



Essex County Council



ECC's Short Breaks Digital Service.

Project context.

As part of Essex County Council's (ECC) early help approach, it delivers a Short Breaks provision for carers of young people with SEND. This highly valued service gives carers a well-deserved break and enables young people to meet friends, participate in activities, develop independence, and have fun.

The provision includes various offers, including subsidised holidays, clubs and activities, max cards, ticket discounts, and other supplementary services.

The challenge.

Until recently, ECC managed the registration, booking, and admin of these offers in isolation via multiple systems and platforms — this confused users and meant that:

- Due to silos, families had to repeatedly tell their story
- Staff had to address user confusion and resolve issues
- Parents had to navigate a complex network of systems
- Manual reporting was disjointed and inefficient ...

The challenge cont.

- Users found the old system frustrating as it was complex and unintuitive
- Staff couldn't provide help outside of business hours
- Customers couldn't fix their mistakes, causing more calls-
- There was a lack of flexibility to adapt the system to meet user needs
- ECC held inaccurate info due to time lags and users
- Users had low confidence in the system, causing an increase in calls &
- Providers had to identify and accommodate special requirements manually

This approach cost ECC ~528 hours of staff time, plus the support of a TS Business Partner.

The solution.

Based on the above, bookinglab worked with ECC to design an end-to-end digital service that will join the entire SB offering.

This includes the development and implementation of a host of new industry-leading features, including:

- A centralised admin portal that enables staff to approve and check registrations, view information in real-time, edit service details, and manage bookings, ticket allocations, discounts, communications, and reporting
- A GDS-compliant registration checking and approval process
- A Digital Account where users can manage their information in real-time
- A consolidated reporting suite that brings together data from across the service
- A centralised access point where users can book 24/7 and learn about related offers
- Automated PUSH notifications via Email/SMS

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The (early) results.

According to Hazel North Stephens, Commissioning Manager at ECC, the new Short Breaks Digital Service has:

- Reduced admin time through process automation
- Provided quicker and easier access for families who already face difficulties navigating a complex education, social care and health system
- Reduced human error and provided an audit trail for management oversight
- Reduced manual contact as staff no longer need to guide users through the process
- Decreased staffing costs
- Provided staff with easier access to parent and child records

Based on these benefits, Hazel states:

“We are really pleased with the bookinglab product and can see how it could apply to many other local authority services.”

79%

ECC saw a 79% reduction in emails from customers upon go-live due to an improved UX.

2%

ECC has seen a 2% increase in uptake for its caravans and beach hut service.

2-3

Previously, commissioners were helping 2-3 users per week to navigate the process, this is no longer required.

Hazel (ECC) adds:

“Although the solution has only been in place for a month, we already see the potential for a significant reduction in staff & family time. While it’s too early to put a value to this, anecdotally, it feels considerably less.”

Note: We are currently in phase three of this project. Once the clubs, activities, and max cards stage is completed, we will update this case study with additional insights.

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