

How Torfaen County Borough Council is driving channel shift and transformation using the My Council Services suite of products

What is My Council Services?

My Council Services (MCS) provides public sector organisations with innovative smartphone and web applications that enable self-service customer access and mobile working. The MCS platform is unique. It is the only fully synchronised, dynamically configurable and integrated multi-channel customer self-service and mobile working platform. The combination of innovative, cost-effective technology and made-to-measure professional services ensures clients realise rapid returns on their investments.

About Torfaen County Borough Council

Torfaen County Borough Council is the governing body for Torfaen, one of the principal areas of Wales. Torfaen is home to over 90,000 residents and a thriving business community and tourist industry. It comprises a twelve mile-long valley stretching from the World Heritage Town of Blaenavon in the North, through the historic town of Pontypool, to Wales' first new town, Cwmbran in the South. Formed in 1997, Torfaen County Borough Council is a unitary local authority delivering hundreds of services to residents, businesses and visitors every day of the year.

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Key drivers of My Council Services implementation at Torfaen

In common with many local authorities, Torfaen has a very high volume of calls coming in to its customer contact centre and struggles to find the resource to manage this demand. Therefore, the Council began looking for technology solutions that would help with demand management and also facilitate channel shift.

The Council's main requirements were for a product that would be simple to use, user-friendly, accessible and fully customisable. Torfaen also wanted people to be able to contact them whilst on the move so the solution they implemented needed to be accessible via a web interface, mobile phone or other handheld device. It was also important for them to be able to link all of their existing systems together. Finally, Torfaen wanted a system that would be simple to build and quick to deploy.

A number of tender submissions were received and, after careful consideration, the decision was made to appoint Abavus and install its My Council Services system.

"Cost was a big factor – the main thing really. That and how quickly the product could be implemented. Development time to actual implementation time – they were really key – and also that My Council Services delivered functionality that was straightforward but worked and delivered the option of customisation and building it how we wanted to build it. They were the main things we were looking for and My Council Services delivers on all of those.

We were looking for something that would be easy to use yet could handle more sophisticated processes where required and that would give us quick wins that we could deliver and implement instantly. We didn't want to wait months and months. Abavus was the one that was able to offer all of those things.

In fact it has turned out that the real selling point is the additional products and services that Abavus supplied that we had no idea of when we first went out to tender. If we were doing a spec now and were looking to tender again then our process would be completely written around what Abavus as a company has been able to deliver for us."

Linda King, Customer Services Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council

Details of the project

Phase one – implementing smart forms in the Environmental Services Department

The first phase of the project focused on the customer services contact centre. The aim was to try and better manage the volume of calls coming in. The Council started with a soft launch in the Environmental Services Department and work began on building an app which would enable people to interact with the department quickly and easily via their smart phones, tablets or computers.

The My Council Services system is so easy to use that the Torfaen team were able to design and build all of the forms themselves, and the app was officially launched in April 2014.

"Within Customer Services we recognised that the quick win was to focus on environmental services – waste management, highways – the things that the app was really made for, for the customer to be able to go out and take a picture and send a form and for us to be able to work with that, so we launched with that first.

We had an existing in house tool we used that was very cumbersome and all based on programming language so when we tried to change something it was very difficult. With My Council Services we found it very simple to design and arrange all the forms. My colleagues and I actually built and designed all the forms ourselves.

The biggest impact came when we integrated the forms onto the website. That's when we really started to feel the benefit and started to see the number of customer registering to use the app increased quite significantly."

Linda King, Customer Services Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council

Phase two – installing MCS's contact centre module across all areas of Customer Services

The Council quickly realised that the My Council Services suite of products offered potential far beyond what they had originally considered, and so they installed MCS's contact centre module across all areas of Customer Services.

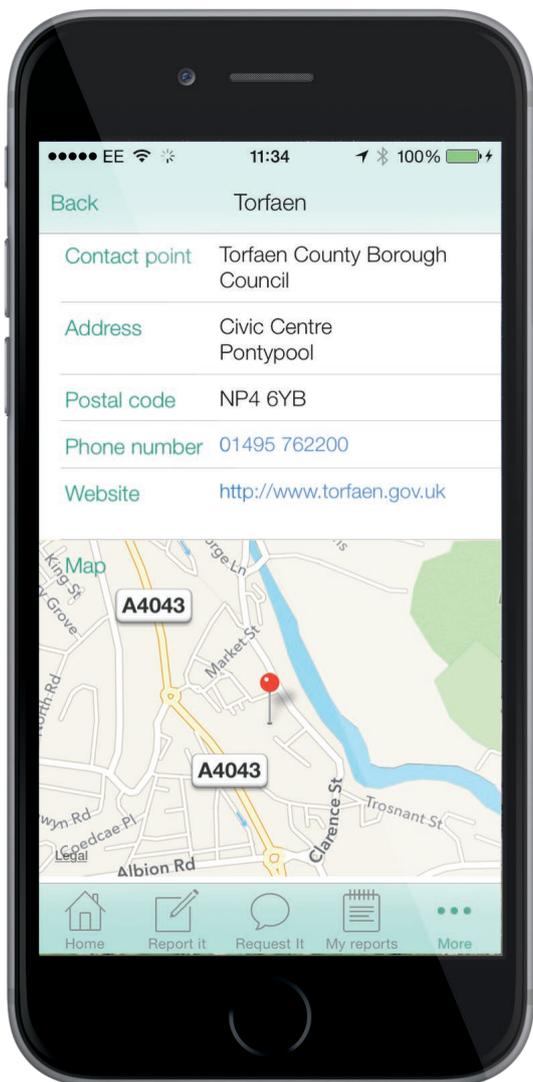
The previous system was slow, cumbersome and largely paper-based. In contrast the contact centre module offers an end-to-end customer service experience that was not previously possible. Customers can be routed immediately to whichever department they need and all their communications tracked and responded to in one place.

"One of the things I noticed as soon as we had the product was the potential of the contact centre module.

It's a real game changer for us - customers can actually track the progress of their own enquiries regardless of how they contact us. We've never been able to achieve that before and we're really starting to see the results of it. It's not something that we've ever thought we'd be able to achieve so it's a big step forward.

One of the key things I love about the My Council Services platform is that it gives you opportunity to really think about what you want to do. It doesn't just give you one way of doing things but you can configure and apply changes exactly how you want to."

Linda King, Customer Services Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council



Phase three – enabling mobile working in the Street Scene team

With an impressive initial return from phases one and two, the team at Torfaen shifted their focus from digitising customer transactions towards digitally transforming every stage of the business process. The fly tipping service was chosen to pilot the process automation and mobile working elements of the MCS platform.

Why focus on fly tipping?

- Internal processes in this team were almost entirely paper-based so there was considerable scope to improve efficiency
- The service performance was judged on time taken to complete transactions so the team were motivated to see if technology could help them improve this
- The process was a complex one involved multiple service areas working together (Customer Care, Street Scene Administration, Street Cleansing Operatives and Public Protection)
- Fly tipping is a high profile and high volume service area – its performance has a direct impact on the Council's reputation with its residents

Historically there had been limited use of technology in this area of operations, so implementing MCS had the added benefit of developing digital skills in new areas of the Council.

"We felt that if we could prove the value and efficacy of this technology in our Street Scene service we'd have a model that could be picked up and adapted by any service area that wants to implement process automation and mobile working in their service. We learned a lot along the way, but we knew at the outset that if we could deliver it there, we could deliver it anywhere."

Gareth Phillips, Digital Transformation Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council

Torfaen rolled out mobile working capabilities to five frontline teams dealing with fly tipping. Staff were equipped with Windows 640 smartphones, each running the My Council Services Mobile Worker native application. They then received service requests and tasks on their devices, rather than needing to collect paper copies from the depot each day. Using their mobile devices, they can manage, update and resolve all tasks assigned to them whilst in the field, as well as gathering valuable fly tipping evidence that has led to prosecutions.

Since launch, the new process has saved around 200 hours in reduced administration work alone.

Another key benefit has been improved communication between residents and frontline council workers.

"We've had numerous instances where a fly tipping incident was reported by a customer, responded to quickly by our operatives who were then able to liaise directly with the customer whilst the work was being completed."

"These real time, automated and digital processes are reducing avoidable contact and mitigate the negative impact of demand failure simply because people don't need to phone us to find out what's happening because they always kept informed."

Gareth Phillips, Digital Transformation Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council

Next steps

Following a successful roll out with fly tipping, the Mobile Working programme is scaling up to encompass other areas of the Council's operation, including other areas of Waste Services as well as social care processes such as the community meals service.

"Our community meals drivers have a key role to play in looking out for some of our most vulnerable residents. They had heard of the mobile worker capabilities and were keen to trial it in their service. One of the features we're introducing is for them to instantly flag up any concerns or issues they have about residents. Using the MCS rules system we can have a process that automatically alerts other services and designated family members (next of kin contact) to respond. It's a simple set up that could save lives."

Gareth Phillips, Digital Transformation Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council



How Torfaen has benefitted from implementing My Council Services

Substantial savings from channel shift

Implementing MCS's contact centre module has led to substantial savings for the Council. During 2015/16 the Council received more than 25,000 self-service transactions through My Council Services. Using SOCITM's channel shift return on investment methodology, this represents a conservative saving of almost £70K.

"We saw a measurable return on our initial investment comfortably within the first twelve months just on channel shift savings alone. Where we've added high volume, low complexity services like ordering bins and recycling boxes, the results have been hugely impressive, with around 80% of these transactions now being completed by residents online. As we move the project on to transforming entire processes from end to end on the MCS platform the potential savings are even greater."

Gareth Phillips, Digital Transformation Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council

Improved levels of customer satisfaction

Feedback from customers has been overwhelmingly positive. The current satisfaction rate with the reporting system is 88% positive, with one customer saying:

"Submitting a Direct Debit request could not have been easier or quicker. The form was clear and the response time by email to confirm my request was immediate. Torfaen is to be congratulated."

Saving money and time through automating back end processes

"What I really love as Customer Services Manager is being able to automate a lot of the backend processes. We've been able to streamline processes and we've learnt a lot more about the platform. The forms we've built are very intuitive and capture a lot more information. It really has saved time and we're now moving on to give access to our colleagues within the Waste Department. This will mean that if, for example, someone contacts us to request a container the request will go directly from the initial form that they fill in straight to the department and the department then will close the request down or update accordingly."

Linda King, Customer Services Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council

Working with an innovative and responsive team

"The Abavus team almost feel like they're part of us. It doesn't feel like we're dealing with a separate company. If ever I've had a question they've been great. When we came to the annual customer day we really realised just how innovative and how responsive Abavus is and that triggered in us a lot of thoughts of things that

we could do. When we make suggestions the majority of them are implemented immediately and the other things tend to be on the agenda for the future. It seems to be a constantly evolving product that has got much more scope than we originally envisaged. That's the real selling point for me, not necessarily what we originally went out to tender for but all of the things we've found the product delivers after that."

Linda King, Customer Services Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council

A better service experience for customers

"In the early stages we knew that we wouldn't get everything right so we created a feedback form on the app specifically about the app and we get regular suggestions and feedback from customers as well as praise for how easy it is to use. Our customers really like it. Suggestions can be implemented very quickly. The Abavus development team are very, very proactive. They seem to know what we're going to ask for before we even ask for it."

Linda King, Customer Services Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council

Flexibility to think strategically about future direction

"The suite of packages that came along with the product has really given us something to think about for our future direction. Initially it was just about trying to better manage the volumes coming in to the main call centre, but now we're looking at being able to build end-to-end customer service throughout the whole authority and My Council Services really gives you the option to be able to do that."

Linda King, Customer Services Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council

A bespoke product, precisely tailored to Torfaen's needs

"We've ended up with something really bespoke that's entirely tailored to what we need. When you work in customer services time is precious and you don't want to have to rely on something else or some other department doing something for you. You want to be able to instantly make change and MCS enables that. The training we've received has been excellent but it's a really simple product – anyone can use it. It's logical and very, very easy to use."

Linda King, Customer Services Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council

Savings through channel shift

"We are seeing every day the number of registered users grow and I can see the channel shift. We're still getting phone calls through but what's really exciting to see is that already we are getting as many people report faulty streetlights through MCS as we do on the telephone. We now get more people requesting a new container via MCS than we do on the telephone so those are clear differences that are demonstrating to me the channel shift."

Linda King, Customer Services Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council

Staff embracing the new way of working

"Staff have responded really well. The majority of them have signed up themselves and the big selling point has been getting those who are more afraid of technology to use it and to see how simple it is. Most CRM systems need weeks of training and it is quite a big cultural change for staff to move from one system to another. But in this case the transition has been really easy because the majority of the staff use the app themselves."

Linda King, Customer Services Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council

Opening up many more possibilities

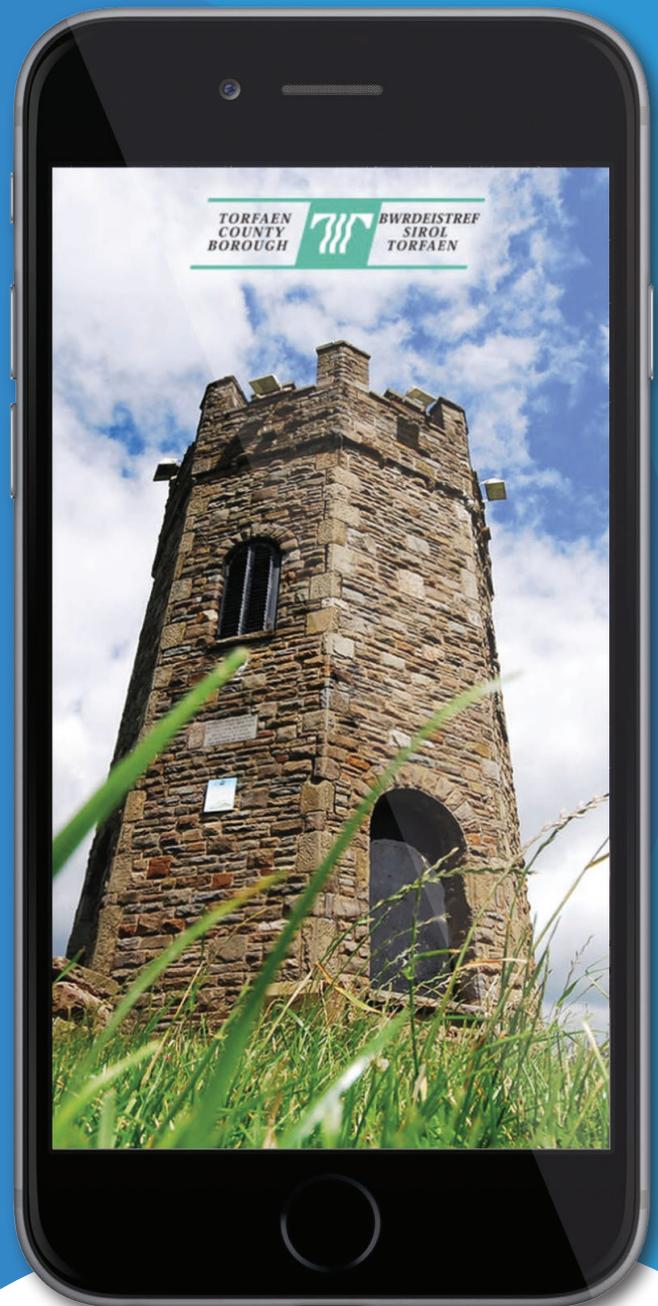
"It's not a case of trying to think about more things to do, it's more a case of 'right, we can change so many things – which ones are we going to prioritise?' and that is a real big thing about this tool – it enables you to change really everything, it's just about prioritising what you're going to do first."

Linda King, Customer Services Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council

Simple and easy to manage with no need for additional technical support

"Key for us is the flexibility of the system and the ability for our internal teams to configure My Council Services to meet the needs of our customers and the services without the need for any technical ICT support. From day one, we were all excited about the huge potential that the platform has to transform the way we operate, and the passion and enthusiasm shown by the Abavus team."

Gareth Phillips, Digital Transformation Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council



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About Abavus Ltd and My Council Services

Abavus is a partner to iTouch Vision and the exclusive certified partner for My Council Services. Over the last five years Abavus has delivered operational consultancy alongside accredited training and development to UK public sector organisations. During that time Abavus has also been involved with the implementation and setup of IT platforms.

iTouch Vision is a leading innovator in the development of technology applications focused on increasing efficiency and improving the customer experience for both public sector and commercial organisations.



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iTouch Vision

For more information about My Council Services and to book your free demo:

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