

Executive Insights



Executive Insights

Business Needs Assessment

- Hutt City Council has set up a Customer Services Group to develop a customer service strategy that aims to make improvements to continuously enhance the organisation's services to its customers. This strategy can be summarised as:



Executive Insights

Business Needs Assessment

- To implement this strategy, Hutt City Council is aiming to encourage a culture where staff gain satisfaction from putting customers first. It has also made the following commitments to its customers:



Our Commitments

- easy to contact
- responsive
- take ownership
- keep promises
- go the extra mile
- take follow-up action
- act promptly
- do it right the first time
- keep customers informed
- provide frank, honest feedback
- be knowledgeable and accurate
- do what we say we will do
- complete in the agreed time
- be interested, fair, professional and friendly
- seek to understand customer needs

- In order to ensure that these commitments to its customers are met, Hutt City Council is also implementing a process for measuring its performance against key service dimensions, via independent market research.

Executive Insights

Business Needs Assessment

- 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.
- The research in 1999 was conducted by Ingrid van Aalst & Associates using a “gap analysis” approach to evaluate service quality by comparing service performance (perceptions) with their expectations of service from an organisation such as Hutt City Council.
- Earlier this year, ACNielsen was commissioned to produce a set of guidelines designed to assist Council staff in implementing customer satisfaction surveys across the **entire** organisation in a consistent manner.
- ACNielsen was also requested to repeat the 1999 Customer Service Centre Survey, using the newly adopted methodology, whilst still allowing results to be compared against the benchmark measure where applicable.

Executive Insights

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 since the benchmark measure conducted last year?
- 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?

Executive Insights

Research Design

- A total of 322 exit interviews were completed at the Hutt City Council Customer Service Centre between 18 and 25 September 2000.
- Interviewers from ACNielsen approached customers as they left one of the four customer service desks within the Customer Service Centre. The interviewers introduced themselves, explained the purpose of the survey and how to fill in the questionnaire and then asked respondents to complete the questionnaire themselves and drop it into a box before they left the Customer Service Centre.*
- When a respondent did not have enough time to complete the survey, they were encouraged to take the survey away and return it to ACNielsen in a reply paid envelope provided.
- Two interviewers were present during each of the 6 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.
- Interviewers rotated between the four service desks to ensure interviews were obtained from a spread of respondents visiting each desk.

* During the course of the survey it became apparent that some respondents were not completing the survey in the way that was intended. As a result, when time permitted, interviewers administered the questionnaire themselves, rather than using the self-completion approach

Executive Insights

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

- Nine out of ten visitors to the Hutt City Council's Customer Service Centre rated Hutt City Council's overall standard of customer service as very good or good.
- One in two rated Hutt City Council as very good, whilst only 2% rated Hutt City Council's overall standard of customer service as poor.

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 Hutt City Council has staff who:
 - Act in a professional way (88% agree)
 - Are always courteous with customers (88% agree)
 - Are always easy to approach for assistance (86% 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 (64% agree)
 - Hutt City Council will perform services right the first time (61% agree)
 - When Hutt City Council promises to do something by a certain time, it will do it by that time" (57% agree)

Executive Insights

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?

- In order to better reflect Hutt City Council's stated commitments to its customers, a number of changes were made to existing statements and a number of new statements included in the questionnaire. As such, it is difficult to make direct comparisons between the two measures.
- However, for all statements that are directly comparable, Hutt City Council's performance has improved since the benchmark measure, in particular:
 - Performs the service right the first time (increased from 51% to 61% agree)
 - Tells customers when they can expect services to be performed (increased from 53% to 74% agree)
 - Has staff who are always courteous with customers (increased from 80% to 88% agree).

Executive Insights

Do perceptions of Hutt City Council's standard of customer service differ by the type of inquiry?

- Whilst perceptions of Hutt City Council's overall standard of customer service was positive across all four service desks, visitors to the approvals desk (inquiring about a planning or building consent) were less likely to rate Hutt City Council's standard of customer service as very good or good.

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

- In order to help prioritise the areas for improvement, two methods were used to identify the importance customers place on the five service dimensions and then the individual components of customer service that comprise each service dimension.
- In terms of the five service dimensions, reliability, followed by responsiveness and assurance are the most important service dimensions. Less importance is placed on empathy and tangibles. This order is consistent with last year's survey.
- At the more detailed level, 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

Executive Insights

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). They are:
 - Performs the service right the first time
 - When it promises to do something by a certain time will do it by that time
- The research has also identified three further aspects of customer service for improvement. These are less important to customers and hence lower priorities for improvement:
 - Customers can feel confident that when instructing Hutt City Council to make changes to their records (e.g. change of name, address) the correct changes will be made first time
 - Has staff who can be relied upon to keep customers informed when necessary
 - Has staff who are prepared to go the extra mile for customers.

Executive Insights

Recommended Actions

- The research has identified several priorities for Hutt City Council to focus on over the next 12 months, primarily related to the accuracy and reliability of the services it provides, in particular:
 - Not over-promising in terms of the timeframe in which customers can expect a request for service to be resolved.
 - Ensuring customers are kept informed when a request cannot be resolved quickly.
 - Striving for greater accuracy with maintaining customers' records and other services provided by the Council.
- Consideration should also be given to exploring the customer service needs of customers visiting the approvals desk in more detail, to address the slightly less positive perceptions of Hutt City Council's customer service amongst these customers.

Recommendation for future surveys

- During interviewing, it became apparent that some respondents were not completing the survey according to instructions. This primarily related to the question where respondents were asked to **rank** the five service dimensions in order of importance.
- Once we became aware of this, we tried to minimise this happening by getting the the interviewers to administer the survey themselves during less busy periods.
- By adopting this approach we were able to reduce the incidence of incorrectly completed surveys compared with last year's survey and we recommend that future surveys are administered by interviewers rather than via self-completion, to help improve the reliability and accuracy of information collected.