



## Achieving consistency in customer service

The London Borough of Lewisham has used drama-based training to help it provide a consistently high level of customer service across all of its directorates. After working with Steps to bring customer service to life at a series of conferences for front line staff, the council is now planning to incorporate drama into its management development.

### Objectives

The London Borough of Lewisham is one of the largest inner London boroughs. It serves over 245,000 people who live south-east of the city, in an area of some 14 square miles. The council had devised a set of corporate customer service standards that could not only be adopted across the whole organisation but could also be promoted to customers as a 'promise' of good service. The council was looking to instill a customer service culture, with these standards at the heart of provision.

*"In the past, it has been difficult to provide a consistent level of customer service throughout the authority because people work in different areas, in different circumstances,"* said Sharon Wilkins, LB Lewisham's Front Line Academy Manager. *"Residents, however, see the council as one organisation, so it is important that our service level is the same across all directorates."*

### Approach

Sharon met with Steps and asked us to bring alive the customer service standards at the conference. Steps had previously worked with the council in 2000, which provided a good foundation for the intervention. *"Steps understand learning and development and they've got a lot of experience of working with local authorities,"* said Sharon Wilkins. *"Their previous session had stuck in people's minds long afterwards. For this conference, we wanted to get the message across in a way that engaged staff, so we thought it would be good to use Steps again. They're great to work with and very responsive."*

The one-day conference was held at the borough council's civic suite. Around 130 staff who deliver services and deal with the public attended, filling the capacity of the venue. As well as highlighting the customer service standards, the conference featured workshops for front line staff on issues such as communications, e-government and 'joined up' working.

### Outcomes

*"With Steps, the interactive nature of their work is very entertaining and the quality of their delivery is always excellent,"* said Sharon Wilkins. *"Feedback showed that the conference was a great success. If we'd just sent out leaflets saying these are the customer service standards you have to live by, people would've been less inclined to take the messages on board. Because staff were so engaged, and they had an opportunity to contribute and discuss the points raised in the Steps scenarios, they bought into the reasons why the customer service standards were needed."*

Tracey Wilkinson, a Staff Development Officer at LB Lewisham, added: *"The people who attended said they learned a great deal from the role plays. They liked the fact that, rather than being 'talked at', they could interact and put their views across and they felt that the drama approach not only made the conference more interesting and enjoyable but it was also very strong in helping them to learn."*