



## **Case study: South Staffordshire Council**

Review of Customer Services

### **Objectives:**

- To review if the current staffing structure is fit for purpose
- To analyse demand and assess how to configure the service to best meet current and future demand
- To assess how to measure on-going performance of the service to ensure optimum delivery
- To prepare a report of the recommendations for the future of the service

### **Outcomes:**

- Proposal for a new refreshed structure
- Capacity to transfer further services to the Customer Services function subject to a series of improvements
- Identified the critical improvements needed for the Council to optimise resource usage, performance and meet future demand.
- Network response from members giving benchmarking information and key contacts

South Staffordshire is a rural area consisting of 27 parishes and a higher than average level of older residents. The Council has an open and welcoming environment that is well used by the community and plays a key part in sustaining and improving the overall quality of community for the district's residents.

Over the last 18 months South Staffordshire Council has put in place the necessary changes to ensure it is financially viable and is now well placed to focus on taking forwards its plans to further improve customer satisfaction. The contact centre lies at the heart of the Council's ambitious plans and the Council wishes to ensure that the service is able to meet its current and future responsibilities in the most effective way. The Council requested that APSE conduct a timely review of the contact centre taking account of the Council demographics and imminent appointment of a Customer Services and Strategy Manager.

The Contact Centre is part of a wider Customer Services function which also delivers face to face customer services and a reception service. Given the integral nature of the contact centre and how it is resourced the review was broadened to cover the whole Customer Services function with no increase in the cost of the project.

A project plan was developed which was regularly reviewed and updated.

APSE conducted a two day on site fact finding including:

- Observation of the contact centre and listening in to customer enquires
- Meetings with the Chief Executive, the Director, the Interim Customer Services Manager, Customer Services Supervisor, Trade Unions and HR.
- Three focus groups were held to give all Customer Services Staff the opportunity to provide feedback on how to improve the service for external customers, current issues and how Customer Services and internal customers could better work together to improve the customer experience.

As part of the review APSE also considered recent feedback from internal customers and any available information on demand. A network query was sent out to members to identify current practice in other councils.

The review progressed swiftly and clear findings and recommendations emerged.

### **Key recommendations:**

1. The Council refresh the structure of its Customer Service function, to clarify responsibilities, ensure the service has appropriate management support and allows more flexibility for delivering current and future Council duties and objectives. A new proposed structure was included as part of the review.
2. The Council further update work patterns within Customer Service function ahead of the adoption of the new CRM to allow the successful operation of the modernised front line service, from its inception.
3. The Council support this with a structured training and career plan, and implement a coaching approach to enable better knowledge sharing. The training needs analysis shows significant gaps in knowledge and would indicate that multi-skilling all staff is impractical at this stage. The career plan should reflect a progression in knowledge/skills.
4. The Council conduct an exercise to review the current mix of services within the Customer Services function. A decision needs to be taken between the appropriateness of the service being handled by the Customer Services function, where value is/can be added, the training implications and call volume.
5. The Council adopt a more structured approach to managing the relationship with internal customers as part of the process to manage in services.
6. A Leadership Strategy be devised, to ensure the changes envisaged by these recommendations can be sustained, and brought to fruition.
7. A performance review and monitoring process be adopted by the service, as part of an on-going more structured communication with internal customers. This should include contact centre and face to face services and be informed by the responses to the Network Query as well as local issues. Key issue is how to reduce waiting times at every stage in the process.
8. The service use this to benchmark its costs, processes, outputs and outcomes, to ensure current effectiveness is sustained, and continues to improve.