



SWCCF Contact Centre of the Year (In house) nomination

Introduction

Southwest One is a unique joint venture partnership between Somerset County Council (SCC), Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC), Avon and Somerset Police and IBM and has been operational for the last 8 years. Breaking the mould from the traditional outsourced models; Southwest One is a strategic partnership where services are delivered by staff employed by all partners. As part of a multichannel Contact Centre; Customer Contact delivers front line services for users of Somerset County Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council through 2 Contact Centres based in Taunton, a face to face office in Taunton and one in Wellington.

With a customer base of almost 550,000 and almost 1,000 different services provided; from waste collection and council tax to adult and children social care referrals there is a significant degree of diversity and breadth in service provision

Having won Best Public Sector Contact Centre in 2012, the years since have been spent building on our existing good practice and investing where improvements were needed; including further enhancements to our best in class technology infrastructure and creating 5 key strategic objectives to drive the service forward. Additionally, these enhancements have been underpinned by a cost-neutral service restructure in 2013 which has created an improved career and development path for our people and has directly contributed to significantly improved attrition and staff satisfaction.

AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE

Structure

High attrition and sickness figures combined with the implementation of new technology and a target to reduce overall headcount resulted in a number of difficult years where it was challenging to stabilise the workforce and performance. Disproportionate amounts of time and money were being spent managing attendance and recruitment initiatives and not on the support and development of our teams.

These challenges were addressed head on in 2013 with the implementation of a service restructure designed to help us become more resilient and more efficient, to establish clearer, more defined roles and responsibilities and to create more motivated, empowered teams.

The structure now rewards those who have a greater knowledge and provides progression opportunities for those ambitious and capable people who want to move on in their career. It also ensures that Team Managers are now more accountable for their team's performance and encourages a little competitiveness amongst teams.

Advantageously it also enables us to recruit to 'Specialist' positions internally freeing up significant training time as core technical and soft skills have already been learnt; reducing training time to these posts by almost half.

The results of this restructure have had a hugely positive affect on the team, our performance and our culture. (*See Appendices 1&2 - Structure Charts old and new*)

Attrition and Sickness

With fairly high attrition and sickness rates, the loss of knowledge and experience to the teams when a colleague left or became absent was significant. Training new starters to reach the same level took a significant amount of time, during which morale was detrimentally affected. The cycle was quite hard to break.

Since 2013 we have seen a steady decline in our attrition rates from our peak pre restructure rate of 34% to a realistic and healthy 11% in 2015. Our sickness rates have decreased steadily too from a peak of 11% (inclusive of long term sickness) to a more manageable 3% in the final quarter of 2015. (*See Appendix 3*).

As you would expect from a drop in Attrition and Sickness, our staff satisfaction results have also increased considerably. Our staff satisfaction net promoter score has increased by 37 in the last year alone.

Recruitment

Our recruitment strategy has developed to match our changing needs and we now look to recruit based on attitude and behaviours rather than experience; with assessment being conversational as well as competency based. The benefit of a steadier work force has helped us put this strategy into practice and has had a direct impact on our on-going attrition rates.

Coaching and development

A comprehensive training matrix accompanies every role and defines what training is required, by whom, using what format and when for an individual to be effective in their role. This training programme supports our full 3 day induction and on-going quality monitoring framework to ensure we are consistent in our approach. This format is also transparent, making it clear what criteria needs to be met to meet the requirements of the next role up to enable pro-activity for those that wish to progress.

Our new Experts (please see Appendix 2) now take the lead to ensure best practice is rolled out across the teams. To maximise efficiency and productivity we now also operate a floor walking initiative providing 'real time' coaching. This enables

leaders to understand if there are any frequently asked questions that may need retraining or whether there may be a need for more one to one support. It also prevents pulling a number of Advisers off the phone to help answer each other's queries.

Our World at Work

To support the restructure our employee engagement group 'Our World at Work' continues to grow in strength and influence. The group, made up of representatives from across the service leads on Staff Satisfaction and engagement and is empowered to make decisions that will have a positive effect on morale or performance. Initiatives driven by OWAW include team and individual performance boards on each site, a Charity Day to support colleagues that have faced challenges in previous years and also an internal Employee of the Month Award.

People Excellence Model

Our People Excellence Model which consists of a dedicated team of trained coaches / mentors and trainers fully supports our new structure and in particular those individuals that wish to progress. Many of our newly appointed 'Experts' are now following a very focused and highly successful 'Aspiring Leaders' programme designed to fully equip individuals to take the next step into a Leadership role. This programme assigns performing leaders from across the organisation to act as mentors and help guide individuals through the process. It will also help ensure that our succession planning goals are more adequately met – a previous area of weakness.

In addition a host of additional business as usual and bespoke training solutions are offered to cover various solutions from Change Management to Influencing skills depending on the needs of the business.

One to one independent coaching sessions are also offered to help support individuals who wish to develop within their role and the organisation.

Work Force Management (WFM)

Our new WFM tool, IEX, is now fully functional having been implemented early in 2015 and enables advisers to take more ownership of their shifts, lunches and leave. In many cases shift and lunch swaps can take place, and leave can be booked without further authorisation.

Benefits

With a salary of between £16500 and £25600 we are highly competitive in the industry and in the local area. We also offer parking, childcare vouchers, pension, discounted gym membership and a minimum of 26 days annual leave per year (excluding bank holidays). A newly launched 'Staff shop' also entitles staff to

discounts from many shops and online retailers as well as the opportunity to buy extra annual leave amongst many other benefits.

In addition we run an employee of the month award; nominations from across the service are welcomed for those individuals that have excelled in the previous month. The winner is recognised across the service and rewarded with high street vouchers from the Head of Service. Furthermore; an annual awards system celebrates innovation and excellence across the Organisation, nominations from within the service are acknowledged and presented at Director level.

Health and Wellbeing

The health and welfare of our teams is paramount. In recent years we have invested heavily in ensuring both the physical and mental wellbeing of our staff. All of our Managers have attended mental health awareness sessions over the last year and we have mental health champions throughout the organisation. We promote healthy lifestyles in our quarterly Health and Wellbeing newsletter. This is supported through varying activities including Pedometer Challenges, Free Health Checks, Back Clinics and Flu Jabs.

SUPPORTING THE OVERALL BUSINESS

With our focus on quality and customer experience, we demonstrate our support of the overall business in a number of ways. Clearly the overall effectiveness of the Contact Centre has a direct impact on the public's perception of both Authorities and as such it is imperative that we get it right first time.

Key strategic objectives

Our 5 key strategic objectives drive everything we do.

- Work closely with all partners
- Meet Performance Indicators
- Create and maintain high performing teams
- Drive down non value added contacts
- Develop efficient and effective services

Performance

We have a number of longstanding Performance Indicators that set about our expectations for service delivery. These indicators review both our qualitative and quantitative performance and we have a strong history of these having been met consistently over the last 8 years. (*see Appendix 3*)

Our Grade of Service remains consistently above 80% and our Abandon Rate less than 3%. Our Customer Satisfaction rates are at their highest ever level with a quarter 4 2015 figure of 94% of customers rating our service as Good or Very Good.

Since integrating our email transactions through the Contact Centre solution towards the end of 2015 we are also now proud to acknowledge that our average response time for emails is just 36 minutes.

Continuous Improvement

Southwest One's Customer Contact strives to maintain a continuous improvement environment. In doing so, we ensure that our robust management system is underpinned by an innate desire to pursue perfection. To this end, it is vitally important to us that everybody in the service, in all roles feels empowered to make changes where improvements can be made, where they are unable to and that a mechanism exists for them to escalate. Our innovation programme ensures that Lean Six Sigma trained practitioners are empowered to commission improvement projects utilising the skills and expertise of our subject matter experts in the process.

The service is accredited to the CCA global standard and can evidence natural compliance at all levels of the organisation. Feedback is extremely valuable; the service receives a significant amount of positive feedback from external and internal customers. Additionally, we believe that failure presents opportunities to further improve the service we provide. Where failure occurs, root cause analysis is undertaken and corrective and preventative actions are logged on a central feedback document so that it is accessible to everybody within the service. Demonstrating our high performance in customer satisfaction, the service receives on average fewer than five complaints a year from an average of around four hundred thousand contacts.

Operating Level Agreements

We hold Operating Level Agreements with all back office areas to help ensure that we are working together to provide the best level of service to our customers. Working in partnership, we develop processes and services to reduce non value added contacts and provide a consistent and seamless service.

SUMMARY

Having identified a number of development areas in 2013 we took time to listen to our staff and we created a service development programme based on 5 key strategic objectives.

Given budget limitations, this enhanced the necessity for creativity and innovation.

Following the restructure of the service in 2013:

- Attrition has fallen from a high of 34% to a stable and healthy 11%
- Sickness has reduced from a high of 11% to a manageable 3% (inclusive of long-term sickness)
- Our Staff Satisfaction Net Promoter Score has risen by 37 in the last year alone

- Customer Satisfaction has increased to an all-time high of 94% of customers rating our service as good or very good
- Grade of service remains consistent at over 80% of calls answered within 20 seconds
- Abandon rates have fallen to consistently below 3%
- Complaint rate is less than 0.01%
- Increase in internal Quality Monitoring results from 82% in 2013 to 86% 2015/16
- Reduction in outbound calls of 20% demonstrating the efficiency gained from having a stable, knowledgeable work force.
- Reduction in recruitment costs of more than 10%

We're now proud of Southwest One Customer Contact. We have a great team of hard working, supportive and dedicated people who really care about our customers and the service they provide. We work together, collaboratively to achieve mutual goals and are confident that this will only improve in the future.