

## TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL DRIVES JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

### SOFTWARE AG SOA IMPLEMENTATION STREAMLINES CUSTOMER SERVICE

#### Challenges

Previously, many key customer-facing processes, such as the collection and processing of Council Tax payments, and the provision of Commercial Services, relied on a number of disparate third-party systems. This resulted in the duplication of key data within information silos, and also required much manual intervention to drive processes through in order to respond to customer service requirements.

One example highlights such difficulties - Tewkesbury processes Council Tax payments from 33,000 residents. These payments were previously managed by the Council using an in-house developed system. Customers would provide their financial details to the Council either on-line via the internet, or directly to an officer via telephone or at a Council office. These details were then manually collected and consolidated by the Council's Finance Officers, who would need to re-key individual payment details into the appropriate system.

This approach was not only administratively intensive, but also if there was a problem with the payment, such as incorrect card details or insufficient funds, it would be a matter of days before either the Council or the customer would know about it.

"We had situations where customers, who thought they had already paid, would be chased up by our staff by phone or through 'reminder' letters," said Malcolm Ashdown, Team Leader, Business Development and Helpdesk, at Tewkesbury Borough Council.

"Not only was this frustrating for our customers, the extra phone calls demanded more time and resources from our staff."



**Tewkesbury  
Borough Council**

Tewkesbury Borough Council is one of six District Councils in the county of Gloucestershire. Tewkesbury works with Gloucestershire County Council to provide a full range of services to the citizens of the Borough.

Tewkesbury covers an area of approximately 160 square miles, with a population of about 77,000. The elected Councillors are responsible for a revenue budget of over £7.6 million.

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“SOA basically acts as the glue between the front-office CRM function and the back-office operational systems. The linking of the systems means that they ‘talk to each other’, customer processes are automated, more accurately and faster. For Tewkesbury, the webMethods Service Orchestrator product, from Software AG, provides that glue – it serves as the backbone of the Council’s SOA model. This product is key to providing the integration already implemented, as well as all future requirements the Council may identify and deliver.”



Within Commercial Services, each year the Council processes 5,500 requests for the collection of bulky waste items. Previously, this also relied on internal processes that the Council wished to streamline. Initially, the Customer Services team would use a standalone Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to log customer bookings. In parallel, an in-house developed business system was used to log and maintain the schedule for the actual bulky waste collections. As these two systems were not connected, information about one customer request needed to be separately keyed into both.

“It was an inefficient process, which duplicated efforts, and human error could lead to data discrepancies between the systems,” said Ashdown.

#### The solution

The Council identified the Government Gateway hosted Payments Engine as a simple and cost-effective way of processing customer payment of Council Tax bills and other Council services. The Software AG ePayments solution, built using a Service-Orientated Architecture (SOA) model, was selected to utilise the capabilities of that Payments Engine, supported by the Sun Software AG DIS for connectivity. This solution enables immediate authorisation and processing of all customer transactions, as well as automatic posting to back office systems.

During a transaction, once a payment has been submitted by the customer, details are checked in real-time. There is an automatic response - within ten seconds - which confirms to the customer that the payment has been accepted, or a notification of any problem. “It removes the need for inefficient manual processes”.

The options available to the customer are now multiple. Payments may be made through online self-service via the public Internet, or Council officers can provide assistance through the secure Council Intranet on behalf of telephone callers who wish to continue to use more familiar payment channels.

The Software AG ePayments solution acts as an integration broker between the Council’s CRM system and the Government Gateway Payments Engine, allowing Council officers to more easily manage customer activity and payments. The next stage was to directly integrate the relevant third-party system with the CRM, through the loosely coupled links supported by the SOA model.

The same SOA model was also utilised to integrate the disparate in-house systems which drive the management and delivery of bulky waste collection requests.

In both of the Tewkesbury examples, SOA-enabled technology provides integration between multiple systems, so that those systems are presented to a Council officer as one. Information that is entered into the central CRM system is automatically updated within third-party systems, and vice versa. For example, if a Council officer logs an order via the CRM system following a customer request, this process automatically updates the relevant service’s operational system. At the same time, that operational system can advise officers of relevant information such as available dates for a bulky waste collection – through the single, CRM interface.

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#### Benefits

Within Tewkesbury Borough Council, there is now a much more integrated approach to customer service delivery through the CRM. The supporting SOA model allows for full customer service enquiries to be completed within the CRM front-end, which is now integrated to the required supporting operational third-party systems.

“Since introducing Software AG’s technology, the Tewkesbury Customer Service Team’s job has become less stressful and resource intensive. The staff now spend a lot less time on administration, and can spend more time on adding value to their customers.”

This overall approach has streamlined processes significantly - for example, it has slashed the time it takes to fully process a Council Tax payment from eight days down to three.

To date, six services implemented within the CRM system have benefited from the joined-up, automated approach to processing payments. These include: Council Tax; National Non-Domestic Rates (NDR); garden waste collections; bulky waste collections; and car parking excess charges. These are all processed far

quicker, with less manual effort.

“Our customers also have an improved experience when working with us. They receive immediate authorisation on each payment they make, and can be confident that their payments have gone through. At the same time, the automation of clunky processes has given our team more time to spend on adding value to their customers”.

#### MOVING FORWARD

Tewkesbury Borough Council is now looking to extend the SOA model and supporting technology to help streamline other customer-facing services and underlying processes, such as Garden Waste Collection, Civil Parking Enforcement and Integrated Council Tax processes.

“The success we have achieved in streamlining processes for both customer payments and bulky waste collections has proved the concept of the SOA model and we can see that there are other areas which can benefit within the council,” said Graham Quint, IT Manager, Tewkesbury Borough Council “Basically, we are looking at any area where we can link front-office and back-office. Using Software AG’s expertise, the technical sequences have been built, it is just a matter of working with a small internal team to make this happen.”