

CUSTOMER SERVICE & TRANSFORMATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Customer Service and Transformation Scrutiny Committee of the Bolsover District Council held as a Virtual Meeting by Video Conference and Live Streamed on the Council's website on Monday 14th September 2020 at 1000 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor Rose Bowler in the Chair

Councillors Rita Turner (Vice-Chair), Jane Bryson, Anne Clarke, Tricia Clough, Paul Cooper, David Dixon, Ray Heffer and Andrew Joesbury.

Officers:- Ann Bedford (Customer Standards and Complaints Officer), Joanne Wilson (Scrutiny and Elections Officer) and Alison Bluff (Governance Officer).

Also in attendance at the meeting was Councillor Mary Dooley, Portfolio Holder for Partnerships and Leisure.

CUS9-20/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

CUS10-20/21 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business.

CUS11-20/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were requested to declare the existence and nature of any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or other interests, not already on their register of interests, in any item on the agenda and withdraw from the meeting at the appropriate time.

There were no declarations of interest.

CUS12-20/21 MINUTES - 3RD AUGUST 2020

Moved by Councillor Rose Bowler and seconded by Councillor Rita Turner

RESOLVED that the Minutes of a Customer Service and Transformation Scrutiny Committee held on 3rd August 2020 be approved as a correct record.

CUS13-20/21 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.

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Moved by Councillor Rose Bowler and seconded by Councillor David Dixon

RESOLVED that the List of Key Decisions and items to be considered in private document be noted.

CUS14-20/21 CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS / COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS 2019/20 (1ST OCTOBER 2019 TO 31ST MARCH 2020) AND ANNUAL SUMMARY

Committee considered a report which provided information on the Council's performance in relation to its customer service standards and effective management of complaints for the period 1st October 2019 to 31st March 2020 and the annual summary for 2019/20.

Customer Service Standards

Appendix 1 to the report provided a breakdown of the key customer service standards by quarterly period, together with the target and the cumulative performance for each standard.

Telephones - Target - 93% to be answered within 20 seconds

Appendix 2 to the report provided performance information between 1st October 2019 and 31st March 2020 by quarterly period. The report identified that 98% (in both Quarter 3 and Quarter 4) of incoming calls were answered corporately within 20 seconds cumulatively. The departments narrowly missing the key customer service standard of 93% for those periods were;

- Housing and Community Safety 92% in Q3
- Planning 92% in Q3.

Cumulatively, performance is 98% over 2019/20.

Contact Centres - Target - 80% of incoming calls to be answered within 20 seconds

Contact Centres achieved 80% and 76% for Q3 & 4 respectively (78% cumulatively).

Cumulatively performance was 78% over 2019/20, which fell just short of the target of 80%.

Revenues & Benefits - Target - 60% of incoming calls to be answered within 20 seconds

Revenues & Benefits 'direct dial' achieved 81% and 81% for Q3 & 4 respectively (81% cumulatively).

Cumulatively performance was 77% over 2019/20, which exceeded the target of 60%.

E-mails - Target 1 - 100% to be acknowledged within 1 working day and Target 2 - 100% to be replied to within 8 working days

6,488 email enquiries (3,388 in Q3 and 3,100 in Q4) were received from the public through enquiries@bolsover.gov.uk - all were acknowledged within 1 working day and 99% were replied to in full within 8 working days.

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Emailing remained the popular method of contacting the Council with more e-mails received by the public in the reporting period compared to the same period in 2018/19 of 4,798 emails.

Face to face monitoring - Target – 99% not kept waiting longer than 20 minutes at a Contact Centre

Waiting times were monitored for 1 week (w/c 15th July 2019) in 2019/20 due to the Contact Centre being closed because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Of the 813 customers who called into the Contact Centres, 812 (99.9%) waited less than 20 minutes to be served. This exceeded the corporate target and demonstrated excellent service.

During the same period, 199 callers were served on Meet & Greet at The Arc, bringing the total number of callers served during the monitoring period to **1012**.

Compliments, Comments and Complaints

Compliments

Written compliments received for the period by department were set out at Appendix 3 (A) attached to the report.

In total 218 written compliments were received from customers who appreciated excellent service. These included 44 for Leisure, 35 for Streetscene, 35 for Revenues & Benefits and 26 for Housing. As some compliments cross cut departments, the number did not correspond with the total above when viewed in this way.

A Member referred to the several compliments received for a Tutor who had delivered training in relation to safeguarding and protecting children and requested that a letter of thanks be sent to the Tutor from the Committee acknowledging how well she had done.

In relation to compliments, comments and complaints which cross cut departments, a Member requested that these be broken down by department on future reports.

Comments

Written comments received for the period were set out at Appendix 3 (B) attached to the report. 100% (all 39) were acknowledged and passed to the respective department within the target time of 3 working days for consideration when reviewing their service.

Complaints

Frontline resolution (stage one)

The number of Frontline Resolution complaints received by the Contact Centre service and recorded on the Customer Information System (Firmstep) by department were set out at Appendix 3 (C) attached to the report. The customer service standard for responding to these complaints was 3 working days.

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Formal Investigation (stage two)

Formal Investigation complaints by department were set out at Appendix 3 (D) attached to the report. 110 complaints were received during the period and 92% were responded to within the customer service standard of 15 working days.

This had not met the target of 97% and was due to officer availability who were dealing with contingency plans in relation to the Covid 19 pandemic which consequently impacted on response times.

As some complaints cross cut departments, the number did not correspond with the total above when viewed in this way.

Internal Review (stage three)

Stage three complaints received for the period by department were set out at Appendix 3 (E) attached to the report. These were complainants who had already made a stage two complaint and still felt dissatisfied.

Thirteen stage three complaints were received, 77% (10) of which were responded to within the standard of 20 working days. Again, this did not meet the target of 100% due to the Covid 19 pandemic impacting on the availability of officers and consequently response times.

Ombudsman

The status of Ombudsman complaints for 2019/20 as at the end of March 2020 was set out at Appendix 3 (F) attached to the report.

Three cases were received during the period – 1 decision was 'Not upheld: no maladministration', 1 was commuted to the Internal Review stage as the complainant had not fully completed the complaints process and a decision was still awaited regarding the third.

A table in the report provided a summary of performance for compliments, comments and complaints for 2019/20 with comparative data from previous years.

Complaints Feedback

Whilst there were no real trends leading to service improvements during the financial year some issues had been identified around the New Bolsover regeneration project, which was currently the subject of a Scrutiny Review.

A Member requested clarity on the number of stage 2 complaints which cross cut service areas and the % responded to in time. The Customer Standards and Complaints Officer advised Committee that 3 or 4 different departments could be involved in a complaint and she referred Members to the 'out of time' column in Appendix 3 (C). For future reports the Customer Standards and Complaints Officer would list each department involved in a complaint and the % of who had responded in time.

Another Member noted that as Covid 19 had only impacted on the last two weeks of March 2020, from the report, there were clearly some complaints raised prior to the

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pandemic that were not completed in the designated timescale. She queried if any of these cross-cut more than one service area or if they only related to stage 2 complaints raised in March. The Customer Standards and Complaints Officer confirmed that the 15 working days response time for some complaints received towards the end of February had been impacted on due to the Covid 19 pandemic impacting on the availability of officers who had been deployed to other service areas and also that some officers had been unavailable due to displaying symptoms of Covid 19.

With regard to Stage 3 complaints failing to meet their target, a Member queried at what point these had been received by the Council in relation to the timing of Covid 19 and how far over the 20 day response time they had been completed.

The Customer Standards and Complaints Officer noted that again these were complaints received by the Council towards the end of February and had gone over target due to officer unavailability for the same reasons as stated previously. However, she asked Committee to note that this had affected only 3 Stage 3 complaints which were completed in 22 working days. She added that this situation was being monitored going forward

Another Member queried how a number of similar complaints sent in by Councillors on behalf of constituents were counted. For example, 10 separate complaints received by a Councillor regarding the same issue. The Customer Standards and Complaints Officer replied that if these complaints were for a service request, they would be put through to the Contact Centre but if they were formal complaints regarding the same issue, it would be counted as 1 complaint. If it included more than one department it would be counted as a complaint against each department involved but responded to as 1 complaint.

A Member referred to Appendix 1 in the report and a gap in data for Quarter 4. She queried if monitoring had not taken place in the early part of Quarter 4 or if some data could have been partially reported. The Customer Standards and Complaints Officer replied that two periods of monitoring for face to face enquiries took place each year, however, the second period of monitoring did not take place in March due to Covid 19. The grayed out boxes in the table in the report were the periods where monitoring would not normally take place.

A Member queried how Stage 3 complaints were now dealt with following the departure of the Chief Executive Officer and which officer was the final point of contact and signatory.

The Customer Standards and Complaints Officer replied that Stage 3 complaints were now dealt with by the Council's 3 Directors and also the Monitoring Officer as she had a role in the complaints process and the Ombudsman complaints.

A Member queried if a Director would deal with a complaint in relation to their own directorate. The Customer Standards and Complaints Officer advised Committee that they could. However, if a complaint was in relation to that Director or they were part of a complaint, then the internal review would be passed to another Director to carry out.

In relation to the 'Summary for 2019/20' in the report, a Member noted that there had been more written complaints and this went against the Council's aim to generally

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encourage more digital transactions where possible. There had also been more Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints which required greater investigation. Although this showed the complaints system was accessible at the higher stages, the Member queried if it were an indication that customer standards were not being met in certain areas. The Customer Standards and Complaints Officer replied that the Ombudsman was now recognising that the volume of complaints received by a council was not an indicator of how poorly it was performing but that it was about justified complaints and service improvements which followed on from a justified or partially justified complaint.

Moved by Councillor Rose Bowler and seconded by Councillor Rita Turner
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

CUS15-20/21 ANNUAL LETTER FROM THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN 2019/20

Committee considered a report which provided information contained within the Annual Letter from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) 2019/20 which was appended to the report.

The LGSCO letter contained an annual summary of statistics on the complaints made about the Authority for the financial year ending 31st March 2020. Committee was asked to note that the data provided by the LGSCO may not align with the data the Council held as the LGSCO numbers included enquiries from people who had been signposted back to the Council by the LGSCO but then the enquirer(s) may have chosen not to pursue their complaint.

Key points;

- The LGSCO had received 11 enquiries and complaints during 2019/20, four of which were subject to a detailed investigation.
- The LGSCO decided 16 complaints, of which 2 were incomplete or invalid, 8 were closed after initial enquiries, 2 were referred back to the Council and 3 were 'no maladministration'. The remaining one was decided as 'maladministration and injustice'. This was a particularly complex case and fault was found in the delays which occurred.

Benchmarking information looking at close neighbouring authorities comparative figures was contained in the report or Committee's information.

One complaint was upheld against the Council (25%) which may seem high but this was based on a small number on detailed investigations (4 in this period).

The LGSCO had upheld 61% of complaints submitted to them in 2019/20 – this was an increase from 58% in 2018/19 with the average being 45% for similar authorities.

The Council also received 1 complaint via the Housing Ombudsman (HO), for the same period, which was also reviewed by them. In both cases the decision was to 'close the case and there was no maladministration'.

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A Member noted the training courses referred to in the LGSCO letter and queried how many of the Council's staff had attended courses to improve their skills. The Customer Standards and Complaints Officer replied that she attended the LGSCO course each year. The Council had also hosted a training event in 2018 on behalf of the Planning Ombudsman (PO) which included neighbouring authorities. Although, the PO did not deal with planning decision complaints they did deal with complaints about how these had been administered by the Council. Currently online courses were being offered by the PO and the Customer Standards and Complaints Officer was arranging for relevant staff to attend these.

Moved by Councillor Rose Bowler and seconded by Councillor Andrew Joesbury
RESOVLED that the report be noted.

The Customer Standards and Complaints Officer, Councillors Mary Dooley and Andrew Joesbury left the meeting.

CUS16-20/21 WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

Committee considered their work programme 2020/21.

It was noted that some items on the work plan were provisional and the Scrutiny & Elections Officer would update the plan and inform Members as confirmation of items and officer availability were made.

Moved by Councillor Rose Bowler and seconded by Councillor Ray Heffer
RESOLVED that the Work Programme 2020/21 be noted.

The meeting concluded at 10:57 hours.