

# North York Moors National Park Authority

27 June 2016

## Customer Service Excellence

### 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To update Members on the external verification, via the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) standard, of the Authority's work in relation to the delivery of services to the public.
- 1.2 To seek Members' approval for provisionally including continuation of this work in the Business Plan

### 2. Background

- 2.1 The Government wants public services that are efficient, effective, excellent, equitable and empowering – with customers' needs at the heart of service provision. With this in mind CSE was developed to offer organisations delivering services a practical tool for driving customer-focused change. While the majority of the 750 CSE holders are public and third sector, there are also a small and increasing number of private sector companies who see the value of testing themselves against a standard that looks directly at service provision.
- 2.2 The 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. There is also emphasis placed on developing customer insight, understanding the user's experience and robust measurement of service satisfaction.
- 2.3 CSE is designed to operate on three distinct levels:
  - As a driver of continuous improvement. By allowing organisations to self-assess their capability, in relation to customer focussed service delivery, identifying areas and methods for improvement;
  - As a skills development tool. By encouraging individuals and teams within the organisation to explore and acquire new skills in the area of customer focus and customer engagement, therefore building their capacity for delivering improved services;
  - As an independent validation of achievement. By giving organisations the opportunity to seek formal accreditation to the CSE standard, demonstrate their competence, identify key areas for improvement and celebrate their success.
- 2.4 The Authority has held CSE and its predecessor Charter Mark since 1997. There are other external accreditations that organisations use such as Investors in People. While these have their value they tend to be more inward looking, and Officers have taken the view that Charter Mark/CSE is the most appropriate one for the Authority with its strong emphasis on delivery of services to the public.

2.5 The CSE standard is made up of 5 criteria with 57 elements in total (for further details, see [http://www.customerserviceexcellence.uk.com/CSE\\_Standard.pdf](http://www.customerserviceexcellence.uk.com/CSE_Standard.pdf)). Assessment is carried out via a desktop review by an authorised assessor followed by an on-site visit lasting one or two days. As well as viewing physical documentation, and carrying out observations, the assessor speaks to customers, staff and partners to review the Authority's attitudes and working practices along with details of its customer focussed initiatives and performance. A score is awarded for each criteria – partial compliance, compliance or compliance plus (the latter is regarded as an exemplar of good practice). The Cabinet Office has contracted several private sector companies to carry out CSE assessments and the Authority uses G4S for this purpose.

### 3. **2016 Application and Assessment**

3.1 Chris Hudson is a frequent customer of the Authority's services and also our regular CSE assessor. He visited the Authority for the day on 9 May. He met a variety of staff and also talked to a number of people from outside the organisation who have used our services over the last year. Chris visited the Moors Centre and was able to talk to one of our visitor centre volunteers and to customers about what they thought of the Visitor Centre. He also talked with school teachers whose special school were on site taking part in activities led by the education team. The reaction from customers to what we were delivering was extremely positive.

3.2 Overall Chris said that he continued to be very impressed by what the Authority does. He felt that one of the main differences between us and other organisations that he sees is that each year we keep doing new things that our customers want us to do, while at the same time maintaining strong levels of customer service in our day to day work. He regards the day to day activities of our staff across all 4 Departments as being very good in delivering excellent service – the presentation to Members that will accompany this paper will provide examples of this.

3.3 We retained the standard with flying colours, securing full compliance across all 57 criteria and in ten of the fifty seven criteria we were assessed as Compliance Plus (best practice). Two new areas of best practice awarded this year is the work that we do in learning from best practice and in providing accurate, complete information to our customers. The assessor saw numerous examples of these criteria both in discussions with staff and in the evidence that we showed him. The Authority's Compliance Plus criteria are as follows;

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;

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.

2.2.4 We can demonstrate how customer facing staffs' insights and experiences 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.

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

#### 4. **Wider Context**

- 4.1 As stated above, there are 750 holders of the standard. Many holders are individual departments or operating units within much bigger organisations, e.g. individual care homes, single corporate services departments in colleges etc. The Authority is relatively unusual in holding the standard across all of its functions. There is no national 'league table' that shows holders of the standard in order of compliance plus, compliance and partial-compliance. G4S, which carries out approximately one third of the total number of assessments, has, however, carried out some benchmarking, awarding points depending upon the assessment result. Within this group, the Authority is ranked as follows after the recent assessment;
  - 35th organisation overall, (8 of those ahead in the ranking have 1 or more partial compliances).
  - One of only 79 organisations with no partial compliances.
- 4.2 Previously the Authority has been subject to external scrutiny via the NPAPA process. At the moment, there appears to be little prospect of this process being repeated in the near future. While the range of assessment topics for CSE is narrower than NPAPA, Officers do place considerable value on having regular external verification of the work that the Authority does.
- 4.3 A small amount of staff time has to be committed annually to preparing the application and arranging the assessment visit (approximately 1 working week) and there is a modest financial cost of £1k to pay for the assessment.
- 4.4 The rationale behind seeking this external accreditation is that it focusses on what the Authority is delivering to its customers and the ways in which decisions are made using knowledge of what our customers want and need. Judging from Members' recent comments, this will continue to be a priority for our work and will provisionally form part of the revised Business Plan, subject to Members' approval.

5. **Financial, Staff and Legal Implications**

- 5.1 The staff time necessary is already in work programmes and the costs have been included in future budgets.

6. **Recommendation**

That Members;

- 6.1 Note the contents of the report, the current work being done to ensure that the CSE standard is used effectively to continue to improve service delivery.
- 6.2 Confirm that they wish the continuation of work on CSE to be provisionally included in the Business Plan subject to the resources outlined in Paragraph 4.3 not being exceeded.

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