

**Overview & Scrutiny Committee  
Responses to follow-up questionnaire**

“I think the service has improved since last year. I called the call centre recently to be linked to the housing office in my area. It went through and was answered promptly. Well done Southwark for listening.”

“It’s miles better! Thank you. The staff are helpful and cheerful on the whole, and any time I have had to ring in I’ve had no problems at all. For me, personally, it’s a vast improvement to last year.”

“As a street leader, on 20 August I rang to report a Sainsbury’s trolley in Bellenden Road near Avondale Rise. The Street Leader Statement said: 20-Aug-07 313 (Street Leader No.) Fly tipping Everthorpe Road Vicarage Grove – no waste found on inspection – estimated completion date: N/A - status: closed.

I rang street leader manager to complain about this.

When the next edition of “An A-Z of services in Southwark” is published it is vital that all direct numbers are published so that fewer people will have bad experiences with the call centre.

In Southwark’s 2006/07 Annual Report the Council Leader wrote: “we will continue to deliver improved services for residents”. I hope very much that this will be done by publicising all the direct line numbers in other publications and leaflets so residents will not have to suffer the frustration of having to use the call centre which I hate having to use.”

“While the call centre more readily connects one to the Local History Library, it is an unnecessary link in the chain. Because of the special nature of enquiries to SLHL and its unique position in Southwark it would be of considerable help to both the enquirer and the library if an exception to the call centre use could be made for them. It would show up Southwark in a better light to callers from the rest of the country (and indeed from other countries). I have always found the staff in the library itself to deal with matters promptly and efficiently. It may not be part of your remit, but SLHL deserve commendations and thanks.”

“I believe the call centre is a waste of public funding. I am chairman of (Neighbourhood Forum) and some of our delegates visited the call centre about a year ago. Nothing has changed much at all. When tenants call the centre, the answer you get is that you have five options, 1 to 5, you press any number 1 to 5 and this will be repeated. We did ask if this could be changed

to once, this is still the same. In another instance, I live in Chiltern on the Aylesbury. One Friday afternoon, workmen working on new water main pipes burst the pipes and Chiltern had no water for 4 hours. People were calling the call centre who work for Southwark Council and were told to call Thames Water. A lot of people were angry about this including my self. We are Southwark tenants first, not Thames Water. I then contacted the area manager who deal with this problem which was much appreciated. The council has two officers working at the call centre who both worked at Taplow Office for a long time and know the problems of tenants, but nothing has changed much. I do not know the answers to these problems at the call centre but I believe phoning your neighbourhood office direct worked a lot better. Tenants complaining about the call centre can't be all wrong."

"Last night I had the misfortune of having to call the call centre (020 7525 5777) where I spoke to somebody concerning a very loud noise nuisance which was being attended by Mayor Skelly. Personally I had to be up at 5:00am and my son was woken up by tribal drumming directly opposite his bedroom window at 10:00pm. - pretty bad organising I can tell you! - just for future reference.

I called the call centre at 22:06 and didn't receive a call back until around an hour and twenty minutes later. Of course the noise had stopped by then - doesn't it always? I was then told by the investigator calling that he had only just received the call "about three minutes ago from the call centre" and if I had a problem - I should call them back. I rang the call centre back for confirmation and was told that the "tracker" (apparently the person who receives the information and forwards it to the investigator) was on the phone the whole length of that time dealing with another call.

So... I confirmed that the person whose job it is to pass on the information to the investigator (the tracker) takes over an hour to pass over each job? - This was confirmed on this occasion. And I was also told "besides we can take up to three hours to respond to each job".

It's no wonder the service is so dire! Can somebody please tell me this isn't the case?"

"I have had to use the call centre recently. For me, my requests follow a similar pattern to last year. If I ring the call centre a recorded message suggests that email would be quicker. If I email my problem a standard message comes back saying it would be quicker to telephone.

If I do telephone I am told the problem lies with the contractors, when the contractors are contacted I am told the problem lies with the Housing Office. Nobody gets back to me and rain continues to come down inside the kitchen walls and this continues from July until September, when as I did in the past year I contact the Mayor of Southwark. The scaffolding goes up and the problem of clearing the gutters has been done, but I suspect there will be a

failure to inspect the work, or carry out a regular clearing of the gutters which is essential, and next year I will have to contact the call centre again and the same pattern might emerge once again. I am grateful to the person at the call centre, who thanked me for being patient.

I have not had a letter about scaffolding going up, but that may be due to the recent postal strike.”

“I feel that the service has improved but there are still a few problems.

As estate manager tenants come to me if the lifts are not working and I report telephone the call centre, on several occasions when I have been asked for the post code of Applegarth House TMC which is SE1 0QA, they say it does not come up on the system so I have to give a flat number and the flat post code which is SE1 0PZ?

Also there still seems to be a problem with the information that is passed over to the lift engineers for example on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2007 I called the call centre to report that the lights in lift number 1056 were out in fact one of the bulbs had gone completely and the other one was flickering. The young man was very polite and gave me a reference number 3488007 and said that the engineer would call that afternoon. The engineer did visit that afternoon and I went out and asked him if he repaired the lights in the lift as he did not seem to be here for very long. He said he had been told the lift was out of service and as it was working when he arrived he was just about to leave. He did not have any bulbs with him but said he would be back which he did. If I had not seen the engineer and he had left and the other bulb had gone the lift would have been in complete darkness for the weekend?

My last point is that a couple of the tenants from Applegarth House TMC have called because their heating and hot water had broken down the call centre has given them the Co-op office telephone number to arrange a repair. Southwark Council is responsible for the heating and hot water and the lifts in Applegarth House I would appreciate it if all the call centre staff was made aware of this.”

“I have had no need to call the centre for a while. Last week one of our tenants rang me, she had an appointment that day for painters to decorate her staircase. I asked, have you a reference number or contact phone number – answer no. I advised her to ring the call centre. It took the young lady over an hour to trace the job on her computer only to find the job had been booked as completed. She then set things up to start again, good service. I have found listening to tenants that it is the workmen’s follow-up that lets tenants down i.e. when a part has to be ordered and no date set for completion so the work is outstanding for months or not completed.”

“Our members feel that satisfaction with the call centre depends very much on which operative answers! We agree that many respond positively and give accurate information. There are still occasions, however, when help and information are not obtained. Callers are also still left holding on, listening to a ringing phone, once the first operative has attempted to put them through to the person that they need to speak to.

The repairs line is much better than it was, but one of our members was recently on the phone for 47 minutes because the operative could not trace the job number.

However, our members feel that there has been an overall improvement in the service.”