Council Tax

Online Account
Fife Council

Contact for Enquiries

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Summary & Background

To introduce an Online facility where Council Tax, Benefits and Landlord customers could self–serve. The facility was also to provide electronic communications including bills, notifications, outgoing correspondence and landlord payment schedules.

Intended Outcomes

To allow customers to self-serve 24/7 improving access out of hours. Offer electronic communications reducing cost by shifting service delivery to lower cost channels.

Actions and Approach

A Project Team was set up. They looked at the possibilities of buying in an off the shelf product or building a bespoke in-house system. The decision was made to progress with in-house solution. Work started with our Web Team to develop this. It was also decided to start with Council Tax then move to Benefits then Landlords.

It took nine months to create the Council Tax Online Account. Customers can view their billing address, account reference, start and end date of liability, the band of property, the actual breakdown of their charge, what stage of recovery the account is at, the date the payments are due and a record of payments made.

Seven months later we introduced e-billing and e-CTR notifications.

Once we had this live we then introduced Online Forms and made these available for customers to complete within their online account although these forms are also available on our Council website.

The next stage was to introduce the Benefit Service. However, at that time the Department of Work In Pensions were introducing Universal Credits so the decision was made not to progress this.

Most recently we have launched our Landlord Online Account.

This allows landlords to view the date the payment is made, the payment amount, type of payment i.e. cheque, BACS or first payment to landlord, downloadable payment schedule showing how exactly the payment is made up. There is also a downloadable Blameless Tenant schedule this is produced when Housing Benefit Overpayments are being recovered from landlords.

Results

The total Registrations for Council Tax Online Account as at 31 March 2015 were 16986.

From 1 April 2014 until 31 March 2015 there were a total of 26,566 E-bills issued. Also during this same period there was a further 1271 merged bill/Council Tax Reduction notifications issued. A decision has been made that as of the 1 April 2015 Council Tax Reduction notifications will no longer be issued.

Obstacles and Issues

One obstacle was the registration process as we did not want to have to post anything out to a customer half way through the process but had to ensure the data would be secure. So in order to overcome this, the customer firstly has to register for the council website and then, in order to access their Council Tax Account, they have to create a security code so is very similar to the online banking system.

Also, as part of the Council Tax Online Account it was always the intention that we would send all correspondence to customers via their account but due to development work required via a third party supplier this has still not been progressed.

Learning

As the scope of the project was too big it was decided to cut it down into smaller manageable chunks.

We had experience Council Tax staff and experience Web Team developers but did not have an individual with an understanding of both sides of the project. This resulted in delays due to lack of understanding in what was being delivered and what was being asked for.

Due to having to rely on third parties for development work there were unanticipated delivery timescales.

Next Steps

The next step is to continue marketing Online Accounts and get Outgoing Correspondence set up.

We are also looking to expand this to other services e.g. Rents & Non-Domestic Rates.

We are looking to go totally paperless with all forms.