

Customer first

The Coal Authority is proud of its “revolution in customer services,” achieved by focusing on the simple things. As **Karma Harvey**, Head of Customer Strategy and Insight, tells Modern Law, it is committed to listening to the market and offering customers greater input in the provision and shape of its services, to ensure timely and clear information, a more buoyant property market and very happy customers.

The Coal Authority has always thrived upon building customer relationships and is very outwardly focused, working with multiple partners in the private, public and government sectors. These interactions take place in a number of ways, through national infrastructure projects and remediation, to the conveyancing markets and planning system.

“Building relationships has always been critical to us but what is often unknown by a lot of our customers is the extent of the products, services and expertise we offer. We are now getting closer to our customer groups to really share what we do and to understand their needs and pressures to help deliver an even greater service,” Karma explains.

“On the mining reports side, where most conveyancers interact with us, we have made significant changes to our

online ordering platform, helping customers to obtain information quicker and easier. We have specialist customer service advisors readily available to support customers with their reports. This includes interpreting our experts’ language in more detail to respond to concerns. As an organisation, we have also invested heavily in technology to make the reporting process incredibly fast without losing the quality, thanks to our digitised mining heritage database. By putting the customer first and their needs, we have created something for us to be proud of. Importantly, conveyancers benefit from our products and services by being able to offer a first class service of their own with transparent information delivered to their own clients - along with the peace of mind that the report is provided by leading coalfield experts in the UK,” she adds.



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What does this mean for conveyancers and their clients?

The customer-first approach means that Coal Authority experts from across the organisation can be pulled upon to provide highly technical and up-to-date specialist information, delivered in a way that conveyancers, purchasers and lenders can understand.

“Our customers, including conveyancers, can pick up the phone to us or email at any time. We constantly work on the content of our reports and how it’s presented to support the industry. We take the time to understand the pressures that the legal sector is under and work closely with customers and The Law Society to improve what we do. We constantly seek feedback on the information we provide so that we can continue to enhance our reports and customer support after a product has been purchased and at various focus groups and CPD seminars for professionals across the country,” Karma explains.

The Coal Authority is keen to stay nimble and strives to do even more for professionals and their clients in the ever-changing property market. The enhanced Enviro All-in-One report – a collaboration with Groundsure – is a good example, as Karma explains:

“We created the first fully integrated coal mining and environmental searches report, following direct feedback from our customers. Our data is backed up by a team of mining experts to provide peace of mind and our databases are updated regularly, ensuring the most up-to-date information is available to the market.”

She adds: “We offer customers the chance to have their say in a number of different ways; from our work to reach out to local communities through focus groups and public meetings to surveys, seminars and roadshows with conveyancers across the country. It’s embedded in our culture to listen and act upon feedback at all times, to better understand how customers feel about the Coal Authority and what we can do better.”

Long-term relationships are “very important” to the Coal Authority and the customer feedback to date has been “incredible.” Karma believes this is because what the Coal Authority does, across the board, is “very important.”

“Aside from the statutory role of the Coal Authority to protect the public, we also want to reassure homeowners, to support legal professionals effectively and allow them to work faster and smarter and to aid the provision of a buoyant property market,” she said, adding:

“What we’ve learned is that conveyancers really value our expertise and heritage in the coal industry and our almost exclusive understanding of the risks, the impact and how to articulate that in a report.”

“Most of our experts were mining surveyors and go-to specialists in their field before joining the Coal Authority so there isn’t much they don’t know about the mining industry! If we can help to translate any problems, risks or solutions clearly to conveyancers then that’s a hugely positive result for customers and the property market,” Karma said.

It’s all about you

Karma is keen to explain that it is intrinsic to the role of the Coal Authority that its customers come first, whether they are members of the public, local community groups, business, partner organisations or Members of Parliament.

She said: “We have made it incredibly easy to contact us and access the Authority - whether that is online, over the phone or in person at our office. We are proud to be an accessible government authority and strive to ensure that every customer experience with us is a positive one.”

Why we’re great to do business with

After its establishment in 1994 to manage the impacts of the nation’s coal mining heritage, the Coal Authority has evolved beyond all recognition in terms of what it does and how.

As Karma explains: “As an authority, we work daily to collect, update, enhance and understand our data as well as protect the public, remediate the land and innovate new ways of using by-products from historic mining activity and treatments. The experts who help the Coal Authority deliver are the same people who supply knowledge and support to our customers in a language and format that everyone can understand.

“We are incredibly critical to supporting business providing new infrastructure in the UK to help understand the impact of mining heritage across the network. The reason that we are so valuable to the property market is due to our multi-layered support on projects across the country – we don’t just work with the public but with other businesses and government bodies and reflect on each interaction to see if there is anything we could have done better and work on addressing that.

“We have evolved so much since 1994 but we refuse to stand still. It’s within our nature to put people first and to provide innovative and creative solutions based on feedback – which is why we’re still here today, supporting the property market and helping it to thrive.”

If you would like to share any feedback following this article please get in touch with karmaharvey@coal.gov.uk

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