Self-service taxi licensing in Calderdale

Calderdale Council's new online taxi licence renewal and application self-service has delivered over £53,000 in savings in its first six months of operation.

The issue and context

Calderdale Council's corporate mission is to be the 'Best Borough in the North' by focusing on three key priorities: growing the economy, reducing inequalities, and building a sustainable future.

At the time of applying to the LGA Digital Channel Shift Programme in early 2017 the council had recently adopted a new customer services strategy. This was informed by the organisational vision and mission, and by a recent LGA Corporate Peer Review. This strategy aimed to build from a position of strength and learning.

Calderdale had seen significant change in the way that customers had chosen to interact with it, with many now preferring to use the online self-serve options that were available 24/7. It was keen to ensure that its service delivery model continued to reflect this increasing demand and to deliver access to services that customers wanted, in the way they wanted them, whilst achieving much-needed savings.

The approach to channel shift was driven by the common need of all councils to reduce costs whilst ensuring that service delivery continued to meet the needs of citizens. Calderdale's major change programme aimed to deliver digital innovation and transformation to underpin and deliver the aspiration for channel shift via its already highly rated (Socitm four-star) website.

In the previous five years Calderdale had seen online transactions increase from less than 9,000 to over 227,000 in 2015/16. Service efficiencies, achieved through service redesign, reducing avoidable contact and getting things

"We wanted to use the opportunity of moving taxi applications online to show taxi drivers and taxi operators the other applications that are available online to them too. As a council we are looking at where we've got areas of digital isolation – and if we can show people applying for a taxi licence that online is the simplest and quickest way to do it then hopefully they will use online for other council services as well."

Sarah Richardson, Assistant Director, Customer Services

right first time, had seen the number of contacts reduced via traditional channels – telephony contacts had reduced by 10 per cent, and face-to-face contacts by six per cent, year-on-year.

The project to make taxi licensing available online and have personal licence holder/applicant information available via the council's main customer account, MyCalderdale, was seen as the next logical step in the council's journey to deliver 'digital by choice' services and encourage wider use of all its online services.

"Digital is the infrastructure that helps us provide services for people –it's not so much a digital transformation, it's actually a service transformation in terms of delivering better services to people."

Councillor Jane Scullion, Portfolio Holder for Business Change and Customer Service

Digital Channel Shift Programme

The work at Calderdale Council to support its innovative use of digital technology has been funded through the Digital Channel Shift Programme, which is managed and overseen by the Local Government Association (LGA).

The Digital Channel Shift Programme was set up to help councils and their partners to promote greater use of online tools and technologies for the benefit of both their customers and staff.

The aim is for the digital tools and solutions created through the programme to be reused by other councils and contribute to the wider work to transform local public services.

The project objectives and targets

With the exception of taxi licensing, all high-volume transactions at Calderdale are available online with full back-office integration. The project therefore aimed to create an online taxi driver and vehicle licencing self-service facility, so that taxi and private hire drivers could apply online at any time of day or night, could track their applications, and see when their licences, MOTs or medical certificates were due to expire.

The starting point was the council's modern, responsive corporate website that provided access to standalone application forms for taxi licensing. These application forms, once submitted to the licensing department via post or in person, then had to be rekeyed into a back-end system – which risked errors through miskeying.

Taxi licensing is a complex process and the existing provision was time-consuming and labour-intensive for both staff and drivers. Drivers often had to make repeat visits to the council in order to submit applications or provide additional documentary evidence to accompany their claim.

A self-serve facility could enable required evidence to be asked for and submitted during the application process. The process could be simplified such that applications could be automatically uploaded to the back-office system for processing, with drivers notified of the outcomes.

In addition, December 2016's Casey Review[1] had highlighted the safeguarding risks and had been highly critical of Rotherham MBC's approach to licensing, calling for 'much greater interest being shown' by councils into the licensing of drivers.

Calderdale felt strongly that its approach to taxi licensing should be robust and transparent as it continued to make service improvements and efficiencies in order to address the issues highlighted in the Casey Review.

The taxi licensing service was to be redesigned to be available online through Calderdale's customer account, MyCalderdale. The service

> "As part of our digital channel shift strategy, we're looking all the time at giving customers options of how they access our council. One of the issues we'd identified was that for taxi drivers in particular it was quite a lengthy manual process which required numerous visits to the office with various pieces of paperwork."
>
> **Toni Kershaw, Customer Access Manager**

was to be fully integrated with an existing CRM, payment system and back-office licensing software. Simple workflow would be developed in the back office to automate the processing of applications.

As there was no online service for taxi licencing then available, the project had potential to move significant numbers of these customers online. In addition to enabling drivers to manage their licensing applications online, using MyCalderdale as a portal was expected to encourage these customers to do other business with the council online.

Calderdale applied to the LGA for £15,000 funding to help purchase the taxi licensing module required to deliver the project. Including integration, consultancy support, licensing and training the total project cost was £23,919.

Targets

- move 100 per cent of all taxi licensing applications online, either through self-service or assisted service within council offices
- fully integrate with corporate CRM and back-office licensing software, eliminating dual keying completely
- generate £44,000 in efficiency savings in first full year of operation.

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf

The approach and progress to date

Calderdale's licensing team handles the licensing and renewal process for over 1,500 licences on average in any one year. In 2015/16 the service incurred 6,369 calls and 4,101 face-to-face contacts relating to these licences.

At the start of this project to enable all licensing customers to self-serve, Calderdale's licensing department was in the process of migrating from a legacy back-office system onto a new Idox licensing system.

The initial intention was to develop new, integrated online forms in a newly purchased Oracle Service Cloud customer relationship management system using its MyAccount facility. Forms were then to be integrated both into the licensing back-office system and an existing payment system.

However, it quickly became apparent that delays relating to securing the Oracle Identity Management single sign-on functionality within MyAccount would make this approach unachievable within project timescales.

A decision was therefore taken to procure and implement an existing Idox online taxi licensing module alongside the migration to the Idox licensing system. The web forms in this package could be tailored and configured to meet local user need and Calderdale's own licensing requirements.

The intelligent forms would ask only for the information required for each type of licence application – new or renewal of an operator, driver or vehicle licence.

This switch in approach and the added complexity of running the project alongside a

> "The drivers are not difficult to engage with but it's traditionally cash-based business, so there are issues around any online service because it will require them to make payment online rather than by cash."
>
> **Councillor Jane Scullion, Portfolio Holder for Business Change and Customer Service**

> "Had we just been putting in a forms package and integrating it with our existing licensing software it would have been a much more straightforward project – but we were doing it as part of a much bigger migration."
>
> **Toni Kershaw, Customer Access Manager**

larger migration project led to some delay in delivery.

User research

Due to the historically high levels of face-to-face contact the team had few problems in engaging the drivers in this project.

However, they discovered a number of objections to moving the process online. For example, taxi driving is traditionally a cash-based business and an online service would involve online payment via credit or debit card.

In addition, Calderdale has a high percentage of Asian drivers, some of whom have English as a second language. Therefore research suggested that plain English and simple processes would be essential in order to make the service accessible to as many drivers as possible.

There had been an initial assumption that the trade was not digitally engaged, however this turned out to not be true. The majority of drivers had access to mobile phones and many were used to using internet services, such as Google maps, via these devices.

The mainly self-employed drivers predominantly worked shifts and were found to be enterprising as well as very good with their mobiles, but not necessarily so keen on paperwork, bureaucracy and 'gathering up their documents'.

An engagement strategy therefore aimed to tap into the drivers' existing interest in 'doing things' via their mobile phones whilst highlighting the time saved and convenience of being able to use their phone to apply for or renew their licence at any time of day and night.

Eligibility checklist

Applying for a taxi licence is a rigorous process and the project team wanted to be sure that applicants had all the required information to hand – and were eligible to apply in the first place – before applying.

It was felt that the best way to manage expectations and prepare applicants for the application process was to first take them through a checklist of requirements.

Customers need to check the relevant boxes to confirm that they have read the information, are eligible to apply, and have supporting evidence to hand before they can go through to the application process. For example, applicants must be over 21, have held a UK driving licence for at least two years and have the right to work in the UK. Applicants would also need to provide a driving licence check code, a medical report, a disclosure and barring service enhanced disclosure, and proof of their right to work in the UK. They would also have to pass a driving assessment and English test, and attend the council's professional standards training.

There is also information at this point about what happens to the application after it is submitted.

The checklist was considered key to both managing expectations and improving the customer experience – and avoiding the risk of a customer losing money by applying for something they could not have. It would also improve efficiency by reducing the number of ineligible or incomplete applications.

User testing

The first round of user testing was an internal process, with the taxi licensing team plus some internal staff who were not familiar with the taxi

"The user testing was done internally to start and then we involved the taxi drivers. We held workshops to show them what the new system was going to be like and asked them to try it – to tell us any errors and give us any feedback."

Angela Johnson, Licensing Officer

"We felt that the checklist was quite important – not only does it save hassle for us further down the line in terms of applications coming through from applicants that won't qualify, it saves the applicants ultimately a lot of time and money. The last thing that we want is somebody applying who isn't eligible. So we feel it's really important to manage those expectations right from the outset."

Toni Kershaw, Customer Access Manager

licensing process working through the process on computer, iPads and mobile phone to sense-check the information and customer journey.

Following on from this a series of workshops were held both at the licencing office and at the Customer First office in Halifax where there were a number of self-serve PCs available. A number of taxi operators and potential applicants were asked to test the process and give their feedback.

The feedback from this second round of testing was all positive, with very little comment about the form itself. Feedback instead focused around things that the team was already aware of through the user research – for example, the cultural shift to self-service and online payment.

Apart from getting feedback and testing the solution, a key aim of the workshops was to identify 'influencers' within the driver community who would be keen to 'pass the word' on to other drivers about the benefit of applying for and renewing their licences online.

The team is continually and proactively seeking feedback on the service in order to further improve it. When forms are submitted users are asked to comment on their experience. An example of the type of comment now received is: "About time".

Digital inclusion

To accommodate those drivers who were unable, or unwilling, to make the switch to online self-service the council's paper forms would continue to be available. In addition,

access to computers was also freely available in the council's Customer First office and staff both there and in the licencing offices would be available to help people make an online application and show them how to do it – with the expectation that they may be able to do this for themselves subsequently.

Calderdale was particularly keen to support people to use its online services because that opens up opportunities in other areas of life. Digital inclusion is therefore a key focus for all the council's service areas.

Drop-in service

The licencing service runs regular drop-ins where drivers can come for support with an application and from where they must pick up their licence when their vehicle or driver licence is successful.

Waiting times and workloads at these drop-ins had been historically variable. With the online application process the team saw an opportunity to initiate an appointment system following a successful application, in order to better manage the footfall through the drop-in.

Promotion

A soft launch was agreed due the larger data migration running in parallel with the project.

The team felt that promotion of this service would be easier than that of other services as they already knew who all the 1,500 licence holders were, and these people could be targeted via the renewals process and via their operators' offices.

When drivers are notified that a licence is due for renewal they are now sent a letter containing their reference code and told to use this to complete the renewal online.

Operators were also encouraged to put up information posters and to support their drivers by giving them access to the PCs in their offices and helping those for whom English was not their first language.

During research and testing sessions staff had looked for opinion formers, those people who are influential in the taxi business, the people that others go to for advice and information. Staff then made sure that these people were engaged and that they understood how the system worked and what the benefits were for them from going digital.

This influencer strategy has been particularly successful as taxi drivers who have used the self-serve application are not only happy with it but they are actively telling their peers about it.

Meanwhile, those contacting the service to apply or renew a licence are being nudged to the online service and are told 'this is really easy, you can even do it on your phone'. Alternatively they are encouraged to visit the licensing service's reception where a computer has been specifically installed for taxi drivers to use and staff are happy to help them through the process.

LGA support

The Calderdale project team believes that participating in the LGA Channel Shift Programme has given them much more than just funding.

The support, networking, shared learning and best practice has also been of great benefit. For example, another council on the programme, Cheltenham Borough Council, was also tackling

a project to put taxi licensing online. In addition, Cheltenham was using the Idox back-office system and online forms solution and both councils were able to share their learnings and experience with implementation.

Despite the different demographics that these councils serve, this engagement was very helpful as the projects progressed.

Launch

The self-service taxi licensing forms launched in September 2018, seven months after an original planned launch target of February that year. The delay was attributable to a number of things including the change in approach from the Oracle MyAccount to the Idox forms and the complexity of running alongside a broader data and system migration project within the service. In addition, the council elections in May 2018 impacted on the planned launch day which was postponed until after these took place. However, this did provide an opportunity for the officers leading on this project to better engage elected members who had expressed concerns about how taxi drivers had been consulted and involved in shaping this new online service. As a result, members were happy to go ahead with the launch.

Calderdale Council

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Apply for taxi licences

Taxi Licensing Office Opening Hours

Monday - Friday: 9am - 12.30pm (closed for lunch) 1.30pm - 4.30pm.

Please note: We cannot accept new applications or DBS applications in the last half hour before closing time.

You can apply for your Hackney Carriage, Private Hire or dual licence online.

Before you apply, please read: 📄 Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy [PDF 816KB] .

Driver

| Apply for a new drivers licence | Renew a drivers licence |

Vehicle

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Operators

| Apply for or renew an operators licence |

Apply for taxi licences

Apply for a Private Hire Operators licence

Apply for a new drivers licence

Apply for a new vehicle licence

Apply to renew a drivers licence

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Apply for a new drivers licence

Private Hire Driver, Hackney Carriage Driver and Dual Badge Driver

To apply for a new driver licence, please confirm that you:

- meet our requirements;
- and have fulfilled or are aware you need to fulfill the fitness criteria.

Apply for a Private Hire Operators licence

Apply for a new drivers licence

Apply for a new vehicle licence

Apply to renew a drivers licence

Apply to renew a vehicle licence

Pre-application check

Fitness criteria

In order for us to consider your application, you will be required to supply the council with evidence of your fitness to hold a Hackney Carriage or Private Hire driver's licence. For this the council will require the following:

☐ A copy of your full UK driving licence along with a check code to view my details online (only valid for 21 days)

☐ A medical report from your own GP using the council's approved medical form, and passport size photograph signed by the GP 📄 **Driver medical examination form [PDF 183KB]**

☐ Disclosure Barring Service check Enhanced Disclosure (x2 forms of ID required unless registered on the update service)

☐ Proof of your right to work/remain in the UK (we will need sight of original approved documents)

☐ Pass the driving assessment with Kirklees Council, the certificate is required to be shown as evidence along with a signed photograph by the driving examiner (please see our **policy** for details)

☐ Pass English Test at ESOL Entry Level 3 in Speaking, Listening and Reading (please see our **policy** for details)

☐ Attend the Council's Professional Standards Training

Requirements

Please confirm that you meet the following minimum requirements:

☐ I am 21 years or over

☐ I have held a full DVLA driving licence for two years or over

☐ I have the right to work in the UK

Submit

What happens after your application is submitted?

After you submit your application, you will be given a reference number.

Note: Use this in all correspondence with us.

The outcome – successes and challenges

The service had only been live for six months at the time that this case study was written. In that time period, whilst some way off its first-year target of 100 per cent, the service has seen promising take-up of the self-service channel.

It has also seen a corresponding reduction in the use of traditional face-to-face (down six per cent), telephone (down 3.5 per cent) and postal channels.

Back-office administration has been significantly improved as applications and renewals are automatically updated in the back-office system and applicants no longer drop off pieces of paper as and when.

Previously, the administrative work involved in collating, rekeying and processing these paper applications and supporting evidence, and then communicating with applicants about what was required next, had placed a large time burden on staff. Self-serve and automation has removed this burden freeing up staff time and removed the risk of miskeying application information.

Calderdale's licensing team had been anticipating the launch of Uber in its area. This was expected to significantly increase the department's workload as more drivers applied for licences to work for this new operator. However, with the new system in place the service has been able to cope with the additional 15 per cent demand for licences without the need to take on additional staff.

Calderdale believes that the project will deliver significant financial and efficiency benefits to the council over the next twelve months, but that it has already been a win-win for both the council and the taxi drivers.

> "It has allowed us to reduce demand on face-to-face services and telephony services, and it's much more efficient because we don't need to key the applications into our system – they upload automatically."
>
> **Sarah Richardson, Assistant Director, Customer Services**

Financial benefits

Since September 2018 when self-service taxi licencing went live on Calderdale's website to the end of the financial year in March 2019 the council has monitored its savings in reduced face-to-face visits, call volumes, print and postage and cash payments.

Perhaps more importantly at this stage in the take-up cycle for the new service it has also coped with a 15 per cent increase in the volume of licence applications. This is quantifiable as a efficiency of £16,085. They have also avoided recruiting a manager, as had been previously expected, thanks to the automation and self-serve facility. This resulted in a saving of £32,083 – calculated from the go-live in September 2018 to the end of March 2019.

They have also seen a reduction in face-to-face visits, saving £3,279 and a reduction in call volumes resulting in £1,315 saved compared to the same six-month period in the previous year.

Further small savings have been made through automating payments and on post and packaging totalling £373.

> "It is a lot easier to do it online, but you need to tell people how easy it is. If you have a smart phone you can do it no matter where you are, so it's a lot easier and convenient.
>
> "Drivers took time off work before and they'd spend an hour or hour and a half in the council office when they could have been working and earning money."
>
> **Yasir Iqbal, Private Hire Driver**

> "It works absolutely perfectly. We've had no negative feedback about the online process. The only area we need to expand into now is to increase the take-up and do some work around promoting and raising confidence in the online process."
>
> **Sarah Richardson, Assistant Director, Customer Services**

In this first six months Calderdale has delivered a total of £53,134.94 in savings from the successful introduction of its online taxi licencing self-service – significantly ahead of the anticipated target of £44,000 for the first full year of operation.

Non-financial benefits

The team is confident that the improved speed and accuracy of licence applications is helping to keep the public safe – making sure that details are checked, paperwork complete and licenses issued with a clear audit trail.

As outlined above, the released capacity in staff time meant that the service could manage the 15 per cent increase in workload due to the arrival of Uber in the borough without the need to recruit more staff.

Taxi drivers meanwhile like the new system as it is accessible from anywhere, at any time and via their choice of computer, tablet or mobile phone. This is of particular benefit to those drivers working the night shifts.

Not only has the council saved money but so have taxi drivers as they no longer need to take time off work during office hours to apply for or renew their licences.

The service also has a better and wider range of clean customer data in a standardised format to analyse and gain customer insight for better decision-making and resource targeting.

This improved data set and the released staff capacity has led to a reduction in enforcement cases and better decision-making in the enforcement process.

Staff in licensing feel positive about the change according to staff surveys and feel that they are

"We've received a much higher percentage of applications with the introduction of Uber and we've been able to manage those applications without extra resource. Applications have increased by 15 per cent but we have been able to absorb that work due to the fact that the manual side and administration side has been reduced."

Toni Kershaw, Customer Access Manager

"As a politician you always count success if you don't get any complaints – and I've had absolutely no complaints. I've checked in with various other people in the community and there have been no problems at all. And that's what a politician wants to hear!"

Councillor Jane Scullion, Portfolio Holder for Business Change and Customer Service

able to add more value to the service delivery. And the project team as a whole has had the opportunity to enhance their digital skills leading to greater confidence in their ability to deliver such projects.

No formal complaints have been made about this service since it was launched in September 2018.

Challenges

Finding that the original plan to develop the licensing self-service within the council's planned new MyAccount was not possible due to issues with the Oracle identity management system was a major blow to project plans.

Whilst switching to an approach linked to the new back-office system in licensing was ultimately successful, the change in direction added significant delay to the start of the project.

During the project the back-office supplier, Idox, created a new digital team and appointed a new project manager to provide more robust project support and faster responses. However, until this point the project had progressed more slowly than anticipated.

Meanwhile, the local elections in May 2018 led to a delay in completing the user testing.

In the meantime, the team also found that running the project alongside a major data migration to a new licensing system added an additional strain on resources and staff time.

All of these issues contributed to some extent to the seven-month delay in the go-live of this service.

Key learning points

Political impact: don't underestimate the political interest in programmes relating to niche or specific client groups. Earlier and ongoing engagement with elected members at different stages of the project would have been beneficial as nervousness about the impact this project would have on the taxi trade community led to a delay in launch. As a result of this experience members are now involved from day one in all service delivery change projects.

Conflicting priorities: take account of the impact of other projects on staff resource. Licensing staff were grappling with the migration to a new licensing system – and a steep learning curve in its adoption – at the same time as delivering this project. This meant that key activities such as user research and testing were competing for time and attention against other priorities.

Pace: in hindsight the team felt that it probably 'bit off more than we could chew'. The ambition to deliver both migration and self-serve projects simultaneously was commendable, but a phased approach may have worked better and perhaps have delivered efficiencies more quickly along the way.

Engage early: you can never engage too early with service users especially in niche areas where opinion formers and influencers can help to bring the behavioural change required in a shift to self-service.

Be agile but stick to the plan: the team was impacted by projects running in tandem and had to readjust its approach, timelines and delivery plan which meant that some planned

> "These are the easy things to get right, but the things that are quite often missed – and we've been guilty of that ourselves this time in terms of the communication and stakeholder buy-in including elected members. You've got to bring them along with you and make sure they are aware at every stage."
>
> **Toni Kershaw, Customer Access Manager**

> "Pick your battles is the key learning and look at what you can do to get those efficiencies more quickly, rather than waiting for the end game."
>
> **Toni Kershaw, Customer Access Manager**

> "Always plan for more user testing than you think you will need! Try and think of all the different possible scenarios and really test, then give yourself time before going live."
>
> **Sarah Mellor, Licensing Officer**

> "One key lesson learnt was that we had not done enough engagement with our elected members and they were concerned that we hadn't consulted or engaged with taxi drivers sufficiently so the new online service might cause some problems within the taxi trade community, and that they would find it difficult to use."
>
> **Sarah Richardson, Assistant Director, Customer Services**

activities, for example user engagement, could not be undertaken as early as intended.

Knock-on impact of delays: as the project experienced delays it was impacted by corporate events that were unanticipated in project planning. For example, a corporate service review – which started after the planned delivery date – began to absorb staff time and attention because the channel shift project had been delayed.

Focus on testing: you can always do more testing and even after go-live this should be continued to ensure that anomalies and unusual application circumstances are accommodated.

Next steps

The key focus for the immediate future is to achieve the target switch to 100 per cent self-serve for taxi licencing renewals and applications.

In light of Calderdale's experience with take-up of other services it believes that this target is achievable. For example, the council has already delivered a 98 per cent take-up of online school applications and the recent introduction of an online blue badge application has already led to 50 per cent of applications moving to self-serve or assisted digital.

Work to deliver the 100 per cent self-serve target in taxi licencing has already begun, with further visits to taxi operators and drivers being encouraged during all telephone and face-to-face contacts to try the online renewal service, supported by offers to help them work through the process.

Meanwhile, as paper application forms are no longer generally available, new applicants are encouraged to try digital first.

Targeted communications with new operators to the area, such as Uber, are also taking place – suggesting that, as an online operator, Uber should be leading the way in encouraging its drivers to use the online services.

In terms of future development, the team plans to create options for customers to receive text and email notifications about the progress of their transaction.

It is also exploring a joint initiative with neighbouring authorities – under the West Yorkshire Combined Authority – to create a new online disclosure and barring service (DBS) check.

"I don't see any reason why in 12 to 18 months' time we will not have 100 per cent of applications online. A bit of confidence in the system, more engagement and making sure that's ongoing and we keep the momentum going – to make sure the drivers understand how it benefits them, that it's not just about making it easier for us."

Toni Kershaw, Customer Access Manager

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Contact for further information

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