

North East Lincolnshire Council

NELC introduces seamless Direct Debit payments for waste collections

PAYING FOR AN ANNUAL WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE

North East Lincolnshire Council provides a full range of local government services, including an annual chargeable garden waste service that operates between April and March. Today, more than 26,000 households recycle their garden waste each year.

It was vital for the council to offer the community efficient onboarding and payment options. A secure self-service portal from Capita allowed customers to pay the annual waste collection charge by PayPoint, debit or credit card. However, previous attempts to introduce Direct Debit payments had missed the crucial March deadline for capturing payments before the new service year begins.

THE PREFERRED CHOICE FOR COLLECTING RECURRING PAYMENTS

The council faced challenges in creating the right infrastructure for collecting Direct Debits. It had experienced issues with getting a Service User Number (SUN) and ensuring it was AUDDIS compliant which is mandatory for all new service users that submit directly to Bacs.

Carl Render, ICT Change and Information Manager at North East Lincolnshire Council, explains, "The council had twice missed the narrow window in March for introducing Direct Debits. However, working with the payment experts at Bottomline, we were able to successfully launch Direct Debit as a payment option for 2022. This is our preferred choice for collecting over 4,000 recurring annual payments as it is cost-effective for the council and offers simplicity and assurance for customers."

ROBUST, SECURE DIRECT DEBIT SIGN UP

The council writes to or emails all customers each year regarding the garden waste collection service. First time and returning customers simply visit the 'Sign up and Pay' section of the council's website.

Customers that wish to pay using Direct Debit are redirected to a Direct Debit mandate hosted on Pay360, an online portal from Capita, powered by Bottomline payments technology. Customers enter their account name, sort code and account number. Their bank account details and ownership are validated and verified to reduce the risk of a future Direct Debit collection failure.

"The portal is easy to use, robust and features the highest standards of security. This is important as we have to meet our GDPR commitments for collecting, storing and processing customer bank details," states Carl.



CUSTOMER OVERVIEW

North East Lincolnshire Council was formed in 1996. It provides a full range of local government services including Council Tax billing, libraries, social services, processing planning applications, waste collection and disposal to citizens of the borough. In 2021, it recycled more than 8,500 tonnes of garden waste into compost.

BENEFITS



Offers annual Direct Debit payment options for waste collections



Has created a seamless self-service payment service



Delivers a better experience to first-time and renewing customers



Enjoys a more cost-effective way of collecting recurring payments



Gains greater visibility over the payment lifecycle

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ABOUT BOTTOMLINE

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Once the customer has submitted the Direct Debit mandate, the portal generates the notification required for the Direct Debit Guarantee and confirms both payment and collection dates for the waste service.

For any customers that miss the deadline for setting up a Direct Debit in March, there is the option to use the portal to pay by a credit or debit card, and at the same time, set up a Direct Debit for the following year.

Carl comments, "In addition to offering customers a wider choice of payments, we have gained greater visibility over the payment lifecycle. We can detect anomalies such as where a customer has set up a Direct Debit as well using a one-off payment. This allows the council to be more proactive in resolving any exceptions and ensure we deliver a great customer experience."

NAVIGATING DIRECT DEBIT COMPLEXITIES

Carl describes the project's benefits, "The introduction of Direct Debits is an important step in increasing the number of customers that have an automated annual renewal. This is a key goal for the council as it minimises the risk of a late or failed payment and prevents any interruption to the waste collection service. It is also beneficial as Direct Debits have lower transaction costs than processing card payments.

Bottomline was instrumental in helping the council go live on time. They provided refresher training, and the implementation itself was relatively straightforward. Bottomline provided all the support, guidance and expertise to help us navigate the complexities of the Direct Debit world.

The team reassured us at every stage of the project, from kick-off to launch day, when they were on standby to assist with any exceptions. Everything went as planned, but it was useful to know help was just a call away. If we had missed the March deadline, we would have faced potential reputational impact, so I am extremely pleased we were able to introduce Direct Debits this year."

A MODEL FOR FUTURE SERVICE REQUESTS

The level of service has impressed Carl. He concludes, "The introduction of Direct Debits for waste collections is a model for other council services that want to introduce an efficient, seamless payment experience. We know that we can have experts on hand to support any future requirements with the same high level of professionalism and knowledge of the payments world.

Once we engaged with Bottomline, I can honestly say they went above and beyond when it came to our project. They were always flexible, accommodating and responsive to any of our questions or requests.

This was a time-critical project, and Bottomline's service ethos and attention to detail were vital in helping us to achieve our go-live target."



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