

Case Study

Mobile Working with Stafford Borough Council seven years on...

Abavus was selected to become the Mobile Working technology partner for Stafford Borough Council's StreetScene department. Seven years later, Stafford continue to work with Abavus, and during this time they have been shortlisted as the best performing StreetScene authority for six consecutive years.

This case study revisits the original brief, documenting the progress and results that Stafford Borough Council has achieved using our My Council Services (MCS) Mobile Working solution. We interviewed Phil Bates (Quality and Performance Manager), who originally implemented the system, to understand the key benefits realised by Stafford's StreetScene since we started working together.





About Stafford Borough Council

Stafford Borough Council serves approximately 55,000 homes in the borough, with 136,000 residents relying on the services it provides. StreetScene is a key part of Stafford's Operations Service, with the aim of keeping the borough's environment clean and tidy. StreetScene provides a range of services including:

- Street Cleansing (public area cleansing, fly-tip removal, graffiti cleanup, dead animal removal, litter picking and road sweeping)
- Grounds Maintenance (formal parks, cemeteries, public open spaces, grass cutting, shrub bed maintenance, sports grounds maintenance)
- Playground Maintenance
- Horticulture and Arboriculture Service

Background and key issues of Stafford's legacy system

Before implementing our Mobile Working solution, Stafford's StreetScene managed service requests through a paper-based CRM system. Residents would report incidents by phone to the call centre, whose staff would enter the job details into the back-office system. Senior supervisors would then print paper copies of job sheets every day, passing them to the appropriate work teams. If operatives noticed additional tasks out in the field, they would record them on paper referral sheets. This process had a number of problems:

- The system relied on operatives completing paperwork correctly and returning it at the end of the day so jobs could be signed off. From time to time, paperwork would disappear, meaning that jobs remained open on the system long after they had actually been completed.
- The system did not encourage any ownership of tasks and responsibilities. Onus was placed on senior supervisors to remember who they allocated each job to so that they could chase up missing paperwork and incomplete tasks.
- Supervisors would wait for a full day's worth of tasks to come in before printing them out and allocating them to operatives for work the next day. This led to a minimum delay of 24 hours between a resident reporting an incident and the problem being dealt with by StreetScene.
- The system relied heavily on phone calls between management teams, supervisors and operatives in the field. Staff from the call centre were phoning jobs to managers, who would then phone field operatives to carry out the work. There were no formal records of the work being requested or completed.
- StreetScene regularly came across other jobs that needed doing while they were out in the field (e.g. an animal carcass whilst out picking litter). In this situation, they would retrieve the animal carcass and then complete a paper referral sheet to record the task as an additional piece of work for that day. The sheets were then passed to the contact centre who entered the jobs onto the system, which were immediately closed to prevent them from coming back as a repeat job. This was a time-consuming and unreliable process, meaning that tasks were often dealt with in the field but not recorded on the system until sometime later, or even not at all.

With a heavily manual and paper-based workflow, Stafford decided they needed a new and complete digital system to transform their work process.

"We decided to implement this project as we wanted to move from a paper-based workflow to a digital one. After researching the market and available software, we agreed that Mobile Working would be the best solution for us, particularly due to Stafford's geography. Stafford is a very rural borough split into seven StreetScene sections. We have to travel a lot between locations to properly accommodate for

all catchment areas. With our legacy system, jobs would come through every day on a sheet of paper, but they wouldn't be sorted into geographical areas. Because of this, we were travelling from one side of the borough to another, which is very inefficient, not environmentally friendly, and simply isn't manageable on a day-to-day basis."

- Phil Bates (Quality and Performance Manager)

Key objectives of the project

"The purpose of the project was to source a provider who could implement a comprehensive and intuitive Mobile Working solution. Firstly, the technology would need to enable StreetScene to digitally raise and receive daily jobs, replacing paper-based workflow and thereby improving efficiencies across the service. Secondly, we needed a system with automation that

could allocate jobs to the right people in the right geographical locations. Thirdly, the system needed to keep an in-depth and accurate record of job completion."

- Phil Bates (Quality and Performance Manager)

Why Stafford decided to implement the MCS Mobile Working solution

"Often with IT solutions, there's an underlying concern that what is initially sold to you is a bare minimum solution, and to further customise it for your exact needs will incur significant additional costs. From the outset, Abavus were very clear about their capabilities and how they operate. Based upon the amount of technology required, we were impressed with the depth and breadth of the out-of-the-box solution. The solution was also very affordable, to the point

where we were comfortable requesting additional functionality on top of our initial specifications. Abavus were happy to build and develop our system, often at no additional cost because it enhanced the broader Mobile Working solution they offered. As a result, our system quickly became a comprehensive and intuitive piece of software."

- Phil Bates (Quality and Performance Manager)

Stafford's experience working with Abavus

"Throughout the time we have worked with Abavus, they have always been very open, honest and upfront with us about everything. They have been very easy to contact in regards to queries, issues or enhancement requests. In the early days in particular, it felt like they

were working 24/7 to ensure our specific requirements were built to a high standard. We are very grateful for that, and as a result we have been able to evolve our services."

- Phil Bates (Quality and Performance Manager)

How Abavus implemented a Mobile Working solution for Stafford

In the first phase, teams from Abavus and Stafford worked together to provide Abavus with a full understanding of StreetScene's legacy work processes and requirements. Work also began on developing 'middleware' that enabled our technology to integrate with Stafford's then existing Lagan CRM system, in order to create an end-to-end process (Abavus have since become their full CRM provider). Once completed, work then began on creating a mobile app and back-office system with Stafford's branding and processes embedded within it. Abavus trained a core team of 'super users' within StreetScene who would act as ambassadors for the project, and also rolled out training to all operatives who would be using the mobile app.

In the second phase, a small team of users began testing the product out in the field. This testing identified additional requirements:

- Overlaying boundary data in the mobile app, enabling automatic allocation of tasks to relevant location-based teams.
- Building geographical auto-allocation of jobs to relevant teams via shape files.
- Automatic email requests to other organisations if a task is not owned by Stafford.
- Fly-tipping requests to go to Environmental Enforcement before StreetScene.
- All jobs can be manually signed off on the app.
- All jobs to auto-close after being signed off.

Thorough testing at this stage ensured the final product was completely customised to StreetScene's needs. After final user acceptance testing, the system was fully deployed and successfully embedded in the entire StreetScene department.



How Stafford StreetScene use the MCS Mobile Working solution

"In essence, everything is completed using the mobile app. Jobs are automatically allocated to your work queue based on geographical location. If you find something else while out in the field, you raise the job. The operatives who use the technology are able to train new operatives because they use it every day and know how to get the most out of it. Operatives are

big advocates for the system. They really like what it does and how Abavus have implemented it, and they provide ongoing feedback to our back-office when they think new improvements can be made. Due to the flexibility of the system, administrators are able to quickly make any required configurations."

- Phil Bates (Quality and Performance Manager)

How Stafford have benefitted from the MCS Mobile Working solution

Quicker handling of tasks

"Previously, requests to deal with fly-tips would come in to the contact centre and get logged on the system. The jobs would be sent out to environmental enforcement officers, who would change the priority queue on our then legacy CRM to send the job to StreetScene for completion. This workflow has completely changed since adopting MCS Mobile Working. Every time a fly-tipping incident is reported, tasks are automatically allocated to the appropriate geographical team. Within minutes they can know there's a fly-tip, look at any submitted photos of it, and pick it up straight away. This has made the whole process very efficient."

- Phil Bates (Quality and Performance Manager)

Improved efficiency

"With MCS Mobile Working, our workforce is much more efficient as jobs are dealt with in real-time. Our previous system had a 24-hour time lag before printing jobs off, with no record of who a job had been allocated to, when it had been allocated, and when the job was due for completion. MCS Mobile Working has that functionality built-in so you don't have to remember everything. It's all automated."

Staff take more pride in their work

"StreetScene operatives take pride in using MCS. We have 25 devices using it and we get regular requests for additional operatives to be added to the system. A large number of referrals put onto the system are submitted by operatives themselves. They are much more comfortable with the digital system than they were with the paper-based one."



Summary of benefits

- Less paperwork. The mobile app has completely replaced the paper-based referral system. When field operatives come across additional jobs that need doing while out on their rounds, the app enables them to raise the job digitally. They can then immediately close it off without needing to involve the contact centre at all.
- Quick and more accurate reporting of jobs. Before the app, operatives were submitting between 70-80 jobs per month via referral sheets. They are now using the app to log details of around 500 jobs per month. Details are entered onto the system when the operative spots what needs doing rather than having to wait until the end of the day or the following day for it to be entered by the contact centre. This means there are no duplicate tasks, as jobs are entered in real-time.
- Automatic allocation of tasks to the right team. StreetScene uses area-based working, with particular teams focused on their own dedicated areas. With mobile working, incoming tasks can be automatically allocated to the correct geographical team and sent to them in real-time.
- More information about tasks and less duplicated effort. MCS includes mapping functionality so the geographical location of an incident can be automatically recorded. If an incident is logged by an operative and a resident alerts the contact centre to the same incident, the contact centre can see by looking at a map that the incident is already on the system. In the old system, two separate jobs relating to the same incident would have been logged, leading to duplication of time and effort.
- Issues being dealt with before they are noticed by the public. More and more jobs are being put onto the system by operatives rather than being called into the contact centre by residents. Increasingly, when a resident calls in to report an issue, they are told that the council is already dealing with it. Issues are being dealt with much more quickly than was previously the case, and communication between the council and its citizens has hugely improved.



Phil Bates details the performance improvements...

“Through MCS, we can accurately measure performance using indices such as volume of work, requests through contact centre, number of referrals raised in a service area, etc. We then report on end-to-end times for particular service requests. Because of the geographical split, the close times for jobs are different, and we have been able to build that into our SLAs. For example, close times may be 24-48 hours in urban areas, but because Stafford’s rural areas are split into five locations and we only visit a location once per week, we extended the SLA to seven days for rural areas.”

Relieving contact centre burden

“When we started, around 60% of jobs came through contact centre, and 40% were submitted by StreetScene. We’re now running 25% through contact centre and 75% through StreetScene. We have significantly reduced contact centre workload.”

Flexible scheduling enabling additional revenue generation

“Mobile Working has provided us with the flexibility to reschedule certain tasks and teams depending on changing circumstances (e.g. seasonal changes). In the summer, for example, when the temperature is too hot for grass to grow, we can reschedule jobs such as grass cutting to push more resource and service to external income generation.”

Delivering inspections to improve the environment

“Being able to identify where jobs are being raised geographically, we have built an Inspection eForm to fulfil Land Audit Management inspections. If areas are graded low, the team is aware these are problem areas, and these can be mapped into the GIS space. We can also ask our enforcement team whether they’ve issued fixed penalty notices, and these can be mapped as well. We are able to map where the service requests are, where we’ve carried out quality inspections, and where penalties are being issued. This provides us with important data and information,

and an overall picture of what’s going on in any given area to target resources and quickly address the problems.”

Cashable savings through headcount reduction

“On project initiation, our StreetScene headcount was 49 FTEs. Since then, we have reduced our headcount to around 40 FTEs, as we are able to monitor what we’re doing and understand the timeframes for delivering services. This has driven headcount efficiency savings, and provided us with the capacity to take on more work. We now take on external income-generating activities as well as our day jobs. The MCS technology has been a big contributing factor in enabling this.”

Positive feedback and evidence recording for service improvement:

“With our inspections, we can inform operatives who work in that area if there are problems that need addressing. All the operatives know what’s expected of them, as we can run reports on problem areas and can feedback all attached information. Through MCS, we are able to provide early intervention to stop small issues escalating.”

Performance statistics before and after implementing the MCS Mobile Working solution

“As Quality and Performance Manager, it’s important that I am able to accurately measure the performance of StreetScene. The two tables below represent the great strides we have made over the last seven years using the MCS Mobile Working solution.”

“This table below shows how we have become much more self-sufficient in raising jobs, without the need to rely on contact centre staff for support. It also shows how productivity has increased exponentially, even against the backdrop of less resource. We couldn’t have done this without the MCS technology.”

Time	Number of jobs raised per month	Ratio of jobs raised by operatives and contact centre
Pre-2014 (before MCS)	70-80	40% StreetScene, 60% Contact Centre
Post implementation	200-250	48% StreetScene, 52% Contact Centre
Post 2020	500	73% StreetScene, 27% Contact Centre

“This second table reflects the enormous improvements that have been made to our service level agreements, closing jobs in both urban and rural areas.”

Time	Average SLA for Street Cleansing	Average SLA for Grounds Maintenance	Average SLA for Fly Tipping	Average SLA for Litter Bins
2014	Urban 19 days, Rural 17 days	Urban 24 days, Rural 19 days	Urban 37 days, Rural 27 days	Urban 16 days, Rural 14 days
Post 2020	Urban 1 day, Rural 1 day	Urban 7 days, Rural 5 days	Urban 3 days, Rural 2 days	Urban 3 days, Rural 1 day

Summarising the ongoing relationship between Stafford and Abavus

The success of the MCS Mobile Working solution has been a catalyst for delivery of not only broader technology for the environmental services area, but also for the wider service.

“At the beginning of our relationship with Stafford, we made a considerable investment to develop a Mobile Working solution that met their urban and rural work requirements. Phil and his colleagues were very clear with what they needed to achieve. By making this investment, we have built a strong relationship with

Stafford over the last seven years across all business areas. Their operatives have frequently and consistently provided feedback and enhancement requests to ensure that their system has the capacity to go above and beyond. Their commitment to delivering a high performance service is readily apparent, and it’s no surprise that the authority’s StreetScene is nationally recognised.”

– Darren Bird, Abavus Operations Director



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 and independent software house – iTouchVision – who develop the widely used My Council Services enterprise platform. Abavus and iTouchVision are in 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 solution, 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.

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.



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