



Assessment Report

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Warwickshire County Council

Renewal
January 2020





1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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 in action.

The outcome of the assessment was –

“Renewal of the Customer Service Excellence Standard has been recommended”

Address:	Shire Hall, Market Place Warwickshire CV34 4RL		
Standard(s):	Customer Service Excellence	Accreditation Body(s)	UKAS
Representative:	Mrs Maureen Oakes		
Site(s) assessed:	11	Date(s) of audit(s):	07-01-2020, 09-01-2020, 13-01-2020, 15-01-2020, 16-01-2020, 20-01-2020, 21-01-2020, 22-01-2020, 23-01-2020, 27-01-2020, 29-01-2020, 30-01-2020
Lead Assessor:	Di Smith	Additional team member(s):	
Type of Assessment:	Renewal		
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 4,500 people (excluding schools) and has 109 sites. The budget responsibility in 2020/21 before income, including revenue spending and capital investment excluding schools is £748 million. 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.'

These are two priority outcomes:

- Warwickshire's communities and individuals are supported to be safe, healthy and independent
- Warwickshire's economy is vibrant and supported by the right jobs, training, skills and infrastructure

These are supported by a third outcome 'Making the best use of resources'.

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.



Since the 2018 audit WCC has been in a period of transformation which has continued apace throughout 2019. They are now moving into a period of sustained change with a new organisational structure and new operational systems.

There are still three directorates and now there are 12 Assistant Directors with services being split between Strategy and Commissioning and Service Delivery.

In the light of increasing demand and reducing resources WCC via the transformation programme of work, 'Doing things better' is focusing on using resources differently and transforming the way services are delivered and commissioned.

The objective is to deliver to the Council Plan 2020 -2025 and improve customer experience and future proof services to meet current challenges. These challenges include aiming to ensure increasing self -service as first choice for most customers as more and more interactions are encouraged to be via digital channels, changes to service delivery and budgetary and resource constraints. They continue to face the challenge of achieving savings of £33 million by 2025 and deliver their Core purpose of making Warwickshire the best it can be.

Warwickshire – 'Being the best it can be'



3. METHOD OF ASSESSMENT

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 on-site. 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.

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 on-site assessment commenced with an opening meeting.

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. ON-SITE ASSESSMENT

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

The assessment resulted in the raising of a number of partial compliances and several observations which are listed in Section 6 and 7 of this report.



Number of good practices awarded during the assessment	18
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Have the partial compliance(s) raised at the last assessment been closed?	Yes
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6. AREAS OF PARTIAL COMPLIANCE

CRITERION 1

1.3.4 *We set challenging and stretching targets for customer satisfaction and our levels are improving.*

You are in a period of major change in service delivery and the systems you use for reporting. Although you have some areas where you can evidence improved satisfaction this is not yet consistent.

For example: -

- Those customers being signposted to partners to seek solutions- e.g. Adult Social Care CSC- you have no measure of customer satisfaction with the service delivered. The Customer Relationship Management tool is good but this aspect of completing the circle to understand outcomes is not available.
- The move to digital applications for school transport. You claim you have improved the customer experience, but you cannot evidence this. The customer feedback on site was that although the digital application was good there are ongoing issues with some aspects. These include refunds 'taking a long time' and responses to requests being delayed.
- There was little meaningful evidence on satisfaction and timeliness of the CAHMS referral process, yet customers and stakeholders interviewed felt it was an area of concern for them.

CRITERION 2

2.2.1 *We can demonstrate our commitment to developing and delivering customer focused services through our recruitment, training and development policies for staff.*

There is evidence of you having customer focus at the heart of the business case for change. It is understandable at this stage in the Transformation agenda that the results of your staff survey do show some downward trends. Staff morale is still reflecting the findings of the staff survey. Members of staff, not just at the focus group, but at other times during the assessment saying they do not feel valued and having an anxiety around their future opportunities for development. Staff are committed to their service and to good customer experience for both internal and external customers.



The key areas of anxiety are

1. The perceived enforcing of generic job descriptions.
2. 'Downgrading' of some lower tier management posts.
3. Late communication to individuals during their consultations.
4. Too much change all at once.
5. How these changes will impact on their customers.

You may wish to consider fully who your customers are as this will include the traditional customers, stakeholders, volunteers and employees. It is important that external and internal customers have a good customer experience.

It should be stated that this is a partial compliance because of where you are in the changes and therefore there is an inconsistency against this criterion. On the last day of the assessment you announced the reinvigorating of the Employee Forum which is a positive step.

CRITERION 3

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

There are many individual examples of where this does happen. However, on looking at the key point of access being promoted – 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, but this is not clear to customers. It transpired that some users send service request and feedback via this link which then may not be seen by the appropriate team for a week or more.

Some customers interviewed reported having to chase requests and responses and be proactive in seeking answers -this may be related to this.

Because of the importance of website interactions this is a partial compliance

CRITERION 4

No partial compliances identified



CRITERION 5

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

As some customer contacts into the website are potentially going to the wrong place and customers reported having to chase responses this is a partial compliance (see 3.3.2)

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

There is some evidence of teams who do share, and it can result in reduced customer contacts and swifter interventions e.g. Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFRS) community prevention projects and MASH. These cross-team approaches are a good start but there are other areas where the 'silo' effect, or just the lack of awareness of what other teams are working on may be marring progress in sharing information and best practice.

The understanding of the CSE standard is not consistent across teams and you may wish to consider developing champions in teams as this could assist with that understanding and help 'silos' engage perhaps by sharing departmental briefings, vlogs and blogs etc.

Some previous internal connections may need reinvigorating too for example mobile libraries using the WFRS as an information link.



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

- The Adoption Central England (ACE) is new and the relationship between the potential parents, adoption office and social workers is described as excellent. However, there is a willingness for all families met to be engaged with the team to develop information and guidance e.g. on the Letterbox system- especially in complex cases and foster to adopt, a new process. You may also wish to consider engaging with parents and staff to develop guidance. (1.2.1)
- The parents from the Flexible Learning Team (FLT) who attended the focus group are keen for more engagement and networking. You may wish to consider enabling this. (1.2.1)
- The calls on the calls management screen in the CSC is not easily visible for all agents, you may wish to consider where it could be best located to support all agents and therefore customer demand. (2.1.6)
- You do share good news stories and pride in awards and successes. The internal impact of your sharing is limited and patchy. You may wish to review how you raise employee awareness of the good stories and celebrate together (2.1.6)
- The CSE Hallmark is used in some places and the certificate is displayed however you may wish to consider how you could make more of this achievement as something for the whole organisation to be proud of as 'one team'. (2.1.6)
- The recent shift to Microsoft 365 is a positive move. However, you may wish to consider ongoing training and shared learning as teams were reporting some reporting issues and 'loss' of data. (3.2.2)
- Although there are no metrics to evidence these aspects, there is a lot of 'noise' around the organisation's performance on Education, Health and Care plans- which can unlock other eligibilities- and CAHMs (a national issue too). Customers noted that there was some inconsistency in understanding the information on eligibility criteria around EHCP's and they did not find your website information to be clear. (3.2.2)

- The first responder's initiative brought positives to your communities. You may wish to look to reinvigorating the partnership with the ambulance service to support the first responder's initiative again. (3.4.2)
- You have many strong partnerships with Health and Education. The comparatively new structure of the CCG's and some parts of Education appear to bring some challenges. You may wish to consider if you can further build these relationships to support the needs and demands of your customers. (3.4.2)
- There is also 'noise' around school admissions and the number of students not yet placed in school, but the data available did not seem to reflect the concerns raised. You may wish to consider reviewing the information you provide to ensure that it is meaningful to your customers. (4.1.2)
- You may wish to consider if you can evidence that services are customer focused and right first time in most instances and if the methods of reporting are still meaningful to the public, considering the amount of change that has been and is being implemented. (4.2.2)
- You are committed to building Community Capacity and may wish to consider metrics to show that increase and the Social value impact. (4.2.2)
- There is some evidence of reporting and capturing evidence of improvements from informal complaints. You may wish to consider how to make this consistent across the organisation. (4.3.4)
- The 'conversation' and strength-based approach in the CSC is becoming embedded. However, you may wish to consider a supporting 'checklist' to ensure the 'conversations' do not inadvertently miss any crucial steps which a scripted call may have captured. (5.2.2)

Areas of Good Practice

- You have developed strong partnerships and networks across the county and region. These include
 1. the WFRS work in partnership with NHS on the Hospital to Home and the follow up Safe and Well visits. This approach meets the demands of the Functional Operational Model (FOM) with good outcomes and tangible impacts on other services
 2. The Brexit forum is a good example of your partnership working and leading on the Resilience Team across the region sharing best practice and assessing risk for your citizens
- The way you have developed the services in line with the 2025 Plan to enable the key objectives to be supported -for example Demand delivery with a strength-based approach, the Building Community Capacity agenda.

- The development of the Fitter Futures-portal to improve referral pathways and capture appropriate data.
- The work WFRS are doing to develop processes to gain meaningful feedback jointly working with the customer services team.
- The new Customer Relationship Management tool in Adult Social Care – Mosaic appears to have good integration with FirmStep thus achieving a comprehensive contextual history of the customer supporting good customer communication.
- The Family Information Service (FIS) change to delivery and outreach with restorative practice for Children and families is with earlier intervention and triage which is freeing up Social Worker hours for the more specialist areas at a time of severe pressure.
- The council office reception at Kings House in Bedworth is now modern and welcoming to visitors following a facelift.
- The new draft Complaints policy in its infancy and it is good that the drivers for this were a response to improve performance monitoring and learning following last year's assessment.
- The development of a Customer Experience Strategy High Level Action Plan is good practice.
- Your open and honest engagement with your staff following the staff survey via blogs and vlogs acknowledging the areas for improvement is good practice.
- The Commercial Strategy is a fresh approach at challenging the traditional approach to local government finances and maximizing value.
- Your approach to volunteering is proactive in many different services. The volunteers delivered Home Library Service for the isolated and housebound is being viewed as best practice by other local authorities.
- The hub and spoke approach to the service FLT is enabling the demand on social worker hours to be eased a little in this time of pressure.
- This year the students of the FLT have had their own ProMax and Craft Fayre which is innovative and good practice.
- The library team has great insight into its customers for the residential homes and housebound. This is evidenced with the care taken in selecting bespoke reading lists and the provision of dementia boxes as required by individuals and nursing homes.
- The engagement by Children's service to 'bespoke' the style of their web page is innovative and in step with their customer needs rather than the corporate style which may be modern but not necessarily customer friendly for those accessing information.
- The achievement over the past 5 years resulting in 53% reduction of CO2 omissions exceeds your customer promise target
- The use of Peer group sessions by the Physical Disability and Sensory Services team is a totally customer and solution focused approach to



meeting the excessive demand on their services due to an increase in those accessing their service on top of their traditional customers This increase appears to be due to a change in legislation and the grey areas between health and social responsibilities

Areas of Compliance Plus

1.1.2 We have developed customer insight about our customer groups to better understand their needs and preferences.

The outstanding example of this, and other aspects of the Customer Excellence Standard, observed during the assessment, is the work of the 'Bridges Team'. The projects at Clopton Bridge and the Westgate repair were exemplar in the way they approached the needs and aspirations of all customers, stakeholders and partners. They used informal and formal consultation and had an end to end approach of the customer experience of these projects. They actively sought the opinions of all and adjusted their plans to best meet customer needs based on the insight gained. They incorporated the historical importance that emerged and delivered the projects on time.

These considerations included

- The re-routing of a diversion to better accommodate mobility scooter users.
- Amending timings to support commercial activity.
- Engaging with a local school to ensure they experienced the historical value of the project and burying time capsules.
- Developing a multiagency group to capture information from all. (Reinvigoration of the cross-county Vale of Evesham Freight Partnership).
- Prioritising communication -especially important as some aspects changed during the projects.
- Liaison with film crews working in Warwick to minimise inconvenience to all.

One interviewee said 'I work with many local authorities planning teams and have never encountered an approach as good as this experience. Both community and business needs are embraced as the norm. The team were commercially and customer focused and went over and above to ensure their project was completed but all stakeholder views and requirements were taken into consideration.'



This is compliance plus

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.

There are many examples across the council where this is evidenced

- Your engagement on the Council Plan including 9 roadshows held across the county and an online survey provided a broad geographic and demographic representation of views. Additionally, the views of the Youth Parliament were sought. You were also responsive to a key theme obtained from the engagement exercise by increasing the profile of Climate Change in your offer as a key council commitment.
- The FLT approach is outreach based and reaches the people furthest away from the services
- Family Centers are a focus for service delivery aimed at specific needs. Your outreach works ensure the people most in need are referred into and have access to this wonderful service.
- The interagency work from WFRS to seek opportunities to develop services in the community.
- You have engaged many citizens in a variety of stakeholder groups, and these include a youth parliament and smaller young people's groups specific to services e.g. Flexible Learning and young carers.

This is compliance plus

1.3.5 We have made positive changes to services as a result of analysing customer experience, including improved customer journeys

You use customer journey mapping in service improvement, planning and delivery Some examples are: -

- the development of the Customer Experience Strategy.
- The cultural changes in the WFRS to proactively seek community opportunities to employ their services in a different way. The safe and well checks following hospital to home referrals further strengthens this service and early results are showing reduced readmissions, improved sign

- posting to other support and therefore efficiencies for both them and health.
- the person-centered strength-based triage which has replaced scripting at the Adult Social Care CSC
 - The Road Safety Team have developed the Warwickshire Road Safety Club since analysing feedback from teachers via a satisfaction survey. You have developed a modern and effective approach which is appealing to the audience and has a strong message. The use of Makaton to reinforce the messages to reception age children is laudable.
 - Children and Family Centres, Early Help and Family Support use a range of mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of services and support. The voice of the child and parent are captured through a range of mechanisms such as parent/carer representatives on the Advisory Board, captured in action plans and online Parent Voice Group – established and consulted on all developments of the service
 - The Early help application process was streamlined in line with customer feedback

This is compliance plus

2.1.3 We have policies and procedures which support the right of all customers to expect excellent levels of service.

You have a suite of policies and key performance information which set out what people can expect from your services. You have developed the new Council plan until 2025 and incorporated commitments based on feedback from your consultation. These are now underpinned by the Customer Experience strategy which evidences your culture of embedding a positive customer experience for all customers both internal and external.

This is compliance plus

2.2.4 We can demonstrate how customer-facing staffs' insight and experience is incorporated into internal processes, policy development and service planning.

There are many examples of how you meet this criterion. Some key examples are: -

- WFRS community diversification projects including the consideration being given to regain services lost to competition under previous regional policies to deliver efficient services to the Council and wider. Also, the exploration of new offers e.g. 'control' service for other organisation such as monitoring lone workers.

- Safe and Well visits
- The introduction of the strengths-based approach to 'triage' in social services
- The development of Volunteer support and signposting to third sector providers for some interventions.
- Your approach to the climate change emergency.
- The changes to the Family Information Service to better support the families and the Social Worker Team

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.

Across the council there are examples which meet this criterion and the following examples are of note: -

- The Warwickshire Fire & Rescue Service brand and unique strengths is being used to provide opportunities to make huge contributions in the community. You are providing services in people's homes, schools and businesses in the course of your statutory duties. The evaluation of the Hospital to Home service and Safe and Well checks evidence the huge benefits to the people of Warwickshire and the health providers you coordinate the work with. You have further coordinated with the charity Edible Links to enable those arriving home alone to have basic sustenance to get them settled back in after illness.
- The Veterans Contact Point Charity project is evidence of the council being part of a coordinated service. The commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant here means that they have not just 'adopted it' but they have enabled the charity to establish itself and supported it too to enable services to be offered for those in need. Other 'real' actions include fast tracking MOD personnel on issues such as mental health and employment and offering support in recruitment to employment with the council.
- Your coordinated delivery of reuse centers with Age UK at your household waste sites has demonstrable benefits. It generates income, meets the core climate change agenda and puts money back into services at the heart of your community.
- The Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy, which defines relationships and shows added value, underpins the strength agenda and pulls together the social inclusion and social value aspects. It is dependent on coordinated services.
- The County Record Office offer many facilities including access to Ancestry databases and working with other teams and organisation's including Shakespeare's birthplace, education and events

(Commonwealth games 2022). There are many legacy projects which require coordinated delivery e.g. Warwickshire Bytes. The benefits are tangible in both the capture of accessible local history and the support for volunteers, many of whom, see their role as a way to stop them being isolated.

Visitors and volunteers on site described the office as ‘the best in the country’

This is compliance plus

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

Your community interactions are well evidenced. For example

- Your work with Volunteers is extensive across many services
- The Veterans Contact Point project and provision of an appropriate community facility
- The home library service for those who are housebound or isolated
- The Children and family centres at the heart of your communities.
- Your liaison with HS2 and local areas to use monies to be spend on Road Safety in developing areas.
- Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy
- The staff engagement in national and local charitable initiatives e.g. Macmillan and support for local charities with the 4 annual fundraising days.

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

Adoption Central England (ACE) launched in February 2018 and as a new service are constantly reviewing their practices. You have developed the service and learned best practice by embracing the Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) approach.

This has brought tangible changes to the service delivery. In particular, the new way the staff treat one another, as well as their approach to customers, has been commented upon by customers, partners and stakeholder as being a huge positive. The DDP training and approach enables staff to feel valued, supported and resilient in a traditionally stressful role.

The service leads have been guest speakers at national conference on the methodology of DDP and the impacts it has had.

This is compliance plus



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.