

Northampton Borough Scrutiny Panel 3 Customer Services



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Please find enclosed the agenda and supporting papers for Scrutiny Panel 3 Customer Services

Date: **Thursday, 1 March 2012**

Time: **6:00 pm**

Place: **The Court Room - The Guildhall, St. Giles Square, Northampton, NN1 1DE.**

If you need any advice or information regarding this agenda please phone who will be able to assist with your enquiry. For further information regarding Scrutiny Panel 3 Customer Services please visit the website www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny

Members of the Panel

Chair	Councillor Mike Hallam
Panel Members	Councillor Tony Ansell Councillor Dennis Meredith Councillor David Palethorpe Councillor Terry Wire DL
Co-opted Member	County Councillor Marion Minney

Calendar of meetings

Date	Room
21 March 2012 19 April 2012	All meetings to be held in the Jeffery Room at the Guildhall unless otherwise stated

Northampton Borough Scrutiny Panel 3 Customer Services

Agenda

Item No and Time	Title	Pages	Action required
1. 6.00PM	Apologies		Members to note any apologies and substitution.
2	Minutes	1 - 4	Members to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2012.
3	Deputations/Public Addresses		The Chair to note public address requests. The public can speak on any agenda item for a maximum of three minutes per speaker per item. You are not required to register your intention to speak in advance but should arrive at the meeting a few minutes early, complete a Public Address Protocol and notify the Scrutiny Officer of your intention to speak.
4	Declarations of Interest (Including Whipping)		Members to state any interests
5	Witness Evidence - Expert Witnesses		The Scrutiny Panel to receive the responses to its core questions from key witnesses.
5 (a) 6.05- 6.25PM	Councillor David Mackintosh, Leader of the Council, and Councillor Brandon Eldred Cabinet Member for Community Engagement	5 - 8	
5 (b) 6.25- 6.45PM	Director of Finance and Support and Head of Customer Services NBC	9 - 18	
5 (c) 6.45 – 7.00PM	Head of Strategic Housing, Head of Landlord Services and Head of Planning	19 - 31	
6	Baseline Data	32 - 34	The Panel to receive budgetary data .
7	Report back from site visits	35 - 39	The Scrutiny Panel to consider the outcomes from the recent site visits. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rugby Borough Council • Customer Services, Northampton Borough Council

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



NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

Scrutiny Panel 3 - Customer Services

Core Questions – Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Community Engagement

1 Please supply details how you evaluate whether customer services is providing value for money around:

i. The quality of the Service and Service delivery

Monthly customer satisfaction is measured through surveying customers on a monthly basis, this survey looks at general measures around quality of service received by the council and assesses customer opinions on elements such as environment and length of wait for service. Satisfaction scores on an average basis is 85%.. This compared to the national average of 75% for public sector services.

An annual benchmark survey is also conducted as part of national customer services week, this survey asks the customer more in-depth questions in relation to service delivery and allows us to benchmark as part of the national OSS benchmarking group.

ii. Customer Satisfaction across the whole organisation

As well as surveying our own customer satisfaction on a monthly basis, the customers' opinion generally impinges on the view of the end to end service the council provide, customer services will see most customers at the first point of contact and raise a service request. On occasions the customers will contact customer services to chase requests that have failed to meet their expectations so therefore our survey processes are planned to measure individual satisfaction with the service received by customer services and then also the customers end-to-end experience across the whole organisation on the services provided through customer services. Corporate reputation is an exercise measured through the performance team with current satisfaction at 54%.

iii. Cost and efficiency

Monthly 'PAFs' are undertaken on each team member. The PAF is our Customer Services Performance Assessment Framework where each Customer Information Officer is measured for quality and accuracy of Customer interaction, and for adherence to the standards and behaviours expected to ensure that the customer's experience of the Council is effective and high quality.

There is now a much lower rate of referrals to 'back-office'. Due to the high level of on-going cross-training through qualitative training, the hand-off to back offices is much reduced as the Customer Services team deal with many more enquires to a greater degree of depth. This has taken pressure from departmental resources such as Benefits and Council tax and enabled them to reduce their own 'backlogs'. Value for money can also be demonstrated by the capability of Customer Services to support other departments to reduce their workloads prior to projected high demand.

A recent example being the Contact Centre supporting Council tax to reduce their back-log prior to annual billing. The value is demonstrated by proactively working together to reduce the number of calls from those customers who have recently advised of change of circumstances, and the Contact Centre staff have updated the Council Tax system to ensure accuracy of information at time of billing publication.

Migration of services to Customer services provides value for money due to optimal use of agents time Services such as Rent Income, and Housing management calls, are migrating to customer services without any additional resource.

iv. Staff satisfaction of the process

A recent internal staff survey indicated that staff were very satisfied that customer services provide good value for money and provide a high quality service.

2 In particular, in relation to those customers who have the most need for services, please explain how the services that the organisation offers are advertised

Now that the newly transformed One Stop Shop has settled-in, and the partnerships firm and established, Customer services are in the process of planning a 'launch' of the facility, our partners, and what customers services can provide with an marketing campaign which will reach far out into the community through forums, community groups, posters etc in doctors / dentists etc etc.

3 Do you feel that the One Stop Shop at the Council makes best use of the space available, and how would you rate comfort and accessibility?

We are still reviewing the refurbished One Stop Shop and will have a presentation available at Overview and Scrutiny on 1st March to demonstrate our findings to date.

4a What do you feel are the best features of the One Stop Shop and why?

Friendly, relaxed, clean and calm environment. Spacious, good atmosphere, one point of access. The One Stop Shop has a very modern, professional ambience and is quite unlike any other 'One Stop Shop' in that it has a unique and very appealing design, style and colour-scheme, and the Council has 'dared to be different' – and to great and well-received effect. There is a strong One Stop Shop 'identity' now, which is further enhanced with stylish, non-authoritarian uniforms, which supports the ambience of professionalism, consistency and approachability.

Customers view the Council's One Stop Shop as a place to go to get help, particularly when they find themselves in a position of crisis for a variety of reasons. Long gone are the days when customers only dealt with the council 'because they had to'.

The private interview rooms are superbly designed and perfectly meet the needs for customers to discuss their issues in a confidential yet practical and comfortable environment, with formal, informal and family sized rooms to best meet the individual needs of customers particular situations. For example, the family room is quietly located and is of a size to fit an entire family comfortably – a recent example of how this worked well was a whole family made homeless by a house-fire, extremely distressed and were able to have their needs discussed and addressed in confidence, all-together as a family, and away from other customers. The informal interview room has also proved a real hit in that vulnerable young adults who have hit a crisis in their lives can be helped in a private room which does not feel 'council-like', in that it has a sofa and easy chair in and feels a bit more like home., and again this is located in a quieter area of the One Stop Shop. The design of the 'secure room' is also a good feature, in that we have done away with the high counter and glass partition type of interrogation feel, and instead provided a room which is secure by design,

but can also be used for other interviews ergo maximising value for money with regards to use of accommodation.

4b Please provide suggestions of where you feel improvements could be made?

Presentation to be made on 1st March at Overview and Scrutiny Meeting.

5 Do you feel that customers are comfortable entering the One Stop Shop, if not, please provide examples of why you feel this is the case

Included in Presentation.

6 Please supply details of how the customer can access the customer services facilities

Customers can choose how to access services, face-to-face, on the phone or via the internet. The physical facility is DDA compliant, centrally located, and welcoming.

7 Is the organisation successfully identifying the levels of the service that the customer requires? If not please explain why.

Customers are regularly consulted via forums, feedback and through monitoring of complaints.

8 Please advise which is the most frequently used method of contacting customer services

Telephone contact is the most frequent being nearly 360,000 per year, face-to-face contact is around 67,000 per year and emails being 22,000 per year.

For calendar year 2011

Footfall 67000

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9 Please supply details of a 'Lessons Learnt Process' that is in place following contact with difficult customers?

Lessons learnt are implemented from the recommendations we give when we investigate an accident/incident, however the line manager is responsible for the implementation.

Example:

Lessons Learned from dealing with difficult customers:

- Employees must be clearer at the start of a discussion that appears to have become difficult
- Recognise the early warning signs and what to do.
- Examples are: rudeness; being overly-critical of what the employee had said or about the service. Knowing when to call their line manager to intercede or to get out or use the panic alarm.
- Learning to spot the difficult customers as quickly as possible and don't be afraid to calm the situation down and/or get help. If it is a phone call, let them know that you will put the phone down if they continue to use offensive or abusive words.
- Part of the lessons learnt is the use of security staff at the One stop shop to intercede and/or remove difficult customers who have become aggressive.
- To ensure prompt reporting of all incidents and the use of PVP register.

Lastly we advise personal training for all staff who deal with members of the public and the use of fair statement letter.

10 Please supply details of how you analyse complaints received and how complaints are dealt with?

We analyse and monitor the levels of complaints on a monthly basis, making yearly comparisons to measure our performance and effectiveness of the department. We identify the cause of complaint and lessons learnt, and make changes to service delivery where necessary. A report is produced each month which includes the detailed analysis of complaints received through customer feedback and survey responses.

For example

A customer complained that she found it difficult to access our services when trying to report a neighbour's dead animal. She reported that she was unable to get through to someone, and the phone line was unobtainable during working hours. We carried out an impartial investigation, putting ourselves in the customer's shoes, and found that the information provided on the website, regarding dead animals, was not as clear as it could have been.

We also found through web searches that the web page was not available through Direct Gov (due to a broken link), and the RSPCA were advertising an incorrect telephone number for us. We made the necessary changes to our website, and requested that Direct Gov and the RSPCA did the same to theirs. We apologised to the customer, thanked her for bringing this to our attention, and advised her on the action that we had taken following her complaint.

We aim to deal with complaints at the first point of contact, but where this is not possible the complaint is re-directed to the appropriate person, and the customer is informed of our action. Customer Services Team Leaders are responsible for investigating and responding to all informal complaints (NIPs). Formal Stage 1 complaints are investigated and responded to by a complaint owner (minimum Operational Manager), and Formal Stage 2 complaints are responded to by the Director (Investigated by minimum-Head of Service)

Whether the complaint is formal or informal we carry out full and impartial investigation, and handle them with dignity and respect. We admit when we get things wrong and put them right at the earliest opportunity.

If the complaint is covered by an alternative appeals process, we will advise the customer of this, and inform them what they need to do.

Any complaints that are received about staff may, if it is appropriate, go through the staff disciplinary procedure.

11 Please provide your views on the benefits of a shared customer services facility

Partnership and synergy working enables the 'gaps' between organisations to be recognised and addressed, and intelligence shared for the good of the customers

12 Please supply details of both allocated and unallocated reserves for customer services for your areas?

Budget information supplied separately.

13 Any other comments



NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

Scrutiny Panel 3 - Customer Services

Core Questions - Director of Finance and Support and Head of Customer Services and ICT

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Framework where each Customer Information Officer is measured for quality and accuracy of Customer interaction, and for adherence to the standards and behaviours expected to ensure that the customer's experience of the Council is effective and high quality.

There is now a much lower rate of referrals to 'back-office'. Due to the high level of on-going cross-training through qualitative training, the hand-off to back offices is much reduced as the Customer Services team deal with many more enquires to a greater degree of depth. This has taken pressure from departmental resources such as Benefits and Council tax and enabled them to reduce their own 'backlogs'. Value for money can also be demonstrated by the capability of Customer Services to support other departments to reduce their workloads prior to projected high demand. A recent example being the Contact Centre supporting Council tax to reduce their back-log prior to annual billing. The value is demonstrated by proactively working together to reduce the number of calls from those customers who have recently advised of change of circumstances, and the Contact Centre staff have updated the Council Tax system to ensure accuracy of information at time of billing publication.

Migration of services to Customer services provides value for money due to optimal use of agents time Services such as Rent Income, and Housing management calls, are migrating to customer services without any additional resource.

IV. Staff satisfaction of the process

A recent internal staff survey indicated that staff were very satisfied that customer services provide good value for money and provide a high quality service.

- 2 Please explain how you use current technology and social networking to drive services forward?

Current Technologies

Process Improvement - We are starting to use BPM (Business Process Management) software to manage and monitor customer interactions, bringing back office services into line with customer services for responding to interactions with customers in a consistent manner. It will also enable more back office functions to be brought forward to the contact centre so that a greater percentage of contacts can be resolved at the first point of contact.

Automation - We have automation software currently in development that will take ownership of repetitive and time consuming tasks which currently need to be actioned manually. This will allow customer centre operatives to deal with more calls per operative.

Google Maps - We have been using Google Maps as the base for our MyCouncil application which has handled 40,000 customer queries since it's launch, 25,000 of which were self served queries by the public

with would have previously gone to our contact centre. MyCouncil also handles our environmental reporting issues, Find My Bin Round, Find My Polling Station and election results.

Mobile Application - We are currently developing a mobile application with a view to bringing all the council functions available via our website to mobile phones, this will further increase channel shift and reduce calls made to the contact centre.

Cloud Computing - We already have one cloud computing server in operation, in the coming weeks we will be launching more for the public to use. They are more robust and yet also more cost effective than locally hosted solutions. In addition to this cloud computing is scalable, if no-one uses the site, it costs us little or nothing to run, if demand peaks (as in the Find My Bin Round example) we are automatically allocated more resources from the cloud to cope and ensure that service delivery of that information remains consistent.

Gamification - We are currently working on methods to encourage customers to deal with environmental issues themselves, where appropriate. Via the mobile application, instead of a 'report a problem' there will also be a "I fixed a problem" whereby customers can notify us that they resolved an issue themselves (litter, leaves, fly-tipping, graffiti, etc). In doing so we can then reward them in non financial ways, by giving them kudos via our social media channels and awards, running competitions to see who has fixed the most problems in a given time period ("Citizen of the Year", for example) and having ward versus ward competitions to see which ward can resolve the most issues themselves (making a game of the popular community clear up campaigns). This will result in further channel shift, fewer calls to the contact centre and greater participation in the "Love Northampton" campaign.

Social Media

TWITTER

We currently have a very advanced use for twitter. We have the basic NorthamptonBC twitter account, which notifies customers of news and events in Northampton. We have also developed localised new notification channels, such as Northampton_All and Northampton_SW. These have been developed to make the workings of the authority more transparent and promote the work the authority is doing around Northampton, they also help to reduce avoidable contacts. These channels currently contain details of environmental problems reported to the authority (reducing the avoidable contact because everyone in the local area is notified that we are working on the problem already) and a date by which we will have the issue resolved. Coming additions to these channels are notifications when calls are closed, the facility to allow customers to rate how we dealt with a call and potentially opening up of the channels to allow councillors and other service providers to post notification messages to the public (road closure, crime, gas leaks, school closures, etc). New channels will also be arriving that focus content down to Ward level, so customers can

choose to be notified of events and issues all around town, or just for their area. Councillors will be able to use these channels to notify their customers directly of the work they are doing for their ward. This function will be via a simple web page we are setting up, that means even councillors with no prior knowledge of social networking will be able to speak directly to their electorate.

FACEBOOK

We are working on replicating the twitter functionality above onto Facebook in the coming months. In addition to this we are currently in the process of setting up Facebook to be treated as just another communication channel (like phones or email) in our contact centre. This will enable customers to interact with the authority via Facebook just as they would by telephone. Our BPM system will continually monitor Facebook for when someone asks the authority a question and then assign an agent to respond to that query on Facebook. In addition to the service improvement for the customer, this gives the authority the opportunity to cross promote our other online services for further channel shift opportunities. It also allows us to reduce avoidable contact, as interactions (where appropriate) will be available for all to see. This will mean common questions will already be answered before someone poses the question to us. As other Facebook users become familiar with our social media presence we expect to find that they themselves take to answering common queries and become 'champions' for the authority. We will also have the facility to post video messages and responses from councillors or agents where appropriate to give a much more human touch to our interactions.

- 3 How do you encourage customers to access the Internet to make contact with the Council?

Encouragement for web usage - within the site we are making it easy to use. Simple layout, improving the search, simplifying content, using real English terms instead of council based English, and improving links to transactions. This also includes removing email as an option.

External to the site, friendly URLs are used to advertise initiatives. Facebook and twitter are used to both push out communications and respond to customer comments, so awareness of the site increases. By responding we encourage more use of the web as an access channel generally. Cross linking with other websites including direct gov, and the county and local district councils so customers can find the right service provider. Also use of the PCs in the One Stop Shop to do direct channel shift, so showing customers how to use the web. General awareness through our printed literature always listing the website. Also sending pin codes with Council Tax bills to encourage citizen account usage.

- 4 Please explain the advice and services that you provide to customers who are unable to access the Internet.

Customers can *choose* how they access services and advice. The full range is available on the phones and Face-to-Face, and the web is

being further developed in this respect. Channel shift and the internet is to support choice and value for money in accessing the advice and guidance that the Council and its partners have to offer.

- 5 In particular, in relation to those customers who have the most need for services, please explain how the services that the organisation offers are advertised.

Now that the newly transformed One Stop Shop has settled-in, and the partnerships firm and established, Customer services are in the process of planning a 'launch' of the facility, our partners, and what customers services can provide with an marketing campaign which will reach far out into the community through forums, community groups, posters etc in doctors / dentists etc etc.

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Included in Presentation.

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11 Please can you provide details of:

- a. Current targets for customer services – to follow separately.
- b. How the targets were arrived at – verbal update to be given at O&S on 1 March.
- c. How the data is analysed
Performance data is analysed using Q-Nomy reporting and Callplus reporting to analyse footfall into the One Stop Shop and phone calls

into the Contact Centre. Speed of answer/wait time is monitored as well as number of customers abandoning their wait. This is then reported against agreed service levels.

In addition, quality is measured through the Performance Assessment Framework. This focuses on assessments on individual interactions with customers (face to face and telephone) as well as performance statistics, escalations, errors, compliments and complaints. This information is then fed back to CSO's individually in 121s.

- 12 What level of information compliance has the organisation been awarded for its customer service facility?

Customer Service Excellence Accreditation.

- 13 How does the organisation prioritise emergency situations?

If it is a situation occurring in the OSS, we deal with them in the most appropriate way at the time – each situation is different and usually needs handling differently. There are panic buttons on each position and in each interview room, and there is a security guard on site with direct access to CCTV and the Police for immediate back-up. There is also a permanent Police presence in the One Stop Shop as they are one of our partners with their own Police desk.

- 14 Please provide details of the training given to officers to help them to deal with distressed customers?

'Dealing with Difficult Situations' training, 'Customer Services' training. Domestic Violence training, 'Keep Safe' training. The Team Leaders also 'counsel' members of staff individually as and when required to help any team member who has had to deal with distressed customers.

- 15 How are staff supported in cases where dealing with distressed customers have caused them levels of distress?

Personal counselling with team leaders, 'time-out', CIC counselling.

- 16 Please supply details of a 'Lessons Learnt Process' that is in place following contact with difficult customers?

Lessons learnt are implemented from the recommendations we give when we investigate an accident/incident, however the line manager is responsible for the implementation.

Example:

Lessons Learned from dealing with difficult customers:

- Employees must be clearer at the start of a discussion that appears to have become difficult
- Recognise the early warning signs and what to do.
- Examples are: rudeness; being overly-critical of what the employee had said or about the service. Knowing when to call their line manager to intercede or to get out or use the panic alarm.

- Learning to spot the difficult customers as quickly as possible and don't be afraid to calm the situation down and/or get help. If it is a phone call, let them know that you will put the phone down if they continue to use offensive or abusive words.
- Part of the lessons learnt is the use of security staff at the One stop shop to intercede and/or remove difficult customers who have become aggressive.
- To ensure prompt reporting of all incidents and the use of PVP register.

Lastly we advise personal training for all staff who deal with members of the public and the use of fair statement letter.

17 Please supply details of how you analyse complaints received and how complaints are dealt with?

We analyse and monitor the levels of complaints on a monthly basis, making yearly comparisons to measure our performance and effectiveness of the department. We identify the cause of complaint and lessons learnt, and make changes to service delivery where necessary. A report is produced each month which includes the detailed analysis of complaints received through customer feedback and survey responses.

For example

A customer complained that she found it difficult to access our services when trying to report a neighbour's dead animal. She reported that she was unable to get through to someone, and the phone line was unobtainable during working hours. We carried out an impartial investigation, putting ourselves in the customer's shoes, and found that the information provided on the website, regarding dead animals, was not as clear as it could have been.

We also found through web searches that the web page was not available through Direct Gov (due to a broken link), and the RSPCA were advertising an incorrect telephone number for us. We made the necessary changes to our website, and requested that Direct Gov and the RSPCA did the same to theirs. We apologised to the customer, thanked her for bringing this to our attention, and advised her on the action that we had taken following her complaint.

We aim to deal with complaints at the first point of contact, but where this is not possible the complaint is re-directed to the appropriate person, and the customer is informed of our action. Customer Services Team Leaders are responsible for investigating and responding to all informal complaints (NIPs). Formal Stage 1 complaints are investigated and responded to by a complaint owner (minimum Operational Manager), and Formal Stage 2 complaints are responded by the Director (Investigated by minimum-Head of Service)

Whether the complaint is formal or informal we carry out full and impartial investigation, and handle them with dignity and respect. We

admit when we get things wrong and put them right at the earliest opportunity.

If the complaint is covered by an alternative appeals process, we will advise the customer of this, and inform them what they need to do. Any complaints that are received about staff may, if it is appropriate, go through the staff disciplinary procedure.

- 18 Please explain the process for dealing with customers who feel that they have contacted numerous departments and still not spoken to the correct service area. How could this process be improved?

Currently the process for dealing with a situation as above would be to firstly obtain as much details from the customer at the point of contact with customer services to see if the enquiry can be resolved locally. If this is not the case the enquiry will be escalated as a NIP to the service area (informal complaints stages), this will highlight to the service area that there is a dissatisfied customer and the enquiry will be dealt with by an appropriate level office.

Processes to improve this include migration of all 1st point of contact to customer services, in line with the service area, types of enquires are mapped to ensure that all relevant details are collected, correct information is re-laid to the customer and if unable to deal with at the first point of contact, there is an appropriate hand off to the service area and a firm SLA to provide to the customer for when they can expect a response.

Customer services are currently in the process of optimisation all current services to ensure adequate processes are in place to support this improvement.

- 19 Would it be possible for Councillors to be given access to the CRM system and log complaints and issues themselves?

It would be possible for councillor to be given access to the CRM to add their own complaints, however the process is more streamlined and user friendly to log complaints and issues through the web. My council has been developed for councillors and residents to report issues with ease.

Further development is currently underway for complaints to be added directly into the CRM via the web using integration technology, this will also enable the councillors to receive notifications and track responses.

- 20 Was there any resistance to change when the new customer services facilities were implemented? If so please explain how this was managed?

No

21. Please explain the process for customer contact with the organisation during out of hours?

Switches to Call-care. Highly trained call care officers can deal with all out of hours calls using a host of information on the intranet and internal knowledge base.

22. Please provide your views on the benefits of a shared customer services facility

Partnership and synergy working enables the 'gaps' between organisations to be recognised and addressed, and intelligence shared for the good of the customers.

- 23 Please supply details of both allocated and unallocated reserves for customer services for your area?

Budget information supplied separately

- 24 Any other comments

Scrutiny Panel 3 – Customer Services

Core Questions – Head of Landlord Services

1. Please supply details how you evaluate whether customer services is providing value for money around:

The quality of the service and service delivery
Customer Satisfaction across the whole of the organisation
Cost and efficiency
Staff satisfaction of the process

The first point of contact for tenants is the contact centre or the one stop shop. Tenants report all their repairs to the Contact Centre.

We carry out surveys of tenants to find out how satisfied they are with the service provided. The last survey showed that when tenants contacted the Council, 82% found staff helpful. Sixty four percent said staff were able to deal with their problem. Sixty one per cent were satisfied with the outcome.

The Housing Revenue Account pays the following amount as its contribution towards the contact centre and one stop shop.

One Stop Shop	£203,446
Contact Centre	£337,222

These amounts are reviewed at the end of each year to check that the amount charged reflects the cost of providing the service.

Housing Managers and Repairs managers hold regular meetings with the Contact Centre and One Stop Shop Managers to discuss performance and issues that have arisen. This has led to improvements in repairs performance with both teams understanding the requirements of the other. Tenants also carry out mystery shopping of the one stop shop.

2. Please explain how you use current technology and social networking to drive services forward

We use text messaging to communicate with tenants about rent arrears and also to remind them of dates of tenant area meetings.

We are gradually rolling out mobile working devices for repairs operatives to replace paper job tickets. This will increase productivity and should, therefore, increase tenant satisfaction.

3. How do you encourage customers to access the internet to make contact with the Council?

Council's web site is promoted on all letters and other documents issued. For specific projects dedicated e mail boxes are set up – for example so that tenants can respond to consultation exercises.

4. Please explain the advice and services that you provide to customers who are unable to access the internet.

We have a tenants general handbook that is given to all tenants. We do the same with a separate repairs handbook. We also have a range of leaflets and advice packs – for example on what to do if you are in rent arrears.

We have revised the tenancy agreement so that it contains advice on tenants rights and what they can expect from the Council and this is covered in great detail.

All new tenants receive a comprehensive new tenants information pack containing the leaflets with comprehensive information on the service provided and how to access it.

5. In particular, in relation to those customers who have the most need for services, please explain how the services that organisation offers are advertised.

The handbook, which all tenants have, explains how to access support. For example, adaptations for tenants with a disability. Information is also on the web site.

6. Do you feel that the One Stop Shop at the Council makes the best use of the space available, and how would you rate comfort and accessibility?

Accessibility is good for people with a disability and the area is comfortable and inviting. The new layout makes much better use of space.

(a) What do you feel are the best features of the One Stop Shop and why?

It is light and airy and, therefore, welcoming. Also the self service areas.

(b) Please provide suggestions of where you feel improvements could be made?

Queues need to be reduced –particularly at peak times. Self service points are often not being used and it may be because customers are not aware what information they can obtain/queries they can resolve in this way.

A dedicated payment hot line for making payments over the phone now that the cash office has been closed would be useful.

Improved signage is required as is the ability to access more information

without queuing.

7. Do you feel that customers are comfortable entering the One Stop Shop. If not, please provide examples of why you feel this is the case.

Surveys have not shown that this is an issue or that customers feel uncomfortable in any way.

8. Please supply details of how customers can access the customer service facilities.

In person at the one stop shop
Over the phone to the contact centre
By email to the contact centre
By accessing information on the Council's web site

9. Is the organisation successfully identifying the level of the service that the customer requires?

We have a number of mechanisms in place to identify this. We carry out surveys of tenants asking standard questions about what tenants think of the service provided and what their priority areas for improvement are. Tenants also mystery shop and give feedback of the service they received. Groups of tenants also carry out audits into service areas and make observations and recommendations. Audits have been carried out into rent arrears, voids and repairs and are currently looking at how we deal with anti social behaviour. We also carry out service specific surveys to identify satisfaction levels. This has been done for cleaning and void properties – we are currently updating the latter with a survey.

We carry out consultation exercises on new policies – for example, depooling. We take the opportunity to also seek feedback and information on what tenants think of the level of service delivery.

10. Please advise which the most frequently used method of contacting customer services.

75% of contact has been by telephone
17% has been through the tenants going to the one stop shop

The most common reason for tenants contacting the Council was to report a repair (60%). The next most common reason was rent arrears at 11%.

11. How does the organisation prioritise emergency situations?

Legislation prioritises repairs and gives statutory response times for types of repairs. It defines what is emergency, urgent and routine. For other service areas, housing managers meet with contact centre staff to discuss and scripts and guidance notes are provided.

12. Please provide details of the training given to officers to help them to deal with distressed customers.

Housing staff receive training on how to deal with difficult situations and also how to deal with violence and aggression. The Institute of Housing and Shelter provide excellent courses in this area.

13. How are staff supported in cases where dealing with distressed customers have caused them levels of distress?

Staff have one to one meetings with line managers. The Council also provides a confidential counselling service which staff can access. There are also the Council's HR and health and safety procedures.

14. Please supply details of a lesson learnt process that is in place following contact with difficult customers.

Managers will debrief at team meetings following discussions with staff involved in any incident. If necessary, risk assessments will be revisited and mitigation measures re-assessed.

15. Please supply details of how you analyse complaints received and how complaints are dealt with.

The Council's corporate complaints process is the procedure used to deal with complaints with all complaints being registered on the CRM software and monitored in terms of response within target time. This is followed up by regular complaints review meetings where reasons for the complaints are discussed and any actions necessary are taken, particularly if any trends are identified.

16. Please provide your views on the benefits of a shared customer services facility.

The need to achieve efficiencies, value for money and reduced costs is a key driver and that is understood and accepted. However, there would need to be mechanisms in place to ensure that generic staff had sufficient knowledge and skills in repairs, rent arrears and tenancy management, which are specialist areas.

17. Please supply details of both allocated and unallocated reserves for customer services for your area?

The Housing Revenue Account pays the following amount as its contribution towards the contact centre and one stop shop.

One Stop Shop	£203,446
Contact Centre	£337,222



NORTHAMPTON
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Scrutiny Panel 3 - Customer Services

Core Questions - Head of Strategic Housing and Head of Landlord Services

- 1 Please supply details how you evaluate whether customer services is providing value for money around:

The quality of the Service and Service delivery
Customer Satisfaction across the whole organisation
Cost and efficiency
Staff satisfaction of the process

- 2 Please explain how you use current technology and social networking to drive services forward? Housing Solutions have used facebook, texting services, the web site and on line questionnaires and various on line applications to drive services forward
- 3 How do you encourage customers to access the Internet to make contact with the Council? Through the Choice Based Lettings scheme all 9,000 customers on the Housing Register access the Housing Solutions services via the web site. All services that the Housing Solutions service provides are available on line through the web site
- 4 Please explain the advice and services that you provide to customers who are unable to access the Internet. The Housing Solutions service provides access to service at 7 surgeries across the geographical locations across the Borough of Northampton. All customers can request home visits and or visit the Guildhall to access the Housing Solutions service.
- 5 In particular, in relation to those customers who have the most need for services please explain how the services that the organisation offers are advertised. The Housing Solutions service is advertised through BCC Northampton, local written press, visits to community organisations, posters in all public buildings advertising our services, leaflets that are available in libraries, and on the web site

6 Do you feel that the One Stop Shop at the Council makes best use of the space available, and how would you rate comfort and accessibility? The rating would be poor to adequate as the layout is confusing, inadequate signs, the information desks at the tightest part of the layout were overcrowding occurs and the initial first impression from this is poor.

6(a) What do you feel are the best features of the One Stop Shop and why? The staff, they manage to do a very difficult job with some very testing customers. Generic roles mean that staff may not be able to answer all questions in detail, which may lead to frustration for customers.

6(b) Please provide suggestions of where you feel improvements could be made? Move the entrance for customers, include a desk/area specifically for Housing customers, which could be near the interview rooms. This may alleviate the frustration of staff that do not have the knowledge and would assist customers who need specialist advice, but may have to come back on a different day to get it.

7 Do you feel that customers are comfortable entering the One Stop Shop, if not, please provide examples of why you feel this is the case. The entrance is at the tightest part of the service were overcrowding occurs. The first impressions are long queues and over crowding and inadequately staffed. Customer may not want to wait or may find this intimidating in such a small area.

8 Please supply details of how the customer can access the customer services facilities Through the one stop shop, the contact centre and directly with the service via letter, telephone, web, text, interview, and through the local MP's and Councillors

9 Is the organisation successfully identifying the levels of the service that the customer requires? If not please explain why. The Customer Service Excellence assessment report (section 5) highlights some failings of the contact centre service and mystery shopping has also highlighted the lack of in-depth knowledge at first contact with customers

Please advise which is the most frequently used method of contacting customer services In person at the One Stop Shop, email and telephone

11 How does the organisation prioritise emergency situations? The One stop shop has generic officers who may only be able to give basic advice,

any housing emergencies are passed directly to the Housing Solutions team to resolve. A solution for this could be to have an area/desk specifically for Housing which could be staffed by specialist staff.

- 12 Please provide details of the training given to officers to help them to deal with distressed customers? Full range of training courses, shadowing, best practice written material, peer support, reflect learning in partnership with Human Resources
- 13 How are staff supported in cases where dealing with distressed customers have caused them levels of distress? Through reflective learning in partnership with Human Resources and Peer Support
- 14 Please supply details of a 'Lessons Learnt Process' that is in place following contact with difficult customers? All customer satisfaction questionnaires are assessed and lessons learnt approach from each completed questionnaire undertaken.
- 15 Please supply details of how you analyse complaints received and how complaints are dealt with? All complaints are considered by the Housing Solutions Manager. The Housing Solutions Manager contacts all customers that complain to ensure they are satisfied with the outcome to their complaint
- 16 Please provide your views on the benefits of a shared customer services facility. I believe that there are limited benefits, as the lack of in-depth knowledge at the first point of contact can be misleading, incorrect and detrimental to customers and the reputation of the council. Housing customers would benefit from Housing Solutions requires its own customer service facility in the One Stop Shop area
- 17 Please supply details of both allocated and unallocated reserves for customer services for your area?
- 18 Any other comments

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY PANEL 3 CUSTOMER SERVICES

THURSDAY 1ST MARCH 2012

ITEM 5c

RESPONSE OF:

SUSAN BRIDGE

Head of Planning

1. The Department operates a separate system to the corporate Customer Contact Centre and has its own customer service telephone help line for Development Control and Building Control

Planning does not use the Contact Centre because of the volume and technical nature of the calls received in the department daily. The Department has at least one Support Officer on telephone duty throughout the working day and a duty Planning Officer is also available. This service is provided between 8.30 – 5 pm Monday – Thursday and 8.30 – 4.30 pm on Friday.

Planning and Building Control have separate contact telephone numbers. Planning is on the ACD system whilst Building Control is on a group link so customers can always reach an officer. This is essential in view of the fact that Building Control offers the service in competition with the private sector.

In addition, there is always one Support Officer to deal with Planning or Building Control customers in the One Stop Shop for face-to-face enquiries and the Duty Planning Officer is also available to discuss matters in the One Stop Shop.

The Department rarely, if at all, receives complaints about its customer service.

2. Customers are encouraged to access information through the web-site although generally first-time customers will visit the One Stop Shop or telephone the Department. A member of staff is always available to explain to first-time customers how to access on-line services, including downloading application forms, relevant leaflets and information on the Planning Portal.

The Department is reducing the number of paper copies of information, encouraging customers to access information on line which is freely available and free of charge.

The Department does not use social networking sites, although the Joint Planning Unit has a Facebook page and Twitter where they advertise any events held, consultation dates, any documents that are being published and Committee dates.

3. Frequent users of the service are called or visited annually to up-date them on changes to the Planning Portal and encouraged to submit planning applications on line. This has led to significant efficiencies as all applications submitted to the Portal can be transferred electronically

into Fast Planning, whereas paper copies have to be scanned and manually inputted.

Building Control is not as advanced as Planning in the use of on-line systems, primarily because there is no BC equivalent to the Planning Portal. However, improving customer access to BC information and services through the internet is a workstream for 2012/2013.

Occasional customers are encouraged through the initial contact by telephone or One Stop Shop to submit on-line and a member of staff is available in the Planning area of the One Stop Shop to assist them to submit on-line.

Policy information is available free of charge via the internet. Paper copies are always subject to a charge.

4. Paper copies are still available for customers who do not have access to the internet, Customers can also come into the One Stop Shop where there are information leaflets available.
5. Planning is not a service which needs to be advertised, other than if we are changing systems or there is a legislative change. These changes are advertised through the web-site and frequent users of the service will be notified by e-mail or telephone.
6. Generally the One Stop Shop has worked well. However, the Planning area is too small and the signage is poor. Improving the appearance and profile of the Planning area is a priority project in 2012/2013 as we expect an increase in usage with the transfer of planning powers from WNDK.
 - 6(a) The best feature is the appearance and spaciousness. The self serve area also works well for repeat customers.
 - 6(b) The Meet and Greet and reception area does not work well. Visitors who have appointments should be met without having to queue to see the receptionist. There should be a meet and greet person to direct visitors to the Planning area and/or ring the officer who they are meeting. Visitors have been known to queue for 20 minutes to be attended to.
7. Visitors can be made to feel uncomfortable when entering the One Stop Shop if there are people congregating in what can appear to be an anti-social manner in the courtyard area and around the entrance. The courtyard should be better policed. Signage to the appropriate sections should be more prominent within the One Stop Shop.

8. N/A
9. Planning and Building Control give excellent customer service. They advertise through using CD Rom, leaflets in One Stop Shop, site signs, promotional products and also the Planning and Building Control web-site.
10. Telephone is the most frequently used medium, although I understand that the planning web-site are the most used pages of the internet.
11. The only emergency service that the Department provides is in respect of dangerous structures. Access to this is most frequently through the 'blue-light' services. Details are also posted on the internet. The call centre has the relevant contact details.
12. Every 6 months the Support Officers receive relevant customer refresher courses and are trained to escalate difficult customers and issues to managers. These circumstances are comparatively rare due to the nature of the service.
13. This is very rare, but staff have access to support if it should ever be required.
14. Staff will discuss sensitive or difficult situations with their line-manager and in team meetings.
15. Monitoring of planning customers takes place through Fast Planning when:
 1. a planning application decision notice is made
 2. an enforcement job is closed

Customers receive an automatically generated feedback survey and monitoring questionnaire. These are returned to the Community Engagement Officer in the Planning Team who inputs them onto a database. Any specific issues requiring attention or compliments are directed to the Development Control Manager. A report is generated on an approximately 6 monthly basis and contains actions to be considered by the Planning Management Team which are identified from the feedback received.

Monitoring questionnaires are also input into a separate monitoring database to protect customers' identity.

Relatively small numbers of feedback forms have been returned which makes patterns in the data difficult to detect, e.g. between July 2010 – May 2011 a total of 99 forms for development control were received (1134 were sent out). However over time, and particularly when planning powers are returned from WNDC a more robust sample should be achieved and will therefore prove more useful to refining procedures and systems.

16. Planning does not really use the One Stop Shop or the Contact Centre as a shared service.

17. N/A

18. None

Agenda Item 6



NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

SCRUTINY PANEL 3 – CUSTOMER SERVICES

1 MARCH 2012

Baseline Data: Budgetary details

Customer Services

Total transactions per year: 447,785

Total cost to run Customer Services is **£2,907,793** (including controllable costs and re-charges/back office costs ie Finance, HR)

£1,569,554 (including controllable costs and print, but excluding re-charges/back office costs),

Cost to Serve

Channel		including controllable costs and re-charges/back office costs) Each transaction costs:	(including controllable costs and print, but excluding re-charges/back office costs), Each transaction costs:
Web		28p	17p
Email	21,567 dealt with	£7.92	£4.80
Telephones (Contact centre)	359,218 phone calls received	£3.96	£2.40
Face to Face	67,000 interactions	£22.13	£10.53

The Deprivation Index:

The Deprivation Indices, published by the Department for Communities and Local Government, studies poverty across a range of significant indicators - all to try and work out which places are the poorest, and theoretically have the greatest need for support from their local council and other agencies. The idea is to try to break out different areas which are all influenced by poverty. The figures show that out of 326 Councils up and down the country, where Liverpool is the highest ranked area for deprivation, and Hart District Council (Hampshire) the least deprived area, Northampton is ranked 119th on the list and is therefore in the top third of areas of deprivation.

Face to Face Interactions

The cost to service face-to-face has risen considerably over the past 2 years. One of the key drivers of the One Stop Shop transformation project Business Case was to support and future-proof the drive to channel shift to the phones and web, to address the cost imbalance in the main, but also to improve the choice in how to access council and partner services. Considering the deprivation status of Northampton, and the current financial climate worsening, the need to provide face-to-face support to our vulnerable customers has remained a critical function.

Emails

Email is currently an expensive access channel to run. This is because the e-mail information has to be handled by staff and manually dealt with. Often essential information is missing and multiple contacts need to be made. Improvements to this process have been made and 6000 on-line forms were completed which involved no staff intervention at all (completely automated).

We are currently developing in conjunction with ICT an online form for the website to replace all email contacts. This means the customer will be given options to refine the service they want. The implementation date of this cost saving improvement is June 2012.

Also in June, the new website goes live. This will be a task focussed approach, getting customers access to online forms and processes as simply as possible. On an information page, we will have a 'call to action' part of the screen listing relevant online transactions, therefore driving customers further towards self service.

Channel Shift within the transformed One Stop Shop

Footfall	67000
Phone calls generated from the 'self-serve' area:	359,218
Emails generated from the 'self-serve':	21567
lagan transactions online (not all online transactions):	5377
online visits (less internal usage):	926,529

These figures tell a picture. They show demand for web is there, and we can say that when transactions are migrated across or improved, transactions will increase further.

Encouragement for web usage - within the site we are making it easy to use. Simple layout, improving the search, simplifying content, using real 'english' terms instead of council based 'english', and improving links to transactions. This also includes removing email as an option.

External to the site, friendly URLs are used to advertise initiatives. Facebook and twitter are used to both push out communications and respond to customer comments, so awareness of the site increases. By responding we encourage more use of the web as an access channel generally. Cross linking with other websites including direct gov, and the county and local district councils so customers can find the right service provider. Also use of the PCs in the OSS self-serve area to do direct channel shift, so showing customers how to use the web. General awareness through our printed literature always listing the website. Also, sending pins codes with CTAX bills to encourage citizen account usage.



NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

SCRUTINY PANEL 3 – CUSTOMER SERVICES

1 MARCH 2012

BRIEFING NOTE

SITE VISIT – RUGBY BOROUGH COUNCIL

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On 20 February 2012, representatives of this Scrutiny Panel, along with the Customer Services Manager, the MIS Analyst and the Scrutiny Officer, attended a site visit to Rugby Borough Council (RBC) to look at its customer services facilities.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council has its main One Stop Shop based at the offices in Evereux Way. The One Stop Shop was refurbished approximately two years ago and more recently the Customer Services facility was downsized creating annual savings of £132,000. As a result of the refurbishment project the following outcomes were achieved:

- The main reception area has a hearing loop facility at Meet and Greet and a portable hearing loop, available for use in the customer booths, to improve access to services for the deaf or hard of hearing.
- Low level reception desks enable better physical access for all customers, particularly wheelchair users.
- DDA compliant self service terminals situated in private booths enable customers to access our Website and on line services.
- A separate terminal allows customers to undertake land searches.
- An automated telephone service enables customers to make payments and access the new Uchoose service.
- Individual soundproofed booths facilitate private discussions with customers.
- Plasma screens in the reception area and lobby provide customers with information about services and the use of the Council Chamber and Committee rooms.

- High level lighting and improved colour coded signage incorporating Braille improves access to services for the partially sighted.
- Panic alarms in customer booths and CCTV covering the whole of the reception area and 3 interview rooms ensure staff safety.
- A screened interview room ensures staff safety when dealing with customers who have been identified as potentially violent and a PACE compliant interview room enables interviews under caution to be undertaken.
- New half hour fire retardant sliding doors, fitted in the interior lobby area, ensure safety for all.

2.1 From 1st April 2011 all support services came under one umbrella.

2.2 The services that are dealt with at the One Stop Shop include:

Council Tax
Car parking
Licensing

2.3 Customer and Business Support Services support the system thinking philosophy. System thinking is an approach that helps services to understand how a request flows through the system and precisely what value each stage of the process contributes to delivering what the customer wants - "value demand".

2.4 The reported aim is to streamline the organisation's processes by eliminating those things which either contribute nothing or cause the system to fail meaning that the customer demand is not met or is unnecessarily delayed. It is reported that eliminating these non-productive elements from the process will help the customer's requests to flow more quickly, efficiently and effectively through the system, reducing cost and waste.

2.5 An example of some of the reported key principles of system thinking:

- Understanding the purpose of the service from the customers' point of view and concentrating on what matters to them
- Making improvements and changes based on evidential knowledge, not assumptions or hunches
- Reducing the amount of work that adds no value to the customer and is frustrating for both them and the organisation
- Empowering the organisation's frontline staff to make improvements to their own processes
- Changing the way the organisation thinks about and manages work so that it moves away from traditional 'command and control' management, focussed on targets and budgets and towards 'system thinking' which focuses on how well the organisation meets customer needs as little wasted work as possible.

3 ONE STOP SHOP

- 3.1 The colour scheme of the One Stop Shop is green, which is recognised for its calming effects. The seating is dark maroon. The area was quite small and comprised approximately 25 seats for customers with a play area for children. A plasma screen is in situ that broadcasts BBC news. There is no cost for this facility as the Council has a TV licence and the news is shown through freeview.
- 3.2 Customers enter the One Stop Shop and book in with the face to face Officers on the reception desk; they then wait for a Customer Services Advisor (CSA) to become free. The aim is to see all customers within 10 minutes but this does depend on customer numbers, available staff, peak volumes etc. Detailed below is how RBC is performing against this target:

Month	Working Days	Customers	Seen in 10 mins	Service Level
Dec-10	20	1121	987	88%
Jan-11	20	1467	1105	75%
Feb-11	20	1564	1322	85%
Mar-11	23	1908	1572	82%
Apr-11	18	1566	1048	67%
May-11	20	1709	1157	68%
Jun-11	22	1676	1164	69%
Jul-11	21	1545	1084	70%
Aug-11	22	1638	1214	74%
Sep-11	22	1715	1174	68%
Oct-11	21	1559	1096	70%
Nov-11	22	1380	958	69%
Dec-11	19	963	712	74%
Jan-12	21	1361	1028	76%

- 3.3 Customers then meet with a CSA in a booth, which has a private feel as they are partitioned to the left and right.
- 3.4 There are 11.34 full time equivalent CSA who offer a full, in-depth service for issues such as housing and council tax queries. CSAs wear black with a pink scarf. Male CSAs wear white shirts with a grey and pink tie, black trousers and a jacket when they are customer-facing. Staff take staggered lunch breaks to ensure continuity of service.

11am
12pm
1pm

2pm

- 3.4 There is also a pool of casual staff who is engaged to fill in gaps as required. The casual staff are issued with a rota one month in advance but this is often subject to change.
- 3.5 Footfall is changing all the time but currently the busy periods are Wednesday and Thursday afternoons.
- 3.5 RBC currently has an additional 1.5 Meet & Greet posts but these will be disestablished on 1 April 2012 and the number of CSAs will be increased to 12.34. Meet & Greet currently deal with 50,000 customers each year.
- 3.6 There are five interview rooms which are reported as adequate.
- 3.7 A terminal is available for customers to use regarding Choice Based Lettings and a telephone to Warwickshire County Council is available for customers to use regarding county council services such as education.
- 3.8 Organisations such as CAB, Money Advice and Broomford Services are regularly based in the One Stop Shop
- 3.9 The One Stop Shop has limited forms on display. A Kiosk is in situ for customers to use to provide feedback on the service provided. It is reported that the cost of this is around £30,000 per year.
- 3.10 The One Stop Shop is open until 5.00pm on weekdays.
- 3.11 The total cost of running the Customer Service Centre is £580,000 which includes Warwickshire Direct Partnership costs. In real terms the cost of each transaction differs from service to service particularly on the telephone as switchboard calls take a couple of minutes and Council Tax calls can take up to 14 minutes if the customer is doing a move out and move in. Currently it costs, on average, £5.14 for a F2F transaction and £4 for a telephone call or email to be dealt with. For RBC the GovMetric costs are as follows:-

Option	Implementation £	Annual Service Charge (payable in advance)
Standard	£17,517.50	£11,278.00

- 3.12 CSAs deal with 95,000 calls, 28,500 customers and 4,000 emails per year.
- 3.13 The Scrutiny Panel sat with Customer Services Officers and made observations.
- 3.14 Whilst sitting with a Customer Services Officer, the Scrutiny Officer noted:
- The Officer was very friendly and proficient
 - The queries were dealt with quickly and efficiently
 - You could not hear what the customer was saying at the neighbouring desk

- 3.15 Members of the Scrutiny Panel also sat with customer services officers and will give an update at the meeting on 1 March 2012

4 CONTACT CENTRE

- 4.1 The Contact Centre opens at 9am and closes at 5pm. CSAs do not just work in the Contact Centre but are trained to work in all customer service locations and will move around.
- 4.2 The computer screen details how many customers' calls are waiting to be answered, as does a separate screen on the wall in the office.
- 4.3 The Scrutiny Panel sat with Customer Services Officers listening to calls and will give an update to the meeting on 1st March 2012.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The evidence gathered at the site visit to Rugby Borough Council's customer services facilities will help to inform the Review of Customer Services at Northampton Borough Council.
- 5.2 The Customer Services Officer, Rugby Borough Council provided a written response to the Panel's core questions and this information will be provided in a briefing note to the Panel's next meeting on 21 March, together with information provided by a range of Local Authorities.
- 5.3 The Scrutiny Panel found the One Stop Shop to have a very welcoming, calm atmosphere and supported the showing of BBC news in the One Stop advising that this added to the relaxed environment. It was found that staff were very friendly putting customers at ease. Drinking water was available for customers. The One Stop Shop was a smaller scale to that of Northampton but in comparison, the electorate for Rugby Borough is 75,000 compared to 157,420 for Northampton Borough. Staff were very smartly dressed in black with pint neckties, although this is not a corporate uniform it is a colour scheme that staff are asked to wear.
- 5.4 Councillors Tony Ansell and Dennis Meredith will, at the meeting, report back details of their observations when listening in to calls from customers in the Contact Centre.

Author: Tracy Tiff, Overview and Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of Councillor Dennis Meredith

Date: 21st February 2012