

The Southampton Capita Strategic Partnership: Transforming customer services to ensure the customer always comes first



Overview

■ The challenge

To turn Southampton City Council's vision for its customer services into a reality by transforming the customer experience it provides. This required creating a more joined-up approach between the Council's customer service elements, modernising the technology and streamlining processes to guarantee significantly improved service levels.

■ The solution

In partnership with Southampton, Capita has implemented a number of innovative transformational solutions including: the refurbishment of the one stop shop, the creation of a unified contact centre, the introduction of modern systems and the development of a well-trained, cross-skilled team.

■ The results

By utilising the expertise and resources of Capita – an experienced transformation partner – Southampton City Council's customer services have successfully undergone major transformation. The Council now provides cohesive, efficient and easily accessible customer services which have improved customer satisfaction levels. The Council itself is also benefiting from this transformation through cost savings and the creation of a resilient and multi-skilled customer services workforce.

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Realising the necessity of change

Serving a population in excess of 230,000, Southampton City Council was determined to transform the customer experience it provides and made developing its customer services into an operation designed around the customer its number one priority. The Council had a strong vision in place for its customer services but wanted the support and expertise of an experienced transformation partner to turn it into a reality. In order to fulfil its vision, Southampton recognised that it needed to enhance and redevelop a number of its existing customer service operations – the processes, technology, locations and people – to support the delivery of a consistently high-quality, customer-centric service.

When Capita came on board, at the start of the 10-year strategic partnership in October 2007, the different elements within Southampton's customer services function were not coordinated centrally. Capita realised that to present a consistent and uniform customer experience, greater cohesion would need to be achieved between the Council's customer services functions.

The technology used in delivering the Council's customer services required modernising and standardisation in order to be able to truly support efficient, streamlined service delivery. Developing fully integrated and up-to-date customer relationship management, telephony and workforce management systems would be integral to the successful transformation of Southampton's customer services.

Southampton was also intent on expanding the cover of its customer services function and in order to initiate this growth it acknowledged that the development of its customer services team would be necessary. The aim was to create a performance-driven work environment that would facilitate service expansion and aid resilience. To achieve this, the skills of its customer services agents would need to be enhanced to enable cross-skilled working across multiple customer service disciplines.

At the outset Capita was set a list of demanding key performance indicators (KPIs) by the Council to be achieved within ambitious timeframes. The KPIs were centred around three themes – responsiveness, resolution and quality – and entailed Capita improving the times that calls were answered in and visitors seen, improving the quality of all customer-facing services and increasing customer satisfaction.

Overall, the challenge that lay ahead for Capita – working in close partnership with the Council – was to develop and transform Southampton's customer services into a resilient, efficient, modern, streamlined and unified department with standardised and consistent procedures. Ultimately ensuring the customer receives the best service, every time.



*"In Capita we have a partner that has enabled us to achieve our vision. We have all worked tirelessly together to achieve joint goals that would not otherwise have been possible. Most importantly, we can demonstrate an excellent level of service to our customers – this is the true measure of the investment that both partners have made to our vision."
Paul Medland, Head of Partnership,
Southampton City Council.*



Creating a customer-focused service offering

At the beginning of the partnership, before the transformation projects had started, Capita worked with Southampton to develop a customer access strategy which involved carrying out customer research on behalf of the Council to find out what its customers' views were on its customer-facing services. The results of this research provided Capita with invaluable insight and assistance in developing the new improved customer service strategy for going forward.

Capita went on to implement a number of innovative solutions designed to further enhance Southampton's customer experience, by improving and expanding service access, increasing overall satisfaction levels and delivering a more efficient service to customers.

In order to successfully present a single view of the Council to its customers and guarantee consistency in the customer experience, Capita embarked on refurbishing the Council's existing one stop shop – Gateway – and developed a new contact centre that accommodates all customer service agents under one roof. In doing this potential first-point-of-contact resolution for customers has increased due to the creation of effective and streamlined links between the Council's front-line customer services and back-office administration services.

It was not only office space that underwent renovation – the successful transformation of Southampton's customer services was contingent on the development and delivery of state-of-the-art technology solutions. To this end Capita implemented three interconnected systems:

- **A market-leading telephony solution**
A top-of-the-range Avaya telephony system has been installed which has fully-comprehensive call handling, recording and reporting functionality. It enables calls to be automatically pushed to the correct agents, records conversations and provides accurate reporting in real time on statistical data pertaining to specific agents, the time calls are answered in and the number of abandoned or engaged calls.
- **A highly-effective workforce management system**
A Verint workforce management suite has been implemented which enables information from the telephony system to be automatically collated and used to create efficient staff attendance schedules. Via a web-based application the system

"We have worked extremely hard with the Council in designing and then building a very successful customer service operation. This has required much joint working with various Council service areas and has been an excellent example of partnership working. We continue to work with the client in seeking opportunities to build on the success of the new operation for the good of both the Council and its citizens."

*Steve Taylor, Head of Customer Services,
Capita Southampton Strategic Services Partnership.*

allows agents to view their own schedules, plan holidays and book training. It then assesses the impact of staff schedules on customer response times and generates reports in real time.

- **An unrivalled customer relationship management (CRM) system**
Capita has further developed the Council's existing Lagan CRM system – a fully comprehensive customer contact database – which has been rolled out to the majority of the Council's customer services.

Capita realised that in order to create a truly seamless customer service operation, it would need to develop a strong multi-skilled team capable of supporting transformation. To achieve this Capita has initiated a variety of ongoing training activities aided by the introduction of in-house trainers and the creation of a fully equipped training room on site. Cross-training of staff at all levels working in the one stop shop and contact centre is now carried out via e-learning, classroom-based tuition, mentoring, coaching and bespoke training manuals, and equips agents to respond seamlessly to customer requests spanning multiple service areas. Capita has also introduced a structured and more active approach to staff performance management, whereby staff are rewarded for meeting targets and therefore encouraged to be more performance driven.

In addition to providing Council facilities that are accessible to all customers, Capita was intent on delivering services which are more easily available too.

Once the service accessibility of Gateway had been developed – complete with improved disability access, interview rooms and self-service kiosks – Capita began further expanding service access by:

- Extending the opening hours of the Council's customer services by opening earlier in the morning and closing later in the evening, with certain services available on Saturdays as well
- Working with the Council to reduce its previous set of over 100 published customer-facing telephone numbers for different customer service areas to a refined set of 15 published telephone numbers covering all service areas
- Implementing a telephone payment solution for parking fines.

Reaping the benefits of true transformation

Demonstrating how strong strategic partnership working delivers impressive results, the successful transformation of Southampton's customer services has provided a win-win solution for both the Council and its customers.

The Council is benefiting from:

- Improved staff moral and high staff retention – enabling more efficient resourcing as staff are now cross-skilled and able work across multiple service areas
- Significantly higher levels of customer satisfaction – customer surveys conducted on the performance of Gateway and the new contact centre, 18 months after going live, yielded strong results with customer satisfaction at 98% for the one stop shop, Gateway, and 86% for the contact centre
- Efficiency and cost savings – as a result of better resourcing, improved systems and streamlined processes.

Southampton's customers are benefiting from:

- A consistently high level of service – calls are answered faster, customers visiting the one stop shop are seen quicker and the majority of customer contact now receives first-point-of-contact resolution (see performance improvement statistics in the table below)

Service performance improvements:

	2007 – pre transformation	2009 – post transformation
Customer service calls answered within 30 seconds	55%	82%
Abandoned customer service calls	11%	Less than 2%
Engaged call rate	10%	Less than 1%
Gateway (one stop shop) customers seen within 10 minutes	39%	84%

- Increased service accessibility – through a modern one stop shop, new contact centre and efficient telephone service solutions, all with extended opening hours
- Streamlined and more cohesive services – achieved by integrating state-of-the art systems with effective business processes.

For the remainder of the strategic partnership Capita will continue to work closely with Southampton City Council to ensure that its high standard of customer service delivery is sustained and that ultimately the needs and satisfaction of the customer always come first.