

CUSTOMER SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Customer Services Scrutiny Committee of the Bolsover District Council held in Committee Room 1, The Arc, Clowne on Monday, 31st March 2025 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor Vicky Waplington in the Chair

Councillors Amanda Davis, Anne Clarke, Louise Fox, Sandra Peake and Deborah Watson.

Officers:- Steve Brunt (Strategic Director of Services), 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), Alice Willoughby (Customer Standards and Complaints Officer), Jo Wilson (Housing Strategy and Development Officer), Thomas Dunne-Wragg (Scrutiny Officer) and Matthew Kerry (Governance and Civic Officer).

CS49-24/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Rita Turner and Phil Smith, Portfolio Holder for Housing.

CS50-24/25 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business to consider.

CS51-24/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

CS52-24/25 MINUTES

Moved by Councillor Louise Fox and seconded by Councillor Amanda Davis
RESOLVED that the Minutes of a Customer Services Scrutiny Committee held on 3rd February 2025 be approved as a true and correct record.

CS53-24/25 LIST OF KEY DECISIONS AND ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE

The Committee considered the updated List of Key Decisions and Items to be Considered in Private provided as a handout at the meeting.

It was noted the list of Executive Members had not yet been updated to reflect the recent changes in Council leadership.

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

CS54-24/25 CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS AND COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS REPORT 2024/25 - 1ST OCTOBER 2024 TO 31ST DECEMBER 2024

The Customer Service, Complaints & Standards Manager presented the report to the Committee which detailed the Council's performance in relation to its Customer Service Standards and management of complaints.

Attached at Appendix 1 was the Customer Service Standards monitoring for Quarter 3 2024/25 (1st October 2024 to 31st December 2024).

For Revenues, the target was answering 70% of incoming calls within 20 seconds – 92% was achieved in Quarter 3 2024/25.

For Benefits, the target was answering 80% of incoming calls within 20 seconds – 96% was achieved in the same period.

For Contact Centres, the target was answering 80% of incoming calls within 20 seconds – 80% was achieved (16,456 calls were answered) in the same period.

Acknowledging emails within 1 working day (Target 1) and replying to emails within 8 working days (Target 2) had both achieved 100% in the same period, with only 23 emails (out of 7,349) replied to over 8 working days.

The target of answering 90% incoming Live Chats within 20 seconds was achieved in the same period (580 answered out of 624).

Attached at Appendix 2 was the Telephony Performance for Quarter 3 2024/25.

93% of incoming calls were being answered corporately within 20 seconds cumulatively – above standard. Most departments had achieved and exceeded the corporate target of 90% except for the following: Environmental; Governance & Civic; and Health & Safety.

For abandoned calls, the target was 10% unanswered – 8% of incoming calls direct to service areas had not been answered in this period.

The Committee was informed the tool for collecting the above data was now not 100% reliable. This was due to an increasing number of officers using mobile phones for work. As a result, this did not permit the collection of accurate data without the purchase of individual licenses for each of these devices.

Whilst this had cost implications to the Council, senior officers sought the above data to understand their departments' performances. The I.T team had been contacted to carry out a financial appraisal of these licences.

Attached at Appendix 3 were details of the Compliments, Comments and Complaints (Stage 1 and 2) as well as MP Enquiries received for the same period.

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84 Compliments (with an additional 20 from Go!Active Customers), 5 Comments (15 from Go!Active Customers), 58 Stage 1 Complaints, 13 Stage 2 Complaints, 3 MP Enquiries and 0 Ombudsman Complaints were received in the same period.

The Committee was informed regular meetings with the MP's office were being held to ensure a consistent approach to constituents with enquiries.

Go!Active had removed the 'Complaint' option on their Customer Feedback Forms. All Complaints would now be logged through the Complaints system, which could be monitored by the Complaints Team.

Service improvements included general system updates and the introduction of a Behavioural Policy (approved in the Committee's last meeting). An updated phone message for the latter would also be implemented.

The report detailed the other improvements made as a result from Compliments, Comments and Complaints received in Quarter 3 2024/25.

To a question on the cost of the licences to collect accurate telephony performance data, the Customer Service, Complaints & Standards Manager informed the individual price of these licences was £140. The Customer Standards and Complaints Officer added licences were used for desk and soft phones, but not mobile phones.

The Customer Service, Complaints & Standards Manager stated presenting the current, not 100% accurate data was not desirable.

The Strategic Director of Services noted collecting the current data took considerable time and effort – if the data could not be reliable it might not be worth reporting.

The Customer Service, Complaints & Standards Manager recalled collecting this data had not been easy during the COVID-19 Pandemic (and when officers first started working from home), but while the team was happy to continue collecting this data, it was not reliable.

Members noted there had been no Complaints received from customers regarding the Council's telephony performance. Additionally, with the Local Government Reorganisation following the publication of the UK Government's English Devolution White Paper in December 2024, they saw no need for the purchase of these licences nor the continued publication of this performance data.

The Strategic Director of Services stated the option to review the data could be retained for senior officer use, and the Committee's, if desired.

Moved by Councillor Louise Fox and seconded by Councillor Sandra Peake

RESOLVED that the Customer Services Scrutiny Committee note the overall performance on Customer Service Standards and Compliments, Comments and Complaints.

The Customer Service, Complaints & Standards Manager and Customer Standards and Complaints Officer left the meeting at 10:14 hours.

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CS55-24/25 HOUSING DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY 2025-2028

The Assistant Director for Housing Management presented the report to the Committee for the consideration and provision of a response on the proposed Housing Domestic Abuse Policy (the 'Policy').

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 introduced significant changes to improve the quality of social housing for tenants by tightening the regulations imposed on the Social Housing Sector.

The Regulator for Social Housing had produced the following standards to “deliver a well governed social housing sector” which provided quality homes and services for tenants:

1. The Safety and Quality Standard;
2. The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard;
3. The Neighbourhood and Community Standard; and,
4. The Tenancy Standard.

The Neighbourhood and Community Standard required landlords to engage with other relevant parties so tenants could live in safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods and feel safe in their homes.

It also set out that all Registered Providers must have a policy for how they recognised and effectively responded to cases of domestic abuse.

The proposed Policy, attached at Appendix 1, set out how the Council's Housing department, including Dragonfly Management (Bolsover) Ltd. acting on behalf of the Council, would tackle domestic abuse, support victims and survivors of domestic abuse, and hold perpetrators to account.

The Policy did not propose any changes to the operational management of domestic abuse cases, but did create a need for Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding training to be undertaken for some roles. This would include, upon starting a position, regular training to ensure skills and knowledge were retained.

The Committee was provided a further updated “Homeless applicant pathway referral” which, while similar to the one presented on Page 75, included additional support for tenants and customers.

With regards figure 4.4 on Page 67, the “Perpetrators of domestic abuse”, the Committee was informed the Council took into account victims' and survivors' wishes, with many preferring to walk away. However, if possession action was desired against the perpetrator, the Council would take possession against the tenant who had been convicted of an offence relating to domestic abuse.

The Committee was informed the Specialist Domestic Abuse Officer had been in post from January 2025 and as of the meeting had handled 22 applications from homeless victims and survivors and 3 applications from existing tenants – a difference was already being made.

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A Member welcomed the Policy and noted the use of “domestic violence” instead of “domestic abuse” on Page 61. The Assistant Director for Housing Management would update the Policy accordingly.

To questions on victims and survivors not fitting under the safeguarding rules or not providing consent for the Council to act on their behalf (and what the following steps would be), the Assistant Director for Housing Management informed an exploration on these questions would be carried out but noted the Council’s actions would depend on the individual circumstances of each case.

The Committee was further informed that while a fortnightly meeting took place between the Council and police colleagues, it was important to not breach data protection regulations. However, the Council would always step in to protect children if required and would continue working with the police.

A Member noted the Council was always concerned with safeguarding, especially when children were involved, but if required the Council should pass on appropriate information to relevant agencies. The Assistant Director for Housing Management stated this could be incorporated into the Policy.

Moved by Councillor Sandra Peake and seconded by Councillor Amanda Clarke

RESOLVED that the Customer Services Scrutiny Committee note the proposed Housing Domestic Abuse Policy and provide comments for consideration in its further development.

The Assistant Director for Housing Management and Housing Strategy and Development Officer left the meeting at 10:27 hours.

CS56-24/25 REVIEW OF MEMBERS ICT & SUPPORT AND ICT SERVICE DELIVERY: FINAL REPORT - (POST SCRUTINY MONITORING UPDATE)

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report to the Committee, which assessed progress against the recommendations to date for the Review of Members’ ICT & Support and ICT Service Delivery.

The Committee had put together 13 recommendations to the Executive with the intent to assist the Council in improving equipment provision and support to Members and the operation of meeting spaces within a modern post-COVID-19 environment.

12 out of 13 recommendations had been achieved at the writing of the report:

- 7 within the target date;
- 5 completed behind schedule; and
- 1 had been extended.

For CSSC22-23 1.4, the Committee was informed this would not be extended. While the installation of the new AV equipment in the Chamber over March and April 2025 would be achieved, the power supply was not planned to be upgraded.

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For CSSC22-23 1.5, the provision of additional access to the Council's intranet to Members would not be carried out (there was limited use for Members on this network). However, it was conveyed that Members could make full use of the Council's telephony system, MiCollab, to contact any officer.

For CSSC22-23 1.9, as previously stated the new AV equipment was being installed in the Chamber over March and April 2025.

A progress report would be submitted in 6 to 12 months' time, with any exceptions to expected delivery highlighted.

Officers were informed by Members that accessing Council documents via the use of the provided Apple iPads, or even writing emails and making use of Microsoft Word on these devices, remained unreliable outside of The Arc. The Scrutiny Officer noted, with the approaching 2025/26 municipal year, Members' ICT equipment could be further reviewed, though it was noted with the Local Government Reorganisation, this might not be cost effective if the Council was dissolved in the next few years.

A Member noted it was stated that CSSC22-23 1.3 had been achieved, but as previously discussed there was no adequate PC/laptop provision to Members (outside the Executive). There was also no desktop PC available for Members to use in the Members' Room (there was no Members' Room).

The Scrutiny Officer informed this item had been listed as achieved in November 2023, before recruitment by the Council.

The Strategic Director of Services confirmed awareness of Members' ICT issues: the Apple iPads had not performed as expected, with both poor 4G connection and limited capability. ICT was exploring the use of a Microsoft Windows powered tablet that would enable high portability for convenience and full access to Microsoft's Office and Outlook software.

The Assistant Director for Streetscene, Community Safety and Enforcement added ICT was rolling out additional changes to Microsoft Office 365, which would enable easier access to essential software.

It was requested if, with no Members' Room available, a PC laptop be provided in the Independent Members' Office for all Members outside the Executive to use. The Scrutiny Officer reiterated Members' ICT could be reviewed further in 2025/26.

Moved by Councillor Sandra Peake and seconded by Councillor Amanda Davis

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

- 2) Members acknowledge any exceptions to delivery and clarify the additional action required by the service;
- 3) 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 twelve months' time highlighting progress and any exceptions to delivery.

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CS57-24/25 CUSTOMER SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25

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

An informal session would be organised early in 2025/26 for all Scrutiny Committee Members to attend and contribute topic ideas (even if not Members of that Scrutiny Committee).

A Member noted, with the Local Government Reorganisation covering all aspects, this could be a topic for all Scrutiny Committee Members to consider.

A discussion on making use of the Council's reserves was held. The Scrutiny Officer informed that in an informal meeting of the Finance and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee, this topic had been discussed with the Section 151 Officer present who provided the necessary information for Members to determine.

It was conveyed that all Scrutiny Committee Members were invited to all formal meetings of the Finance and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee and could provide appropriate ideas to that Committee and the Section 151 Officer.

The Strategic Director of Services noted between March and November 2025, the Council, like all other local authorities in its position, would have to provide detailed options on the future unitary Council it would be replaced by to the UK Government. Until then, the Council must remain financially resilient (the Council was the only local authority not cutting services – e.g., it did not charge for new Green Bins).

The Scrutiny Officer informed a discussion with Scrutiny Committee Chairs would be arranged, with a possible Annual Scrutiny Conference to follow.

Moved by Councillor Sandra Peake and seconded by Councillor Deborah Watson

RESOLVED that Members review this report and the Programme attached at Appendix 1 for approval and amendment as required. All Members are advised to contact the Scrutiny Officer should they have any queries regarding future meetings.

The formal part of the meeting concluded at 10:48 hours and Members then met as a working party to continue their review work. The working party concluded at 10:57 hours.