

Focus Group Newsletter

Issue 14
Thursday 16th July 2009
At The Leeds City Museum



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Awarded for excellence



Excellence in Local Government



Welcome to the 14th edition of the Focus Group Newsletter covering the events of the latest Focus Group meeting that took place on 16th July 2009 at the Leeds City Museum. Thank you for attending, it was a very good event and it was so nice to see so many familiar faces and to welcome lots of new ones. Hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter!

Welcome from Susan Murray

Susan Murray (Head of Face to Face Contact) welcomed customers to the Focus Group. Susan reminded the group that the aim of the Focus Group is to look at how the Council deals with customers who contact the Council. Susan reported that the focus of the event was to look at our services we deliver to our customers and One Stop Centres. As always we are here to look at issues and hopefully improve any issues you may have and to also answer any questions. Susan introduced the new Chief Officer of Customer Services - Paul Broughton to the Focus Group. Paul started work with Customer Services in June 2009. Paul has worked with Leeds City Council for over 20 years in various roles. Susan explained to the Focus Group that Paddy Clarke (former Chief Customer Services Officer) was moving on to pastures new at the end of October. The Focus Group joined Susan in wishing him well.



Susan talked about how challenging it is to get customers to come to Focus Groups meetings. We offer a free lunch and a prize draw, but we hope that customers come to events to participate in discussions and not just for the incentives we provide! We don't want to have to pay to get customers to attend, we think it's important for customers to want to attend and to come purely to express their views and help us improve our services wherever possible.

Susan updated the group about what's happened in Customer Services since we last met and the following was reported:

- **Condensed Credit Union opening hours**
- **Re-accredited with Charter Mark**
- **Golden telephone number launched**
- **Impact of the recession**
- **Harehills and Chapeltown Joint Service Centres approved**
 - Harehills opens in October 2010
 - Chapeltown opens in December 2010

Contact Leeds logo

The current government guidance asks the Council to identify all its services as Leeds City Council. The Customer Services part of the council has been using the brand 'Contact Leeds', so you will start to see this logo removed from One Stop Centres.

At the last Focus Group (on 20th November 2009), a customer made the following comments/questions on the feedback form. Please see below Susan's answers in response to the questions:

- **Not enough diversity. Young people's concerns not aired. We should have a separate Focus Group - Susan explained that we want to develop other ways to get customer feedback i.e. from young people via text messages etc - Susan explained that there is a need for this and that work is currently taking place to see what can be done in order to gain feedback from a variety of people.**

- **Provide information from previous Focus Groups** - Susan reported that we provide information from previous Focus Groups by providing Focus Group newsletters on each table at an event. The newsletters for a particular event are also posted out to customers after an event has taken place. This newsletter is also available in the One Stop Centres and on the Internet.
- **More women presented items and more women facilitated tables - why?** Susan reported that Customer Services attracts a lot of women, possibly more than men as it offers part time hours and flexible working which is good for women who have families etc. Customer Services attracts women due to the nature of the job and getting things sorted out for people. Susan advised that she doesn't have an answer as to why more women present items and facilitate tables at Focus Groups - this is most likely due to the fact that women like to take on this role and automatically like to take a lead on things!!
- **A customer commented that women take on the role automatically for wanting to look after people, and like to feel in control, this is why they are attracted to Customer Services.** The customer commented that women take on a lead at home by doing house work and looking after their families etc and this is the same in their workplace to want to look after people. The Focus Group agreed with this comment!
- **Susan circulated a copy of the Leeds City Council Management Structure to the Focus Group.** The diagram showed Management structure from Chief Executive Level to the Directors/Chief Officers of each Leeds City Council service to the Customer Services structure, this included Chief Officer (Paul Broughton), to the Heads of Service, down to Customer Services Managers and Assistant Managers of the One Stop Centres. Susan wanted to show customers that there is a mixed structure of both men and women who work for Leeds City Council and Customer Services.

Here is a reminder of what the Programme for the day looked like:



Focus Group Agenda

Leeds City Museum
Thoresby Room

Thursday 16th July 2009

- 10.15 Registration – Refreshments
- 10.30 Introduction
Susan Murray (15 mins)
- 10.45 Appointments feedback from last focus group
Peter Cassidy & Claire Todd (15 mins)
- 11.00 Avoidable contact – table exercise
Kate Brooks (30 mins)
- 11.30 Comfort Break
- 11.45 Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR)
Anthony Derbyshire (30 mins)
- 12.15 Welfare Rights – service standards
Joy Wetherill /Nadine Statham (30 mins)
- 12.45 Lunch – expenses and prize draw

The first item on the agenda was:

Appointment feedback from the last Focus Group – Peter Cassidy and Claire Todd

You will remember that Peter Cassidy and Claire Todd, (Assistant Customer Services Managers of the City One Stop Centre) attended the last Focus Group meeting on 20th November to talk about the appointment system available at 2 Great George Street. Claire and Peter came back to the meeting on 16th July to talk about the findings from last the event and how things have moved on since then. Claire and Peter talked you through some slides which focussed on:

- ***Appointments available in other One Stop Centres***
- ***To deal with other council services other than just Benefit and Council enquiries***
- ***Ability to book appointments on the Internet***
- ***The ability to book, cancel and change appointments by text and also receive text reminders***
- ***The appointment take up has increased since the last Focus Group from around 300 per month to nearly 500 per month***
- ***Any questions***

The Focus Group are supportive of appointments being offered in addition to a drop in service.

Please see slides on next page.

Slide 1



Slide 2

'This is a good idea it cuts down on waiting around'

- **Appointments available in other One Stop Centres.**
- *Appointments being rolled out to Morley, St George's Centre and Dewsbury Road One Stops. Appointments being extended to a full day at Armley.*


Leeds
CITY COUNCIL

www.leeds.gov.uk

Slide 3

'Much more efficient, gives people the option to return another day'

- **To deal with other Council Services other than just Benefit and Council Tax enquiries.**
- *The Appointments system at the City Centre One Stop was extended to include Housing Appointments from March 2009*

 Leeds www.leeds.gov.uk

Slide 4

'Very good idea. Much more organised, I can make an appointment in my lunch hour and know that I will be seen and can go back to work less stressed'


- **Ability to book appointments on the Internet.**
- *Work is being undertaken with our IT department to look at ways that this can be available in the future.*

 Leeds www.leeds.gov.uk

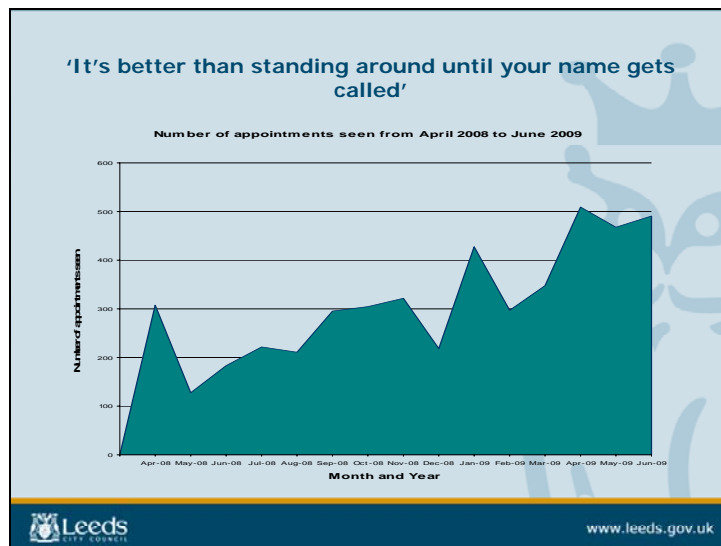
Slide 5

'Keep the appointment system going'

- **The ability to book, cancel and change appointments by text and also receive text reminders.**
- *This technology is being investigated to look at ways that this service can be available in the future.*

 Leeds www.leeds.gov.uk

Slide 6



Slide 7

'Appointment system – First class!'

- **The Appointments take up has increased since the last Focus Group from around 300 per month to nearly 500 per month.**
- *As a result of this we will be increasing the number of Appointments that are available at the City Centre in the near future.*



www.leeds.gov.uk

Slide 8

Any Questions?



www.leeds.gov.uk

Below are some of the questions that customers asked on the day about the appointment system.

Question:

A customer asked about appointments that do not start on time and run over, and what would happen as a result of this?

Answer:

It was reported that Officers try to run on time and try hard not to run over the allocated time slot. If this was to happen we would offer the customer to see another Customer Services Officer (CSO) or another appointment can be made if necessary.

Question:

Paul Broughton asked about customers not turning up for appointments (no shows)?

Answer:

It was reported that work is currently taking place to look at and deal with customers who book an appointment and then do not turn up for these. Claire and Peter will be able to report back about this and the work that has been done at a future Focus Group event.

Question:

A customer talked about a time when they visited a One Stop Centre and had to wait approximately 1 hour to see a Customer Services Officer.

Answer:

It was reported that this is the reason why appointments have been introduced to prevent customers having to wait a long time for complex enquires. Susan apologised about the length of time the customer had to wait for this.

For information: ***Claire and Peter reported that if a customer has seen a CSO for an appointment and would like to see the same officer for another appointment then this can be arranged. It was also reported that if a particular member of staff is sick and absent from work, then we will contact the customer before the visit and give them the option of seeing another officer or rearranging the appointment to when the preferred officer is back at work. It is up to the customer to choose.***

Question:

A customer asked how long do you have to wait for an appointment?

Answer:

A customer can make an appointment and then have it the same day if wanted.

For information: Appointments are available at 2 Great George Street from – **8.30 – 16.00 Mondays to Thursdays and 9.30 – 16.00 on Fridays.** Our next task is to make appointments available at other One Stop Centres.

Claire and Peter talked about the floor walker role at 2 Great George Street. The role of the floor walker is to greet customers on their arrival into the One Stop Centre and direct and advise customers to the specific part of the service they need to be at. They also advise if an enquiry can be dealt with at the helpdesk or if a customer needs to see an officer in a booth. The role of the floor walker is to also take customers to their appointments. It was reported that we are looking at rolling out floor walker roles to other One Stop Centres across the city.

Question:

A customer asked why home visits are required for Benefit checks.

Answer:

Susan advised that Benefit checks need to take place at a person's home as the officer needs proof that the customers lives at that specific address.

For information:

Susan stated that customers who have made an appointment need to report to the Security Desk at 2 Great George Street or speak to one of the floor walkers who will take them to their appointment. It is important that customers do not join the main queue for their appointment.

AN ACTION FOR FOCUS GROUP MEMBERS!!

Susan has asked that any customers who need a council tax or benefits enquiry dealing with to make an appointment at 2 Great George Street. Customers are then to feedback their experience at the next Focus Group event. Susan will ask customers about this at the next meeting (date to be set).

Thank you for taking part in these discussions!

Here are some photos from the event!



Pictured to the left is Jason Newman. Jason is the Assistant Customer Services manager of the Peripatetic team. Jason deals with the rotas for the One Stop Centres and you may sometimes see him covering the counter at some sites!

Jason deals with the rotas for the One Stop Centres to ensure we have the right people in the right place at the right time.

Pictured to the right is Paul Broughton our new Chief Customer Services Officer. Paul is responsible for the whole of Customer Services including the One Stop Centres, Welfare Rights Unit, Central Interpretation and Translation Unit, the Contact Centre and the officers who work in the back office – the Customer Services Development and Management and Support team!



Here are some familiar faces!!

To the left are some of our loyal customers with Rob Swithinbank (Customer Services Manager of Otley, Aireborough and Armley One Stop Centres) and Pam Broadbent (Customer Services Officer based at Pudsey One Stop Centre)

Next on the agenda was Kate Brooks talking about Avoidable Contact

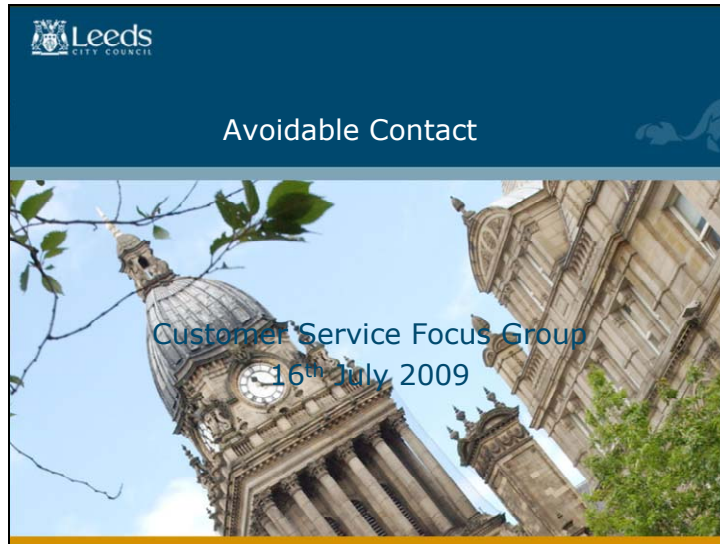
Kate introduced herself to the Focus Group. Kate reported that she works on the Customer Services Development Team at West Gate. The aim of the team is to develop services/systems to help staff on the front line deliver an excellent service. This involves working with staff who work on the front line and those who deal with customers on a daily basis. Adam Quesne is the Head of the Development Team – you may remember Adam from previous meetings. Kate reported that she used to manage a couple of One Stop Centres some years ago, but now works on the Development team carrying out project work.



Kate talked the Focus Group through some slides, the slides focussed on:

- **What is avoidable contact?**
- **Building on what we already know**
- **What types of avoidable contacts are there?**
- **What have we done in Leeds so far**
- **The sample**
- **What were the results from the sampling?**
- **What will happen next**
- **Table exercise**

Slide 1



Slide 2

What is Avoidable Contact?

- Unnecessary
- Wasteful
- Frustrating
- Does not add anything of value

Leeds
CITY COUNCIL

www.leeds.gov.uk

Building on what we already know

Measuring and reducing avoidable contact is not about avoiding contact with our customers, but it is about reducing the need for customers to contact us because we have failed to deliver a service or information

What types of avoidable contact are there?

- Clarification
- Signposting
- Repeat information
- Progress chasing
- Closed too soon

Slide 5

What have we done in Leeds so far

- Sampled and taken a baseline measurement for the following services
 - Housing
 - Adult Social Care
 - Housing Benefit and Council Tax
 - Planning
 - Highways and Street Lighting
 - Environmental Services
 - School Admissions
 - Blue Badge
 - Electoral Services
 - Trading Standards

Slide 6

The sample

- Services sampled for a few days or a month depending on the size of the service
- Between October 2008 and March 2009
- Sample taken in front and back offices
- Phone, letter, email, face to face
- Samples were collated and aggregated up to represent yearly volumes

What were the results from the sampling?


- 23.2% of customer initiated contact with Leeds City Council is avoidable
- The national average was 22% avoidable contact
- The national range for avoidable contact was 0.4% to 88%
- The average sample size was 5,900
- The national sample size was 69 – 2.2 million
- Main types of avoidable contact for Leeds City Council are 'Clarification' and 'Progress Chasing'

What will happen next?

- Services will be monitored internally and the council as a whole will be assessed on their ability to take action, make changes and report a reduction in avoidable contact every for the next two years
- Customer services is working with service partners
 - To reduce progress chasing
 - Promote clear / accessible written communication to customers

Table Exercise

- Discuss and share your experiences of avoidable contact with Leeds City Council
- Focus on Progress Chasing and / or Clarification
- Make some notes for me to take away
- I will take your experiences and comments away. To co-ordinate with specific colleagues in Customer Services who are working with services to make change

 Leeds www.leeds.gov.uk

Focus group members were asked to give details of their experiences of 'Avoidable Contact' when accessing council services. The main areas of avoidable contact were

- *missed refuse collection*
- *Replacement bin chase ups*
- *Confusing letters*

The Focus Group agreed that avoidable contact is an area they want to see the council tackle and improve in.

The next item on the agenda was Interactive Voice Recognition presented by Anthony Derbyshire.

Anthony Derbyshire (Leeds City Council Project Manager, from the Business Transformation Team at West Gate) gave an overview of a new service that is currently under development. Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) will allow our customers to telephone Leeds City Council and conduct certain, simple, transactions without needing to speak to a Customer Services Officer. The first service to be made available through IVR will allow customers to register bids for a Council property under the Choice Based Lettings scheme. A demonstration of how this service would operate was given at the Focus Group and was met with a generally favourable response with the majority of attendees saying that they would find such a service very useful.

A number of suggestions, particularly around how the service 'sounds', were made and these have been noted by Anthony and will be taken into account during the development. All being well, this service should be available just before in the new year.



Anthony talked you through some slides which focussed on:

- ◆ Project Background
- ◆ What does IVR do?
- ◆ What doesn't IVR do?
- ◆ What will we use it for?
- ◆ Heres one I made earlier – sample of the system
- ◆ The Benefits of IVR
- ◆ Over to you – any questions and a questionnaire

Please see slides below.

 Leeds
CITY COUNCIL



Interactive Voice Response


Anthony Derbyshire – Business Transformation



Project Background

- The Corporate Contact Centre opened in 2006.
- It handles over 1.5 million calls per year.
- 85% of all calls made to the Council are handled by the Contact Centre.
- Now looking to introduce an Interactive Voice Response system (IVR) to further increase the volume of calls handled.





 Leeds
CITY COUNCIL

www.leeds.gov.uk

What does IVR do?

- Automated service that allows customers to access information or perform a transaction, i.e. make a payment.
- Customer interacts via key presses or by speaking short phrases (voice recognition).
- End-to-end process is completed without the need to speak to a customer services officer (CSO).
- IVR can handle multiple calls at the same time.



 Leeds
www.leeds.gov.uk

What doesn't IVR do?



 Leeds
www.leeds.gov.uk


What will we use it for?


- Two service areas are ideally suited to IVR;
 - the making of Choice Based Lettings bids.
 - requesting a bulky waste collection.
- Both these are simple, transactional enquiries and also high in volume.



 Leeds www.leeds.gov.uk


Here's one I made earlier....



 Leeds www.leeds.gov.uk

The benefits of IVR

- IVR will;
 - offer an additional access channel to complement those already in place.
 - provide '24/7' access to key services, initially CBL and bulky collections
 - reduce waiting times
 - reduce call handling times
 - allow the Contact Centre to handle even more calls, particularly the more complex enquiries
 - help the Contact Centre deal with peaks in demand



www.leeds.gov.uk

Over to you

- Any questions?
- Questionnaire



www.leeds.gov.uk

Anthony played a sample of the system to the group and your comments/questions and answers are below.

Comment:

One customer commented that the system was too informal.

Comment:

One customer commented that the system did not give a timescale of when you will hear if not successful with the bid that you have placed. The customer advised that the system should say “If you do not hear within x amount of days, your bid has not been successful on this occasion”

Comment:

A customer commented that sometimes numbers are not recognised when speaking to systems such as these and can be a waste of time if a number is not recognised.

Answer:

Anthony advised that the system gives the customer the opportunity to verify the number and if still not recognised the customers can type the bid reference number into the phone by using the number keys on their handset or can hold and wait to speak to an advisor. The Advisor is always there as a back up, just in case.

SM asked the Focus Group if they would use the IVR system and the majority of the Focus group said that they would use the system for basic services. The Focus group would not want to see IVR for complex enquiries or to replace speaking to a member of staff.

It was reported that this project went to the Council’s Scrutiny Board Meeting and it was stressed that IVR will not replace front line staff (our Customer Services Officers). The role of the Scrutiny Board is to examine decisions and policies of the council and overall performance of services and make recommendations, making sure that the people of Leeds get the best out of their public services.

Comment:

Paul Broughton commented that the system looks useful for simple enquiries. Anthony reported that we are not looking to use IVR for something it should not be used for. The system is ideally suited to enquiries that are high in volume but low in complexity.

Customers in general were not in favour of having to go through different menus, but overall were in favour of the system.

Question

A customer asked if the project includes rolling out the system to One Stop Centres. This could be done by having a phone accessible in a private booth for customers to use.

Answer

Anthony agreed that this is a good idea. It was noted that this service would be free of charge for customers as they will not have to use their own mobile phones or landline. Susan and Anthony are to meet to take this suggestion forward. **Action SM/AD.**

Anthony is to add this into the scope of the project for IVR to be available in One Stop Centres. **Action AD**

For information

IVR can be used from a mobile phone. It was reported that ringing IVR internally and externally can affect the cost of the call.

A request from a customer!

One customer asked that the IVR operator does not say “Shall we try again” – if a piece of information is incorrect i.e. a number etc. The customer advised that this can be very patronising!!

Thank you for giving us valuable feedback. Your comments and suggestions are always welcomed and valued.

A Question from West North West Homes Leeds

SM asked the Focus Group a question on behalf of West North West Homes Leeds.

The ALMO wanted to know the Focus Group's opinion about a message left on a Housing telephone line if the Customer Services Officer is unable to take the call. The message says "*sorry we are busy at the moment, please leave a message and your contact details and we will ring you back*".

At this stage you can leave your message and receive a call back or you can continue to hold for a Customer Services Officer.

Susan asked the Focus Group if this is acceptable and the majority of customers agreed that it is acceptable.

Concerns were raised and these are listed below:

- *People did not believe they would be called back*
- *People would prefer to be called back when it is convenient to them so the message should ask what time you want calling back*
- *There should be a time scale said on the message when the call will be returned i.e. within 1 hour was thought to be reasonable.*

Susan thanked the group for their comments and reported that these will be fed back to West North West Homes Leeds.

Here are some more pictures from the event!



Above are some of our Focus Groups members deep in discussion!



Above: more of our customers along with Jas Dhariwal Holmes (Manager of Dewsbury Road and Rothwell One Stop Centres)



Here are some of our customers busy at work! We like to keep our customers busy!

The next item on the agenda was [Welfare Rights - Service Standards](#) presented by Joy Wetherill (Manager of the Welfare Rights Service).



Joy provided background about the Welfare Rights Unit and the following was reported:

The Welfare Rights Unit is part of Leeds City Council's Customer Services Section. The service offers free, confidential and impartial advice and support on a whole range of welfare benefits.

They can:-

- **Give you advice and information on a variety of Welfare Benefits and appropriate services and schemes**
- **Help you to complete claim forms**
- **Offer guidance and support when making appeals**
- **Provide talks and displays to statutory and voluntary organisations and groups**

If they cannot help, they will try to provide details of other agencies who may be able to help.

If you would like to speak to a Welfare Rights Worker you can:-

- **Call our advice line (0113 3760452)**
- **Call into one of our advice surgeries**

- **If you would find it difficult to get to a surgery you can book a home visit - to arrange this please contact us**

Joy asked the Focus Group for help to review the Welfare Rights service standards - and wanted to know if the ones they have are important to you and if you feel the waiting periods are acceptable. Joy also wanted to find out if there was anything else you would want adding to the list of standards.

Please see results below.

Table Exercise – Service Standards for Welfare Rights Unit (20 customers took part in the table exercise)

- 1 Is it important to you that there is a choice of how you access our service? Y = 13 N = 0**

At the moment we provide telephone advice, appointments at surgeries, home visits, advice via email, advice via writing

Is this acceptable? **Y = 20 N = 0**

If not what other ways would you want to access our service?

- 2 At the moment we have the following delivery standards are these acceptable if not please say what you feel would be acceptable**

We aim to answer your call within 20 seconds or give you the option to leave a message and we will get back to you within 24 hours. Is this acceptable **Y = 12 N = 7**

If not please give details of what is acceptable:-

Call back at a given time / Call back within 4 hrs / Phone to be answered in 15 seconds

We aim to visit you within 14 days of your request. Is this acceptable **Y = 10 N = 10**

If not please give details of what is acceptable:-

Visit within 10 days / Visit within 1 week / Visit within 48hrs

We aim to make you an appointment at a surgery within 14 days of your request. Is this acceptable **Y = 10 N = 9**

If not please give details of what is acceptable:-

Appointment within 10 days / Appointment within 1 week / Appointment within 5 days / Appointment within 48 hrs

We aim to acknowledge your emails within 1 working day and provide a full response within 10 working days. Is this acceptable **Y = 15 N = 2**

If not please give details of what is acceptable:-

Response within 2/3 days

We aim to respond to your written correspondence within 10 working days. Is this acceptable

Y = 17 N = 2

If not please give details of what is acceptable:-

Response within 5 days

3 Is it important to you that we provide a confidential service? **Y = 16 N = 0**

4 Is it important to you that our workers are polite and treat you with respect at all times?

Y = 18 N = 2

5 Is it important to you that we give accurate and unbiased advice on all welfare benefits?

Y = 19 N = 0

6 Is it important to you that we leave a receipt to say what we have done, what we have asked you to do after the meeting and what we need to do after the meeting? **Y = 18 N = 0**

7 Is it important to you that our workers carry Identification badges which provides you with their name and photograph? **Y = 18 N = 1**

8 Is it important to you that information is available in Braille, large print and audio and that interpreters are available in BSL (British Sign Language) and community languages if English is not your first language? **Y = 16 N = 2**

9 Is it important to you that we have a feedback system so that you can let us know about the service you have received be that good or bad and also gives us suggestions on how we could improve our service to you? **Y = 18 N = 0**

10 Our service is free is this important to you? **Y = 20 N = 0**

Is there anything else that you feel is important about our service that has not been mentioned above?

If there is please provide details here:-

Service not very well publicised

Please note where totals do not add up to 20 it is because some customers did not answer the questions

Following this exercise a decision has been made to keep the standards as they are at present as the majority of customers agreed that these are acceptable.

With regard to the length of time customers have to wait for an appointment or for a home visit we always try to see people as quickly as we can but this can prove difficult when the volume of work is high.

We will take into account the comments made with regard to call backs with the aim of improving this service.

Thank you for your taking part in this exercise.

This information will be used by Welfare Rights as part of their accreditation for Customer Services Excellence (This is the new name for Charter Mark).

And finally.....

One Stop Centres celebrated their 10th year anniversary this month!

Publicity to celebrate this success was circulated to Focus Group members to take home with them!

Susan reminded the Focus Group that customers can now have their Leeds City Council business dealt with face to face on a Saturday morning. North Seacroft One Stop Centre is now open on a Saturday mornings (weekly) from 9.00 - 12.30 in addition to weekdays. The full address is:

***North Seacroft One Stop Centre
Unit 8, Seacroft Green Shopping Centre,
LS14***

Paul Broughton introduced himself officially to the Focus Group and reported how impressed he was by the event and it's members. Paul thanked our customers for attending the meetings and for continually supporting us and providing feedback and views in order for us to help improve the services we deliver. Paul also thanked those involved in organising the event.

Paul thinks it is very important to keep the Focus Group going and talked about how impressed he is with the Face to Face service (One Stop Centres and the Welfare Rights Unit).

Draw for £50

The draw for £50 took place.

The prize was won by Brenda Smith
(Pictured below with Paul Broughton)

Congratulations Brenda!!



Finally may we take this opportunity to thank you for your contribution to the excellent event and look forward to seeing you at our next meeting.

Date of next meeting: TBC

Time of next meeting: TBC

Venue: Leeds City Museum, Cookridge Street, Leeds. LS2 8BH