

Transforming and digitising the refuse and recycling service

Scarborough Borough Council is delivering over £250,000 in savings and a 58 per cent channel shift to online citizen self-service by digitising its bin collection service.

The issue and context

Scarborough Borough Council provides refuse and recycling services to over 56,000 homes and 6,000 businesses.

Over the years the service has made significant savings and service improvements, most recently with the introduction of a double collection shift approach, enabling it to remove a number of bin lorries from active service. However, as a key priority for the council, there is a strategic focus on continuous improvement in its waste services.

In addition, as a tourist town, the borough's population grows significantly during the summer season and being able to accurately respond to service demand fluctuations has long been a key goal.

This was reflected in Scarborough's application to the LGA Digital Channel Shift Programme for support with further transformation of refuse and recycling services. The bid aimed to provide residents and staff with modern, customer-centric online services offering real-time information and service access. It covered:

- deployment of in-cab tablet devices
- vehicle tracking
- efficiency-delivering process redesign
- the promotion of channel shift from telephone and face-to-face queries to online interaction.

The project fell under an ongoing, organisation-wide transformation programme designed to deliver a 'One Council' model. This has already seen the design and deployment of enhanced and automated business workflow processes,

"We are heading for a One Council model where everybody is working equally towards transformation – whether you are a binman or whether you are in the IT department, people understand that we can work together. Transformation isn't about getting rid of jobs, it's about getting the best value out of those jobs and all the service unit managers are challenged to think outside what they normally do. This approach has identified a lot of people with skills they didn't know they had and that's important because it's all about people – we're trying to make sure we maintain employment for Scarborough Borough Council's employees and also efficiencies and a better service for members of the public."

Councillor Heather Phillips, Portfolio Holder for Transformation

and responsive, customer-friendly online forms, successfully delivered in a number of council services.

An underpinning theme of the corporate transformation programme has been to harness and develop internal skills, which has generated real enthusiasm for positive change since its inception. The council has successfully supported and developed business analysis skills, software and mobile working technology solutions and promoted a culture of continuous improvement – and these skills would be deployed in the cleansing services transformation.

Digital Channel Shift Programme

The work at Scarborough Borough Council to support its innovative use of digital technology has been funded through the Digital Channel Shift Programme, which is managed and overseen by the Local Government Association (LGA).

The Digital Channel Shift Programme was set up to help councils and their partners to promote greater use of online tools and technologies for the benefit of both their customers and staff.

The aim is for the digital tools and solutions created through the programme to be reused by other councils and contribute to the wider work to transform local public services.

Meanwhile, local employment and workforce development are very important to Scarborough due to the limited number of job vacancies locally compared with other areas of the country. Its focus on workforce development and giving employees 'the right tools to do their job' has enabled it to reduce costs, improve service delivery and capacity, and successfully maintain employment levels.

The new in-cab project aimed to deliver a communication and tracking system into the council's refuse vehicle fleet undertaking both residential and business collections. Combined with the introduction of new and enhanced online forms, this would provide the opportunity to optimise collection rounds and provide near real-time information exchange, resulting in an enhanced customer experience, reduced administration and notable cost reductions.

This coordinated programme of improvements to waste services aimed to optimise the flow, accuracy and availability of information. This, in turn, would reduce the number and frequency of customer calls to the Customer First centre whilst improving the quality of service and customer experience.

In addition, a round review was on the horizon, due to take place in June 2019, and the data generated by the new system would form a key plank of evidence.

The LGA funding was an essential contribution towards the purchase of the in-cab devices, project assurance and both implementation and optimisation of the in-cab project.

"The LGA has played a very important role over the past two and three decades in trying to inspire and lead change particularly in the digital sector within local government. This programme is all about sharing knowledge, sharing innovation and making sure that we move forward together as a local authority family."

Jim Dillon, Chief Executive

The project objectives and targets

The objective was to link up the frontline service with the call centre in real time through the use of in-cab units.

Refuse and recycling crews would use these new in-cab devices to easily input and process rounds completed and the reasons for missed bins as well as other issues such as damaged waste bins, contamination and blocked access – all of which are common problems for the council. The devices would dynamically update a cloud-based database, providing instant updates to citizens, the customer services team and other relevant back-office services.

This direct data flow from the bin lorries to back-office systems would remove paperwork and administration related to service delivery. It would also significantly reduce internal contacts and queries as all points, from customer services through to the bin lorries, would be working with the same, up-to-date information.

Digital management of the operational collection services would also create rostering flexibility of drivers by enabling them to effectively navigate rounds unfamiliar to them.

The in-cab tracking system would allow Scarborough to create new, optimised rounds, enabling it to be far more responsive to issues as they arise, such as crew changes and the impactful seasonal demands of a tourism-reliant borough, whilst maintaining current staffing levels.

The redesign of the service's underpinning business processes and the display of relevant customer information in enhanced online forms would maximise the benefits of implementing the in-cab devices. These new processes would be integrated into Scarborough's Firmstep customer relationship management (CRM) platform, and be shared as a 'single-truth' database with relevant workflow processes, the extranet, reporting systems and the council's self-service website.

Before the start of this project, when members of the public rang in to say that their bin had been missed the council had no way of knowing

“One of the catalysts for this project was data protection. With a manual, paper-driven system, our bin lorry drivers had lots of pieces of paper which had a resident's name, address and telephone number. Although this would be kept in the cab, this information was not stored as securely as we'd liked. The use of In-Cab means we are just visiting no17 High Street and we're not looking at Mrs Smith's house or not going to Mr Jones's property – we are just going to a set of addresses.”

James Atthews, Project Manager

whether this was true or whether the resident had just forgotten to put their bin out for collection. If the bin had truly been missed the council had an obligation to send the bin lorry out to collect the bin – an expensive exercise.

However, intelligent application of technology across this project will enable the council to 'push' information out to both the customer and customer services. For example, if a citizen has an online self-service account they will receive a proactive notification of an operative issue or action, such as a change to bin collection days. Furthermore, if a customer opts to report a missed bin online they will immediately see information about why the bin was not collected. If they then choose to phone in, call centre staff will be aware of the issue at the property and be immediately able to explain why the bin was not collected – for example, it had not been put out, there were access issues or it was contaminated – and take enforcement action if required.

As part of an overall, corporate transformation programme, the 'digital by default' project would deliver corporate improvement objectives by removing or reducing wasteful and/or risk-laden steps, making best use of technology and giving citizens a much-improved service and greater choice in how they interact with the council.

One additional objective for the project was to tackle a perceived risk of data breach from drivers handling multiple pieces of paper with citizen information. Much of this paper was kept in the cab and there was a risk of this information being lost or being seen inappropriately. Once this information was handled electronically, this risk would be removed as no personally identifying information would be visible in the cab and routes would be displayed and referenced by properties only.

In addition, the project aimed to evidence through accurate data that no further purchase of refuse collection vehicles (RCVs) would be required following optimisation of collection routes, and that additional capacity could be delivered whilst maintaining employment levels. Increased data accuracy would also enable the council to monitor contamination levels and CO₂ emissions.

Key objectives therefore included to:

- ensure no redundancies
- fix the back office – get rid of paper
- improve data protection
- optimise vehicle usage – no new RCVs and crews
- produce accurate data for ‘round review’, contamination and CO₂ monitoring
- improve the user and customer experience
- reduce internal contacts
- optimise everyone’s experience – internally and externally
- enhance enforcement
- channel shift from call centre to online self-service
- deliver savings.

“A waste vehicle will roughly cost £150,000 which we pay for over a five-year working life. £150,000 equates to roughly six refuse collectors – to put into context that is two collection crews that would serve about 1200-1300 properties on average per day.”

James Atthews, Project Manager



Targets

Scarborough expected the project to deliver cost savings of £1.5 million over ten years, representing a figure of £150,000 per annum and a saving of 3.5 per cent off the cleansing services’ annual revenue budget.

The savings would be achieved through several outcomes, most notably through optimisation of vehicle and operative time as follows:

- reduction of annual operating costs for the service of
 - £120,000 from the refuse rounds review if all elements were implemented
 - £20,000 admin efficiencies
 - £10,000 from removal of tracking units (included as part of the in-cab system).

Other expected benefits included:

- provision of a service which is better value for money for the residents of the borough
- an improved customer experience
- provision of an online self-service facility for residents.

The approach and progress to date

Scarborough believes that customers and society in general are well used to doing things online. However, they felt that often the 'digital' layer where the customer interacts with the council was superficial as this did not properly integrate with the back-office systems. The approach in this project was therefore to transform processes from start to finish, that is creating a digitally-enabled customer interface to a fully integrated digital process.

Scarborough's chief executive, Jim Dillon, was fully supportive of the council's overall transformation programme, which has a heavy focus on redesigning processes and services with digital technologies to both improve efficiency and deliver a better customer service. Elected member support and engagement with the project was also high, with improving refuse and recycling services seen as strategically important.

As the project sits within a wider corporate transformation programme, monthly reports were submitted to the council's existing governance structure and Corporate Modernisation Board and quarterly meetings were held with the chief executive and key councillors.

Technology

Scarborough chose to implement Webaspix's In-Cab units and route optimisation solution. Firmstep CRM and online forms were already in use in the council and were the natural route to support customer access and workflow for the new project.

However, the In-Cab solution as a product is designed as a stand-alone system accessed via a portal. To integrate this system with the Firmstep forms and enable self-service access for customers and the Customer First team, the council drew upon existing internal skills to provide links between the datasets and systems.

Two project team members working within IT developed a number of bespoke integrations. This worked extremely well, enabling the two

systems to communicate with and update each

"The heart of it all is really about improving the customer experience and meeting the challenges of cutting costs so that we can deliver things more effectively, more efficiently and make it a better all-round thing for both the customer and the organisation. We were particularly looking at ways of maintaining employment but changing the way we operated. So some of the savings in the long term for us we knew were going to be savings on bin lorries rather than having fewer people operating them."

Jim Dillon, Chief Executive

other in both directions, successfully enabling management of the existing bin collection database within the In-Cab management software side of the programme.

In turn, the bin collection database uses the council's UPRN (unique property reference number – a nationally recognised reference system) from its Land and Property Gazetteer. This ensures that the data can be onward-matched across council systems if required and is particularly important in responding to Data Protection Act subject access requests by providing a 'golden record' of all property and people.

Meanwhile, the touchscreen In-Cab tablet units enable drivers to quickly and easily interact with the system. They use GPS satellite information to provide vehicle tracking and a GPRS system to enable communication from cab to base.

The new system has also provided easy opportunities to better manage specific



“If you give people the right equipment, the right tools and the right amount of resources to carry out their job, you’ll get efficiencies and also better motivated people.”

Jim Dillon, Chief Executive

services. For example, garden waste is a licensed scheme so citizens must pay for a licence in order to receive it. With the In-Cab units crews are easily able to see which properties are licenced and therefore eligible for the service.

User research

In order to help shape waste service delivery and process redesign the council made use of existing residents and business panels, and drew on recent satisfaction surveys. During the early stages of service transformation these panels and all feedback/complaints were crucial to informing service redesign. Policy and performance and business analysis teams were involved in mapping customer journeys and information flows to ensure that the customer experience was an integral part of the process.

As the council moves forwards, information from the CRM and workflow regarding customer interactions and customer feedback will be used to analyse service performance and for continual improvement.

Stakeholder engagement and communication

Scarborough put in place a comprehensive internal and external communications and promotional plan regarding the new service.

The project team focused on engaging the IT and Customer First teams and refuse vehicle crews, providing extensive training and feedback as the project progressed. Equally

“Working with stakeholders is key to the delivery of this project – if we’ve not got people onboard with the project then the project is not going to work and will not work as effectively or as efficiently as intended.”

James Atthews, Project Manager

important to the team, however, was engagement with senior managers, council leadership and elected members to keep them informed, engaged and supportive of the project.

The communications plan involved all project stakeholders and ensured that they received regular updates and emails, briefings, training sessions, meetings and workshops. Specific member briefings and the leader’s messages to all staff were additionally aimed at driving internal awareness and support for the transformation.

A press release and social media were used to raise external awareness and uptake. With over 6,000 followers on the council’s Twitter account and an active Facebook community, these channels were chosen to publicise the new service and encourage adoption of self-service. Meanwhile messages on the website kept visitors and account users informed about the new service.

User training

According to the project team, when the refuse crews were told about the in-cab system they were generally supportive of it despite some initial concerns over having ‘a spy in the cab’. The prospect of replacing multiple pieces of paper with a touch-screen device appealed to drivers as it would be far quicker to report issues, log in the vehicle, and complete the daily work sheet.

There was no push back on the implementation of new technologies as over recent years a number of different systems had successfully been implemented on the RCVs. For example, onboard cameras and vehicle tracking had already proven to be of benefit to crews in terms of providing evidence for bogus



insurance claims, potential speeding offences or other traffic-related issues. Both had originally been seen as a potential 'big brother watcher' but have demonstrated how they can successfully protect the crew and their operations.

Training officers went out with cleansing staff to trial the units and get direct 'on-the-job' feedback. Issues such as robustness of devices and the subsequent need to educate crews about unnecessary excessive pressure on the screens were picked up and included in subsequent training sessions.

A period of two weeks was scheduled after the implementation of all in-cab units before official go-live in order to provide briefings, training sessions and practice opportunities for crews. A comprehensive briefing note also provided crews with an ongoing reference or 'crib sheet' for use of the units.

Health, Safety and Hazards

As the project progressed it became apparent that the in-cab units and new workflows could enable the management and display of health and safety information about the collections service in the vehicles' cabs.

The in-cab technology provided an opportunity to enhance and improve on the previous use of paper-based health and safety manuals that were supplemented by regular paper updates of current hazards. The new, dynamic, solution enabled a more efficient production of the hazard reports for drivers required by the Health and Safety Executive.

Drivers are able to update and log warnings for low bridges, weight limits, parked cars, pylons and other hazards.

LGA support

The LGA provided significant support to the project in terms of:

- providing a steer on the project objectives
- ensuring a focus on benefits realisation for both the council and its customers
- strengthening engagement with members and the council's leadership

- offering opportunities to engage with other councils in the Digital Channel Shift Programme at workshops and events
- validating the approaches taken during the project
- enhancing the project governance
- supporting a new role in project assurance
- providing financial support of £15,000, enabling the project to be extended into new areas including litter bins, bin repairs and hazard logging.

Of particular note is the role of project assurance that the LGA's involvement helped to support. The council had not traditionally had a specific role with this purpose in projects and found the addition 'a new and interesting development' that provided significant benefits in terms of constant checking on requirements, project status and outputs. In addition, the higher visibility gained for the project from the internal reporting provided by this role helped significantly with the internal engagement of Scarborough's members and leadership.



Project milestones

Project Milestones	Planned	Actual	Comments
Design/discovery phase	January – March 2017	March 2017	Completed, with agreement to proceed
External supplier Webaspx commences work	April 2017	April 2017	Commenced on time
User testing with customer services, back office and operatives	June – September 2017	June – September 2017	Completed successfully
Technical testing	July – September 2017	July – September 2017	Completed successfully
Pre-launch communication and staff training	July – September 2017	July – September 2017	Completed successfully
Forms and process redevelopment	June 2017 – March 2018	Ongoing	Feedback being acquired for continuous improvement
Launch of live In-Cab system for operatives, back-office administration and customer services, leading to improvements for the public	August – September 2017	September 2017	Delayed by 2 weeks, but this did not hamper project delivery. Completed successfully

The citizen's view

Missed Collections
Contact Details
CSA Enquiries
Select Collection
About Your Collection
Collection Calendar

ActionNo * ✓

Your missed collection....

There are no reported incidents for this collection from the crew so we will treat this incident as a missed collection.

Return for Collection: As this is the first request to return for a collection at your address, we will return for your Individual Bin within 8 days. We will monitor future collections to ensure this does not happen again.

Before you go, would you like to view a list of future collection dates? * ✓

The outcome – successes and challenges

The project is considered to be a great success by all those involved. In addition to the successes set out below, it was delivered at a lower than expected cost – £49,000 instead of £53,000.

To date the project has delivered:

- **savings of £262,631 to date with projected cumulative savings of £478,587 by the end of financial year 2018/19**
- a 26 per cent reduction in phone calls to the call centre
- a 34 per cent reduction in missed bins that operators must return for
- a 58 per cent uptake of online self-service for missed bin reporting
- a 9 per cent increase in the number of calls resolved 'first time' by call centre advisors as relevant information is available to them
- a decrease of over 50 per cent in internal communications between Customer First, the back office and crews.

Scarborough is now able to manage the cleansing service more proactively and flexibly. All rounds are available to all vehicles, allowing efficient cover for sickness or vehicle breakdowns.

Customer experience has been improved, with an increase in online self-service facilities and the availability of collection information in real time. Residents now have access to collection information from their phone, tablet or computer but are still able to receive the same information from the call centre if they choose to phone.

Drivers and crews are very happy with the new processes, technologies and the removal of paper from their daily workload. They are extremely positive about the ease of use and access to up-to-date information.

The savings that have been highlighted are extremely important in the delivery of a balanced budget for the council. Savings made in this manner are preferable to cutting services or making compulsory redundancies.

"It has made the operation of reporting missed bins much easier and it is all done digitally. And we are finding that our ability to respond to those requests is much better – when someone reports a missed bin it goes directly to the bin lorry, there's no administration and it is done very quickly and efficiently. It gives a lot of confidence to the public and that can be reflected in anything else we may provide for them."

Jim Dillon, Chief Executive

"The project has been very successful. It's been implemented very, very well. The outcomes have gone beyond what we expected them to be initially and it has made a real difference to our customer services, our back office and crucially to our citizens as well."

Jeff Crowe, Project Assurance / Analyst

"The project has been extremely successful – 58 per cent are using the new service and we're trying as a council to get more people online. But we still need to be there for the ones who can't do – we don't need to be digital by default because that's a step too far. However, whilst there are people who can't do digital there are also a lot of people who don't want to do anything but digital – so giving them that facility at little cost means that we'll achieve more in the long run."

Councillor Bill Chatt, Cabinet member, Housing, Public Health, Sustainability and Environmental Services

Refuse driver testimonials

"It's really good, it's a piece of cake for us."
Chris W

"I can concentrate more on driving, instead of paperwork."
Jon B

"In-Cab allows me to report any problems with bins at the press of a button."
Dave E

The borough is very conscious that it has an ageing population and people who do not want to use online services through either disability, lifestyle or choice. Therefore, whilst the new self-service system has been very successful

the council is keen to ensure that those who wish to can still either use the telephone or go in person to speak to somebody about refuse collection.

Financial benefits

Areas for savings	2017	2018
Retire 1 small RCV – cost of vehicle (one-off cost)	£ 25,000.00	
Retire 1 small RCV – cost of crew, maintenance, tax, MOT, servicing etc. (per annum)	£ 45,000.00	£ 45,000.00
Delay purchase larger RCV – vehicle (one-off cost)	£ 35,000.00	
Delay purchase larger RCV – cost of crew, maintenance, tax, MOT, servicing etc. (per annum)	£ 90,000.00	£ 90,000.00
Admin staff reduction (reassignment to other duties)	£ 16,575.00	£ 22,100.00
Internal contacts between customer service, back office and crews	£ 9,976.00	£ 10,776.00
Contaminated bins	£ 25,080.00	£ 25,080.00
Face-to-face customer contact	£ 8,000.00	£ 10,000.00
Telephone calls	£ 9,000.00	£ 14,000.00
Cost of increased online usage	-£ 1,000.00	-£ 1,000.00
Annual savings	£ 262,631.00	£ 215,956.00
Cumulative savings	£ 262,631.00	£ 478,587.00

Financial savings have been delivered in a number of areas, from providing faster and improved customer information and thereby reducing the number of calls and forms submitted to customer services to reducing the volume and frequency of internal communication between customer services and the cleansing services' back-office teams. Key areas of savings have been delivered via:

“In-Cab has given many benefits, ranging from reductions in reported bins of over 33 per cent to reducing back-office support to virtually zero. It has given us full accountability for our vehicles, and our staff are able to report all issues at the touch of a button.”

James Atthews, Project Manager

- preventing the purchase of more RCV cleansing vehicles to cover the growing number of properties in the borough
- retiring an RCV from the current fleet due to more efficient processes and route optimisation
- reassigning a member of staff
- reducing back-office costs and contacts through automation and the provision of real-time information
- reducing and avoiding contaminated bins
- preventing wasted and irrelevant journeys to collect 'missed' bins
- reducing face-to-face and telephone customer contact through enhanced information and processes.

Contaminated bins – an example of process redesign and savings

Scarborough had over 10,000 cases of contaminated bins in 2016. By redesigning and automating its operation, the council has delivered annual administrative savings of just over £25,000, a total saving over five years of more than £125,000 for this one process. The table below illustrates how the process was handled prior to redesign, what the redesign involved and how the service is delivered today.

“We've chosen to retire one of the small 7.5 tonne refuse collection vehicles as part of the forthcoming round review. We currently have one vehicle operated from our main depot and two from a depot in the North but we are looking at getting rid of the vehicle that's in the main depot and rostering crew to cover the residual work with the remaining vehicles.”

James Atthews, Project Manager

Before	Redesign	After
Driver hand fills a paper form, preventing vehicle from moving	Business analysis	Operative pushes a couple of icons on their tablet
Paper form returned to office Following day – cases are typed up	Process re-imagining	Website, customer services, and the cleansing service updated in real time
Weekly bespoke warning and enforcement letters	Databases/processes/forms Integrations/website	Automated enforcement emails
Administration overhead and failure demand created	User testing and refinement during which project teams sat in the cabs with crew	Minimal administration
Over 20 hours admin per week		Under 2 hours admin per week

Non-financial benefits

In line with Scarborough's focus on staff development the project team is keen to highlight that they have all learnt new skills during the project, including, for example, the opportunity to present at a high level at LGA conferences. They feel that the project has been a very positive experience for all those involved.

Staff roles are now more productive and satisfaction in general has risen across customer services, back-office administration

and refuse crews according to both staff surveys and one-to-one reviews.

Drivers and crews are also confident that the council is protecting them from both fraudulent insurance claims and unjustified complaints with full recording of operations data.

Reductions in fleet management time, costs and route optimisation have delivered green benefits. Whilst CO₂ levels have not been monitored it is reasonable to equate a reduction in mileage with a reduction in CO₂ from the fleet's activity.

Residents have less need to contact the council, meaning less customer waiting time, and a shift in customer behaviour has been delivered with the use of the cheaper online self-service channels. Customers can also now see real-time updates such as 'There are no reported incidents for this collection from the crew so we will treat this incident as a missed collection' on the website.

Consequently, there has been a 50 per cent increase in the number of compliments received about the refuse and recycling service.

Back-office and service performance is now visible to all involved with delivery through new dashboards of continuously updated data and cases.

Closer and more timely communication with citizens has also helped to deliver behavioural change towards correct recycling and waste practices. This has helped the council to deliver an improvement against waste targets, to enforce policy, and to move the green agenda in the borough forward.

The in-cab system and data have allowed the council to plan its rounds more effectively and it now has a better understanding of its seasonality and how best to meet peaks in demand.

"The In-Cab system is a way of communicating directly with the bin lorry and one of the advantages is that it can become very efficient – you can use technology to identify which bin lorry is closest to the reported missing bin, so they can quickly manoeuvre rather than get back to the depot, find out all the missed bins and send out people again – but actually in real time those problems can be identified and addressed.

"It also means with the added use of video technology we can say you reported your bin was missed, but here's a photograph of your street at 6:30 am and your bin wasn't out. We'll collect it this time but next time you'll be charged for collection."

Jim Dillon, Chief Executive

"With this programme James (the programme manager) is trying to get as much as he can out of it – and in achieving this he is making cash savings for this borough. He's saving us time, he's saving us money and that means that he and his lads are having a better time.

"When it first went live there were fears that 'there's a spy in the cab - they're going to watch us all the time'. But now that the system is bedded in they're thinking 'they're making sure that we are safe – making sure that what we are doing is right'."

Councillor Bill Chatt, Cabinet member, Housing, Public Health, Sustainability and Environmental Services

Challenges

A key challenge experienced by the project was the failure of hard-drives within the in-cab units that were provided. This was resolved with supplier, WebAspx, and its own supply chain. This put the project back by one week.

One ongoing challenge to the project has been device reliability in real-life conditions. For example, operatives keep hitting the screen in specific areas if the response is slow and this has resulted in broken screens which have to be quickly replaced. To remedy this a number of extra devices are available and can be swapped into operation while devices are repaired.

Cleansing operatives initially declined to consistently use the tablet devices. However, this was successfully remedied by further staff engagement and training 'on the job' – such that the crews are now enthusiastic about the benefits of the in-cab units.

An additional project challenge was the risk of key staff leaving the service and loss of the knowledge and impetus to see the entire process through. This was flagged early on in the project as a risk to management and was mitigated with a focus on encouraging cooperative working and knowledge sharing across the back office.

Key learning points

Having clear guidelines on how the service will respond to certain situations significantly helps when implementing a new system. At the start of this project guidelines were set that would dictate what the council would do under every circumstance. For example, if a bin is missed, there is snow or contamination, what would happen next to resolve the issue. This means that the processes within Firmstep and the in-cab system operate exactly as the council wishes them to.

Clean data is essential, but do not underestimate the work required to deliver this. If you do not have data that is accurate then the system will not work and benefits will not be realised. When you have 50 bins on one street and your data shows only 45 then you are at a loss straight away.

Use of the UPRN from the council's Land and Property Gazetteer has knock-on benefits in terms of data use across the council. Having a golden record of properties can, for example, enable rapid handling of Data Protection Act subject access requests.

Successful user engagement depends on using the right tools and language for people. For example, a whiteboard version of a Kanban board – a visual system for managing and improving work as it moves through a process – was used in the depot to log issues and actions in a format that was transparent, visible to all

“James as the project manager is responsible for all the vehicles and all the operatives so at the end of each day when the drivers come in there's a white board which they can update – and they'll actually report anything that's wrong. James has his column on that board where he updates it with how he has responded to it and what the fix has been – so everybody can see what is happening and the drivers and operatives are engaged throughout. It's effectively a practical way to do a Kanban board down at the depot – for the operatives to use in a way that appeals and works for them.”

Jeff Crowe, Project Assurance / Analyst

and easily understood – and resulted in positive rates of project progress.

Identifying positive and committed officers is also essential in delivering the new system. Scarborough believes that it managed to deliver more than anticipated, and more quickly, by doing this.

Build a good relationship with the suppliers. This proved essential when issues were discovered with the in-cab hardware and enabled swift resolution.

Engaging with the LGA is a very useful undertaking and helpful with project delivery and benefits realisation. It gave the team an extra set of eyes and another prompt and challenge in delivery by enabling the creation of a project assurance role.

Creating a 'joined-up' approach to stakeholder management and engagement is essential. This should extend to engaging anybody who is involved in the project, at any point – making everybody feel valued and capturing their knowledge and expertise in order to ensure that the project can achieve as much as possible.

The project has evidenced that if you fix the back-office process it is much easier to build a new online form for the citizen that provides a better experience for citizens and enables both significant cuts in interactions and the ability to give customers more information about service delivery. Moving forward, the approach to service redesign will be to fix the back office before fixing the front end.

As this project is supported by the chief executive the project team is keen to share learnings and knowledge with other councils regionally. It will produce an information pack for other councils, in line with those created from other recent transformation projects in Scarborough.

There is always more that can be done in user research and to act on feedback to optimise the user experience at all stages of implementation.

Finally, Christmas is a hopeless period for projects due to public and staff holidays and winter illnesses.

Next steps

The project team has been looking at using GOV.UK Notify to communicate with people who sign up to the service about revised collection services and seasonal changes to their bin collection days. This is possible now that the in-cab system and process redesign has been completed and will enable email and SMS communication with service users.

This capability will be particularly useful following the round review in June 2019 and any subsequent changes to schedules. Notify provides a set number of free text messages for each service area, adequate for the anticipated volume in cleansing, and the team is looking to integrate this capability ahead of the round review.

Trade waste collections are to be added to the in-cab system. Transformation of the commercial waste service has already generated significant additional income for the council – in the region of £600,000 – and expectations are that the addition of the in-cab system will further boost efficiency.

Close working with the in-cab supplier, Webaspx, has led to the council testing new developments. For example, Scarborough is testing a new TomTom device in the vehicle cabs. If successful, this will significantly reduce ongoing costs as the consumer device is significantly cheaper than the current tablet device in use.

Experience in the use of Firmstep means that online forms, relating to other council services and processes, can be made available to self-service users. Uptake of 58 per cent for missed

bin reports strongly demonstrates the benefit and need for channel choice and for all council services to be offered online.

Ongoing service improvement will further refine and integrate related processes in cleansing services. Immediate next steps include:

- continuing improvements to the database
- integrating current stand-alone systems such as medical bin services
- highlighting the presence of a large family or other elements that make households different to the norm.

Meanwhile, the council intends that this system will act as a corporate data set, holding information specific to refuse, recycling, garden waste and clinical waste collections. This information is held against the UPRN so that it can be transferred or referenced by other services as required with the ultimate aim of creating a golden record system within the council.

“As more services are changed, transformed and improved we look at the feedback we are getting and see how we can further improve to make them more effective for the customer. We’ll also be working with the service to ensure we don’t miss marketing opportunities such as our annual council and billing letters to put messages out and to get customers online.”

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Contact for further information

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