

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

20 JANUARY 2021

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET INFORMATION ITEM

Access Communities and Community Safety - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Steve Nelson

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE ANNUAL REVIEW

SUMMARY

Customer Service Excellence is a national quality mark that seeks to reward organisations that demonstrate a customer-focused commitment to all that they do. Certification to the Customer Service Excellence standard is through a rigorous assessment process which includes a review of documents that demonstrate compliance against each element of the standard and an on-site visit to observe practical evidence.

There are 5 criteria that must be satisfied with a number of elements within each. Compliance plus is awarded for elements where particular strength is demonstrated.

Accreditation operates on a 3-year cycle, with a full assessment in year 1 followed up by 2 annual reviews to ensure standards are maintained. Stockton Council has been accredited with Customer Service Excellence since 2010 and has demonstrated continuous improvement through the assessment cycle. In the 2019 full assessment, the Council was awarded full accreditation with compliance plus in 13 elements.

The 12 month review took place in July 2020. The Council retained full certification, achieving full compliance across all 57 aspects of assessment with compliance plus for 17 elements, 4 of which were in addition to the 13 achieved at the full assessment in 2019.

The 24 month review took place in October 2021 and returned to the usual approach. Documentary evidence was submitted in advance and the assessor was on site for 2 days during which he conducted a number of meetings and attended a Library event at Ingleby Barwick. Staff from a range of Council services contributed supporting evidence and participated in review meetings with the assessor.

The Council has retained full certification, achieving full compliance across all 57 aspects of assessment with compliance plus for 17 elements. The assessor was very complimentary about the quality of the report and evidence, the energy and enthusiasm of the staff and of the services that the Council has delivered during the pandemic.

This completes this 3 year cycle. Full assessment is due in July 2022.

STAFF AWARDS

The annual Staff Awards for Customer Service Excellence were held on 18th November in 2 sessions at ARC. The first session was to celebrate staff achievements in the usual judged categories and the second session was to recognise the outstanding contributions of staff during the unprecedented challenges we've faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

REASONS FOR PRODUCING THIS REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of outcome of the Council's 24 month Customer Service Excellence review and the plans for the next 3 year cycle, including the staff awards.

DETAIL

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE – 24 MONTH REVIEW

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.
2. The framework consists of 57 aspects of assessment grouped across 5 criteria: -
 - Customer Insight
 - Culture of the Organisation
 - Information and Access
 - Delivery
 - Timeliness and Quality of Service
3. In July 2019 the Council was re-accredited, achieving full compliance with all 57 aspects. 13 points of compliance plus were awarded, 4 within Customer Insight, 5 within the Culture of the organisation and 4 within Information and Access.
4. Following the 12 month review in July 2020 the assessor confirmed that the Council continued to meet the Customer Service Excellence standard with full compliance with all 57 aspects and awarded compliance plus in a further 4 aspects, bringing the total to 17, 5 (1) within Customer Insight, 6 (1) within the Culture of the organisation, 5 (1) within Information and Access and 1 (1) within Timeliness and Quality of Service. (The numbers in brackets are the new ones achieved from the 12 month review).
5. Following the 24 month review in October 2021 the assessor confirmed that the Council continued to meet the Customer Service Excellence standard with full compliance with all 57 aspects and retention of all 17 points of compliance plus awarded at the 12 month review.
6. In 2020 the assessor observed that many commercial organisations would be envious of the agility and effectiveness that has been demonstrated and the way that partnership working has enabled complex delivery and logistical issues to be handled very effectively. The report acknowledges that this remains evident through the continuation of the Council's work to deal with the impacts of the pandemic.
7. The assessment identifies the following examples that the Council should be really proud of: -
 - A holistic approach to supporting communities.
 - Many comments that customers feel supported.
 - Focus on the increased inequalities caused by COVID.
 - Staff feel that they are making a difference.
 - Increase in digital service users including library, customer services, events.
 - Much closer liaison with customers to better understand their needs (eg inclusive growth strategy).

- Ongoing support for informal carers, single point of access for Mental Health support, support to businesses, development of Covid marshals.
 - Town centre update, staff survey, setting the scene virtual presentation, support for staff working from home.
 - HR communication and engagement, social media, Stockton news.
 - Contact tracing, CEV support, Surge testing.
8. The 2020 assessment identified new areas for development related to learning from the COVID crisis, considering what could be preserved in permanent improvements and suggestions for the wellbeing of homeworking staff, including virtual staff rooms and separation of home and work life. The 2021 review of these development points was positive, with evidence of progress acknowledged.
9. This completes the 3 year cycle. The Council has achieved Customer Service Excellence accreditation since 2010 and the principles underpinning the framework are now firmly established in culture and practice.
10. The next 3 year cycle begins with a full assessment due to take place in July 2022.

STAFF AWARDS

11. The annual Staff Awards for Customer Service Excellence this year gave us the opportunity to celebrate the achievements of more of our staff than in previous years, many who have shown amazing resilience, professionalism and innovation in delivering fantastic service to customers during the past 2 years. Despite the need to make adjustments to the ceremony to ensure COVID safety, there has been many positive comments from staff, who said they appreciated the recognition and that it made them feel valued. In total there were 226 certificates awarded to individuals and teams in the following categories:-

Standard Awards

- **Star Apprentice Award – 1 winner; 2 runners up**
An apprentice who has demonstrated outstanding achievements and made a positive contribution to the Council's services to customers.
- **Star Employee Award – 1 winner; 8 highly commended**
An individual who has made an outstanding contribution at work for the whole Council.
- **Pride of Stockton Team Award – 1 winner; 2 runners up**
A team who has excelled in helping others and generated real trust which has enabled them to make a profound difference to the lives of those they have helped.

Special Award (for saving a customer's life with CPR) - Claire Shepherd

COVID Special Awards

- **Caring Colleague Award (Individual) – 1 winner; 2 runners up**
An outstanding example of an individual who has provided guidance and practical or emotional support to other colleagues through the COVID crisis.
- **Caring Colleague Award (Team) - 1 winner; 2 runners up**
An outstanding example of a team who has provided guidance and practical or emotional support to other colleagues through the COVID crisis.
- **Outstanding Contribution Award (Individual) – 186 staff**
- **Outstanding Contribution Award (Team) - 18 teams**
(*Special Recognition for multiple nominees*).
Teams or individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to the Council's COVID response work beyond the expectations of their day job.

Staff Awards linked to IIP feedback

12. The approach to the Customer Service Awards will be reviewed for next year in accordance with the feedback on **IIP Indicator 5: Recognising and Rewarding High Performance**. A development Area was suggested that we review the Customer Service Awards to strengthen the link with high performance. We recognised that the Customer Service Awards were different this year due to the additional Covid-19 recognition awards. However, as some people nominated for the 2021 awards were unclear as to why they had been nominated, we have committed to reviewing and recommunicating the criteria for nominating people for Customer Service Awards and to consider how they can be linked to our definitions of high performance

Name of Contact Officer: Lorraine Dixon

Post Title: Assistant Director, Customer and Digital Services

Telephone No. 01642 526283

Email Address: lorraine.dixon@stockton.gov.uk