



KIRKLEES MBC

Keeping services operational, whilst tackling huge financial pressures:

Maximising digital automation in channel shift, to free up resource for redeployment into recovery.

- 36 staff re-trained to participate in Recovery
- 50% of calls resulted in a payment
- £5m Aged Debt recovered within 3 years by a new dedicated team of 8
- £200k average collection, per team member, per annum
- 85% of address changes now submitted by citizens and landlords online

ABOUT KIRKLEES MBC

- Services 422,500 residents
- Based in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire
- Long-term requirement to save £152m

CONTEXT

Delivery of statutory functions in Kirklees was costing the council £270m, whilst non-statutory services accounted for an additional £87m. The council was faced with having to shrink non-statutory services to around £20m over the following few years.

There was no online capability for citizens to self-serve, so staff members had to deal with enquiries in person or over the phone, resulting in costly processing time.

Since many non-statutory services are preventative in nature, simply cutting them would not result in sustainable savings.

SOLUTION

Members decided the council needed to embark on a strategy to digitally transform and modernise the delivery of all services to its residents, in order to protect funding for non-statutory services.

The aim in Revenues: Shift services online and maximise automation to increase resources available for Recovery.

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Revenues had to shoulder a greater burden and achieve a new set of targets and challenges, when CTR and other changes meant that collection had become more difficult and the work associated with collection activities was rising significantly.

Steve Bird, Head of Welfare & Exchequer Services

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ACHIEVING SUCCESS FOR CITIZENS AND STAFF

Members were anxious about the impact on citizens, whilst staff displacement meant many people were concerned about jobs. There was uncertainty at how residents would react but, as Kirklees discovered: “Citizens were fine, so long as the process worked and was easy.”

A Project Board was created which covered all the areas affected as it was vital that they were included and empowered to agree and implement changes. The Project Board was single-minded in its determination to:

- Channel shift services online
- Make this the de facto method for service delivery
- Maximise and fully exploit the resulting automation to redeploy resources into higher priorities

Changing the culture with communications

To realise all the benefits of automation, the Project Board had to promote a change in attitudes and behaviour. A Communication Plan was developed to reassure members and brief staff.

The overall strategy and direction of the council was explained, with specific challenges and targets set for the Revenues department. The benefits to resident were highlighted so employees could understand and support the changes. It was emphasised there could be no exceptions and no passengers. Managers had to accept the principles and hold the line. Nobody could be permitted to bypass new service delivery methods.

Visits and training obtained buy-in from Partners and briefings continued after live running to ensure that those who felt out of their comfort zone could be supported and assisted to adapt. The Revenues department was at the forefront of this transformation and faced additional challenges. At the time of introduction, CTR changes meant residents had to pay a minimum of 28% of Council Tax.

This had already affected collection, provisions, and arrears. The council wished to reduce the burden of CTR as soon as it could, but any change would have to be funded and required the Revenues department to reverse trends that were heading in the wrong directions.

Revenues Digital transformation

The Revenues service would move all activities online and staff were trained to use web forms when dealing with calls. This would assist them to encourage citizens to serve themselves. Non-digital channels were monitored and progressively closed. Channel shift and back-office automation provided by webCAPTURE immediately freed up customer service and billing administration resources for reassignment into Recovery activities.

Revenues would pursue achievement of new, more challenging, targets and objectives:

- Achievement of a collection rate made more challenging by recent CTR changes
- Reduce provisions (which had doubled) back to normal levels within 3 years
- Substantially reduce aged arrears (which had risen to £19.5m) within 3 years
- Deploy webCAPTURE without delay, in 14 weeks, with Live running to coincide with annual billing, to maximise ROI

RESULTS

The project began on 19 December. Once testing was completed in February, staff keyed the backlog from the document management system into web forms which then automated the clearance of that backlog. Staff quickly became confident in encouraging residents to have a go themselves. By May, 85% of address changes were being submitted online, with around 75% being fully automated by webCAPTURE.

webCAPTURE delivered 'straight through' automation from web form to completed item. Staff were redeployed into targeted customer engagement with a focus on agreeing sustainable

1,203
address changes
automated in the
first week



18,000
transactions
submitted in the
first 23 weeks



85%
of address changes
submitted online
within 3 months



3/4
of address
changes were fully
automated



1 for 6
floor-walkers
replaced counter
staff to aid citizens



36
members of
staff retrained in
recovery activities



50%
of calls received
resulted in a
payment



8 ppl
a newly created
team, dedicated to
clearing aged debt



£5m in 3yrs
reducing aged debt
from £19.5, to
£14.5m



collection plans, in the knowledge that improving collection and reducing aged debt would both help to reduce the financial deficit and fund non-statutory services.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Clear instructions aid rapid adoption

Good publicity and communications helped encourage uptake. Annual bills explained the new ways to engage and old stationary, email addresses and general enquiry telephone numbers were withdrawn. Service point advertisements were removed and old payment methods no longer publicised. Service points were equipped with self-service terminals, manned by one person, to look after six citizens simultaneously. This facilitated a front-to-back office redeployment, via targeted internal recruitment.

Statistics were very important

"If you're closing channels, you need to understand what's happening."
Volumes of online transactions were tracked every week to ensure a steadily rising trend. Other channels were also reported, with deviations from a steadily declining trend investigated and, if necessary, fixed.

Automation provided the means to improve working practices and processes.
"These were changed to suit automation, not the other way round."

Cross-skilling and flexible working

The demarcation between Billing and Recovery was removed; staff were trained to work generically on the most important activities. All staff answered the telephone in any area, using web forms to capture information. Revenues quickly got on track to meet its Collection target.

Change in culture

Billing staff no longer checked 100% of everything. Low value housekeeping activities were discouraged and most writing out for further information ceased. A new working presumption was that the council will be charging and webCAPTURE with auto-indexing will trigger and prioritise interventions, which would happen only when the council stood to make a financial gain. The results of this approach were monitored and just one customer complaint was received from 50,000 bills despatched.

Steve Bird says it took 18 months to fully realise all the benefits of digital transformation in Revenues. But the early returns and results you get from webCAPTURE are hugely encouraging and these lend momentum to further changes.

ABOUT GOVTECH

Govtech is a trusted partner for its many UK local authority customers. As experts in digital process automation, we help councils to maximise returns on investments in online services, Customer Experience and Customer Relationship Management systems. Our hosted solutions integrate with all mainstream Revenues and Benefits systems and automate processing of online Revenues and Benefits transactions.

We track and monitor the automation rates, review these with customers and compare them with others. This helps you achieve more by freeing up skilled resources that are lost to manual checking and processing. As budgets tighten, demand and expectations grow and resources are stretched thinner, you're being asked to do more. Whether you use NEC Revenues & Benefits (previously known as Northgate), Capita or Civica, our end-to-end eCAPTURE and webCAPTURE digital process automation services will help you to bridge the gap.

All standout digital transformation success stories begin somewhere...

No matter what your starting point is, get in touch and our team will arrange an informal conversation to understand what improvements you want to make and why, explore ways digital process automation may be able to assist and, if you need it, provide help to write a business case based on achieving those goals.

hello@govtech.co.uk | [01285 659286](tel:01285659286) | www.govtech.co.uk



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