

Reception Survey 2009 – Results and Report

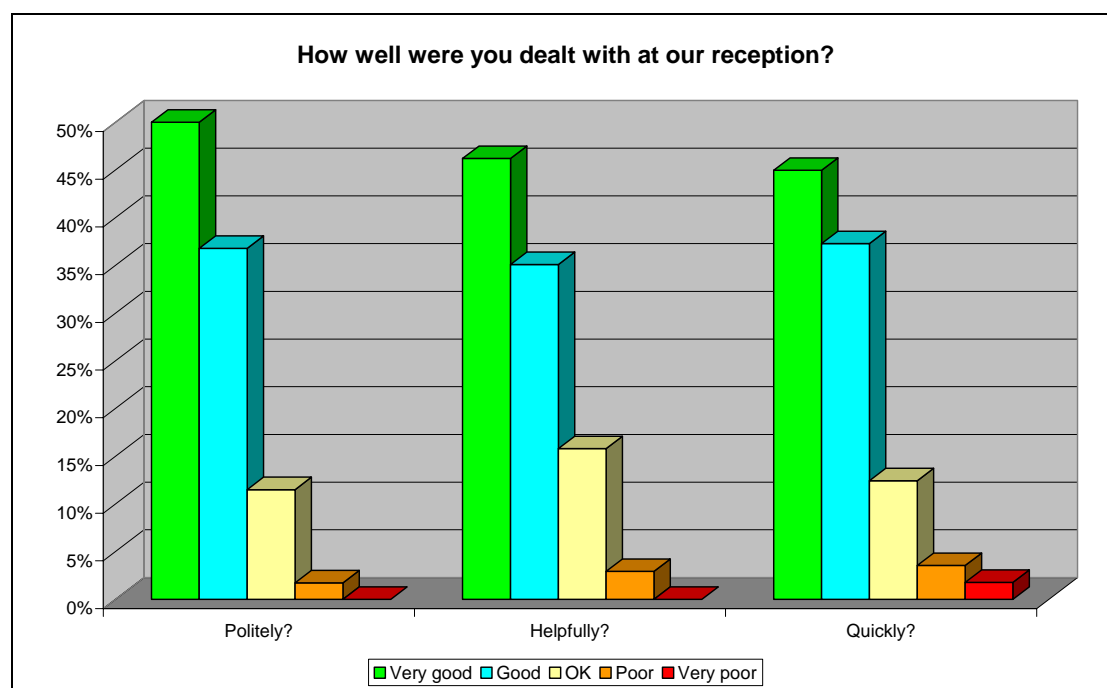
Introduction

The 2009 Reception Exit Poll was conducted between the 7th and 18th of December, by a team of homeless applicants selected by the Single Point of Access to Employment (SPA) team. Based in the reception area from 10am to 4pm, the four applicants and two Youth Trainees got 176 surveys completed between them and provided valuable feedback on reception conduct and customer enquiries.

Reception Environment

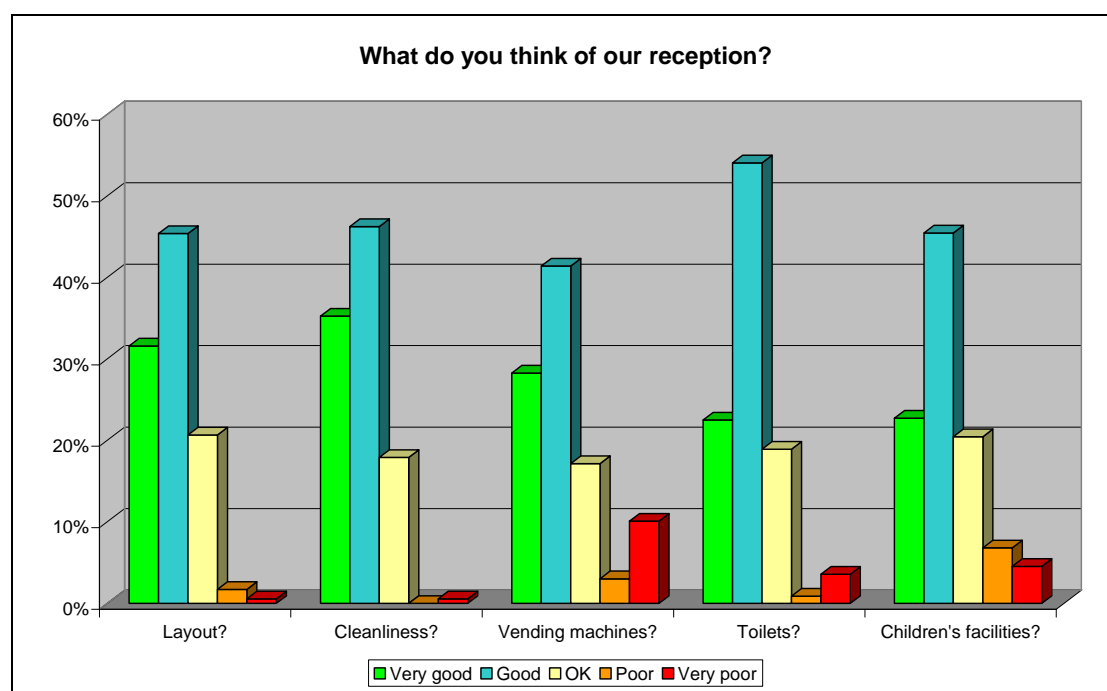
The perception of our reception area is very important for HHAS, as it is often the first point of contact for vulnerable people. Given the adverse situations that our visitors have often endured prior to their visit, it is critical that we are welcoming, polite and helpful.

When asked how they were dealt with when they entered reception, in terms of speed, politeness and helpfulness, the following results were found:



We are aware that, at busy times, there is often a queue to see the receptionists, so understand the reasons behind the negative 'speed of service' results. We also had a new receptionist, who started in December, so the delivery of his training would have affected the speed of service delivery.

Visitors to reception were asked to rate various aspects of the reception area, including the layout, cleanliness and various facilities, with the results shown in the graph below:

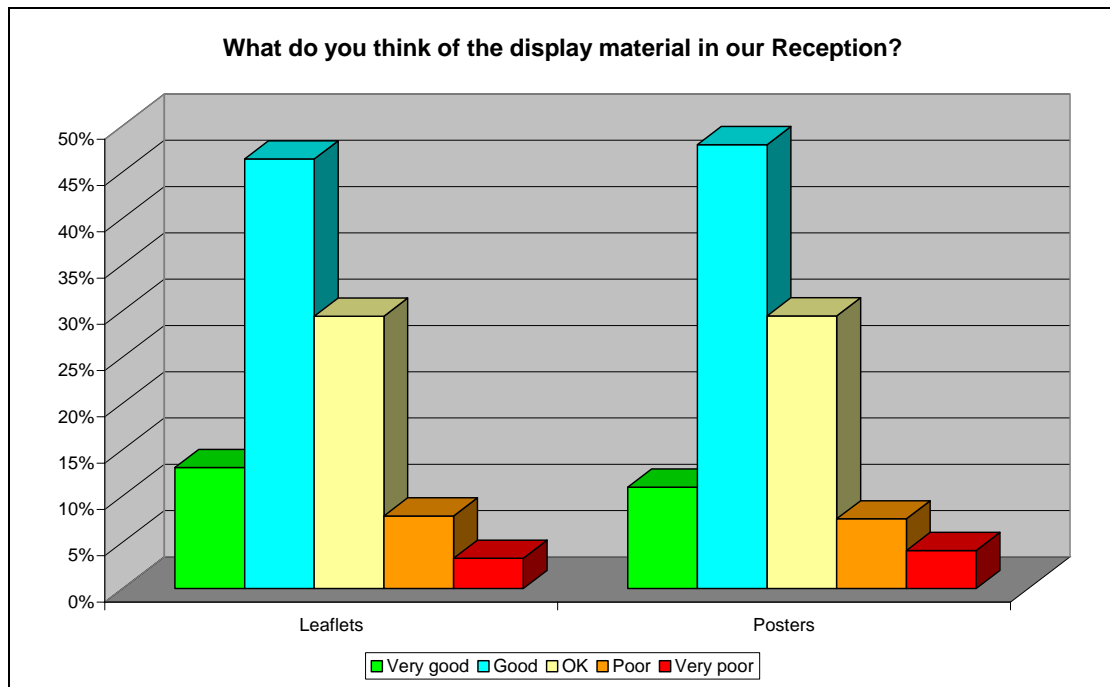


These results show that visitors are happiest with the layout and cleanliness of our reception area, with more attention required for the vending machines, toilets and children's facilities. The vending machines were virtually empty during the period of the survey, which explains the percentage of 'very poor' ratings, and the condition of the toilets deteriorate with use throughout the day.

Visitors were asked if they were happy with our office opening times (9.30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday), and 76% of respondents stated that they were. Despite three-quarters of respondents said that they were satisfied with our opening hours, we received many written comments from people saying that the office should open until 5pm or 6pm, during the week.

When asked if visitors had used our internet terminals to access the bidding or Council websites, nearly 95% responded negatively, with a few comments made about a lack of publicity at reception (as the terminals are located at the back corner of the reception area). The few people who had accessed the terminals stated that they would like to see more information on local events and services, availability of temporary accommodation and an explanation of the Council's complaints process.

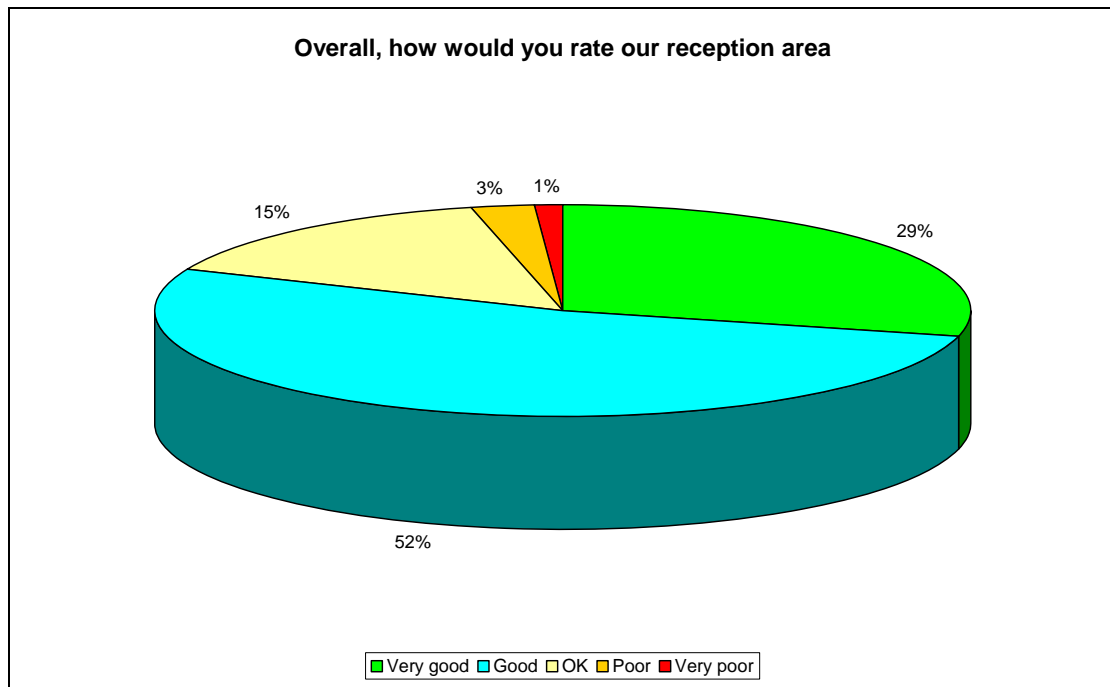
We also asked visitors their opinion on the selection of information available in our reception area, particularly information in poster or leaflet form, with results shown in the following graph, overleaf:



The majority of respondents identified our leaflets and posters as being 'good' or 'ok', with a number of comments being made by respondents, in terms of other information that should be available in our reception area or improvements to the information already on display:

- More details on posters and in leaflets
- A display with all of the Council's news
- Information about activities going on in the local area
- Leaflets on housing advice and how to find a property
- Application forms for benefits and services
- More information in other languages

When asked to give an overall rating for our reception area, we received 81% positive feedback (29% 'Very Good' & 52% 'Good'), with 15% providing neutral feedback and 4% giving negative feedback (3% 'Poor' & 1% 'Very Poor'). As the graph overleaf shows, this is a very good result for our Reception, and the feedback provided by the survey officers and respondents will help us to continue to improve all aspects of the Reception area.



Reception Population

This section analyses the results of a number of questions that were asked of respondents, to ascertain the type of, and reason for, visitors coming to our reception area.

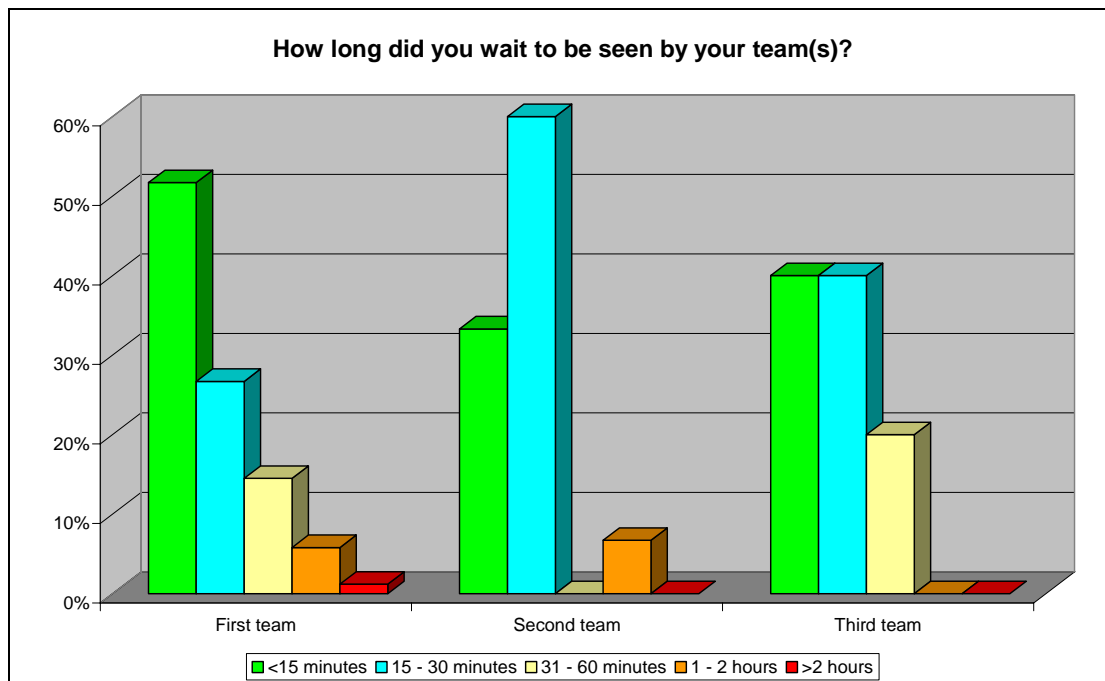
When asked whether they had an appointment to come into the office, 73% of respondents said that they did not, indicating that the majority of our reception footfall consists of enquiries. Some teams book interview appointments (e.g. HILT or Social Work), but homeless application interviews are not booked in advance.

Looking at the 27% who had appointments, just over a third of them had come in for an appointment relating to their homeless application, with 10% for Housing Advice and 14% giving a variety of other reasons. This highlights the fact that our reception population is particularly dependent on initial enquiries, and that an appointment-based system could help to regulate the flow of clients through the reception area.

In terms of the length of time clients spend in our reception, 91% of respondents identified that they had attended the office to see one team, with only 6% seeing two teams and 3% needing to see three or more teams during their visit to the office.

Ideally, no client should have to wait for more than 15 minutes to be seen by our teams and our aim is to see people within this time, but the reality of the situation is that we manage to do so for just over 50% of the time, for the

majority of people who are only seeing one team. More detail is provided in the graph below:



When these results were broken down by reported teams, an issue was quickly identified with these results, based on the number of respondents who claimed to have seen the Accommodation team. The main disadvantage of employing individuals who are not HHAS staff is that they do not necessarily understand the process of a homeless application. As a result, many respondents, when interviewed, indicated that they had been in to arrange temporary accommodation – this would, reasonably, lead to the assumption that they had seen the Accommodation team, especially if the interviewing officer did not state what team they were representing.

Unfortunately, the majority of these respondents probably saw the EPO, CLO, HOST or Assessments teams, as the Accommodation team deal with homeless applicants who are being booked into, have problems with or are leaving, a temporary accommodation property.

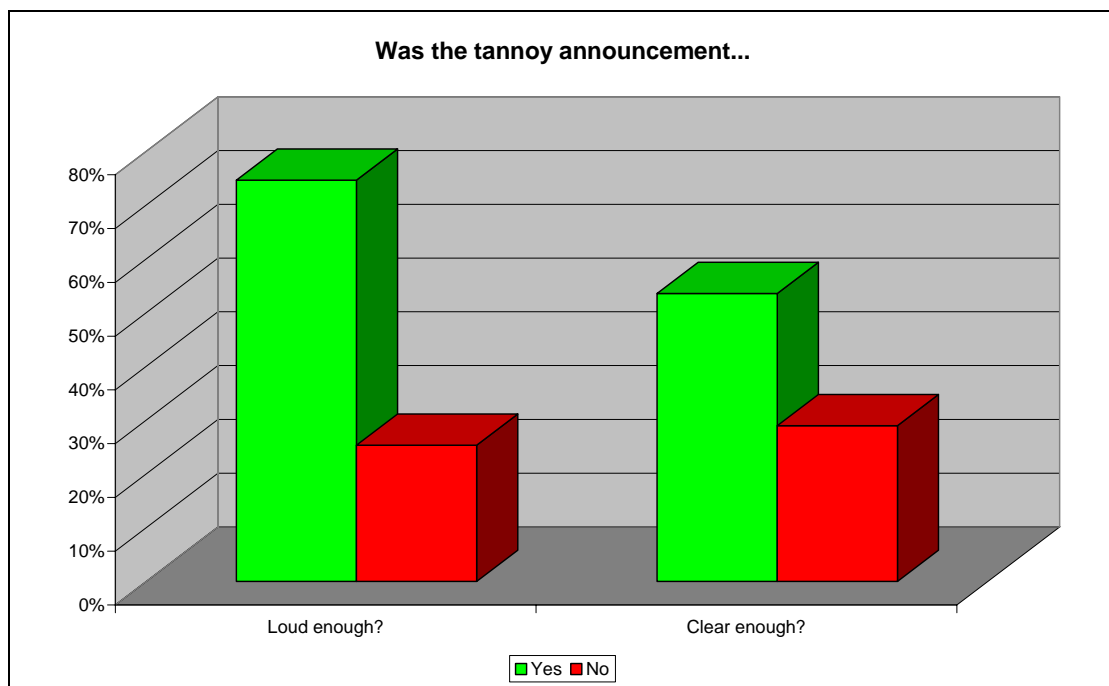
This means that the Accommodation teams results should, in theory, be distributed across the results for the aforementioned teams, but as the survey did not ask for respondent contact details, we cannot correctly attribute individual responses by checking interview records. However, the previous graph, 'How long did you wait to be seen by your team(s)?', is still accurate because its focus is the wait time rather than whom they were waiting for.

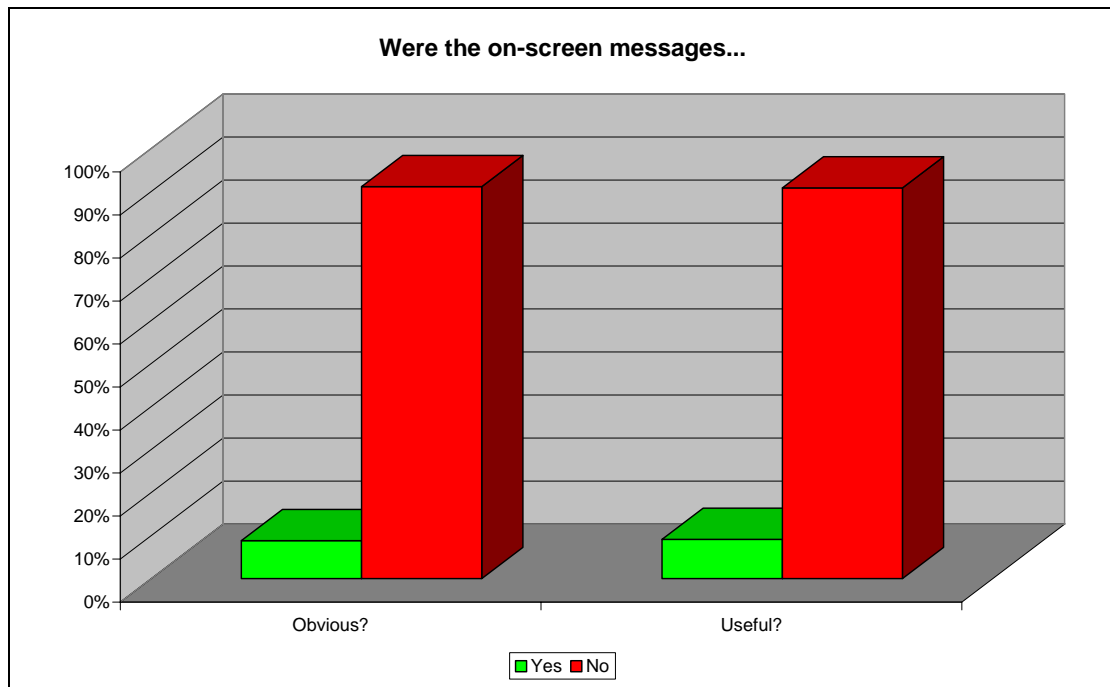
When waiting, visitors are called to an interview location using a tannoy announcement and a scrolling message on one of the reception TV screens, and we asked whether people thought the tannoy and on-screen message were effective. We specifically asked whether the tannoy announcements

were clear enough and loud enough, and whether the on-screen messages were obvious and useful (as the messages are only displayed on one of the three TV screens).

The graphs, below and overleaf, show that a large majority of our respondents believe that the tannoy announcements are loud enough but could be clearer, which could well be an issue with the use of the microphone or with the microphone itself. Our reception area can get very noisy during busy periods, and it can be difficult for waiting visitors to hear their names called, sometimes causing extra delays for the person.

To counteract this, we invested in a TV monitor for displaying the names of the individuals called, and the interview location. From the visitor responses received, dissatisfaction with this facility is very high (with negative responses at over 90% for both answers). This may be partly due to the location and visibility of the screen, as it can only be seen from certain seated areas.

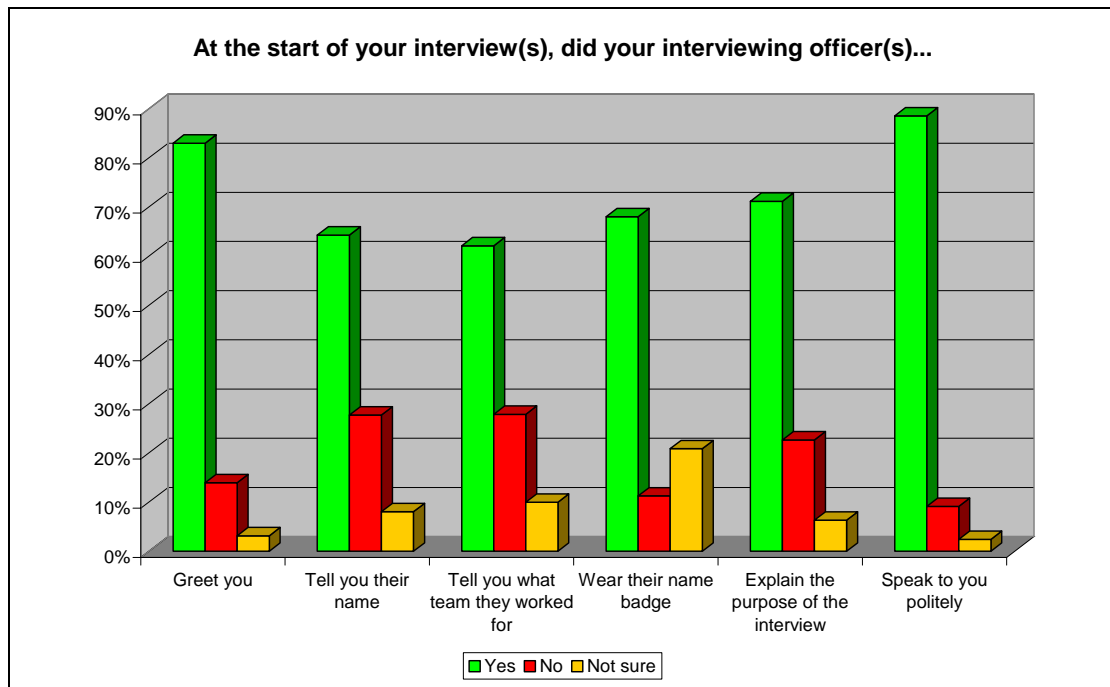




Interview Quality

This section focuses on the experiences and observations of the survey respondents, during their interview. The results discussed, unless specifically identified as such, are an amalgamation of the results for the first, second and third interview survey sheets.

As part of our commitment to customer service, we expect that certain basic information is conveyed to our clients during an interview and that officers greet their clients, wear their name badges and speak politely during interviews. Respondents were asked whether these standards were met, with the following graph showing how we performed:



Our interviewing officers performed well enough, but more work needs to be done to ensure that all of the indicators shown achieve a higher percentage of positive outcomes.

A high proportion of our visitors speak English as a second language, and there is often a need for interpretation – we asked whether the respondent felt they needed an interpreter, and 7% agreed. We then asked whether the interviewing officer offered them an interpreter, which was the case in the majority (5%) of interviews.

We employ a language support officer, have a number of staff who are fluent in a range of local community languages and have access to telephone interpretation through the Newham Language Shop, so we have a range of options available to ensure we avoid placing clients at a disadvantage by failing to guarantee full understanding of their interview.

The level of background noise present in our reception area can also pose problems for visitors being interviewed on the counters, and the location of the seating areas means that some visitors are not comfortable discussing their personal situation in a public environment. Where possible, clients should be asked whether they would like their interview conducted in an interview booth, although the high demand for booths means that their waiting time may be prolonged until one becomes available.

When asked, 22% of respondents said that they were interviewed on the open counter, with 19% of those having been offered an interview booth. This is reassuring, as it reflects that interviewing officers have an understanding of the need for privacy in certain situations. This is backed up

by the response to the question "Did you feel your privacy was protected during your interview(s)?" where 92% of respondents answered positively.

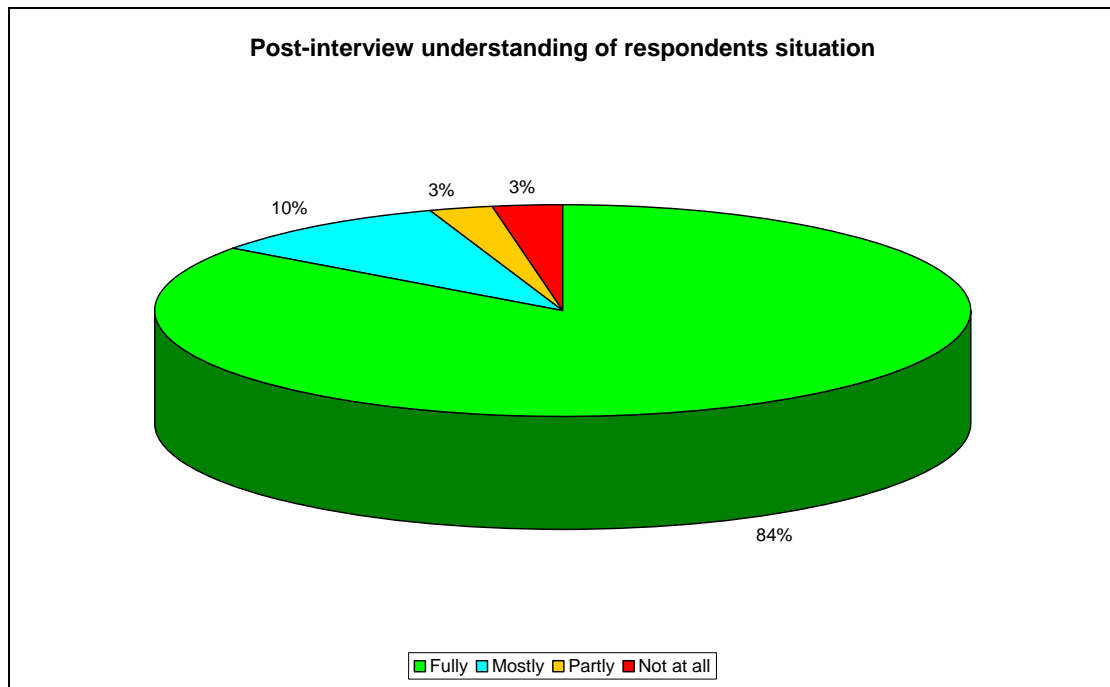
Those who felt that their privacy was not protected adequately made the following comments:

- The counter positions were too close together
- The waiting area seating was too close to some of the counter positions
- That some interviewing officers were not discrete enough when asking for personal information while on the counter

Because of the nature of many of the interviews conducted, it is very difficult to define and ensure 'fairness' – it is more about the perception of the client, whether or not they felt that they were treated fairly. We asked respondents "Did you feel that you were treated fairly during your interview?" and 93% agreed that they were.

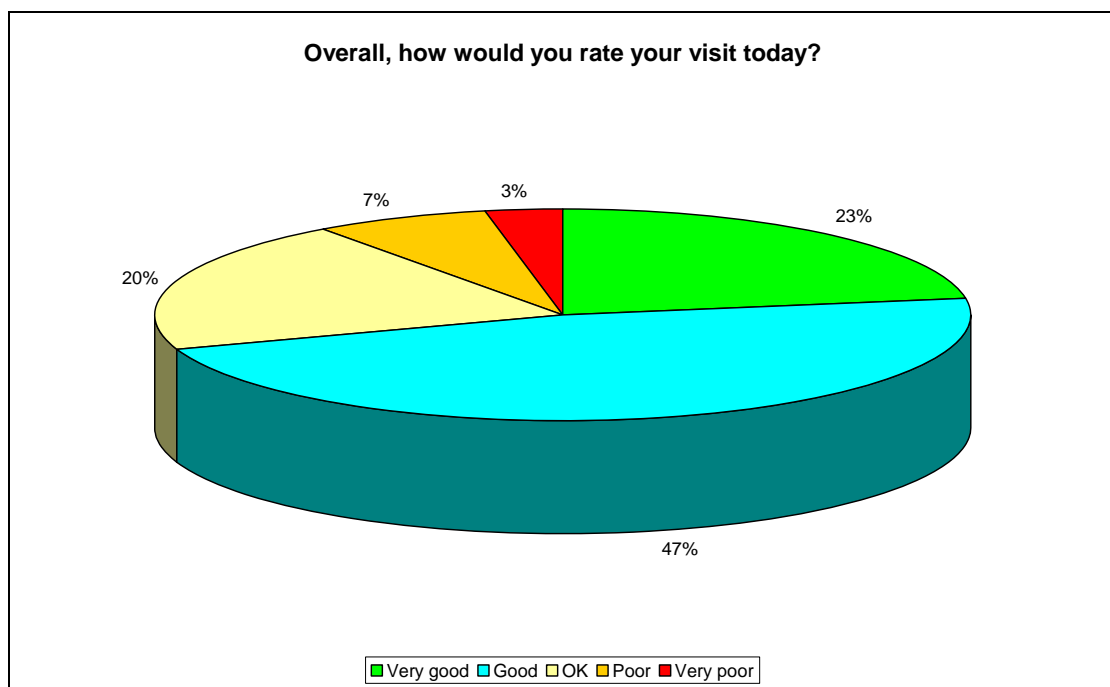
The respondents who felt they had been treated unfairly made a number of comments, many relating to our evidence requirements. Some clients said that they had been sent away a number of times to get different pieces of evidence, with their application being delayed (unfairly, in their eyes). Others said that the interviewing officer did not listen to their problems or were rude to them, and a small number believed that their expectations should have been met, e.g. "I didn't get the help I thought I would receive"

At the end of an interview, we believe that it is essential that the client is aware of the outcome of the interview, the effect it will have on their application and what options are available to them as a result of the interview. We asked, "At the end of the interview, how well did you understand your situation?" and got the following responses, shown in the graph, overleaf:



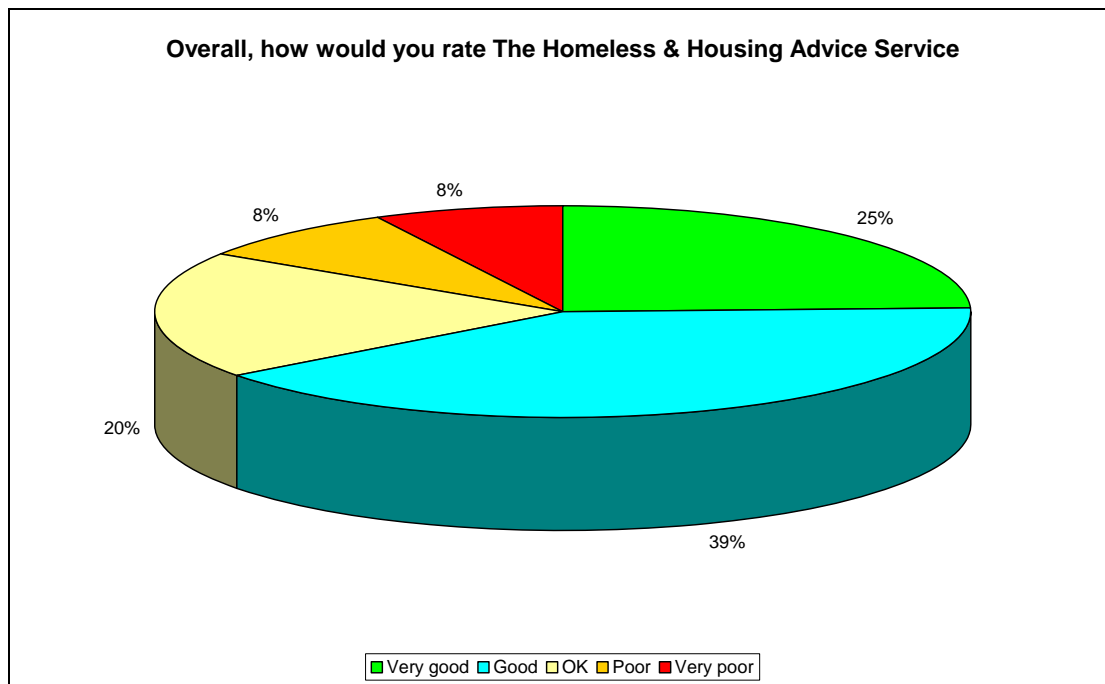
This is a very good result and, with a little more work, we could reach a point where every interview ends with the client fully understanding their situation and the options available to them.

We asked clients to rate their visit to the office, and received the following results, shown in the graph, below.



70% of respondents indicated that their visit to our office had been positive, with 20% expressing neutrality and the remaining 10% responding negatively, which is a good proportion of positive feedback.

We also asked visitors to rate the Homeless & Housing Advice Service, overall, indicating their satisfaction with the service we provide, shown in the graph below. Just under two-thirds (64%) of respondents were positive about the work performed by HHAS, with 20% giving noncommittal responses and 16% responding negatively. Again, we have achieved a good proportion of positive feedback, which provides us with a good basis for further improvement in customer perception of our service.



We received a number of comments in response to our request for service improvement suggestions and about the service we provide, with a selection of them included.

- *The questionnaires do not ask the questions we want to answer, like "How is your landlord treating you?" Some landlords are not good and don't listen.*
- *I'm in a hostel and it's taking too long to get me a place – no one is helping me enough. I want to get out of that place!*
- *I am very upset because I don't think anyone helped me enough.*
- *Waiting time is too long, and give us a receipt when we provide evidence.*
- *You need to employ more staff, to see people more efficiently. You need people who want to help people and more people to answer telephones.*
- *You need more services for single people.*

- *Stop wasting people's time – if you require documents, tell me everything I need to bring so I can provide everything in one go, rather than over a number of visits.*
- *I've been living in a hostel for five years – I just want my own place so I can find a job and settle down.*
- *The Homeless Service does nothing over the phone.*
- *They should have someone returning calls when they say they will, as it saves me the journey to the office to resolve the issue.*

These, and the remaining, comments are a valuable source of feedback for the Service, highlighting areas where we need to perform better, e.g. reducing waiting times and improving telephone answering. They also provide the client's perspective on the homeless application process and signpost areas for increased focus, e.g. evidence requests and services for single people.

Survey Officer Feedback

After the end of the survey period, we held a meeting with the survey officers to gather feedback about their experiences in the Reception area – it is not often that we have representatives in the public area for a sustained period of time, so their feedback is invaluable to us.

The following selection of comments, regarding their experiences in the Reception area, were made during the feedback meeting:

- They enjoyed the experience, but received many complaints about impoliteness from interviewing officers, i.e. no greeting, not giving their name and being rude
- Clients complained that they received poor explanations and were passed around various teams before receiving assistance
- Some clients highlighted that their telephone enquiries had either not been answered or they had been given incorrect information
- There were a number of complaints about clients being sent away for additional documentation, then not being given receipts when they provided the information or being sent away to provide other documentation, requiring multiple journeys to the office
- The survey officers thought that we could make better use of posters to convey useful information to visitors
- The use, and condition, of hostels was mentioned a number of times, regarding individuals and families being placed in close proximity to alcohol and drug abusers

- The survey officers suggested that we have either a general enquiries desk or regular general enquiry sessions to answer simple queries without the need for an appointment
- They also suggested that we create multilingual guidance forms to help clients correctly complete the forms we use and that we encourage staff to 'go the extra mile' when it comes to assisting clients with form completion or translation

Improving the Reception Survey

The survey officers suggested that we conduct the survey with a break of a couple of weeks in between the survey weeks, to minimise the chance of approaching the same visitors. As it appears that we have a number of repeat visitors, spacing out the two survey periods should improve our response rate, or at least enable the survey officers to approach a larger sample of visitors.

They also suggest that the number of survey officers on duty is biased towards the morning 'shift', as they state that we have more visitors to the office in the mornings, making it more productive for approaching visitors.

We will also change the way in which we ask which teams visitors saw, so we can analyse which teams were responsible for the longest, and shortest, waiting times. Although we have a system for monitoring waiting times, these can be validated (or questioned) using client feedback.

Conclusion

The Reception Survey, utilising Service Users to conduct visitor interviews, highlighted a number of service delivery aspects, both positive and negative, which are listed here for consideration.

Positive feedback

We deal with clients at reception well, achieving positive response rates of 87% for politeness, 81% for helpfulness and 82% for speed of service

The cleanliness of our reception area garnered an 82% positive response, and the overall reception rating was 81%

In terms of the quality of interviews conducted, we scored highly for politeness (89%), privacy protection (92%) and fairness (93%)

At the end of our interviews, respondents felt that they fully understood their situation in 85% of cases, though this figure drops to 62% when looking at the first interview only

Negative feedback

A substantial percentage of respondents stated that at the start of interviews, interviewing officers did not identify themselves (28%), inform the visitor of what team they work for (28%) or explain the purpose of the interview (23%)

Respondents highlighted that the tannoy was not loud enough (25%) or clear enough (29%)

The on-screen messages were judged to be neither obvious (91%) or useful (91%)

Only 6% of respondents had used our internet terminals in reception

We received a number of comments about the stocking of the vending machine, which was empty during the period of the Reception Survey

We received a small number of comments about interviewing officers speaking rudely to survey respondents, and about clients' privacy not being protected while being interviewed on the open counter points

Action Plan

In terms of improving upon our current performance during interviews, as our reception performance is perceived as being very good, we propose that the following actions are taken:

- Ensuring that interviewing officers identify themselves, explain the purpose of the interview and state the team they represent
- Highlighting the informal complaints procedure to visitors so that they can report, and we can reduce, incidences of staff impoliteness
- Requesting required documents at the same time, and issuing receipts for documentation received
- Reminding staff of the need to guarantee clients' privacy when being interviewed on the open counter points
- Focus on improving telephone enquiry answering, to reduce the number of visitors to the office, while changing customer perceptions about telephone enquiries