

Virtual Mail Room



Ashford Borough Council

Customer User Experience

How using Virtual Mail Room has enabled Ashford Borough Council to improve its business processes and make significant savings on the management of its outgoing Council Tax & Benefit notifications

Virtual Mail Room's expertly managed communication services enable its clients to deliver the right information, in the right format, to the right person, at the right time; securely, audited and at half the cost of traditional methods, with low start up costs and no minimum commitment.

Within its jurisdiction Ashford Borough Council has 50,000 council tax households and also about 10,000 Benefit claimants, a figure which has grown significantly in the last eighteen months, mostly as a result of the difficult economic climate.

The Revenues and Benefits team is responsible for Council Tax and Business Rate collections, Benefits notifications and also matters relating to sundry debtors.

Why we decided to work with Virtual Mail Room

Peter Purcell, Revenues and Benefits Manager, describes how the Council started working with Virtual Mail Room (VMR):

“We had previously made a significant investment in implementing a licensed software solution to reduce Council Tax and Benefits paperwork and also the general administration overheads in this area. We had also made savings in staffing numbers in order to resource this investment on the assumption we would be able to manage our processes more efficiently via this in-house electronic and online capability.

“As it turned out, this software purchase based strategy was not as effective as we had hoped, so, when we heard about VMR and its outsourced services, we were interested to see how it could offer an alternative way for us to achieve our goal of reducing the office workload but also maintain or actually increase the quality of service that we could provide to borough residents, even with the reduced number of staff now available.”

The benefits of using Virtual Mail Room

Peter adds: “We started with a six month trial with VMR in mid 2010 but then, in order to comply with our financial regulations, we had to put the contract for this work formally out to tender in the autumn. VMR won the tender and now sends out on a daily basis all our Council Tax bills and Benefit notifications, which amounts to about 4,000 bills plus notifications relating to over 2,000 claims per month.

“Where appropriate, and as part of its standard service, VMR will merge these and add enclosures, like direct debit forms, register of elector forms for new properties and change of circumstance notices. This saves us all the time and effort it would take us to do this manually ourselves, and probably more accurately.

	<p>“We provide VMR with the relevant data in overnight batches via an easy to use but secure file transfer system. This was straightforward and quick to set up, does not interfere with or disrupt our other processes and, to be honest, just runs like clockwork!</p> <p>“VMR also manages our annual Council Tax billing for us, but it is on the ongoing, day to day billing and notifications where VMR has taken the bulk of our daily admin work away; we save the equivalent of four days of a member of staff’s time per week as a direct result of outsourcing this work to VMR. We are also no longer incurring paper, envelope and printing costs as we used to. The processing accuracy, reporting, and reduced staff time that we gain by using VMR save us about £15,000 per annum.</p>
	<p>Improved timescales and guaranteed deliveries</p> <p>“In addition, our most recent post delivery contractor had been taking up to ten days to deliver a second class item. Now VMR has reduced this timescale to between 2 -4 days, (which is what it had been before). This has removed the need for us to deal with the many telephone calls we used to receive from people enquiring about this correspondence, and the consequent time and effort it took us to send out duplicates to them, which we often felt we had to do.</p> <p>“As a matter of course VMR also supplies certificates of posting for our 50,000 annual Council Tax billing and this proof is an important requirement for us.</p>
	<p>Going electronic</p> <p>“One of the reasons we went with VMR was to be able to offer Council Tax ‘e-billing’ and ‘e-delivery’ on Benefits. Whilst this is still generally a future rather than a current requirement, it is reassuring for us to know that, when the time does come for us to provide these kinds of electronic delivery options, we will be able to manage the take up easily and effectively with VMR without incurring capital expenditure on new software, as this capability is already built into its flexible delivery service.</p>
<p>Virtual Mail Room Ltd. Maple House 11 Briar Road Twickenham TW2 6RB, UK</p> <p>Tel: +44 (0)20 8898 6565 Fax: +44 (0)20 8867 2855 Email: post@vmailroom.co.uk</p>	<p>Recommending VMR</p> <p>“I am sure every Council would say that it manages its Council Tax billing and Benefits notifications in different ways. However, I’m also confident that many could benefit, as we have, from outsourcing some of these key business processes to a specialist like VMR, whether or not they have already tried to automate some of these procedures, either by developing new in house systems themselves or licensing third party software products.</p> <p>“This is particularly the case in the current economic climate, when councils are under increased pressure to make additional savings, and the benefits could be even more significant for councils sharing services and looking to achieve greater economies of scale.</p> <p>“VMR is a reliable and responsive supplier and we are always interested to hear how VMR could help Ashford introduce faster, cheaper and better business processes.”</p>
<p>Call us today on 020 8898 6565</p>	<p>“We initially contacted Virtual Mail Room to help us with a problem concerning the amount of staff time being spent on dealing with outgoing Council Tax bills and Benefit notifications correspondence. Not only did VMR resolve this issue but they also helped us improve our processes generally, suggesting innovations to resolve other existing problems. I continue to be impressed with VMR's commitment to finding solutions.”</p>