

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

17 NOVEMBER 2022

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET INFORMATION ITEM

Access Communities and Community Safety - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Norma Stephenson

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

SUMMARY

Customer Service Excellence (CSE) is a national quality mark that acknowledges organisations that demonstrate a customer-focused commitment to all that they do. The rigorous assessment process includes a review of relevant documents, followed by an on-site inspection 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 exceptional strength is demonstrated.

Assessment follows a 3-year cycle, with a full assessment in year 1 followed 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 every assessment cycle.

The 3 year cycle started again in 2022, with all our previous points of compliance being reset and re-evaluated. Effectively, the bar raises each year as exemplary practice becomes embedded in normal delivery. Staff from a range of Council services provided supporting evidence for the written submission and hosted visits for the assessors to observe practical examples.

As a result of the assessment the Council achieved full compliance across all 57 aspects of assessment with compliance plus for 14 elements.

REASONS FOR PRODUCING THIS REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the outcomes of the Council's recent Customer Service Excellence assessment.

DETAIL

1. The Customer Service Excellence (CSE) 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. Following the recent assessment in July 2022 the Council was re-accredited, achieving full compliance with all 57 aspects. 14 points of compliance plus were awarded, 4 within Customer Insight, 6 within the Culture of the organisation and 4 within Information and Access.
 4. The Customer Service Excellence report acknowledges that the Council has been accredited with the CSE standard for many years. The benefits of working with the standard have been recognised and used effectively across the Council over the years and despite the many challenges facing the organisation, the commitment to customer service has remained.
 5. The assessors were impressed at how work started during the pandemic was now established in practice with teams from across the Council continuing to work collaboratively for the benefit of the customer. This is summarised in the report which states:- *'Coming out of the acute stages of the pandemic the Council has developed new and innovative approaches to the delivery of services to its wide range of customers. New approaches that had to be developed to continue service delivery during the restrictions of lockdowns have become embedded as 'business as usual' and are continuing to deliver high quality services'*.
 6. The assessment identifies the following key areas of strength across the organisation: -
 - Much more collaborative working now across most of the Council departments. There is a feeling of *'if it needs doing, just do it'* and the demarcation lines between roles appear to have softened. This is helping provide customers with much smoother and more efficient services and responses. It is also providing greater resilience for services when staff are off.
 - Focus on the internal customer has become much more explicit, with many people talking about their 'customers' when referring to colleagues and people in other departments of the Council.
 - A real increase in the sense of engagement of people in the CSE process; this was shown by people referring to the key themes in the framework and occasionally using some of the language from the CSE standard. This may well be the result of developing such a large and diverse group of CSER champions to help promote awareness and engagement across the organisation.
 - There has always been a sense of supporting local employers and industry and this has continued to develop – for example, the Business and Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC) is set to play a crucial role in helping budding entrepreneurs to focus their thoughts, access help and support and to turn their ideas into real business opportunities.
 - Despite the many challenges facing the Council people are very positive about the future and many said that they are *'excited'* by the changes coming up.
 7. Most of the areas identified for development are aimed at developments that are underway, with the addition of the following: -
 - The Council is good at checking how satisfied people are with the services they offer, however there needs to be an effort to identify whether the services being provided are what the customers really want.
 - Linked to the above point, look at how the Council might help customers to see the difference between what they need and what they want.
 - As services continue to evolve to meet changing circumstances, it might be helpful to clearly identify the rights and responsibilities of customers in different service areas and defined in documents such as customer charters which set out what the customer can expect – but alongside what is expected from the customer.
 - Consider other elements in the standard which might be worthy of a 'compliance plus' score at the next review – bearing in mind that fresh evidence will also need to be provided to

show that the current compliance plus scores remain relevant.

8. To complete the 3 year cycle there will be 2 annual reviews in 2023 and 2024 to ensure compliance is retained.

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