

Report title	Bookings System Project
Report author	Stephen Bowen, Head of Digital Innovation
Department	Digital Services
Exempt?	No

Purpose of report:

To resolve.

Synopsis of report:

This report proposes the development of a new online booking system to book community facilities such as halls, day centres and sport bookings online and through our customer relationship management system. The system would be built upon our existing Jadu digital platform, offering residents 24/7 access to book, move or cancel bookings online and over the phone via customer services.

This paper requests approval from the Corporate Management Committee to proceed with the project and release the allocated budget of £25,000 from the capital programme provisional scheme to invest in essential development to enable the Council to manage bookings from within our digital platform.

Recommendation(s):

Corporate Management Committee are asked to:

1. Note the project proposals to improve our online and internal bookings management processes and systems.
2. Approve a capital estimate in the sum of £25,000 to commence the bookings system development required in the Digital Platform to be funded from the equipment replacement reserve.

1. Background and proposal

- 1.1 Runnymede Borough Council offers a wide range of community facilities available for hire by residents, businesses, and visitors. These facilities include Day Centres, community halls, and various sports grounds across our parks and open spaces, catering to activities like football, bowling, and cricket.
- 1.2 Currently, our booking process presents significant challenges. We lack the ability to display real-time availability on our website, forcing customers to express interest through a form. This necessitates manual intervention by our Customer Services team, who must verify availability and calculate costs. This back-and-forth communication consumes valuable time that could be better directed towards other customer enquiries.

- 1.3 The contract for the Council's existing booking system (Artifax) is due to expire in June 2024 and therefore the Council has an opportunity to review the current booking system and how this service can be delivered in a more efficient manner using existing technology. The cost of a new purpose-built booking system would be in excess of £40,000 with ongoing revenue costs of approximately £15k per annum.
- 1.4 Whilst operational, Artifax is outdated (over seven years old) and necessitates an upgrade. Following a comprehensive review, Digital Services recommends developing a bespoke booking system using the Council's Jadu digital platform, which encompasses our website, online services, OneAccount, and Customer Relationship Management System.
- 1.5 While Jadu offers basic booking functionalities, limitations exist. The current system lacks the ability to specify start and end times, restricting bookings to pre-defined slots. Additionally, it doesn't support recurring bookings, a critical feature for our regular hirers.
- 1.6 In line with the Council's commitment to exceptional customer service and streamlined operations, this proposal outlines the development of a modern booking system by maximising our existing functionality with some bespoke software development tailored to our service needs. This development will include an online booking calendar, enabling customers to check facility availability, make bookings, and pay directly via card or debit (depending on booking criteria) all in real time.
- 1.7 The software development will also cater to our regular hirers by allowing them to schedule recurring bookings, simplifying seasonal and annual reservations. Customers will also have access to a dedicated online portal, the 'OneAccount' for managing their bookings. This will empower customers to move, cancel, or update bookings as needed. This shift towards online booking will enhance customer convenience and streamline our booking process across various Council services.
- 1.8 This proposal seeks approval to proceed with the development of the new booking technology integrated with the Council's existing Jadu digital platform and O365 applications. The project requires a £25,000 investment to enable online booking capabilities for our customers.
- 1.9 The proposed development will revolutionise our booking system by enabling online bookings for the first time. Customers seeking flexibility and immediate booking capabilities will be empowered to check facility availability, specify start and end times, and receive instant cost calculations. We will leverage the existing Jadu platform to integrate with our direct debit provider, facilitating direct debit payments for recurring bookings where applicable. Customers will also have the option of online payments for one-off bookings.
- 1.10 For those customers who do not wish to book online, they will still have the option to express an interest in one of our facilities to hire and will be able to call Customer Services who will be able to make bookings in real time over the phone all through the Council's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.
- 1.11 Digital services explored several options available to the Council as set out in the Appendix A – Bookings Business case.

- 1.12 The preferred option prioritises leveraging the Jadu Digital platform while addressing identified shortcomings in its current event booking functionalities.
- 1.13 By implementing this proposal, the Council will establish a modern, user-friendly booking system that enhances customer convenience, streamlines operations, and lays the groundwork for future online booking services across the Council.

2. Policy framework implications

- 2.1 The Council's Corporate Business Plan, prioritises themes like "Empowering our Communities" and "Economic Development." A streamlined online booking system can significantly empower residents by offering greater flexibility and convenience in scheduling appointments for various council services. This can lead to increased resident satisfaction and a more efficient use of council resources.
- 2.2 Our Organisational Development Strategy highlights the importance of modernising technology infrastructure to enhance service delivery. Implementing a new online booking system directly addresses this objective. By streamlining the booking process and offering customers 24/7 access, the Council can improve its operational efficiency and free up customer services staff time for more complex tasks. This aligns with the Council's goal of becoming a more agile and responsive organisation.

3 Financial implications

- 3.1 This proposal presents a significant cost-saving opportunity for Runnymede Borough Council. Through careful planning and negotiation, Digital Services has successfully reduced the initial anticipated development budget from a provisional estimate of £40,000 to a final cost of £25,000. This represents a saving in the amount of money to be withdrawn from reserves.
- 3.2 The £25,000 investment in the new booking system should be viewed as an "invest-to-save" project. The Council has budgeted £6,000 annually for our current booking system which has been included in the Medium-Term Financial Forecast for the next five years along with inflationary increases only. However, by leveraging our existing Jadu digital platform, hosting costs are already absorbed, and there will be no additional ongoing licensing or support fees associated with the new booking system development, meaning an annual saving can be put towards the Council's ongoing savings and efficiencies targets.
- 3.3 A business case (Appendix A) was put forward as part of the 2023/24 annual budget setting process which outlined the drivers for change and the need for investment in a new bookings system.
- 3.4 Corporate Management Committee are asked to consider the proposal set out in this paper and approve the release of the £25,000 from the provisional sum set aside in the Capital Programme for the replacement booking system to enable works to commence on system development and project implementation.

4. Risk implications

- 4.1 Our current contract with the incumbent provider, is due to expire in June 2024. We have secured a six-month extension to allow for the development and migration of bookings to the Jadu digital platform. However, any significant delays in the project beyond this timeframe will necessitate a further extension of the contract, resulting in additional unforeseen costs.

The project team will implement a strict timeline and closely monitor progress to ensure timely completion within the extended contract window.

- 4.2 The accuracy and completeness of migrated data from the existing booking system to the new platform is critical. A comprehensive data migration plan will be developed and rigorously tested to ensure data integrity throughout the process. This will ensure no disruption to service delivery as we move from one system to another.
- 4.3 Encouraging widespread adoption of the new booking system among both staff and customers is essential. The project team will develop a comprehensive communication and training plan to familiarise staff with the new system functionalities. Additionally, our regular hirers will be engaged throughout the project implementation with clear and timely communication to promote the new bookings system and drive user adoption.

5. Equality implications

- 5.1 The proposed online booking system is designed to be inclusive and accessible to all residents, businesses, and visitors. The project will not negatively impact the rights, opportunities, or wellbeing of individuals with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010.
- 5.2 The new system will offer increased flexibility by allowing users to manage their bookings through their online OneAccount on www.runnymede.gov.uk. This empowers individuals who are comfortable using online platforms to book, update or cancel bookings at their convenience.
- 5.3 The project recognises that not everyone prefers or can go online. Customer service representatives will be equipped to make bookings in real-time for those who prefer to phone the Council to check availability and make a booking. The system will automatically calculate availability and fees, with the ability to take one-off payments or direct debits over the phone, something which is all currently manually administered.
- 5.4 The online booking system's user interface will be designed and developed with accessibility in mind. We are committed to ensuring the system adheres to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 standards. WCAG 2.2 is a set of internationally recognised recommendations established by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to improve the accessibility of web content for people with disabilities. By following these guidelines, we will offer an inclusive user experience that is accessible to everyone, regardless of their abilities.
- 5.5 Finally, a comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment will be conducted during the project initiation stage. This assessment will be reviewed by the Council's Equalities Group and updated throughout the Implementation and launch phases to ensure an inclusive and accessible user experience for all and that we comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

6. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

- 6.1 The environmental implications of the proposed project will have a positive environmental impact.
- 6.2 Currently, the Council's processes involve significant manual intervention and paper-based workflows. The new online booking system will facilitate a service redesign that leverages technology to automate internal processes. This automation will eliminate the need for paper-based booking forms and associated intermediary tasks, leading to a significant reduction in paper consumption. This reduction directly translates to a positive impact on the

environment by minimising the Council's reliance on paper production and disposal, both of which contribute to deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions.

- 6.3 By providing real-time availability of Council facilities online, the new booking system is expected to reduce the number of phone calls, emails, and even physical visits to these facilities for booking purposes. This streamlining of the booking process will minimise unnecessary travel for both residents and Council staff. In turn, this reduction in travel translates to a decrease in associated carbon emissions, further contributing to the Council's environmental sustainability goals.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The Council already has a contract in place with Jadu for the provision of a digital platform which includes our website, online forms and customer relationship management system.
- 7.2 Subject to approval from CMC to release the funds the Council will direct award the development work to Jadu to build out the additional functionality we require to be able to move all bookings across to the Jadu Digital Platform.
- 7.3 The estimated development cost of £25,000 falls below the current UK thresholds for mandatory competitive tendering procedures. This allows the Council to explore alternative procurement options including a direct award.
- 7.4 In this case, the Jadu platform is considered an "existing service provider" and the proposed development represents an extension of functionalities within that existing platform. The development cost of £25,000 falls below the 10% threshold of the initial Jadu platform contract value. Furthermore, the new booking system functionalities do not fundamentally alter the core nature of the Jadu platform contract.
- 7.5 To ensure transparency and a well-defined project scope, a comprehensive Statement of Works will be developed. This document will outline the specific development requirements for the online booking system, including functionalities, technical specifications, and timelines. The Statement of Works will serve as the contractual foundation for the project with our Digital Platform Provider, ensuring clear expectations and mutual accountability.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 The proposed online booking system development presents a robust solution to the challenges faced by the Council's current booking process. Leveraging the existing Jadu digital platform offers a cost effective and efficient approach, aligning perfectly with the Council's commitment to digital transformation and maximising the use of technology we already have available.
- 8.2 This report has reviewed the advantages of the preferred option. Residents will benefit from a more convenient and efficient booking experience through 24/7 online access to facility booking and management functionalities. Internally, the online system will automate tasks, streamline booking processes, and reduce the manual workload for Council staff, leading to improved operational efficiency.
- 8.3 Furthermore, the project offers substantial cost savings. Development costs are reduced by £15,000 compared to the initial estimates, ongoing licensing fees associated with the current system will be eliminated, and the potential for future cost increases with the current provider will be avoided.

9. Background papers

- None.

10. Appendices

- Appendix A – Bookings system business case