

## The easyCouncil model

November 2010

The key elements of the 'easyCouncil' model are claimed to be:

- '...the Council will not automatically provide blanket coverage of services as they have tried to do before';
- Service users will pay extra for services once considered part of the standard service;
- Service users will pay extra for jumping the queue services, for example paying extra to obtain faster consideration of a planning permission;
- Personal/individual budgets will allow service users more choice and flexibility in which service they choose to buy;

The public will be also 'nudged' or induced into changing patterns of behaviour, for example, reducing the amount of waste that needs to be collected by reducing the size of waste bins and giving a financial bonus for those who use less waste.

The cheap airlines business model may have some relevance relative to other airlines, but applying this model to the delivery of public services is flawed for the following reasons:

1. Flights on budget airlines are only cheap if tickets are booked weeks in advance. These fares are funded by people who have to travel at short notice (funerals, family emergencies, last minute business travel). *Public services to date do not financially penalise users most in need of the service.*
2. Upgrades or paying more for a better service is not an option on budget airlines – all seats are the same! Only a handful of seats with additional leg room (only some airlines charge extra for these seats) and the additional cost of either selecting a seat in advance or priority queuing are methods of additional income generation and have little benefit, particularly when the bulk of passengers are happy to queue. *The public service equivalent will simply be a method of imposing new or high charges for basic services.*
3. Additional charges for luggage, not applicable on any other form of public transport, is a punitive payment for those who cannot travel light or are going away for more than a few days. High priced food and drinks, are free on scheduled flights. The 'cheap' model is not so cheap if the airline loses your luggage and imposes charges if you don't collect it within a limited period. *Designing public services for those with the minimum needs and charging those most in need for everything else would be a fundamental reversal of public service principles and human rights.*
4. Passengers who cannot or forget to check-in online or lose their boarding card are subjected to further punitive charges that bear no relation to the actual cost incurred by the airline – a practice banks have been severely criticised for

---

employing. *This is another example of punitive treatment. Furthermore, public services have to respond to changing needs and socio-economic circumstances and cannot and must not impose such draconian regulations.*

5. The quality of the service – queuing, walking to the plane in the rain, frequent use of busing from plane to terminal, smaller luggage allowances and frequent promotion of products inflight reduce the quality of the service. This quality/cost trade-off is primarily applicable only to short haul flights. *It is widely accepted that public services must not operate on a ‘take it or leave it’ basis and that the quality of service arises from the delivery process, relations between users and staff, as well as the quality of outputs and outcomes.*
6. The almost exclusive focus only on the cost of the air fare promotes the ‘cheap’ brand but masks the full cost of budget air travel. Once government taxes, airport charges and credit/debit card handling charges are included with the cost of online booking and luggage, the cost rises significantly. It increases again if the cost of priority queuing or booking of seats, an in-flight snack and the additional airport access costs incurred by flying to more remote airports is taken into account. The budget airline model feeds off this lack of transparency. *Whilst the public may accept the budget airline model for the occasional flight, they are almost certain not do so for the daily delivery of the welfare state. Transparency and disclosure needs to be enhanced rather than reduced and commercialised.*

All these attributes are inverse to the function of public services. The claim that the cheap airline model provides a basic low-cost service and passengers wanting a quicker or better service can pay extra is not the cheap airline model. The description of the model is wrong and its application to public services does not provide an effective model.

Furthermore, it is insulting to Barnet Council staff because it implies a degree of simplicity in the delivery of services that does not exist in practice.

It is part of a ‘dumbing down’ of public services and an attempt to reduce people’s expectations whilst simultaneously increasing anticipation that new and/or higher charges for services should be expected.



Dexter Whitfield, Director  
Adjunct Associate Professor,  
Australian Workplace Innovation and Social Research Centre,  
University of Adelaide  
Mobile +353 (0)87 7055509  
Tel. +353 (0)66 7130225  
Email: [dexter.whitfield@gmail.com](mailto:dexter.whitfield@gmail.com)  
Web: [www.european-services-strategy.org.uk](http://www.european-services-strategy.org.uk)