

Southampton City Council improves customer service with Civica e-payments



"ICON has given residents a 24/7 online payment system and departments have been able to offer a wider range of services and goods for payment online. Because the platform is hosted, system support is handled by our IT provider and there were fewer implementation risks than competitor systems."

Sarah Dennis

Head of Information Technology and Organisational Development, Southampton City Council

The Challenge

Southampton City Council's cash office is responsible for handling a huge range of cash payments, cheques and electronic transactions across the council and from partner organisations including 79 schools. As the city's residents are increasingly using online services on a 24/7 basis, the department requires ever higher standards of customer service as well as efficient transaction processes. The Southampton team needed to update their card payment system to comply with the Payment Card Industries Data Security Standards. They also required a more modernised payments platform to accommodate the growing customer online demands. This needed to be applicable to online receipts throughout the authority.

The Solution

Southampton entered into a procurement process for a payment system platform. As well as providing modernised cash management processes, the new platform needed to be compatible within the overall Capita ICT framework that hosts all council services. After evaluating different payment systems, Southampton implemented Civica ICON, an integrated solution for income management, e-payments and cash receipting which can be run either on the customer's IT computing infrastructure or as a hosted platform. Now installed by over 180 UK authorities, ICON manages payments from all sources across all departments round the clock.

Civica has transformed Southampton City Council's payment processing by upgrading its existing system to provide a hosted card solution, user authorisation capability and Chip and PIN which was implemented last year. Provided by Civica as a hosted platform integrated with the Capita infrastructure, ICON has already helped the cash office team increase card processing accuracy through automating existing manual processes and e-payments.



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Sarah Dennis, Head of Information Technology and Organisational Development, Southampton City Council, explained: "Civica's ICON solution for e-payments offered the best solution in terms of implementation risk, value for money and ease of use."

Southampton's e-payments are processed off site through Civica's hosted data centre, which has enabled Southampton to be PCI-DSS compliant, meeting necessary information security standards. In addition, because the software applications are now managed by Civica, staff spend less time on system maintenance and other IT-related administration.

Results

The ICON platform simplifies different partners' payment submissions. The finance team has streamlined many core activities and it provides more focused customer service on payment issues, exception reporting and queries from partner organisations in the city.

Civica's hosted payment solution is delivering different operational benefits for the council as it allows all departments to collect income more efficiently with full system reliability. In addition, the council has been able to transform and secure its payments interface by freeing up staff to focus on customer service matters.

The Future

While ICON is successfully managing a range of internal and external payment processes, Southampton is now looking to further develop its cash management systems with automated bank resolution processes and the ability to collect non-invoice income across all its services.

Southampton is already developing these solutions to extend e-payment systems to partner organisations. Oakwood Junior School is the Council's first school partner and the ICON payment system has been integrated into a proprietary system already used by the school for cash payments and for future automated and e-payment systems. Since parents have been able to pay for dinners, uniforms and music lessons and make contributions for trips online, the school has taken over £8,000 in e-payments, saving administration time and reducing the risk of banking large amounts. The school's e-payments are automatically reported into the Authority's accounting system and this is now available to all schools in Southampton to take up.

Benefits

- > PCI compliant
- > E-payments
- > Modernising receipt transactions
- > Greater focus on customer service delivery
- > Increased staff productivity
- > Development of a new customer access strategy
- > Platform for future projects

"The ICON system makes it easier for Southampton residents to make secure payments online at a time convenient to them. Whilst streamlining our processing we have been able to focus on resolving customer queries faster. With the integration into partner organisations like schools, we will have a double efficiency benefit."

Sarah Dennis

Head of Information Technology and Organisational Development, Southampton City Council



Southampton is one of northern Europe's busiest cruise ship ports



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