

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

12 OCTOBER 2023

**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 to those 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 current 3 year cycle started with a full assessment in July 2022. As a result of the assessment the Council achieved full compliance across all 57 aspects of assessment with “compliance plus” awarded for 14 elements.

The 12 month review took place in July 2023. The Council retained full certification, achieving full compliance across all 57 aspects of assessment with “compliance plus” awarded for 16 elements, 2 of which were in addition to the 14 achieved at the full assessment in 2022.

The second 12 month review is due in July 2024.

REASONS FOR PRODUCING THIS REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of outcome of the Council’s 12 month Customer Service Excellence review.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet are asked to note the report.

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. In July 2022 the Council was re-accredited, achieving full compliance with all 57 aspects. In addition 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. Following the 12 month review in July 2023 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 2 aspects, bringing the total to 16, 4 within Customer Insight, 7 (1) within the Culture of the organisation, 4 within Information and Access and 1 (1) within Delivery. (The numbers in brackets are the new ones achieved from the 12 month review).
5. The assessors commended the Customer Services team on the quality of the submission, the variety of evidence and the organisation of the on-site visit.
6. The Customer Service Excellence review 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.
7. The following examples demonstrate good practice and positive developments identified by the assessors during the review: -
 - The developing approach to asset based community development (ABCD) is seeing improved opportunities for consultation with local people and communities and for making sure that they have a say in what develops and how performance is measured and monitored
 - The Council hosts annual awards for staff and teams showing exceptional focus on identifying and meeting the needs and expectations of customers. People feel that their contribution is recognised and appreciated and that there is a real culture of appreciation in the Council
 - There’s a very clear mission to ‘put the customer at the heart of everything we do’ – both corporately and in specific service areas
 - Several services have developed customer insight and engagement forums to better understand needs and expectations
 - Stockton Food Power Network is helping people in communities experiencing food poverty access support – includes upskilling residents in relation to growing and cooking food, recruiting local residents to drive the van and run the shops and a food aid fund was launched to support people with the rising cost of living
 - Support for Warm Space providers including assisting in transportation for people wanting to attend and for other schemes aimed at people suffering fuel poverty
 - The Fairer Stockton On Tees (FSOT) Team’s blended approach to establishing family activities by using Warm Spaces across the Borough was highlighted as a best practice case study by the Local Government Association.

- Evidence about the positive impact of reablement and rehabilitation services in Stockton, especially in delivering better outcomes for older people
 - Improved offer at the Employment Hub, both for individuals and for employers. Changes have been made to the recruitment processes in some areas and work with the Employment Hub has resulted in much better responses to advertised vacancies.
8. The review recommends the following new areas for development:-
- Look at ways to identify any areas where KPIs might be being met, but the service still may not feel right for the customer
 - Consider how formal 'face behind the case' training might help all staff remain focussed on the person at the end of the service being delivered and how staff can influence outcomes for that person (both positively and negatively)
 - A lot of good practice is emerging regarding the best way to recruit staff in a very difficult market – think about how this good practice could be shared effectively across the piece and help prevent 'reinventing the wheel'. This might include making full use of the service available via the Employment Hub
 - Encourage service areas to undertake formal customer journey mapping exercises, looking at how customers might be feeling at each touchpoint, how staff want them to feel, and what staff can do to help that
9. To complete the 3 year cycle there will be one further annual review in 2024 to ensure compliance is retained.

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