

**1. Title of the case:**

Citizens Service Bureau of Strovolos Municipality, Cyprus

**2. General description of the organization and/or project:**

The Municipality of Strovolos was founded in 1986 and is the second largest Municipality in Cyprus with a population of about 70.000. The Municipal Service consists of 76 employees and 142 workers. The Municipal Service is divided in several Departments according to their different activities.

Aiming at the best possible service of the citizens and the facilitation of their contact with the Municipality we proceeded in 1998 to the establishment of the Citizens' Service Bureau.

**3. The main content of your case:**

The basic priority of the Citizens' Service Bureau, is the direct promotion of complaints, charges, problems and applications of the citizens to the corresponding Departments of the Municipality which will in turn examine and process them. The Office aims also at sensitising the citizens and involve them in the process of detecting and reporting sources of problems for which the Municipality has to take action.

The Citizens' Service Bureau is responsible for:

- providing the mechanism to the citizens of Strovolos to contact and express their complaints/demands and to claim the right of service,
- accepting the public, giving guidance and answering questions that bother the citizens as well as informing them on several processing issues and on the Legislation,
- coordinating and monitoring the processing of the problems/complaints and their resolution and informing the General Management for any delays.

The Citizens' Service Bureau also:

- observes and analyzes statistical elements that are related with the type of complaints, the nature and the time of their submission as well as the categories of complaints and demands,
- suggests ways of preventive action aiming at the prevention of the appearance of demands or complaints on behalf of the public by addressing their needs in advance as much as possible,
- evaluates the effectiveness of the Departments and suggests ways of achieving a higher level of service,
- examines the complaints of the public that are assigned to it and it submits reports and suggestions,
- is responsible for the preparation and submission to the General Management of an annual report regarding the work of the Citizens' Service Bureau.

#### **4. The reasons behind the case:**

We wanted an office that would give the following in an organised and efficient way:

- give the citizen the opportunity to speak in order to express his complaints, demands and/or to claim for the right of being served,
- record and categorize per Department the various demands of the citizens,
- send the demands of citizens to the corresponding Departments of the Municipality so as to be taken care of and then to monitor their processing,
- observe and analyze statistical elements which are related with the nature and the categories of the demands,
- suggest and/or provide the possibility of preventive action in order to prevent the appearance of demands and/or complaints on behalf of the citizens,
- evaluate the effectiveness and the behavior of the Departments and suggest ways of achieving a higher level of service,
- push the Departments of the Municipality in introspection and questioning through the presentation of statistics and data which in fact reflect their way of operation.

## **5. The actors behind the case:**

The main contributors of the establishment of the citizens' service bureau were:

- The rightness of the logic behind this idea which was difficult to be fought even by possible secret opposers.
- The Mayors' determination to proceed towards the implementation of this project and his decision to leave on the side the practice of his predecessors that wanted the citizen standing on a huge queue inside and outside his office in order to be served.
- The decision of a few employees at first and a lot more later to support this attempt.
- The position of the Municipal Council which in its majority adopted and completely supported the effort.
- The positive response of the citizens themselves who massively began to utilize the opportunity to communicate with the Citizens' Service Bureau.
- The meritocratic way of choosing the staff of the Citizens' Service Bureau and their ability to handle the mission that was assigned to them.

## **6. The process leading to success:**

Through a purpose made software, the complaints/demands of the public are registered in a special record, take a serial number so as to be found and monitored more easily and depending on their nature are promoted electronically to the responsible Departments of the Municipality for examination. The number of the complaint is also communicated to the complainer who is informed as well about the Department and the employee that will examine his complaint.

Into various pre-determined time frames, the Department responsible has an obligation of examining the complaint and act responsibly. In the cases of rejecting a demand, a complete justified answer must be given to the complainer.

The Department must also inform the Citizens' Service Bureau for the final result of the complaint.

The Citizens' Service Bureau, through the programme mentioned above, monitors the processing of the complaints from their initial stage of receipt until the issue of their final result. In the frame of this monitoring it reminds the Departments on a regular basis and informs the General Management for any neglections or delays.

At the end of each year, the Citizens' Service Bureau prepares and submits to the General Management an annual report, which includes a numerical and statistical analysis of the complaints of the year, neglections and delays, ascertainments about the function of the institution as well as suggestions and proposals about ways of proccesing and resolving problems.

The Report is discussed in a meeting under the presidency of the Mayor in the presence of the Town Clerk and all the Heads of the Municipality's Departments. The responsibility of implementing any decision-making is of the Citizens' Service Bureau which prepares and submits a report to the Mayor who calls for a new meeting if this is considered to be necessary.

The operation of the Citizens' Service Bureau is certified based on the revised model 2000 (ISO 9001:2000).

The practice we follow has contributed to:

- the improvement of the communication system between the various Departments of the Municipality,
- the development of a sincere dialogue with the citizens, through which the necessity of continuing the institution as well as upgrading the services offered by it, is shown,
- the establishment of mechanisms for dealing with the citizens' problems on time,

- the direct resolution of simple problems, which under other circumstances could be delaying,
- the existence of transparency and objectivity regarding the information of the public,
- the sensitization of the public, and their encouragement to participate in detecting and reporting out problems in the streets, in the parks, about the pavements, the lighting of city etc.

Furthermore, it has also played an important role which undoubtedly has created the necessary conditions for a rational organisation and performance of the Municipal Service and of course the improvement of the quality of service.

Apart from wanting to give to the citizens a proper tool of communication with the Municipal Service and a channel of following up within the Municipal Service of that communication, we had another important strategic target at the back of the Mayor's mind:

Instead of loosing time trying to convince the various middle-level Managers that their Departments need re-organisation and upgrading of the level and quality of service, the Mayor thought that this could be an obvious duty which would be exposed through the reports and the data of the Citizens' Service Bureau.

The institution of measurable goals/indicators of quality as this is required by the revised model of 2000 as well as the fact that in February 2006 another practice that is used by the Municipality called "System of Prevention and Environmental Information" and other four Departments of the Municipal Service have been certified on the basis of this model, it is expected that the quality of service is going to be improved even more.

## **7. Results indicating the success:**

In order to measure the effectiveness of the practice that we follow, we keep records regarding the kind of the complaints submitted, their number, their

nature and the time required for their settlement and we set quantitative and qualitative goals which aimed at its improvement .

Through these measurements it appears that:

- (a) about ten thousand citizens contact the Citizens' Service Bureau every year in order to express or deposit problems, complaints and suggestions. A percentage of 40% that states simple issues or that asks questions about the Municipality's services is directly served by the Citizens' Service Bureau whereas the rest 60% of the complaints are sent to the responsible Departments in order to be examined and processed.
- (b) Out of 6000 claims/demands which end up per year to the several Departments, a percentage of:
- 60%** is about issues of public health and cleanliness
  - 20%** is about problems that are due to the land and the building development in general, issues that have to do with the road network and the road security.
  - 15%** is about the development and conservation of the of green areas
  - 5%** is about the lighting of the city, the illegal parking etc.
- (c) A percentage of 85% of the complaints/demands are processed and satisfied, 8% are rejected as unreasonable and the rest 7% is sent to other public or semi-public organisations for dealing with.

In addition through the setting of goals we managed to:

- Reduce in total number the complaints that are submitted per year
- reduce the time necessary to examine the complaints and as a consequence the time to respond to the citizens
- reduce the time required to transfer the complaints to the relevant Departments/people that will examine them.

An annual research is made by a private company in order to find out the degree of satisfaction of the citizens towards the Citizens' Service

Bureau. The research conducted in November 2005 showed an improvement in comparison to the year before:

- the citizens' satisfaction regarding the information provided to them on the examination of their complaints increased from 3,46 to 3,66
- their satisfaction regarding the time necessary to solve their problems increased from 2,80 to 2,90
- their satisfaction regarding the processing/solution of their problems increased from 2,96 to 3,13.

This research also showed an important increase to the citizens' percentage (from 64% to 73%) who when asked said that they would prefer to visit the Citizens' Service Bureau in order to report their problems rather than visiting separately the different Departments of the Municipality.

## **8. The main obstacles of the case:**

The obstacles and difficulties that had to be faced regarding the establishment of the Citizens' Service Bureau were various:

- On a functional level, there were practical difficulties concerning the housing of the Citizens' Service Bureau which had directed to such procedures which if followed would never allowed the project to make even its first step.
- On a functional level again, there were oppositions and questions that were related with the fear of turning over the already established mentalities and of destabilizing the issue of the "Great" that was developed through the offer of service by favor

From the the part of the Municipal Council, there was a more positive reaction, except from some isolated expression of doubts concerning the effectiveness of such a Bureau.

There was a hidden fear that through the analysis and the records that the Citizens' Service Bureau would keep, there would be a possible exposure of those working inefficiently or not working at all.

## **9. Main sources of inspiration behind the case:**

When the Citizens' Service Bureau was established, there was nowhere else in the Public Service any other similar Citizens' Service Bureau or department.

It was however in the Mayor's electoral manifest that the communication channels between the citizens and the Municipality needed to be synchronised and put on a more efficient infrastructure.

It was about time, the Mayor thought, that the situation of the citizen being sent from office to office and from employee to employee in order to receive the service he deserved, to be stopped. The realization of this simple truth gave birth to the Citizens' Service Bureau.

The Municipality of Strovolos has been the pioneer, the first Municipality that implemented this practice which then other Municipalities followed after visiting and examining our own.

In addition, the Government has also moved into establishing a similar Bureau in the capital, years after Strovolos Municipality's case.

## **10. The most important lesson learned:**

Looking back at the first moment of the initialisation of the effort to establish this Citizens' Service Bureau, we recall that there was a strong determination on the part of the Mayor to seek the best way to serve the citizens of Strovolos without having them hunged up in his office or in any of the Municipality's Managers offices begging for things that are within the citizens' rights to receive.

We recall also that the resistance to the change is impersonal, but is always initiated by certain persons who have to be identified and disarmed without forcing them to an opposing side.