

Wigan Council: Shaping demand through engagement and insight

Context

Wigan Council have successfully dealt with a funding gap of £100 million since 2010, and are facing a further gap of £60 million over the next three years.

Wigan's approach to managing the funding gap has been to design a new relationship between the Council and residents based on shared responsibility and locally known as "The Deal". In the wider context of "The Deal", Wigan has pursued several initiatives to manage demand and change residents' behaviours.

Objective

The Deal is an informal agreement between the council and everyone who lives or works in Wigan to work together to create a better borough. The rationale for creating "The Deal" is to change the behaviour of the Council and residents to be able to deliver high quality outcomes for local people, whilst at the same time delivering on the required savings. The Deal frames and facilitates the conversation between the Council and residents about what is possible.

Wigan Council has committed to a series of pledges such as freezing Council Tax in return for residents and businesses playing their part by using online services, being healthy and active and getting involved in the community. The Deal is framed in terms of intrinsic motivation, incentives and reciprocity.

From the Council's perspective, the aims and principles of "The Deal" are to:

- encourage behaviour change
- focus on people and communities
- encourage a two-way conversation
- indicate a consistent message about the Council and what it stands for

Figure 1. "The Deal" between Wigan Council and the Community



Vital to the role out of The Deal across the Council and the Community has been the application of intelligence to:

- Predicting demand – by understanding resident' service utilisation to prevent or reduce demand using principles of The Deal
- Applying behavioural insight and nudge tactics – understanding residents' behaviours, and the best ways to communicate with them to change their relationship with the Local Authority

In addition, Wigan Council has taken a comprehensive approach to making it easier and simpler for Wigan residents to interact with the Council over digital channels by developing and launching:

- *MyAccount* - a new personalised customer account to access a range of council services online
- *Report It* - enabling residents to report a variety of environmental issues online and via a smartphone app.

Approach

Asset Based Approach

In 2011 Wigan set out on a journey of reform, initially across Adult Social Care, but which now underpins the transformation of public services in the Borough. This approach aims to fundamentally shift from community and client dependence on traditional services to facilitating independence and self-reliance.

This approach focuses upon supporting our workforce to have a different conversation with residents to better understand individual assets, recognising strengths, gifts and talents and to focus upon what people enjoy doing and their strengths rather than their needs and problems. Staff have been trained in ethnographic principles to challenge pre-conceptions and empower them to get to the root cause of the problem. There has also been a focus on connecting to and building community capacity to respond to needs, this has included; mapping and utilisation of community assets, development of community hubs and micro enterprises, the use of new technology and a step change in volunteering. Two of these approaches, the Community Investment Fund and Deal in Action are outlined below.

Community engagement

Wigan Council has established an investment fund to grow community capacity and support local innovation. This is a key component of the Deal and a new relationship with residents and communities. This has seen £5m invested over three years supporting over 100 community organisations, from small grass root community groups to big ideas.

One example is Greenslate Farm, who received investment funding to develop a 30 acre care farm, where they grow fruit and vegetables, raise livestock, create woodland products, hold workshops and sell their own produce direct to the community. They offer the opportunity for people to get involved with all aspects of the day-to-day running of the farm and accept referrals from Adult Social Care, healthcare professionals and self-referrals. They offer varying levels of supported placements depending upon need and are able to design a bespoke package to suit individual needs. Greenslate farm have also successfully secured funding from Public Health England and the Recovery Partnership to support people to address substance misuse. This demonstrates how the investment fund has resulted in wider money being attracted into the borough; this already stands at £1.5million and continues to grow. To find out more visit <http://greenslatefarm.org.uk/>

To ensure that the Council understand the needs and priorities of different areas, the Council has created a rolling programme of community engagement activities called “The Deal in Action”. This brings senior council officers together with other local public service providers and local residents in a week of action in a locality.

The Deal in Action is a dynamic programme that engages residents, builds community capacity and encourages behaviour change. A range of activities are undertaken during the week from CPR training for the community to community litter picks and bulb planting.

An important part of the week is the “Have Your Say” sessions between senior managers and local people, which enable the council to hear about local community priorities and tailor services to align with these needs.

The week of action also enables community groups and organisations to promote the work they do. There are great things happening in communities all over the borough and the Deal in Action provides an opportunity to showcase them. Local residents know their own communities better than anyone and the Deal in Action provides opportunities for them to take ownership of where they live and be part of making their area better. Residents who attend the have your say session with the leader of the council, and chief executive are able to have a different conversation, to talk about local issues and opportunities to work together.

The evening is split into two halves, the first half is an interactive session where residents have the chance to engage with staff from Wigan Council, agencies from across the partnership and groups local to that area. The second half of the evening is an open session where residents are able to talk about what matters most to them and influence service delivery.

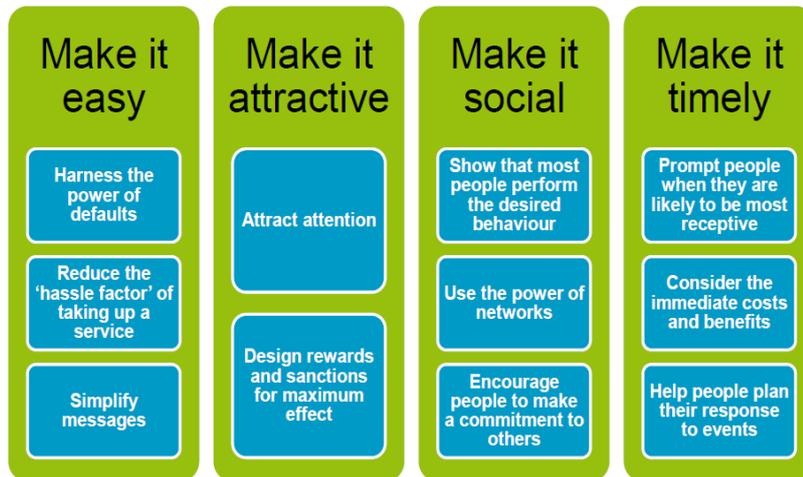
The legacy of the Deal in Action is important to ensuring that the energy and enthusiasm is sustained. For example in areas that the Deal in Action has visited, a number of new volunteers have been recruited and new groups have been formed to sustain improvements to the local area.

Employing Behavioural Insights

Wigan’s behaviour change programme is a major dimension of “the Deal”, and applies the principles of behavioural economics to services including council tax, housing benefit, planning, parking and children and family social care.

Wigan has employed the “EAST” framework for applying behavioural insights to transform the way they communicate with residents, summarised by the diagram below.

Figure 2. The “EAST” Framework for Applying Behavioural Insights

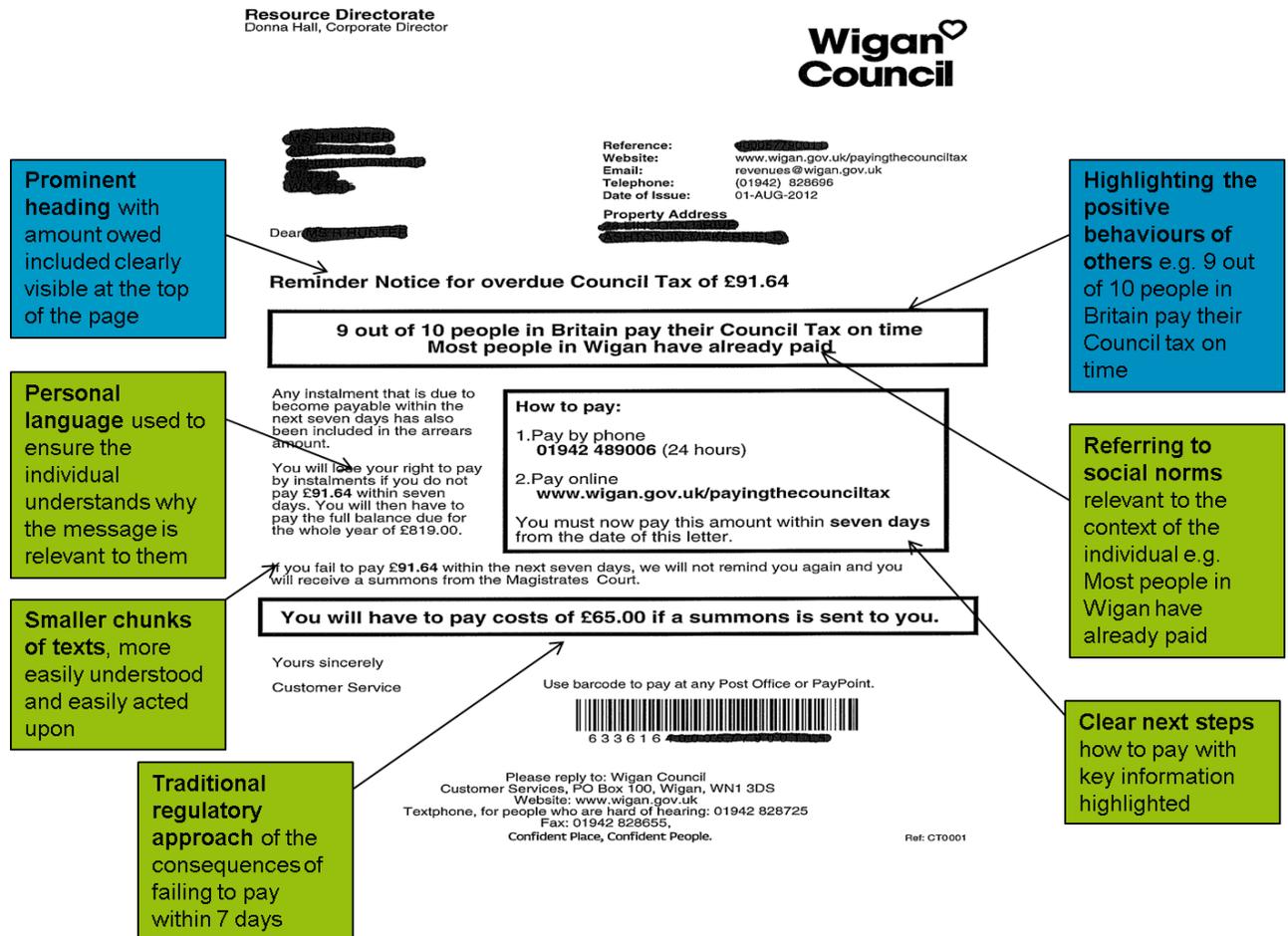


Improving Communication

Wigan's newly redesigned council tax reminders incorporates several of these techniques, including:

- Highlighting the positive behaviours of others
- Referring to social norms
- Using personal language
- Outlining clear next steps

Figure 3. Wigan's New Council Tax Reminder



Prominent heading with amount owed included clearly visible at the top of the page

Highlighting the positive behaviours of others e.g. 9 out of 10 people in Britain pay their Council tax on time

Personal language used to ensure the individual understands why the message is relevant to them

Referring to social norms relevant to the context of the individual e.g. Most people in Wigan have already paid

Smaller chunks of texts, more easily understood and easily acted upon

Clear next steps how to pay with key information highlighted

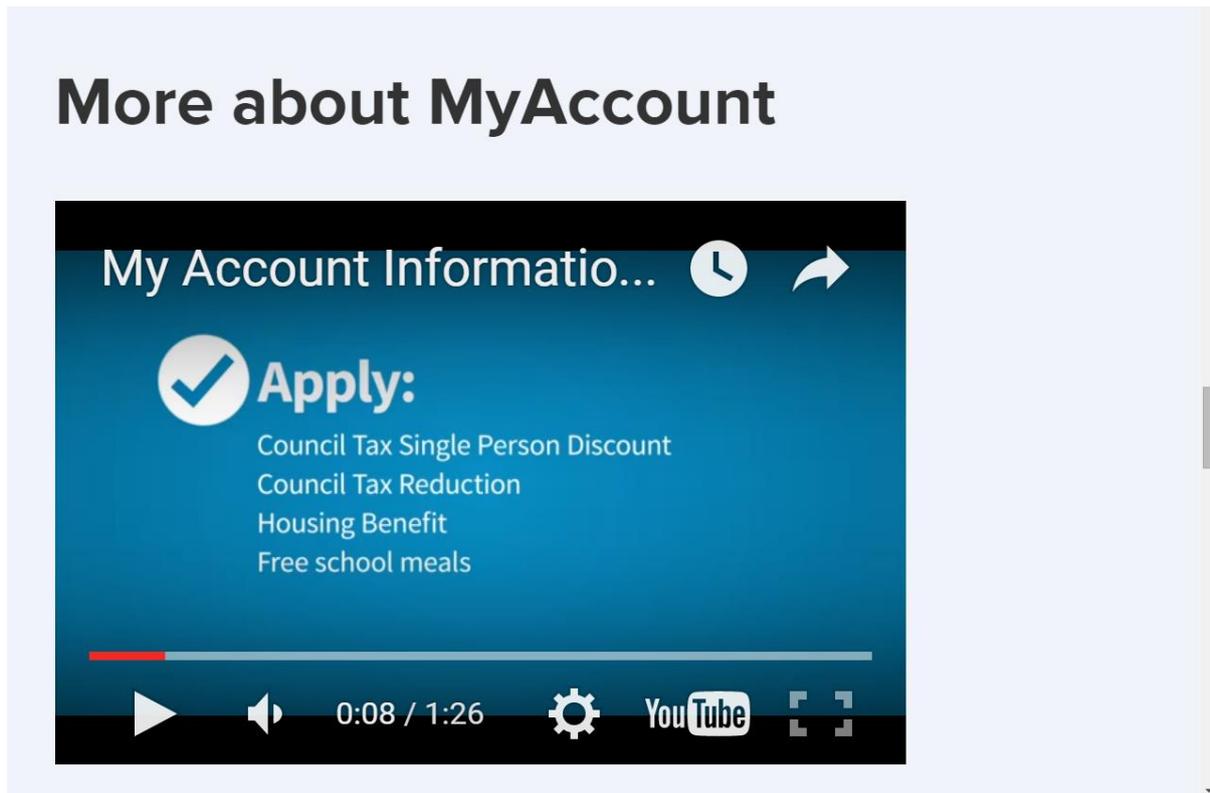
Traditional regulatory approach of the consequences of failing to pay within 7 days

Following the success of the trial, Wigan have rolled out their approach to the service and are monitoring the results.

Moving people online

Wigan Council has launched *MyAccount*, to encourage take-up on online channels by simplifying residents' access to a range of services. *MyAccount* has been designed with ease-of-use in mind, residents can open an account in less than two minutes and Wigan have produced an "explainer" video to show residents how to do this.

Figure 4. MyAccount Explainer Video



Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/XX0AxernUbl>

MyAccount offers residents access to the following services:

- Council Tax – residents can view their details, set up a direct debit, make payments, apply for discounts and amend address details online
- Housing Benefit - residents can apply for Housing Benefit or free school meals and complete a change of circumstances online
- Housing rents - Wigan and Leigh Homes tenants can move over from their current My Council service to view rent statements and make payments
- Report environmental problems - such as graffiti or fly tipping
- Registrar services - residents can book appointments to register a birth, death, marriage, civil partnership and book wedding and other ceremonies, order copy certificates
- Apply for parking and visitor permits.

Report It



Alongside MyAccount, Wigan have also launched a new *Report It* app which enabled residents to both report, and track the Council's response to, the following issues:

- Litter bins that need emptying, litter problems, fly tipping and abandoned bins
- Graffiti
- Dog fouling
- Broken glass or spillages on roads
- Needles on public land
- Pollution and smoke or fumes
- Dead animals.

Further development is now taking place to integrate a range of other environmental issues such as potholes and highways issues.

Outcomes

Community Investment Fund

A Cost-Benefit Analysis of the £5 million the Council has invested so far suggested that for every £1 the Council invests, they gain £1.48 in benefits – so far this has amounted to a return of £2.4 million worth of social, fiscal and economic benefits. .

In addition to these benefits the projects that the fund has supported have brought match funding of £1.5 million in to the Borough.

Asset Based Approach

This asset based approach has resulted in projected savings of £2 million per annum across Adult Services alone.

Improving Communication

Wigan sent newly re-designed Reminder Notices to 1,000 residents with unpaid Council Tax. Based on this trial, there was a 10% increase in earlier payments received, £8,000 in earlier cash flow. This method could potentially help over 5000 residents over the course of a year and prevent over 700 cases going to the bailiffs. The increase in earlier payments could potentially equate to an increase in earlier cash flow of £590,000 over the course of a year.

Moving People Online

MyAccount was launched in March 2014 and now has over 40,000 registered users. The aim is to increase the levels of self-service transactions online, costing an average 15 pence per transaction, shifting customers away from more expensive telephony and face-to-face channels (according to SOCITM with an approximate cost of £2.83 and £8.62 per transaction). Since the implementation of the online services we are starting to see a gradual reduction in telephone calls across waste services and Council Tax. We have most effectively demonstrated the channel shift in Registration Services, where there has been a 40 per cent reduction in phone calls from customers as the use of online bookings and payments has increased.

We now receive an average 200 reports per month via Report It with the assumption that these would have previously been reported via other channels or not at all.

We are now starting to roll out webchat across services which will also provide efficiency savings longer term.

Next Steps

Wigan are rolling out the third phase of their Community Engagement Fund, and applying their lessons from their re-design of the outbound communication to other services.

Wigan are also developing a risk stratification tool in collaboration with local health partners which will enable them to predict who is likely to be a future user of services with the intention to intervene preventatively to maintain people's independence and lessen demand.

Contact Details:

Kathryn Rees
Service Manager Programmes and Partnerships
K.Rees@wigan.gov.uk
Wigan Council