

**The Highland Council**  
**Resources Committee – 27 August 2014**

Agenda Item	<b>16</b>
Report No	<b>RES/44/14</b>

**Customer Service Excellence Award**

**Report by Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Development**

**Summary**

This report details the continued achievement of the externally assessed Customer Service Excellence Award by Highland Council's Customer Services since 2010. Currently, this is the only externally evaluated standard supported and recognised by the UK Cabinet Office.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 External accreditation of the Highland Council's Customer Service has been in place for 15 years with the attainment of the nationally recognised Charter Mark standard. This standard covered all of Customer Services working practices at all locations, including those in joint offices in libraries, registration and Visit Scotland premises where partnerships operated. This standard is only awarded when an organisation is able to demonstrate to the Cabinet Office that they are "producing a first-class customer service". Customer Service Excellence replaced the Charter Mark standard in 2010. Annually assessed, Customer Services has successfully achieved this standard since 2010.
- 1.2 The comprehensive assessment covers all aspects of the Customer Services organisation, including Service Points, Service Centre, Registration Service, digital service delivery and the provision of partnership services to external customers such as HM Passport Service.

**2. Customer Service Excellence (CSE)**

- 2.1 Adherence to this standard requires the organisation to demonstrate that they have put the customer and their journey central to service delivery. Emphasis is placed on ensuring complete customer satisfaction from the beginning to the end of contact with the Council. Assessment is based on external scrutiny of evidence which culminates in a three day "in-depth" assessment visit. This is a challenging and difficult standard, not just to achieve but also to retain. All criteria reviewed must be evidence-based and must show continuous improvement. There are five main criterion; with the organisation providing evidence 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 criterion is further subdivided, with a total of 121 elements to be achieved before the award of the standard. Each element is subject to evidence 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, with a record kept of visits so that during each annual assessment different sites are visited.

2.3 The standard is awarded for 3 years, with detailed onsite independent assessments then taking place on an annual basis to ensure continual compliance with Customer Service Standards. Annual assessment focuses on key criteria where further evidence is required or areas for improvement have been identified.

2.4 A highlight report is attached on Appendix A and the full report can be found on the Council's website. The overall summary of the report states:

*This organisation is consistently delivering a high level of customer service despite some stringent budget constraints. The consistent approach with joint working continues to be impressive and some innovative improvements to the website has enhanced service delivery.*

*The assessor visited a wide range of Service Points and observed a considerable number of customer engagements and was impressed with the professional but very caring approach.*

*Overall the standard of evidence presented is good, but some items are becoming dated and lacking in comprehensive detail. Although three elements are considered to be only partially compliant, retention of CSE accreditation is well deserved. Managers and staff are to be commended for their efforts to deliver a top class service.*

2.5 The assessor also commented on the strong desire to meet standards set for timeliness and quality of customer service and that this was made easier by the top class approach at first point of contact, with support to local communities going beyond normal service commitments. Improvements in verbal and published information were also commended along with the considerable change in customer-friendly language and navigation around the website.

2.6 The website demonstrated that, as an organisation, we focus on the customer and are willing to respond to the evidence that our customers want and expect to access our services on line. The investment in the web is evidence of continuous improvement for the benefit of the customer. The high level of customer service ethos was clearly evident with staff commended for their

focus, innovation, dedication and ability to rise to the challenge through extensive management support and empowerment.

- 2.7 Work is already underway on refreshing evidence for the next assessment due in June 2015 and to ensure that there is sufficient comprehensive detail to support future full compliance overall on the Customer Service Excellence standard.
- 2.8 The Customer Service Team is pleased to have achieved and retained this challenging national standard. This is the only external Cabinet Office Customer Service Standard awarded to any Service in the Highland Council and this continues to be an achievement that the team are very proud of.

### **3. Resource Implications**

- 3.1 There are no additional resource requirements.

### **4. Risks/Equality/Legal/Climate Change/ Gaelic/Rural Implications**

- 4.1 There are no implications arising from this report.

### **5. Recommendation**

- 5.1 Members are requested to:
- i. NOTE the outcomes of the assessment and the ongoing successful achievement of the Customer Service Excellence standard.

Designation: Michelle Morris,

Date: 27 August 2014

Author: Tina Page, Customer Services Manager

Background Papers: None