

HOUSING MOCK INSPECTION CUSTOMER SERVICES

CSC offices

- All similar, branded, look All are presentable, but some feel airy and cleaner – Wood green, N Tottenham. Hornsey – more congested, a little worn, Apex Hse – appears dark, dirty and littered
- Varied from congested and noisy to spacious
- Auto doors, level or gently ramped access
- Carpeted, with plenty of seats, some of reasonable height with arms
- Reception desk for initial queries – customers are either served or given a ticket
- Play equipment is a large, wooden, sit in, see-saw

hqns:

CSC offices ... (cont'd)

- Fluorescent number and a tannoy calls people to booths, with desk height counters and seats (reception desks tend to be higher)
- Different leaflets on show in each office. Some out of reach, a few out of date or not dated leaflets. Little information on view and poorly organised making it hard to spot. Little for people to read
- Telephones available, so the public can call other sections of the council. These have no privacy but lack privacy and anywhere to write notes
- Very little information or signage in community languages, both within and outside the CSCs

hqns:

Customer care and complaints handling

hqns:

Customer care – Strengths

- Some customer care standards in place
- Some targets in place with monitoring and reporting
- Traffic light system used for reporting – makes it clear what the issues are
- SLA with Customer Service Centre (but we were not given a copy) with appointed liaison managers to review and monitor. Issues register compiled to record the points raised and action taken
- CSC able to make appointments for repairs at first point of contact
- Customers able to call in at any CSC across the borough and deal with a range of issues

hqns:



Customer care – Strengths

- Examples of consultation with residents e.g. opening preferences at Wood Green
- Access to languages, loop system, different formats offered etc. Some signage in two languages e.g. Turkish and set days for interpreters
- CSC receptions – generally good appearance and standard (but see office shopping)
- Frontline staff speak of good communications generally e.g. notified about mailouts
- Collecting data and information on customers e.g. diversity, preferred communication (but no links between CSM and OHMs. Systems can be slow and this can lead to delays in customer being seen)
- CSC – focus on repairs and now being extended to wider housing management issues e.g. leaseholder, rents, ASB. Measured approach taken

hqns:



Customer care – Weaknesses

- No clear vision/statement for customer care
- Lots of different targets e.g. 70%, 75%, 80% and 85% of calls to be answered within 15 (or 20) rings
- Staff vague about targets and current performance e.g. waiting times for customers
- Many of the targets are not SMART and cannot be measured.
- Limited office opening – inspectors do not consider 6.00 pm is a late night opening. Opening times differ between offices – no demonstrable link to customer preferences e.g. Broadwater Farm
- Limited (if any) publicity provided to customers to explain the service:
 - Who can do what and where
 - The process to follow
 - Difficult for customers to know what will happen to them, how long it will take and how far their enquiry will be dealt with

hqns:



Customer care – Weaknesses ... (cont'd)

- Sparse CSC reception areas:
 - limited leaflets (you have to ask, kept behind the counter as they get messed up), not really being used to promote the service
 - Security guards – potential for a more customer focused role has not been taken advantage of
- Spooky Area Office receptions:
 - Give out the wrong messages and signs – look as if you are operating behind closed doors
 - Not making best use of prime space – ground floor, high street locations
 - Shabby appearance – is this the image you want to project?
- Has anyone “walked” the experience from a customer perspective – see reality checks?
- CSC do not have access to diaries for housing staff – unable to make an appointment. Inconsistent with repairs

hqns:



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hqns:

Customer care – Weaknesses ... (cont'd)

- Comprehensive guidelines covering everything from body language to dress code but does anyone take any notice of them and are they sufficiently challenging?
 - Don't wear revealing clothes, beach wear or shorts – but should you wear a name badge?
 - Poster displays – should not be stuck using cellotape. Look at the front entrance to Wood Green Area Office
- Some potential morale issues amongst CSC staff due to pay differentials
- Wood Green CSC – volume of callers influenced mainly by HB, Council tax and education. Need to monitor and ensure adequately staffed at peak times and services reflect priorities (could be conflicts) for ALMO customers
- Good take up of Turkish surgeries but lack of monitoring and taking this forward
- Many of the AC recommendations need to be reviewed and actioned further...

hqns:

Audit Commission recommendations

Clear aims – for service users?	No ALMO aim, different targets quoted, vague targets, no explanation of the service offered
Standard of offices	Refurbished CSCs. Scope for improvement – cleanliness, information etc. Area Office reception areas – poor.
Opening times	Limited – but open at the times advertised
Dedicated housing desk	No
Queuing system	Need to queue to get a number. No explanation about how the system works
Waiting time	Monitored and displayed but confusion amongst frontline staff about waiting times and targets. Standards not on display for customers
Telephone callers	Calls go through CC
Tenants charter	Turkish version available

hqns:

Audit Commission recommendations ...

Appointment system	CSC cannot make an appointment for HMs. Appointment needed for HM. CSC deal mainly with repairs – and low level aspects of housing management. Not clearly explained to customers
Reception telephone facility	Telephones in reception areas but lack of privacy (see office shopping)
Email website	Really difficult to find housing
interpreting	Available – some posters offering. Surgeries for Turkish and Kurdish customers but not promoted in reception
Information leaflets	Limited and you have to ask for most of them as kept behind the counter
Customer care performance	Monitoring reports on to DMT and SMT regularly
Access to staff	CSC – but access to other staff not clear Notice board at Broadwater farm with photos of staff

hans:

Recommendations

Customer care

- Establish a clear vision and statement for the ALMO service (with customer involvement). Use this as an opportunity to ratchet up and reinforce expectations
- Establish clear monitoring of the CSC and CC – ensure there is evidence in terms of quality, timeliness and value for money (involved customers in setting standards and monitoring and report performance to them). Ensure ALMO customers are not disadvantaged during peak usage by other customers
- Rationalise the targets and measures – make sure all targets are SMART and customer know what to expect
- Provide clear explanations of the service – who does what. Ensure the process is customer focused

hans:



Recommendations ... (cont'd)

Customer care

- Review the use of the Area Offices – can housing staff interview at the CSCs?
- Review the opening times – in response to customers' preferences
- Review the customer care guidelines/standards for staff
- Ensure appointments can be made for housing as well as repairs at the first point of contact
- Use the liaison meetings between housing and CSC to flag up customer feedback and suggestions
- Monitor usage of Turkish surgeries and develop further
- Ensure previous AC recommendations have been fully addressed – demonstrate the improvements



Our judgement



Uncertain prospects for improvement

Many positive elements however lack of clarity, direction and drive on ALMO customer care and expectations

Little evidence of services being tailored to reflect customer preferences

Complaints – Not a learning organisation yet

Scope for improvement on many of the AC recommendations



Objective	Benefit to Residents	Actions	Target Date	Resources	Progress
Develop improved customer focus		More customer focused use of information in Customer Services: A) Firm up Data Protection procedures for rent enquiries; B) Review collection of Ethnicity and DOB information and how this can be shared with Housing/used in a customer focused way	Aug-05; Jan-06	N/A	A) R Daisley emailing all housing staff & including in team brief, B) no update
		Clean and smarten up Apex House	01-Feb-06	Customer Services	Awaiting update
		Ensure ALMO standards are replicated in Customer Services to ensure consistency	01-Mar-06	Customer services	No current concerns, but dependant on review of service standards
Improved access to services – Customer Services	Improved Housing customer service experience through CSC's	Formulate project plan and form project group to review WI's and M & P's to ensure smooth end to end process with appropriate hand over, transparent process for staff and customer, more customer focused approach.	01-Aug-05	staff Time./ customer services/ Morris Persaud	Initial steering group meeting; project plan to be shared by 1st week Sept
		What are actions coming out of above? - SM to add milestones	?		
		Develop list of key Housing leaflets and ensure all are available for customers in all CSC's without the need to queue	01-Aug-05	Richard Daisley	Update due
		Establish procedure for Customer service staff to be able to make appointments for Housing Managers at first point of contact - via "escalation line"	01-Aug-05	N/A	Awaiting update, action due

		to Area Offices			
		Develop checklist for Sheltered Housing information and ensure full range is provided in all Customer Service Centres	01-Aug-05	Martina Smith	Quick win, but no update received yet
		Develop checklist for ALMO information and ensure full range is provided in all Customer Service Centres	01-Aug-05	N/A	Quick win, but no update received yet
		Improve experience of using internal freephones in CSC's - provide greater privacy (hoods?); shelf in order to write things down; list of key Housing contact numbers without having to queue at reception	01-Sep-05	customer services	No update received
		Review use of CSC security staff to be more customer focused	01-Oct-05	customer services	No update received
		Investigate feasibility of putting a procedure in place to enable Customer Services staff to make Pest Control appointments for tenants and leaseholders	01-Nov-05	TBC	No update received
		Improve awareness of language surgeries in AO's and CSC's by better advertising	01-Dec-05	Winston Reid, Printing & design	No update received
		Establish procedure for Customer service staff to be able to make appointments for Housing Managers at first point of contact - direct to Housing Manager's diaries	01-Jan-06	IT, training, Richard Daisley	No update received

Agree standard of provision to be delivered by CSC's and CC	Ensure ALMO customers are not disadvantaged during peak usage by other customers	Display improved signage in CSC's- in community languages - advising customers to take a ticket and explaining queuing process	01-Feb-06	customer services	No update received
		Launch steering group to review the access issues and options - include use of Area Offices and Opening Times and produce recommendations to DMT; include residents in this process	01-Aug-05	TBC - potential for substantive financial outlay	First meeting held 26/07. 2 further meetings planned and actions agreed.
		Implement actions arising from 'Access' steering group (see above) a) Pilot new arrangements in Hornsey b) Roll out to North Tottenham & Wood Green c) Complete full co-location	TBC	TBC	
		Agree channel strategy for ALMO - to include use of CSC downtime (shared efficiencies), review demarcation, services in scope etc.;	01-Jan-06	TBC	Sorrel Brookes to agree with DMT who will be the client for customer services for the ALMO. No action until this is resolved. SH to talk to JT to enable this work to start.
		Develop ALMO SLA and consider inclusion of penalties for not achieving targets			
		Establish appropriate change control mechanism for relationship between ALMO/Customer Services - allowing flexibility for the introduction of minor change/fixes expediently	01-Jan-06	TBC	Sorrel Brookes to agree with DMT who will be the client for customer services for the ALMO. No action until this is resolved
		Establish dedicated, branded ALMO area's in all CSC's - stocked and updated by CSC staff	Mar 06 & then BAU	Martina Smith, Winston Reid	No update received

		Route all Housing minicom's to contact centre	01-Apr-06	TBC; minimal	Agreed in principle with SB, initial conversation held with Carla Segel. SH to progress
		Phase out minicoms and replace with Typetalk	?		
		Investigate SMS as means of access (1 in 5 only has internet access, how many have mobile phone)	01-Jun-07	Customer services	Customer services state this will be delivered in 2 years
Capture informal complaints comments and suggestions	Able to influence service delivery without having to submit a formal complaint	Comment card/book in Turkish/Kurdish to gather user feedback from Turkish/Kurdish surgeries in CSCs	01-Oct-05	Comms/ Printing - minimal	No update received
		Add field in CSC/Housing improvement plan to highlight customer/staff suggestions; & ensure these feed into housing "learning library"	Aug-05; Jan-06	N/A	Quick win, but no update received yet