Assessment Report

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Warwickshire County Council

2 Surveillance

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The assessment method used was a full remote assessment due to the current circumstances of the Covid19 Pandemic.
Following the assessment, Warwickshire County Council were found to have a deep understanding of, and commitment to, Customer Service Excellence.   The commitment was displayed from Senior Management levels through to operations and front line staff.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those people involved in the overall assessment process. It has been a pleasure meeting with your team and having the opportunity to observe your service remotely.

The outcome of the assessment was -

"Continued award of the Customer Service Excellence Standard has been recommended"

Address:	Shire Hall, Market Place Warwickshire West Midlands CV34 4RL		
Standard(s):	Customer Service Excellence	Accreditation Body(s)	UKAS
Representative:	Mrs. Maureen Oakes		
Site(s) assessed:	Remote Covid19- all directorates represented	Date(s) of audit(s):	07-06-2021, 08-06-2021, 09-06-2021, 10-06-2021, 14-06-2021, 15-06-2021, 17-06-2021,
Lead Assessor :	Di Smith	Additional team member(s):	
Type of Assessment:	Annual Review		
Review of Certification Claims	Claims are accurate and in accordance with SGS guidance		

2. CONTEXT

Warwickshire County Council (WCC) is the authority for the county of Warwickshire in the West Midlands with a diverse demography. The county town is Warwick, home to the Shire Hall, although the largest town is Nuneaton. The county is divided into five districts of North Warwickshire, Nuneaton & Bedworth, Rugby, Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon serving large areas of population and many rural communities and Parish Councils. Warwickshire also has 'transient' residents as it is a tourist area and there is a network of rivers and canals across the county. The mid 2018 population estimate is over 571,000 people.

WCC currently employs approximately 4,830 staff as at 31st March 2021 and has 104 sites - a decrease of 5 since the previous assessment. The budget responsibility in 2020/21 before income, including revenue spending and capital investment excluding schools is £ 905 million. This comprises of £686m revenue spending and £219m capital spending. It works with other public, private and voluntary bodies to deliver the One Organisational Plan which outlines their vision.

'To make Warwickshire the best it can be, sustainable now and for future generations.'

Its statutory responsibilities are to provide: -
- Schools and other educational opportunities
- Social care services for young and older people
- Libraries, Museums and other cultural activities
- Registration Service
- The Fire and Rescue Service
- The Trading Standards service
- Highways and other public rights of way
- Planning advice as the strategic planning authority and determining planning applications for minerals and disposal activities.

Many other services are provided through partnerships including with the five District and Borough councils, NHS and the Voluntary Sector.

There are three directorates and 12 Assistant Directors with services being split between Strategy and Commissioning and Service Delivery.
WCC has transformed the way it works in the light of increasing demand and reducing resources. The transformation programme of work, 'Doing things better' centred on using resources differently and transforming the way the authority delivers and commissions services.

WCC adopted a simple approach to the transformation journey with three phases:

- Concept and shape
- Detailed design
- Implementation

In concept and shape the new operating model was developed and in detailed design work was undertaken on the model's detailed design.

 WCC has moved from detailed design into implementation/delivery - the authority is putting in place the changes needed to support the new operating model and become a high performing organisation.

The three plans for implementation were aligned to the organisational design principles:

- The demand management foundations plan sets out **What we do**
- The digital and technology foundations plan sets out **How we do things**
- The people foundations plan sets out **How we will work**

Implementation consisted of several releases. Each release had a time period of delivery to ensure a clear start and end point of each delivery of change and was delivered in a structured and agile way to ensure controlled change and to manage the impact on staff.

'What we do'

The authority has developed new ways of working in a number of support services including Finance, HR & OD, Business Support and Customer Services.

Reshaping support services has removed duplication of effort across the organisation so that it is now more efficient. Additionally, improvements have and are being made to processes and better use is being made of technology so that services are more effective, and customers can have better experiences when using services.

'How we do things'

How we do things is the programme of work to enable the delivery of Our Digital and Technology Strategy.

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With the right technology and seamless digital services demand for services can be reduced, customer experiences improved, and resources needed to deliver services reduced. How this will be achieved is set out in Our Digital and Technology Strategy, ensuring the best possible use of new technologies and innovation and that customers are placed at the heart of our solutions.

'How we will work'

How we will work programme to change the way we work: adopting smart, agile working as the norm, so that we can meet our business needs in the most effective way.

The implementation plan for this programme of work will enable the delivery of Our People Strategy 2023. The plan focuses on four key themes:

- **People**: working in locations where they are most effective, at the most effective times and always respecting the needs of the task, service, team and individual
- **Process**: ensuring we have the right processes and policies in place
- **Technology**: implementing the right technology and making the best use of it
- **Space**: designing our workspaces to support our new ways of working

The first release in the How we will work programme was the roll out Microsoft 365 in October 2019.

Corporate Board agreed a set of organisational principles which act as a framework for informing individual service team principles.

Change agents were recruited from each of our directorates to promote and support all aspects of change and ensure our approach is consistent across the organisation.

The new transformation governance reflects the move from design to implementation and enables delivery of both service and corporate led transformation programmes.

Early 2020 the new structure for Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFRS) was implemented. The structure is headed by a Chief Fire Officer (CFO) and two Assistant Chief Fire Officers (ACFOs).

 The 3 main pillars of service delivery are:
- Customer Services – To provide effective response to the public

- Enabling – To ensure compliance with all appropriate legislation and policies
- Continuous Improvement and Change – To oversee the Fire continuous change programme including governance and impact assessments.

All senior management positions have now been recruited to and work is focused on embedding the new framework to ensure WFRS can deliver its statutory duties.

Warwickshire – **'Being the best it can be'**

3. METHOD OF ASSESSMENT

The assessment method used was a full remote assessment due to the current circumstances of the Covid19 Pandemic. Evidence was submitted electronically via email and the assessment interviews and observations took place over the telephone and via computer. Microsoft Teams was used for the opening and closing meeting and to conduct interviews with staff and customers.

The assessment was undertaken in two stages; the first was a review of your self-assessment submission. This review enabled the assessor to gain an understanding of how the organisation has met the requirements of the Customer Service Excellence standard.

The next stage was to review the actual service delivered remotely. This was conducted through reviewing practice as well as speaking to staff, partners and customers. This included following customer journeys through your processes and how these aligned with customer insight.

During the assessment process the criteria are scored on a four-band scale:

COMPLIANCE PLUS - Behaviours or practices which exceed the requirements of the standard and are viewed as exceptional or as exemplar to others, either within the applicant's organisation or the wider customer service arena.

COMPLIANT - Your organisation has a variety of good quality evidence which demonstrates that you comply fully with this element. The evidence which reflects compliance is consistent throughout and is embedded in the culture of the organisation.

PARTIAL COMPLIANCE - Your organisation has some evidence but there are significant gaps. The gaps could include:

- Parts of the applicant's organisation which are currently not compliant and/or
- Areas where the quality of the evidence is poor or incomplete and/or
- Areas which have begun to be addressed and are subject to significant further development and/or
- Areas where compliance has only been evident for a very short period of time

NON COMPLIANT - Your organisation has little or no evidence of compliance or what evidence you do have refers solely to a small (minor) part of your organisation.

![SGS logo]

The current scheme allows applicants a maximum number of partial compliances, equating to a pass mark of 80% for all criteria.

4. OPENING MEETING

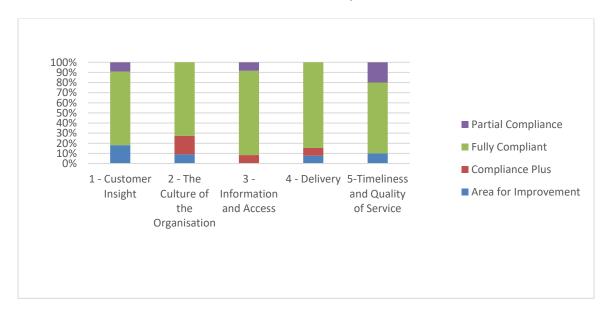The remote assessment commenced with an opening meeting using Microsoft teams.
The assessment activity and the partial compliances were discussed. The itinerary had been agreed with Warwickshire County Council in advance. The organisation was informed that all information obtained during the assessment would be treated as strictly confidential.

The scope of Assessment was confirmed as: Warwickshire County Council

5. REMOTE ASSESSMENT

I was supported throughout the assessment by Maureen Oakes and Nikki Bailey and other personnel within the organisation were involved when assessing activities within their responsibility.

The assessment resulted in the raising of no new partial compliances. A number of observations are listed in Section 7 of this report.

Number of good practices awarded during the assessment	26

Have the partial compliance(s) raised at the last assessment been closed?	No

6. AREAS OF PARTIAL COMPLIANCE

Included in the criterion sections below are the areas of the partial compliance identified at 2020 recertification assessment which are still remaining.

CRITERION 1

No new partial compliances identified June 2021 surveillance assessment

1.3.4 Although there are some areas where you can evidence improved satisfaction this is not yet consistent. There is a requirement for metrics to be established for customer satisfaction/positive customer experience. There is a commitment to look at customer satisfaction and failure demand as part of the implementation of the Customer Experience Strategy and review metrics and analyse outcomes within the CSC and wider. This is to remain as a Partial Compliance as the comments have not yet been completely addressed.

CRITERION 2

No new partial compliances identified June 2021 surveillance assessment

3.3.2 Looking at the key point of access point – the website - an issue on feedback was identified. The most prominent feedback request point is the 'Was This Information Useful' button. This is intended to capture feedback about the web page only, but this was not clear to customers.
You have started to look at data and better understand this issue and found that just under 50% of responses – 1947 contained comments and of these 1205 did not relate specifically to the user experience provided by the website or the information contained on that page but focused on the service offered and included some specific requests.
Due to the competing priorities during the pandemic a process has not yet been established to ensure comments and feedback received are reviewed/triaged in a timely manner and comments passed to relevant service areas for action.
In addition, there is an area you may wish to consider for improvement alongside this- Although you do evaluate the way customers interact with your services,

some services set up during the pandemic may have this evaluation. (e.g. not all calls are recorded.) You may wish to consider reviewing this

This is to remain as a Partial Compliance as the comments have not yet been completely addressed.

CRITERION 3

No new partial compliances identified June 2021 surveillance assessment

CRITERION 4

No new partial compliances identified June 2021 surveillance assessment

CRITERION 5

No new partial compliances identified June 2021 surveillance assessment

5.1.1 As some customer contacts into the website are going to the wrong place and customers are having to chase responses as the process mentioned in 3.3.2 above has not been established. This remains a Partial Compliance

5.2.3 There has been good progress against this element since the previous assessment. There is more evidence of teams sharing information. These cross-team approaches are increasing, and the 'silo' effect is lessening due to an increased awareness of what other teams do. In part this has come about due to the laudable way all teams have pulled together in the response to Covid19. As it is still work in progress to establish this culture in all areas this remains a Partial Compliance

7. OBSERVATIONS

During the site assessment the following general observations were made. These include: positive areas scored as Compliance Plus; areas of good practice; areas for improvement identified throughout the entire assessment process, as listed below.

Areas for Improvement

- Evidence observed during the assessment showed the high levels of digital poverty or exclusion and a demand for traditional methods of engagement (especially in relation to the public health campaigns). You

may wish to consider if your proposed future ways of engaging with people, matches the data on preferences and customer insight captured during the pandemic, to check if your strategy really fits the aspirations of your customers (1.2.3)

- You use reliable and accurate methods to measure customer satisfaction on a regular basis. However, many new methods of delivery have been introduced during the pandemic as a necessary response. Due to the reactive nature there was no opportunity to measure satisfaction at the time. You may wish to consider metrics to capture the wealth of evidence there might be, which might support the new ways of working going forward. (1.3.1)
- During the Covid19 response many decisions were made based on trusting the aptitude of team members to get things done. Some of the decisions would previously have had a series of 'hoops' to get through but have worked very well. You may wish to consider if the best aspects of this approach combined with the democratic process should be retained to improve customer experience. (2.2.4)
- There is more evidence of a commitment to capturing evidence of improvements from informal complaints with the appointment of a new team manager. The team will prioritise prevention work and learning from feedback and a new system and processes under development This is still on going and therefore an area for improvement. (4.3.4)
- Your performance compares very well to that of similar organisations and other local authorities and national government have used your best practice. However, but you do not appear to celebrate this success. You may wish to consider if you should 'raise the bar' in sharing these positive stories. (5.3.3)

Areas of Good Practice

There were many areas of good practice observed during the assessment. Key themes were

- Good use of customer insight.
- Strengthened and new partnership working for the benefit of customers
- Constant review to checking of service demand and delivery.
- Timely communication
- Joined up working for the benefit of customers.
- Innovation, flexibility and proactive actions.
- Going the extra mile.

Below are just some of the notable examples with tangible customer benefits

- Your Customer Experience Strategy, which will raise the profile of the "customer" throughout the organisation, with the stated aim being 'to ensure that our plans, decisions, actions and overall culture, are customer centric and by working together, we can ensure that we make Warwickshire the best it can be.'
- Your engagement with adopters and the production of a video of adopters talking about their experience
- The volunteer 'buddies' for adopters and fostering offering peer support- ACE Hub Buddy scheme.
- Your annual survey of over 700 adoption households
- The reduction in the time taken to complete digital applications for school admissions
- The availability of all publicly related application forms, live, on your website.
- The joint working with Contact to establish a new Parent Carer Forum (Warwickshire Parent Carer Voice)
- The issuing of EHC plans within the statutory timeframe. In 2020, 89% of EHC plans were issued within this timeframe compared with a national average of 55%.
- The new quality assurance framework for EHC introduced in January 2021. The aligned survey resulting in over 90% return with over 60% scoring the process at 7 out of 10 or higher. 68% reporting that they felt fully involved in the planning process
- Your Local Offer website developed with customers as part of the SEND & Inclusion Change Programme.
- Sharing learning via debriefs and daily meetings throughout the pandemic. E.g. the emerging trends meeting to shape the service for domestic abuse teams; constantly learning and changing to meet customer need from data captured and case studies
- Building on existing partnerships to work together in the crisis. Partnerships strengthened during corvid and a legacy for the future, also resulting in less duplication of delivery since this closer collaboration.
- Developing new partnership e.g. working with local pharmacies to reach those who are hard to reach
- The switch to delivering services in a virtual manner yet still meeting customer needs and customer focus e.g. online MARAC meetings; virtual carers forum.
- The innovative approach by the Library service to virtual events, virtual support and flexibility in service delivery based on customer demand
- The increase in delivery of safe and well checks for people isolated in the community

- The use of customer insight to identify families needing extra practical support including white goods and laptops
- The increase in resource to enable more social workers to deal with customer demand in seeking support
- The use of insight to identify all those most in need of food parcel support and not just accepting the data on those stated as shielding
- The introduction of parent champions and the parent and family board
- The innovative use of arts-based interventions to get the message across and support people at this time
- The Christmas shared event - good use of insight - identifying those customers who were not necessarily on the radar as being in need for support at Christmas
- The improved understanding of customer needs regarding those children who were not on a register for school. Using a targeted approach and existing intelligence to achieve positive results and greater insight of customers to feed in to improvements
- The high profile of your Registrars at the West Midlands regional meetings sharing and learning from best practice
- The befriending service, born from the realisation of the impact of isolation on customers - described as a life saver by many of those interviewed

Areas of Compliance Plus

Although Compliance plus is only usually awarded once for each element it should be noted that all those awarded in 2020 are still applicable at that high level as observed during this assessment.

The following additional areas of compliance plus were also identified at this assessment.

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*

During the assessment there was evidence from all directorates that this is consistently the case across Warwickshire County Council.

I would like to quote one of your colleagues who described what you have done as a team as the *'The Art of the Possible',* which you seem to have applied as much as you could and made it happen.

Examples include

- The enhanced working with Edible Links and the WFRS- a public and 3rd sector informal partnership given the full support of leaders to meet the needs of the citizens of Warwickshire. Getting food and essentials to those who may otherwise have fallen through the gaps. This is currently an informal partnership but appears to have been given the status of a formal commitment - maybe this will continue going forward.
- The release of the Customer Service Centre to be able to deliver and coordinate the Shielding Hub combined with the deployment of community development workers to lead the response on the ground.
- The mobilisation of support for care homes with the current Expert Advisory Group -Warwickshire wide- an integrated support pulling together information.
- The shielding hub hotline and the immediate ability to capture data and triage delivering this service seven days a week at the outset of the pandemic.
- The innovative approach to the councils COVID risk assessment for funding, enabling organisations and families to get funding for laptops wi-fi for school work and to enable digital inclusion.
- The prioritising of employee well-being and support for early access to the vaccine for employees
- Freeing up resource for WFRS to increase the number of community safety contacts and checks and supporting more hospital to home events
- The preparedness for agile working – the fact that the Council was already leading the way in this, pre-pandemic, enabled a swift response to the situation.
- The approach to having highly trained employees - in particular the fire prevention team members breadth of training to support customers holistic needs e.g. the dementia training and dementia bus
- Your understanding of the effects of furlough and the crisis on families and pre-empting the huge increase in numbers of children qualifying for free school meals and seeking to inform them how to apply. You are also seeking to advocate for these customers, via financial inclusion partnerships, to change the system so that those qualifying with national benefits would automatically receive free school meals.

2.1.6 *We empower and encourage all employees to actively promote and participate in the customer focused culture of our organisation.*

There are many examples of where employees have been supported and encouraged to achieve this. This is something which was not as evident at the previous assessment and appears to be a real improvement. Colleagues are

working together and communicating strongly across the organisation. Some of this is due to the Covid19 response but is now seen as embedded and a positive outcome from these challenging times.

The contributory events to this element include

- Strategic Directors weekly live broadcasts including the section called 'shout outs' to celebrate good work and a thank you to individuals and teams
- The staff e magazine Working for Warwickshire – focusing on staff well-being -regularly sharing staff stories and experiences.
- The STAR AWARDS - delivered online reaching more colleagues than ever before.
- Corporate Board sharing their own message to all staff regularly.
- The 'You're extraordinary - thank you' video from Corporate Board to WCC staff.
- Your flexible approach to engagement, taking on board the skills and experience of front-line customer facing staff.
- The enhanced joint working between internal teams e.g. Family Information Service and the Welfare Team, WFRS and Edible Links and Home from Hospital, Schools and free School meals and Apettito.
- The use of your established welfare information and welfare schemes and sharing of information, resulting in better data and more streamlined ways of working going forward

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.*

This is primarily in acknowledgement to the superbly coordinated communications during the Covid19 crisis.
The message was strong clear and 'branded' in a way that captured the eye and ear of all customer groups and stakeholders and was appropriate for all channels.
Using the key message 'Let's do what's Right for 'Warwickshire' gave it an overarching feeling of inclusivity and, when used locally for groups or geographical areas, this inclusion and buy-in just strengthened.
Every angle was thought through and it was ably 'tweaked' to suit the current message.
It was a customer focused yet professional approach which caught the interest of others who sought permission to copy it- and did.

This was combined with a corporate commitment to ensure information was going both ways with all the key services taking on board customer need and changing demands

Other good examples are

- Your use of social media not just the 'usual' but also targeting younger people through Snapchat to reach the hard to reach with a strong message
- The delivery of the 'Are You OK 'initiative through schools – a mental health campaign based on customer needs.
- The use of the one-minute guides
- The development of the Directory for COVID merging with other information improving corporate data going forward
- The electronic newsletter bi weekly and use of social media keeping communications as a priority
- The communication with schools and business support teams offering support throughout COVID. The head teachers' weekly meetings and briefings which are very well received (an observation is that the timing of these may not be on the right day for head teachers going forward)

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.*

You have many examples of learning and developing from best practice and sharing this with others

For example:

- Your approach to communications on Covid19 campaign was shared widely and used by other organisations.
- Your approach to engagement was flexible and not one size fits all- reverting to traditional method of face to face with good results – the effectiveness of this was shared with others.
- You have had a proactive approach to supporting the care services in your county with access to PPE and advice on Covid19 risk assessment - an approach then followed by others.
- You set up the 'Blue bed' discharge facility to minimise risk of infection and ease the pressure on NHS –this was then followed by others.

8. ACTION PLANNING & NEXT STEPS

The achievement of Customer Service Excellence is an ongoing activity and it is important that Warwickshire County Council continues to meet the elements of the criteria throughout the three years the hallmark is awarded for. Efforts must be made by Customer Service Excellence holders to continually improve their service.

We recommend that you develop an action plan based on the findings of this report. The action plan does not need to be a separate document and is likely to be more effective if the actions are embedded in your normal improvement and service developments plans.

We will undertake an annual review that will look at your continued compliance with the Customer Service Excellence. As part of the review we will also look at progress on any findings of the previous assessments.

In addition to reviewing progress outlined above, we will also review the services delivery, done so by following customer journeys.

For more information on the annual review please refer to our document "Building on your Customer Service Excellence success – Preparing for the annual review".

Holders must inform SGS of any major changes in the service provision covered by the scope of the certificate. This includes reorganisation or mergers.

In addition, SGS must be informed should the certified service experience a significant increase in customer complaints or critical press coverage.

If you are in doubt at any stage, we strongly recommend contacting the Customer Service Team for advice on the significance of any service or organisational change, or issues surrounding customer complaints.

SGS will visit within the next 12 months for the annual review.

SGS recommends that Warwickshire County Council retains a copy of this report to aid continuous improvement, and as a reference document for future assessment reviews.