



Walsall M.B.C.

# BRIEFING NOTE

Item 9 (a)

**TO: Community Organisation leisure and Culture Scrutiny and Performance Panel**

**DATE: 8 December 2005**

**RE: First Stop Shop**

**At the last meeting of the Community Organisation Leisure and Culture Scrutiny and Performance panel dated 6<sup>th</sup> October 2005, members discussed a number of issues with regard to the new First Stop Shop and requested a further report providing clarification on some of the issues raised at the meeting:**

## **Opening times**

All services including the banking hall are now available during our normal opening hours, currently 8.45 to 5.15 Monday – Thursday and 8.45 to 4.45 on Friday. Although student finance is only available on a morning they do provide an appointment service. Due to the length and complexity of detailed enquiries for housing benefits last issue of tickets for this service is 15 minutes prior to the closing time at the request of their head of service.

## **Equality issues**

### **Deaf or hearing impaired visitors**

Once it has been established that the visitor has a hearing impairment the customer service assistant will assist as much as possible using basic communication methods and body language. There are three team members with recognised BSL qualifications who can provide additional support where necessary.

The use of an audio loop is available at all the customer service desks and an informal interview room can also be provided to help avoid any unnecessary background noise. Appointments can be made on request for those visitors wishing to make their own translation arrangements.

All FSS staff who report to the customer contact managers have, or are programmed to attend, the in house deaf awareness training course. An official interpreter can be arranged by request via AI Tai language services (ALS) or Walsall Deaf Society.

### **Visually Impaired**

Once the nature of the impairment has been established the CSA will assist wherever possible. Customer service staff or concierge can be provided to assist or guide the visitor to the required area of business and keep them informed throughout their stay.

Information in Braille or audio tape is available on request from the appropriate service area or via ALS.

Walsall society for the Blind have agreed to provide further assistance to the FSS where possible e.g. the use of a scanner which can convert standard written documents in to speech. A meeting has been requested to explore further what additional support can be provided.

The FSS customer service team has attended, or are programmed to attend, the councils visual awareness training which is to be supplemented with training videos provided by social services.

### **Wheel Chair users**

Lower level desks, large interview rooms and accessible toilets are now provided within the FSS

### **Alternate languages**

ALS can provide an immediate third party interpretation service via the telephone or face to face translation within an hour depending on the language required and the availability of a suitable interpreter, or an appointment can be made on request. Requests for information or documents in alternate languages are referred to the relevant service area or direct to ALS.

ALS is currently being engaged on a pilot basis to support the introduction of the FSS. However it is important to recognise that translation and interpretation is not only relevant to the FSS but the responsibility of all departments to provide customers with easy access to its services. The Councils equality and diversity team are currently developing a corporate translation service for use by all council departments.

### **Customer Consultation**

All customers have differing needs regardless of any disabilities or language requirements and what suits one user may not necessarily suit, and perhaps in some cases even hinder, another.

What is important is that we obtain and learn from the feedback of our users and adjust or improve service delivery where necessary. This may mean a simple change of process, a new piece of equipment or additional staff training and awareness.

As part of customer service week the FSS conducted its first customer survey (*results to be attached if available*). It is intended to carry out similar surveys on a quarterly basis to help shape and improve the services on offer.

Customer service week also saw the FSS pilot its first customer café (consultation, advice, feedback and enquiries), an informal customer focus group meeting held with representatives of the visually impaired. The objective of these café's is to provide an opportunity for a small sample of users from a particular group to meet with customer service staff and discuss customer issues appropriate to them. A number of the ideas outlined earlier have emanated from this initial meeting and it is intended to programme similar events throughout the year.

The above are intended to supplement the existing communication channels already in place with groups such as the CEN, citizens panel and the councils "Tell Us" comments, compliments and complaints system.

Jez Holding  
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