

Elected Member Caseload Management

Case Study: Clackmannanshire Council

Prepared by Clare Moore, Aileen Littlejohn

& Martin Brown

April 2008



Case Study Structure

1. Background
2. Overview of project tasks
3. The challenge facing Clackmannanshire Council
4. The learning points
5. The solution overview
6. Future plans

Acknowledgements

Appendix 1: Key contacts



Purpose of this Case Study

Since 1995, Clackmannanshire Council has been using a caseload management system, based on the Lotus Notes email system used throughout the whole Council. Elected members have access to a simple template for recording their enquiries with members having the option to complete the form electronically or to hand in the information to members' services staff to action on their behalf.

From May 2007, a series of changes meant the introduction in Scotland of the Single Transferable Vote electoral system, multi-member wards and a new remuneration package for elected members. It was widely anticipated that these changes might alter the way elected members work and represent their constituents. In consequence, one aspect which attracted increasing attention at a national level, is how councils can provide better support to elected members in terms of how they manage their casework.

With the support of The Improvement Service's Smart Ideas Fund, Clackmannanshire Council received funding, firstly, to enhance further its caseload management system in response to users' feedback so that it better meets the needs of a multi member ward environment and; secondly, to explore, and support, the potential to share its tried and tested system with interested Scottish councils using the same Lotus Notes platform.

This case study is designed principally to be of interest to councils using the Lotus Notes platform for members' caseload management, however, equally, it has relevance to Councils considering using a different platform. The case study is intended to:

- help share knowledge about the system itself and its functions;
- highlight some of the challenges faced
- set out the learning points revealed and, finally,
- encourage others to derive advantage and benefits from the developments and investments made in Clackmannanshire.

The Improvement Service's support to Clackmannanshire Council is consistent with a number of initiatives it has been taking forward to help professionalise the support to elected members, allowing them to conduct their roles more effectively. This includes: publishing the Elected Members' Induction Pack; piloting a web-based caseload management system in four Scottish councils; introducing the Political Leadership Programme and leading on the development of a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) framework for elected members.

1. Background

Clackmannanshire Council, located in the middle of the central belt of Scotland, is a single tier unitary authority. It is Scotland's smallest mainland authority with a population of less than 49,000 and the second smallest land area (9sq km) of all Scottish authorities.

The Council has 18 Councillors whose political make up is 8 Labour, 7 SNP, 1 Conservative, 1 Independent and 1 Scottish Liberal Democrat. As from May 2007 elected members represent the area through 5 multi member wards.

The key to successful multi member working lies in ensuring that elected members work together to reduce duplication of case work and workload.

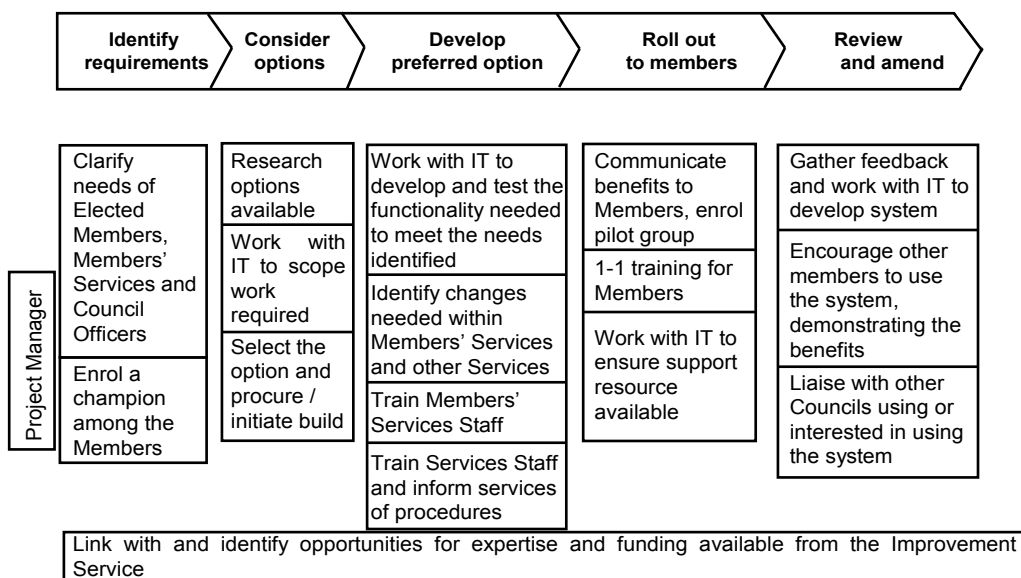
Based in the Council's Chief Executive's Service, Members' Services are provided by 2.5 full time equivalent members of staff.

The email platform used by Council staff is Lotus Notes.

Scottish councils use a range of approaches to handle Elected Members' caseload including manual paper-based, in house developed software solutions and specialist software products available commercially.



2. Overview of Project Tasks



The table above sets out the key stages that Clackmannanshire Council has followed in making available a caseload management system and should have equal relevance to other councils.

3. The Challenges Facing Clackmannanshire Council

In common with other councils, Clackmannanshire Council faces a number of challenges around elected member support including:

1. Pressure to improve the level of service to Elected Members
2. Pressure to improve the level of professionalism and efficiency in responding to constituents' enquiries.
3. A multi-member ward environment which requires a process to identify duplicate cases sent to several Councillors
4. The need to track volumes and make best use of resources available.

The Council has been using a Lotus Notes database to log and track constituents' enquiries raised through Elected Members. The Council's Members Services' staff recognised the significant benefits of enhancing the software to meet the support requirements of multi member wards. The main benefit being to provide an electronic recording and monitoring system tailored to elected members' needs.

4. The Learning Points

The initial development and subsequent enhancement of Clackmannanshire Council's system identified a number of learning points. These include:

- If the system is too complicated it will not be used.
- If elected members are going to use the system on a regular basis, the input document must be easy and quick to complete.
- Providing drop down lists to make options clear which, in turn, helps with information analysis.
- Members need to see a benefit in using the system and so staff in the Services must be trained in the system's use to be able to respond to enquiries.
- The Head of Service needs to promote the need for compliance with response deadlines. This requires access to monitoring reports.
- Whilst the system can be functioning perfectly, if officers do not understand their responsibilities, there is the potential for individuals to become disillusioned very quickly and this, in turn, might undermine users' take up of the system.

In summary, it takes time for everyone to see the benefits of having all the information to hand. Effective Caseload Management is very beneficial but it is not an instant solution.

The benefits of using a caseload management can be shared by several groups of people.

The benefits to the **constituents** are:

- A faster and more efficient response to queries raised

Local constituent Cairns Kettles, who has raised several issues with his elected member, has commented that he "received a first class service. My enquiries about street lighting and traffic calming were acknowledged promptly, and within the agreed timescale, I received follow up responses that answered the questions I had raised with my local councillor. I believe that a computerised system is used to ensure that constituents' enquiries are communicated efficiently to council services. The procedures certainly worked for me and, should the need arise, I will have no hesitation in contacting my Councillor again."

The benefits to the **Elected Members** are:

- Speed of response to enquiries
- Professional handling of queries through effective tracking and monitoring procedures.
- Less time consuming and more efficient
- Better data available on the volume of cases and their purpose
- Simple search facilities help to formulate historic information on types of complaints, problem areas or repeat issues.
- Overdue responses can be identified.
- A means of identifying multiple cases from the same constituent.

"Elected members cannot work alone. We rely on good support and effective procedures to help respond to the issues raised by our constituents. The in-house development of a system to track and monitor our enquiries has been very cost effective. The 'can do' attitude of our staff has delivered a system that meets the requirements of sharing information in our multi member ward environment. I am pleased that the success has been recognised by The Improvement Service."

- Councillor Janet Cadenhead, Leader of the Council

The benefits of the system reported by **Member Services staff** are that it:

- Provides data on volumes to better manage the resources available;
- Provides the ability to track the volume of Councillor, MP, MEP and MSP enquiries;
- Helps in sharing of workload around the team e.g. during holiday cover;
- Allows access to information and historical records;
- Provides the ability to provide a consistent level of service to all elected members.
- Brings confidence in the accuracy of information relating to constituents and members.

The benefits of the system reported by officers based in the council's other Services are that it:

- Reduces the volume of requests directed to officers from Councillors;
- Provides the ability to quantify the resource needed to handle queries;
- Allow access to accurate historical records of all enquiries.

5. The Solution Overview

Aims of the Members' Enquiry System

Through a partnership between the Councils' Members' Services and I. T. Services, the in-house system was developed using Lotus Notes software. The development had several aims:-

- To provide Members with effective procedures for constituency casework;
- To ensure members' enquiries are recorded and tracked through to a satisfactory conclusion;
- To allow statistical information to be compiled on the history of each enquiry and to be aggregated across all enquiries;
- To help Officers identify trends in enquiries generated through ward members;
- To identify trends in the types of enquiries raised through Elected members;
- To assist members' services staff to provide an efficient and effective support to elected members;
- To allow monitoring and reporting on the responses returned within the requested time-scales;
- To identify where identical issues are brought to the attention of different members, especially in the multi-member ward environment;
- To allow analysis of information through the use of a search facility;
- To provide improved customer service to constituents.

The Lotus Notes system covers the following basic functions:

Members have access to a simple template for recording their enquiry which can be completed electronically or handed to Member Services staff to action on their behalf.

The system, which is simple to use, provides an update on the current situation on each enquiry and allows analysis of information to produce statistics, broken down by ward, Councillor, area or trend.

Service performance is closely monitored to ensure that enquiries are recorded and tracked to a satisfactory conclusion.

An automatic reminder is issued to the appropriate Service if a response deadline is not met.

The system is able to highlight if a constituent has raised an enquiry previously and if permission has been given to share the information.

Each ward Councillor can view all the cases for their ward, (where the constituent has given permission to share information).

Examples of the screen layouts are shown on Tables 1 (below) and Table 2 overleaf and the E-enquiry Route, setting out the process to be followed in dealing with enquiries, is shown on Table 3 also overleaf.

Table 1: Clackmannanshire Council, Councillor Enquiry System: Main Menu

Table 2: Clackmannanshire Council, Councillor Enquiry System: Screen Sample

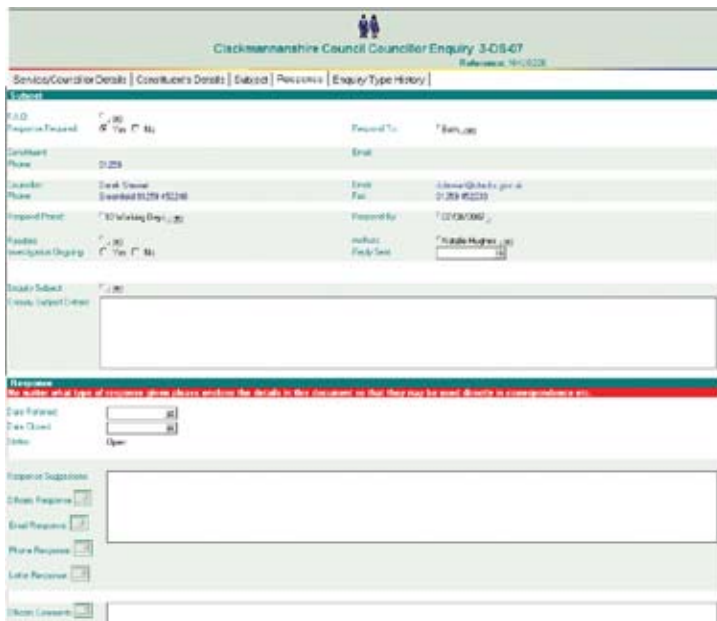
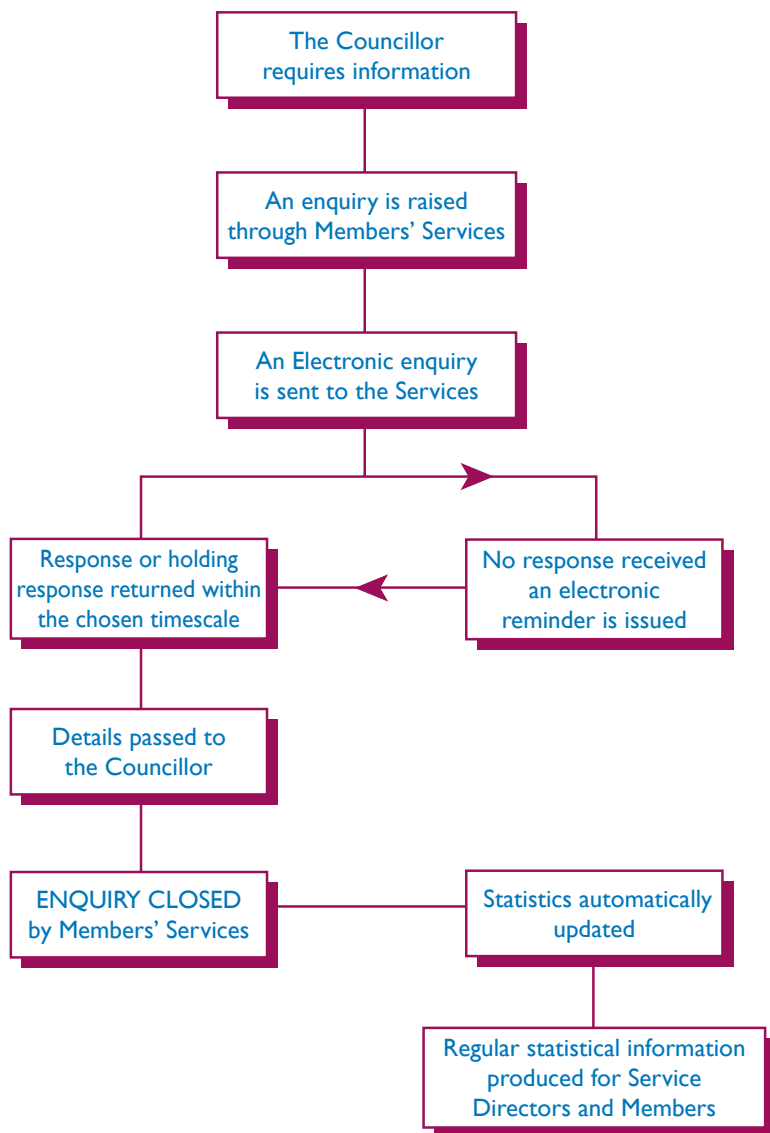


Table 3: Clackmannanshire Council, Councillor Enquiry System Enquiry Route

The Enquiry Route



6. Future plans

Critically, all of Clackmannanshire Council's 18 elected members are using the system. The intention is to continue to improve the system based on ongoing users' feedback. Following the Council's Scrutiny Committee in May 2008, a consultation exercise will be carried out with the system users and other stakeholders to identify the areas of development that might be of further benefit. The outputs from this exercise will help shape the development roadmap.

The Council has recently agreed that a report will be submitted to the Council's Scrutiny Committee every six months detailing the types of enquiries raised through elected members.

Where other councils sharing the same platform adopt Clackmannanshire Council's system, the intention is to create a User Group to share experiences and best practise and, jointly, shape the system's future roadmap.

Acknowledgements

In the development of this case study, we wish to acknowledge the contribution of a number of individuals and organisations including:

Clackmannanshire Council

Councillor Janet Cadenhead and all of her elected member colleagues
Aileen Littlejohn, Member Services Support Manager
All officers based in Members' Services
Barry Dickson, Head of Business Improvement & Information Technology Services
Cairns Kettles, Clackmannanshire resident
Richard Feehan, Designer

The Improvement Service

Tom McHugh, Development Manager
Martin Brown, Head of Customer Relationship Management

Appendix 1: Key Contacts

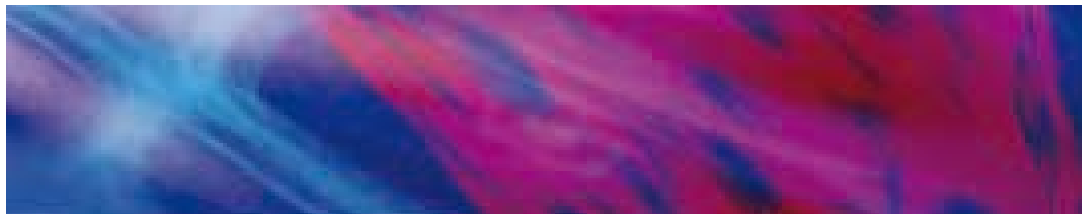
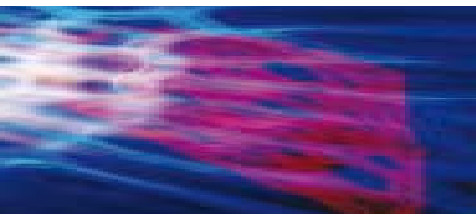
Aileen Littlejohn, (e): alittlejohn@clacks.gov.uk; (t): 01259 452003

Barry Dickson, (e): bdickson@clacks.gov.uk; (t): 01259 452050

Tom McHugh, (e): tom.mchugh@improvementservice.org.uk; (t): 01506-775558

Martin Brown, Martin.brown@improvementservice.org.uk; (t): 01506-775558

Clare Moore, Business Jigsaw, clare@businessjigsaw.com



Westerton House, Westerton Road,
East Mains Industrial Estate
Broxburn
EH52 5AU

Tel: 01506 775558
Fax: 01506 775566

E-mail: info@improvementservice.org.uk
www.improvementservice.org.uk

The Improvement Service is devoted to improving the efficiency, quality and accountability of public services in Scotland through learning and sharing information and experiences.