

## Council Tax

# Text Reminders for Appointments Fife Council

## Contact for Enquiries

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### Summary and Background

To introduce a text reminder service for customers who had an appointment in a Local Office. When Fife Council moved to an appointment based system for completion of benefit application forms it was noted that some customers failed to attend meaning interview rooms which were booked for them were not being utilised efficiently.

### Intended Outcomes

To provide an enhanced customer service and reduce the amount of failed to attend appointments.

### Actions and Approach

Examination of number of FTA appointments identified the scale of the problem. FC had an existing contract with Yakara for issuing Council Tax payment reminders by text. The appointment reminders were a relatively simple add on to this. Information was taken each day from the Council's appointment booking system – Centris - and passed to Yakara to remind the customer of the date time and location of their appointment.

### Results

Figures show an average overall reduction in failure to attend appointments by 2.04% over the period February 2013 – April 2013 when compared to the same 3 months of the previous year.

These figures should be considered in conjunction with anecdotal evidence from Local Office staff who claim to have noticed a significant reduction in missed appointments since the start of the pilot. Consideration must also be given to the fact that not every customer will have provided a telephone number and therefore would not have received the reminder.

Potential reduction of missed 15 minute appointments:  
 $1209 \times 9.98\% = 121$

Potential reduction of missed 30 minute appointments:  
 $12588 \times 1.19\% = 150$

Estimated Total Savings: £12049.00 p.a

Over a full financial year we can estimate roughly 14,000 Housing Benefit appointments. Each text reminder costs £0.08, therefore the total cost (excluding staff administration costs) of the reminder service is estimated £1,120 p.a.

From a quantitative viewpoint it is clear the benefits outweigh the cost. Consideration should be given beyond the cost alone to the qualitative benefits of this service in that we are providing a better overall service to our customers.

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### Obstacles and Issues

Initially we had some problems gathering the information from the appointment booking system which needed to be passed to Yakara. This was mainly down to software incompatibility and was relatively quickly resolved.

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### Learning

We had to ensure we had accurate information about the number of missed appointments both pre and post the introduction of the reminder service so comparisons could be made. The fact we had an existing contract with Yakara meant we could simply add these extra text messages on to our current package. We also ensured our text message was as clear and informative as possible within the allowed single text character limit.

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### Next Steps

We are looking to expand the project and introduce text reminders to benefit claimants who have not reported changes in their circumstances over a defined period of time, highlighting the importance of reporting changes.

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### Additional Information

The company which provides the text service – Yakara – was excellent throughout and made the process simple. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it should any LA wish to proceed with this.