



## 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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

Phones 359218

Email 21567

Lagan transactions online (not all online transactions) 5377

Online visits (less internal usage) 926529

**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**