

# **COMMUNITY & SAFER CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

## **THE NEIGHBOURHOOD HELPLINE**

### **REPORT OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CITY SERVICES 6<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2011**

#### **1. Purpose of Report**

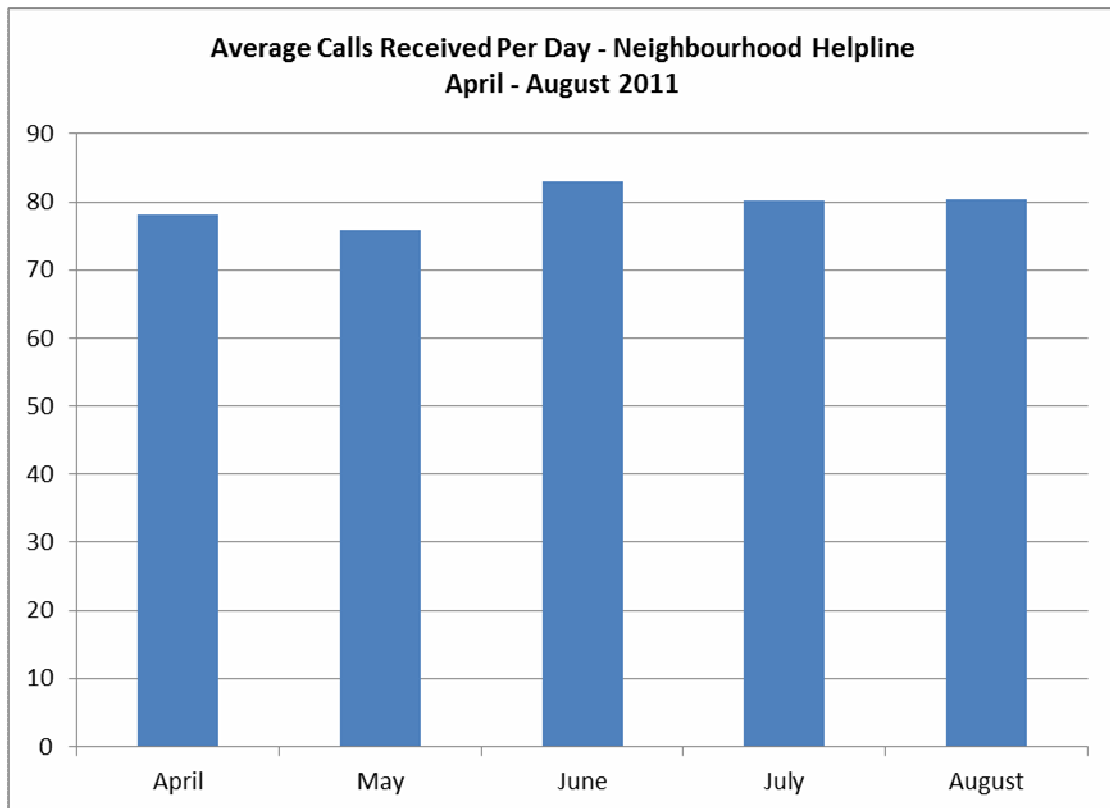
- 1.1 To provide an overview to the Scrutiny Committee of the work of the Neighbourhood Helpline

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1 In June 2006, the Northumbria Partnership launched a Home Office funded initiative, the 101 Non Emergency Helpline. Sunderland was one of 14 partners involved in the initiative along with other Local Authorities and the Police.
- 2.2 In March 2008, the Home Office withdrew the funding for the initiative. Two of the partners, Sunderland and Newcastle decided to continue what had become, a very successful Helpline. On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008, a new 'It's your Service Partnership' was formed and the 101 service transitioned into the 'Neighbourhood Helpline'.
- 2.3 In April 2011, Newcastle City Council reluctantly decided to withdraw from the partnership however due to the popularity of the Helpline, Sunderland City Council committed to the continuation of the service for residents and service users within Sunderland.
- 2.4 Last year, the Committee received a progress report on the work of the Helpline. At that meeting, the Committee recommended that a further report be included on the work programme of the Committee for 2011/12.

#### **3. Call Volumes and Capacity**

- 3.1 The Neighbourhood Helpline operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year with Customer Service Advocates trained to handle a range of enquiries and requests for service.
- 3.2 Since April of this year to the end of August, there have been a total of 11,442 calls to the Helpline, an average of 79.5 calls per day. Call volumes are steadily increasing year on year. As the chart below shows, call volumes are reasonably static month on month although historically, calls do increase over the winter months.



3.3 A breakdown of service request types is listed below with dumping of waste being the most popular issue raised during the first five months of this year. The types of service requested are significantly impacted by seasonal variations;

<b>Service Type</b>	<b>Count</b>
Dumping of waste	4598
Maintenance of grass, plantations, plants, trees & water features	1573
Litter, Debris and Leaves (Does not include blocked gullies)	960
Drains (Gullies and Manhole Covers)	610
Street Lights	456
Roads, pavements or surfaces in need of repair	448
Animal fouling	368
Graffiti	320
Noisy neighbours	276
Damaged or faulty street furniture	263
Damage to Public areas, buildings or property	174
Dead Animals	149
Spillages (oil, chemical, solids etc)	146

Animal noise	144
Litter Bins	137
Animal Fouling - Dog Bins	125
All other types	434

3.3 All requests for service are logged immediately onto the Customer Contact System and referred to Service Delivery Teams within relevant Departments. For example, all Anti Social Behaviour related requests are referred to the Neighbourhood Relations Team. Anti Social Behaviour Officers respond to the requests and determine the most appropriate course of action.

3.4 Reports are also produced directly from the system with data utilised to inform specific courses of action. For example, the Assistant Head of Streetscene takes relevant data along to the Responsible Authority Group, a multi-disciplinary team of officers who discuss issues of mutual concern relating to licensed premises.

3.5 For the period in question Helpline Advisors also signposted customers to appropriate agencies as follows;

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Signposts</b>
Northumbria Police	8
RSPCA	6
Ask the Police	5
Sunderland City Council	3
Durham Council	2
NHS DIRECT	1
North Tyneside	1
South Tyneside Council	1
Gas	1
Sunderland Housing Group	1
Northumbrian Water	1

#### **4. Quality of Service**

4.1 Quantitative call handling performance at Sunderland is very good with;

- 88% of calls answered and;
- 89.4% of those calls answered within 60 seconds

4.2 In addition, a sample of all calls are quality checked for accuracy and quality of service delivery. Again, sample checks return high levels of compliance.

#### **5. Successes and Future Opportunities**

5.1 The Neighbourhood Helpline is a very popular service with residents with high levels of customer satisfaction.

- 5.2 The arrangement allows for the direct dial into emergency services if required to ensure the appropriate level of response is provided, especially during unsociable hours.
- 5.3 Valuable customer intelligence is gained and is being used to inform service delivery and local responsive services. For example, an out of hours noise pilot is due to commence shortly in order to respond to complaints from residents regarding noise nuisance, the majority of which are lodged on Friday and Saturday evenings. The pilot will run for 12 months.
- 5.4 The service is easily scalable and provides the opportunity to expand to other similar service providers and / or out of hour's services in the future.

## **6. Recommendation**

- 6.1 Members are asked to note and comment upon the report.