



TOPLEVEL HELPS WYRE FOREST MANAGE BOOKINGS ACROSS THE BOARD



Wyre Forest District Council is using Toplevel's flexible BookingOffice solution to handle bookings for everything from meeting rooms to places on its Summer Programme of activities for children. The numerous applications of Booking Office, across multiple departments, allow council staff and residents alike to book resources more quickly, more easily and more securely.

THE CHALLENGE

Wyre Forest District Council in the north of Worcestershire provides services to residents in the towns of Kidderminster, Bewdley and Stourport-on-Severn and surrounding villages.

Prior to the introduction of Toplevel BookingOffice, the council used a mixture of spreadsheets and an ageing open source system, adapted in house, to handle bookings for meeting rooms and other resources and activities.

"The room booking system we had did the job, but it was clunky and dated for both the people managing resources and the people trying to book them," explains Dave Johnson, ICT Manager at the council. "We wanted a more professional-looking solution that we could roll out corporately to handle bookings for lots of different kinds of resources. We were also looking for extra features, such as the ability to book associated resources such as audio-visual equipment and catering. Finally, we wanted something that was easier to manage and maintain. With our previous solution, every time we wanted to add a

new kind of resource, we effectively had to install another instance of the program." Looking forward, the council also wanted a solution that could be made available online and integrated with its epayments system to allow residents to book and pay online for resources.



**Wyre Forest
District Council**

WHY TOPLEVEL?

BookingOffice is designed to meet the needs of councils like Wyre Forest. A generic cross-departmental solution that can be used to create booking applications for a wide range of resources, it allows self-service booking by both citizens and staff. Users—whether citizens, staff or staff managing resources—only have to learn a single, consistent interface, helping them make bookings more quickly and easily. This encourages users to make bookings through BookingOffice rather than by telephone or face to face, resulting in

high take-up of online booking when it is introduced. BookingOffice also provides administration and facilities management support for operational staff responsible for the relevant resources. Because the same software can be used to create many different solutions, IT departments are able to simplify their IT infrastructure and cut the cost and time needed to support these systems.

Wyre Forest chose Toplevel BookingOffice as its booking solution after being impressed by seeing it

in action at several other councils. "BookingOffice is a very flexible solution that has the capacity to be applied to lots of different areas but is easy to set up and maintain," Dave Johnson says. "It can be used for both internal applications and for online self-service applications for the public, and it's an open solution that we were confident could be integrated with the externally managed epayments system provided by our bank." BookingOffice also offers Wyre Forest built-in security and accessibility.

ONE SOLUTION, MANY APPLICATIONS

The council's confidence that BookingOffice would be flexible enough to meet all its needs has been borne out by the wide range of business requirements it has addressed, starting with a system to handle bookings for cricket and football pitches and bowling greens.

"It doesn't just track what's been booked by whom and when," Dave Johnson points out. "It provides a complete administration system, allowing the council to create and manage accounts for each of the clubs who book pitches and to apply payments received from them, as well as managing the booking themselves."

Similarly, BookingOffice is the key system for the facilities team who manage meeting rooms at the council's various locations. Each morning, the team can quickly generate reports from BookingOffice which provide them with their workplan for the day. They can also generate a printed summary of each booking which can be placed in the room when it is set up, confirming to the staff who made the booking

that they're in the correct room and which extra resources they ordered.

The meeting room system exploits several other features of BookingOffice. For example, as well as allowing the council to manage multiple rooms, each with its own set of additional associated resources, the council has been able to set up user groups with different permissions. While any member of staff can book a room, users with the lowest access level must have their booking approved by a more senior member of staff, while a limited number of users have the authority to cancel or override bookings made by others. BookingOffice also makes it easier and quicker for staff to find a suitable room by allowing them to search against various criteria, such as maximum number of people or availability of particular audio-visual equipment.

Other areas where the council has used BookingOffice include managing bookings for MoT tests carried out by the council's garage, for campsite pitches for a forthcoming festival, and for the council-run Santa's Grotto.

EASY IMPLEMENTATION

Dave Johnson says getting each of these different systems in place has been straightforward. While Toplevel led the development and implementation of the initial implementation to handle sports pitch bookings, the council has been able to implement subsequent booking applications with minimal assistance from Toplevel, following training from Toplevel for both IT staff and some key users.

"Another of our systems based on BookingOffice, which handles bookings for Stourport Civic Hall, was created entirely by a super-user with no formal IT skills who attended the initial training provided by Toplevel," Dave Johnson points out. "This system demonstrates just how straightforward BookingOffice is to set up and maintain without the need for programming skills. It's extremely easy to model a new resource collection and to tailor the way BookingOffice works to allow for any additional requirements to be included on the form, such as a bar, a request for extended licensing hours or a room layout."

RAPID DEPLOYMENT

Dave Johnson adds that it would typically take just one or two days to get a booking system for a small collection of resources up and running. "Implementing a system for a more complex set of resources, such as the meeting rooms, might take two to four weeks spread across several months, but much of that time involves working with the team that provides that resource to understand what their needs are," he points out. "Once we understand what the needs are, it's very quick and easy to set up BookingOffice to handle them."

The council did call Toplevel back in to help with integrating BookingOffice with the council's finance and e-payments systems when it rolled out an online system that allows

parents to book and pay for events and activities provided as part of the council's annual Summer Programme for children. "Previously these bookings were handled through a semi-manual process based around a spreadsheet that was a nightmare to set up," Dave Johnson explains. "Bookings were taken through a single telephone number that was extremely busy and often went to voicemail. That meant staff handling bookings were faced with a long queue of voicemail to process, while it was frustrating for parents trying to make bookings. Now, almost all bookings are made online, with only two or three a day taken over the phone, and parents get instant confirmation their booking has been accepted and payment taken.





HIGH TAKE-UP OF ONLINE BOOKINGS

The Summer Programme demonstrates the ways in which BookingOffice has made it easier and quicker for users to make bookings and for the staff who manage those resources. While it's hard to quantify the financial benefits the council has seen, research by Socitm shows that introducing self-service can cut costs dramatically, with web-based transactions costing on average less than 30p compared with a cost of more than £3 to handle the same transaction by phone. Using BookingOffice, 58% of bookings for the Summer Programme are now handled online, resulting in savings of several thousand pounds each year for that programme alone.

BookingOffice also provides the council with a much more secure approach to handling bookings, both by providing much tighter control over who can access each system and what they can do and because the data is held centrally rather than on individual PCs and backed up regularly. Finally, by providing a consistent, easy-to-use interface that looks the same no matter which council department citizens are dealing with or what kind of resources they're trying to book, BookingOffice makes it easier for citizens to make bookings, resulting in the high-take up of online booking seen in the Summer Programme.

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DAVE JOHNSON,
ICT MANAGER

EXCELLENT SUPPORT FROM TOPLEVEL

Dave Johnson adds that the support provided by Toplevel during these many projects has always been excellent. “They've always worked closely with us, and with external partners such as the bank that provides our payments system, to resolve any issues,” he says. “Toplevel's experience working with lots of customers also means they're experts in booking processes and we can turn to them for advice on the best way to handle our particular needs and additional services if we need more support.”

Moving forward, BookingOffice will be a key element in the council's plans to introduce hot-desking when it moves to a new headquarters in 2012. Dave Johnson says he can see many other applications for BookingOffice, such as handling inspections by staff in the Planning Services department. “It's up to each department whether or not they use BookingOffice, but we're confident that whatever resources the council needs to manage, BookingOffice can handle it,” he says.


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