



## **NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

#### **SCRUTINY PANEL 3 – CUSTOMER SERVICES**

**21<sup>st</sup> MARCH 2012**

#### **DESKTOP RESEARCH: OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES CUSTOMER SERVICES FACILITIES**

##### **1 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 At its scoping meeting, Scrutiny Panel 3 (Customer Services) agreed that it would receive details of customer services of other Local Authorities. As reported to the previous meeting, representatives of the Scrutiny Panel attended a site visit to Rugby Borough Council and had a tour of its customer services facilities.

1.2 The previous Scrutiny Review into customer services received information on customer services facilities noted as best practice including:

Kettering Borough Council  
Milton Keynes Council  
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

1.2 A sample of questions was put to those local authorities listed above plus:

Rugby Borough Council  
Corby Borough Council  
Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council

##### **2 INFORMATION**

2.1 Information was received from the following:

###### **Kettering Borough Council**

2.2 Kettering Borough Council is part of the Northamptonshire Mystery Shopping Group, along with Northampton Borough Council and takes on board the feedback received through this exercise. The Customer Services Manager and his colleague shadow/listen into calls to gauge the quality of customer services provided by their advisors.

Kettering Borough Council does not cost out its transactions via phone, face to face, emails etc.

Customer satisfaction surveys are completed on an ad hoc basis. These ask for customer opinions on the level of information received as well as the quality of service. It also has customer service feedback forms for customers to complete on each serving desk and at the main reception.

Kettering Borough Council works in partnership with a number of voluntary and public sector organisations that all use the space available at the Council offices to provide a customer service facility for their customers. The Customer Services Manager rated comfort and accessibility as very good and confirmed that this was mirrored in the feedback received from customers via exit surveys.

Customers can access the customer services facilities via phone and face to face at any of the four customer services centres. Other methods of contact are email, web-forms, post, text messaging and live chat. The most frequently used method of contacting customer services is telephone.

**Current targets:**

Face to face customers are seen within ten minutes

Telephones are answered within ten seconds

Correspondence is fully dealt with within ten days

The targets have been in place since the Call Centre was opened over seven years ago.

Data is gathered via relevant system reports. Results are reported monthly to senior management via performance clinics.

The Customer Services Manager felt that a shared customer service facility would provide a better experience for the customer in that they could deal with more issues under one roof. There would be closer working relationships between partners and it would create an income stream for the Council by renting space within the building.

**Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council**

2.3 Customer Services at Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council is evaluated by:

**Quality of the Service and Service Delivery**

Corporate Performance Development Framework involving target setting against core objectives and behaviour expectations

Quality mentoring of staff against agreed targets

Complaint and compliment monitoring

Customer Services Excellence Accreditation

Process Review involving clear hand off to back office

Consistency through the use of Oracle CRM and call guides (scripting)

Review meetings with back office services

Change control process implementation to ensure accurate information

Performance monitoring

**Customer Satisfaction across the whole organisation**

Review meetings with back office services

Staff able to provide comments via web feedback from

SOCTIM web survey

**Cost and efficiency**

Review of targets set for answer rate and service level to ensure cost effective

National benchmarking

Baber report

Cap Gemini Review

The One Stop Shop at the Council makes best use of the space available by including partner services such as the Volunteer Sector, Police ALMO, registration services.

Comfort and accessibility is rated as excellent. The One Stop Shop is rated as Compliance Plus in CSE accreditation.

Customer can access the customer services facilities:

Email

Telephone

Face to face

The most frequently used method of contact is via the telephone

All letters are answered within five days

All emails are answered by 6pm the following working day

The aim is to see face to face customers within fifteen minutes

The targets were arrived at by benchmarking with national and industry standards alongside value for money consideration.

Data is analysed using the mitel telephone system reporting, QMatic queue management and performance system and Oracle Discoverer reports using Oracle CRM data. Operational managers are responsible for monitoring performance reported by exception to monthly management meeting and in detail quarterly. Quarterly reports are submitted to the Corporate Leadership Team.

The Customer Services Manager advised that she supported investigations into shared service facilities as it enables a large resource to more effectively manage peaks and troughs and should reduce overall costs of support and management.

**Corby Borough Council**

Corby Borough Council evaluates its customer services facility via benchmarking and customer satisfaction surveys.

The Recovery and Customer First Manager advised that the Council Offices are a new cube building in the town centre and is easily accessible. The One Stop Shop was planned and built with a large space available with pleasant surroundings.

The customer can make contact via telephone, face to face and on line. In person and telephone are the most frequent methods of contact

dependent upon the query. 50% of face to face contact is in relation to benefits enquiries.

The current targets for customer services are:

Average waiting time for face to face customers	15 minutes
Average call waiting time	45 seconds
Percentage of calls abandoned	10%

Targets were decided through discussions with Senior Management Team and Councillors and through benchmarking with other Local Authorities.

Data is analysed via monthly Management and Team meetings. Individual targets are set for Officers.

The Recovery and Customer First Manager reported that a shared customer service facility has many benefits to customers and closer working relationships with Agencies involved.

### **Rugby Borough Council**

The Customer Services Manager reported that the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) draws up and manages the overview and scrutiny work programme following consultation with the Cabinet. They review and scrutinise the performance of the Council and help drive improvements in services. There are 2 Overview and Scrutiny Committees. These are the Corporate Performance and Scrutiny Committees. A task group was set up in October 2011 to undertake a review of the Customer Service Reception area following its refurbishment which was completed in April 2010. This report went to Cabinet on 14 March 2011.

Rugby Borough Council (RBC) uses the GovMetric system and has a kiosk for face to face services in reception and it puts customers through to the feedback line when they telephone the Customer Service Centre. This has only been a requirement since 1 February 2012 so, as at 20.02.12, 149 customers have used the survey and of these 93% have said that the service is good. GovMetric can be made available to back office services but it hasn't been rolled out as yet. There are a number of other customer satisfaction surveys taking place across the Council but these are not controlled by me. Sue Birch deals with all corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints so you may want to contact her. The Council's face to face GovMetric figures tell the organisation that its is providing services that result in high levels of customer satisfaction as RBC was ranked in the top 7 out of 70 Councils for 9 out of the 12 months in 2011 with between 74% and 89% of customers saying the service was good. In addition to this its Customer Service Advisor face to face transaction costs are below national figures provided by SOCITM and NWEFG - Channel Value Benchmarking.

RBC has always prioritised face to face services over telephone services as customers have had to come into the Town Hall and it is easier to call again if the lines are busy.

In terms of the telephone channel, team members receive data about aspects of their performance that are measurable (records kept/calls taken/how time is utilised). Currently, there is an expectation that each Customer Services Advisor (CSA) deals with, on average, 8 calls per hour. This figure has been arrived at by analysing the call handling and process write up time for each service/call. CSA performance is reviewed monthly and, whilst it is important to be able to perform all aspects of the role well, quality is the main driver so there is a need to always think about how RBC delivers services and outcomes that work for the customer. It is moving away from quantitative measures but what advisors do and how long it takes will always be a factor:

- Too slow and it affects the quality
- Too rushed and it affects the quality
- No record and it affects the quality and the outcome because if there is no record the service may not be delivered at all.

The Customer Services Manager advised that RBC is always trying to identify the best way of working keeping in mind the capacity of the team. With such a small team, all advisors must be able to switch from telephone, to email to face to face depending on the customer demand and the available capacity. 'Hot Desking' is an example of how RBC has reduced costs and increased efficiency.

RBC's channel shift project has been overtaken by other priorities like reducing headcount as a result of the public sector cuts.

The reception area was refurbished in 2010 and as a result of this 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.
- Disability Discrimination Act 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.

Following the refurbishment, and to coincide with the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group and National Customer Survey week, a survey was undertaken to see what customers thought of the improvements 15 examples were given:

- more welcoming (x1)
- more efficient (x1)
- much quicker (x6)
- much improved (x3)
- more private (x1)
- more space (x1)
- very informative (x2)

Customers can telephone, visit or email. Customers can also use the website but this comes under Communication, Consultation & Information which is part of Business Transformation and not Customer and Information Services (C&IS). The most frequently used form of contact is the telephone.

For the telephone service, there are two targets: 80% of calls to be answered in 20 seconds or less and no more than 5% of calls abandoned. These are local performance indicators.

The above targets are fairly typical and the Customer Services Manager confirmed that she has used them in previous organisations.

The data is analysed through Insight MIS which is part of the Macfarlane System.

Currently it costs, on average, £5.14 for a face to face transaction and £4 for a telephone call or email to be dealt with.

For customers who visit, RBC has a target for a Customer Service Advisor (CSA) to see them in 10 minutes or less. Customers are booked in as they arrive and this time is updated as soon as the customer is called into a booth to see a CSA. This information is transferred onto a proforma each day and they transferred to the spreadsheet once a month. This target was introduced as part of the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group which was set up in October 2011 to undertake a review of the Customer Service Reception area.

The Customer Services Manager confirmed that it is important to make services as accessible as possible for the customer. A good example of a service that is shared and is of mutual benefit is concessionary travel. Although Warwickshire County Council holds the contract for this, RBC delivers it on their behalf so that people who live in Rugby can come into the Town Hall.

## **Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council (NBBC)**

NBBC has a feedback system called Govmetric that enables customers to leave their views and feedback on the service they receive. This can either be through the telephone, face to face, emails or the website. The statistics are collated each month giving a reflection of customer opinion for each method of contact and service whether good, average or poor.

Each individual department is responsible for their own feedback and satisfaction surveys measuring quality. The tools used are different throughout.

Govmetric feedback is used to address any problems within Customer Services. NBBC began a Lean Reviews programme 2 years ago focusing on different services mainly looking at improving performance and cost savings. Hopefully all of the larger departments will have been through the process by the end of 2014.

Govmetric covers all media including telephones, F2F, email, and website. This does not currently cover post.

NBBC's One Stop Shop opened in October 2007. The plan included enough space to integrate other organisations if and when required. Current organisations sharing our facility include HMRC and a Veterans contact point. NBBC has not received any complaints with regards to the comfort and accessibility of the centre and it meets all equality needs.

NBBC has one main Town Hall based in Nuneaton and a sub site within Bedworth. The sub site provides similar services to those at Nuneaton but on a smaller scale. The Nuneaton Town Hall has four self serve terminals and the Bedworth Office has a free phone to contact each service direct. Customers can contact the centre either by telephone, F2F, email, website or post.

Telephone has always been the most frequent method to contact the centre.

**Current Targets for Telephone** – 70% of calls answered within 20 seconds.

**Current Targets for Face to face** – 75% of customers seen within 10 minutes.

**Website/Email/Post enquiries** – 100% answered or replied to within 10 working days.

These targets were originally arrived at using a National Average but we have since amended some to a more realistic achievable figure.

The data is analysed on a monthly basis to establish performance. It is also used to establish patterns, customer behaviour, channel shift and resource issues.

NBBC is currently working in partnership with Warwickshire County Council on a number of projects. This includes a shared customer services facility. This project is only currently at the infancy stage.

### 3 CONCLUSIONS

3.1 The main conclusions from this desktop research exercise are:

- Targets for customer services were similar
- Some Local Authorities offer additional points of contact such as text message and live chat
- In the main the most frequent form of contact was telephone
- Costs of dealing with customers were provided by Rugby Borough Council who also provided details of the average costs that had been provided via a channel benchmarking group:

<b>Channel</b>	<b>SOCITM £</b>	<b>NWEGG - Channel Value Benchmarking £</b>	<b>Average £</b>
<b>Web</b>	£0.39	£0.17	£0.28
<b>Telephone</b>	£3.21	£4.00	£3.65
<b>Face to Face</b>	£8.23	£7.81	£8.02

- Responses received confirmed the value of a shared customer service for both the customer and the organisation. The Local Authorities currently make best use of the space available by including a variety of partner services within their One Stop Shop facilities.

3.2 That details obtained via this desktop research exercise inform the evidence base of the Review.

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6<sup>th</sup> March 2012