

# Testing approaches to behavioural science in London

Lisa Henry

15 March 2018

# Why am I standing between you and your lunch?



# What I plan to cover:

- Why we have invested time and money in behavioural science trials and pilots in London?
- What have those trials been about
- Headline results
- Lessons learnt along the way
- Transferability and the transferring of knowledge
- Our next steps in using behavioural science techniques

# Drivers and motivations

## Chief Executives' London Committee:

- Explore and experiment
- Find new and innovative ways to meet financial challenges
- Share experiences

## Capital Ambition:

- Spearheading ways to source and share innovation
- Investing in experimental approaches
- Supporting knowledge sharing

London Councils' networks of professionals and experts

# The two completed trials

Housing benefit  
overpayment –  
recovering the £s



Increasing  
recycling rates



# Recovering Housing Benefit Overpayment

- £2bn billion of outstanding housing benefit debt
- This is increasing each year partly because of two behavioural factors:
  - recipients responsible for alerting the council when their circumstances change
  - endowment effect: overpaid recipients find it psychologically painful to repay money
- Trial: change the letters housing benefit recipients receive:
  - Make it easy and anchor payments
  - Draw on the loss aversion
  - Active choice – not oversight not to pay
- **Overall impact - If rolled out, estimated £212,000 brought forward per year along with £4,500 less spent on debt recovery**

# Increasing recycling rates

- Recycling rates are plateauing – well below EU target rates – especially in London
- Trial targeted households who didn't recycle with a letter:
  - Reminding households of how **easy** and **simple** recycling is, and how to get replacement bins if required
  - Social impact – why it's important
- Households receiving a letter were 6% less likely to miss a recycling collection in the following 4 weeks – both messages had similar effect
- Impact: complex to calculate

# Challenges overcome – lessons to learn



- 3<sup>rd</sup> party support – ensure you have the contractual, or other agreement to make changes to practice
- Communication – if changing letters – in-house/ outsourced – know your ownership and lead in times
- Data – ownership, access and data protection can cause delays – try to understand this before choosing an area of focus
- Joining-up – services are rarely silos – make sure internal communications are first class so everyone understands the aims, process and timelines
- Transferring knowledge – build in to plans

# Engaging and disseminating the results

- Dissemination is built into our grant funding agreement.  
So far:
  - High level summary to CELC
  - Case studies produced for the LGA's website
  - HBOP shared with:
    - London Deputy Treasurers
    - London Revenues and Benefits Managers
  - Increasing recycling rates shared with:
    - London Environment Directors Network
    - Resource London (part of LWARB)
- Detailed presentation and proposals for further work to Capital Ambition Board

# Next steps – phase 2 CAB funded trials



Public Health  
Croydon – raising  
the immunisation  
rates to provide  
herd immunity

Children's social care at  
the three Boroughs of  
Hammersmith & Fulham,  
Kensington and Chelsea,  
and Westminster:

- Decision making at the front door
- Applying behavioural science to improve take up of Early Help
- Foster carer recruitment



Any questions?



[Lisa.henry@londoncouncils.gov.uk](mailto:Lisa.henry@londoncouncils.gov.uk)