

Digitising key services at The County Council of the City and County of Cardiff



Introduction

Cardiff Council, like many other authorities, has the challenge of effectively managing their licensing, permits and enforcement. Great strides have already been made in the parking service provision in Cardiff. Since 2016 most parking permits can be applied for and paid for online, pay and display machines accept contactless card readers and more locations accept 'pay by phone' parking.

However, it was identified that there was limited digital transformation taking place across other services specifically in the areas of Environmental Enforcement and Highways Licensing, where annually, the delivery of 20,000 enforcement processes and 2,500 highways licensing applications were taking place via paper-based systems in 2016.

This document highlights the challenges and subsequent successful digitisation of these key services.

Core objectives and results

Objective	Result
Replace paper-based enforcement and issuing of permits/licences with a digital system.	Paper based system has been replaced by a smartphone app and a cloud based back office system.
Change invoicing through SAP to upfront payments.	All payments can be made online for FPNs. Licences/permits can also be paid for online and made upfront instead of being invoiced.
Issue FPNs for any environmental and highway offence through a digital system to reduce back office time and increase on street hours i.e. mobile working.	All FPNs can be issued by an officer using a smartphone and Bluetooth printer.
Allow customers to access their accounts and purchase licences and services and pay fines, easily and effectively, improving customer service.	Customer service has been improved. Permits/Licences can be applied for and renewed using a customer web portal and new licences can be purchased using an online shopping basket.
Reduce numbers of calls relating to highway licencing by providing an informative personalised digital solution for the customer.	The number of inbound phone calls has been dramatically reduced.
Increase productivity without increasing head count.	Productivity has increased, as shown later in this document. Headcount has actually been reduced by one member of staff.

Steps that Cardiff Council followed in scoping a digital system

- Identify the need for a digital solution
- Benchmarked Cardiff's service against other councils
- Searched marketplace for available solutions
- Explored and investigated options
- Prepared a robust business case
- Achievable action plan
- Delegate roles and responsibilities
- Good communication to all stakeholders
- Build relationships with key providers in IT, Legal, Procurement, Governance

The need for digital transformation

According to a Local Government Association (LGA) report about 'transforming local public services' the need to take advantage of digital innovations has never been greater for UK councils.

View the LGA report at <https://tinyurl.com/yyq2gwkx>

The report shows that the costs of the public making 'first contact' with a council are significantly lower when made online compared with face-to-face and telephone interactions. The research shows a 98% cost reduction compared with face-to-face interactions and 95% cost reduction compared with telephone interactions. There are plenty of examples where councils have improved the customer experience of applying for a service whilst simultaneously saving money. By streamlining council services and incorporating digital tools, customers can move away from traditional methods of contact to digital interactions by preference.

Digitisation of Environmental Enforcement

Cardiff already educate the public to change their behaviour towards littering and they ensure that litter and dog fouling bins are available, however there is a certain section of society that continue to flout the law.

Enforcement is necessary in the fight against environmental crime. Cardiff Council does issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for littering, dog fouling and other offences but the processes that they have previously used were largely paper based and inefficient. In addition, there are the challenges of coordinating the Environmental Enforcement Officers and managing the back-office processes to maximise efficiency. During 2016/17 the total cost of running the Environmental Enforcement service was nearly £1.1M. Digitisation was a key strategy to not only reduce these costs but increase FPN revenue and compliance.

Challenges associated with a paper-based enforcement system

- Re-keying of data in the back office
- Costly back office processing
- Risk of loss of data and records
- Fines can't be paid immediately online
- Lots of paper-based records
- Officers spending a high proportion of time in the back office instead of patrolling
- No easy completeness checks

The solution

The main purpose for digitising the issuance of environmental FPNs is to improve efficiency in the field and in the back office. Cardiff invested in an Environmental Enforcement solution using the latest '.net 'platform to ensure that it is future proofed. The system is delivered in the cloud as a 'Software as a Service' meaning that less IT resources are needed from Cardiff Council and the implementation timescales were reduced.

In the field, the enforcement officer can use a smartphone app to issue FPNs for any offence type including littering and dog fouling. The smartphone only needs a compatible mobile web browser to use the application therefore a download from an app store is not required. Violation data can be cached in the device's web browser, allowing it to work without an internet connection to store data. The app is hardware independent and works on Android and Apple iOS. Forms can record statements and personal responses and the system supports the creation of custom response forms if required.

By using a smartphone app to issue FPNs Cardiff Council have nearly doubled the amount of time for their officers to be on patrol because they do not have to re-key the information from a paper ticket into the back office. Enforcement officers can use the app to issue FPNs more effectively by using geo-tagging to pinpoint the location of an offence and the postcode lookup functionality to verify the offender's address. They can also duplicate the personal contact details in an FPN if more than one offence is being committed.

In the back-office, Cardiff Council's staff only need a workstation with a compatible web browser to use the system therefore the software does not need to be installed locally. This allows users to access the application from any computer with a broadband connection. The back-office system is a workflow/document management system; all documents are stored electronically which means that Cardiff Council can realise the cost benefits of a paperless office whilst reducing their overall carbon footprint. All correspondence, sent or received, relating to an offence is stored against the FPN record. The system identifies if an individual has previous offences and this can be flagged for the attention of the enforcement manager if required. Any comments, e.g. regarding a received phone call, can be logged to the FPN record.

The workflow management system mirrors Cardiff Council's business processes and automates decisions based on rules, conditions and outcomes e.g. reminder letters can be issued after 14 days. Batch printing software is used to create reminders and integration with Microsoft Word provides reusable pre-populated letter templates.

Previously, if a case needed to go to court in Cardiff, it was a laborious and time-consuming process to produce court files. Court files can now be produced in minutes rather than hours by selecting the files required in the court pack and clicking print.

Reports are easy to create and customise on the fly, which enables Cardiff Council to locate the information they need. To create a report, users can drag & drop the fields required and apply the filters accordingly, e.g. a report to show the number and type of offences by location and date.

In addition, staff management is streamlined using dashboards and sophisticated management reporting tools.

Benefits of a digital enforcement system

- Eliminates errors and costs associated with manual ticketing and re-keying of information
- Automatically transfers data to the back office...no lost records
- Reduces payment cycle time
- Reduces labour costs of processing paper tickets
- Allows officers to spend more time on patrol
- Access to detailed management information in real time
- Intuitive court docket creation tools

Making a difference to the community

The community in the Cardiff Council will benefit because more FPNs will result in greater compliance and the additional fine revenue will enable Cardiff Council to invest in other environmental initiatives. Officers will have more time to be patrolling the streets instead of working in the back office; the very presence of more officers in the community will act as a deterrent to environmental crime and vandalism. Councils delivering a zero-tolerance approach to environmental crime show to the wider law-abiding community that something is being done. A cleaner environment leads to greater civic pride which can lead to a reduction in more serious crime in the long term.

Financial gains since digitisation

The officer time spent on street on environmental education and enforcement has increased from 2-3 hrs a day to 6 hours a day. This has improved the street scene and resulted in an increase of 24% in FPNs in the first quarter. In conjunction with this growth, staff costs have been reduced as headcount has been reduced by one member of staff.

Digitisation of Highways Licensing and permits

Controlling the street scene is of paramount importance to Cardiff Council. The primary focus since the inception of Street Scene services in Cardiff has been to align services and drive productivity improvement. Productivity is key to becoming commercially viable, to deliver services that are competitive that will support both internal and external commercialisation. In addition, this focus also enhances the citizen experience in terms of service delivery.

Before digitisation, the application process for highways licences and permits was laborious e.g. skips, street cafés, scaffolding, canopies, A-boards, hoarding, cranes, smoking enclosures and containers etc. A business wishing to buy a permit would have to download a pdf form from Cardiff Council's website, manually complete and post the form and pay over the phone or send a cheque. There wasn't an online system to view existing permits or the status of outstanding permit applications neither was there a way for a business to pay for one or more permits online in one transaction.

Challenges associated with previous licensing and permits system

- Postal/telephone applications take a lot of time to process
- Online customer portal and payments system was not available
- Costly back office processing
- Risk of data loss
- Storage of paper-based record costly and environmentally unfriendly
- Loss of revenue from businesses not purchasing permits
- Little or no enforcement for non-compliance
- Lack of consistency and accuracy in the decision-making process
- Difficult to ensure compliance with GDPR as it is difficult to automate data retention policies with paper records

The solution

Like Environmental Enforcement the main purpose for digitisation of permits and licensing is to improve efficiency in the field and in the back office. Cardiff also chose 'software as a service' as the delivery method for the software system.

The system consists of 3 main components:

1. Permit/Licence application

Business owners can sign up for an online account and apply for multiple permits e.g. street cafés, scaffolding, canopies, A-boards, hoarding, cranes, skips, smoking enclosures and containers. Payments can be made online and permits can be renewed automatically, or a reminder can be sent prior to a permit's expiration. This can be accessed online via a PC, table or smartphone. Other features include:

- Online account functionality to apply, renew and pay for licenses and permits
- Upload documentation to support permit applications e.g. public liability insurance
- Shopping basket to purchase multiple permits
- View status of applications and expiry dates of a permit
- Works on desktop or mobile phone

2. Enforcement app to ensure compliance

Officers can use the latest smartphone technology to view, in real-time, if an obstruction on the highway/pavement has a valid permit or licence. FPNs can be issued and printed on-the-spot if a permit has not been purchased or is invalid. Geo-tagging services will enable the officer to pin-point the location of an offence and the postcode look up facility will verify the business owner's address. Other features include:

- Track valid/invalid permits whilst out in the field
- Issue an FPN if a permit does not exist
- View expired permits on a smartphone map
- Customisable location rules
- Geo-tagging to pinpoint location to issue an FPN
- Quick address integration
- Use in-built camera to gather evidence
- Bluetooth or wireless printing to portable printer

3. Back office management portal

Back office processing staff benefit from an integrated workflow/document management system; all documents are stored electronically which means that local government can realise the paperless office to help to reduce their overall carbon footprint. All correspondence, sent or received, relating to an offence is stored against the FPN record. The system will identify if an individual has previous offences and this can be flagged for the attention of the enforcement manager if required. Any comments, e.g. regarding a received phone call, can be logged to each FPN's record. Other features include:

- Permit reminders
- Automatic permit renewals if required
- Integration with payment providers e.g. World Pay
- Email confirmation of permits
- Easy to find a list of locations to enforce
- Automated case management and follow up
- Appeals management and debt recovery
- Sophisticated report builder for management information

Benefits of a digital licensing and permits system

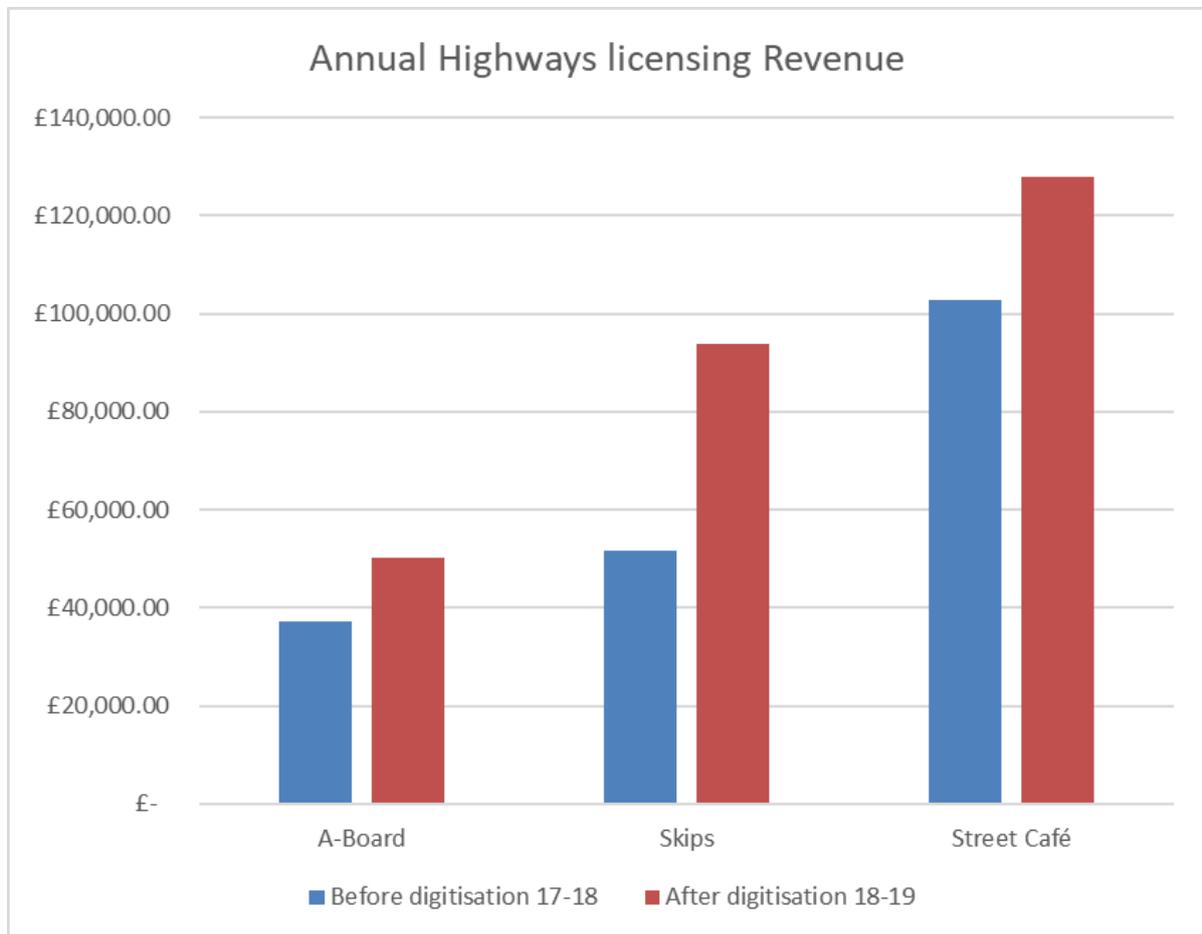
- Increases permit payment compliance = more revenue
- Ensure that all businesses pay for the correct licence not just the diligent ones
- Reduces the number of phone calls received by Cardiff Council
- Reduces unlicensed obstructions on the highway
- Improves safety for pedestrians and motorists
- Eliminates errors and costs associated with a manual/paper-based system
- Reduces payment cycle time
- Allows officers to spend more targeted time on patrol as they can see which businesses have valid permits on a digital map
- Access to detailed management information in real time

Making a difference to the community

Business owners now have a fair, easy and fast way to pay for their permits and licences which means they can spend less time and resources ensuring that they are complaint. This is particularly notable for skip companies that need to apply for multiple permits on the same day. From the general public's point of view, it ensures that only permitted obstructions are allowed on the street. This eases congestion for vehicles and increases safety for pedestrians who should not have to step off the pavement to avoid an unauthorised advertising board or street café.

Financial gains since digitisation

Since digitisation Cardiff Council has increased their overall revenue from £381,000 in 2017/18 to £538,000 in 2018/19; an increase of 41%. This has been achieved through ease of applications, payment and greater compliance. The most notable gains were in applications for A-boards, Skips and Street Cafés as shown in the chart below.



Conclusion

In conclusion, Cardiff Council has achieved its core objectives for digitisation.

- Costs have been reduced because Cardiff are now able to employ fewer staff to process more licences and services to the public and issue more FPNs for non-compliance and environmental crime.
- Cardiff have transformed the way they deliver their services. Citizens can create an online account to apply, renew and pay for a Council service. They can upload any documentation to support applications and there is shopping basket to purchase different services in one transaction. The status of existing services and their expiry dates can be viewed online.
- Public behaviour is being changed for the better by officers issuing electronic FPNs for environmental crime.
- Revenue is being maximised for the Council with greater compliance from license and permits applications.

About StarTraq (Cardiff Council's software provider)

Started in 1999, StarTraq provides software to the Police, Courts and Local Authorities to digitise their processes, automate offence processing and streamline licensing and permit applications.

StarTraq's back-office solution, **Dome**, and smartphone ticketing app, **Traqer**, enables authorities to process many different offence types efficiently, including speeding, red-light running, parking, bus lane and yellow box infringements, littering, fly tipping and dog fouling.

The end-to-end digital transformation software, **StarGO**, is the complete application for the public sector. The system can be 'fully hosted' so that local government can optimise the services they provide for their citizens and deliver value for money to council tax payers. Software services include: highways licensing, environmental enforcement and other permits/licenses. StarTraq's experienced team can help local authorities with one specific service or provide digital transformation across multiple departments. All services can be accessed by the public online using an internet enabled device.

"Just because it hasn't been done before in Local Authorities doesn't mean it can't be done, it probably exists in the private sector or it can be built. Smaller software houses like StarTraq are more inclined to develop a tailored fit solution rather than try and impose existing systems that may be costly. Working with StarTraq to achieve our objectives has been rewarded by increased revenue for Cardiff Council and by enhancing the citizen experience in terms of our service delivery."

Kathryn Palmer, Team Leader Delivery & Business Improvement, Cardiff Council.

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