

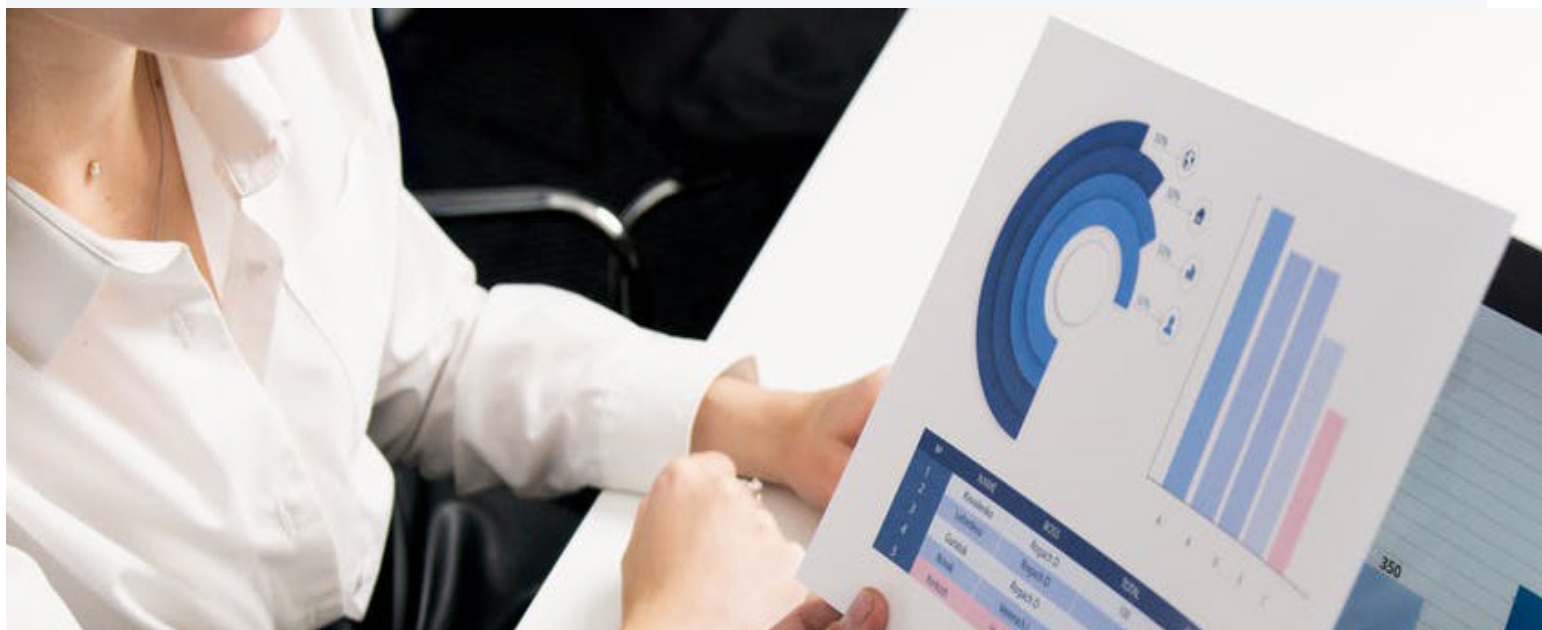
White Paper

Transformation and digitisation for licencing services

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The challenges and opportunities of licencing services for local authorities

Local authorities face numerous challenges and opportunities when it comes to effective execution of their licencing services. Licencing has an important role, ensuring standards compliance in several areas (housing, events, taxis, etc).

In many situations, the effective checking of standards requires physical inspection and assessment. Moreover, licencing activities represent an opportunity for local authorities to responsibly generate revenue. Alongside this opportunity sits the responsibility of effective enforcement when requirements have not been met, or a proper licence has not been issued.

The multiple threads of carrying out the council's licencing responsibilities are highly interdependent. Some of the key supporting factors include:

- Support and ensuring compliance with legally binding standards and conducting effective inspection where necessary. This requires the local authority to offer clear explanation of the responsibilities of the licensee, and the provision of accessible application procedures.
- In turn, accurate records of the licences in place must be maintained, and a record of the inspections conducted along with the associated scores and outcomes must be in place.
- The council has to enable accurate and efficient collection of fees, the records of which will need to be clearly associated with the person, event or asset that is covered by the licence.
- Only with each of these elements present can the council be confident that it has strong governance in place for its range of licencing activities and associated revenue collection, and that the downstream enforcement activities can be carried out with the required rigour.

Overview of our work with UK local authorities

Abavus works exclusively with UK local authorities, enabling them to achieve wide-ranging transformation of service delivery across the full range of council service functions. In recent years we have invested significantly in the development of the My Council Services digital platform to support processes that require application, inspection in the context of required standards, payment collection, automation of downstream workflow and enforcement.

In this white paper we examine how the My Council Services platform supports the following areas of licencing:

- Customer self-service – how councils can most efficiently enable customers to access the relevant application process and complete their application online using an internet connected device of their choosing
- Payment collection, financial reconciliation and licence renewal – how councils streamline the process of licence fee collection and licence renewal whilst also maintaining accurate records on licences held
- Licence management – enabling council officers (be they part of the licencing team or other regulatory teams) to process those applications, and to design and deploy automated workflow to support such processing where desirable and appropriate
- Mobile inspections – how councils can harness technology to support improved efficiency when executing premises inspections (e.g. houses of multiple occupancy and other licence-based inspection processes)
- Enforcement – with the key elements of licence management and fee collection being present, accurate and stable, we will illustrate how councils can become more proactive in terms of enforcement and the benefits this will derive

The screenshot displays the 'My Council Services' web application. The top navigation bar includes a hamburger menu, the service name, a language selector, and a user account link. A left-hand sidebar lists various service categories, with 'Apply for it' highlighted in red. The main content area, titled 'Apply for it', features a search bar and three prominent service tiles: 'HMO License' (with a house icon), 'Temporary Event Notice' (with a tent icon), and 'Table & Chair License' (with a table and chairs icon). Below these tiles, a progress bar indicates the steps of the application process: Form, Application Type, Section 1 Ownership and Management, and Confirmation. The 'Form' step is currently active, showing the 'HMO Application Form #202638 | Section 1 Ownership and Management - 1.1 Applicant Details'. The form includes fields for 'Applicant Details (Proposed Licence Holder)' such as Title (Mr), First Name (Phil), Last Name (Scott), and Address. A search bar is also present at the bottom of the form.

My Council Services provides clients with the ability to configure a range of accessible and responsive eForms.

Implementing guidance and support within the licence application eForm itself ensures the correct licence is chosen (along with the correct payment).

This will save the council time and money, as well as improve customer experience.

Service request and Case

Forms builder
Add or edit your categories, questions and answers

Rules
Add or edit rules, that create actions based on the different attributes on a Service request, Case and Task

Status
Add or edit Service request or Case status

Transitions
View or update status transition detail

Priority
Add or edit Service request or Case priority

Outcomes
View and update your service request / case outcome settings

Quick response
Create, edit and print QR Codes

Store
View and consume existing forms from the store

Service level agreements
View and manage the respond, plan and resolve by service timings

Translate
View and manage translations of all forms and their objects.

The My Council Services Form Store allows our clients to share any eForms they have created. This allows new clients to benefit from eForm templates that have already been created and deployed at other UK local authorities.

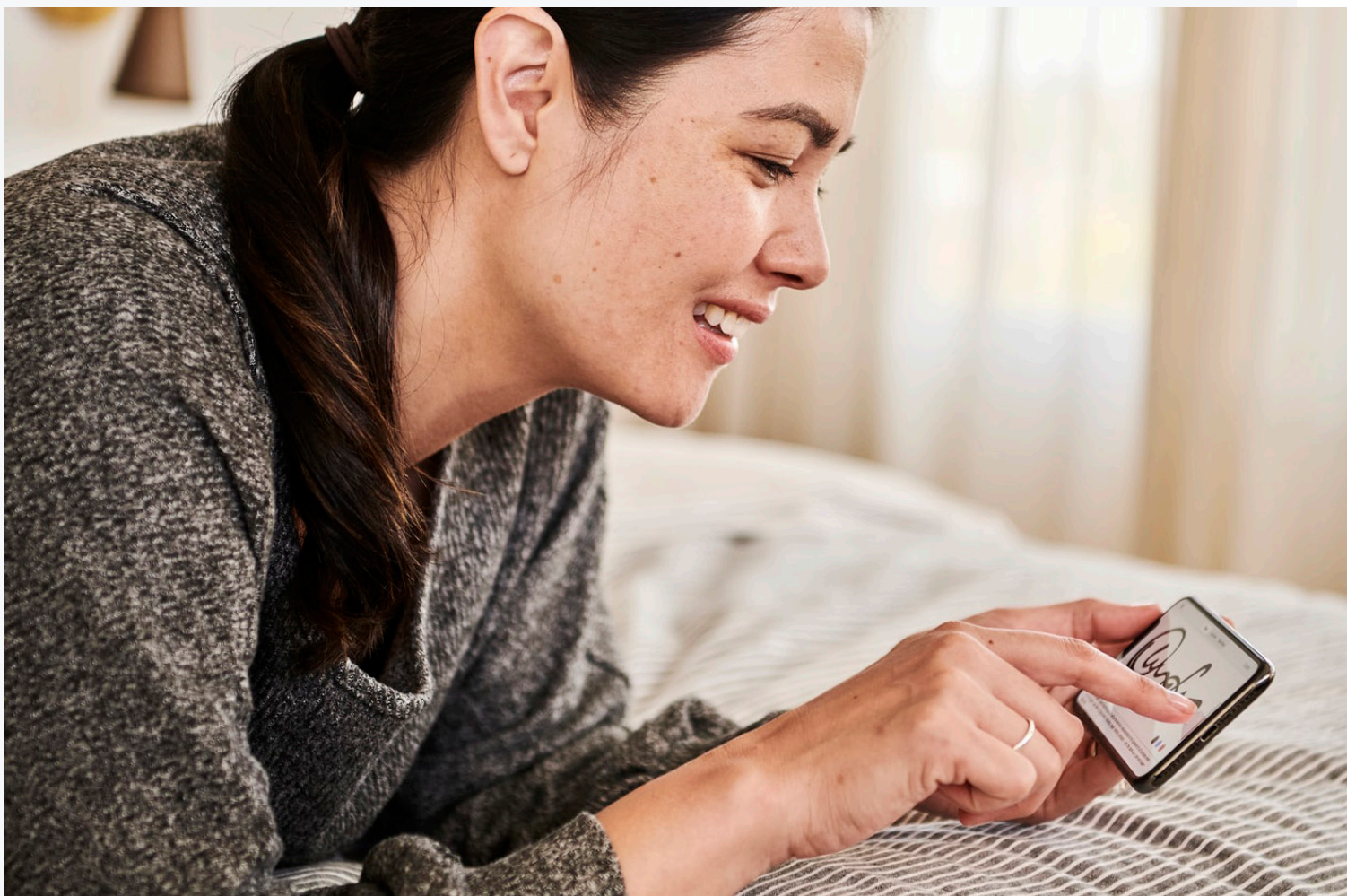
Administration \ **Store**

Forms builder Rules Status Transitions Priority Outcomes Quick response Store Service level agreements Translate Settings

Search forms
HMO Search

Forms Import							
Client	Form	Form	Tree	Rating	Reviews	Download	
<input type="checkbox"/> Allerdale Borough Council	HMO Questionnaire LL			★★★★★	0	0	
<input type="checkbox"/> Southend on Sea Borough Council	HMO Application Form			★★★★★	0	0	
<input type="checkbox"/> Southend on Sea Borough Council	HMO Application Form - Copy			★★★★★	0	0	
<input type="checkbox"/> Southend on Sea Borough Council	Request HMO Advice			★★★★★	0	0	
<input type="checkbox"/> Southend on Sea Borough Council	Vary an HMO Licence Application - Copy			★★★★★	0	0	

1 - 5



Customer self-service for licence applications

The My Council Services platform incorporates a dedicated and fully integrated e-form design module. This enables the entry point for customers requiring licences of any purpose to make an application.

The process of designing suitable and accessible forms is relatively straightforward. In addition to the option of creating new forms from scratch, the My Council Services Form Store allows local authorities to share and borrow existing form templates with one another. Whilst the specifics of the processes and the personnel that will manage and administer them can vary from one council to another, the detailed requirements of the form are very consistent.

A new UK local authority wishing to deploy licence application forms need only to search, preview and import from the existing form templates in the platform's Form Store. Once created and tested, forms can be quickly published and deployed as an integrated part of any web property (either requiring registration or not), and they can be made available as part of a fully functional customer portal.



Payment collection, financial reconciliation, and licence renewal

Integrated and secure online payment enables the council to fully streamline the process, ensuring that the appropriate licence charge is collected. This gives the council confidence that it has actually collected the correct fee for the relevant licence period, and that payment and licensee records are collated.

The My Council Services digital platform is routinely integrated with a wide range of payment gateway providers to enable the online collection of fees as part of the self-service process. Once integrated, the payment capability exists on the platform as a plugin, meaning that it can be used for multiple licence application forms (and more widely for any other form type for that matter).

Collecting, tracking and reconciling licence payments plays a crucial role in effective management. My Council Services allows for integrated online payments with the ability to track and reconcile all transactions as part of the licence management process.

Plugin

Payment integration
Define your payment gateway to take card payments during form creation

Web service reference
Use Web Service References to access a Web service across the network.

Map overlay
Define map overlay, manage visibility and min/max zoom level for each layer.

Repeater fields
Add or edit repeater field for dynamic forms.

Edit	Payment gateway	Name	De
	Capita Payment Gateway		
	CIVICA Payment Gateway (Paylink)		
	WorldPay Payment Gateway		
	Barclaycard Payment Gateway	Barclaycard	

My Council Services also offers a Product Module. This allows a complete database of product assets to be configured and appended with meta data to support ongoing product management.

Having discreet products, with associated pricing and other documented attributes means that multi-line purchases (a single transaction that contains multiple different products) can be enabled. This also means that financial reconciliation is much more straightforward, allowing different product or licence payments to be allocated to the appropriate cost code or department.

Another area that should be given consideration is the support and education that the council provides to prospective licensees as part of the application process. The reality is that the array of licences required

and the range of different people and organisations that must apply for them is broad. Many applicants will be individuals that do not have any professional knowledge in the arena of licences. It would be sensible for the council to think carefully about how it provides advice and guidance in order to offer the required support to applicants.

In our experience, it is more efficient to invest some time and effort to ensure that an applicant makes the correct application for the correct licence type (and pays the correct amount) the first time through the process. Working with frustrated applicants after the event to correct mistakes or to complete a refund will quickly leech away at your council's efficiency gains created through having a digital process.

There is no single right or wrong answer to this challenge, but it is important to provide accessible information and access to informed and accurate advice as part of the application process. This could take the form of clearly written web pages with links to the relevant online application forms, and in some cases it may make sense to allow access to a member of staff who has expert licencing knowledge.

As part of this exercise, it would be sensible for the council's Licencing Team to think about and segment its applicant audience. Some applicants will be one-time only members of the public, whilst others may be 'professional' serial applicants working for an organisation for whom licence application is part of their daily operations. Adapting the channels of support to reflect these different applicant profiles will produce a better outcome for all.



Licence management

Because of the relatively wide range of licence types that a council is responsible for issuing and managing, it is crucial that the council sets itself up to manage the full array in the most effective means possible. This importance of carefully analysing the different licence processes is amplified when taking steps towards making this process more or entirely digital from application through to issue and renewal. Simply rolling an offline, paper-based process into a digital format is not going to deliver the anticipated improvements in efficiency.

Different licence types present different challenges and opportunities. The specific characteristics of the council will also have a significant influence. For example, a larger council covering a densely populated urban area is likely to have high volumes of HMO licence applications. We have spoken to large urban councils recently that are dealing with well in excess of 5,000 HMO applications annually. This is a significant workload. When you dig into the detail, the complexities are numerous. Renewing and inspecting can be a major overhead. Getting things wrong can have multi-faceted implications and negative impacts, including but not limited to:

- Exposing tenants of HMOs to unacceptable risks
- Significant reputational damage to the council when some incident inevitably occurs
- Missed revenue opportunity because of poor underlying data and record keeping

- A failure to properly regulate a housing and accommodation type that may be more heavily relied upon by more vulnerable individuals
- Allowing rogue landlords to dodge their responsibilities and avoid proper licencing

The answer to mitigating and minimising these risks lies in having a fully integrated process from start to finish. This will include:

- Application receipt from would-be licensees
- Calculation and collection of payment
- Review and assessment of the application
- Inspections (if required)
- Award of licence or refusal of licence with advice back to the licensee on how to achieve compliance
- Maintenance of licence and payment records clearly related to the property, asset or individual concerned
- Interim monitoring and enforcement, based on changing legislation and or changing circumstances
- Effective means for management of the renewal process

Filter ()

Catalogue: Licensing

Group: - All -

From: 08-JUN-2021

Options: ☒ All ☐ My service requests ☐ Draft

Available filters:

- ☒ All
- ☐ Skip Permit (Highway) Application
- ☐ Private Hire Vehicle Operators Licence
- ☐ Private Hire Vehicle Licence
- ☐ Hoarding & Fencing Licence Application
- ☐ Scaffolding licence
- ☐ Tables & Chairs Licence
- ☐ Scaffolding - Control Form
- ☐ Full Taxi Vehicle Inspection
- ☐ Operator Inspection
- ☐ Taxi Rank Vehicle Inspection
- ☐ Temporary Event Notice
- ☐ HMO Application Form

Service

Search: Number [x] Options [Add]

	Number	Form	Date	Status	Impact	Service	Priority	Customer	Owner	Location	Risk
	178512	HMO Application Form	29 Jan 20 15:36	Closed	-	-	-	Mr. Gary Wilcox	Mr. Berni Simmons	100 Grove Hill, London, E18 2HZ, UK	-
	178405	HMO Application Form	28 Jan 20 17:17	Closed	-	-	-	Mr. Graham Wilcox	Mr. Berni Simmons	Flat 17, 1 Ullswater Court, Giebelands Avenue, London, E18 2BD, UK	-
	178401	HMO Application Form	28 Jan 20 16:31	Closed	-	-	-	Mrs. Vanessa Wilcox	Mr. Berni Simmons	98 Bressey Grove, London, E18 2HX, UK	-
	178395	HMO Application Form	28 Jan 20 15:16	Closed	-	-	-	Mr. Gary Wilcox	Mr. Berni Simmons	100 Grove Hill, London, E18 2HZ, UK	-

Comprehensive reporting on current applications is available via our Service Desk case management interface. Users can select their preferred view and drill down to specific application details quickly and easily.

Enabling mobile inspections and remote working

Many licence processes have a requirement for the council to conduct some form of inspection. That could be of a property or premises, an asset of some description, or to inspect and evaluate a process or service being carried out by an individual or a business.

In many cases this will require a council officer to visit a location that is not a council office, such as a property or business. Once on site, a structured process of inspection, assessment and data capture needs to be completed. In some cases, the assessment data captured will be used to calculate a score. Oftentimes, this score is based on a specific and pre-defined calculation.

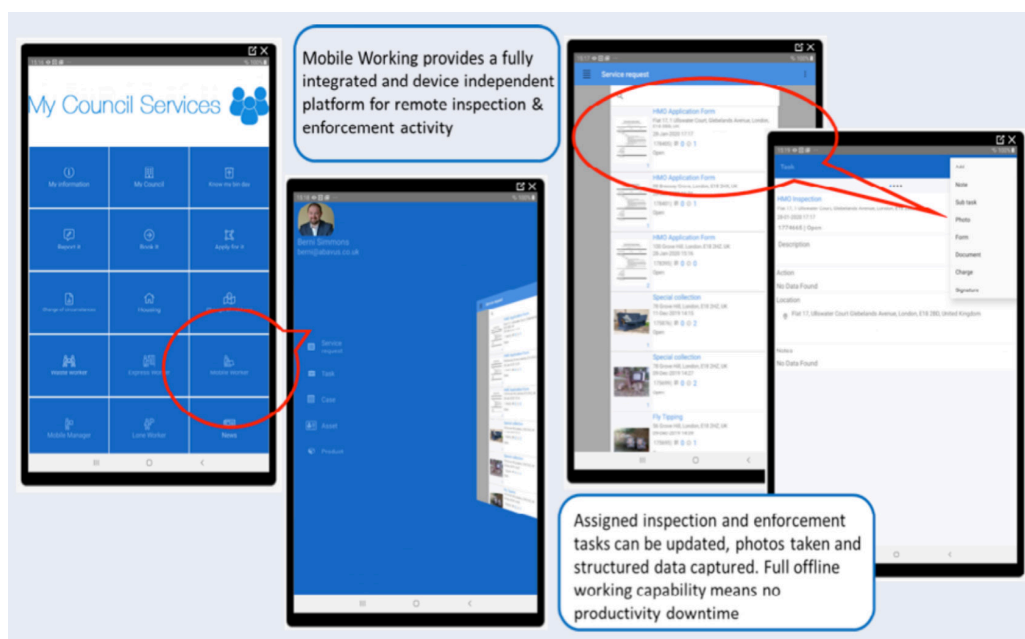
In this context, it is most efficient to be able to equip the council's representative with a mobile device on which all the relevant initial application data is available, and from which the inspector can use structured 'task forms' to complete assessment related data capture. This type of capability removes the need for paper forms, and allows for the eradication of double keying of data (e.g. first manually captured on paper followed by data entry into a separate back office system).

Once captured using a true mobile working application, the assessment and inspection data is automatically and securely transferred to the fully integrated back-office case management system. It is also important that the mobile working technology being used is

device independent, and that the whole infrastructure can be subject to your council's mobile device management protocols.

A further important consideration is offline working capability - enabling a mobile officer to access inspection data, add to it and save it, regardless of mobile carrier or wireless signal. This is generally best achieved through a locally installed native mobile app on the smartphone or tablet. Any locally held data must be securely encrypted and should be wiped once a task or inspection is complete and successfully synchronised to the back-office. The native mobile application approach that is used by My Council Services has numerous benefits over browser-based approaches, specifically:

- The ability to securely encrypt locally held data and manage its removal as part of the workflow once it is no longer required
- Offering better overall security than other approaches (e.g. avoiding the potential security risks associated with caching data in browsers on local devices)
- Perhaps most importantly the ability to enable true offline working ,meaning that your remote officers can remain productive regardless of carrier signal or Wi-Fi availability



Enforcement based on accurate licence status, payment data, and reporting

Enforcement activity in relation to licence management for local authorities in the UK is really only possible with sound and accurate underlying data. That data must include the following details to enable effective and sustainable enforcement:

1. Accurate records of which individuals or organisations hold which type of licence(s)
2. Up-to-date records of the payments made and to which individuals, premises, assets or permissions they relate to
3. Additional focus and intelligence to the planning and execution of enforcement activity, historical data on non-compliance and licence contravention would also be beneficial

Abavus contends that data items 1 and 2 on the above list are absolute pre-requisites. Item 3 is a valuable addition.

The sharp end of enforcement activity itself can also be enabled through the use of mobile working technology as described in the previous section, allowing officers to work remotely whilst maintaining access to licence and payment records.

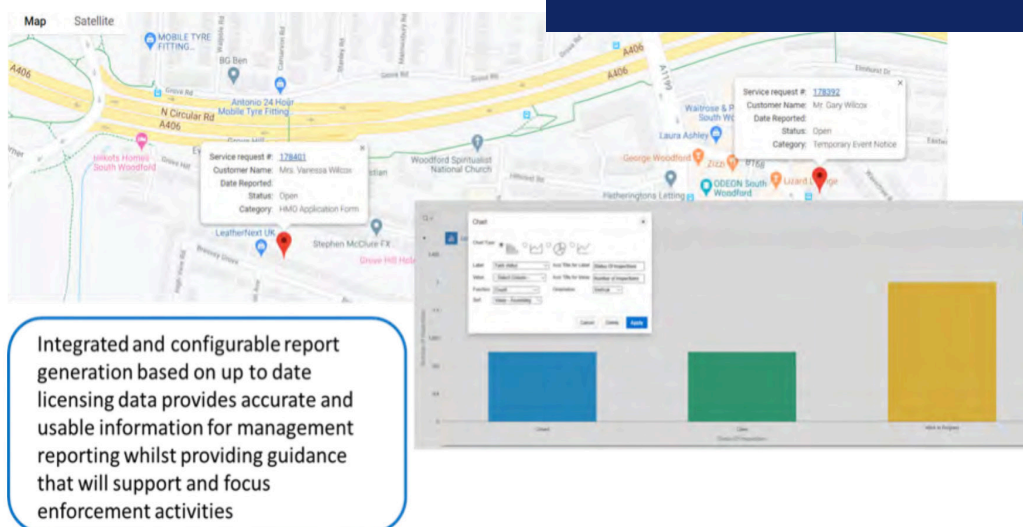
Enforcement of course is closely connected with effective licence renewal. Having accurate historical

data and payment information puts the council in a much more informed position of governance when issuing renewal notices (where this is relevant) and collecting payment where required.

A practical aid to effective oversight and management of the full range of licencing processes is the ability to analyse the up-to-date licence data and for users to be able to run detailed reporting against this. My Council Services provides the council with a range of integrated options in terms of reporting. From real-time reporting on inbound applications through to detailed reporting on licence and payment status by licence type and licence holder details; the council will have the ability to quickly and easily configure reports that summarise and list the required detail to support effective management and enforcement.

In addition to internal reporting capabilities on the My Council Services platform, there is also an API available allowing the council to connect data to an external business intelligence product such as Power BI.

Overall, effective enforcement will improve rates of fee collection and it will reduce the potential risk associated with unlicensed or poorly regulated activities. Both outcomes are positive for the council and at the same time support local communities, enabling them to thrive and flourish with appropriate licence safeguards in place.



About Abavus Ltd and My Council Services

Abavus is a long-term partner of iTouchVision, and the exclusive certified partner for its flagship My Council Services solution. Since 2007, Abavus has implemented IT platforms for over 50 public sector organisations in the UK.

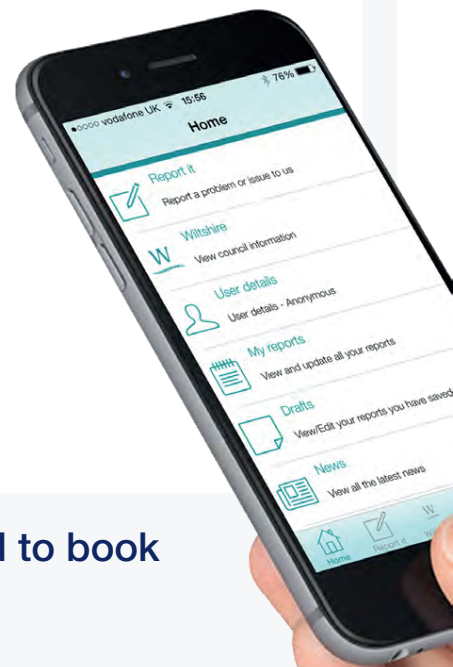
Abavus emerged out of the financial crash of 2007, and the unyielding constraint on funding this has created. These conditions have kept our projects focused on value and delivery. Our responsive, customer-focused approach has enabled us to thrive in a busy marketplace. We are now a leading provider of innovative and cost-effective IT solutions, providing cashable savings for organisations through significant operational efficiency gains.

Consultancy and training

Abavus also provides consulting and training services. This is to ensure that our clients are up and running with our technology solutions as quickly as possible. We draw upon our extensive knowledge and understanding of public sector organisations to drive digital transformation for business.



myCouncilservices



For more information about My Council Services and to book your free demo, contact us below:



www.abavus.co.uk



info@abavus.co.uk



+44 (0) 208 530 2505



@AbavusLtd