



Mike Freer

Leader of Barnet Council

EasyJet will give you what you want, so why can't a council?

PEOPLE often talk about the lack of news in August, and we have seen the perfect example during the past week when the details of Barnet Council's Future Shape plans became national front page news.

It is a quiet news day indeed when one council's plans for reorganisation are deemed the most interesting thing to have happened in the country that day.

The Guardian picked up on a phrase that I used in comparing our plans for developing our services to budget airlines. This was then picked up by several other national papers, the BBC, and ITN.

But I am surprised that no one has looked at how airlines like easyJet redefined such services before now. They are very successful businesses in an industry where long-established competitors have fallen by the wayside. Giants like Pan-Am and TWA have gone, but the new budget airlines prosper. Why?

They have simply asked their customers what they really value. The former giants assumed that a flight to Rome automatically involved checking in at a set time, a "free" (and not very good) meal, and a set amount of luggage.



**Easy life?
No paying,
no gain**

The budget airlines fly you there but if you have £200 to spend on your trip you pay £100 for your flight but the other £100 you can spend on checking in later, or booking later, or carrying extra luggage. You can even use some of it to eat a better meal in the airport than you can on the plane.

Alternatively you can just save £100 and spend it on something else.

As a business model we'd be daft not to look at it.

We are beginning to do something similar at Barnet Council and have begun to trial more flexible services. In adult care, for instance, we now involve

users in defining their own services. We no longer turn up and say: "We are from the council, we think you need this." We are moving to: "We are from the council, what do you think you need?"

Of course this involves help and advice from experts, but where in the past there was a feeling that the council knew best, now we think that you do.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

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