

CASE STUDY

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

TOPLEVEL ENABLES WEBSITE USERS TO "REPORT IT, APPLY FOR IT, OR PAY FOR IT" ONLINE

Residents and businesses served by Arun District Council can more easily "Report It, Apply For It or Pay For It" with online services developed using the Toplevel Outreach case management engine.



The council's website now provides access to more than 60 different online transactions from just three main routes into its services, guiding users down the right pathway through an easy-to-use interface.

Validation of data, including checks against existing council databases, ensures the council captures information that is correct and complete, while data can be immediately routed to the right person or team, enabling staff to respond more quickly to customers.

The online transactions on the website are used by council staff as well as customers, and by staff at more than 20 Parish Councils in the district, who are often the first point of contact for residents, providing consistent customer service no matter how customers choose to interact with the council. Meanwhile, integration with back-office systems is delivering tangible cost savings by reducing the need for staff to re-key data.

THE REQUIREMENT

Covering the three main towns of Arundel, Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, Arun District Council is home to around 150,000 people. The council has been a long-term advocate of allowing customers to interact with the council electronically, says Maureen Chaffe, the council's Head of Information Management.

However, she says, "We're not interested in eforms alone. You only get the value if you can make that eform part of an end-to-end transactional process."

That view was reinforced after some false starts with eform solutions which didn't give the council the longer-term benefits it was looking for.

"It was easy to create forms and take data from customers with those solutions," Chaffe points out, "but we didn't have ability to then move that data around in workflow, automatically put completed forms into our document management system, or integrate forms with our back-office systems."

In complete contrast, when the council began implementing Toplevel Outreach, it found Outreach delivered all the capabilities it was looking for.

THREE ROUTES, MANY TRANSACTIONS

The council acquired Outreach as part of a consortium deal involving eight local authorities in West Sussex and has been one of the last to implement it – but has quickly seen the advantages. One key benefit, Chaffe says, is that Outreach has allowed the council to put a large number of transactions online while making the experience as simple and straightforward as possible for customers. “We actually have just three routes into our services – Report It, Apply For It and Pay For It – but, between them, they deliver access to more than 60 transactions,” she explains. “That helps customers, because it’s very simple to use, while looking smart and professional.”

Once customers choose to report, apply or pay, they’re given more options for specific transactions – and we’ve made sure the names of those options are ones people can understand.”

Toplevel Outreach then guides customers through the process of reporting, applying or paying for the service they’ve selected. Along the way, Outreach not only ensures the data customers enter is valid input but also validates data against existing data sources. “For example, if someone needs to enter their council tax reference number, we’ve created a link to our council tax system to allow that number to be validated,” Chaffe explains. “We also validate address data against the national land and property gazetteer so it’s always clean. It can cost a lot of money to keep data clean, but Outreach helps us do that automatically.”

Once data has been submitted, it is then automatically routed to the right person or the right team within the council. Data from a single submission can even be split and routed to different people, depending on the information customers enter, allowing sensitive data to be restricted to only those who need to see it.

“Because Outreach allows us to automatically send only the relevant information to each person, we can meet our data protection obligations more easily,” Chaffe points out.

ONE SOLUTION, MANY USERS

Outreach also helps the council meet its goal of having the same interface for customers and its own front-line staff.

“We’ve made that a key part of our service delivery,” Chaffe says. “We shouldn’t be asking customers to do anything our own staff can’t do.” In fact, the council has taken this philosophy even further, by making its online transactions easily available to staff in the 20 or so parish councils within the district.

“We support and host the parish councils’ websites for them, so we’ve taken the step of making our forms available through their websites,” Chaffe explains. “Parish councils take a lot of front-end traffic, because they’re in the villages. Now, when residents want to make a report, we encourage parish council staff to use our online services to do that, helping them pass on the right information to us. Previously, they would have taken a message and we’d often have to get back to the customer to get more information. All that costs money and doesn’t provide such a good service to users.”



CUSTOMER SERVICE UP, COSTS DOWN

Improvements to customer service have certainly been one of the main benefits of rolling out Outreach-enabled transactions. “Those using the forms seem to find them very easy to use,” Chaffe points out, “while having payments integrated into forms has made processes more seamless for customers: they no longer have to write a cheque, find a stamp and post it to us.”

She adds, “At our end, we can provide a faster response, because we can start dealing with requests more quickly knowing we have the payment and aren’t waiting for it to be processed and to clear.”

The council has also seen significant cost savings in areas where it has fully integrated Outreach enabled transactions with back-office systems.

For example, it has rolled out a solution based on Outreach for job applications that integrates with its existing personnel systems.

“Because we don’t have to re-key job application data, we’ve been able to save the equivalent of one full-time member of staff,” Chaffe explains.

“We’re now looking at other transactions to see where we can get business benefits from integration.”

EASY INTEGRATION, RAPID DEPLOYMENT

Chaffe adds that ease of integration is one of the key strengths of Outreach. "It's very easy to get data out and the ease with which we can integrate with other systems is entirely dependent on what the other systems are capable of rather than Outreach," she says. A key project for the future will see Outreach integrated with the council's Lagan citizen relationship management (CRM) system.

This will allow every submission made through Outreach to be tracked through the CRM, allowing contact centre staff to see what other interactions have previously taken place.

Another advantage of Outreach is the speed and ease with which even complex transactions can be implemented by the council's own IT team.

"Our developers would be quick to tell me if they were unhappy with the tools provided, but they've been very impressed by Outreach and the support and training provided by Toplevel," Chaffe reports.

"They find Outreach very agile and easy to get their heads around, while letting them create robust solutions which look good. It also allows them to be very productive: using Outreach, we can go live with a reasonably complex form – with validation within the form but without integration to other systems – within five working days from receiving the request, including testing."



More transactions, greater savings

Going forward, Arun is now planning to use Outreach to handle internal administration as well as public-facing transactions.

"There's a lot of money to be saved on internal admin such as car mileage claims, where you can get the form to handle the calculations and use workflow to route them," Chaffe points out.

Meanwhile, she says, the much lower cost of handling customer transactions online rather than by telephone or face-to-face means the council "doesn't need to move many customer transactions online to have a big cost impact."

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