

Apply behavioural insight to manage demand across Wealden District Council

Context

The Wealden District (WD) is situated in East Sussex covering some 323 square miles, making it the largest district in the county and it is an area which is home to 151,029 people.

Half the population live in five main towns: Crowborough; Uckfield; Heathfield; Hailsham; and Polegate. The remainder of the population live in villages and hamlets scattered throughout the district (Wealden District Council, 2014). This dispersed population has a major bearing on the nature of the challenges the District faces.

Like all Councils, Wealden District has experienced funding pressures and achieved cumulative savings of £14m between 2010 and 2015.

Objective

Wealden District has applied behavioural insights to manage demand across a range and variety of different service areas. The initiatives outlined below range from road safety to complaint handling, and from collecting rent arrears to responsible dog ownership.

Approach

Road Safety and Young Male Drivers

More people are killed or seriously injured on the roads in the Wealden District of East Sussex than any other District in Sussex. Wealden also has one of the worst road safety records in the South East region. Serious road crashes in the Wealden District are 63% higher than the national average.

When WD analysed accident data to gain insight into the causes, it became clear that young male drivers make up the main group of road users who are at most risk. Given this demographic, the Council decided to take a social marketing approach to the problem.

WD then conducted additional research with young male drivers, aged 17 to 19 years, to gain their perspective on road safety and driving behaviour. The research involved the use of semi-structured interviews, focus groups and a self-completed



questionnaire. This generated a body of new knowledge and insight into the experience and driving behaviours of young male drivers.

Contributory factors to serious road crashes in Wealden for the 17-19 age group:

17 - 19 year old male drivers	All drivers
Travelling too fast for the conditions	Failed to look properly
Learner or inexperienced driver	Failed to judge the other persons path or speed
Loss of control	Travelling too fast for the conditions
Careless, reckless or in a hurry	Careless, reckless or in a hurry

The research identified four groups of male drivers:

- 28.5% could be classed as non-risk takers.
- 47% were calculated risk takers - thinking things through before taking any risks
- 18.5 % frequent risk takers
- 6% high risk takers - only enforcement will do anything about them.

The results of the research and the literature review indicated that campaigns based upon the outcomes of crashes and people being seriously injured may *not* have the desired effect. The young people interviewed commonly reported that the crashes and injuries featured at the centre of these campaigns as deterrents –“happening to others, not them”. Hence, they had less effect of these drivers than hoped.

Instead, the insight suggested that a road safety campaign using social marketing would be most effective if focused on:

- the 18.5% of young drivers that the research identified as frequent risk takers
- the social inconvenience that young male drivers would suffer if they were to lose their driving licence.

A multi-agency action group comprising the District and County Councils, the Police, Fire and Rescue Services and Safer Communities and Youth Development teams designed a series of interventions based on the three E's: education; engineering; and enforcement.



The campaign has been branded with the strap line: 'We're keeping an eye on you'. This was assessed by a focus group of young males to be: 'menacing'; 'creepy'; and 'made them feel uncomfortable'. The behavioural research tells us that if people believe others are watching us, then we will behave more virtuously.

The campaign material started to appear on roadsides in the week before Christmas – these new messages were posted over the weekend of 19th and 20th December 2015. The initial focus has been on not drinking and driving, which tied in with the annual Christmas drink drive campaigns and raising the fear of being caught, by pointing out the



fact that unmarked police vehicles operate in the area. The roadside posters will be changed regularly with different messages focusing on the major causes of serious crashes. An evaluation of the project is on-going and it is too early at this stage to calculate the impact.

Handling Complaints

Wealden District Council aims to provide good quality services on every occasion but sometimes things can go wrong.

The complaint procedure is intended to deal with specific situations such as serious mistakes, prolonged delay or inefficiency. Once a complaint about a service is received it is acknowledged within one working day and the Council aims to reply fully within 10 working days. If the complaint cannot be resolved to the complainants satisfaction by the first investigation (Stage 1), they can ask for an independent Head of Service plus a Councillor to review how the complaint was dealt with, (Stage 2 in the complaint procedure).

The Council became concerned about the number of Stage 2 investigations and the time and resource that this was taking up, and sought to take steps to prevent costly escalation. Behavioural insights were employed to the way the complaints procedure is communicated to the public and the content of the procedure. The default position was changed and suggestions of norms were used.

The results of the interventions are shown in the table below and show a marked and sustained reduction in both stage 1 complaints and stage 2 complaints.

Year	Numbers of complaints dealt with at Stage 1	Number of complaints requested to be taken to Stage 2
2012 / 2013	72	16
2013 / 2014*	48	2
2014 / 2015	47	0

*The interventions were introduced at the beginning of April 2013.

The interventions listed above, including the use of behavioural insights, has helped to reduce the number of level 2 complaints from 16 to zero. In addition to delivering a better customer experience, this equates to an annual saving, in investigation time, of over £10,000 per year.

The reduction in level 2 complaints has saved the Council around £10,000 per year.

Responsible Dog Ownership

Since the beginning of 2014 a number of posters have been designed to promote responsible dog ownership. WD disseminate these via vets, pet shops and parish and town councils. The design and wording has been guided by behavioural insights. The strap-line: 'Bag it and Bin it, most people in this area do', uses the concept of 'Norms' and the wider look has been designed to appeal to people's emotions.



The design principles have also been carried through to the public notices in key areas of the District, which also highlight the fines. A thirty-week trial of the signs

and their effect was undertaken in one area of Hailsham which resulted in a 66% sustained reduction in fouling.

Rent Arrears

Some of the Council's tenants, for a variety of reasons, fall behind with their rent. If unchecked this can turn from a relatively minor issue to a major one, eventually resulting in the possibility of those tenants losing their home. The Council also lose out on the income from that unpaid rent as well as incur additional costs for pursuing tenants in arrears to secure payment.

Many of the issues can be resolved if early contact is made with the housing officers, rather than the problem being left and worsening. If someone falls behind with their rent then a standard letter is sent to them highlighting that they have not paid their rent and requesting contact be made. If no contact is made then a second letter is sent and so the process continues; there is a whole series of letters that are sent in sequence and each one notching up the importance of the matter.

Before planning any changes it was made clear that the behaviour which needed to be changed was for the tenant in arrears to make contact with the Council, so WD could see how to help in the best way possible. The first and subsequent standard letters were re-drafted.

The first letter, for the first time raised the importance and salience of the subject by highlighting that the tenant by not paying the rent was putting their home at risk. The letter was also simplified and pointed out that many people had found contacting the Council helpful (norms). The council refers to this as the *nudge* letter.

Prior to the letters being changed the average contact time between the first letter and contact was 46 days, and the most common second contact was letter number two! Now the average contact time has been reduced to 21 days and the most common second contact is by telephone.

Anecdotally, staff state that the banner ***PLEASE BE AWARE YOUR HOME IS AT RISK*** in red seems to be the thing that provokes a reaction, with many of the tenants quoting this from the letter - it is clearly jumping off the letter to them!

The nudge letters, along with other changes, have helped to reduce arrears by over £60,000 and have placed Wealden from being a poor performing LA for rent collection to an above average council.

Outcomes



As mentioned, the reduction in level 2 complaints has saved the Council around £10,000 per year. The nudge letters have contributed to a reduction in rent arrears of £60,000.

Organisational learning - In addition a half-day training course has been developed and delivered by the Principal Policy Advisor to selected staff at the Council as an introduction to the concepts of behavioural economics to encourage their interest, motivate them to identify areas for improvement and develop their expertise. This has generated a huge amount of interest and enthusiasm.

Next Steps

WDC are forming a working group with the ambulance, police, and fire service and work collaboratively to see how they can apply behavioural insight and social marketing to reduce demand. An initial areas of focus for the collaboration will be on reducing the number of falls among their older residents, as these incidents can have huge knock-on effects and many are preventable.

Contact details:

Dr Jeremy Leach
Principal Policy Advisor
Wealden District Council
Jeremy.Leach@wealden.gov.uk