

Case study



Cheshire East Council saves money whilst implementing best practice consultations

Using NVivo and being systematic makes decision making clear and accountable, putting residents first

Summary

Cheshire East Council did a comparison of analyzing public consultation information using traditional methods vs. using NVivo software. It found not only could it save time and money, but improve the quality of consultations and create an auditable trail of processes too. It meant it could respond more effectively to residents' views.

"It's going to save you time."

Background

Cheshire East Council, like most councils, is seeing the need to do more and more consultations and public engagement to inform decision making. This puts pressure on research and consultation teams to do more, just at the time when there is increasing pressure to save money and reduce costs.

Cheshire East has a small team of five people managing public engagements and consultations, and it's not uncommon for staff to be running 6 such projects at any one time. Hence finding ways of working more efficiently was a priority for Phil Christian when he started investigating using NVivo to help his team. A trial was set up using a real set of consultation data to compare current analysis methodologies vs. using the best practice used in universities across the world.

The consultation

Cheshire East ran a consultation exercise around Social Care provision between 1st December 2014 and 25th January 2015. A consultation document was produced, which was promoted and distributed to care users and stakeholders.



They were then asked for their feedback. The response was 166 paper and online questionnaires completed. The council also ran 6 face-to-face discussion forums, with 160 people

"NVivo is great at capturing different sources of information"



coming along to express their views. Each forum comprised of smaller sub-groups within them, focussing on various themes and proposals. This resulted in a mixed array of feedback formats to analyze.

“Helps me be more professional as a researcher”

Lois Wilkinson, Business Intelligence Analyst, explains: “We had feedback in lots of different ways. Feedback from the questionnaire, from the discussion groups, also via letter, by phone and email. Somebody even wrote a poem.”

“With NVivo you can capture them all, just scan them in. You can even code an image. It gives you more flexibility in how you analyze different types of information whilst also keeping it all in one place.

So for transparency and audit purposes, it’s all there and it’s clear how you’ve interpreted what people have said. If anybody came and questioned you, you can stand behind your analysis.”

“It’s really effective in keeping things consistent but also clear and accountable. FOI requests take so much time but if you’ve got a system that you can interrogate easily it’s going to save you time.”

The trial involved analyzing all this information, over a 4 day period, by hand, using old methodologies and then doing the same analysis with NVivo.

“Before NVivo, if I got a letter I would read it and take out

points, but it was a separate thing from a questionnaire analyzed with spreadsheets. With NVivo, you can code everything in the same place and pull the results off together as one. So that’s really helpful.”

When asked what happens when she talks to colleagues in other councils about using NVivo Lois says, “They want to know if it saves time. Will it improve processes? Will it make things more consistent and transparent? I tell them, I think it actually will”



Benefits of using NVivo

- Saves time
- Robust and accountable research results
- Pulls different types of data together
- Aids consistency and fairness
- Transparent and auditable
- Allows effective response to residents

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