

TO: EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE – 24th JANUARY 2007

SUBJECT: CUSTOMER BEHAVIOURS WORKING GROUP

FROM: REVENUES AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Members to support the recommendations contained within the report from the Customer Behaviours Working Group (see Appendix).

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As the council has moved to a more customer focused approach to service delivery, the number of staff working on the “frontline” has increased. The council’s strategy is to try and deal with customers at the first point of contact so they do not feel as though they are being handed from one person to another with no resolution to their enquiry.
- 2.2 This strategy is working well with currently 83% of phone enquiries answered at the first point of contact and figures in the high 90%’s for the face-to-face services.
- 2.3 Staff undertaking this frontline work feel as though they are making a real contribution to service delivery and feel motivated when a customer pays a compliment about the way their enquiry has been handled.
- 2.4 Unfortunately the converse to the previous point is where the customer vents their frustration/anger/impatience at the advisor and the advisor often has to sit and listen to abuse and insults.
- 2.5 It became all too clear from staff meetings and feedback to managers that many frontline staff were finding this extremely difficult and de-motivating especially as there were no corporate guidelines in place for advisors to use in dealing with such customers. This situation was also recognised in feedback from the staff survey on stress.
- 2.6 Consequently Revenues and Customer Services established a Working Group to consider this issue and bring forward recommendations which could be rolled out across the organisation. The Group was made up of officers from all aspects of the Service (phone, face-to-face, technical, back-office) so that a real cross-section of views could be taken into account.
- 2.7 The Group was subsequently joined by Tracey Yardley, employed by the authority as a temporary Health and Safety consultant, giving an extra dimension to the discussions.

3. POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK

- 3.1 Corporate Strategy target CO 1 is “To manage our services openly, effectively and efficiently.” The recommendations made by the Customer Behaviours Working Group acknowledge that staff strive to provide excellent customer service and it is

therefore reasonable that they are treated with respect. There are no budgetary implications arising from the report.

4 **RECOMMENDATION**

- 4.1 Members support the recommendations from the Customer Behaviours Working Group.

Andrew Jones
Head of Revenues and Customer Services

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

Areas in District Affected:	All
Key Decision:	No
Included in Forward Plan:	No

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APPENDIX

Customer Behaviours Working Group Recommendations

Website

1. **Include the following text on the contact details page, perhaps as a footnote or similar to a disclaimer:**

‘Please respect our staff and treat them politely and with the same courtesy that you expect of us in return.

We will not tolerate aggressive, abusive or intimidating behaviour, bad language or discriminatory comments’

Reception areas

2. **Posters to be put up in all Warwick District Council (WDC) reception/One Stop Shop areas stating the council’.**

“We strongly feel such posters would be highly effective given the right situation; having spoken to members of staff from the Registrars office they also believe a poster could be an effective means of conveying our message.

“We recommend that they are placed on the main entrance to Riverside House and above the ticket machine leading to the counters.”

E-Mails

3. **A footnote/disclaimer included as on the website when e-mails are being sent from generic mailboxes e.g. Recovery, Benefits etc.**
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Team meetings

4. **Managers and Team Leaders should highlight examples of abusive or stressful calls in meetings, as well as encouraging team members to report such incidents.**

“Team meetings could also be used to provide advice about how to complete incident reports and to provide details about what happens with them once they have been completed.”

General reporting of incidents

“During our meetings it quickly became apparent that lethargy, acceptance or embarrassment (or a combination of all three) stopped a number of members of staff reporting incidents.

Consequently it is vital that we make reporting such incidents easier and less stigmatised. The stigmatisation attached to making reports could be addressed in team meetings (please see above) and should become eroded as members of staff become more aware of the reporting procedure.

Further to this we need to develop or evolve a system that ensures the completed reports are collected together so that records documenting incidents and abusive customers are both current and accurate.

Accordingly we recommend the following:"

5. **Set up an e-mail account for incident reports.** This could be used for shorter reports or for incidents that may not require further action, however, they do need to be recorded. The individual making the report should also be responsible for copying in their line manager.
6. **Set up a link on the intranet (akin to the suggestion box) for members of staff to report incidents this way.** Again this would be primarily used for reporting less serious incidents. To ensure staff are aware of this link the initial launch could then be followed up with reminders on the Intranet; this should also help prevent a lapse in the reporting of such incidents. This method of reporting incidents would also allow for anonymity; this could be of great benefit as it should negate any fears of judgement or reprisal connected to making the report in the first place.
7. **Update the current 'Violent Incident' form so people can complete this either on paper or on their computers.** This form could then be used for reporting more serious incidents. As such would then need to be seen by line managers/managers and Health & Safety.
8. **Introduce a 'weighting' system to incidents.** The types of incidents reported via e-mail or the Intranet may not need any action other than to be recorded. As such some incidents could be deemed 'No Further Action' or similar - this would ensure that our statistics are accurate as the incident would have been reported, but it will also mean members of staff are not spending inordinate amounts of time dealing with incidents that do not need any further action.
Above this – and for more serious incidents - other actions may be necessary; this could range from letters being sent out by line managers/ managers asking for reported behaviour to stop, all the way through to the exclusion of certain customers. It may also be appropriate to offer the member(s) of staff involved counselling.
For the majority of cases we recommend that it be left up to the line manager/manager involved as to the best course of action, however there should be scope for negotiation with the person affected by the incident. There should also be a system in place whereby Health & Safety can overrule this decision given mitigating circumstances. Clearly when making these decisions it will be essential to check the lists (see below) for previous incidents.

The crucial factor in determining which type of report is appropriate is the discretion of the individual involved. It is assumed that managers will back their staff in this decision.

Contact Centre phone calls

9. **Develop further messages for people who are queuing in our telephone system** - for example 'Thank you for your patience; please remember that our staff are here to help' or 'Your call may be recorded if you do not treat staff politely and with respect'

"This could be brought up at the Warwickshire Online Partnership meetings in order that we might consider the sorts of messages that other councils in Warwickshire are using.

We also strongly recommend that abusive phone calls continue to be recorded."

Warnings

10. **Two warnings should be used when dealing with abusive customers either on the phone or in person.**

"The first of these should be along the lines of 'I'm sorry but I do not appreciate being spoken to/treated in this way – if you continue to act in this manner then I'm afraid I will have to terminate this call'

The second should then be 'I have already warned you once about the way that you are acting but you have continued to swear/be abusive. If this continues further then I will be terminating your call'

Finally 'You have had two warnings – I am now ending this call'

After ending the call/meeting the person involved should report the incident in one of the ways discussed earlier in this report. If the incident occurs in person then it will be necessary to advise a line manager/senior officer of this so they can then speak to the customer involved. Again the discretion of the member of staff involved needs to be backed so customers are given a consistent message and staff do not feel undermined."

Leaflets

11. **Advice about how to deal with difficult customers should be included in the leaflet that we have that is directed towards employee-employee harassment.**

"This advice could be geared towards phone calls and the support offered by line managers, managers and Health and Safety. We also feel it would be beneficial to include copies of the Incident Report forms with the Welcome Pack / Contract of Employment given to new members of staff. This could obviously be tied up with the Corporate Induction as well."

Alarms

12. Riverside House

The current panic buttons should remain linked to the back office-only, but members of staff responding to alarms must ensure that they always remain on the staff side of reception when they are responding to an alarm.

Warwick & Kenilworth

Regular risk assessments must take place at the One Stop Shops.

Registrars office

13. **Review the current layout, perhaps seeing the introduction of a second door to provide security. There is also the option of taking the existing door backwards to allow customers' access to the Registrars without further access to the stairwell and Revenues/Recovery.**

“If this is not possible then we need to see greater vigilance from members of this office when they see their customers out of the building (members of the public have been allowed to wander down the corridor on numerous occasions)

Similarly it may be worth looking at the integrity of the door leading from Reception through to the counters; although there is a locked gate in Reception to limit access to this door the gate could easily be opened (or vaulted) and this would leave members of staff in a vulnerable and insecure situation.”

Miscellaneous

- a. We have been advised by Tracy Yardley that issues surrounding staff safety, outside workers, bomb threats and the Registrars office are already being looked into by Health & Safety.
- b. Approach WCC with a view to including them in all/some of the initiatives (their logo could feature on posters, for example)

If this proves to be successful we could then also approach other councils in Warwickshire with a view to sharing ideas and improving the relationships not only between us and our customers but also with the other councils as well.