

Transforming Colchester Borough Council through behaviour change

Background / Context

Like many local authorities, Colchester Borough Council (CBC) is implementing an organisation-wide transformation programme to help overcome a funding gap by saving £4 million between 2014 and 2017, and £2 million for each of the next two years. A major element is managing customer demand - both managing demand



- 'down', e.g. reducing in-person contact from customers and encouraging online transactions; and
- 'up' to support commercial activities by encouraging customers to use the Borough's income-generating services such as leisure.

Hence, managing demand through behaviour change has become a major tenet of CBC's approach to transformation. Fundamental to CBC's approach has been the recognition that to change customers' behaviour the organisation must first develop new behaviours itself.

Objective

Up-to £1million of the £4million total savings that CBC is seeking to realise between 2014 and 2017 will come from re-designing customer journeys and influencing customer behaviour.

Approach

CBC is seeking to embed behaviour change and demand management techniques as "business-as-usual" across the organisation. Their approach has been to evaluate and capture the learning arising from a series of pilot projects employing behavioural insight techniques to develop a behaviour change "framework" for practitioners which is now being applied more widely. The learning generated by these pilots has been developed into staff training geared towards cultivating the capacity of the organisation to employ and apply behavioural insights to service transformation.

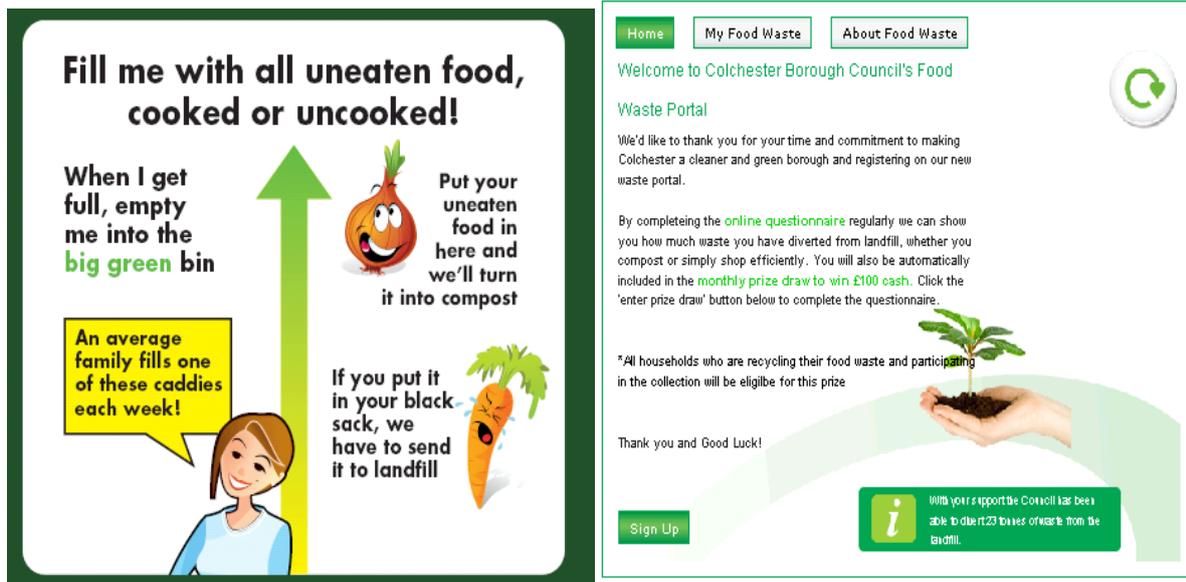
Reducing Food Waste

One of these initial projects which piloted the application of behaviour insights things was funded by DEFRA, and addresses the problem of food waste with the aim of encouraging greater recycling and reducing demand for landfill.

The project tested three different interventions on three groups drawn from a random sample of 7,100 households. The first group were encouraged to use an online portal to measure and incentivise recycling. The second group had the message on

their food caddy redesigned and simplified. The third group acted as the control group and had no intervention.

The group of residents with new messaging on their caddy increased their use of the food caddy and reduced the amount of food placed in their black bags by nearly a quarter of a kilogram per week. In contrast, there was next to no change in those offered the online portal or the control group. Applied to all households, this approach can generate a potential saving of £66,736.



Encouraging Early Debt Recovery

Another pilot project sought to increase payments from residents claiming Council Tax Support, who had not previously had to pay council tax and had fallen into arrears in their new payment requirement, Encouraging early recovery reduces the cost and time of enforcement and the numbers of people sent to court and receiving bailiff action.

Again, CBC tested three approaches with three different groups of people who were in arrears. One group received a phone call to encourage payment; the second received a text message encouraging payment, while the control group received no intervention.

The results were clear: where text messages were sent to 277 people owing council tax on 18 September, the average amount paid per head was almost £10 more than the control group, at £50.73. Two-thirds of the group receiving a text message made a payment, 11% more than in the control group - equating to £2,070 more in payments from the minor intervention of sending texts costing £13.85 (a return of 150 times the cost of the texts). The approach was adopted as business-as-usual by the service in April 2015, and in the first six month generated £60,643 in additional payments.

In addition to raising additional revenue, by reducing the number of cases that reach final stage, CBC avoid the costs associated with processing court action and chasing these debts.

Developing a Practitioners Framework

Based on the experience of these projects, CBC have developed a framework for applying behavioural change principles to successfully manage demand - and sought to mainstream these approaches across the organisation.

The framework comprises:

- leadership from the top - an executive director is responsible for leading a senior team to develop major projects and promote the framework
- championing behaviour change techniques - champions are appointed in each service area to work encourage staff to apply the principles
- raising awareness – by initially having senior speakers from the DWP and Cabinet Office present at workshops to staff and councillors
- promoting a project management methodology where insight and engagement precede intervention, and measurement and evaluation are built into projects from the start.
- ongoing training, support and mentoring for champions and users including
 - customer insight and involvement,
 - the use of 'nudge' techniques for in-service changes
 - customer involvement in process redesign and change
 - data management and analysis
 - measurement frameworks, analysis and evaluation.

Developing Capacity

A dedicated Behaviour Change Officer is responsible for working with staff to encourage the use of behaviour change and support trials and their measurement, as well as running the training. Behaviour change training is available to all and is offered at three levels:

- Senior manager and manager updates around behaviour change, results from trials and the importance of using behaviour change
- Practitioner training for those who might benefit from using behaviour change techniques as part of their role. The training lasts approximately three hours, involves staff developing ideas for projects, and includes:
 - an introduction to behaviour change ideas and the MINDSPACE tool,
 - national examples of behaviour change work, methodologies to follow for measurement and running behaviour change trials, and
 - practical exercises to ensure that staff have understood these elements
- Front line staff training – focused on techniques and wording to use that encourage behaviour change, such as encouraging customers to repeat a

commitment back when staff allocate appointments, or making sure the customer 'drives' the PC when staff do assisted self-serve work

Driving Channel Shift

CBC has ambitious goals to shift customer contact from phone and face-to-face to the web. Shifting demand to lower cost channels can be a win-win for both council and customer. As part of this effort, CBC re-designed and simplified their website – reducing the number of pages from 4,000 to just over 1,000 and simplifying their online forms.

However, CBC recognise the need to go beyond offering services online to enabling people to use them. Developing the capacity of staff across the organisation to support customers to shift channels has been a critical part of CBC's approach.

CBC recognise that to change customers behaviour they first have to change the organisation's digital skills profile.

Hence CBC has:

- set-up the first go-online partnership in the East of England, comprising over 30 partners from the public and private sector including Barclays, Lloyds and Argos. The partnership runs 'digital bazaar' days where customers can drop in for online support and advice
- trained over 30 Colchester 'Online Champions' comprising local councillors, borough staff and volunteers who provide support out in the community to residents who are seeking to go online
- developed and delivered staff digital skills training to ensure CBC has the right skills within the organisation to support customers to change and promote digital inclusion in their lives outside of work. The training is not limited to skills and learning outcomes include:
 - registering for an email accounts
 - understanding and using free WiFi
 - searching online, and using price comparison sites
 - staying safe online
 - creating, saving and printing a document



These initiatives have helped CBC to increase the number of online transactions by 89% between April 2015, and reduce reduced face-to-face contact at Colchester's Community Hub between June 2014 and June 2015.

Outcomes

Following the success of the six pilot projects including addressing food waste and debt recovery, CBC have mainstreamed demand management through behavioural insight and service re-design across the organisation

In so doing, CBC estimates that these techniques have helped them save £300,000 in 2013-2014, £400,000 during 2014-2015 with a further £300,000 projected for 2015-2016.

Challenges & Lessons Identified

Customers have responded very positively to these changes. The major challenge they have faced is cultural change among staff and encouraging people to adopt behaviour change techniques and measurement of projects, particularly as it was identified as an area of limited expertise early on

By encouraging staff to help customers to help themselves, frontline CBC staff have been able to spend more time with those customer who do need help to access services.

Next steps

CBC is seeking to cease accepting cash payments, by reducing the number of services accepting cash payments –thereby directing people to pay online.

The behaviour change team are working with the web team to encourage residents to report missed bins online, rather than by 'phone.

Contact Details

Cheryl Hughes / Mandy Jones

Customer Demand and Research

Colchester Borough Council

www.colchester.gov.uk

Tele: 01206 505390

Mob: 07572159431