

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

PUBLIC PROTECTION SERVICE

PROCEEDS OF CRIME ACT

Arif Gorgi, a prolific dealer in counterfeit goods who had previously been sentenced following an investigation by the trading standards service, surrendered to warrant and was sent to prison for 240 days for failing to pay an outstanding amount of £34,000 towards proceed of crime. The obligation to pay still exists and the imprisonment does not relieve the obligation.

ELECTRIC BLANKET SAFETY TESTING

The trading standards service is to carry out its annual testing of electric blankets. The event is held in conjunction with the Fire Service and Age Concern at Ewood Park football ground on Monday 25th October 2010. This annual check has demonstrated in previous years that over 50% of the blankets tested are unsafe, and these are replaced by new ones free of charge. The event is primarily focused on elderly and vulnerable adults who are able to access a range of services on the day. The event is invaluable in reducing the number of fires associated with malfunctioning blankets within the borough.

NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEARNING SERVICES

Review of Community Engagement - Further to the Neighbourhood Board Engagement meeting held in September, the Neighbourhoods and Learning service are currently undertaking a scoped review of community engagement with a remit to better engage at ward level, including engagement with community associations, residents and tenants groups. A timeline for consultations has been developed with an anticipated completion date of the end of November. Consultations will include ward focus groups, key stakeholders and organisations. It is intended that the consultation process will provide information about how the Council currently engages, how effective this is and recommendations for improvements to strengthen the process. A number of options are also currently being developed for discussion around what a future engagement framework may look like.

ADVICE SERVICES

Customer services attended the CAB AGM where it was reported that the service reported a deficit of £54,386 for year ending March 2010. This was caused by a reduction in income (down by £39,607) and an increase in expenditure (up by £40,420).

This year funding from the PCT (£397,000) has been withdrawn. CAB has made a joint bid with Shelter for Legal Service Commission money which has been successful although confirmation of the amount is still outstanding.

The future of the CAB service in Darwen, operating from the Council One Stop Shop, is in doubt and closure may occur towards the end of this year. With limited funds available it is expected that the overall Advice Service provision across the borough will be reduced with the councils own Advice Service team facing a cut of over 60% in its budget.

A meeting to discuss the issues and understand the overall picture is being arranged to include the Council, Age Concern, CAB and Shelter where options for improved partnership working and best use of resource will be discussed.

BDIRECT

CONTACT CENTRE

In September, the Contact Centre handled 33501 calls and we answered 67% of these calls within 20 seconds. We saw a 6% increase in calls in comparison to the previous month.

Throughout the month, we were involved in meetings with the Environment Department to prepare and implement a number of key service changes, namely the introduction of charging for Bulky Item requests and replacement bins. Both policies have been implemented successfully and we have seen little negative reaction from customers and we have not seen, as anticipated, an increase in fly-tipping reports as a result. Customers are generally happy to pay the charges or are given alternatives where they are not willing to pay (i.e. take it to the tip, using Freecycle or CAG).

Throughout September, we saw a slight increase in demand for the Benefits service as customers were querying Educational Welfare Benefits (i.e. school clothing grants, free school meals).

Two major projects that we are involved in are as follows:

- the upgrade of our telephone system in the Contact Centre – this will bring some significant improvements to what we can offer to customers (i.e. call backs, additional social media capabilities) that should support the resource pressures we are facing over the coming years.
- Implementation of an organisation-wide voice mail system. We have procured a solution and have put together a guidance document for staff and managers for voice mail usage – this is

being done in conjunction with ICT and PR. The solution is currently being trialled in two pilot areas (the Contact Centre & Planning) with a view to devising a corporate roll-out programme by the end of 2010).

Any further questions, please contact Ross McQueen on 01254 585141.