

Accelerating licence and permit applications at Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council had already embraced national e-Government initiatives and started introducing cost-effective services for improving efficiency and the services it offers its customers. With the responsibility for issuing almost 100 different licences and permissions, it recognised that significant benefits could be gained from automating and streamlining the processes involved. Working with Microsoft and Solidsoft it is implementing an integration and workflow solution that will lower costs dramatically, while improving the service for its customers.

Organisation background

Situated in South Yorkshire, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council is responsible for providing a wide range of economic and development, education, culture and leisure, social, housing and environmental services to its 248,000 citizens.

Embracing e-Government

Like all local authorities Rotherham is subject to the e-Government objectives of “achieving 100% capability in the delivery of priority services by 2005, in ways that customers will use”. These priority services are laid down in a Government paper, developed by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, which describes the outcomes that local authorities are expected to achieve.

Rotherham has been quick to embrace the national e-Government initiatives and already introduced cost effective, web-based services that have delivered ‘quick wins’ and improved efficiency. These are embodied in Rotherham Connect, a multi-channel contact centre that encompasses e-mail, phone, and web-based services, as well as the authority’s offices. Rotherham Connect already offers citizens self-service information about the authority’s services, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from their PC or digital TV.

Streamlining licensing and permissions

All local authorities are responsible for issuing a large number of licenses and permissions. These range from simple car parking permits to planning permission and entertainment licences. In Rotherham’s case there are almost 100, and the administration of them is time consuming, costly and results in poor levels of customer service.

Solution overview

Organisation

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Business situation

With nearly 100 licences and permissions the administration processes used were not as efficient as they could be.

Solution

A web front end, incorporating workflow, which connects to Rotherham’s existing systems, and the Government Gateway, via BizTalk Server 2004.

Benefits

- Improved customer satisfaction.
- Reduction in time taken to process licences and permits.
- Significant cost savings through improved efficiency.
- Reduction in the cost and maintenance of disparate systems.
- Re-allocation of staff from back office to customer facing roles.

“Because the number of licences and permissions we deal with has grown over time, how we process them has evolved in an uncontrolled, uncoordinated and disjointed fashion”, explains Jason Ollivent, Head of Information Systems, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council. “It has meant that a number of different processes, platforms and systems are used, which builds inefficiency into their administration. In addition it makes it complex and, sometimes, daunting for our customers to understand and follow the progress of their application.”

Clearly there was room to improve both the service Rotherham offered its citizens and its own internal efficiency.

Government funding

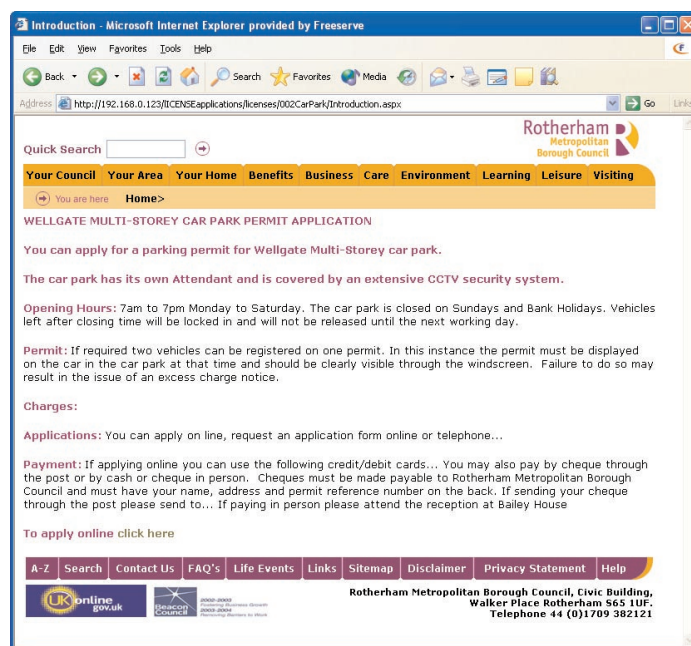
Through its ‘Invest to Save Budget’ the Government offers funding for innovative e-Government projects. The idea is that these can then be passed on to other authorities as best practice.

Having established that there were considerable savings to be made from streamlining the licence and permissions processes, Rotherham, in conjunction with Liverpool City Council, and Kingston upon Hull City Council, built a business case. This was then successfully used to gain central funding under the ‘Invest to Save’ scheme.

Business process re-engineering

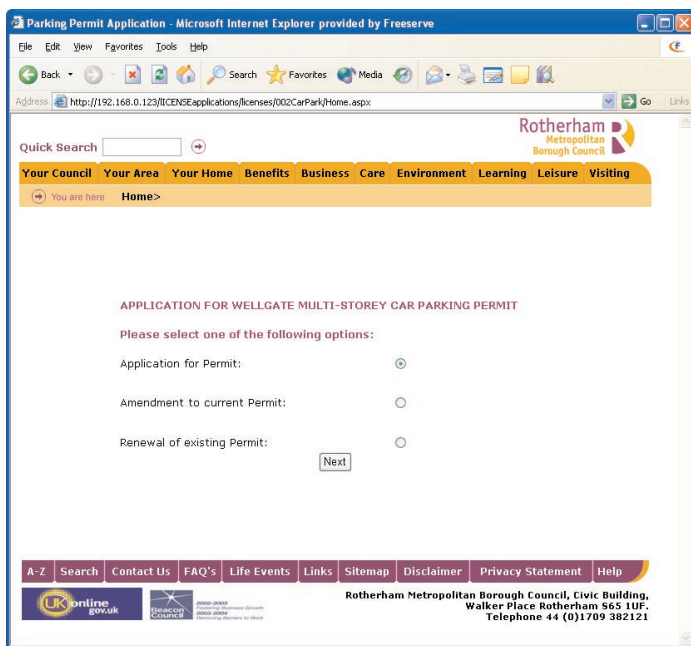
Having secured the funding work could start on building the solution. Because the installed technologies of the partner authorities weren’t the same, each was responsible for developing and implementing its own version of the solution.

In order to decrease the risks involved, and show benefits quickly, a phased approach was adopted. The different licences and permits each authority had to administer were, therefore, broken down into six categories, based on their complexity. These were:



- Requests that could be resolved online.
- Requests that could be resolved online, but needed payment.
- Requests that required face-to-face meetings, assessments, internal checks or court appeals.
- Requests that required communication with outside organisations, such as the police force.
- Requests that required complex activities such as site visits, reports to be written, plans reviews and inspections.
- Other requests not covered by the above.

The processes for these were then mapped. This was a crucial stage, which involved business process re-engineering, and Rotherham were pleased to have Solidsoft’s involvement. “Microsoft had introduced us to Solidsoft”, says Jason Ollivent. “What impressed me about them from the beginning was that they were very keen to contribute to the process mapping. Having their input at that stage helped the people involved understand the technology implications of what they were doing, and meant the processes they designed were more appropriate for automation.”



A consistent interface

Solidsoft also designed and built the technology solution. Customers and Rotherham's staff access different facets of a single web site, which incorporates workflow. BizTalk Server 2004 is the central integration hub. This allows access to and from Rotherham's existing systems. It also provides a link to Microsoft's Departmental Integration Server (DIS) and, from there, to the Government Gateway.

"Microsoft DIS and the Government Gateway are important parts of the solution", comments Jason. "Being able to access the Gateway's authentication, transaction routing, payment engine, business-to-business messaging and secure mail system means we don't have to worry about acquiring that functionality. That means lower costs, lower risk and a faster implementation time."

BizTalk Server 2004 is also an important element in the solution. "Creating the single, consistent interface, and the single log-on for our staff, just wouldn't have been possible without BizTalk 2004", comments Jason. "It's fast, easy to use, cost effective and fits in perfectly with our IT strategy, which is based on Microsoft products.

Using it means we haven't really had to train or familiarise the users, and we haven't needed to employ expensive IT specialists to run it either."

A key reason for this is Solidsoft's approach to the project. All the specification, design, development, planning, testing and implementation were carried out by Solidsoft. But, as the solutions for each category of licence were developed, the knowledge and skills were transferred to Rotherham's staff. It means that Rotherham can extend the work Solidsoft has done to incorporate further licences in the same category. At the same time Solidsoft have been able to move on to the next category, accelerating how quickly the project has progressed.

Ahead of schedule

It's early days yet. Only four licences have been piloted, but work is well ahead of schedule. "Our plans were quite cautious", explains Jason, "to ensure we could deliver on our commitment. But the project is moving much faster than we thought. Already I can see that we will be able to accelerate the take up of the services into Rotherham Connect. By the end of 2004 we should have most of the licences and permissions online."

And how does Jason feel about working with Solidsoft? "I tend to manage by exception", he says. "If I need to get involved in any project it's usually because there is a problem. But I haven't needed to with this project. Solidsoft have kept me regularly updated and it's run very smoothly."

For more information about Solidsoft's services:

- call **01256 375700**
- email **enquiries@solidsoft.com**
- visit **www.solidsoft.com**



Solidsoft Ltd, County House, Armstrong Road, Daneshill
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG24 8NU
Telephone: +44 (0) 1256 375700
Fax: +44 (0) 1256 476361
email: enquiries@solidsoft.com

Solidsoft