

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
SCRUTINY PANEL 3 CUSTOMER SERVICES

Wednesday, 21 March 2012

PRESENT: Councillor Mike Hallam (Chair); Councillors Tony Ansell, Dennis Meredith, David Palethorpe and Terry Wire

OFFICERS: Julie Sedddon – Director of Customers and Communities
Marion Goodman- Head of Customer Services
Tracy Tiff - Scrutiny Officer
Jonne Birkin- Democratic Services Officer

WITNESSES John Leatham -Customer Relations Director Ford Retail- Item 5
John Connolly- Northampton Federation of Residents Associations-
Item 7 (A)
Ian Whibley -Northampton Federation of Residents Associations-
Item 7 (A)

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence from the meeting was received from County Councillor Marion Minney.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 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. PRESENTATION FORD RETAIL

The Committee received a presentation from Mr John Leatham the Customer Services Director of Ford Retail on its Customer Experience Programme.

- Ford Retail encompasses the 80 dealers nationwide that are owned by Ford.
- Ford uses one main, easily identifiable strap line through its advertising an service identification points. Surveys indicated that the “feel the difference” logo is seen 9,000 times every day.
- When the Customer Experience Programme was first launched car dealerships popularity was just above estate agents.

- Determining the customer experience was about identifying the “moments of truth” when the service was being tested in some way. The scheme applies to everyone who works for Ford Retail at whatever level, and internal and external customers.
- Previous employee reward schemes had been about achieving certain financial targets. Many employees felt that this did not apply to them and therefore felt that they had little involvement in the customer satisfaction process. For example service technicians did not have any face-to-face contact with customers and therefore did not contribute to a positive customer experience.
- The programme is driven by staff satisfaction, which in turn feeds customer satisfaction. Research by Bob Johnston of the Warwick Business School indicates that a person’s perception of excellent customer service is 25% rational and 75% emotional. Customers want their dealings to be efficient, that staff are helpful and polite, they want any promises to be kept and they enjoy feeling that the service is personal and that staff have gone above and beyond the call of duty.
- A large number of change projects fail and as such there does need to be a long term commitment for long lasting results.
- The Ford Retail change programme focussed on the whole customer experience. Workshops were held for all members of staff, off site with a personal invitation and interactive workshops. All staff took part in mapping out their place in the customer services process.
- All staff then had a workbook to complete, this is an NVQ. They were supported by internal change champions and the train for gain organisation. All staff now have an NVQ in Customer Service or Institute of Customer Service.
- There is also an employee recognition scheme called “making the moment”. Anyone can nominate any member of staff for what they believe has been good customer service. Each nominee gets a personally signed letter from the Director of Customer Services. There are about 500 a year and there have been 10,000 in total. “Moments” are also used in promotion and for example everyone who wants to has a photograph taken of them when they pick up their new or used car and these are displayed in showrooms.
- There is a magic moments club, which has a sum of money allocated and staff can take part in outings/activities. There is also an E newsletter detailing awards. This scheme is being expanded to include suppliers. Money that was originally paid through an individual bonus scheme was now diverted to the magic moments scheme.
- Research shows that only about 5% of complaints are reported, which indicates that the vast majority of people who feel that they have had bad service do not complain but either do not use the company again or tell other people that they are not happy with the services that they received.

- Customers who have had their car serviced will receive a call within 24 hours asking about their experience.
- The customer service scheme has received national recognition and many awards.
- The scheme has been going for around 4 years and has been very intensive; with 7,000 staff training days delivered over 18 months.
- Members commented that there was a difference for local authorities as our customer base is fixed .It was noted however that if the majority of staff were happier then the workplace is a better and more productive environment. There is also the element of corporate responsibility and promoting good citizenship.
- Members also asked how temporary agency workers could be involved. If there is a culture of positive customer experience then this will be passed between staff.
- Members of the Panel thanked Mr Leatham for his very interesting presentation.

6. WITNESS EVIDENCE - EXPERT WITNESSES

7. DIRECTOR, ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

The Panel received written responses to their core questions from the Director of Enterprise Management Services.

AGREED:-The response (as attached as Appendix A) be agreed as part of the evidence base for the review.

(A) REPORT BACK FROM NORTHAMPTON FEDERATION OF RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION FOCUS GROUP

The Panel received a report back from Mr John Connolly Vice Chair, Northampton Federation of Residents Associations, on its responses to the Panel's core questions.

The main points of discussion were as follows: -

- Generally it was felt that the questionnaire should have been split allowing for responses relating to specific services.
- There was a difference in perception of service between Council and private tenants. There was also a perceived difference between areas.
- Some people found the automated telephone system difficult to use as it asked for the department that people required which they were not always sure of. Others had found that the system did not recognise their accents. There were also frustrations when people left messages and their calls were

not returned.

- Members were advised that the automated service is continually being updated to include additional search phrases. The system was originally introduced as a cost saving measure as it replaced 3 receptionists who answered phones.
- Residents felt that service across issues such as repairs, refuse collection and maintenance was patchy.
- With regard to contact methods, people who had Internet access were happy to use it and found it helpful. However those without it did not appreciate being asked if friends or family could make contact by this method on their behalf. Most preferred to speak to someone over the telephone.
- Most people did not want to make personal visits to the One Stop Shop as they had difficulty in travelling to it. For those who had visited the main issues with the One Stop Shop were lack of privacy and the queues at reception, which were seen as very off putting.
- Residents did not always know which services they were entitled to, although generally they felt that services were well publicised. They did feel that the people who were part of Residents Associations did tend to be those who were more informed and engaged in the local community.
- Residents felt that they felt that they could not comment on whether services were good value for money, as they did not know how much was spent on them.
- Some residents had been deterred from using the out of hours service because there was a message that stated that they could be fined unless the problem was a real emergency.
- Some people would use social networking sites, and that was not necessarily determined by someone's age. They also felt that partnership working would very much depend on whom the partners were but there was a concern that they might not have such a strong customer focus.

AGREED – That the responses of the Federation of Residents' Associations to the core questions inform the evidence base of this Review.

8. MANAGING DIRECTOR, NORTHAMPTON LEISURE TRUST

The Panel received written responses to its core questions from the Managing Director Northampton Leisure Trust.

AGREED: -The response be agreed as part of the evidence base for the review.

9. EVIDENCE FROM PARTNERS

The Panel received a written response from Northamptonshire County Council in respect of the Registrars service.

AGREED:-The response be agreed as part of the evidence base for the review.

10. COUNCILLORS' OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS ON THEIR CUSTOMER SERVICES FACILITIES AT NBC

The Panel considered a briefing note that detailed Councillors views on Customer Services.

AGREED:-The response be agreed as part of the evidence base for the review.

11. BASELINE DATA

The Panel received baseline data on :

- One Stop Shop Performance Report 2 May 31 December 2011
- Community Engagement Portfolio Performance data for January 2012
- CCTV in the One Stop Shop
- Repair response times.

AGREED:-The data be agreed as part of the evidence base for the review.

12. REPORT BACK FROM SITE VISITS.

Danes Camp

Councillor Palethorpe reported back on the visit to the Danes Camp facility.

The main points were as follows: -

- The Panel were very impressed with the way that the facility was being run. They were not afraid to admit when they had made mistakes but took the overall view that it was better to openly recognise any problems and address them.
- There was a recognition that the needs of existing customers needed to be considered alongside that of having to attract new customers.
- There is a concern over how car parking changes surrounding the leisure sites might affect future business.

- The facility was busy, seemed well run and staff were welcoming. There seemed to be some minor inconsistencies in uniform. Members were also impressed with the crèche facilities.
- Overall there was confidence that the Leisure Trust would go from strength to strength.

EMS

Councillor Meredith reported back on the EMS site visit.

The main points were as follows: -

- Access to the site was difficult, signage was poor and speed restrictions did not seem to be adhered to.
- There were a lot of agency workers on site. This led to a feeling that with so many temporary staff enough consideration wasn't given to training and enforcement of health and safety. Ear defenders were not always being used where they should be.
- There seemed to be a conflict between Housing services and EMS on usage of the site. It was also felt that there was a poor rapport between EMS and the neighbourhood wardens who could act as a more effective liaison.
- Members felt that there were a number of issues concerning visitors to the site. They felt that signage and speed limit information was inadequate. The site has been resurfaced and two new weighbridges provided.

Housing Benefits

- Members listened in to a call where an officer completed a Housing Benefit claim form with the customer. They felt that the officer involved had been very good, explaining things as they went along and leaving the customer with a clear picture as to what the next steps would be.
- There was concern at the numbers of single homeless that were presenting to the Council. It was noted that although there was not a statutory duty to rehouse them unless they were in a vulnerable category staff did make an effort to help and advice them. There was an overall concern that the numbers presenting will increase as a result of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, which will increase the pressure on staff.
- Members were very impressed at the speed in which a member of the Housing options team processed a query.

Guildhall Office

- Members felt that the Guildhall Office staff were very important in keeping the building running. It was noted that they did not wear uniforms.
- It was felt that there were some issues with signage and that it could be made clearer where the public should go particularly to access the registrar's service.

Planning

- Planning did not use the central call answering service.
- Panel members felt that there should be a clearly signed designated area in the One Stop Shop for Planning.

13. DESKTOP RESEARCH

The Panel received written a report on desktop research on best practice for customer services facilities.

AGREED:-The report be agreed as part of the evidence base for the review.

14. DESKTOP RESEARCH GENTOO

The Panel received written a report on desktop research on the Gentoo Group, which was an organisation based in Sunderland and created following housing stock transfer from a local authority.

AGREED:-The report be agreed as part of the evidence base for the review.

The meeting concluded at 8:10 pm