CIVICA
ideas into action

Empowering customers with online revenues and benefits services

OPENPortal improves efficiencies saving Basildon and Brentwood Councils time and money

When Basildon and Brentwood Councils created a shared services partnership to deliver revenues and benefits services more efficiently, moving to a single system was a critical step.

The councils chose to consolidate to Civica's revenues and benefits solution, OPENRevenues, already used at Basildon. Uniquely, the Civica solution can hold data for both councils in a single database. This enables staff to work seamlessly across each authority's workload, deal with cross boundary citizen queries within a single screen and provides statutory and other reporting on a per-council basis.

Going paperless

Always looking to the future, the councils are rolling out paperless billing for council tax using Civica's e-billing capability.

They've also upgraded their online revenues and benefits customer portal to OPENPortal, to help drive digital transformation.

The councils are making it their mission to encourage as many customers as possible to switch to paperless billing and online services. Nicholas Wimbledon, Customer Development Lead at Basildon Council, explains the driver for this proactive channel shift.

"In light of climate change, we have a 2030 plan to reduce our carbon emissions, and Civica's solutions have a part to play by helping us cut down on paper use," he says. "On top of that, online services are part of daily life for many people, and they expect councils to offer them too."

Key outcomes

1 29,000 active e-Services users

2 4-star customer satisfaction rating

3 Support for carbon emissions reduction plan

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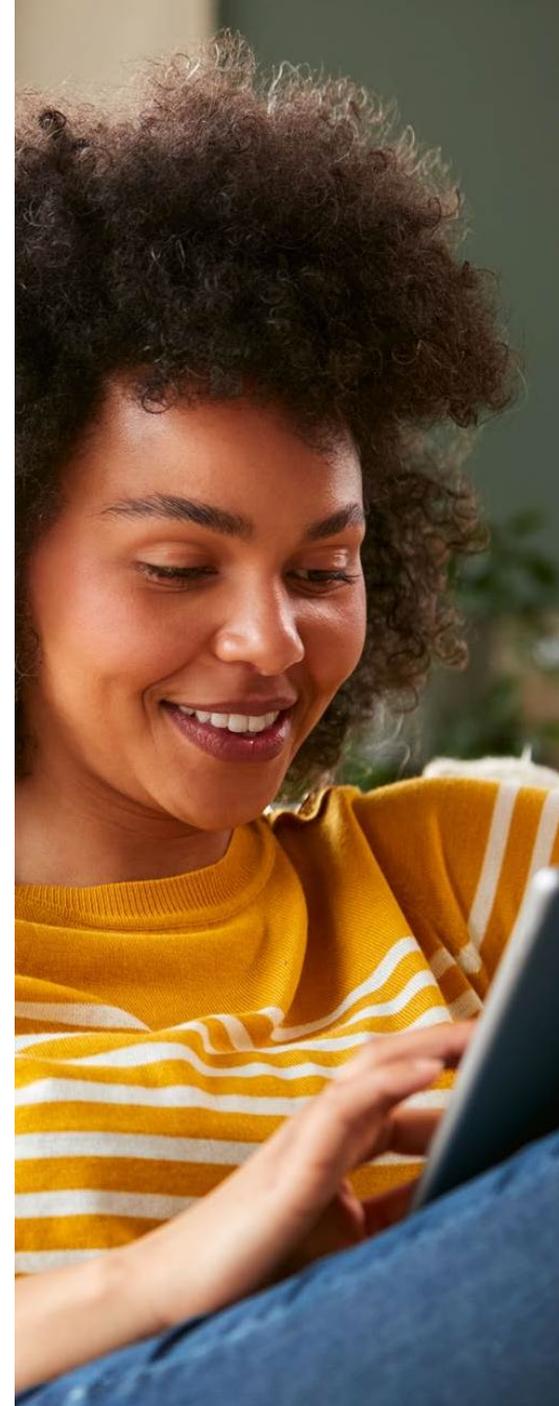
Craig Beadle,
Revenues and Benefits Technical Manager, Basildon Council.

Learn more:

www.civica.com/revenues-benefits

Contact email:

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Registration made easy

Basildon has implemented e-billing and embedded OPENPortal into its website as Council Tax and Housing Benefits e-Services; Brentwood will soon follow on. Customers can use their e-Services accounts to do things like change their contact details or apply for a refund of a credit balance or for single person discount.

At the launch of e-Services, Civica automation migrated customers' accounts from the previous portal software. For customers for whom it held active email addresses, the council created e-Services accounts in a GDPR-compliant way.

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> **Nick Wimbledon,**
> Customer Development Lead,
> Basildon Council

"By taking away the work of registering, we enhanced the customer journey and made it quick and easy for people to start using their e-Services accounts," says Nick.

At the same time, customers were moved to paperless council tax billing unless they opted out. "We sent 40,000 notification emails and only 450 people asked to retain paper bills," says Craig Beadle, Revenues and Benefits Technical Manager at Basildon. "Paperless billing on this scale saves us thousands of pounds on printing and postage every year."

29,000 active users

Basildon promotes e-Services and paperless billing online, on the phone and in its council magazine; and encourages all residents to register.

"Today we have 49,000 registered customers, 29,000 of whom are active users," says Craig. In a 2022 survey*, 81% of respondents said they would have had to visit or call the council if they hadn't been able to use e-Services. "Having so many customers relying on e-Services saves time and effort for our front-office teams, who can focus on other work, and reduces our telephony and call-handling costs," he says.

The power of texts

Civica's revenues and benefits solution incorporates text messaging functionality that Basildon uses to add an extra layer of security to e-Services accounts with two-factor authentication. The council also finds that customers are more inclined to act on reminders sent as text messages, compared with phone calls or letters.

Craig cites the example of pre-empting a summons for non-payment by inviting a customer to make an online payment by a certain time. "When you receive a message to your mobile, it's right there in your hand, making it more likely you'll click and pay," he says. "It's a neat process that does away with the cost and effort of a summons."

4 out of 5 stars

The 2022 survey confirms that Basildon customers like using e-Services. "The average rating was four out of five stars — it's rare to get such positive feedback on a council service," says Craig. "Civica did a brilliant job of setting up OPENPortal and the service does everything we wanted. It's easily ten times better than the previous solution."

Since 2017, Basildon and Brentwood Councils in Essex have delivered revenues and benefits services in a nationally recognised partnership agreement. The combined service aims to provide higher-quality services at lower cost to a total population of around 265,000 people.

Learn more:

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