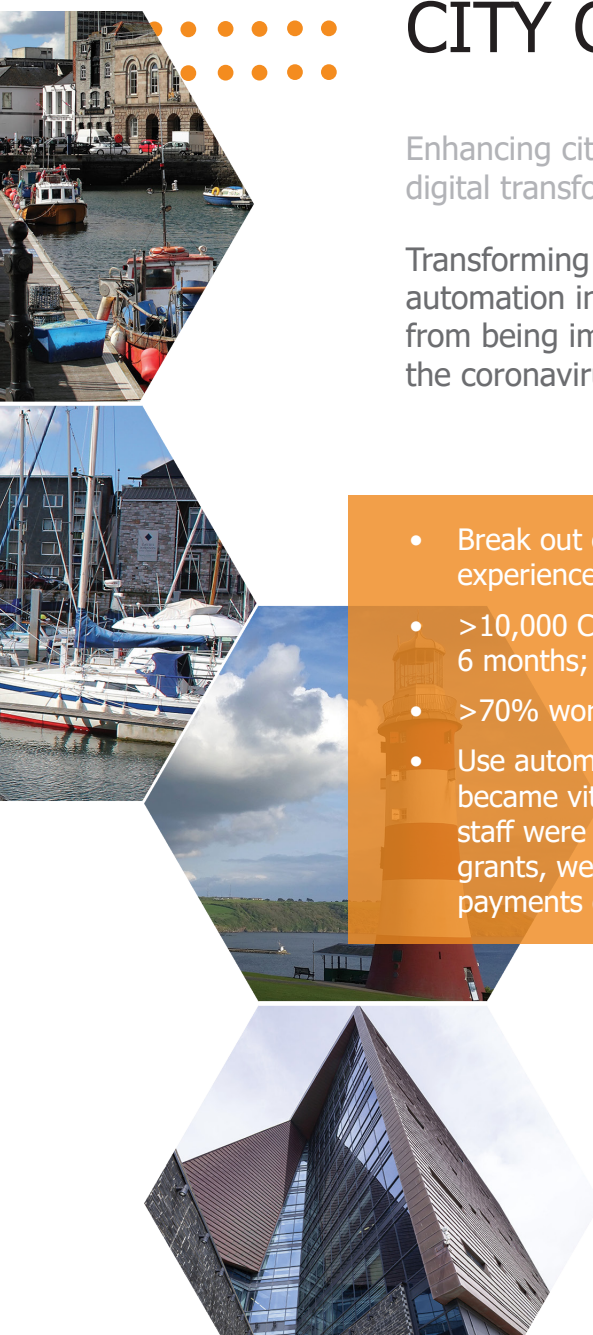# PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

Enhancing citizens' experience through digital transformation

Transforming digital services to exploit automation in Revenues & Benefits went from being important, to imperative, when the coronavirus pandemic struck.

- Break out of a silo to transform citizens' experience of online self-service in Revenues

- \>10,000 Council Tax transactions in the first 6 months; 97% online take-up

- \>70% workload automated

- Use automation to free up team resource – became vital to managing workload when staff were reassigned to cope-with business grants, welfare changes and track and trace payments due to the Covid-19 pandemic

GOVTECH
AUTOMATION MADE SIMPLE

A Netcall Company

ABOUT PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

- Servicing 262,700 residents
- Over 100,000 chargeable dwellings
- Established in 1998 as a unitary authority

PROBLEM

More than 65% of all customer service requests made to the council were in relation to Council Tax or Street Services. Whilst the channel mix for Street Services (built in the Granicus govService platform) often reached over 90% digital, Council Tax (supplied by another vendor) was stuck at around 28%. Analysis and customer feedback on why Council Tax digital uptake was so low highlighted the poor usability of the existing digital offering.

BRIEF

A key initiative in Plymouth's wider Strategic Digital Transformation Programme was to improve its Council Tax self-service facilities for citizens and facilitate automation between the front-end web forms and its Capita R&B system. Increasing the rate of online self-service and automating transactions would free up contact centre and other staff to focus on more complex cases and vulnerable citizens.

SOLUTION

Based on a successful digital transformation project with Kirklees MBC, Granicus recommended Govtech as a Revenues & Benefits integration partner for Plymouth. A new partnership between Granicus and Govtech offered the means to address digital deficiencies in Revenues as part of a single council-wide digital service. The partnership promised a fully hosted, off-the-shelf solution on the Granicus govService platform that could be configured to fully digitise Revenues in a matter of weeks and automate processing in Capita's Revenues system.

Improvements in useability would drive uptake of online digital services by citizens. Automation would allow the council to consider how and where to reassign Customer Service resources to best meet the needs of vulnerable customers. A business case was required to underpin the investment and responsibility for developing this rested with Peter Honeywell, Plymouth's Transformation Architecture Manager.

Setting outcomes

The key assumptions required:

- Govtech would automate at least 56% of all the customer interactions presented to it.

  The dependency in delivering this level of automation was whether Capita's R&B system APIs would allow customer requests to be automatically processed, since no supplier had previously shown that this could be done to the extent proposed.

- The value of the capacity freed up by Govtech automation within Customer Services would cover the costs associated with the investment and the ongoing costs for the service.

  The business case investment was modelled against the expected benefits, expressed as the value of resources freed up and revenue gains from re-assigning resources into debt recovery and other high value activities. The task of realising benefits was owned by the Customer Services management team.

  Reassigning resources would play a key role in benefit realisation with the main associated dependency being the additional recovery of debt.

RESULTS

Following approval of the business case, Govtech undertook a 3-month discovery project to test and prove API capabilities from end to end. The results were documented and presented to the council in December which then commissioned implementation in January.

> Govtech was 'a company with a mission'. A mission to help us break out of the silo we were in. The Granicus govService platform was already widely deployed but nobody had previously integrated with our core R&B system in the way they were proposing to do, so we had to have confidence in their abilities. What we found as we went along was that they are experts in the field in which they practice, Revenues and Benefits automation. Govtech's approach was to present themselves as good problem solvers. And I was particularly struck by the focus they placed on "value"; that what they are doing, the problems they are solving, must generate a return that we can measure. Their people are credible and the partnership they have forged with Granicus has created an eco-system for councils to exploit across all service areas. I am sure it will have a major role to play in the continuing modernisation of the council.

Peter Honeywell, Transformation Architecture Manager

97%
online Council Tax self-service take-up

>10,000
R&B transactions processed within 6 months

>70%
workload automated of all R&B transactions

Covid-19
resources able to cope-with pandemic priorities

Unprecedented times

Within weeks of the project commencing, the Coronavirus pandemic led to the first lockdown. Despite both organisations' staff having to set up new home-working environments and practices, the impact on the project plan was confined to just a 4-week slippage on the planned 'go live' date, from May to June.

Post-live, there was continuous tracking, monitoring and joint analysis of automation rates, including identification of underlying business rules, or core product configuration issues, that were affecting automation.

By October, automation rates were approaching 70% - well above the business case breakeven point. Business rules were triggering interventions for the balance of work and these were automatically classified as High, Medium or Low priority items and sent to work queues with instructions to aid officers.

Adapting to the pandemic

The business case clearly identified and quantified the benefits that would flow from transforming citizens' digital experiences and exploiting automation to release staff for other priorities. The pandemic had two significant effects on the business case. It greatly amplified the need to transform digital and exploit automation, and it greatly accelerated achievement of the outcomes. In a matter of weeks, the entire Revenues and Benefits service was moved online while staff were relocated to work from home and reassigned to urgent new priorities.

Automation was a key investment. It enabled services to remain operational while freeing up skilled people to deal with the emergency. A smaller team was able to manage an increased day-to-day workload whilst colleagues processed business grants, welfare changes and, later, the even more time-critical track and trace payments. Citizens and businesses in Plymouth, desperate to make ends meet, were supported by staff able to work more flexibly and cooperatively than ever before.

> "Automation has been vital. The more of it we can do, the better. It's difficult to imagine how we would still be managing without it."
>
> Emma Rose, Strategic Development Manager

ABOUT GOVTECH

Govtech is a trusted partner for its many UK local authority customers. As experts in digital process automation, we help councils to maximise returns on investments in online services, Customer Experience and Customer Relationship Management systems. Our hosted solutions integrate with all mainstream Revenues and Benefits systems and automate processing of online Revenues and Benefits transactions.

We track and monitor the automation rates, review these with customers and compare them with others. This helps you achieve more by freeing up skilled resources that are lost to manual checking and processing. As budgets tighten, demand and expectations grow and resources are stretched thinner, you're being asked to do more. Whether you use NEC Revenues & Benefits, Capita or Civica, our end-to-end eCAPTURE and webCAPTURE digital process automation services will help you to bridge the gap.

Are you looking to break out of a silo and transform your digital services?

Plymouth showed it can be done with a partner that is focused on your business needs, not its own. Let's start a conversation to explore how we can help to realise your digital transformation ambitions.

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