



Meeting of the APPG on Customer Service Protecting public facing workers: Roundtable

Wednesday 12th February 2025

An in-person meeting, held in Room W3, Westminster Hall, Houses of Parliament

In attendance:

- Connor Rand MP (Labour and Chair of the APPG)
- Baroness Tina Stowell of Beeston (Conservative and Officer of the APPG)
- Baroness Natalie Bennett of Manor Castle (Green and Member of the APPG)
- Eric Leenders – Managing Director: Retail Finance, UK Finance
- Maryam Eslamdoust – General Secretary, The Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA)
- Carol Knowles – President, Accord Union
- Allen Simpson – Deputy Chief Executive, UKHospitality
- Ben Hall – Parliamentary Assistant to Connor Rand MP
- Grace McLeod – Parliamentary Assistant to Olivia Blake MP
- Toby Bell – Parliamentary Assistant to John Slinger MP
- Sam Browse – Political Officer, The Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA)
- Jo Causon - CEO, Institute of Customer Service
- David Dagger – Director of Communications and Corporate Affairs, Institute of Customer Service
- Rachel McFaul – Head of Communications and Corporate Affairs, Institute of Customer Service
- Oliver Hazell – Associate Director, Cavendish Consulting
- Richard Cahill – Hawthorn Advisors

Apologies:

- Paulette Hamilton MP (Labour and Member of the APPG)



Contributions from speakers and attendees

Connor Rand MP – Chair of the APPG:

- Opened the meeting and welcomed attendees.
- Noted that worker protection was a key issue to be discussing. Noted that, whilst working for USDAW, he had worked on, and led, the ‘freedom for fear’ campaign being run by the organisation.
- Commented on the need to protect workers in all sectors.
- Said that this discussion was timely given the forthcoming Crime and Policing Bill .

Jo Causon – Chief Executive of the Institute of Customer Service:

- Noted the Institute’s Service with Respect campaign and outlined the inception of the campaign.
- Outlined the campaign’s objectives to drive down abuse of customer-facing workers across all sectors.
- Said the standalone offence being proposed by government in the forthcoming Crime and Policing Bill should be widened to include all public service workers and that the campaign existed to increase awareness of the abuse and violence that front-line workers faced on a daily basis.
- Covered the data the Institute had commissioned from January 2025 on key elements of the campaign and said that people needed protecting from abuse and violence whilst at work.

Baroness Natalie Bennett of Manor Castle – Member of the APPG:

- Asked what the name and corresponding social media straplines and hashtags were for the Institute’s campaign.

Jo Causon – Chief Executive of the Institute of Customer Service:

- Noted the vital nature of the forthcoming Crime and Policing Bill and the need for government to get reform of legislation right first time on this issue.

Allen Simpson – Deputy Chief Executive, UKHospitality:

- Said this discussion was important.
- Noted that the ways and methods through which abuse occurred in the hospitality sector were quite specific.
- Said the challenge for hospitality staff was usually regarding two or more members of the public and intervening should a fight, argument or similar break out.
- Commented that “dine and dash” tactics from those looking to eat or drink in hospitality establishments without paying the bill were increasing to violence in some circumstances.
- Noted that the extent to which society was asking hospitality staff to ‘police’ their establishments needed consideration.

Connor Rand MP – Chair of the APPG:

- Thanked Allen Simpson for his remarks and noted that this specific nature of abuse and violence in the hospitality sector of staff was a key point, and a particularly pertinent point for SME hospitality businesses.
- A discussion between Connor Rand and Allen Simpson discussed the risks of staff in the hospitality sector intervening between two or more customers.

Baroness Natalie Bennett of Manor Castle – Member of the APPG:

- Commented that employers needed to train their people and acknowledge their skills.
- Outlined a case study of a female employee who was stationed at the door of a busy McDonalds in Manchester on an evening/night who was able to keep decorum in the establishment despite a challenging environment.



Jo Causon – Chief Executive of the Institute of Customer Service:

- Noted that nearly one million people worked in call centres and received unacceptable levels of verbal abuse.

Eric Leenders - Managing Director: Retail Finance, UK Finance:

- Noted that many customers became irritated in the banking industry from poor service.
- He noted that this irritation could boil over, on occasion, to people committing bank raids.
- Lamented that this was nothing new for the banking industry which had been experiencing this for around 40 years.
- Noted that around 50% of violence and abuse of staff was due to service failures.
- Said that there were mental health impacts for staff to take account of and that damage was being caused by customers and others in violent ways to bank property across the country.
- Said that there were, in his view, no age differences or gender differences to be discerned from those who were committing acts of violence or abuse.

Connor Rand MP – Chair of the APPG:

- Noted that it was important to understand the drivers of these issues being experienced and that there were lots of differing factors at play.

Carol Knowles - President, Accord Union:

- Said she had worked in the banking industry for 40 years.
- Noted that the issue of abuse and violence of customer-facing staff had got worse since the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Noted that customers felt more entitled nowadays.
- Recounted two instances of abuse that she herself had experienced.
- Noted that training of staff and ensuring that staff were as flexible as possible for customers to try and alleviate anger and abuse from customers was important.

Maryam Eslamdoust – General Secretary, The Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA):

- Notes the TSSA campaign the Association is running to drive down abuse and violence against train and station staff.
- Outlined the statistics the campaign has picked up thus far, but noted that, importantly, there are people behind these numbers.
- Commented that the TSSA represent staff that enforce ticketing and 'fare dodging' and that the TSSA's campaign had witnessed many women and those from minority backgrounds leaving their roles due to abuse and violence.
- Noted a lower morale amongst train and station staff workforces and that staff leaving their roles left those roles unfilled for at least a temporary period whilst recruitment for replacements happened which impacted passenger safety too.
- Wanted to see the Government drive more funding towards the British Transport Police (BTP) to help station and train staff.
- Called for a standalone offence of being violent or abusive towards a key worker.
- Urged all organisations to adopt zero tolerance policies towards abusive or violent customers/passengers.
- Said that violence against those just doing their job at work was a preventable crisis.

Jo Causon – Chief Executive of the Institute of Customer Service:

- Noted that a recent Service with Respect case study that had appeared on a BBC Breakfast show was from the transport sector.

Baroness Natalie Bennett of Manor Castle – Member of the APPG:

- Recalled an instance of staff on their own at a small, empty train station and questioned whether increased staff presence would discourage violence and abuse.
- Questioned whether cuts to funding and staff numbers at train stations would be a factor in increasing violence and abuse.



Maryam Eslamdoust – General Secretary, The Transport Salaried Staffs’ Association (TSSA):

- Agreed the isolated staff were susceptible to more violence and abuse.

Carol Knowles - President, Accord Union:

- Noted that petrol stations across the country had worked hard to ensure lone worker protection at petrol stations.

Allen Simpson – Deputy Chief Executive, UKHospitality:

- Asked about banking and transport sectors and questioned whether service failure was the leading cause that sparked violence and abuse.

Maryam Eslamdoust – General Secretary, The Transport Salaried Staffs’ Association (TSSA):

- Commented that lone working and the cost-of-living crisis, coupled with the issue of affordability of public transport and anti-social behaviour on the rise, had all created an environment where increased flashpoints and issues can potentially arise. Also noted cuts to police budgets.

Jo Causon – Chief Executive of the Institute of Customer Service:

- Noted public health demands of customers during COVID-19 that caused aggression and frustration too.
- Noted though that there is a difference between frustration and abuse of staff.
- Outlined a case study of verbal abuse and said that workers were still not reporting incidents as they either didn’t think the report would lead to anything or that incidents happen too often for them to be able to report all of them.
- Urged for a change in the law to act as a deterrent that customer service workers should not be being abused at work.

Eric Leenders - Managing Director: Retail Finance, UK Finance:

- Noted that banks were one of the few outlets during the COVID-19 pandemic that remained open.
- Said that abuse of staff leads, in some circumstances, to banks closing customer accounts.
- But also said that customers can simply go to another branch and open a new account with ease.
- Urged for the need for a deterrent to prevent pushing problems of violent or abusive customers from one bank to another.

Jo Causon – Chief Executive of the Institute of Customer Service:

- Noted that this wasn’t a situation isolated to the banking industry.

Connor Rand MP – Chair of the APPG:

- Said that police have some powers which need to be strengthened.
- Noted that the role that public facing workers play in our society need consideration.
- Understood the call for a deterrent to drive down violence and abuse.

Jo Causon – Chief Executive of the Institute of Customer Service:

- Notes the economic impact of abuse of customer service workers through increased absence and violence and the economic impact of staff turnover due to workers leaving their roles as a result of violence and/or abuse.

Connor Rand MP – Chair of the APPG:

- Noted the increased issues of recruitment and retention in customer facing roles as a result too.

Carol Knowles - President, Accord Union:

- Noted that by closing accounts of violent/abusive customers can make those customers’ lives worse and therefore lead to more violence/abuse.
- Noted that some customers can also open accounts of the same bank that has closed an account of theirs online.



Eric Leenders - Managing Director: Retail Finance, UK Finance:

- Noted that service can be stopped from banks to customers if there is suspicion of fraud but that banks can't always use this.

Allen Simpson – Deputy Chief Executive, UKHospitality:

- Noted that the Proceeds of Crime Act didn't allow organisations to detail why service to customers had been stopped.

Connor Rand MP – Chair of the APPG:

- Noted the impact on witnesses of abuse. Said that there was a question of where we're going as a society.

Allen Simpson – Deputy Chief Executive, UKHospitality:

- Noted that some thefts of items from stores wasn't always correlated with financial needs.

Connor Rand MP – Chair of the APPG:

- Noted that organised crime was key to consider but wasn't always the cause of violence and abuse of staff.

Baroness Tina Stowell of Beeston - Officer of the APPG:

- Said that a cost-of-living crisis should not justify crime or violence/abuse towards workers.

Jo Causon – Chief Executive of the Institute of Customer Service:

- Noted that around 60% of the UK's workforce was in some form of public facing role so a solution to this issue needs a cross-sector approach.

Maryam Eslamdoust – General Secretary, The Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA):

- Noted that fare increases have caused an uptick in 'fare dodging' and presents a scenario where customers can become violent when challenged on this by staff.

Eric Leenders - Managing Director: Retail Finance, UK Finance:

- Discusses other causes of thefts and 'fare dodging', such as self-service checkouts and station barriers being left open.

Jo Causon – Chief Executive of the Institute of Customer Service:

- Noted a need for clarity on what will help drive down abuse and violence against workers.

Baroness Natalie Bennett of Manor Castle – Member of the APPG:

- Said a change in the law, or the law itself, shouldn't take responsibility off employers to protect their staff too.

Connor Rand MP – Chair of the APPG:

- Noted a wider angle about customer service and that, sometimes, the customer isn't always right.

Baroness Tina Stowell of Beeston - Officer of the APPG:

- Noted that enforcement and police presence was key.
- Worried about a potential conflation of poor service and violent behaviour.
- Discussed with the room how organisations should communicate with customers.

Connor Rand MP – Chair of the APPG:

- Noted the need for customer service staff to uphold good standards and for customers to equally be respectful of staff.
- Noted an issue of police response to these reports of abuse and violence against workers.

Carol Knowles - President, Accord Union:



All-Party Parliamentary Group on
Customer Service



- Said that body-worn cameras were a deterrent but expensive and heavy for staff to wear.

Eric Leenders - Managing Director: Retail Finance, UK Finance:

- Said that many civil servants would also be being abused by customers, such as those in HMRC and other public-facing departments.

Meeting Ends: 14:58