

## NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL 3 CUSTOMER SERVICES

Wednesday, 23 May 2012

**COUNCILLORS PRESENT:** Councillor Mike Hallam (Chair), Councillors Tony Ansell, Dennis Meredith, David Palethorpe, Terry Wire and County Councillor Marion Minney ( co-optee)

**Officers**

Tracy Tiff	Overview and Scrutiny Officer
Kerry Greaves	Project Manager Customer Services
Joanne Birkin	Democratic Services Officer

#### 1. APOLOGIES

There were none.

#### 2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2012 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

#### 3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

#### 4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST ( INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

#### 5. MYSTERY SHOPPING EXERCISE

The Panel received a briefing note from Councillor Marion Minney detailing a mystery shopping exercise, which she carried out.

The main points of the discussion were as follows: -

- The mystery shopping was done by telephone calls during April 2012. 7 calls were made to: -
- NBC to Environment services, Environmental Health, 2 calls to Legal Services, 2 calls to wardens and Parks.
- NCC, Democratic Services and Child Safeguarding team
- Northants Police, 2 to PCSO'S and 1 to Locality Sergeant.
- All the calls related to genuine casework.
- Initial responses for all services except wardens were automated and within 3 rings. Both calls to the warden service rang out over 20 times without connection to an answer phone or intervention by a switchboard.

- There were no queues. All calls were made during the day. The telephone number for the Police was the non-emergency one.
- Overall greetings were full, including names of departments and individuals. Only the Police did not give a name.
- It took between 1 and 3 different person contacts to resolve the queries. She rated the overall interest and helpfulness of the respondents, how many times information had to be repeated and knowledge of the service required.
- Generally first contact was better than average overall, the more difficult enquiries did result in more contacts and hence a poorer service, particularly in the two environment areas.
- Councillor Minney considered that the spoken request for service required was better than pure number automation as it gave an additional chance if first attempt was unsuccessful. She was also concerned that there wasn't an alternative for people who could not see the numbers.
- Overall performance had been rated as average or above. It was considered that actually this was a good result in comparison to a lot of commercial organisations.
- Members related experiences of difficulties that they have had in contacting the Police non-emergency number. In one instance this was because of a power failure, members were assured that NBC has a backup procedure for such a scenario. Overall they were concerned that if it were not possible to contact the Police on the non-emergency number this would lead to an increase in the inappropriate use of the emergency number.
- Members thanked Councillor Minney for undertaking the Mystery shopping exercise.

**AGREED:** The mystery shopping exercise be agreed as part of the evidence base for the review.

## **6. CHAIR'S DRAFT REPORT**

The Panel considered the Chair's draft report. The Chair emphasised that at this stage it was his draft report, and this was the Panel's opportunity to make comments so that it went forward to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as the Panel's report.

The main points of discussion were as follows: -

- Members requested the inclusion of a recommendation requesting that the contact centre hours be reviewed. Opening hours had been changed from

8.15am to 9am following a decision to tie opening hours of the call centre to public demand at the one stop shop. Members felt then even if there was just a skeleton staff this would be a useful service if people wanted to report a problem before they went to work.

- It was agreed to reorder the evidence so that the emphasis was on the public.
- During the review visit to EMS, members had viewed GPS tracking systems in vehicles and felt that this could be used to give information to the public if there were serious delays to scheduled services or breakdowns etc. Therefore they agreed to put an additional recommendation should be added: - "Where budgets permit, the GPS in cab system be extended more widely to appropriate departments".
- Recommendation 6.1.1 Panel decided to remove the word "minor" as it was felt that this devalued the recommendations.
- Recommendation 6.2.1 relating to signage, Members felt that particular attention should be paid to the Civic part of the building.
- Recommendation 6.2.12. Members agreed to include reference to the need to improve direction signage at Westbridge depot .The Recommendation to read "That improvements be made to the signage at Westbridge depot with a particular focus regarding signage for the EMS site.
- Recommendation 6.2.7 and 6.2.14 relating to the Planning reception area in the One Stop Shop to be combined. Recommendation to read "That Planning Services is incorporated into the One Stop Shop and the Planning Reception desk is constantly manned during opening hours by a fully trained customer services advisor.
- The Panel also felt that its work had highlighted that more detailed investigation needed to be done on customer services provided by EMS and also the potential impact the Welfare Reform Act 2012 could have on resources. The Panel decided to make a request to the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee for these as potential reviews.
- The Panel felt that the process of Customer Service improvement was continuous and therefore it should also make a request to the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider having a further review in two years time.
- The Panel felt that the input of public witnesses had been very valuable to the review and that they should be kept fully informed of the review recommendations and their implementation. It was agreed that contributors should be kept informed of progress as part of the monitoring process.
- The Panel did not consider that there was any priority order of recommendations.

## **AGREED**

1. The final Review report: Customer Services be confirmed, subject to the comments above, including the additional recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
2. The Chair of the Panel will present the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 28 May 2012.

The meeting concluded at 7:05 pm