

Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee

26 February 2014

Customer Service Excellence Standard

Recommendations

That the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider progress to date in achieving the Customer Service Excellence Standard corporately and ask questions in relation to its content and making recommendations, as considered appropriate.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Corporate Board agreed in February 2012 to implement the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) Standard across Warwickshire County Council (WCC). This report seeks to update Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee on progress to date.

2 Background

2.1 What is the Customer Service Excellence Standard?

- 2.1.1 CSE was developed from Charter Mark and Prime Minister John Major's Citizen's Charter (1992). The Standard has been informed by the Canadian public sector experience on key drivers of customer satisfaction. This Canadian approach led to further work within the UK which was validated by MORI.
- 2.1.2 The research in the UK identified five key drivers of customer satisfaction and arranged the drivers in order of relative importance to members of the public interviewed:
1. Delivery – the service delivers the outcomes it promised and manages to deal with any problems that arise
 2. Timeliness – the service responds immediately to customer contact and deals with the issue at the heart of it quickly and without passing it on between staff
 3. Information – accurate and comprehensive information is given to customers and they are kept informed about progress
 4. Professionalism – staff are competent and treat customers fairly
 5. Staff attitude – staff are friendly, polite and sympathetic to customers' needs
- 2.1.3 The Standard consists of 5 Criteria, 57 elements and more than 100 themes. Each element is rated for compliance. Evidence needs to demonstrate compliance with each theme.

2.1.4 The framework focuses on five criterion (detailed in [Appendix 1](#)):

- Customer Insight
- Culture of the Organisation
- Information and Access
- Delivery
- Timeliness and Quality of service

2.1.5 Once a service or organisation gains accreditation there is a lighter touch assessment, this is an annual surveillance which considers a third of the elements and becomes a rolling programme.

2.2 Benefits to be gained from the CSE standard for the authority and its customers

2.2.1 WCC should provide the services local citizens need, want and will use within the available budget. The primary focus for delivery of our services should therefore be on our customers - their requirements, perceptions and satisfaction levels. In the context of the One Organisational Plan and the delivery over the next 4 years of £92 million of savings the Customer Service Excellence standard will be a valuable tool.

2.2.2 It will also provide a strong corporate direction for future improvements that will see us continue to improve our customer service during challenging times whilst retaining the standard corporately and providing areas for individual improvements across the Groups and Fire and Rescue. Strong management will continue to be needed to ensure that individual sections continue to actively seek their own improvements in customer service - and not think of CSE as a centralised, corporate and separate project. It should also be noted that all services would be simultaneously involved in annual CSE assessments, which may, potentially put strain on available resources.

3. Progress in achieving Customer Service Excellence Corporately

3.1 Outcomes of assessments

3.1.1 To achieve the standard WCC overall and each of the Groups and Fire and Rescue individually must:

- Be fully compliant in at least 46 criteria (80%)
- have 0 non-compliances
- Be partially compliant in no more than 11 criteria (20%)

3.1.2 The table below outlines the timetable and achievements to date:

	Assessment date	Outcome
Resources Group	8 th and 9 th July 2013	Awarded Customer Service Excellence Standard
People Group	4 th and 5 th November 2013	Awarded Customer Service Excellence Standard

Communities Group	18 th and 19 th November 2013	Awarded Customer Service Excellence Standard
Fire and Rescue	4 th and 5 th February 2014	Recommended to receive Customer Service Excellence Standard
Corporate assessment	24 th February	Unknown at this point

3.1.3 Of the assessments completed to date the following has been achieved:

- Resources Group – fully compliant in 54 of the 57 criteria, representing 94.7% achievement rate
- People Group - fully compliant in 54 of the 57 criteria, representing 94.7% achievement rate
- Communities Group - fully compliant in 54 of the 57 criteria, representing 94.7% achievement rate
- Fire & Rescue – fully compliant in 54 of the 57 criteria, representing 94.7% achievement rate

These are excellent levels of achievement and recognise the commitment that WCC has made to its customers and the outcomes we are achieving for them.

WCC is therefore on-track to achieve the Customer Service Excellence standard corporately. Comments from the assessor to date have included:

“.....it is my opinion that the services being provided by Warwickshire County Council Resources Group to both internal and external customers is good and in some areas excellent. It is clear that the service works to ensure the customer receives the best possible experience and this was confirmed in the sample of customers, partners and staff I had the opportunity to meet or have a discussion with.”

“.....the services being provided by Warwickshire County Council People’s Group to both internal and external customers is good and to a high standard. It is clear that the service works to ensure the customer receives the best possible experience and this was confirmed in the sample of customers, complainants, partners and staff involved at the on-site assessment.”

“.....the services being provided by Warwickshire County Council Communities Group to both internal and external customers is too a very high standard. The Communities Group endeavour to ensure that customers receive the best possible experience from what is a very large, diverse and public facing service.”

3.1.4 There are areas for improvement and development although at this stage this is not a complete overview across WCC. Each area will have an improvement plan developed with an expectation that we have moved from partial compliance to full compliance within 12 months. The identified areas of partial compliance for each of the Groups are outlined below:

- Resources Group:

- a. Criteria 2.2.4 – We can demonstrate how customer-facing staff’s insight and experience are incorporated into internal processes, policy development and service planning.
 - b. Criteria 4.3.6 – We ensure that the outcome of the complaints process for customers (whose complaint is upheld) is satisfactory for them.
 - c. Criteria 5.2.4 – Where service is not completed at the first point of contact we discuss with the customer the next steps and indicate the likely overall time to achieve outcomes.
- People Group:
 - a. Criteria 2.2.5 – We value the contribution our staff make to delivering customer-focused services, and leaders, managers and staff demonstrate these behaviours.
 - b. Criteria 3.2.4 – We can demonstrate that information we provide to our customers is accurate and complete, and that when this is not the case we advise customers when they will receive the information they requested.
 - c. Criteria 4.3.6 – We ensure that the outcome of the complaints process for customers (whose complaint is upheld) is satisfactory for them.
 - Communities Group:
 - a. Criteria 3.2.1 – We provide our customers with the information they need in ways that meet their needs and preferences, using a variety of appropriate channels.
 - b. Criteria 3.2.2 – We take reasonable steps to make sure our customers have received and understood the information we provide.
 - c. Criteria 4.3.6 – We ensure that the outcome of the complaints process for customers (whose complaint is upheld) is satisfactory for them.
 - Fire & Rescue:
 - a. Criteria 2.1.2 - We use customer insight to inform policy and strategy and to prioritise service improvement activity.
 - b. Criteria 2.2.5 - We value the contribution our staff make to delivering customer-focused services, and leaders, managers and staff demonstrate these behaviours.
 - c. Criteria 4.3.6 - We ensure that the outcome of the complaints process for customers (whose complaint is upheld) is satisfactory for them.

3.2 Next steps

We are confident of achieving the standard across all parts of WCC’s business and therefore as a corporate body. Once the outcome report for Fire and Rescue has been formally received and the corporate assessment completed on 24th February, we will be able to produce a more detailed over-view of our areas of success and those for improvement. These will then form a three year development plan where we will be improving these areas of customer service whilst continuing to sustain and develop those we have achieved well in.

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Customer Service Excellence Standard

1 Criterion 1: Customer Insight

1.1 Customer Identification

- 1.1.1 We have an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of our current and potential customer groups based on recent and reliable information.
- 1.1.2 We have developed customer insight about our customer groups to better understand their needs and preferences.
- 1.1.3 We make particular efforts to identify hard-to-reach and disadvantaged groups and individuals and have developed our services in response to their specific needs.

1.2 Engagement and Consultation

- 1.2.1 We have a strategy for engaging and involving customers using a range of methods appropriate to the needs of identified customer groups.
- 1.2.2 We have made the consultation of customers integral to continually improving our service and we advise customers of the results and action taken.
- 1.2.3 We regularly review our strategies and opportunities for consulting and engaging with customers to ensure that the methods used are effective and provide reliable and representative results.

1.3 Customer Satisfaction

- 1.3.1 We use reliable and accurate methods to measure customer satisfaction on a regular basis.
- 1.3.2 We analyse and publicise satisfaction levels for the full range of customers for all main areas of our service and we have improved services as a result.
- 1.3.3 We include in our measurement of satisfaction specific questions relating to key areas including those on delivery, timeliness, information, access and the quality of customer service, as well as specific questions which are informed by customer insight.
- 1.3.4 We set challenging and stretching targets for customer satisfaction and our levels are improving.
- 1.3.5 We have made positive changes to services as a result of analysing customer experience, including improved customer journeys.

Criterion 2: The Culture of the Organisation

2.1 Leadership, Policy and Culture

- 2.1.1 There is corporate commitment to putting the customer at the heart of service delivery and leaders in our organisation actively support this and advocate for customers.
- 2.1.2 We use customer insight to inform policy and strategy and to prioritise service improvement activity.
- 2.1.3 We have policies and procedures that support the right of all customers to expect excellent levels of service.
- 2.1.4 We ensure that all customers and customer groups are treated fairly and this is confirmed by feedback and the measurement of customer experience.
- 2.1.5 We protect customers' privacy both in face-to-face discussions and in the transfer and storage of customer information.
- 2.1.6 We empower and encourage all employees to actively promote and participate in the customer-focused culture of our organisation.

2.2 Staff professionalism and attitude

- 2.2.1 We can demonstrate our commitment to developing and delivering customer focused services through our recruitment, training and development policies for staff.
- 2.2.2 Our staff are polite and friendly to customers and have an understanding of customer needs.
- 2.2.3 We prioritise customer focus at all levels of our organisation and evaluate individual and team commitment through the performance management system.
- 2.2.4 We can demonstrate how customer-facing staff's insight and experience are incorporated into internal processes, policy development and service planning.
- 2.2.5 We value the contribution our staff make to delivering customer-focused services, and leaders, managers and staff demonstrate these behaviours.

Criterion 3: Information and Access

3.1 Range of Information

- 3.1.1 We make information about the full range of services we provide available to our customers and potential customers, including how and when people can contact us, how our services are run and who is in charge.

3.1.2 Where there is a charge for services, we tell our customers how much they will have to pay.

3.2 Quality of Information

3.2.1 We provide our customers with the information they need in ways that meet their needs and preferences, using a variety of appropriate channels.

3.2.2 We take reasonable steps to make sure our customers have received and understood the information we provide.

3.2.3 We have improved the range, content and quality of verbal, published and web-based information we provide to ensure it is relevant and meets the needs of customers.

3.2.4 We can demonstrate that information we provide to our customers is accurate and complete, and that when this is not the case we advise customers when they will receive the information they requested.

3.3 Access

3.3.1 We make our services easily accessible to all customers through provision of a range of alternative channels.

3.3.2 We evaluate how customers interact with the organisation through access channels and we use this information to identify possible service improvements and offer better choices.

3.3.3 We ensure that where customers can visit our premises in person facilities are as clean and comfortable as possible.

3.4 Co-operative working with other providers, partners and communities

3.4.1 We have made arrangements with other providers and partners to offer and supply co-ordinated services, and these arrangements have demonstrable benefits for our customers.

3.4.2 We have developed co-ordinated working arrangements with our partners that ensure customers have clear lines of accountability for quality of service.

3.4.3 We interact within wider communities and we can demonstrate the ways in which we support those communities.

Criterion 4: Delivery

4.1 Delivery Standards

4.1.1 We have challenging standards for our main services, which take account of our responsibility for delivering national and statutory standards and targets.

4.1.2 We monitor and meet our standards and key departmental and performance targets, and we tell our customers about our performance.

4.1.3 We consult and involve customers, citizens, partners and staff on the setting, reviewing and raising of our local standards.

4.2 Achieved Delivery and Outcomes

4.2.1 We agree with our customers at the outset what they can expect from the service we provide.

4.2.2 We can demonstrate that we deliver the service we promised to individual customers and that outcomes are positive for the majority of our customers.

4.2.3 We can demonstrate that we benchmark our performance against that of similar or complementary organisations and have used that information to improve our service.

4.2.4 We have developed and learned from best practice identified within and outside our organisation, and we publish our examples externally where appropriate.

4.3 Deal Effectively with Problems

4.3.1 We identify any dips in performance against our standards and explain these to customers, together with action we are taking to put things right and prevent further recurrence.

4.3.2 We have an easy-to-use complaints procedure, which includes a commitment to deal with problems fully and solve them wherever possible within a reasonable time limit.

4.3.3 We give staff training and guidance to handle complaints and to investigate them objectively, and we can demonstrate that we empower staff to put things right.

4.3.4 We learn from any mistakes we make by identifying patterns in formal and informal complaints and comments from customers and use this information to improve services and publicise action taken.

4.3.5 We regularly review and improve our complaints procedure, taking account of the views of customers, complainants and staff.

4.3.6 We ensure that the outcome of the complaints process for customers (whose complaint is upheld) is satisfactory for them.

Criterion 5: Timeliness and Quality of Service

5.1 Standards for timeliness and quality

5.1.1 We set appropriate and measurable standards for the timeliness of response for all forms of customer contact including phone calls, letters, e-communications and personal callers.

5.1.2 We set comprehensive standards for all aspects of the quality of customer service to be expected in all dealings with our organisation.

5.2 Timely Outcomes

5.2.1 We advise our customers and potential customers about our promises on timeliness and quality of customer service.

5.2.2 We identify individual customer needs at the first point of contact with us and ensure that an appropriate person who can address the reason for contact deals with the customer.

5.2.3 We promptly share customer information with colleagues and partners within our organisation whenever appropriate and can demonstrate how this has reduced unnecessary contact for customers.

5.2.4 Where service is not completed at the first point of contact we discuss with the customer the next steps and indicate the likely overall time to achieve outcomes.

5.2.5 We respond to initial enquiries promptly, and if there is a delay we advise the customer and take action to rectify the problem.

5.3 Achieved timely delivery

5.3.1 We monitor our performance against standards for timeliness and quality of customer service and we take action if problems are identified.

5.3.2 We are meeting our current standards for timeliness and quality of customer service and we publicise our performance against these standards.

5.3.3 Our performance in relation to timeliness and quality of service compares well with that of similar organisations.