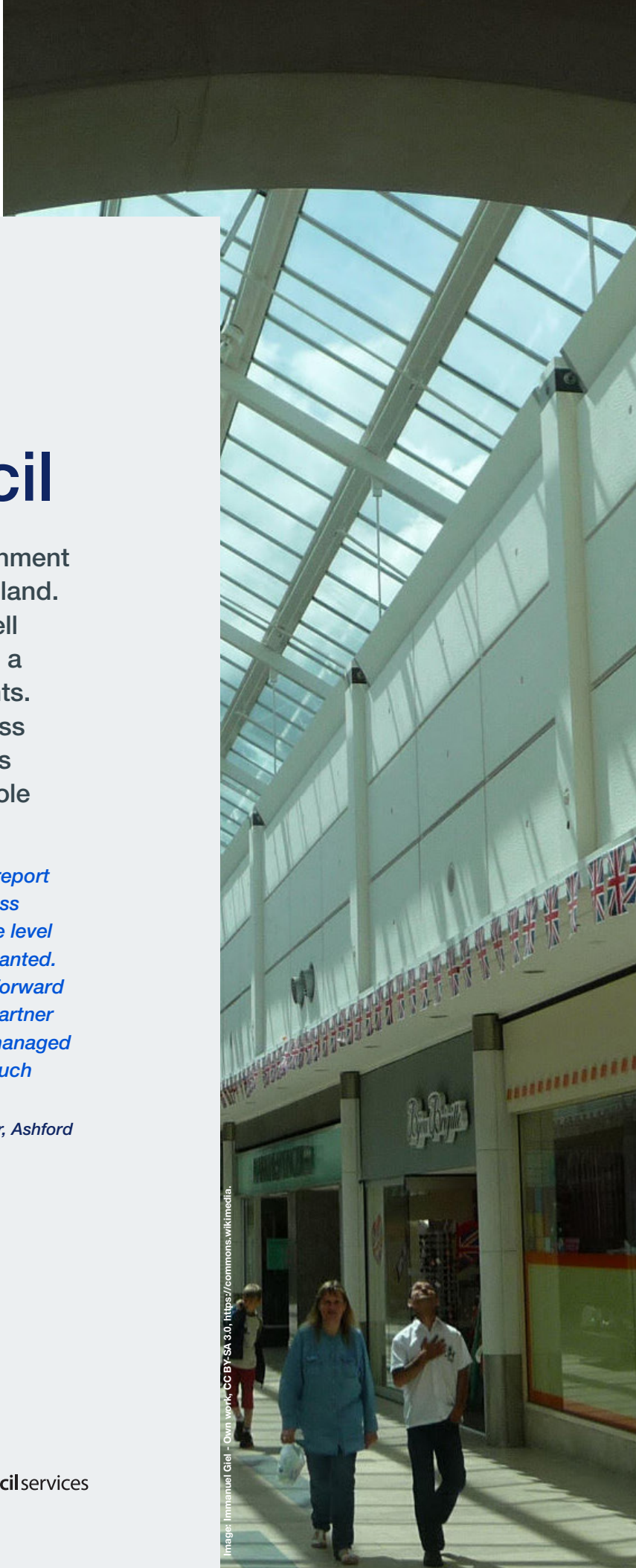# abavus

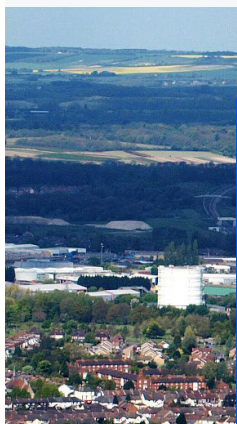**Shaping government for a digital future**

Case Study

Ashford Borough Council

The Borough of Ashford is a local government district with borough status in Kent, England. It borders five other Kent districts, as well as East Sussex to the south-west. It has a population of just under 120,000 residents. Ashford Borough Council is in the process of developing a digital customer services platform that will operate across the whole organisation.

"We had a previous app that enabled customers to report issues however it didn't enable them to track progress once an issue had been reported and didn't offer the level of automation and workflow management that we wanted. The officer had to see what the issue was and then forward it onto a contractor who might then forward it to a partner or a subcontractor. All that work would have to be managed and then reported back to the customer manually. Such processes are now fully automated."

Ben Robinson, Customer Service and Digital Project Manager, Ashford Borough Council

iTouchVision   **my**Council services

Image: Immanuel Giel - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.

Background to the project

Ashford selected Abavus and My Council Services as part of upgrade to its contact centre technology. The implementation included deployment of the My Council Services Customer Portal (My Account) and CRM module (Contact Centre) and with a range of other My Council Service modules to enable back office processing.

The aim of the project is to automate existing processes to enable more efficient working and an improved customer experience.

Key objectives of the project

Further move towards customer self-service

"We had a previous app that enabled customers to report issues however it didn't enable them to track progress once an issue had been reported and didn't offer the level of automation and workflow management that we wanted. The officer had to see what the issue was and then forward it onto a contractor who might then forward it to a partner or a subcontractor. All that work would have to be managed and then reported back to the customer manually. Such processes are now fully automated."

Build a system that worked for both customers and staff

"We wanted to make things easier for customers so that they would trust and use the new system, but we also wanted to make sure that it made things easier for our staff as well, so that they wouldn't get bogged down by mundane admin tasks but could actually do the job they were hired to do."

Creating efficiencies

"The key driver behind this project was really to create efficiency so that staff are better able to do their jobs. We're finding as we look at our processes that there are many areas where things aren't operating as efficiently as they could be, there's duplication of effort or redundancy built into the legacy process, so our aim with this project was really to see how technology could help us address those issues and get our staff working more efficiently.

Ashford Council has been measuring and monitoring efficiency gains realised following the implementation of

My Council Services. One of the early results from the Environmental Services Team is in relation to the cost of processing and resolving fly tips in the Borough.

Ashford deals with approximately 700 fly tips in each 6 month period. This has been consistent over the previous 36 months. The calculated cost of dealing with each fly tip using the legacy processes (prior to the implementation of My Council Services) was calculated at £90.00 per incident.

The same calculation, over the 2 years that My Council Services has been in place, now puts the cost of dealing with each fly tip at £27.00. This is the result of more efficient working with time and resources saved which has a measurable financial saving. This is a saving in excess of £80,000.00 per year. This is just one example in one service area."

Meet customers' expectations

"Channel shift has changed. Whereas it used to be about pushing people to interact with councils online as a cost saving measure, it's now about delivering services digitally because that's what customers expect and want. The rules have changed and now the majority of people are looking to contact us through digital means whenever possible. They prefer that rather than talking to a person. We know that people want to use our website and contact us via digital channels."

Ben Robinson, Customer Service and Digital Project Manager

Benefits of the project

The flexibility of a modular and bespoke system

"One of the things I personally liked about Abavus, particularly when compared to some of the other companies that we looked at, was that the Abavus team were open to working on the additional things we needed and were able to adapt the system to our requirements. With some of the other suppliers it was much more a case of "You get what you're given" but with Abavus there was that flexibility and ability to customise."

Quick implementation

"The implementation of the modules and the systems was relatively quick. We are picking things up as we go along, and the system is relatively easy to use so we're able to pick things up and run with them ourselves."

Responsive support and collaborative working with Abavus

"Whenever we get to a bit where we need help, Abavus have been available to help us out or to walk us through something. We were able to get the project up and running and see some wins really quickly too. The implementation project was delivered in a short period of time."

"When we put forward suggestions Abavus are honest with us about what can be achieved at the moment and what can be developed as a future change."

Ability to deploy the system for new applications quickly and easily

"As we get to know the system better, we're thinking of more things that we could be using it for. For example, I was having a conversation with the guy who does our insurance claims and was able to show him the whole platform and how it might be used to make his processes quicker and more efficient."

Customers' ideas

"Customers have really engaged with the app, and when they've made suggestions about things that they'd like to see we've been able to make those changes quite quickly, add new features into the app and go back to the customers to let them know that we've implemented their ideas."

No longer reliant on IT developers

"We're finding that this system gives us much more of a free reign internally. It's easy to use and customisable so we're able to configure it the way we want it and deploy it for new processes without necessarily being reliant on IT developers to do that work for us, which allows them to get involved with the more technical work."

Able to respond to Moving away from legacy systems

"We've got to the point where we can really see the power of what the system can do, so we're able to start moving away from some of our legacy systems without any trepidation."

Ben Robinson, Customer Service and Digital Project Manager

Summary of benefits

- The deployment, promotion and widespread adoption of the integrated eForms portal and native app for customer self-service

  - Ashford now has over 45 integrated, public facing forms across the website and the native mobile applications

  - A further 30 forms have been designed and deployed to enable internal process (e.g. call back request with a specialist adviser)

  - There has been contact with over 18,000 customers through new digital channels with this number growing monthly

- An automated garage rental programme (previously a manual process for customers)

- Introduction of online form payments (integrating with Capita online payment technology)

- Integration between My Council Services and Biffa, Ashford's outsourced waste provider

- Service Desk, providing sophisticated Case Management capability, is being used across 13 departments including:

  - Environmental Contract Team
  - Housing Area Managers
  - Licensing
  - Property Services
  - Internal insurance management & assessment

- Use of Mobile Working across multiple service areas using Android tablets

  - This began with a pilot to support fly tip response management, offering automated workflow and task allocation based on the characteristics of the fly tipping incident

- The Council has deployed the My Council Services Assets Module

  - Enabling Sheltered Housing checks which are now done digitally using dynamic data about the resident to ensure appropriate processes

  - Using the Product Module to support sales and management of stock levels for seasonal products

my **Council** services   **Biffa**

Next steps

Since the implementation of My Council Services and the launch of the transformation plan, the longer term objective has always been to bring more and more services onto the platform so that My Council Services can be utilised as the de facto digital platform across the whole of the Council's operation.

A little over 2 years into the project this plan is now the reality with 13 departments now making active use of the technology across an ever-increasing range of individual services and process. Progress will not stop here; the intention is to deliver increasing automation and digitisation ever deeper into each of those services in order that continued efficiency gains can be realised.

About Abavus Ltd and My Council Services

Abavus is an established UK-based technology and service provider to the UK public sector. Since 2007 we have been delivering software solutions and consultancy services that underpin and enable transformation and efficiency programmes in local authorities.

At Abavus we work extremely closely with one innovative, independent software house – iTouchVision – who develop the widely used My Council Services enterprise platform. Abavus and iTouchVision have entered into a long-term partnership agreement, whereby Abavus implements and supports My Council Services exclusively in the UK public sector. This allows iTouchVision to invest the maximum resource in its continued research and development activities, whilst Abavus focuses on the delivery and support of the solutions to clients.

Abavus has a customer base of over 50 UK local authorities and government organisations using the My Council Services solutions, as well as a small number of private clients. We are firmly established in the public sector market as a leading provider of innovative, cost-effective information technology solutions, helping public and third sector organisations to save money and make significant efficiency gains.

Abavus has been successfully delivering technology-enabled transformation projects in the testing operating environment that has prevailed following the financial crash of 2007 and the unyielding constraint on funding that this has created. Whilst this has been challenging it has meant we have to keep our projects focused on value and delivery. Our responsive, customer-focused approach has enabled us to thrive in a busy marketplace.

Consultancy and training

Abavus also provides consulting and training services to ensure that our clients are up and running with the technology solutions we provide as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Drawing upon our extensive knowledge and understanding of public sector organisations and the specialist technical skills within the team, Abavus leads and supports consultancy and training engagements with the focus on driving business transformation and change.

my **Council** services

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