

The Highland Council
Resource Committee – 23 November 2016

Agenda Item	15
Report No	RES/ 84/16

Report on Customer Service Excellence Award
Report by Head of Digital Transformation

Summary

This report details the recent audit and resulting achievement of the externally assessed Customer Service Excellence Award by Highland Council's Customer Services. The achievement of this award is recognised as best practice within Customer Services nationally and is the only externally evaluated standard supported and recognised by the UK Cabinet Office.

1. Background

- 1.1 Highland Council's Customer Service has now held a nationally recognised Customer Service accreditation since 1999. This is a significant achievement and demonstrates the commitment and focus on service delivery and customer experience with an emphasis on putting the customer at the centre of service delivery and ensuring a first class service for all.
- 1.2 The comprehensive assessment for Customer Service Excellence 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

- 2.1 The Customer Service Excellence ® standard tests in great depth those areas that research has indicated are a priority for customers, with particular focus on delivery, timeliness, information, professionalism and staff attitude. Emphasis is also placed on developing customer insight, understanding the user's experience and robust measurement of service satisfaction.

We are measured on ensuring complete customer satisfaction from the beginning of the customer's journey to the end of their contact with the Council. Assessment is based on rigorous external scrutiny of evidence off-site and culminates in a two\three day "in depth" assessment visit. This is a very challenging standard not just to achieve; but also to retain. All criteria reviewed must be evidence based and must demonstrate continuous improvement. There are five main criterion, with the organisation providing evidence in the following areas:

- Customer Insight
 - The Culture of the Organisation
 - Information and Access
 - Customer Service Delivery
 - Timeliness and Quality of Service
- 2.2 The standard is awarded for 3 years, with independent assessments then taking place on an annual basis to ensure on-going continual compliance and continuous service improvement.
- 2.3 A highlight report is attached in **Appendix 1** and the full report can be found on the Council's website. The overall summary of the report is extremely positive; we have successfully retained the award and this has been achieved by a major, sustained focus on key elements such as service delivery, measurement of customer experience and involving customers in setting standards.

We have also increased the number of compliance plus ratings to 3 criteria, these include customer satisfaction and partnership working and for the first time we have also been strongly commended for the value we place on the contribution our staff make to deliver customer focused services.

An extract of the highlight report is included below:-

“Customer Insight gathering continues to be effective, despite the pressures of implementing the Service Points closures and re-deployment of resources and responsibilities. The introduction of the new CRM system, despite the initial delay problems, has proved to be a very effective tool to provide additional data which is easily interrogated for identifying improvements in service delivery.”

“Delivering a high level of service to a satisfied range of customers is a top priority for all staff. A number of developments and improvements have been made to the Web Site, which has attracted external plaudits, and the Digital access has also been expanded with considerable success.”

“The ethos of first class service delivery is clearly evident throughout the organisation.”

“Staff have faced a difficult year with uncertainty and apprehension, but managers are to be commended for the way in which staff have been supported and developed to face greater challenges with fewer resources. The assessor detected at all locations visited an immense pride and commitment to deliver improved services, despite the strain of less resources.”

“Information continues to be provided very professionally.....Several appropriate channels are used to ensure information provided is both received and understood. The extensive consultation and engagement provides a

wealth of data, which is analysed thoroughly and very professionally. Reports are prepared and published with clarity in mind and clearly outline areas for improvement.”

“Standards are clearly set to suit the requirements of a customer service provider for Highland Council. This includes interaction with customers on a front line basis involving digital channels, telephony and direct face-to-face engagement.”

- 2.4 In his feedback session the assessor also praised staff and managers on their commitment to delivering a seamless and integrated service at a time when there were significant challenges and changes taking place throughout the network. He also commented on the considerable effort that had been made to engage with stakeholders, staff, customers and partners around these changes.
- 2.5 The Customer Service Team is very pleased and proud to have retained, achieved and increased our rating on this challenging, national standard. The Customer Service Excellence award demonstrates the on-going commitment of staff to the delivery of first class service for customers and communities throughout Highland Council.

3 Resource Implications

- 3.1 There are no additional resource requirements at this time but the retention of this award requires commitment and focus on continuous improvement which may have some resource implications in the future around training, quality assurance and development.

4 Risks/Equality/Legal/Climate Change/ Gaelic Implications

- 4.1 There are no implications arising from this report.

Recommendation

Members are requested to note the outcomes of the assessment and the on-going successful achievement of the Customer Service Excellence standard.

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Background Papers: Appendix 1 – CSE - Highlight Report

http://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/11952/customer_service_excellence_report