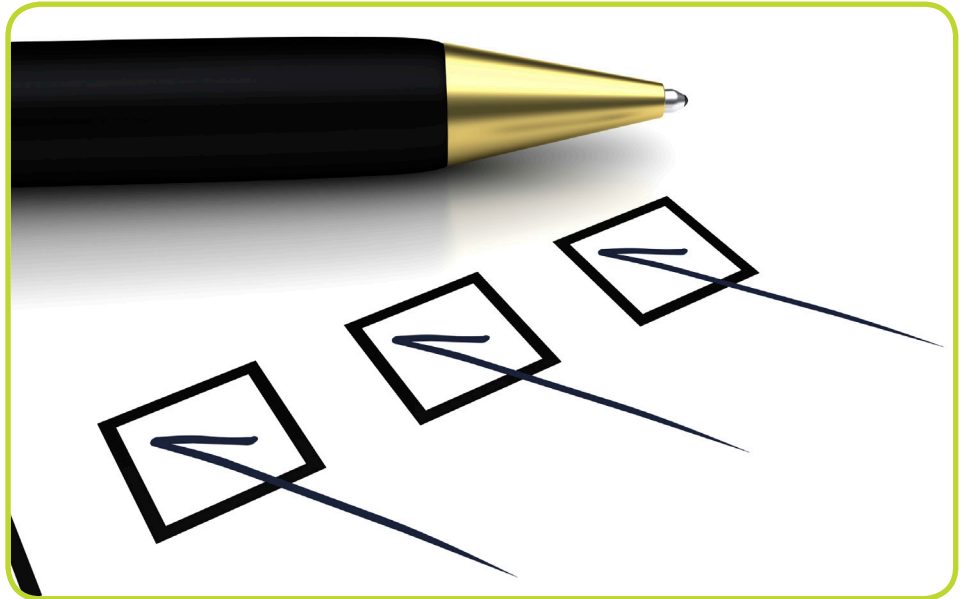


CUSTOMER
FIRST

Getting the personal touch



Having a single view of the customer affords significant benefits to local government organisations, including the power to:

- improve the quality of customer records, and deliver joined-up services;
- reduce operational costs, and the cost of customer contact;
- make it easier for customers to migrate to lower cost channels, including online;
- protect their reputation in the eyes of the public, removing the need to ask a customer to repeat details already known about them, and reducing the potential embarrassment - and distress to families - by contacting customers after they have died;
- increase revenues & benefit take-up;
- generate more income; and
- run more effective marketing campaigns.

Bottom Line Benefits

- 24% - improvement in quality of Council Tax records
- 21% - improvement in quality of Housing Benefit records
- 6 weeks – time taken for the automated data quality exercise to complete, compared to around 52 weeks if exercise run manually
- 1 x FTE – staff savings freed up for release into front line service delivery

The Challenge

Putting customers at the heart of service delivery is a cornerstone of the customer services strategy of Scotland's fourth largest Council, North Lanarkshire Council. Serving a population of over 326,000, this commitment is reflected in the Council's vision:

Continued overleaf >

CUSTOMER FIRST

The Customer First Advantage

In the new spending context for local government, the Customer First programme helps councils to deliver:

Better quality public services
through improved collaboration and learning

Faster response
by delivering "first time" public services

Enhanced credibility
improving perceptions of local government

Lower costs
by delivering public services more efficiently

Wider coverage
ensuring people receive the services they're entitled to

'Customers of North Lanarkshire can access information and service quickly and easily, when and where they want, however they chose in a manner that suits their needs.'

North Lanarkshire Council, Customer Services Strategy

In trying to achieve this mission, North Lanarkshire Council shares a challenge common to most, if not all, UK local authorities.

The delivery of over 800 services to its customers involves the Council operating and supporting multiple computer systems and databases holding a vast number of customer records.

Many of these records are subject to a significant amount of change arising from changes in circumstances such as births and deaths, marriages and divorces, address changes and new build developments.

Keeping on top of the changes can present a costly administrative burden and overhead, yet for the effective delivery of services and entitlements to customers, the quality and integrity of customer records is an important dimension to their role as a public service provider.

In short, this means that the Council needs to know who its customers are, where they live and to keep track of their relationships within and possibly, also, beyond the Council.

Yet while understanding that a good standard of data quality was required, the Council also recognised that the current situation presented the following challenges:

- back office data designed specifically to meet local needs;
- back office systems that contained data with keying errors, omissions and sometimes data held in the wrong fields;
- no practical way of cross referencing the same customers across multiple databases;
- services not having the resources to clean their own data to the necessary level for use across the Council; and
- no unique identifier for the customer.

The Solution

In partnership with Experian QAS and the Improvement Service, North Lanarkshire Council ran a successful customer data cleansing and matching exercise.

Using the Experian QAS data cleansing and de-duplication tools, the exercise analysed thousands of customer records held across a number of the multiple systems and databases operated across the Council.

The exercise followed a number of distinct phases including:

Continued overleaf >



“The results from this exercise were impressive, saving us significant time and effort and delivering good quality data in the process”

**Peter Tolland,
Customer Services
Manager, North
Lanarkshire Council**

- a **Discovery** Phase to understand North Lanarkshire Council’s distinct needs and context;
- a **Scoping** Phase to identify clearly the statement of works, the data sets on which to focus attention during the fieldwork phase, and roles and responsibilities;
- a **Fieldwork** Phase centred around data integration and quality, and involving:
 - importing and exporting customer data sets including, for example, Libraries, Housing Benefits and Council Tax;
 - formatting the data into a common standard, a particular challenge given the lack of standardisation due to historical and other factors;
 - correcting and improving data e.g. adding missing elements, spelling errors, re-coding postcodes, adding valuable demographic and geographic information to records;
 - merging duplicates and assigning unique IDs – a single customer view; and
 - deploying these to operational systems.

North Lanarkshire Council followed a five-step process during the field work phase:

- Stage 1: Identify data sets to be cleansed;
- Stage 2: Cleanse and append date of birth;
- Stage 3: Add any address changes;
- Stage 4: Identify and remove duplicate records;
- Stage 5: Build new customer record.

The exercise was well scoped out and as a result delivered some impressive results in the process. To find out how, read on...

The Results

The Experian QAS, Improvement Service and North Lanarkshire Council exercise emerged with some early wins.

First, Council Tax record quality **increased by almost a quarter** (24%), from 73.9% to 97.8%, while the quality of Housing Benefit records **increased by over a fifth** (almost 21%) from 78.1% to 98.6%.



Second, the exercise resulted in the creation of a ‘single customer view’ across several key data sets used by the Council to deliver vital public services.

Using QAS Experian’s data cleansing tools, the data matching and cleansing exercise involved **around six weeks of effort** to complete, significantly shorter timeframes than those

Continued overleaf >



typically experienced by the Council when processing and validating records manually.

The Council estimates **it would have taken one full time member of staff working over a 12 month period to achieve the same results** using manual processes.

The exercise demonstrated the real potential to divert savings into supporting front line services from the shorter times taken to improve the quality of the data, and from the reduced staff effort it involved.

To further enhance the project the Council deployed indexing tools provided by VisionWare and as a result the Council's back-office systems are now benefiting from having an accurate - and definitive - views of the customer.

Learning Points

Some useful learning points emerged from the exercise.

The Council concluded that manually cleansing back office systems would take too long, and that automation is the only viable option.

However, the Council also concluded that automation does need to be used with a degree of care. For example, some date of birth information provided from external sources was less complete than records already held by the Council.

Number Crunching

326,360	North Lanarkshire Council's population (2010)
1,500,000	the number of records matched across key data sets
32	the number of Scottish councils
6	the number of key data sets used by North Lanarkshire Council during the exercise from which to build the single customer view

The Customer First programme has been developed in partnership with all 32 Scottish local authorities and is managed by the Improvement Service with COSLA and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE).

It is a Scottish Government-backed programme to help councils deliver more convenient and responsive public services, encourage online access to services and ensure that at least 75% of core service requests can be handled at first point of contact.

About North Lanarkshire Council

Based in the heart of Scotland, North Lanarkshire has a population of around 326,360 (2010 figures) and covers one of the largest local council areas in Scotland.

www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk

About The Improvement Service

www.improvementservice.org.uk

About Experian's Public Sector services

Experian is a leading global information services company, providing data and analytical tools to clients globally, and with over 20 years experience working with the public sector.

www.qas.co.uk

For more information contact:

The Improvement Service
Westerton House, Westerton Road
Broxburn EH52 5AU
Tel: 01506 775558 Fax: 01506 775566
E-mail: info@improvementservice.org.uk
www.improvementservice.org.uk

