

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Finance, Housing and Resources Committee

28 August 2013

Agenda Item	3
Report No	FHR/87/13

Report on Achievement of Customer Services Excellence Award

Report by Assistant Chief Executive

Summary

This report details the continued achievement of the Customer Services organisation in retaining the externally assessed Customer Service Excellence Standard. This is currently the only externally assessed Customer Service standard recognised and supported by the UK Cabinet Office.

1. Background

1.1 The Highland Council Customer Services organisation has been externally assessed under the Charter Mark Standard since 1999 when it was first achieved. This standard covered all the customer services joint offices including libraries, registration and VisitScotland premises where joint partnerships operated. This standard was only awarded when an organisation could demonstrate to the Cabinet Office that the organisation was “producing a first class customer service”. The Charter Mark Standard was replaced in 2010 by Customer Service Excellence, which the Council attained in 2010 and is externally assessed on an annual basis

1.2 The in-depth assessment covers all aspects of the Customer Services organisation including Service Points, Service Centre, Registration service and the provision of partnership services to external customers such as the Identity and Passport Service.

2 Customer Service Excellence (CSE)

2.1 The standard places emphasis on customers and the customer journey to ensure complete customer satisfaction from beginning to end of contact with the Council. It is externally assessed over a five day period and is a challenging and difficult standard to achieve. All criteria awarded must be evidence based and must show continuous improvement. The five main criteria where the organisation must provide evidence are in the following areas:

1. Customer Insight
2. The Culture of the Organisation
3. Information and Access
4. Customer Service Delivery
- 5 Timeliness and Quality of Service

- 2.2 Each criteria is further subdivided and there are a total of 121 criteria that must be achieved before the award of the standard. Each criteria is subject to evidenced based examination by an independent assessor appointed by the Assessment Service. The assessor also visits 15 Customer Service Offices during the course of the assessment, a record is kept of visits so that during each annual assessment different sites are visited.
- 2.3 The standard is awarded for three years, with independent assessments then taking place on an annual basis to ensure the required customer service standards are being maintained. The annual assessments will focus in on key criteria where further evidence is required or areas for improvement have been identified.
- 2.4 A highlight report is attached at Appendix A and the full report can be found on the Council's website. The overall summary of the report states

The Service Point Network operates across the whole of Highland Region in 35 locations. Each office acts as the first point of contact for customers wishing to access services from the council. The Call Centre is also part of the Network and provides valuable telephony access for the public. Managers and staff take immense pride in operating the service and despite considerable financial constraints have maintained a high level of customer service delivery. Considerable partnership working has been developed for the benefit of customers and arrangements are tailored to suit the needs of local communities and customer groups. The transition from Charter Mark to Customer Service Excellence has been a challenging journey, but all involved have demonstrated a huge commitment and they are to be congratulated on this achievement.

Overall a job very well done and all managers and staff should take pride in their achievement. Delivering a constant service over such a large geographical area is impressive. Partnership working is exceptional with staff and partners taking ownership and customer service delivery seriously. All Service Points visited were found to be very tidy and presentation of material was first class. Although each location was different there was a corporate feel about the Service Points.

Overall this organisation has demonstrated a commitment to continuously improve customer service delivery. Challenges with fewer resources, changes in working relationships with partners, such as Police Scotland have not deterred progress in improving customer journeys. Service Points, including the Service Centre are in the main the first point of contact for Highland Council and all staff and managers should take great pride in the high level of service they deliver. A great deal of attention is being applied to improving the quality of service delivery. All elements in the Standard are considered to be fully met and the retention of CSE accreditation is well deserved.

2.5 The assesor also commented that although the organisation was undergoing a period of change, outcomes to customers were being maintained and in some cases improved. Again the staff were commended for their focus and dedication on delivering a high level of service to customers.

2.6 The Customer Service Team are therefore delighted to have achieved the standard set by the Cabinet Office, to follow on from their successful retention of the Charter Mark since 1999. This is the only external Cabinet Office Customer Service Standard awarded to any service in the Highland Council, and an acheivement that the team are very proud of.

3. **Implications**

3.1 Legal/Risk/Resources/Finance/Equalities/Climate change - there are no implications arising from this report.

4. Recommendation

- i. Members are asked to note the outcomes from the assesment and the successful achievement and improvement against the criteria of the Customer Service Excellence standard.

Signature: Michelle Morris

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive

Date: 12th August 2013

Author/Reference: Vicki Nairn



Assessment Report
Customer Service Excellence

Highland Council
Highland Council Customer Services

Successful
2 July 2013

Assessment Summary

Overview

Overall Self-assessment	Satisfactory
Overall outcome	Successful

The Service Point Network operates across the whole of Highland Region in 35 locations. Each office acts as the first point of contact for customers wishing to access services from the council. The Call Centre is also part of the Network and provides valuable telephony access for the public. Managers and staff take immense pride in operating the service and despite considerable financial constraints have maintained a high level of customer service delivery. Considerable partnership working has been developed for the benefit of customers and arrangements are tailored to suit the needs of local communities and customer groups. The transition from Charter Mark to Customer Service Excellence has been a challenging journey, but all involved have demonstrated a huge commitment and they are to be congratulated on this achievement.

June 12 - RP1: Overall a job very well done and all managers and staff should take pride in their achievement. Delivering a constant service over such a large geographical area is impressive. Partnership working is exceptional with staff and partners taking ownership and customer service delivery seriously. All Service Points visited were found to be very tidy and presentation of material was first class. Although each location was different there was a corporate feel about the Service Points.

June 13 RP2: Overall this organisation has demonstrated a commitment to continuously improve customer service delivery. Challenges with fewer resources, changes in working relationships with partners, such as Police Scotland have not deterred progress in improving customer journeys. Service Points, including the Service Centre are in the main the first point of contact for Highland Council and all staff and managers should take great pride in the high level of service they deliver. A great deal of attention is being applied to improving the quality of service delivery. All elements in the Standard are considered to be fully met and the retention of CSE accreditation is well deserved.

1: Customer Insight

Criterion 1 self-assessment	Strong
Criterion 1 outcome	Successful

Customer consultation and engagement is thorough and reviewed effectively, with clear goals set and outcomes are beneficial to customers. Generally publication of outcomes is satisfactory, although not always visible at all service Points.

Evidence on customer satisfaction is fairly general, but feedback from staff, partners and customers met indicates a high level of satisfaction with positive changes being made by listening to customers. Although standards for customer service are set in a number of areas, analysis of trends was not evident. Likewise evidence on measuring certain aspects of customer service such as delivery and information was lacking.

June 12 - RP1: All aspects of Customer Insight are now fully compliant and data collected continues to be used effectively with improvement in mind.

June 13 RP 2: The revised Engagement Strategy outlines very clearly the approaches to fresh customer needs and preferences from channel shifts such as digital and electronic traffic. This has come from wide and thorough consultation and detailed research which included conventional methods such as surveys and customer comments as well as capturing information electronically.

2: The Culture of the Organisation

Criterion 2 self-assessment	Satisfactory
Criterion 2 outcome	Successful

Staff are very polite and professional in service delivery, and are well trained and supported. Although the considerable effort of staff is appreciated by customers, managers could not fully demonstrate how they evaluated staff contributions and gave appropriate reward.

June 12 - RP1: The culture of this organisation remains focused on customers. Senior managers lead, middle managers implement but add their own style and input. Front line managers and staff must be given the credit for taking ownership of customer service delivery.

June 13 RP 2: Managers and staff remain completely customer focused and are well supported by policies, procedures and engagement from senior managers. Staff display innovation and commitment to meet customer needs in all locations. This was very evident from the tour of Service Points, which were all well appointed, despite some issues with building alterations.

3: Information and Access

Criterion 3 self-assessment	Strong
Criterion 3 outcome	Successful

June 12 - RP1: Provision of information and accessibility of service remains very effective. Work with partners has been enhanced over the last twelve months, particularly where Service Points have been relocated or changed. There is clear joint commitment and the outcome is clearly for the benefit of customers. This aspect deserves the Compliance Plus rating.

June 13 RP 2: Information continues to be provided in a professional way, ensuring that it reaches the right customers in the right way. Access has been enhanced with changes to digital and electronic channels to cope with the shift in demand. Partnership working continues to be very strong and fresh challenges have been well managed despite financial constraints as well as adjusting to considerable changes such as the introduction of Police Scotland. Other arrangements with Libraries, Registration and the Passport Service have blossomed and the assessor considers that the compliance plus rating at 3.4.1 should remain.

4: Delivery

Criterion 4 self-assessment	Satisfactory
Criterion 4 outcome	Successful

June 12 - RP1: Standards remain relevant and effective, with sound methods of monitoring, benchmarking, complaint handling and learning from customer comments. However more concrete evidence of consulting on setting, reviewing and raising local standards still requires to be provided. Likewise you need to show how complaints procedures are reviewed and changed to provide better customer service.

June 13 RP 2: Good standards for measuring performance remain in place and are monitored very effectively. Performance remains high throughout because of the commitment to delivery first class customer service. The applicant has demonstrated the involvement with customers regarding the reviewing and setting of standards and 4.1.3 is now considered fully compliant. The organisation has adapted well to the new complaints system and the assessor was impressed with the level of co-ordination of complaints handling throughout the complainants customer journey. Consequently element 4.3.5 on reviewing complaints procedures is considered to be fully compliant.

5: Timeliness and Quality of Service

Criterion 5 self-assessment	Satisfactory
Criterion 5 outcome	Successful

Standards for timeliness and quality are in place and customers are made fully aware on what to expect. Delivery of those standards is well managed and first point of contact arrangements are designed to benefit customers. Sharing of relevant information around the whole network and with partners is very effective. Response times are important to this organisation and performance is monitored effectively. Outcomes are positive, but effective comparison against others is not obvious.

June 12 - RP1: Responding quickly and providing a quality service remains important to this organisation. Targets are monitored effectively, with good outcomes and performance compares favourably with other similar organisations.

June 13 RP2: There remains a keen desire to deliver services quickly and smoothly, but it is the assessor's view that this has been enhanced with a greater degree of quality in all aspects. This stems from the strategy that is set at the head of the organisation and delivered by committed managers and staff.