

# SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CUSTOMER SERVICES



**MARCH 2006**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



2005-2006  
Getting Closer to Communities

## CONTENTS

	<b>Page No.</b>
1. Executive Summary & Recommendations	3
2. Introduction	8
3. Customer Services Performance	11
4. Customer Care	21
5. Communication with Client Services	28
6. Visits & Consultation	32
7. Conclusion	32

### Appendices

Appendix 1	Customer Services Performance Management Framework
Appendix 2	Customer Services Performance Indicators
Appendix 3	Comparative Consultation Results
Appendix 4	Customer Consultation in Local Authorities
Appendix 5	OPM Mystery Shopping Methodology
Appendix 6	Local Authority Call Centre Benchmarking
Appendix 7	Contributors to the Review & Sources of Information

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## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee as part of its work programme for 2005/06 commissioned a scrutiny review into Customer Services. The review topic was chosen based on concerns previously raised about the performance of Customer Services.
- 1.2 Customer Services has been in operation in Haringey for over four years and provides convenient and effective access to Council services through a single point of contact for an increasing range of services in a way that serves the needs of local residents. Over the past four years it has extended its provision to more services and more customers. The caller and visitor numbers during this period indicate that the service is becoming more popular and well known by residents.
- 1.3 The Customer Service Strategy agreed by the Executive in 2002 underpins the Customer Services vision, which is to ensure that '80% of contacts with the Council are handled through customer services channels and 80% of those are resolved at first point of contact'. Annual reviews of the strategy in 2003, 2004 and 2005 noted the significant progress that has been made in achieving the strategy. This was recognised by customers in the annual telephone survey, which registered an overall increase in satisfaction over this period.
- 1.4 The Scrutiny Review Panel's aim was to look at the performance of the Council's four Customer Service Centres and the Call Centre and make recommendations on ways they could be further improved. The Panel found that customer services has improved significantly over the last two years. Residents are receiving a wide range of services which are efficient and effective. This has been confirmed by customers in the annual telephone survey results. **The service is comparable to many of the best in the business, to the extent that the Panel believes that it should apply for national awards.** The Panel has made a set of recommendations which it hopes will help further improve performance, increase usage and also improve residents satisfaction with the services.
- 1.5 The Review Panel received evidence from the Executive Member for Community Involvement, Executive Member for Organisational Development & Performance, Assistant Chief Executive (Access), Head of Customer Services, Senior Managers in Customer Services, IT Managers and various Customer Services Officers and officers from various Client Services. The Panel visited the Council's four Customer Service Centres and the Call Centre as well as a One Stop Shop and Call Centre in London Borough's of Brent and Westminster.
- 1.6 A summary of the recommendations is given below and is based around 3 key themes: Customer Services Performance; Customer Care and Communication with Client Services:

## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **CUSTOMER SERVICES PERFORMANCE**

#### **Recommendation 1**

That Customer Services Department review the value and process of the user satisfaction survey undertaken by Customer Services Officers after each interaction. The Panel requested that, in 12 months time, a report outlining the conclusions reached including supporting evidence, details of actions, if any, implemented be submitted to Overview & Scrutiny Committee. If the value cannot be justified the Panel believes that this practise should be ceased.

#### **Recommendation 2**

That Customer Services develop a mystery shopping exercise as part of their performance assessment process. The mystery shoppers to include local residents, disabled people, businesses and Council officers. The mystery shopping should include testing access for disabled users including parking facilities.

#### **Recommendation 3**

That the monthly award scheme for staff in Customer Services be re-introduced to recognise and reward excellent customer service.

#### **Recommendation 4**

That training for Customer Services and Client Services staff be co-ordinated and where possible shared in particular where there is change of legislations or a new Council service is introduced.

#### **Recommendation 5**

That Team Managers keep log of reasons for calls to Client Services and that this be reported to liaison meetings. All calls to Client Services by Customer Services staff which are outside the process agreed with Client Services must be authorised by Team Managers.

#### **Recommendation 6**

Staff feedback needs to be enhanced, bottom up. In addition the staff suggestion scheme should be reintroduced.

#### **Recommendation 7**

That IT Services undertake a review of the underlying causes of system downtime with particular emphasis on reducing such downtime.

#### **Recommendation 8**

That logs of system downtime be reported to each Customer Services Member Working Group meeting.

#### **Recommendation 9**

That the planned saving targets for the next three years are considered to be achievable whilst maintaining existing targets.

## **CUSTOMER CARE**

### **Recommendation 10**

The Review Panel endorsed the projects being developed by the Corporate Customer Focus Manager. This includes the following:

- Further developing Customer Focus throughout the Council through a Customer Focus Strategy;
- Membership of the Institute of Customer Services, including opportunities for staff development/qualifications in the field;
- That the Communication Unit manages and controls the printing and distribution of posters and leaflets. All leaflets and posters should include versions/ date of issue indicators, to assist in removal of obsolete items. In addition, electronic copies of posters and leaflets be made available on the Council Website.

### **Recommendation 11**

That in line with the findings of Reception Project report, it is recommended that firstly the need for security staff at all Customer Service Centres be investigated. Secondly if there is a need, that they be employed permanently by the Council with a varied role to include some of the following:

1. Welcoming customers;
2. Direct customers to appropriate officers;
3. Provide answers to basic queries;
4. Be responsible for the maintenance and updating of displays containing application forms, posters and leaflets etc.

### **Recommendation 12**

That the Call Centre be renamed 'Contact Centre' as it now deals with e-mails.

### **Recommendation 13**

It is the opinion of the Scrutiny Panel that the ability is there to 'win' a national award for the excellent service provided by the department. The Panel encourages Customer Services Department to apply for a Charter Mark award or other national awards for Customer Services.

### **Recommendation 14**

That all Customer Service Centres introduce the facility to take credit/debit card payments immediately.

### **Recommendation 15**

That the roll out of parking permits to all centres be completed immediately.

### **Recommendation 16**

That it be investigated whether the demand and usage of the Customer Service Centre in Hornsey justifies the need for a centre in the area. In addition that in future the Accommodation Strategy considers, if there is a need to move the Hornsey Customer Service Centre, that it be relocated to Hornsey Library, taking into account the need to co-locate with Housing Services.

**Recommendation 17**

That Customer Services provide a 'Sign Video' system for deaf service users at the Customer Service Centres and a 'Type Talk' system at the Call Centre. These should replace the Minicom facility and deaf sign language interpreters.

**Recommendation 18**

That Customer Services in consultation with Property Services/ Highways Department provide parking facilities for customers with disability as near as possible to the Customer Service Centres, which should be clearly marked for the use of disabled customers only and clamping be enforced for unauthorised parking.

**Recommendation 19**

That the single queue at Apex House Customer Service Centre be reconfigured as a matter of urgency.

**CLIENT SERVICES**

**Recommendation 20**

That Team Managers and staff members be trained as service champions in particular service areas to reduce calling Client Services and improve service time.

**Recommendation 21**

That Customer Services be responsible for the development and update of a forward plan in conjunction with Client Services which has details of all major letters, information, bills, reminders etc being sent to residents throughout the year to enable Customer Services to prepare resources adequately.

**Recommendation 22**

That regular service liaison meetings between management and staff from Customer Services and Client Services be held as required. At each meeting at least one member of staff from Customer Services should participate. The agenda for the meeting to include the following:

1. Minutes of the last meeting (review of actions/responsibilities);
2. Review Performance Measures/Statistics and quality against targets ;
3. Call Centre performance statistics;
4. Key Housing performance indicators;
5. Review current issue logs/raise new issues;
6. Review of future development plan- Include anticipated workloads, contingency planning, scheduled downtime, training, recruitment and resource capacity;
7. ;Review Draft SLA;
8. Reports from Team Managers on calls to Client Services which are outside the agreed process.

In addition, all staff and team managers in Customer Services and Client Services should be advised of key outcomes arising out of service liaison meetings.

**Recommendation 23**

That as part of the Corporate Induction, organised by Organisational Development & Learning, all new employees visit the Call Centre and a Customer Service Centre.

**Recommendation 24**

That Customer Services investigate additional funding streams to further assist in the recruitment and training of new recruits.

**Recommendation25**

That the recharging arrangements to all client services be clarified. Client services need to be made aware of the number of calls / visits handled on their behalf along with the average time of their transaction, repeat visit / calls information to be included. Provision of this information will encourage client services to ensure a reduction in repeat visits / calls and to streamline their transactions to achieve reduced transaction times.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Customer Services provides convenient and effective access to Council services with a contact centre approach and a single point of contact for an increasing range of services, in a way that serves the needs of the customer through;
- face to face contact in Customer Service Centres,
  - telephone contact in the Call Centre,
  - e-mail access
  - frequently asked questions on the Council's website, enabling access to this material in other customer facing services.
- 2.2 Customer Services channels, including services offered through the website, are the principal means of user access to a high volume of Council services and facilitate accessibility, including facilitated and self service, through other service delivery points in Access Services, such as Neighbourhood Resource Centres and Libraries.
- 2.3 As the face of the Council, Customer Services deal with a wide and diverse range of people in the local community. The services offered span across the whole community. Specific groups in the community are targeted by virtue of the services they require e.g. pensioners applying for their bus passes. It should be noted that the departments Customer Services provides services for are referred to in this report as 'Client Services'. Some of the key services delivered by the Customer Services Department are listed below:

Service	Customers
<b>Parking</b>	Resident and local business vehicle users, non-Haringey residents and businesses parking in the area
<b>Abandoned Vehicles</b>	Haringey residents and non-Haringey residents
<b>Graffiti removal</b>	Haringey residents and non-Haringey residents
<b>Concessionary travel</b>	Resident pensioners and disabled residents
<b>Housing</b>	Any Haringey Council tenant and/or resident in housing need
<b>Benefits and Local Taxation</b>	Any lower income resident for benefits and any resident for Council Tax
<b>Child Protection</b>	Anyone with concerns about a resident child.
<b>The Children's Service</b>	Parents and children resident in Haringey or attending Haringey schools

- 2.4 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee as part of its work programme for 2005/06 commissioned a Scrutiny Review into Customer Services. The review topic was chosen as part of the on-going review of the implementation of the customer services strategy and based on concerns previously raised about the performance of customer services.
- 2.5 The needs of our residents can and should be at the heart of how we manage and organise our services. The approach to access, whether it is improving people's ability to access our services, or their experience in our Customer Service Centres and the Call Centre, will change residents' perceptions of the Council and, in doing so, challenge the way that the Council thinks about itself and how it is organised.



- 2.6 The Executive agreed the Customer Service Forward Strategy in July 2002. Annual reviews of the Customer Services Strategy in 2003, 2004 and 2005 noted the significant progress that had been made in achieving the strategy. In particular the success in improving the customer experience in Service Centres and the improved performance in the Call Centre.
- 2.7 This review focused on the performance of Customer Services and in particular the four Customer Service Centres and the Call Centre. The review also looked at ways communication can be improved between Customer Services and Client Services.
- 2.8 Customer Services has been in operation in Haringey for over 4 years. Over this period it has extended its provision to more services and more customers. The table below illustrates the visitor and call numbers to Customer Service Centres (CSC), Call Centre and Switchboard over the last three years. The figures show that there has been an increase in the visitor numbers and callers coming through the customer service channels, which now equate to 37% of all initial approaches to the Council.

Year	CSC	Call Centre	Switchboard
2002/3	75,920	258,729	876,001
2003/4	74,910	250,308	785,700
2004/05	138,816	299,821	700,599

*Source: CS News August 2005*

- 2.9 The 2005 Annual Review of Customer Services Strategy and Vision noted the poor service level experienced in the Call Centre during 2003/04. This was addressed through the investment in staffing and has been significant improvement with only 5.6% of calls answered in 15 seconds in April 2004 to 77.2% of calls answered in 15 seconds in March 2005, achieving 43% for the year overall against the target of 45%. This was recognised by customers in the annual telephone survey, which registered an increase in overall customer satisfaction from 71% in late 2003 to 77% in May 2005.
- 2.10 The review also noted that service levels in CSCs remained good and achieved 77% of customers seen in 15 minutes, for the year, against the target of 70%. Service levels have continued to achieve target levels in 2005/06 year to date.

## 2.11 Customer Services Strategy

2.11.1 The Customer Services strategy is based on four simple premises:

- Accessing services should be a good quality experience;
- Services should be accessible in one place, which suits the individual;
- The service should be consistent; and
- The service should deliver a result.

2.11.2 In the longer term, the primary way into the Council should be through the Council website because it is both convenient for users and cost effective. This is becoming increasingly possible as tactical technological solutions are developed, but some of our residents do not feel comfortable using the web, or have no easy access to it. In the meantime, residents can access us in the four Customer Service Centres or preferably, the Call Centre. There are also a number of places, receptions and libraries, where

enquiries will be dealt with, where public access computers are available for use and where their use will be supported.

2.11.3 The underpinning vision of the customer services strategy is that:

*Over time, 80% of customer contacts with the Council will be handled through Customer Services channels (customers services centres and call centre, e-mail, the internet and other self service channels) and 80% of these will be completed at first contact, so that customers may contact the Council when, where and how they need to.*

2.11.4 This work contributes to the Council's overall priority of delivering excellent services as outlined in our Community Strategy and, when successful, will result in improved perception ratings of both the Council overall and individual services.

2.11.5 Implementing the Customer Services Strategy is one of the biggest e-government (IEG) project the Council is managing. This is underlined by the objective of improving face to face and telephone services through electronic delivery, as well as increasing the transactional facility of the website. The Council is on target to achieve the targets on this and it is hoped it will have a positive effect on local residents.

## **2.12 Membership of the Review**

Cllr John Bevan (Chair)

Cllr Judith Bax

Cllr Gideon Bull

Cllr Bernard Millar

Cllr Sheila Peacock

Cllr Susan Oatway

## **2.13 Scope and Aims of the Review**

### Aim

To review the performance of Customer Services in Haringey Council in particular the four Customer Service Centres and the Call Centre.

### Tasks

1. To consider current and prospective corporate customer services strategies and how these link with services across the Council;
2. To consider key corporate customer services improvement targets and plans in place to achieve them;
3. To understand how customer services impacts on residents of Haringey;
4. To consider how customer services performance can be improved;
5. To consider results of customer services telephone survey and in particular look at areas of concerns;
6. To consider ways customer service relationship and communication can be improved with client service to reduce duplication of work.

### 3.0 CUSTOMER SERVICES PERFORMANCE

#### 3.1 Performance Key Issues

3.1.1 A critical concern for customers is how long they have to wait for their enquiry or transaction to be dealt with. Consequently this performance indicator is a key headline measure for Customer Services. The service level over the last four years has been as follows:

	Call Centre	Customer Service Centres (CSCs)	
Year	Calls answered in 15 seconds	Callers seen in 15 minutes	Commentary
2002/3	15.0%	58.9%	Call Centre performance improved towards end of the year but was unable to overcome poor service at the start of the year. 2 CSCs open
2003/4	9.3%	65.4%	Siebel Customer Relationship system upgraded in August 2003 which added 2 minutes to transaction times. Call Centre staffing increased from December 2003 3 <sup>rd</sup> CSC opened in February 2004
2004/5	43.0%	77.1%	£535K invested in more staff for the Call Centre, and were fully trained by November 2004. 4 <sup>th</sup> CSC opened July 2004
2005/6	69.5%	67.8%	Performance to end of August 2005

3.1.2 A critical enabler for service level is the availability of staff resource. In the early years of Customer Services, the staffing level lagged behind the demand for service. When the Call Centre began operations in late 2001, the demand was suppressed by the availability of staff and the telephone lines to accept calls. Consequently there was hidden demand which became more obvious as staffing resources were increased and the technology was changed to record the calls and demand behaviour. The table below shows the number of calls taken in each of the years and the baseline that was derived from previous service call handling.

Year	Calls answered	Index (trend)	Commentary
Baseline	222156	100	Includes Council Tax, Benefits, Housing and Parking
2002/3	258729	116	Abandoned vehicles calls added
2003/4	250308	113	

2004/5	299821	135	
2005/6	362616	163	Projection on basis of calls answered to end of August 2005

3.1.3 Staff performance is a critical enabler for customer services, customer care and service quality. During 2004/05, staffing resources in the Call Centre were increased significantly as a result of additional funding. The management structure also changed allowing the recruitment of a more experienced Call Centre Manager. The changes to the management structures have enabled improved management systems to be developed. The nature of the technology supporting both Call Centre and CSC operations, enables measurement of inputs and outputs, down to individual staff member level. Consequently all aspects of staff performance are managed through one to one reviews and performance appraisal. A brief description of the performance management framework is given at Appendix 1 and the performance indicators are at Appendix 2.

3.1.4 Performance and service level are affected by:

- Fluctuations in demand, such as increased levels of demand for repairs in cold or wet weather, and as a result of actions by Client Services, such as Council Tax recovery actions – reminders and summonses – which tend to occur monthly.
- The robustness and reliability of supporting IT systems. In May and June of 2005, the department suffered a loss of major systems as a result of new system implementation, as well as periods of system downtime which had a significant effect on both the Call Centre and the CSCs.

The sensitivity of Client Services and IT developers to the impacts on service to customers needs to be developed to a greater extent, in order to avoid the situation the Council was in during May and June 2005, when it was unable to maintain an acceptable level of service. Customer Services has regular service level meetings with Client Services, to discuss performance and service levels, as well as maintain a future view of potential impacts on service. Customer Services managers recognise that building a better working relationship with Client Service managers is key to avoiding the circumstances experienced this year.

## **3.2 Audit Commission Review of Performance Management**

3.2.1 An Audit Commission Review of how well the Customer Services Department was using the corporate performance management framework to deliver and sustain improvement, identified some effective tools being used by the Department and also some opportunities for further improvement.

3.2.2 Among the strengths the Commission identified were clear focused and measurable priorities had been set and extensive monitoring and reporting arrangements were in place at all service locations. The department's Business Plan also reflected corporate priorities and staff were familiar with both service specific and personal objectives.

3.2.3 The opportunities identified for further improvement included, developing more flexible performance targets and monitoring the service's ability to meet the needs of the

diverse local community it serves. In line with these suggestions for improvement, the Scrutiny Review Panel was given the opportunity to view the Action Plan which dealt with many of the issues raised. The Panel noted that some of the Audit Commission concerns were similar to those of the Panel, such as the forward planning arrangements with Client Services and staff involvement.

### 3.3 Customer Surveys

3.3.1 Customer Services operate a programme of user surveys to identify user satisfaction and track it over time. The programme includes:

- An annual telephone survey with a sample size of around 1000 customers;
- An annual exit and call back survey in between telephone surveys, to establish satisfaction with particular interactions. The sample size is 100 customers per site.
- A user satisfaction question at the end of each interaction, which is recorded in the Customer Relationship Management System. This has been in place since the upgrade to the system in 2003 but because of problems with that upgrade, **the department have been unable to extract the information.** The overall results were as follows:

From the telephone surveys

Were they...?							
	Satisfied (sat. and v. sat)	Very satisfie d	Satisfie d	Not satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfi ed	Very dissatisfi ed	Dissatisfied (dis. & v. dis.)
All 2005	77.1% (763)	30.2% (299)	46.9% (464)	9.9% (98)	8.3% (82)	4.7% (46)	13% (128)
All 2003	72.2% (596)	22.9% (189)	49.3% (407)	10.5% (87)	11.5% (95)	5.8% (48)	17.3% (143)
All 2002	74.5% (584)	31% (243)	43.5% (341)	12.4% (97)	7.5% (59)	5.6% (44)	13.1%

From the Exit and Call Back Surveys

Were they...?			
	Satisfied (very and satisfied)	Neither S or D	Dissatisfied (very and dissatisfied)
Nov 2004 (Reception Survey WG & STCSC only)	84.2%	9.6%	10.9%
June 2004	88.7%	3.7%	7.6%
2003	88.9%	7.7%	3.4%

More details can be found in Appendix 3, which also shows differences between centres.

3.3.2 From the survey results, South Tottenham CSC customers are consistently less satisfied than at other centres. This can be as a result of:

- **The environment**, because this colours people's perception of the interaction they have with the Council. South Tottenham CSC was not fully refurbished when it became a CSC and is consequently looking worn and grubby. However, this year the department have changed the chairs in the public area, and are replacing the older worn carpet, redecorating the walls, laying out the queue differently and improving the lighting. The layout changes will allow increased use of the wall space for leaflets (particularly for Housing as a result of the ALMO mock inspection).
- **The standard of customer care.** The areas of main concerns were the ability to deal with the enquiries and the ability to answer all the questions. The department have undertaken a range of refresher training courses for all staff across the service in the main service areas handled in CSCs. This was a concern raised by customers in the 2005 Annual Telephone Survey as highlighted in the table below and also by residents at the North Tottenham Area Housing Forum. Other contributory factors include, further widening of services and staff lacking confidence. The Panel felt that this issue could be resolved through improving training and ensuring Team Managers have specialist knowledge of service areas as outlined in recommendation 20.

Were they...?				
Year	...Able to deal with your enquiry?		...Able to answer all of your questions?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
2005	80.5% (795)	19.5% (192)	84.7% (827)	15.3%(149)
2003	82.7% (664)	17.3% (139)	84.4% (665)	15.6% (123)
2002	85.3% (617)	14.7% (106)	85.7% (603)	14.3% (101)
2001	86%	-	82%	-

- 3.3.3 The Panel were generally pleased with the customer feedback methods used by the department. An area of concern for the Panel was whether the user satisfaction surveys undertaken at the end of each interaction would give any real valuable information. The Panel observed the various methods used by Customer Services Officers in undertaking this feedback, which were inconsistent and could lead to unsubstantiated conclusions. The Panel felt staff need to be better trained on undertaking this survey and more information needs to be derived from this survey to consider it be a useful exercise. In light of the fact that results of the survey had not been available until the recent upgrade of the Customer Relationship Management System, the Panel has recommended that Customer Services Department review the value and process of the user satisfaction survey. The Panel requested that, in 12 months time, a report outlining the conclusions reached including supporting evidence, details of actions, if any, implemented be submitted to Overview & Scrutiny Committee. If the value cannot be justified the Panel believes that this practise should be ceased.
- 3.3.4 The Panel observed at Westminster Council an automated survey system, 'Viewscast', to obtain user information after each call to the call centre. The system allows the capture of feedback and learn the results in real time, through an online reporting tool. The Panel had considered recommending that the Department purchase such a system, but due to the cost it is suggested that this is something the Department looks into the future.

- 3.3.5 A brief survey was undertaken to find out what other local authorities were doing to obtain customer feedback after each interaction. This is attached in Appendix 4. The survey shows that none of the boroughs surveyed, undertake any regular customer feedback. As the Panel are unsure of the value of the information from this survey, it has asked the department to analyse the information and establish whether it is helpful in resource allocation.

**RECOMMENDATION 1**

**That Customer Services Department review the value and process of the user satisfaction survey undertaken by Customer Services Officers after each interaction. The Panel requested that, in 12 months time, a report outlining the conclusions reached including supporting evidence, details of actions, if any, implemented be submitted to Overview & Scrutiny Committee. If the value cannot be justified the Panel believes that this practise should be ceased.**

- 3.3.6 A pilot Mystery Shopping exercise has been developed by Westminster Council, with the Office of Public Management (OPM), as part of their performance assessment. The Panel were particularly impressed with this customer centred approach, which involves recruiting and building the capacity of local residents to act as mystery shoppers themselves. This approach has the advantage of testing whether service meets the real needs of real customers and can include complex interactions, which can only be experienced by real customers e.g. school selection. The OPM methodology to mystery shopping is attached in Appendix 5.
- 3.3.7 The Panel was informed that the Department already had a list of local residents who would be willing to take part in such a survey, for a small fee. The Panel felt that mystery shopping would give the Department real independent feedback from customers of the service received and therefore enable them to make real changes. It is therefore recommended that Customer Services Department develop a mystery shopping exercise as part of their user consultation. The mystery shoppers to include local residents, disabled users, local businesses and Council officers. The mystery shopping should include testing access for disabled users including parking facilities.

**RECOMMENDATION 2**

**That Customer Services develop a mystery shopping exercise as part of their performance assessment process. The mystery shoppers to include local residents, disabled people, businesses and council officers. The mystery shopping should include testing access for disabled users including parking facilities.**

**3.4 Customer Services Staff Training & Recognition**

- 3.4.1 Staff training, feedback and recognition is an important element in improving the performance of the service. The Audit Commission report noted that 'there is clear understanding and recognition of the overarching service vision, goals and targets amongst staff'. There are currently a variety of means used to communicate with and encourage staff feedback including monthly team meetings, operational briefings and newsletters.

3.4.2 The Panel held a focus group with staff from Customer Services and Client Services to better understand their needs and ideas for improving services to residents. The Panel were particularly pleased with some of the issues raised by staff, who acknowledged that a good service was being provided to residents, but it has the potential to provide excellent services. Some of the Panel's recommendations in this section arise from the discussion held with staff.

3.4.3 Recognising the work of staff is a proven method to improving staff performance and productivity. The Council already has programmes such as the 'extra mile' award to recognise and reward staffs who provide excellent services. The Review Panel heard from staff at the focus group, that an award scheme would not only motivate staff to work harder, but would also recognise those staff that provide a consistent level of excellent service to residents. The Panel was informed by the Head of Customer Services that a scheme was in existence, but had stopped for a while. The Panel has therefore recommended that the monthly award scheme for staff in Customer Services be reintroduced to recognise and reward excellent customer services.

**RECOMMENDATION 3**

**That the monthly award scheme for staff in Customer Services be reintroduced to recognise and reward excellent customer service.**

3.4.4 Staff from Customer Services and Client Services highlighted the need for co-ordinated training to ensure a consistent level of service is being delivered to residents. The Panel heard of the need to keep up to date with developments in both side, was an important element of service provision. The Panel has therefore recommended that training for Customer Services and Client Services staff be co-ordinated and where possible shared in particular where there is change of legislations or a new Council service is introduced.

**RECOMMENDATION 4**

**That training for Customer Services and Client Services staff be co-ordinated and where possible shared in particular where there is change of legislations or a new Council service is introduced.**

3.4.5 An issue brought to the attention of the Panel by officers in Client Services, was that Customer Services staff were calling them for basic queries which was affecting performance in both services. They felt that many of these queries could and should be dealt with by Team Managers. It was noted that in many cases calls to Client Services were part of the standard process. The Panel concluded that by reducing unnecessary calls to Client Service, it would improve performance for both services. It has therefore recommended that Team Managers keep log of reasons for calls to Client Services, and that this be reported to liaison meetings. All calls to Client Services by Customer Services staff which are outside the process agreed with Client Services must be authorised by Team Managers. The Panel hopes that by keeping a log and the subsequent discussion at liaison meetings, it will enable Customer Services to identify and address issues which are reoccurring.



**RECOMMENDATION 5**

**That Team Managers keep log of reasons for calls to Client Services and that this be reported to liaison meetings. All calls to Client Services by Customer Services staff which are outside the process agreed with Client Services must be authorised by Team Managers.**

3.4.6 The Panel noted from the Staff Survey in 2005 that staff feedback about service development was limited. This was also highlighted by the Audit Commission's report. There were four issues which were raised with Members of the Scrutiny Panel, which indicate that opportunity for staff feedback are not as effective as should be. They were as follows:

- a. Housing Benefit application form needs to have section for applicants to give permission at the time of application for others to make enquiries / representations on the applicant's behalf.
- b. Housing surveyors need to leave a slip stating what repairs/work is to be done.
- c. Housing department to check if there is a Housing benefit claim being processed prior to taking income recovery action.
- d. Parking enforcement during public holidays, especially Christmas holidays.

3.4.7 The Panel attempted to ensure that these four issues could be resolved before the work of the Panel was completed. The Panel noted the following:

- a. Subject to legal issues the department would look into implementing this, when the Housing Benefit form is redesigned again.
- b. The Head of Repairs Operation has stated that leaving a slip would remove any discrepancy over what has been said and agreed. Managers in the Repairs Department are working on drafting a slip.
- c. In regards to checking of any claims for benefits, before income recovery, this has now been included in the 'Initial Recovery Work Plan' to be used by all staff. It states that 'the Housing Managers /Rent Recovery Officers checks account records for the previous payment history and to ensure there has been no changes in Housing Benefit payments, or other issues that may have caused the arrears.
- d. The Panel saw a copy of the Operational Brief (December 2005) from Customer Services, which detailed the parking arrangements during the Christmas holiday period.

3.4.8 The Panel has therefore recommended that Staff feedback needs to be enhanced, bottom up and the staff suggestion scheme should be reintroduced.

**RECOMMENDATION 6**

**Staff feedback needs to be enhanced, bottom up. In addition the staff suggestion scheme should be reintroduced.**

**3.5 Information Technology Systems**

3.5.1 Information technology (IT) creates both new opportunities and new challenges for local government. It enables services to be more efficient and individualised. At the same time it poses challenges in managing the systems to deliver the service and ensuring the system does not fail.

- 3.5.2 The Customer Relationship Management (CRM) enables the generic Customer Services staff to handle a wide range of request for service and information consistently and professionally. Without it, specialist staff would be required creating bottlenecks and impacting on service levels and flexibility of staff deployment. The system comprises;
- A customer database which includes a history of each customer's contacts with the Council and their outcomes.
  - A source of business rules and processes to ensure that customers enjoy consistent treatment and outcomes for any given set of inputs/requests for service or information.
  - A knowledge base of information.
  - A source of support for customer service staff operation of client service systems.
- 3.5.3 The Panel noted that IT support to Customer Services was good, with incidents for Customer Services treated as a high priority. There were clear escalation process and regular meetings with software suppliers. However, there were challenges facing this which include supporting two environments: legacy and the refreshed environment. This will be resolved by the completion of tech refresh. In addition, the contract with software suppliers needs to be reviewed to reflect the department's core business hours.
- 3.5.4 A new version of Siebel (Customer Relationship Management Software) was deployed from November 2005. This was a major upgrade utilising the Public Sector version of the Siebel product. It introduces new 'easier to use' processes and activities for the Customer Services Officers and also provides the foundation for the continued evolution of Siebel. Future enhancements to Siebel will be aimed at continuing to both widen the services provided by Customer Services and "deepen" the service offerings through integration between Siebel in the front-office and the back-office "departmental" systems. This evolution will include Siebel interacting with various customer channels such as face-to-face, web, phone, fax, SMS etc. The plans are not rigid, it allows for flexibility to support the evolution and any changing priorities of the Customer Services Strategy.
- 3.5.5 Service levels in Customer Services is affected by system downtime, which means the software's used by the department are unavailable. This also increases the call demand as customers have to call back. System down time is measured from the moment a call has been logged within Clarify (the call logging system) until the call is resolved (deemed fixed by the user). If the incident is not resolved then it is escalated within the IT services management structure. All systems and services deployed during the last 12 months have added resilience built into the design of the systems/services.
- 3.5.6 A project Board for Customer Services chaired by the Head of Customer Services manages the priorities for IT investment based upon the needs of the Customer Services Strategy. Projects are planned and executed in accordance with the Council's Project Management Framework and are jointly staffed and led by Customer Services and IT project managers. Customer Services lead the business implementation, undertaking change management activities with the appropriate level of support from IT. In the case of Siebel, over the course of the next 24 months it is anticipated that on average, 3 new releases per year will take place in line with the roadmap, thereby

providing new functionality in a regular and controlled manner and avoiding the higher risks

- 3.5.7 The Review Panel has recommended that IT Service undertake a review of the underlying causes of system downtime with particular emphasis on reducing such downtime. The Panel believes due to the reliability on IT softwares and support, it is imperative that the Department has reliable, dynamic and cost effective systems. Although the Panel had looked briefly at the IT support it is their opinion that this needs to be further looked at, as internal scrutiny have insufficient expertise to carry out such a review.

**RECOMMENDATION 7**

**That IT Service undertake a review of the underlying causes of system downtime with particular emphasis on reducing such downtime.**

- 3.5.8 The Panel noted that logs of system downtime were reported to the Executive Member for Organisational Development & Performance (Responsibility for IT). It would also be useful for this to be reported to the Customer Services Member Working Group (CSMWG) chaired by the Executive Member for Community Involvement. The CSMWG consists of the Leader and the Executive Members for Community Involvement, Organisational Development & Performance and Finance and has the remit of supporting the implementation of the Customer Services Strategy and IS/IT Strategy. This would enable this group to direct resources and amend strategies accordingly.

**RECOMMENDATION 8**

**That logs of system downtime be reported to each Customer Services Member Working Group meeting.**

**3.6 Budget & Performance**

- 3.6.1 The Assistant Chief Executive (Access) presented to the Panel the Pre Business Plan for 2006/07. The Panel noted the key revenue investment and new cashable efficiency savings proposed for the next three financial years. In particular Customer Services are expected to save £899,000 over the next three years. These savings will be achieved through the development of Siebel (CRM) programme resulting in improved efficiencies including process improvement, understanding what creates demand and taking action to satisfy needs and reduce demand and migration of self service channels. These will be delivered through a combination of taking on new services (more service from the same resource) and some Customer Service staff reductions, through natural turnover.
- 3.6.2 The Panel considered that the proposed investment in a Voice Recording System costing £75,000 would be great benefit to the department. Currently call monitoring of staff at the call centre takes place with Team Managers sitting down and listening to Customer Services Officers taking calls from residents. The Panel heard from Team Managers in Westminster & Brent Council, who have this system, which enables them to undertake other duties and listen to calls at times suitable for them and the department. The system would also reduce any uncertainty about nature of conversations taking place between officers and residents. Such systems are used by many organisations to improve training and services.

3.6.3 The Panel is of the opinion that this saving is achievable at the same time as maintaining existing targets due to the development of Siebel and the implementation of the more robust performance management system. They had seen no evidence or received representations on service targets to be reduced any further. The Panel were particularly keen to ensure that the planned targets were not increased or decreased during this period as this may compromise service quality which the Panel finds to be satisfactory.

**RECOMMENDATION 9**

**That the planned saving targets for the next three years are considered to be achievable whilst maintaining existing targets.**

**3.7 Value for Money**

3.7.1 The revised Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) arrangements increase the focus on being able to demonstrate value for money. Taken with the decision to establish an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) for the Council's housing, there is a challenging agenda to ensure that the Customer Services channels are perceived by the residents and the ALMO as their service of choice, which demonstrably offers value.

3.7.2 Customer Services has a developed performance management system and the IT systems that are used to enable the department to measure and manage performance. Consequently, the service do understand how much of staff time is productive and how efficient that time is. Over the last 18 months, improvements in efficiency have been made, by reducing transaction times and by managing non-productive time downwards.

3.7.3 Further efficiency gains will be delivered as a result of the Siebel Development programme. It is anticipated a reduction of 1 minute per transaction increasing the capacity of Customer Services and reducing the unit cost per transaction further. This is reflected in the proposals in this year's budget savings to extract around £900k of efficiency savings from the Customer Service operation over the next three years.

3.7.4 The Council has been leading bench marking activity on a pan London basis so that comparison can be made of the cost, quality and operation. The department is also commissioning research to retest the value which customers attach to the way the service is organised.

3.7.5 The service delivery design is different from many of the comparators. For example, Customer Services average transaction time is much longer than some of the comparators and this is because:

- Our cut off point is deeper than other authorities (we complete more at first contact)
- We have much more data entry, Customer services staff are using the CRM system and client service systems which as yet has no system integration.

3.7.6 There is little comparative data for Customer Service Centres. The Council has supported and analysed a survey across 14 London Boroughs. The results of this are encouraging as outlined below:

<b>Customer Services for London Survey results</b>	<b>London average</b>	<b>Haringey</b>
Was the Customer Services Officer you spoke with welcoming and professional	98.7% yes	97.8% yes
Was the time that you waited acceptable given the nature of your enquiry	92.4% yes	94.8% yes
How long did you wait - more than 15 minutes	15.1%	11% 89% seen within 15 minutes (our target 70%)
Was the environment welcoming and user friendly	94.6% yes	98.9% yes
Were we able to provide the service that you wanted or direct you to the correct point of contact	95.9% yes	94.8%
How do you rate the service received	1.3% said poor	0.5% said poor
Why did you choose to visit the service - better service	23.9%	28.8%
Why did you choose to visit the service - only way for the enquiry to be handled	33.9%	26.1%
Why did you choose to visit the service - convenience	20.6%	34.8%

3.7.7 In terms of service level in the Call Centre particularly, performance is amongst the best of those surveyed. A copy of the local authority call centre benchmarking group is attached in Appendix 6. The fact that our call handling time is one of the highest relates to the depth of the service.

3.7.8 In the Local Government Customer Services Benchmark report (by Mystery Shoppers Ltd), Haringey ranked 6<sup>th</sup> of the 16 authorities in the group. In addition, the UK Contact Centre Operational Review in 2004 noted the following:

- Average call length was 207 seconds in comparison to the 515 seconds in Haringey, reflecting the range of quite different approaches to service depth;
- Abandonment Rate was 8/9% against 5.5% in Haringey;
- Average speed to answer was 24.6 seconds against Haringey's 26 seconds.

## **4.0 CUSTOMER CARE**

### **4.1 Customer Focus Council Wide**

4.1.1 The 2004 Customer Services Strategy Review highlighted the development of Customer Services across the whole Council as an issue. The council has appointed a Corporate Customer Focus Manager with corporate responsibility to promote customer focussed behaviour and good standards of customer care across the Council, to which the Smart Working programme is geared. A Corporate Customer Focus Strategy is being developed; this will complement the principles on which Customer Services operate and will be pivotal in embedding the one-council approach that we wish to instil

throughout the organisation. It is important that what is proposed as a Customer Focus Strategy does not duplicate or overcomplicate but rather adds real value. To achieve this, we need to ensure that parameters, objectives, targets and responsibilities are clear, well communicated, understood and owned.

- 4.1.2 Customer Focus in Haringey means putting our customers at the heart of service design and delivery. By customers, we mean local people who access or are affected by our services, recognising that the usual customer notion of choice is often absent, particularly in the case of rationed and enforcement services.
- 4.1.3 Haringey has made tremendous progress in the last four years, with many examples of excellent practice right across the authority. There is also a broad acknowledgment of instances of poor practices which require assertive, systematic action to address. The creation of Customer Services always ran the risk of sidelining 'customer service' as something that only Customer Services was responsible for. The Customer Services Strategy is based on two basic principles; to provide accessible single points of contact for services and to provide cheaper forms of access. Customer Focus provides a timely opportunity to ensure a corporate approach to addressing customer needs, interests and convenience. However, we currently lack the mechanisms to share and learn from what we do and our actions lack strategic direction and support. This mitigates against establishing and implementing minimum service standards and the one-council approach that we wish to instil throughout the organisation.
- 4.1.4 Customer Focus was the theme of the Staff Summer Event held in July 2005. The event was attended by around 550 staff at all levels and the feedback from the day has been overwhelmingly positive. An impressive 85% stated that they would be doing things differently back in the workplace, as a result of what they learned on the day. In addition, a Council wide Customer Focus Network is currently being put together. The Network will provide a major mechanism for involving staff from across the authority at all levels. Additional remit for the Customer Focus Network would include some of the following:
- play a key role in keeping Customer Focus on the agenda in the workplace
  - raise awareness of problems around service delivery
  - provide a platform for discussing common minutiae e.g. phone answering
  - help to develop new service standards and performance indicators
  - be offered training to champion given initiatives e.g. the use of plain language
  - mystery shop each others web pages
  - share and pilot ideas for improvement
- 4.1.5 Membership of the Institute of Customer Services (ICS) offers the Council the opportunity to keep informed of developments in the field, learn from other organisations and to benchmark. ICS is a not-for-profit organisation established in 1997 whose purpose has been to create a new profession of customer service. It is backed by the Cabinet Office, SOLACE, and the IDeA amongst others and has a wide membership including over 60 local authorities (which includes about a third of London boroughs).
- 4.1.6 The headline advantages of joining are;

- access to the latest research;
- ready-made benchmarking mechanisms;
- a wide-ranging national network of public and private sector organisations;
- access to their extensive and excellently regarded staff awards and development programme.

The staff award scheme is heralded because of its approach of embedding the development programme firmly in the business of the organisation. Its nature means that it is attractive to a much wider range of staff than more traditional qualification routes and would help to instil a very inclusive, corporate concept of the customer service professional. The programme is aligned with Investors in People (IiP) and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). During the course of the Review the Panel heard that a decision had been made to go ahead with the Membership and the Panel supports this decision. **In particular the Panel is keen to ensure that opportunities for staff development are utilised.**

4.1.7 The Reception Project report by the Corporate Customer Focus Manager and confirmed by the Panel's visit to the Customer Service Centre, noted that the display and update of posters and leaflets in receptions was patchy. The Panel agreed with the Reception Project recommendations that the Communication Unit be responsible for the distribution, design and update of leaflets and posters to ensure posters and leaflets are consistent throughout all the Council buildings.

4.1.8 The Review Panel endorsed the projects being developed by the Corporate Customer Focus Manager. This includes the following:

- Further developing Customer Focus throughout the Council;
- Membership of the Institute of Customer Services, including opportunities for staff development in the field;
- That the Communication Unit manages and controls the printing and distribution of posters and leaflets. All leaflets and posters should include versions/ date of issue indicators, to assist in removal of obsolete items. In addition, electronic copies of posters and leaflets be made available on the Council Website.

**RECOMMENDATION 10**

**The Review Panel endorsed the projects being developed by the Corporate Customer Focus Manager. This includes the following:**

- 1. Further developing Customer Focus throughout the Council through a Customer Focus Strategy;**
- 2. Membership of the Institute of Customer Services, including opportunities for staff development/qualifications in the field;**
- 3. That the Communication Unit manages and controls the printing and distribution of posters and leaflets. All leaflets and posters should include versions/ date of issue indicators, to assist in removal of obsolete items. In addition, electronic copies of posters and leaflets be made available on the Council Website.**

## **4.2 Security at Customer Services Centres**

4.2.1 The Reception Project also considered the issue of security guards at reception points and it noted that their roles varied between receptions. The Panel was particularly interested in whether there was a need for security guards at the Customer Services Centres. They noted during their visit to Brent and Westminster Council that they had no security guards at their One-Stop Shops. As far as the public are concerned, security guards are Council staff (although currently employed through an agency), and as such a greater interest needs to be taken in ensuring that they portray an image that the Council is happy with.

4.2.2 The Review Panel has therefore recommended that in line with the findings of Reception Project report, it is recommended that firstly the need for security staff at all Customer Service Centres be investigated. It has suggested that if security guards are not needed then the responsibility for the maintenance and updating of displays of leaflets, forms etc be the responsibility of a permanent member of staff. Secondly if there is a need, that they be employed permanently by the Council with a varied role to include some of the following:

1. Welcoming customers;
2. Direct customers to appropriate officers;
3. Provide answers to basic queries;
4. Be responsible for the maintenance and updating of application forms, posters and leaflets display.

### **RECOMMENDATION 11**

**That inline with the findings of Reception Project report, it is recommended that firstly the need for security staff at all Customer Service Centres be investigated. Secondly if there is a need that they be employed permanently by the Council with a varied role to include some of the following:**

- 1. Welcoming customers;**
- 2. Direct customers to appropriate officers;**
- 3. Provide answers to basic queries;**
- 4. Be responsible for the maintenance and updating of displays containing application forms, posters and leaflets display.**

## **4.3 Customer Contacts**

4.3.1 The Call Centre staff have been handling the task of responding to e-mails and e-forms while they are waiting for calls to come through. This obviously makes greater usage of their time. The Panel heard about the process involved in responding to e-mail and were pleased with this. The Panel has recommended that the Call Centre be renamed Contact Centre to reflect the varied services it provides.

### **RECOMMENDATION 12**

**That the Call Centre be renamed 'Contact Centre' as it now deals with e-mails.**



#### **4.4. Achievements**

- 4.4.1 The Panel noted the significant improvement in performance and service delivery that Customer Services had made over the last few years. In particular in March 2005 77.3% of calls to the call centre were answered in 15 seconds, compared with the 5.5% in April 2004. This has been recognised by customers in the annual telephone survey, which registered an increase in overall customer satisfaction from 71% in late 2003 to 77% in May 2005. Service levels in Customer Service Centres remained good and achieved 77% of customers seen in 15 minutes for the year, against the target of 70%.
- 4.4.2 Through the Customer Services Strategy the department is now offering more services and in more depth to the customer. This has increased the proportion of initial contacts through Customer Services from 34% to 37%. The Council is closer to its aspiration of dealing with customer's queries in one visit.
- 4.4.3 The Panel believes that Haringey's Customer Services has the ability to be recognised nationally for the excellent service provided by the department. The Charter Mark is recognised as the tool for continuous improvement in customer service and is unique in its focus on the service the customer actually receives. The Charter Mark has the benefit of demonstrating to the wider public the high level of service that can be expected from the organisation and has a positive impact upon staff morale, by acknowledging their commitment to customer service.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 13**

**It is the opinion of the Scrutiny Panel that the ability is there to 'win a national award for the excellent services provided by the department. The Panel encourages Customer Services Department to apply for a Charter Mark award or other national awards for Customer Services.**

#### **4.5 Service Enhancement**

- 4.5.1 The Head of Customer Services informed the Panel that a review of the phone system was to take place. At present callers are informed on the length of time they have to wait until their call will be answered. The Panel's experience of other call centres where the phone system indicates the callers' position in the queue and the estimated time of waiting, was queried with the department, who stated that this could be something that can be looked into as part of this review. The Panel believes that improving the user experience of the service would improve customer satisfaction levels, and it would enable customers to contact the Council at times appropriate to them.
- 4.5.2 In this modern age of cashless payment it is important that the Council offers residents the opportunity to pay for services using their debit/credit card. Although residents are able to pay for some services, such as parking, using their cards over the phone, the ability to use them at Customer Service Centre does not yet exist. The Panel noted that the department had been considering introducing this facility this year and therefore recommended this be undertaken as soon as possible. The opportunity to encourage more customers to use Customer Services can only be beneficial for the Council and therefore it is important to offer the residents various payments methods. This is of more importance in light of recommendation 15 of the Panel.

**RECOMMENDATION 14**

**That all Customer Service Centres introduce the facility to take credit/debit card payments immediately.**

4.5.3 The Panel noted that currently parking permits are only available through the Parking Shop which is based in Wood Green. A pilot to provide parking permits through Customer Service Centres was completed in October 2004. The rollout to all the Centres has been delayed due to technical difficulties. This is an important service which affects residents in the whole borough and it is not available through the Call Centre, as various evidence of identification is needed. To improve residents' perceptions of the Customer Service Centres, it is important to provide those key services which affect the majority of residents. It defeats the purpose of providing local centres, if for a key service; residents have to go to a specific building. The Panel was assured by the Head of Customer Services, that work had been going on to overcome the technical difficulties and that parking permits would be available from Customer Service Centres very soon.

**RECOMMENDATION 15**

**That the roll out of parking permits to all centres be completed immediately.**

**4.6 Customers Accessibility**

4.6.1 Accessibility is about ensuring that we reach out to the many different communities that live in Haringey. A clear analysis of the service user base is essential to enable the service to identify service take-up issues. The data gathered as part of customer consultations add to this. The Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system is designed to allow detailed analysis of user base and provides information to assist the targeting of services and communities. In 2005 the overall satisfaction rate was 77.1% which disaggregates as follows:

- Disabled users 79.3%
- White users 75%
- Asian users 64.1%
- Black users 77.3%
- Council tenant users 80.7%

4.6.2 The department is not aware why the Asian communities' satisfaction level is so different and will be undertaking some focus group work to explore this. The Panel through their visit to the Customer Service Centres and the Call Centre noted the many good procedures were in place, such as the Turkish Surgery in Wood Green Customer Service Centre. The Panel however felt that there were some accessibility issues which could help some sections of people in Haringey, access our services more easily.

4.6.3 The analysis of Customer Services performance indicators revealed that the Hornsey Customer Services Centre (CSC) had the lowest number of visitors in 2004/05 and this trend had continued from April 2005 to July 2005 as indicated by the table below:

Customer Service Centre	Out-turn 2004/05	April 2005	May 2005	June 2005	July 2005
Hornsey	19007	1754	1526	1624	1507
South Tottenham	43418	3551	3693	3829	3354
North Tottenham	26376	2245	2209	2456	2198
Wood Green	50015	6185	5307	5988	5932

- 4.6.4 The 2005 Customer Services Telephone Survey, revealed that personal visits to the Hornsey CSC was the lowest of the four centres and had the highest number of contacts by telephone. The Panel, in its discussion about the future use of the Hornsey Town Hall, has recommended that it be investigated whether the demand and usage of the Customer Service Centre in Hornsey justifies the need for a centre in the area.
- 4.6.5 The Panel has recommended that as part of the Accommodation Strategy it is considered, if there is a need to move the Hornsey Customer Service Centre. If so the Panel suggest it is relocated to Hornsey Library, taking into account the need to co-locate with Housing Services. The Panel received comments from the Project Manager in Property Services, who stated that 'proposals for the future management and use of Hornsey Town Hall are currently being developed by the Community Partnership Board. The mix of future uses would not necessarily preclude use by the Council, particularly for services with a customer focus. Whilst any future review of the Hornsey CSC location would in all likelihood include Hornsey Library amongst the options to explore, it would also need to take account of factors such as customer accessibility, the need for housing (ALMO) services to be co-located with the CSC'.

**RECOMMENDATION 16**

**That it be investigated whether the demand and usage of the Customer Service Centre in Hornsey justifies the need for a centre in the area. In addition, that in the future Accommodation Strategy considers, if there is a need to move the Hornsey Customer Service Centre, that it be relocated to Hornsey Library, , taking into account the need to co-locate with Housing Services.**

- 4.6.6 The Panel was informed that the use of 'Deaf Sign Language interpreters' and 'Minicom' facility were minimal. It is important that facilities for disabled users continue to be provided, to ensure all communities can access service through the customer service channels. During the course of the review the Panel heard that the department was introducing 'Type Talk', which is a user-friendly service specifically designed for the deaf and hard of hearing. In addition, the Panel has also recommended that 'Sign Video', which provides professional Sign Language interpreters in minutes through a videophone, be introduced in Customer Service Centres. The Sign Video project is funded by the Office of Deputy prime Minister and supported by the Greater London Authority. The equipment is provided free and the Council is only charged when the service is used. It is cheaper than bringing an interpreter to the office. The Panel was informed that Officers from Customer Services had visited the company providing this service for a demonstration and work is underway for a pilot in Wood Green Customer Services Centre.

**RECOMMENDATION 17**

**That Customer Services provide 'Sign Video' system for deaf users at the Customer Service Centres and a 'Type Talk' system at the Call Centre. This should replace the Minicom facility and deaf sign language interpreters.**

- 4.6.7 The Panel noted during their visits to the four Customer Service Centres, that parking facilities for disabled users were minimal, if any. To ensure disabled users are welcome and able to use the centres, it is vital parking facilities are available. The Panel has therefore recommended that Customer Services, in consultation with Property Services and Highways Department, provide parking facilities for customers with disability as near as possible to the Customer Service Centres. These facilities should be clearly marked for the use of disabled customers only and actively enforced.

**RECOMMENDATION 18**

**That Customer Services in consultation with Property Services/ Highways Department provide parking facilities for customers with disability as near as possible to the Customer Service Centres, which should be clearly marked for the use of disabled customers only and clamping be in operation for unauthorised parking.**

- 4.6.8 As a result of the Panel's visit to Apex House (South Tottenham) Customer Service Centre and residents' comments to Councillors about the current queuing system at the centre the Panel has recommended that the single queue at Apex House be reconfigured as a matter of urgency. The Panel believes that the first impression our customers receive of our centres makes an impact on their future use of the centre.

**RECOMMENDATION 19**

**That the single queue at Apex House Customer Service Centre be reconfigured as a matter of urgency.**

## **5. CLIENT SERVICES**

### **5.1 Planning & Communications**

- 5.1.1 The importance of effective communication and planning with Client Services is highlighted in the 2005 Staff Survey, as well as the Customer Services Business Plan. It was further reiterated to the Review Panel, at the focus group held with staff from Customer Services and Client Services. The department has service level agreements with client services and there are regular meetings about service levels, hand off arrangements, future development plans and other issues arising. The department currently holds monthly liaison meetings with all the key client services, involving operational staff and holds quarterly meeting involving senior staff from client and customer services.
- 5.1.2 However there remain a number of key issues to be resolved, to enable customer services to achieve their objective of seamless and effective service. These include:
- Client Services informing Customer Services of changes that will affect them at an early stage;

- Client Services to improve performance and reduce backlogs so that repeat calls are decreased;
- Customer Services to explore with client services the clashing of peak demands, so that movement can be achieved to smooth demand wherever possible.

5.1.3 The need for more robust joint forward planning arrangements with client services, to help balance demand levels was highlighted by the Audit Commission in their review. The report noted that the service remains largely reactive as there are no plans in place to balance demand levels. Good communication is essential to ensure that operational activities are planned in such a way, to minimise impact on Customer Services ability to meet demand.

5.1.4 The staff focus group which was facilitated by a consultant from the Council's Organisational Development & Training Department and was designed to ensure that staff identified three key issues and suggested solutions. An issue raised by staff was relationship with Client Services, which included looking into the communication, priorities and information. Staff suggested that feedback from liaison meetings needed to be provided to all staff, and that shadowing staff from other departments would give better understanding of each of their roles. Visits to a Customer Service Centre for all new staff, should be included in Corporate Induction and information sent to staff should be prioritised and sent at the right time.

5.1.5 Client Service staff highlighted the number of calls they are receiving from Customer Services Officers as an issue causing backlogs. They are unable to reduce their backlogs because of the number of calls they have to take from Customer Services. Discussion with senior staff from Customer Services revealed that in many cases staff lacked in confidence and knowledge of the 'cut off' point. The Panel has therefore recommended that Team Managers and senior staff be trained as service champions, in particular service areas, to reduce calling Client Services and improve service time. It is proposed that two champions for each service, be developed in the Call Centre and one for each of the major services, in Customer Services Centres.

**RECOMMENDATION 20**

**That Team Managers and staff be trained as service champions in particular service areas to reduce calling client services and improve service time.**

5.1.6 The Panel heard that Customer Services were not aware of changes taking place in Client Services which was affecting performance. At the time of the Panel's visit to the Customer Service Centres, Members were informed that a reminder letter had been sent to a number of residents by one of the Client Services. Customer Services were not aware of this until very late and therefore did not have adequate resources to cope with the subsequent demand. The Panel has recommended that Customer Services be responsible for the development and updates of a forward plan in conjunction with Client Services which has details of all major letters, information, bills, reminders etc being sent to residents throughout the year, to enable Customer Services to prepare resources adequately.

**RECOMMENDATION 21**

**That Customer Services be responsible for the development and updates of a forward plan in conjunction with Client Services which has details of all major**

**letters, information, bills, reminders etc being sent to residents throughout the year to enable Customer Services to prepare resources adequately.**

- 5.1.7 The department currently keeps staff informed through monthly operational briefs, urgent briefs and team meetings. It is important that information through these channels is better focused. The Panel have recommended that regular service liaison meetings between Customer Services and Client Services be held. At each meeting at least one member of staff from Customer Services should participate, with different staff taking part. In addition, all staff and team managers in Customer Services and Client Services should be advised of key outcomes, arising out of service liaison meetings. The Audit Commission report identified that 'key messages on service development or as to how service delivery issues raised through 'issue logs' will be addressed, were not clearly communicated to staff by team managers. There is currently no standard approach for doing this. Their report also recommended that key messages regarding service development and resolution of issues raised through 'issues logs' are clearly communicated to Customer Services Officers in a systematic way.

**RECOMMENDATION 22**

**That regular service liaison meetings between Customer Services and Client Services be held as required. At each meeting at least one member of staff from Customer Services should participate. The agenda for the meeting to include the following meetings should cover some of the following issues:**

- 1. Minutes of the last meeting (review of actions/responsibilities);**
- 2. Review Performance Measures/Statistics and quality against targets;**
- 3. Call Centre performance statistics;**
- 4. Key Housing performance indicators;**
- 5. Review current issue logs / raise new issues;**
- 6. Review of future development plan – include anticipated workloads, contingency planning, scheduled downtime, training, recruitment and resource capacity;**
- 7. Review Draft SLA;**
- 8. Reports from Team Managers on calls to Client Services which are outside the agreed process.**

**In addition, all staff and team managers in Customer Services and Client Services should be advised of key outcomes arising out of service liaison meetings.**

## **5.2 Induction & Training**

- 5.2.1 The awareness of Customer Services as the face of Council is an important element in improving performance. The focus group highlighted this as an issue. Member's of the Panel who sat in with the staff at the Call Centre also found this to be an issue which needs to be addressed. The Panel has therefore recommended that as part of the Corporate Induction, organised by Organisational Development & Learning, all new employees visit the Call Centre and a Customer Service Centre.

**RECOMMENDATION 23**

**That as part of the Corporate Induction, organised by Organisational Development & Learning, all new employees visit the Call Centre and a Customer Service Centre.**

- 5.2.2 The Panel was informed that currently Customer Services takes in 2 to 3 young people a year, through the New Start Scheme. The majority of these people later secured permanent jobs with the Council. The Panel recognises the need for the Council's workforce to be representative and reflection of the diversity within the borough. It is keen to take advantage of National Schemes which help to reduce unemployment. The Panel has therefore recommended that Customer Services investigate additional funding streams to further assist in the recruitment and training of new recruits.

**RECOMMENDATION 24**

**That Customer Services investigate additional funding streams to further assist in the recruitment and training of new recruits.**

### 5.3 Service Re-charge

- 5.3.1 Customer Services costs are recharged to Clients Services through the corporate overhead process. Charges are based on the volume of activity, weighted by the average duration of the interactions. Initial funding is transferred from the client services, based on a scoping exercise, which assesses the numbers of staff required to undertake the work. The table below from the 2005 Annual Telephone Survey, shows that quite a high proportion of actions were not carried out by Client Services. Although this had reduced from 2003, it still meant that Customer Services were receiving a number of repeat calls from residents, whose request for information or work had not been carried out.

<b>Were any agreed actions carried out?</b>		
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>All 2005</b>	<b>76.2% (725)</b>	<b>23.8% (227)</b>
<b>All 2003</b>	<b>69.8% (529)</b>	<b>30.2% (229)</b>

- 5.3.2 The Panel felt that Client Services need to understand and pay for the service they receive. The current payment arrangements do not satisfactorily reflect this and therefore the Panel is recommending that the charging arrangements for Customer Services be clarified. Client Services need to be made aware of visits/ calls handled on their behalf along with the average time of their transaction. Repeat visit/ calls information should also be included. Provision of this information will encourage client services to ensure a reduction in unnecessary repeat visit/ calls and to streamline their process to achieve reduced transaction times.

**RECOMMENDATION 25**

**That the charging arrangements to all Client Services be clarified. Client Services need to be made aware of visits/ calls handled on their behalf along with the average time of their transaction, repeat visit/ calls information to be included. Provision of this information will encourage client services to ensure a reduction in repeat visit/ calls and to streamline their transactions to achieve reduced transaction times.**

**6.0 VISITS & STAFF CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 During their visits Panel Members were able to sit in with staff at the Call Centre and listen to residents' calls being taken. This experience proved valuable for Members to understand how the department worked and the issues facing the department.
- 6.2 The Panel Members and staff from Customer Services visited the London Borough of Brent and Westminster. The Panel met with officers from Customers Services in both authorities. They visited a One-Stop Shop (Customer Service Centre) and the Call Centre. The Panel found the comparison of performance, service level and depth of service enlightening. The visits indicated that Customer Services in Haringey was performing very well. The Panel is grateful to officers in Westminster and Brent for their hospitality and openness in discussions.
- 6.3 A focus group with staff from Customer Services and Client Services was held as part of the work of the Review Panel. Approximately eight staff from Customer Services and eighth from all the major Client Services were present. The discussion and conclusions from this focus group are based on some of the Panel's recommendations. The Panel were particularly pleased to note the determination and ideas for improvements which were suggested by the officers and would be of enormous benefit to the department and their customers. There were three key issues raised by staff which included service capacity and training, relationships with client services and quality service. The Panel has attempted to input into all these issues through the recommendations.

**7.0 CONCLUSIONS**

- 7.1 The Panel concluded that Customer Services in Haringey has progressed considerably over the last two years. The service compares favourably too many local authorities who are recognised for development in this field. The Panel felt Haringey's Customer Service Department has the potential to win an award, for the excellent service it provides to residents.
- 7.2 The Panel has made recommendations which it hopes will help further improve the performance of Customer Services. These include different forms of customer consultation, improving staff training and feedback opportunities, and ensuring other factors which affect the performance are minimised.
- 7.3 The Panel were particularly keen to ensure that the work being undertaken to improve customer focus council wide continues. The Panel endorsed the establishment of a customer focus strategy and a customer focus network. In addition acquiring



Membership of the Institute of Customer Services which will bring benefits to staff development and benchmarking.

- 7.4 The Panel has also made recommendations on ways services could be improved for customers with disabilities. Finally the Panel looked at ways communications could be improved with Client Services, to ensure their actions do not affect the performance of Customer Services. The Panel firmly believes that with the strategies in place and those being developed and the implementation of the recommendations from this review and the Audit Commission's review, Customer Services in Haringey will be delivering an excellent service, which is good value for money.

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