

Report of Director of Environment & Neighbourhoods

Report to Scrutiny Board

Date: 11 February 2013

**Subject: Integration of the Domestic Noise Nuisance Service into Safer
Leeds - Update**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. At the Safer and Stronger Scrutiny Board meeting in April 2011, members were given responsibility for overseeing the redesign and development of the Domestic Noise Nuisance Service previously delivered via the E&N Environmental Protection Team. This report provides an update on the progress made to date.

Recommendations

2. Members to note the contents of this report.

1.0 Purpose of this report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Scrutiny members on the progress made in integrating and developing the domestic Noise Nuisance Service as part of Safer Leeds (Leeds Anti-Social Behaviour Team).

2.0 Background information

2.1 Domestic noise nuisance enquires represent a substantial proportion of complaints received by the LASBT. Previously officers from the Environmental Protection Team (EPT) would determine whether a resident was in breach of statutory noise legislation, and only then action would be taken through criminal proceedings. This limited the Council's ability to deal with issues such as neighbourhood disputes, which are often linked to persistent domestic noise issues, and other noise that could be regarded as 'anti-social'.

2.2 Domestic noise is now treated as anti social behaviour, with a range of remedies available, rather than with sole reliance on environmental legislation. This approach enables the council to find better solutions for people experiencing noise problems and deal with problems quickly and robustly.

2.3 The Domestic Noise Nuisance service comprises of two sections, both of which have transferred from the Environmental Protection team :

- Day time case worker team - Nine officers now embedded in the LASBT
- The Out of Hours Domestic Noise Response Service - embedded into Leedswatch.

2.4 In May 2011, the Leedswatch service took over the delivery of the Out of Hours Domestic Noise Nuisance Service. This service had previously been delivered by Environmental Health Officers operating a skeleton service, primarily dealing with persistent offenders. This service was funded via time limited resources (NRF), and paid for officer overtime to attend the home of victims to verify noise levels, a clearly unsustainable position.

2.5 Whilst often welcomed by those who the service reached, one off calls for service were not routinely dealt with due to a lack of officer capacity. Also, one off calls for service would not qualify for action under criminal legislation, making visits from expert officers ineffective and poor value for money.

2.6 All out of hours noise calls are now responded to by a dedicated service, manned by experienced Safer Leeds officers. The aim of the new out of hours service is to:

- Stop excessive noise from domestic properties between the hours of 6pm and 6am.
- Provide a professional witness service to support criminal and civil proceeding in relation to persistent noise nuisance perpetrators.

- Respond to calls from Care Ring customers (vulnerable adults), alarm responses to council or other buildings and undertake estate patrols. The service operates, Mon – Fri 6pm – 6am, all day Sat, Sun and Bank Holidays 365 days per year.

- 2.7 The out of hours service aims to deal with all calls from residents, by approaching the address of the perpetrator and requesting the noise to be turned off or lowered to a more acceptable level. This new approach is successful in approx 85% of cases, and is the approach historically taken by the police. In approx 15% of cases where perpetrators are not compliant, details are passed through to the day time team to investigate.
- 2.8 Should enforcement action be required Safer Leeds officers are not qualified to do so. Only qualified Environmental Health Officer are able to do this. However, they can provide professional witness statements to support criminal and civil cases, which would be led by an appropriately qualified Environmental Health Officer. This is a new way of working, and the service will review and monitor success rates through this approach.
- 2.9 This new approach to dealing with out of hours noise has been integrated in to existing council budgets, providing excellent value for money and improving the reach and coverage across the city.

3.0 Main Issues

- 3.1 On 1st October 2012, the day time domestic noise nuisance service was formally transferred into the Leeds Anti-Social Behaviour Team. Nine noise officers joined LASBT, the breakdown of officers are:

Environmental Health Officers (PO2)	3 Full time 1 Part time
Senior Technical Officer (SO1/2)	1 Full time
Technical Officers (C3)	4 Full time

- 3.2 The nine officers are split amongst the three LASBT area teams, according to the evidenced demand. The nine noise officers have been consulted on aspects of the integration, with opinions and feedback being taken into account in designing the approach used.
- 3.3 Acknowledging that the integration of the EPT was driven by both Members and residents, who recognise that noise nuisance should be responded to as an ASB issue, integrating the team was not without its procedural difficulties.
- 3.4 Changing procedures, adapting to different working practices and legislation whilst respecting the professional skills and qualifications of EPT staff, to achieve a fully integrated service has been challenging.

- 3.5 Managing the large volume of noise enquires has been complex. Over the last 4 months of the integration there have been approx 1148 request for service, with only nine staff to respond to them. In order to incorporate the scale of demand, we are training the ASB Case Officers to be able to investigate noise complaints and in the long term increase capacity within the service. In the meantime, a bespoke service for dealing with noise complaints has been developed that meets the demands. We have found that a large proportion of noise complaints are 'one offs' i.e. as a result of a party on a single occasion. Due to the high demand of these types of complaint, an improved noise pack has been introduced to assist the complainant in rectifying the problem themselves such as speaking with the offending party. If the issue is not resolved and the problem becomes persistent then the noise diaries within the pack can be used as a means of gathering evidence to assist with later procedures of enforcement. The more problematic and persistent cases are now being managed within the ASB process and procedures and the noise officers are working jointly, learning different investigation techniques.
- 3.6 Ways to improve the out of hours service are constantly being reviewed, and feedback since the service began using the CCTV vans has been positive.
- 3.7 However, demand for the out of hours service is extremely high, and given the limited resource available to serve the whole of the city, it is not always possible to respond to every complaint with a visit or direct action.

4.0 Service Development

- 4.1 Since the full integration of the noise service into Safer Leeds there have been a number of benefits:

4.2 ALMO Procedure

During the integration it transpired that there were inconsistencies amongst the three ALMOs. Some housing officers sent all noise complainants directly to Environment Protection Team without undertaking the initial investigation, increasing the volume of referrals to Environment Protection Team. In turn they were not able to respond effectively to cases due to the large volume of work. It has now been agreed that all ALMO's will take on noise investigations and attempt at least three interventions to resolve the issue under the Tenancy Agreement. If a noise nuisance case escalates and initial investigation and interventions have failed a referral will be sent to LASBT.

4.3 LASBT procedures

The LASBT noise procedures have been in place since 1st October 2012. These procedures are work in progress and have been written to help guide noise and asb case officers in dealing with noise complaints. They are being updated and reviewed as time goes on and once they are near to completion public consultation will take place.

4.4 Information Sharing Between the Out of Hours and Day Time Service

There have been substantial improvements in collating data of noise complaints across the day and night service. The out of hours team are working more closely with the daytime noise service, sharing case management information on persistent and problematic cases passing them onto the night service to ensure that complainants receive an appropriate response. Once all staff are fully trained, both criminal and civil powers will be more effectively used to deal with persistent noise offenders.

4.5 Information Technology

There has been considerable work undertaken to transfer noise complaints from the IT database Uniform into the ASB database Caseworks, this will enable the service to track cases, monitor noise cases by type, performance manage cases and introduce customer satisfaction ring backs for noise complaints.

5.0 Out of hours

5.1 A new telephone system replicating the Councils main call centre which places calls in a queue and can relay messages to customers to advising of delays and busy periods has been installed

5.2 Call handling staff have been doubled, and customer service training is taking place to improve call management and customer satisfaction. This has helped to improve call handling (now at over 90%) and waiting times, (statistics are showing that, even at busy times, callers do not wait longer than 5 minutes).

5.3 A dedicated service using the 2 CCTV mobile vans operates between 6pm and 4am. This is supplemented by 2 x security vehicles after 4am and during busy periods (albeit that the security vehicles are not a dedicated resource and also respond to other emergency calls from across the city). In practice this is twice as many officers than was previously being delivered.

5.4 The vans are proving to be a very effective deterrent in noise hot spots due to their visible presence.

5.5 In certain areas PCSOs or PCs are 'double crewing' with the out of hours officers (8pm – 1pm subject to police resources being available) to undertake joint visits, meaning there are can be three times more staff dealing with noise than under the previous service.

5.6 Good communication links are in place between the Council, Police and Universities to deal with noise hotspots, but it should be understood that 'noise nuisance' is not confined to certain wards and is a city-wide issue.

6.0 Requests for Service

- 6.1 Appendix A outlines requests for service. The initial findings are that there are a large number of calls from non ALMO properties. The statistics show that call volume varies between 200 and 374 calls across the city per month and this workload is split across the three area teams. Further work is being done to understand trends and comparison with historical data.

In reference to appendix A, from Oct 2012 – January 2013 LASBT received approximately 1148 calls requesting service. As previously outlined in the report there have been a number of procedural improvements that have allowed for better demand management for requests for service. We are now able to prioritise and assess requests for service and provide an appropriate response. Of these 1148 calls, 178 cases were opened as live cases. Staff feedback to this process has been positive giving staff direction and accountability for cases.

7.0 Future

- 7.1 Further work to improve the flexibility and effectiveness of the service is planned as we move forward.
- 7.2 The delegated authority regarding noise could be extended to include LASBT Case Officers as witness to statutory nuisance that will increase the expertise across LASBT and the OOHS.
- 7.3 The new ASB legislation provides more tools to deal with noise and ASB which offer opportunities to improve the service.

8.0 Corporate Considerations

8.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 8.1.1 Extensive consultation took place with project partners, key stakeholders including service users, affected staff, HR and Unions prior to full implementation.

8.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 8.2.1 Full Equality Impact Assessments were undertaken in relation to both personal (staffing/accommodation) and procedural changes prior to full implementation.

8.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 8.3.1 Effectively tackling and reducing Anti-Social Behaviour is a strategic objective within the one city priorities plan, the vision for Leeds and forms a key strand of the Safer Leeds Plan 2011-2015 that aspires to create safer and stronger communities.

8.4 Resources and value for money

- 8.4.1 The integration has relocated staff in shared accommodation and reallocate existing resources therefore the net outcome is a restructured service it is hoped

through more efficient joined up working will demonstrate significant value for money in the longer term.

- 8.4.2 There is no further funding available at this time to extend or enhance the service in areas of greater need. Area Committees may wish to consider commissioning an enhanced noise service using their Well Being funding, particularly the out of hours team, where demand can be high in some areas at particular times in the year.

8.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 8.5.1 This report is subject to call in.

8.6 Risk Management

- 8.6.1 Partners will continue to assess and evaluate the outcomes of implemented changes to determine any risks to service delivery and additionally identify any opportunities for further developmental improvements.

8.7 Recommendations

- 8.7.1 Members are requested to:

- Note the impact of integration of the noise service to Safer Leeds.

8.8 Background documents

- 8.8.1 **None**

Appendix A

Enquiry & Case data

Siebel Enquiries

Between October 2012 to January 2013, 1148 Siebel enquires were logged onto CRM. These 1148 were dealt with by the three ALMO's and LASBT depending on the tenure of the parties involved. The table below show the breakdown of month

Month/Area	East	South	West	Unknown	Total
Oct-12	66	56	80	22	224
Nov-12	101	72	122	31	326
Dec-12	62	61	79	22	224
Jan - 13	128	105	118	23	374
Total	357	294	399	98	1148

Cases

Between October 2012 - January 2013, 178 cases were opened on Caseworks within LASBT. Cases have been investigated by the Noise Officers and LASBT Case Officers.

Team	Active	Closed	Total
LASBT (Noise Officers)	59	23	82
LASBT East	18	11	29
LASBT South	27	12	39
LASBT West	16	12	28
Total	120	58	178

Out of hours calls

Between October 2012 to January 2013, 2588 calls were made to the OOH's service. The table below shows the breakdown of calls by month, due to database restrictions, it is not possible to break this down by area.

Month	Quantity of calls made to OOH's
October 2012	741
November 2012	662
December 2012	644
January 2013	541
Total	2588