

Charter Mark Assessment Services



Charter Mark Standard 2005

Summary Assessment Evaluation Report

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service

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Introduction

Charter Mark is a unique national customer service standard that offers public sector organisations the opportunity to work through a customer focused improvement programme to be recognised for providing excellent customer service. Its uniqueness stems from its focus on outcomes - the service actually provided to the customer. Charter Mark also acts as a quality improvement tool; the emphasis on self-assessment encourages organisations to focus upon their strengths and strive for continuous improvement. Charter Mark remains the tool of choice for public service organisations seeking to meet their users' needs, with the Government's agenda for reform of public services giving renewed impetus to the drive for greater choice, flexibility and value for customers.

Central to the scheme are the six Charter Mark criteria. These were most recently updated in 2003 in line with the views of users and Government. The revised criteria have at their heart the Government's four principles of public services reform and focus on:

- Setting standards and performing well
- Actively engaging with customers, partners and staff
- Being fair and accessible to everyone and promoting choice
- Continuous development and improvement
- Effective and imaginative use of resources
- Contributing to improving opportunities and quality of life in the community

The following pages present the major findings of the Assessors from their inspection of East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service, under each of the above themes.

1 Set standards and perform well

1.1 You set precise and measurable standards for the main elements of your service that reflect the needs, expectations and rights of your customers and the general public.

- You work to a comprehensive range of measurable standards and performance indicators.
- Performance targets are set nationally. Your local targets are set in line with these and exceed them in some cases.
- Station action plans set targets based on assessment of local situations. You have set additional standards for speed of response as a priority identified by customers.
- Your service charter sets clear measurable standards for customer service.
- Quality aspects are integral to customer service standards, as evidenced by the protocol for home safety visits.
- Standards and targets are regularly reviewed in the light of performance.

1.2 Your standards actively influence your organisation and you perform well.

- Higher standards and targets are set on a planned basis for improving performance. Additional standards are set for areas not included in statutory PIs.
- There is a commendable level of comprehensive monitoring of performance on a regular basis with detailed comparisons over time and for different areas which enable the identification of trends.
- There have been significant improvements in performance over the last two years, but there remain a few areas where standards are not met. This is insufficient to demonstrate full compliance.
- Independent audit confirms performance levels.
- Latest available data(02/03) shows variable performance relative to others. Improved performance suggests comparisons may now be more favourable, but there is insufficient evidence for full compliance

1.3 Your standards are relevant to the people who use your services, and your customers, potential customers, partners and staff know about the standards.

- A commendably wide range of customers, staff and partners are involved in consideration of standards.
- Review of standards takes account of customers' priorities and views from all interested parties.
- Standards information is available in leaflet form, in public places and on the internet.
- Documents detailing performance are well distributed and available on the website.
- Standards information is clearly set out in the Service charter which is available in alternative formats.
- Standards are meaningful to partners.
- Rigorous, systematic monitoring of performance enables the identification of any dips on an ongoing basis.
- Action to address dips in performance is included with explanations of their occurrence

2 Actively engage with your customers, partners and staff

2.1 Consulting customers, partners and staff is a central part of your organisation.

- A wide range of methods is used for consultation, including surveys, focus groups and public meetings.
- Consultation is reviewed annually. Changes are made to try to make it more effective and representative.

- Some good efforts have been made to involve staff in planning. However, staff spoken to during the visit were not confident that their views are valued, so the process is not fully effective
- At Station level staff feel able to make suggestions. However they are not confident that suggestions are welcome at corporate level. A suggestions scheme is planned to address this.
- Consultation outcomes are well analysed and summarised to identify any action necessary as a result.
- Feedback on consultation is provided through meetings, staff newsletters, publications and the website. However, feedback to customers does not cover all consultations that involve them.
- Reports of consultations include details of action planned as a result.
- The development of the Service is clearly linked to consultation outcomes.

2.2 You provide reliable and wide-ranging information for customers about all aspects of your organisation and services.

- In addition to printed information and comprehensive website information, you made good efforts to publicise services by attending community events.
- Full organisational details with names and pictures of those in charge are included in printed and website information.
- Clear cost information is provided in the Council Tax leaflet. The only service for which there is a charge is commercial training; costs for this are clearly explained.
- Comparative running costs are included in publications and on the website.

2.3 Your information meets the full range of your customers' needs, abilities and preferences.

- Information is clearly presented. Customers express satisfaction with information provision.
- Information is available in different formats. The Council Tax information was introduced in response to feedback. Face-to-face information provision takes account of individual needs.
- Surveys show positive results for customers' receipt and understanding of information. Potential customers are less aware, but this is improving.
- You have made significant improvements to information in response to feedback.

2.4 You work effectively with other providers to improve access and services for customers from all sections of the community.

- There are very positive working links with a range of public and voluntary agencies.
- Meetings and good informal contacts are effective mechanisms for information exchange and consultation. Partners view this as a strength of the Service.
- The success of partnerships is demonstrated by positive evaluation of activities in relation to performance indicators and expected outcomes.
- Partnerships are cost-effective through pooling of resources and access to external funding.
- Publications and the website include information relating to partnership initiatives.

3 Be fair and accessible to everyone and promote choice

3.1 You widely publicise access to your services and their availability.

- Contact is possible by phone, email or personal visit. Service is taken to customers in most cases.
- There is a good range of information and advice available on the website.
- It is possible to request home safety visits via the website.
- Surveys show that customers experience prompt service. This was also observed during the visit.
- Surveys show that customers experience polite, helpful and efficient service. This was validated during the visit.

- Staff in contact with the public are required to wear name badges except when responding to incidents. Names are given on the telephone
- You provide choice in times of home safety visits and location of training. Freephone numbers, the mobile unit and joint initiatives extend the flexibility of provision.
- Surveys seek some views on how to improve choice, but this is limited. Staff consultation is not very clear in this respect.
- New information has been introduced in response to customers' choice preferences.
- Services are free. There is good use of freephone facilities and services are taken out to people and events to ensure cost does not prevent access.

3.3 You have responsive equal opportunities and disability policies for delivering your service, and you put these into practice.

- There is good consultation with groups representing people with a wide range of special needs.
- Consultation with special needs groups considers access issues as well as information
- Good provision is made to ensure people with special needs have access to information, with adapted formats, translations and a personalised approach to take account of individual needs.
- The Vulnerable Persons Strategy demonstrates a commendable approach to tailoring services to particular needs.
- Some work has been done to reach minority groups, but a need for further work in this area has been identified.
- Your Charter includes commitments relating to customer care and fair treatment for all.
- A good start has been made in customer care and diversity training. A need for further guidance for staff in some areas has been identified and action is planned to address this.
- Interpersonal skills are key to job descriptions and are considered in appraisal. Observation during the visit confirmed appropriate attitudes.
- Surveys show very positive results regarding the sensitivity of treatment. Differential analysis indicates that people are treated fairly.

4 Continuously develop and improve

4.1 Continuous development is built into your organisation.

- The yearly business planning process identifies developments which are prioritised for all the objectives within strategic aims.
- Strategy schemes and capital programmes are all costed.

4.2 Your services and facilities have developed and improved.

- There have been a good range of improvements to services and facilities since the previous assessment
- There have been significant improvements in a number of areas of performance over the last two years, particularly in relation to community fire safety.
- Users of the Service express very high levels of satisfaction, and numerous unsolicited letters of appreciation are received.
- Overall satisfaction has been maintained at a high level.
- There were commendable efforts to involve customers in the risk management strategy planning. An annual survey informs the planning process.
- Publications are used to inform customers of improvements. However, customers' appreciation of improvements is not assessed.
- Satisfaction with a range of different aspects of service is assessed on a regular basis.
- You respond to lower levels of satisfaction, for example with improvements to information and to catering arrangements at the Training Centre.
- You have made good use of technology opportunities. The installation of mobile data systems in appliances is a particularly significant development.

4.3 You deal effectively with complaints, compliments and suggestions, and act on them to improve your service.

- The complaints procedure is clearly set out. It is available in leaflet form, carried on appliances, and is on the website.
- The procedure is set out in stages and gives a commitment to deal with problems fully.
- The procedure has timescales for response and resolution.
- Complaints handling is covered in initial training and is backed up by a comprehensive procedure.
- Staff are encouraged to deal with problems where appropriate but to treat them seriously and formalise them where necessary.
- All publications invite comments and all users are asked for comments following contact with the Service. Partners feel their comments are welcome. However, staff lack confidence about response to comments.
- Formal complaints are fully recorded and analysed.
- Informal complaints are kept and numbers of compliments are logged. Most suggestions come from surveys and are analysed.
- Timescales for dealing with formal complaints are well recorded, with note of explanatory letters where there is a need for delay for further investigation
- You publish details of the number and type of complaints and compliments received. However, you do not publish suggestions.
- There is no clear publication of improvements showing a linkage to feedback.
- A comprehensive survey seeks complainants views on the process.
- Procedure is kept under review and has recently been amended in relation to repeat complainants.
- Feedback from customers and staff informs review of the procedure.

5 Use your resources effectively and imaginatively

5.1 You manage your resources effectively.

- You operate within budget with appropriate financial management procedures. You have achieved significant savings in insurance premiums through effective risk management.
- Monthly monitoring and reporting identifies any variances.
- Performance indicators include efficiency measures. You have undertaken a range of mini best value reviews to determine the cost-effectiveness of certain services.
- You give careful consideration to the best use of equipment and staff. Good use is made of partnership opportunities to maximise efficient use of resources.
- You benchmark financial indicators with all other Fire and Rescue Services and with your designated family group.
- Independent assessment shows finances are managed well, with effective systems of internal audit and for preventing and detecting fraud.

5.2 Your organisation puts a priority on value for money.

- The budget is based on consultation with stakeholders including staff. Ideas for further efficiency are sought at meetings with staff.
- You have plans for improving value for money by reviewing utilisation of staff, and pursuing further partnerships for procurement and training to give economies of scale.

6 Contribute to improving opportunities and quality of life in the communities you serve

6.1 You are aware of the impact and potential usefulness of your organisation in the communities you serve and you have explored opportunities to enrich those communities.

- Clear corporate commitment to social inclusion, neighbourhood renewal and reduction of crime.
- Good environmental awareness evidenced by use of 1 in 7 foam and synthetic oil, and consideration of environmental aspects as part of property investment.
- Very good use is made of provision of space and facilities and staff resources for community benefit.
- Active involvement in CDRPs and LSPs provides good opportunities for gathering ideas. Staff contribute ideas for charity involvement.

6.2 You have achieved positive results from your involvement with the community.

- Community roles and responsibilities are defined corporately.
- Financial and staff resources are committed to community involvement as an integral part of the Service.
- The range and depth of community involvement over a prolonged period demonstrates Best Practice in this area.
- Structured evaluation is planned for new projects. Take-up, feedback and impact on performance are used as monitoring tools.
- Feedback on community initiatives from beneficiaries and partners is very positive.
- Community initiatives are extended following successful implementation.