

## **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, 29<sup>th</sup> September 2025 at 10:00 hours.

### **PRESENT:-**

Members:-

Councillor Vicky Waplington in the Chair

Councillors Amanda Davis, Jeanne Raspin, Emma Stevenson and Rita Turner (from Minute No. CS27-25/26).

Officers:- Steve Brunt (Strategic Director of Services) (from Minute No. CS27-25/26), Elizabeth Ellis (Housing Options Manager), Deborah Whallett (Housing Services Manager), Alice Willoughby (Customer Standards and Complaints Officer), Jo Wilson (Housing Strategy and Development Officer), Angelika Kaufhold (Governance and Civic Manager) and Matthew Kerry (Governance and Civic Officer).

### **CS20-25/26      APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors Louise Fox and Mary Dooley (Portfolio Holder for Health & Wellbeing).

### **CS21-25/26      URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS**

There were no urgent items of business to consider.

### **CS22-25/26      DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

### **CS23-25/26      MINUTES**

Moved by Councillor Emma Stevenson and seconded by Councillor Jeanne Raspin

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of a Customer Services Scrutiny Committee held on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2025 be approved as a true and correct record.

### **CS24-25/26      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 provided as a handout at the meeting.

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

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### **CS25-25/26      CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS AND COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS 2025/26 - 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2025 TO 30<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2025**

The Customer Standards and Complaints Officer 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 1 2025/26 (1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025).

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 78% of incoming calls answered within 20 seconds for Quarter 1 2025/26 (target 70%).

Benefits had achieved 91% of incoming calls answered within 20 seconds for Quarter 1 2025/26 (target 80%).

In Quarter 1 2025/26, Revenues and Benefits had received 4,222 emails – all acknowledged within 1 working day.

For Quarter 1 2025/26, Contact Centres had achieved: 75% of incoming calls answered within 20 seconds (target 75%); abandoned 2% of incoming calls (target less than 3%); and the average waiting time was 35 seconds (target not exceeding 30 seconds).

In the same period, Contact Centres had acknowledged all 8,484 email enquiries received within 1 working day (meeting the target of 100%), with 99.7% of emails replied to within 8 working days (just shy of the target of 100%).

Contact Centres had answered 89% of incoming Live Chats within 20 seconds for Quarter 1 2025/26 (target 90%), with 580 chats answered out of 589 in total.

In Quarter 1 2025/26, all 4 Contact Centres and The Arc's Meet & Greet Reception Desk had received 7,597 visitors.

Monitoring had been undertaken week commencing 12<sup>th</sup> May 2025 to measure waiting times – 80% (519) of customers were served within 20 seconds (648 face to face contacts in total), with the majority of enquiries being for Housing/Repairs, Revenues, Bus Passes, and Meet & Greet Enquiries), and the remaining 20% were waiting up to 20 minutes.

58 Compliments had been received during Quarter 1 2025/26, with Go!Active receiving 7 Customer Feedback Form Compliments within this time.

13 Comments had been received, with all acknowledged and passed to the respective department within the target time of 5 working days during Quarter 1 2025/26, with Go!Active receiving 13 Customer Feedback Form Comments within this time.

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59 Stage 1 Complaints had been recorded in Quarter 1 2025/26, with 10 M.P. Enquiries received during the same period. 97% of Stage 1 Complaints and 100% M.P. Enquiries had been responded to within the Council's Customer Service Standard of 10 working days.

It was noted 2 complaints had fallen just outside of time frame, and that the average days taken to respond to Stage 1 Complaints and M.P. Enquiries was 6 working days.

7 Stage 2 Complaints had been recorded in Quarter 1 2025/25. 100% of Stage 2 Complaints had been responded to within the Council's Customer Service Standard of 20 working days, with the average response being 16 working days.

1 Local Government Ombudsman Complaint and 1 Housing Ombudsman Complaint had been received for investigation during Quarter 1 2025/26. No fault was found for the Complaint sent to the Local Government Ombudsman, while the other was still awaiting a decision.

The report further detailed the service improvements made ("Debtors to look at changing the system so that [a] bailiff... letter [was] not triggered for debts under a certain value" was 1 of the examples provided to the Committee) following receipt of applicable Comments and Complaints.

It was noted that the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Junior Portfolio Holder for Health & Wellbeing would attend a Complaints Conference in October 2025 to help further improve Complaints handling.

A Member noted it was a brilliant set of results and stated the Customer Services Team must be pleased with the current levels of performance.

Moved by Councillor Jeanne Raspin and seconded by Councillor Emma Stevenson

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

## **CS26-25/26      WELFARE AND ADAPTATION POLICY REVIEW**

The Housing Services Manager presented the report to the Committee.

The Council had 4,940 housing properties. The Welfare Adaptation Policy (the 'Policy') provided a framework for the provision of adaptations to the homes of tenants living in Council accommodation.

The Council had approved the Policy May 2022 and was due for renewal, with minor changes to definitions and clarifications made.

Minor adaptations were simple, cost effective solutions to assist a person to live independently (grab rails, small external handrails, etc.) and tended to be under £1,000 in costs. In 2024/25, 42 minor adaptations had been undertaken.

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Major adaptations were valued over £1,000 (replacing a bath with a level access shower or wet room, hard standing / driveways, stair lifts, etc.). In 2024/25, 141 major adaptations had been undertaken.

Several sessions with various officers involved in the Welfare Adaptation process (incl. a representative from Derbyshire County Council) were held. In addition, the Council had reviewed the Housing Ombudsman Good Practice Guidance issued in February 2025 (regarding disabled adaptations in social housing).

Several tenants who had been through the Welfare Adaptation Process (the 'Process') were also invited to form a working group to discuss their experiences and make suggestions for improvement to the Policy and Process.

While it had been intended to recruit a working group of tenants with a wide experience of the Process, only those who had received a good experience could be found. It was noted the Ombudsman would look favourably on the Council seeking to involve tenants in the review.

The key changes within the Policy were;

- Eligibility – the Council had added that the occupant must be using the property as their permanent or principal home for 12 months or more;
- Where a stair lift was required in a block of flats this would only be considered following a feasibility and fire risk assessment;
- Feasibility assessments would be undertaken when looking at the provision of hard standing for wheelchairs users or where this could provide a more economical solution to provide a hard standing that provided additional paths / ramping from the roadside;
- Ramping for self-purchased wheelchairs or mobility scooters might not be considered unless assessed as a necessary requirement by an Occupational Therapist or other suitably qualified medical professional;
- Where a level access shower was required in properties at first floor or above, this could be considered following a feasibility and / or accommodation needs assessment;
- Should alternative suitable accommodation become available prior to work commencing, the Council could make this as an alternative offer to the adaption agreed;
- The Council had removed reference to a £500 rent arrears threshold, rather stating where there were any arrears, and that the Council make contact with the applicant to ensure a payment plan was in place and being adhered to prior to works being carried out.

The Updated Policy was attached at Appendix 1.

To a question on how much a wet room adaptation could cost, the Housing Services Manager believed it to be around £5,000-£6,000, though the Repairs Team would be able to answer accurately.

To a question on the most expensive adaptation the Council could make, the Housing Services Manager informed it would be extensions of properties. An example of a recent request was provided to the Committee – an extension would have cost £100,000.

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However, in this circumstance a Council owned 3-bedroomed new-build property (already fully adapted and which met all the tenant's criteria) had become available within 1 mile of the tenant's residence – this had been offered to the tenant, saving the Council from providing the extension.

Moved by Councillor Jeanne Raspin and resolved by Councillor Amanda Davis

**RESOLVED** that the Scrutiny Committee review and provide comments on the updated Welfare Adaptation Policy prior to final approval by Executive.

### **CS27-25/26      PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY - MONITORING UPDATE**

The Housing Strategy and Development Officer presented the report to the Committee.

The Private Sector Housing Strategy 2024-2027 (the 'Strategy') was the Council's first dedicated strategy aimed solely at the private sector. It was noted that funding for the Strategy had been jointly secured with North East Derbyshire District Council.

Owner occupied and privately rented properties made up over 83.3% of homes in the District (Census 2021).

Many homes in the private sector in the District were in poor condition.

Data analysis completed as part of development of the Strategy showed that 45.8% did not meet Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C, and 16.3% of owner-occupied homes and 18.6% of privately rented properties failed the Decent Homes Standard for having a Category 1 hazard (which posed a serious and immediate risk to a person's health).

Following approval by Council of the Strategy in 2024, a range of activity had progressed, and the Strategy was delivered in partnership across Housing Management, Housing Options, Environmental Health, and Planning Policy.

#### **Key achievements:**

Objective 1 had included:

- Delivery of a joint Landlord Forum November 2024;
- Securing £1.2m grant funding via Warm Homes: Local Grant for delivery across the private sector (the programme targeted households with an EPC rating of D-G, combined with a low household income;
- Work had commenced on design of the new Housing Enforcement Policy (to complete end of 2025);
- New literature had been devised for damp and mould advice;
- The Council's website was revised to include a wider range of links and advice for both private landlords and tenants on rights and responsibilities;
- DASH Services and Call Before You Serve (CB4YS) were continually promoted by the Housing Options team, particularly the Triage Officers; and,
- The renewal of a DASH Services contract.

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Objective 2 was:

- Analysis of the private rented sector provision by Supported Accommodation Review Team (SART) officers – data showed good success rates placing those presenting as homeless in the privately rented sector.

Objective 3 had included:

- Development of an in-house design and contract management service for the Disabled Facilities Grant following the closure of the Derbyshire County Council (DCC) service;
- Background research completed for new minor adaptations policy; and
- DCC consultation on potential withdrawal of the Healthy Homes Project – this could lead to the need for a District level approach.

### **Immediate plans for future delivery:**

Objective 1 had included:

- Run a Landlord Forum for 2025;
- Develop a Landlord / Agent e-bulletin;
- Complete year 1 of Warm Homes: Local Grant and secure further interest for years 2 and 3;
- Develop an Intervention Strategy to support landlords to meet the requirements of the Renters' Rights Bill (the 'Bill') and help 'myth bust' the legislation;
- Freedom of Information contact to all Registered Providers operating in the District to establish current stock, future plans, secure access to affordable stock via additional nomination rights, and establish options for development of new affordable stock.

Objective 2 was:

- Further develop working relationships with local Landlords / Agents to create additional links to private rented sector. This would be particularly important once the Bill was formally enacted – the sector would require additional support to comply with new regulations.

Objective 3 had included:

- Raise awareness of support options for older and vulnerable tenants as part of a Landlord Forum 2025; and,
- Develop a database of private rented sector adapted properties to enable tenant referrals by Housing Allocations and Housing Options teams.

Objective 4 was:

- New Council Tax charges for empty properties would come into force April 2026.

The Private Sector Housing Strategy Delivery Plan was attached at Appendix 1 and the Strategy was attached at Appendix 2.

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While the Bill required Landlords to consider much, it was important to provide support where possible – no local authority would be able to compensate a further reduction in the numbers of privately rented properties.

For the provision of supported accommodation, the Council was working with Amber Valley, Chesterfield, High Peak, and North East Derbyshire District / Borough Councils to help deliver this service.

It was noted that after DCC had withdrawn the previously offered Disability Design Team which supported delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants, the Council had moved to provide its own in conjunction with North East Derbyshire District Council. This service had become operational from April-May 2025 and it was offered that the Service Manager (Environmental Health) could provide more information if requested.

For the matter of empty properties in the District, the Council would consider the UK Government's efforts and its attempts to address this issue. It would not be easy and could prove expensive, but the Council could consider compulsory purchase orders – Planning Services were investigating this future option and would report to the Council by end of March 2026.

Developing communications with Landlords / Agents would be a worthwhile endeavour, as while face-face conferences had proven highly successful they required extensive organising and investment. It was also acknowledged that joint work with Planning Services to contact local registered providers operating within the District would build improved knowledge of their housing stock and future development plans.

For the Warm Homes: Local Grant (the 'Grant') objective, the Committee was informed that this 3-year programme had started April 2025, and a service level agreement had been made with Bassetlaw District Council for them to deliver the programme on our behalf.

7 locations (based on nationally determined eligible postcodes) had been identified in the District where properties would be automatically entitled where their property was below EPC rating C. Following assessment of the property, they would be provided with the measures identified as delivering the best efficiency Grant. For those households not in an auto-eligible postcode, there were other criteria related to household income / benefits received which meant the Grant scheme could still be accessed (a household income not exceeding £36,000).

Homes assessed would likely receive improvements such as loft insulation, heating system improvements or solar panels (the latter to help reduce energy costs).

To a question on how Landlords were found, the Housing Strategy and Development Officer informed the Council would regularly update a database of existing known Landlords. The Council would also attempt to build relationships with Agents, though this could prove challenging as there was currently no mandatory requirement for Landlords to engage and register with local authorities – if Members were aware of interested Landlords through their casework, they could ask for them to contact the Council. The requirement for a landlord to register with the local authority would change once the Bill received assent.

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It was noted some Landlords might only want information and / or support – services such as DASH could provide this, and the Council regularly directed landlords to them.

The Housing Options Manager informed the recent face-face conference had been to help address the fear of the unknown that Landlords might have for matters such as the Renters' Rights Bill.

Moved by Councillor Jeanne Raspin and seconded by Councillor Emma Stevenson

**RESOLVED** that Members review the attached Delivery Plan, progress made to date, and plans for the immediate future.

### **CS28-25/26      HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2022-27 - UPDATE**

The Housing Options Manager presented the report to the Committee.

The Bolsover Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy (the 'Strategy') was attached at Appendix 1 and sought to build upon a multi-agency response, seen during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic, to continue to prevent and reduce homelessness in the District.

There were 4 clear strategic priorities, broken down into individual actions, within the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan (the 'Plan'), which was attached at Appendix 2. These were:

1. Make homelessness everyone's responsibility through a systemwide approach;
2. Prevent and respond to homelessness through early intervention and personalised solutions;
3. End rough sleeping and repeat homelessness; and,
4. Develop sustainable supported and settled housing solutions.

The 5-year Strategy was developed in partnership with all Derbyshire lower-tier authorities and Derbyshire County Council. All the local authorities had adopted the Strategy by the end of 2022. The Strategy was formally launched in May 2023 with an event attended by over one hundred partners from across Derbyshire.

Building on achievements outlined at the Committee's July 2024 meeting, updates from the previous 12 months included:

- Supported housing improvement programme (SHIP);
- Trauma Informed Derbyshire;
- Health Needs Audit;
- SIGNAL pilot extension;
- SALUS project; and,
- Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant (RSPARG) funded projects.

Details on each of the above were provided in the report.



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Current funding arrangements for these services were through a joint bid with all Derbyshire local authorities. There was still some uncertainty about how the UK Government would be funding rough sleeping from 2026 – local authorities had started a process of assessing options depending on the level of funding received.

### **Current / future actions included:**

- Prison release protocol, final draft presented to Derbyshire Homeless Officers Group (DHOG) in September 2025 – the protocol was a collaborative commitment to improve data sharing for individuals in custody where they were presenting with unstable housing options. To ensure that where possible rough sleeping was rare, brief and non-recurring, and to collaborate with partners to ensure efforts to secure accommodation begin as soon as possible to prevent homelessness on release;
- Temporary accommodation review, analysis of usage and availability across the Derbyshire region – to be completed by the Homelessness Special Projects Officer to forecast future demand and suitability of current options;
- Continued representation at East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) meetings – to continue attendance and advocate for commitment to collaborate within the EMCCA region; and,
- Duty to refer improvements – specific public bodies had a duty to refer to notify the council if a person was homeless, or at risk of homelessness, within 56 days. The timeliness and quality of these referrals was very important for an effective response.

It was noted that the Council was in a stronger position on background research than other comparable local authorities, which would help future arrangements and policy making after Local Government Reorganisation had taken place.

Staff would be able to access assistance after handling emotionally demanding homelessness and rough sleeping cases.

It was noted the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) would be reviewing how funding was allocated – homelessness support currently covered numerous grants and so MHCLG intended to bring together the grants to make it easier to apply and receive available funding.

For the prison release protocol, improved data sharing would take place between prisons and local authorities to prevent homelessness.

Temporary accommodation would be reviewed across Derbyshire in anticipation of Local Government Reorganisation and what EMCCA's role would be in future.

It was noted preventing crisis homelessness in the first place was essential as while Bed & Breakfast establishments could be the best outcome for one night, it was not a sustainable option.

A Member informed that inadequate mental health discharge was preventable through improved communication. The Housing Options Manager stated mental health services were in a very difficult situation and patient discharge (without knowing future accommodation situations) was often the only option available.

The recommendation was amended to note the Strategy.

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Moved by Councillor Rita Turner and seconded by Councillor Amanda Davis

**RESOLVED** that the Customer Services Scrutiny Committee note the contents of the Bolsover Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy and make any necessary recommendations arising from this work area.

*Councillor Jeanne Raspin left the meeting at 10:56 hours.*

### **CS29-25/26      REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNCIL'S WASTE COLLECTION AND DISPOSAL EDUCATION - POST SCRUTINY MONITORING UPDATE (SECOND INTERIM REPORT)**

The Governance & Civic Manager 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 as part of its 2023/24 Work Programme.

The issue was initially raised due to concerns of contamination rates within recycling waste collections, creating additional costs to the Council through contamination charges.

The Committee had put together 11 recommendations, as outlined in the attached Appendices, which would aim to ensure that the Council's approach to waste disposal advice and education was reaching all target audiences, reduce current contamination rates, and improve recycling rates by way of increased resident participation.

To date, 9 out of the 11 recommendations had been achieved: 1 recommendation had been with the intent to complete in 2026; 1 recommendation was marked 'Alert' as it was not able to be completed due to Local Government Reorganisation implications.

The continued access issues to provide disposal education in schools was discussed.

The Committee was informed that whilst the amount of burgundy bin material recycling had increased, garden waste collected in Quarter 1 2025/26 had been 500 tonnes lower than Quarter 1 2024/25 due to the extended hot, dry spring and summer 2025 conditions. This had resulted in a lower combined recycling rate.

On the current and future collections of food waste, the Strategic Director of Services stated commercial waste collections had commenced April 2025 and domestic / household waste (which included schools) collections would commence April 2026.

To a question on the feedback on the disposal education materials provided to schools (if access was not achieved), the Strategic Director of Services informed this information could be requested.

During a discussion of bulky waste collections, the Strategic Director of Services had noted that North East Derbyshire District had 25% more households and around 650 incidences of fly tipping per annum. The District, in comparison, had around 1,400 per annum, despite its more rural nature.

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The Housing Strategy and Development Officer observed the District had more communication / infrastructure links than North East Derbyshire District – a likely reason for the higher figure.

The Strategic Director of Services informed the Assistant Director of Streetscene, Community Safety and Enforcement was undertaking efforts to bring Enforcement of this issue into the Council (it was currently a shared service with North East Derbyshire District Council).

Moved by Councillor Rita Turner and seconded by Councillor Emma Stevenson

**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; and,
- 4) Officers continue to implement the recommendations and submit a further report in six months' time highlighting progress and any exceptions to delivery.

### **CS30-25/26      CUSTOMER SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2025/26**

The Governance & Civic Manager presented the Work Programme 2025/26, attached at Appendix 1, to the Committee.

The Committee was informed, following the departure of the previous Scrutiny Officer from the Council, all reviews would be paused.

Moved by Councillor Amanda Davis and seconded by Councillor Emma Stevenson

**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 meeting concluded at 11:10 hours.