Nottingham City Council: getting the figures right

Summary

Nottingham City Council carried out an innovative project producing population figures that excluded students living in the area. This resulted in more accurate figures and targets and new areas of need being identified.

Key learnings for other councils

- Sharing knowledge and information between organisations within the council can help provide better services and more efficient action.
- Representing information on a map may uncover new needs and new solutions.
- Using your in-house capabilities to tackle problems may uncover new priorities you didn't consider before.

Background to the council

Nottingham city has a population of 286,400 people. Nottingham also has on average more than 50,000 full-time students studying at its two universities.

In the 20th century, the main industries in Nottingham were textiles, tobacco, bicycles, pharmaceuticals and printing. However, Nottingham is progressively changing from an industrial city to one based largely on services.

In 1998 Nottingham was made a unitary authority.

Who was involved?

- Greater Nottingham Partnership
- Nottingham City Strategy Team
- Nottingham's universities
- The council's policy and information department.

The problems and how we tackled them

The City Strategy is a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) initiative aimed at reducing worklessness.

The challenge faced by Nottingham City Council was that, as part of the City Strategy, they needed accurate figures of benefit claimants. However, there was a local perception that high numbers of students were masking areas of real need.

Population figures traditionally include resident students. However, students do not typically claim benefits and therefore produced a skewed claimant rate for a given area.

Working with the city's two universities, Nottingham Trent University and the University of Nottingham, the council recalculated its population figures. This was done by combining the most recent population estimates with the student population numbers.

The team then mapped the results to show real-time population figures and recalculated claimant numbers according to this more realistic figure. The effect of student population numbers can be seen in the map below.

Without analysing the results through the use of mapping and local knowledge, the project could not have been attempted. Both of these facets provided a check on the results to ensure they were accurate.

Outcomes and impact

The results of the recalibration of the base population figures produced startling results. In one area, claimant levels were 26 per cent higher than previously thought. On average, claimant rates were 3.5 per cent higher.

The project combined innovative information sharing and analysis of issues from a geographical perspective. This approach resulted in citizens who had previously been invisible becoming visible to the council.

New priority areas were identified as a result of the project. These have been fed into the action plan for the City Strategy. Areas with dense pockets of need, previously obscured by high numbers of students, can now be identified.

The City Strategy sets out to engage local businesses and agencies within the city area to address the newly-identified areas of need. This means more efficient, effective targeting and service delivery for all wards within Nottingham City and areas within bordering authorities.

Next steps

As a result of this project, the council now has accurate base population figures which can be used in all future plans. By using these population figures in a whole array of initiatives planned by the council, more effective and efficient service delivery can be achieved.

Further information

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