

CUSTOMER SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Customer Services Scrutiny Committee of the Bolsover District Council held in the Council Chamber, The Arc, Clowne on Monday, 2nd August 2021 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:

Councillor Rose Bowler in the Chair

Councillors Rita Turner, Allan Bailey, David Dixon, Fox, Ray Heffer, Andrew Joesbury and Dan Salt.

Officers:- Deborah Whallett (Housing Enforcement Manager), Joanne Wilson (Scrutiny & Elections Officer) and Alison Bluff (Governance Officer).

Also in attendance at the meeting was Councillor David Downes, Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism.

CS1- 21/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Rita Turner.

CS2-21/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

CS3-21/22 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business to consider.

CS4-21/22 MINUTES

Committee considered the Minutes of a Customer Service and Transformation Scrutiny meeting held on 8th March 2021.

Moved by Councillor Rose Bowler and seconded by Councillor Ray Heffer

RESOLVED that the Minutes of a Customer Service and Transformation Scrutiny Committee held on 8th March 2021 be approved as a correct record.

CS5-21/22 LIST OF KEY DECISIONS AND ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE

Committee considered the List of Key Decisions and items to be considered in private document.

Moved by Councillor Ray Heffer and seconded by Councillor Rose Bowler
RESOLVED that the List of Key Decisions and items to be considered in private document be noted.

CS6-21/22 BRIEFING ON ADAPTED ACCOMMODATION

Committee considered a report which provided information regarding Council owned adapted accommodation in the District.

Following approaches by applicants seeking family units, in April 2021, Executive received a report regarding the supply, management and allocation of Council owned adapted accommodation. Executive agreed that Scrutiny review the process and prepare recommendations to further support families with needs for adapted properties. The Executive report was attached as Appendix 1 and Committee was asked to note that the report referred to 41 x 2 bedroom bungalows when in fact 6 of these were flats.

The Council liaised with Derbyshire County Council's (DCC) Occupational Therapists to ensure the right adaptations were provided in a person's home. However, some work could be so significant that it could potentially mean the property should be considered as 'fully adapted', which meant the categorisation on the housing system would need to change.

Examples of significant adaptations which the Council regularly undertook were;

- Wetroom
- Ceiling Track Hoist (CTH)
- Closomat toilet (wash dry toilet)
- Through floor lift
- Adapted kitchen

It was important to note that although a property was categorised by Housing as disabled adapted for management of allocation purposes – it didn't mean the property was exempt from Right to Buy and could be legally challenged if an application was refused. The relevant section was part 7 of Schedule 5 to the Housing Act 1985 and stated;

"The right to buy does not arise if the dwelling-house has features which are substantially different from those of ordinary dwelling-houses and are designed to make it suitable for occupation by physically disabled persons, and

- (a) it is one of a group of dwelling-houses which it is the practice of the landlord to let for occupation by physically disabled persons, and*
- (b) a social service or special facilities are provided in close proximity to the group of dwelling-houses wholly or partly for the purpose of assisting those persons."*

Housing officers had recently commenced a piece of work to agree a set of principles that reflected practice in terms of what 'significant adaptations' meant, and to look at what decision making processes should follow if a property was no longer considered 'general needs' adapted stock. This was important as it would mean that a significant or fully adapted property would most likely be exempt from Right to Buy legislation

but also the way in which disabled housing stock was allocated.

The Council continually looked for fully adapted properties to keep families together and had purchased some properties from 'Keepmoat Homes'. However, the number of fully adapted properties the Council should have required balancing with 'need' and also taking into consideration Right to Buy legislation.

Due to a limited budget for adapted properties, a working group had been set up to better manage stock and referrals – this would also help reduce the waiting list for these type of properties. For example, a wet room was a significant change to a house but not so much a bungalow. A through floor lift was expensive and tenants didn't always want to move so the balance of adapted properties in each area was being looked at.

If Scrutiny agreed to carry out a Review in relation to Council owned adapted properties, the Housing Enforcement Manager suggested that 2 Members from this Committee could attend the working group meetings to get insight on the issues facing Housing.

In response to a Member's query regarding right to buy on adapted properties, Committee was advised that some other authorities had been successful in stopping right to buy applications on properties where only 2 major adaptations had been made. This Council was proposing that where 3 or more major adaptations had been undertaken, or where there was one element with a value of over £15,000 - this be discussed at the internal officer welfare meeting for agreement that the property sat in the 'disabled adapted property' category, with a recommendation to the Housing Stock Management meeting for Member approval to change categorisation on the system. However, although this was a set of principles to work to, each case would need to be treated on its own merits.

In response to a Member's question regarding referrals for adapted properties, Committee was advised that around 35 referrals were discussed at each panel meeting with DCC, which took place every 6 weeks. However, referrals which came from DCC were for customers who already lived in their properties.

Committee was asked to note that there were also occasions where adaptations were removed and this meant a property would no longer be classed as disabled adapted on the housing system and would be put back into general needs accommodation. It would be proposed that any decision to move a property categorisation would follow the same process in terms of officer agreement before being presented to the Housing Stock Management Group. A number of properties that may meet this criteria had been identified and a formal assessment would be carried out to determine if they needed to be re-categorised. These properties were set out in Appendix 2 but in summary were 11 x 3 bedroom houses and 3 x 4 bedroom houses.

In response to a Member's question regarding payment to tenants who needed to move from a property to an adapted property, the Housing Enforcement Manager advised that no allowance was awarded in these types of cases.

Moved by Councillor Ray Heffer and seconded by Councillor David Dixon

RESOLVED that in accordance with the recommendation agreed at Executive on 26th April 2021, Customer Services Scrutiny Committee take forward a review of Council owned adapted accommodation for the 2021/22 municipal year.

(Scrutiny and Elections Officer)

The Housing Enforcement Manager and the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism left the meeting.

CS7-21/22 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

Committee considered their work programme for 2021/22.

It was noted that this Committee now held all the 'housing elements' for review work, where previously it had been split with the former Healthy, Safe, Clean & Green Communities and Growth Scrutiny Committees. However, this Committee now had the waste collection element of Streetscene and the Head of Streetscene was currently looking at new legislation in relation to waste collection.

In relation to the Adapted Accommodation briefing presented earlier in the meeting, Members would need to agree the scope of the review within their Informal session. Further detail could then be considered at the September meeting.

It was noted that the Council's Joint Homelessness Strategy, with North East Derbyshire District and Chesterfield Borough Councils, was currently under review. This would be presented by the Head of Housing Management & Enforcement to the September meeting.

Due to the change to Committee Terms of Reference following Council AGM, Audit and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee (ACOSC) would be reviewing the Council's in-house procurement service and the Scrutiny & Elections Officer would speak to the Chair of ACOSC with regard to a Member from this Committee engaging in the discussion regarding procurement.

The formal meeting concluded at 1055 hours and Members then met as a working party to continue their review work. The working party concluded at 1115 hours.