

Customer Services Council Tax Behaviour Change Implementation Plan

MEDWAY COUNCIL

Intervention Number 1

Reduce the prominence of telephone numbers on correspondence and the Council website.

Objective

To encourage customers to self serve to reduce the amount of staff time spent on avoidable council tax queries thereby freeing up staff to support customers with more complex needs.

Rationale

- The Council currently provides two different telephone numbers, both of which are heavily prominent on the website and outward bound customer correspondence.
- Where a telephone number does not add value, or direct customers to carry out a specific action, it could be removed to reduce unnecessary customer contact.
- The Council has a significant amount of information on its web pages as well as an online Direct Debit application form.
- By ensuring that the different online services are clearly structured and presented, the Council can save customers two separate transactions of going onto the Council website and then contacting the Council by phone.
- Online contact is significantly cheaper for the Council than more traditional channels of Phone and Face to Face. By promoting online to manage customer demand, the Council has the opportunity to make savings and free up staff time for customers with complex needs.

Implementation process

In order to implement this change, the Council will need to:

- Review all outward bound communications including letters and leaflets and remove, where possible, non essential phone numbers.
- Review the website content and remove, where possible, non essential phone numbers.
- Support the customer to self serve by ensuring that there is guidance in place for the customer to be able to carry out their transaction online, so that this does not generate additional contact.
 - For example, ensure that phone numbers are replaced with the web link to the online Direct Debit application or the FAQ section of the Council tax web pages.

Impact Measurement process

The interventions need to be in place by 1st November 2013 and the monitoring period will last for three calendar months until the end of January 2014.

The number of phone contacts should be measured consistently. The Council should use the same methodology it used to record contacts in the period November - January last year and submit this in the same form to BDO as the original contact data. This will then allow a fair comparison to show the actual change compared to last year and allow us to understand the potential financial and non financial benefits.

Number of Phone Contacts per Month		
November 2012	December 2012	January 2013
7,208	5,364	8,770
November 2013 Total	December 2013 Total	January 2014 Total
XXX	XXX	XXX

Intervention Number 2

Remove the prominence of email addresses on outward bound council tax correspondence and on the council tax pages of the website.

Objective

To decrease the number of incoming free form email contacts.

Rationale

- The channel of email is resource intensive and cost heavy.
- The Council has an extensive series of online enquiry forms which are less resource intensive for the Council because they capture and collate customer information in a consistent fashion.
- There is currently a low uptake of online forms and a high level of email contact. This presents the Council with the opportunity to reduce freeform email contact by shifting some of this contact to online forms, without impacting on the quality of customer experience.

Implementation process

In order to implement this change, the Council will need to:

- Review all outward bound communications including letters and leaflets and remove the council tax email address “ctax@medway.gov.uk”.
- Review the website content and remove the council tax email address “ctax@medway.gov.uk”.
- Ensure that the website clearly signposts the online forms section so that customers have a viable online self-serve alternative.

Impact Measurement process

The interventions need to be in place by 1st November 2013 and the monitoring period will last for three calendar months until the end of January 2014.

The number of email contacts should be measured consistently. The Council should use the same methodology it used to record contacts in the period November - January last year and submit this in the same form to BDO as the original contact data. This will then allow a fair comparison to show the actual change compared to last year and allow us to understand the potential financial and non financial benefits.

Number of Email Contacts per Month		
November 2012	December 2012	January 2013
1,957	1,265	1,853
November 2013 Total	December 2013 Total	January 2014 Total
XXX	XXX	XXX

Intervention Number 3

Simplify the content, structure and layout of:

- a) Council tax web pages.
- b) Outward bound correspondence.

The Council will focus on removing technical terminology and promoting preferred payment channels through positive reinforcement.

Objective

To increase number of online contact (proportionate to a decrease in other forms of enquiry) and promote payment types of online self serve and Direct Debit.

Rationale

- The Council has identified that there are currently multiple website pages with information about Council tax which do not logically direct the customer towards key payment information.
 - E.g. the Council currently uses the council tax payment page to direct the customer to all available payment options, as opposed to prioritising the payment options which are most convenient for the customer and the Council.
- By restructuring the website page layout and consolidating the number of pages, the Council can promote their preferred contact channels and ensure there is no duplication.
- Some of the content of Medway's outbound correspondence is constrained by the need to include statutory information, however there is still scope to reduce the amount of choice given to the customer over the different ways they can pay:
 - The number of different payment options can be reduced to promote the Council's preferred payment methods and the Council can use language of positive reinforcement.
 - Language of positive reinforcement can be used to influence customer behaviour and drive customers to online self serve.

Implementation process

- Review the number, content, style and structure of council tax web pages to ensure that the customer journey process is smooth, logical to guide the customer use online payment and Direct Debit options.
 - E.g. Structure the payment pages to put the preferred payment methods on a primary page with a sub page which contains the least preferred payment methods such as post.
 - E.g. Highlight the ease of online transactions and suggesting that this will save the customer time and save the Council money.
- The Council has already printed several of its letters and leaflets for next year however, where possible, the Council can review the content and layout of future correspondence to ensure that technical language is made more customer friendly.
 - E.g. Ensure that the actions which the customer needs to take are clearly outlined and separate from statutory, technical language.
- For both the website and outward bound correspondence, the Council can review the language and messaging to employ behaviour change techniques such as thanking the customer for paying online, or telling the customer how much their preferred payment method is saving the Council.
- If possible, create a shortened link for Council tax online payments e.g. www.medway.gov.uk/council-tax.

Impact Measurement process

The interventions need to be in place by 1st November 2013 and the monitoring period will last for three calendar months until the end of January 2014.

The number of online contacts and the number of online self serve payments should be measured consistently. The Council should use the same methodology it used to record contacts and payments in the period November - January last year and submit this in the same form to BDO as the original payment and

contact data. This will then allow a fair comparison to show the actual change compared to last year and allow us to understand the potential financial and non financial benefits.

Number of Online Contacts per Month		
November 2012	December 2012	January 2013
325	185	322
November 2013 Total	December 2013 Total	January 2014 Total
XXX	XXX	XXX

Number of Online Self-Serve Payments per Month		
November 2012	December 2012	January 2013
2,600	2,579	2,752
November 2013 Total	December 2013 Total	January 2014 Total
XXX	XXX	XXX

Intervention Number 4

Change phone scripting for both the automated payment line and contact centre scripts to use the behaviour change technique of positive reinforcement.

Objective

To increase the proportion of Direct Debit payments.

Rationale

- By thanking customers at the beginning of the automated payment message for using the self serve method, the Council is more likely to retain the customer on the automated call.
- Instead of asking the customer “how would you like to pay”, the Council can suggest setting up a Direct Debit, which will direct the customer towards the most convenient method of payment.
- Direct Debit is the most efficient way for the Council to receive council tax payments. Increasing the proportion of Direct Debit payments provides the Council with the opportunity to save money by decreasing the proportion of alternative and higher cost payment methods.

Implementation process

- Change the scripting around the automated payment messaging to thank customers for choosing the self serve method and explain that this saves the Council money.
- Place the thank you message at the beginning of the automated scripting so that it is the first thing the customer hears.
- Provide training for contact centre staff to change the scripting around payments to promote Direct Debit as the primary form of payment.
- Provide training to the contact centre staff to suggest online as an alternative method for future contact, suggesting that this saves the Council money.

Impact Measurement process

The interventions need to be in place by 1st November 2013 and the monitoring period will last for three calendar months until the end of January 2014.

The number of Direct Debit payments should be measured consistently. The Council should use the same methodology it used to record payments in the period November - January last year and submit this in the same form to BDO as the original payment data. This will then allow a fair comparison to show the actual change compared to last year and allow us to understand the potential financial and non financial benefits.

Number of Online Direct Debit Payments per Month		
November 2012	December 2012	January 2013
3,168	2,962	3,411
November 2013 Total	December 2013 Total	January 2014 Total
XXX	XXX	XXX

Intervention Number 5

Send a Direct Debit application form in the post with every cheque receipt sent out.

Objective

To decrease the number of payments received via post and therefore reduce processing time.

Rationale

- Customers who are making payments via post may be doing so out of habit and could be happy to set up a Direct Debit.
- By explaining the savings for the Council and providing the customer with the means to set this up easily (i.e. providing a postal copy of the form), the Council may be able to convert these customers to an alternative self serve payment method and save money.

Implementation process

- Include a printed Direct Debit form in the letter with the cheque receipt sent to customers who have paid their council tax via cheque or postal order.
- Develop a short generic letter which can be included alongside the Direct Debit form. This letter should thank the customer, explain the difference in processing cost between the cheque and the Direct Debit over the course of the year, and ask the customer if they would be willing to help save the customer money by switching to Direct Debit.

Impact Measurement process

The interventions need to be in place by 1st November 2013 and the monitoring period will last for three calendar months until the end of January 2014.

The number of Direct Debit payments should be measured consistently. The Council should use the same methodology it used to record payments in the period November - January last year and submit this in the same form to BDO as the original payment data. This will then allow a fair comparison to show the actual change compared to last year and allow us to understand the potential financial and non financial benefits.

Number of Post Payments per Month		
November 2012	December 2012	January 2013
586	399	648
November 2013 Total	December 2013 Total	January 2014 Total
XXX	XXX	XXX