



# STOKE-ON-TRENT COUNCIL

## CASE STUDY

### CUSTOMER DETAILS

Stoke-on-Trent City Council

<http://www.stoke.gov.uk/>

### APTEAN SOLUTION

Respond

### SOLUTION

Stoke-on-Trent City Council needed a robust complaints management system to take care of the mundane administration and through automation emancipate the team to add value in the process. The chosen solution was Respond.

### BENEFITS

- A single solution for all the council's complaints
- An end to end solution covering simple stage 1 responses to those processed via the Ombudsman
- Enables the council to focus their resources to make improvements on the areas that matter most to their customers
- Increased the number of complaints responded within timeframe by 20%
- Reduced the timeframe to respond to complaints by 33%
- 50% reduction in the time taken to log complaints

Stoke-on-Trent City Council, a regional local government body that looks after around 250,000 people and employs 11,000 staff, last year dealt with nearly 3,000 complaints. A small, dedicated team has to respond to every one of these complaints within a designated period of time, making sure that any issues are resolved and problems addressed. These range from social care problems (statutory complaints), to issues over customer service, street lighting or bin collection (corporate complaints).

Stoke-on-Trent City Council have now completed the implementation of the Respond complaints management solution already used successfully by over a third of local authorities in the UK. Since going live with the new Respond system in April 2010, Stoke-on-Trent City Council has managed to halve the time it takes to manage complaints and has helped it deal with over 90% of complaints within reduced timescales.

## THE BUSINESS CHALLENGE

In a bid to continually improve customer service, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, a user of Respond since 2000 for dealing with statutory complaints, decided to introduce a similar system for corporate complaints. Until recently, the council was relying on its customer relationship management (CRM) software to log all corporate complaints and felt that it was not proactive enough. "Many other local government customers who've used CRM for complaints management have eventually realised that it turns out to be a false economy in the end, generally leading to a lot of wasted time, effort and money," says Eric Brown, Business Consultant at Aptean.

Around sixty percent of the complaints management team's time was spent chasing up managers for responses and checking what was happening with individual cases. By using Respond the complaint management team can investigate complaints fully within 10 days, involving all the necessary

departments. The case management system prompts action and reminds people when to react. Some unresolved complaints have to be taken a stage further, before finally being referred to an independent advisor or Ombudsmen for any that can't satisfactorily be worked out.

## EASING THE FEEDBACK PROCESS

With the new system, automated letters are sent out at the touch of a button and emails and diary alerts make sure that deadlines are far less likely to be missed. The Respond Customer online portal makes it easier to process and respond to complaints as it allows customers to enter any feedback directly via the Internet.

The number of complaints, comments and compliments has virtually doubled during the last five years, reflecting Stoke-on-Trent's proactive approach in encouraging feedback about the quality of the council's services. Stoke-on-Trent City Council can now clearly identify business issues and areas that need particular attention. The software aggregates all the information about complaints, so that management can see recurring problems, such as faulty traffic lights or persistently troublesome staff. Respond allows businesses to see what service or department has failed. Trends are more easily identifiable and the council has a better chance of resolving problems quickly.

## LEARNING FROM COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

The delivery of a consistent and effective approach to processing, investigating and learning from complaints is invaluable to any business in raising the bar in customer service.



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Feedback can give an early indication that services are not being provided as they guide businesses on where to focus their attention. For example, in Stoke-on-Trent more feedback on the use of grit during the winter months led to improvements in grit management and less chance of it running out; while dog fouling in public places has been addressed with improved signage and patrols. Accident hot spots on roads have been identified and new signs and rules introduced. Customer satisfaction over school dinners was improved after a few suggested changes to the menu.

The Respond system can help businesses become more customer-centric, as they are based on feedback and advice from customers. Improved communication and a redesign of the process for reporting potholes identified from customer feedback, has helped Stoke-on-Trent reduce response times to just one day, with 97% of pot-holes being permanently filled and not needing further attention.

## ORGANISATIONAL BENEFITS

With the new technology and processes now in place, Stoke-on-Trent City Council has seen a number of operational efficiencies. For instance, the Respond Customer online portal saves time and means data is more accurate as customers key in information themselves. In Stoke-on-Trent, the time it takes to log a complaint has been reduced from twenty minutes down to less than ten on average. Reports, which before took about a week to do, are now done in a matter of minutes.

Overall, the percentage of complaints resolved within a 15 working day timescale for 2009/08 was 90%, compared with 75% the year before. The figure recently is closer to 95% within a new, more demanding timeframe of 10 days. From an organisational point of view, more robust processes and systems means that all the necessary information is now in one place, so that contact information or a full case history is available at the click of mouse. Improved visibility and integration with users' email also makes it easier to keep up with demand, prioritise tasks and manage deadlines.