

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CUSTOMER SERVICES

NOTES OF MEETING HELD ON 4TH OCTOBER 2005

Members Present: Cllrs John Bevan, Gideon Bull & Susan Oatway

Also present: Jane Waterhouse (JW) (Head of Customer Services), Harry Gulrajani (HG) (Finance & Performance Manager, CS), Lydia Dlaboha (LD) (Expert Adviser), Afazul Hoque (AH) (Principal Scrutiny Support Officer).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (IF ANY)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Judith Bax, Stephen Gilbert & Sheila Peacock.

2. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY, IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA

None.

4. APPOINTMENT OF EXPERT ADVISER

Lydia Dlaboha introduced herself, she is a Consultant with Housing Quality Network (HQN), which mainly worked on housing projects. There are a lot of cross cutting issues such as customer care, access and performance. She led on the Housing Mock Inspection in Haringey which took place in preparation for the ALMO. There were some vital issues picked up in the mock inspection on customer care, equality, diversity and the links of customer service with housing.

The Panel endorsed the appointment of Lydia Dlaboha as an Expert Adviser to this review subject to the terms and conditions of appointment set out in the service level agreement.

5. CUSTOMER SERVICES KEY PERFORMANCE ISSUES

The Head of Customer Services introduced this report, which followed a question and answer session:

Q1) Is Homeless Unit part of Customer Services (CS)

Ans 1) Homeless Unit is not part of CS or part of this review. Although external Inspectors do look at how local authorities serve vulnerable people in the community. A key challenge for Customer Services was joint working and the Housing Improvement Plan in response to the housing mock inspection detailed ways to address this issue.

Action: JW- Issues relating to CS in the Housing Mock Inspection, along with the Improvement Plan relating to them be presented at a later stage of the review.

Q2) The Customer Services Telephone Survey data table for CSC's & CC had a high proportion of actions which were agreed with customers but not carried out. Can you explain why that is? Can this data be split into Directorates to identify those departments not undertaking the actions.

Ans2) This may not necessarily be a Customer Services issue. For example if a resident phones up about a Housing Repair, but for some reason the repair does not get done but the transaction has been completed on CS side then this obviously is out of the remit of CS. This data can be split into Client Service and I will provide a copy to the Review Panel.

Action: JW – Data of % of action carried out by Client Service. (Please See Appendix 4)

Q3) During our visits to the CSC's it was obvious managing and displaying leaflets was an issue. There were boxes lying around and it was not clear if the leaflets they contained were out of date.

Ans 3) We are currently looking into this and it has been proposed that Corporate Communication take responsibility for all reception and corporate leaflets, which includes version control. At present we have boxes lying around as departments get them printed in bulk and give to us as it is cheaper and we have to store them wherever possible. The re-design of some of the reception areas in CSC will create further display space, in particular for ALMO.

It was noted that the CSC's were a very important way of communicating with residents for the Council. It was imperative that the information displayed are accurate and sufficient.

Q4) CS's last recruitment was undertaken through the website. This meant that a lot of people were excluded. Are there any Government Schemes which pays for local people to train in such a job, or do you have any plans to recruit local people? What do you look for in your officers? Local people will have more empathy towards residents and also a better understanding of the issues affecting the borough.

Ans 4) Through the New Start Scheme we have taken on 2/3 people each year, and most of these have secured permanent jobs with the Council. There may be a possibility of setting up a Customer Service Academy which is self financing. This will obviously need to be thoroughly thought out with sufficient resources invested.

Q5) What kind of an impact does IT have on Customer Services?

Ans 5) CS is very reliant on IT as it has major impact on our performance. CS is now last in line to be Tech Refreshed due to the compatibility of some of the software's.

Action: AH to arrange for Mark Saffrey (Prioritisation Manager) to attend meeting in November.

Q6) Do CS have access to any other database on residents from other directorates of the Council?

Ans 6) Most departments do not hold the type of information that we need and capture in the CRM system. We are looking at ways we can share our system with other databases. The Council has managed to negotiate a site contract with Cyborg which means that the Council will not have to purchase a license for all the sites.

Q7) There does not seem to be much information on benchmarking?

Ans 7) Currently there is not much information on similar services. Haringey is leading on a benchmarking group and the data we have gathered is the only data available.

Q8) How much duplicate data is there on your database? How often do you clear duplicate data?

Ans 8) We have about 270,000 people on the database and of those 26,000 are duplicate. These are not all Haringey residents they can be people visiting and working in the borough. The database is from 2001 when CS came in to existence.

Q9) What do you do to get feedback from Customers?

Ans 9) The following consultations are undertaken annually:

- The Annual Residents Telephone Survey – 1,000 people are surveyed and survey undertaken by independent agency researchers and the data is put together by CS.
- The Exit & Call Back Survey is undertaken 6 months after the telephone survey. It is also undertaken by Independent staff but managed by CS.
- The Corporate Reception Survey is undertaken annually
- A Customer Services London Group had also undertaken a research on 14 boroughs. Initial results show high level of satisfaction.

Action: Chair asked to see results of this survey. – JW & AH (Please See Appendix 5)

- At the end of each call all callers are asked 'were they happy with the service they received'. The data on this is currently not available but would be soon.

Q10) Any ideas where the weak link is in client service?

Ans10) There are regular meetings with Client Service where operational staff meet from both side to discuss the key issues. There are also log books which you can have a look at.

Action: Chair asked to attend one of the liaison meetings and view notes of log and notes of meeting. - JW & AH (Please See Appendix 6)

Q11) Does the 15 minutes waiting time referred to in the performance data is from when a customer takes a ticket at the reception?

Ans 11) The waiting time to be seen at the reception is not easily measurable. In addition the upgrade to the CRM system will ensure that waiting time at the reception is reduced as transaction time is reduced. The 15 minutes refers to the time once a customer has taken a ticket and waits to be seen by a customer services officer.

Some further questions and answers which were sent to the officer prior to the meeting are attached as appendix A.

6. REVIEW WORK PLAN

The Review Panel made the following comments on the work plan:

That the meeting arranged for 18th October 2005 be combined with the meeting on 29th November 2005. JW to arrange staff from CS and Client Sides to attend meeting on 29th November 2005. CS will arrange for facilitation of this focus group.

LD suggested that perhaps visits to private sector or Housing Associations such as English Churches or Metropolitan Housing may be a good learning experience for Members.

JW suggested that perhaps a visit to Westminster Council Call Centre which is operated by a private company would be beneficial.

LD stated that Customers view points needed to be taken in to account. JW said that a focus group with customers could be undertaken and agreed to arrange a focus group with local service users.

Action: AH to amend work plan and arrange the visits.

Meeting ended at 8.35pm.

Cllr John Bevan
Chair, Scrutiny Review of Customer Services

Q 'N' A: Customer Services Scrutiny Review (041005)
Item 05 (Customer Services Key Performance Issues)

Question No.	Page/ Point	Question/Observation	Answer (Where applicable)
1	2.1	Despite a substantial improvement in 'callers seen in 15minutes', please explain why there has been a 10% drop between 2004/05 and 2005/06	<p>May and June's service levels were affected by problems with new IT system implementations, as well as changes in demand as a result of client service actions. More specific information is in the answer to Question 10 about Wood Green CSC's(Customer Service Centre) performance. Wood Green CSC was the worst affected because of its size and complexity, and its historic importance as the place people go for Council Tax enquiries and the only place to go for The Children's Service enquiries..</p> <p>Later months of the year tend to be quieter and service level much better, so comparing the whole of last year, with the first 5 months is misleading. For the same period April to August 2004, the CSC service level was almost identical to this year, at 68%.</p>
2	2.4	What steps are we taking to ensure that the downtime referred to is kept to a minimum?	<p>Planned downtime is restricted to outside of operational hours.</p> <p>Managed service contracts include financial penalties for downtime.</p>

Question No.	Page/ Point	Question/Observation	Answer (Where applicable)
3	2.5	Please explain a little more about how the annual telephone survey works	<p>A list of Customer Service contacts for the previous 6 months is extracted from the Customer Relationship System (CRM) and then:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ checked through the Telephone Preference Service - to ensure that no-one is called who has specifically requested not to be ◆ randomised and prepared for use. <p>Over a 1 week period those on the list are phoned and following explanation of why the survey is being carried out and their agreement to participate, a standard set of questions are asked.</p> <p>The questions asked include standard customer satisfaction and customer care questions as well as questions that support future service development (additional opening hour preferences for example). Demographic questions (ethnicity, disability) complete the questionnaire.</p> <p>Analysis of the results is carried out using the industry-standard software package SNAP and analysis provided to managers for use in identifying issues specific to their centres.</p>

Question No.	Page/ Point	Question/Observation	Answer (Where applicable)
4	2.5	What effort is being made to address the fact that 13% of the 1000 customers who took part in the telephone survey were either 'satisfied' or 'dissatisfied'?	<p>Results indicate that a substantial part of the dissatisfaction appears to be related to long queuing times and to some areas of customer care.</p> <p>Queuing times particularly in the Call Centre (CC) are reducing following major investment in new staff and we are now well within achieving the service target of answering calls or seeing customers within 15 seconds/15 minutes respectively. The investment which was only just coming on stream at the time of the last survey, is expected to lead to a reduction in dissatisfaction in the next survey (scheduled for March 2006).</p> <p>With the customer care related issues we have instituted a new individual staff monitoring procedure that concentrates more on service quality. This includes elements of customer care monitoring. Any issues identified during monitoring are then fed into the Performance Appraisal process and addressed through training and development, and possibly capability procedures.</p> <p>To compliment this, regular customer care training is carried out for new staff and for those existing staff that require refresher training.</p>
5	General	Please give me a breakdown of the % of customers that use the 4 CSCs since they all came on line.	Attached, Appendix 1.

Question No.	Page/ Point	Question/Observation	Answer (Where applicable)
6	General	What steps are being taken to inform customers that they can use any of the 4 CSCs across the borough?	<p>A recent survey (Exit & Call Back Survey - June 2004) indicated that many customers are in fact aware of their ability to travel between and use other centres - especially CSC customers where nearly 30% use other centres or the Call Centre, however only 5% of Call Centre users use our CSCs.</p> <p>Promotion of Customer Services (CS) services has been carried out by poster, leaflets, Haringey People etc. over the past 18 months but has in general concentrated on range of services and access arrangements (opening hours, addresses).</p> <p>There are currently some difficulties in promoting a use any centre message as for technical reasons Children's Services - admissions can only be provided through the Wood Green Centre. A resolution will allow us to promote a use any centre message (together with opening hours extensions at Wood Green and the additional services that will be made available over the coming months.</p> <p>A feature of the next advertising campaign will be an increase in service promotion in community languages.</p>
7	App 2	What constitutes an email response? A holding response or a complete response?	A complete response. A response is sent out informing the customer when they can expect a complete response. This acknowledgement will be automated from November 2005 when the CRM system is upgraded.

Question No.	Page/ Point	Question/Observation	Answer (Where applicable)
8	App 2	What steps are being taken to encourage more people from ethnic minority backgrounds to join the Customer Services team?	Customer Services is very successful at attracting people from ethnic minority backgrounds and our profile as at February 05 is attached, App 2.
9	Gen	What do you say to the critics of the CSCs agenda who claim that the fluctuating and, in most instances, disappointing response rates, are proof that the agenda is not delivering for the people of Haringey?	<p>CSC's measure the response rate to our customers, through our ticketing system. In most cases prior to the CSC's opening, waiting times could not be measured.</p> <p>To improve this figure significantly, would lead to many of our staff being unproductive at quieter times during the day., and would not be cost-effective. We are planning to improve this response rate over time, by more and better analysis of our peak times, and deploying staff to match these demand patterns, as well as by working even more closely with our Client Services to be better able to predict changes in demand.</p> <p>Satisfaction levels recorded in regular Annual Telephone Surveys confirm a continuing high level of customer satisfaction (and reducing levels of dissatisfaction) with the service provided.</p> <p>Further confirmation came recently from a cross-London benchmarking survey of 200 of our customers. The survey found that only 11% of those interviewed claimed to have waited more than 15 minutes and over 94% considered that the waiting time was acceptable given the nature of the enquiry they were making.</p>

Question No.	Page/ Point	Question/Observation	Answer (Where applicable)
10	App 2	What is the explanation for the drop in waiting times at Wood Green between April and May 2005?	<p>Significant system problems in May affected performance. These included</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qmatic failure and roll back to previous version (no service 1st week). The queues were managed manually and required a significant and complicated arrangement in a centre which has 3 receptionists and 17 service desks. • Opti-time implementation problems (from 12/5), increasing transaction times. • Civica concessionary travel implementation (relatively minor problems) (from 3/5) • High level of Council Tax recovery action 2nd and 4th weeks • Benefits recalculations in late April but sent out late and increased benefits enquiry flow as result. <p>Any one of these problems would have been containable, but the occurrence of all of them together had a significant impact.</p>
11	App 2	What is the explanation for the waiting time of 25:02 at Wood Green between in May 2005?	See answer to 10 above

Question No.	Page/ Point	Question/Observation	Answer (Where applicable)
12	App 2	What is specifically being done to address the fact that, overall, some 25.4% of all customers were not seen within 15minutes aggregately across the 4 CSCs?	To improve this significantly, by deploying more staff, would not be cost-effective. We are planning to improve this response rate over time, by more and better analysis of our peak times, and deploying staff to match these demand patterns, as well as by working even more closely with our Client Services to be better able to predict changes in demand.
13	App 2	Please explain what 'average contact rate per productive staff hour' means.	Numbers of customers seen or calls answered divided by the numbers of hours staff are productive. A productive hour is time actually at the service desk serving customers or available to answer the phone.
14	App 2	Has any analytical work been done to see if there is a link between sickness rates and higher throughput of customers in individual CSCs or excessive waiting times etc?	Sickness rates at CSCs are generally lower than at the Call Centre and an appropriate minimum level of staffing resource is always maintained within each CSC, moving staff between centres if necessary. Sickness levels in 2005/06 are shown in Appendix 2 (second table) of the circulated report
15	App 2	Please explain what factors are taken into consideration when assessing 'productivity'	Productivity is customer contact time (number of contacts x average transaction time) as a percentage of productive time.
16	App 2	Taking into consideration the number of customers per CSC, please supply me with a ratio of staff per customers for each of the CSCs	Attached, Appendix 3.

Question No.	Page/ Point	Question/Observation	Answer (Where applicable)
17	App 2	Please explain what 'unit cost per call/visit by site (Staff costs divided by no of calls' means	Staff costs from the SAP financial system at the particular centre divided by the numbers of customers seen at that centre. It gives a crude estimate of the staff cost of the transaction. It also gives an indication of cost trends over time as a result of fluctuations in cost, and demand trends.

Appendix 2

A headcount taken in February 2005 showed the following ethnicity and gender profile for customer services.

Grade	Total Staff	White	White %	B&ME	B&ME %	B&ME (F)	B&ME (F) %	Undeclared	Undeclared %	Women	Women %
Sc1-Sc5	27	8	30%	18	67%	19	70%	1	4%	26	96%
Sc6-SO2	135	47	35%	83	61%	74	55%	5	4%	104	77%
PO1-PO3	24	12	50%	12	50%	5	21%	0	0	13	54%
PO4-PO7	9	4	44%	5	56%	1	11%	0	0	6	67%
PO8+	1		100%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100%
Totals	196	71	36%	118	60%	99	50%	6	3%	150	77%

Customer Services is well represented at all levels by Black and Ethnic Minority and female staff.