

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

RESPONSIVE SERVICES & CUSTOMER CARE PANEL

REPORT OF THE LEAD MEMBER FOR RESPONSIVE SERVICES & CUSTOMER CARE FEEDBACK ON THE REPORTING OF HATE INCIDENTS IN SUNDERLAND

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 At the first meeting of the year, the Panel decided to investigate how hate crime is reported. This report provides the conclusions of the evidence received.

2. Background

- 2.1 If someone is harassed because of their age, skin colour, gender identity, so called 'race', national origin, religion, sexual orientation or disability, this is called a hate incident.
- 2.2 The definition of a hate crime used within the reporting mechanisms is: "*Any behaviour intended to cause harm to another, which is perceived by the victim or any other person as being motivated by the perpetrator's prejudice of the victim's identity*".
- 2.3 The Macpherson report which was written after the murder of the black teenager, Stephen Lawrence in London in 1993 highlighted the concern that victims of hate often did not have their case recorded or investigated as a hate incident because the victim was required to prove the suspect's motivation at the point of reporting.
- 2.4 It may be very hard for victims to prove that they were attacked because of their identity. This is often only established after detailed investigation. This was found to be one of the main reasons why people stopped reporting hate. People did not report hate incidents which meant that cases were not investigated and victims did not get the support they needed and no enforcement action was taken against perpetrators.

3. Current Situation

- 3.1 ARCH is a network of organisations working together across the city to help support victims of hate incidents and where possible take action against the suspect.
- 3.2 Aims of ARCH
- Provide as best as possible support to the victims of hate incidents in the Sunderland area
 - To take action on the suspects of hate incidents

- To encourage people to report the incidents that happened to them and any that they have witnessed
 - To increase people's confidence in reporting hate incidents by taking people seriously, believing them and offering the best possible support
 - To get the overall picture of hate incidents in the city, which then helps to tackle the issue
- 3.3 There are various types of hate incidents including racist, religious, homophobic and disability. Hate incidents can also take many forms. These can include verbal abuse, threatening behaviour, criminal damage, offensive graffiti, or physical attacks.
- 3.4 Some types of hate incidents, such as verbal abuse and threats are more obvious. Other examples, such as damage to property, bullying or rude gestures are harder to identify.
- 3.5 If someone believes they have suffered a hate incident then it is important that this is recorded on the ARCH system. Hate incidents can happen anywhere including at home, work school, in a pub and in any public place.

4. **Findings of the Panel**

- 4.1 The Panel took evidence at a meeting on 27th January 2014 and toured the new Customer Contact Centre on 11th March 2014, met with staff and had a briefing on the new reporting system which goes live on 1 April 2014. Our observations are:
- a) The new system is very much focused on the victim. It allows for intelligence to be reviewed and is less admin orientated. Calls can be made to the contact centre, or incidents can be reported online. Staff taking the calls are trained to handle, sometimes difficult calls, and work through information gathering in the easiest way possible for the caller.
 - b) In the last year, out of 107 reported incidents last year only 3 were made by the public. Clearly, the system did not have a public profile and it is intended that the new arrangements will be better used.
 - c) There will be a risk assessment upfront and customer feedback will be provided. We saw how this risk assessment will be used and are reassured that the process is not bureaucratic or onerous, but allows for a full picture to be gathered.
 - d) The new arrangements can be aligned to other reporting mechanisms (Anti-Social Behaviour, Domestic Violence, neighbour disputes and issues reported directly to the police) and also links to the council's customer contacts. This will allow for a much smarter use of the data and allow for identification of trends.
 - e) The system allows for direct referrals, not signposting which leaves too much to chance.
 - f) There is no password protection so anyone can input data (although we were reassured that password protection will be needed to access data on the system).

- g) The new system will rationalise where the same incident is reported by multiple contacts.
- h) We requested that the online database always requests a description of the offender, even if the name of the individual is reported.
- i) Race issues are mainly reported in certain areas of the city and not others. We requested that there be links into other sources of information, for example, schools, youth groups, children's centres and officers should approach local community leaders to encourage reporting and provide reassurance where people may be afraid of repercussion
- j) Work is ongoing with partners including Gentoo and other RSL's to have one approach in the city.
- k) It is estimated that previously there has been considerable under-reporting. As anyone can report an incident, for example, if a councillor is aware of something in their ward they can add it to the database this should be encouraged and highlighted.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The Panel concluded that the new system will provide a robust arrangement for future reporting and is an improvement on the current system, using more intelligence-led information and putting the victim at the centre.
- 5.2 We concur that change is needed for the system to be sustainable, to be more victims focused and to improve outcomes. This is in line with the council's Community Leadership approach. The new system allows for risk assessment up-front, customer feedback and for identifying trends.
- 5.3 The system does depend on a partnership approach and each organisation needs to commit to working collaboratively on make best use of the resource.
- 5.4 Our recommendations to the Scrutiny Committee are:
 - (a) Representatives from partner organisations should continue to discuss how to work collaboratively to use the new system to best effect;
 - (b) Councillors should be made aware of the new system and how they can report issues themselves on behalf of their own residents at city or area level;
 - (c) Information should be shared with Community Leaders and with members of the public who should be encouraged to report incidents rather than keep them within the community and provided with reassurance where people may be afraid of repercussions.