

LGA case study template

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Local authority: New Forest District Council

Submitted by: Social Engine

Case study title:

Reducing littering in the New Forest: A behavioural insights project

Case study synopsis (100 words):

New Forest District Council commissioned [Social Engine](#) to support the development of a new insight-led approach to tackling littering in the New Forest. Coronavirus gave rise to a new challenge, of littering in coastal areas, and the project shifted from littering from vehicles to address this. The intervention, which used novel messaging and imagery on advertising trailers at three sites and dispensed rubbish bags, reduced litter by 10.8 tonnes over a one month period (a reduction of 29 per cent), saving an estimated £10,000 in waste collection costs.

The challenge:

New Forest District Council (NFDC) spends £1.5m each year on manual and mechanical sweeping, litter picking, the provision and emptying of litter and dog waste bins, and the collection and removal of fly-tipped waste.

The challenge is not simply a financial one – littering poses a threat to wildlife, causes traffic disruption, danger for cleaning operatives, and is the cause of dissatisfaction amongst many who live in or visit the area.

Covid-19 has presented Local Authorities with new challenges. In the New Forest, the Council have experienced a huge increase in rubbish

left at coastal locations.

This project sought to develop a new evidence-based and insight-led approach to reducing littering in the area.

The solution:

The Look Out For Our Forest framework was developed to address the behaviours and attitudes that underlie littering behaviours among New Forest residents and visitors to the area. We sought to gain first hand insight into littering through a range of research engagement methods, comprising primary and secondary research. Interviews and workshops were conducted with key stakeholders including partners, council staff and Members, food retailers and local interest groups. Additionally, focus groups with young people and an online public survey of attitudes to littering were undertaken alongside observational research. The framework, which was based on the extensive evidence and insight gathering phase, drew on two hypotheses:

1. Residents of the New Forest are very proud of where they live
2. People are more likely to litter if they are alone and think they will not get caught

These underpinned the Look Out for the Forest identity, which was intended to provide a multi-year framework beneath which a wide range of interventions could be developed. The shift in focus away from littering from vehicles on coastal littering, presented an opportunity to put the framework to the test by adapting the approach to a coastal variant. The result was the *Crabby Costal Litter intervention* which was deployed at three coastal areas of the New Forest. At the intervention sites (Milford on Sea, Barton on Sea and Calshot) free refuse sacks were supplied from prime visitor points alongside posters on large advertising trailers. The intervention ran for a month over the summer 2020, when lockdown was eased and people flocked to the beaches causing a significant increase in coastal litter.

The intervention sought to challenge behaviours such as ‘polite littering’ - where litter is left by the side of an already full or overflowing bin and to make the desired behaviour (disposing of litter in bags) easy for people by providing them with litter bags.

The impact (including cost savings/income generated if applicable):

As a randomised controlled trial was not considered viable, the intervention was evaluated using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. Litter volume (weighbridge) data from the pre-intervention period and the intervention period, coupled with visitor numbers was used to measure the change in litter and a community survey, and stakeholder interviews provided evidence of perceptions of littering.

Based on available weighbridge data, the intervention reduced the amount of litter discarded by 10.8 tonnes over the one month intervention period. This represents a reduction in litter of 29 per cent. This realised savings for the Council in litter collection costs by over £10,000 across the three coastal areas in just one month.

Results from two community surveys - one before and one after the intervention – and stakeholder interviews consistently showed positive changes in perceptions and behaviours of the public towards littering. The qualitative evidence therefore confirmed the findings from the quantitative analysis.

How is the new approach being sustained?:

In developing the Look Out for Our Forest identity, the project sought to establish a long-term framework that could be used in different ways to respond to particular littering challenges.

The *Crabby Coastal Litter intervention* was the first ‘road testing’ of this approach and proved to be successful, both in the ability of the framework to be adapted to a specific challenge (coastal litter) and in the effectiveness of the intervention to reduce littering.

In a wider sense, this project has given us a good initial grounding in behaviour change and we will be continuing to think how using behavioural science can improve our communications and improvement programmes.

The Council are now looking ahead to 2021 at the ways that the ‘Look Out for Our Forest’ framework can be adapted to support further anti-littering interventions. The intention is to share this brand with partner organisations to ensure consistency of messaging throughout the New

Forest. The New Forest National Park Authority have already utilised the messaging to support their ambassador scheme, where ‘Look Out For Our Forest’ branded hi vis tabards were provided to members of the public in free litter picking kits.

The success of the #crabby campaign and the noticeable reduction in coastal litter along with positive public perception, means the Council will now look at the possibilities of repeating this work at the coast for summer 2021, as well has how it can be adapted to help with problems in town centres or parks and open spaces.

Lessons learned:

Developing a behaviourally-informed approach to littering represented a new way of working for the Council. The project aimed to develop a framework that could be adapted and deployed in a creative and practical way to respond to a variety of challenges.

The shift in focus from littering from vehicles to coastal litter during the course of the project presented us with a real opportunity to test the Look Out for Our Forest framework in an unanticipated but highly practical way.

The coastal litter intervention was able to be designed and deployed in the space of just a couple of weeks, adapting the ‘Look Out for Our Forest’ framework to create a relevant, targeted and behaviourally-informed intervention. The messaging and imagery were consistent with the overarching brand identity, but tailored to the specific circumstances and opportunity.

Survey responses strongly indicate that New Forest residents perceive the council as an authority that is taking action, making efforts to reduce littering and that these efforts should continue. Residents and stakeholders appeared to recognise that the intervention reflected a new and positive way of engaging people with the issue of littering and felt the initiative had been well received and had a positive impact on littering.

This experience suggests the framework is fit for purpose and can provide the sort of multi-year brand and concepts beneath which

numerous further interventions can be developed, to move forward with confidence beyond the lifetime of the project.

There is also considerable scope to expand the use of audience segmentation and personas across other service areas to enhance messaging and engagement and service design.

The success of the coastal littering intervention has provided a good proof of concept and when the circumstances allow, the interventions which were developed to reduce littering from vehicle can be tested.

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Links to relevant documents:

Look Out for Our Forest Style Guide

Full report