

DOCUMENT ONE**Review of Mystery Shopping Exercise October – November 2008**

By Business Intelligence Team, March 2009

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1 Executive Summary

The council commissioned a specialist company to conduct a Mystery Shopping exercise during October and November 2008. Individuals contacted the council using face to face, email and telephone channels and rated their experience using a series of standardised questions.

These exercises can be indicative of general performance and can also be useful to identify areas of good practice or highlight areas for improvement and further analysis.

The survey findings have been compared against our own Customer Service Standards document to ascertain if Barnet is meeting its own service level ambitions.

The results, despite the small sample size, show that the email process in particular requires urgent attention as it appears to be regularly breaching the corporate Customer Service Standards charter.

- 61% of emails did not receive a full response within the corporate target of 10 days, with 50% receiving no reply at all
- Only 5 out of 18 operators mentioned the corporate website to the caller
- On the whole, name badges were not seen to be worn by staff
- Wait times were mainly less than 2 minutes for those who dropped in without an appointment
- Good access and facilities were reported for those with wheelchairs
- Poor information about translation and interpretation services for non-English speaker was noted

Recommendations

- A full audit of the email contact channel: system, process, procedures
- direct callers to our internet site for general information as this offers a cost benefit to both the customer and the council
- Name badges for all face-to-face staff to be clearly visible at all times
- Review the translation and interpretation services available and make more visible

2 Emails

In the Customer Service Standards document, LBB pledge to acknowledge written contacts (by email, letter or web-form) within 2 days and to respond fully within 10 days.

Out of 18 mystery emails sent via the website, Barnet failed to respond fully within the corporate standard in 11 cases (61%). In all cases a generic auto-reply email was received, so this points to a serious failure in either the process or the individuals services responding to their enquiries.

Of the 11 cases, **9 (half of all emails) received no full response at all.**¹ The make up of these failed cases were: 3 emails sent to planning, 2 sent to housing, 1 each to democratic services, benefits (fraud), council tax (business rates) and environment & transport (pest control).

Positively, out of the 7 cases which were responded to within the corporate timescale, 6 were rated as “excellent” and 1 were rated as “good”.

There is an aim within the council to push enquiries to this interaction channel, as there is a cost benefit, but given the above evidence it is highly unlikely that the council could be prepared to effectively handle any increase in responses. A full process review is therefore required to identify the root causes of this failure prior to opening up this channel. This should include:

- **Investigate the reason why emails were not responded to:** was it a technical problem eg the email was not received by the relevant department or mail box? Were they sent to the wrong email address?
- **Introduce a regular internal spot check process** to ensure email processes are being followed
- **Measure and regularly monitor the corporate 10 day target**, which may be possible through the CRM. If this is not possible through CRM, a manual process should be implemented
- **Learn from the cases that were actioned in a timely manor and received positive feedback**

3 Telephone calls

An objective of the mystery shopper calls was to investigate if the responses from staff were in line with the customer service charter – for example if they are “welcoming, polite and helpful”.

There were 18 successful calls made targeting different aspects of the councils First Contact, made up of 13 calls to the Contact Centre, 4 to the switchboard and 1 direct dial.

In all but one case, the calls were rated “good” or “excellent”. Specific staff feedback included “a friendly and positive manner”, “courteous and polite” and “extremely polite manner”.

Overall the results for the telephone surveys were very positive. In every case, reviewers said the operators owned the problem and handled it professionally. In all but one case it was said the operator understood the enquiry. 13 out of 18 operators were rated to have developed a rapport with the reviewer.

Some questions in the survey highlighted potential areas for improvement in the service provided.

¹ The surveys took place in October and November 2008; if no response had been received by the middle of December, it was noted on the feedback .In total 9 were marked as no reply received.

- **“Is there anything else I can help you with today?”**

In terms of improvements, only two operators asked the caller if there was anything else they could help them with at the end of the call.

There could be a case made to include this as part of the standard script to further improve the service and eliminate any lingering doubts or concerns the caller may have.

- **“Have you seen our website?”**

Also, only 5 out of 18 operators mentioned the corporate website to the caller, which arguably would contain answers to many general queries they may have in the future, and is a cheaper alternative for both the council and the customer.

Including this information in the call script could be an option to drive users towards the website if they have further queries.

4 Face to Face

There were nine mystery shopper visits in total, spread over the three main face-to-face customer centres: Burnt Oak library, North London Business Park and Barnet House.

Because of how the questionnaire was structured, it was only apparent which building the reviewer was referring to in **seven out of nine visits**, but there are some overarching themes which gleaned from all 9 visits.

Of the four identified visits to Burnt Oak Library, there were comments about building works, as the survey was conducted during the renovation work on the building. Therefore, many comments made about construction are no longer relevant as this work has now completed.

The corporate Customer Services Standards document states that when visiting us we will ensure all of the Barnet reception staff members are wearing a name badge. The results of these visits show that in 8 of the 9 visits staff were **not** reported to be wearing a name badge.

Barnet also aims to provide a “pleasant, clean, tidy and safe reception area” in all face-to-face contact centres, and in nearly all visits it was deemed to have done this. The only reviewer who did not agree was referring to Burnt Oak Library during the renovation period.

The corporate standard is to keep waiting times to a minimum for those without an appointment. Reviewing the wait times from the mystery shopper results it can be seen:

- The longest waiting time of all visits was 16 minutes,
- 4 reviewers were seen immediately
- 4 were seen in 2 minutes or less.

In terms of accessibility, every reviewer believed that the reception area was suitable for wheelchair access, and 8 of out 9 visitors said they saw available disabled parking facilities. The reception desk was deemed to be of suitable height for wheelchair users in each visit.

In 8 out of 9 visits, the reviewer did not see any information about translation or interpretation services for non-English speakers.

Mystery Shop – Action plan

1. Email

- **Process**

- Map out current process and identify areas of concern, improvement or excellence
- Illustrate the 'customer decision making process' to establish why customers choose electronic methods of contact and what factors have an impact upon the service
- Analyse the relationships involved with the process
- Implement a control process to ensure the end to end process remains in control
- Run a report on the,
 - Number of emails received
 - Number of emails outstanding
 - Number of emails received / outstanding broken down per service

- **Monitoring**

- Report on the number of outstanding emails, forward this information on to the service area contact and senior – this to be done on a weekly / monthly basis?
- Perform internal mystery shopping

- **Resource**

- Carry out a survey and target First Contact Sources and establish,
 - That their contact details are still correct?
 - Their back office process
 - Approximate amount of emails received
 - Time spent dealing with FC emails
 - FAQ's – can customers find the answers to their enquires at barnet.gov.uk?
- Establish if the back offices have a dedicated member of staff to process and deal with emails or is it a case of 'as and when'?

- **Marketing**

- Publish hints and tips for writing emails on the intranet
- Introduce a First Contact page on the intranet? Publish the contact list?
- Introduce 'InfoSig', incorporate a text footer to the email promoting services and web pages that relate to the service who is dealing with the enquiry,
 - E.g., Email received which is being sent to Recycling, footer could point customers to recycling pages, or promote items like green bins etc dependant upon the time of year? E.g. Spring or autumn, using the most of our customer data

If the flexibility of adjusting templates has been lost or complicated following the implementation of CRM, could provide a database bank with template extracts and footers which would enable the user to copy and paste on to the generic CRM template.

- Promote First Contact as a team / department, raise the profile of email and webform contact – possible comms campaign?

Target services

- Who receive little in the way of electronic contact?
- Who receive vast amounts in the way of electronic contact?

2. Telephone calls

- **Call handling**
 - Introduce call script to promote corporate website
 - Introduce call script to ensure agents finalise the call by enquiring if they can be of any further assistance?
- **Call Centre prompt**
 - Consider the prospect of editing the current Cisco call centre prompt to promote the corporate website – *(Need to double check to ascertain if a prompt for this is already active when callers are holding in the queue)*

3. Face to face

- **Corporate standards**
 - Find new styles of name badges for members of staff which will enable
 - Names to be clearly visible
 - Cause no damage to staff members clothing
 - Pose no safety risk to the staff member
- **Market Translation and interpretation services**
 - Produce marketing material (posters, leaflets) highlighting and promoting the councils translation and interpretation services available at all reception points
 - Posters and leaflets to be created and placed in all reception areas and Libraries

Action Plan

No.	Mystery Shop Issue / Recommendations	Action	Responsible Officer	Timescale	R/A/G	Mitigation
1	Out of 18 mystery emails sent via the website, Barnet failed to respond fully within the corporate standard in 11 cases (61%). In all cases a generic auto-reply email was received, so this points to a serious failure in either the process or the individuals services responding to their enquiries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map out current process and identify areas of concern, improvement or excellence Implement a control process to ensure the end to end process remains in control 	JB			
2	Of the 11 cases, 9 (half of all emails) received no full response at all. ¹ The make up of these failed cases were: 3 emails sent to planning, 2 sent to housing, 1 each to democratic services, benefits (fraud), council tax (business rates) and environment & transport (pest control).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report on the number of emails received Report on the number of emails outstanding Report on the number of emails received / outstanding broken down per service 	SM?	Ongoing, Weekly, Monthly		

¹ The surveys took place in October and November 2008; if no response had been received by the middle of December, it was noted on the feedback. In total 9 were marked as no reply received.

3	<p>Investigate the reason why emails were not responded to: was it a technical problem eg the email was not received by the relevant department or mail box? Were they sent to the wrong email address?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report on the number of outstanding emails, forward this information on to the service area contact and senior – this to be done on a weekly / monthly basis? • Carry out a survey and target First Contact Sources and establish that their contact details are still correct. The back office process. Approximate amount of emails received. Time spent dealing with FC emails • FAQ's – can customers find the answers to the enquiries at barnet.gov.uk? 	SM			
4	<p>Introduce a regular internal spot check process to ensure email processes are being</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform internal mystery 	TBC			

	followed	shopping				
5	Measure and regularly monitor the corporate 10 day target, which may be possible through the CRM. If this is not possible through CRM, a manual process should be implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Run and send regular reports to services commenting on the number of outstanding mail 	SM / JB			
6	Learn from the cases that were actioned in a timely manor and received positive feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Illustrate the 'customer decision making process' to establish why customers choose electronic methods of contact and what factors have an impact upon the service Analyse the relationships involved with the process 	JB			
7	Improve communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish hints and tips for writing emails on the intranet Implement a First Contact page on the intranet, use this to publish FC contact list 	JB / HS			

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce 'InfoSig', incorporate a text footer to the email promoting services and web pages that relate to the service who is dealing with the enquiry, E.g., Email received which is being sent to Recycling, footer could point customers to recycling pages, or promote items like green bins etc dependant upon the time of year? E.g. Spring or autumn, using the most of our customer data 	JB / HS			
8	Call completions <i>"Is there anything else I can help you with today?"</i> In terms of improvements, only two operators asked the caller if	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce call script to promote corporate website Introduce call 	VM			

	<p>there was anything else they could help them with at the end of the call.</p> <p><i>There could be a case made to include this as part of the standard script to further improve the service and eliminate any lingering doubts or concerns the caller may have</i></p>	<p>script to ensure agents finalise the call by enquiring if they can be of any further assistance?</p>				
9	<p>Call Centre Prompt</p> <p>“Have you seen our website?”</p> <p>Also, only 5 out of 18 operators mentioned the corporate website to the caller, which arguably would contain answers to many general queries they may have in the future, and is a cheaper alternative for both the council and the customer.</p> <p><i>Including this information in the call script could be an option to drive users towards the website if they have further queries.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the prospect of editing the current Cisco call centre prompt to promote the corporate website – <i>(Need to double check to ascertain if a prompt for this is already active when callers are holding in the queue)</i> 	VM / JB			
10	<p>The corporate Customer Services Standards document states that when visiting us we will ensure all of the Barnet reception staff members are wearing a name badge. The results of these visits show that in 8 of the 9 visits staff were not reported to be wearing a name badge.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find new styles of name badges for members of staff which will enable Names to be clearly visible Cause no damage to staff members 	AS / NT			

		<p>clothing Pose no safety risk to the staff member</p>			
11	<p>In 8 out of 9 visits, the reviewer did not see any information about translation or interpretation services for non-English speakers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce marketing material (posters, leaflets) highlighting and promoting the councils translation and interpretation services available at all reception points Posters and leaflets to be created and placed in all reception areas and Libraries 	NT / AS		