

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, 3rd February 2025 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor Rita Turner in the Chair

Councillors Amanda Davis, Louise Fox, Phil Smith and Vicky Waplington.

Officers:- Lesley Botham (Customer Service, Standards and Complaints Manager), Victoria Dawson (Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement), Mark Giles (Assistant Director for Streetscene, Community Safety and Enforcement), Thomas Dunne-Wragg (Scrutiny Officer) and Matthew Kerry (Governance and Civic Officer).

Also in attendance at the meeting, observing, was Councillor Donna Hales, Deputy Leader of the Council.

CS39-24/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Deborah Watson.

CS40-24/25 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business to consider.

CS41-24/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

CS42-24/25 MINUTES

To a question on minute number CS36-24/25 (Housing Strategy 2024-2029: Final Draft), the Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement informed it was intended to provide feedback on this at the next meeting.

Moved by Councillor Phil Smith and seconded by Councillor Vicky Waplington

RESOLVED that the Minutes of a Customer Services Scrutiny Committee held on 18th November 2024 be approved as a true and correct record.

CS43-24/25 LIST OF KEY DECISIONS AND ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE

The Committee considered the updated List of Key Decisions and Items provided at the meeting.

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

CS44-24/25 UNREASONABLE BEHAVIOUR POLICY

The Customer Services Manager presented the report to the Committee.

The draft policy and procedure was aimed at providing the following framework:

- To identify what might be classed as an unreasonable complaint or contact from a customer;
- To manage the Council's limited resources to help ensure that customers had access to limited resources in a proportionate way to the issues being raised;
- To set out openly how the Council handled unreasonable complaints or customers (what steps would be taken if action was required and who could authorise such actions);
- Which the Council could provide to customers where this policy and procedure was applied so that customers could understand the process (this may help manage individual expectations and behaviours).

The Council aimed to deal with complaints and customers in a way which was fair and impartial. On occasion, customers could behave unreasonably or make unreasonable complaints.

Unreasonable customers or complaints could hinder the proper consideration of their cases and could delay consideration of other cases. They could also have significant resource implications for the Council.

The Council did not expect staff to suffer behaviour or complaints by customers which was / were unreasonable in content, tone or persistence. In appropriate circumstances, the Council would take proportionate action to protect the wellbeing of staff, Members and contractors, and the integrity of its processes and limited resources.

When considering the draft policy and procedure, the Council had regard to other relevant policies and procedures including:

- The Customer Service Code of Practice and Standards;
- The Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy;
- The Equality and Diversity Policy;
- The Physical aggressive customer behaviour – Violent Incident Report Form, for inclusion on the Employee Protection Register (EPR).

However, it was noted customers might act out of character due to factors outside of their and / or the Council's control (e.g., feeling anxious, facing relationship breakdown, experiencing financial difficulties, etc.). While it was important to protect staff, it was equally important to consider what customers might be facing.

It was reiterated the draft policy and procedure was a framework and not intended to be prescriptive (in rare situations customers could behave unreasonably or make unreasonable complaints – each case would need to be considered on its own facts).

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It was anticipated the policy would be invoked in only 'extreme' cases. The draft policy and procedure framework was attached at Appendix 1.

The Deputy Leader of the Council was pleased to see the Committee had been ahead of the curve regarding staff and Member safety, sharing the policy fit in well with the Committee's current review work on security at The Arc.

A Member noted the framework would have been very difficult to write to ensure staff were protected and customers (who might be in a situation out of their control) were equally given the benefit of the doubt.

The Customer Services Manager informed the Information, Engagement and Performance Manager had approved the draft template letter from an equalities perspective, and the Health & Safety Manager and Service Managers Forum had been consulted as part of the development of the framework.

The main telephonic recorded message would be updated to incorporate a message reflecting the policy (i.e. to treat staff with courtesy and respect when spoken to).

A Member noted the framework was very good and comprehensive; it had been correct to consider any reasonable adjustment that could be made for some customers experiencing challenging situations.

Moved by Councillor Phil Smith and seconded by Councillor Louise Fox

RESOLVED that Members review the attached Policy and Procedure on the Management of Unreasonable Complaints or Customers and provide comments for consideration as part of the development of the Policy in advance of formal Executive approval and implementation.

Approved by Councillor Mary Dooley, Portfolio Holder for Customer Services

The Customer Services Manager left the meeting.

CS45-24/25 THE ELECTRICAL SAFETY POLICY

The Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement presented the first report of two policies to the Committee.

The Safety and Quality Standard required landlords to provide good quality homes and landlord services to tenants. The main compliance areas were:

- Fire safety: Ensuring properties are safe from fire;
- Gas safety: Ensuring properties are safe from gas;
- Electrical safety: Ensuring properties are safe from electrical hazards;
- Lift safety: Ensuring lifts are safe to use;
- Asbestos management: Ensuring properties are safe from asbestos;
- Legionella: Ensuring properties are safe from legionella bacteria.

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The Council reported on the compliance of all the above areas as part of the annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures. Quarterly updates were then provided to the Housing Liaison Board and Housing Stock Management Group.

The produced Electrical Safety Policy 2025-2028 (the 'Policy') was attached at Appendix 1.

The Policy went into detail on how the Council would meet legal obligations (e.g., qualified electricians and contractors would carry out five yearly electrical installation inspections and tests to all Council owned properties).

The Policy also set out how the Council would monitor and report on the performance of the legal requirements, including an escalation process for when there was noncompliance.

To a question on the six main compliance areas and the lack of a policy focussing on damp / mould, the Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement informed such a policy was being drafted – Awaab's Law would also ensure when instances of damp / mould were reported, all social and private landlords would need to legally respond within a new defined timeframe.

The draft policy on this matter would be brought to a future meeting.

The Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement reiterated that for the six main compliance areas, Gas and Electrical safety was what tenants were most aware of and so these were the policies currently prioritised.

To a question on the management of asbestos in Council owned properties, the Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement explained legislation was already in place and that for any property which became void (available), a full asbestos survey investigation would take place.

Following the meeting, it was confirmed by the Assistant Director of Housing Management that if asbestos was found, deemed to be in a poor condition and / or was affecting the works required to get the property to a lettable standard, it was removed by the Council's approved contactor (European Asbestos). This was then recorded on an Asbestos portal managed by the Health and Safety team.

A brief discussion on the liability of work when it needed to be undertaken was held. The Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement informed, post meeting, that the Council was responsible for ensuring compliance, but necessary checks would be managed by Dragonfly Management (Bolsover) Ltd. (work could subcontracted by them to trained and competent contractors with the necessary certificates then provided).

Moved by Councillor Phil Smith and seconded by Councillor Vicky Waplington

RESOLVED that Members review the attached Electrical Compliance Policy and provide comments for consideration as part of the development of the Policy in advance of formal Executive approval and implementation.

Approved by Councillor Sandra Peake, Portfolio Holder for Housing

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CS46-24/25 THE GAS AND HEATING COMPLIANCE POLICY

The Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement presented the report to the Committee.

As explained in the previous item, the Safety and Quality Standard required landlords to provide good quality homes and landlord services to tenants.

The produced Gas and Heating Compliance Policy 2025-2028 (the 'Policy') was attached at Appendix 1.

While not necessary, the Policy would also include other heating systems like air source heat pumps and solid fuel boilers.

The Council, via Dragonfly Management (Bolsover) Ltd., would undertake duties including:

- Carrying out an annual gas safety check to all properties with a gas supply, irrespective of whether the gas was connected or not;
- Ensuring that copies of all landlord's gas safety records (LGSRs) / certificates were provided to residents or displayed in a common area within 28 days of completion; and,
- Capping off gas supplies to all properties when the property become void. This would be completed by the end of the next working day.

The Policy went into further detail on how the Council would meet the legal obligations (e.g., qualified electricians and contractors would carry out five yearly electrical installation inspections and tests to all Council owned properties).

The Policy also set out how the Council would monitor and report on the performance of the legal requirements as exemplified above, including an escalation process for when there was noncompliance (to ensure the safety of residents).

The Council reported on the compliance of all the above areas as part of the annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures. Quarterly updates were provided to the Housing Liaison Board and Housing Stock Management Group.

To a question on the checks being carried out every 12 months, the Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement explained the Council would always attempt to organise and carry out checks with 2 months spare (to enable enforcement measures if required). This tended to result in the Council carrying out these checks at around the 11 month mark.

To a question on the noncompliance of tenants, the Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement informed that for 2023/24, the Council had achieved 99.1% compliance. When inspections had not been carried out within 12 months, the Council had to show the regulator what it intended to do to correct this (this was why checks were now organised with 2 months spare).

For the tenants where injunctions had to be repeatedly utilised every year, instead of seeking injunctions every time, the Council would seek an injunction to allow access for this reason for a longer period to prevent repeated applications and costs. Any tenant

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who failed to allow access after an injunction would be found in contempt of court.

The Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement was optimistic that for 2024/25, the Council would achieve 100% compliance.

Moved by Councillor Vicky Waplington and seconded by Councillor Phil Smith
RESOLVED that Members review the attached Gas and Heating Compliance Policy and provide comments for consideration as part of the development of the Policy in advance of formal Executive approval and implementation.

Approved by Councillor Sandra Peake, Portfolio Holder for Housing

The Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement left the meeting.

CS47-24/25 REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNCIL'S WASTE COLLECTION AND DISPOSAL EDUCATION - (POST SCRUTINY MONITORING UPDATE)

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report to the Committee.

The Committee had agreed to undertake a Review of Effectiveness of the Council's Waste Collection and Disposal Education (the 'Review') as part of the 2023/24 Work Programme.

This was the first 6 month interim report after submission to the Executive.

Attached at Appendix 1 was the Executive's response to the Review. Attached at Appendix 2 was the Post Scrutiny Monitoring Report.

The Committee had put together 11 recommendations: 2 had been completed; 2 extended to achieve; and 7 were on track.

Key achievements included:

- Publishing recycling-related content in InTouch magazine (including features on green bins, food waste, and clothing recycling);
- Successfully airing educational segments on Bolsover TV (covering topics like damaged bins and recycling statistics);
- Launching a bi-weekly e-newsletter that included regular waste disposal education for residents;
- Uploading the burgundy bin diagram to the Council's website and introducing an A-Z guide on recyclable items; and,
- Creating animated recycling adverts for digital screens in market towns (to promote recycling awareness).

The reasons for the non-implementation of recommendations included:

- The redesign of the bin calendar and recycling guide was still under discussion with the new Assistant Director for Streetscene, Community Safety and

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Enforcement (leading to a reassessment of the design approach and a delayed timeline);

- Additional planning and consultations were required for several recommendations;
- Educational materials were still being finalised (with design and content undergoing review to ensure accessibility and clarity); and,
- Few schools had responded to offers for recycling education visits (hindering outreach efforts).

A further report would be provided in 6 months.

A Member stated the progress made was really positive. To a question on the efforts to attend schools, the Assistant Director for Streetscene, Community Safety and Enforcement noted other local authorities were experiencing the same issue with schools' time availability.

The Deputy Leader shared she was pleased the Assistant Director for Streetscene, Community Safety and Enforcement had been recruited and that while the leaflet designs had certainly improved, she felt they also possibly remained too busy. The Assistant Director for Streetscene, Community Safety and Enforcement agreed to coordinate with the Scrutiny Officer to see if further improvements to the leaflets could be made.

To a question on the future food waste bins being deployed in 2026, the Assistant Director for Streetscene, Community Safety and Enforcement informed that the food waste collection vehicles would arrive later in 2025 and that this already meant the Council was ahead of many other local authorities.

New documentation would be provided to inform customers of the new legislation – the Council would likely be able to hit the ground running when food waste started being collected.

To a further question on ensuring the correct disposal of food waste, the Assistant Director for Streetscene, Community Safety and Enforcement informed the enforcement of correct food waste disposal was being investigated. However, enforcement was costly in time and resources – it was better to educate and persuade customers first with documentation that was easy to understand.

To a question on the input of customers in the creation of the new documentation, the Deputy Leader noted legibility and style was important – the Council had multiple customer focus groups and one of these could be utilised to review the documentation.

The Committee briefly discussed the need to persuade customers on why it was important to collect food waste from both environmental and financial perspectives. It was also important to ensure customers knew the collection of food waste had been mandated by the UK National Government.

Finally, it was also important to use all the Council's communication channels to inform customers of the new recycling regime (e.g., Bolsover TV, InTouch magazine, etc.).

To a suggestion on quantifying the financial benefits of correct food waste collection, the Scrutiny Officer informed the Council's Communications team were working on such articles and going further than the Committees recommendations – customers could be as informed as the Council could hope to achieve.

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Moved by Councillor Amanda Davis and seconded by Councillor Vicky Waplington

RESOLVED that: 1) Scrutiny Members note the progress against the review recommendations;

- 2) Scrutiny Members acknowledge any exceptions to delivery and clarify the additional action required by the service;
- 3) Scrutiny Members make its report and findings public, in accordance with Part 4.5.17(4) of the Council's Constitution;
- 4) Officers continue to implement the recommendations and submit a further report in six months' time highlighting progress and any exceptions to delivery.

Approved by Councillor Anne Clarke, Portfolio Holder for Environment

CS48-24/25 CUSTOMER SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25

The Scrutiny Officer presented the Work Programme 2024/25 attached at Appendix 1.

One Committee meeting remained in 2024/25, and the Domestic Abuse Policy had been moved to that meeting.

Moved by Councillor Louise Fox and seconded by Councillor Amanda Davis

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

The formal part of the meeting concluded at 10:42 hours and Members then met as a working party to continue their review work. The working party concluded at 11:20 hours.