



***Hutt City Council Customer
Service Centre Survey
Executive Report
December 2003
Presented By***



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Business Needs Assessment

Background

- Excellence in customer service has been an area of focus for Hutt City Council over a number of years. The Council set up the Customer Services Group to develop a customer service strategy that aims to provide Hutt City residents with excellent service, and to make improvements to continuously enhance the organisation's services to its customers.
- This strategy is outlined in the Council's 2002/2003 Annual Plan, as follows:

Customer Strategy

- treat customers as they would like to be treated
- provide excellent value for money and extraordinary services
- involve and inform customers
- take pride in the services we deliver

Background

- To implement this strategy, Hutt City Council is aiming to encourage a culture where by working as a team, staff gain great satisfaction from looking after customers and putting them first. It has also made the following commitments to its customers:

Commitments to our customers

We will:

- do it right first time, on time, every time
 - make realistic promises and keep them
 - measure ourselves against the best
 - go the extra mile
 - be knowledgeable, accurate and informative
 - be interested, fair, professional and friendly
 - be easy to contact
 - take ownership
- In order to ensure that these commitments to its customers are met, Hutt City Council has implemented a process for measuring its performance against key service dimensions, via independent market research. This is one of a number of initiatives undertaken by the Council to measure and improve the quality of the services it provides.

Business Needs Assessment

Background

- In September 1999, Hutt City Council conducted research to benchmark customer satisfaction amongst visitors to its Customer Service Centre. This comprises four desks, each dealing with different types of customer enquiries (front reception, approvals, engineering records and payments) and is one of the main points of contacts with customers.
- This report details the findings of the fourth follow-up measure, conducted annually by ACNielsen.

Purpose of This Research

The purpose of this research is to:

- Up-date the findings of previous measures conducted by ACNielsen.
- Investigate how service may be improved, to further reduce instances of perceptions of poor service, or instances of service which are not rated in a positive way.

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Research Objectives

- How well is Hutt City Council performing in terms of its overall standard of customer service?
- How well is Hutt City Council performing on specific aspects of customer service related to the five service dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles; and to what extent have customer perceptions of Hutt City Council's standard of customer service changed over the course of the surveys?
- What are the issues/problems in these areas and what could the Council do better?
- Do perceptions of service differ according to the type of enquiry or contact with Hutt City Council staff?
- Which aspects of customer service are most important in driving overall customer satisfaction?
- What are the priorities for Hutt City Council to help improve the standard of customer service it delivers?

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Research Design

- Compared with earlier measures, sample size has been reduced, and additional question areas have been added to identify any issues or problems that customers may have, and to recommend areas where improvements could be made, that would lead to higher overall ratings of service received. The purpose of reducing the sample size is to enable more in-depth questioning of customers about any issues or problems they may have, within the total budgetary provision allowed for this research.
- A total of 94 exit interviews were completed at the Hutt City Council Customer Service Centre on the 1st and 3rd of December 2003.
- Interviewers from ACNielsen approached customers as they left one of the four customer service desks within the Customer Service Centre. All interviews were administered by an ACNielsen interviewer, to ensure any issues identified were probed sufficiently to obtain a good understanding of causes and possible remedies.
- Two interviewers were present during each of the 2 days that interviewing took place. One interviewer worked between 8am and 2pm and the other between 11am and 5pm. This ensured that all times of the day as well as the busier lunchtime period were adequately covered.

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How well is Hutt City Council performing in terms of its overall standard of customer service?

- Six out of ten visitors to the Hutt City Council's Customer Service Centre rated the overall standard of customer service as 'very good'. Nine out of ten rated the Council's overall standard of customer service as 'very good' or 'good'. Ratings in December 2003 are similar to ratings in 2002 survey.
- Perceptions of Hutt city Council's overall standard of customer service has improved significantly amongst those visiting the "Front Reception" desk.
- Encouragingly, the Council's more regular customers (those who have visited the Council more than once in the last 12 months) tend to be more positive towards the Council than those who were making their first visit. About six in ten "regular" customers rated the overall standard of service as 'very good', compared with about one third of those who were making their first visit in the last 12 months.

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How well is Hutt City Council performing on specific aspects of service and to what extent have perceptions of service improved since last year's measure?

- Hutt City Council's customers are most likely to agree that the Council:
 - Has staff who act in a professional way (96% agree)
 - Has visually appealing facilities (95% agree)
 - Staff are always courteous with customers (94% agree)
 - Staff are always easy to approach for assistance (84% agree)
- Hutt City Council customers are least likely to agree that:
 - They can feel confident that when instructing Hutt City Council to make any changes to their records the correct changes will be made the first time (82% agree)
 - When Hutt City Council promises to do something by a certain time, it will do it by that time (81% agree)
 - Hutt City Council staff can be relied upon to keep customers informed when necessary (80% agree)
- While perceptions of service on all five service dimensions are predominantly positive, “tangibles” and “assurance” may be considered areas of relative strength, while “reliability” and “empathy” continue to be viewed less positively
- There appear to have been positive movements in ratings of some aspects of service, compared with September 2002. These mainly relate to; empathy, reliability and tangibles.

Which aspects of customer service are most important in driving overall customer satisfaction?

- While a fresh regression analysis was undertaken in December 2003, this did not yield meaningful results, due to the reduced sample size. In identifying priorities for improvement we have assumed that there has been minimal change to customers' views of the relative importance of each aspect of service asked about
- The most important drivers of customer satisfaction are:
 - Having staff who show a sincere interest in solving customers' problems
 - Having staff who are always easy to approach for assistance
 - Performing services right the first time
 - Having staff who are courteous with customers
 - Telling customers when they can expect services to be performed and then delivering in the time promised

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What are the priorities for Hutt City Council to help improve the standard of customer service it delivers?

- By comparing the importance of individual aspects of customer service with how well Hutt City Council performs on those aspects of service, the research has identified two key areas to focus on for improvement (high importance, lower performance). These are:
 - Performs the service right the first time
 - Shows a sincere interest in solving customers problems
- The these findings were reinforced by seeking more a detailed understanding of issues raised by customers, which shows that speed of response, reliability, staff manner and staff knoweldge are possible barriers to achieving higher ratings of customer service overall. Solutions suggested by customers to these perceived issues include:
 - Reducing errors
 - Improving communication with customers (proactively keeping customers informed of progress with issues or problems, ensuring customers are contacted to reschedule appointments if they cannot be met)
 - Improving staff knowledge
 - Employing more staff
 - Ensuring that the things staff have said they would do, are done.

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Conclusions/Recommended Actions

- Results are strongly positive and there have been significant improvements in individual aspects of service for this year's measure. In particular:
 - Improvements to perceptions of overall service amongst those visiting the Front Reception desk
 - Improvements in perceptions of tangibles, reliability and empathy.
- This research has been undertaken at a different time of year to previous measures (December rather than September) and this change may have contributed to these more positive impressions. However, this research confirms that service is generally perceived in a very positive light
- In spite of these improvements, reliability and empathy remain aspects of service about which customers have less positive impressions
- To achieve further gains, the main focus for improvement over the next 12 months lies in:
 - Reducing errors (that is "getting things right the first time")
 - Focussing on demonstrating to customers that service staff both understand customers' problems and issues, and that they proactively communicate the actions being taken to solve problems or resolve issues. Council may also like to consider how to improve staff knowledge, so as to provide reassurance that staff are empowered to resolve issues
 - Ensuring that staff deal with customers in a helpful, cooperative and efficient manner on a occasions.

Introduction/ Analysis Notes



Analysis Notes

- The results presented in this report compare the 2003 survey with those from 2002 and 2001.
- The results of all four surveys are directly comparable, and enable us to see changes in perceptions of service over the last 3 years.

Summary

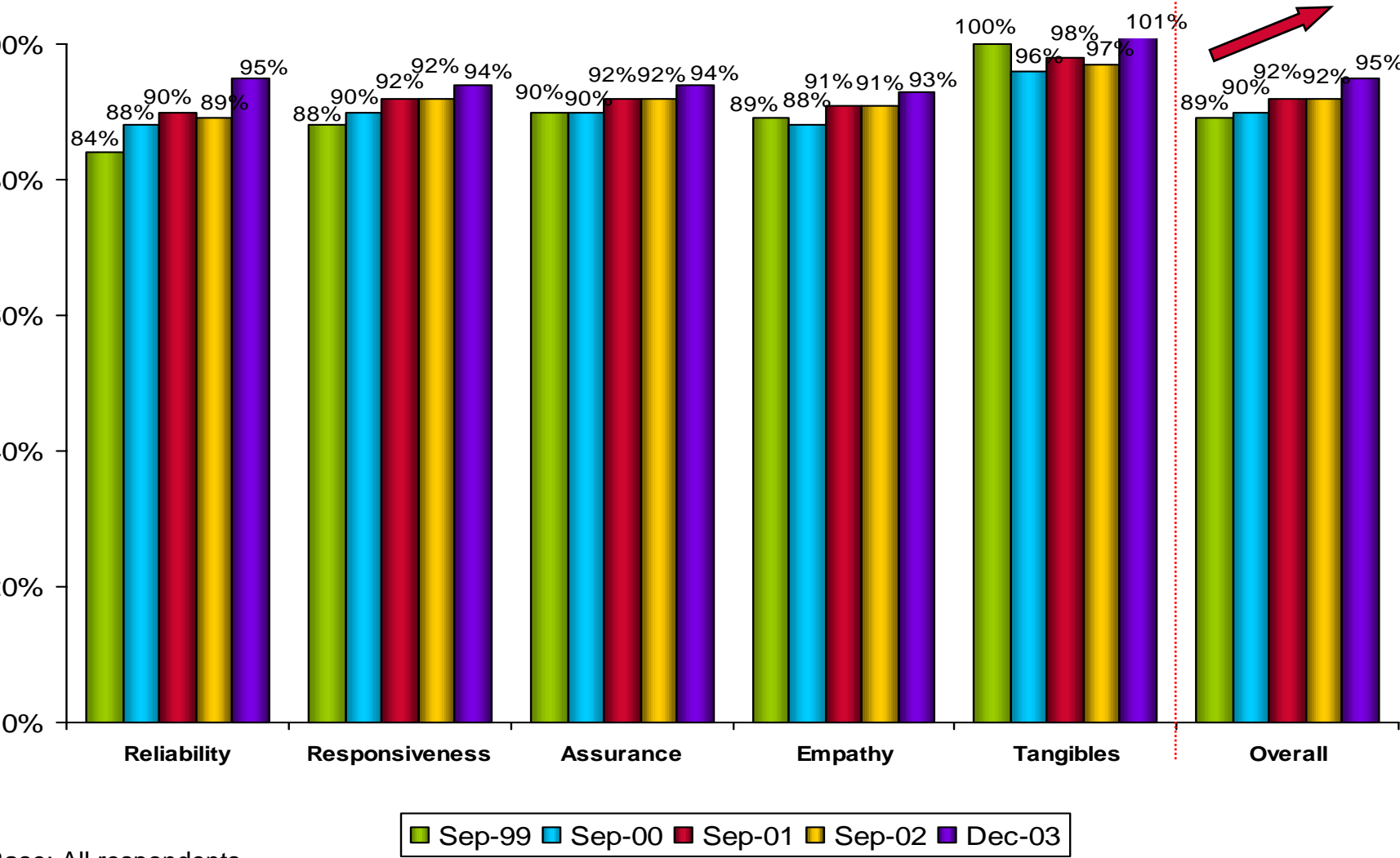


In the 1999 benchmark survey, customers were asked to rate their expectations of service from an 'excellent organisation'.

The following chart compares Hutt City Council's ratings on the five aspects of service, with customers' expectations for these aspects of service from an 'excellent organisation'.

A score of 100% means that perceptions of service provided by Council matches those of an excellent organisation.

Perceptions of Hutt City Council's standard of customer service closely matches what customers would expect from an excellent organisation. Encouragingly, there appears to be a positive trend in overall perceptions of Hutt City Council's standard of customer since 1999.





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