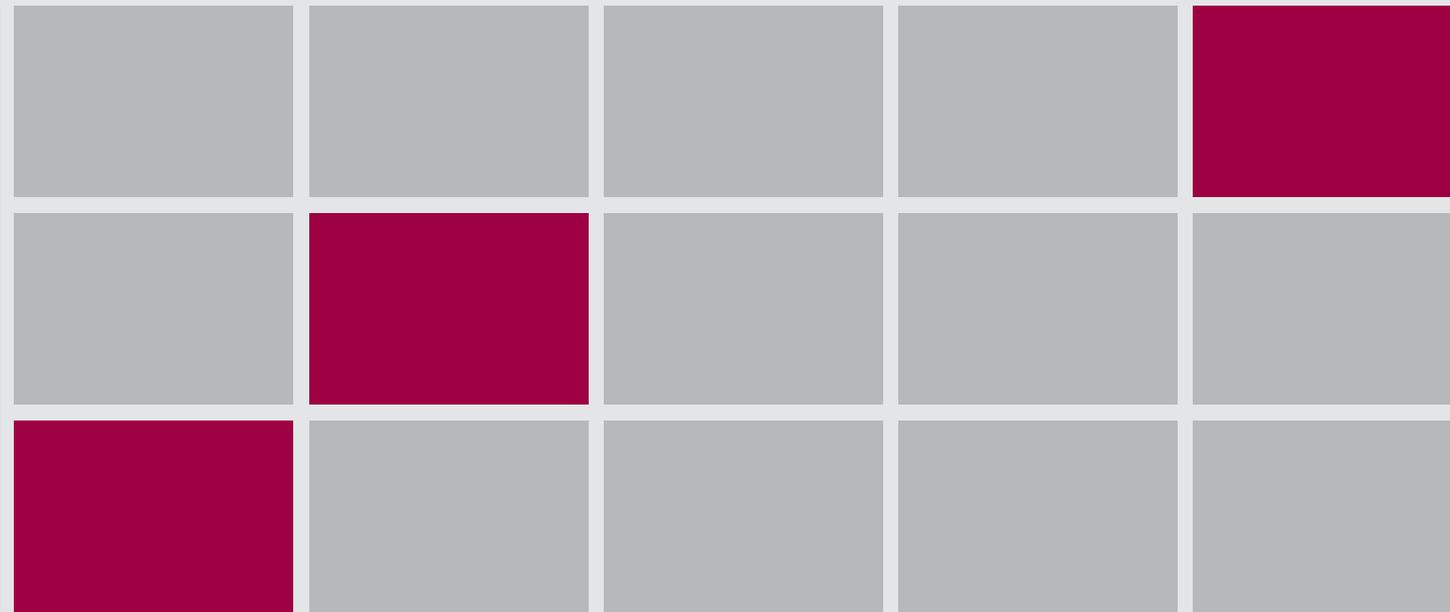


# SSO LE

Tell Us Once

case study



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# 1 overview

This case study looks at Tell Us Once (TUO) which is a major programme being led by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on behalf of the Government as a whole, to transform the way in which people tell central and local government about changes to their circumstances.

It is examining whether it is feasible for people to tell the Government only once about a birth or death and for this information to be passed on their behalf to other relevant departments. In addition to DWP the key stakeholders are HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) and local authorities. They are also working with the Cabinet Office, HM Treasury, Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) and Dept for Transport (DfT), Identity and Passport Service (IPS), Communities and Local Government (CLG), Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), Local Government Association (LGA) and Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

A number of authorities are involved in TUO including; Rotherham MBC, Thameside MBC, Wolverhampton CC, LB of Southwark, LB of Lambeth, Kent County Council and Districts and Lancashire County Council and Districts. This case study is drawn from the collective experiences of local government stakeholders who have been working closely with TUO Programme and from the local authorities directly involved as Pathfinders. It looks at the particular experiences and progress made by three of the pilots; Wolverhampton, Southwark and Thameside who were part of the initial pilot phase and have been working to introduce TUO into their service delivery addressing registration of births and deaths. They are testing various delivery models and assessing whether customers' expectations of the service are met. Customer research, to date, has shown that there is demand for such a service and the results from Pathfinders and evaluation of these against existing data collection processes will form the basis of the Case for Tell Us Once, which will be submitted to Government later this year for a decision on whether or not to roll out the service nationally.

This report will look in more detail at 3 of the pilot local authority TUO services:

- Wolverhampton City Council has, following introduction of TUO, extended its existing Bereavement Centre offer involving the reporting of a birth as well as a death on a telephone and face-to-face basis
- London Borough of Southwark did not previously have a Bereavement or Birth service but now offers these from the local registrars office and is working in partnership with Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation trust and its existing Joint Team in order to deliver the bereavement service in the best location for its customers
- Thameside MBC embarked on the TUO journey in March 2008, working in partnership with DWP. The initial focus was to offer a telephone service for the reporting of bereavements via the TUO call centre which operates from Walsall. In October 2008, Thameside expanded the current service offering to include reporting of both births and bereavements over the telephone and through a face-to-face channel with the addition of the online service for reporting bereavement in November 2008.

The customer feedback on the introduction of TUO has been very positive and examples of scenarios are provided from all three authorities that demonstrate the immediate impact it has had upon a client group at a vulnerable period in their lives. The benefit of introducing TUO has been to greatly improve both customer satisfaction and staff buy-in to TUO. The work continues to identify savings in capacity and resources, illustrated by the reduction in time and anxiety of the client group in handling daunting and repetitive tasks particularly around the notification of death.

The results from Pathfinders and evaluation of these against existing data collection processes will form the basis of the case for Tell Us Once (based on HMT Green Book principles) due in September 2009. This will help outline the principles of what a TUO service would look like and the underlying business case for local authorities to help them adapt and implement this approach to collecting and sharing customer's data when they are reporting a death or birth so that it meets the needs of their local citizens. The Case for Tell Us Once will be submitted to Government later this year for a decision on whether or not to roll out the service nationally. However, further work will need to be done to support any national implementation.



## 2 background

The report by Sir David Varney, 'Service Transformation; a better service for citizens and businesses, a better deal for the taxpayer', published in December 2006, contained a recommendation that a service should be developed to allow citizens to inform government of their changes in circumstance once. This concentrated initially on registration of births, deaths and change of address.

The TUO programme was established in June 2007 to manage an intensive testing pilot programme, the running of e-channel prototypes and research to determine whether the proposals were viable and will add real value to the citizen's interaction with government. TUO is developing a service for reporting birth and bereavement just once, and is also working to build a business case for a wider change of circumstance service across government through to 2011. It is envisaged by 2011, that a customer should be able to easily access government services related to birth, bereavement and change of address.

For many people, dealing with government, especially when reporting changes in their lives, can require them to repeat and verify the same information to numerous departments, agencies and parts of local authorities. TUO is a cross-government programme looking into the feasibility of people being able to inform the government just once of changes in their circumstances.

A number of authorities are involved in TUO including; Rotherham, Tameside, Wolverhampton, Southwark, Lambeth, Kent County Council and Districts and Lancashire County Council and Districts. This case study is drawn from the collective experiences of local government stakeholders who have been working closely with TUO Programme and from the local authorities directly involved as Pathfinders. It looks at the particular experiences and progress made by three of the pilots; Wolverhampton, Southwark and Tameside who were part of the initial pilot phase and have worked to introduce TUO into their service delivery around registration of births and deaths.

Their work will feed into the development of the Case for Tell Us Once (based on HMT Green Book principles) due in September 2009. This will help outline the principles of what a TUO service would look like and the underlying business case for local authorities to help them adapt and implement this approach to collecting and sharing customers' data when they are reporting a death or birth so that it meets the needs of their local citizens.

### Wolverhampton City Council

Wolverhampton Bereavement Centre (BC) is a single point in the City Centre from which the next of kin can access, free of charge, most of the services they need in order to settle the affairs of the deceased. Following the introduction of the TUO project the service now includes registration of births.

The origins of the BC came when in the late 1990s, a group of citizens in Wolverhampton, the Older Persons Task Force, were asked the question - 'when do public services fall down in Wolverhampton?' They highlighted bereavement, as they saw it as a key life event made more distressing by time-consuming and complex procedures.

The council thus took the initiative and formed a Multi-Agency Group to look at improving the experience for the bereaved. Members of this group included:

- Council Departments: Bereavement Services, Registrars, Social Services, Local Taxes and Housing Benefits
- Government Agencies: Benefits Agency (now Department for Work and Pensions), Probate Registry and Inland Revenue (now HM Revenues and Customs)
- Others: Older Persons Task Force (now Over 50's Forum), Age Concern, CRUSE, Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals, Coroners Office, Local GPs and Funeral Directors.

The Government's 'Invest to Save' programme (ITS) prompted them to propose the establishment of a one-stop shop approach in the form of a bereavement centre. The partners agreed the aims of the BC would be threefold:

- To reduce the stress and anxiety faced by the bereaved at their time of grief
- To provide accurate and speedy information for partner agencies (with consent)
- To explore the benefits of partnership working.

The BC was subsequently established in 2001 following a successful bid to the ITS and the success of the BC resulted in the Council sustaining it, upon cessation of the ITS funding in April 2003.

As part of the TUO pilot phase work Wolverhampton expanded its bereavement service and also incorporated birth notification as well. The services now available include:

- Death and birth registration
- Bookings for burials and cremations, and subsequent commemoration
- Access to Housing/Council Tax Benefit staff at the centre as and when required by service users
- Access to Social Services Financial Assessment team members (who deal with residential care/nursing homes) at the centre at the request of service users
- Access to Probate Officer at the centre on a weekly basis.

Other advice and practical assistance from the centre's advisors include the following:

- Housing issues (e.g. termination or succession of tenancies)
- Benefits: The Bereavement Centre has a direct telephone link with the Department for Work and Pensions and where necessary interviews or home visits can be arranged

- Post Office Card Accounts – (termination of)
- Notification of Social Services Departments (e.g. care providers, equipment loans, assistance with funeral costs)
- Council Tax: applying for reduction or suspensions etc
- Tax and Tax Credits: direct links with HM Revenue and Customs
- Notifying Severn Trent water authority, some Pension Providers and financial institutions
- Returning library tickets/books, passports, driving licences, bus passes, blue badge etc
- Contacting aftercare services e.g. CRUSE Bereavement Care etc.

## London Borough of Southwark

Southwark implemented TUO in February 2008 as a face-to-face service where people registering a death can also use this service to notify relevant council departments and other government organisations at the same time. Prior to this, such a service did not exist and therefore the customer had to work out whom to inform and usually had to send each service a separate certified copy of the death certificate. One in three households in Southwark is on some form of benefits and therefore, this is time-consuming and expensive, as a death often means a significant change of circumstances and they need to get in touch with a number of separate organisations and departments. While this information was available from the individual organisations, many people are simply not in a state of mind to follow all these processes at this difficult time.

Now with the introduction of the TUO service, and with the customer's consent, the Registrar passes the customer on to one of the Bereavement Support Officers who deliver the service which consists of the following four key strands:

- Send (securely) details of the deceased and next of kin or contact point to the relevant Southwark and central government departments and local hospitals
- Explain who else needs to be informed
- Identify other relevant council services including likely benefits entitlement and offer advice on claiming
- Make referrals or signpost to other appropriate services e.g. counselling, support groups.

Southwark council services currently involved are Council Tax, Electoral Services, Housing, Housing/Council Tax Benefit, Blue Badge, Adult and Children's Social Services, Libraries, General Accounts and Pensions. Other government agencies involved are DWP - The Pension Service, Disability & Carers Service and Jobcentre Plus; HMRC - Tax Credits and Child Benefit; DVLA; Immigration and Passport Service and local hospitals.

For Southwark many of their residents do not pass away in the borough as the two nearest main hospitals are located in the neighbouring borough of Lambeth. This has led to increased partnership working between the two councils so that the service is offered from both Southwark and Lambeth Register Offices and from the Bereavement Centre at St Thomas' Hospital. The latter is a truly one-stop service where bereaved relatives collect the medical certificate of cause of death, register the death and receive the Bereavement Support Service all in a single appointment. They also now offer a telephone bereavement service at all three locations and provide a birth telephone service from Southwark Register Office.



### Tameside MBC

Tameside Council embarked on the TUO journey in March 2008, working in partnership with DWP. The initial focus was to offer a telephone service for the reporting of bereavements via the TUO call centre which operates from Walsall. The objective of this service offering was to take death information over the phone to inform local authority services and other government departments, removing the need for the customer to have to do this. In October 2008, Tameside expanded the current service offering to include reporting of both births and bereavements over the telephone and through a face-to-face channel with the addition of the online service for reporting bereavement in November 2008. This has in turn widened partnership working as all birth related service offerings are delivered alongside HMRC.

The main aims in March 2008 were to:

- Build on the face-to-face TUO service offering
- Use a central government department or a local authority to act as the TUO hub
- Give customers another option to use the TUO service
- Taking in the birth and/or death information over the phone and informing other government departments and local authorities of the event

- Look to test how mobile working arrangements would support the TUO proposition.

Between March and October 2008 Tameside was the only local authority at this stage working with DWP that offered a phone service within the council. They deliver a TUO telephone contact centre to collect the customer's information about the bereavement over the phone and then, with their consent, share this information with appropriate other government departments and local authorities. They are using and developing the Bereavement Reporting System (BRS), an automatic notification system that all local authorities can also use for this purpose.

After the registration of the birth/death at the council, should the customer opt to use the bereavement or birth telephone service, the customer first has to complete a consent form. Then the Registrar provides the person reporting the birth/death with the dedicated phone number of the Walsall Pension Centre. Staff at the centre then passes the information to the other Government partners as appropriate. The partners in Tameside are DWP (Jobcentre Plus, The Pension, Disability and Carers Service) and HMRC (Child Benefit and Tax Credits).

If the customer opts to use the face-to-face service for births the officer ensures the customer completes a consent form to use the service. They also receive useful information about how to apply for a child passport and about childcare services in the local area. The customer is assisted in completing the Child Benefit application form.

If the customer opts to use the face-to-face bereavement service the officer again ensures the customer completes a consent form to use the service and then complete the details on the BRS system.

The officer signposts other organisations such as CRUSE, offering support and guidance and follows up with the recipient organisations if necessary.

The TUO call centre is currently situated in Walsall and is operated by DWP staff on behalf of all government.

### The Journey

In the case of both birth and death, the event needs to be registered at a Registrars Office and if the customer only has the option of a face-to-face service it makes sense to co-locate many of the TUO services in the same or adjoining offices. Of course TUO can only be delivered with the customer's consent and they find out about the service in a number of ways: via publicity across the locality (e.g. with the local undertakers or health centres), signposting from local organisations (e.g. the hospital or Age Concern), when calling to book a Registration appointment or when visiting the Registrars Office itself. In some localities they have the choice of either face-to-face, telephone, online or for the housebound, some local authorities are using their Joint Teams to deliver the TUO service.

Once the customer has opted for the TUO service the officer collects some standard information and asks the customer whom they wish to inform. At the end of this process they will be provided with a letter explaining who has been informed of the event and what they should do if they have any further queries. Whilst the general collection and sharing of data is a standard process across all pathfinder sites, the local authorities have also been able to add additional help which is specific to their customers, for example:

- Tameside co-ordinates the response for all LA services so that the customer receives one joint response
- Southwark will offer a follow up service for any of their customers so that they can chase any outstanding actions on their behalf
- Wolverhampton has found that a high percentage of the residents who pass away are ex-employees so they have a process to advise the local pension providers.

Two of the pathfinders have carried out their own customer feedback which has revealed that 98% of customers rated the service as "excellent" or "good" and some examples of customer quotes can be seen below:

- "I myself could have coped with all these jobs (as I have a professional background) but it was a great boon to have them done for me. I shudder to think how a less fortunate person than me would have coped. This is a social service which ought to have been established decades ago"
- "My mother-in-law's death was registered at the Civic Centre, Wolverhampton. What a difference, after registering the death we were introduced to a lady from the Bereavement Team who went through all the details of who we needed to contact, she even filled in forms and made telephone calls as necessary. Within thirty minutes she had achieved what had taken us days to do following my father-in-law's death..... We have within a few weeks experienced both sides of the coin and at the time of bereavement you are in no fit state to be dealing with legalities and form filling in"
- "I felt grateful that there was someone to support me in my time of sadness with things that you do not even think about, as everything like registering a death can be very overwhelming. He was very supportive and I very much

appreciated the fact that a lot of the paperwork could be sorted in one go. I was very relieved and reassured that the burden was taken off my shoulders which gave me great comfort”

- “When you know what needs to be done, how to put things in order it helps to have a clear picture with all the details. This is important especially when there is the stress of bereavement. If someone is making the calls for you and informing ALL the relevant departments and agencies then this is a great relief. THANK YOU”
- “This service has took a great deal of stress away and will give me more of a chance to grieve”
- “What a great idea, sharing information with other government departments and I don’t even have to send my original birth certificate.”

The following are some case scenarios which show the service and the impact it has had on the customers.

Miss C came to see the service to seek advice on the recent death of her baby son of 9 weeks old. He died on the 13th July, but was taken to the Coroner and the Interim death certificate was waiting to be processed. Miss C was a single mother, who came to the officer with her own mother.

Miss C had several issues she needed information on with the most important being her tenancy at her current address. She had been placed in temporary accommodation on the basis of her being a single mother and she was worried that she would be “thrown out” of the accommodation as her child was no longer present. She also had questions around the Child Trust Fund and what would happen to the monies that had been paid and also a Social Fund Maternity Grant of £500 she had recently received and whether it would need to be repaid.

Once in receipt of the interim death certificate, the service was able to notify on her behalf:

- Housing
- Benefits (housing and council tax)
- Children’s Services
- HMRC Child Benefit and Tax Credits
- Guys & St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust.

Following the interview, they contacted the Housing department responsible for temporary lettings, they advised the service that Miss C has been given the tenancy and that it was not at risk.

They contacted the Child Trust Fund who advised them that if the money voucher had been put into the child’s account, it would become part of their estate and therefore go directly to the mother. If the voucher was still un-cashed, a letter would be required to go to the head office and the mother would be asked where she would like the money paid (i.e. direct to her). They also contacted the Social Fund and we were advised that once a Maternity Grant had been paid or agreed it was the possession of the parent and did not need to be repaid and they advised Miss C of this.

The following week a reassessment of Miss C’s Housing and Council Tax benefit was made and she was advised of her new entitlement.

*Source: Southwark TUO*

A young person used the Tell Us Once bereavement service at Tameside to inform that his father had died. Mr W was the main carer for his father, and he had some concerns regarding the terms of his tenancy and how he was going to meet his household bills as these were mainly paid by benefits that he would no longer be entitled to. The officer was able to contact the Housing Office to clarify his position on his tenancy and provide some details regarding low cost funeral service. Mr W was also given contact numbers for welfare rights to help with his entitlements.

Although Mr W was going through a difficult time in his life, he was grateful that he now knew who to contact and he felt able to deal with his own affairs and remarked that the Tell Us Once service was an excellent idea.

A total of five Service Providers received notifications on his behalf.

*Source: Tameside TUO*

A citizen using the Tell Us Once face-to-face bereavement service, as his mother had just died, expressed concerns that he would need to give notice on his mother’s property and was worried about removing her belongings. The officer contacted the housing association and clarified the process so he was in a better position to deal with the upheaval and was very complimentary about the service he received, he said ‘the process was sensitive and efficient’. A total of six Service Providers received notifications.

*Source: Tameside TUO*

Many of the TUO staff had not been involved in delivering birth or bereavement services before and so a number of awareness sessions with front-line staff and service providers were held for example with CRUSE or Hospital staff. From staff surveys the initial findings are showing an increase in staff satisfaction because:

- They are able to assist a customer at what is often a very difficult time
- They are learning new skills and have been able to contribute to the design of a new service
- New partnerships and working relationships have been built
- They can deal with all of the customer enquiries rather than one small part.

General comments from staff included:

- "I think it's a fantastic service with a good team in place - the people make the service what it is from the front office to back office to the management"
- "Can't wait for other boroughs to join"
- "A good and useful service that I trust will go nationwide"
- "Really happy with the job and being involved in project"
- "I think the idea of having to inform central / local government about birth or bereavement with one contact is excellent and will help the customer immensely"

- "Inevitably there will be reduced contacts for the customer, greater customer satisfaction and better working relationships between central and local government agencies"
- "This job is so rewarding"
- "I feel privileged to be part of something so transformational".

*"I've worked within Benefits for 18 years now, so I've always dealt with people who really need help. For me TUO is the instant gratification, knowing that I have taken the information, dealt with it and that I've made a difference in their life. There are some very difficult and upsetting cases, but I can go home knowing that I've done a good job."*

*Karen Michael - Bereavement Support Officer  
Southwark Council*

**The results from Pathfinders and evaluation of these against existing data collection processes will form the basis of the business case for Tell Us Once, which will be submitted to Government later this year for a decision on whether or not to roll out the service nationally. However, the pathfinders are already starting to see some benefits both for themselves and the customers:**

- Reduction of avoidable and unavoidable contacts (NI14)
- More efficient process with TUO – relating to improvements in back office processes as more accurate data is also received more quickly
- Identification and prevention of fraud/abuse for example use of disabled parking spaces by non-entitled persons
- More timely service in retrieving specialist equipment
- More timely management of rent succession and clearance
- Saving time and money by not having to carry out multiple visits or notifications for both customers and the members of staff working on their behalf

- Single point of contact improves relationships at this difficult time
- Customer wellbeing is improved
- Prevention of inappropriate debt recovery action following the death
- Quicker response when a carer dies.

### Tameside

Tameside has identified that valuable time is saved by the customer. There is a reduction in the number of avoidable contacts because there is a more efficient back office process with TUO that results in quicker more accurate notifications leading to prompter actions for the customer. The average number of contacts is reduced from 8 to 1 and because the responses are co-ordinated this further reduces contacts from up to 10 to 1. The receipt of Notification internally rather than from the customer is a simpler process in that recipient departments spend less time transcribing the data from TUO in comparison to when previously received direct from the customer. Furthermore, after notification, there is less need to chase additional information from the customer.

Quicker notifications have produced reported savings in Blue Badge, Adult Services and Housing, Council Tax and Benefits.

- Benefits reported a significant decrease in overpayments – this results in an improvement in cash flow rather than a cash saving
- Adult Services noted faster termination of services to deceased, in particular those who were not in residential care (where the death is reported nearly as quickly on average as with TUO) – care packages e.g. meals on wheels, equipment etc
- Housing reported faster termination or reassignment of tenancies and hence reduced debt and write-offs and are making useful contacts with NHS, central government, local government offices and private businesses; DWP, connections (careers centre and organisation to help young parents), bereavement/ midwifery at hospital, carers centre and children's information service.

As a result of such savings there is consideration being given to provide additional staff for face-to-face work on births and bereavements at the TUO base in Tameside Hospital. In addition at New Charter Housing (Service Provider) there will be an 'a la carte' service provided through a Service Level Agreement with the council taking into account the legalities around the sharing of third party information.

**Southwark**

Southwark has also estimated that a customer's avoidable contact is reduced as TUO notifies on average seven service areas through just one appointment. However, according to reports from the Contact Council, it is known that customers take more than one call on average to complete their transaction and that nationally only 77% of local authority customers achieve first time resolution. So this is certainly likely to be an underestimate of time saved.

Nevertheless for the council, the customer's reduction of time in notifying various council departments and their prompt receipt of extra benefits and services, could equate to a substantial saving per person plus savings in debt recovery. This will also impact on those services delivered by central government for example Child Tax Credits, as they are notified faster enabling them to respond to the customer change in circumstances.

Finally, their analysis of Joint Team referrals from TUO compared to their general referrals shows that 85% of Joint Team visits result in additional benefits compared to a 69% average. This is not necessarily 'new money' but will be paid in a more timely, systematic and cost-effective manner.



**Enablers**

The key enablers in Wolverhampton, Southwark and Tameside have quite clearly been their respective desire and capacity to transform their services that led them all to become pilots. In each locality the TUO programme has added to existing degrees of momentum around viewing service delivery from the customer's perspective. In the origins of Wolverhampton's Bereavement Centre, some eight years ago, there was a high degree of innovation driven by the desire to reduce the frustrations of an elderly client group who brought the matter to their attention. The Invest to Save finances were a vital enabler, as this external funding supported their work across a two year period. This helped them compile sufficient evidence to get on going support for their Bereavement Centre.

**Barriers and challenges**

One significant challenge was the shift required to move the organisational from responding on a service by service basis to one which redesigned the service around the needs of the customer and this therefore required both new ways of thinking and new ways of working. However in all three localities, judging from the positive customer comments, this has been more than adequately overcome and well surpassed. Staff involved from a variety of departments in all three localities appeared to have been rewarded with greater job satisfaction

arising from reducing the frustrations and anguish from a client group at a most vulnerable time in their respective lives.

A future challenge remains the need to bring in more partner organisations operating within their localities but the depth of feeling amongst both service users and staff bodes well on this.

**Organisational impact**

Each of the three localities has benefited from implementation of the project particularly in terms of saving time with some resultant release of capacity in Tameside. The gradual introduction of TUO has ensured buy-in from service areas and the direct feedback from customers to front-line staff has maintained it.

### Relevance to and replicability in other local authorities

This case study focuses on the learning from the first wave of Pathfinders, Tameside MBC, LB Southwark, Wolverhampton City Council and Rotherham MBC. However, a number of other local authorities are now contributing to the design and development of the TUO service.

These include Kent County Council and districts, Lancashire County Council and districts and LB Lambeth. It will be important to continue to work with a range of different types of local authorities in different locations and with different circumstances in order to develop a TUO that will operate effectively across the local government sector.

There are a number of factors that other authorities should take account of when considering whether to implement a similar project:

- Number of births and deaths of residents compared to those registered in a neighbouring locality
- Location of service
- Local partners (e.g. hospitals)
- Staff knowledge reflects customers need.

The TUO project is developing an Implementation Plan that should their Business Case get signed off will be available to share with other authorities with support from TUO. The TUO programme could be easily replicated at other authorities given that the findings from all pathfinders have been similar.



As reported at the beginning of this case study on TUO, a number of local authorities including county councils and some of their district partners are now involved in work on this pathfinder project. This will provide further important information about how the TUO service will need to operate across these two tier areas. Some of these local authorities are piloting a TUO service and some are contributing data and information which will feed into the work to develop the Case for Tell Us Once.

The results from Pathfinders and evaluation of these against existing data collection processes will form the basis of the Case for Tell Us Once (based on HMT Green Book principles) due in September 2009. This will help outline the principles of what a TUO service would look like and the underlying business case for local authorities to help them adapt and implement this approach to collecting and sharing customers' data when they are reporting a death or birth so that it meets the needs of their local citizens. The Case for Tell Us Once will be submitted to Government later this year for a decision on whether or not to roll out the service nationally. However, as noted earlier further work will need to be done to support any national implementation of a TUO service.



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