

## Surrey Heath Borough Council uses new marketing approach to enhance Direct Debit take up

Surrey Heath Borough Council adopted a new marketing approach to promote Direct Debit to its 30,000 Council Tax payers, which has resulted in the local authority securing an additional 1,000 Direct Debit customers – and earned the council first place in its division of the Bacs Direct Debit Challenge League.

### New approach to increase efficiency

Previously the council sent out payment booklets to each resident who was not already a Direct Debit payer at the time of the annual billing. In a quest to further enhance take up rates for Direct Debit, and provide significant cost and time savings to the council, this approach was reviewed and a new strategy of providing a simple one page A4 bill with Direct Debit information was implemented.

In the Autumn of 2008 the traditional payment book mailing was replaced with a new A4 information sheet, promoting the benefits of Direct Debit and indicating that, in light of the benefits to both residents and the council of paying council tax by Direct Debit, unless specifically requested a payment book would not be distributed.

Following annual billing in 2009 the council saw a greatly enhanced influx of council tax Direct Debit payments, with Direct Debit rates rising 2% on the previous year to hit 70.9%. In addition the council witnessed significant cost and environmental savings on payment booklet production costs, reducing printing by 8,000 items.

### Communication is key

Andrew Davis, Revenues and Benefits Manager at Surrey Heath Borough Council said: “We realised the benefits to both the council and our residents of promoting Direct Debit as the most efficient option for council tax payments.”

“Direct Debit is a simple tool that enables residents to ensure they know when their payments are due to be made and allows them to budget more effectively. This campaign, and the change in our marketing tactics, has enabled us to target residents more directly with our Direct Debit focused message and helped prompt residents into changing the way they pay their council tax.”

“We are delighted to have won our division in the Direct Debit Challenge League and the opportunity to win the £1,000 prize which will be passed on to our chosen charity, the Council’s Mayor’s charity which supports a number of local good causes.”