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## INTERNAL REPORT OF: RAISE

TO: Executive Team

SUBJECT: Scrutiny Report on the Call Centre and Reception Service

DATE: 16<sup>th</sup> November 2010

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### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 RAISE began work on its first scrutiny exercise in April 2010, after receiving approval from Board in March 2010 to consider this topic.
- 1.2 This report outlines the methodology used and evidence considered during this scrutiny exercise. It identifies strengths of the service and areas for improvement and makes a number of recommendations for the Executive Team to consider.
- 1.3 RAISE noted that the KPI's for the service showed no areas of concern with regard to meeting targets, therefore the scrutiny has focused on the quality of service received.

### **2. Methodology used for scrutiny of the call centre and reception service**

- 2.1 Before beginning the scrutiny exercise RAISE visited the Customer Senate at Salix Homes who perform a scrutiny function. The senate had recently completed a scrutiny exercise on their out of hours service and RAISE discussed the methodologies used and issues the senate had encountered. This provided reassurance for RAISE that the methodology they were adopting was appropriate to the scrutiny topic.
- 2.2 A variety of methods were used to scrutinise the call centre and reception from April – October 2010. They included:
  - Desk top review of policies, key performance indicators, short notice inspection report, complaints and customer service standards
  - Briefing session and information pack from the head of service
  - Observations of reception
  - Shadowing call centre staff
  - Listening in to calls at the call centre

- Commissioning the mystery shoppers to test out reception
  - Findings from members personal experience of accessing reception and the call centre
  - Facilitation of a customer focus group
  - Visit to Guinness Northern Counties to look at their call centre service
  - Informal discussions with staff
  - Attendance at team meeting and staff comments box
- 2.3 RAISE has been assisted by Jayne Boote from Engage Associates who has been appointed as the independent mentor for the group. Jayne has provided advice and guidance on scrutiny activities and facilitated activities where appropriate. This has been to ensure that RAISE has retained its independence during the scrutiny process.
- 2.4 Each member of RAISE assigned themselves to specific scrutiny tasks and produced reports on their findings, which were shared with all RAISE members. These reports have shaped the recommendations from RAISE and are available to staff if they require further information.

### **3. Overall strengths and areas for improvement in the call centre**

#### **3.1 Strengths**

The focus group, observations and listening in exercises showed the call staff to be polite, dedicated and professional. The team is focused and work well together. RAISE noted that there were some similarities between the Guinness Northern Counties call centre and Calico – an enthusiastic senior management team, which is proactive and solution focused.

- 3.2 Overall RAISE felt that the standard of service from call centre staff was high and that largely calls were answered promptly. The exception to this being lunchtimes and Monday mornings. The call centre was highly competent at dealing with complex queries and had a range of information available to them to assist customers. The local knowledge of staff was viewed as of great benefit to the organisation and its customers.

#### **3.3 Areas for improvement**

It was felt that the largest area for improvement was the profile of the call centre within the organisation. The focus group, observations and listening in exercises all noted that having calls returned once they had been passed on from the call centre was an issue. Equally customers noted when they were transferred to another department often the voicemail message they listened to was out of date, therefore they were unsure as to when they would receive a response. This is also reflected in comments we have received from staff in the call centre.

- 3.4 Non-returning of calls leads to the call centre receiving 'avoidable calls', this takes up call centre staff time which could be better spent on dealing with new enquiries rather than repeat calls.
- 3.5 When RAISE visited Guinness Northern Counties they identified the following as areas of good practice
- Large pleasant call centre office, with non call centre staff working within the same office, which promotes greater communication
  - The branding of the centre as a 'Customer Service Centre' which deals only with calls from customers; businesses use a separate number
  - Efficient systems for the data analysis of calls
  - 'Goody cupboard' as a reward for receiving compliments and good performance
- 3.6 RAISE felt that the above gave a strong message to customers and the organisation that the call centre was a highly valued service, and helped to motivate staff to deliver a high standard of service. RAISE felt that the call centre at Calico is not given the same profile and is hidden away from the organisation and customers, and this potentially may result in staff from other departments not communicating effectively with staff in the centre. Staff comments from the call centre reflected this feeling.

## **4. Overall strengths and areas for improvement in reception**

### **4.1 Strengths**

The focus group and observations showed reception staff to be polite, dedicated and professional. The focus group commented that staff 'take the time to listen, even during busy times'. RAISE noted they were often seen to 'go the extra mile' to assist customers with enquires.

### **4.2 Areas for improvement**

Overwhelmingly from all the evidence gathered the reception area is too small and is not fit for purpose. Currently reception handles around 600 visitors a week and at busy times there is no privacy and little room for pushchairs and wheelchairs.

In the current reception area the following issues were identified:

- The doors are difficult to open and have hit people as they move from one door to the next
- The reception area is too small for the number of visitors it gets
- The small space means that everyone in the reception can hear the enquiry that is being made
- A lack of private interview rooms
- The lift in reception can be filled with boxes, which stops customers from using the lifts

- The repairs phone is not obvious, therefore some customers wait at reception when they could use the phone
- There is no disabled parking available
- The seats are too low and difficult to get out of
- Television located at the back of the seating area where no-one can see it
- When large queues form business visitors are not able to notify staff they have arrived

4.3 RAISE felt that the reception area at Calico does not reflect the fact that it is a top 100 company.

## 5. Recommendations

RAISE have considered their findings and propose the following recommendations, which they feel will improve call centre and reception service.

Area	Recommendation
Call Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Call centre rebranded to reflect the 'customer service' it provides, this also includes the job titles of call centre staff</li><li>• Consider a separate number for business calls, so the call centre focuses on dealing with residents</li><li>• Profile of call centre to be raised so it is seen as the hub of the organisation, this may involve moving it within the office to a more prominent position</li><li>• Place non call centre staff near the team to aid communication</li><li>• All staff should ensure there are up to date voicemail messages on their phones when calls are transferred</li><li>• Ensure staff meet current standards and return phonecalls within 24 hours</li><li>• Emphasise the benefit of a department answering calls when transferred</li><li>• Call centre staff to produce information on ' a day in the life of call centre advisor' to be used at induction of all staff, to promote the importance of the call centres work</li><li>• Where possible staff visit the call centre to see the work of advisors</li></ul>
Reception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider feasibility of renting the space available next door to Calico's office</li><li>• Re-modelling of current reception area to<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Enlarge it and provide more space for customers</li><li>○ Provide more areas for private conversations</li><li>○ More and improved seats, which are easier to get in and out of</li><li>○ Enable more space in area to prevent bottle neck being created</li><li>○ Enable a reception facility for business visitors</li></ul></li><li>• Lift in reception to be kept clear at all times</li><li>• New entrance doors for easier customer access</li><li>• Improve parking and awareness of what is available for disabled visitors</li></ul>

## **5.1 Value for Money**

The panel fully appreciate that a value for money evaluation will need to be considered by the company before implementing changes. The recommendations are made subject to this evaluation but in support of the company's desire to offer excellent customer service and rank number one in the top 100 list.