CIVICA
ideas into action

Speed and automation helps Oxford deliver a more efficient service

Migrating to Civica OPENRevenues is helping Oxford City Council to streamline how it manages revenues and benefits

In 2020, Oxford City Council signed a 10-year contract with Civica for a new digital platform to handle its revenues and benefits services. The new platform will support a very busy team: during 2019, the Oxford Revenues and Benefits contact centre received over 56,000 calls, while in the same period the department paid around £42m in Housing benefit and collected £96m in Council Tax and £180m in Non-Domestic Rates.

More automation

Shaun Butler, leader of the revenues and benefits systems and projects team for Oxford City Council, explained why the local authority took the decision to change its system: "We felt that our existing software had become dated and was not adding functionality at the pace we wanted."

The system was also slow to operate, which made it difficult for staff to use.

With input from revenues and benefits specialists at the Council, Shaun and colleagues put together a specification for a new system and asked for proposals from providers.

According to Shaun, support for automation was an important reason behind Oxford City Council's decision to choose OPENRevenues from Civica: "As well as covering all the areas that we required, Civica showed that they could help us with the shift we wanted towards less manual intervention and more automation.

"In particular, their service will enable customers to self-serve more with electronic forms, and get results more quickly."

1 | Saves time with accurate automated processes

2 | Improves customer satisfaction with self service capabilities

3 | Enables better collaboration between teams.

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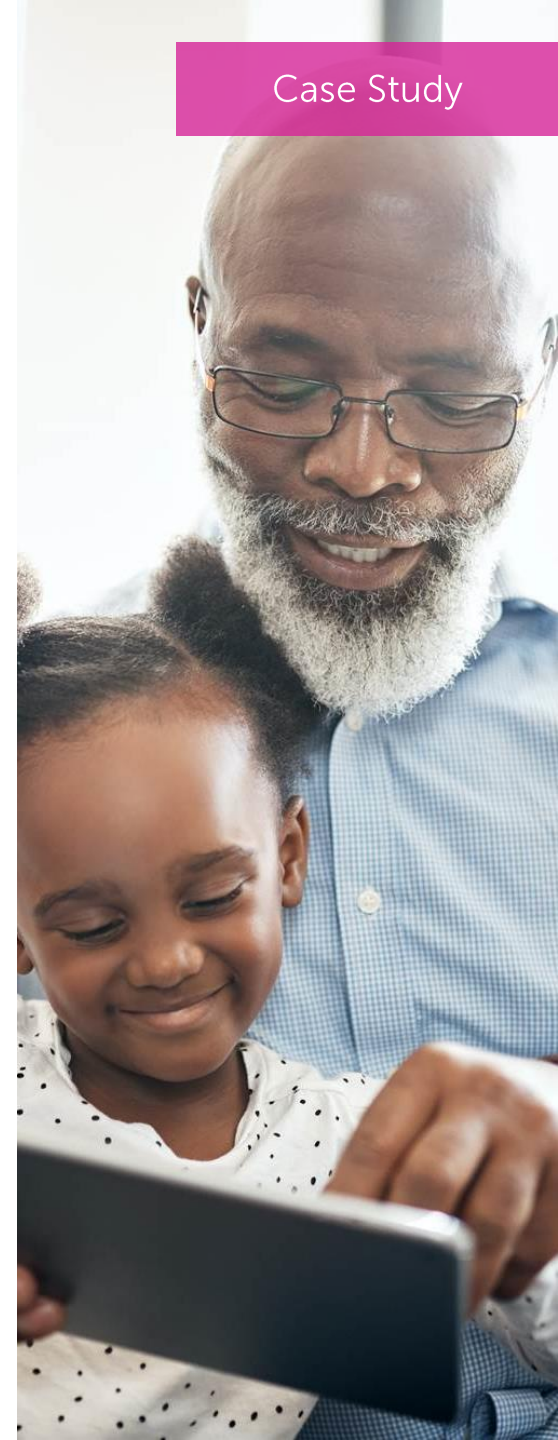
Shaun Butler, Revenues and Benefits Systems and Projects Team Leader

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>
> Shaun Butler, Revenues and Benefits Systems and Projects Team Leader

Remote migration because of COVID-19

After the contract was signed, the project formally kicked off in November 2020, with COVID-19 constraints meaning that the entire migration process was handled remotely up to the go-live date, with no physical meetings.

This was no mean feat given the extensive testing cycles needed before the system went live in [September 2021. Training, too, needed to be virtual, with sessions delivered via Microsoft Teams.

Joined-up working

OPENRevenues covers the full range of revenues and benefits activity: online self-service, contact centre management, electronic documents, automated workflow, payments, telephony and mobile working.

Oxford City Council is also taking advantage of the connectivity it brings between departments: benefits staff, for example, can be permissioned to make changes to council tax discounts.

Shaun notes that this supports the direction the Council is taking: "We're leaning towards more collaborative working between teams – having a joined-up approach both internally and with customers saves time and reduces errors."

Oxford City Council also uses OPENWorkflow email PLUS functionality, which automatically searches the text and body of an email for a valid reference number. The generated item bypasses any manual referencing and is routed directly to the user or team to deal with as a work item.

Self-service efficiency

The self-serve options in OPENRevenues offer important benefits. For example, customers can now submit forms and get revised bills without any need for back-office interaction. And residents and landlords can see details of their payments and liabilities and report changes via a portal, with no need to get in touch with the contact centre.

Better speed and response time

With less than a year since the new system went live, Shaun says that it's too early to quantify how the benefits from automation have started to flow through into benefits processing and debt recovery performance.

However, users are appreciating how it performs: "Speed was a big issue with our previous system and the main bugbear for staff. Civica OPENRevenues is much more modern and far quicker. Screens turn over fast, as soon as you hit update or exit. We had assured users that it was going to be much faster to use, and they were not disappointed."

OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

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