

**Bolsover District Council**

**Meeting of the Employment and Personnel Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

**Customer Service (Complaints and Standards) Staffing**

**Report of the Portfolio Holder – Health & Wellbeing**

Classification	This report is public.
Contact Officer	Lesley Botham, Customer Service Standards and Complaints Manager

**PURPOSE/SUMMARY OF REPORT**

For the Committee to consider the proposal to create a 0.6FTE Complaints and Standards Officer, to make the Customer Service team more resilient and better resourced to deliver the Council's Complaints administration to meet Corporate Standards. This report seeks approval to request additional resources to be able to meet targets and report information to service areas, so we are compliant and streamlined in line with the new requirements.

**REPORT DETAILS**

**Background**

- 1.1 The current Customer Service department structure is made up of the Customer Services Standards and Complaints Manager and 1 Customer Standards and Complaints Officer (CSCO). Contact Centre staffing includes 2.5 FTE Contact Centre Managers and 18.42 FTE Customer Advisors/Meet & Greet Receptionists.
- 1.2 Since April 2024, the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO), Housing Ombudsman (HO) and Regulator for Social Housing have made substantial statutory changes to the way Councils interact with their customers and tenants. As such we have had to change our internal Complaints Comments and Compliments Policy (CCC Policy) to align both Codes for all complaints to comply with the statutory LGO & HO Complaint Handling Codes.
- 1.3 The process has changed in respect of the Complaint stages and timeframes, whereas the previous 3-stage Complaint Handling process has now changed to just a 2-stage process, with shortened response times to the complainant. Informal complaints were previously resolved largely by the customer service team, and relatively quickly. These have now become the stage 1 complaints, this is taking a significantly longer period of time to process as this has now to be dealt with formally, with a written acknowledgement to the customer, an email to the relevant department, co-ordination of a response and then issuing to the customer. As we now only have a 2-stage procedure we are also seeing an increase in what are stage 2 complaints which require a formal review and again co-ordination of responses.

- 1.4 The HO has made it mandatory that the Council now submit an Annual Performance and Improvement Report that looks at housing complaints data. We need to identify trends, show learning, and demonstrate how we have implemented and embedded the Complaint Handling Code and this is extra work collating and analysing data taking up additional time.
- 1.5 The Regulator for Social Housing have revised the consumer standards of which complaints is a key theme and an enhanced focus around learning from complaints. The Council is now required to measure and publish data on the type of complaints received and how we have learnt from complaints to continuously improve our services.
- 1.6 The CSCO will be required to present reports within strict timeframes, attend any tenant or customer participation groups and attend biannual service review meetings with all key service areas. To cascade and discuss improvements, deliver bespoke CCC and Ombudsman training to staff and new starters. All of this impacts on the general administration of complaints which may lead to responses not being handled in accordance with the timeframes. The Ombudsman clearly states within the Code 'resource' cannot be used as a reason to not respond in the appropriate timeframes.
- 1.6 A Customer Advisor is currently supporting the CSCO by covering for leave and the current workload. Since April 2024, 126 additional hours have been used from the overtime budget or time out from the Contact Centre service, to meet demand and the increase of complaints following the removal of the stage 1 Informal process. This is now having a detrimental affect on corporate customer service standards and service delivery.
- 1.7 To compare the CCC's and MP Enquiries administered in the same period by the CSCO this is demonstrating a 25% increase and is in addition to the requirements of the LGO & HO.

2024/25				
	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY
Compliments	18	17	16	25
Comments	4	2	2	2
Stage 1 Complaints	29	27	30	38
Stage 2 Complaints	5	4	6	6
MP Enquiries*	13	13	6	0

\* New Elected MP May

2023/24				
	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY
Compliments	10	19	15	11
Comments	2	4	0	3
Stage 1 Complaints**	30	24	35	20
Stage 2 Complaints	12	9	6	10
Stage 3 Complaints	3	1	1	10
MP Enquiries	16	34	22	14

\*\* Not dealt with by CSCO

## **Details of Proposal or Information**

- 2.1 We are seeking to create an additional permanent post to assist with the increased volume of work generated by the changes outlined above. There are two proposals for consideration.
- 2.2 **Option 1**  
To create a permanent Customer Advisor/Complaints Administrator post. This would be a full-time position with 3 days per week (22hr) dedicated to the Complaints Handling, with 2 days operating as a Customer Advisor (15hr). It is incredibly beneficial for the complaints administrator to have the practical knowledge of the Council's functions, services and departmental duties when undertaking the complaints role. This option would also allow for a reduction in the overtime budget of £8,000.
- 2.3 This post will offer stability across the Customer Service team that bridges both Customer Services Standards and Complaint Handling with Customer Service Team and Housing requirements.
- 2.4 Both posts are a Grade 5, this would mean Option 1 would incur an additional Salary cost including National Insurance and Superannuation of £34,072.09 to be funded from the General Fund, less the reduction of £8,000 from the existing overtime budget, so therefore £26,072.09 in total.
- 2.5 **Option 2**  
To create a permanent dedicated Complaints Administrator for a 3 day per week (22.5hr) to help meet expected compliance and targets. The Grade 5 role would incur an additional salary cost including National Insurance and Superannuation of £20,443.25 to be funded from the General Fund.
- 2.6 It is therefore felt that Option 1 would be the preferred approach as this ensures adequate resource to deal with all complaints in accordance with the HO and LGO together with ensuring compliance with the Council's corporate service standards.
- 2.7 The Customer Service is one of the Council's support services. A proportion of these costs are recharged to the HRA and Dragonfly by Finance, based on use each year-end. Roughly 42% of this cost would be recharged to the HRA and Dragonfly based on the support service calculations performed in March 2024.

## **3. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 3.1 It is recommended that an additional post is added to the establishment to ensure the Council has the appropriate resource to deal with complaints in accordance with the HO & future LGO Code to ensure compliancy. Option 1 would also provide extra resilience to the Customer Services team to ensure corporate standards are met.
- 3.2 An additional post will increase the resilience of the service in preparation for LGO code implementation in April 2025 (the HO element is already active). Create development opportunities for staff, assist in succession planning, improve our customer's experience, and meet the statutory Ombudsman requirements.

#### 4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejections

- 4.1 To remain as the current structure, without re-allocating resource, the Contact Centre Service may not maintain service delivery such as meeting key performance indicators and the CSCO may not meet HO & LGCSO timeframes with complaint responses.
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#### RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. To approve a new full time, Customer Advisor/Complaints Administrator post to be funded by the General Fund.
2. To recommend to Council an annual revenue budget increase of £26,072.09 to the general fund.

Approved by Councillor Mary Dooley, Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing

#### IMPLICATIONS

**Finance and Risk:**            Yes             No

**Details:** The Council is at risk if complaints are not handled appropriately, in cases of maladministration financial penalties can be imposed, resource will not be considered as an acceptable cause for not administering according to HO/LGO Codes. This proposal will mean an annual net increase in the general fund budget of £26,072.09. However, some of the extra cost (42%) will be recovered from the HRA through the support service recharge process.

On behalf of the Section 151 Officer

**Legal (including Data Protection):**            Yes             No

**Details:** There are no areas contained within this report.

On behalf of the Solicitor to the Council

**Environment:**            Yes             No

**Details:** There are no areas contained within this report.

**Staffing:**            Yes             No

**Details:** Covered within the report. Resource will not to be considered as an acceptable cause for not administering according to HO/LGO Codes.

On behalf of the Head of Paid Service

## DECISION INFORMATION

<p><b>Is the decision a Key Decision?</b>          A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards, or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds:</p> <p><b>Revenue - £75,000</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Capital - £150,000</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Please indicate which threshold applies</i></p>	No
<p><b>Is the decision subject to Call-In?</b>  <i>(Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)</i></p>	No

<p><b>District Wards Significantly Affected</b></p>	All
<p><b>Consultation:</b>  <b>Leader / Deputy Leader</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Executive</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  <b>SLT</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Relevant Service Manager</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  <b>Members</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Public</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Other</b> <input type="checkbox"/></p>	Details:

<p><b>Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy, Environment and Housing</b></p>
<p>Providing excellent and accessible services, by continuous improvement to service delivery and listening to our customers.          Having a skilled and engaged workforce and improving the customer experience removing barriers to accessing information.</p>

DOCUMENT INFORMATION	
Appendix No	Title

<p><b>Background Papers</b>  <i>(These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Executive, you must provide copies of the background papers).</i></p>