

ARE YOU BEING SERVED?

Surrey County Council Shared Service Centre Wins Three Shared Service Awards



The word ‘council’ is not often synonymous with customer service.

Whether fairly or unfairly, the public sector has a bit of a poor reputation when it comes to putting the needs of the customer first.

Surrey County Council, like many others, is faced with decreasing budgets, increased requirements to make efficiencies and growing customer expectations.

In 2005, it established its own Shared Service Centre to cope with this complex and demanding environment.

Here was an opportunity to think differently: to create a public sector service that behaved with integrity and fostered a culture of continuous improvement, affecting the way people not only worked, but how they felt about their work.

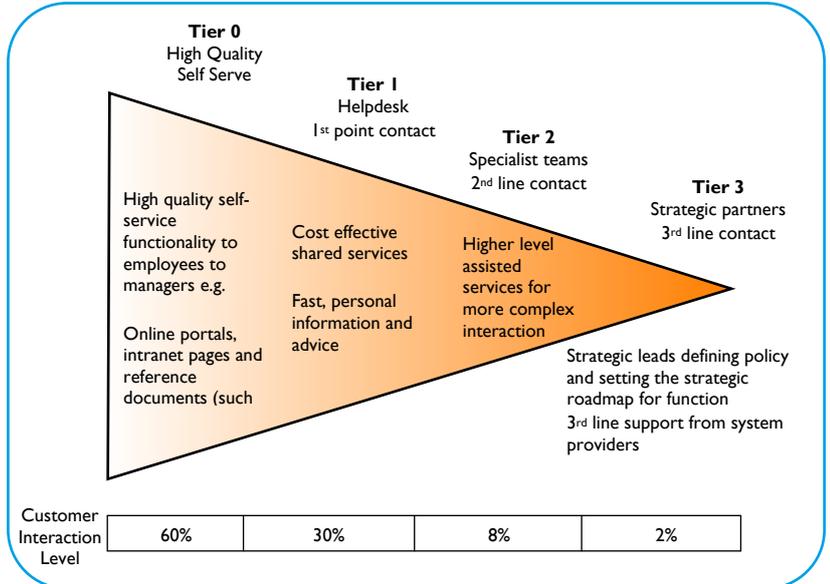
Throughout the process of establishing and developing the Shared Service Centre, the driver behind this change was a focus on customer service.

How we did it: The customer experience approach...

The overall aim was to provide a high quality service whilst maximising value for money. The senior management team realised that customer focus was critical.

To create this focus, a customer experience and strategy team was brought in to address the issue of low customer satisfaction, and to build capability, capacity and reputation.

Their activities focused on the following:



- Developing an in-depth understanding of our customers by consulting them and using the feedback we received to redesign our services;
- Creating a customer-centric culture, in which teams were taught to listen to their customers and put them at the heart of everything that they did;
- Designing and implementing effective processes to enable us to measure our performance and strive for excellence.

The Ulrich model was adapted to help us understand customer enquiries and identify the main areas that required improvement. This channelled initial enquiries to our web pages and self-service function, reducing the demands on our helpdesk. These web pages cover policy and self-serve forms as well as outlining all our processes.

The helpdesk is the first point of contact and receives over 115,000 calls a year with a first point fix rate of 87%, minimising the number of calls being passed on to the second line teams.

The contact process for our customers is now so streamlined that a large proportion of queries are resolved at tiers 0 and 1 as shown in the diagram at the top of this page.

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In addition to this, our customer focus helped us win three awards in 2014 for customer service achievements... including *Best Shared Service Centre in Europe*...

Our achievements

Since the Shared Service Centre was established, we have seen a decrease in costs, and an increase in activities and satisfaction.

A customer-focused approach has seen multiple benefits

You can see in the graph on the right that, since 2005, we have driven down costs, whilst increasing activities and customer satisfaction.

Putting the customer at the heart of our service delivery has meant that we were able to achieve the following results since 2005:

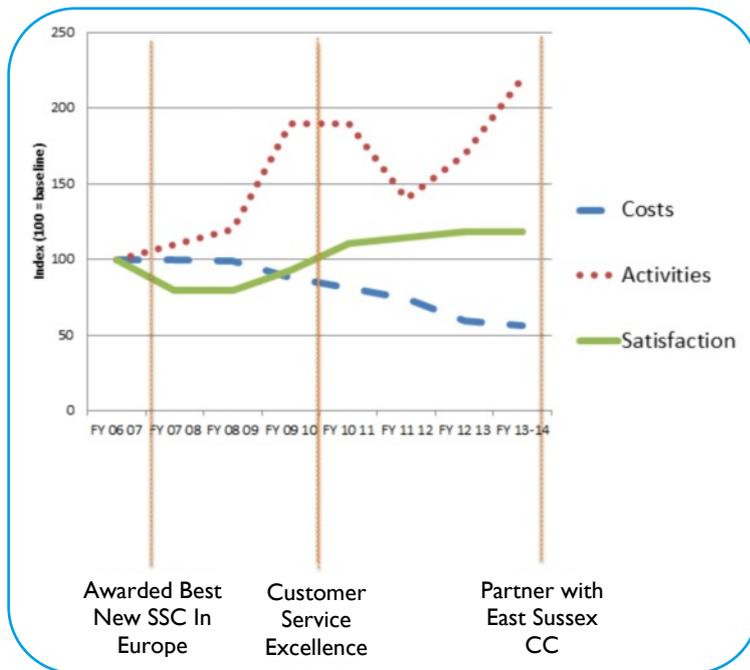
- 50% decreased cost to serve
- increased volume (up to 200%)
- 30% customer satisfaction increase

In addition to this, our customer focus has helped us win three awards this year for customer service achievements:

- Best Shared Service Centre in Europe 2014 – Shared Service Outsourcing Network
- Customer Service Excellence – with a 100% pass rate and two areas of merit
- Giving to the Community category winner – Peer awards

Support from the SSA programme...

The knowledge we gained from sending staff on the Shared Service Practitioner’s programme and a number through the Postgraduate Certificate in Shared Services at Canterbury Christ Church University has contributed to our success.



The key message is that putting customers first has helped build a successful shared service centre and we are proud of what it has achieved to date.

The excitement doesn’t stop there. In April 2013 we developed a partnership with East Sussex County Council to merge transactional and corporate support services to share resources, best practices and further strive for those savings.

The success of this programme has given us the confidence to extend this partnership even further and we are currently working on combining the business service functions across both organisations.

Customer service is no longer simply a ‘nice thing to do’, it is fundamental to running a successful, sustainable service. This trend is set to continue and certainly will never reverse.