

Scrutiny Panel



September 2013

Customer Service – reception review report

1. Introduction

The review focused on the face to face service delivered by SLH through its Parklands reception. Specifically, the review covered:

- Reception layout;
- Visitor handling;
- Privacy;
- Signage & communication materials;
- Customer experience.

The review was selected through the experience of Scrutiny Panel members visiting reception and listening to feedback from customers and visitors in the reception area as well from performance report feedback at each panel meeting which indicated that visitor numbers to reception was increasing.



Where this symbol appears in the report an example of a finding is given to support the conclusion.

2. Recommendations

As a result of the review, the Scrutiny Panel makes a series of recommendations (Appendix A) which have been considered by SLH and their responses are attached in the action plan.

1. Flooring change to make enhance feeling in reception, making it brighter and less dull;
2. More floor space needed;
3. Ticket machine not routinely used – either use it or remove it. Should only be used for non-repair reports. A button should be available for both reception staff and not just the one terminal;
4. A touch screen self-service terminal be introduced for reporting repairs;

5. Floor worker introduced to direct customers and visitors appropriately and to support customers to use self-service terminals;
6. Introduce an improved standard dress code for staff with name badge clearly visible – the current badge sometimes cannot be seen from behind the desk;
7. All customers to be offered a private room on arrival;
8. Openly accept cash payments by introducing a system which is efficient and safe for both staff and customers which is:
 - Safe and secure;
 - In a private area within reception;
 - Flexible to take both cash and debit card payments;
 - Flexible to provide change and a receipt which includes current rent balance.
9. It was difficult to see the leaflets, it would be better if these were moved nearer to the door underneath the plasma screen so that customers can easily access them;
10. Clear signs for the translation service to be installed;
11. Clear arrangements for out of hour's emergency arrangements to be displayed.

3. Methodology

The review was carried out in six parts:

- Reception observation;
- Visits to other registered providers;
- Visits to other establishments such as banks, estate agents;
- Cash handling review;
- Commission mystery shoppers;
- Interview staff.

This report will cover the findings and recommendation for each element of the review.

4. Detail

4.1 Reception observation

The panel carried out observations of the Customer Service Team to identify how visitor handling was carried out, if customers received privacy during their visit and what the whole customer experience was.

As well as the designated observations, panel members also used the weekly visits to the office to observe how the reception was working.

The first observation from the panel is that there is no direct shop front for the reception and that it is quite a dark area. The panel

recommends that extra floor space is considered to accommodate a cash facility as well as a touch screen type of service to encourage more self service. The floor covering should be upgraded to a brighter colour / material. Extra space should also be designated for office visitors so they are not waiting by reception where they could overhear the conversations of customers discussing issues with staff.

The panel found the reception to be an extremely busy area with a mix of customers and visitors – both with different needs from the reception area but who are both pushed down the same route of dealing with one of the two members of staff on reception.

In terms of visitor experience, they could be waiting quite some time to simply notify a staff member that they have arrived. Visitors present difficulty for staff on reception who may appear rude if they leave a customer to let them in and notify a member of staff that their visitor has arrived. This can leave visitors feeling frustrated and adding to the picture of the reception looking busy.

In terms of customer experience, this differs depending on the officer who deals with the customer. Although the panel acknowledge that SLH officers extensive training to staff which is supported by a computer system giving advice on how to deal with different types of situations, officers need to be reminded to use this at all times.

The ticket machine brought into ease issues with 'whose next in line' is not used effectively leading to confusion from customers who are using it. Observations show that some customers come in and sit down without taking a ticket causing further issues when they believe they are next in line.

Observations highlighted that some sensitive issues are discussed with customers in the open reception area. The panel feel a private room should be offered for all customers particularly due to the increase in the number of lengthy enquiries received. Whilst the panel understand that SLH has started to implement this since the observations and that some customers do not accept the offer of a private room, we feel it should always be offered.

Whilst a dress code of black and white is in place, the panel recommend an improvement to this standard which is adhered to at all times as the current dress code is not always followed. The panel recommends a charcoal grey suit with a white shirt / blouse with a lapel name badge making it easier for customers to identify staff member names.

4.2 Visits to other registered providers

The panel visited two offices of other local providers: LHT Halton and LMH's head office at the observatory. SLH's average daily footfall for April and May 2013 was 68 – in comparison LHT average 80 per week at their Halton office. This is a significant difference showing the volume that SLH is dealing with.

The panel found that both receptions were clear shop fronts which SLH lack being within the Parklands building. Both receptions were light and airy with complementary decoration. The panel believe this is stark contrast to SLH's which is dull through lack of natural light and through the decoration and floor covering.

The panel feel that LHT's model of a reception officer to meet and greet customers and visitors directing them to the most appropriate person / self-service port is a more efficient service than that currently delivered by SLH.

The self service options offered by both LHT and LMH are more interactive and extensive than SLH's offer. The panel feel that SLH's service is far more intensive and less private as in-depth enquiries are dealt with at reception rather than through the private rooms available which are not offered as standard. This is because the officers on reception are static and have to deal with all customers and visitors.

The panel recommend an interactive touch screen repair facility is introduced which is simple and easy to use, showing the parts of the home where the repair is so the customer can visually see the report of their repair.

4.3 Visits to banks

Panel members visited Nat West, Barclays Bank, Halifax and TSB all of who operate a floor worker service who direct customers to the relevant service whether it be to a cash kiosk, self-service terminals or to an appointment with a member of staff.

The panel feel that this service is more personalised and efficient with the floor worker having access to a handheld tablet which provides fingertip information to respond to the visitor whether be by confirming an appointment and letting the officer know the visitor has arrived or by checking information held on systems.

The floor worker also supports customers to use the self-service terminals to speed up transactions particularly for cash payments.

4.4 Cash handling

Between June 2012 and 2013, SLH collected £202,382.11 at reception an average of £3800 per week.

This represents a huge source of income for SLH which the panel believe cannot be turned away but which is being handled in an inefficient way presenting a range of safety concerns.

The current SLH process requires payment to be taken two staff to witness the transaction, a further member of staff to open the safe followed by two members of Finance collecting payment from the safe. Not only is this inefficient the panel feels that it is unsafe both for staff and customers.

Another issue is that because SLH is not officially set up to accept cash, change cannot be given therefore if someone has three £20 notes to pay £50, £10 change cannot be given therefore a risk of the customer falling into arrears by that £10 is presented should the customer not wish to forfeit the change.

Scrutiny Panel believe that more customers will want to pay by cash following the introduction of universal credit therefore SLH need to act to provide a solution which is more efficient, effective and secure.

4.5 Mystery Shoppers

The mystery shopping report is shown as appendix B. Positive points from the shop included:

- The play area for children was great for keeping them entertained while waiting;
- There was lots of information on the plasma screen that was very relevant;
- Staff were smart;
- Some of the scenarios were handled well.

Learning points:

- All staff wore name badges, however they are not clear as they hang beneath the desk. It would be helpful to know who the customer is talking to. The Customer Service Advisor could introduce themselves or have a name plate on the desk;
- It was difficult to see the leaflets, it would be better if these were moved nearer to the door underneath the plasma screen so that customers can easily access them;
- Clear signs for the translation service to be installed;
- Clear arrangements for out of hours emergency arrangements to be displayed;

- Clarity over the ticket machine and waiting procedure. Staff should all use the same procedure for waiting as it is quite confusing for the customer;

4.6 Staff interview

The panel met Lianne at the start of the review to discuss service capacity and issues currently faced. The panel found Lianne extremely enthusiastic about her service and the review seeing it as an opportunity to challenge and improve what the current offer is.

Lianne accompanied the visit to LHT to support the panel with questions posed to staff there.

Scrutiny Panel feel that there are a number of areas for improvement but that there are some positive aspects that they found. Particular mention should go to three members of the Customer Service Team: Kevin, Lynne and Sue who go the extra mile for customers and deliver a service which should be replicated by the whole team. Positivity is also taken from the recognition of the need to change by SLH.

5. Conclusions

Whilst the Scrutiny Panel found elements of positive practice in the service, it is clear that there a number of areas of improvement which we feel could enhance performance.

SLH clearly operate a busy reception area but there are a number of areas for improvement which we feel could both enhance the customer experience whilst also delivering efficiency in contact handling times.

The Scrutiny Panel is also concerned at the security around current cash handling processes and feel SLH need to address this urgently.

These recommendations are to be reported to Senior Management Team in the first instance. Scrutiny Panel keenly await feedback on results.

Report compiled by:

SLH Scrutiny Panel.