



# **NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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### **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 1<sup>st</sup> 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:-

<b>Option</b>	<b>Implementation £</b>	<b>Annual Service Charge (payable in advance)</b>
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 1<sup>st</sup> 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: 21<sup>st</sup> February 2012