

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1	Meeting:	Audit Committee
2	Date:	19th October 2011
3	Title:	Customer Inspection Service
4	Directorate :	Commissioning, Policy & Performance

5 Summary

The Performance and Quality unit aims to develop a single organisational culture that is focused on getting things right first time; so that citizens feel that the Council is delivering real outcomes. The unit provides information on the customer experience to help inform priority setting and ensure that learning from service successes or failures are used to improve services and provide consistently better results in the future.

The Customer Inspection Service was formed in Neighbourhoods & Adult Services in 2005 as part of the development of our learning from customers' culture; whereby real customers were placed at the heart of service delivery to test performance against customer service standards and inspect access to our services...as the experts by experience.

Working in partnership with real Customer Inspectors has contributed to positive outcomes with numerous inspections and regulatory assessments; along with the achievement of a number of unique rewards and accolades.

Following the restructure to the new Commissioning, Policy and Performance unit in January 2011 and the development of a Service Plan priority to implement consistent approaches to Customer Service Excellence across the Council; the Customer Inspection Service has been rolled out across Children and Young People Services and Environment and Development Services.

6 Recommendation

- **That Audit Committee receives information on the Customer Inspection Service including outcomes and future developments**

7 Proposals and Details

Working in partnership with real Customer Inspectors has contributed to positive outcomes with numerous inspections and regulatory assessments; along with the achievement of a number of unique rewards and accolades:

- Achieved 'Best Performing' Category - Review of First Point of Contact to Adult Social Care Services (CQC Jan 2011)
- Corporate Customer Service Excellence Award (Cabinet Office 2009 and continuous compliance Jan 2011)
- Excellent Service –Adult Social Care (CQC 2009)
- Performing Well – Safeguarding Adults (CQC 2009)
- Achieved RNID 'Louder than Words' accreditation (2009)
- Housing Services Audit Commission Inspection – moved from 0 to 2 starts (2006, retained 2008)
- A compliance plus was awarded as an area of best practice which exceeded the requirements of the Customer Service Excellence Standard for demonstrating exceptional performance in the way we involve and consult with customers and use this to make service improvements (2009)
- The Cabinet Office 'Standard Bearer' accreditation was attained for our innovative work on learning from customers (2010)
- Our Customer Insight approaches have been published as Best practice Case Studies within the Front Office Shared Services 'Developing Customer Insight' publication (2008) and the Improvement and Development Agency 'Understanding Your Citizens, Customers and Communities' publication (2008)
- Winners of Rotherham Business Award for Customer Services and Health and Social Care Yorkshire and Humber 'Leadership for Improvement' Award (2009)
- Shared mystery shopping approaches at LGC and IDeA Conferences (2009)

The Customer Inspectors also play a key role during inspections and audits; carrying out a range of spot inspections, reality checks, information reviews and focus group discussions with inspectors. The customers' are currently supporting on preparation for a potential follow up audit from the Food Standards Agency and will contribute to preparation for a potential inspection of Learning Disability Services.

The Customer Inspection Service are made up of thirteen volunteer customers of mixed age ranges, gender and some with physical disabilities meet for one full day once a month to:

- test the most popular contacts for requesting services and information; using a variety of access channels and methods e.g. mystery shopping, reality checking exercises, observations, website tests, exit polls, journey maps
- test performance against service standards
- conduct additional activities to see the service through the eyes of the customer e.g. carry out reality checks and customer to customer interviews to assess the quality of care provided in residential and nursing care homes as part of our Home from Home scheme (complementing CQC's Essential Standards)

In addition the customer inspectors utilise contacts with real customers as an opportunity to:

- Gain a compliment, comment, suggestion
- Ask the 'If Only Question'...if you could change one thing about the service you received what would it be?
- Recruit new people to become Mystery Shoppers or participate in a customer journey map
- Gain customer satisfaction scores
- Record any observations– eyes and ears

The group also get involved in:

- act as a sounding board for consultation
- participation in consultation exercises
- review and customer approve public information as easy read
- review standard letters
- share experiences of accessing services

Since January 2011, the Customer Inspection Service focuses activity on different service areas each month including Neighbourhoods and Adult Services, Children and Young Peoples Services and Environment and Development Services. Exceptions are identified against an Excellence Customer Services Model which has been developed from a range of sources including:

- Customer Service Excellence Standard including key Drivers of satisfaction – timeliness, delivery, information, staff professionalism and attitude
- Service Standards, Customer 1st Standards and Charter
- Customer Care Charter
- Access and Customer Care - Key Lines of Enquiries (Audit Commission)
- Care Quality Commission First Point of Contact Themes
- Performance & Quality Team Quality Assurance, Reality Checks and Standards

Exceptions are reported to the Service Manager and quick wins are put right immediately and learning from customers' improvement meetings are held to address larger scale issues. Exceptions and changes are reported to management and leadership teams on a regular basis and outcomes fed back to the customers.

Improvements:

The Customer Inspection Service have informed and contributed to a number of changes as part of our learning from customers' culture. Real outcomes are being delivered on the ground, from small changes which can have a big impact on the quality of services received, to larger scale service improvements; all through the eyes of the customer.

Example Improvements:

- Improved our customer access points including information, signage, lighting and the quality of information provided to customers at the first point of contact
- Reviewed and customer approved a range of information leaflets, booklets, application forms and standard letters. For example the Local Account Booklet – ‘Rotherham People Calling the Shots’, Business Regulation leaflets and Ageing Well information.
- Reviewed and improved a range of customer defined service standards; ensuring we measure what matters to our customers
- Contributed to reviewing and improving information on the website; focusing on making our pages and Google search fields customer friendly
- Improved the content of internal customer care training packages
- Improved access to services through the implementation of Assessment Direct which has radically changed the first point of contact for Adult Social Care services through a 24/7 access, one stop shop approach.
- Introduced a ‘Text to Tell’ service for customers to contact us to report adult abuse
- Personalised the complaints service whereby any member of staff dealing with a complaint contacts the customer personally to discuss the issues before they start the formal investigation and agree outcomes
- Informed focused work to clear an Occupational Therapy backlog to zero over a six week period and a number of future improvements, for example:
 - Social Workers will refer customers directly for low level equipment and fixings without the need for an occupational therapy assessment
 - Review the information captured at the first point of contact to avoid unnecessary customer contacts
 - All customers will be informed of current waiting times at the first point of contact
 - Identified streamlined ICT processes
- Additional process to remind customers when it is time to renew their blue badge; working in partnership with Civil Enforcement Officers who alert drivers by leaving a leaflet on their windscreen advising holders that their current badge is due to expire and explaining how to apply for a renewal
- Contributed to customer satisfaction survey reviews; streamlining surveys and setting local performance indicators
- Introduced ‘Out of Hours’ Noise Service
- Improved customer service and choice by asking people where they would like their RotherCare Community Alarm fitting

- Identified a range of improvements required within Children's Centres including information and access. Findings are contributing to a review of Early Years Services which is currently being undertaken by Commissioning.
- Identified improvements needed to webpages on the council website including access to information about services for children and young people in their local area and inclusion of online forms for some services. Feedback is being utilised in an ongoing review of all content on the council website.
- Working on improving the consistency of planning applications prior to them being determined by reviewing our internal planning documentation to ensure clearer interpretation of Government guidance.
- Reviewed RMBC policy and guidance documentation relating to obtaining documents in alternative languages in particularly information sent to households around waste management.
- Reviewing our Home to School Transport policy to reiterate our code of conduct and working procedures to our partners for when carrying out the service on behalf of the Council.
- Rewritten letters that are sent out to the public to be more customer focused and customer friendly.

Future Developments

An improvement plan has been developed to increase the number of Customer Inspectors; targeting recruitment campaigns to under representative groups including young people. There are also plans to involve looked after children in testing the quality of services.

The Customer Inspection Service will be rolled out across services integrated back into the Council; including RBT and functions previously delivered by 2010 Rotherham Limited.

Contributing towards getting it right first time; Customer Inspectors will also be involved in future developments and customer inspections at Riverside House and Customer Service Centres.

8. Finance

The Customer Inspectors are not paid, as a gesture of good will for committing one full day each month to help us, a £5.00 High Street Voucher, lunch (sandwich or chip butty) and travel expenses are provided. This equates to around £360 in total on a quarterly basis which is shared between each of the three Directorates at £120 each.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

As the Customer Inspectors are volunteers; there is a risk of the group disbanding and individual members leaving to take part in new forums/groups that are established in the future. There are also uncertainties with the future representation of members of the group across the Borough and sample sizes. These will be managed by enhancing recruitment as part of the improvement plan, utilising the website and tapping into existing forums/groups across the Borough, reviewing the focus of the Customer Inspection Service on an annual basis and continuing to feed back the changes made as a result of their involvement. The fact that some Customer Inspectors have been members for 6 years demonstrates the ongoing commitment and well established customer involvement in testing the quality of services.

There are uncertainties with regards to the impact of any future budget decisions on the sustainability of Customer Inspectors; if there were no funds for incentives in the form of High Street Vouchers.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

- Contributes to the Commissioning, Policy and Performance Priority - 'to further improve the perception of the Council as a service provider so that the customer experience is consistent and improved across all services and the Council as a whole becomes fully compliant with the requirements of the Customer Service Excellence Standard.'
- Corporate Plan and linking to the way we do business - 'Talking and listening to all our customers and treating everyone fairly and with respect' and 'Getting it right first time, reducing bureaucracy and getting better value for money'
- Performance Outcomes Framework - placing our customer at the heart of all that we do and to continuously improve the customer experience with RMBC services

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Commissioning, Policy & Performance Service Plan
Customer Service Excellence Standard

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