

Direct Debit is the Purr-fect way for Warwick District Council to cut costs

A two pronged marketing campaign by Warwick District Council (DC) to promote Direct Debit as the best method for residents to pay council tax has meant now 70 per cent of people pay using this quick and simple option. As well as helping the authority to significantly reduce costs, it has also secured Warwick top spot in Bacs' Direct Debit Challenge League.

Steven Marshall, Administration and Control Manager, said: "In comparison with alternative options, Direct Debit is a significantly cheaper method for us to collect council tax. Therefore we are always keen to suggest it as a payment option in all communication with our customers. To increase awareness of Direct Debit and make it as attractive as possible for people to pay this way we introduced three key initiatives through a two stage marketing campaign."

Attention grabbing marketing

Warwick's first step was to create a charitable incentive so for each new household that chose to pay by Direct Debit, Warwick donated £3 to local charities. To publicise this, the authority produced a simple A4 promotional leaflet that was sent out to around 22,000 residents not currently paying by Direct Debit. At the end of the campaign the council had signed up more than 1,500 new Direct Debit payers for council tax, and also donated £2,916 to two local charitable causes.

Steven Marshall, Administration and Control Manager, continued: "The Direct Debit Challenge League has been a real motivator for our campaign activity. It was a real incentive to be able to benchmark ourselves against similar authorities and really drove us see where there was scope for improvement. Following the initial campaign, we were really enthused by the results and so wanted to build on our success by introducing a second phase of activity. Looking at the fantastic success that Bassetlaw have achieved, we chose to partner with them to use their Creature Comforts campaign."

Direct Debit offers greater flexibility

Warwick District Council also syndicated an existing, and very successful, promotional campaign developed by Bassetlaw District Council to highlight the convenience of Direct Debit. Using straplines like "Direct Debit – the Purr-fect Way to Pay" and "P-P-P Pick Up a Direct Debit", the local authority also highlighted the option for those who chose Direct Debit to select from a wide variety of payment dates and frequency. Instead of the standard payment date on the 5th of the month, Direct Debit payers could chose from five other payments dates throughout the month, enabling residents to fit their payments to suit their financial circumstances – such as timing the payment following payday.

Benchmarking is key to success

Steven concluded: "The Direct Debit Challenge League gave us the opportunity to see, in real-time, that our campaigns were having an impact on the number of people choosing to pay by Direct Debit – demonstrating the tangible benefit of our proactive approach. To have won our league is the icing on the cake and recognition of the effort that the team has put in to promote Direct Debit across the district. We look forward to participating in the forthcoming season and hope we can mirror the success that we have already achieved."