



Back our essential workers: Service with Respect campaign

APPG on Customer Service Annual General Meeting, 6th July 2021

This meeting was a virtual meeting, held on Zoom

In attendance:

- Philip Davies MP, Chair (Conservative, Shipley)
- Chris Evans MP, Co-Chair (Labour, Islwyn)
- Andrew Lewer MP, Officer (Conservative, Northampton South)
- Steven Bonnar MP, Officer (SNP, Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill)
- Charlotte Nichols MP, Officer (Labour, Warrington North)
- Liz Twist MP, Officer (Labour, Blaydon)
- Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle, Officer (Green Party)
- Margaret Ferrier MP (Independent, Rutherglen and Hamilton West)
- Alex Wheeler – parliamentary assistant to Philip Davies MP
- Emma Evans – parliamentary assistant to Chris Evans MP
- Stine Holm – parliamentary assistant to Liz Twist MP
- Jo Lloyd – parliamentary assistant to Carolyn Harris MP
- Michael Gauterin – Director of Enterprise Customer Service and Operations at BT
- Liz Fairburn – Head of Claims Response, Travel, Pet & Creditor at Direct Line Group
- Ryan Hilton - Head of Functional Intelligence at Direct Line Group
- Carla Thomas – Director of Business Customer Service at Openreach
- Patrick Holdaway – Head of Organisational Learning, National Business Crime Centre
- Joanna Causon – Chief Executive at the Institute of Customer Service
- David Dagger - Marketing and Communications Director at the Institute of Customer Service
- Anne Stoddart – Client Relationship Director at the Institute of Customer Service
- Kelsey Pienaar – Executive Assistant at the Institute of Customer Service
- Gareth Morgan – Managing Director at Cavendish Advocacy
- Oliver Hazell – Senior Account Manager at Cavendish Advocacy
- Chloé Bester – Monitoring Assistant at Cavendish Advocacy

Philip Davies MP opened the session by thanking all in attendance and stated that it was necessary to elect the chair and officers at this AGM meeting.

- Philip Davies MP and Chris Evans MP both continue in their role as Chair and Co-Chair respectively.
- For the election of officers, after no alternative nominations were made, Parliamentarians in attendance were issued an email with links allowing them to vote which they used to re-elect Andrew Lewer MP, Bill Esterson MP and Carolyn Harris MP as officers to the APPG. Also elected as new officers to the APPG were Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle, Liz Twist MP, Charlotte Nichols MP and Steven Bonnar MP.
- Philip Davies MP then updated attendees on the progress of the Police, Crime, Sentencing Courts Bill, and Matt Vickers MP's amendment to the Bill. In his update, Mr Davies mentioned that Government has agreed with MPs to introduce an amendment in the House of Lords on a parallel offence for abuse against customer service workers. Mr Davies said MPs are now working with Robert Buckland MP to draft an agreeable amendment. He then went on to call on fellow parliamentarian to keep pushing the Government on this.

Following, Mr Davies opened the floor to Joanna Causon, Chief Executive of the Institute of Customer Service.

Contributions from invited speakers

Joanna Causon, Chief Executive at the Institute of Customer Service

- Gave an update on the 'Service with Respect' campaign.
- Reiterated that the campaign aims to create a deterrent to customer service abuse, and asks employers to take more responsibility.



- Shared that the Institute met with Kit Matlhouse MP about creating a parallel offence for the abuse of customer service workers.
- Offered to share case studies with Parliamentarians if interested.

Carla Thomas, Director of Business Service, Openreach

- Stated that last year one month alone saw more instances of abuse of workers than the year before that.
- Shared a case study of an apprentice working in London, who was stabbed whilst doing his job.
- Shared another case study of someone who was abused whilst someone was trying to steal his telecoms testing equipment.
- Noted that there were 11 assault cases against engineers last month.
- Mentioned that Openreach are considering different means to protect their engineers, such as panic alarms and biometric testing.
- Stressed that their staff are trained to handle assault, as well as on how to defuse situations.

Patrick Holdaway, National Business Crime Centre

- Said he was responsible for tackling the abuse that centred around misinformation on 5G and the accompanying workers.
- Suggested that until there is some understanding of the level of abuse, it is difficult to tackle the abuse of customer service workers.
- Shared that numerous constabularies are focusing on this topic, particularly the constabulary in Sussex.

Philip Davies MP, Chair of the APPG for Customer Service

- Asked Carla what the police response was to the two case studies she had shared.

Carla Thomas, Director of Business Customer Service at Openreach

- Said the perpetrator that stabbed one case study had been arrested, but added that this arrest is in the midst of being processed, so there is no outcome yet.
- Added that the other case study's perpetrator has not yet been found.
- Emphasised that the trauma associated with these instances of abuse came from the abuse itself, rather than how the police have dealt with the instances.

Philip Davies MP, Chair of the APPG for Customer Service

- Asked Carla what effect the abuse of workers has had on the wider workforce within Openreach?

Carla Thomas, Director of Business Customer Service at Openreach

- Observed that there is a wider effect felt after instances of abuse. Indeed, workers feel less safe whilst working after an incident of abuse.

Michael Gauterin, Director of Enterprise Customer Service and Operations at BT

- Agreed with Carla, adding that a similar effect is felt within the wider BT field workforce after an incident
- Shared that in BT they also take all the UK's 999 calls - this is often an area where the most abuse is centred.

Patrick Holdaway, Head of Organisational Learning at National Business Crime Centre

- Noted that there is a massive number of underreporting of retail crimes.
- Acknowledged the barriers to reporting, but said the policing sector are working to address this.

Joanna Causon, Chief Executive at the Institute of Customer Service

- Shared a case study of a transport company where customers were pulling emergency alarms to get workers to enter the carriages to abuse them.
- Stressed that there is evidence from a range of sectors, which illustrates that abuse of customer service workers is not isolated to particular sectors.
- Emphasised that a change in behaviour is important as well as implementing a deterrent.

Liz Twist MP, Member of Parliament for Blaydon

- Noted that the issue of reporting crimes was raised by the Minister during a recent debate.
- Added that people are less inclined to report instances of abuse if they don't think police will respond.



Patrick Holdaway, Head of Organisational Learning at National Business Crime Centre

- Clarified that he is unable to discuss the police response to customer service abuse as there is simply not enough data to understand what the levels of reporting are and consequently the response that is being enacted.

Andrew Lewer MP, Member of Parliament for Northampton South

- Shared a case study of a constituent who is a shop owner, and was followed home by an abusive customer after they were removed from the store.
- Stressed there is a need for on the ground responses to instances of abuse, as well as raising awareness of customer service abuse.

Patrick Holdaway, Head of Organisational Learning at National Business Crime Centre

- Shared that police are hoping to have more resources soon to be able to adequately address on-the-ground abuse.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle

- Said there is a tendency to focus on the public's inappropriate abuse and behaviour.
- Suggested focus should also be placed on businesses and their responsibility to properly service their customers.

Joanna Causon, Chief Executive at the Institute of Customer Service

- Agreed with Baroness Bennett's point, stressing that the 'Service with Respect' campaign does not excuse poor customer service.
- Added that there are instances of housing associations where workers are too afraid to service homes.

Ryan Hilton, Head of Functional Intelligence at Direct Line Group

- Stated that at Direct Line Group they are empowering their employees to terminate calls if the customer becomes abusive.

Philip Davies MP, Chair of the APPG for Customer Service

- Asked if workers perceive this abuse as "part of the job", or is it addressed by the company.

Michael Gauterin, Director of Enterprise Customer Service and Operations at BT

- Clarified that BT has a zero-tolerance policy of abuse.
- Noted the worrying tendency to accept abuse as part of the job.
- Stated that BT support calls for a deterrent to be put in place to stop the abuse of workers.

Philip Davies MP, Chair of the APPG for Customer Service

- Asked if BT has a system by which they can address abuse internally.

Michael Gauterin, Director of Enterprise Customer Service and Operations at BT

- Said there is an auditing and recording system, which can be used to highlight instances of abuse and internally address why they are not acceptable.

Philip Davies MP, Chair of the APPG for Customer Service

- Urged Parliamentarian colleagues to consider Matt Vickers MP's amendment to the Police, Crime, Sentencing Courts Bill to change the wording of the Bill, as it is important to stress that abuse of workers goes beyond the retail sector.

Philip Davies MP, Chair of the APPG for Customer Service

- Asked Ryan if there is an upward trajectory of abusive customers.

Ryan Hilton, Head of Functional Intelligence at Direct Line Group

- Noted that approximately 2% of customer engagement is abusive at Direct Line.
- Admitted that data collection needs to be strengthened internally.
- Added that Direct Line are aiming to more actively refer instances of abuse to the police.



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Liz Fairburn, Head of Claims Response, Travel, Pet & Creditor at Direct Line Group

- Pointed out that workers at home do not have colleagues and a support network to lean on after instances of abuse.
- Shared a case study whereby a customer was homophobic with a phonenumber worker, thinking it was a robot.

Jo Causon MP

- Thanked attendees and speakers for their time.
- Stated that the 'Service with Respect' campaign will be continuing, with more upcoming Ministerial meetings to discuss what the next steps are.

Philip Davies thanked all in attendance and closed the meeting.

Ends at 10:31am