

During August/September 2006 a second wave of mystery shopping took place to help us to measure performance against our customer service standards.

The mystery shopper exercise provides an independent external assessment of our customer service, identifies areas of particularly good service and where there is needs for improvement.

Visits, calls and enquiries by letter or email are made by a number of agents, who complete detailed reports on their findings. Agents measure the speed and quality of responses, and the suitability of those responses.

Generally the news is very good, with significant improvements in respect of enquiries by email and letter. This is excellent news as we specifically targeted these areas of communicating with customers.

But, as ever, we won't be resting on our laurels, and we have identified six areas we need to focus on in the coming months.

These are ...

- to ensure every outgoing email has standard signature details (instructions for these are available in the intranet)
- to ensure professional email layouts
- to ensure senders name and contact details are on all letters
- to expect staff to give name when answering calls
- to improve training at contact centres for specific services
- to review the signs at the contact centres

It is important to remember that these results are based on a small sample of enquiries across the various channels. However, they can be seen as indicative. Generally we have seen improvements, particularly in relation to emails and letters which we specifically targeted following the first wave of mystery shopping. Managers have received copies of the individual case reports and will be picking up any specific issues in team meetings.

Here are the highlights from the most recent wave of mystery shopping.

Telephone Calls

This section measured calls to all services across the authority.

On average calls were answered in 5.7 seconds which is within our target time of 7 rings (or 20 seconds)

97% (up 2% on the previous wave of mystery shopping) of the calls were answered with an appropriate salutation, and 83% included a salutation (up 8%). 85% included the department name.

The member of staff gave their name in 76% of instances which is 56% better than in the first wave but is still something to work on.

98% of calls were ended politely.

Overall our telephone services scored 90%. This is an improvement on our average in the first wave, which was 85%.

Visits

Visits are made to each of the Contact Centres, to Pershore's main enquiry desk and to the Planning reception desk.

Signage at Evesham was considered to be a problem where we scored only 50%. It may be that there is increased confusion due to Jobcentre Plus opening and we will look at how we can improve this.

Staff were considered to have understood the enquiry and been helpful in 97% of cases (up by 4%) and polite 97% of the time.

Jargon free information was provided in 100% of cases.

The mystery shopping exercise did identify a need for further training in some areas. As hundreds of services are offered by the Contact Centres keeping staff fully up to date with all processes and procedures is a challenge. We are committed to ensuring that the back office services work with the front office customer service providers to ensure the highest level of service is provided.

Emails

It is in this section that we see the biggest improvements.

Our overall average score for content increased by 19% to 81%. This reflected better performance in relation to giving the name, job title and telephone number of the officer. We will continue to strive for 100% in this area.

The responses were clear and jargon free in 97% of cases and the enquirers name was used correctly 69% (up 38%) of the time.

The layout was considered professional in only 46% of the emails. Although this was a 13% improvement we clearly still have some way to go.

Overall we saw significant improvements in our email responses, 13% better than in the first exercise earlier this year, but we have identified some areas for improvement.

Letters

Responses were received in all but 4 cases and we will investigate whether the original enquiries were received, in those cases.

The number of days to respond varied between 1 and 9 days, but the majority (30) were responded to in 3 days and our average response time has improved by 17%.

Regarding content we saw a 3% improvement, up to 84%. The sender's name and contact number was still not used in 10% of responses and this is an issue for us to address.

Where information was provided it was clear in 97% of cases and 100% were jargon free.

The majority of letters were felt to have been laid out professionally (83%) which was a 26% improvement on the first wave.

Amanda de Warr
1st November 2006