
Meeting of Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services and Advisory Panel

19th March 2008

Report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services

Renewal of Charter Mark to the Environmental Services and Cleaning Operations

Summary

1. The report reviews the background and seeks to inform the Executive Member of the outcome of the inspection against the Cabinet Office's customer charter mark standard.

Background

2. The environmental services assessed for this award include the neighbourhood pride service, waste services and building & school cleaning.
3. Charter mark is the government's national set of standards for customer service for public sector organisations. This group of services was first awarded charter mark status in August 2006, after an independent assessment and evaluation.
4. The charter mark scheme sets out six criteria. These are:
 - To set standards and consult with customers,
 - To engage with customers, partners and staff;
 - To offer services fairly and accessibly to everyone, and to promote choice.
 - To continuously develop and improve services,
 - To make effective use of resources,
 - To contribute to improving opportunities and quality of life in the wider community.

Why Charter Mark?

5. Environmental services and cleaning services applied for charter mark for a number of reasons.
6. To improve our service:
 - The experience of holders is that charter mark provides an excellent framework for self-assessment and a tool kit for improvement.

7. To get expert feedback:
 - Almost all applicants for formal charter mark assessment find it of great help; even those who are unsuccessful find the feedback useful in order to identify areas of weakness.
8. To improve staff morale
 - Charter mark holders say that attaining the standard has a positive effect on morale and motivation.
9. To help achieve good value
 - Charter mark holders listen more to their customers, perform better than average, have more satisfied users and use resources wisely.

The Challenge of the Review

10. The initial independent assessment against the charter mark standard that we received in August 2006 told us about our strengths and also set out a number of areas where we needed to consider further improvement. When the service was re-inspected late last year, we were able to point the inspector to a significant amount of positive changes that had been undertaken. Key changes include:
 - A street scene review led to the neighbourhood pride service piloting a new way of working from December 2006. The new approach meant street cleansing staff working with barrows to clean in 5 city zones – a much more transparent and visible approach. This approach was rolled out across York in March 2007.
 - In December 2006 Neighbourhood Services moved from its old site at Foss Islands Road to a new eco-depot at Hazel Court. A very successful open day was held in February 2007 for families and residents. Over 500 people turned up to view the new facility.
 - All telephonic and electronic customer contact on the charter mark service areas has moved to the York Call Centre – which went live on 7th February 2007. Centralised call centre staff now handle our customer contact, deal with simple requests and issues, collect customer information and then feed that information where necessary into the service via a customer relationship management (CRM) computer system. As with any computer system this has taken time to bed down and iron out teething problems.
 - A full directorate restructure was agreed in March 2007, and has now been fully implemented.
 - A review of the council's corporate strategy during 2007 with a new strategy agreed in September 2007.
 - A Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) waste management inspection in June 2007 reported positively about the improvements made to the service since the previous inspection in 2004.
 - EnCams (Environmental Campaigns) reviewed our street scene services in August 2007. Their report identified a range of further developments that could be made.

- Over the summer we developed a directorate plan for Neighbourhood Services, which set out 12 priorities for the directorate. The strategy was formally agreed in October 2007.
11. The re-inspection visit took place at the end of November 2007. We completed a brief self-assessment, and set out how we had responded to the original areas where the inspector had pointed to some weaknesses (described as 'partial compliances'). After reviewing our self-assessment documentation, the inspector visited York to undertake interviews with service managers and talk to a small number of staff. While he was here he also saw a CRM system demonstration and had a tour round the depot.

Inspection Feedback

12. The full feedback report is available in Annex 1. The inspector reported that he had enjoyed visiting a team which had made such a lot of progress in the past year.
13. The inspector was very impressed by the amount of positive change over the last year. Overall we were fully compliant in 56 of the 63 criteria. The services retained the Charter Mark award – which will be valid until August 2009. Issues he mentioned specifically were:
- the Eco-depot / Hazel Court – as a step up in terms of customer experience from Foss Islands Depot.,
 - the successful reshaping of the old street scene service to benefit front line service delivery,
 - the closer working between the waste strategy unit (WSU) and operational waste teams,
 - improved performance on waste and street scene,
 - the customer relationship management (CRM) system to deliver a better 'end to end' service to the customer,
 - strong operational performance monitoring and management against service standards and targets,
 - school cleaning service standards that have been revised around the needs of individual schools,
 - approach to consulting customers before service improvement changes are made eg piloting the extension of recycling,
 - widely available publicity about our services to residents and business customers – including for example information about revised timings of refuse collections around Christmas and bank holidays.
14. One of the reasons to undertake the assessment is to receive an external view of how well the service is doing, including suggestions over areas where further progress could be made. A number of areas for improvement were identified – partial compliances against the charter mark standards.

15. Under criteria 1 (set standards and perform well) there were two partial compliances around informing the public about service standards, and informing the wider public about performance against those standards.
16. Although the inspector recognised the WSU role and compared this favourably to other authorities, he was unclear as to how we report information back to customers/ public. The inspector made a number of innovative suggestions over how we could inform customers about performance – for example by placing performance information on the side of fleet vehicles. We are currently trying to identify how best to feed back annual performance to customers, particularly in light of the removal of the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP), and the ongoing corporate review of customer standards. There is potential to develop an annual report for the directorate, but we need to do more work to see whether this would be cost effective, and whether it would fit whatever corporate arrangement will be made post-BVPP.
17. Under criteria 2 (engage with customers, partners and staff) two partial compliances were identified. The first was a suggestion that we should improve how we feed back to customers on the outcome of consultation. The second was that we do not seek feedback on the information that we provide to customers, and hence we are uncertain how effective that information is. The directorate is looking at how we consult and engage with customers, as part of a wider corporate development in light of changes to the national performance management framework.
18. Under criteria 3 (fair and accessible to everyone) one partial compliance was noted. The inspector felt that while we work within the council's policies and train staff on equality issues, we did not seek feedback from customers on whether they felt that they had been treated fairly and sensitively. The waste service is currently undertaking an equality impact assessment against its service and the council's waste strategy. Any findings within this assessment will be responded to in order to improve the equity and accessibility of the service, which will respond to this area of partial compliance.
19. Under criteria 4 (continuously develop and improve) two partial compliances were noted. These were that services could learn more from informal feedback. In response the performance team have started to explore how to analyse the CRM system to try to identify trends in informal feedback. For example we have started to look at reports of bins not being replaced in the right place, and spillages following waste collection to see whether trends can be identified on either issue. The second partial compliance was around how we published information about complaints as a directorate and service area – recognising that the council overall did do this. Until the corporate complaints review is completed we do not plan to respond as an individual service area.
20. Criteria 5 (use of resources) and 6 (community impact) were fully compliant.
21. Work being done in response is noted above. More generally, the directorate management team has considered a paper suggesting that a range of customer focused development work could be undertaken across Neighbourhood Services. The scope of this does depend on the outcome of two separate but related corporate level reviews of customer complaints and customer standards.

Consultation

22. Consultation with members, frontline staff and officers were carried out on the service standards. Consultation will form a part of the waste service's equality impact assessment.

Options/Analysis

23. The report is for information, so no options are provided.

Corporate Priorities

24. This work is specifically relevant to the following Corporate Priorities:
- Decrease the tonnage of biodegradable waste and recyclable products going to landfill.
 - Improve the actual and perceived condition and appearance of the city's streets, housing estates and publicly accessible spaces.

Implications

25. Financial – No implication in this report.
26. Human Resources (HR) – No implication in this report
27. Equalities – To note the recommendations under criteria 3 in paragraph 17 above
28. Legal - No implication in this report
29. Crime and Disorder – No implication in this report
30. Information Technology (IT) – No implications in this report
31. Property – No implication in this report.

Risk Management

32. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy, there are no risks identified in connection with this report.

Recommendations

33. That the Advisory Panel advise the Executive Member to note the content of the report.

Reason: So the Executive Member is updated on the position regarding the Award of the Charter Mark.

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Specialist Implications Officer(s) None**Wards Affected:****All****For further information please contact the author of the report****Background Papers:** None**Annex 1:** Environmental Services assessment report.