Tewkesbury Borough Council

Revenues and Benefits – Case Study

The brief

ICE Creates was commissioned to support the Revenues & Benefits team at Tewkesbury Borough Council to review the way they delivered their services in light of the national changes around welfare. The aim was to release capacity to focus on a more joined up approach around financial inclusion. Against a range of local and national performance targets, it was shown that the service was at bottom quartile levels and that staff were struggling to cope with a never-ending backlog and rising customer complaints.

The Council had already started to look at the way it could better support its aspiration to focus on the broader financial inclusion issues by working with a range of key partners, but needed to make significant efficiencies in the service through identifying improvements in systems and processes and identifying cashable savings to release sufficient capacity to develop this work. The Council had struggled to deliver this on its own and needed external help to drive the improvement programme, and ICE provided this critical support.

Methodology

The review concentrated on the 2 separate workstreams, with representatives from the teams, managers and support services coming together from across the authority to form a core team.

These 2 main work streams were benefits processing and revenues administration (to include both Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates).

Using the principles of lean systems thinking by directly involving the staff, the project looked to deliver the following outcomes:

- Improve the effectiveness of the revenues process to meet the purpose of issuing the right bill, to the right customer at the right time - therefore increasing collection rates

- Reduce the end-to-end times for processing benefit claims and changes in circumstances

- Improve the processes to achieve a better customer experience

- Reduce levels of handoff, duplication and other waste within the processes
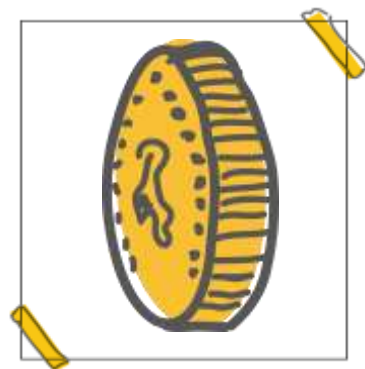
This work was based on the ICE model for service transformation and it began with a period - Establish - designed to set up the engagement cleanly by building relationships across the service and with wider stakeholders to ensure the most value from the review.

During the Explore stage, a team representing the whole of the service, plus some of the wider support services, was brought together to create a current state map. This visual representation of the in-scope work included the demands placed on the service by its customers, the flow of work and data to show the performance of the systems, along with details of the system conditions that had an effect on the current service design.

The Envisage stage allowed the team to present these findings back to the wider stakeholder group at a vision workshop. It was at this event that areas for improvement were agreed and buy-in from across the organisation was gained. This buy-in was vital to ensure that any changes would be sustained in the future.

The areas for improvement included:

- Working to get complete applications in first time

- Improving the cleanliness of information around change of circumstances

- Reducing the number of Council Tax bills issued incorrectly

- Issuing bills to new properties with provisional bandings

There then followed the Experiment stage, where changes were trialled and measured against the data collected in Explore to understand the level of benefits that could be achieved. Once the concepts of the experiments were tried, amended and proven, the team went on to Embed the changes and incorporate them as business as usual.

As a result of this work, Tewkesbury Borough Council were national finalists in the IRRV performance awards in two categories - 'Revenues Team of the Year' and 'Benefits Team of the Year' - making them one of the top five organisations in this field.

The benefits achieved to date include:

- Elimination of backlog of work
- New claims – reduction in end-to-end time from 37 days to 9 days
- Change of circumstances – reduction in end-to-end processing time from 25 days to 8 days
- Significant increase in benefits subsidy achieved
- 80% reduction in failure demand into the benefits service
- 75% increase in revenues customers having their accounts administered at the point of contact
- 60% reduction in incorrect ad-hoc bills produced
- Creation of a motivated and empowered workforce open to change and with the capacity to build wider partnerships
- Improved staff communications with daily, self-managed team 'huddles' to promote ownership and efficiency
- Capacity release to undertake a more proactive approach
- Identified cashable savings of £150,000 –with non-cashable additional capacity at a further £100,000
- Skills transfer whereby staff are supporting other services in their transformation journeys

For more information please contact:

Rachel Stamp
rachel.stamp@icecreates.com
07979 906 065

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