

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
DATE: 25th February, 2010
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PORTFOLIO: Cllr Dhaliwal – Performance & Accountability

PART I **FOR INFORMATION**

IMPROVEMENTS TO CUSTOMER SERVICE PROVIDED AT MYCOUNCIL

1 Purpose of Report

To provide a progress report on the improvements made to customer service at My Council and an outline of future improvement plans for member discussion, comment and endorsement

Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

The Committee is requested to resolve:

- (a) That the progress made to date to improve customer service at MyCouncil be noted
- (b) That future plans for further improvement detailed in paragraph 5 of the report be endorsed.

2 Community Strategy Priorities–

The Customer Service centre contributes to all of the Community Strategy priorities

- **Celebrating Diversity, Enabling inclusion**
- **Adding years to Life and Life to years**
- **Being Safe, Feeling Safe**
- **A Cleaner, Greener place to live, Work and Play**
- **Prosperity for All**

3 **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

There are no financial implications of proposed action. The improvements planned are included within existing budgets

(b) Risk Management

There are no significant risks, threats and opportunities associated with this report

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act Implications.

Equalities Impact Assessment

An Equalities Impact Assessment has already been completed for MyCouncil

(d) Workforce

No workforce implications

4 **Supporting Information**

4.1 **Background**

- 4.2 The Customer Service Centre was opened in 2005 replacing the old One Stop Shop . The aims of MyCouncil are to provide a first point of contact between customers and SBC, in a timely manner and providing as much choice to the customers as to how and when they contact SBC.
- 4.3 To date the centre has been largely successful with over 500 services available via MyCouncil, using a telephone enquiry line, a call-back service, email, face to face advice and appointments. Customer Service advisors are based at Landmark place and three satellite locations, Britwell Talk Shop, Cippenham Library and Langley Library.
- 4.4 In 2008/9 MyCouncil was ranked in the top 50 Customer Service Centres across all types of organisation including John Lewis, Virgin and First Direct, with only 3 other Councils making it in. Alongside Slough, were Cambridge County Council, Kent County Council, and London Borough of Lambeth.
- 4.5 Despite the good work to date, challenges to ensure the service meets our customers needs in a timely manner still persist.
- 4.6 The volume of activity handled by My Council has grown proportionality with its success and popularity and this now poses some challenges in how the council responds to this volume. The old One stop shop, handled 36,000 customer enquiries which was the equivalent of 1500 enquiries per staff member. When My Council was developed to improve customer services and it was estimated that it would deal with 120,000 Customer enquires a year. The centre actually receives between 300 and 400, 000 per year , and whilst productivity has increased to around 6127 customer transactions per staff member per year, has resulted in queues at peak times.

5. Recent and Planned Improvements

	Proposed action	Outcome	Responsible officer	Date of implementation	Status Red/amber/green
1	Educate customers as to the best times to visit by advising them of less busy times	Reduce the queues at busy times	ZM	2009	Green
2	Promote Local access points to increase their use by advertising them on the website and on posters at LP	Increase use of local access points and reduce queues at Landmark Place	ZM	2009/10	Green
3	Improved queue management by moving staff more frequently between face to face and phones	Decrease in waiting times in both areas making the service more flexible and customer focussed	ZM	2009/10	Green
4	Introduce a call back service	Allows customers to leave a message instead of queue, the service is advertised to every caller and has been used by over 2000 customers a month	ZM	2009	Green
5	Planned upgrades on systems to introduce self service	A self service facility will allow customers to check information or find answers to their questions on the internet , this will reduce queues at peak times if customers are able to help themselves at a time convenient to them.	ZM	2009/10/11	Amber- possible budget cuts in IT could prevent or delay this facility. Upgrade has already been deferred from 08/09 and 09/10
6.	Investigate alternative IT solution in the event for self service	I have already sourced a possible alternative and this is being reviewed by IT and Customer service heads	ZM	2009/10/11	Amber- solution is currently hosted offshore
7	Working with Communications team to improve website to offer	A self service facility will allow customers to check information or find	ZM	2009/10	Green

	more self service options	answers to their questions on the internet , this will reduce queues at peak times if customers are able to help themselves at a time convenient to them.			
8	Introduced Queue position announcements	This gives customers a more informed expectation of wait times	ZM	2009/10	Green
9	Analysis of 'take up' of call back option..	This indicates that benefits callers are the least likely to use this facility. Our task now is to identify the reason why benefits callers do not respond in this way and take steps to encourage them.	ZM	2009/10	Green
10	Recruitment programme has been further streamlined and retention of staff is high.	All staff have a training and development plan and appraisals have been completed 100% each year since 2005/6. (We few vacancies but often several staff on maternity leave who cannot be replaced for legal reasons until such time as they decline to return. So far we have 100% returning but this means that for 6-9 months we have reduced staff levels	ZM	2009/10	Green
11	Induction process for new employees is under review and due for completion in 2010.	When MyCouncil opened, the induction was 3weeks, it is now just over 4 weeks as the service areas covered expand and it is estimated the period of induction training will reach 5weeks.High quality advice reduces the need for customers to repeatedly visit about the same issue.	ZM	2009/10	Green
12	Ongoing training and development of MYCouncil staff	Regular review groups will work to service level agreements that are being	ZM	2009/10/11	Green

	has been reviewed and due for completion 2010 focussing on the quality of advice provided for us to give on behalf of the internal directorates. All other service areas have been engaged with to improve customer care. Each aspect of training has been re-assessed and checked by the relevant back office team. We place a great deal of emphasis not only on the content of the information we give but on how it is delivered, the 'soft skills'..	rolled out and this will make sure advice is kept up to date. The better the quality of training, the better able the advisor is able to help the customer with the right information and the less likely a customer will need to contact us again about that issue.			
13	FAQ's (frequently asked questions) are subject to an ongoing review programme with 'back office' services expected to review the accuracy of their submissions regularly	This ensures up to date and consistent information for customers	ZM	2009/10 and then ongoing	Green
14	Resolving enquiries at the first contact has increased to between 80-90% and is reducing the work in back office areas and enabling those areas to work more effectively and efficiently.	Council tax has increased their collections rates and benefits have improved their subsidiary levels as the reduction of work passed directly to these areas results in them having more time to focus on other more important tasks	ZM	2009/10	Green
15	Run and measure Independent satisfaction surveys show customer satisfaction when	Independent satisfaction surveys continue to show an upward trend with customer satisfaction when	TL/ZM	annual	Green

	dealing with not just the council, but specifically MyCouncil	dealing with not just the council, but specifically MyCouncil being polled independently at 81% (compared with 65% when dealing with SBC). It should be noted that this does not mean 19% were dissatisfied, over half were 'neither happy nor unhappy' with only around 8-9% being dissatisfied. It should also be noted that upon investigation, many were not necessarily unhappy with the service they received from SBC/MyCouncil. but were not happy with the outcome e.g. they wanted a benefit they were not eligible for. <u>This high level of satisfaction of 81% is up 23% from the 58% recorded in 2004 prior to MyCouncil's launch.</u>			
16	Regular 'stakeholder' or 'internal partner' meetings to be held.	Council tax, benefits and MyCouncil meet every 6 weeks to discuss any issues and ways to further improve the service delivered. People 1 st meet monthly with MyCouncil to do the same. Future liaison meetings planned with Social Care.	ZM	2009/10/11	Green
17	Set up arrangements for voluntary sector to see how we can improve how we work together	We have a standing arrangement with the CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau) to give priority any of their customer issues and do this in conjunction with the benefits team. Both MyCouncil and benefits have 'nominated' points of contact if needed by the CAB.	ZM	2008/9	Green

18	Relationships are being developed with the voluntary sector	Improves the services available to customers	ZM	2009/10/11	Green
19	Hold Councillors surgerys at MyCouncil offices	Helps Councillors to meet customers at the places they already go and improves all levels of customer engagement. Allows members to work constructively to improve the customer experience	ZM	2009/10/11	Green
20	Review and improve customer service experience across the whole organisation	<p>19.In October a corporate customer service review commenced having successfully bid for a £100,000 grant initially targeting specific service areas e.g. Council tax, and this programme has been funded by an external bid. One of the outcomes will be to use the ‘structure’ of improvements made in this ‘first wave’ to support further improvements council wide. This project is being managed by one of the Customer Service Managers, Mo Hassan, from MyCouncil</p> <p>The funding has paid for training, promotional material, 100 interviews with customers recorded on camera. 300 customer surveys, investigations into using and buying text messaging facilities, workshops with other council services, other councils and groups of staff.</p>	ZM/RP	2009/10/11	Green

21	Improve the customer experience when customers are engaged with back offices	All customer facing service areas within SBC to attend customer service training. Council tax, Benefits, Environmental have already started the programme. This has been funded by the grant won. Some staff will be trained how to train others and will use the course that we have had designed and now own.	ZM/RP	2009/10/11	Green
22	Improve the service received by Social Care customers	Work has commenced with Social care to review process from the point of contact from the customer to the delivery of a personalised care plan with the AD of Social care and Head of Customer Service attending the 'as is' and all 'to be' workshops to ensure a streamlined approach that benefits all customers.	ZM/DO	2009/10/11	Green
23	Raise the standard of processes at MyCouncil	All processes at MyCouncil are being written to ISO9000 standard and accreditation will be sought by December 2010 which will raise the standards and ensure consistency.	ZM	2009/10	Green
24	Use of benchmarking with other authorities to import better practice into the Slough Customer Service Centre.	So far exchange visits have taken place/will take place :- London Borough of Barnet Bucks County Council Cambridge City Council London borough of Lambeth	ZM	2008/9/10/11	Green

		Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Surrey County Council South Gloucester Council Bracknell Forest Council Wokingham Council Ashford /Kent Council			
25	Raise the standard of quality and achieve recognised external accreditation	In February 2010 MyCouncil will be assessed for Investors in People, reflecting the standards of training, development and ‘customer service skills’. As there will be some overlap with other departments this will be to their advantage should other areas of the Council seek these accreditations in the future.	ZM	2009/10	Green
26	Engage the employees at MyCouncil in the search for continuous and ongoing improvement	A staff survey at MyCouncil was completed in 2009 and all staff have been involved and will continue to be involved in the ongoing improvement plan raising the standard of customer service and employee engagement, training and development . This survey specifically asked the question ‘ how can we improve’ With everyone involved we can improve more efficiently and effectively as a team which benefits all customers	ZM	2009/10	Green

6 **Conclusion**

Recent improvement at MyCouncil have lead to increased customer satisfaction, more choice for customers and a decrease in waiting times.

However, it is recognised that further and ongoing improvement is needed. This report outlines the progress made to date and future improvement plans for member comment and endorsement

7. **Appendices**

- A - table demonstrating volume increases
- B - comparison of Q2 08/9 and Q2 09/10
- C - Q3 09/10 balance scorecard results
- D - Service requests by each location by year
- E - Key points of the Labour Group presentation on 23 Sept 2009
- F - Services accessed by customers via MyCouncil

8. **Background Papers**

None