



# Overview & Scrutiny Committee

## SCRUTINY PANEL 3 **Customer Services** May 2012



**NORTHAMPTON**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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## Foreword

The objective of this Scrutiny Panel was to evaluate all customer services with a review of the customer contact centre, customer satisfaction and the refurbished and extended one stop shop.

Over the last two years there have been a number of significant improvements made within the Council's Customer Services with great strides being made in several areas. With this review, the panel has evaluated many of these improvements and also added a number of additional recommendations that it feels would further enhance both customer satisfaction and the customer experience.

The Scrutiny Panel was made up of Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: myself (Chair of the Scrutiny Panel) and Councillor Tony Ansell together with other non-Executives Councillors Dennis Meredith, David Palethorpe and Terry Wire. County Councillor Marion Minney was also co-opted to the Review to share best practice with the County Council and to evaluate ways in which the two Council's do or could work together on in relation to Customer Services.

The Review took place between January 2012 and May 2012 and the Panel received both written and spoken evidence from a wide variety of expert advisors. The Panel read with particular interest the contributions made from members of the public and representations received on their behalf from the Northampton Federation of Residents Associations. The Panel also received internal evidence with contributions including that of the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, evidence from other organisations most notably Rugby Borough Council and their approach to customer services, but also a very informative presentation and data from the corporate sector with a presentation from the Customer Relations Director of Ford Retail. Additional desk-top research was carried out by the Scrutiny Officer across both public and private sector and was also received by the Panel.

I would like to thank everyone who took the time to contribute to this review and share their own experiences with us.

The Panel's Findings and Recommendations are all contained within this report and I hope you find them as useful and insightful as I have.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mike Hallam'.

**Councillor Mike Hallam**  
**Chair, Scrutiny Panel 3, Customer Services**

**Acknowledgements to all those who took part in the Review: -**

- Councillors Tony Ansell, Dennis Meredith, David Palethorpe, Terry Wire and County Councillor Marion Minney who sat with me on this Review
- John Connolly, Vice Chair, Northamptonshire Federation of Residents' Association for provided a response to the Panel's core questions
- Richard Beeves, Director, Customer Plus, for recommending both Gentoo and Ford Retail's customer services facilities as examples of best practice
- John Leatham, Customer Relations Director, Ford Retail, for giving the Panel a comprehensive presentation about the about the organisation's Moments of Truth Customer Experience Programme
- David Dixon, Customer Experience Director, Gentoo, for provided a precis of the organisation's customer services facilities
- Debbie McCarthy, Customer Services Manager, Rugby Borough Council, for showing the Panel the customer services facilities at Rugby
- Robert Chadwick, Registration Services Manager, Northamptonshire County Council for providing a response to the Panel's core questions
- Simone Wade, Director, EMS, Ian Redfern, Managing Director, Northampton Leisure Trust, Kerry Greaves, Customer Services Manager, Robin Bates, Head of Resources, Fran Rodgers, Head of Strategic Housing, Sue Bridge, Head of Planning, for enabling the Panel to have a site visit of the customer services facilities
- Councillor David Mackintosh, Leader of the Council, Councillor Brandon Eldred, Cabinet Member (Community Engagement), Northampton Borough Council (NBC), Lesley Wearing, Director of Housing, NBC, Sue Bridge, Head of Planning NBC, Simone Wade, Director, Enterprise Management Services (EMS), Ian Redfern, Managing Director, Northampton Leisure Trust for providing expert advice to inform this Review
- Marion Goodman, Head of Customer Services for her support to this Review

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The purpose of the Review was to evaluate all customer services with a review of the customer contact centre, customer satisfaction and the refurbished and extended one stop shop.”

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed at its work programming event in June 2011 to include a Review of Customer Services to its work programme for 2011/2012 and commissioned Scrutiny Panel 3 to undertake the Review.

A Scrutiny Panel was established comprising Councillor Mike Hallam (Chair); Councillors Tony Ansell, Dennis Meredith, David Palethorpe, Terry Wire and County Councillor Marion Minney (co-optee). The Review commenced in January 2012 and the Scrutiny Panel concluded its work in May 2012.

It was highlighted that over the last two years there have been significant improvements made within customer services throughout that the Council and new and innovative improvements have been made. This Scrutiny Review demonstrates the importance of good quality customer services to each and every customer

This Review links to the Council's corporate priorities - Corporate priority: CP9 – Satisfying our customers.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS**

A considerable amount of evidence was heard, details of which are contained in the report. After gathering evidence the Scrutiny Panel established that: -

- 5.1.1 It was highlighted that over the last two years there have been significant improvements made within customer services and new and innovative improvements introduced, although it was recognised that there are still some further limited improvements that could be made to help improve both customer satisfaction and the customer experience. . This Scrutiny Review demonstrates the importance of good quality customer services.
- 5.1.2 In considering the data for the mystery shopping exercise, the Panel felt that the mystery shopping exercise should be repeated, including the Centres under the management of the Northampton Leisure Trust, and that in order to achieve consistency the same questions should be used. It welcomed the re-establishment of the Northamptonshire Customer Services Group so that different members would be able to mystery shop each other.
- 5.1.3 The Panel acknowledged that the Customer Excellence Strategy 2009-2012 was being updated; to reflect the fact that there was no longer a separate site at Cliftonville and also the implementation of the Northampton Leisure Trust.
- 5.1.4 The satisfaction scores for Northampton Borough Council (NBC) were welcomed. On an average basis is 85%. This compared to the national average of 75% for public sector services.

5.1.5 In considering the desktop research exercise, the Panel concluded that::

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

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

5.1.6 The value of a shared customer service for both the customer and the organisation was recognised.

5.1.7 The importance of various methods for the customer to contact the Council was highlighted. It was acknowledged that external organisations and the Northampton Leisure Trust provided other methods such as social media sites and short messaging services as a form of contact. Social media is a method to quickly disseminate information.

5.1.8 Migration of services to Customer Services provides value for money due to optimal use of agent's time. Therefore the Panel recognised that more technical departments could be incorporated into the call centre for "first contact" to enable the channel shift strategy to be fully applied to these calls too.

5.1.9 It was acknowledged that flow of people into the One Stop Shop is not normally monitored, but had been manually counted for a month.

5.1.10 The Panel emphasised the need for improved signage, in particular directing customers to the Registrars. Signage must be clear, precise and displayed in an appropriate time frame. The provision of signage at Danes Camp was commended. Signage at Rugby Borough Council was perceived as very good and informative:



5.1.11 Positive feedback was received from the survey of Councillors of Northampton Borough Council regarding their experiences of the Contact Centre. However, one

Councillor indicated the automated telephone system was rather slow when the caller needed to contact a particular officer or service area.

- 5.1.12 The Panel highlighted that public perceptions of how they were dealt with within the service area is vital, irrespective of whether people receive the outcome that they want. They should feel that best efforts have been made to help them. It was accepted that there might be an issue regarding managing people's expectations of service.
- 5.1.13 It was realised that due to the current economic climate and a number of changes being introduced to the benefits system, more people will be seeking help, therefore there is a need to prioritise queries.
- 5.1.14 Queries from customers to the One Stop Shop, such as homeless and rough sleepers can be very challenging for staff and disruptive to other customers.
- 5.1.15 The Panel felt that it was important that the floorwalkers, located in the One Stop Shop, were easily identifiable.
- 5.1.16 It was highlighted that first impressions count. The Panel felt that this is demonstrated by staff being very positive and friendly, smart and efficient. There is a need for uniforms to be replaced regularly to ensure that staff are always of smart appearance.
- 5.1.17 The Panel noted the recommendation of the previous Customer Services Task and Finish Group "*That resources be allocated for the provision of uniforms for frontline Customer Services Officers, identifying a corporate image. Staff be consulted on the style of the uniform.*" The Panel felt that the uniforms provided did not clearly identify the corporate image.
- 5.1.18 The Panel supported the broadcasting of news channels in One Stop Shop at Rugby Borough Council, noting that as long as the Authority has a television licence there is no cost to providing this.
- 5.1.19 The Panel realised that there is difference between the customer base of commercial organisations and that of Local Authorities. The customer base of Local Authorities is fixed. The Panel emphasises that if the majority of staff are happy, the workplace is a better and more productive environment and fits for both a commercial organisation and a Local Authority. There is also the element of corporate responsibility and promoting good citizenship.
- 5.1.20 The Panel was concerned at the numbers of single homeless people that were presenting to the Council. It was noted that although it is not a statutory duty to re-house them unless they are within a vulnerable category, staff made an effort to help and advice them. It was noted that numbers presenting to the Council could increase as a result of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, which will increase the pressure on staff.
- 5.1.21 The area of the One Stop Shop where the Planning desk is located could be better utilised and it was felt that there should be a clearly signed designated area in the One Stop Shop for Planning.

- 5.1.22 The Panel recognised the need for interface with the Lagan System of reporting and the system used by EMS so that queries can be easily shared and supported the upgrading of the system.
- 5.1.23 It was felt that good links between Neighbourhood wardens and EMS would improve customer services.
- 5.1.24 The Panel agreed that a better customer service will be provided if less Agency staff are engaged at EMS as there had been problems with the attitude of some Agency staff particularly in respect of spillages at the side of the lorry but understood that a staffing structure was currently being investigated which would involve the engagement of less Agency staff.
- 5.1.25 The Panel supported the introduction of new technology that EMS is introducing to the lorries which details information such as the street, which households require assisted collection. The operator can detail whether bins are put out on the specified day. This technology will soon connect to the Customer Services system at NBC which was felt to be very useful.
- 5.1.26 The Panel supported the education package offered by the Northampton Waste Partnership. It is a good customer service practice.
- 5.1.27 Tours of the EMS site would be useful for both Customer Services Officers and Councillors at NBC so that they are aware of all the processes carried out by EMS. This would help them in their role answering queries and providing information to the public.
- 5.1.28 Health and Safety is a key priority of EMS. It was considered to be important that all staff and visitors to the site adhere to the wearing of the appropriate PPE when on site.
- 5.1.29 The Panel recognised that the most inexpensive method of contact was via the Internet. It was realised that channel shift to other methods such as the Internet would only apply to those customers who are happy with this

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The above overall findings have formed the basis for the following recommendations: -

- 6.1.1 The Scrutiny Panel highlights that over the last two years there has been significant improvements made and new and innovative improvements introduced. This Scrutiny Review demonstrates the importance of good quality customer services to each and every customer. The Scrutiny Panel has put forward a series of recommendations to Cabinet that it feels will further develop and improve customer services facilities at Northampton Borough Council:



- 6.2.1 That funding for improved signage both outside and inside the Guildhall be made available, particularly in relation to signs for housing and registrars; with a particular focus on the improvement of signage around the old building of the Guildhall.
- 6.2.2 That floor walkers, located in the One Stop Shop, be provided with a uniform that makes them and their role clearly identifiable to customer.
- 6.2.3 That funding for additional uniforms for front line Customer Services Officers be investigated.
- 6.2.4 That the uniforms provided for front line Customer Services Officer identify the corporate image of the Council.
- 6.2.5 That the plasma screens in situ in the One Stop Shop be utilised to broadcast news channels which can be done at no extra cost to the Council.
- 6.2.6 That those departments not currently delivered through Customer Services, such as Planning, Building Control and Licensing be brought into Customer Services for “first contact”, to apply customer services skills, to enable the channel shift strategy to be fully applied to calls/visits in relation to these departments.
- 6.2.7 That Planning Services is incorporated into the One Stop Shop and the Planning Reception desk is constantly manned during opening hours by a fully trained Customer Services Advisor.
- 6.2.8 That, with a particular focus on the entrances and exits, the layout of the One Stop Shop be altered to improve customer flow and further support channel shift.
- 6.2.9 That funding is identified for a further automatic ticketing machine to support the improved layout and increase the number of floor walkers.
- 6.2.10 That in order to reduce the time the process takes, the volume of evidence requested from customers in relation to housing applications is reduced and evidence is only sought upon offer of accommodation to validate the information given.
- 6.2.11 That a project be undertaken to assess the feasibility and cost implications of extending the hours of the contact centre and One Stop shop from 8.30am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday.
- 6.2.12 That the mystery shopping exercise is repeated, including the Centres under the management of the Northampton Leisure Trust, and that in order to achieve consistency the same questions should be used and repeated on a regular basis.
- 6.2.13 That further methods of communication both to and from the Council, such as social media sites and short messaging services be

investigated; with a special focus to pre-empting messaging regarding local issues.

- 6.2.14 That in recognising that more customers may seek assistance due to the current economic climate and a number of changes to the benefits system a priority queuing system be introduced.
- 6.2.15 That the area of the One Stop Shop located around the Planning reception desk be better utilised for use by customers.
- 6.2.16 That it be ensured that Neighbourhood Wardens share all relevant data and information with EMS.
- 6.2.17 That a tour of the EMS site be incorporated into the Councillor Induction Package so that Councillors are aware of all the processes and procedures in place.
- 6.2.18 That tours of the EMS site be arranged for all front line Customer Services Officers to further aid them in answering queries and providing information to the public.
- 6.2.19 That Equality and Multi-cultural Awareness continues to have a high priority for Induction and on going training of Customer Services Advisors, recognising the skills and knowledge required of Advisors dealing with a very diverse range of customers.
- 6.2.20 That a Protocol be produced for all NBC staff to follow that details clear guidelines, including the wearing the appropriate PPE, when visiting the site at EMS.
- 6.2.21 That improvements be made to the signage at Westbridge depot, with a particular focus regarding signage for the EMS site.
- 6.2.22 That, where budgets permit, the GPS in-cab system is extended more widely to appropriate departments.
- 6.2.23 That the Scrutiny Panel informs Cabinet that it recognises the value of a shared customer service for both the customer and the organisation.
- 6.2.24 That a copy of the updated Customer Excellence Strategy 2009-2012 be circulated to the Panel when finalised.

#### **Recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

- 6.2.25 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertakes a Scrutiny Review of customer services provided by EMS in relation to the environmental services contract.
- 6.2.26 That, in recognising that customer services is a continuous improvement process, this Scrutiny Panel reconvenes in 2014 to evaluate all customer services provided by Northampton Borough Council.

- 6.2.27 That a Scrutiny Review is set up to assess the impact on the Council of the Welfare Reform Act 2012.
- 6.2.28 That a copy of this Overview and Scrutiny Review be circulated to all those involved in the Review.
- 6.2.29 That the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee contacts all those involved in this Review, informing them of Cabinet's response to the recommendations and provides continuous feedback at regular intervals regarding the implementation of the accepted recommendations.
- 6.2.30 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of its monitoring regime, reviews the impact of this report in six months time.

# Northampton Borough Council

## Overview and Scrutiny

### Report of Scrutiny Panel 3 – Customer Services

#### **1 Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of the Scrutiny Panel was to evaluate all customer services with a review of the customer contact centre, customer satisfaction and the refurbished and extended one stop shop.
- 1.2 A copy of the scope is attached at Appendix A.

#### **2 Context and Background**

- 2.1 Northampton Borough Council's (NBC) ambition is to become one of the best Councils in terms of public service by 2013; one of the key management aims that will contribute to achieving this is to provide excellent customer service. By focusing on the delivery of Customer Services at NBC, the Panel contributed ideas to an area of particular interest and focus for Cabinet.
- 2.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed at its work programming event in June 2011 to include a review of Customer Services to its work programme for 2011/2012 and commissioned Scrutiny Panel 3 to undertake the review. A short, sharp review commenced in January 2012 concluded in May 2012.
- 2.3 A Scrutiny Panel was established comprising Councillor Mike Hallam (Chair); Councillors Tony Ansell, Dennis Meredith, David Palethorpe, Terry Wire and County Councillor Marion Minney (co-optee).
- 2.4 This review links to the Council's corporate priorities - Corporate priority: CP9 – Satisfying our customers.
- 2.5 The Scrutiny Panel agreed that the following needed to be investigated and linked to the realisation of the Council's corporate priorities:
  - Baseline data
  - Data from other Local Authorities
  - Published Guidance
  - Evidence from internal Officers
  - Evidence from appropriate external witnesses
  - Evidence from partners
    - Site visits and desktop research
  - Focus Group

2.6 The work of this Scrutiny Panel followed on from the previous Scrutiny review that had been undertaken late in 2008 that had looked at customer services facilities throughout the Council with the purpose of putting forward recommendations for improvement. All of the recommendations contained within that Overview and Scrutiny report were accepted by Cabinet and implemented. Following on from this Review, Overview and Scrutiny agreed that there was a need to evaluate the impact of the improvements introduced.

### **3. Evidence Collection**

3.1 Evidence was gathered from a variety of sources:

#### **3.2 Background data**

- One Stop Shop performance
- Customer Contact Centre performance
- Performance Indicators
- Mystery Shopping Exercise March/April 2010
- Customer Excellence Strategy 2009-2012
- Statistics for the One Stop Shop:
  - 70% of customers were seen within the standard waiting times, 82% within 15 minutes.
  - The One Stop Shop self serve phone system generated 190 calls a day.
  - 45% people enter through the self-service area, 55% into the main reception. This can lead to a backlog in the reception area.
- Presentation detailing potential improvements on the layout of the One Stop Shop. The options: -
  1. No Change
  2. Remove the general reception area, create a drop in desk in the self serve area, use floor walkers to direct incoming visitors and direct them to where they needed to be.
  3. Other options could be considered arising from outcomes of the Review.
- Budgetary data:

#### **Customer Services**

Total transactions per year: 447,785

Total cost to run Customer Services is 2,907,793 (including controllable costs and re-charges/back office costs)

£1,569,554 (including controllable costs and print, but excluding re-charges/back office costs), further details at Appendix B.

### **3.3 Looking at Best Practice and other Local Authorities**

3.3.1 Customer Plus , a marketing company that focuses on assisting organisations to help their customers commended two organisations as examples of best practice:

#### **3.3.2 Ford First - Moments of Truth Customer Experience Programme**

3.3.2.1 The Customer Relations Director, Ford Retail gave the Panel an information presentation on its Moments of Truth Customer Experience Programme at the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012. Key points:

- Ford Retail encompasses 80 dealers nationwide that are owned by Ford.
- Ford uses one main, easily identifiable strap line through its advertising a service identification points. Surveys indicated that the “feel the difference” logo is seen 9,000 times every day.
- When the Customer Experience Programme was first launched car dealerships were not particularly popular.
- Determining the customer experience is about identifying the “Moments of Truth” when the service is being tested in some way. The Scheme applies to all employees at Ford Retail.
- Previous employee reward schemes were around achieving financial targets. Many employees felt that this did not apply to them and therefore felt that they had little involvement in the customer satisfaction process.
- The programme is driven by staff satisfaction, which in turn feeds customer satisfaction. Research by Bob Johnston of the Warwick Business School indications that a person’s perception of excellent customer service is 25% rational and 75% emotional.
- Customers want communication to be efficient with helpful and polite staff, they want commitment to promises made and want to experience the service being personal and that staff has gone above and beyond the call of duty.
- The Ford Retail change programme focussed on the whole customer experience. Workshops were held for all members of staff, off site with a personal invitation and interactive workshops. All staff took part in mapping out their place in the customer services process.
- All staff has achieved an NVQ in Customer Service or Institute of Customer Service.

- Ford Retail has an employee recognition scheme - "Making the moment". Each nominee gets a personally signed letter from the Director of Customer Relations. There have been 10,000 in total. "
- Customers who want to have a photograph taken of them when they pick up their new or used car and these are displayed in showrooms.
- Ford Retail has set up a magic moments club, which has a sum of money allocated and staff can take part in outings/activities. There is also an E newsletter detailing awards. This scheme is being expanded to include suppliers. Finance that was originally paid through an individual bonus scheme was now diverted to the magic moments scheme.
- Research shows that only about 5% of complaints are reported, which indicates that the vast majority of people who feel that they have had bad service do not complain but either do not use the company again or tell other people that they are not happy with the services that they received.
- Customers who have had their car serviced will receive a call within 24 hours asking about their experience.
- The customer service scheme has received national recognition and many awards.
- The scheme has been going for around four years and has been very intensive; with 7,000 staff training days delivered over 18 months.

### 3.3.3 **Gentoo**

- Gentoo was awarded 'North East Contact Centre runner up' in 2010 and 2011.
- The Customer Services Centre is open between 8am and 7pm, Monday to Friday and between 9am and 2pm on Saturdays. There is a 24 hour emergency care line, manned by a concierge team outside the above hours that deals with mainly emergency repairs and individuals presenting as homeless.
- Approximately 400,000 calls are made to the Customer Services Centre (CSC) each year. The CSC is headed up by a Director of Customer Services and a Customer Services Manager. There are 32 FTEs in post.
- There are various methods for customers to contact the organisation:
  - In person
  - Telephone
  - Email
  - Short Message Service (Text)
  - Social media, such as Twitter
- The organisation has invested in its website and social media channels in order to introduce a Channel Shift Strategy; the aim being to achieve a 10% shift from face to face/email contact to social media. It is anticipated that this would create an annual saving of £150,000, with extended access for customers. Gentoo continues to promote the other channels.

- Gentoo is a member of a number of groups:
  - Customer Services Benchmarking Club
  - Customer Services Network
  - Institute of Customer Services
  - Northern Consortium Network
- Gentoo utilises the Net Promoter Score (NPS) as a key customer service measure. Net Promoter is a customer loyalty metric. The Net Promoter Score is obtained by asking customers a single question on a 0 to 10 rating scale, where 10 is "extremely likely" and 0 is "not at all likely": It is reported that users of the Net Promoter approach claim the score can be used to motivate an organisation to become more focused on improving products and services for customers. Over the course of the last two year, the NPS has increased from 16% to 68%, putting Gentoo top of British Customer Companies, alongside organisations such as First Direct Bank.
- Customer satisfaction levels have increased to 92%.
- Gentoo takes a quality approach to customer services rather than a quantitative approach; offering quality advice and empathy. It uses a CRM system which creates professional contact with customer. A performance coach is in post, who's role is to improve how the organisation deals with customers. Regular coaching and mentoring takes places.
- The organisation reports that it 'puts the customer in the heart of everything it does.'
- Gentoo uses the Harvard Business School Service Profit Chain. The service-profit chain, developed from analyses of successful service organisations, puts "hard" values on "soft" measures. It helps managers target new investments to develop service and satisfaction levels for maximum competitive impact, widening the gap between service leaders and their merely good competitors.
- Gentoo looks at people requirements, satisfaction requirements, loyalty to promote repeat business etc with the aim of removing non-value added processes from its customer services.

3.3.4 Desktop research was undertaken for the previous Scrutiny review into Local Authorities that were recognised as examples of best practice. A series of questions were put to the same Local Authorities, plus two further Councils. The main points:

### 3.3.5 **Kettering Borough Council**

- The Customer Services Manager shadows/listens into calls to gauge the quality of customer services provided by its advisors.
- Kettering Borough Council does not cost out its transactions via phone, face to face, emails etc.
- Customer satisfaction surveys are completed on an ad hoc basis.



- Kettering Borough Council works in partnership with a number of voluntary and public sector organisations that all use the space available at the Council offices to provide a customer service facility for their customers.
- Comfort and accessibility of the One Stop Shop as rated as very good and confirmed that this was mirrored in the feedback received from customers via exit surveys.
- Customers can access the customer services facilities via phone and face to face at any of the four customer services centres. Other methods of contact are email, web-forms, post, text messaging and live chat. The most frequently used method of contacting customer services is telephone.
- Current targets:
  - Face to face customers are seen within ten minutes
  - Telephones are answered within ten seconds
  - Correspondence is fully dealt with within ten days
  - Data is gathered via relevant system reports. Results are reported monthly to senior management via performance clinics.
- A shared customer service facility would provide a better experience for the customer in that they could deal with more issues under one roof. There would be closer working relationships between partners and it would create an income stream for the Council by renting space within the building.

### 3.3.6

#### **Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council**

- Customer Services at Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council is evaluated by:
  - **Quality of the Service and Service Delivery**
  - Corporate Performance Development Framework involving target setting against core objectives and behaviour expectations
  - Quality mentoring of staff against agreed targets
  - Complaint and compliment monitoring
  - Customer Services Excellence Accreditation
  - Process Review involving clear hand off to back office
  - Consistency through the use of Oracle CRM and call guides (scripting)
  - Review meetings with back office services
  - Change control process implementation to ensure accurate information
  - Performance monitoring
  - **Customer Satisfaction across the whole organisation**
  - Review meetings with back office services

- Staff able to provide comments via web feedback from
- SOCTIM web survey
- **Cost and efficiency**
- Review of targets set for answer rate and service level to ensure cost effective
- National benchmarking
- Baber report
- Cap Gemini Review
- The One Stop Shop at the Council makes best use of the space available by including partner services such as the Volunteer Sector, Police ALMO, registration services.
- Comfort and accessibility is rated as excellent. The One Stop Shop is rated as Compliance Plus in CSE accreditation.
- Customer can access the customer services facilities:
  - Email
  - Telephone
  - Face to face
- The most frequently used method of contact is via the telephone
- All letters are answered within five days
- All emails are answered by 6pm the following working day
- The aim is to see face to face customers within fifteen minutes
- The targets were arrived at by benchmarking with national and industry standards alongside value for money consideration.
- Data is analysed using the mitel telephone system reporting, QMatic queue management and performance system and Oracle Discoverer reports using Oracle CRM data. Operational managers are responsible for monitoring performance reported by exception to monthly management meeting and in detail quarterly. Quarterly reports are submitted to the Corporate Leadership Team.
- Investigations into shared service facilities as it enables a large resource to more effectively manage peaks and troughs and should reduce overall costs of support and management.

### 3.3.7

#### **Corby Borough Council**

- Corby Borough Council evaluates its customer services facility via benchmarking and customer satisfaction surveys.
- The Council Offices are a new cube building in the town centre and is easily accessible. The One Stop Shop was planned and built with a large space available with pleasant surroundings.
- The customer can make contact via telephone, face to face and on line. In person and telephone are the most frequent methods of contact dependent upon the query. 50% of face to face contact is in relation to benefits enquiries.

- The current targets for customer services are:
- Average waiting time for face to face customers 15 minutes
- Average call waiting time 45 seconds
- Percentage of calls abandoned 10%
- Targets were decided through discussions with Senior Management Team and Councillors and through benchmarking with other Local Authorities.
- Data is analysed via monthly Management and Team meetings. Individual targets are set for Officers.
- A shared customer service facility has many benefits to customers and closer working relationships with Agencies involved.

### 3.3.8

#### Rugby Borough Council

- Rugby Borough Council (RBC) uses the GovMetric system. It has a kiosk for face to face services in reception and it puts customers through to the feedback line when they telephone the Customer Service Centre. The Council's face to face GovMetric figures tell the organisation that its is providing services that result in high levels of customer satisfaction as RBC was ranked in the top 7 out of 70 Councils for 9 out of the 12 months in 2011 with between 74% and 89% of customers saying the service was good.
- Its Customer Service Advisor face to face transaction costs are below national figures provided by SOCITM and NWECC (Channel Value Benchmarking).
- RBC has always prioritised face to face services over telephone services as customers have had to come into the Town Hall and it is easier to call again if the lines are busy.
- In terms of the telephone channel, team members receive data about aspects of their performance that are measurable (records kept/calls taken/how time is utilised). Currently, there is an expectation that each Customer Services Advisor (CSA) deals with, on average, 8 calls per hour. CSA performance is reviewed monthly. RBC is moving away from quantitative measures but what advisors do and how long it takes will always be a factor:
  - Too slow and it affects the quality
  - Too rushed and it affects the quality
  - No record and it affects the quality and the outcome because if there is no record the service may not be delivered at all.
- RBC is always trying to identify the best way of working keeping in mind the capacity of the team. With such a small team, all advisors must be able to switch from telephone, to email to face to face depending on the customer demand and the available capacity. 'Hot Desking' is an example of how RBC has reduced costs and increased efficiency.

- The reception area was refurbished in 2010 and as a result of this project a number of outcomes were achieved
- Following the refurbishment, and to coincide with National Customer Survey week, a survey was undertaken to see what customers thought of the improvements 15 examples were given:
  - more welcoming (x1)
  - more efficient (x1)
  - much quicker (x6)
  - much improved (x3)
  - more private (x1)
  - more space (x1)
  - very informative (x2)
- The most frequently used form of contact is the telephone.
- For the telephone service, there are two targets: 80% of calls to be answered in 20 seconds or less and no more than 5% of calls abandoned. These are local performance indicators.
- The data is analysed through Insight MIS.
- Currently it costs, on average, £5.14 for a face to face transaction and £4 for a telephone call or email to be dealt with.
- For customers who visit, RBC has a target for a Customer Service Advisor (CSA) to see them in 10 minutes or less.
- An example of a service that is shared and is of mutual benefit is concessionary travel. Although Warwickshire County Council holds the contract for this, RBC delivers it on their behalf so that people who live in Rugby can come into the Town Hall.

### 3.3.9

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

- NBBC uses the feedback system, Govmetric that enables customers to leave their views and feedback on the service they receive. This can either be through the telephone, face to face, emails or the website. The statistics are collated each month giving a reflection of customer opinion for each method of contact and service whether good, average or poor.
- Each individual department is responsible for their own feedback and satisfaction surveys measuring quality. The tools used are different throughout.
- Govmetric feedback is used to address any problems within Customer Services. NBBC began a Lean Reviews programme 2 years ago focusing on different services mainly looking at improving performance and cost savings. It is expected that all of the larger departments will have been through the process by the end of 2014.
- Govmetric covers all media including telephones, face to face, email, and website. This does not currently cover post.

- NBBC's One Stop Shop opened in October 2007. The plan included enough space to integrate other organisations if and when required. Current organisations sharing our facility include HMRC and a Veterans contact point. NBBC has not received any complaints with regards to the comfort and accessibility of the centre and it meets all equality needs.
- NBBC has one main Town Hall based in Nuneaton and a sub site within Bedworth. The sub site provides similar services to those at Nuneaton but on a smaller scale. The Nuneaton Town Hall has four self serve terminals and the Bedworth Office has a free phone to contact each service direct. Customers can contact the centre either by telephone, face to face, email, website or post.
- Telephone has always been the most frequent method to contact the centre.

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

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

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

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

- The data is analysed on a monthly basis to establish performance. It is also used to establish patterns, customer behaviour, channel shift and resource issues.
- NBBC is currently working in partnership with Warwickshire County Council on a number of projects. This includes a shared customer services facility. This project is only currently at the infancy stage.

### 3.4 Core Questions

3.4.1 The Scrutiny Panel produced a set of core questions that it put to key witnesses over a series of meetings.

3.4.2 Key witnesses provided a response to these core questions at the meetings of the Scrutiny Panel held on 1<sup>st</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012.

3.4.3 Key points of evidence: -

### 3.5 Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Community Engagement

- Monthly customer satisfaction is measured through surveying customers on a monthly basis. This survey looks at general measures around

quality of service received by the council and assesses customer opinions on elements such as environment and length of wait for service.

- Satisfaction scores on an average basis are 85%. This compares to the national average of 75% for public sector services.
- An annual benchmark survey is also conducted as part of national customer services week,
- The customers' opinion generally impinges on the view of the end to end service the council provide, customer services will see most customers at the first point of contact and raise a service request.
- Corporate reputation is an exercise measured through the performance team with current satisfaction at 54%.
- Monthly 'Performance Assessment Frameworks (PAFs)' are undertaken on each team member. The PAF is NBC's Customer Services Performance Assessment Framework where each Customer Information Officer is measured for quality and accuracy of customer interaction, and for adherence to the standards and behaviours expected to ensure that the customer's experience of the Council is effective and high quality.
- There is now a much lower rate of referrals to 'back-office'.
- Due to the high level of on-going cross-training through qualitative training, the hand-off to back offices is much reduced as the Customer Services team deal with many more enquires to a greater degree of depth.
- Migration of services to Customer Services provides value for money due to optimal use of agent's time.
- A recent internal staff survey indicated that staff were very satisfied that customer services provide good value for money and provide a high quality service.
- A launch of the Customer Services facilities is in planning stage.
- The One Stop Shop provides friendly, relaxed, clean and calm environment. Spacious, good atmosphere, one point of access. The One Stop Shop has a very modern, professional ambience and is quite unlike any other 'One Stop Shop' in that it has a unique and very appealing design, style and colour-scheme, and the Council has 'dared to be different' – and to great and well-received effect. There is a strong One Stop Shop 'identity' now, which is further enhanced with stylish, non-authoritarian uniforms, which supports the ambience of professionalism, consistency and approachability.
- Customers view the Council's One Stop Shop as a place to go to get help, particularly when they find themselves in a position of crisis for a variety of reasons.
- The private interview rooms are superbly designed and perfectly meet the needs for customers to discuss their issues in a confidential yet practical and comfortable environment, with formal, informal and family sized rooms to best meet the individual needs of customers, particular

situations.

- Customers can choose how to access services, face-to-face, on the phone or via the internet. The physical facility is Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Compliant, centrally located, and welcoming.
- Telephone contact is the most frequent being nearly 360,000 per year, face-to-face contact is around 67,000 per year and emails being 22,000 per year.
- For calendar year 2011:

Footfall 67,000

Phones 359,218

Email 21,567

Lagan transactions online (not all online transactions) 5,377

Online visits (less internal usage) 926,529

- Lessons learnt are implemented from the recommendations given when an accident/incident is investigated, however the line manager is responsible for the implementation.
- Personal training is advised for all staff who deal with members of the public and the use of fair statement letter.
- The levels of complaints are analysed and monitored on a monthly basis, making yearly comparisons to measure our performance and effectiveness of the department. We identify the cause of complaint and lessons learnt, and make changes to service delivery where necessary. A report is produced each month which includes the detailed analysis of complaints received through customer feedback and survey responses.
- It is aimed to deal with complaints at the first point of contact, but where this is not possible the complaint is re-directed to the appropriate person, and the customer is informed of our action.
- Whether the complaint is formal or informal a full and impartial investigation is carried out, with dignity and respect.
- If the complaint is covered by an alternative appeals process, the customer will be advised of this, and informed of what they need to do.
- Any complaints that are received about staff may, if it is appropriate, go through the staff disciplinary procedure.
- Partnership and synergy working enables the 'gaps' between organisations to be recognised and addressed, and intelligence shared for the good of the customers

### **3.6 Director of Housing, Northampton Borough Council**

- There is a need to manage customer expectations of out of hours services.
- Tenants are issued with a handbook, which includes details of contact numbers and procedures. They are unlikely to be visitors to the One Stop Shop.
- Queries that present at the One Stop Shop that are housing based are

- usually around general housing advice, bidding for properties on Choice Based Lettings, homelessness, rough sleeping and right to buy.
- Repair service requests are divided into emergency, urgent and routine. Emergency would be dealt with on the same day
- Out of hours contact goes through the Call Care handling service. The Service handles calls from sheltered housing residents, those calls take priority, other customers can leave a message and they are then contacted.
- Clearly for value for money it is better if as much work as possible takes place on a planned schedule.
- Due to the current economic climate and a number of changes to benefits system being implemented there are more people seeking assistance.

### **3.7 Head of Planning, Northampton Borough Council**

- Calls made to Planning Services receive a number of options such as Development Control, duty Planning Officer. Any calls presenting in the Contact Centre will be diverted to the Planning system.
- The number of calls and responses times are monitored.
- There is a designated Planning area within the One Stop Shop but it is not manned by Planning staff. The floor walker directs customers to that area if required and advises of who they need to speak with.
- Planning Officers spend a lot of time out of the office but duty officers are available between 8.30am- 5pm, Monday to Friday.

3.7.1 Comprehensive responses to the core questions from the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Director of Housing and Head of Planning, Northampton Borough Council, are detailed at Appendix G.

### **3.8 Director, Enterprise Management Services (EMS)**

3.8.1 The Director of EMS provided a response to the Panel's core questions at the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012. Full response is detailed at Appendix E.

- In respect of customer services for the Environmental Services contract between Northampton Borough Council, Daventry District Council and EMS, customer services was one of the topics for discussion during Competitive Dialogue.
- All topics discussed in competitive dialogue were used by the bidders to develop their tender bid. This was then evaluated against a number of criteria.
- The best score was then designated as preferred bidder.
- The process of outsourcing the service and using Competitive dialogue ensured that there was value for money and that the winning bid would



- provide the best quality services including customer service.
- The contract is based on outcomes
- The performance indicators form part of the contract and EMS is monitored against them.
- Customer satisfaction plays a large part in monitoring the quality and performance of the contract.
- The measurement of customer satisfaction is a crucial element of the contract and ensuring the outcomes are achieved.
- The satisfaction of staff is equally important to the company as this will be reflected in the organisation's performance.
- An example of the use of technology is the newly installed and award winning in-cab devices which allow us to monitor in real time the progress of the waste crews.
- Services that the organisation offers are advertised through Northampton Borough Council's contact channels
- The most frequently used method of contacting customer services is the telephone
- EMS has a very comprehensive Business Continuity, Risk and Emergency approach. This is also established within the contract.
- EMS uses the 'learning log' process very similar to that used by the Council.
- EMS deals with complaints along side the Council and mirrors its Policy. Complaint numbers and trends are monitored at the senior management team meetings so that services can be improved as a result
- EMS has a contact Centre based at Matchworks in Liverpool where the customer receiving services on a Saturday are able to contact the company

### **3.9**

#### **Managing Director, Northampton Leisure Trust**

##### **3.9.1**

The Managing Director, Northampton Leisure Trust, provided a response to the Panel's core questions at the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012. Key points:

- Feedback surveys are run throughout each business year
- Competitor analysis is undertaken to ensure the Trust is pricing competitively within the Borough
- Quarterly Employee Forums allow staff to voice their opinions on the services provided
- Northampton Leisure Trust (NLT) currently uses the NBC website to advertise all promotions and activities offered by NLT.
- By joining the direct debit system online the customer receives the latest promotions and incentives.

- A range of activity programmes can be downloaded from the website
- NLT also advertise and update through Face book- there are 3 different pages- Trilogy Northampton, The Forum Cinema and Sport and Play Development.
- NLT has a twitter account.
- The Trust have joined the 'Splashpath' website which advertises all pool timetables online and via Smart phones as an Application (free to download) .
- Customer Services for the Trust now also offer contact electronically via the three centre email addresses.
- All printed literature clearly advertises the website and trilogy membership addresses.
- Customers who do not have access to the internet can gain information about all the centres from an extensive range of printed literature detailing all timetables and programmes and activities.
- Customers can also obtain information and make bookings at each leisure centre reception A multi-screen TV system operates at each leisure centre visually showing information on a range of activities on a rolling programme.
- The Forum Cinema operates a recorded information line detailing upcoming film programme.
- NLT provides services and activities for a wide and diverse range of people within Northampton's Communities.
- A brochure detailing the Trust holiday programme is circulated to schools in preparation for each school holidays period.
- The MEND Scheme (to combat childhood obesity) is promoted by GP's, School Nurses and Teachers and is also advertised through the central MEND website with links to programmes in all areas of the country.
- The Trust Sport and Play Development Team actively promote activities out in the community, hosting and advertising a range of free or funded activities for all from the under 5's through to health walks for the over 50's.
- Information on the Activity on Referral Scheme is advertised within NHS practices and local Primary Care Trust Organisations. Doctors refer patients to the leisure centre who need to participate in physical activity for health reasons.
- The Membership Sales Team visit colleges and the University to encourage students to be more active and join the Trilogy Community.
- Activities for distinct user groups will be advertised by working in partnership with relevant groups, and organisations and advertising in relevant media.
- Customers can contact NLT Customer Services as follows:
  - 'Tell it like it is' feedback forms
  - Email

- By Telephone (direct extensions available)
  - Letter
  - Facebook
  - Via the NBC website feedback form
  - Via the NBC contact centre phone line
  - Via a staff member
  - Verbal Feedback Books
- The Trust has many avenues for customers to contact regarding their views on the centres and how they operate. This information, where relevant, is used to improve services and adapt the business to suit the requirements of the customer.
  - Sport and Play analyse every event and it is reviewed for improvements to ensure we aim meet the service standards expected for the next time the event occurs.
  - Through careful monitoring and recording of all feedback, trends can be identified for investigation and to be resolved.
  - The most used system in terms of feedback about the Trust facilities is by 'Tell it like it is' forms.
  - Each facility operates under the guidelines of its NOP (Normal Operating Procedure) and EAP (Emergency Action Plan). There are set procedures for emergency situations and the health and safety of customers and staff will be prioritised at all times.
  - In the event of an emergency situation, contact would be made with the NBC Communications Team to ensure the necessary press requirements are followed to communicate with our customers.
  - Signage must be clear and precise and displayed in an appropriate time frame.
  - Complaints are all recorded on a spreadsheet relevant to the stated centre.
  - All complaints are first sent to the Customer Services Officer. The Customer Services Officer would refer to Senior Management if required.
  - The complainant would then be contacted by the Customer Services Officer or another team member (Centre Manager) for more information if necessary.
  - Complaints are analysed quarterly and an overview for each site and the Trust as a whole are evaluated. This report contains statistics of feedback.
  - The main avenue for contact outside of leisure business hours is

electronic.

- A shared customer services facility can be beneficial to the customer as long as the staff employed is knowledgeable about all the services provided and the customer journey/experience is improved and not elongated.

3.9.2 The comprehensive response from NLT is attached at Appendix D.

### **3.10 Key Partners**

3.10.1 Key partners who share the facilities of the One Stop at Northampton were asked to provide a response to the core questions. Comprehensive response is detailed at Appendix F. Key points:

### **3.11 Registrars, Northamptonshire County Council**

- Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) has agreed with Northampton Borough Council to pay for the provision of reception and information services at the Guildhall. This works very well for NCC registration service
- The One Stop Shop also provides information and support to customers wishing to access any NCC service.
- The One Stop Shop is the reception and information point for customers accessing the county council's registration service.
- Customers also visit the reception to hand over or collect papers.
- From a registration service perspective, the space is used well. The issue of comfort cooling/air movement within the registration rooms is outstanding
- One of the two best features is the self service area as this is located at the front of the building.
- The other best feature is the quiet seating area located close to the registration rooms as this helps those who are grieving, to wait away from the busier activity taking place elsewhere i.e. reception.
- The floor walkers appear to work really well so ideally, these would always be available and perhaps already are.
- Customers book their appointments by contacting the customer service centre at John Dryden House.
- NCC registration has an electronic appointment booking system so activity levels are monitored centrally and resources can be adjusted accordingly e.g. peak periods of the year where there are more deaths occurring or following bank holiday closures.
- Increasingly, more customers are choosing to self-serve as NCC makes more services available on-line.
- NCC utilises its complaints recording system and follows NCC procedures to ensure these are logged and responded to.

### 3.12 Northampton Federation of Residents' Association

3.12.1 The Northampton Federation of Residents' Association formed a Focus Group to provide a response to the Panel's questions about customer services facilities at Northampton Borough Council. Comprehensive response attached at Appendix C. Key points:

- The quality of service and customer satisfaction is inconsistent dependant on service required and whom you speak to
- Those residents that have internet access and are able to use it are generally happy that they can make contact with the appropriate office or person.
- A large number of residents will not make contact online via websites or email.
- Most residents prefer to make contact via the telephone
- Many issues raised by residents were around unanswered phones, automated answer phones, not getting to speak to the relevant person or office – promised call-backs not being honoured.
- Residents have found some branches of customer services particularly difficult to contact, and complain of evasive replies or an apparent lack of knowledge on the part of the NBC person answering the phone.
- Officers do not always direct customers to the website for future contact. A number of residents, in particular the elderly prefer face to face contact. Some older resident say they have been told to contact a relative or friend who may have internet access, or attempt to call by telephone for them
- The vast majority of residents of the Association have never used the One Stop Shop – those that have vary in opinion – Some say they find everything under one roof, or are pointed in the right direction. They find it reasonably accessible, warm and comfortable – Others find the lack of privacy and queues very off putting.
- The One Stop Shop is reasonably accessible, warm and comfortable
- There is a need for a somewhat faster method of dealing with customers and cutting down queues would be appreciated.
- Residents are put off by the size of queues and waiting times.
- Services are advertised pretty well
- Customers also need to know what level of service to expect for the money they are paying
- Every method of contact will be used by residents. Most preferring the telephone and speaking to a person as opposed to an automated service – those that are able and have access will use online methods, perhaps emails as opposed to websites, which can sometimes be difficult to navigate.
- Feedback suggests the more residents engage with resident associations, neighbourhood wardens, local councillors, pcso's and the community generally, the easier it becomes. Sensible residents will

- keep the out-of-hours number in a place that is easy to find.
- A lot of residents would use social networking to contact the Council, particularly but not exclusively the younger residents would – Many of the older more vulnerable would not, although there are exceptions to that rule too – One size does not fit all.
- Dependant on the organisations sharing the facility – Customer rights organisations could be beneficial.

### **3.13 Northampton Borough Councillors**

3.13.1 Councillors of Northampton Borough Council were asked to provide details of their experiences when contacting the Council. Salient points:

3.13.2 Comments received from Councillors centred on the efficiency of staff in the One Stop Shop and Contact Centre, particularly noted the speed of responses provided. A Councillor advised that they preferred making direct contact with individual officers and departments rather than making contact through a Customer Contact Centre. The automated telephone system was sometimes rather slow when the caller needed to contact a particular officer or service area.

### **3.14 Site Visit – Rugby Borough Council**

3.14.1 The Panel visited the customer services facilities at Rugby Borough Council on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2012. Key points of evidence

- The One Stop Shop was poorly lit.
- BBC news was broadcast which gave a relaxed feel to the environment.
- Staff were very friendly putting customers at ease.
- Drinking water was available for customers.
- The One Stop Shop was a smaller scale to that of Northampton but in comparison, the electorate for Rugby Borough is 75,000 compared to 157,420 for Northampton Borough.
- Staff were very smartly dressed in black with pint neckties, although this is not a corporate uniform it is a colour scheme that staff are asked to wear.
- Signage was clear.
- The feedback podium located in the One Stop Shop did not appear to be cost effective.

### **3.15 Site visit – One Stop Shop and Contact Centre, Northampton Borough Council**



3.15.1. The Panel visited the One Stop Shop and Contact Centre, Northampton Borough Council, on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2012. Key points:

- Considerable improvements had been made to the One Stop Shop.
- Staff were all very friendly and professional.
- Staff handled difficult calls very well, calming down angry callers and taking charge of the call in order to reach a conclusion. Some of the calls and visits could be very stressful for the staff; however, staff could discuss these matters and get support from their line managers.
- Staff had the provision of panic buttons should they require it which would locate security.
- Northampton's customer services facilities are of a larger scale to that of Rugby Borough Council

### **3.16 Site Visit – Customer Services areas, Northampton Borough Council**

3.16.1 The Panel visited other customer service areas, outside the One Stop Shop at Northampton Borough Council on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012; Key points:

#### **3.17 Revenues and Benefits**

- The Panel shadowed an officer when contact was made with a customer regarding completing a Housing Benefit claim form over the telephone. The Officer explained the process well so that the customer had a clear picture of the next steps.
- New claims are directed to Revenues and Benefits as specialised knowledge is required
- Officers have a list of calls to customers on a daily basis
- Queries were dealt with effectively and efficiently.
- Good processes are in place.

### **3.18 Housing**

- A fair number of single people present to the Council as homeless.
- It is not a statutory duty to house single people unless they are categorised as vulnerable, staff make an effort to help and advice them.
- It is perceived that the numbers presenting as homeless will increase as a result of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, which will increase the pressure on staff.
- It is ensured that two appointments on a Friday afternoon are kept free for emergency appointments.
- Customer with a priority need:
  - Fire or flood
  - Vulnerable, including pregnant women and individuals with dependents

### **3.19 Guildhall Office**

- Guildhall Office staff do not wear uniforms.
- Signage could be more effective.

### **3.20 Planning**

- Planning Services do not use the central call answering service.
- The Planning reception desk located in the One Stop shop is not continually staffed.
- There is a lot of wasted space in the area of the One Stop Shop where the Planning desk is located.
- Signage for the Planning desk is not clear.
- The public can use a PC located in the One Stop Shop to view planning applications etc.
- An increasing number of planning applications are submitted electronically

### **3.21 Site Visit – Danes Camp Leisure Centre, Northampton**

3.21.1 The Panel visited Danes Camp Leisure Centre on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2012. Salient points:

- A wide variety of leaflets are available in the reception area for customers
- The Centre clearly displays the Customer Services Charter 2010, the mission statement being:
  - *“To provide a quality, value for money leisure service that meets the needs and aspirations of the local community.”*



- The Trust has achieved Quest status and will be reassessed later this year
- Danes Camp Leisure Centre was the first centre to be credited with the Inclusive Fitness Initiative (IFI) status.
- Free parking is offered for its customers with a dedicated section for disabled parking.
- By offering a variety of ways for customers to access leisure, such as annual membership, concessions and pay as you go rates, all customers' needs are recognised.
- Previously, Danes Camp was awarded Customer Services Accreditation but due to the cost it has been decided that it will not go for the accreditation this year. However, the Centre continues to follow the assessment used.
- On a regular basis, Danes Camp shares details of its customer services as an example of best practice with various departments of NBC.
- A variety of fitness classes are offered for all ages.
- The Centre provides for the needs of disabled customers.
- The Customer Forum meeting ensures that customers' views are heard.
- Signage around the Centre is very clear as it the information available for customers.

### **3.22 Site visit – EMS Management Service, Northampton**

3.22.1 Key points from the site visit that took place on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2012:

- Good links between Neighbourhood wardens and EMS would improve customer services
- A lot of agency staff are currently engaged however a structure is being worked up and it is envisaged that less Agency staff will be used.
- An education unit is in situ at the car park at EMS and is part of the Northampton Waste Partnership.
- Tours are organised for schools and other groups such as scouts and Pensioners.
- The Unit also goes out to schools and staff gives pupils a presentation.
- There are minimal complaints from the public about odour from the site.
- Health and safety is a key priority for EMS
- EMS operates a zero tolerance policy regarding the wearing of the required PPE.

## **4 Equality Impact Assessment**

4.1 Overview and Scrutiny ensures that it adheres to the Council's statutory duty to provide the public with access to Scrutiny Reports/agendas/minutes and other such documents. Meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny/Scrutiny Panels are widely publicised, i.e.: on the Council's website, copies issues to the local media

- and paper copies available in the Council's One Stop Shop and local libraries.
- 4.2 The Scrutiny Panel was mindful of the eight protected characteristics when undertaking scrutiny activity so that any recommendations that it made could identify potential positive and negative impacts on any particular sector of the community. This was borne in mind as the Scrutiny Review progressed and evidence gathered.
- 4.3 Any possible recommended changes may have perceived adverse and beneficial effects for all diversity groups.
- 4.4 So that the Scrutiny Panel obtains a variety of views, a number of key witnesses provided evidence as detailed in section 3 of this report.:
- 4.5 It was noted that a full Equality Impact Assessment had been produced for customer services at NBC.

## **5 Conclusions and Key Findings**

- 5.1 After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn:
- 5.1.1 It was highlighted that over the last two years there have been significant improvements made within customer services and new and innovative improvements introduced, although it was recognised that there are still some further limited improvements that could be made to help improve both customer satisfaction and the customer experience. . This Scrutiny Review demonstrates the importance of good quality customer services.
- 5.1.2 In considering the data for the mystery shopping exercise, the Panel felt that the mystery shopping exercise should be repeated, including the Centres under the management of the Northampton Leisure Trust, and that in order to achieve consistency the same questions should be used. It welcomed the re-establishment of the Northamptonshire Customer Services Group so that different members would be able to mystery shop each other.
- 5.1.3 The Panel acknowledged that the Customer Excellence Strategy 2009-2012 was being updated; to reflect the fact that there was no longer a separate site at Cliftonville and also the implementation of the Northampton Leisure Trust.
- 5.1.4 The satisfaction scores for Northampton Borough Council (NBC) were welcomed. On an average basis is 85%. This compared to the national average of 75% for public sector services.
- 5.1.5 In considering the desktop research exercise, the Panel concluded that::
- Targets for customer services were similar

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

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

5.1.6 The value of a shared customer service for both the customer and the organisation was recognised.

5.1.7 The importance of various methods for the customer to contact the Council was highlighted. It was acknowledged that external organisations and the Northampton Leisure Trust provided other methods such as social media sites and short messaging services as a form of contact. Social media is a method to quickly disseminate information.

5.1.8 Migration of services to Customer Services provides value for money due to optimal use of agent's time. Therefore the Panel recognised that more technical departments could be incorporated into the call centre for "first contact" to enable the channel shift strategy to be fully applied to these calls too.

5.1.9 It was acknowledged that flow of people into the One Stop Shop is not normally monitored, but had been manually counted for a month.

5.1.10 The Panel emphasised the need for improved signage, in particular directing customers to the Registrars. Signage must be clear, precise and displayed in an appropriate time frame. The provision of signage at Danes Camp was commended. Signage at Rugby Borough Council was perceived as very good and informative:



- 5.1.11 Positive feedback was received from the survey of Councillors of Northampton Borough Council regarding their experiences of the Contact Centre. However, one Councillor indicated the automated telephone system was rather slow when the caller needed to contact a particular officer or service area.
- 5.1.12 The Panel highlighted that public perceptions of how they were dealt with within the service area is vital, irrespective of whether people receive the outcome that they want. They should feel that best efforts have been made to help them. It was accepted that there might be an issue regarding managing people's expectations of service.
- 5.1.13 It was realised that due to the current economic climate and a number of changes being introduced to the benefits system, more people will be seeking help, therefore there is a need to prioritise queries.
- 5.1.14 Queries from customers to the One Stop Shop, such as homeless and rough sleepers can be very challenging for staff and disruptive to other customers.
- 5.1.15 The Panel felt that it was important that the floorwalkers, located in the One Stop Shop, were easily identifiable.
- 5.1.16 It was highlighted that first impressions count. The Panel felt that this is demonstrated by staff being very positive and friendly, smart and efficient. There is a need for uniforms to be replaced regularly to ensure that staff are always of smart appearance.
- 5.1.17 The Panel noted the recommendation of the previous Customer Services Task and Finish Group "*That resources be allocated for the provision of uniforms for frontline Customer Services Officers, identifying a corporate image. Staff be consulted on the style of the uniform.*" The Panel felt that the uniforms provided did not clearly identify the corporate image.
- 5.1.18 The Panel supported the broadcasting of news channels in One Stop Shop at Rugby Borough Council, noting that as long as the Authority has a television licence there is no cost to providing this.
- 5.1.19 The Panel realised that there is difference between the customer base of commercial organisations and that of Local Authorities. The customer base of Local Authorities is fixed. The Panel emphasises that if the majority of staff are happy, the workplace is a better and more productive environment and fits for both a commercial organisation and a Local Authority. There is also the element of corporate responsibility and promoting good citizenship.
- 5.1.20 The Panel was concerned at the numbers of single homeless people that were presenting to the Council. It was noted that although it is not a statutory duty to re-house them unless they are within a vulnerable category, staff made an effort to

- help and advice them. It was noted that numbers presenting to the Council could increase as a result of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, which will increase the pressure on staff.
- 5.1.21 The area of the One Stop Shop where the Planning desk is located could be better utilised and it was felt that there should be a clearly signed designated area in the One Stop Shop for Planning.
  - 5.1.22 The Panel recognised the need for interface with the Lagan System of reporting and the system used by EMS so that queries can be easily shared and supported the upgrading of the system.
  - 5.1.23 It was felt that good links between Neighbourhood wardens and EMS would improve customer services.
  - 5.1.24 The Panel agreed that a better customer service will be provided if less Agency staff are engaged at EMS as there had been problems with the attitude of some Agency staff particularly in respect of spillages at the side of the lorry but understood that a staffing structure was currently being investigated which would involve the engagement of less Agency staff.
  - 5.1.25 The Panel supported the introduction of new technology that EMS is introducing to the lorries which details information such as the street, which households require assisted collection. The operator can detail whether bins are put out on the specified day. This technology will soon connect to the Customer Services system at NBC which was felt to be very useful.
  - 5.1.26 The Panel supported the education package offered by the Northampton Waste Partnership. It is a good customer service practice.
  - 5.1.27 Tours of the EMS site would be useful for both Customer Services Officers and Councillors at NBC so that they are aware of all the processes carried out by EMS. This would help them in their role answering queries and providing information to the public.
  - 5.1.28 Health and Safety is a key priority of EMS. It was considered to be important that all staff and visitors to the site adhere to the wearing of the appropriate PPE when on site.
  - 5.1.29 The Panel recognised that the most inexpensive method of contact was via the Internet. It was realised that channel shift to other methods such as the Internet would only apply to those customers who are happy with this

## 6

### Recommendations

- 6.1 The purpose of the Scrutiny Panel was to evaluate all customer services with a review of the customer contact centre, customer satisfaction and the refurbished and extended one stop shop.
- 6.1.1 The Scrutiny Panel highlights that over the last two years there has been significant improvements made and new and innovative improvements introduced. This Scrutiny Review demonstrates the importance of good quality customer services to each and every customer. The Scrutiny Panel has put forward a series of recommendations to Cabinet that it feels will further develop and improve customer services facilities at Northampton Borough Council:
- 6.2.1 That funding for improved signage both outside and inside the Guildhall be made available, particularly in relation to signs for housing and registrars; with a particular focus on the improvement of signage around the old building of the Guildhall.
- 6.2.2 That floor walkers, located in the One Stop Shop, be provided with a uniform that makes them and their role clearly identifiable to customer.
- 6.2.3 That funding for additional uniforms for front line Customer Services Officers be investigated.
- 6.2.4 That the uniforms provided for front line Customer Services Officer identify the corporate image of the Council.
- 6.2.5 That the plasma screens in situ in the One Stop Shop be utilised to broadcast news channels which can be done at no extra cost to the Council.
- 6.2.6 That those departments not currently delivered through Customer Services, such as Planning, Building Control and Licensing be brought into Customer Services for “first contact”, to apply customer services skills, to enable the channel shift strategy to be fully applied to calls/visits in relation to these departments.

- 6.2.7 That Planning Services is incorporated into the One Stop Shop and the Planning Reception desk is constantly manned during opening hours by a fully trained Customer Services Advisor.
- 6.2.8 That, with a particular focus on the entrances and exits, the layout of the One Stop Shop be altered to improve customer flow and further support channel shift.
- 6.2.9 That funding is identified for a further automatic ticketing machine to support the improved layout and increase the number of floor walkers.
- 6.2.10 That in order to reduce the time the process takes, the volume of evidence requested from customers in relation to housing applications is reduced and evidence is only sought upon offer of accommodation to validate the information given.
- 6.2.11 That a project be undertaken to assess the feasibility and cost implications of extending the hours of the contact centre and One Stop shop from 8.30am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday.
- 6.2.12 That the mystery shopping exercise is repeated, including the Centres under the management of the Northampton Leisure Trust, and that in order to achieve consistency the same questions should be used and repeated on a regular basis.
- 6.2.13 That further methods of communication both to and from the Council, such as social media sites and short messaging services be investigated; with a special focus to pre-empting messaging regarding local issues.
- 6.2.14 That in recognising that more customers may seek assistance due to the current economic climate and a number of changes to the benefits system a priority queuing system be introduced.
- 6.2.15 That the area of the One Stop Shop located around the Planning reception desk be better utilised for use by customers.
- 6.2.16 That it be ensured that Neighbourhood Wardens share all relevant data and information with EMS.
- 6.2.17 That a tour of the EMS site be incorporated into the Councillor Induction Package so that Councillors are aware of all the processes and procedures in place.
- 6.2.18 That tours of the EMS site be arranged for all front line Customer Services Officers to further aid them in answering queries and providing information to the public.

- 6.2.19 That Equality and Multi-cultural Awareness continues to have a high priority for Induction and on going training of Customer Services Advisors, recognising the skills and knowledge required of Advisors dealing with a very diverse range of customers.
- 6.2.20 That a Protocol be produced for all NBC staff to follow that details clear guidelines, including the wearing the appropriate PPE, when visiting the site at EMS.
- 6.2.21 That improvements be made to the signage at Westbridge depot, with a particular focus regarding signage for the EMS site.
- 6.2.22 That, where budgets permit, the GPS in-cab system is extended more widely to appropriate departments.
- 6.2.23 That the Scrutiny Panel informs Cabinet that it recognises the value of a shared customer service for both the customer and the organisation.
- 6.2.24 That a copy of the updated Customer Excellence Strategy 2009-2012 be circulated to the Panel when finalised.

#### **Recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

- 6.2.25 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertakes a Scrutiny Review of customer services provided by EMS in relation to the environmental services contract.
- 6.2.26 That, in recognising that customer services is a continuous improvement process, this Scrutiny Panel reconvenes in 2014 to evaluate all customer services provided by Northampton Borough Council.
- 6.2.27 That a Scrutiny Review is set up to assess the impact on the Council of the Welfare Reform Act 2012.
- 6.2.28 That a copy of this Overview and Scrutiny Review be circulated to all those involved in the Review.
- 6.2.29 That the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee contacts all those involved in this Review, informing them of Cabinet's response to the recommendations and provides continuous feedback at regular intervals regarding the implementation of the accepted recommendations.
- 6.2.30 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of its monitoring regime, reviews the impact of this report in six months time.



## **Appendices**



## Appendix A

### OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

#### Scrutiny Panel 3 - Customer Services

##### 1. Purpose/Objectives of the Review

- To evaluate all customer services with a review of the customer contact centre, customer satisfaction and the refurbished and extended one stop shop.

##### 2. Outcomes Required

- To establish whether all customer services are providing value for money around:
  - Quality of service and service delivery
  - Customer satisfaction across the whole organisation
  - Cost and efficiency
  - Use of all media
- To establish the accessibility of customer services
- To establish the benefits of a shared customer services facility
- To establish the appropriateness of current targets for customer services
- To make recommendations for improvement as appropriate

##### 3. Information Required

- Baseline data including
  - Budgets
  - Statistics
  - Targets
  - Call times
  - Performance Indicator data
- Evidence from partners, key employees, including the Customer Services Manager and service users
- Evidence from the Portfolio Holder (Community Engagement) and the Leader of the Council, NBC
- Evidence from the Director of Finance and Support, NBC
- Benchmarking with other Local Authorities, including information regarding:-
  - Targets

- Costs
  - Recorded calls
- Site visits to internal customer services facilities at Northampton Borough Council (NBC) - observing process including perusing waiting times, signage, observing calls into the contact centre, speaking with staff and service users
- Site visit to a sample of departments within NBC, including the Gateway Project
- Site visit to Enterprise Managed Services (EMS) and Northampton Leisure Trust
- Site visit to a best practice Council external to Northamptonshire
- Focus Group with a sample of Chairs of Residents' Association

#### **4. Format of Information**

- Various site visits
- Officer briefings/presentations
- Baseline data
- Witness interviews and written evidence
- Portfolio Holder evidence
- Officer evidence:
  - Director of Finance and Support
  - Customer Services Manager
  - Various other Officers
- Partner evidence including:
  - Northamptonshire County Council
  - Northants Police
  - Womens' Aid
  - Citizens' Advice Bureau
  - Bromford Support
  - Enterprise Managed Services (EMS)
  - Northampton Leisure Trust
- Evidence from Councillors regarding their experience of customer services at NBC
- Desktop research
- Encapsulate all new methods of customer services within the Council, including organisations providing a service on behalf of the Council
- Northamptonshire Residents' Association to be approached suggesting that it sets up the Focus Group as detailed in section 3 above.

#### **5. Methods Used to Gather Information**

- Desktop research
- Minutes of the meetings of the Scrutiny Panel
- Officer Reports and presentations
- Witness evidence

- Site Visits
- Examples of best practice
- Witness interviews and evidence as detailed in section 4 above.
- The Northamptonshire Residents' Association to be approached regarding it setting up a Focus Group comprising a sample of Resident Association Chairs.

## **6. Co-Options to the Review**

- County Councillor Marion Minney to be approached suggesting that she is co opted to this Review for its life. County Councillor Marion Minney had been co opted to the previous Scrutiny Review into Customer Services (2009)

## **7 Equality Impact Screening Assessment**

- Scrutiny Officer to undertake an Equality Impact Screening Assessment shortly after the Scoping meeting

## **8 Evidence gathering Timetable**

January 2012 – April 2012

5<sup>th</sup> January 2012 – Scoping meeting  
 2nd February - Evidence gathering  
 1<sup>st</sup> March - Evidence gathering  
 21<sup>st</sup> March - Evidence gathering  
 19<sup>th</sup> April - Approval of final report

Meetings will commence at 6pm

Various site visits will be programmed during January and April 2012.

## **9 Responsible Officers**

- Lead Officer Marion Goodman, Head of Customer Services and ICT
- Co-ordinator Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer

## **10 Resources and Budgets**

- Marion Goodman, Lead Officer, to provide internal support and advice.

## **11 Final report presented by:**

- The Chair of the Scrutiny Panel to present the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to then present the report to Cabinet.

## **12 Monitoring procedure:**

- Review the impact of the report after approximately six months (November/December 2012)

**Cost to Serve**

Channel		including controllable costs and re-charges/back office costs)  Each transaction costs:	(including controllable costs and print, but excluding re-charges/back office costs), Each transaction costs:
Web		28p	17p
Email	21,567 dealt with	£7.92	£4.80
Telephones (Contact centre)	359,218 phone calls received	£3.96	£2.40
Face to Face	67,000 interactions	£22.13	£10.53

**The Deprivation Index:**

The Deprivation Indices, published by the Department for Communities and Local Government, studies poverty across a range of significant indicators - all to try and work out which places are the poorest, and theoretically have the greatest need for support from their local council and other agencies. The idea is to try to break out different areas which are all influenced by poverty. The figures show that out of 326 Councils up and down the country, where Liverpool is the highest ranked area for deprivation, and Hart District Council (Hampshire) the least deprived area, Northampton is ranked 119<sup>th</sup> on the list and is therefore in the top third of areas of deprivation.

**Face to Face Interactions**

The cost to service face-to-face has risen considerably over the past 2 years. One of the key drivers of the One Stop Shop transformation project Business Case was to support and future-proof the drive to channel shift to the phones and web, to address the cost imbalance in the main, but also to improve the choice in how to access council and partner services. Considering the deprivation status of Northampton, and the current financial climate worsening, the need to provide face-to-face support to our vulnerable customers has remained a critical function.

**Emails**

Email is currently an expensive access channel to run. This is because the e-mail information has to be handled by staff and manually dealt with. Often essential information is missing and multiple contacts need to be made.

Improvements to this process have been made and 6000 on-line forms were completed which involved no staff intervention at all (completely automated).

We are currently developing in conjunction with ICT an online form for the website to replace all email contacts. This means the customer will be given options to refine the service they want. The implementation date of this cost saving improvement is June 2012.

Also in June, the new website goes live. This will be a task focussed approach, getting customers access to online forms and processes as simply as possible. On an information page, we will have a 'call to action' part of the screen listing relevant online transactions, therefore driving customers further towards self service.

### **Channel Shift within the transformed One Stop Shop**

Footfall	67000
Phone calls generated from the 'self-serve' area:	359,218
Emails generated from the 'self-serve':	21567
lagan transactions online (not all online transactions):	5377
online visits (less internal usage):	926,529

These figures tell a picture. They show demand for web is there, and we can say that when transactions are migrated across or improved, transactions will increase further.

Encouragement for web usage - within the site we are making it easy to use. Simple layout, improving the search, simplifying content, using real 'english' terms instead of council based 'english', and improving links to transactions. This also includes removing email as an option.

External to the site, friendly URLs are used to advertise initiatives. Facebook and twitter are used to both push out communications and respond to customer comments, so awareness of the site increases. By responding we encourage more use of the web as an access channel generally. Cross linking with other websites including direct gov, and the county and local district councils so customers can find the right service provider. Also use of the PCs in the OSS self-serve area to do direct channel shift, so showing customers how to use the web. General awareness through our printed literature always listing the website. Also, sending pins codes with CTAX bills to encourage citizen account usage.

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

Scrutiny Panel 3 - Customer Services

**Core Questions put to Residents' Association Focus Group by the Northampton Federation of Residents Associations**

**Focus Group consists of St James Residents Association, Kings Heath Residents Association and the Eastfield Residents Association.**

**(Opinion of residents living outside these areas were also taken into account)**

- 1 Do you perceive the Council's customer services facility to provide value for money around:

***No idea of value for money, having no similar services or funding to compare to.***

- I. The quality of the Service and Service delivery

***Patchy - dependant on service required and whom you speak to. For example, some are relatively happy when it comes to service repairs and the speed in which work is carried out – Others find it totally lacking on both counts – The same can be said about the refuse collection services and area maintenance, it varies from area to area, often within the same estate.***

- I. Customer Satisfaction from reporting an issue to having it resolved. ?

***Again patchy and dependant on who you speak to and service required – some areas get many complaints and are disgusted with the service they receive. For example some properties lacking adequate heating, cupboard doors falling off, antiquated electrical wiring..... Tenants find they are continually complaining and getting nowhere - Others are happy with the service they receive and feel they are dealt with promptly i.e. . Phone up about a repair or missed refuse collection and have it dealt with quickly - It would be easier to answer this if questioned on specific services.***

- I. Cost and efficiency

***As 1 above – How can we judge ? Compare with what ?***

- 2 Are you aware of how to contact Customer Services at the Council and



do you find this easy to do so?

***Those that have internet access and are able to use it are generally happy that they can make contact with the appropriate office or person.***

***A large number will not entertain the idea of making contact online via websites or email.***

***Most people prefer to telephone – when people are able to make contact with the relevant person, they are generally happy with the service.***

***Many complaints about unanswered phones, automated answer phones, not getting to speak to the relevant person or office – promised call-backs not being honoured.***

***Residents have found some branches of customer services particularly difficult to contact, and complain of evasive replies or an apparent lack of knowledge on the part of the NBC person answering the phone.***

- 3 When you contact the Council, are you encouraged to make contact via the website next time you need to make contact?

***Patchy – sometimes – some, particularly the elderly feel fobbed off, being unable to use the internet and not having the facility to do so – travelling to the 'One Stop Shop' to be helped to use the service is often an impossibility for the elderly or infirm – many prefer to speak to an actual person over the telephone.***

- 4 If you are unable to access services via the Internet what advice is provided to you?

***Some older resident say they have been told to contact a relative or friend who may have internet access, or attempt to call by telephone for them – This is rather unsatisfactory***

- 5 Do you feel that the One Stop Shop at the Council makes best use of the space available, and how would you rate comfort and accessibility?

***The vast majority have never used the One Stop Shop – those that have vary in opinion – Some say they find everything under one roof, or are pointed in the right direction. They find it reasonably accessible, warm and comfortable – Others find the lack of privacy and queues very off putting.***

- 6(a) What do you feel are the best features of the One Stop Shop and why?

***Reasonably accessible, warm and comfortable***

6(b) Please provide suggestions of where you feel improvements could be made?

***A somewhat faster method of dealing with customers and cutting down queues would be appreciated.***

7 Do you feel comfortable on entering the One Stop Shop, if not, please provide examples of why you feel this is the case

***Again, residents are put off by the size of queues and waiting times.***

8 Do you feel that the services offered by the Council are advertised well, if not, please provide suggestions for improvement.

***Services are advertised pretty well – Some people don't read the news papers, don't listen to local radio, not sure how you could reach those - Perhaps a newsletter once or twice a year – posters in local shops, libraries, community notice boards etc.***

9 Is the Council successfully identifying the levels of the service that the customer requires? If not please explain why.

***Impossible to say without going into individual areas of service. For example, your bins are emptied on time or they are not – one is a level of success the other unsuccessful. A customer generally requires a successful service. Therefore, in this example the level of success does vary across the town. Some areas meet the expected level, others do not.***

***Customers also need to know what level of service to expect for the money they are paying i.e. if you are paying for your communal areas to be cleaned twice a week, anything less would not be meeting the required level.***

10 Please advise which is the most frequently used method that you use to contact customer services and the Council

***Every method of contact will be used by residents. Most preferring the telephone and speaking to a person as opposed to an automated service – those that are able and have access will use online methods, perhaps emails as opposed to websites, which can sometimes be difficult to navigate.***

11 Do you find it easy to contact the department that you require? If not please explain why. How could this process be improved?

**Feedback suggests the more residents engage with resident associations, neighbourhood wardens, local councillors, pcso's and the community generally, the easier it becomes. Those that take no interest and are not community minded until they have a problem, what can they expect ? Residents have to take some responsibility in making sure they are informed.**

- 12 Have you needed to contact the Council during out of working hours? If so, was the number to contact easy to find?

**Sensible residents will keep the out-of-hours number in a place that is easy to find. Some complain that they are given the number on a newsletter only once a year, if this is accidentally thrown away they have difficulty finding the number – Not sure the council can be held responsible for that ! Generally, residents do not have a problem contacting the out-of-hour number.**

- 13 Would you use social networking to contact the Council or find out information i.e. Twitter or Facebook?

**A lot would, particularly but not exclusively the younger residents would – Many of the older more vulnerable would not, although there are exceptions to that rule too – One size does not fit all.**

- 14 Please provide your views on the benefits of a shared customer services facility with other organisations

**Dependant on the organisations sharing the facility – Customer rights organisations could be beneficial - Some would find the arrangement would be deficient not only in answering residents' questions, due to lack of trained staff, but also in not being able to reach anyone capable of making decisions. At best, a shared service facility could only provide limited information, not make decisions that benefit the customer - Some that have had experiences with businesses which outsource customer service facilities, find they generally do a very poor job, resulting in annoyance and frustration.**

- 15 Any other comments

**Questionnaire far too long and general - Needs to be shorter and more concise to encourage more detailed answers about specific services.**

### Northampton Borough Council

#### Scrutiny Panel 3 – Customer Services

### Northampton Leisure Trust

#### Question 1

- I. Feedback surveys are run throughout each business year. Some are generalised to ask an overview of Trust and others more specific to events the Trust host.
- II. There are many avenues for customers to feedback their views and opinions. A 'Tell It Like It Is' Customer Comments, Compliments and Complaints Scheme operates at each site and a Quarterly Customer Forum operates at each leisure centre. Regular meetings with Front of house staff help gain a view on satisfaction as they receive most verbal feedback from people.
- III. Competitor analysis is undertaken to ensure the Trust is pricing competitively within the Borough. Business Development Manager and Marketing Officer work to ensure all activities are good value whilst remaining financially viable.
- IV. Quarterly Employee Forums allow staff to voice their opinions on the services we provide. Regular team meetings throughout the business allow all to verbalise opinions on service and value.

#### Question 2.

Northampton Leisure Trust currently uses the NBC website to advertise all promotions and activities offered by Northampton Leisure Trust. This can be accessed through the 'northampton.gov' website or directly at the 'nleisure' web address. Customers can download all Trust literature via this website and also join the Trilogy membership scheme online. By joining the direct debit system online the customer receives the latest promotions and incentives. The staff verbally direct people to the site to receive offers and we can give access to a computer at all three facilities.

A range of activity programmes can be downloaded from the website and in recent months each centre has developed an embedded timetable that shows each swimming pool programme and can also be amended to announce closures and any alterations. Customers can also sign up to receive a monthly electronic newsletter from the Trust that is sent to them advertising all upcoming events and news.

NLT also advertise and update through Face book- there are 3 different pages- Trilogy Northampton, The Forum Cinema and Sport and Play Development. The Trilogy page has over 1000 followers. This is used to advertise and promote all activities- holiday clubs for children to fitness events and also

we highlight any operational problems. Members can upload information and it is also a forum for feedback. The online 'chat' facility is also available for questions and queries.

Northampton Leisure Trust does have a twitter account. This is used to tweet information on activities. This is currently being expanded.

The Trust have joined the 'Splashpath' website which advertises all pool timetables online and via Smart phones as an Application (free to download) . On phones it is GPS related highlighting the pools you are located closest too. Splashpath is advertised in site and online. It also allows customers to undertake swimming challenges enhancing their training experience.

Customer services for the Trust now also offer contact electronically via the 3 centre email addresses. On the Trusts main website customers can also feedback via the Council feedback system. The Trust also uses the 'Survey Monkey' system to evaluate events and also conduct satisfaction surveys.

### Question 3

All printed literature clearly advertises the website and trilogy membership addresses. Where the 'Tell it like it' forms are stored at each site there are also slips for the customer to take advertising the twitter, Facebook pages and the centre email address for feedback.

### Question 4

Customers who do not have access to the internet can gain information about all the centres from an extensive range of printed literature detailing all timetables and programmes and activities. Most literature gives information for all three facilities with some containing more detailed information being site specific.

Customers can also obtain information and make bookings at each leisure centre reception (open from 0645 to 2200 hours weekdays and 0800 to 1900 hours weekends). This can be done in person or by telephone.

A multi-screen TV system operates at each leisure centre visually showing information on a range of activities on a rolling programme. Screens are located in reception/vending areas and with each Trilogy Fitness Suite. Multi-screen can be updated quickly to reflect any changes or new activities.

The Forum Cinema operates a recorded information line detailing upcoming film programme.

### Question 5

Northampton Leisure Trust provides services and activities for a wide and diverse range of people within Northampton's Communities including the elderly, young and more vulnerable members of the community.

A brochure detailing the Trust holiday programme is circulated to schools in preparation for each school holidays period. We have also recently introduced open days prior to holiday periods to give children the opportunity to try a wide range of activities for a nominal fee.

The MEND Scheme (to combat childhood obesity) is promoted by GP's, School Nurses and Teachers and is also advertised through the central MEND website with links to programmes in all areas of the country.

The Trust Sport and Play Development Team actively promote activities out in the community, hosting and advertising a range of free or funded activities for all from the under 5's through to health walks for the over 50's. The Northampton Street Football Project is delivered by the Trust and reaches young people in areas of deprivation across Northampton encouraging them to both participate and also in some cases to train as a volunteer leader.

Information on our Activity on Referral Scheme is advertised within NHS practices and local Primary Care Trust Organisations. Doctors refer patients to the leisure centre who need to participate in physical activity for health reasons.

Members of our Membership Sales Team visit colleges and the University to encourage students to be more active and join the Trilogy Community.

Activities for distinct user groups will be advertised by working in partnership with relevant groups, and organisations and advertising in relevant media. For example parent and child magazines, age concern UK, Northamptonshire Sport, Northamptonshire Federation of Disability Sport.

#### Question 8

Customers can contact NLT Customer Services as follows:

- 'Tell it like it is' feedback forms
- Email
- By Telephone (direct extensions available)
- Letter
- Facebook
- Via the NBC website feedback form
- Via the NBC contact centre phone line
- Via a staff member
- Verbal Feedback Books

#### Question 9

The Trust has many avenues for customers to contact regarding their views on the centres and how they operate. This information, where relevant, is used to improve services and adapt the business to suit the requirements of the customer. A simple example of this would be altering a swimming session to add lanes for those training.

Sport and Play analyse every event and it is reviewed for improvements to ensure we aim meet the service standards expected for the next time the event occurs.

A Customer Charter is available that outlines what we believe to be the service levels we aim to provide to customers and this is reviewed regularly.

Through careful monitoring and recording of all feedback, trends can be identified for investigation and to be resolved. This helps the trust highlight areas of importance where service is required by those attending, what they believe should be provided to them and how we can look to accommodate it.

#### Question 10

The most used system in terms of feedback about the Trust facilities is by 'Tell it like it is' forms.

#### Question 11

Each facility operates under the guidelines of its NOP (Normal Operating Procedure) and EAP (Emergency Action Plan). There are set procedures for emergency situations and the health and safety of customers and staff will be prioritised at all times. The Trust has a service level agreement with NBC Health & Safety who will give advice and guidance as required.

In the event of an emergency situation, contact would be made with the NBC Communications Team to ensure the necessary press requirements are followed to communicate with our customers.

#### Question 12

##### Example

Recently maintenance work was being undertaken in the studio at Danes Camp. The information was misunderstood by staff that prematurely relayed this to the customers. The customers believed we would be cutting the aerobic class size down by half and were aggrieved as classes were currently at full capacity.

Customers were verbally complaining and also started a petition, stating that we had not consulted on the works that they believed would be detrimental to their memberships. Through word of mouth this escalated very quickly, with staff receiving verbal complaints some of a heated nature. Many were threatening cancellation of membership. The class size was only being reduced whilst work was undertaken for a period of a few days.

All customers were contacted and the situation clarified. More specific signage was put in place and all staff made aware of exactly what was happening.

Customer Services Identified that communication amongst staff had been at the root of this problem. Steps have been taken to ensure that in future, projects are communicated more effectively to staff and advertised with more of an open forum for questions from customers. Signage must be clear and precise and displayed in an appropriate time frame.

#### Question 13.

Complaints are all recorded on a spreadsheet relevant to the stated centre. This overview provides customer details with brief description of complaint, contact details and the staff member the incident was reported to and details of the Customer Services Officer or staff member who responded.

Secondary to this all communication is given a reference number, each case is completed and all communication is compiled and then filed away in order. All copies are also stored electronically against their reference numbers in folders for each site.

All complaints are first sent to the Customer Services Officer. They evaluate the complaint and determine the severity of the issue raised. This is then referred to the relevant operational team member for the centre/area complained about. The complaint would be investigated. During the recording, it would be determined if previous feedback has highlighted the issue already. The Customer Services Officer would refer to Senior Management if required.

The complainant would then be contacted by the Customer Services Officer or another team member (Centre Manager) for more information if necessary. If the complaint is resolved or there is explanation to be given, the Customer Services Officer would relay this to the customer. If lessons learnt from the process, the necessary changes would then be communicated to the staff and any changes made.

Complaints are analysed quarterly and an overview for each site and the Trust as a whole are evaluated. This report contains statistics of feedback. It would be hoped that trends would be noticed and rectified before a 3 month period but if not these can then be carried forward for further investigation and outcome. The information of all complaints is available to all Managers throughout the business to ensure all complaints are upheld fairly and appropriately.

#### Question 14

The main avenue for contact outside of leisure business hours is electronic. Customers can access the Internet for information or email in through the methods previously outlined. Customer Services do have a direct extension with an answer machine service for customers to contact.

#### Question 15

A shared customer services facility can be beneficial to the customer as long as the staff employed is knowledgeable about all the services provided and the customer journey/experience is improved and not elongated.

To a certain extend Northampton Leisure Trust operate in this way in that we have a corporate customer service position which operates across the three leisure centre, cinema and also now covers our sport and play development service. We are also considering a centralised booking



system whereby an operator would take bookings and provide information related to all three sites and sport and play development.

As Northampton Leisure Trust grows the Customer Service function will remain corporate and will provide a service to all branches of the business and potentially to partners.



## **NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **Scrutiny Panel 3 - Customer Services**

**Appendix E**

#### **Core Questions – Enterprise Managed Services**

**Many of the questions below are not applicable as the contract dictates the approach that will be taken.**

**In respect of company wide customer services, again most contracts are not impacted by this as they follow the contract. I will demonstrate my meaning by answering many of the questions below.**

- 1 Please supply details how you evaluate whether customer services is providing value for money around:
  - I. The quality of the Service and Service delivery
  - II. Customer Satisfaction across the whole organisation
  - III. Cost and efficiency
  - IV. Staff satisfaction of the process

**In respect of customer services for the Environmental Services contract between Northampton Borough Council, Daventry District Council and Enterprise, customer services was one of the topics for discussion during Competitive Dialogue. This is the procurement method used to outsource the environmental services and involved detailed discussions around each bidders proposed service solution.**

**All topics discussed in Competitive Dialogue were used by the bidders to develop their tender bid. This was then evaluated against a number of criteria. The criteria were made up of three parts. The first was a pass or fail test of affordability. The affordability figure was the true cost of the services being tendered for minus 10% (those years' savings targets). Each bid had to be below this figure. Once through this stage the next was an assessment of the service quality proposed by the bidding company. This was weighted as worth 75% of the total marks. It would be in this section that customer services would be evaluated. The third part of the evaluation would be an**

**assessment of the financial data that supports the bid. This was weighted as worth 25% of the total marks.**

**The best score was then designated as Preferred Bidder. The evaluation process involved a comparison of the bid against the specification and points awarded accordingly against a scoring matrix.**

**The process of outsourcing the service and using Competitive dialogue ensured that there was value for money and that the winning bid would provide the best quality services including customer service.**

**The contract is based on outcomes, for example the contract is about how an area looks and how satisfied the customer is rather than how many times the grass is cut. The performance indicators form part of the contract and Enterprise is monitored against them. Customer Satisfaction plays a large part in monitoring the quality and performance of the contract.**

**The measurement of customer satisfaction is a crucial element of the contract and ensuring the outcomes are achieved.**

**Enterprise is made up of approximately 17,000 staff and it grows from acquisition and winning contracts to deliver services, therefore there are many staff who transferred from other companies and the public sector. This means that there are many different cultures within Enterprise, however there are a strong set of driving principles that we all subscribe to. The satisfaction of staff is equally important to the company as this will be reflected in our performance. Periodic regular surveys are undertaken and action plans established to improve satisfaction of staff.**

**2 Please explain how you use current technology and social networking to drive services forward?**

**An example of the use of technology is the newly installed and award winning in-cab devices which allow us to monitor in real time the progress of the waste crews. The customer services team at the Council will be able to view the information and answer customer's queries about their collection directly. An example could be the issue of people getting used to their bins being collected at a certain time. We state that times may vary and we have the whole day to collect. Invariably people phone up to report a missed bin. The in-cab device allows the contact centre to see where the crew is and tell the customer whether the bin is missed or not.**

**3 How do you encourage customers to access the Internet to make contact with the Council?**

**This is not applicable as the website belongs to the council however we will in the future be responsible for the content that relates to environmental services.**

- 4 Please explain the advice and services that you provide to customers who are unable to access the Internet

**N/A**

- 5 In particular, in relation to those customers who have the most need for services, please explain how the services that the organisation offers are advertised

**Through the Councils' customer contact channels**

- 6 Do you feel that the One Stop Shop at the Council makes best use of the space available, and how would you rate comfort and accessibility?

**N/A**

- 6(a) What do you feel are the best features of the One Stop Shop and why?

**N/A**

- 6(b) Please provide suggestions of where you feel improvements could be made?

**N/A**

- 7 Do you feel that customers are comfortable entering the One Stop Shop, if not, please provide examples of why you feel this is the case

**N/A**

- 8 Please supply details of how the customer can access the customer services facilities

**N/A**

- 9 Is the organisation successfully identifying the levels of the service that the customer requires? If not please explain why.

**N/A**

- 10 Please advise which is the most frequently used method of contacting customer services

**The telephone**

- 11 How does the organisation prioritise emergency situations?

**Enterprise has a very comprehensive Business Continuity, Risk and Emergency approach. This is also established within the contract.**

11 Please supply details of a 'Lessons Learnt Process' that is in place following contact with difficult customers?

**We use the 'learning log' process very similar to that used by the Council.**

13 Please supply details of how you analyse complaints received and how complaints are dealt with?

**We deal with complains along side the council and mirror their policy. Complaint numbers and trends are monitored at the senior management team meetings so that servives can be improved as a result**

14 Please explain the process for customer contact with the organisation during out of hours?

**Enterpsire has a contact Centres based at Matchworks in Liverpool where the customer recieveing services on a Saturday are able to contact the company**

15 Please provide your views on the benefits of a shared customer services facility

**N/A**

16 Please supply details of both allocated and unallocated reserves for customer services for your area?

**N/A**

17 Any other comments



## Appendix F

### NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

#### Scrutiny Panel 3 - Customer Services

#### Core Questions – Partners (Northamptonshire County Council)

- 1 Please supply details how you evaluate whether customer services is providing value for money around:
  - I. The quality of the Service and Service delivery
  - II. Customer Satisfaction across the whole organisation
  - III. Cost and efficiency
  - IV. Staff satisfaction of the process

Northamptonshire County Council has agreed with Northampton Borough Council to pay for the provision of reception and information services at the Guildhall.

The One Stop Shop also provides information and support to customers wishing to access any NCC service. The preference for NCC is that this takes the form of a 'warm transfer' either to a telephone handset in order for the customer to receive service from Northamptonshire County Council, directly or a 'warm transfer' to a computer terminal so that customer can self-serve.

- 2 In particular, in relation to those customers who have the most need for services, please explain how the services that the organisation offers are advertised

The One Stop Shop is the reception and information point for customers accessing the county council's registration service. Customers attend for their pre booked appointments, check in at the One Stop Shop initially and they are then guided to a seating area. One of the registrars then greets the customers and takes them to one of the four dedicated registration rooms so that the customer can register their birth, still-birth, neo natal, death or give notice of marriage in private.

Customers also visit the reception to hand over or collect papers related to their marriage or a CD of their ceremony music, whilst those

enquiring for a copy birth death or marriage certificate are guided towards the self-service area as a 'warm transfer'.

- 3 Do you feel that the One Stop Shop at the Council makes best use of the space available, and how would you rate comfort and accessibility?

From a registration service perspective, I believe that the space is used well. The issue of comfort within the registration rooms is outstanding, and I understand is being attended to, as the current comfort cooling system means that the rooms lack air circulation for customers and can be too hot during warmer weather.

- a) What do you feel are the best features of the One Stop Shop and why?

One of the two best features is the self service area as this is located at the front of the building. The provision of this area not only supports NCC strategy of helping customers to help themselves, it also ensures that face-to-face staff are more likely to assist those customers who cannot help themselves eg the truly vulnerable.

The other best feature is the quiet seating area located close to the registration rooms as this helps those who are grieving, to wait away from the busier activity taking place elsewhere i.e. reception.

- b) Please provide suggestions of where you feel improvements could be made?

Not necessarily an improvement, more so an observation that the floor walkers appear to work really well so ideally, these would always be available and perhaps already are.

- 4 Do you feel that customers are comfortable entering the One Stop Shop, if not, please provide examples of why you feel this is the case
- 5 Please supply details of how the customer can access the customer services facilities

Customers book their appointments by contacting the customer service centre at John Dryden House. This is open 08:00 – 18:00 hrs Monday to Friday. If a customer arrives at the Guildhall without an appointment, they are guided to the self-service area where they can make one. Later this year, appointment booking will be available via the NCC website. Those handing or collecting papers can do this via Reception, as noted in point 2 above.

- 6 Is the organisation successfully identifying the levels of the service that the customer requires? If not please explain why.

Yes as NCC registration has an electronic appointment booking system so activity levels are monitored centrally and resources can be adjusted accordingly eg peak periods of the year where there are more deaths occurring or following bank holiday closures.

7 Please advise which is the most frequently used method of contacting customer services

With NCC, this is via the customer service centre located at John Dryden House. Increasingly, more customers are choosing to self-serve as we make more services available on-line. Street Doctor on-line is well used as is the ordering of copy birth, death or marriage certificates where nearly 50% of all applications come via this self-service route.

8 Please supply details of how you analyse complaints received and how complaints are dealt with?

We utilise our complaints recording system and follow NCC procedures to ensure these are logged and responded to. In the event that the complaint partly relates to service provided to registration service customers by NBC staff, we work together to ensure that the customer receives just one agreed response and on behalf of both council's.

9 Please provide your views on the benefits of a shared customer services facility

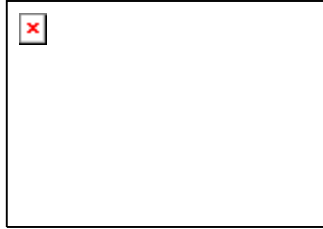
This works very well for NCC registration service. In common with the other main towns in Northamptonshire, we are located alongside the district and borough councils. With Northampton, we took this a step further to ensure the customer receives a seamless service regardless of which council is the actual local authority responsible. This works well for us in Northampton, particularly as the Guildhall is the natural home for this business including where they like to get married.

10 Any other comments

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute towards this work. We value the work we do with Northampton Borough Council as this approach to providing customer service really benefits the customers of both our councils.

**Robert Chadwick**  
Registration Service Manager





## **NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **Scrutiny Panel 3 - Customer Services**

### **Appendix G**

#### **Core Questions – Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Community Engagement**

#### **1 Please supply details how you evaluate whether customer services is providing value for money around:**

i. The quality of the Service and Service delivery

Monthly customer satisfaction is measured through surveying customers on a monthly basis, this survey looks at general measures around quality of service received by the council and assesses customer opinions on elements such as environment and length of wait for service. Satisfaction scores on an average basis is 85%.. This compared to the national average of 75% for public sector services.

An annual benchmark survey is also conducted as part of national customer services week, this survey asks the customer more in-depth questions in relation to service delivery and allows us to benchmark as part of the national OSS benchmarking group.

ii. Customer Satisfaction across the whole organisation

As well as surveying our own customer satisfaction on a monthly basis, the customers' opinion generally impinges on the view of the end to end service the council provide, customer services will see most customers at the first point of contact and raise a service request. On occasions the customers will contact customer services to chase requests that have failed to meet their expectations so therefore our survey processes are planned to measure individual satisfaction with the service received by customer services and then also the customers end-to-end experience across the whole organisation on the services provided through customer services. Corporate reputation is an exercise measured through the performance team with current satisfaction at 54%.

iii. Cost and efficiency

Monthly 'PAFs' are undertaken on each team member. The PAF is our Customer Services Performance Assessment Framework where each Customer Information Officer is measured for quality and accuracy of Customer interaction, and for adherence to the standards and behaviours expected to ensure that the customer's experience of the Council is effective and high quality.

There is now a much lower rate of referrals to 'back-office'. Due to the high level of on-going cross-training through qualitative training, the hand-off to back offices is much reduced as the Customer Services team deal with many more enquires to a greater degree of depth. This has taken pressure from departmental resources such as Benefits and Council tax and enabled them to reduce their own 'backlogs'. Value for money can also be demonstrated by the capability of Customer Services to support other departments to reduce their workloads prior to projected high demand.

A recent example being the Contact Centre supporting Council tax to reduce their back-log prior to annual billing. The value is demonstrated by proactively working together to reduce the number of calls from those customers who have recently advised of change of circumstances, and the Contact Centre staff have updated the Council Tax system to ensure accuracy of information at time of billing publication.

Migration of services to Customer services provides value for money due to optimal use of agents time Services such as Rent Income, and Housing management calls, are migrating to customer services without any additional resource.

iv. Staff satisfaction of the process

A recent internal staff survey indicated that staff were very satisfied that customer services provide good value for money and provide a high quality service.

**2 In particular, in relation to those customers who have the most need for services, please explain how the services that the organisation offers are advertised**

Now that the newly transformed One Stop Shop has settled-in, and the partnerships firm and established, Customer services are in the process of planning a 'launch' of the facility, our partners, and what customers services can provide with an marketing campaign which will reach far out into the community through forums, community groups, posters etc in doctors / dentists etc etc.

**3 Do you feel that the One Stop Shop at the Council makes best use of the space available, and how would you rate comfort and accessibility?**

We are still reviewing the refurbished One Stop Shop and will have a presentation available at Overview and Scrutiny on 1<sup>st</sup> March to demonstrate our findings to date.

**4a What do you feel are the best features of the One Stop Shop and why?**

Friendly, relaxed, clean and calm environment. Spacious, good atmosphere, one point of access. The One Stop Shop has a very modern, professional ambience and is quite unlike any other 'One Stop Shop' in that it has a unique and very appealing design, style and colour-scheme, and the Council has 'dared to be different' – and to great and well-received effect. There is a strong One Stop Shop 'identity' now, which is further enhanced with stylish, non-authoritarian uniforms, which supports the ambience of professionalism, consistency and approachability.

Customers view the Council's One Stop Shop as a place to go to get help, particularly when they find themselves in a position of crisis for a variety of reasons. Long gone are the days when customers only dealt with the council 'because they had to'.

The private interview rooms are superbly designed and perfectly meet the needs for customers to discuss their issues in a confidential yet practical and comfortable environment, with formal, informal and family sized rooms to best meet the individual needs of customers particular situations. For example, the family room is quietly located and is of a size to fit an entire family comfortably – a recent example of how this worked well was a whole family made homeless by a house-fire, extremely distressed and were able to have their needs discussed and addressed in confidence, all-together as a family, and away from other customers. The informal interview room has also proved a real hit in that vulnerable young adults who have hit a crisis in their lives can be helped in a private room which does not feel 'council-like', in that it has a sofa and easy chair in and feels a bit more like home., and again this is located in a quieter area of the One Stop Shop. The design of the 'secure room' is also a good feature, in that we have done away with the high counter and glass partition type of interrogation feel, and instead provided a room which is secure by design,

but can also be used for other interviews ergo maximising value for money with regards to use of accommodation.

**4b Please provide suggestions of where you feel improvements could be made?**

Presentation to be made on 1<sup>st</sup> March at Overview and Scrutiny Meeting.

**5 Do you feel that customers are comfortable entering the One Stop Shop, if not, please provide examples of why you feel this is the case**

Included in Presentation.

**6 Please supply details of how the customer can access the customer services facilities**

Customers can choose how to access services, face-to-face, on the phone or via the internet. The physical facility is DDA compliant, centrally located, and welcoming.

**7 Is the organisation successfully identifying the levels of the service that the customer requires? If not please explain why.**

Customers are regularly consulted via forums, feedback and through monitoring of complaints.

**8 Please advise which is the most frequently used method of contacting customer services**

Telephone contact is the most frequent being nearly 360,000 per year, face-to-face contact is around 67,000 per year and emails being 22,000 per year.

For calendar year 2011

Footfall 67000

Phones 359218

Email 21567

Lagan transactions online (not all online transactions) 5377

Online visits (less internal usage) 926529

**9 Please supply details of a 'Lessons Learnt Process' that is in place following contact with difficult customers?**

Lessons learnt are implemented from the recommendations we give when we investigate an accident/incident, however the line manager is responsible for the implementation.

Example:

Lessons Learned from dealing with difficult customers:

- Employees must be clearer at the start of a discussion that appears to have become difficult
- Recognise the early warning signs and what to do.
- Examples are: rudeness; being overly-critical of what the employee had said or about the service. Knowing when to call their line manager to intercede or to get out or use the panic alarm.
- Learning to spot the difficult customers as quickly as possible and don't be afraid to calm the situation down and/or get help. If it is a phone call, let them know that you will put the phone down if they continue to use offensive or abusive words.
- Part of the lessons learnt is the use of security staff at the One stop shop to intercede and/or remove difficult customers who have become aggressive.
- To ensure prompt reporting of all incidents and the use of PVP register.

Lastly we advise personal training for all staff who deal with members of the public and the use of fair statement letter.

**10 Please supply details of how you analyse complaints received and how complaints are dealt with?**

We analyse and monitor the levels of complaints on a monthly basis, making yearly comparisons to measure our performance and effectiveness of the department. We identify the cause of complaint and lessons learnt, and make changes to service delivery where necessary. A report is produced each month which includes the detailed analysis of complaints received through customer feedback and survey responses.

For example

A customer complained that she found it difficult to access our services when trying to report a neighbour's dead animal. She reported that she was unable to get through to someone, and the phone line was unobtainable during working hours. We carried out an impartial investigation, putting ourselves in the customer's shoes, and found that the information provided on the website, regarding dead animals, was not as clear as it could have been.

We also found through web searches that the web page was not available through Direct Gov (due to a broken link), and the RSPCA were advertising an incorrect telephone number for us. We made the necessary changes to our website, and requested that Direct Gov and the RSPCA did the same to theirs. We apologised to the customer, thanked her for bringing this to our attention, and advised her on the action that we had taken following her complaint.

We aim to deal with complaints at the first point of contact, but where this is not possible the complaint is re-directed to the appropriate person, and the customer is informed of our action. Customer Services Team Leaders are responsible for investigating and responding to all informal complaints (NIPs). Formal Stage 1 complaints are investigated and responded to by a complaint owner (minimum Operational Manager), and Formal Stage 2 complaints are responded to by the Director (Investigated by minimum-Head of Service)

Whether the complaint is formal or informal we carry out full and impartial investigation, and handle them with dignity and respect. We admit when we get things wrong and put them right at the earliest opportunity.

If the complaint is covered by an alternative appeals process, we will advise the customer of this, and inform them what they need to do.

Any complaints that are received about staff may, if it is appropriate, go through the staff disciplinary procedure.

**11 Please provide your views on the benefits of a shared customer services facility**

Partnership and synergy working enables the 'gaps' between organisations to be recognised and addressed, and intelligence shared for the good of the customers

**12 Please supply details of both allocated and unallocated reserves for customer services for your areas?**

Budget information supplied separately.

**13 Any other comments**



## **NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **Scrutiny Panel 3 - Customer Services**

#### **Core Questions - Head of Strategic Housing and Head of Landlord Services**

- 1 Please supply details how you evaluate whether customer services is providing value for money around:  
  
The quality of the Service and Service delivery  
Customer Satisfaction across the whole organisation  
Cost and efficiency  
Staff satisfaction of the process
- 2 Please explain how you use current technology and social networking to drive services forward? Housing Solutions have used facebook, texting services, the web site and on line questionnaires and various on line applications to drive services forward
- 3 How do you encourage customers to access the Internet to make contact with the Council? Through the Choice Based Lettings scheme all 9,000 customers on the Housing Register access the Housing Solutions services via the web site. All services that the Housing Solutions service provides are available on line through the web site
- 4 Please explain the advice and services that you provide to customers who are unable to access the Internet. The Housing Solutions service provides access to service at 7 surgeries across the geographical locations across the Borough of Northampton. All customers can request home visits and or visit the Guildhall to access the Housing Solutions service.
- 5 In particular, in relation to those customers who have the most need for services please explain how the services that the organisation offers are advertised. The Housing Solutions service is advertised through BCC Northampton, local written press, visits to community organisations, posters in all public buildings advertising our services, leaflets that are available in libraries, and on the web site

6 Do you feel that the One Stop Shop at the Council makes best use of the space available, and how would you rate comfort and accessibility? The rating would be poor to adequate as the layout is confusing, inadequate signs, the information desks at the tightest part of the layout were overcrowding occurs and the initial first impression from this is poor.

6(a) What do you feel are the best features of the One Stop Shop and why? The staff, they manage to do a very difficult job with some very testing customers. Generic roles mean that staff may not be able to answer all questions in detail, which may lead to frustration for customers.

6(b) Please provide suggestions of where you feel improvements could be made? Move the entrance for customers, include a desk/area specifically for Housing customers, which could be near the interview rooms. This may alleviate the frustration of staff that do not have the knowledge and would assist customers who need specialist advice, but may have to come back on a different day to get it.

7 Do you feel that customers are comfortable entering the One Stop Shop, if not, please provide examples of why you feel this is the case. The entrance is at the tightest part of the service were overcrowding occurs. The first impressions are long queues and over crowding and inadequately staffed. Customer may not want to wait or may find this intimidating in such a small area.

8 Please supply details of how the customer can access the customer services facilities Through the one stop shop, the contact centre and directly with the service via letter, telephone, web, text, interview, and through the local MP's and Councillors

9 Is the organisation successfully identifying the levels of the service that the customer requires? If not please explain why. The Customer Service Excellence assessment report (section 5) highlights some failings of the contact centre service and mystery shopping has also highlighted the lack of in-depth knowledge at first contact with customers

Please advise which is the most frequently used method of contacting customer services In person at the One Stop Shop, email and telephone

11 How does the organisation prioritise emergency situations? The One stop shop has generic officers who may only be able to give basic advice,

any housing emergencies are passed directly to the Housing Solutions team to resolve. A solution for this could be to have an area/desk specifically for Housing which could be staffed by specialist staff.

- 12 Please provide details of the training given to officers to help them to deal with distressed customers? Full range of training courses, shadowing, best practice written material, peer support, reflect learning in partnership with Human Resources
- 13 How are staff supported in cases where dealing with distressed customers have caused them levels of distress? Through reflective learning in partnership with Human Resources and Peer Support
- 14 Please supply details of a 'Lessons Learnt Process' that is in place following contact with difficult customers? All customer satisfaction questionnaires are assessed and lessons learnt approach from each completed questionnaire undertaken.
- 15 Please supply details of how you analyse complaints received and how complaints are dealt with? All complaints are considered by the Housing Solutions Manager. The Housing Solutions Manager contacts all customers that complain to ensure they are satisfied with the outcome to their complaint
- 16 Please provide your views on the benefits of a shared customer services facility. I believe that there are limited benefits, as the lack of in-depth knowledge at the first point of contact can be misleading, incorrect and detrimental to customers and the reputation of the council. Housing customers would benefit from Housing Solutions requires its own customer service facility in the One Stop Shop area
- 17 Please supply details of both allocated and unallocated reserves for customer services for your area?
- 18 Any other comments

**NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**SCRUTINY PANEL 3 CUSTOMER SERVICES**

**THURSDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2012**

**ITEM 5c**

**RESPONSE OF:**

**SUSAN BRIDGE**

**Head of Planning**



1. The Department operates a separate system to the corporate Customer Contact Centre and has its own customer service telephone help line for Development Control and Building Control

Planning does not use the Contact Centre because of the volume and technical nature of the calls received in the department daily. The Department has at least one Support Officer on telephone duty throughout the working day and a duty Planning Officer is also available. This service is provided between 8.30 – 5 pm Monday – Thursday and 8.30 – 4.30 pm on Friday.

Planning and Building Control have separate contact telephone numbers. Planning is on the ACD system whilst Building Control is on a group link so customers can always reach an officer. This is essential in view of the fact that Building Control offers the service in competition with the private sector.

In addition, there is always one Support Officer to deal with Planning or Building Control customers in the One Stop Shop for face-to-face enquiries and the Duty Planning Officer is also available to discuss matters in the One Stop Shop.

The Department rarely, if at all, receives complaints about its customer service.

2. Customers are encouraged to access information through the web-site although generally first-time customers will visit the One Stop Shop or telephone the Department. A member of staff is always available to explain to first-time customers how to access on-line services, including downloading application forms, relevant leaflets and information on the Planning Portal.

The Department is reducing the number of paper copies of information, encouraging customers to access information on line which is freely available and free of charge.

The Department does not use social networking sites, although the Joint Planning Unit has a Facebook page and Twitter where they advertise any events held, consultation dates, any documents that are being published and Committee dates.

3. Frequent users of the service are called or visited annually to up-date them on changes to the Planning Portal and encouraged to submit planning applications on line. This has led to significant efficiencies as all applications submitted to the Portal can be transferred electronically

into Fast Planning, whereas paper copies have to be scanned and manually inputted.

Building Control is not as advanced as Planning in the use of on-line systems, primarily because there is no BC equivalent to the Planning Portal. However, improving customer access to BC information and services through the internet is a workstream for 2012/2013.

Occasional customers are encouraged through the initial contact by telephone or One Stop Shop to submit on-line and a member of staff is available in the Planning area of the One Stop Shop to assist them to submit on-line.

Policy information is available free of charge via the internet. Paper copies are always subject to a charge.

4. Paper copies are still available for customers who do not have access to the internet, Customers can also come into the One Stop Shop where there are information leaflets available.
5. Planning is not a service which needs to be advertised, other than if we are changing systems or there is a legislative change. These changes are advertised through the web-site and frequent users of the service will be notified by e-mail or telephone.
6. Generally the One Stop Shop has worked well. However, the Planning area is too small and the signage is poor. Improving the appearance and profile of the Planning area is a priority project in 2012/2013 as we expect an increase in usage with the transfer of planning powers from WNDP.
  - 6(a) The best feature is the appearance and spaciousness. The self serve area also works well for repeat customers.
  - 6(b) The Meet and Greet and reception area does not work well. Visitors who have appointments should be met without having to queue to see the receptionist. There should be a meet and greet person to direct visitors to the Planning area and/or ring the officer who they are meeting. Visitors have been known to queue for 20 minutes to be attended to.
7. Visitors can be made to feel uncomfortable when entering the One Stop Shop if there are people congregating in what can appear to be an anti-social manner in the courtyard area and around the entrance. The courtyard should be better policed. Signage to the appropriate sections should be more prominent within the One Stop Shop.

8. N/A
9. Planning and Building Control give excellent customer service. They advertise through using CD Rom, leaflets in One Stop Shop, site signs, promotional products and also the Planning and Building Control web-site.
10. Telephone is the most frequently used medium, although I understand that the planning web-site are the most used pages of the internet.
11. The only emergency service that the Department provides is in respect of dangerous structures. Access to this is most frequently through the 'blue-light' services. Details are also posted on the internet. The call centre has the relevant contact details.
12. Every 6 months the Support Officers receive relevant customer refresher courses and are trained to escalate difficult customers and issues to managers. These circumstances are comparatively rare due to the nature of the service.
13. This is very rare, but staff have access to support if it should ever be required.
14. Staff will discuss sensitive or difficult situations with their line-manager and in team meetings.
15. Monitoring of planning customers takes place through Fast Planning when:
  1. a planning application decision notice is made
  2. an enforcement job is closed

Customers receive an automatically generated feedback survey and monitoring questionnaire. These are returned to the Community Engagement Officer in the Planning Team who inputs them onto a database. Any specific issues requiring attention or compliments are directed to the Development Control Manager. A report is generated on an approximately 6 monthly basis and contains actions to be considered by the Planning Management Team which are identified from the feedback received.

Monitoring questionnaires are also input into a separate monitoring database to protect customers' identity.

Relatively small numbers of feedback forms have been returned which makes patterns in the data difficult to detect, e.g. between July 2010 – May 2011 a total of 99 forms for development control were received (1134 were sent out). However over time, and particularly when planning powers are returned from WNDC a more robust sample should be achieved and will therefore prove more useful to refining procedures and systems.

16. Planning does not really use the One Stop Shop or the Contact Centre as a shared service.

17. N/A

18. None