

Neighbourhood Advice and information Service

Birmingham City Council, Customer Service Organisation and Housing and Constituencies Directorate

The Neighbourhood Advice and Information Service, Birmingham City Council in obtaining Customer Service Excellence accreditation is delivering real benefits to customers. By embedding CSE principles, customer satisfaction has increased while complaints have fallen. CSE has also delivered benefits to the organisation including increased productivity and an improved staff morale, and importantly a more engaged and responsive customer base.

NAIS forms part of the Housing and Constituencies Directorate working in partnership with the city's Customer Services Organisation. We provide advice, guidance and information for all council service, welfare benefits and money advice.

“Providing a consistent and equitable service across the face to face, contact centre and self service channels is fundamental to our organisation”, says Shona Adams, Face to Face Channel Manager. CSE has enabled us to assess the efficiency, effectiveness and equity of our service; importantly identifying potential service delivery gaps. Soft skills training for all front line staff has been delivered. New technology has been utilised to deliver timely service delivery. We have made use of customer insight to re-structure our service with the needs of our customers in mind, taking every opportunity to consult and engage with service users; staff; and in making effective use of our existing partnerships and scoping others to deliver enhanced customer service.

We opted to apply for CSE as its core principles were those that we as an organisation felt could best support us in our transitional to transformational approach to customer service; using the CSE as a driver for continuous improvement and the development of skills. It is to the testament to our staff, customers and partners that we achieved our accreditation within 12 months.

Our staff, customers and stakeholders were instrumental in changing the way we deliver our services. Service users were engaged at every possible opportunity, and by making use of different media. Customers were clear about what they wanted from our service and we use the development tools of CSE to deliver them.

Although we were familiar with the assessment process, having been holders of the Charter Mark accreditation for a number of years; we needed to renew our focus to deliver first class customer service. In order to achieve this we arranged a pre assessment visit to assess the 'as is' and what areas within the self assessment we could develop further.

Our service had moved into a new area of service delivery since our Charter Mark Accreditation; a cross channel approach to service delivery incorporating telephone and self service channels. Our assessor visited both our contact centre and our new flag ship customer service centre during the assessment and was astonished by the changes to service delivery that had been achieved.

The assessor identified strengths in our application which fundamentally focussed on customer and staff engagement; incorporating value for money and partnership working. As a result of improving customer journeys, customers now state that they are aware that appointments can be booked through the Contact Centre.

As a result of our CSE assessment and accreditation, our staff are united with our partners and customers in delivering excellent customer services. We have seen a significant reduction in complaints; comments are not a chore, but an opportunity to engage with our customers. Our service has been strengthened by our staffs' commitment to excellence.

The benefits of the CSE to our customers can be evidenced during every interaction with our staff. Customers told us that we now have better telephone responses to enquiries. Some stated they are happy they can now make an appointment to suit their convenience. We have clear service standards, designed in partnership with our customers and stakeholders. We have maintained a high customer satisfaction rating of 98% with our service, and significantly seen a reduction in complaints. Customers stated that our offices provided an excellent service that was good from start to finish, that staff went that extra 10% to get their enquiry resolved and also provided them with feedback on actions that had been updated.

Establishing what your customers think of your current service is important. We had become complacent in assuming we know what our customers want and how they want to receive it. The same can be said of our staff. By giving them a voice and really listening, they are able to provide significant insight, a comment here and there, which can be translated into knowledge and service planning for the future. CSE has provided us with a tool to re-engage with our front line staff, empowering them to engage in service planning.

Our colleagues in our corporate contact centre have also seen the benefits of the CSE. They too have applied and are (now accredited to the CSE Standard).

Moving forward?

We intend to encourage more Birmingham City Council directorates to apply for the CSE accreditation and to build on our work so far. We will continue to engage with our workforce and provide appropriate methods of engagement with our customers. We will continue to embed the CSE principles into the core management and planning of our services.