

Digital Experts Programme

Blackpool Council channel shift case study – update



Background to the project

Faced with severe cuts to its finances, including to the resources in its contact centre, Blackpool Council investigated the opportunities that channel shift could provide as a means of moving some residents away from telephone and face-to-face contact towards accessing council services via the website.

In addition to saving money via lower transaction costs, the move would potentially offer improved customer service, as residents would be able to access services at times that suited their lives, 24 hours a day 7 days a week, as well as efficiency gains through integrating web forms into the council's back-office systems and thereby eliminating the 'double handling' of information by staff.

On reviewing demand in its contact centre, the council found that queries relating to waste management – including bulky collection requests and missed bin reports – were in the top ten of the volumes being dealt with. Staff also found that fly-tipping was subject to duplicate reporting and frequent chase-up calls.

The council therefore chose to make waste management the main focus of its push towards increasing levels of self-service under the Digital Experts programme. In particular, developing a 24/7 self-service system for bulky waste collection was prioritised as these transactions are relatively high value and high-frequency and generate revenue for the council. Furthermore, failure to handle the bulky waste calls was a potential contributor to increased rates of fly-tipping.

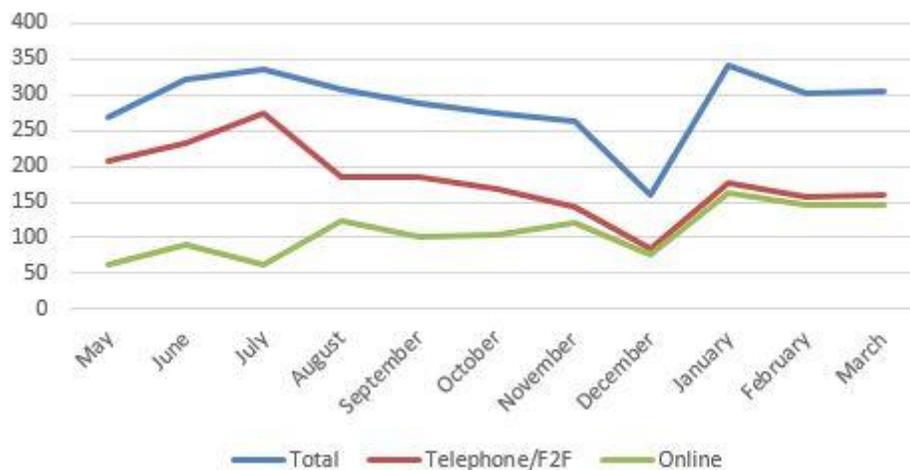
The position in Spring 2016

Following the establishment of a project board, a series of workshops were held to develop the requirements for the new online services. By the end of February 2016, the following progress had been made:

Bulky waste management

This system went live in May 2015 and from mid-2015 onwards the council saw a switch from bookings via the council's Customer First operation to online, with January and February 2016 rates showing a stable 48 per cent of bookings made via the web.

Blackpool bulky waste booking volumes 2015-16



Blackpool Council estimates that online self-service avoids an estimated 10-15 minute ‘phone call. By the end of March 2016, there had been a switch of 1,192 calls in total since the self-service was launched, representing a saving of nearly £3,400 (based on Socitm’s estimated cost of £2.83 per telephone call).

Fly-tipping

The new fly-tipping service went live in January 2016 and therefore had only been running for a short period at the time of the initial Digital Experts case study. However, volumes were already moving in the right direction – with 188 reports into the new system between launch and the end of February 2016 versus 124 report via the web site for the same period in the previous year.

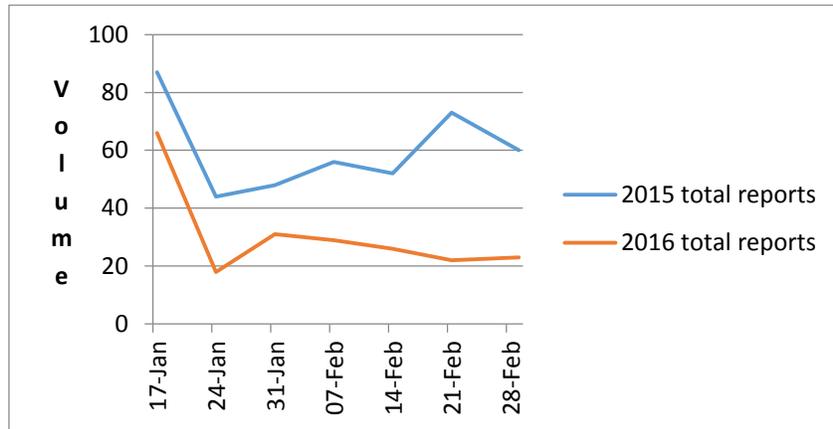
Blackpool fly-tipping reports for February 2016

Reporting	% difference from February 2015
Total reports	↓ 16%
Customer First reports	↓ 11%
Online reports	↑ 72%

Missed bins

Missed bins also went live in January 2016. By the end of February there had been a 54 per cent reduction in missed bin reports compared to the same period during 2015, although a significant part of this reduction was the result of Customer First staff now having access to data so that only valid missed collections were reported.

2015 to 2016 comparison of Blackpool missed bin reporting volumes



Our original case study and vox pops can be found at http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/productivity/-/journal_content/56/10180/6357119/ARTICLE

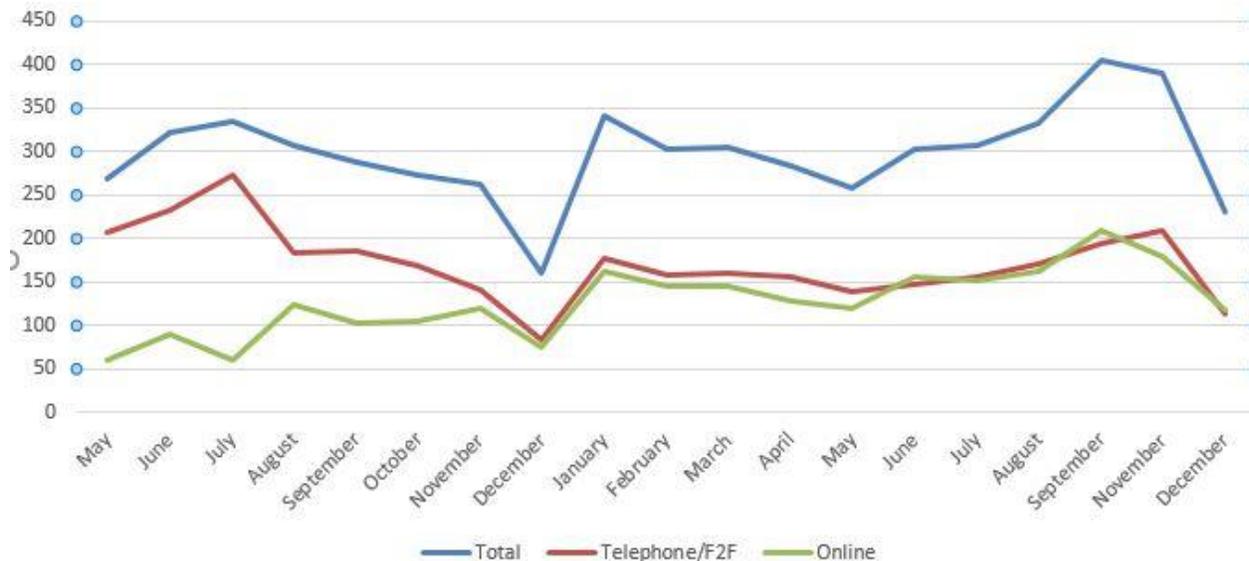
The position in Autumn 2016

Blackpool has continued to monitor the statistics on its waste management services.

Bulky waste management

Online bookings have continued at around 50 per cent of total bookings. In the nine months to the end of December 2016, a further 1430 online bookings had been made. Assuming this pattern continues for the rest of the financial year, this would suggest a total of 1906 online bookings for 2016/17, generating a saving of just under £5,400 on the Socitm assumptions set out above.

Blackpool bulky waste booking volumes up to December 2016



As the original case study pointed out, bulky waste collection also generates revenue for the council. In the period leading up to the launch of the new online service (January – April 2015), there were 1103 collections booked. For the equivalent period in the following year (January – April 2016), there were 1233, an uplift of 11.8 per cent. On this basis, the council could expect almost 400 additional collections over the year as a result of putting the service online.¹ Even at Blackpool’s minimum charge of £18.00 for three items, this would generate a potential additional revenue of £7,200.

Fly-tipping

The new online fly-tipping service went live in January 2016. Comparing the 2016 calendar year with the equivalent period in 2015, overall reports were slightly up by around 1.4 per cent. However, there had been a significant shift towards online reporting (from 1248 reports to 1696 reports, an increase of 448 or 36 per cent) and an almost equivalent drop of 375 calls in telephone contact. Online reports constituted 31 per cent of the total over 2016 compared with 23 per cent for 2015. Assuming the additional 448 online reports would otherwise have come in by phone, this represents a potential saving of more than £1,265 over the year.

Reporting	% difference Jan-July 2016 v Jan-July 2015	
Total reports		1.4%
Customer First reports		9%
Online reports		36%

Missed bins

The new missed bins service also went live in January 2016. The position here is complicated by other changes, including Customer First staff now having access to better data on valid missed collections.

Overall, the period January – December 2016 continued to show a marked drop in the overall level of reports compared to the same period in 2015, falling from 2694 reports to 1758, a 35 per cent reduction, suggesting a significantly improved service. Within this overall total, the proportion of online reports fell to 25 per cent, suggesting that those reports that are now made are more complicated.

¹In the event, there were 543 more collections in calendar year 2016 than in 2015, but the online facilities were available for part of 2015.

As for the future, during the summer of 2016 Blackpool worked on the introduction of a new highways process, which has now been launched. The council also mapped new flows for dog-related issues which are due to go live mid-January 2017 and the work on building this facility started in mid-August. The team has now started to plan for developing new processes for ordering replacement bins and repairs to bins, environmental protection issues and street cleaning requests. Other services that are currently being investigated for inclusion in channel shift include anti-social behaviour reporting, alley gate faults and car parking/parking permits.

Contact for further information

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