

Council Tax

Texting Services

Fife Council

Contact for Enquiries

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Summary and Background

In 2011/12 Fife introduced a texting service for council tax. The initiative was two-fold. Firstly to provide an electronic messaging system to meet Fife Council's Customer Management Strategy of alternative delivery methods, integrating technology into the existing customer service. We were looking to provide a high volume text and voicemail service. In addition to allow customers to make payment of Council Tax via text or Smartphone telephone links. The drivers were to shift services to lower cost channels, improve customer service, offer alternative delivery and payment methods and reduce our carbon footprint.

Intended Outcomes

Increase council tax collection rates, reduction in processing time for payments therefore benefits to council of receiving monies earlier, reduction in operational costs by reducing paper, printing and postage costs, targeted messaging service to customers and improve customer service.

Actions and Approach

The texting scheme was part of a channel shift programme for 3 separate streams which ran concurrently, each identifying opportunities for efficiencies.

Initially we cleansed our telephone data to ensure that the information that we held for customers was as up to date as possible. Thereafter we phased in each approach in order that we could monitor the response and deal with any issues that occurred.

In conjunction with an external company Yakara, the text services initially started with reminders where SMS texts and voicemails were sent to prompt customers to pay their council tax prior to issuing of paper reminders for late payment.

This was then expanded to include reminders for upcoming appointments at our Local Offices and the marketing of various services such as promotion of direct debit and our on-line customer account for council tax and housing benefit.

The service was further enhanced to include a text-pay facility allowing customers to pre-register and make payment via SMS.

This has continued to be improved by introducing a Smart phone link which allows customers to make quicker and easier payments.

Results

Text message savings: over the three financial years from 2011/12 – 2013/14, just over 154,000 texts have been issued. These have resulted in payments (less costs) equating to over £2.5m and resulted in 14.5% of the text recipients not progressing to a recovery stage.

Appointment reminders: Full information provided in the case study done for appointment reminders but figures show an average overall reduction in failure to attend appointments by 2.04% over the period Feb 2013- April 2013 when compared to same three months of the previous year.

Obstacles and Issues

A small number of telephone numbers were found to be incorrect but these were rectified and the problem has diminished.

With the appointment reminders there were some initial problems gathering the information from the appointment booking system but this was down to software incompatibility and was quickly resolved.

Learning

We had to ensure that both our DP Team and Yakara were happy with the contents of the text messages to ensure that they were compliant for information provision. We also had to ensure that if a customer indicated that they did not wish to be contacted by this method that we had a practice in place to remove them from further exercises. It is also essential that you cleanse your telephone number data as much as possible prior to undertaking any exercises.

It is also beneficial to make any messages within the 160 character single text allowance to help reduce costs.

Next Steps

We are in the process of “tying” the two payment text services together which will allow customers who receive a Smart phone link to make payment but then register their details so they can make voluntary payments to their council tax in the same way as customers who have registered to make payment.
