

Mystery shopping of the Suffolk Childcare Information Service (CIS)

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Objective

To enable Suffolk County Council (SCC) to evaluate and recommend developments to the service and Customer Service Direct to further improve and develop the operational aspects of the Suffolk Childcare Information Service.

Before the service transferred two independent surveys questioned 800 customers and they rated overall customer satisfaction at **93%**. A much smaller customer consultation group rated the service against different phases of a customer service journey.

Methodology

For a six-week period from the end of February 2007 to the beginning of April 2007, SCC commissioned Strategem Market Checker to carry out a mystery shopping exercise. They used 12 real-life scenarios, (provided by SCC – see annexe A), to evaluate if customers needs are being met effectively accessing five phases of a typical customer service journey (see figure 1 highlighted in yellow).

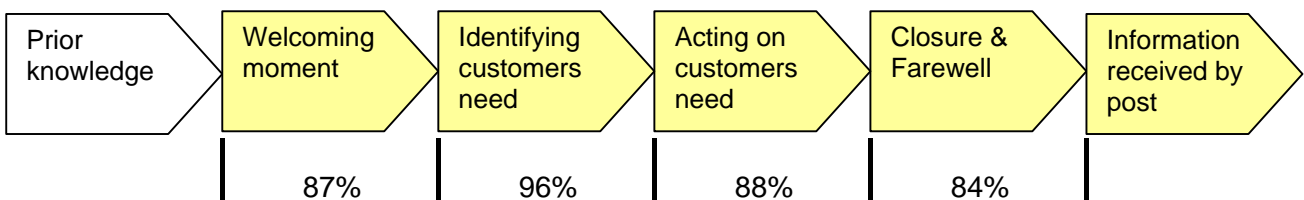


Figure 1. Customer Service Journey and overall customer satisfaction as rated by customers (Customer Consultation 2004 © Spectaris Ltd)

Each call to the service was scored against 14 criteria. Criteria 1-12 related to the call itself. Criteria 13 and 14 related to the information received by post as a result of the call. The maximum overall score available for each call was 130. Each criterion could score up to a maximum of either 5 or 10 points, for example:

Confirm Understanding (of customers needs)

Full = 10 Part = 5 None = 0

All calls made to the Suffolk Childcare Information Service by mystery shoppers were voice recorded. Only 2 scorers assessed each recorded call against the 14 criteria to make sure the scoring was consistent.

The results

Number of scenarios: 12

Total number of calls: 100

Welcoming moment 100%		Identifying customers need 90%		Acting on customers need 91%				Closure & Farewell 67%				Follow up 99%		TOTAL	TOTAL as % of 130
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		
Name given? (full or part)	How can I help	Ask questions to find out about caller's needs	Confirm understanding	Appropriate Services / Products Recommended	Clearly explained products	Mention Other Services e.g. types of childcare, early ed, courses etc.	Take contact details	Agree / confirm follow-up action	Thank them for calling and say Goodbye	Use caller's name during call	Overall customer experience rating	SUB-TOTAL	Sub-Total as % of 110	Information received by post promptly	Information received answers callers need
Yes = 5 No = 0	Yes = 5 No = 0	Good = 10 Average = 5 Poor = 0	Full = 10 Part = 5 None = 0	Yes = 10 No = 0	Good = 10 Average = 5 Poor = 0	Yes = 10 No = 0	Yes = 10 No = 0	Good = 10 Average = 5 Poor = 0	Both = 10 Either = 5 None = 0	Yes = 10 No = 0	Good = 10 Average = 5 Poor = 0			1-3 days = 10 4-6 days = 5 7days+ = 0	Fully = 10 Partially = 5 No = 0

Scenario 1 Average	5.0	5.0	8.9	9.4	10.0	7.8	10.0	10.0	5.6	10.0	1.1	8.3	91.1	82.8%	10.0	10.0	111.1	85.5%
Scenario 2 Average	5.0	5.0	8.3	9.4	10.0	9.4	10.0	10.0	6.7	10.0	1.1	8.9	93.9	85.4%	10.0	10.0	113.9	87.6%
Scenario 3 Average	5.0	5.0	9.4	9.4	10.0	9.4	10.0	10.0	5.0	10.0	3.8	9.4	96.3	87.5%	10.0	10.0	116.3	89.4%
Scenario 4 Average	5.0	5.0	8.9	8.9	10.0	9.4	8.9	10.0	5.6	10.0	6.7	8.9	97.2	88.4%	9.4	10.0	116.7	89.7%
Scenario 5 Average	5.0	5.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	5.0	10.0	3.8	10.0	98.8	89.8%	10.0	10.0	118.8	91.3%
Scenario 6 Average	5.0	5.0	8.8	9.4	10.0	8.1	7.5	8.8	5.0	10.0	2.5	8.8	88.8	80.7%	10.0	10.0	108.8	83.7%
Scenario 7 Average	5.0	5.0	7.5	8.8	8.8	9.4	6.3	8.8	3.8	10.0	1.3	7.5	81.9	74.4%	10.0	10.0	101.9	78.4%
Scenario 8 Average	5.0	5.0	9.3	10.0	10.0	7.9	10.0	10.0	6.4	10.0	1.4	9.3	94.3	85.7%	10.0	10.0	114.3	87.9%
Scenario 9 Average	5.0	5.0	8.3	10.0	10.0	8.3	7.8	8.9	3.9	10.0	3.3	8.3	88.9	80.8%	10.0	10.0	108.9	83.8%
Scenario 10 Average	5.0	5.0	8.1	8.1	8.8	6.9	8.8	8.8	4.4	10.0	2.5	8.1	84.4	76.7%	10.0	10.0	104.4	80.3%
Scenario 11 Average	5.0	5.0	8.1	9.4	8.8	7.5	8.8	10.0	6.9	10.0	2.5	7.5	89.4	81.3%	10.0	10.0	109.4	84.1%
Scenario 12 Average	5.0	5.0	7.8	10.0	8.9	10.0	4.4	10.0	5.0	10.0	3.3	9.4	88.9	80.8%	8.1	10.0	107.0	82.3%

Next Steps

The set of data provided by Strategem Market Checker has been scored on 14 criteria. However, the data was evaluated from a customer's perspective and not by those with early years and childcare specific knowledge. Therefore, a further piece of work will need to be carried out by the Childcare Information Service Team Leader, (Lisa Adams), and the Children's Information Development Officer, (Janine Pettit). This will ensure the appropriateness of the information, advice and assistance against each scenario and provide an assessment of staffs prior knowledge. The results will inform future training and development needs of the service.

This work along with that carried out by Strategem Market Checker will also enable Suffolk County Council to realign the existing service to meet the new duties in the Childcare Act 2006.

- Information, advice and assistance on a full range of services for parents about a full range of services that will benefit children and young people from birth up to their twentieth birthday.
- A brokerage service for parents that find childcare hard to access. This will involve providing more help to parents and could involve helping set up visits to prospective childcare providers.

Annexe A

Mystery Shopping – Scenarios

1. You are a parent looking for Out of School Care for your son/daughter aged between 6 – 10 years old. You would like the CIS to provide details of those in your area.

2. You are a parent planning to go back to work. You need to know what childcare is available for you new baby/young child aged between 6 months and 2 yrs.

3. You are a parent requiring information about pre-schools in their local area for their child to attend. It could be because you want to get their name down on a waiting list as you have heard there can be a long wait **or** because your child is approaching pre-school age (2.5yrs approx).

4. You are a caller to the Suffolk Childcare Information Service (CIS). You are interested in becoming a registered childminder, but are unsure what you need to do to become registered

5. You are a caller to the Suffolk Childcare Information Service (CIS). You are interested in working in childcare. At present you do not have any childcare qualifications or relevant experience working with children.

6. You are a caller to the Suffolk Childcare Information Service (CIS). You are interested in working in childcare. At present you currently hold a level 2 childcare qualification and have relevant experience working with children.

7. You are a parent. You have already got a pre-school/nursery place for your child. However, you are aware, or have been told, that your child could be entitled to pre-school funding once they start. You would like to know how you apply for it?

8. You are a parent planning on moving to Suffolk. You have a child aged between 2 – 8 years old. Currently you use a childminder where you live now. You would like to know what childcare is available in the place you are planning on moving to (details provided of places in Suffolk for you to be moving to)

9. You are interested in working in childcare. You have no relevant childcare qualifications or experience. Recently you attended a Making Choices course. Following this, you are now interested in finding a volunteer placement, as advised by

10. You are a parent. You have heard on the local radio an advert about free nursery places. You would like to find out when your child will be entitled to a free nursery place?

11. You are a parent. You are looking for activities for you and your baby to do in your local area. For example, parent & toddler groups, music groups, gym groups etc.

12. You have heard an advert on Kiss FM about a free making choices course being offered for people who want to work with children. The advert says to phone the Suffolk Childcare Information Service for further information, so that is what you are doing. You don't have any qualifications, though you have some minimal experience.