

# Customer Care Strategy

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Central government is taking a strong lead in putting the customer at the centre of public services. E-government is not just about electronic service delivery, but improving services to the customer. There are 4 key principles – citizen focused authorities, accessible services, social inclusion and using information better.
- 1.2. The Welsh Assembly Government are also committed to improving public services, and have produced the first ever set of Core Principles on Customer Service which will apply to all public services across Wales. The Principles along with accompanying Good Practice Guidance have been designed to drive forward the vision of putting the citizen centre stage in the shaping and delivery of services; as set out in 'Making the Connections' and in the subsequent five year action plan, 'Delivering the Connections'.
- 1.3. The Authority is under a statutory duty to avoid discrimination in service delivery and to be more open about how we conduct our business. As a result the Authority has adopted (or is in the process of formulating) various policies and initiatives to ensure compliance with the regulations. Requirements under the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, Disability Discrimination Act 2005, Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations to name but a few; has meant that the Authority has become more customer focused in recent years.
- 1.4. The statutory responsibilities all amount to providing good customer care. However, regulation alone is not enough to drive changes in improving customer care. It is vital for the Authority to incorporate Welsh Assembly Government and central government expectations into our own plans and ideas on providing good customer care, and to come up with a clear vision and a co-ordinated approach across the Authority.
- 1.5. This document aims to supply that co-ordinated approach and outlines Snowdonia National Park Authority's vision for achieving high standards of customer care during the next five years.
- 1.6. High standards of care must be integral to all our services, and effective service delivery, by definition, includes high standards of customer care tailored to each individual service. This strategy specifically addresses those generic issues common to all our services e.g. accessibility, bilingualism, response times to initial contacts etc.
- 1.7. The supporting customer care standards and action plan are designed to provide a framework for helping to achieve strong customer focus in

the delivery of all our services. These standards will be incorporated into each service's customer charter.

- 1.8. This strategy sets out how we will publicise our customer care standards both internally and externally, how we will manage customer information and how we will monitor and improve performance on customer care.
- 1.9. The term 'customer' in the context of this strategy is a generic term used to describe all people who have contact with the Authority, be it residents, visitors, businesses, partner agencies, local and national organisations and local and national government.

## **2. Our Vision**

- 2.1. The Authority's customer care vision is to provide good quality, efficient, effective and consistent services at every point of contact with the Authority.

## **3. The Aim of the Customer Care Strategy**

- 3.1. In order to fulfil the strategy's vision, the main aim is to get the Authority looking at the services we provide from the customer's perspective, and to deliver those services in a way that meets (and if possible) exceeds the customer's expectations.

## **4. The Welsh Assembly Government's Core Principles**

- 4.1. Core Principle 1: Citizens will be able to find and access the information, advice and services they need and get a timely response with information and advice they are able to understand.
- 4.2. Core Principle 2: Citizens will be dealt with politely, shown care and dignity, have options explained openly and constructively, and be kept informed of progress. Citizens and public services need to treat each other on the basis of mutual respect.
- 4.3. Core Principle 3: Citizens will be offered services that take into account their needs, circumstances and any barriers they might face.
- 4.4. Core Principle 4: Citizens who prefer to access and use services in English or Welsh, or need to use minority ethnic languages or British Sign Language will be able to do so.
- 4.5. Core Principle 5: Citizens will find it easy to complain and get things put right when the service they receive is not good enough.

## **5. Current Position**

- 5.1. In general, service areas are not working under adopted customer charters. For the few that do have them, they are either out-of-date, or performance isn't monitored adequately and published.
- 5.2. Performance however is monitored at Plas Tan y Bwlch. It regularly undertakes surveys of its customers and publishes the satisfaction results as one of its performance indicators.
- 5.3. The perception of the Authority's planning services by its customers needs to improve – this is the key message which came out of a recent survey conducted by Research and Marketing Ltd.
- 5.4. Following a baseline assessment of planning services by the Wales Audit Office, a comprehensive action plan for improvement has been undertaken over the last year.
- 5.5. Customer friendly information and leaflets have been produced by the Authority over the last year and published on the website, in an effort to improve communication with the public. However, some of the planning services information and leaflets remain out-of-date, and work is ongoing on these e.g. Design Guidance and Conservation Area leaflets.
- 5.6. Planning services have procured new planning software to manage planning applications electronically. It is intended that this be integrated fully with the website to enable the online viewing of applications, and also lead to a fully integrated and efficient document management system.
- 5.7. Arrangements for the preparation of the National Park Management Plan and the Local Development Plan have been published. These arrangements explain the timeframe as well as how we will consult with, and involve people and organisations in the preparation of the plans.
- 5.8. Investment by the Authority's property services over the last few years has meant improved access and better facilities for disabled customers at our buildings. This includes multi-access bedrooms and lifts our environmental study centre Plas Tan y Bwlch.
- 5.9. Investment in leisure opportunities for both visitors and residents of the National Park over the last few years by the access section; has meant that several leisure walks are now fully accessible to all members of the public. A further investment of £116,000 is planned, which will enable further substantial improvements.

- 5.10 A sample survey of the Park's residents conducted in the summer of 2005 concluded that residents were happy and confident about being able to access the Authority's services in the language of their choice (Welsh or English).
- 5.11 The Authority's complaints policy has recently been reviewed, and all complaints are now centrally recorded and monitored. However, customer consultation and feedback are not systematically undertaken to improve service provision and we have some way to go in responding to complaints and using them as effective customer feedback on the quality of services.
- 5.12 The Authority's website is considered overall to be an useful customer friendly resource. The website continues to be developed with additional customer friendly information being added weekly.
- 5.13 Currently, the communication section is going through the process of reviewing the Communication Strategy. As there is now more emphasis on electronic communication, there is a need to look again at our means of communication and the effectiveness of those means.

## **6 Making it Happen**

- 6.1. Fulfilling and maintaining the strategy will require a combination of short term initiatives which are fairly easy to implement with medium to longer term changes that will require ongoing development and commitment.
- 6.2. The strategy takes the Welsh Assembly's Core Principles as a foundation for good customer care, and incorporates these into our own set of priorities and strategic objectives. The priorities have been set out below:

### Priority 1: Putting the Customer First

#### Our beliefs:

- Every customer should be treated with respect, dignity and understanding whoever they are and whatever their background;
- The quality of the customer's experience of accessing the service is as important as the quality of the service itself;
- If we review services with input from our customers, we are more likely to get it right;
- The only way for us to fulfil our statutory and non-statutory purposes effectively is with the involvement and co-operation of our customers at every level.

#### Our Strategic Objectives:

- We aim to have high standards of customer care which are applied consistently across all our services.
- Ensure that access channels meet the needs of all our customers.
- We will adopt the Welsh Assembly Government's Core Principles as the foundation for good customer care.

#### Priority 2: Supporting Staff

##### Our beliefs:

- The staff are our most valuable resource;
- We believe in the value of a well trained, well managed workforce;
- If we look after our staff well, they will look after our customers well.

##### Our Strategic Objectives:

- We aim to deliver services through a committed and motivated workforce.
- We aim to foster and develop a customer focused culture.
- We aim to incorporate and support customer care principles at every level.

#### Priority 3: Improving Service Provision

##### Our beliefs:

- In getting the best out of the available resources;
- In removing wasteful duplication or inefficient practices and processes;
- That technology should support and enhance customer access and service delivery.

##### Our Strategic Objectives:

- We aim to better equip staff to ensure that customers receive excellent service.
- We aim to ensure that services are focused fully around the needs of the customer.
- We aim to redesign services from front to back and maximise the use of customer access channels and new technology for improved service delivery.

## **7. Turning the Strategy into a Reality**

- 7.1. This strategy will need to go through a staff consultation process before being submitted as a final draft for Member approval. This will enable input at all levels from the outset.
- 7.2. The prior consultation will be the start of the awareness raising process with staff, which will continue once the strategy has been formally adopted.

- 7.3. The accompanying customer care standards will be publicised in the Authority's reception areas, on our website and at key access points within the Park.
- 7.4. Monitoring of the strategy and its accompanying Customer Charters and customer care standards will be co-ordinated by the Administration and Customer Services Manager, but with every service area being responsible for their own performance and monitoring.
- 7.5. Publicising the results will form a part of the public relations process with our customers and potential customers.
- 7.6. To enable the Authority to work towards achieving the strategic objectives in this document, an action plan has been produced and attached as Appendix A.

## APPENDIX A: Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	Timescale	Comments
<b>Putting the Customer First</b>			
Ensure as far as practically possible that our services are easy to access.  1. Fully bilingual service provision (Welsh & English): Monitor compliance with Welsh Language Scheme.	Admin & Customer Care Mgr to continue monitoring Section and Service Heads to ensure compliance within own section / service areas.	Ongoing	
2. For customers who wish to access our services in other languages, we will develop a system which will enable staff to easily access translation services.	Admin & Customer Care Manager	6 months	Sign up to Language Line Services. Promote new system through staff training and booklet.
3. The Authority will develop a comprehensive disability equality scheme to ensure easy and equal access to our services for customers who have disabilities.	Chair of Performance and Resources Committee / Head of Planning Services	December 2006	Statutory requirement. Promote new system through staff training and booklet.
4. Review, publish and implement the Social Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan	Policy and Community Manager	10 months	
5. Ensure that Complaints Procedure (including time limits for response) is adhered to, and that complaints are centrally logged with Admin & Customer Care Mgr	Section Heads	Immediately	Low number of annual complaints logged centrally and anecdotal evidence suggest that procedure not being followed by all.

Action	Responsibility	Timescale	Comments
6. Increase our public relations work and promote positive service outcomes to our customers.	Communication Manager in consultation with Section Heads	Ongoing, to start immediately	Further work is needed on ensuring that our customers' perceptions of us are correct.
7. We will be proactive in ensuring that customers receive basic service information without having to ask for it. Where appropriate, information leaflets will be sent automatically with correspondence to various customers, which will outline the service process. Information leaflets will also be available on our website and in all our reception areas.	Relevant Section Heads	Ongoing, to start immediately	This also includes complaint leaflets.
8. Develop a robust customer consultation programme that ensures effective use of feedback and evaluation as part of service design, development and delivery.	Admin & Customer Care Mgr to develop further	2 years	Statutory consultation programmes already in existence as part of the development of National Park Mgt Plan, Local Development Plan and Disability Equality Scheme.
<b>Improving Service Provision</b>			
9. Develop consistent and measurable service and customer care standards which incorporate the WAG core principles.	Admin & Customer Care Mgr	Immediately	These standards will form the backbone of good customer service, ensuring consistency in the basic functions of each service area, i.e. response times etc.
10. Each service area will need to develop a customer charter to include service standards and promises. These should be published in leaflet form and be available at key access points and on the website.	Each Section Head in consultation with Admin & Customer Care Mgr	1 year	



Action	Responsibility	Timescale	Comments
11. Monitor and evaluate performance against service standards.	Each Section Head in consultation with Admin & Customer Care Mgr	On adoption of Charter	
12. The published information that we provide needs to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, and new information sources need to be developed in some service areas.	<p>Reviewing current information</p> <p>Develop new information sources</p>	<p>6 months</p> <p>18 months</p>	<p>Information should be clear, concise, up to date and useful, in plain language without jargon and includes details of how to obtain further information. Information should be clearly and consistently branded so that customers have confidence in the information they are receiving.</p>
13. Increase customer awareness, by promoting and marketing our services and how they can be accessed. As the National Park covers a large geographical area, customers need to be aware that some services can be accessed without visiting our head office.	Communication Manager in consultation with Section Heads	1 year	Services such as planning surgeries, online services and information etc. need further promotion, as current low usage levels suggest low awareness.
<p>We will integrate customer care into service provision by reviewing current systems and structures, and where appropriate to streamline and integrate systems and processes that are essential to supporting punctual and efficient service delivery.</p> <p>14. Management Structure Review</p> <p>15. Admin &amp; Technical staff review</p>	<p>Chief Executive</p> <p>Mgt Team</p>	<p>Commenced</p> <p>t.b.c.</p>	

Action	Responsibility	Timescale	Comments
<b>Supporting Staff</b>			
16. Produce customer care booklet for every member of staff.	Admin & Customer Care Mgr	12 months	
17. Develop and roll out a programme of training on our Social Inclusion Strategy.	Chair of Performance and Resources Committee / Head of Planning Services	March 2007	We will invest in our members and staff to support them in achieving our vision. Creating a customer orientated culture starts with the staff, and through awareness, training and guidance they will be able to convey a consistent corporate image in the things they say, write and do.
18. Develop and roll out a programme of training on our Disability Equality Scheme	Policy & Community Manager	March 2007	
19. Develop and roll out a programme of customer care training.	Admin & Customer Care Mgr	January 2008	
20. To ensure that customer care is integrated fully into the Authority's working culture. Customer Care will need to feature prominently and regularly in internal meetings and in 'Newyddion y Parc'.	All	Immediately	
21. Customer care objectives to be integrated into all aspects of the Corporate Work Plan.	All Section / Service Heads	2 years	

Action	Responsibility	Timescale	Comments
22. To ensure that the customer care objectives in the Corporate Work Plan are fulfilled, a discussion on customer care will be integrated into the annual appraisal, and where appropriate the employee's performance will be assessed through supervision against the customer care standards.	All Section / Service Heads	2 years	
23. Incorporate customer care into job descriptions of restructured posts.	Personnel Mgr to lead	t.b.c.	
24. Systems have been developed to log centrally information requests under the Freedom of Information, Environmental Information Regulations and Data Protection Act and to ensure that the required outcomes are consistently delivered to time and quality. Further awareness and monitoring is required to ensure that section managers and staff understand and work within the systems.	Admin & Customer Care Mgr	Immediately	
25. Analyse annual complaints and determine any further training needed.	Admin & Customer Care Mgr	Ongoing, annually	Report is presented to the Members at the Performance and Resources Committee.
26. Develop on-line services through the website, especially in relation to planning and geographic information.	Planning Service	Commenced	
27. Investigation into viability / efficiency gains of procuring Document Management System	Independent Consultant to lead the process.	Initial work: March 2007	

## **APPENDIX B: Corporate Customer Care Standards**

### **Snowdonia National Park Authority's Customer Care Standards**

We are taking up the challenge of meeting new customer care standards that will shape the way we deliver our services to you now and in the future.

This leaflet sets out the standards that we aim to follow in order to provide you with the highest possible standard of customer service, no matter how you choose to contact us.

We will try to meet or exceed these standards at all times and we will measure our performance so that we can take action to improve if necessary.

Snowdonia National Park Authority is committed to providing the efficient and effective delivery of first class services to all its customers. We aim to deliver services in an inclusive and fair manner, without discrimination, prejudice or bias.

#### **We want to:**

- Be polite and treat you with courtesy, fairness, honesty and respect.
- Make sure that services are accessible to everyone.
- Provide equal service provision in Welsh and English.
- Listen to you carefully and use plain language when we speak or write to you.
- Explain our decisions and the reasons for them.
- Respect confidentiality.

#### **We will do our best to provide services and information in ways that make them accessible for everyone, including:**

- A translator, if you are unable to communicate in either Welsh or English, including a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter.
- Preparing written information in large print and on tape if necessary.
- Public meetings and outreach services in accessible venues, and the use of an induction loop or other suitable system for people who are hard of hearing.
- Our aim is to have contact details provided in all our published documents.

#### **If you contact us by telephone:**

- We will aim to answer your calls within 15 seconds.
- We will respond to voice mail messages within 48 hours.
- Main reception areas will greet you bilingually. Individual staff telephones will be answered by giving our name.
- When we pass your enquiry to a specialist, we will pass on your personal details and the nature of your query so that you do not have to repeat it to another person.
- We will arrange with you when we can contact you again or if you prefer when best for you to contact us again, in the event of not being able to help you immediately.
- If you telephone us directly (not through reception) and the person you are trying to contact is out of the office for more than 2 days, the voice mail message will state when that person will be back in the office.

- When we telephone you, we will give you our name, tell you we are calling from Snowdonia National Park Authority and explain clearly why we are phoning.

### **When you write to us:**

- We will reply to correspondence requiring a response within 10 working days.
- There will be some circumstances when we are not able to give you a full answer within 10 working days – for example with some complex enquiries or where we need to make a visit or request information from someone else. If so, we will keep you informed of what we are doing, including the date by which we hope to give you a full answer.
- We will provide a contact name, office address, e-mail address and telephone number in the response.
- We will send a response which is typed, clearly set out in plain language and in the same language (Welsh or English) that you have chosen to communicate with us.
- We will provide information in large print, on tape or in braille at your request.

### **If you visit us:**

- We aim to see you within 5 minutes of your arrival.
- We will provide a clean, tidy and comfortable waiting area, with information about our services.
- Whenever possible, we will provide a place to discuss matters in private, if you wish.

### **If we visit you:**

- We will normally agree a time with you in advance. If necessary, we will let you know as early as possible if we are delayed or have to cancel the visit.
- We will say who we are, where we come from and why we are calling. We will always carry an identity card.

### **Comments, compliments and complaints about services:**

We welcome all comments about our services and use your feedback to help us to improve.

### **We will:**

- Pass comments and compliments on to the staff concerned as soon as possible.
- Do our best to resolve verbal complaints on the spot. If we cannot, we will invite you to make a written complaint.
- Register complaints made by letter, e-mail or fax.
- Respond to written complaints within 5 working days.
- Take unresolved complaints on to Stage 2 of the complaints procedure and acknowledge them within a further 5 working days.
- Send a full response within 15 working days.

### **Your responsibility:**

- Snowdonia National Park Authority does not tolerate abusive and violent behaviour against our staff.
- These circumstances are very rare but our staff are not expected to stay in situations where they feel threatened either verbally or physically, or if they fear for their own safety, that of colleagues or members of the public.

**If you have any comments about the standards or for more information, contact us by calling 01766 770274, e-mailing us at: [parc@eryri-npa.gov.uk](mailto:parc@eryri-npa.gov.uk), or visiting our website: [www.eryri-npa.gov.uk](http://www.eryri-npa.gov.uk)**