

# Draft Evidence Customer Engagement Strategy

## Relevance

This strategy is specific to the Evidence function and it supports Natural England's corporate Customer Strategy. As the corporate strategy and related standards evolve, the strategy for Evidence will be reviewed to ensure it remains fit for purpose and well aligned.

## Purpose

To set out Evidence's ambition to be an outward facing, customer focussed function, which delivers excellent services directly to external customers and supports the direct customer service delivery of other functions.

To provide the focus and structure which will drive continuous improvement in relation to customer focused service delivery by identifying areas and methods for improvement.

To provide our staff with a clear outline of how Evidence now delivers its ambitions to be customer focussed.

## Context

Natural England strives to be a science-led and evidence-based organisation and the Evidence function has a lead role in enabling this ambition. As we use evidence to inform and support all our decisions, advice and actions, the quality and availability of evidence directly supports our customer services. The Evidence function both delivers customer services directly (e.g. through publication of evidence documents) and supports customer services delivered by other functions (e.g. through providing maps to advisers working with external customers).

The Natural England Evidence Strategy provides the overall framework for all of our evidence work including delivery of customer services. This strategy is based on 6 core principles:

- Our evidence programme is fit for purpose and effectively coordinated with others'.
- Our evidence and its application are quality assured.
- We use specialist skills, knowledge and expertise effectively.
- We maximise the benefits of working in partnerships.
- **We are transparent and open about our evidence and communicate it effectively.**
- **We make evidence easily accessible and at the scales required.**

The two most important principles that underpin our approach to customer engagement are highlighted in bold.

## Evidence function strategic aims

Based on our core evidence principles we have a simple and clear vision: to deliver excellent customer service by making good quality evidence available to those who need it (internally and externally) and in the form that users want.

Transparency, quality and accessibility of evidence underpin our approach.

We want our customers to have confidence in the quality of evidence used and to understand how it has been used.

We will always take into account the equality and diversity needs of our customers, and ensure our services are accessible to all who wish to use them.

## Evidence - our services

Our customer services are grouped under four main headings:

- **Interactive Map services:**  
Established web-based map services where our goal is to continue to provide excellent customer service and to develop services to meet customer needs.  
E.g. MAGIC, and the Biodiversity Actions Reporting System (BARS).
- **Publishing:**  
Routine publishing of data, research, evidence and publications where our goal is to make information readily accessible and available for reuse; and where we use customer feedback to monitor satisfaction and adapt the service we provide to meet needs where possible.  
E.g. our GIS data download service, Evidence Publications Catalogue and our routine publication of data from ENSIS, Natural England's Designated sites information system or GENESIS, the key application for delivering environmental stewardship.
- **Requests:**  
*Ad hoc* reactive services that we provide to defined customer groups where our goal is to respond in line with our published customer service standards and we request feedback on how well we have responded to continually improve the service.  
E.g. our *ad hoc* mapping and analysis services and our *ad hoc* analysis of monitoring data.
- **Collaborative:**  
Services that represent a step change in our approach as our goal is to use customer needs, insight and feedback to deliver jointly with partners and stakeholders an outcome and to influence the behaviours and services that others provide.  
E.g. My Environment, the Biodiversity Action Fund and external consultations.

We will have mechanisms in place for gathering customer feedback and monitoring customer demand (use) for all these service categories, which is then used to inform service

improvements. Customer feedback is also obtained through non-service specific mechanisms, such as NE stakeholder survey, NE staff survey and Natural England Feedback and Enquiries Monitoring System (NEFEMS).

## Strategy actions

We will make our evidence publicly available through the full range of channels.

We will target our communications to ensure that everyone can understand and access this evidence base in ways that are meaningful for them.

We will develop mechanisms to strike the right balance in responding to national and local needs, identifying what we can effectively provide at the local level.

We will consult local stakeholders on what they need, and engage with them in our development of innovative methods and products to make data and evidence easier to find and use.

We will operate on the basis of making all data freely available and will also seek, wherever possible, to develop *ad hoc* products that summarise and present this information in ways that are most valuable to our customers.

We would also welcome requests from customers to go beyond standard products and develop more complex, bespoke reports / analysis, though where these exceed our resource capabilities, we would need to explore ways of recovering the costs of providing this additional service.

We will work with others to provide an accessible system to enable the public to contribute new evidence on their local natural environment.

We will work with partners to develop our internet site to make evidence more accessible and relevant to local communities. We will review the contribution that new technologies might offer in facilitating the gathering and sharing of local evidence.

We will take opportunities (eg INSPIRE, the Public Sector Mapping Agreement, the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act ) to increase the volumes and types of evidence we make available through our various portals.

We will improve the provision of data, information and interpretation for front-line advisers so that they can access and apply the most up-to-date evidence to inform their delivery.

We will continue to develop our new data infrastructure to make all of our environmental data accessible to all our staff.

We will help Natural England be clear about the balance of scientific and other information and expert judgement that has supported decisions made.

We will help Natural England state clearly the nature and scale of the limitations of the evidence, in terms of completeness, the nature and scale of the uncertainties, and assumptions and imperfections in the data.

We will help Natural England make best efforts to understand the implications of these uncertainties on our judgements, decisions and advice, working with other partners to avoid overly precautionary responses.

## **Measures of success and reporting**

Our high level measures of success are:

- Upward trend in % of stakeholders believing NE to be an evidence based organisation and staff saying they have access to the evidence they need – as reported annually through stakeholder and staff surveys.
- Meet published targets set out in Corporate Plan for availability for evidence available on-line and numbers of evidence publications downloaded by customers.
- Deliver (in 2013/14) key projects aimed at improving customer service: new My Environment service, refreshed MAGIC service , evidence input to regulatory improvement programme, evidence and guidance resulting from upland evidence review.
- Obtain and maintain CSE accreditation.

Progress will be reported quarterly through function performance reporting: CPMS with quarterly updates to function via webinar and monthly/quarterly Board reports derived from CPMS. Progress will also be reported through our Evidence Matters newsletter (internal) and will be incorporated into our annual review of progress in delivering our overall Evidence Strategy.