

Fife Council Case Study

Local authority use text messaging to communicate with parents, teachers and other residents.

Fife, situated between the Firth of Tay and the Firth of Forth, is Scotland's third largest local authority area with a resident population of just under 360,000. Almost a third of the population live in the three principle towns of Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy, and Glenrothes.

Fife Council has an annual budget of over £580 million, and delivers over 800 public services across Fife, through a team of 20,000 people. Fife Council also plays a large part in the Fife Partnership which brings together, the NHS, Constabulary, Scottish Enterprise, Communities Scotland, and the appropriate further and higher education bodies of Fife.

Project Requirements

Fife Council was faced with a challenge – how to proactively communicate with parents, teachers, and residents when an emergency caused a school to be closed. Emergency school closures were most often caused by poor weather during the winter, and occasionally by heating or water supply failures.

The solution to the challenge lay in the in-house development of a service that would enable the head teachers of the local schools to be able to call a dedicated phone line, access the system securely, and, through touch-phone access, select their school, and choose the reason for the school's closure.

Once the head teacher hangs up the phone, the system would then automatically send texts and emails out to registered parents and teachers of the affected school, as well as updating the school and Council's website, in addition to emailing local radio and TV stations.

Project Solution

Fife Council decided to develop and deploy the new system itself, and, as text-messaging was an integral component to the system, the Council entered a tendering process to select a text-messaging partner for the pilot project.

Six companies responded to the tender invitation and, as a result of the scoring process applied to the tender and the subsequent trial, TextAnywhere was awarded the contract for the pilot system.

“We chose TextAnywhere on the simple basis that they came out top on the scoring system. Simplicity of using the system was important to us, and, in procuring best-value services, the cost of the text service was critical – we liked having no setup fee, and the messages were low-cost too,” commented Michael McMonagle, New Media Developer with Fife Council.

The overall system was developed and deployed in a matter of months, on-time, on-spec and on-budget.

Project Successes

Since the system has been live it has received very positive feedback, most noticeably from parents of children affected by school closures. The text-messaging element of the system has become the most popular means for parents to receive closure notifications.

“The system has proved to be immensely popular with all parties involved. The text service functions very well because a head teacher can convey the school closure message to the parents within a minute of calling the phone line”, added Michael McMonagle.

“TextAnywhere has proven to be a very capable partner, providing a robust and reliable service over the three years that we have been running this service.”

On the back of the success of the school closure system, a second, innovative use of SMS technology has been deployed in the area of matching available supply teachers to short-term teaching vacancies.

Previously, when a head teacher had a supply teacher need, they would ring round a list of registered supply teachers, provided in book-form by Fife Council.

The fully automated, intranet-integrated system enables a head teacher to securely login, and enter their supply teacher requirements (skills, location, and timing). The system then sends out text messages to those supply teachers that match the requirements, providing assignment and contact details for the vacancy.

“This second system works exceptionally well because we can match supply teachers with head teachers in minutes, and the text system is again at the heart of the system”, commented Michael McMonagle.

In fact the system has recently won two prestigious awards – “National eGovernment Award 2007”, and a “Fife Council Partnership” award for best use of technology.

Secure Company

Since 2002, TextAnywhere has offered a range of text services that focus on reliability, ease of use, security and good value, backed by quality support from a financially secure, profitable organisation.

Range of Services

TextAnywhere provides commercial and public sector organisations with text messaging services that enable the sending and receiving of SMS messages from individual desktops or handheld devices, through online and email applications. These can be through a simple pre-paid model or monthly account terms.

The company also offers a Developer Toolkit for clients to integrate texting in to their own applications, as well as a White Label service for partners who wish to offer TextAnywhere’s services as their own, branded text messaging services.

If you would like to find out more about how TextAnywhere can help your business communications, please visit our website www.textanywhere.net or call the sales team on 08451 221 302, or email us on: welcome@textanywhere.net.

