CIVICA

Edinburgh City Council increases council tax collection year on year

EDINBVRGH
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

Accurate council tax billing based on up-to-date resident data boosts collection rates and improves the customer experience.

Handling a seasonal spike in workload

Keeping residents' details up to date to ensure accuracy of council tax bills is a challenge for any large city as people move in, move away, or change address within the city. In Edinburgh, with approximately 250,000 households, the issue is compounded, as around 20,000 students arrive every September to take up their university places.

"Processing students' information in good time causes a significant spike in our workload," says Brian Murphy, Transactions Team Manager at Edinburgh City Council. "It can be a challenge to manage such a sharp increase in incoming mail as many students are eligible to claim exemptions or discounts."

Several years ago, faced with a backlog of approximately 10,000 council tax items, Edinburgh City Council decided to look for external resource to help clear it. Following a procurement exercise the council chose Civica OnDemand to provide an experienced team able to efficiently process address changes, applications for discounts and exemptions, and general correspondence.

Outcomes

▶ Backlog of 10,000 council tax items cleared by Civica OnDemand in conjunction with the council's back office team

▶ Flexible, scalable resourcing to meet Edinburgh's changing needs

▶ Productivity target to handle 23 items per person per day consistently met or exceeded

▶ Year-on-year improvements in council tax collection through more accurate billing

▶ Edinburgh City Council shortlisted for Revenues Team of the Year in the IRRV Performance Awards 2018

250,000
households

10,000
item backlog cleared

23+
items processed per person per day

> "Our council tax collection rate has increased year on year, and we're on track to beat our target again. There's no doubt that Civica OnDemand has helped to put us in that position."
>
> **Brian Murphy,**
> Transactions Team Manager, Edinburgh City Council

With scalable Civica OnDemand resources working alongside Edinburgh's own team, the council has cleared its backlog, maintained quality and productivity and, importantly, improved council tax collection rates through more accurate billing.

Scalable resources to meet fluctuating needs

With secure access to Edinburgh's processing systems, a seven-member Civica OnDemand team worked remotely to help the council clear the backlog. To prevent another backlog forming, a smaller Civica team continued supporting the council while it focused on recruiting and training new members of staff.

"The fact that it's quick and easy to scale the Civica OnDemand team means we can ensure it always matches our needs," says Murphy. "Civica understands the pressures and constraints of local government, and is always helpful and accommodating."

Several members of the Civica team have been with Edinburgh since the start of the contract, adding expertise in the council's own policies to their general knowledge of council tax legislation. "Working with the same core team over the years has provided us with invaluable consistency," says Murphy.

Maximising income tax collection

Keeping on top of changes to residents' information means that a much higher proportion of the council tax bills issued by Edinburgh are correct, which helps the council to maximise the amount of council tax income it collects. This is particularly important in the current landscape where funding is limited and councils are under pressure to bring in as much income as possible.

"As well as increasing our collection rate, accurate billing provides a better customer experience," says Murphy.

When accurate bills are issued at the start of the financial year, residents can spread the amount over more months, which makes payment easier and more likely. The council also has more chance of collecting the tax from short-term tenants if accurate bills are sent out before they move away. And for Edinburgh's student population, prompt application of the correct discounts and exemptions avoids the hassle of overcharging them initially and refunding them later.

"Our collection rate has increased year on year, and we're on track to beat our target again," says Murphy. "There's no doubt that Civica OnDemand has helped to put us in that position."

Quality and productivity delivered

The council's quality assurance process reveals that the Civica OnDemand team matches the council's own officers for accuracy. In addition, the Civica team meets — and often exceeds — its target for each person to process 23 items in a standard working day.

"The big difference between Civica OnDemand and other providers we've used in the past is that every member of the Civica team has at least five years' experience of council tax processing," says Murphy. "So they're able to be very productive and deliver high-quality work right from the start."

In 2018 Edinburgh City Council was shortlisted for Revenues Team of the Year in the IRRV Performance Awards. "Civica played a role in us achieving that distinction by focusing on collection rates and clearing our backlog," says Murphy.

As the council built its revenues team up to strength, it gradually scaled back its reliance on Civica OnDemand. "We're now ready to try going it alone," says Murphy. "But if we need flexible, capable resources again in the future, we know we can always count on Civica."

> "The big difference between Civica OnDemand and other providers we've used is that every member of the team has at least five years' experience. So they're very productive and deliver high-quality work right from the start."
>
> **Brian Murphy,**
> Transactions Team Manager, Edinburgh City Council