

COMMUNITY AND SAFER CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Neighbourhood Helpline

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CUSTOMER SERVICES

8 DECEMBER 2009

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an overview to the Scrutiny Committee of the work of the Neighbourhood Helpline.
- 1.2 The report will contribute to the Committee's study into anti social behaviour and the findings will be included in the final report.

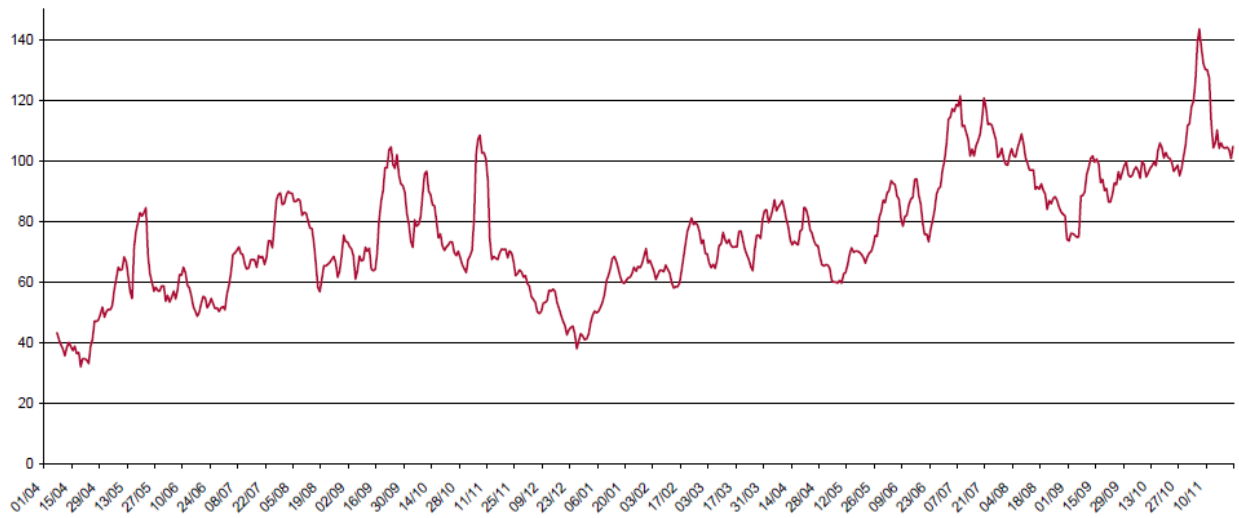
2. Background

- 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.
- 2.3 On 1st April 2008, a new 'It's your Service Partnership' was formed and the 101 service transitioned into the 'Neighbourhood Helpline'. The Helpline is delivered in partnership by Sunderland and Newcastle City Councils.

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 Between July and the end of November this year, there were a total of 14,730 calls to the Helpline, an average of 101 calls per day. As the chart below shows, volumes have risen steadily over the course of 2009. The single busiest day of the Helpline to date was 5th November 2009, unsurprisingly Bonfire Night;

Chart 1. Seven Day Moving Average - Calls offered



3.3 A breakdown of service request types is listed below with rubbish and litter being the most popular issue raised;

Concern for Safety and Welfare	56
Drunk or Rowdy in Public Places	33
Environmental Issues	132
Intimidation and Harassment	77
Licensing breaches	11
Noise nuisance	599
Parks (Sunderland only)	312
Rubbish or Litter	6972
Stray Dogs	65
Street Lighting	552

Sunderland City Council Feedback	563
Vandalised, damaged or in need of repair	2779
Vehicles and Parking	18

3.3 For the period in question Helpline Advisors also handled a total of 7 emergencies. 1 was referred to Northumbria Police and 6 to Tyne and Wear Fire Service.

3.4 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.

4. Quality of Service

4.1 Quantitative call handling performance at Sunderland is excellent with;

- 96.9% of calls answered and;
- 86.5% of those calls answered within 30 seconds

Only 2% of calls were abandoned having rung for more than 30 seconds.

4.2 30 compliments were recorded for the period and 12 complaints. The complaints in the main arose from caller's perceptions of services being delivered late or to a poor standard.

4.3 In addition, a sample of all calls are quality checked for accuracy and quality of service delivery. Again, sample checks in the main 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.
- 5.3 The Neighbourhood Helpline is an excellent example of a front office shared service and demonstrates a robust partnership between Sunderland and Newcastle City Council's. As calls are answered for and on behalf of each local authority, business continuity and resilience is an integral part of the service provision.
- 5.2 The Partnership 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.