

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL 3 CUSTOMER SERVICES

Thursday, 2 February 2012

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillor Mike Hallam (Chair), Councillors Tony Ansell, Dennis Meredith, David Palethorpe and Terry Wire

Officers	Justin Bonnie	MIS Analyst Customer Services
	Kerry Greaves	Customer Services Manager
	Tracy Tiff	Overview and Scrutiny Officer
	Joanne Birkin	Democratic Services Officer

Observers Councillor Les Marriott
Gary Youens- Political Assistant

1. APOLOGIES

There were none.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5th January 2012 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

County Councillor Marion Minney, co optee declared an interest as an elected Member of Northamptonshire County Council in the potential mystery shopping evaluating the performance of partners.

5. BASELINE DATA

The Scrutiny Panel considered data on

One Stop Shop Performance
Customer Contact Centre Performance
Performance Indicators
Mystery Shopping Exercise March/April 2010
Customer Excellence Strategy 2009-2012

The main points of discussion were as follows: -

Mystery Shopping Exercise March/April 2010

The Panel considered that the mystery shopping exercise should be repeated and that in order to achieve consistency the same questions should be used.

They were advised that the Northamptonshire Customer Services Group had just been re-established so the different members would be able to mystery shop each other.

The Panel felt that the Northampton Leisure Trust should be included in the mystery shopping.

Customer Excellence Strategy 2009-2012

The Panel commented that the Customer Excellence Strategy needed updating; to reflect the fact that there was no longer a separate site at Cliftonville and also the implementation of the Leisure Trust. They were assured that this is currently being progressed.

Customer Contact Centre Performance

The Panel considered that it would be useful to be able to listen in to some live and some recorded calls when it undertook its site visit to the One Stop Shop and Customer Contact Centre. They considered that an emphasis should be placed on what happened when the calls were passed on to various different service departments.

The Panel was also interested to establish whether staff felt that they were adequately supported by the technology. Certain service areas, such as Planning handle their own calls; they are not routed through the contact centre.

The Panel requested budget data, which will be available at a later meeting.

AGREED: - That the baseline data be accepted as part of the evidence base informing the Scrutiny Panel's Review.

6. CORE QUESTIONS - EXPERT WITNESSES.

The Scrutiny Panel considered a list of core questions to be put to the expert witnesses.

The Panel considered that the Head of Planning and the Director of Housing should be included on the list of expert witnesses. These services had not used the contact centre, but managed their own calls although the Housing service was moving across. It was suggested that the Head of Planning and the Head of Housing NBC, be asked to provide responses to the Panel's core questions.

It was also suggested that the facilitator who had run the recent Councillor Development Session "Technology- Making IT work for Customers " be asked to be an expert witness to provide evidence to inform this Review.

The Panel considered the draft core questions, providing comment and wording for additional questions.

These were centred around: -

- What happened when the call left the call centre for the service area?
- Whether staff felt that the technology and equipment was adequate.

- What could be done to encourage more customers to use other methods of contacting the Council, for example E-mail or telephone rather than face to face visits. This would be cheaper and free up additional staff resources for face to face customers.
- What support is available for face to face customers that are very distressed and whether there is adequate privacy available and what support is available for the officers that deal with these cases? Is special training available to them?
- How do we let people know about the services provided at the One Stop Shop by partner agencies?
- Do we need to look at signage into the One Stop Shop?
- How should Councillors be feeding into the reporting mechanism?
- How are out of hours contacts received and monitored?
- How do we as an organisation learn from past experiences, complaints?
- How do service requests get prioritised?

The finalised core questions are attached at Appendix 1.

AGREED: 1. That additional expert witnesses to inform this Review, as stated above, be approved.
 2. That the Core questions to be put to key witnesses be approved, as attached as Appendix 1

7. SITE VISITS

The Scrutiny Panel was informed of the arrangements for site visits to:

- Local Authority external to Northamptonshire- visit to Rugby Borough Council customer Services at 10am on Monday 20th February. Councillor Meredith will lead, all Councillors attending to confirm arrangements with the Scrutiny Officer.
- Internal customer services and contact centre – Thursday 1st March at 3pm prior to the Panel meeting that evening.
- Northampton Leisure Trust – Thursday 8th March Danes Camp at 10.00am.
- Sample of departments within NBC, including the Guildhall Office, Revenues and Benefits, Housing and Planning – Wednesday 21st March at 3pm prior to the Panel meeting that evening.

Arrangements have still to be finalised with Enterprise Management Service (EMS).

For a private sector perspective, the Scrutiny Officer has contacted a company called Contact Plus who runs customer services programmes, some of which have been awarded best practice status. Amongst their clients are Ford First and a number of Housing Associations. The Scrutiny Officer will try to arrange a visit but if that is not practical then a representative of Ford First had indicated that he would be willing to attend a meeting of the Panel to share best practice.

AGREED That the site visits as detailed above be confirmed.

8. DRAFT EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The Scrutiny Panel considered the draft Equality Impact Assessment for the Customer Services Review.

AGREED ; That subject to the changes to the key witnesses and core questions that had been agreed during the meeting the draft Equality Impact Assessment for the Customer Services Review be approved.

The meeting concluded at 7:10 pm