

Report to the *Economic Development & Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee*

15 Sept 2016

Business Support Helpline



Report Author: Trudi Barnard
Job Title: Business Development Officer
Email: trudi.barnard@newcastle-staffs.gov.uk
Telephone: x2461

Introduction

A request was made by the EDE O&S Committee for a performance report relating to the use of the Business Support Helpline by Newcastle businesses.

Background

The LEP Business Support Helpline provides free, expert business advice and support. Where appropriate, the Business Helpline will put callers in touch with a range of specialist advisors, programmes or funds via the Growth Hub. The service is managed by Staffordshire Chambers and is open to all businesses and start-ups, regardless of whether they are Chamber members.

Typical topics include:

- Starting a new business
- Growing your business
- Accessing appropriate finance and funding
- Marketing and promoting your business
- Improving productivity and increasing profitability
- Exporting and international trade
- Recruiting and employing staff
- Tackling regulation and cutting through red tape
- Enhancing environmental efficiency and business resilience
- Handling rural business issues
- Dealing with premises and land
- Learning how apprenticeships can benefit your business
- And many more!

The Business Helpline 0300 111 8002 is open 8.30am to 5.30pm from Monday to Friday or via e-mail growthhub@staffordshirechambers.co.uk

The Growth Hub, which is funded through the Regional Growth Fund, has been established to help drive strong, sustainable business growth across Staffordshire. It will act as the focal point for businesses that wish to grow, providing co-ordinated and cohesive growth programmes, business networks, growth groups and links to specialist information, advice and services. The Hub focusses on the delivery of access to finance, resource efficiency, innovation, mentoring, export and manufacturing advice, and start up support.

The Chamber actively promotes the Helpline on its website, at events and via social media. However, it relies heavily on partners to promote the service as well.

The number of Newcastle Borough based businesses contacting the Helpline in May, June and July 2016 were:

- May 2016 – 22 Contacts (21 of these were phone calls).
- June 2016 – 27 Contacts (23 were calls)
- July 2016 – 14 Contacts (11 were calls)

Questions to be Addressed

Are these contact figures about average or do districts which promote the Helpline more heavily have a greater number of contacts with the helpline?

The Helpline number is given on the Business pages of the Council's website (General business advice and specific start-up support) and Economic Regeneration officers will pass on the details directly to telephone or e-mail enquirers. What else can we do to promote the service to businesses, bearing in mind that there is very little support available for retail. Activities might include:

- Explore possibility of running drop-in sessions for businesses, possibly in conjunction with the county council using their business centres.
- Flyers in Civic Offices, Guildhall and the business centre on Parkhouse.
- Use of council communication channels such as The Reporter, social media, etc.

Outcomes

Committee to consider how the council can better promote the service to encourage more local businesses to take advantage of the support on offer.

Supporting Information

None

Invited Partners/Stakeholders/Residents

Helpline and Growth Hub representative can be invited to a future meeting if not available for 15th September meeting.

Constraints

Increased promotion may have implications for financial resources and use of officer time.

Conclusions

Members requested more information on the uptake of Staffordshire Chamber's Business Helpline. The Helpline is the gateway for local businesses to access free expert business advice and support. Although the service is publicised on the council's website, better promotion of the service should lead to increased contact from Newcastle businesses. Members are asked to consider how we can raise awareness of the Helpline.

Relevant Portfolio Holder(s)

Cllr John Williams, Portfolio Holder - Town Centres, Property and Business