

ANGUS COUNCIL

CONTRACT SERVICES COMMITTEE - 15 AUGUST 2000

SERVQUAL

REPORT BY CONTRACT SERVICES MANAGER

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the outcome of the follow up customer survey using the Servqual Model, carried out within Contract Services Leisure Management section and to seek approval to continue the process in future years.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to note the results of the customer survey carried out in January/February 1999 and January/February 2000 and approve the Contract Services Manager's recommendation to accept the offer by the University of Stirling Faculty of Management to continue the Servqual Model in conjunction with Contract Services for future years.

2. BACKGROUND

The Servqual Model is a useful tool in that the process measures customer expectations for service delivery against customer perceptions of services actually being delivered. The process results in the production of a gap analysis which will highlight possible areas for improvement within service delivery in line with the Council's Best Value submission and allows continued monitoring of the effect of any measures put in place to bring about these improvements. The results also assist in the preparation of the department's Service Plan and budget for future years by prioritising requirements in areas highlighted for improvement by users of the service and assists in providing benchmarking information via the APSE Performance Networks for Leisure Management.

The Best Value Customer Care/Valuing Staff Group meeting held on the 11 March 1998 discussed the Servqual Model after a presentation given by Mik Wisniewski of the Accounts Commission. Resulting from this meeting and presentation, the Group expressed interest in piloting the model. After much deliberation the Group suggested that the model be piloted in Housing, Planning and Contract Services Leisure Management.

Report 566/98 approved the recommendation that Contract Services pilot the Servqual Model in conjunction with the Accounts Commission. Report 1142/99 informed members of the results of the pilot survey carried out in January / February 1999.

3. CURRENT POSITION

As approved by the Committee a follow-up survey, based on the same questionnaire as last year, was carried out in January / February 2000, with analysis being conducted by Mik Wisniewski of the Accounts Commission. Approximately 1000 questionnaires were prepared and distributed by Contract Services, with the same number going to each of nine different Leisure Centres. 427 useable questionnaires were returned for analysis, compared to 509 last year. Overall, this is a particularly high response rate for this type of survey although considerable variability occurred in the response rate between the nine Centres.

Some of the responses from the Servqual questionnaires were also used as part of the APSE Leisure Management Performance Networks Return.

Overall Findings

The questionnaire included around 30 questions designed to capture respondents' views on expectations of service, perceptions of the services provided by Contract Services Leisure Management and thus any gap between the two. Respondents were asked to score each question on a scale from 1 to 7 where 1 represented low opinions of service and 7 high opinions.

A response rate of over 50% was achieved. Compared with surveys in other organisations, this is an encouragingly high response rate.

Expectation scores by specific Centre were very consistent showing little variation. This implies that customer expectations are effectively the same no matter which Centre they use

The findings of the survey and significant differences with last year's results are summarised below :

- customers viewed the tangible aspects of the service as most important to them (facilities, equipment, decoration and appearance)
- almost as important was our ability to provide a reliable service to customers
- the surveys have identified specific areas for improvement that, as far as customers are concerned, will have most impact on the quality of service provision. These are:
 - having up-to-date changing and showering facilities
 - having up-to-date facilities and equipment
 - having up-to-date heating, lighting and ventilation
 - having a wide range of equipment
- overall in 2000, Contract Services continued to provide quality of service to customers compared with 1999. There were, however, a few areas where customers felt our performance had slipped. These are:
 - having up-to-date facilities and equipment
 - the appearance and decoration of our facilities
 - providing a high standard of cleanliness
 - ensuring safety as a high priority

It is self-evident that the connection between the first two areas, where customers felt our performance had slipped, is directly related to the difficult financial situation which faces the Council.

The second two problem areas highlighted relate to two specific and separate facilities.

Prior to the results of the Servqual survey being known, the cleanliness problem had already been highlighted and dealt with by the department's *Quest* self audit process. Similarly the safety issue related to problems some users had experienced at a specific facility, in having minor injuries dealt with quickly and efficiently. This matter has already been addressed by the introduction of new procedures and further staff training.

These issues highlight the worth of the Servqual and *Quest* self audit processes in ensuring the continuing provision of high quality services that are important and relevant to the users of the service.

As stated above the Servqual questionnaire responses were also used to compile the APSE Performance Networks information. However the questionnaire did not cover all areas required for the APSE return. In addition, the department faced resistance from customers to filling in the questionnaire. Feedback from the customers surveyed indicated that the current Servqual questionnaire is too long and complicated.

Having completed the pilot survey the Audit Commission will no longer assist in the analysis development or amendment of future surveys.

The University of Stirling, Faculty of Management has however offered the services of Mik Wisniewski (Senior Research Fellow), who carried out the initial pilot survey for the Accounts Commission, to assist with the redesign of the survey form to take account of the APSE requirements and the comments made by our customers, then analyse the returns and report on same. The University would charge a one-off fee of £600 per year for this work.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The survey has shown that, overall, our customers are happy with the service being provided. However, it is clear that the difficult financial situation that has faced the Council over the last few years is having an impact on service provision. Although the Council has recognised this and allocated additional funds for the replacement of equipment corporate wide, further work requires to be undertaken if the Council is to retain its customer base. This issue is now also being brought to a head with the opening of three private leisure facilities in the area, thus giving our customers a choice in service delivery.

The outcome of the surveys over the last two years has proved very useful in assessing our performance in service provision from our customers perspective. The information gained helps ensure continuous improvement is being achieved via various initiatives like the *Quest* quality scheme.

The continuation of the survey for future years will allow the Contract Services Manager to monitor our customers' perceptions of the service being delivered and the effect of initiatives such as *Quest* has on service delivery.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report as all costs can be contained within current budgets.

6. CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Director of Law and Administration and Director of Personnel have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

M P Graham
Contract Services Manager
12 July 2000

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing this report.