

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND TRANSFORMATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Customer Service and Transformation Scrutiny Committee of the Bolsover District Council held in the Council Chamber, The Arc, Clowne on Monday 25th February 2019 at 1000 hours.

PRESENT;-

Members:-

Councillor R.J. Bowler in the Chair

Councillors C.P. Cooper, M.G. Crane, R.A. Heffer, J.E. Smith, E. Stevenson, P.M. Bowmer and A. Joesbury.

Officers:-

J. Wilson (Scrutiny and Elections Officer), K. Drury (Information, Engagement and Performance Manager), D. Stanton (Governance Officer – NED)

(A) APOLOGY

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R. Turner.

(B) URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business.

(C) DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

(D) MINUTES – 1ST OCTOBER 2018

Moved by Councillor R.A. Heffer and seconded by Councillor A. Joesbury.

RESOLVED that the minutes of a meeting of the Customer Service and Transformation Scrutiny Committee held on 21st January 2019 be approved as a true and correct record.

(E) LIST OF KEY DECISIONS AND ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE

The Committee considered the List of Key Decisions and Items to be considered in private.

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Moved by Councillor J.E. Smith and seconded by Councillor R.A. Heffer.

RESOLVED that the List of Key Decisions and Items to be Considered in Private be noted.

(F) CORPORATE PLAN TARGETS PERFORMANCE UPDATE – OCTOBER 2018 TO DECEMBER 2018 (Q3 – 2018/19).

The Committee considered a report from the Information, Engagement and Performance Manager, that outlined the performance outturns from the period October 2018 to December 2018 in relation to Corporate Plan Targets under the Committee's remit of 'Providing our customers with excellent service' and 'Transforming our organisation'.

It was stated that out of the 30 targets, 14 were on track, 4 had been flagged as an 'alert', 2 had been achieved within Q3, 6 had previously been achieved, and 4 had been previously withdrawn.

With regard to the four performance targets at 'alert', queries had been raised at the Scrutiny pre meeting by the Chair and Vice Chair and responses to those queries were circulated at the meeting as follows;

C 13 - Reduce average re-let times of Council properties (not including sheltered accommodation) to 20 days by March 2019.

What is the 'small number' referred to within the report? (It is not clear from the narrative.)

The 'small number' refers to less than 10 properties that have been void for an extended period of time prior to successfully re-letting. The Void Review Task Group (VTG) identified a range of actions to improve these properties.

Why are these properties proving difficult to let and what action is being taken to address this?

The following actions have been agreed for ongoing properties

- Void Task Group (VTG) visiting properties that have not been let following two weeks of advertising.
- Identifying and carrying out additional works i.e. ad hoc redecoration, ensuring gardens are cut and cleared, offering enhancements including rent free week for tenant to move in/decorate.

These properties have since been successfully allocated in this quarter, however, the length of time void has skewed the figures in this quarter.

The reasons certain properties are proving difficult to let are varied:-

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- Location – remote location e.g. Briar Close.
- Environmental factors i.e. too small/too large gardens.
- Low demand: at certain times if there are a number of similar properties available in a village.

NB 47% of our stock is designated for elderly people (50 years plus) and applicants can exercise choice of location to be near family, friends shops etc. Few applicants choose to move to other villages/settlements.

Members made enquiries in regards to Target C13, and the possibility of offering reduced rent to tenants in order to encourage further demand for those properties that have proved difficult to let. The Committee discussed a number of factors as to why the Council had continued to fail in reaching the stated Target, including the poor maintenance of surrounding properties, and the need to be more proactive in assisting other residents in the upkeep of local housing.

Members reached a consensus that this target had struggled to be achieved for a number of years, and discussed the recommendations of reviews from a number of Committees. It was proposed that a list of those vacant properties be established to allow for potential site visits/further investigation, and that Councillors be notified of housing that struggled to be let so that they could notify constituents.

The Committee discussed provisions for Ex-Servicemen to take up those houses that are proving difficult to let, as they are often on the bottom of the housing register. Members agreed that this could be offered as well as support if they are experiencing mental ill-health.

C 14 - Attend 99% of repair emergencies within 6 working hours

Are you still looking to change the calculation method for this Target? If so, when will this new methodology commence?

A new calculation method which is more accurate is now being used. In January 2019 the figure reached 98.10%.

Members discussed target C14, and whether the aim of attending 99% of repair emergencies within 6 working hours was too high, as well as any plans to increase the target from 6 working hours as other Councils have done. The Committee was advised that there was no plans to increase the 6 hour target, and Members reached a consensus that the 99% target should remain.

T 10 - Reduce the level of Former Tenants Arrears by 10% through early intervention and effective monitoring by 2019.

Members are aware that the Council introduced Tenancy Management Officers to work on previous high rent arrears. Have these posts proved value for money given the current figures? Who is currently leading on this piece of work?

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There is a full-time Former Tenants Rent Administrator within the Rents Team whose role is to collect FTA. This post reports directly to the Housing Enforcement Manager.

Housing have recently met with Legal to trial a process involving the Legal section in recovery of these arrears.

This is a new initiative which will add in a further layer of recovery for the Former Tenants Arrears (FTA). We are hoping that correspondence and possible action from the Council's Legal section will increase arrears recovery.

T 13 - Increase on-line self-service transactions dealt with by the Contact Centre by 20% each year.

How was the original target of 20% agreed? We are concerned that there will be a natural saturation point, where an extra 20% each year becomes unachievable. We would like consideration to be given to a target of 10% increase, should a similar 'Corporate Target' to this remain in 2019/20 and beyond.

The target was set as part of the initial Transformation Programme to channel shift customers to a more efficient way of making transactions to the council. The 2015/16 External Satisfaction Survey Action Plan was also updated with an agreed planned action to increase the number of on-line services following comments recorded.

The Target was set at 20% as this was seen as a reasonable expectation following the implementation of the 'Self Service' module which was introduced on the council's website. Ongoing improvements to accessibility on the Councils website and the development of online forms/services are continuing to be made available online to increase customer contact via this channel

The latest External Satisfaction Survey 2017/18 also recommended that priority is given to Online Services, hence the decision to maintain the target at 20% for 2019/20 and monitor the transactions made.

Moved by Councillor R.A. Heffer and seconded by Councillor A. Joesbury.

RESOLVED that (1) the performance outturns from the period October 2018 to December 2018 in relation to Corporate Plan Targets be noted,

- (2) the Committee refers the minute of this item to the next Executive raising the Committee's concern in regards to the lack of action taken on achieving Target C 13, Members ideas

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for further action and that a list of vacant properties be made available to Councillors to facilitate further investigation.

(Scrutiny and Elections Officer/Joint Head of Housing and Community Safety)

(G) SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19

Committee considered their Work Programme for 2018/19.

Moved by Councillor R.A. Heffer and seconded by Councillor A. Joesbury.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme for 2018/19 be noted.

The meeting concluded at 1040 hours.