MINUTES OF CUSTOMER SERVICE RECEPTION TASK GROUP

4TH OCTOBER 2010

PRESENT:

Councillors Mrs Avis, Mrs Bragg, Butlin, Lewis, Ms Robbins (substituting for Councillor Helen Walton) and Srivastava.

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED THAT – Councillor Butlin be appointed Chairman of the Task Group for the 2010/11 municipal year.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors Mistry and Helen Walton.

3. INTRODUCTORY BRIEFING FROM HEAD OF CUSTOMER AND INFORMATION SERVICES AND CUSTOMER AND INFORMATION SERVICES MANAGER

The Task Group considered the briefing paper of the Head of Customer and Information Services and Customer and Information Services Manager (agenda item 4) and received a presentation concerning the background to the reception refurbishment project at the Town Hall and statistical data. A copy of the presentation is attached as an annex to the minutes.

Further to the presentation, the following points were made:

• there had been concerns from Members regarding the initial proposal for a one stop shop to be located at the Rugby Art Gallery and Museum and not the Town Hall due to accessibility.

• a financial contribution for the project was received from Warwickshire County Council because the reception area is being promoted as a one stop shop.

• with regard to internal consultation on the redesign of the reception, a group of staff from a range of service areas which dealt with customers on a face to face basis was used as a consultative group. External agencies, such as the Rugby Disability Forum, Citizen’s Advice Bureau and the Rugby Tenants Association were also consulted on the design and facilities.

• the reception area had been designed to comply with current Health and Safety regulations and the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

• customer service advisors had begun training recently on the delivery of Warwickshire County Council services including highways services, the Blue Badge scheme, street lighting and schools (admissions/free school meals). Discussions were also taking place with the Police with a view to delivering some of their civilian services from the Town Hall. Recently, Coventry and Warwickshire Pathways (providing support for unemployed people) had been available in reception and this may be established as a regular arrangement. Members suggested that it could be helpful to work with Jobcentre Plus to establish a terminal for people to search for jobs at the same time as visiting the council regarding benefits queries.
• the most welcomed new facility by customers was the installation of private soundproofed booths. DDA compliant self-service computer terminals had been installed, which also assisted users with pushchairs.

• there had been much debate concerning the installation of a screened interview room but, on balance, it had been considered useful to retain this facility for revenue and benefits staff, particularly when dealing with potentially violent people and those being cautioned. This decision remains under review.

• with regard to customers visiting the Town Hall, numbers remained relatively constant, with Mondays being the busiest day. Thursday was the quietest day.

• the largest percentage of customers came to the Town Hall with queries relating to Benefits and Council Tax, followed by Housing. 28% of customers attended the reception to use other services offered by the Council, including planning and licensing. In July 2010, data gathered for face to face contact from the new Govmetric customer feedback system showed that 77% of customers were satisfied with the level of service they received, whilst 12% considered it poor. Of this 12%, it should be noted that 20 out of 44 were housing customers, and their views may have reflected disappointment with the decision they received.

• officers were exploring the potential to encourage ‘channel’ shift by customers. £7.74 pr transaction could be saved using website instead of face to face contact. £3.37 could be saved per transaction using website instead of telephone. However, it was important to give customers all choices.

• as part of National Customer Service Week (4th – 10th October), members of the Task Group had been invited to visit the reception area and to feed back their findings to the Group. Customers were also being invited to complete surveys, building on a small number of informal customer surveys completed earlier in the summer. 30 had been completed that day and by the end of the week they should provide a useful evidence base that could be reported to the Task Group.

The following questions were asked by Task Group members:

(i) with additional communities coming to the town, was training required by staff to deal with their needs?

There were diverse communities (e.g. Eastern European) within the town. As part of the Council’s internal review and development scheme there was an equality and diversity section and staff were asked to record perceived obstacles when dealing with enquiries from other communities. Measures had been put in place for dealing with the hearing impaired. Customer service advisors were due to receive training on safety issues when dealing with customers, including aggression and potentially violent people.

(ii) would data from the Govmetric feedback system be available for August and September?

Monthly reports from the Govmetric system would be collated and the data would be submitted to the next meeting of the Task Group.
(iii) would data from the Govmetric system be fed back to users?

Although in its early stages, it was anticipated that the Govmetric system would be rolled out to all 'back office' services. Once a good sample of data had been collated, the Council would look at how to respond to feedback and tell people what had been done as a result of issues highlighted by customers.

(iv) who provided training for the delivery of Warwickshire County Council services?

Warwickshire County Council trained three customer service advisors. The 'train the trainer' approach would then be used for remaining staff. Forms would be provided by the County Council for enquiries etc to be forwarded to them. Currently, only 'light touch' services would be delivered.

(v) with the potential for more online access to customers, this would obviously have an impact on staffing levels with a decrease in visits to the reception area. Is this issue being monitored?

Staffing levels were being monitored and reviewed as they did not currently match service demand. Different models of resourcing were being assessed to deal with peaks and troughs. A business requirements document had been discussed and produced concerning timing of breaks, annual leave and lunch breaks. Traffic from both face to face and telephone channels was monitored and as a result, 'hotdesking' had been introduced to the customer contact centre. Part-time staff would be consulted regarding renegotiation of working hours to tie in with service demand. Details of staffing levels would be submitted to the next meeting of the Task Group.

End-to-end service reviews had resulted in the planning service being withdrawn from the customer contact centre, with a loss of 1.5 FTE posts. A breakdown of data regarding services delivered for 'back office' would also be produced for the Group’s next meeting.

(vi) were issues/trends that needed addressing discussed with staff?

Monthly team meetings were held and had been addressing productivity. The main focus now was quality of service provision, with accuracy of information provided being looked at. A link officer had been assigned to each service area delivered by the customer contact centre. They were responsible for maintaining relevant and up to date information on the centre’s system and ensuring other users were aware of any changes.

(vii) was help provided for users of the PC terminals in the reception area?

The Council was mindful of the affordability issue of PCs for some customers. Customers were also offered help as and when required. If necessary, appointments were made for them to be supported to use terminals. This had been particularly relevant with the implementation of the UChoose choice based lettings scheme.

(viii) is there space capacity available in the reception area to expand services?

Currently there was not a space issue. The aim was to continue to deliver and expand on services delivered on behalf of other public agencies. The Government was rolling out a 'Tell Us Once' project regarding the registration of births, deaths etc where information would be given by the customer once and then forwarded to other relevant public bodies accordingly. This scheme was due to implemented in Rugby in February 2011.
(viii) Have the new facilities been inspected for DDA and Health and Safety compliance?

The internal access officer had carried out an assessment. There were plans to invite external representative groups to assist in completing a full equality and diversity assessment of the refurbished reception.

(ix) Had the loss of the cash desk caused any hardship to people?

It was felt that this was no longer a particular problem for people. A new income management system was being procured and chip and pin devices were being explored.

RESOLVED THAT – the following data be provided for the Task Group’s next meeting:

(a) Govmetric customer feedback data for August and September 2010
(b) details of staffing levels within the customer contact centre
(c) a breakdown of all ‘other services’ used by customers at the reception area
(d) a breakdown of data regarding services delivered on behalf of ‘back office’
(e) feedback from Members who attended the visits to the reception area during National Customer Service Week
(f) feedback from the customer surveys being completed by visitors to reception during National Customer Service Week.

4. REVIEW OF ONE PAGE STRATEGY

The Task Group considered the briefing paper (agenda item 5) relating to the One Page Strategy.

The Task Group considered that the ambition of the review should be amended to read, “To ensure that the reception service, now that the basic works to the reception area have been carried out, provides value for money and clear customer service benefits, having regard to both visual and service delivery aspects of the arrangements.”

There was no data available to compare performance before and after the refurbishment. However, it was considered that an assessment of current performance could be made by looking at the pattern of performance once several months of Govmetric data had been gathered, and by comparing the Council’s performance with that of the other 77 councils who use Govmetric – including all Warwickshire councils (with the exception of Stratford). A further benchmark against which the group could assess performance was the National Customer Service Excellence Standard, and a review outcome, in the longer-term, could be for the Council to achieve this Standard.

A customer satisfaction survey was being undertaken as part of the National Customer Service Week, so it was not considered necessary for the Group to commission its own survey at this time.

It was agreed that the following witnesses be approached to provide evidence to the Group:

- Rugby Disability Forum
- Rugby District Tenants’ Association
- Penny Jeffers (Tenant Participation Officer)
- Service officers who regularly use reception facilities, eg. Benefits/Council Tax, Housing, Environmental Health, Planning
- Warwickshire County Council Customer Services Manager
It was also suggested that a Task Group member could attend a meeting of Warwickshire Direct Partnership Steering Group.

It was considered that the review could be completed in approximately three months.

RESOLVED THAT -

(1) the one page strategy be revised by the Scrutiny Officer in accordance with the Group’s comments;

(2) comparative Govmetric customer satisfaction data be provided to the next meeting of the group; and

(3) the Scrutiny Officer work with the Chairman to devise a programme of work to deliver the aim of the review.

5. PROGRAMME OF WORK AND DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was agreed that the Task Group's next two meetings be held as detailed below.

(i) 5.30pm Wednesday 27th October 2010 Committee Room 1
(ii) 5.00pm Monday 29th November 2010 Committee Room 1

CHAIRMAN