

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 12th December 2022 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:

Members:

Councillor Rose Bowler in the Chair

Councillors Allan Bailey, Patricia Clough, David Dixon, Ray Heffer, Andrew Joesbury, and Rita Turner (from during Minute CS33-22/23).

Officers: Victoria Dawson (Assistant Director Housing Management & Enforcement), Lesley Botham (Customer Services Manager), and Joanne Wilson (Scrutiny & Elections Officer).

CS28-22/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

CS29-22/23 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business.

CS30-22/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

CS31-22/23 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 10TH OCTOBER 2022

Moved by Councillor Ray Heffer and seconded by Councillor Andrew Joesbury
RESOLVED that the Minutes of a Customer Services Scrutiny Committee held on 10th October 2022 be approved as a correct record.

CS32-22/23 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 Andrew Joesbury
RESOLVED that the List of Key Decisions and items to be considered in private document be noted.

CUSTOMER SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

CS33-22/23

CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS AND COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS 2022/23 - 1ST APRIL 2022 TO 31ST SEPTEMBER 2022

The Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement and the Customer Services Manager provided Members with an overview of the Council's performance for Q1 & Q2 2022/23, in relation to the Council's customer standards and complaints.

The report presented followed the usual format but it was noted that following the change in delivery for customer standards and complaints that the reports would now be available on a more frequent, quarterly basis. Furthermore, following feedback from Members at the last meeting, data for the compliments and stage 1 complaints was now presented in more of a summary format which would hopefully make the data more accessible to Members and officers.

Officers noted the headline detail in the cover report and then presented each of the appendices in turn.

Customer Service Standards (Appendix 1)

Most service areas except for Contact Centres had met the required standards in relation to telephone calls, with Contact Centres just 1% below target. Live Chat data had now also been added to the report as previously discussed with Members. A summary of performance for MP Enquiries had also been added and it was noted that the volume of enquiries was up by 50%. To try alleviate pressure in dealing with this, officers were identifying those enquires that could have come as a customer service request and were raising them via contact centre rather than an MP enquiry.

Corporate Telephone Standards (Appendix 2)

The data presented reflected both internal and direct dial external calls received by the service areas. The performance for Q1 and Q2 was slightly below standard. The table also included data on abandoned calls – a new feature of the report. The target for this indicator had initially been set at 5% but all service areas were currently exceeding this, so it was noted that this would be reviewed again at Q3 with the target potentially revised to more accurately reflect call management by service areas.

Compliments, Comments and Complaints

Officers went through the summary of performance and then referred to the appendices in more detail.

Compliments (Appendix 3A)

This data was now being presented in a summarised format. In total 78 written compliments were received during Q1 (40) and Q2 (38), with a number of the compliments relating to more than one service area.

Comments (Appendix 3B)

This data was now being presented in a summarised format. A total of 10 had been received by the end of Q2 with a number of the compliments relating to more than one service area. In total this was Q1 (7) and Q2 (3). 100% (all 10) had been acknowledged and passed to the respective department within the target time of 3 working days, for consideration when reviewing their service.

CUSTOMER SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Informal Complaints (Frontline resolution stage 1) (Appendix 3C)

The data showed the number of Frontline Resolution complaints received by the Contact Centre service, in total 159 complaints had been recorded on the Customer Information System for the period (Q1 70 and Q2 89). 91% of which had been responded to within the customer service standard of 3 working days.

The service area with the highest number of complaints was refuse. The new method of analysing and presenting the data had enabled officers to more easily identify hotspot areas where targeted improvement work and monitoring could take place.

Formal Investigation (stage two) (Appendix 3D) and MP Enquires (Appendix 3E)

The appendices detailed the number of Formal Investigation complaints and MP enquiries received by department. 38 formal complaints (Q1 24 and Q2 14) were received – the officer noted that this had been reported inaccurately in the report and the figures had been transposed in error. Furthermore, each of the 3 blank cells for August should read as '1' in each of the rows.

There had also been 112 MP enquiries (Q1 38 and Q2 74) during this period. 83% of formal complaints and 91% of MP enquiries were responded to within the customer service standard of 15 working days. Officers hoped to gain further clarity from the MP's office as to the reasons for the significant increase and to try and assist them to send enquires via the appropriate channel and to the correct authority. It was noted there had been instances where enquires had been submitted for issues out of the Council's control.

Internal Review (stage three) (Appendix 3F)

Appendix 3 (F) showed the number of stage three complaints received for the period by department. These had been complainants who had already made a stage two complaint and still felt dissatisfied. During this period, 19 stage three complaints had been received (Q1 13 and Q2 6), all of which had been responded to within the standard of 20 working days.

Ombudsman (Appendix 3G)

The table showed the status of Ombudsman complaints received for Q1/Q2 as at 30th September 2022. During this period only 1 case had been received, with no fault found.

Following presentation by officers, Committee discussed the report and raised the following issues:

A Member noted that in the report it was stated that a complaint over drainage was sent through to Leisure services and queried if this was the correct service for referral.

Officers stated that this was possibly an error in the report and would check and report back.

With regard to waste collection, a Member noted that in their Ward a number of residents were not putting their bins out by the required time so collection was being missed.

A number of Members noted that they were aware of contamination and that affected bins were usually highlighted with a sticker. They questioned whether

CUSTOMER SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

the changes to the eligible items for the Red Bin had confused residents and requested if clarification could be sought from the Assistant Director Streetscene about how they could get information to share with residents.

The Customer Services Manager noted that the Education Officer had spent time at The Arc recently doing face-to-face campaigning with residents to raise awareness of the rules. The officer agreed to enquire if this service could be rolled out across all Contact Centres and possibly within village halls to further raise awareness.

A Member noted that contamination rates had been discussed previously at a Council meeting and the rates had been as high as 50% in some cases. The officer noted that currently there was a system in place whereby in instances of continued contamination the Red Bin was removed completely.

A Member noted that a number of residents moving in to the new estates within Bolsover were from out of the area and likely unfamiliar with the local recycling policy and the rules for each bin.

A Member queried if there could be an inspector type role that would work alongside refuse collections to speak to households directly where issues were found. Furthermore, they queried whether the Council was clear on its current policy and if households that did not comply could be fined.

In response it was confirmed that there was a local policy in place and it had been found that repeat messaging and awareness raising was the most effective approach. The officer confirmed that the question regarding fines would be raised with the relevant Assistant Director.

Moved by Councillor Ray Heffer and seconded by Councillor Andrew Joesbury
RESOLVED that the overall performance on Customer Service Standards and Compliments, Comments and Complaints be noted.

(Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement/
Customer Services Manager)

***Post meeting clarification from Assistant Director of Streetscene*

Current contamination rates average 15%, not 50% as stated in the meeting. This was considered good in comparison to more urban dense areas such as neighbouring cities operating around 40-50% contamination.

A further note on the issues raised would be circulated to Members as requested.

CS34-22/23 RENT ARREARS POLICY

Scrutiny's consideration was sought in relation to the updated Rent Arrears Policy before its submission to Executive for approval.

CUSTOMER SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Due to staffing restructures and changes to internal processes it was necessary to update the Policy to reflect current practice. The service now had a number of Income Management Assistants that would deal with arrears cases from beginning to end, rather than the tenant dealing with multiple officers. It was felt this provided a more consistent approach for the tenant and ensured the service gave more personalised support based on the tenant's situation.

It was also noted that the Policy now had a new section for recovery of former tenancy arrears which would be managed by the patch based Income Management Assistants. The Policy also had details as to the recovery process for garages, garage plots and parking bay arrears which would be managed by the Housing Assistants Tenancy.

The Council had also recently procured a rent income analytics software, which was compatible with the Housing Case Management System to aid in rent recovery.

Moved by Councillor Andrew Joesbury and seconded by Councillor Rose Bowler **RESOLVED** that Members were satisfied with the updated Rent Arrears Policy.

(Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement)

CS35-22/23 MOBILITY SCOOTER POLICY

Scrutiny's consideration was sought in relation to a draft Mobility Scooter Policy before its submission to tenants and leaseholders for consultation.

The Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement presented the background to the draft policy and also the draft Communal Area Management Policy together as both policies interlinked.

It was noted that the Council currently had 4,986 properties (at November 2022). Within this stock, the Council had a number of older persons' housing schemes with communal areas. These were Orchard Close, Hides Green, Pattison Street, The Paddocks and Sandhills Lane. This comprised of 177 properties in 58 blocks. In addition, the Council had a number of general needs accommodation with communal areas, this comprised 136 properties in 34 blocks.

As noted in the report, in 2021 a number of inspections and fire risk assessments of these schemes had been undertaken. This revealed that many communal areas were being used to store and charge mobility scooters. This was identified as an unacceptable health and safety risk where fire escape routes were being blocked. On some occasions scooters had been seen outside of a property being charged, but with an extension lead through the window of the residential accommodation, which was also a recognised fire risk.

The report outlined the consultation that had taken place with tenants on changes to the Tenancy Agreement in relation to storage and charging of mobility scooters. A significant piece of work had taken place and would continue to take place to support tenants wishing to obtain permission for a mobility scooter. The Council was working with existing tenants affected on storage and charging solutions and also considering the size of scooter and whether other options needed to be considered. It was

CUSTOMER SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

acknowledged that some scooters were small enough to go through the main doorways of the communal flats but this wasn't possible for all types of scooter. The Council could only control what was stored in communal areas, not those used inside the flats.

Members agreed that the sensible approach would be to take a consistent approach to the storage and charging of the scooters and then generate an appropriate service charge to the tenant – safety of all within the communal blocks was paramount. Members also suggested that the Council could consider incorporating a maintenance element within the service charge, as annual testing of the scooters to ensure they remained fit for purpose was key.

Moved by Councillor Rose Bowler and seconded by Councillor Rita Turner
RESOLVED that Members were satisfied with the draft Mobility Scooter Policy.

(Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement)

CS36-22/23 COMMUNAL AREA MANAGEMENT POLICY

Scrutiny's consideration was sought in relation to a draft Communal Area Management Policy before its submission to tenants and leaseholders for consultation.

The Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement advised that the Policy presented would cover all General Needs communal properties and those older persons' housing schemes with communal areas. As noted when discussing the Mobility Scooter Policy, the Council had a number of properties with communal areas. The core elements of the Policy mirrored the new clause within the recently revised Tenancy Agreement.

Where any items were found following an inspection of a communal area, the Council would aim to identify the owner where possible. However, should the item found create a significant fire risk, it would be removed immediately and then subsequent enquires made to find the owner.

It was also planned to improve the quality of the communal areas through carpeting, sunken doormats, refreshed paintwork, window cleaning and monthly cleaning of the whole area. This would generate a service charge to the tenants but would be something that they could claim for, so shouldn't incur a cost to those who were in receipt of eligible benefits. It was noted that the charges could not be introduced until April 2024 at the earliest due to the consultation and further works that needed to take place. Once complete and the Policy was live it would result in a weekly service charge.

A Member questioned who was responsible for implementation as a range of services were listed within the Policy at section 7. The officer advised that while the responsibility predominantly sat with Housing Management, support would be required from the range of services listed in order to complete the initial works and maintain the areas in the long-term. The wording of this section would be checked and rephrased if required.

CUSTOMER SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Scrutiny Members acknowledged that this was an excellent idea and the work was long overdue to bring the areas up to standard. It was acknowledged that it was vitally important that the Council reduced additional fire risks in light of advice following the Grenfell disaster. Members also welcomed that the anticipated service charge would not come in to force until 2024 given the current cost of living crisis. This would hopefully provide a sufficient buffer allowing for change in the national situation.

Moved by Councillor Ray Heffer and seconded by Councillor Andrew Joesbury
RESOLVED that Members were satisfied with the draft Communal Area Management Policy.

(Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement)

CS37-22/23 REVIEW OF COUNCIL-OWNED ADAPTED ACCOMMODATION – POST SCRUTINY MONITORING (INTERIM MONITORING REPORT)

The Scrutiny & Elections Officer advised Members on progress to date on the recommendations from their recent review. Of the nine recommendations five were now delivered, two were on track and two were extended but likely to complete within the original twelve month monitoring period.

Key achievements included completion of the revised Adaptations Policy (Council Owned Properties) 2022-2025 which had been adopted by Executive. As a consequence the following documents had also been revised and approved:

- Welfare Adaptations Procedure
- Stock Categorisation Procedure

Outstanding stock identified as requiring 'categorisation' had now also been dealt with. In addition, the new Open Housing software system had been adapted to enable officers to apply the correct categorisation to stock, enabling more effective management.

Completion of the Mobility Scooter Policy had been slightly delayed, but following presentation at this meeting it would now go out to consultation with tenants and leaseholders of Independent Living Schemes. The mapping of housing stock data in the Council's GIS system was still in development, however, it would be completed within the original twelve month monitoring period.

Moved by Councillor Ray Heffer and seconded by Councillor Rose Bowler
RESOLVED that (1) the progress against the review recommendations be noted,

(2) the exceptions to delivery and additional action required by the service be acknowledged,

(3) the report and findings be made public, in accordance with Part 4.5.17(4) of the Constitution,

CUSTOMER SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(4) officers continue to implement the recommendations and submit a final report in six months' time highlighting any exceptions to delivery.

(Scrutiny & Elections Officer)

CS38-22/23 LOCAL LETTINGS POLICY - NEW BUILDS

Scrutiny's consideration was sought in relation to a draft Local Lettings Policy for new build properties before its submission to Executive for approval.

The Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement presented a proposed Local Lettings Policy – New Build, which would apply to new Council housing added via the Bolsover Homes scheme.

The Council's Allocations Policy provided the overall framework for lettings of Council properties. Local lettings policies allowed the Council to respond to local needs and have a localised approach to the management of specific property types. The officer advised that Local Lettings policies may give preference for offers of accommodation to defined groups of customers, for example, on the basis of their age, employment status or local connection to an area.

The Local Lettings Policy – New Build Properties (Appendix 1), detailed the method of allocating the new build properties to those who lived in or had a strong connection to the ward where the new properties were located, in the first instance.

The strong local connection criteria would include:

- Living within the ward where the new build homes were located (for the past 3 years);
- In paid work in the ward – (for the past 3 years);
- Having a close family member (parents, grandparents or children) living in the ward – (for the past 3 years);
- Being able to demonstrate a strong local connection having lived in the area for five years, for example, lived in the area as a child and then moved away.

It was also confirmed that if there were no applicants in the categories above, the properties would be allocated in accordance with the Council Allocations Policy, in order of priority banding and waiting time.

It was intended that the Local Lettings Policy would apply to any new build property built or acquired by the Council and any other new build schemes in the District owned/ managed by the Council. However, where there was a property with adaptations, this would be excluded and allocations would be through the Housing Allocation and Review Panel (HARP) as set out in the Allocation Policy.

As part of the review of the Policy, Members raised the following questions:

A Member noted that the wording of section 4.4 implied that the Council would only let to those in employment and queried if this was the case?

CUSTOMER SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

In response, the officer noted that this had been queried by another Member and would be reworded accordingly. It was noted that the Policy should emphasise that by being employed within the Ward in question, this could give a local connection to the area. This was just one possible criteria a prospective tenant could rely on. There was no criteria which would require a prospective Council tenant to be in employment.

A Member queried how the policy would work alongside the existing allocation process of points/banding?

In response, the officer confirmed that the Policy would only apply to new build Council housing which had been designed to meet a known housing need within specific wards. The aim would be to ensure allocation to people from the locality in the first instance to ensure the housing need was met. Once this phase had taken place, any unallocated new stock would be available to those on the waiting list and subject to the Council's Allocation Policy.

A Member queried whether the Policy would also apply to properties purchased from new estates via s.106?

In response, officers noted that it would apply to those properties as the Council were adding stock via that process where there was an identified need in the area.

A Member noted that within the Bolsover area, there were only new builds coming forward in the Bolsover North & Shuttlewood, and Bolsover East Wards, as Bolsover South had no further capacity for new housing. They sought clarification on whether those resident in Bolsover South be able to apply and move to either of the other two Wards via this Policy?

In response, the officer confirmed that those residents would be able to apply.

A Member queried whether the Policy would apply to properties that the Council were buying to renovate (i.e. empty properties) or houses that the Council were buying to add in to existing stock?

The officer confirmed that it would also apply to those properties.

Moved by Councillor Ray Heffer and seconded by Councillor David Dixon
RESOLVED that Members were satisfied with the draft Local Lettings Policy – New Builds.

(Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement)

CS39-22/23

WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

Committee considered their proposed work programme for 2022/23, and noted remaining items for the rest of the programme up to the end of March.

Moved by Councillor Ray Heffer and seconded by Councillor Rose Bowler

CUSTOMER SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED that the Work Programme 2022/23 be approved and noted.

(Scrutiny & Elections Officer)

The formal part of the meeting concluded at 11:15 hours and Members then met as a working party to continue their review work. The working party concluded at 12:30 hours.