

## South Norfolk and Broadland Council streamline support for applications with Better Off Apply

### Better Off Apply case study

#### At a glance

Two councils merge back office functions

Opportunity to create one joint process to apply for benefits

Over 273,600 residents living in South Norfolk and Broadland

£114 million in unclaimed support

Better Off Apply introduced to streamline applications

### Creating one route for local benefits assessment as two councils merge their back office functions

Since 2020 South Norfolk (SNC) and Broadland District Councils (BDC) have been supported by a shared officer team. Together, they manage key services for over 273,600 residents, including the administration of Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Support (CTS).

The councils aimed to create a joint benefits application process to simplify benefits applications. To help residents and ease the administrative load on their team, they needed an efficient system to direct residents to support.

By January 2023, the two councils were at different stages in digitising their benefits applications. BDC had an online calculator that helped residents claim support easily and staff assess applications quickly. However, this was to be discontinued as the council transitioned to a joint IT system.

In contrast, SNC had no online benefits application, causing more work for residents and staff. Internal data showed that SNC received 7% more calls than BDC, with two thirds of calls about benefits forms.

Both councils saw the importance of implementing a new benefits application system, knowing that removing online forms would be a setback.

At the time, both councils were using Policy in Practice's Better Off Calculator to help residents identify the support they were eligible for and submit applications directly. To build on this, the Partnership and Innovation Programme Manager approached Policy in Practice to expand the Better Off approach, aiming to streamline applications for HB and CTS.



“We are starting to grow procedures to use this as part of all the work we do with our vulnerable customers... It’s helping us grow our model of providing a more holistic service, and to stop working in silos.”

Lindsay Sayer, South Norfolk and Broadland Council

## **Simplified benefits applications with Better Off Apply have reduced costs and administration work**

The council took a two-step approach to launching Better Off Apply

### **Step 1: Integrating Better Off Apply into the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support process**

Policy in Practice worked with South Norfolk and Broadland councils to customise Better Off Apply which was launched after three months of development.

Better Off Apply is an innovative system combining eligibility checks and applications for national and local benefits into one form. Now, Better Off Calculator users can easily apply for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support while doing a benefits check.

When users in SNC or BDC enter their postcode they see the option to apply for local support and give consent to share their data. With two clicks and a few questions, customers finish their application in minutes.

### **Step 2: Promoting Better Off Apply with the Help Hub**

The council uses a Help Hub model, bringing together the Benefits, Homelessness, Housing Standards and Health and Wellbeing teams.

The Help Hub team launched campaigns to promote the new calculator. They distributed leaflets and included QR codes in their annual billing encouraging residents to use the online tool. For officers, the calculator became a core resource, helping them quickly determine residents’ benefit eligibility.

### **Impact: Better Off Apply saves time for customers and officers, streamlining support applications**

Early results of Better Off Apply are positive. By streamlining applications it has removed barriers that kept eligible residents from claiming support.

The system also reduced unnecessary phone calls, as customers no longer needed to contact the council for help with applications.

Better Off Apply also enabled collaboration in the Help Hub, allowing officers to work across teams to see the most appropriate way to help customers without making them reapply for support.

Watch Lindsay Sayer, South Norfolk and Broadland Council, talking about this work on a free to view webinar at [policyinpractice.co.uk/events](https://policyinpractice.co.uk/events)

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