# Project Evaluation Report

Coventry City Council

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**To:  West Midlands Combined Authority – Homelessness Project Team**

**Date: 26th January 2024**

**Subject:  Targeted Prevention – Advice and Guidance – Project Evaluation Report**

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**1      Purpose of the report**

1.1     To provide an update to West Midlands Combined Authority - Homelessness Project Team, on the outcomes of the Targeted Prevention – Advice and Guidance Project, and the use of social media as a means of engaging households in homelessness prevention earlier, as well as to outline the successes and challenges of this project and the utility it may have for future expansion.

**2      Background**

2.1     As a Local Authority, Coventry City Council wants to encourage households to approach us at the stage they are threatened with homelessness, rather than when they are already homeless. This would give us more time to work with them to prevent, rather than relieve, homelessness, averting distress for applicants and costs for temporary accommodation.

2.2     The opportunity arose in March 2023 for the service to apply for funding of £9,995 to run a small-scale, proof of concept project in partnership with the WMCA to evaluate new approaches to delivering early advice and intervention to help prevent homelessness. Coventry City Council had previously trialled different approaches, such as delivering leaflets and flyers to target those at risk of homelessness, however this had not been successful.

2.3     The service applied for the funding to run a prototype project to establish whether social media offered a stronger avenue to raise awareness of the assistance available, by using the in-built analytics of social media platforms to target households with potentially low financial resilience, single-parent households etc. and streamline the process through which they can access the service (an advert graphic leading to a short survey).

**3      Methodology**

3.1     Rather than purely looking to evaluate whether there was any value in using social media, the aim of the project was also to establish what factors of advertising in this way would impact its effectiveness. For instance, would certain platforms attract more responses than others, would different graphic/advert designs have fewer or more responses?

3.2     To establish answers to these questions, two graphics were created: one being aesthetically bright and colourful, the other being urgent and eye-catching:

**Graphic 1:**



**Graphic 2:**



3.3    3 platforms were selected for use: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. In order to gather a fair sample, each of the graphics above would be run for two weeks on each platform, with the number of responses being compared to demonstrate which was most effective.

3.4    The adverts would be run with the minimum possible reach on each platform to keep the process a small-scale pilot, with a view to increase user reach at a later stage with the best performing graphic on the best performing platform, staying up for 4 weeks rather than 2.

**4     Results**

4.1    The following is a visual breakdown of the results of the campaign:

**Total Responses (by platform):**

| 26 Responses total | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Facebook** | **Twitter** | **Instagram** |
| 21 | 4 | 1 |

**First Campaigns - Engagement/Reach (Facebook & Twitter):**

| Facebook Stats | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Graphic 1 | | | |
| Impressions | Reach | Clicks | Responses |
| 9921 | 3808 | 56 | 4 |
| Graphic 2 | | | |
| Impressions | Reach | Clicks | Responses |
| 9183 | 3765 | 54 | 4 |

| Twitter Stats | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Graphic 1 | | | |
| Impressions | Reach | Clicks | Responses |
| N/A | 74,763 | 150 | 2 |
| Graphic 2 | | | |
| Impressions | Reach | Clicks | Responses |
| N/A | 171,788 | 309 | 2 |

**Case Outcomes:**

| Outcomes | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| No Contact/ No Further Action | Pre-existing case | Owed a statutory Prevention Duty - successfully prevented | Pre-Prevention advice given |
| 8 | 4 | 5 | 9 |

## 5 Challenges

5.1 As with any project, multiple challenges arose throughout the process both foreseen and unforeseen. These can largely be summarised under the following:

- Lack of Engagement and Communication

5.2 Throughout the process there was a significant discrepancy in the number of people who would click the link on the graphic, and the number of people that would complete the survey. As well as this, on occasion people that filled in the survey would not respond to attempts to contact them to book an assessment. While a certain level of drop-off in contact is to be expected, it demonstrated that this issue remains despite people voluntarily taking the initiative to fill in the survey and access assistance themselves, which it was hoped may make follow-through engagement more likely.

- Unique platform policies and lack of control

5.3 The initial plan as above was to run the advert on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. An issue arose when running the advert on Instagram, as it was taken down after briefly being up due to the advertisement being deemed a 'social or political cause.' Interestingly, Instagram is owned and operated by Meta, the same company that owns Facebook, but running the ad on Facebook was issue-free despite the policies being the same. TikTok was explored as an alternative, however Coventry City Council corporate communications team do not currently support the use of this platform. Realistically, these issues stem from the platforms themselves being the property of private companies and is an unavoidable consequence of advertising and performing outreach through external sources.

5.4 Another example of this is a lack of control over the advertisements themselves. It was important for our purposes to be able to determine a clear correlation between money spent, total reach, and number of clicks and uses of the link. However, we were advised it is not possible to disable the 'share' option on the advert, as adverts on social media are designed with the intention of virality as their end goal. This meant that the adverts could (and would) be shared, making it not possible to track with precision if all respondents came from naturally seeing the advert due to the platform's analytics, or due to having it shared with them by a follower or friend.

- Opportunities for feedback and refinement

5.5  As above, the drop-off from link-clicks to survey responses was large. The Communications Team suggested this is the norm and to be expected, but part of the initial aim of the project was to refine the survey based on critique. Those that responded to the survey when asked had no constructive notes to offer on their experience, with the truly valuable insight (users who clicked the link and then decided not to complete the survey) being out of reach. This meant our key audience for feedback was unavailable to us.

## 6 Successes

- Valid responses from previously unidentified households genuinely threatened with homelessness.

6.1 A concern at the outset of the project was the possibility that households completing the survey may not be threatened with homelessness, instead electing to call for irrelevant issues. In reality, almost all respondents had legitimate housing concerns, often having been given a valid eviction notice or having developed rent arrears that required clearing. This demonstrates that firstly, the graphics and survey were effective in filtering out households without legitimate housing issues, and secondly, the reliance on social media analytics to target relevant households was effective in doing so.

- High number of successes and pre-prevention advice given

6.2 On a few occasions, households had valid concerns, having been advised by their landlords of their intentions to evict or sell but had not been provided with anything formal to trigger a Prevention Duty. These cases were provided with pre-prevention advice, and none have returned in the months since, demonstrating value in the project in terms of respondents averting evictions at an earlier stage by receiving advice from officers.

6.3 The number of successful Preventions also demonstrates the usefulness of the project and in general the approach of getting engagement from threatened households as quickly as possible. All 5 cases that were owed a Prevention Duty were successfully prevented from becoming homeless; a 100% record as opposed to the general service average at Prevention of around 50%. This of course is a small scale but gives very promising signs as to the effectiveness of this approach and the willingness to engage of the respondents, with none having entered Relief or Temporary Accommodation since approach.

- Final campaign success and value for spending

6.4 Below are the results from the final campaign, which ran on Facebook (the most successful platform) with graphic 1 (the most successful graphic), for 4 weeks as opposed to 2, with slightly higher spending:

| Facebook 2 Stats | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Graphic 1 | | | |
| Impressions | Reach | Clicks | Responses |
| 33,532 | 9,094 | 241 | 13 |

6.5 This demonstrates a potential for upscaling and consistency in responses as a result. More time and money resulted in more responses, demonstrating that the number of initial responses was not a one-off or unpredictable, but something that can be reliably replicated if we were to run such a campaign again in future, and can produce a predictable number of responses that would allow for control over the number of applicants we have capacity to take on through this method.

## 7 Budget/Cost

7.1 The project has been delivered within budget of £9,995 with social media fees accounting for around 15% of the overall spend. The remaining budget has been utilised to cover graphic design and resource costs associated with the project.

## 8 Conclusion

8.1 While some aspects of the project presented challenges as outlined above, this is largely to be expected with a new method of raising awareness such as this. The results of the project however demonstrate its usefulness, it is a relatively low-cost, low maintenance means of raising awareness of the service and attracting respondents, in a way that previous attempts at analogue advertising have been unable to offer.

8.2 If it were to be upscaled, the reality is it would likely require far greater maintenance and time commitment than this iteration, which was possible to be managed by myself alone, but the potential to do so is clear: 26 respondents, 14 of which required a Prevention Duty or relevant pre-prevention advice, with those requiring a Prevention Duty having wholly successful outcomes and no need to enter temporary accommodation or Relief. While we can only speculate, this ratio of success may not have been the case for these households had they had purely traditional means of presentation to the service available to them.

**Project Evaluation Report of: Housing & Homelessness - Manager**
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