

One Housing Group:  
Island Homes  
Personal Visit Mystery Shopper Report

August 2009

# Executive Summary

## Context

1. In February 2009 One Housing Group re commissioned Solon Community Network to Mystery Shop Island Homes to test their customers experience of service provision within the organisation.
2. The Personal Visit Mystery Shops tested the accessibility and environment of Island's main office. It also set out to test staff knowledge and information provision on specific housing management enquiries and customer care practices.
3. Request for Information on the Complaints Procedure was the enquiry used to test the organisation.
4. Solon trained nine Mystery Shoppers, each completed one personal visit (9 shops allocated in total).

## Overall Mystery Shopping Results

5. Overall results for the organisation were positive.
  - All the shoppers visiting the Millwall Office thought the office was accessible but only a third thought the approach to the office was clearly sign posted.
  - Only a third of those visiting Castalia Square thought the office was accessible but a majority (83%) thought the approach to the office was clearly sign posted.
  - All the shoppers visiting both offices said the approach to the office was clean, tidy and presentable and the reception area clearly visible.
  - The '*Service Charter*' standard of seeing visitors within 10 minutes was fully met. Shoppers visiting both offices reported they either did not have to wait to be seen and the three people that have had to wait were seen within less than 2 minutes.
  - Results were positive for the reception area environment, with a majority of shoppers reporting that seating was available (100%) and leaflets and drinking water was available (67% in both offices).
  - One shopper visiting the Millwall office (33%) and three shoppers visiting Castalia Square office (50%) reported not seeing a name badge.
  - The Customer Care results were positive with a staff from Millwall being awarded a maximum score for treating shoppers with respect and staff at Castalia being awarded 67% for being polite and giving information without prompting.

- Staff performance was average when giving Information on Making a Complaint enquiry. A minority of shoppers reported they were advised correctly how to lodge a complaint and the stages involved in resolving their complaint.

6. Our recommendations include:

- Fully publicising the Mystery Shopper programme results to staff and residents, and congratulating staff where they have achieved positive results.
- Reminding staff of the corporate standards, either through staff appraisals, printing & distributing greeting cards, reminders by senior management or through the intranet. Where basic staff knowledge needs to be improved, Island Homes could for instance:
  - Develop and distribute a Frequently Asked Questions leaflet for dealing with basic housing management enquiries to aid staff in answering enquiries
- Training is an effective way to address gaps in staff knowledge and improve performance, as well as updating existing staff and inducting new staff on commonly asked housing management questions.
- To continually monitor staff performance and service delivery, we recommend that further Mystery Shopper exercises be undertaken at 6 to 12 month intervals.

## **MAIN REPORT CONTENT**

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Methodology**
- 3. Profile of Mystery Shoppers**
- 4. Interpretation of Data**
- 5. Data Analysis**
  - Service Standards**
  - Customer Care Practices**
  - Knowledge & Information Giving**
- 6. Conclusions**

## Introduction

- 1.1 In February 2009 One Housing Group commissioned Solon Community Network to pilot a resident Mystery Shopping project with Island Homes.
- 1.2 Nine residents undertook nine Personal Visits to test the services provided by Island Housing Association over a period of two weeks, from 9 June until 19 June 2009.
- 1.3 This report covers:
- Analysis of personal visits shops
  - Detailed scenario analysis
  - Identification of areas for service improvement

## Methodology

- 2.1 Island Housing Association posted approximately 1,000 flyers inviting residents to become Mystery Shoppers.
- 2.2 A total of 15 residents expressed an interest in becoming Mystery Shoppers, 13 were booked onto the training course.
- 2.3 Nine residents and one member of One Housing Group staff attended a full day training session on 8 June 2009.
- 2.4 A total of 9 Mystery Shoppers completed one visit each to one of Island's two main offices in London
- Millwall Office (3 visits)
  - Castalia Square Office (6 visits)
- 2.5 The personal visits tested staff performance against published standards in the following service areas:

Island Housing Association's Standards	Areas tested by Mystery Shopping
Office / Service Accessibility: N/A	Entrance accessibility

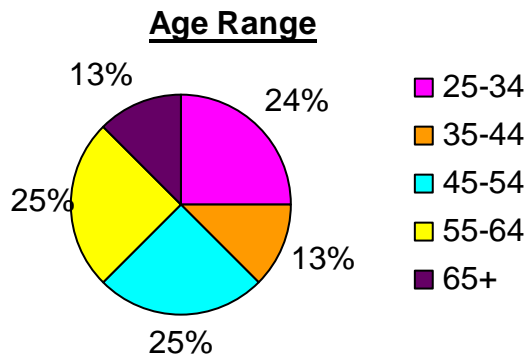
Island Housing Association's Standards	Areas tested by Mystery Shopping
	Clear signposted office entrance Visibility and staffing of reception desk
<p><b>Office Environment:</b></p> <p>We aim to ensure you wait no longer than 10 minutes to see a Duty Housing Officer</p> <p>The reception area will be clean and tidy with drinking water available</p> <p>The reception staff will always be wearing name badges</p> <p>There will be colouring books and crayons available for children and magazines available for adults</p>	Procedures for queuing / waiting  Use & visibility of name badges  Did the waiting area have: Seats Water Magazines  Office atmosphere  Display of booklets, posters, leaflets
<p><b>Customer Services:</b></p> <p>We will be polite</p>	Did staff member:  Offer a seat Apologise for wait  Staff were:  Polite & courteous Quick & efficient Treat customers with respect Come across as professional Genuinely wanted to help

2.6 The only enquiry / scenario used to test staff knowledge and information giving of 'Information on How to Make a Complaint'.

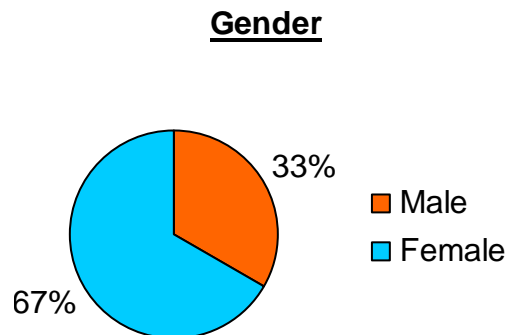
## Profile of mystery shoppers

3.1 Application packs collected a range of demographic and other information to build a profile of the shoppers. The charts below summarise this data.

3.2 Age Range

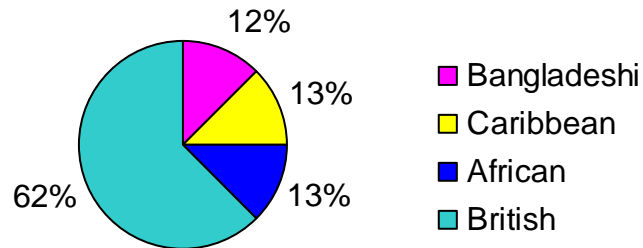


3.3 Gender



3.4 Ethnicity

### Ethnicity



- 3.5** Disability  
None of the shoppers reported having a disability.

## Interpretation of Data

- 4.1** Throughout this report all percentages have been rounded up or down.
- 4.2** Apart from spelling, the verbatim comments on Appendix One have not been edited.

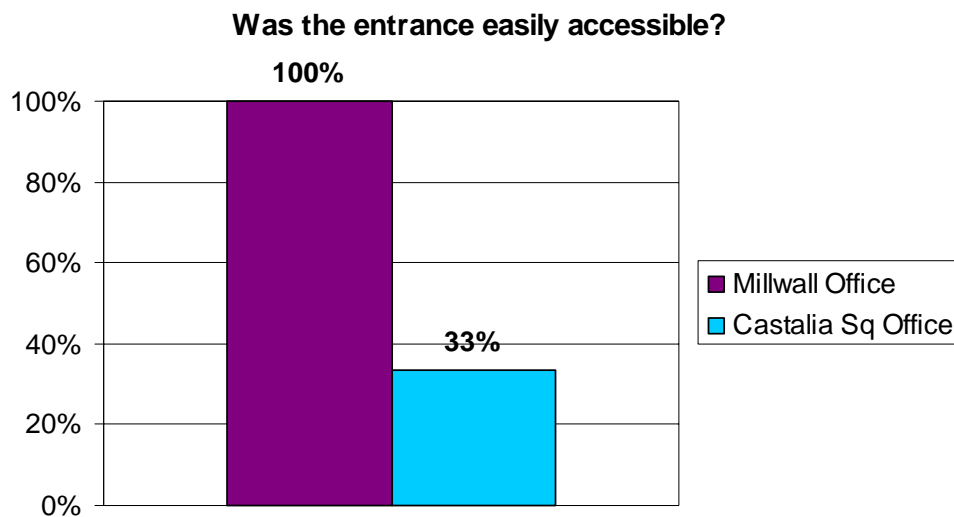
## Data Analysis

- 5.1 The personal visits tested 4 areas of service provision:
- Office Accessibility
  - Office Environment
  - Service Standards & Customer Care practices
  - Staff knowledge and information provision
- 5.2 The objective of the Personal Visit Mystery Shop was to:
- test staff knowledge
  - provide a baseline of service provision
  - make an evaluation of services from a residents perspective
  - carry out a real time audit of residents' experience of the service

### Office Accessibility

#### Entrance Accessibility

- 5.3 Shoppers were asked to score how accessible they found the office entrance, also taking into consideration disabled access to the office.
- 5.4 All the shoppers judged the Millwall office to be accessible. Only 33% (2 shoppers) of those visiting Castalia Square office considered the office accessible.



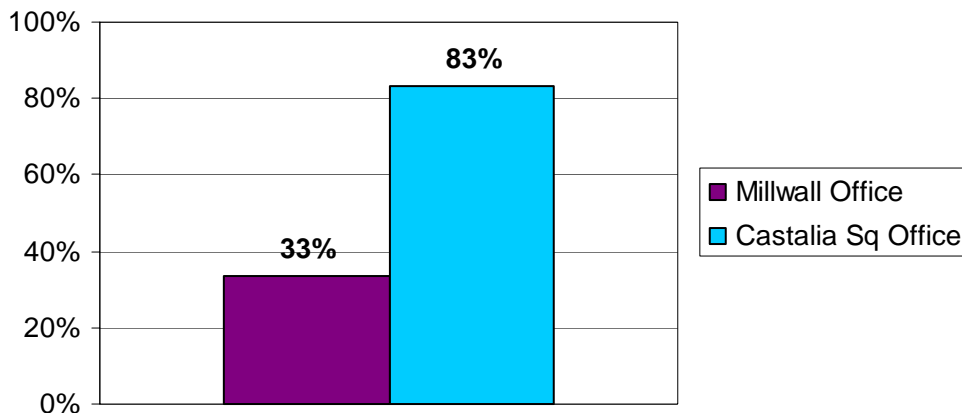
- 5.5 Of the shoppers that did not feel the Castalia Square office entrance to be accessible, below are the reasons they stated:
- *Did notice it had a very low step on entering*
  - *A person with a disability cannot open the door with out help. There should be automatic door facility*

- You have to open the door yourself and there is a sign saying – mind the step

### Sign posting of Office Entrance

5.6 Shoppers were asked to score sign posting to the office entrance. A majority of shoppers (83%) visiting Castalia Square as clearly signposted. This was not the case for the Millwall office.

#### Was the approach to the office clearly sign posted?

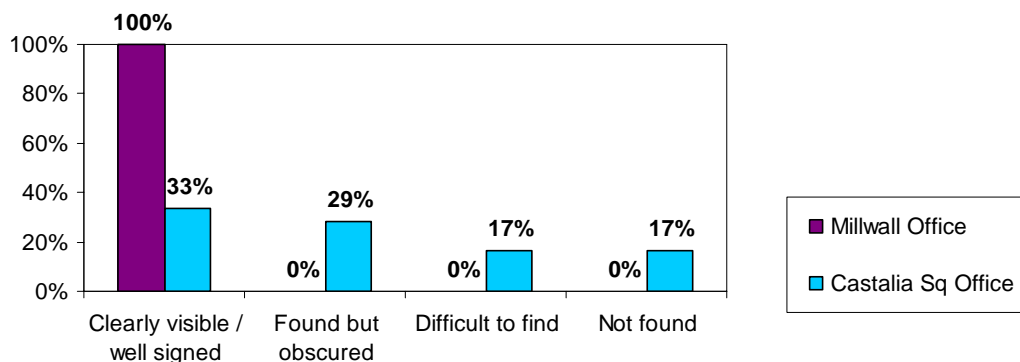


### Approach to the office and reception area

5.7 All the Mystery Shoppers visiting both Millwall and Castalia offices thought the approach to the office was clean, tidy and presentable.

5.8 When asked if the reception area was clearly visible, all the shoppers visiting Millwall office reported this was the case. Only two shoppers (33%) felt this was the case at the Castalia Square office.

#### On entry was the reception/welcome desk?



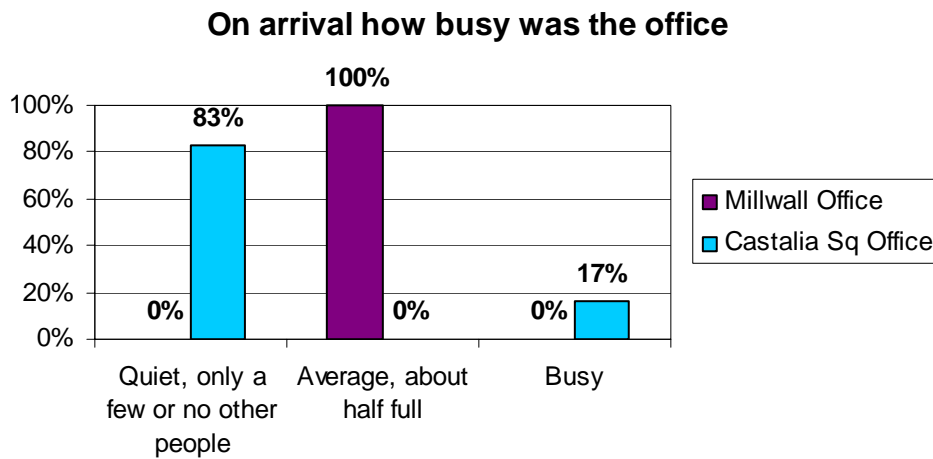
**5.9** All the shoppers reported that the reception area was staffed once they entered the Millwall office. Only one shopper reported not seeing a member of staff when entering the Castalia office.

## Office Environment

### Reception Area

**5.10** Shoppers were asked to observe how busy the office was.

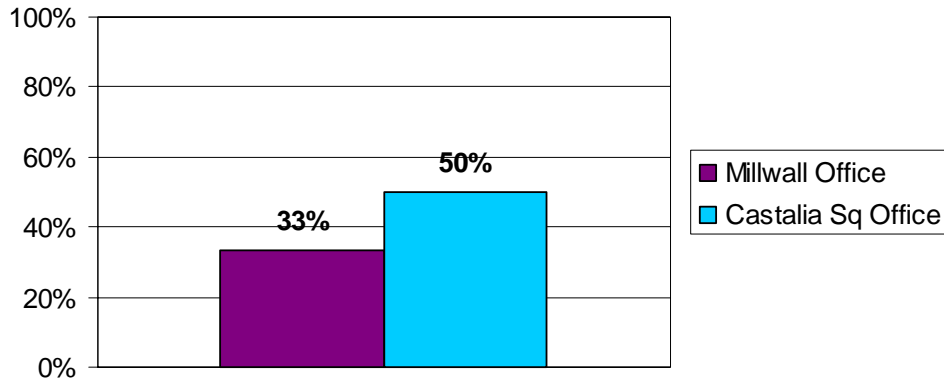
**5.11** All the shoppers visiting Millwall said the office was about half full. A majority of shoppers (80%) visiting Castalia Square noted that the office was quiet and there were only a few other people waiting to be seen.



### Procedures for queuing

**5.12** Half the shoppers visiting Castalia Square identified there were procedures for waiting. Only 33% of the shoppers (1 shopper) visiting Millwall office were able to identify queuing systems.

### Was there a clear process for queuing / waiting?

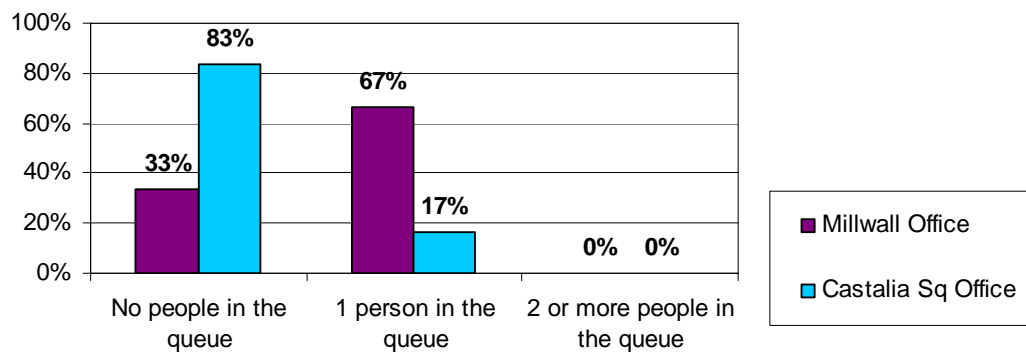


5.13 The verbatim comments below illustrate shoppers experiences:

- *A sign saying that I needed to press a bell was not visible as someone was sitting in front of it at the reception desk*
- *I rang reception bell and it was answered immediately therefore I didn't see any sort of queuing system*
- *It's basically take a seat and first come, first served. So your solely relying on everyone being honest.*
- *Small place, the other 2 people were talking to xxx*
- *I didn't see any sign*

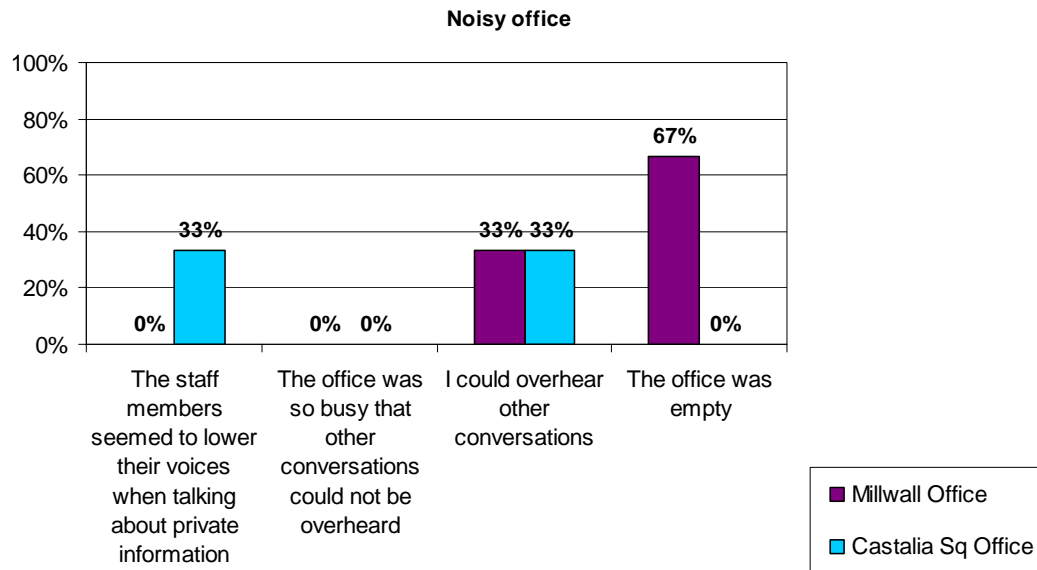
5.14 When asked about the number of people in front of them waiting to be seen, a majority of shoppers visiting Castalia Square (83%; 5 shoppers) reported there were no people in the queue. A majority of those visiting Millwall office (67%; 2 shoppers) said there was 1 person in front of them waiting to be seen.

### Number of people in front of you



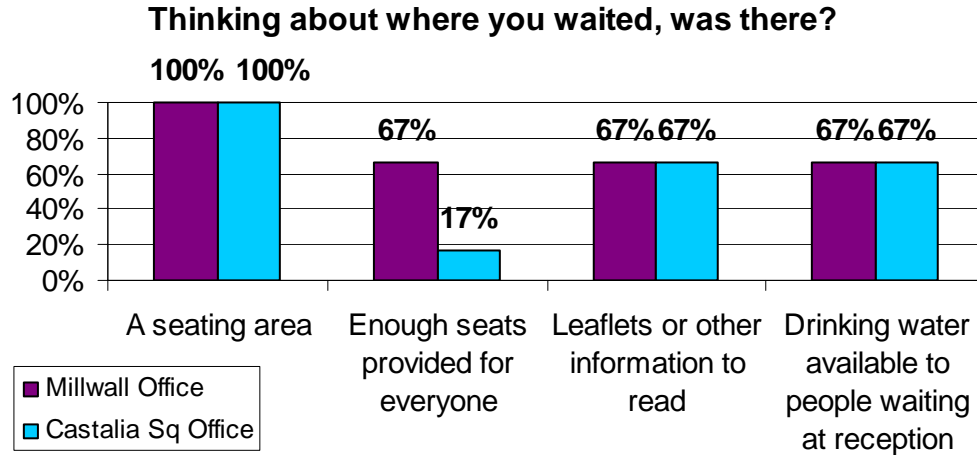
**5.15** All those shoppers that reported there were people in front of them waiting to be seen, subsequently noted that they had to wait less than two minutes to be seen by the reception staff. The *'Tenants' Compact'* standard of seeing visitors within 10 minutes was fully met.

**5.16** Shoppers recorded mixed observations when they were also asked to comment on noise levels in the reception area.



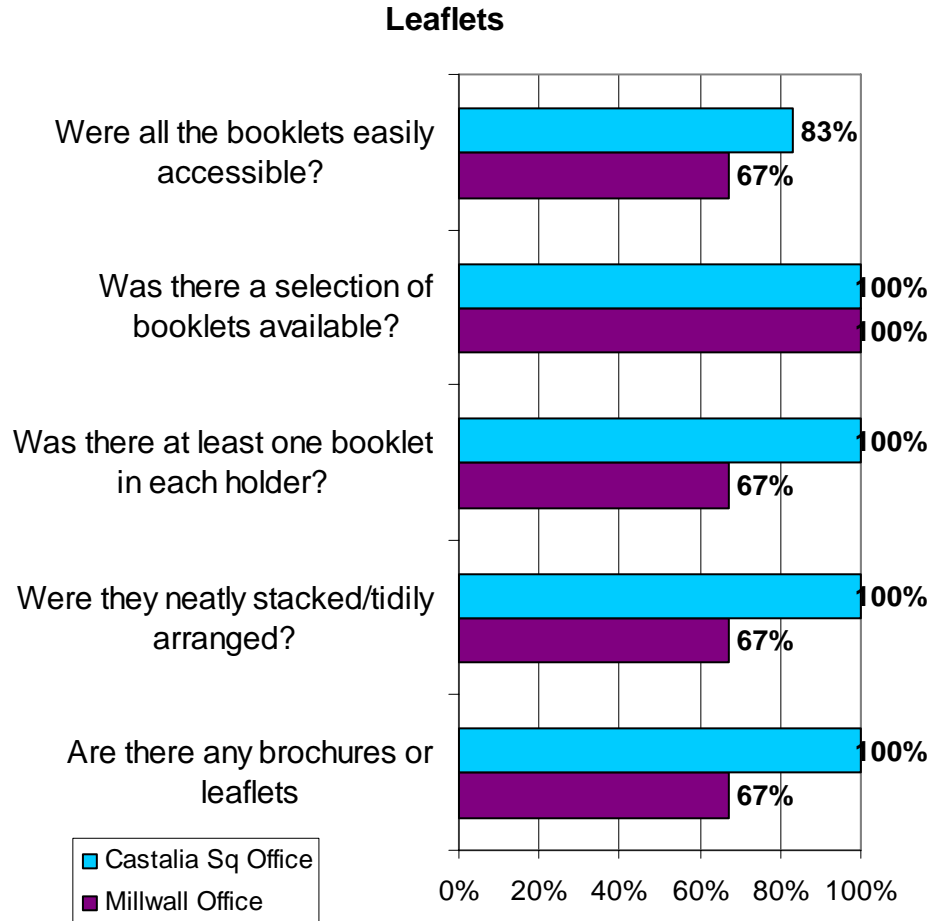
## The Seating Area

5.17 Shoppers were asked to observe if there is the provision of drinking water, colouring books & crayons for children and magazines for adults in the reception area.



5.18 Overall in a majority of cases, shoppers reported there being a seating area, leaflets and drinking water. Only one shopper (17%) felt there were enough seats provided for everyone in Castalia Square.

**5.19** Shoppers were also asked to observe how leaflets and booklets were displayed around the seating and reception area.

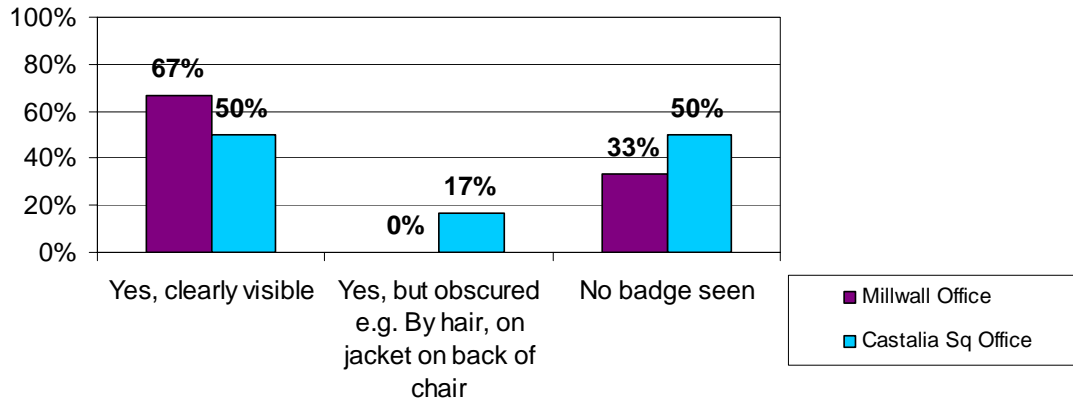


**5.20** Results demonstrate that a majority of shoppers reported that the leaflets and posters were displayed neatly, with a number of maximum scores being given by shoppers.

## Name Badges

5.21 Shoppers were asked to observe if reception staff were wearing a name badge. A majority of shoppers reported seeing a badge when visiting Millwall office. This was the case with only half the shoppers visiting Castalia Square office.

Was the staff member wearing a visible name badge?



## Service Standards & Customer Care

### Greeting by Staff

5.22 Shoppers were asked to record how they were greeted when they arrived at the reception desk

5.23 Of the shoppers visiting the Millwall office:

- 67% of staff said 'how can I help you?'
- 33% of staff gave positive eye contact / warm expression
- 33% of staff just looked at them
- None of the shoppers were offered a seat

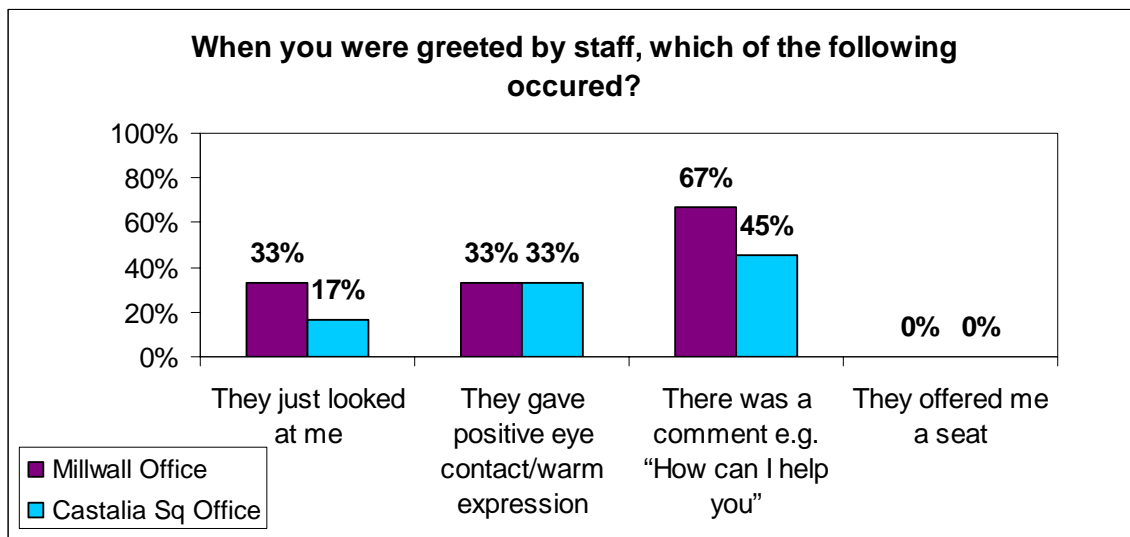
5.24 Of the shoppers visiting the Castalia Square office:

- None of the staff said 'how can I help you?'
- 33% of staff gave positive eye contact / warm expression
- 17% of staff just looked at them
- 83% were offered a seat

### Dealing with the enquiry at the first point of contact

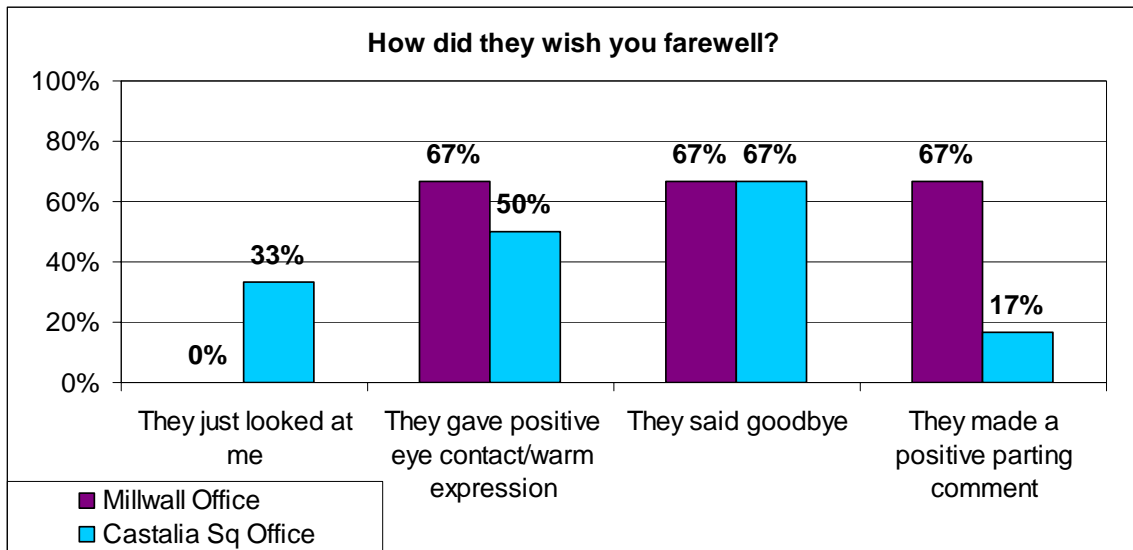
5.25 All the shoppers visiting both offices reported their enquiry was dealt with straight away by the person they spoke to.

5.26 Only one shopper visiting the Millwall office reported her conversation was interrupted and did not receive an apology from the member of staff.



## Ending the Visit

5.27 Overall staff scored well on the parting greeting.



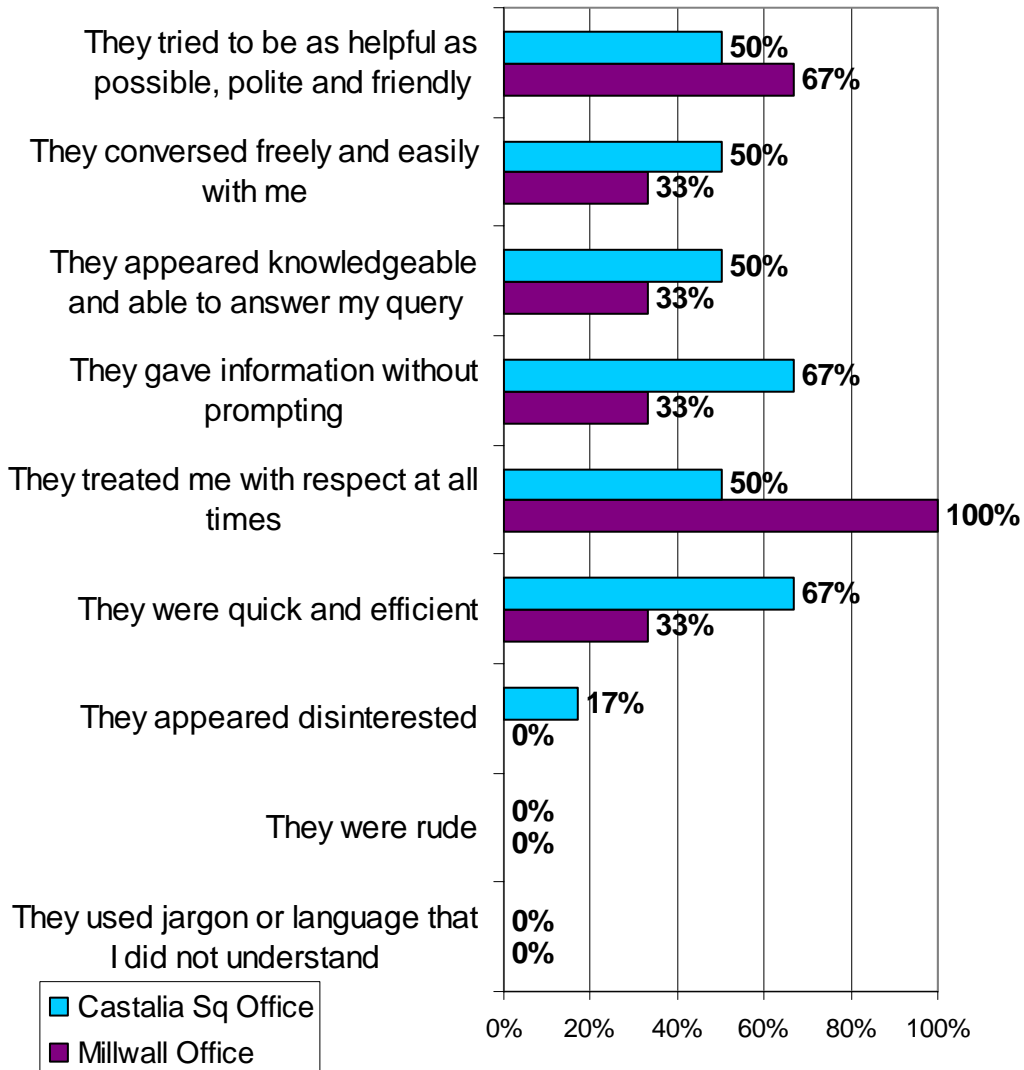
5.28 The shoppers visiting the Millwall Office reported 67% of staff gave positive eye contact, said good bye and made a positive parting comment.

5.29 The shoppers visiting Castalia Square 67% reported staff said good bye, half of staff gave positive eye contact. However over a third of shoppers felt staff did not acknowledge they were leaving and just looked at shoppers.

## Overall Impression of Customer Care

5.30 Results indicate that the majority of staff provided average customer care.

### Quality of Customer Care



5.31 Staff are expected to be friendly, polite and helpful.

5.32 For shoppers visiting Castalia Square office staff were given the following scores:

- 67% being quick and efficient
- 67% for giving information without prompting
- 50% for being helpful, polite and friendly
- 50% for conversing freely and easily with shoppers

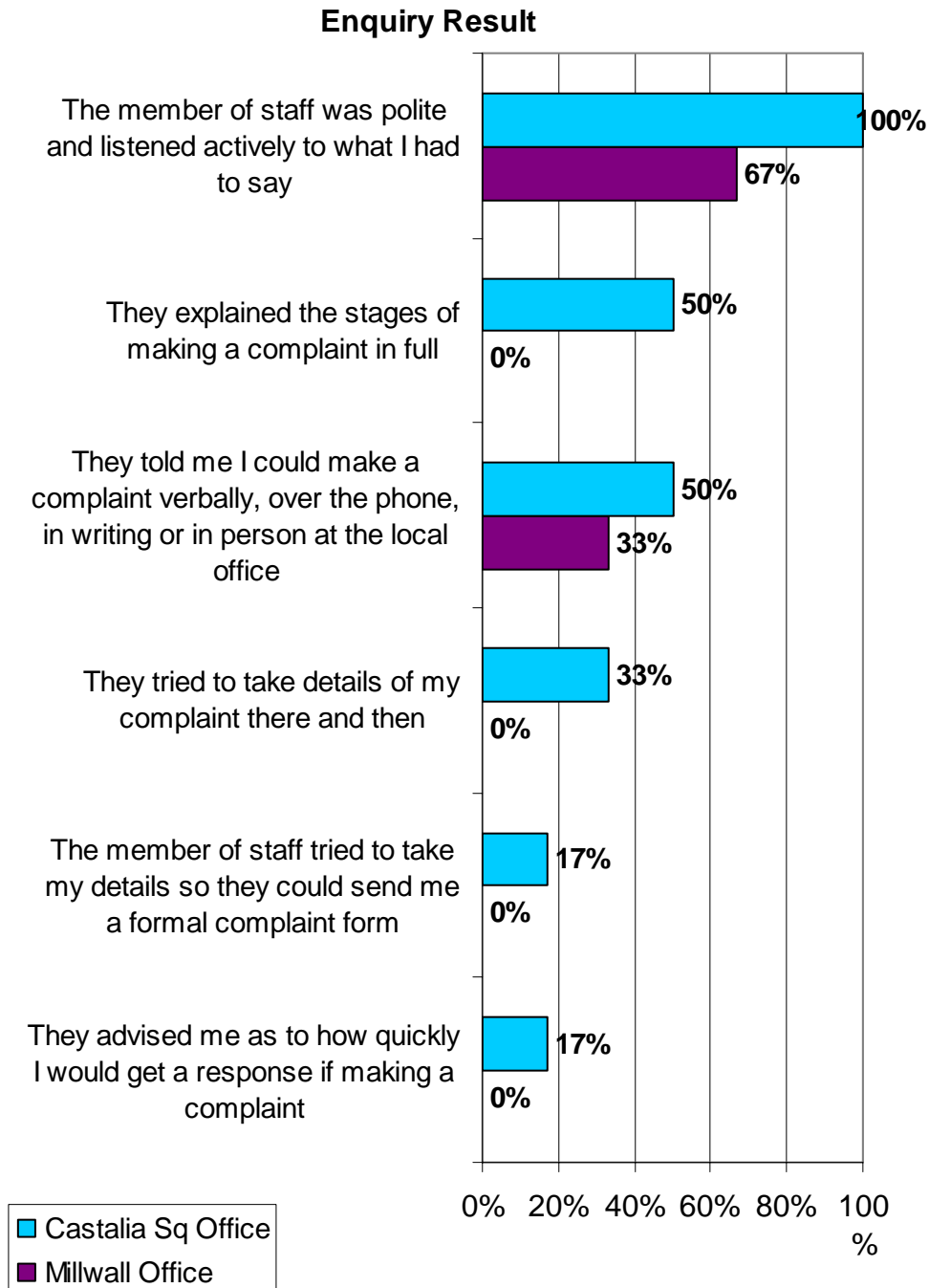
5.33 Shoppers visiting the Millwall office were more satisfied with the service they received but said staff were less knowledgeable about their enquiry:

- 100% said staff treated them with respect
- 67% said staff were helpful, polite and friendly
- 33% for being quick and efficient
- 33% for giving information without prompting
- 33% for conversing freely and easily with shoppers

**5.34** None of the shoppers visiting either office reported staff used language they did not understand or were rude to them.

## Knowledge and Information Giving

5.35 The results show that for the 'Information on Making a Complaint' staff did answer the enquiry satisfactorily.



**5.35.1** The results show that staff performance was average when answering this enquiry.

**5.35.2** Shoppers visiting Castalia Square reported:

- 50% of staff explained the stages of making the complaint in full
- 50% of staff explained complaints can be made verbally, in writing or over the phone
- 33% of staff tried to deal with the complaint there and then

**5.35.3** Staff at the Millwall office performed less well:

- None of the staff explained the stages of making the complaint in full
- 33% of staff explained complaints can be made verbally, in writing or over the phone
- None of the staff tried to deal with the complaint there and then

## Conclusion

**6.1** The results for Island Homes' Personal Visit Mystery Shopping were positive.

- All the shoppers visiting the Millwall Office thought the office was accessible but only a third thought the approach to the office was clearly sign posted.
- Only a third of those visiting Castalia Square thought the office was accessible but a majority (83%) thought the approach to the office was clearly sign posted.
- All the shoppers visiting both offices said the approach to the office was clean, tidy and presentable and the reception area clearly visible.
- The 'Service Charter' standard of seeing visitors within 10 minutes was fully met. Shoppers visiting both offices reported they either did not have to wait to be seen and the three people that have had to wait were seen within less than 2 minutes.
- Results were positive for the reception area environment, with a majority of shoppers reporting that seating was available (100%) and leaflets and drinking water was available (67% in both offices).
- One shopper visiting the Millwall office (33%) and three shoppers visiting Castalia Square office (50%) reported not seeing a name badge.
- The Customer Care results were positive with a staff from Millwall being awarded a maximum score for treating shoppers with respect and staff at Castalia being awarded 67% for being polite and giving information without prompting.
- Staff performance was average when giving Information on Making a Complaint enquiry. A minority of shoppers reported they were advised correctly how to lodge a complaint and the stages involved in resolving their complaint.

## Recommendations

**7.** To improve performance in service delivery we would recommend:

- Publishing highlights of the Mystery Shopping Results on Island Housing's intranet and / or staff newsletter and congratulating staff on achieving positive results
- Developing and agreeing a service improvement plan with housing managers and agree future action plan and incentives to improve staff performance
- Reminding staff of the corporate standards, either through staff appraisals, printing & distributing greeting cards, reminders by senior management or through the intranet, for instance on the need to wear name badges.

**8.** Training is an effective way to address gaps in staff knowledge and improve performance, as well as updating existing staff and inducting new staff on commonly asked housing management questions. Training could include:

- A compulsory yearly multi choice online quiz to keep staff knowledge levels 'topped up'
  - Quarterly & bi-annual housing management ½ day training / refresher sessions
9. We recommend the Mystery Shopper results be shared with all of Island Homes' residents. Information could be disseminated through a newsletter; as an agenda item at the Tenants' Conference and/or briefings with tenant representatives and groups. Based on our experience, this encourages more residents to become involved in Mystery Shopping and other tenant involvement activities.
  10. To continually monitor staff performance and service delivery, we recommend that further Mystery Shopper exercises be undertaken at 6 to 12 month intervals.