

Crawley Borough Council

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Commission 6 November 2017

Receiving Customers in the Town Hall

Report of the Head of People & Technology, **PAT/30**

1. Purpose

- 1.1 An information report on new ways of working in the Contact Centre.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To the Overview and Scrutiny Commission:

That the Commission notes the report.

3. Background

- 3.1 A scrutiny suggestion on the New Town Hall Reception was submitted and subsequently discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Commission (OSC) Workshop in September 2017 and Commission meeting in October 2017.
- 3.2 The trial of a podium as a focal point for staff to base themselves and also to further draw attention as to where customers need to go while still giving staff the freedom to be able to serve customers in the current way (floor walking) was initiated in August 2017. It was noted that the podium would be a trial approach and feedback was requested. Evaluation would then take place on the most effective working practices which will assist in collating evidence as to which way of working would be best to ensure the council is able to deliver the best possible service to its customers in the future in the new building.
- 3.3 Given the nature of the questions being raised and that the podium was in a trial phase acting as a 'mini reception', it is proposed that the examination of the scrutiny topic be deferred. It was proposed that the OSC receive a report or presentation from the Head of People and Technology setting out the research, information and survey results, together with feedback from site visits which would allow Councillors to 'scrutinise' the information available.

4. Development of new ways of working in the Contact Centre

- 4.1 The Contact Centre takes a leading role in delivering the front line services to customers responding to telephone calls, emails and visitors to the Town Hall. The purpose of the service is to offer a "one stop shop" to deal with a range of enquiries in a single location or transaction. Over the last 4 years the Contact Centre

management team have been delivering an incremental plan to improve customer service in the current town hall building.

4.2 The layout of the face to face service had many shortcomings:

- 2 separate receptions meant that customers were queuing twice which was a cause for customer dissatisfaction
- Long queues for cashiers at certain times of the month
- The long narrow layout with two public entrances (from Exchange Road car park and the Boulevard) with some customers using the foyer as a cut through which makes the space hectic and confusing
- There were no opportunities for customers with simple service requests to self-serve
- The staff and managers were located over two floors which limited flexibility to respond to peaks and troughs in demand
- The front reception desk was not suitable for disabled customers or for those needing some privacy when explaining their requirements.
- Staff using the same entrance throughout the day

4.3 The managers developed a plan to improve the space and to increase the availability of staff to provide services to customers. By the autumn of 2016 this included:

- Removal of shelving and displays to open up views of the central courtyard area
- Redecoration of the ground floor area with different colours for different zones
- The introduction of self-pay kiosks that take cash to meet the need of customers when cashiers is closed and during peak demand periods
- The introduction of self-service screens to allow customers an alternative option for some service requests
- The move to one reception at the front of the building to ease confusion and to stop the need for repeat queuing
- Co-location of telephone service and face to face service to allow greater flexibility to respond to customer demand
- Trials of floor walking to manage the queues at reception and to assist customers to use self-service screens, self-pay kiosks. These staff were able to provide a more personal service including the opportunity to take the customer to a more private space where appropriate.

4.4 This range of initiatives provided significant improvements to the delivery of services in the face to face space. However staff were still hampered by the limitations of the building and in particular the unsuitability of the reception desk at the front of the building.

- The desk was not suitable for wheel chair users (feedback received from Town Access Group - TAG)
- The high level desk and glass screen were not welcoming for customers
- It did not offer any privacy for customers
- There was no obvious place to queue that did not cause an obstruction during peak periods
- It was not possible for staff to assist customers with use of self service options or the use of house phones from behind the formal structure of the desk
- Staff felt they were unable to assist customers as much sufficiently which meant queries were not being resolved "one stop"
- Customers and visitors to the building were queuing at the same location.

4.5 Contact Centre managers considered models used by other Councils such as Croydon and by other private sector customer service organisations such as banks

where floor-walking was being used increasingly. Following the success of the limited use of floor walkers to supplement the reception staff it was decided to extend the trials. This involved whole days when the reception desk was closed and services were provided by floor walkers. This was positively received by customers but the presence of an unmanned reception desk caused confusion.

- 4.6 The feedback from the majority of staff carrying out the floor-walking trials was positive with many seeing it as a much more effective way to interact with customers. It gave them more freedom to resolve enquiries without a “hand off” to another colleague in the Contact Centre and it gave them the ability to move around rather than being stuck behind a desk. They preferred being able to greet customers as they entered the building rather than making them wait in a queue and they were also able to assist customers to report things themselves through the self-service machines. There were a minority of staff who did not like the floor walking role and wanted to continue to work behind a traditional reception desk.
- 4.7 It was agreed at the Town Hall Board that it was appropriate to facilitate this new way of working by taking out the reception desk and that decision was then endorsed by CMT. The Cabinet Member and the Shadow Cabinet Member for Resources were also consulted on the proposal at this stage as was the Branch Secretary of Unison.
- 4.8 Following this ‘in principle’ decision, the Contact Centre Managers carried out a series of meetings with staff in the Contact Centre and service managers who used the reception desk. The purpose of these meetings was to understand their concerns and to agree revised processes which could be put in place in advance of the removal of the desk. Some managers would have preferred to keep the desk as a drop off point for documents, keys etc. but alternative procedures were agreed to ensure that services could continue to function effectively. Email communication of the imminent change was sent to all staff and Councillors ahead of the change.
- 4.9 The reception desk was removed in November 2016 and the introduction of the new way of working was monitored closely to identify any teething problems. A number of changes were implemented within the first few weeks to address these issues.
- Addition of a post box in face to face area
 - Additional house phones
 - Additional signage and badges for floor walkers
 - Additional guidance to floor walkers about remaining visible at all times.

There was also an extended period of working with the IT team to improve the wi-fi reception and to procure better tablets for floor walkers.

- 4.10 The numbers of customers entering the building and potentially requiring assistance from floor walkers varies but a conservative estimate would be 150 per day. Informal feedback from customers over the first couple of months showed that there was an initial surprise for customers who were used to coming in and queuing for reception. However, most were comfortable with the changes once they realised how the floor walkers worked. There were a handful of complaints in the first 2 or 3 months and these were about the lack of a reception desk rather than any concern about the delivery of service. A detailed survey was carried out in January/February 2017.
- 4.11 Over a seven week period, 42 customers agreed to take part in the survey about the changes made to the ground floor, during various times of the day. The customers surveyed came in for a variety of different services and were all asked to rate the

level of service received by the floor walkers out of 10 and average ratings have been calculated.

- 4.12 Of the customers surveyed, 17 were seeing the changes to reception for the first time. The comments from this group of customers was very positive and on the whole they liked the changes. The majority felt that they did not have to queue and felt they had received a helpful, friendly service provided by the floor walkers. These customers also found this service more personable, quicker, easier to use, more spacious and the floor walkers helped them more with their enquiry. The new customers rated the service received as 9.33 out of 10 and the customers returning to the Town Hall for the first time rated the service received as 9.16 out of 10.
- 4.13 There was some feedback around not always being able to identify the floorwalkers when the area was busy. The other main point was that some regular customers were dissatisfied that their routine had been disrupted with the removal of the reception and felt disorientated by the change. Overall the Floor Walking service rated an average of 9 out of 10 from all customers taking part in the survey. The overriding impression from customers was of a positive, friendly and professional experience from the floor walkers. Further details are available at appendix 1.
- 4.14 The Contact Centre Managers have continued to monitor the performance of the floorwalkers to make sure that they are all offering a proactive service and that they are ensuring that they remain visible for customers walking into the building. Although this has improved, the layout of the building means there are times when the service is very busy and it isn't clear where the customer should go when floor walkers are all engaged with other customers. In order to address these concerns a podium has been introduced on a trial basis from August 2017 to provide a focal point for customers and staff. The new lighter tablets are also in use which makes it easier for the staff to use them without the need for a surface to rest on and more reliable corporate wi-fi is also available.
- 4.15 There have been some concerns raised from staff about their safety in the event of an aggressive or difficult customer challenging them. This is not a new issue as the contact centre staff have always worked in the face to face space with a wide range of customers. Additional controls were introduced and a risk assessment for the floorwalkers was developed and agreed by the Corporate Health and Safety Manager this year. The other concern that some staff have is the need to stand for long periods of time. This has been managed by keeping shifts to 4.5 hours with a tea break in the middle. Staff with health reasons are either given shorter shifts or asked to work in other parts of the contact centre. It has also been agreed that some of the floorwalkers can sit down when it is quiet but there should always be one member of the team standing at the podium and they should all be ready to serve customers as they enter the building.
- 4.16 A further survey of customers was carried out in October 2017. 28 customers took part and 93% found the floor walkers to be approachable, friendly and helpful. 82% felt the service from the floor walkers was good, very good or excellent. When asked about the podium, 68% thought that it was identifiable and half of those questioned thought that there was no need for any improvements in the provision of services in the face to face area. Suggested improvements included a more prominent podium, better signage and consideration of uniform for the floor walkers.
- 4.17 71% of customers thought their enquiry was dealt with in a private manner and this is consistent with the previous survey which showed privacy provided by the floor walking staff was much higher than had been the case with the reception desk. Further details are available at appendix 2

- 4.18 The Contact Centre Managers have also sought feedback from floor walking staff. Whilst the podium does create a focal point for customers entering the building and does make them more visible to customers. The staff feel that it has restricted them in being able to move around the face to face area when serving customers. They also feel that it has limited their ability to discuss matters of a more private nature away from the podium space. The management team are drawing up new guidelines to assist the floor walking staff on how best to manage these issues within the limitations of the current face to face area. Trials of using a more defined dress code and clothing with corporate branding are being introduced to improve visibility.
- 4.19 Taking all the feedback into account the podium does offer the best option for customers within the limitations for the current building and it is proposed to keep this in place for the remainder of the time that the Contact Centre are based in this building.

5. Costs

- 5.1 The cost of implementing all the structural and decorative changes has been less than £10,000 over 4 years using council staff and existing maintenance contractors and there have been no additional revenue costs.
- 5.2 There were additional costs for the implementation of self-pay machines which were funded from capital IT budgets. These machines have a support and maintenance cost of £2,813 per annum.
- 5.3 The Contact Centre has also invested in 6 tablets for the floor walkers at a cost of £650 each including carry cases and screen protectors. The use of tablets and the learning from the trials in the contact centre have been extremely valuable as part of the wider mobile working project to see how different technology can support staff working in a more agile way

6. Implications for the new Town Hall

- 6.1 We want to ensure we retain all the positive elements of customer service that we have developed in the current building with exceptional interactivity and access for service users and we are working with our designers to ensure we do not recreate any of the negative elements of the current contact centre.
- 6.2 Councillors have taken part in workshops with the design team to outline the accommodation brief for the new town hall and the Member Working Group has participated in site visits to support the governance of the project. A further all member seminar is planned for 6th December to share features of the interior design. There is also a wider consultation programme with the public, staff workshops are taking place throughout September and October, Unison and groups such as the Crawley Tenants Panel. Due to the sensitive nature of this section of the report, should Members wish to scrutinise this conclusion in further detail, the meeting will need to move to Part B (Exempt item) where the report can be discussed.

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Podium and Floor Walker Survey October 2017

Appendix 1

2. What service did you come in for?		3. Is this the first time you have been in or have you been in before? If you have been in before are there any differences from the service you received from the Podium or from mobile Floor Walkers?		4. Were the Floor Walkers easy to identify? If no how could they be more identifiable?		5. Was the Floor Walker who assisted you approachable?		If not, why?
Benefits	14	Yes	7	Yes	19	Yes	26	
CTX	6	No	21	No	9	No	2	1 said staff looked moody and the other said they didn't want to answer Floor Walkers questions
HHP	3							
Parking	2							
Garages	1							
Meeting	1							
Other	1							

6. How did you find the service they provided?		7. Was it clear where you should go? If no how could we make this clearer?		8. Do you feel the Floor Walker was clear to you about what would happen with your enquiry? If no what else could they have done?		9. What do you think of the podium/lectern?	
Average	2	Yes	20	Yes	20	Don't like it, Ug	6
Acceptable	2	No	8	No	5	Don't mind it	2
Efficient	1			NA	3	Its ok but needs to stand out more	7
Good	18					Clear Focal Poi	2
Very Good	4					Its good/ok	7
Excellent	1					Like it, stood ou	4

Key:

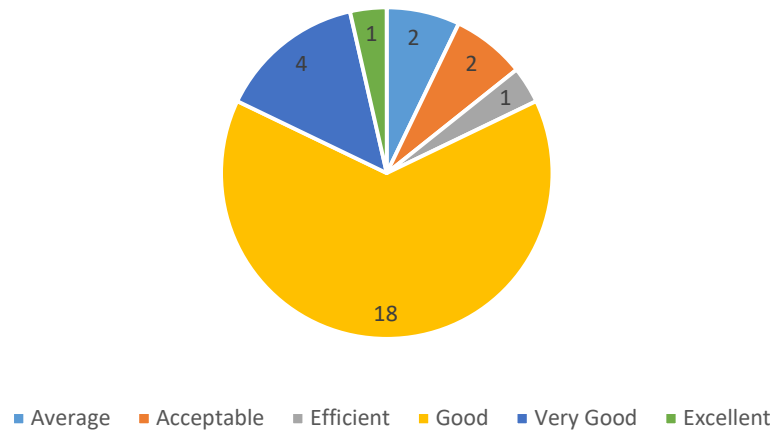
CTX - Council Tax

HHP - Housing Help Point

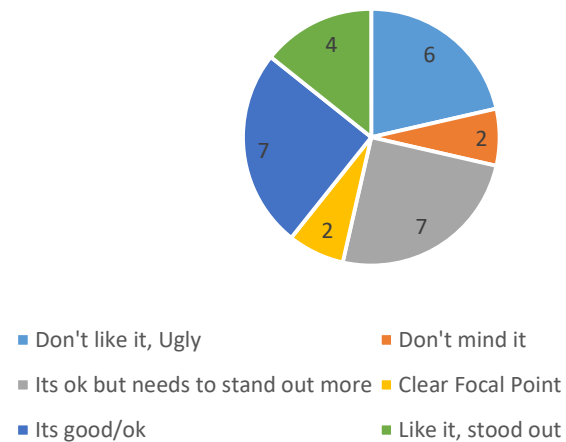
Appendix 1

10. Did you feel that your enquiry was handled in a private manner? If no how could this have been done more privately?		11. What else could we do better with the Floor Walking service?	
Yes	20	Make Podium more identifiable	3
No	8	Better signage	3
		Make staff more identifiable	3
		Nothing	11
		Improve Privacy	4
		Fine with how it is and prefer it	3
		Improve Self-Service	1

How did you find the service they provided?



What do you think of the podium/lectern?



Floor Walking Survey April 2017

Appendix 2

Surveyed	Av Score out of 10
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New Customers	3	9.33
Existing but 1st time since changes made	14	9.16
Existing and been in after changes made	25	8.87

Total	42	9.12
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All Customer Ratings out of 10	Total	%
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10	21	50%
9	10	24%
8	7	17%
7	3	7%
6	1	2%

