

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

27 March 2014

Report by Deputy Chief Executive

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE AWARD – CUSTOMER FIRST

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to advise Cabinet of the outcome of the most recent Customer Service Excellence assessment for Customer First.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that the Cabinet notes the continuing high standard of service in Customer First, as demonstrated by this award, and recognises the team's sustained commitment to continuous improvement.

BACKGROUND

3. The Customer Service Excellence standard is a nationally recognised one, which was formerly the Chartermark standard. It *“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.”*

4. The previous review for Customer First was undertaken in February 2013 and the assessment is completed on an annual basis.

REPORT

5. The assessor spent two days visiting the Council's service centres at HQ and Barrhead; talking to customers; and interviewing staff, service colleagues and partner agencies. The outcome of the review was the award of the Customer Service Excellence Standard.

6. The assessment report, included as Annex 1 to this paper, noted:

“Following the assessment East Renfrewshire Council – Customer First 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 frontline staff.”

7. The report recognises the service's continuing commitment to providing excellent services and to seeking continuous improvement. The assessment identified no areas of non-compliance with the Customer Service Excellence standard and indeed identified six areas of “Compliance Plus”. These are *“behaviours or practices which exceed the requirements of the standard and area viewed as exceptional or as an exemplar to others”*.

8. This is the highest number of “Compliance Plus” awards that the Customer First team has received to date as part of these annual assessments. These six areas are set out in the attached report but include: building customer insight and using this to make improvements; improving the customer journey; putting customers at the heart of service delivery; prioritisation of service delivery; improving leaflet displays; and sharing customer information with partners and colleagues appropriately to reduce unnecessary duplication for customers.

FINANCE & EFFICIENCY

9. Costs for the annual assessment are met from within the Chief Executive’s Department revenue budget.

CONCLUSION

10. The assessment report and the confirmation of the continued achievement of the Customer Service Excellence standard recognise the Customer First team’s sustained commitment to service excellence and continuous improvement.

RECOMMENDATION

11. It is recommended that the Cabinet notes the continuing high standard of service in Customer First, as demonstrated by this award, and recognises the team’s sustained commitment to continuous improvement.

REPORT AUTHOR

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KEYWORDS

Customer Service Excellence; Customer First; assessment; continuous improvement.



Assessment Report

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

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East Renfrewshire Council - Customer First

Address:	211 Main Street, Barrhead, East Renfrewshire, G78 1SY		
Standard(s):	CSE	Accreditation Body(s)	UKAS
Representative:	Linda Wilson		
Site(s) audited:	Barrhead Eastwood (HQ)	Date(s) of audit(s):	30 and 31/1/2014
Effective No. of Personnel	46	No. of sites:	2
Lead auditor:	Robert Sullivan	Additional team member(s):	NA
Type of Assessment:	Annual Review		
Certificate Outcome	<input type="checkbox"/> Granted <input type="checkbox"/> Withheld	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continued <input type="checkbox"/> Suspended	
Certification Claims are accurate and in accordance with SGS guidance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

East Renfrewshire Council - Customer First is responsible for the provision and future development of some additional council services. The services continues to expand its online services to enable a wide range of access channels that allow greater flexibility in the ways customers may interact with the service.

Both service centres have seen varying degrees of refurbishment and environmental investment over the last year to make them even better environments in which to transact business. The service has 46 staff.

Six PCs for public use have now been installed in the Barrhead Service Centre to enhance your online/self-service provision and in preparation for the implementation of Universal Credits where applicants will be required to complete their application forms online. The service has employed an additional 1.5 members of staff to help deal with changes relating to Welfare Reform and has also been working with the Adult and Family Learning team to offer courses to members of the public on using a PC and creating e-mail accounts and so on.

You continue to be at the forefront of service provision and a first point of contact for many customers experiencing financial hardship. The multiple skillset of a customer services officer in assisting these customers to understand the complexity of the many changes to welfare and the benefits system is very important. In April 2013, the administration of DWP Crisis and Community Care Loans were transferred to Councils and the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) was created. Customer First played a significant role in the successful implementation and smooth operation of the new SWF and has helped create as seamless a transition as possible for many applicants to the new fund. A local food bank has been introduced and Customer First now regularly refers customers in need to this facility through the Money Advice Service. Staff has attended events designed to help customers with disabilities mitigate the impact of Universal Credit (in particular Personal Independence Payments).

Council launched the new Community Covenant service for ex or returning service men and women with four team members being trained as 'Champions' to be able to deal with more in-depth issues. The Council also successfully bid into the LIBOR fund with neighboring councils to help support this initiative.

Customer First has also been at the forefront of implementing the new Scottish Public Service Ombudsman's complaints handling procedure with many of the Complaint Handler's Network group looking to East Renfrewshire's Customer First for support and advice on implementing the procedures.

The Customer Records Management (CRM) system is in its final stages of an upgrade. This upgrade has modernised the system offering additional functionalities therefore enabling you to provide a better more advanced service to our customer.



Following the assessment, East Renfrewshire Council - Customer First 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.

During the assessment no non or partial compliances with the standard were identified.

As a result of these findings:

“Award of the **Customer Service Excellence** Standard has been recommended” Yes No

2. METHOD OF ASSESSMENT

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

The next stage was an on-site assessment. The objective of this part of the assessment was to obtain evidence demonstrating that the applicant was meeting the requirements of the standard, within the area covered by the scope of the application. This evidence was obtained through a documentation review as well as interviews with staff, customers, representatives of partner organisations, and senior management.

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 in the wider public 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.

3. OPENING MEETING

The on-site assessment commenced with an opening meeting.

The assessment activity and the partial / non compliances were discussed. The itinerary, which had been forwarded to East Renfrewshire Council - Customer First in advance, was agreed. The organisation was informed that all information obtained during the assessment would be treated as strictly confidential.

The scope of Assessment was confirmed as: “East Renfrewshire Council - Customer First”

4. ON-SITE ASSESSMENT

The Assessor was accompanied throughout the assessment by Eileen O'Donnell and other Personnel within the organisation were involved when assessing activities within their responsibility.

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

Criterion	Number of Elements	Maximum number of Partial compliance	Actual number of non compliance	Actual number of partial compliance
1	11	2	0	0
2	11	2	0	0
3	12	2	0	0
4	13	3	0	0
5	10	2	0	0

	Yes	No
Have the partial compliance(s) raised at the last assessment been closed?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. AREAS OF NON / PARTIAL COMPLIANCE

CRITERION 1

None

CRITERION 2

None

CRITERION 3

None

CRITERION 4

None

CRITERION 5

None

6. OBSERVATIONS

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

Areas for Improvement

Council Headquarters

- The external door sensors appeared to 'miss' customers unless they were within a very limited detection area.
- The digital display in the foyer area had a PAT testing label indicating that a test was overdue although this has been reporting to Property and Technical Department.
- Mail crates were all within this area creating a less favourable initial impression to customers and visitors.
- You may to consider if the notice on the door of the 'old' Registration Service offices could be more corporate and professional.

- There were a number of holes in the ceiling that again may have a detrimental impact on initial impressions; you may wish to consider some form of repair. This has also been reported to the relevant Department.
- There are non-adjustable seats at the Planning PC, you may wish to consider any Health and Safety issues surrounding that.
- In the Marriage Suite corridor the door to the electrical cupboard was unlocked and cleaner's supplies were also stored there. This included flammable materials and cardboard. You should consider any health and safety and fire risks. This has been highlighted by the service to the Community Resources Manager.

Barrhead Service Centre

- The Planning PC has social media icons displayed but when clicked these could not be accessed. This has been reported to IT but remains unchanged.
- The Planning PC opens the Councils website but you cannot make use of a number of features include the book and pay functions. . This has been reported to IT but remains unchanged.
- The chairs at the centre of the service centre are all armless, you may wish to consider if some chairs could have an arm on them to assist customers with mobility difficulties. This has been noted but as yet remains.
- Again for another year, there was storage of materials under the stairs at the main stairway and fire exit despite a proliferation of signage saying nothing should be stored there. Although this is a communal non-public area I remain concerned about staff and visitor safety and you should consider any implications of this situation.

Areas of Good Practice

- You have further improved the service offering since the last review. Additional services are now offered which include 'firm bases' – a service for returning veterans, processing of the welfare fund and preparation for universal credit services, making increased referrals to external agencies such as Citizens Advice and the Money Advice Centres. In addition, any overflow from theatre bookings is now dealt with by Customer First.
- You have made a number of environmental improvements this year some of which were a result of the Customer Service Excellence reviews in previous years. This continuous improvement philosophy is commendable.
- You have improved the privacy of the service to customers by installing a new sound system with directed speakers above the seating areas. This was noted in previous assessments and it was good to see successful implementation of this improvement.
- You have installed 6 PC's in order to enhance on-line self-service provision in preparation for Universal Credits.
- Staff all appeared to have a good rapport with customers and demonstrated good customer insight.

- You have added additional online services including ordering registration certificates. Customers can also now book sports development classes online.

Areas of Compliance Plus

- 1.1.2 You have continued to build on your customer insight for current and prospective customers through the use of more detailed information. You have done this by using special interest focus groups such as those for veterans and welfare reform in conjunction with other Departments to develop enhanced insight. You have worked with other local authorities such as Renfrewshire as well as such as Voluntary Action to improve insight about customer needs and preferences.
- 1.3.5 You provided numerous examples where you analysed the customer journey and made changes to the service to make it more effective and efficient. You have improved the privacy in the Barrhead Office for customers. You have refined and revised the process of Trade Waste payments in order to make the process smoother for customers and the Cleansing Department. Customer insight indicated that customers wanted more information on 'authorised venues for civil marriages' this is now on the website. You have reduced the number of steps taken by customers to receive the 'dog chipping' service as a result of analyzing the previous customer journey.
- 2.1.1 There is evidence that you put the customer at the heart of service delivery in many ways. One example being that staff can operate all systems from home in event of emergencies and in bad weather conditions to provide on-going services to customers. The assessor also observed staff offering added value services to customer during this review visit.
- 2.1.2 You have continued over the years of being involved in Customer Service Excellence to use your developing customer insight to prioritise service improvement activity. It is commendable that any partial compliance raised or areas of improvement identified are addressed where feasible and as soon as possible given constraints. You demonstrate an ethos of continuous improvement driven by your understanding of the customer and good practice.
- 3.2.3 You have further improved your leaflet displays at Barrhead and at HQ you have improved your poster displays and the leaflet display significantly. This has made a positive impact on initial impressions.
- 5.2.3 You share customer information with colleagues and partners within your organisation whenever appropriate and demonstrated how this has reduced unnecessary contact for customers. You provided a number of examples such as dustbin uplift assistance, grass cutting, school meals, school clothing grants, blue badges, concessionary travel cards and so forth. This helped customers receive services they are entitled to, often without any further contact, therefore reducing unnecessary contact for customers.

7. ACTION PLANNING

The achievement of Customer Service Excellence is an on-going activity and it is important that East Renfrewshire Council - Customer First 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.

Your next steps:

On-going review

It is a requirement of the Customer Service Excellence scheme that 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 East Renfrewshire Council - Customer First retains a copy of this report to aid continuous improvement, and as a reference document for future assessment reviews.