



Case Study: Digital Transformation at Highland Council

One year on from introducing new digital services using myaccount for customer sign-in and authentication, Highland Council is well on its way to achieving its target of dealing with 40% of customer transactions online.

When Highland Council went live with a host of new services on its website in March 2015, it marked a significant milestone in its digital transformation programme. Thirty-four online services, ranging from reporting a missed bin collection to licence applications and requests for money advice, formed the new offering. By the end of January 2016, this had increased to 87 online services, with plans to add a further 15 over the course of the year.

For the council, it marks the culmination of a long-term effort to improve its customer experience, streamline its own processes and, of course, make financial savings.

The roots of the council's digital transformation programme, called Digital First, go back around eight years to the Scottish Government's Shared Service Diagnostic Programme. This looked at how councils could simplify, standardise and share services. At Highland Council, it triggered an examination of how customers engaged with the council and many of the processes behind its service delivery. From that grew a number of work streams, one of which was Digital First.

"Digital First is about making our online offering right, increasing the number of processes and driving up the number of online transactions to 40% by April 2017," explains David Moreton of the council's Corporate Improvement Team.

In order to do that, the council needed to revitalise its existing digital offering, both the technology used and the processes involved. "At the start of the Digital First Programme, we tried online forms but the software was limited in its functionality," says David Moreton.

“It was OK for simple transactions but not for things like licence applications. We found we were compromising the re-design of services to fit the software so we began looking for a more agile, functional solution.”

A series of workshops was held to develop a list of business requirements and evaluation criteria for a new forms package to underpin the web services. One crucial aspect was the need for a customer account to avoid data loss from forms.

Using G-cloud, Highland Council identified an online forms package from Firmstep that would meet its needs. Around the same time, the soft launch of myaccount took place, leading to the Council to get in touch with the Improvement Service (IS), to see if it could provide the secure customer account function that the Council was looking for.

myaccount is the simple and secure sign-in service for online public services in Scotland. It provides people living in Scotland with the ability to set up an online account, and use it to access a growing range of online services provided by eligible public bodies.

For citizens, it provides the convenience of a single, secure account that can be used across multiple public services without the need to constantly present proofs of identity, residence and even entitlement. For public service organisations such as Highland Council, it provides customer authentication, reducing the need for repeat evidence-checking and increasing confidence that the person is who they say they are. It also helps organisations create a single customer record.

In August 2014, Firmstep, the Improvement Service and Highland Council began working on the new digital services, with Firmstep and the IS building the technical aspects and the Council defining the customer journey. In March 2015, 34 online services supported by the new forms package and powered by myaccount were launched.

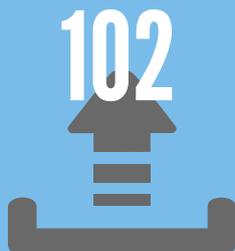
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David Moreton
Corporate Improvement Team
Highland Council

Number Crunching...



Number of online services provided by Highland Council in March 2015



Number of online services Highland Council expects to offer by end of 2016



Transactions with the council carried out online (Feb 2016)



Target for online transactions by April 2017



Expected savings from online services over four years

Now, when a customer accesses certain online services through the Highland Council website, they are asked to create a myaccount. Once registered, they are routed to the myaccount sign-in page whenever they attempt to use the Council's online services. This authenticates them, then hands them back seamlessly to the Council website with the assurance that their log-in details are genuine.

The services that are made available online to each customer depends on the customer's Level of Assurance. Every person receives Level 0 assurance on registering for a myaccount. This level is increased as more information is presented by the customer about their identity, residency and entitlement; the highest is Level 2, meaning their identity has been formally verified by the Council or another public service organisation with whom they have a relationship e.g. a school or NHS clinic. On reaching a Level 2, the Council doesn't need to ask for proofs of evidence of identity and residency again. For added customer convenience, web forms are automatically pre-populated with the customer's information, itself derived from their myaccount registration and log-in process and from the consent provided by a customer to share their information with public sector organisations.

In practice, this has measurable benefits for the Council. For example, Highland Council receives around 7,000 applications for Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction each year, half of which are repeat claimants. It estimates that the use of Level of Assurance in myaccount will save approximately 15 minutes per application, due to the reduced need to check evidence of identity and address. If the Council reaches its target for online transactions, it will save £13,000 a year on one process alone.

For Michelle Morris, Deputy Chief Executive of the Highland Council, myaccount is a key element in the success of its digital transformation programme. "It's given us the opportunity to use an existing public sector asset, avoiding the need to develop our own solution to authenticate customers. myaccount has enabled us to deliver this cost effectively and to release significant cost savings, while at the same time making it easy for our customers to access online services. In the past 12 months, our take-up has doubled and set to grow further."

The Council is on track to meet its targets for digital services. When the new services launched in March 2015, 10% of customer transactions took place online. By February 2016, it had reached 23%, the overall aim being to grow that to 40% by April 2017.

At this adoption level, the Council is expecting financial savings of £1.3 million over four years. Of this, £275,000 had been achieved by February 2016.

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Michelle Morris
Deputy Chief Executive
Highland Council

Customer feedback is positive too – “much better than a paper form”, “simple to navigate” and “easy to understand” are just some of the comments received.

The next steps are to continue increasing the number of online services offered and driving channel shift. From 34 services in March 2015, the council expects to have 102 online forms by the end of 2016. Services planned for this year include Free School Meals and School Clothing Grants, Discretionary Housing Payment, School Enrolment and Annual Data Check, Online School Payments and Landlord Registration.

As for myaccount, David Moreton says. “I would absolutely recommend it to other councils.”

Find out more...

For more information about myaccount, visit <http://signin.mygovscot.org> or contact Martin Brown at: martin.brown@improvementservice.org.uk

myaccount benefits

For the customer...

- Single sign on for all council online services
- Save forms for completion later
- Automatic population of online forms with their details
- Customer record of all requests
- Same login to access local public services can be used when they move to another part of Scotland
- Obtain trusted access to council services that require evidence of identity

For the business...

- Reduced requirement for repeat checking of proofs of identity, residence and entitlement
- Enhanced customer authentication – more confidence that the customer is genuine
- Encourages channel shift – making it easier for customers to complete forms online
- Helps with single customer record – reduces duplicate customer potential
- Increased potential of outgoing electronic communication with customers – email instead of letters