

Customer Service Excellence for Humberside Fire & Rescue Service

Humberside Fire & Rescue Service (HFRS) has gained Customer Service Excellence (CSE) certification. The award recognises HFRS's cross-organisation understanding of, and commitment to, providing excellent customer service.

Satisfied Customers

Over recent years HFRS customer service initiatives have included open days, feedback forms, focus groups and multi-language documents. Often closely related, performance initiatives have included improved flood prevention and protection.

Over the past 10 years HFRS's first-rate service has been demonstrated by its holding of Charter Mark, the Government's former standard for customer service.

Surveys have found that 97% of HFRS customers are 'extremely satisfied'. When compared with other fire and rescue services around the UK, HFRS has come 11th out of 42.

Martyn Shields, Systems Analyst at HFRS, says: "We held Charter Mark for a whole decade and CSE was a natural progression. We wanted to do our best to serve our customers, to identify and overcome shortcomings and benchmark with other fire and rescue services."

SGS "Thorough and Helpful"

Having used independent assessment body SGS before and built up a good rapport, HFRS chose SGS to assess it for CSE.

In the assessment SGS reviewed HFRS's application and supporting evidence and then met managers, staff, customers and representatives from partner organisations.

Martyn Shields of HFRS says: "I was impressed that a member of the SGS team visited me at our headquarters to check our application was on the right track. The assessment itself went well and our assessor Bob Waddle was friendly, thorough and helpful. Bob gave us some excellent feedback on our application which we've used in our 2009–10 action plan."

Service Ethos and Initiatives

Also impressed was Bob Waddle, SGS' CSE Assessor, who praised HFRS's customer service ethos and initiatives, professionalism and attention to detail. He says: "During my visit I was especially struck by the sophistication of HFRS's risk-mapping system, which is based on socio-demographic information, proximity to industry, likelihood of flooding and other factors. This helps HFRS to meet special needs in particular areas, and so improves customer care."

Good Practice

In its CSE assessment HFRS achieved a level of 90%, 10 percentage points above the pass mark.

In his assessment report Bob Waddle of SGS highlighted examples of good practice at HFRS. These included:

- The adoption of five national strategic priorities for community engagement
- Reducing to four its number of Community Protection Unit risk-reduction teams to make them geographically aligned with the four unitary authority areas it covers (enabling it to work more closely with the authorities' Local Strategic Partnerships, whose participants aim to maximise customer service)
- The appointment of staff to develop links with local area action teams, engage with communities and address local priorities

- The establishment of a new corporate performance team, partly to measure customer satisfaction
- Fire-prevention education aimed at young offenders, schools and community groups
- A successful fire and rescue BTEC course at a local school

Best Practice

SGS also highlighted examples of best practice such as:

- HFRS's driver safety training at Defence School of Transport Leconfield, which has helped to reduce road accidents involving army HGV drivers
- HFRS's 'Play Football not Fire' youth engagement project

CSE has "Opened our Eyes"

Martyn Shields says: "CSE is an excellent auditing tool. It's made us much more customer focused, more aware of gaps in our service and the need to fill those gaps, and it's opened our eyes to the scope for improvements."

As CSE is a process of continual improvement, not just a badge of achievement, HFRS will continue to review its operations and aim to achieve best practice in all areas.

CSE has helped in particular with customer journey mapping, in which HFRS examines the customer's experience from start to finish. This has highlighted shortcomings such as the need to provide better information after an incident, which is now in its action plan. HFRS is also working hard to improve its complaints monitoring and trends analysis.

It has also recruited a web designer to provide more information for local people, such as performance and audit reports and strategic plans, and to encourage feedback through customer questionnaires.

Other areas for development include improved rescue training and even greater emphasis on fire prevention.

HFRS's CSE is valid for three years, subject to satisfactory annual health checks by an external assessment organisation such as SGS.

Ends

Notes for Editors:

SGS is the global leader and innovator in inspection, verification, testing and certification services. Founded in 1878, SGS is recognised as the global benchmark in quality and integrity. With over 55,000 employees, SGS operates a network of almost 1,000 offices and laboratories around the world.

Humberside Fire & Rescue Service (HFRS) was formed in 1974 following the reorganisation of local government and amalgamation of all or parts of five fire services. It operates under the auspices of Humberside Fire Authority.

The HFRS area encompasses the four unitary authorities of East Riding of Yorkshire, Kingston upon Hull, North Lincolnshire, and North East Lincolnshire and covers 3,512 sq km (1,356 sq miles). Almost half of the 890,000 people it serves live in the area's three largest centres of population, Hull, Scunthorpe and Grimsby.

HFRS operates from 31 fire stations and employs 1,034 operational personnel (674 full-time and 360 retained), 30 control staff and 220 support staff.

Each year HFRS responds to over 20,000 incidents. Its fire safety officers carry out some 20,000 inspections of premises a year and provide advice for the community.

In its recent Audit Commission assessment, HFRS scored 4 out of 4 for its 'strong' performance, 3 out of 4 for its 'good' use of resources and 2 out of 4 for 'adequate' progress.

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