

LIFT platform and Better Off Calculator case study

Challenge

Referrals for welfare support have increased dramatically in Folkestone and Hythe. The council needed a streamlined way to distribute Discretionary Housing Payments and other welfare benefits to residents

Solution

The team used LIFT to identify households and the Better Off Calculator to assess affordability levels before targeting financial support

Impact

£288,890 worth of DHP were made to **393 households**

£246,771 worth of FSP were made to **493 households**. An average of over **£500 per household**

Following **successful distribution of £221,358** in Household Support Fund payments, the council was allocated an **additional £50,000 in funding**

Using a data-led approach to distribute funds and improve social inclusion

The challenge of reaching disengaged community groups

The number of households referred for welfare support from Folkestone and Hythe District Council has significantly increased. With the cost of living crisis escalating, this trend is expected to continue.

A key aspect of Folkestone and Hythe District Council's work is the allocation of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and financial support payments for council tax. In order to support residents holistically, a proactive approach was needed to identify and contact eligible households.

With a focus on social inclusion, a highly-targeted approach was required to reach out to community groups who, typically, would either struggle to engage with the council or be reluctant to do so, such as armed forces veterans.

Data-led insights help the team to provide tailored support

The Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) platform is used by the council to identify potentially vulnerable residents in need of financial support or help with claiming benefits.

The council's frontline staff, together with a network of partners such as the Money Advice Network and the Illegal Money Lending team, can then offer residents expert guidance to help tackle specific challenges.

The Better Off Calculator is also used by Folkestone and Hythe to assess residents' affordability levels, and once identified as eligible, to award DHP and Financial Support Payments (FSP). The calculator can also identify residents who might be eligible for additional benefits that they may not already be getting.

The use of the software allows the council to take a 'tell-us-once' approach towards helping residents resolve their financial difficulties, and streamlining the process for both residents and the council.

Over £900,000 in welfare benefits distributed in one financial year

Folkestone and Hythe District Council's services have been strengthened by data-led insights that mean a more tailored approach to meeting the specific needs of households can be taken.

Communication with community groups has been greatly enhanced. Using data-led targeting, the team has engaged with previously reticent community groups.

The team has:

- Attended community events for armed forces veterans and speaking with them to identify the support required
- Taken proactive steps to offer the support identified; such as housing advice
- Identified digital exclusion within the Nepalese community
- Supplied laptops to remove this element of social exclusion, and delivered "train the trainer" workshops so that digital skills can be taught to the wider Nepalese community

As well as tackling social inclusion, Folkestone and Hythe has a dedicated welfare team that has identified support available for the borough's residents, and maximised claims for any eligible benefits.

Using LIFT, the team has achieved incredible results during the 2021/22 financial year:

- £246,771 of financial support payments (FSP) were made to 493 customers
- £288,890 of discretionary housing payments (DHP) were made to 393 customers
- £221,358 was allocated to the household support fund
- Because of the team's success, an additional allocation of £50,000 was added to the original funding
- £137,158 was allocated to 986 people with children for food, clothing and bedding.

Folkestone and Hythe's work on improving social inclusion has seen them rewarded at the IRRV Awards 2022.

Winning the Benefits/Welfare Reform Team of the Year award, and being highly commended in the Excellence in Social Inclusion category, shows the impact of a data-led approach towards improving outcomes.

"Due to the holistic approach we take with all our customers who look for our help, we are **excelling in social inclusion** and working more and more with external partners.

"Off the back of these successes we now train people on welfare, how to run a data led campaign using LIFT, and how to use the Better Off Calculator.

Jane Worrell
Revenues and Benefits Senior Specialist
Folkestone and Hythe

0330 088 9242
hello@policyinpractice.co.uk
www.policyinpractice.co.uk