

## Opposition Priority Business – Customer Service

Opposition Priority Business is time given to the Opposition 4 times a year to table important issues affecting the community and the way in which Enfield Council delivers its services. The Conservative Group therefore brings forward this paper this evening to discuss our Council's current level of customer service which is a present issue affecting the community who we serve.

The Magazine for Customer Service Managers & Professionals lists the below as one of the definitions of customer service.

**“Customer service is an organization’s ability to supply their customers’ wants and needs.”**

If we analyse our current level of customer service against this definition we can only come to one conclusion that our service delivery must improve. We cannot ignore those who have complained and it would be irresponsible for us as an organisation to simply live in ignorance rather than take the issue in hand and tackle the problems the service has been experiencing over the last six months.

- **Problem 1 – Call Centre.** Residents and other stakeholders contacting the call centre have had to wait up to 42 minutes in some instances to get through to an officer. After eventually getting through to the call centre, customers have little chance of speaking to an officer in the department required when transferred. On some occasions people have not been able to even get through to the automated welcome message as the phone line was just constantly engaged.
- **Problem 2 – Website.** The Council since the launch of the new website has conducted a big drive to get residents and other customers to contact the organisation via the website rather than by telephone. We accept this concept as it is part of our transformational programme; however difficulties have occurred with the website. Residents have logged issues and never received an email response. When browsing the website you can search for a certain subject but the correct page will not appear and if you then choose to use the old site it simply sends you back to the new one.
- **Problem 3 – Members Enquiries.** Prior to the Members Enquiries Teams in individual departments being placed into Gateway Services the Service Level Agreement for most departments was an 8 day turnaround of enquiries. However many MEQs are not dealt within 8 days anymore, with Councillors waiting up to 3 weeks for an issue to be resolved. This is simply unacceptable.
- **Problem 4 – Front Desk Customer Services.** The Civic Centre front desk has a large amount of customers each day. There are frequent long queues out of the door as there are not enough members of staff manning the front desks. A scene replicated at other offices across the borough. The day after the last Bank Holiday there were only two members of staff on in the morning at the Civic Centre front desk, as you can imagine the queue was long and customers were frustrated. On 28 June there was only one person on duty from mid-morning through to beyond 2pm, with long queues again.

The problems listed above all impact on the Council's customer service reputation. Our customers are experiencing difficulties in engaging with Enfield Council, the organisation they ultimately pay for. If we look back at the definition of customer service than we can only conclude that our current level is affecting the Council's ability to supply their customers wants and needs because on many occasions customers have not been able to inform the Council of them or they have simply been lost in the system or we have allowed customers to experience the difficulties for long periods of time.

In conclusion, the customer service delivery over the last six months has been unacceptable. We cannot have our customers unable to contact the organisation or wait a long time for an issue that has been inconveniencing them to be resolved. There have been complaints raised about these issues to Councillors, in newspapers and across social media. These complaints are impacting on the Council's reputation to deliver services and therefore must be addressed sooner rather than later. We need to remember that residents do not need to be grateful for the service they receive from Enfield Council because they are the customer and pay for the organisation and for that very reason our customer service must improve.

It is also important to note in the context, that this situation has nothing to do with funding. This is part of the 2017 arrangements which have simply not been planned and implemented as well as they might have been, despite both the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition raising the matter on several occasions with the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance and Customer Services.

The Conservative Opposition recommends that the Administration implement the following as a matter of urgency and that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review progress in three months.

1. Recruit the necessary number of staff needed for the call centre to cope with the level of demand from our customers.
2. Review the new website to ensure that if it cannot show a certain information page, then the previous website can be accessed and used.
3. Carry out a full scale review of the effectiveness of the Gateway Services Hub.
4. Review of the number of MEQs that are not responded to within the Service Level Agreement (SLA).
5. Those departments that are not meeting the SLA from investigating MEQs will implement an action plan to improve the service as soon as possible.
6. Provide the necessary number of staff at the front desk of the Civic Centre to adequately deal with demand.
7. Establish a cross party working group on specific remit of customer services to report its work to Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.