

## The Highland Council

Resources Committee 25 November 2015

Agenda Item	21
Report No	RES/112/15

### Report on 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 the Council's Customer Services team. 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 since 1999, with the attainment of the nationally recognised Charter Mark standard. This standard covers 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

OFFICIAL

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 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:

*“Engaging with customers, including hard to reach and disadvantaged customers happens very naturally. Providing comprehensive services at a high standard is a top priority and customer satisfaction outcomes prove this. Consequently the quality aspect of delivering services must receive specific recognition and this element is awarded a Compliance Plus rating.*

*Staff are trusted to deliver services at the first point of contact as in many locations they are the face of Highland Council. The assessor was impressed with the helpfulness and friendly approach by staff in the locations visited. This demonstrates a complete focus and ethos of first class service delivery.*

*Full and meaningful information is provided in a variety of ways, including web based facilities, electronic channels, social media and hard copy visual material. Information is provided to the right people, at the right time and using the right channel. Although many customers reside in remote locations access to services is never a problem. Customer feedback confirms that access is very open and choices are available.”*

2.5 The assessor also commented on the strong approach to establish links with partners and Customers Services take the lead in making the arrangements work in locations where joint services are delivered. He noted the outcome is very impressive and of clear benefit to customers and he deemed the element deserves to retain the Compliance Plus rating.

2.6 The Customer Service Team is pleased to have achieved and retained this challenging, national standard. The award of this standard demonstrates the high quality service delivered by all staff in Customer Services and this continues to be an achievement that the team are very proud of.

### **3. Implications**

#### **3.1 Resource Implications**

There are no additional resource requirements.

#### **3.2 Risks/Equality/Legal/Climate Change/Rural/ Gaelic Implications**

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.

Designation: Michelle Morris, Depute Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Development

Date: 04 November 15

Author: Tina Page, Customer Services Manager

Background Papers: Appendix A – Assessment Review

Appendix A for Customer Service Excellence Achievement Report

<b>Customer Service Excellence</b>		<b>Publishing</b>	<b>126378</b>
<b>Overall Self-assessment</b>	<b>Insufficient</b>	<b>Overall outcome</b>	<b>Successful</b>
<b>Summary:</b>		<b>Overall Self-assessment</b>	
<b>Overall Assessment Review:</b>	<p>June 15 - RP1: Highland Council operates a network of Service Points covering the whole of the Highlands, stretching from Kingussie in the south to Durness in the north and from Acharacle in the west to Nairn in the east. In addition the Service Centre offers a telephony service to customers during working hours and at weekends to complement the 35 Service Points. Customers can also contact the network via the website or direct by email and now social media. Service Points also carry out a large range of Registration duties in co-operation with the General Registrar for Scotland. Around 100 staff are employed in the 35 locations, although this will be reduced in future to around 25 when the Customer Service Review recommendations have been rolled out later this year. Although this visit is recorded as an RP1 visit, the assessor has reviewed all evidence in agreement with the applicant. Overall the evidence is of a good quality, although some better signposting would be helpful to direct the assessor. Some of the evidence could not be viewed on MORPHUS, due to the type of attachment used, but hard copies of the evidence was made available on site. This will be rectified when MORPHUS is unlocked. A considerable amount of additional or new evidence was presented, which the assessor accepted and is noted in the report. A number of Elements in the CSE Criteria have also been identified as requiring some attention, although compliance has been accepted at this visit. An appropriate note has been made in the report where this applies. However overall the level of customer service delivered continues to be of a high standard and staff are to commended for their efforts. Continued CSE accreditation is well deserved.</p>		
<b>Criterion 1</b>	<p>June 15 - RP1: A lot of effort is made to engage with customer groups, partners and staff to gain customer insight. Good records of consultation and engagement are maintained and outcome improvements are easily identified through thorough analysis. Engaging with customers, including hard to reach and disadvantaged happens very naturally. Providing comprehensive services at a high standard is a top priority and customer satisfaction outcomes prove that. Consequently the quality aspect of delivering services must receive specific recognition and element 1.3.5 is awarded a compliance plus rating.</p>		
<b>Criterion 2</b>	<p>June 15 - RP1: The culture throughout the Service Point Network, both at management and staff level is clearly customer focused. Leaders lead but support, staff contribute but are self motivated. There is clear commitment to ensuring customers expectations are outlined and well managed. Likewise people are treated fairly, but customer feedback to confirm this is required at 2.1.4, which is considered to be partially compliant. Staff deliver a very professional service and have a good understanding of needs and preferences. This is very obvious around the Service Point Network, as requirements vary according to locality. Staff are trusted to deliver services at the first point of contact as in many locations they are the face of Highland Council. The assessor was impressed with the helpfulness and friendly approach by staff in the locations visited. This demonstrates a complete focus and ethos of first class service delivery.</p>		

Appendix A for Customer Service Excellence Achievement Report

<p><b>Criterion 3</b></p>	<p>June 15 - RP1: Full and meaningful information is provided in a variety of ways, including web based facilities, electronic channels, social media and hard copy visual material. Information is provided to the right people, at the right time and using the right channel. Improvements are made where appropriate and the website has been substantially upgraded. Although many customers reside in remote locations access to services is never a problem. Customer feedback confirms that access is very open and choices are available. Considerable effort is made to establish links with partners and it appears to the assessor that all in the Service Point Network take the lead to make arrangements work in all locations where joint services are delivered. The outcome is very impressive and of clear benefit to customers, consequently element 3.4.1 deserves to retain the compliance plus rating. Support to the wider community is widespread and is appreciated by customers.</p>
<p><b>Criterion 4</b></p>	<p>June 15 - RP1: Delivering services to standard is a top priority and outcomes are monitored, analysed and acted upon with diligence. Although appropriate targets are set across all main services, it is not clear how these are reviewed and raised. Consequently element 4.1.3. is still considered to be partially complaint. Services are delivered very professionally at the first point of contact and although expectations are high delivery matches the high standards set. Promises are delivered and lessons learned to identify areas for improvement. Monitoring of performance is thorough and systems such as CRM and Net Call are used extensively to identify dips and take appropriate action. Complaints are handled very professionally and staff should take pride in taking responsibility for dealing with issues at an early stage.</p>
<p><b>Criterion 5</b></p>	<p>June 15 - RP1: Appropriate customer contact standards and measures are in place for timeliness and quality of service delivery. The ethos of service delivery throughout the Service Point Network, particularly at first point of contact, is top class and staff take responsibility at all times. Due to the remoteness of some Service Points good communications are appropriate and use of the CRM System plays an important role. The strong partnership arrangements also help to maintain high standards. Although thorough monitoring of performance is in place it is noted that little evidence was presented to show where delays occur, action is taken to inform customers. Consequently element 5.2.5 is considered to be partially compliant. Overall standards are met and compare well with other organisations.</p>