

Virtual Mail Room



Great Yarmouth Borough Council

Customer User Experience

How using Virtual Mail Room has enabled Great Yarmouth Borough Council to make significant savings & improve collection rates on Council Tax & Business Rate Recovery

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.

Great Yarmouth Borough Council has 45,000 council tax households and about 4,500 people liable to pay business rates within its jurisdiction. There are some issues of local deprivation, with seasonal employment attracting a transient population and people moving in and out of the benefit system as seasonal work comes and goes.

The Recovery Team at Great Yarmouth is responsible for collecting payments from defaulting council tax or business rate customers, a process which effectively starts when the Recovery Team receives a list of Liability Orders granted by the magistrates' court, where previous reminders from the Council have not resulted in sufficient payment being made.

How our recovery process used to work

James Wedon, the Recovery Team Manager, describes how manual and time consuming the process used to be before the Council started working with Virtual Mail Room (VMR):

"We have an ongoing need to send out reminders, cancellation notices to customers, summonses and liability orders, usually a few hundred at a time. We used to manage this ourselves via a completely manual in-house process that I'm sure is probably typical for a lot of local authorities. The documents would all need to be printed off internally, which takes a considerable amount of time, then all the paperwork would have to be folded and inserted in envelopes ready for posting. To do this, we had to take all of our Recovery staff off case processing work for about two days every week, depending on the size of the runs we were doing. They were obliged to undertake this repetitive manual work rather than getting on with the core recovery process of actually going through the cases and dealing with the customers.

The benefits of using Virtual Mail Room

"Virtual Mail Room now handles all of our bulk reminder and recovery communications – first and second reminders for council tax defaulters and only one reminder for business rate defaulters; instalment cancellation notifications with request for full payment of all sums outstanding within seven days; summonses with proof of postage; and the issuing of any Liability Order granted by the magistrates court. As far as we are concerned, the process is both simple and secure: we run a report on our own computer system to

	<p>establish who hasn't paid and from that report we generate a data file of names, addresses and amounts outstanding that we upload via a secure web interface to Virtual Mail Room for them to process the notifications.</p>
	<p>Data security and legal compliance</p>
	<p>"With security of personal data being the issue that it is now, we had to ensure that the VMR service adhered to our increasingly stringent data security policies. Amongst other safeguards, we receive an email from VMR confirming safe receipt of each encrypted data file by return.</p> <p>"To comply with the magistrates' court and in order to be granted a Liability Order against a council tax or a business rate defaulter we have to be able to prove that we have sent the appropriate notices. As part of Virtual Mail Room's automated process we are provided with a Proof of Postage Certificate, which we can then produce should this be required. Being able simply to upload a data file and then automatically receive Proof of Postage Certificates a few days later is a valuable saving of time and effort.</p> <p>"Virtual Mail Room also ensures that the Council complies with an essential legal requirement by inserting the necessary additional regulatory and other documentation with the Liability Orders that it sends out on the Council's behalf."</p>
	<p>Saving time, collecting more debt and improving staff job satisfaction</p>
	<p>Great Yarmouth has been using VMR's services since 2006. According to James Wedon: "The Council now saves between six and eight days of five staff members' time every month as a direct result of using Virtual Mail Room. This is a huge saving and outsourcing our bulk communications to VMR has also given my team the freedom to concentrate on collecting the money, which is after all our main role.</p> <p>"Staff job satisfaction has been transformed as their time is now more constructively spent on front line recovery with the inevitably positive result that more money is collected more quickly and efficiently. Using VMR's services simply helps me to get the most out of my team.</p>
	<p>Improving our performance year on year</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>"Over the past four years Great Yarmouth Borough Council has increased its collection rate year on year. The increases in our collection figures from 2006 onwards show how Virtual Mail Room on its own has contributed to our improvement in performance. In 2005-6 we collected 95.7% of our council tax debt – the target for local authorities is to get to 97% or 98% collection. In 2006-7 we collected 96%. The big jump was by 1.1% to 97.1% in 2007-8 when the Virtual Mail Room service had started to kick in. This was really a massive increase by any local authority collection standard. By 20089 we had achieved a collection rate of 97.2% and in 2009-10 our council tax collection rate rose again to 97.5% - a continuing improvement that is higher than either the local or national trend.</p>
<p>Call us today on 020 8898 6565</p>	<p>"The Council now saves between six and eight days of five staff members' time every month as a direct result of using Virtual Mail Room. This is a huge saving and outsourcing our bulk communications to VMR has also given my team the freedom to concentrate on collecting the money, which is after all our main role."</p>