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PURE COSMOS Expert Paper 1

DIGITAL LOG BOOK:

Connecting citizens and providers to public services digitally





PURE COSMOS (Public authorities Role Enhancing COmpetitiveness of SMES) project (2016-2020) brings together two of the big challenges the EU faces: the need to stimulate and support SMEs and the need to reduce the weight of public administration.

The project focuses on the role public authorities can play in enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs by making the business climate more transparent and reliable supporting the needs of SMEs and promoting administrative modernization of public services. Improved governance is expected through IT administrative solutions, regional legislation review, simplifying processes and influencing funding calls for businesses.

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- ❖ Municipality of Florence (IT)
- ❖ Hajdú-Bihar County Government (HU)
- ❖ Development Bank of Saxony-Anhalt (DE)
- ❖ Birmingham City Council (UK)
- ❖ Development Agency of Eastern Thessaloniki's Local Authorities (ANATOLIKI SA)(GR)
- ❖ Ústí Region (CZ)
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DIGITAL LOG BOOK: Connecting citizens and providers to public services digitally

by Birmingham City Council

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THE CHALLENGE

Local authorities and social landlords are under even more pressure to reduce their operating costs and deliver more for less.

This is happening at a time when social housing tenants are demanding more support from housing associations and local authorities’ front line teams, as the implications of digital transformation and welfare reform take effect.

This has led to an increase in money and debt advice as well as impacting on health and wellbeing.

In addition people now expect to be able to engage and transact digitally and many prefer to do so as it enables them to do it as and when they want.

SOCITM (The Society for IT Practitioners in the Public Sector) research highlighted that improved self-service can reduce your costs by up to 24 times compared to a phone call or face-to-face.



Birmingham City Council re-modelled their Lettings Process for new social housing applications in order to prepare customers for their new housing tenancies based on an invest to save approach and to test the potential impact of the introduction of Universal Credit.

Universal Credit is a new single payment for people who are looking for work or on a low income, and replaces a number of separate benefits including Job

Seekers Allowance, income support, tax credits, and housing benefit. Under Universal Credit, recipients get a large, single, monthly payment, in place of the smaller, more frequent payments made under the current system. In addition, payment to cover rent is paid direct to the tenant, rather than the landlord.

Both changes make budgeting a much greater challenge for recipients, increasing their risk of running out of money and getting into difficulty.

Universal Credit must also be applied for online, and recipients must have a bank account to receive payments.

Birmingham City Council developed the Digital Log Book project, with initial funding from the Department of Work and Pensions, to help those of its residents affected manage the transition to Universal Credit.

The Digital Log Book has been piloted with new applicants for council housing in the city, to address digital, social and financial inclusion, employment and health and well-being by changing people’s behaviour to help develop more sustainable tenancies.

KEY ACTORS

Birmingham City Council housing teams worked in partnership with Etive, an SME that was already developing digital platforms in the private sector. This was facilitated through Digital Birmingham, the local authority's team responsible for exploiting the benefits of digital technologies, who identified the opportunity to utilise the digital logbook to transform service provision and enhance digital skills. Birmingham City Council brought internal knowledge of the council business and organisation and Etive supported digital re-design through its technology expertise. It was co-designed with the new housing tenants and support staff centred on the 'Gateways of Influence' model, which looked at every aspect of the tenancy and an individual's journey through that process.

ABOUT THE DIGITAL LOGBOOK

The Digital Log Book (DLB) is a web based enterprise portal empowering people to interact with on-line local authority/government services, in-line with the UK Governments Digital Service – digital by default – where all Government services are to be delivered on-line.



The Digital Log Book provides citizens with an easy to use interface enabling them to access services from any browser and for the purposes of this project provided tenants with an online portal to help them better manage every aspect of their tenancy and undertake all interactions with their landlord, their money, housing and even health & wellbeing. Digital Log Book users own their own data and can share relevant modules and information with their support providers or employers which reduces duplication through a common assessment platform.

The development of the Digital Log Book has been a key enabler in looking at how the local authority has transformed its service delivery to social housing

tenants and shift to a digital by default model of service that has not only helped achieve efficiencies but also supported social and financial inclusion of citizens.

THE JOURNEY – A NEW APPROACH AND PROCESS

Birmingham City Council recognised the need to change the way it delivers services and this pilot was specifically aimed at revolutionising service delivery by supporting housing tenants to sustain their tenancy; increase their life chances and get them to take responsibility for their home by providing them with a personalised Digital Log Book.



The starting point was to track a prospective tenant's housing journey from start to finish. All of the processes that an individual has to go through to obtain and maintain a tenancy were identified, mapped, and accommodated within the Log Book design.

At the start of the pilot a 'Gateways of Influence' model was created to understand and improve the tenancy experience and increase channel shift to self-service opportunities. The pilot tracked the customer journey and evaluated and identified the level of intervention required to help customers manage their finances and improve their digital literacy. The secondary element of the pilot was to review the customer behaviours, their propensity to transact online and explore ways to encourage customers to shift to this channel.

The goal was to create sustainable communities with support for employment, financial, health and wellbeing, social and digital skills. This was to be achieved through excellent customer service and high quality digital toolkit.

The Digital Log Book covered everything from initial bidding for a property through to applying for housing benefit, to getting the keys, managing the property, paying rent, requesting repairs, and viewing council rent statements.

SOLUTION – THE TENANT CUSTOMER JOURNEY

The journey begins with a set of tools through the Digital Log Book enabling clients to be tenant ready. It begins with the application process to enable bidding on tenant properties. The user starts the process by creation of a username and i.d. and setting up an email address if they don't already have one. This enables them to log into a personalised Log Book where they have access to a gateway of resources including financial budgeting, tenancy conditions, training and employment and information about their local council.

Once the prospective tenant has submitted their application they are awarded points to bid on a digital portal 'Birmingham Home Choice' that is incorporated into the Digital Log Book. If they are successful in the bidding process, they are notified and a viewing is arranged for them to visit the property. If they accept the property, an interview is arranged with the welfare support team at one of the lettings suites. During the interview they are guided through a number of important steps that include applying for housing benefit online, setting up direct debits, making payments online, setting up an online budget, all of which is done through the Digital Log Book. In addition they are signposted to further help to furniture, health, training and employment skills. Once all the support tools in place they are ready to move.

This initial session is followed by a 12-week period of support in which the housing officer ensures that they have settled into their new property, have furniture, are using their Digital Log Book and are paying their rent and that their utilities are set up as well as

offering other support or referring to other support services as required

RESULTS AND LESSONS LEARNT

Birmingham City Council worked in partnership with the SME Etive to produce a Digital Log Book that enabled new tenants to control their personal data and share it with those who were supporting them to help sustain their tenancy and manage their finances in-line with Universal Credit.

The Digital Log Book was integral to the success of the project by supporting a digital by default wrap-around service that addressed digital, financial and social exclusion and encouraged customers to channel shift and develop their digital skills.

The outcomes were:

- Simple to use digital by default tenancy journey
- More effective use of front line teams
- Reduced system costs to serve by transferring additional services onto online channels
- Tenancy sustainability increased by 5%
- Birmingham City Council saw the number of evictions reduce within the first 12 months by 57, which saved £400K based on an average cost of managing an eviction being £7K
- Rent arrears reduced by £144K within the first 12 weeks of starting a tenancy
- On-line housing benefit claims rose from 26% to 92%

This was a learning curve as both the business and public sector work very differently and it was important to develop a good relationship through a collaborative approach that exploited the knowledge of the public sector who understood the needs of the citizen and the private sector that was able to innovate, transform and streamline a previously paper based system. This involved changes to internal policy and processes to enable the logbook to be used by tenants as part of their tenancy agreement.

From this collaboration between the Council and Etive, there has emerged potentially new revenue streams for the city to expand and develop the Digital Log Book further and to make this online toolkit and model available to other local authorities and housing associations.

“THE DIGITAL LOG BOOK HAS BEEN A HELPFUL TOOL IN GETTING ME BACK INTO EMPLOYMENT. IT HAS HELPED TO MOVE ME IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION AND ALLOWED ME TO SEE WHERE MY STRENGTHS ARE AND PURSUE A PARTICULAR AREA. IT IS A USEFUL TOOL IN FINDING A JOB” DIGITAL LOG BOOK USER

TRANSFERABILITY

As part of another project the digital logbook has been given to unemployed citizens of Birmingham and an electronic Service Directory Referral System (SDRS) integrated within the logbook.

This is called the Gateways to Birmingham Advisory Service (GBAS) and brings together 17 agencies based within Birmingham who have agreed to work in partnership to improve the access to advice for the citizens of Birmingham through an integrated, online approach.

This project has seen nearly 800 referrals being made via the Digital Log Book to access support services which went onto help 400 citizens back into work related activity out of the 3,500 citizens targeted. The Digital Log Book service has already been deployed in a number of other local authorities and housing providers.

WHAT NEXT?

Further work is being undertaken to look at how the Digital Log Book can be used by Birmingham City Council to verify a person’s identity thus improving access to Government and local authority services.

This is particularly important in terms of reaching the digital footprints of the demographic who are the highest users of public service and key to a properly functioning digital service.

Some of the benefits include:

- Reducing your cost to serve by transferring additional services onto digital channels.
- Building a digital identity for your customers, ensuring they can reuse their credentials to access other services reducing your business costs.



- Enabling single sign-on solution that removes the need for customer to remember multiple login details, therefore encouraging the use of digital channels and services.



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