

Case Study

Delivering Digital Transformation Across Newport City Council

Newport is both a city and a principal area, standing at the gateway between England and Wales. With a 160,000+ population, Newport is vibrant and steeped in a rich industrial heritage. Newport is officially a digital city, with residents and visitors being able to access free Wi-Fi from any wireless-enabled device throughout Newport.

“It has been a huge transformation. Prior to implementation it was often difficult to convince service areas about the potential of new systems. With the momentum that we have built by replacing legacy systems with dynamic and customer-friendly systems, convincing these service areas of the potential has been much easier. It's been a really good evolution, and it's had fantastic feedback from customers.”

Karen Gregg, Newport City Council's Operations Support Manager



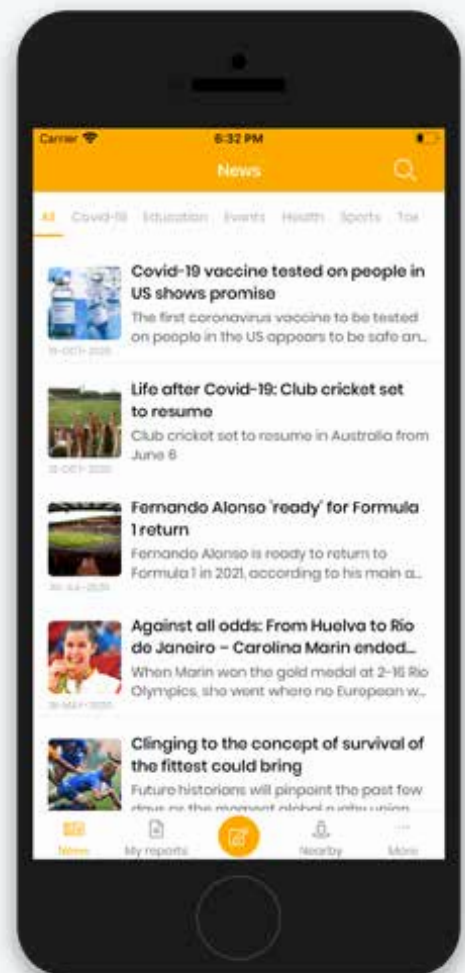
Background to the project

Before onboarding the Abavus My Council Services platform, Newport's digital architecture was comprised of several bespoke solutions that were integrated together. Newport wanted to consolidate their digital infrastructure into a single enterprise system. This would make their digital services easier to use, manage and administer for customers, customer agents, and back-office IT staff.

What were the key drivers for digital transformation at Newport?

As a digital city, Newport City Council wanted to transform how they worked. Key objectives of this transformation included:

- Providing easy 24/7 access to council services through streamlined digital channels.
- Providing a digital experience comparable or better than other digital platforms
- Replacing existing paper-based workflow with a fully digital cloud-based platform.
- Improving workforce autonomy, giving them more responsibility for their data and tasks.
- Implementing an intuitive platform enabling service automation to lighten the council's workload.
- Implementing a flexible platform that is configurable by the council's back-office staff.
- Implementing a versatile platform allowing for seamless two-way integrations between data sources.



What problems were Newport facing at the time?

Before partnering with Abavus, Newport had already embarked on a separate digital transformation project. This included providing customer self-service channels and completing system integrations.

In doing so, however, Newport encountered several problems. eForms built for the council were unintuitive and old-fashioned. The CRM provided was clunky, resource-hungry, and often required IT support. Their workforce was also limited to a paper-based workflow. Despite their efforts at the time, only 42% of Newport's transactions came through digital self-service channels. These technology systems therefore would not fulfil Newport's digital transformation objectives and expectations moving forward.

For Newport, the first step was to replace their existing eForms and introduce a mobile reporting application. Importantly, Newport did not want to take any steps backwards. They wanted to replicate current integrations and move forward with further development. Legacy systems required replacement with a stable and flexible platform. This platform had to accommodate integrations, enhance customer satisfaction, and increase digital usage.

Why did Newport choose Abavus to deliver digital transformation?

Abavus had already built a strong presence among Welsh councils and were already known to Newport's in-house technology provider (SRS Wales). We held several sessions with the council and SRS representatives to fully agree the scope and requirements.

"As a council, we felt we were having a conversation with Abavus rather than a sales pitch. We felt we were being listened to as an organisation. Abavus were honest and open about their ability to meet our requirements. Importantly, Abavus also challenged the approach we wanted to take. Having agreed a plan, we were confident that Abavus would support us in achieving our goals."

Leanne Rowlands, Newport City Council's Democratic Services Manager



How was digital transformation implemented at Newport?

From the outset, we dedicated sufficient time and resources to agree a robust plan. This included setting priorities and phases of the project. There was significant work required to achieve their digital transformation objectives. As such, Newport committed a qualified and well-resourced in-house and SRS team to work alongside Abavus on the project.

"In the short-term, this would ensure that digital transformation would proceed swiftly and effectively. In the long-term, team members could be re-assigned to service areas using the new system. This would put experts back in the field to build workforce capacity and capability. This approach worked really well. We would certainly do the same approach again in the future."

Leanne Rowlands, Newport City Council's Democratic Services Manager

"We now advocate the Newport resourcing model to all new and prospective clients. You cannot undertake significant transformation if staff are working two jobs. By making the investment and dedicating full-time resources, Newport completed much more transformative work using the platform. They have really been able to use the system to its full effect."

Darren Bird, Abavus Operations Director

Phase 1

The first phase involved replacing 230+ eForms (many linked to web- and mobile-based payments). There was also a need to build web and mobile capability for customers to transact with the council.

Abavus integrated its eForms and Customer Portal into Newport's legacy CRM. This was a tactical decision to avoid service disruption whilst other integrations were developed. By doing so, we ensured there was no degradation of the existing service delivery. Phase 1 was successfully completed within the three-month project timescale.

Phase 2

We successfully deployed 230+ new eForms and associated back-office workflows during the first phase. The second phase involved the building of further back-office processes with integrations. This included street lighting, planning, public protection and building control.

Once completed and tested, Newport's legacy CRM was decommissioned and replaced with the Abavus My Council Services CRM. Newport wanted to better automate other service processes, including Tell Us Once. To achieve this, Newport commissioned Abavus to complete additional development work. This resulted in new functionality that is now in use not only by Newport, but also by other Abavus enterprise clients.

Phase 3

Newport's original plan was for Abavus to integrate its platform into their existing waste technology provider's solution. Based upon the success of Phases 1 and 2, the plan changed. Newport decided they would replace their waste technology with our waste capability, creating a seamless end-to-end waste solution.

Colleagues from Newport's waste and environmental departments were also onboard with the decision. With their help, Abavus has now implemented a full waste solution with optimised route/round navigation. We now provide solutions for Newport's bulky waste, green garden waste, domestic waste, trade, and recycling services. Abavus also delivered a mobile working solution for Newport's streets and grounds team. This enabled reactive and scheduled work to be captured and processed through their mobile devices whilst out in the field.

The completion of Phase 3 resulted in Newport having a single platform for waste and environmental service activity.

What was Newport's experience working with Abavus?

The delivery of this project has been an extremely positive experience for Abavus and Newport. With real commitment and sensible resource allocation on both sides, and despite the challenges of COVID, Newport to date has successfully achieved their digital transformation goals.

"The relationship between Newport and Abavus has been really good. There were several instances where we asked for additions to the original specification. Despite this, Abavus have always been amenable,

and worked with us to deliver our requirements. That's really different compared to other big supplier projects we have worked on. Thanks to this flexibility, our environmental service areas have seen a significant turnaround. They are now coming back with suggestions and requests for further developments. It has completely shifted their mindset, and they are now owning their digital services. We are really happy with that."

Leanne Rowlands, Newport City Council's Democratic Services Manager



What benefits have been realised at Newport?

The benefits of the transformation work completed on this project have been significant.

- Before working with Abavus, 42% of Newport's transactions were through self-service channels. Since onboarding My Council Services, this percentage has jumped to over 90%.
- Not only customer-facing services benefited from our solution. Many of Newport's internal processes (previously paper-based) have seen significant improvement.
- The system has seen impressive organic growth, despite limited publicity. Newport now has over 88,000 registered accounts on their My Council Services platform.
- As super users of the system, Newport are committed to pushing their services online. Our platform's analytical capabilities have enabled greater levels of corporate accountability.
- A significant number of councils (many in Wales) use My Council Services. At times, Newport have utilised processes built by other Abavus clients to support their own internal delivery, saving time and resource. A good example of this collaboration involved utilising Caerphilly County Borough Council's Parking Permits scheme.
- Newport staff satisfaction levels have increased, as they have the ability to create and adapt services to meet their needs.

"Our customer services absolutely love it. They loved it straight away. Certain aspects like being able to create response templates cut down a huge amount of work time. They can get through repetitive tasks quickly and spend more time on tasks that add more value. They like responsibilities, being able to tweak and amend, and pull their own data. That's been really good. We've also made financial savings, but that was not the main driver. Residents have expectations from using private sector platforms, and we wanted to meet them."

Karen Gregg, Newport City Council's Operations Support Manager

"There have been savings on supplies and services. A big thing for us was ratifying the systems we had, making the most use of My Council Services and the services it provides. The collaborative element with other councils has helped as well. Being able to use Caerphilly's Parking Permits and share our own form templates is great. It's crucial for saving money and being lean."

Karen Gregg, Newport City Council's Operations Support Manager

In conclusion...

By working with Abavus, Newport has already achieved comprehensive digital transformation. Many service areas have seen great improvement, and the work to deliver transformation continues at a pace. Further work utilising the My Council Services system over the next twelve months includes:

- Replacing Newport's current FOIA system
- Replacing Newport's current Drainage/Cleansing IT system
- Enabling Room Bookings and Charges for Community Hubs
- Replacing Newport's legacy Allotments system
- Completing Social Media integration

"We would certainly recommend the My Council Services platform to other councils embarking on a similar journey. Abavus have been really helpful throughout, and this is a real difference compared to other suppliers. They have enabled us to get to where we need to be. For projects with as many phases as this one, I would definitely recommend Abavus."

Karen Gregg, Newport City Council's Operations Support Manager

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. We work with city and unitary authorities, as well as borough, county, district, and town councils. Our solutions straddle all service areas.

At Abavus we work exclusively with one innovative 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. 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.



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

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