

The Lightest Touch

Helen Olsen visits Southwark to see how the council is delivering 'one touch' services to citizens as it transforms service delivery.



When residents call Southwark's customer service centre they routinely get more than they bargained for: a proactive, citizen-centric, efficient service that reduces the likelihood of them having to contact the council again for related service requests.

In fact, in the six months since the One Touch initiative went live, nearly five thousand residents have called in to Southwark for one service and opted to take an average of three at the same time.

The one touch service is the latest development in Southwark's strategic partnership with Vangent to transform customer services – a partnership that has also delivered millions of pounds worth of savings over the past three years.

Vangent is using its new One Touch Gov solution to put Southwark well ahead of the game when it comes to both reducing unnecessary contacts and reporting on

the new National Indicator 14, which intends to track local authorities' progress in meeting the new requirement to 'reduce avoidable citizen contacts by half by 2011'.

Powered by Adobe, the solution cuts through the red tape to pull together live data from back office systems into dynamic intelligent forms, enabling customer service representatives (CSRs) to gain a quick overview and offer a proactive service to citizens - at the same time triggering workflows to get the job done and creating audit and reporting trails. It is literally about having 'one touch' with the citizen.

Southwark is a dynamic borough with the largest social housing stock in the capital and a high level of population change as citizens move in to, or out of, the area to live and work. The council's ethos is to deliver the very best lifestyle and service to its citizens whilst building efficiency into back office processes, but four years ago it was struggling to move its plans forward following a 'weak' CPA result. By partnering with Vangent the council hoped to kick start the transformation it was after and move to a 'good' rating in its subsequent CPA – which was duly achieved.

Vangent essentially delivers the customer facing element of Southwark's operations. The aim is to use leading edge technology to deliver consistent, comprehensive and joined up citizen services based on an authority-wide CRM master database of people and property, appointments and property maps; and the company has worked closely with Southwark to deliver business process improvement with organisational structure recommendations, project and change management, cultural transformation and deployment skills to deliver this goal. In advance of discussion of NI14 Vangent also initiated authority-wide service performance reporting via a warehouse of reports on a web portal.

One innovative example of this approach is the Repairs Control Centre that went live in May 2007 replacing the former housing repairs department. The whole

process has been re-engineered such that when a citizen calls in the CSR can quickly pinpoint the property – complete with details of current installation and maintenance history - identify the repair needed and specific parts this might require, choose a contractor to undertake the repair and book a convenient appointment date while the citizen is still on the line. Once the call is complete, sophisticated workflow ensures that all the actions are carried out. The citizen can even opt to have an SMS reminder the day before.

Satisfaction with the service has gone from hovering around the 60 percent mark to over 90 percent; and costs for running the service have been slashed.

The partnership's overall approach to service transformation is to engineer efficiency from every angle - not just in terms of how it does the job but also in terms of making the transaction more efficient for the citizen whilst delivering it at lower cost to the council.

With One Touch Gov this translates into understanding the life events that cause someone to then have numerous individual service requests. For example, take moving in to the borough. If you have moved into a new home you need to register for council tax. You may be entitled to benefits. You may be entitled to free school meals and uniforms for your children. You would need to organise your wheelie bin collection, apply for a parking permit and so on.

Up until now the citizen would have had to have made separate calls on each of these items but now, when any of these 'life event connected' services is requested the CSR first checks on the underlying reason for the request then offers other services connected to that 'life event': "Have you moved into the borough or had a change of circumstances? Would you like me to check for other services you might need or be eligible for?"

If the customer agrees, the CSR then checks details on Southwark's centralised resident account enabling a number of

What does the customer think?

"Very efficient, even though there was a lot to take in and a lot of questions asked, everything was explained thoroughly to me. It's fantastic how a new tenant can do everything they need on one call."

"Fantastic team, I spoke with Deloras and Sellina and both of them couldn't do enough to help me. So much easier than having to fill in tons of paperwork."

"Registering as a new tenant involves a lot and is so boring but Vanessa made this so easy for me, she is such a pleasure to speak with and was nice all the way through the call. She didn't rush me off the phone and had all the time in the world for me. A lot of call centres seem to treat you like you're just a number but when I spoke with Vanessa I felt like I actually mattered."

dynamic service application forms to be automatically pre-filled and the customer offered additional suggestions for services – along with an estimate of how much of the form has now been filled in and how much time it would take to complete: “Your parking permit application is 75 percent there, it will only take five minutes to complete, would you like to go through it now?”

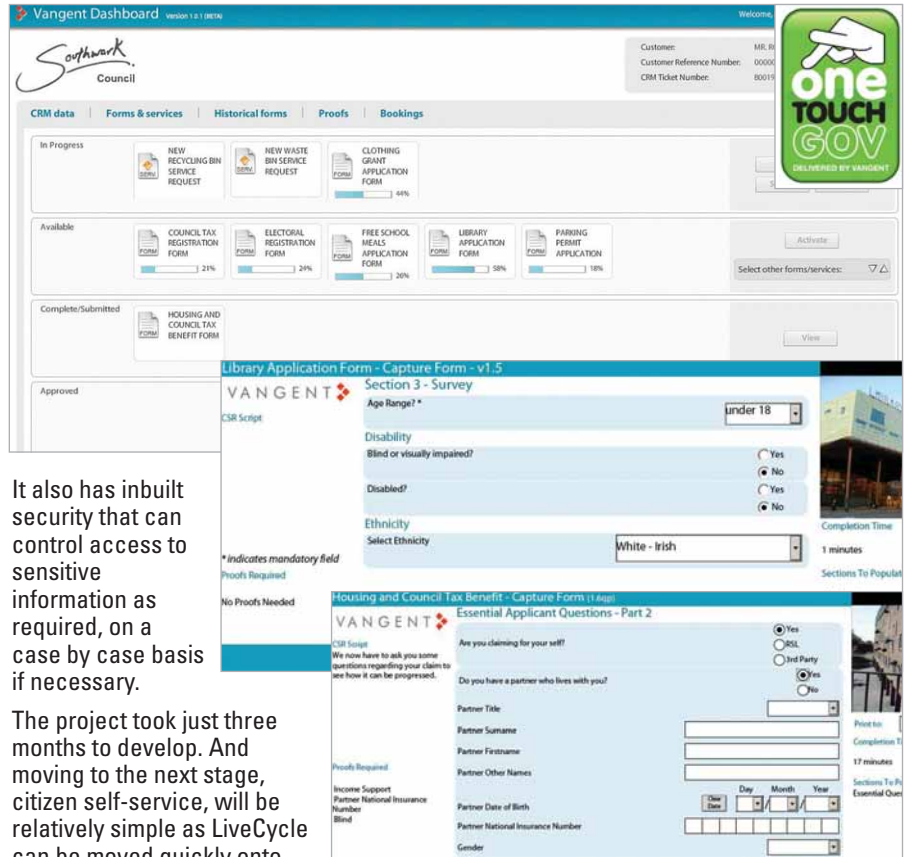
Services covered by One Touch include bookings, applications for disabled travel, blue badges and parking permits, library memberships, free school meals, requests for recycling or waste bins, electoral and council tax registrations, council tax and housing benefits, pension/tax credits and attendance allowance.

Customer satisfaction levels are high: “Once the customer gives consent the Adobe technology harnesses a single view of their dealings with Southwark and enables relevant services to be offered on the spot,” says Vangent’s head of professional services and ICT, Adrian Blair. “It’s come as a welcome surprise to people to be offered a full service when they rang expecting only one.”

What Vangent has done with Adobe LiveCycle Enterprise Suite is impressive. The platform independent solution is being used to pull together information in disparate back end systems, quickly, easily and cost effectively – obviating the need for expensive and time consuming back end integration exercises between Southwark’s SAP CRM and existing back office systems. The Adobe solution can interact with various back end systems using a number of different interaction methods and acts as the thread with which to weave the information held about citizens across the council into a usable tool to transform service delivery.

One Touch Gov in Southwark

- Approximately 800 customers opt for the One Touch service each month.
- Over 50 percent of these customers decide to take more than one service, in some months this has peaked at 75 percent.
- The majority of these customers are taking two or three services in addition to the one they originally rang in for.
- Many customers are using the ‘appointment’ service, enabling them to complete the service at a time that suits them via callback from the Customer Service Centre.



It also has inbuilt security that can control access to sensitive information as required, on a case by case basis if necessary.

The project took just three months to develop. And moving to the next stage, citizen self-service, will be relatively simple as LiveCycle can be moved quickly onto the customer facing website. As an added bonus, as Adobe’s PDF reader is ubiquitous these days, citizens will be able to view electronic forms that look just like the familiar paper ones and either fill them out on screen for online submission or print them off to fill out by hand – whichever they feel more comfortable with. But, importantly, it is the same form; there is no extra development work involved.

“The Adobe technology is a fantastic front end,” says Blair. “It is completely flexible and allows you to quickly do the integration piece producing excellent professional looking results.

“We might still have the data held in a SharePoint, CRM or bespoke system, but the user doesn’t see that. He just clicks on a button in the Adobe framework and there is an automatic link through to wherever the data is actually held.”

The resulting system developed by Blair and his team has lots of nice tools on screen to help the CSR manage calls and provide instant feedback on progress. One, for example, flags the average time it takes to complete a form, dynamically updating itself as questions are answered. Another provides a script or further information linked to the individual question being asked. Having such accurate feedback to hand is very powerful in a telephone situation, says Blair.

For example, benefits and entitlement assessments can be calculated while the

citizen is on the phone and, if proofs of identity or eligibility are required, an appointment can be made for them to go into one of the borough’s one-stop shops at a convenient time. The Adobe technology has also been integrated into the council’s document management system so any previously used proofs already held by the council can also be verified – and the citizen won’t be asked to bring the same document in again.

One touch services aren’t a new concept, says Blair. “I think the difference is that Southwark is actually implementing what many have been talking about for years. And this is a model that you can lift and shift to any other authority - that is the strength of the Adobe product; the integration is not tied in to any one type of messaging.”

Southwark has made one touch, citizen-centric services a reality though, he adds, because “Southwark is very dynamic, a really forward thinking authority and really committed to doing these things. They are not committed to working on a legacy of how authorities have always worked in the past but want to be different, to move forward and deliver modern services to their citizens.”

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