

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, 16th June 2025 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor Vicky Waplington in the Chair

Councillors Amanda Davis (Vice-Chair), Louise Fox, Jeanne Raspin, Emma Stevenson and Rita Turner.

Officers:- Lesley Botham (Customer Service, Standards and Complaints Manager), Jo Wilson (Housing Strategy and Development Officer), Alice Willoughby (Customer Standards and Complaints Officer), Jane Calladine (Tenant Engagement Officer), Richard Camps (Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing Manager), Thomas Dunne-Wragg (Scrutiny Officer) and Matthew Kerry (Governance and Civic Officer).

Also in attendance at the meeting was Mr. Tony McRae (for item no. CS8-25/26).

CS1-25/26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Mary Dooley (Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing), Cathy Jeffery (Junior Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing), and the Chief Executive Karen Hanson.

CS2-25/26 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business to consider.

CS3-25/26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

CS4-25/26 MINUTES

Moved by Councillor Louise Fox and seconded by Councillor Amanda Davis
RESOLVED that the Minutes of a Customer Services Scrutiny Committee held on 31st March 2025 be approved as a true and correct record.

CS5-25/26 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.

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

CS6-25/26 CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS AND COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS 2025/26 - 1ST JANUARY 2025 TO 31ST MARCH 2025 AND ANNUAL SUMMARY

The Customer Service, Complaints and Standards Manager presented the report to the Committee to provide information on the Council's performance in relation to its customer service standards and the number of compliments, comments and complaints received for Quarter 4 2024/25 (1st January 2025 to 31st March 2025). The Council's overall performance for 2024/25 would also be presented.

A breakdown of the key customer service standards by quarterly period, together with the target and the cumulative performance for each standard, were attached at Appendixes 1 and 2.

Revenues had achieved 88% of incoming calls answered within 20 seconds for Quarter 4 2024/25 (the target had been 70%). Cumulative performance for all 2024/25 was 87% (exceeding the target of 70%).

Benefits had achieved 95% of incoming calls answered within 20 seconds for Quarter 4 2024/25 (the target had been 80%). Cumulative performance for all 2024/25 was 95% (exceeding the target of 80%).

In Quarter 4 2024/25, Revenues and Benefits had received 2,819 and 1,151 emails. In Quarter 3 2024/25, Revenues and Benefits had received 2,299 and 1,037 (this data had only been collected from October 2024).

Contact Centres had achieved 79% of incoming calls answered within 20 seconds for Quarter 4 2024/25 (the target had been 80%). Cumulative performance for all 2024/25 was 77% (the target was 80%).

In Quarter 4 2024/25, Contact Centres had acknowledged all 8,101 email enquiries received within 1 working day (meeting the target of 100%). All emails had been replied to within 8 working days (meeting the target of 100%).

For the year 2024/25, Contact Centres had received 32,382 email enquiries – 100% had been answered within 8 working days.

Contact Centres had answered 89% of incoming Live Chats within 20 seconds for Quarter 4 2024/25 (the target had been 90%). Cumulative performance for all 2024/25 was also 89% (the target was 90%).

For the Corporate Telephone Standard, 91% of incoming calls had been answered within 20 seconds in Quarter 4 2024/25 (above standard).

The majority of departments had achieved and exceeded the corporate target of 90%, with the exception of the following: Revenues & Benefits; Planning & Planning Policy; and Environmental Health.

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Cumulative performance for all 2024/25 was also 91% (the target had been 90%).

The number of unanswered calls in Quarter 4 2024/25 was 7% (within target). The cumulative performance for all 2024/25 was also 7% (the target had been under 10%).

59 Compliments had been received during Quarter 4 2024/25. Go!Active had received 8 Customer Feedback Form Compliments in Quarter 4 2024/25.

15 Comments had been received, with all acknowledged and passed to the respective department within the target time of 5 working days during Quarter 4 2024/25. Go!Active had received 14 Customer Feedback Form Comments in Quarter 4 2024/25.

59 Stage 1 Complaints had been recorded in Quarter 4 2024/25, with 10 M.P. Enquiries received during the same period. 100% of Stage 1 Complaints and M.P. Enquiries had been responded to within the Council's Customer Service Standard of 10 working days.

It was noted that during recent discussions with the M.P.'s Office, the Complaints Team had highlighted the scope of the Council's complaints policy. The M.P.'s Office had advised that in most cases the enquiries received had been concerning housing decisions, which fell outside the scope of the Council's Complaints Policy. As a result, the M.P.'s Office had created email and letter templates to accurately signpost customers.

14 Stage 2 Complaints had been recorded in Quarter 4 2024/25. 94% of Stage 2 Complaints had been responded to within the Council's Customer Service Standard of 20 working days (1 Stage 2 Complaint response had been sent on the 21st working day).

3 Ombudsman (Local Government) Complaints had been received for investigation during Quarter 4 2024/25 in Quarter 4 2024/25. No fault was found by the Local Government Ombudsman for any of these Complaints.

The report detailed the service improvements made following receipt of applicable Comments and Complaints.

The following table provided a summary of performance for the Compliments, Comments and Complaints received in 2024/25, with comparative data from previous years:

Volume by type:	2024/25 Total:	2023/24 Total:	2022/23 Total:	2021/22 Total:
Compliments	268	203	160	187
Comments	33	33	24	23
M.P. Enquiries	46	213	235	126
Informal Stage 1 Complaints	N/A removed from April 2024	265	311	447
Formal Stage 1 Complaints	302	103	116	117
Internal Review Stage 2 Complaints from April 2024	57	27	27	39
Total	706	844	873	938

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% of Comments acknowledged within the standard (Target 5 working days)	100%	100%	100%	100%
% of Stage 1 Complaints responded to within the standard (Target 100%)	99%	98%	88%	91%
Average response in days (Target 10 working days)	5	9	10	11
% of Stage 2 Complaints responded to within the standard (Target 100%)	98%	100%	92%	82%
Average response in days (target 20 working days)	13	12	18	16

When comparing 2024/25 to 2023/24, the following was noted in the report:

- An increase in Compliments;
- A large decrease in M.P. Enquiries;
- A large increase in Stage 1 Complaints;
- An increase in Stage 2 Complaints; and,
- Improvement in Stage 1 Complaints average response time (and within the target percentage).

The Annual Summary comparison for 2024/25 indicated that the Council had a very good and transparent Complaints system and was meeting analysis and regulatory requests from the Ombudsman. The second annual report to the Ombudsman would be presented at the Committee's Extraordinary meeting in August 2025.

To a question on the drop of M.P. Enquiries from previous years, the Customer Service, Complaints and Standards Manager informed with the change in M.P. following the General Election 2024, a change in office administration had also taken place. The Council was now working closely with case workers and it was noted that many previous M.P. Enquiries had been regarding Council service requests.

Both the Council and Derbyshire County Council had previously been granted less time to handle enquiries, resulting in premature Complaints being submitted. This time was now being granted, leading to a reduction of Complaints and more customers successfully accessing the requested Council services.

A Member noted the results were good though asked why there had been a large increase in Formal Stage 1 Complaints for 2024/25. The Customer Standards and Complaints Officer informed Informal Stage 1 Complaints were now included in Formal Stage 1 Complaints – while the number looked higher in reality it remained consistent with previous data sets.

The Chair noted the letter sent to those falling behind on the payment of their Council Tax could read as 'abrupt'. The Customer Service, Complaints and Standards Manager explained it was a standard template but a review of the letter was currently taking place with the Council Tax Team.

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Moved by Councillor Louise Fox and seconded by Councillor Rita Turner

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

The Customer Service, Complaints and Standards Manager and Customer Standards and Complaints Officer left the meeting at 10:16 hours.

CS7-25/26 DAMP AND MOULD POLICY

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer presented the report for the Committee to consider and provide feedback on the Damp and Mould Policy (the 'Policy') – the Committee's comments would be considered by the Executive before approval.

The Council, as a landlord, was responsible for the maintenance of its properties to be in line with the relevant regulations, legislation and guidance. This included keeping tenants' homes safe from hazards under the Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) of the Housing Act 2004. One such identified hazard was damp and mould.

The Housing Ombudsman had published a spotlight report on damp and mould in October 2021, which stated landlords should take a zero-tolerance approach.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 had also introduced "Awaab's Law." The death of Awaab Ishak, a two-year old child living with his parents who sadly passed away from a respiratory condition, was found to have been caused by the presence of damp and mould in their home.

'Awaab's Law' required landlords to fix reported health hazards within prescribed timescales and provided greater powers to the Regulator of Social Housing to ensure housing providers were managing condensation, damp and mould effectively.

The Housing Ombudsman had published a severe maladministration report in October 2024 specific to damp and mould – timeliness was key.

Awaab's Law would come into force (for the social housing sector) from October 2025, with a phased implementation approach. Specific to damp and mould, social landlords were required to investigate reported damp and mould hazards within 14 days, with a written report issued within 48 hours.

For hazards posing a significant risk to health or safety, repair work must have begun within 7 days of the investigation. Emergency repairs, defined as those presenting an immediate and significant risk to residents, had to be completed within 24 hours. Where work could not be undertaken within the timescale, alternative accommodation would need to be provided.

The Policy, attached at Appendix 1, had the key aim of raising awareness of the issues surrounding damp and mould for those living in Council owned properties and to set out the Council's zero-tolerance approach to addressing and resolving reports of damp and mould (in its tenanted properties).

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In addition, the Policy would:

- Provide a clear framework for identifying, reporting, and addressing damp and mould issues;
- Ensure timely and effective responses to reports of damp and mould, and to ensure that repairs to alleviate damp (for example work to guttering and drains, replacing tiles, repairing leaks to pipework, etc.) were carried out as quickly and efficiently as possible, to minimise the impact on the health of the resident and damage to the structure, fixtures and fittings of the property;
- Promote tenant awareness and provide access to information in a variety of formats, and access to support to help residents prevent and reduce risks of damp and mould in their homes;
- To ensure all tenants were treated in a fair, respectful, empathetic and consistent way; and,
- Comply with relevant legislation and regulatory standards, including the HHSRS.

The Council would ensure that all resident-facing Housing Officers and operatives were responsible for spotting damp and mould, reporting and recording the information they gathered – relevant training would be provided.

The Council would ensure that Dragonfly Management (Bolsover) Ltd. staff and subcontractors were capable of diagnosing and remedying damp and mould issues, and that all reports of damp and mould would be fully assessed and responded to appropriately to minimise the risk of conditions returning.

This Policy explained and defined how it would meet the Council's legal obligations.

The Policy contained definitions around the subject of damp and mould and referred to tenant responsibilities in ensuring they took reasonable measures to help reduce the conditions that led to condensation, damp and mould. This reiterated the tenancy agreement and the requirement that tenants report a repair and allow access upon 72 hours' notice for repairs to be actioned.

The Policy also set out how the Council would monitor and report on its performance against these legal requirements, including an escalation process for when noncompliance took place.

To a question on what the Council sent to new tenants to make them aware of controlling damp and mould, the Housing Strategy and Development Officer informed a leaflet, and all appropriate conversations would take place before a tenant's residency began. The routine of good air quality across the entire property, not just the bathroom, was just as important and also promoted.

The Tenant Engagement Officer added the Council would complete 4 visits to a new tenant to encourage appropriate actions to improve air quality and manage issues like damp and mould. It was also a way for the Council to identify other problems / issues taking place before they could escalate.

If tenants were acting inappropriately with managing the property (which could affect their health), the Council would, on a case-by-case basis, seek to work with tenants and visit regularly to try and resolve this. This additional contact could also prove useful if the tenant was vulnerable to other matters unknown.

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Moved by Councillor Rita Turner and seconded by Councillor Louise Fox

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

CS8-25/26 BOLSOVER TENANTS CHALLENGE AND CHANGE GROUP - REVIEW OF GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer explained, as part of the Tenant Engagement Strategy, one of the ways in which tenants could engage with the Council was via the Bolsover Tenants Challenge and Change Group. This Group delivered the tenant scrutiny function of the tenant engagement and governance structure (attached at Appendix 1).

The Review of Grounds Maintenance had taken place between June 2024 and March 2025,

Tenants had been supported by the Tenant Engagement Officer, the Housing Strategy and Development Officer, and the Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing Manager.

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer invited Mr. Tony McRae, a tenant and representative of the Challenge and Change Group, to present the report

Mr. Tony McRae informed tenants had chosen to review the Grounds Maintenance on Council Estates (provided by Streetscene) as they had shared concerns on the quality of the service, on whether voids gardens were being maintained to the required standard, and the negative impact this could have on neighbourhoods.

The tenants had agreed recommendations across four areas:

- Clarification of responsibilities for both tenants and the Council;
- Clarification of the current maintenance programme and potential factors which could impact planned works;
- Evaluation of the quality of maintenance works and how this was assessed by the service; and,
- Analysis of complaints related to grounds maintenance and the actions taken.

As part of the review, tenants had spoken to a number of Council officers and completed site visits to three new build schemes, two existing estates with communal open space, and to two void properties to assess the standard of the grounds maintenance. Six meetings and one day of site visits had taken place.

Tenants had looked at the different areas of ground maintenance (grass cutting, hedge cutting, weed spraying, assisted gardens service, and tree management and maintenance).

Tenants had also reviewed works schedules and sought clarification on how the service adjusted when impacted by incremental weather.

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It was noted that the planning of new trees had not been well maintained. For existing Council properties, hedges and grass areas had been found untidy. Staff resources were stretched. It was found that church / burial grounds were often prioritised over higher-use areas.

12 recommendations were listed in the final report of the review (attached at Appendix 2).

To a question on the parking of vehicles on kerbsides and grass verges / areas, the Housing Strategy and Development Officer informed tenants had shared similar concerns but could not prioritise investigation due to it not being proportional to other concerns and not being able to successfully resolve with any recommendations.

Moved by Councillor Jeanne Raspin and seconded by Councillor Emma Stevenson

RESOLVED that the Customer Services Scrutiny Committee note the recommendations of the Bolsover Tenants Challenge and Change Group in relation to the Grounds Maintenance on Council Estates.

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer, Tenant Engagement Officer, and Mr. Tony McRae left the meeting at 10:40 hours.

CS9-25/26 CUSTOMER SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2025/26

The Scrutiny Officer presented the Work Programme 2025/25 attached at Appendix 1, with the proposed agenda items for approval / amendment listed for the new municipal year.

Attention was drawn to the Extraordinary meeting required before the Executive meeting in September 2025. It was confirmed this Extraordinary meeting would take place on 19th August 2025.

It was noted the document was fluid and could be changed at any point.

Moved by Councillor Amanda Davis and seconded by Councillor Jeanne Raspin

RESOLVED 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.

CS10-25/26 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

Moved by Councillor Rita Turner and seconded by Councillor Emma Stevenson

RESOLVED that the public be excluded from the meeting during the discussion of the following items of business to avoid the disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 7, Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006).

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CS11-25/26

APPROVAL OF THE INFORMATION AND CYBER SECURITY POLICY OCTOBER 2024

The Joint ICT Assistant Director presented the report to the Committee which sought recommendation for the Information and Cyber Security Policy October 2024 (the 'Policy') to the Executive for approval.

The Joint Information and Cyber Security Policy aimed to ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of ICT systems and data for the Council, Dragonfly Developments Ltd. and Dragonfly Management (Bolsover) Ltd.

The Policy was essential for maintaining the successful operation of these entities and protecting the information held, processed, maintained, and shared with other public sector organisations. It was designed to maintain public confidence and ensure compliance with relevant statutory legislation.

The Policy applied to all employees, contractors, partners, agents, and other stakeholders who had access to ICT facilities and data. It covered all assets owned by the parties, information held or owned, ICT infrastructure used, and the physical environment in which the information and / or supporting ICT was used.

The objective of the Policy was to ensure the highest standards of information security were always maintained across the parties.

UNISON had approved the Policy.

Moved by Councillor Amanda Davis and seconded by Councillor Jeanne Raspin

RESOLVED that the Committee recommends the Joint Information and Cyber Security Policy October 2024 to the Executive for approval.

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 11:28 hours.