

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

**15 March 2017**

***Stoke and Staffordshire Business Helpline***



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## **Introduction**

A request was made by the Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee for a performance report relating to use of the Business Helpline by Newcastle businesses.

## **Background**

The Stoke and Staffordshire Business Helpline 0300 111 8002 [growthhub@staffordshirechambers.co.uk](mailto:growthhub@staffordshirechambers.co.uk) is the first point of contact for business support across Staffordshire. The helpline provides a central point of contact for a range of free business support which includes Start Up, Growth, Finance, Regulation, People and Contacts. 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

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](mailto:growthhub@staffordshirechambers.co.uk)

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.

### **Questions to be addressed**

How can we encourage Newcastle Businesses to access the Business Helpline to help them strengthen and grow their business?

### **Outcomes**

After a meeting with the Business Helpline Advisor 14 September 2016 a number of ways to help our local businesses to access the helpline were suggested. Improvement areas to consider:

- Business pages more prominent on the Council website and easier access to the Business Helpline
- Distribution of the Business Helpline e-newsletter to all Cllrs, link on business pages and BID website
- Pop up banners at the Civic Offices and Guildhall
- Leaflets for all Councillors, Locality Action Partnerships, Business Centres and Industrial Parks
- Information on the digital screens at the Guildhall
- Include a feature in The Reporter
- Use our social media to help raise the profile
- Ensure our Customer Services have the Business Helpline number
- Promote through Business Boost
- One off events with partners to raise the profile of the helpline (Lymedale Business Centre 12 September)
- Invite to the BID Business Connects events
- Develop a database of our Newcastle businesses including those in rural areas

- Send out Business Helpline leaflet with business rates bills
- Small business Saturday event
- Greater focus on business development

### **Supporting Information (updated 24/02/17)**

93 Newcastle Businesses have contacted the Business Helpline since March 2016.

This compares with the following districts over the same period:

- Stafford 235
- East Staffs 93
- Staffordshire Moorlands 85
- Cannock 84
- South Staffs 59
- Lichfield 64
- Tamworth 34

### **Invited Partners/Stakeholders/Residents**

A meeting took place with the Business Helpline Advisor 14 September 2016 to discuss options to increase Newcastle business contact with the Business Helpline.

### **Constraints**

There is no financial cost to the Council as the Business Helpline is funded through external finance (Regional Growth Deal) for the whole of Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire. However, more officer time will be required to implement the range of improvement areas suggested earlier in this report.

### **Conclusions**

In response to a request made by the Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee for a performance report relating to use of the Business Helpline by Newcastle businesses, a meeting was arranged with the Business Helpline Advisor to discuss current uptake of the service and make improvements.

Business Helpline performance reports show that 93 Newcastle businesses have accessed the Business Helpline since March 2016, which is more than 5 other Staffordshire authorities (Cannock, Lichfield, South Staffs, Tamworth and Staffordshire Moorlands), equal to East Staffordshire and less than Stafford.

There are number of ways that we can further help our local businesses to access the helpline as detailed earlier in this report – many of these have already been implemented.

There is no financial cost to the Council but more officer time will be required to implement all the suggested improvements areas.

**Relevant Portfolio Holder(s)**

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

**Local Ward Member (if applicable)**

**Background Materials**

Business Helpline Newsletter and Leaflets

**Appendices**