

THE HONG KONG HOUSING AUTHORITY

Memorandum for the Human Resources Committee

Customer Service Framework and Training Strategy

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to outline a customer service framework and training strategy for improving customer service in HA, and to support its core value of ‘customer focused’.

THE NEED

2. The Management Enhancement Programmes (MEP) aims at developing a culture of service in HA with an enhanced organization profile of -

- being vision, mission and core values driven;
- being process oriented, with focus on quality and customer service;
- empowering staff for culture change and improving overall service delivery.

3. Key initiatives being introduced to support a culture of service include -

- (i) Performance Pledges
- (ii) Tenants’ Rights and Responsibilities
- (iii) EMAC
- (iv) Complaints and enquiries and public relations initiatives
- (v) Business Process Reengineering etc.

4. Customer service is not just a transaction between the customer and the front-line staff. It should be an organization's basic competence and culture, characterised by management practices and staff behaviours that put customer service at the heart of operation. To make the change more effective, the drive to service improvement should come from senior management, line managers and staff, adopting a planned and partnership approach.

5. Whilst the objectives for culture change and service improvement have been set, there is the need to align management practices and staff behaviours to the new service culture. It is recognized that customer service is to be provided and delivered through people, front-line staff, in particular. Staff skills and commitment need to be enhanced and they should regard service as an essential and integral part of their job. Leaders of customer service should communicate the need for change to a culture of service and lead staff teams for continuous customer service improvement. We must give regard to customers' feedback and priority issues identified in previous survey(s) in planning support programmes for improving customer service.

PROGRAMMES FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

6. A total approach to improving customer service should be adopted based on the framework as set out in **Appendix I**. Three main programmes for customer service improvement are proposed in this paper:

- (a) To develop customer service focus and culture, with emphasis on both external and internal customers, and a sense of continuous improvement. This culture will be reflected by the customer service competence of customer service leaders, general and front-line staff. Service values and appropriate behaviours should be made specific and promulgated to staff to provide for practical, actionable pointers.
- (b) To steer, guide and support staff behaviours and practices to become service and customer focused through action planning projects and a shift in mindset to taking pride and personal responsibility for self and service improvement.

- (c) To improve business and operational processes to streamline and improve service delivery, with emphasis on best resource utilization and service improvement projects.

7. These customer service improvement initiatives will synchronize with other MEP initiatives, such as quality and process improvement, BPR and customer feedback system. Other organization support systems and HRM best practices are being developed separately to drive service improvement initiatives e.g. performance management system, competency development initiatives, and staff incentive schemes.

ROLES OF PARTIES CONCERNED

8. To provide a total approach, the roles of parties concerned have been defined -

- (a) *Senior management* to create support systems (e.g. performance management system and staff incentive schemes) and to integrate other initiatives (e.g. BPR) with the customer service improvement projects.
- (b) *Line managers* to be the owners and drivers of customer service improvement projects. They should identify and prioritize improvement areas, appoint customer service leaders, mobilize staff to participate in customer service improvement projects, propose customer service performance criteria, provide training and coaching, steer and monitor applications by streamlining operational procedures and practices, and entrench new practices as routines.
- (c) *Staff* to participate in identifying improvement areas, set customer service performance criteria, attend training programmes, practise customer service skills and appropriate behaviours, and through service improvement projects, propose ways to enhance customer service and performance.

- (d) *T&D Centre* to facilitate line managers and staff in these projects and provide training and other support for service improvement projects and competency development.

CUSTOMER SERVICE COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING STRATEGY

9. Customer service competency profiles and appropriate behaviours have been defined for and through input from customer service leaders, general and frontline staff. The recommended customer service competency profiles and appropriate behaviours are set out in **Appendix II**. These will be promulgated to staff to provide clear management expectations, focus and actionable steps for them to direct their efforts and energy to serving both internal and external customers.

10. General and frontline staff, and their customer service leaders will be given appropriate training. The former group will be introduced to service concepts, departmental expectations, skills and practices related to the competency profiles. The latter group will attend a condensed version of the programme with the addition of a total approach to customer service, setting performance criteria, leading customer service improvement projects, and monitoring and coaching staff teams for success.

11. Staff who have attended training will be encouraged to undertake customer service improvement projects and identify ways to implement changes and to overcome hurdles. Other appropriate training support will also be provided. (See paragraph 13 (b)(c) and (d).)

12. External training providers will be engaged initially for the design and delivery of training, but internal trainers will be used after the training packages have been assimilated into HD's settings. Best practices of outside customer-oriented organizations will also be introduced to staff.

ACTION PLAN

13. To make implementation more effective, a pilot project is recommended before full launch on a departmental basis, involving the following key action steps -

- (a) To select 6 pilot sites (4 from regional offices/estate offices and 2 from Administration Division) for customer service improvement and competency development projects. Customer service leaders and their general and frontline staff teams will be briefed of the overall framework and their roles, and provided with training and other support for implementing customer service improvement projects.
(Note : Since the submission of the proposal, 2 other pilot sites have joined the pilot scheme, making a total of 8 pilot sites.)
- (b) To promulgate competency profiles for customer service to general and front-line staff and their leaders. - It has been suggested that suitable supporting communication approaches (eg posters and pamphlets etc) should also be produced for communication and promotion purposes.
- (c) To design and implement multiple training programmes to support project sites in -
 - use of customer service competency profiles and appropriate behaviours;
 - customer service training as listed in paragraphs 9 to 11 above;
 - team building programme to energize staff and build common purpose;
 - customer service best practice visits for benchmarking and learning from other organizations;
 - aligning other existing programmes towards customer service improvement applications, after staff have attended the training eg horticultural training in China for CEAs.

- (d) To report progress and achievements of pilot sites for re-inforcement and further motivation of staff.
- (e) To recommend the creation of a customer service competency applications award to provide incentives for improvement projects undertaken by customer service leaders, general and front-line staff.
- (f) To submit a report on the customer service improvement initiatives and training for extension of the initiatives to other project sites. We have identified that the roll-out programme should give priority to the Management Branch to support their re-organization and merger exercise.

The Action Plan Time Schedule for the pilot project is attached at
_____ **Appendix III.**

EVALUATION OF SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

14. Service improvement evaluation will be measured by:
- (a) the number of customer service improvement ideas initiated and implemented;
 - (b) staff's own assessment of using the competency profiles and practising appropriate behaviours;
 - (c) supervisors' assessment of customer service leaders, general and frontline staff in using the customer service competency profiles and practising appropriate behaviours; and
 - (d) customer survey on service rendered; feedback will be collected on deficiencies before and achievements after customer service initiatives and training.

RESOURCE IMPLICATION

15. Resources required for implementing the pilot project will be absorbed by internal deployment. Resources required for full scale launch will be determined in the light of experience in the pilot project.

ADVICE SOUGHT

16. At the HRC meeting to be held on 10 July 1997, Members will be invited :

- (a) to comment on the proposed framework outlined in para 6 to 8;
- (b) endorse the training strategy and action plan for a pilot scheme for launching customer service improvement initiatives and developing competencies in para 9 to 13; and
- (c) based on the experience and success of the pilot project, to implement the strategy on a departmental basis.

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