


## ITEM NO: 6

<b>Report To:</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE CABINET</b>
<b>Date:</b>	26 August 2015
<b>Executive Member/Reporting Officer:</b>	Councillor John Taylor (Deputy Executive Leader) Councillor Jim Fitzpatrick First Deputy (Performance & Finance) Steven Pleasant – Chief Executive Sandra Stewart - Executive Director - Governance & Resources
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE ASSESSMENT 2015</b>
<b>Report Summary:</b>	The purpose of this report is to advise and update Cabinet members on the recent Customer Service Excellence Assessment and the recommendations submitted and ratified by Centre for Assessment – Accredited Body for the Cabinet Office.
<b>Recommendations:</b>	That Cabinet note the award of the Customer Service Excellence standard which has been achieved for the whole of the Council.
<b>Links to Community Strategy:</b>	The Customer Service Excellence standard links across all aims of the Sustainable Community Strategy. The standard is a tool that shows that the council and its services put the customer at the heart of service delivery.
<b>Policy Implications:</b>	It is an essential component for the organisation to have external validation to view the way that we deliver our services and that we constantly review and continually strive to improve.
<b>Financial Implications: (Authorised by the Section 151 Officer)</b>	There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.
<b>Legal Implications: (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)</b>	It is important particularly as the Council addresses its significant budget reductions that we have external measures of performance and delivery of services to residents.
<b>Risk Management:</b>	High standards of customer care impacts significantly on the customer's perceptions of the council and their satisfaction with our services.
<b>Access to Information:</b>	The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer Julie Speakman Head of Executive Support.

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## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The aim of the Customer Service Excellence standard is to encourage, enable and reward organisations that are delivering services based on a genuine understanding of the needs and preferences of their customers and communities.
- 1.3 The foundation of this tool is that the Customer Service Excellence 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. Emphasis is also placed on developing customer insight, understanding the user's experience and robust measurement methods.
- 1.4 There are five criteria within the standard that we are judged against. These are:-
  - a) Customer Insight
  - b) Culture of the Organisation
  - c) Information and Access
  - d) Delivery
  - e) Timeliness and Quality of Service
- 1.5 Once accredited with the standard the organisation is subject to annual review for the next two years followed by a full review at year three.
- 1.6 Since the initial accreditation of the standard in 2009, the Council has gone from strength to strength in terms of the continued compliance and a summary of the achievements are outlined below:-
  - a) 2009 Full Assessment – 100% compliance and 2 areas of Compliance Plus.
  - b) 2012 Full Assessment – 100% compliance and 6 areas of Compliance Plus.
  - c) 2013 Surveillance – 100% compliance and a further 1 area to Compliance Plus to add to the existing 6.

*(Compliance plus is a discretionary element that can be awarded for parts of a criteria and recognises exceptional best practice.)*

## **2. THE PROCESS FOR 2015 ACCREDITATION**

- 2.1 The reaccreditation process for 2015 began some months ago, when service areas began preparing and collating written submissions of evidence to outline how we thought we would meet the standard.
- 2.2 With the information provided an overall council submission was developed and sent for an initial pre assessment known as a Desk-Top Review. The process allows the assessors to check remotely our evidence against the standard's criteria and provide us with some feedback on how far we fared against the standard requirements at that moment in time. This also aided us in planning the assessment site visit timetable.
- 2.3 The next and final stage of the process involved a 5 day onsite assessment. The onsite visits gave the assessors the opportunity to meet with elected members, staff, partners and customers to gain an understanding and demonstration of how we work together to place the customer at the heart of all our service provision.

### 3. OUTCOME OF THE ASSESSMENT

- 3.1 The assessment was received very positively across the organisation and with our partners and customers. Informal final overall feedback was excellent, with extremely positive comments including:-

***“The sense of consistency across service areas in delivery high quality services to customers was even more evident at this assessment.***

***The passion and motivation of staff is as strong as previous if not stronger and keeping sight of the customer at the end of the process was always at the forefront of service delivering.***

***The standard that has been witnessed during the assessment week has been extremely high and it continues to be even more remarkable given the continued reduction of resources”***

- 3.2 The informal recommendation made by the lead assessor was that the Council should be awarded the standard with 100% compliance against all criteria.
- 3.3 In the Council's previous full assessment in 2012 the organisation in addition to complying the standard 100%, was also awarded **six** areas of compliance plus. Compliance plus is a discretionary element that can be awarded for parts of a criteria and recognises exceptional best practice.
- 3.4 On this occasion, the Lead Assessor confirmed that he was recommending that that not only was the council fulfilling the full requirements of the standard, he was also recommending for this assessment that the council be awarded **eight** new areas of Compliance Plus. This is a tremendous outcome and the Lead Assessor stated ***“in all my time as an assessor for this standard I don't think I have every recommended any organisation for this many areas of compliance plus. This recognises the depth and breadth the organisation places customer services excellence at the heart of what it does”.***

Noted below are the criteria recommended for the Compliance Plus:-

**Criteria 1.1.3 – We make particular efforts to identify hard to reach and disadvantage groups and individuals, and have developed our services in response to their specific needs.**

**Criteria 1.3.5 – We have made positive changes to services as a result of analyzing customer experience, including improved customer journeys.**

**Criteria 2.1.1 - There is corporate commitment to putting the customer at the heart of service delivery and leaders in our organization actively support this and advocate for customers.**

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

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

**Criteria 3.4.1 – We have made arrangements with other providers and partners to offer and supply coordinated services, and these arrangements have demonstrable benefits for our customers**

**Criteria 3.4.2** – *We have developed coordinated working arrangements with our partners to ensure customers have clear lines of accountability for quality of service.*

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

- 3.5 The recommendations as a whole have been ratified by the Customer Service Excellence Panel and a copy of the full report can be found at **Appendix 1**.

#### **4. SUMMARY**

- 4.1 Service areas will continue to ensure that excellence in customer service is intrinsic in future deliver models and through the Big Conversation the organisation will continue with its commitment to listen to customer's views and feedback.
- 4.2 Communications with our employees, elected members and communities through the use of internal and external channels are being planned to widely publicise the outcome of the assessment.
- 4.3 Coordination of certifications to be displayed in public buildings will be distributed on receipt of the documentation.
- 4.4 The council will be subject to a 12 month on site surveillance visit in the summer 2016 and this is currently scheduled to take place 24 and 25 June 2016.

#### **5. RECOMMENDATION**

- 5.1 As set out on the front of the report.

# Customer Service Excellence Commercial in Confidence Assessment Report

<b>Organisation</b>	Tameside MBC
<b>Certificate Number</b>	14/3469
<b>Date of next Surveillance</b>	22.06.15
<b>Duration of next Surveillance</b>	TBC
<b>Legal Status</b>	Public

**Date: 22 to 25 June 2015**

**Andrew Mackey and Hugh Keachie**  
Assessor name  
*On behalf of* Centre for Assessment Ltd

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## **Introduction**

Tameside is a mixed Borough with a mix of rural and urban areas. It is roughly eight miles across and has just under 215,000 people settled in its 40 square miles. It is bordered to the north by the River Medlock, to the south by the River Etherow and Werneth Low, to the east by the Pennines, and to the west by the City of Manchester. It was created in 1974 and comprises 9 towns: Ashton-under-Lyne, Audenshaw, Denton, Droylsden, Dukinfield, Hyde, Longdendale (comprising the villages of Broadbottom, Hollingworth and Mottram), Mossley and Stalybridge. The area includes historic market towns, a canal network and industrial heritage areas as well as direct motorway links and a 20-minute journey to Manchester International Airport.

There is a rich mixture of different cultures, religions and ethnic groups in Tameside. Over five percent of the population is made up of people from ethnic backgrounds other than European, including Afro-Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Chinese, East African, Asian, Indian and Pakistani families. Many more Tamesiders are of Irish, Italian, Polish and Ukrainian backgrounds. In common with all Local Authorities, the Council continues to deal with major reductions in funding, while striving to maintain service levels wherever possible.

The Authority has previously been accredited under the CSE standard following a building block approach in 2009 and a recertification in 2012. This latest assessment looked at the work of the Council as a whole and covered all service areas.

The key objective of the assessment was to establish whether or not the Authority as a whole continues to meet the requirements of the standard; no additional objectives were agreed with the client.

## **Executive Summary**

### **Overall impression**

It was very clear from the evidence provided throughout the assessment process that the organisation does meet the requirements of the Customer Service Excellence standard and the recommendation is therefore that accreditation be agreed. There was clear evidence that the organisation has continued to improve and to focus on the development and delivery of customer-focussed services, despite the continuing financial challenges. Working with the CSE framework has had a definite impact and the client has provided a short statement of the impacts which is provided below.

Areas of particular strength were identified as follows:

- Services across the Council continue to strive to identify the needs and expectations of all their customers, particularly those who are considered to be 'hard to reach'. As a result of the evidence presented, element 1.1.3 has been scored as 'compliance plus'.
- Customer data is being used effectively to inform the ongoing development of services and many examples were provided to show how this works in practice. Element 1.3.5 has been scored 'compliance plus'.
- The corporate commitment is clear and the message about customer service has been communicated and embedded effectively across service areas. Element 2.1.1 has therefore been scored 'compliance plus'.
- The level and impact of empowerment of staff at all levels is clear and this helps drive the continued focus on customer service. Element 2.1.6 has been scored as 'compliance plus'.
- A great deal of work has been done (and continues) to ensure that the workforce in all areas are engaged and involved in the ongoing development of the services, including a series of workforce

engagement sessions hosted by the Chief Executive. Element 2.2.4 has been scored as 'compliance plus'.

- Partnership working has long been seen as being an important part of service delivery and several key examples were provided to show how this has continued over the last 3 years. As a result elements 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 have been scored as 'compliance plus'
- Another area that has always been strong in Tameside has been the support that is provided for local businesses, organisations and communities and again this is an area where further developments have been achieved over the past three years and element 3.4.3 has been scored as 'compliance plus'

Scoring overall across the whole of the framework was very strong and as a result there were no partial compliances. However, a number of areas for ongoing development were identified as follows:

- Information is provided to customers in a range of ways including on the web site and via more traditional means such as local notice boards. It would be helpful to ensure that all information displayed is dated so that customers can see how current the information is. In addition, someone should have responsibility for making regular checks to update and refresh local notice boards. If out of date information is displayed it can cause people to be cynical about the organisation's commitment to really share information.
- Many examples were shown of how good practice has been shared, especially with external agencies, it might be helpful to think about how the Authority could provide regular structured opportunities for staff in different service areas to share good practice across services.

#### **Impacts of using CSE Framework (NB The following was provided by the client)**

*For many years Tameside MBC has valued the use of the Customer Service Excellence, now more than ever it is important for the organisation to receive external validation on the services and functions we deliver to our customers.*

*Just because we think we are doing a good job and delivering what is important to customers doesn't necessarily mean it to be the case, that's where the external validation is extremely important to us.*

*We use the CSE Standard as a tool for learning and improvement across the organisation. We know we have service areas that specialise in key specific fields of work and where best practice can be shared and the standard gives us a platform to support this.*

*The criteria of the standard helps us to focus our efforts and question ourselves and the work that we do, to make sure that we do what matters in a way that makes a positive difference to customers. By "checking back" to the standard helps us to go back to basics to see we are doing things right in a way that the standard guides us.*

*The learning of the standard is also of importance to us and each year we review what we have submitted and showcased and reported back through the organisation, so all staff and elected members are aware of the outcome. More important too though is that we share the outcomes with our customers and partners. Finally the external value we get from the standard is of importance. Linking up with likeminded organisations and those that are on the journey of CSE is good for us. We can share good practice but also learn from others in this key field area of work.*

*Having an accredited body that knows and understands the organisation is of key importance too and over the years we have built a good working relationships with colleagues both in CFA office and our lead assessor Andrew and colleague Hugh.*



## **Summary of findings against Customer Service Excellence**

### **Criterion 1 - CUSTOMER INSIGHT**

During the past 3 years the Council's understanding of its customer base has grown and developed. As in previous years, Tameside continue to use appropriate demographic data but this has been supplemented by data from a number of initiatives. For example, the Public Services Hub has helped all the agencies involved to understand their customers and what they need and expect from services. This knowledge is being used to continually shape and develop the range and type of service offered via the hub, especially to individuals and families with complex and challenging needs. Work with the 'hard to reach' groups has included working with local organisations providing services to specific ethnic communities, projects to contact and engage with 'troubled families' and work to help make sure that parents of young children are fully engaged and involved in making sure their children are school-ready when they go into full time school.

Consultation and engagement have become real watchwords for the Authority and several examples were provided to show how these processes work in practice, both with external customers and with staff. A wide range of methods is used to collect feedback from customers, ranging from informal (e.g. in Museums and visitor attractions) to more formal processes (e.g. in relation to Electoral Registration). When consultation takes place the results are analysed effectively and published (e.g. via the website or in the regular newsletter). Many examples were provided to show how the feedback received from customers has been used to improve services for them. 'You said, We did' communications are used to make sure customers know that their input does make a difference.

Satisfaction with services is measured regularly in most service areas and satisfaction rates are generally high. Results are published via the website and on noticeboards at appropriate points around the Borough. Again, several examples were shown to demonstrate how the data collected about customer satisfaction has been used to good effect in developing improved services and better customer journeys – for example the development of partnership working to bring appropriate support services together in the Customer Contact Centre, work on improving support for people to enable them to live independently in their own homes (including at least 6 people aged over 100) and greater coordination between services (e.g. through the 'Making every contact count' initiative) to make customer journeys easier and more effective.

### **Criterion 2 - THE CULTURE OF THE ORGANISATION**

The corporate commitment to the customer and to developing and delivering customer-focussed services is crystal clear, well-documented and effectively communicated. The Chief Executive and the Leader are passionate about what they do and this passion is shared effectively with staff throughout the organisation. A series of workforce engagement sessions has been developed to help further embed this approach for all staff and these are proving to be successful and popular. The Chief Executive and his senior team are visible around the organisation and staff reported that they are easily able to access the senior management team when needed; this helps model the behaviours that the senior team wish to see in their staff. The commitment to customers is embodied in a number of corporate documents including the Corporate Plan, the Mission Statement and in the agreed '15 pledges for 2015'. Staff empowerment across the piece is very high and was evidenced clearly in many service areas. Several staff talked about not allowing the systems to get in the way. Staff retain a clear focus on the person at the end of each contact and they will do what they can to make things right for them. One group of staff talked about 'the power of saying sorry', emphasising the importance of the 'no blame' culture. It was clear from how this approach is implemented that staff are effectively empowered to deliver.

The focus on effective recruitment, selection and training for staff is clear and effective. The approach to training and development has been developed to apply equally to elected members, helping ensure that they have the skills, knowledge and support they need to deliver effectively to local residents. Both

assessors saw clear evidence that staff are helpful and friendly to their customers and this was confirmed by some of the customers spoken to. One customer in the Customer Contact Centre commented *'I might not always like what they say, but they are always brilliant with me'*. Performance is monitored and reported appropriately. Staff ideas and suggestions are actively encouraged – for example as a result of the recent workforce engagement sessions, around 900 staff suggestions have been received and are being processed. Staff feel that they are valued in the organisation – one staff member commented that the workforce engagement sessions made her feel *'validated'* and *'listened to'*.

### **Criterion 3 - INFORMATION AND ACCESS**

Information for customers is made available in a variety of ways and again these have been developed and added to during the last 3 years. Traditional methods including leaflets, newsletters and other written formats, including the website, have been supplemented by the increasing use of social media, including Facebook and Twitter. These developments provide further evidence that the Council continues to monitor what its customers want and respond to those expressed needs as much as possible. A lot of information is provided face to face and staff are trained in information giving – especially in helping make sure that customers have both received and understood the information that has been provided. Alternative formats and presentations are used where appropriate (e.g. through translations, interpreters, provision of large print or Braille and, in some cases, the provision of audio options).

Usage of the various channels is monitored and appropriate action is taken to address any identified issues. For example, recent analysis of customer services appointment data showed a sharp decline in demand over time. With the exception of Ashton, the use of Customer Service Centres has fallen significantly between over the last 3 years and therefore an extensive consultation was undertaken with local residents to ask their views on how they would like customer services to operate in future. In other areas of provision the use and appearance of many buildings owned and operated by the Council are changing as the Vision Tameside initiative takes hold. In the longer term this will deliver better services more efficiently (e.g. through co-locating services and through moving some provision out into the Borough rather than being centred on Ashton).

Partnership working has long been an essential part of how Tameside MBC works and this is no less true today. Many examples were provided during the assessment process to show how this is working in practice to develop and deliver services that better meet the needs and expectations of all customers. Major initiatives include the Public Sector Hub and work towards the development of the Integrated Care Organisation (ICO). However, smaller but equally effective partnership examples were also evidenced (e.g. co-location of the CAB, Credit Union and other supporting bodies in the Customer Contact Centre). The positive impacts of these developments was clearly evidenced, as well as the effective ways in which lines of accountability and responsibility are maintained, even in the closest partnerships. Support for local communities is effective and includes many innovative elements – for example a 'speed networking' event was held to bring local businesses into contact with local charities. The businesses were asked to consider what they could offer to the voluntary sector and the charities were asked to consider their needs. As a result some interesting and productive schemes were developed. Staff rewards schemes also help local businesses through offering discounts at local outlets.

### **Criterion 4 - DELIVERY**

Service standards are well established in all service areas and are documented in a number of areas. Different services publicise and promote their service standards in different ways, appropriate to their own services, but methods used across the piece include information provided on the website, leaflets, information on notice boards and information provided face to face. Performance is monitored and reported effectively and any dips in performance are identified, addressed and reported back to customers as appropriate. Wherever possible the public are engaged in developing, reviewing and raising service standards. A recent major consultation process has taken place on setting local budgets; as part of this project customers were helped to consider the impacts of budget decisions on service levels and service

standards. Wherever possible, standards and performance are benchmarked against those of other Local Authorities and good practice is shared effectively, both internally and with outside bodies.

Inevitably, things will go wrong and there is a clear commitment from staff to do what they can to put things right. Several people gave examples to show how they will strive to resolve issues as close to the event as possible and as a result the number of formal complaints is kept quite low. When a complaint is formalised there is a clear and effective procedure to receive, review and address the issue as quickly and as effectively as possible. Staff show a real appreciation that resolving issues early on not only benefits the customer but also takes further demand out of the system, reducing the workload for themselves. This provides an additional incentive for staff to really try to get things right first time as far as possible.

#### **Criterion 5 - TIMELINESS AND QUALITY OF SERVICE**

The service standards evidenced for Criterion 4 included standards covering timeliness and quality of service. Although there are some generic standards across the Council (e.g. response to communications), different service areas will also have their own, more service-specific standards which will reflect the needs and expectations of their own customer groups. Some of the specific initiatives evidenced during the assessment process are designed to help, amongst other things, to ensure that customer needs are identified and met at the first point of contact wherever possible – for example the Public Sector Hub brings together such a range of services that it is more than likely that the customer can be provided with an appropriate response immediately without being transferred out to another service. This has been shown to be especially effective in maintaining levels of engagement with particular customer groups who might otherwise have fallen through the net.

Again, where possible, the performance of Tameside is benchmarked against other Local Authorities and good practice identified and shared.

## Scoring

- To achieve Customer Service Excellence an organisation may not have any non-compliances
- To achieve Customer Service Excellence organisations must demonstrate compliance with each of the criteria. To do so the organisation must achieve full compliance or compliance plus in at least 80% of the elements contained in each of the criteria

Criterion	Number of Elements	Maximum number of partial compliances	Actual number of partial compliances	Actual number of major compliance plus elements
1	11	2	0	2
2	11	2	0	3
3	12	2	0	3
4	13	3	0	0
5	10	2	0	0

- The maximum number of partial compliances allowed within each criterion is shown in the table below

## Conclusions

### Assessment

Having carried out the assessment process in accordance with the guidelines provided for assessors by the Cabinet Office the Assessor was satisfied beyond any doubt that Tameside MBC meets the requirements of Customer Service Excellence. The Assessor recommends to the Panel that the organisation be recognised under the standard. On behalf of Centre for Assessment Ltd. the assessor would like to congratulate all the staff on their achievement.

**Assessor Name:** Andrew Mackey and Hugh Keachie

**Date of report:** 30 June 2015

June 2015