Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 13**

Audit and Review Committee

26 November 2024

Customer Service Excellence Award

Purpose of the Report

1. To update Members on the recent Customer Service Excellence (CSE) assessment.

Recommendation

2. That the report, and the Authority's ongoing retention of the CSE award, be noted.

Strategic Framework

3. The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and support the strategic planning framework:
    - Corporate Plan Objective 31:
      Provide high quality, efficient and effective services and communications to the public and other stakeholders, and so maintain the Customer Service Excellence standard every year.

Background

4. The Customer Service Excellence standard provides recognition for organisations that are successfully assessed against the criteria. The five criteria of CSE are:
    i. Customer Insight
    ii. The Culture of the Organisation
    iii. Information and Access
    iv. Delivery
    v. Timeliness and Quality of Service

5. Within the 5 criteria are 57 separate elements that are assessed on a 3-yearly rolling programme, with 19 elements assessed each year.

6. Since 2010 the Authority has undergone an annual assessment against the standard. The assessment involves several pieces of evidence being uploaded to the CSE portal prior to the assessment. During the visit the assessment involves an examination of this

evidence and a range of meetings with staff, managers, visitors, partners and other service users.

Assessment Report

7. An extract of the 2024 Assessment Report, can be found at **Appendix A**, confirming the successful outcome with a summary of the five criteria. The full 95 page report can be viewed here.

8. For the 2024 assessment, 19 elements were reviewed. The Authority was assessed as being fully compliant on 16 elements. Further, the assessor gave the highest rating of 'Compliance Plus' (i.e. outstanding) to the other 3 assessed elements ('Corporate commitment to service delivery', 'Information channels' and 'Beneficial partnerships'). In total, the Authority has 8 elements assessed as 'Compliance Plus', which is referred to within the report as 'impressive'.

9. Certificates confirming the achievement of retaining the award are displayed at both Yoredale and Colvend and the Visitor Centres.

Ongoing assessment

10. Due to the considerable amount of staff time spent on the preparation and gathering of evidence ahead of the visit and during the visit itself, in order to maintain the CSE standard, alternative options will be investigated and considered ahead of next year. This will be undertaken to ensure the Authority is achieving the best outcome, in terms of recognition for the excellent service provided to our customers, compared against the level of staff input required to demonstrate this and subsequently maintain the standard, as we have been doing since 2010.

Financial Implications

11. None.

Legal Implications

12. None.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

13. None

Conclusion

14. The overall result of the assessment was positive and the assessor was keen to pass on her high praise, during the feedback session, to the staff she'd met during her visit.

Vikki Thomas Head of HR

Assessment Report

Customer Service Excellence

Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority

Successful

2 August 2024

Assessment Summary

Overview

Overall Self-assessment	Satisfactory
Overall outcome	Successful

RP1 2024
The Yorkshire Dales became a National Park (the Park) in 1954 in recognition of its outstanding natural scenery, diversity of wildlife habitats, cultural heritage and opportunities for outdoor recreation. An extension of the Park boundary in 2016 means it now covers 2,179 square kilometres in North Yorkshire and Cumbria, and a small area within Lancashire. The Park is a working environment and home to over 23,000 people, with over 95% of land in private ownership. The Park is proud to be celebrating its 70th Anniversary on 16th November 2024.

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (the Authority) has its objectives set by Parliament and its customers have diverse and often conflicting needs and preferences. Some services are similar to those provided elsewhere, for example, providing the function of local planning authority, but most services are specific to National Park Authorities. The role of the Authority is defined to conserve and enhance the Park's natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities by the public. There is also a requirement to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities, and the retention and attraction to the area of young people.

The Authority has a Board of 25 Members and employs 130 full-time equivalent staff, working across nine sites, supported by 270 highly valued Dales Volunteers, who carry out a wide range of work, often 'out and about' the Park, easily accessible to the public. Staff are hardworking and knowledgeable, and are a credit to the Authority, demonstrating commitment and genuinely caring attitudes that are greatly appreciated by the many different customer groups and partners. Great efforts are made to forge effective and transparent working relationships with customers and create an atmosphere of trust between all. This is particularly important as the Authority often has to provide balance and resolve situations where there may be potential conflicts of interest.

The Authority continues to achieve at least Full Compliance in all elements of the Standard. There is an impressive total of eight Compliance Plus elements (1.1.2, 1.1.3, 1.3.5, 2.1.1, 2.2.2, 3.2.1, 3.4.1 and 3.4.3).

The Authority is a long-standing holder of the Customer Service Excellence Standard since 2010, and the Assessor is delighted to recommend continued accreditation.

1: Customer Insight

Criterion 1 self-assessment	Strong
Criterion 1 outcome	Successful

RP1 2024
Criterion 1 is about customer insight, consultation, engagement, satisfaction levels and improving the customer experience. This Criterion is fully compliant, with three Compliance Plus elements (1.1.2, 1.1.3 and 1.3.5).

Compliance Plus is merited for impressive commitment to understanding the needs and preferences of the many customer groups (1.1.2) and exemplary efforts to develop services in response to the specific needs of the hard to reach and disadvantaged (1.1.3). The Authority takes every opportunity to improve the customer journey, meriting Compliance Plus (1.3.5).

Customer insight is gained from major surveys, such as the Visitor Survey and the Resident Survey, both completed every five years, as well as from other surveys, including the questionnaire for readers of the popular 'The Visitor' magazine and the Visitor Centre Survey. 96% of respondents to the Visitor Survey 2022, published on the web site, were very satisfied with their overall visit to the Park. The Resident Survey 2023 plays an important role in capturing local people's views and perceptions.

Formal consultation procedures include the very important Local Plan 2023-2040 Public Consultations and the statutory Local Access Forum consultations.

2: The Culture of the Organisation

Criterion 2 self-assessment	Strong
Criterion 2 outcome	Successful

RP1 2024
Criterion 2 is about the culture of the Service and staff commitment to the customer focus. This Criterion is fully compliant with two Compliance Plus elements (2.1.1 and 2.2.2).

There is strong corporate commitment to putting the customer at the heart of service delivery, admirably supported by the long-standing Chief Executive, meriting Compliance Plus (2.1.1). Staff are polite and friendly, knowledgeable and highly professional, with an impressive understanding of customers' needs, also meriting Compliance Plus (2.2.2).

The Park is funded by Central Government, but financial pressure in recent years has led to a cultural change as a result of the need for the Park staff to actively generate more local funding through grant applications, income generating initiatives and charges for professional services. More staff have thus been appointed to facilitate this change, which has resulted in more income now from additional project funding than from core Government funding.

The Staff Survey 2024, with an impressive 88% response rate, found that 93% of staff feel valued and appreciated, with 80% feeling supported by their manager.

The Authority is proud to hold Investors in People accreditation.

3: Information and Access

Criterion 3 self-assessment	Strong
Criterion 3 outcome	Successful

RP1 2024
Criterion 3 is about information and access, partnership working and working in the wider community. This Criterion is fully compliant, with three Compliance Plus elements (3.2.1, 3.4.1 and 3.4.3).

Compliance Plus is merited for the efforts made to ensure that customers receive all relevant information, through a wide variety of channels (3.2.1). The Authority provides a wide range of verbal, published and web-based information.

Partnership arrangements are very strong, meriting Compliance Plus (3.4.1). The National Park Management Plan 2019-2024 is the most important document for the Park and is produced and monitored by a partnership of local organisations that operate across the area. These partners include Councils and Local Authorities, the National Trust, farmers and landowners, blue light services, environmental groups and charities. The Authority has to perform a delicate balancing act between a variety of interests and these partnerships, and consequently their co-ordinated services, form a crucial part in ensuring that the Authority continues to deliver its role as a place of conservation, industry, recreation and enjoyment.

Outstanding support for wider communities also merits Compliance Plus (3.4.3).

4: Delivery

Criterion 4 self-assessment	Satisfactory
Criterion 4 outcome	Successful

RP1 2024
Criterion 4 is about core business standards, performance, benchmarking and best practice, and complaints handling. This Criterion is fully compliant.

The Authority has challenging standards and performance indicators, well laid out in the National Park Management Plan 2019-2024, which has 49 specific objectives, overseen by the Management Plan Steering Group, focussing on many areas and issues, including building stronger communities, retaining and attracting young people to the Park, and shaping planning policies for existing residents and potential new dwelling developments. The Steering Group prepare annual progress reports to inform the National Park Authority and other key delivery partners, identifying where there are opportunities or the need for greater collaboration and co-ordinated action amongst partners in order to deliver the objectives in the Management Plan.

The Service consults and involves people in a wide range of ways, learning from best practice and benchmarking performance against other National Parks.

The Complaints Policy is clear, easy to use and subject to regular review. It fully sets out its commitment to dealing with complaints quickly, thoroughly, and effectively.

5: Timeliness and Quality of Service

Criterion 5 self-assessment	Satisfactory
Criterion 5 outcome	Successful

RP1 2024
Criterion 5 is about customer service standards for timeliness and quality of customer service, and performance against these standards. This Criterion is fully compliant.

The Authority has clear and measurable standards in relation to timeliness and quality of customer service, which are published in the ‘Standards of Service’ section of the web site.

Performance against standards for timeliness of customer service is publicised in the ‘Our Performance’ section of the web site which sits below the ‘Standards of Service’ section. With regard to quality of service, the results of both the Visitor and Resident Survey are published on the web site.

Staff make every effort to ensure that enquiries are dealt with quickly and fully at first point of contact, with procedures in place to keep the customer updated, if that is not possible.

A recent Reception Review has taken place, in response to fewer visitors to the two main offices, following the introduction of blended working for some roles and the changes to core hours. The offices are thus generally quieter, with fewer people working from the office. As a result, there is no longer a need for designated receptionists at the Grassington and Bainbridge offices.