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Sefton Council



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Town Hall
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To all Members of the Overview and Scrutiny
Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and
Corporate Services)

Date: 8 June 2023
Our Ref:
Your Ref: PGF

Please contact: Paul Fraser
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Dear Councillor

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGULATORY, COMPLIANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES) - TUESDAY 13TH JUNE, 2023

I refer to the agenda for the above meeting and now enclose the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was published.

Agenda No.	Item
4.	Debt Management (Pages 51 - 96) Report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services
7.	Cabinet Member Report - February 2023 to June 2023 (Pages 97 - 110) Cabinet Member Report

Yours sincerely,

D.Johnson

Chief Executive

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Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)	Date of Meeting:	Tuesday 13 June 2023
Subject:	Debt Management		
Report of:	Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Portfolio:	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services		
Is this a Key Decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

The report provides the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with details of steps taken to manage uncollected debt owed to the Council.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is also asked to note that it is proposed that the Audit and Governance Committee will be asked to recommence considering write-offs of bad debt over £10,000, with the S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer reviewing requests under £10,000.

In addition, an update has been produced for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee providing performance information relating to the Council's contracted Enforcement Agents.

Finally, a copy of the Council's Corporate Debt Policy is provided for the Committee's information.

Recommendation(s):

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- (1) Notes the contents of this report.
- (2) Notes that it is proposed that the Council's Audit and Governance Committee be asked to recommence reviewing requests to write-off bad debts over £10,000, with the S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer reviewing requests under £10,000.

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- (3) Notes the information detailing the performance of the Council's contracted Enforcement Agents up to 31st March 2023 at section 6.14 below.
- (4) Notes the Corporate Debt Policy as outlined in section 2 of this briefing note and attached at Appendix 1.

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

- (1) The report summarises actions taken to collect and enforce debt, and the risks in managing the Council's debt position. It also sets out debt levels compared to the wider context of local taxation collection, enforcement, and policies.
- (2) The Council's Schemes of Financial Delegations set out that the Audit and Governance Committee must consider and approve write-off of bad debts over £10,000 with the S151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer approving the write-off of debts under £10,000. There have been no requests to consider bad-debt write-offs since March 2021 due to the reasons set out at paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5 below. It is proposed that a regular schedule of bad debt identified for write-off recommences for Audit and Governance and S151 Officer / Monitoring Officer review.
- (3) It is considered good practise that performance information for the Council's contracted Enforcement Agents be formally reported. It is therefore recommended that such information is provided to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.
- (4) The Corporate Debt Policy was last reviewed and updated in 2020. While the policy remains relatively unchanged the updated version, recently approved by the Cabinet Member for Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services, reflects current terminology, and updates links to useful resources and information for residents and stakeholders seeking assistance with debt.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)

None

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

Not Applicable

(B) Capital Costs

Not Applicable

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets):
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None	
Legal Implications:	
None	
Equality Implications:	
There are no equality implications.	
Impact on Cared for Children and Care Experienced Young People: Yes	
<p>In the context of debt collection and enforcement the Council's policies require staff to take account of any resident considered to be vulnerable. This is not necessarily restricted to the liable tax payer but may include the circumstances of a child within the care of a resident, or of a young person who has left care and is now responsible for managing their own affairs.</p>	
Climate Emergency Implications:	
The recommendations within this report will	
Have a positive impact	No
Have a neutral impact	Yes
Have a negative impact	No
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Yes
This report provides background information only.	

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable: The Corporate Debt Policy seeks to ensure that fair processes are followed where a resident in debt is considered to be vulnerable and to provide that person with additional support.	
Facilitate confident and resilient communities:	
Not applicable	
Commission, broker and provide core services:	
Not applicable	
Place – leadership and influencer:	
Not applicable	
Drivers of change and reform:	
Not applicable	
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity:	
Not applicable	

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Greater income for social investment:
Not applicable
Cleaner Greener
Not applicable.

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD.7256/23) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.5456/23) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

None

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following the Committee / Council meeting.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Corporate Debt Policy – Revised May 2023

Background Papers:

None

1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1 Sefton Council raises a significant proportion of its total income through local taxes and charges and has a duty to recover sums outstanding. At a time of significant financial pressure for the Council, income collection is particularly important to ensure that valuable frontline services continue.
- 1.2 The management of this income is a key business area for the Council. This income comes from many streams, for example Council Tax and Business Rates. Some of the activity is governed by legislation whilst others by sound principles of financial management. The majority of people and businesses in Sefton pay the Council on time. However, all Council service areas have to deal with people and businesses that get into arrears. For many it is simply an oversight. For others

living on very low incomes, or where business owners are struggling in the current economic climate, keeping up with payments can present real difficulties.

- 1.3 This report seeks to provide insight into the debt position and the risks associated with it.
- 1.4 A Debt Working Group was formed in 2019, led by the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services consisting of key staff from the legal, financial management and revenues teams. The aim of the group was to scrutinise all aspects of the Council's policy and operational procedures in relation to debt management to identify improvements to working practices to enhance debt recovery.
- 1.5 The work of the Group was curtailed during the 2020-2022 period due to the need to prioritise tasks associated with supporting residents and businesses through the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst some debt collection activity continued during the period of the pandemic, enforcement activity was significantly disrupted due to the Magistrates Court being unavailable for a time for obtaining liability orders, and enforcement agents restricted from home visiting. For these reasons, it was not considered appropriate to continue with a business-as-usual programme of writing off bad debt. Although some bad debts were submitted to the March 2021 Audit and Governance for write-off approval, restrictions in place meant that it was not possible to exhaust all collection and enforcement options as outlined below at 4.4. For these reasons, there is now a backlog of bad debt identified for submission for write-off.

2. Corporate Debt Policy

- 2.1 The objectives of this Policy are cost effective income collection and recovery that is sensitive to the needs of people and businesses in our community.
- 2.2 Importantly, this Policy details the practical help, advice and support available that will enable those who are in debt to help themselves and become debt free sooner and help maintain the Council's cash flow.
- 2.3 This Policy is shared with the Council's partners (for example, Southport Business Improvement District, Citizens Advice Sefton, Sefton CVS, One Vision Housing) and its debt enforcement agents.
- 2.4 This Policy does not prejudice any legal action that the Council may wish to take.
- 2.5 The Policy is regularly reviewed but also updated as and when legislative, technical or process changes need to be reflected within the Policy. However, with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic arising during the last scheduled review the policy has not been updated since 2020.
- 2.6 The Policy has now been reviewed and is still considered to be up to date in terms of legislation and process. However, since the last review some terminology has been updated and more importantly the Council's web pages have been significantly amended. Consequently, links to online resources contained within the Policy were found to be out of date and have been replaced with the current links. These links are important for residents and stakeholders to be able to easily

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access the help they require.

3.0 Annual Charges Raised

3.1 An important factor in understanding the Council's debt position is the amount of potential revenue the Council has to raise. The revenues fall into the following categories:-

- Local taxation i.e., Council Tax (CTAX) and Business Rates (NNDR).
- Charges for Services raised (Sundry Debt) e.g., for Care packages.
- Reclaims of overpaid housing benefit payments (HBOP). These are debts where an invoice has been raised for repayment. However, with the move to Universal Credit the number and value of these is reducing.
- Southport Business Improvement District (BID) levy. Although this is income collected on behalf of the BID, the Council has an obligation to manage the debt.

3.2 The table below summarises the total value of charges raised in the three years between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2023. The figures for Sundry Debt include any amounts raised for reclaiming HBOP.

Revenue	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Total
CTAX	£ 165,847,964	£ 178,923,322	£ 186,971,766	£ 531,743,052
NNDR	£ 32,245,771	£ 56,475,049	£ 69,655,432	£ 158,376,252
Sundry Debt	£ 60,832,577	£ 64,832,026	£ 80,705,602	£ 206,370,205
Totals	£ 258,926,312	£ 300,230,397	£ 337,332,800	£ 896,489,508

The amount of Business Rates raised in 2020/21 and 2021/22 was reduced due to additional support provided by the Government to ease the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The amount raised in 2022/23 is more typical of the expected annual charges raised.

4.0 Current Arrears Outstanding

4.1 For the purposes of this report a distinction is made between arrears and bad debt. Arrears outstanding are the amounts that have been raised but remain due to be paid, while bad debt are amounts that are difficult to collect and will be or likely to be considered for write off as uncollectable. Bad debt is dealt with in sections 6 and 7 below.

4.2 There may be a number of reasons why arrears are outstanding but, in most cases, efforts continue to be made to collect or enforce an outstanding amount due. The debtor may have an agreed payment schedule in place but the amounts due would still be considered to be arrears outstanding.

4.3 The table below indicates to the levels of arrears outstanding as at 31 March 2023.

Revenue	2022-23	2021-22	All Previous Years	Total
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CTAX	£ 10,443,904	£ 6,736,000	£ 24,426,387	£ 41,606,292
NNDR	£ 1,547,434	£ 1,411,825	£ 3,192,353	£ 6,151,612
HBOP	£ 268,163	£ 239,022	£ 1,430,457	£ 1,937,643
Sundry Debt	£ 5,007,092	£ 4,186,089	£ 6,282,504	£ 15,475,685
Totals	£ 17,266,593	£ 12,572,937	£ 35,331,701	£ 65,171,232

Excluded from the table above will be charges raised towards the end of the 2022/23 year, but which may not have been due to be paid until April 2023, even though they are deemed as arrears as they are amounts due in respect of a previous year. Where amounts outstanding have identifiable payment dates after 1 April 2023, they have been excluded from the figures shown.

4.4 There are a variety of options for collecting or enforcing an amount due if not paid. These will vary according to the debt type and to the debtors' individual circumstances but include:-

- Bill / Invoice sent.
- Reminder sent.
- Final Notice sent.
- Summons sent.
- Liability Order granted at Magistrates Court for Council Tax and NNDR.
- Wherever possible Attachment of Earnings or an Attachment of Benefit is set up for Council Tax.
- Telephone debt chasing to make arrangements to pay.
- Home visits are made to make arrangements to pay, where it is considered that the debtor needs additional support.
- 14 Day Warning Letter / Letter before action sent.
- Cases referred to Enforcement Agents / Debt Collectors.
- Charging Orders and Land Charges raised against the property if appropriate.
- Statutory Demands issued for Bankruptcy proceedings.
- Cases where all available methods of enforcement have been exhausted are being returned to an enforcement agent for a further attempt to trace a new address and provide a propensity to pay score. Those with a reported high or medium propensity to pay undergo a final attempt to enforce the debt before consideration for write off.
- Complex and high value cases are referred to the Legal Department.
- If a person or business is having difficulty making the payment, special arrangements are used to effect recovery, and this may mean extending the period to collect the debt. Only when all options have been explored would a debt be considered for write off.

4.5 In cases where a debtor is considered vulnerable the debt will be entered into a separate process managed and monitored by a welfare advisor. If appropriate, cases will also be referred to specialist debt advice agencies such as Sefton Citizens Advice.

4.6 In a small number of cases debtors will be held in Breathing Space, a statutory holding period for people in debt to obtain specialist advice.

4.7 Data regarding arrears of Council Tax and NNDR are included on a Government

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Return at the end of each financial year. The data shows that the Council's outstanding debt position is similar to other local authorities in the Liverpool City Region.

5.0 Council Tax and Business Rates Collection Performance

- 5.1 The Council seeks to limit the level of debt by implementing procedures to maximise collections.
- 5.2 The Government publishes collection performance for Council Tax, and NNDR for all councils by the end of June each year. Sefton Council's performance compares favourably when compared to both other metropolitan authorities and neighbouring authorities in the Liverpool City Region.

6.0 Bad Debt for Write Off

- 6.1 The operational teams will explore all available options for enforcing a debt as outlined in 4.4 above. However, when all potential avenues have been exhausted then a case may be submitted for consideration for write off.
- 6.2 When a case has been identified it will undergo further scrutiny by a manager with responsibility for that area e.g., Council Tax, to ensure all efforts to collect have been exhausted. Debts with a value in excess of £10,000 will then be further reviewed by a more senior manager.
- 6.3 Debts that are still considered to require writing off will be added to a report for formal consideration for write off. Debts of £10,000 or more will be reported to the next available Audit and Governance Committee, debts below that value will be considered by the Executive Director for Corporate Resources and Customer Services via a Chief Officer report.
- 6.4 A final review of cases submitted for write off is undertaken by the Legal team prior to the reports being considered.
- 6.5 Outstanding debts that have been identified for write off still require managing within the operational workloads. This risks having a negative impact on the workload aimed at collecting debts that may still be settled. It is, therefore, important to establish a regular programme of bad debt for write off to ensure that uncollectable debt is managed as efficiently as collectable debt.
- 6.6 A backlog of bad debt that will potentially require write-off has accrued for the reasons set out in paragraph 1.5 above. Consequently, for the period ending 31 March 2023, the Council has identified a significant amount of debt for potential write-off, it should however be noted that the level is less than 1% of the collectible liability as set out in the table at paragraph 3.2 above.
- 6.7 A large proportion of debt that is submitted for write off occurs when the debtor absconds leaving no forwarding address. Whilst efforts are made to trace debtors, if a new address has not been found, the case is suspended for six months before a further attempt is made.

There is a large number of cases that fall into this category, that have previously

been marked as requiring write off, and where further scrutiny has not taken place during the period since the COVID-19 pandemic. To bring this work backlog up to date, the Council is exploring options with its contracted Enforcement Agents to run all cases through their tracing process before including them on a write off report.

- 6.8 Whenever an amount is written off it is possible that further sums may be recovered in the future as new information is obtained. This would happen in the following instances: -
- Where a new address is found for an absconded debtor, attempts will be made to recover any outstanding sums.
 - New information may become known that indicates it is now feasible to collect a debt that had previously been deemed uncollectable for example, a large outstanding debt for a taxpayer suffering extreme financial hardship, and in receipt of benefits, may have entered employment.
 - Whenever a firm or individual goes into bankruptcy, liquidation or receivership, the Council's interest is registered with the Receiver or Liquidator and the receiver may pay a dividend to creditors.
 - Companies that have ceased trading but have not entered into insolvency may restart their business.

6.9 Enforcement Agent Performance

The Council has contracts in place with Enforcement Agents who also undertake debt collection work on Sundry Debt and Housing Benefit Overpayments. The agents' performance is monitored by the operational teams but has not been regularly reported. It is intended that Enforcement Agent performance is reported as part of an annual outturn report.

- 6.10 There are multiple debt types that are referred to the agents for collection and performance is monitored monthly. Regular performance monitoring meetings are held with each contracted supplier and relative performance is shared with all suppliers.
- 6.11 Operationally different debts are referred to as debt schemes, and the actions taken will differ. For example, debt outstanding from current Council Tax Reduction claimants has agreed limits on the actions that Enforcement Agents are allowed to take to obtain payment and will be given additional time in which to pay. These cases are referred only as a last resort. The priority will be to attempt collection via an Attachment to Benefits or Earnings, or to negotiate a payment arrangement. A referral to the Enforcement Agent is only made when all other avenues have not been possible.

The different debt schemes are identified as follows:-

- CTAX and NNDR 1st Phase – These are cases that have been referred to an agent having failed to pay or enter an arrangement after being summonsed to Court.
- CTAX and NNDR 2nd Phase – These are debts that the Enforcement Agent has failed to collect. They will be re-allocated to a separate agent to undertake further attempts at collection. Costs cannot be

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incurred twice in these cases but are more difficult to collect.

- CTRS – these are debts where the Council Tax Reduction claimant has failed to pay following a summons. Attempts to enforce payment are limited and agents would not be allowed to enforce debt via more traditional 'bailiff' doorstep activity.
- Sundry Debt, HBOP and CTAX Debt. These are dealt with as debt collection activities and do not allow for removal of goods in any circumstances. CTAX debt in these cases are very small debts that would otherwise incur additional costs to a value of more than the debt outstanding.

6.12 All contracted Enforcement Agents are required to implement robust policies and procedures for the identification and sensitive handling of vulnerable debtors. All contracted firms have dedicated welfare teams or advisors that vulnerable clients are referred to in the first instance to provide immediate support and/or signposting to specialist advice.

6.13 For the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2023 the contracts for Enforcement Agents and Debt collection were awarded to:-

- Jacobs Enforcement Agents
- Marstons Holdings plc
- Newlyn plc
- Equita plc

6.14 During the lifetime of the contract the activities of the agents were curtailed by the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions placed upon them by the Government during that period. However, the collection performance during the lifetime of the contract is summarised in the table below.

Debt Type	Number of Cases Referred	Value of Collectable Debt £	Debt Collected £	% Collected	Agreed Payment Arrangements Ongoing £
Council Tax	44,490	24,265,474.63	8,239,592.75	33.96	1,023,699.86
CTAX CTR Claimants	934	289,589.37	37,555.45	12.97	6,101.65
Business Rates	2,170	5,428,299.96	1,339,733.42	24.68	222,785.59
Total	47,594	29,983,363.96	9,616,881.62	32.07	1,252,587.10
* Total Debt Collection	8,909	4,373,555.82	456,264.75	10.43	48,301.93

* Total Debt collection refers to Sundry Debt, HBOP debt and small Council Tax balances

6.15 Agents are also monitored on the actions they take to collect debt to ensure they comply with legislation, the code of conduct of their governing body CIVEA, and the Council's own code of conduct. In the event of any complaints the details are discussed with the appropriate agent and remedial actions agreed. During the four year period of the last contract the Council referred 47,594 cases and received 9 complaints, of which one complaint was upheld and one complaint was partially upheld.

6.16 New contracts are now in place with effect from 1 April 2023 following a procurement exercise completed in January 2023.

Enforcement Agent contracts for the collection of Council Tax and Business Rates were awarded to:-

- Jacobs
- Marstons
- Bristow and Sutor

Debt Collection contracts were awarded to:-

- Jacobs
- Bristow and Sutor
- Rundles

Contracts are for three years with an optional one-year extension subject to performance. Regular performance monitoring meetings will take place at least quarterly. Performance will be reported to members annually.

7.0 Bad Debt Provisions

- 7.1 Like all local authorities, Sefton Council maintains provisions for bad debts for the four main areas of debt. These are re-evaluated at the end of each financial year to take account of the amounts collected in the year, new debt raised in the year, changes in economic conditions, etc.

The Bad Debt Provisions for 2022/23 are being finalised as part of the closedown process. The provisions will be more substantial than would otherwise be the case due to minimal amounts of debt being written off since the COVID-19 pandemic.

8.0 Future Service Enhancements

- 8.1 Service provision is maintained under constant review to ensure current processes are robust or to identify new software capabilities to improve efficiency and improve the Council's collection capabilities.

- 8.2 Plans for 2023/24 include:-

- Implementation of a Citizen Access module for Council Tax and NNDR payers. This will enable residents to manage accounts online by direct integration of online forms, a portal to view their bills online and apply for discounts. The module will also open up opportunities for use of SMS messaging and e-billing.
- Introduction of Direct Debit as a method of payment for regular Sundry Debt charges.
- Enhancements to the NEC Revenues and Benefits Software to enable better management of debts on negotiated payment arrangements and manging the enforcement workflow.

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Corporate Debt Policy 2023.24

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1. Introduction

Sefton Council raises a significant proportion of its total income through local taxes and charges and has a duty to recover sums outstanding.

At a time of significant financial pressure for the Council, income collection is now particularly important to ensure that valuable frontline services continue.

The management of this income is a key business area for the Council. This income comes from many streams, for example Council Tax and Business Rates. Some of the activity is governed by legislation whilst others by sound principles of financial management.

The majority of people and businesses in Sefton pay the Council on time. However, all Council service areas have to deal with people and businesses that get into arrears. For many it is simply an oversight. For others living on very low incomes, or where business owners are struggling in the current economic climate, keeping up with payments can present real difficulties.

The objectives of this Policy are cost effective income collection and recovery that is sensitive to the needs of people and businesses in our community.

Importantly, this Policy details the practical help, advice and support available that will enable those who are in debt to help themselves and become debt free sooner and help maintain the Council's cash flow.

This Policy will be shared with the Council's partners (for example, Southport Business Improvement District, Citizens Advice Sefton, Sefton CVS, One Vision Housing) and its debt enforcement agents.

This Policy does not prejudice any legal action that the Council may wish to take.

The Policy will be reviewed annually, but also updated as and when legislative, technical or process changes need to be reflected within the Policy.

Exceptions to the Policy

On rare occasions, it may be in the best interests of the Council or local residents for action to be taken in the collection or recovery of a debt other than in accordance with this Policy. On such occasions, a decision may be taken by an appropriate senior officer (Service Manager or above) to allow an exception to the Policy having considered the normal requirements of the Policy, the specific case, and the interests of the Council and local residents.

Where such an exception is made to the Policy the decision and the reason for the decision shall be recorded in writing by the officer making the decision and should be open for audit/inspection.

2. What is a Corporate Debt Policy and why have one?

2.1 What is a Corporate Debt Policy?

The Corporate Debt Policy and Procedures is the Council's statement on how it works with its customers and partners to collect debt from both citizens and businesses. The document details the Council's policies on the billing, collection and recovery of money due to the Council.

2.2 Why have a Corporate Debt Policy?

The Council aims to achieve good practice in collecting all its income.

2.3 What is a debt?

For the purposes of this Policy a debt is defined as any payment expected by the Council that has not been paid by the due date. All Council bills and invoices will be raised as soon as practicable and will clearly include the following information: -

- What the bill or invoice is for
- When payment is due
- How to pay
- Who to contact for further information and advice

2.4 What types of debt are owed to the Council?

The Policy applies to the collection of

- Council Tax
- Business Rates (also known as non-domestic rates)
- Business Improvement District (BID) Levy
- Sundry Debts
- Housing Benefit Overpayments
- Health and Social Care Invoices
- Parking charges
- Civil Penalties in relation to Landlord Licenses & Housing Standards enforcement
- All other debts, for example unpaid fees and charges.

2.5 What does the Policy cover?

The Policy covers the processes and practices that the Council will take with regard to the following: -

- How people can access advice and support
- How ability to pay will be assessed
- How information may be shared
- How the Council uses collection and other external agencies
- How we will conduct personal visit to debtors
- What procedures are used
- The principles and processes that the Council will follow with regard to debt recovery
- The Council's Corporate Complaints procedures
- What discretionary payment arrangements are available for customers experiencing financial hardship.

2.6 How will we operate this Policy?

This Policy will apply to all Council service areas.

Different types of income may have their own procedures and processes for the recovery of the debt largely due to Government Acts and legislation that govern recovery. The relevant processes are outlined in this Policy.

Some of our customers will have multiple debts with the Council and the Council will seek to work collectively to ensure that customers' needs are addressed. For example, we may consider collecting it corporately in one payment arrangement for all debts. Such an approach must be mindful of the different regulations that govern each debt and must compliment the Council's procedures rather than compromise.

2.7 Debt Recovery Principles

- Collect all monies owed to the Council
- Comply with all relevant Government legislation that governs the collection and enforcement of debt
- Comply with the Council's Financial Procedures
- Apply best practice to debt collection.

3. How the Council will collect and recover income.

To achieve best practice in income collection the Council will make paying bills as easy as possible by: -

- Encouraging early and regular contact with customers at every stage of the collection and recovery process.
- Make it easy to contact the Council through a range of options, encouraging use of the Council's website, via self-serve contact forms, web chat etc., where possible.
- Offering a range of payment options.
- Encouraging automated payment where possible. For example, Direct Debit which is the most cost-efficient method for the Council helping to keep bills as low as possible.
- Promoting - Pay on line for services on our website.
[Online services \(sefton.gov.uk\)](https://sefton.gov.uk)
- Raising awareness of the payment hotline which is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week 0151 934 4697.
- Providing advice on the bills on how to claim any discounts, reliefs, exemptions, reductions, financial support, welfare benefits or how to query or appeal against the amount due.
- Reminding people at the right times when payment is late.
- Requiring payment in advance for low level debts such as pest control, green bins.
- Providing information about what happens if payments are not received on time.
- Establishing the customers preferred method of communication, where known.
- Providing communication assistance, where possible.
- Ensuring all our communications are clear and simple to understand, by using Plain English in written letters and documents.
- Responding to all enquiries courteously and as promptly as possible.
- Identifying vulnerable persons and providing intervention at an early stage so that income collection is done in a sensitive manner.
- Providing proactive support to customers experiencing undue financial hardship by ensuring realistic payment arrangements are agreed upon.
- Encouraging people to get help from a range of sources.
- Providing information about who can give help and advice.
- Working in partnership with advice agencies, collection agents and other partners by promoting and signposting customers to sources of independent money and debt advice.

4. Council Tax Recovery

Your Council Tax ensures access to a range of services including adult & children's social care, access to our many community facilities including libraries, leisure centres, parks, green spaces, refuse collection, and access to our fabulous coastline. It helps protect our most vulnerable in Sefton, including children, adults at risk and older people, and contributes to the education of thousands of children across Sefton. These are just some of the vital services we provide for you. To see what else your Council does for you, go to www.sefton.gov.uk

4.1 Council Tax Demand Notice (Council Tax bill)

We will issue annual Council Tax bills in March each year after the Council has set its Council Tax for the forthcoming year. This ensures that payments will commence as early in April as possible.

We have produced a short video if you have difficulty understanding your Council Tax bill [A guide to understanding your Council Tax bill \(sefton.gov.uk\)](http://sefton.gov.uk)

Where a Council Tax payer's circumstances change during the year, for example a change of address or an award of Council Tax Reduction, we will send a revised Council Tax bill (known as an adjustment notice) as soon as practicable after the liability is known with payment(s) being due on the earliest date(s) allowed by legislation.

All Council Tax bills include a monthly instalment arrangement.

We offer several different payment methods and dates for customers to pay their bills. We offer instalment dates of the 7th, 11th, 13th and the 15th of the month to all non-direct debit payers.

We promote payment by direct debit, as it is the most efficient payment method. It also helps customers avoid missing instalments and being subjected to recovery action.

To encourage customers to pay by direct debit, we offer a choice of 8 instalment dates: 2nd, 5th, 11th, 15th, 18th, 22nd, 25th and the 28th of the month. We promote the setting up of Direct Debit online via the Council's website <https://forms.sefton.gov.uk/ddcounciltax/>

If a customer pays regularly, but fails to do so by the instalment date, we will still take recovery action, as payments are late.

In line with Council Tax legislation customers can request payments over 12 monthly instalments. If possible, this request should be made before 1st April to allow us sufficient time to adjust the payment plan over the whole period. Where this request is made part way through the year, instalments are reduced accordingly. Where applicable, when a customer clearly demonstrates they are struggling to pay over a 10-month payment plan this 12-month payment option should be made known to them.

Where a Council Tax customer cannot pay on the set instalment date, the Council can use its discretion to vary the instalment dates. Such arrangements will only be considered where

customers can demonstrate sufficient reason why they cannot pay on the instalment date given. The final instalment date must be before 31st March of the financial year in question unless there are extenuating circumstances. If a customer does not pay on the dates agreed, no further amendments to instalment dates are allowed in that year.

4.2 Council Tax Reminder/Final Notice

If payment is not received by the payment date, we will usually issue a reminder. The reminder gives 7 days for the customer to bring their account up to date.

If the overdue instalment is paid, but the customer misses a future instalment, we will usually issue a second reminder. We will tell the customer that we will not issue any further reminders and that they must bring their account up to date within 7 days and maintain future instalments on the due date or a summons will be requested from the Magistrates' Courts.

If a customer misses a third instalment a Final Notice will usually be sent. This means the annual charge will become due in full immediately, otherwise a summons is issued.

We will not usually issue more than three reminders in a financial year - a maximum of two instalment reminders and one final notice.

4.3 Council Tax Summons

If the customer does not pay as the reminder, or final reminder, instructs we will usually request a summons to be issued from the Magistrates' Court. The summons gives details of when the customer must attend court to explain why they have not paid their bill. The cost of sending the summons is added to their bill.

Once a summons has been issued, the full amount of Council Tax as well as the summons cost is due.

If the customer pays the full amount of the summons, including costs, before the hearing date, the customer does not have to attend court.

If the customer makes a payment arrangement with us before the hearing, they do not have to attend court. However, we will ask the Magistrates' Court to grant a "liability order" to secure the debt (explained below). Providing the customer keeps to the payment arrangement, we will not take any further recovery action.

At the court hearing, we must satisfy the Magistrates' Court we have followed correct procedures. If the Magistrates' Court are satisfied with the evidence we present they will grant a liability order and costs.

4.4 Do I have to attend court?

You do not have to attend court: -

- If you do not dispute that you owe the amount due.
- If the total amount due, including costs is paid before the date of the hearing.

4.5 If you are unable to pay the full amount on the summons?

If you are having difficulty paying the full payment, you must contact us as soon as possible with your proposed payment arrangement by completing a Special Payment Arrangement form on our website <https://forms.sefton.gov.uk/specpayct/>

All Special Payment Arrangements must be made with the agreement of the Council and can only be accepted by Direct Debit, that way we can enter a formal arrangement on your account and make sure that no further action is taken as long as you keep to the agreed payment arrangement.

The Council will still apply for a Liability Order but undertake not to take any further proceedings if you make the payments as agreed.

4.6 What if I dispute the debt?

If you dispute that you owe the amount due or that you are not responsible for the property contact the Council immediately.

The Council will attempt to resolve any dispute before the court hearing date.

If the dispute cannot be resolved, your right to ask the Magistrates to consider your case is unaffected.

4.7 Attending Court

If you want to attend the court hearing, the Magistrate will ask if you have a valid defence which will stop a liability order being granted.

A valid defence that the Magistrate will take into account are:

- You have paid your bill, including summons costs
- You are not responsible for the dwelling during the period you have been summonsed for
- Bankruptcy or liquidation proceedings have commenced
- The application for the liability order was made more than six years after the first demand notice was issued

If any of the above apply to you, it is very important that you contact the Council prior to the

court hearing to try to resolve the matter before appearing before the Magistrates.

The Magistrates will not consider issues such as outstanding valuation appeals or your ability to pay.

4.8 Recovery process after a Liability Order is obtained.

At all stages, including following the issue of the Liability Order, the customer will be given an opportunity to pay by instalments. The Council will issue a notification of issue of Liability Order and Request for Information to each customer after court. This gives the customer an opportunity to supply their personal details so that consideration may be given to making an arrangement or determining the next course of recovery action.

The Request for Information will ask you to supply details about your income and expenditure. You have two weeks to complete it and return it to us. This letter also provides details of what happens if your account is issued to one of the Council's contracted Enforcement Agent Companies for them to collect the outstanding debt from you.

If you do not complete and return the Request for Information form within two weeks, we can take legal action against you. This may result in a fine of up to £500 and a criminal record. If you knowingly supply false information you are liable to a fine of up to £1,000.

A Liability Order gives certain powers of recovery to the Council. These include the following: -

- Attachment of Earnings – This results in weekly or monthly deductions being made directly by the customer's employer and then paid over to the Council. The amounts that may be deducted are set out in legislation.
- Deductions from Income Support/Job Seekers Allowance/Employment Support Allowance/Universal Credit. This results in deductions being taken directly from state benefits and then paid over to the Council. The amounts that may be deducted are set out in legislation.
- Taking control of goods – Use of Enforcement Agents – Enforcement Agents contracted by the Council will be required to comply with the Taking Control of Goods Regulations 2013, the Tribunals Courts and Enforcement Act 2007 as well as maintaining the terms of a code of practice issued by the Council
- Bankruptcy/Liquidation – If sufficient assets exist to meet the outstanding debt and all other reasonable routes of recovery have been exhausted the Council may petition for Bankruptcy/Liquidation
- Charging Orders – An order may be placed on a debtor's property through a County Court process. The Council has the option to enforce the sale of the property or await a voluntary sale prior to the charge being repaid
- Committal to Prison – In exceptional circumstances the Council can make an application to the court for Committal to Prison
- Attachment of Members Allowances – Deductions can be made from elected member's

allowances in the event of non-payment.

4.9 Exceptional Hardship Payment Fund

If you are suffering financial hardship as a result of exceptional circumstances, we will consider reducing your Council Tax with a discretionary award using our hardship fund.

Each case will be decided on its individual merits, but you must meet some or all of our qualifying criteria.

This means we will look at whether:

- There is evidence of exceptional financial hardship or personal circumstances that justifies a reduction in your Council Tax liability.
- You satisfy us that you have taken all reasonable steps to resolve your situation prior to applying.
- You have applied for localised Council Tax support (Sefton Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme).
- You have already applied for and been awarded any other discounts or reliefs you are eligible for.
- You have access to other assets which you could use to pay your Council Tax.
- You have investigated all other legitimate means of resolving your situation.
- Our finances allow for a reduction to be made.
- Your situation and reason for your application are outside of your control.

To apply please complete the application form on our website

<https://forms.sefton.gov.uk/dhpehpform/>

5. Business Rates Recovery (including Business Improvement District Levy -BID)

Business Rates is a local tax collected by local authorities and contributes towards the cost of local services. For more information about Business Rates visit our website

<https://www.sefton.gov.uk/business/business-rates.aspx>

5.1 Non-Domestic Rate Demand Notice (Business Rate bill)

Business Rate payers are entitled to pay their current year's bill in instalments. If you receive a bill at the start of the financial year you will be given 10 instalments. Where bills are issued later in the year, the number of instalments you can pay over will be reduced. Every customer has the right to make a request for their payments to be extended for up to 12 months (i.e., April to March). Payments should be made by the due dates shown on the bill and it is important that

payments are received by the Council by that date.

5.2 Business Rate Reminder/Final Notice

If you miss an instalment, or pay less than the amount due, you can expect the following action:

- We will usually send a reminder notice for any unpaid instalment shortly after it is due.
- The overdue amount must be paid within 7 days.
- If the overdue amount is not paid, you will lose the right to pay by instalments after a further seven days. No further reminders will be sent and a summons will be requested from the Magistrate's Court.
- If you bring your account up to date within 7 days of the reminder you can still continue to pay by monthly instalments as shown on your bill.
- Further non-payment will usually result in a final notice being used. This means that your right to pay by instalments is withdrawn and the full amount outstanding on the notice must be paid within 7 days.
- If the overdue amount is not paid a summons will usually be requested from the Magistrate's Court.

5.3 Business Rate Summons

If you do not pay as the reminder/final notice instructs, we will usually request a summons to be issued from the Magistrates' Court. The summons gives details of when you must attend court to explain why you have not paid your bill. The cost of sending the summons is added to the bill.

Once a summons has been issued, the full amount of Business Rates, as well as the summons cost is due.

If you pay the full amount of the summons, including costs, before the hearing date, you do not have to attend court.

If you make a payment arrangement with us before the hearing, you do not have to attend court. However, we will ask the Magistrates' Court to grant a "liability order" to secure the debt (explained below). Providing you keep to the payment arrangement, we will not take any further recovery action.

5.4 Do I have to attend court?

You do not have to attend court: -

- If you do not dispute that you owe the amount due.
- If the total amount due, including costs is paid before the date of the hearing.

5.5 If you are unable to pay the full amount on the summons?

If you are having difficulty paying the full payment, you must contact us as soon as possible with your proposed payment arrangement or by completing the online Special Payment Arrangement form on our website <https://forms.sefton.gov.uk/specpaybr/>

All Special Payment arrangements must be made with the agreement of the Council and can only be accepted by Direct Debit, that way we can enter a formal arrangement on your account and make sure that no further action is taken as long as you keep to the agreed Special Payment Arrangement.

The Council will still apply for a Liability Order but undertake not to take any further proceedings if you make the payments as agreed.

5.6 What if I dispute the debt?

If you dispute that you owe the amount due or that you are not responsible for the property contact the Council immediately. The Council will attempt to resolve any dispute before the court hearing date.

If the dispute cannot be resolved, your right to ask the Magistrates to consider your case is unaffected.

5.7 Attending Court

At the court hearing, we must satisfy the Magistrates' that we have followed correct procedures.

If the Magistrates' Court are satisfied with the evidence we present they will grant a liability order and costs to the Council.

If you attend the court hearing, the Magistrates will ask if you have a valid defence which will stop a liability order being granted.

A valid defence that the Magistrate will take into account are:

- You have paid your bill, including summons costs
- You are not responsible for the property during the period you have been summonsed for
- Bankruptcy or liquidation proceedings have commenced
- The application for the liability order was made more than six years after the first demand notice was issued.

If any of the above apply to you, it is very important that you contact the Council prior to the court hearing to try to resolve the matter before appearing before the Magistrates.

The Magistrates will not consider issues such as outstanding valuation appeals or your ability to

pay.

5.8 Recovery process after a Liability Order is obtained

A Liability Order gives certain powers of recovery to the Council. These include the following: -

- Taking control of goods – Use of Enforcement Agents – Enforcement Agents contracted by the Council will be required to comply with the Taking Control of Goods Regulations 2013, the Tribunals Courts and Enforcement Act 2007 as well as maintaining the terms of a code of practice issued by the Council
- Committal to Prison – In exceptional circumstances the Council can make an application to the court for Committal to Prison
- Bankruptcy/Liquidation – If sufficient assets exist to meet the outstanding debt and all other reasonable routes of recovery have been exhausted the Council may petition for Bankruptcy/Liquidation
- Civil court proceedings for recovery of the debt and subsequent enforcement action

Further costs may be incurred if any of these actions are taken.

5.9 Business Rates Hardship Relief

The Council has a discretionary power to reduce or remit the amount a business ratepayer is liable to pay if it is satisfied that: -

- The ratepayer would sustain hardship if it did not do so, and
- It is reasonable to do so having regard to the interests of its Council Tax payers.

Hardship relief is available to ratepayers whose circumstances have become so severe that not granting relief may cause unnecessary hardship, either financially or otherwise. It is expected that businesses will take prompt action to mitigate any factors giving rise to hardship, for example seeking business advice, offering discounts and promotions, reviewing pricing, extending the range of stock or services, negotiating with creditors, etc. Applicants must be able to demonstrate that reasonable steps are being taken to alleviate the hardship.

You will be required to provide the following information to support your application: -

- Full details of why the business is experiencing hardship.
- A comprehensive recovery action plan outlining how you intend to return the business into profitability and how any discretionary financial support from Sefton Council will help achieve this.
- The past three years' audited accounts, or, in the case of a new business, an estimate of annual income and expenditure and cash flow forecast for a minimum of the next twelve months.
- Details of the impact of not granting relief on the business and the local community.

- Details of additional financial support that you have sought from other sources to alleviate your current hardship.
- All relevant factors affecting the ability of the business to meet its rate liability.
- An outline of how the business contributes to the economic growth / regeneration of the local area.
- A state aid declaration

Please note whilst your application is being processed, your current rates are due and payable.

Once a decision has been made, we will write to you to confirm this. If relief is awarded an amended rates demand will be issued with new payment instructions. This will take account of any payments you have already made.

To apply please complete the application form on our website <https://forms.sefton.gov.uk/brhr/>

An application will only be considered when you have fully completed the form and provided all required supporting information and evidence.

5.10. Business Improvement District

Bills for properties within the Business Improvement District are issued annually and payable in one lump sum. If an account is overdue, a reminder notice will be issued.

To pay on line via the Council's website visit

https://www.civicaepay.co.uk/Sefton/Webpay_Public/Webpay/Default.aspx?fund=16

If payment is not made within 14 days of the Reminder Notice, an application will usually be made to the Magistrates Court for a summons to be issued.

If payment is not received, then we will seek to obtain a Liability Order. This allows us to ask enforcement agents to recover the debt outstanding.

6. Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery

6.1 How an overpayment may occur

An overpayment occurs when you have received Housing Benefit that you were not entitled to. Overpayments of Housing Benefit can occur due to various reasons, such as: -

- You move home.
- Someone else moving into or out of your home.
- You, or a member of your household, may have started work.
- You, or a member of your household, may have had an increase in income or capital.

If you have been paid too much Housing Benefit you will normally be asked to pay back the overpayment to the Council, this is known as a recoverable overpayment.

6.2 When an overpayment occurs we will write to you, the letter will tell you: -

- The reason that you have received too much Housing Benefit.
- A breakdown of the overpayment, including the period it covers.
- The total amount of the overpayment.
- The decision if you have to pay back the amount.
- How the overpayment will be recovered.
- How you can appeal if you think the overpayment is incorrect.

6.3 Recovery of the overpayment

We will look at who has caused the overpayment and to whom the Housing Benefit has been paid and then make our decision if the overpayment is recoverable and, if so, who to recover it from.

Overpayments are usually recoverable so long as they have not been caused by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP error) or the Local Authority (LA error). However, if it is reasonable to assume that the claimant was aware that they were being overpaid at the time the payments were made, the overpayment will remain recoverable.

An overpayment can be recovered from both the claimant and the person to whom the overpaid housing benefit was paid, normally a landlord or managing agent.

For claimants, an overpayment will either be recovered from the ongoing entitlement to Housing Benefit you still have in the form of claw-back deductions, or you will receive an invoice for the total amount of the overpayment, if you no longer qualify for benefit.

If you wish to reduce the amount of any claw-back that is being taken from your ongoing entitlement to Housing Benefit, you can request this by contacting the Council's Housing Benefit Overpayment Team on 0151 934 4348. If you wish to make arrangements to pay an invoice received, then you should contact the Council's Accounts Receivable Team on 0151 934 4149.

A reminder is usually issued if a balance remains outstanding, unless there is an agreed instalment plan or notification has been received that the invoice is in dispute.

If a debt remains after the reminder has been issued, a final notice will be sent.

If we are unable to recover the overpayment, we will approach the Department for Work and Pensions and seek recovery through an attachment from your allowable state benefits.

We can also contact your employer directly and use current legislation to instruct your employer to make deductions directly from your earnings (known as a Direct Earnings Attachment).

If you are the Landlord/Managing Agent and you are receiving Housing Benefit payments from the Council for other tenants, deductions will be taken at the earliest possible time from these payments. Where possible the overpayment will be recovered in one lump sum.

Alternatively, where the Landlord/Managing Agent is no longer receiving benefit for any tenants, an invoice will be issued.

A reminder is issued if a balance remains outstanding, unless there is an agreed instalment plan or notification has been received that the invoice is in dispute.

If a debt remains after the reminder has been issued, a final notice will be sent.

If the invoice remains unpaid, we will usually refer the overpayment to a contracted debt collection agency for collection.

6.4 What if I do not agree with the overpayment?

If you disagree with the Housing Benefit overpayment you must write to the Council within one calendar month of the date on the decision letter. Your full appeal rights will be shown on the overpayment letter and the decision letter.

For further guidance please follow the link below: -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-overpayments-guide>

6.5 Council Tax Reduction Scheme Overpayment

If we find out you have been given more Council Tax support than you were entitled to under the Sefton Council Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme, we will send you a revised Council Tax bill (known as a Council Tax adjustment notice) and a letter explaining the amount of the overpayment and the period to which the overpayment relates. The revised Council Tax bill will show what additional payment is required and when. We will recover the amount overpaid in line with normal Council Tax recovery procedures - see section 4 Council Tax Recovery.

7. Sundry Debtors Recovery

Sefton Council collects general income known as Sundry Debt. The value of this income can vary from a few pounds to hundreds of thousands of pounds and therefore provides a significant source of income to the Council. Invoices are issued by the Council in respect of a range of services including, but not limited to, trade waste collection, home care and residential charges, hire of facilities for leisure centres, education and libraries and ground rent and chief rents.

7.1 Raising Invoices

The Council will ensure that invoices for goods and services are issued promptly.

The invoice will show:

- Customer name and full address including postcode
- Date services provided
- Full description of debt and period to which it relates
- Purchase order and/or any reference details
- Amount due including VAT, if applicable
- Methods of payment
- Payment due date
- Any supporting information where required
- Name and contact number of person/issuing department to contact in event of a query about the invoice
- Contact number should you wish to discuss alternative payment options.

7.2 Collection

Invoices are normally sent by post and are payable immediately.

A reminder will be issued if the amount is not paid by the due date shown on the invoice, unless there is an agreed instalment plan, or the invoice has been disputed.

If no payment is received following the reminder notice, a final notice will be sent.

If no payment is received following a final notice, further recovery action will be taken which may include legal proceedings/referral to enforcement agents.

7.3 Recovery and Enforcement

If a debt remains outstanding following the reminder and/or final notice, single and multiple debts of under £500.00 will usually be referred to one of the Council's contracted debt collection agent companies to collect the amount due. Subsequent contact from the debtor will then be referred to the debt collection agent company dealing with the debt, except in exceptional circumstances.

The Council will commence legal action for single or multiple debts of £500.00 and over.

The Council will issue a pre-action letter which outlines the actions a customer must take to avoid the matter being referred to the County Court.

If a judgement is obtained at County Court the collection of arrears may be made by making an application for a warrant of execution, to seize goods to the value of the debt, or for an attachment of earnings order, or an application for an oral examination as to means at the county court or charging order application, which may result in an enforced sale of property.

The Council will seek to levy and recover from the debtor costs/fees that are legitimately due from the debtor to the Council or its agents.

7.4 Payment difficulties

Customers may request an instalment arrangement for debts, which will be considered by the Council.

All requests to pay by instalments are considered on a case-by-case basis and are dependent upon the type of debt that is being repaid.

Where an instalment plan is agreed, the Council will seek to have the debt repaid in the shortest amount of time possible.

If an offer of payment is considered too low in proportion to the size of the debt outstanding, an income and expenditure form is sent to the debtor to assess their ability to pay. Each case will be assessed individually.

Instalment arrangements are regularly reviewed by the Council to see if they remain affordable to the debtor or if payments can be increased to shorten the payment plan.

Failure to pay as agreed will lead to the arrangement being cancelled and recovery action commencing without further notice.

8. Adult Social Care Charges Recovery

Adult Social Care provides a range of services to adults and vulnerable people, these include home care services, supported living, care home placements, day care services and community support. The social care assessment will determine eligibility and access to these services.

8.1 Charges for services

If you have savings or assets over £23,250, you will have to pay the full cost of any services you receive or arrange services yourself.

If you have less than £23,250, you will be offered a financial assessment as you may have to pay a contribution towards any care that you receive. The amount you pay for services will depend on your individual financial circumstances and the cost of the services that. If applicable, you will be referred to the financial assessment team who will ask you for details of your finances including bank statements.

8.2 Financial assessment

As part of the Council's social care assessment a financial assessment will be offered to you. The financial assessment will determine how much you are required to contribute towards the cost of your care services. Following a financial assessment, you may not have to pay for your care services at all, or you may be assessed as being able to pay either part or all of the cost of your services. If you do not wish to have a financial assessment, then you will be charged the full cost of the services that you receive.

As part of the financial assessment the Council will also ensure that you are receiving all the benefits to which you are entitled and will help you to claim any additional benefits.

If you are unable to deal with your own financial affairs and you have a representative who manages your finances, we will liaise with them.

8.3 Residential Care

If you are a long-term resident of a care home which is funded by Sefton Council then any contribution that you have been assessed to pay towards the care home fees, you will pay directly to the care home. The Care Home administrator will be able to give you information on how to make these payments.

If you or your representative fall into arrears with your contributions, then the Care Home will contact Sefton Council for assistance with this. If you have a representative who is failing to act in your best interests in relation to your finances, then the Council may make a referral to its Safeguarding team, the Department for Work and Pensions or the Office of Public Guardian and ask them to investigate.

The Council has an obligation to pay care homes any arrears outstanding and will then follow its debt recovery process with you or your representative.

8.4 Services in the community

If you live in your own home and have been assessed to pay a contribution for the services you receive, the Council will send you an invoice, every four weeks.

If you choose to receive a Direct Payment, then your contribution will be deducted from the amount of the Direct Payment that you receive. You must then pay your contribution into your Direct Payment bank account or pre-payment card.

8.5 Methods of payment available

If you receive an invoice from the Council for the care that you receive, the invoice will contain the payment options available to you, these are:

- By standing order
- At any post office
- Via Sefton Council's website
- Using Cash, Cheque, Debit or Credit Card at the Council's One Stop Shops, by post or telephone.

8.6 Recovery action

After 14 days, if you or your Representative have not paid the invoice for care services, then a Reminder will automatically be sent. After a further 14 days if the invoice remains unpaid then a Final Notice will be issued.

If the invoice is still unpaid, then Sefton Council will try to contact you or your Representative by telephone or letter to discuss any problems that you may be having with making payment, they will offer you a realistic repayment schedule to pay off your arrears.

If contact cannot be made with you or your Representative, then a Revenues Visiting Officer will usually arrange a home visit. The Officer can liaise with the financial assessment team, and if necessary, they will request a financial re-assessment, particularly if there has been a change in your circumstances. The Officer will also ensure that your full benefit entitlement has been granted, and if possible, make an arrangement to pay off the outstanding arrears.

Ultimately, the Recovery and Enforcement procedures outlined in Section 7.3 can be followed. However, Council collection staff will take special care in pursuing debts for those who are vulnerable and will work with Adult Social Care colleagues to assist those who are in arrears.

9. Parking Services Recovery

Sefton Council operates decriminalised parking enforcement under The Traffic Management Act 2004. This Act prescribes on the administration process of a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN).

A parking debt can remain live for a period of up to six years from the date of PCN issue and the Council are permitted under the above Act to continue to seek collection of the charge for this length of time.

9.1 Penalty Charge Notice (Parking Ticket)

A Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) can be issued by our enforcement contractor to any vehicle parked in contravention of any lawful parking restriction within the borough. In addition to this if a motorist drives off before issue, a PCN can be sent by post. A PCN, dependent on the type of contravention, can be either the lower rate of £50 or the higher rate of £70.

The statutory requirement of the processing of a PCN is as follows:

PCN Issued – Within 14 days from issue option to pay at the discounted rate of either £25/£35 or make an informal representation against the issue of the PCN.

If no payment or representation received within the above timescale, after 28 days from issue a Notice to Owner will be sent to the registered keeper of the vehicle as per the information provided by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority.

On issue of the Notice to Owner, the registered keeper has 28 days from issue to either make payment of the full standard rate of £50/£70 or make a formal representation against the issue of the PCN. It is only at this point if the representation is rejected the registered keeper has the opportunity to put the case forward for consideration by an Independent Adjudicator at the Traffic Penalty Tribunal service.

If neither payment nor representation is made within the permitted time, the Council will issue a Charge Certificate. At this stage, the opportunity to make further representations is lost and payment of the original full standard rate plus a 50% surcharge becomes due within 14 days of issue of the Charge Certificate.

9.2 Recovery of Parking Debt

After 14 days from issue of the Charge Certificate if no payment is received, the Council will apply to have the debt registered at the Traffic Enforcement Centre (TEC) at Northampton County Court Business Centre.

On registration of the debt an Order for Recovery will be issued, this process incurs a court registration fee inclusive of the PCN debt. Included with the Order for Recovery is a Witness Statement form.

Within 21 days of issue of the Order for Recovery the keeper has the option to either make payment of the amount due or file the Witness Statement and return this to County Court Business Centre.

If payment or Witness Statement is not received the Council will seek authorisation from TEC to issue a Warrant of Control.

This warrant enables the Council to transfer the debt to an Enforcement Agent to recover monies due on their behalf.

Once a debt is transferred to an Enforcement Agent the registered keeper must deal with them direct.

10.0 Housing Standards- Civil Penalty Recovery

Sefton Council have powers under the Housing Act 2004 s249a to serve Civil Penalty Notices for certain Housing offences instead of taking prosecutions. A Notice of Intent will first be served, allowing 28 days representation. At the end of this period the Council will decide whether or not to serve a Final Civil Penalty Notice. If a Civil Penalty Notice is served, an invoice will be included

with the Notice, detailing how payment is to be made.

10.1 Recovery of Civil Penalty Debt – Housing Standards/ Licensing enforcement

After a minimum of 28 days from the service of a Final Civil Penalty Notice (unless Notice suspended due to an appeal to the First Tier Tribunal), the Council will commence the sundry debt recovery process.

11. Use of Enforcement Agents

11.1 Council Tax and Business Rates

If we pass your case to our enforcement agents, a £75 fee will be added to your account immediately.

You should contact the enforcement agents straight away to discuss payment arrangements to avoid further fees being added to your account.

If you do not, an enforcement agent will visit you to remove goods to cover the amount you owe and an additional £235 enforcement fee will be added to your account, plus 7.5% of any balance owed over £1,500. You can make a payment arrangement with the enforcement agent at any stage, but you must sign the controlled goods agreement.

If you do not keep up your payments, they can remove goods and will charge an additional fee of £110 plus 7.5% of any balance owed over £1,500 - plus reasonable storage and auctioneer fees.

If you make payments to us after your case has been passed to the enforcement agency, your case will remain open with them and they will proceed as normal for the remaining balance, including their fees.

Once your case has been passed to the enforcement agent it will usually remain with them until the full debt is cleared.

11.2 Sundry Debts, Housing Benefit Overpayments and small balance Council Tax and Business Rates.

For the above cases, the enforcement agents collect these via debt collection methods of telephone calls and visits. This will incur a commission charge that is paid by the Council.

11.3 Parking Services

If we pass your case to the enforcement agents, a £75 fee will be added to your account immediately.

You should contact the enforcement agents straight away to discuss payment arrangements to avoid further fees being added to your account.

If you don't, an enforcement agent will visit you to remove goods to cover the amount you owe and an additional £235 enforcement fee will be added to your account.

You can make a payment arrangement with the enforcement agent at any stage, but you must sign the controlled goods agreement.

If you do not keep up your payments, they can remove goods and will charge an additional fee of £110 - plus reasonable storage and auctioneer fees.

If you make payments to us after your case has been passed to the enforcement agency, your case will remain open with them and they will proceed as normal for the remaining balance, including their fees.

Once your case has been passed to the enforcement agent it will usually remain with them until the full debt is cleared.

11.4 Sefton Council Code of Practice for Enforcement Agents

The Code of Practice has been drawn up in an endeavour to achieve the very best practice in the conduct that is expected of our Enforcement Agents. Failure to comply with the requirements of the Code of Practice and the relevant legislation may result in the Council terminating with the services of the firm of Enforcement Agents.

11.5 Collection of Council Tax Arrears in Sefton - Good Practice Protocol

The Protocol reflects best practice at local level and is intended to facilitate regular liaison with the Council, its Enforcement Agents and Citizens Advice Sefton on practices and policy concerning Council Tax collection.

In setting down clear procedures and keeping these regularly under review, all parties to the Protocol can ensure that arrears are dealt with appropriately whilst complaints are handled efficiently.

By signing up to the Protocol and adopting its practices all parties to the Protocol will work closely together to help Sefton's residents pay their Council Tax bills while accessing high quality debt advice when needed.

The Code of Practice and the Good Practice Protocol are currently being reviewed following the commencement of new Enforcement Agents contracts in April 2023. As soon as they are updated, website links will be included here. [Privacy Notice and Codes of Practice \(sefton.gov.uk\)](#)

12. Use of Insolvency, Charging Order, Enforced Sales, Committal and Write Off

12.1 Insolvency (Bankruptcy and Liquidation)

12.1.1 Legal requirements

The legal requirements are contained within the Insolvency Act 1986. Bankruptcy action can be taken against any debtor who owes in excess of £5,000 to creditors and who, for whatever reason, is unable to satisfy his creditor's claims in full.

In addition, a debtor may initiate action by petitioning for their own bankruptcy. Winding Up proceedings are used against Limited Companies.

Insolvency frees a debtor from overwhelming debts so they can make a fresh start, subject to some restrictions, and makes sure the assets belonging to the debtor are shared out fairly among all the creditors. However, the consequences can be severe and can involve the loss of the debtor's home or business and considerable legal and Trustee costs. The level of costs will reflect the complexity of the matters involved and the extent to which the debtor cooperates with the Trustee who is administering the estate.

Insolvency action takes place in the County Court or the High Court if the debtor resides in London.

12.1.2 When will Insolvency Proceedings be considered?

Sefton Council will consider using insolvency proceedings under the following circumstances (the list is not exhaustive):

- Where the debt exceeds £5,000 and the debtor has sufficient assets or equity to ensure the debt is recoverable by the Official Receiver or the Trustee.
- Where the debtor is not making regular and mutually agreed payments that are sufficient to clear accruing debt and the arrears within an acceptable timescale.
- Where insolvency action is considered most effective in recovering from a particular debtor.
- Where the debt has arisen as a result of fraud.
- Where specific assets cannot be identified but there are indicators that the debtor is one of high material worth, for example, renting high value property/has a high salaried profession.
- Where bankruptcy action would encourage payment from specific groups of debtors where their credit rating is important to them, for example company directors, self-

employed people and those people needing finance.

- That the Council can justify to the Court that no other recovery options are appropriate.
- The debtor has received suitable warning to seek independent legal advice as to the implication of insolvency proceedings being made.

12.1.3 Special Circumstances

Particular care will be taken to substantiate or clarify the debtor's position before insolvency proceedings are considered, especially if there are vulnerability issues.

The Council will consider alternative enforcement action where the debtor falls into one or more of the following vulnerability categories:-

- Appears to be severely mentally impaired or suffering severe mental confusion.
- Has young children and severe social deprivation is evident.
- Is pregnant, or the spouse of the debtor is pregnant.
- Is in mourning, due to recent bereavement
- Is currently unemployed and provides proof that they are in receipt of Universal Credit, Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance (Income Based) payments from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
- Has severe long-term sickness or illness including the terminally ill.
- Has difficulty communicating due to profound deafness, blindness or language difficulties.
- Is over 70 years of age.

12.1.4 Decision making

As part of the decision-making process, we will seek to build a picture of the debtor and their circumstances and will achieve this in various ways, including some or all of the following activities. The list is not exhaustive.

- Demanding financial information in writing following a Liability Order being granted, whilst stating bankruptcy is an option to be considered.
- Requesting the debtor to disclose any vulnerability issues that we should be made aware of.
- Checking all appropriate discounts and exemptions has been awarded.
- Seeking an offer of payment from the debtor.

- Conducting a personal visit to the debtor's home.
- Checking our Council Tax records to see if there is any reason bankruptcy would not be appropriate.
- Checking our Benefits records to ensure that all Council Tax Reduction due to the debtor has been posted to the Council Tax account and that their records do not indicate that the debtor lies within the criteria mentioned in Section 12.1.3.
- Checking with Adult Social Care to see if there are issues known to them that would make bankruptcy action inappropriate.
- Checking with H.M. Land Registry to confirm property assets.
- Checking with a Credit Reference Agency for information on outgoings, requests for finance, mortgages and other financial information.
- Checking Companies House records for business information.
- Checking known or potential employment details.
- Checking all Corporate Debt records, such as Housing Benefit Overpayment records; Business Rates records and sundry debts for outstanding balances and including all debts in the bankruptcy action, if appropriate.
- Warning of bankruptcy action and encouraging contact by the issue of a letter including a guidance booklet "Guide to Bankruptcy" published by the Insolvency Service. This fully details the effects of bankruptcy action, the alternatives to it, a glossary of terms and where to go for help and advice. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-bankruptcy> where online copies are available to view and download.

12.1.5 Publicity

When a Bankruptcy Order is granted the administration of it lies with the Official Receiver (OR) or an Insolvency Practitioner (IP). The fact that the order has been granted is advertised in the London Gazette and in a local newspaper. The OR/IP will also notify other bodies such as local authorities, utility suppliers, land registry, National Savings and Investments etc. to give them an opportunity to submit claims of their own and to prevent illegal disposal of assets.

12.2 Charging Orders & Enforced Sales

12.2.1 Legal Requirements

Council Tax debts

If the aggregated balances on Council Tax Liability Orders and statutory charges for a property is over £1,000 then an application may be made for a Charge to be placed on the same property, to secure the debt owed to the Council. If the debt is to be actively recovered, then following a

Charging Order being obtained, an application has to be made to the Court for an Order of Possession and Order for sale.

Sundry debts

If the debt due to the Council is over £300, the Council will consider making an application to the county court for a charging order be placed against a property owned by a debtor.

If the debt is to be actively recovered then following a charging order being obtained, and application for an order for sale and possession must be made.

Enforced Sales is a process where the Council will be exercising its legal powers under the Law of Property Act 1925, which gives the Council the statutory power to recover costs it has incurred by enabling the sale of a property to a new owner. Such costs normally result from enforcement actions and works in default relating to specified statutory powers that result in land charges against a property.

The procedure may be used to recover debt arising from the exercise of any statutory powers that: -

- Confer a charge on all the estates and interests in the property
- Confer Law of Property rights (i.e., grant the powers and remedies available as if the charge had been created by deed).

The current adopted Enforced Sales Procedures state:

Principally, the statutory powers that will enable the procedure to be used are: -

- Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949
- Housing Act 1985
- Building Act 1984
- Public Health Act 1936
- Public Health Act 1961
- Environmental Protection Act 1990

Actions in relation to the service of statutory notices under these provisions are most likely to have given rise to the relevant debt(s).

By adopting this Corporate Debt Policy and Procedures the Council is confirming it will extend use of its Enforced Sales Procedure by using the same powers to recover debts owed in respect of Council Tax Charging Orders. This means of recovery of Charging Order debt will most likely be utilised where the property is being considered for action under the Empty Homes Strategy.

12.2.2 Decision Making

The number of cases is very small. Each case will be considered on its own merits being mindful of all the facts and the level of arrears.

12.3 Committal

12.3.1 Legal requirements

The legal requirements are contained within the Council Tax (Administration & Enforcement) Regulations SI 1992/613 (as amended) and Business Rates (Non-Domestic Rating (Collection & Enforcement) (Local Lists) Regulations SI 1989/1058.

12.3.2 Commencement of Committal Proceedings

Only after a Liability Order has been returned by an Enforcement Agent can committal proceedings be taken. The Enforcement Agent must sign a certificate, stating that the debtor has insufficient goods available to cover the outstanding debt.

Prior to the issue of a committal summons the debtor will be issued with a letter explaining that committal proceedings are shortly to commence, and a letter of explanation is enclosed detailing what this means. The debtor is also encouraged at this time to contact the Council to discuss payment. The Council will allow at least 14 days from the issue of the warning letter before issuing a committal summons.

The Council may consider using committal proceedings in the following circumstances (the list is not exhaustive):

- Where the debt exceeds £1,000
- Where the debtor is not making regular and mutually agreed payments that are sufficient to clear accruing debt and the arrears within an acceptable timescale.
- Where a Charging Order or Bankruptcy are not considered viable options.
- The Council can justify to the Court that no other recovery options are appropriate.
- The debtor has received suitable warning to seek independent legal advice as to the implication of committal proceedings being made.

12.3.3 Committal Summons

If we are unable to collect an amount of outstanding Council Tax, for which a Court Order (liability order) has been issued by the Magistrates' Court using other recovery methods, including the use of Enforcement Agents, then the Council may apply to the Magistrates' Court for the issue of a Warrant of Commitment.

The Magistrates' Court will issue a Committal Summons requiring you to appear before the court, in order to enable an enquiry to be made regarding your means and whether your failure

to pay is due to either your “wilful refusal” or “culpable neglect.”

If you receive a committal summons you should

- Contact us immediately on 0151 934 4651
- Seek legal advice (from either a solicitor or a local advice agency) before your hearing.

12.3.4 Committal Hearing

The committal hearing is an enquiry by the magistrates into a debtor’s means with a view to whether the failure to pay was due to “wilful refusal” or “culpable neglect.” Such an enquiry can only be conducted in the presence of the debtor and if they fail to appear a warrant for their arrest will be applied for. This would normally be a warrant with bail to appear at the next available hearing date. This avoids the debtor being held for any length of time.

The court will request the debtor to complete a means enquiry form. At the hearing, the debtor will be asked to explain in front of the magistrates why the debt has not been paid.

If the magistrates are satisfied that the Council has complied with legislation and has also taken steps to try to recover the debt through taking control of goods, they will consider the issue of whether payment has not been made through ‘wilful refusal’ or ‘culpable neglect’.

‘Wilful refusal’ – examples, the debtor has made a conscious decision not to pay the outstanding debt; refuses to make any effort to clear the outstanding balance.

‘Culpable neglect’ – examples, the debtor has failed to pay as required; did have the means to pay but the debt was a lower priority.

If they find either present the following options available to them are: -

- Send you to prison for a period not exceeding 3 months
- Send you to prison for a period of not more than 3 months but postpone this on condition that you make a payment or regular payments.
- Refuse to send you to prison
- Remit or reduce all or part of the arrears

The Magistrates may decide to adjourn for a period requested by the Council in order to obtain

employment or benefit details so an attachment can be made.

The Magistrates may also adjourn a case if they feel they do not have enough evidence to make a decision and require further evidence to be provided by the Council or the debtor.

The Magistrates have the power to dismiss a case with or without finding “wilful refusal” or “culpable neglect”. If this is the case the Council may renew the application at a future date if the circumstances of the debtor change. (This is not the case of any monies remitted by the court).

12.3.5 Payment Order

Any payments made under an order must be made direct to the Council who will monitor them and report back to court if they fail to be paid as ordered.

The issue of warrant costs is £81, and the debtor will be liable for the costs incurred in obtaining and executing the warrant in addition to the upfront costs already paid by the Council.

12.3.6 Non-payment of Court Order

Where the court order is not maintained the Council will bring the debtor back before the Magistrates to seek immediate committal to prison.

12.3.7 Special Circumstances

Particular care will be taken to substantiate or clarify the debtor’s position before committal proceedings are considered, especially if there are vulnerability issues.

The Council will consider taking alternative enforcement action where the debtor, or a member of their household, falls into one or more of the following categories: -

- Appears to be severely mentally impaired or suffering severe mental confusion.
- Has young children and severe social deprivation is evident.
- Is pregnant, or the spouse of the debtor is pregnant.
- Is in mourning, due to recent bereavement
- Is currently unemployed and provides proof that they are in receipt of Universal Credit, Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance (Income Based) payments from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
- Has severe long-term sickness or illness including the terminally ill.
- Has difficulty communicating due to profound deafness, blindness or language difficulties.

- Is over 70 years of age.

12.3.8 Decision Making

The more information held about the debtor, the more efficient the decision-making process will be in terms of selecting the most effective enforcement option. As part of the decision-making process the Council will seek to build a picture of the debtor and their circumstances and will achieve this in various ways, including some or all of the following activities. The list is not exhaustive.

- Requesting financial information in writing stating committal is an option to be considered.
- Requesting the debtor to disclose any vulnerability issues that the Council should be made aware of.
- Warning of committal and encouraging contact.
- Seeking an offer of payment from the debtor.
- Conducting a personal visit to the debtor's home.
- Checking all appropriate discounts and exemptions has been awarded.
- Checking all corporate debt accounts to see if there is any reason why committal would not be appropriate
- Checking our Benefits records to ensure that all Council Tax Reduction due to the debtor has been posted to the Council Tax account and that their records do not indicate that the debtor lies within the criteria mentioned in Section 12.1.3
- Checking H.M. Land Registry to confirm property assets.
- Checking with a Credit Reference Agency for information on outgoings, requests for finance, mortgages and other financial information.
- Checking known or potential employment/benefit details.
- Checking with Social services regarding vulnerability issues

13. Data Sharing and Privacy Statement

See our website:-

<https://www.sefton.gov.uk/council-tax/council-tax/privacy-notice-and-codes-of-practice/>

14. Complaints and appeals

At Sefton Council, we want to give you the best possible service we can. We welcome your feedback on our services, as it gives us the opportunity to see where we can make

improvements. The following link provides information about Sefton Council's complaints process and should be used to make your complaint online: -.

<https://www.sefton.gov.uk/your-council/consultations-complaints-feedback/compliments-comments-and-complaints/>

14.1 Appeals for Council Tax

If you are the person liable for Council Tax, and you are not happy with decisions made in relation to your liability, you have certain rights of appeal, as follows:

- that a dwelling is a chargeable dwelling, or
- that you are the liable person for Council Tax, or
- that the dwelling is or is not exempt, or
- any decisions relating to the granting of discount, disability reduction, Council Tax Benefit or Council Tax Reduction.

In the first instance, such appeals should be made in writing to Sefton Council, PO Box 21, Bootle, L20 3US. Making an appeal does not allow you to withhold payment pending the outcome. If your appeal is successful, you will be entitled to a refund of any overpaid Council Tax.

14.2 Appeals for Business Rates

All appeals must be made to the Valuation Office Agency.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/valuation-office-agency>

A business ratepayer cannot withhold any payment pending the outcome of an appeal. Legally, the Council must bill you based on the rateable value that the Rating List shows at the time. You are legally obliged to pay in accordance with the demand sent to you.

The Valuation Officer can backdate amendments to the rateable value. Where this results in you having paid too much, we will automatically refund any overpayment you have made. In addition, you are entitled to statutory interest on that overpayment. The Government sets the rate of interest payable each year.

If you do not pay as demanded, and we have to enforce payment, you could forfeit the right to receive interest on any subsequent overpayment.

14.3 Appeals for Parking Services

If you wish to challenge the issue of the Penalty Charge Notice, your appeal must be made online at <https://sefton.tarantportal.com/pcn>, or by email to parkingcc@sefton.gov.uk

For more information about parking appeals visit:-

<https://www.sefton.gov.uk/parking-roads-travel/parking/challenges-representations/>

15. Further Information and advice

National Policy/Guidance

- Council Tax Guidance to Local Councils on good practice in the collection of Council Tax arrears, visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/council-tax>
- The Local Authority are obliged to participate in the Audit Commission's National Fraud initiative and to share certain limited personal information with other bodies responsible for auditing or administering public funds. The Council has a duty to protect the public funds it administers and may use information held about individuals for lawful purposes, including and not limited to the prevention and detection of fraud. The Council will share information for the purpose of performing any of our statutory enforcement duties and will make any disclosures required by law. This may include sharing information with other bodies responsible for detecting/preventing fraud or auditing/administering public funds.

Advice & Benefits

- You will find a range of advice and information as well as contacts of local and national organisations that may be able to assist further, visit [Advice & Benefits \(sefton.gov.uk\)](https://www.sefton.gov.uk/advice-benefits)

Contact us

- Call **0345 140 0845** (Monday to Thursday 9am – 5.30pm, Friday 9am to 5pm, closed weekends and Bank Holidays)
- Use our [online contact form](#) (this will be forwarded to the appropriate officer or department for a response which may take a few days).
- Contact your Councillor [Sefton Home](#)
- Provide feedback online [Compliments, Comments, Complaints and Whistleblowing Policy \(sefton.gov.uk\)](#)
- Write to us at [Bootle or Southport Town Hall](#)

CABINET MEMBER REPORT

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGULATORY, COMPLIANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES) 13 JUNE 2023

Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Paulette Lappin	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services	June 2023

Finance

Within the finance service, there has been significant activity on a number of key issues:

Following the approval of the 2023/24 budget, budget adjustments have been incorporated into each service's budget to form the initial budget for the year. This has been loaded into the Council's Financial Management System.

The Council's revenue outturn position is currently being finalised with a view to ensuring that the overall position is balanced with no call on the Council's General Balances. The position will be reported to Cabinet in July along with the Capital outturn position and performance information for 2022/2023.

The draft Statement of Accounts for 2020/2021 was published at the end of July 2021 with the final Statement of Accounts being presented to Audit and Governance Committee on 15th December. However, although nearly all work has been finalised, the audit is still to be completed. This is mainly due to a technical valuation issue that needed to be resolved at a national level – the Government has now introduced legislation that will allow councils to resolve the issue. Officers are working with the Council's external auditors to understand what changes, if any, are required. Should any further amendments be required since the December 2021 Committee, the Chair has been granted delegated authority to approve the final Statement of Accounts following these changes.

The work to close the accounts for 2021/2022 was completed, with the revenue and capital outturn position reported to Cabinet in July. The draft Statement of Accounts for 2021/2022 have been published. The Council's external auditors are continuing with their audit. It is hoped that this will be finalised soon with a few residual issues remaining.

Due to the delays in finalising the audit of the 2021/2022 Statement of Accounts the production of the Statement of Accounts for 2022/23 has been delayed. Officers will produce and publish the accounts as soon as possible after the completion of the 2021/2022 audit. The audit of the accounts for 2022/2023 is expected to commence later in the year.

Customer Centric Services

Annual Billing

All areas of the service are continuing to deal with high volumes of work as is typical and expected at this stage in the year following the issue of annual bills for Council Tax, Business Rates and benefit annual uprating notification letters.

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As part of Council Tax billing, the Service has effectively implemented the Council Tax Support Scheme, i.e., a payment of up to £25 to households in receipt of Council Tax Support to help them pay Council Tax in 2023/24. The payment discounts were included on the annual bills issued in March.

Energy Bills Support Scheme / Alternative Fuel Funding Support

The EBSS AF commenced on 27th February for eligible households to apply for support and is open for applications until 31st May 2023. This consists of a one-off £400 non-repayable discount to eligible households who have not received the main EBSS payment automatically from their energy supplier to help with their energy bills between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023. By the end of April, the service had received 189 applications, 110 of these applications have been verified, approved and payments made.

The Alternative Fuel Payment Alternative Fund (AFP AF) scheme was launched on 6th March to help eligible households with domestic fuel costs. This is a one-off £200 non-repayable discount to eligible households who have not received support directly from their energy supplier to help with their fuel costs between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023.

In total, at the end of April, the Council has made 119 payments totaling £45,800 and has rejected 44 applications that do not meet eligibility criteria. Customers must wait 30 working days from making the application before contacting the Council, applications are being dealt with within the 30-working day target. The Schemes are due to close on 31st May, with final payment to reach bank accounts by 7th July 2023.

Customer Services

Customer Services experienced a very busy April for call volumes and visits to both One Stop Shops; in total, 17,710 telephone calls were answered.

Of calls that were received, 82% were answered and 18% were abandoned. Customers continue to be encouraged to use the online Council services if they can, allowing for staff to handle calls for prioritised services, i.e., Children's Social Care and ELAS.

The Contact Centre continues to handle a steady increase in telephone enquiries for Adult Social Care as customers are finding it more difficult to get appointments with their doctor and other health professionals.

ELAS enquiries remain consistently high as customers experiencing hardship seek support with food and utility bills. It is noted that call volumes for this service started to reduce at the end of the month as further cost-of-living payments of £301.00 were made to residents in receipt of means tested state benefits.

There was also a high volume of Cleansing telephone calls due to various green bins not being collected and there being a shortage of new brown bins. During the busier periods, a greeting message is relayed encouraging customers to report the issues online. It is evident that customers chose this option with the abandonment rate for this service so high.

With the implementation of various changes to the electoral system and voters now required to provide photographic identification at polling stations, Election enquiries were far higher than usual.

Enquiries for Council Tax started to reduce as the tail-end of annual billing passed. For the customers who did call, many were requesting that their payments be extended over 12- instalments or seeking advice about what financial support is available. Other Council services

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that also experienced a notable increase in telephone enquiries were Blue Badges who currently have a backlog of applications.

With customer demand at Bootle One Stop Shop increasing week-by-week, the drop-in service continues to be well received by customers who have complex enquiries or requiring financial support.

In April, 2,859 customers attended Bootle One Stop Shop, this included 626 taxi drivers, 204 of which had an appointment and a further 422 who 'dropped in'. There were 976 customers who attended with a Council Tax or benefits enquiry, and 49 customers seeking ELAS support. The remaining 1,208 customers were seeking general council-related advice at reception.

At Southport, 645 customers attended the Atkinson, with 198 customers booking an appointment to discuss their Council Tax or benefit and the remainder seeking general council – related advice at reception.

While overall customer contact is continuing to increase month-on-month, enquiries for Social Care and ELAS remain prioritised above all other services that are offered by Customer Services.

Taxi-Licensing

The processing of all Taxi Licensing general enquiry e-mails and new/renewal vehicle plates continues to be excellent, with most of the workloads again being processed within 2-3 days of receipt. For Driver renewals, customers are generally issued with a renewal letter four-weeks in advance of their licence expiry date and are asked to drop-in at Bootle One Stop Shop to apply for their badge.

For the new/renewal of vehicle plates, a submission by e-mail from the customer is required. At present customer demand for this service remains exceptionally high with over 600 new/renewal/transfer plates being processed each month.

Migration of Revenues and Benefits document management system

The rollout of the new Revenues and Benefits document management system is continuing with work still taking place to migrate existing historical documents in line with data retention policies and regulations. Staff continue to familiarise themselves with the new application and changes to working practices.

There has been an initial impact on increasing outstanding workloads due to intermittent system issues throughout the early weeks of May which resulted in some staff being unable to access the system at times. The issues have now been resolved.

Citizen Access - Revenues

A project to introduce a web-based citizen access portal for Council Tax and Business Rates customers to manage their accounts on-line has commenced. A project start-up meeting has taken place and a target date of 30 September 2023 has been agreed for completing the implementation.

Risk and Audit

The **Internal Audit** team are continuing to work on delivering the internal audit plan with a current focus on reviews of:

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- ASC Finance Budget Management
- Sefton New Direction Governance review
- Review of number of Schools.
- Highways Maintenance
- SHOL Governance review
- Sandway Homes finance review
- Annual Governance Statement
- Assurance Mapping

We have started the recruitment of a permanent staff member in February 2023 however we have not had any suitable candidates so far to interview.

Insurance Team have completed and are working on the following initiatives to improve the Council's risk management.

- Procurement exercise for the re-valuation for insurance purposes of the remaining Council properties which have not been subject to a re-valuation in the past two years. The re-valuations are due to be completed by 31 May 2023 and feed into the September 2023 renewal.
- A paper on the proposed tender for the Council's insurance arrangements was presented to Cabinet in March 2023 and was approved. We are currently in the position of placing the tender on the Council's CHEST. The insurance market remains focused on technical pricing to achieve profit rather than in the past focused on market share.
- We have used some of the "free days" as part of the insurance programme risk bursary to provide training for duty holders and manage contractors on site at schools and corporately.
- We are working with insurers and the Council's liability insurers to robustly defend claims and in limited circumstances will pursue through the Courts claimants to recover Council costs where the claims are proven to be exaggerated.
- Team continues to work extensively with Service Teams including Highways, Green Sefton and Tourism to improve the management of insurable risk in areas where there are high numbers of claims or areas of concern.

The **Risk and Resilience Team**.

Business Continuity are currently developing a Corporate Business Continuity Plan using the existing Service Area Business Continuity (BC) Plans. Following the exercise of the Council's BC arrangements in January 2023 which we have subsequently received feedback on we are currently implementing the recommendations from the review. We have revised the Council's BC Strategy and Policy which is due to be presented to the Cabinet during the summer 2023.

The **Risk and Resilience Team** have completed the Council's Risk Appetite which was presented to the Audit and Governance Committee in March 2023 as well as facilitating the updates of the Council's Corporate Risk Register working with the Risk Owners to update the risk register. Other work includes:

- Working with the Merseyside Resilience Forum
- Development of a Shoreline Pollution Plan
- Review of the Council's emergency facilities

For the **Health and Safety Team** there will be a continued focus during the next quarter of delivering the Health and Safety Improvement Plan.

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- Continue to review, update and monitor the Health and Safety Standards and Policies, with focus on working from home, display screen and workstation assessments and stress risk assessments.
- Continue to develop the Council-wide training needs assessment which will eventually build into the health and safety training plan and provision.
- Completing a planned review of the Council's Health and Safety Policy and completing the Annual Health and Safety report.
- Focus on improving the accuracy of incident reporting across the Council will continue to ensure incidents of threatening and abusive behaviours towards staff are reported.
- Continue to deliver a health and safety management audit and inspection regime across the Council, to schools with a Service Level Agreement with the Council and those schools where the Council retains responsibility for the health and safety as the employer. This will provide assurance that health and safety management systems are suitable and effective.

ICT

- The ICT Service continues to work on a number of significant transformation programmes as well as delivering the BAU ICT Service alongside Agilisys. Key projects currently in flight relate to support for the Children's Improvement Programme, Customer Services (CXP), Data Centre relocation, Sefton Arc and Leisure ICT Improvements as well as Cyber Security.
- There have been challenges obtaining the larger volumes of ICT KIT required to finish the backfilling of all desks at Magdalen House, however the team are pleased to report that this work is nearing completion. In addition, devices have been deployed across Southport Town Hall to support the Adult Social Care teams located in this space.
- Data centre rationalisation and right sizing is now completed within the existing Data Centre at St Peters ready for a move to Bootle Town Hall during financial year 23/24. Conversations are ongoing around options for the location of the new data centre, given the complexity of the design.
- The Cloud telephony project is now closed, the final work to be completed during the next few months is to remove the remaining infrastructure supporting a legacy telephony range which is not linked to the historical Mitel telephony system (which 8x8 replaced). Most of these direct dial numbers are thought to be historical but unfortunately it is not possible to report on the usage of these lines, work is to be planned with Virgin to soft cease these numbers to assess impact prior to removal. Communications will be issued in advance across the Council. This has been slightly delayed due to the need to move one Library which is currently on a direct dial number, work in progress.
- The new CXP solution went live across all services in January this year, with the final elements of phase one (migration of legacy processes) nearing completion. The two remaining legacy services - Cleansing Maintenance & Pest Control - are in final stages of build and test in the new CXP solution; once complete, the legacy CRM system can be formally decommissioned. In terms of phase two, work is now underway to transfer Council eforms to CXP from the legacy eforms system, and work is also starting on the configuration and set up of FOI processes in CXP. Initial scoping of future process builds is being prepared, most notably for Registrars and for internal Establishment Control.

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- Work is now completed on the last phase of the website improvement programme. A project request is now with Agilisys to schedule the upgrade of the Umbraco web content management system. Alongside this, the Communications team continues with an ongoing content review and is also reviewing ancillary sites to see if any of these should be incorporated into the main Council website.
- Procurement activity continues to be a challenge. Consultation on the new forward plan has taken place with corporate procurement colleagues with the final report due to be presented to ELT and the Cabinet member soon.
- As per the last update the procurement for Corporate Connectivity did not complete with a successful outcome, with no bidders meeting the requirements of the authority. The Client team is now exploring alternative routes to market, with a potential for joint procurement across the Liverpool City Region, in the interim Cabinet have now approved a direct award with Virgin to ensure continuity of the existing service whilst options are reviewed.
- The threat level in relation to Cyber Security remains high and the team are working hard to implement new technologies and tools to stay one step ahead of the risk. Work is underway on a full security review linked to Zero Trust networking, with proposals to follow in relation to potential security improvements.

Property Services

The Property Services Department are a multi-Disciplinary team delivering various services, professional advice and initiatives across the Borough of Sefton. Below are some examples of ongoing pieces of work throughout the department.

Asset Management / FM

- Ongoing work to deliver approved Asset Disposals with further phases being developed for approval.
- Ongoing work supporting Growth Board projects.
- Delivery of centralised accommodation for Children's Services to support their accommodation strategy.
- Ongoing work in connection to lease agreements.

Maintenance Management & Building Services

- Delivering a range of schemes in support of Corporate Buildings.
- Delivering a range of schemes in support of Education Capital & SEND programme.
- Delivery of reactive maintenance and statutory compliance services to Corporate and Educational buildings.
- Professional advice and support on a broad range of regeneration programmes.
- Implementation of a new coordinated (property based) IT system in support of Corporate & Education.
- Phase 1 essential maintenance delivery plan for corporate buildings progressing with some works complete.
- Formulating asset survey delivery plan alongside the essential maintenance.
- Delivering services in support of major adaptation to vulnerable and disabled residents.

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Project Management

- Provide professional support to Growth Board on several projects.
- Project delivery for various Education capital & SEND schemes.
- Provide support to other teams on Asset Disposal, Building Maintenance, Asset Management, Energy and Statutory Compliance colleagues.

Energy Management

- Sefton Council Retrofit programme (LAD3, HUG) – Providing insulation to privately owned properties (worst/not insulated & for poorest residents 407). This has been extended and the completion date is now September 2023.
- A programme of work to support schools (after large energy price rises) is ongoing.
- Feasibility Study for a Wind turbine is ongoing.
- Sefton have transferred electricity provider. Post 1 April, all Council buildings and street lights are 100% renewable energy powered.
- Energy prices (gas and electricity) continue to be high in particular due to the government support has been removed.
- Work on the next phase of the Climate Emergency programme is progressing.

Legal Services

Democratic Services Team – Overview

- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Adult Social Care and Health)**

At the time of drafting this report, the next meeting of the Committee will be held on 20 June 2023 and the following items are likely to be considered at the meeting:

- Liverpool Clinical Services Review
- Public Health Outcomes Framework
- Adult Social Care Preparation for Assurance
- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Sefton - Update Report
- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Sefton - Health Provider Performance Dashboard
- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Work Programme Update

- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding)**

At the time of drafting this report, the next meeting of the Committee will be held on 6 June 2023 and the following items will be considered at the meeting:

- Sefton Place - Community Emotional Health and Wellbeing Services Update 2022 – 2023
- Children's Services Improvement Programme
- Children's Social Care Overview of Practice
- Safeguarding Learning and Development Offer
- Education Scorecard
- Ofsted Inspection Reports
- Parent Governor Representative
- Cabinet Member Reports

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- Work Programme Key Decision Forward Plan

- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills)**

Since the last update a meeting of the Committee has not been held. The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 27 June 2023 and will consider the Work Programme for 2023/24. The Committee will also consider:

- a potential date for an informal meeting of the Committee to consider a strategic approach for waste containment/disposal across the borough
- a date for a visit by Members of the Committee to the Recycling Discovery Centre at Gillmoss
- the views of the Head of Highways and Public Protection on the separation of parking offences and environmental offences, currently undertaken in a dual enforcement role by Civil Enforcement Officers

- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)**

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 13 June 2023 and it will consider the Work Programme for 2023/24.

Corporate Communications and Covid-19 - An informal meeting of the Committee was held on 3 February 2023 to review the topic of Corporate Communications and Covid-19. Recommendations from the informal meeting were approved by the Committee held on 28 February 2023. Following this, a report was submitted to Councillor Lappin as the appropriate Cabinet Member seeking her approval of the recommendations. The recommendations were approved and arrangements are now being put in place to implement them.

- **Overview and Scrutiny Management Board**

The next meeting of the Management Board will be held on 20 June 2023. Matters considered at the meeting will be included in the next update.

- **Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The last meeting of the LCRO&S scheduled to be held on 19 April 2013 was cancelled.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held in July 2023 and matters discussed at this meeting will be reported as part of the next update.

The Committee is made up of 3 elected Members from each of the constituent Local Authorities of the LCR Combined Authority, along with one elected Member from both the Liverpool City Region Liberal Democrat Group and the Liverpool City Region Conservative Group.

Sefton's appointed Members are Councillors Desmond, Hart and Howard. Councillor Howard is Sefton's Scrutiny Link.

School Appeals

The Section has continued to organise and clerk school admission appeal hearings and school exclusion reviews.

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This is the busiest time of year in the school appeals calendar for the Clerk to the Education Appeal Panel. Between 10 May through to 19 June, 256 LEA appeals were listed/heard and 44 Archdiocese (Catholic voluntary aided schools) appeals were listed/heard. Primary school hearings will start week commencing 26 June and run through to 4 July. The number of Primary appeals is still to be confirmed, but it is thought to be higher than previous years. Further 'wash up' dates dealing with late appeals and in-year transfers will also continue to be held during this period.

During April two days of training events for Education Appeal Panels were held. The first was aimed to train new volunteers for the role of Panel members. We aimed to recruit new Panel members from serving school governors. The second was the bi-annual refresher training to appraise existing Panel members of any changes or developments to the Admissions and Appeals Codes. This training was conducted internally as a remote training session using MS Teams.

Civic and Mayoral Services

- The Freedom of the Borough Ceremony for HMS Mersey took place on 13 April 2023, followed by a Parade on 16 April.
- Councillor Burns was installed as Mayor of Sefton for 2023/24 at the Council's Annual meeting on 16 May 2023. The installation brought to a close Councillor Clare Louise Carragher's two-year term as Mayor of Sefton and Councillor Carragher served the office with dedication and distinction.

Member Development

Member Induction

The induction of new Councillors took place in the week following the elections. Councillors attended individual induction sessions for the completion of requisite forms to enable them to receive their Councillor allowances, car park passes, etc.

On Friday 12 May 2023, the new Councillors attended a half day Induction Programme and were welcomed and introduced to the Council by the Chief Executive and the 5 Executive Directors. They also received briefings by the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer on the Code of Conduct, the Nolan Principles and Standards regime, Register of Interests and Members Allowance Scheme, etc. Information was also provided on IT provision, the Member Development Programme and accessing and navigating the Council's intranet / Committee pages. The half day morning session culminated in a buffet lunch when they were joined by Assistant Directors.

Details of induction programmes provided by the **Local Government Association** and **North West Employers** are detailed Member Development Handbook and new Councillors have been enrolled on these programmes.

Handbooks

As part of their induction, Councillors also received 2 key documents:

- The Guidance for Councillors Handbook 2023-24 and
- Member Development Programme Handbook 2023-24.

Hard copies of these documents were provided to all Members at the Adjourned Annual Council meeting on 18 May 2023 and Councillors have also since received electronic copies.

Member Development Programme 2023-2024

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The Member Development Programme is now well underway with training being provided to **Committee Members** as soon as possible following the confirmation of Committee appointments by Council on 18 May 2023.

1. The mandatory Planning Committee Training session took place on 24 May and was well received by Members and Substitute Members of Planning Committee. The session was attended by all of 15 of the Planning Committee Members and 11 of the 15 Substitute members. A special “mop-up” training session has been arranged for those Councillors who could not attend.
2. Mandatory Licensing and Regulatory Committee training is due to take place on 12 June prior to the first meeting of that Committee.
3. Overview and Scrutiny Committee training - Democratic Services have been working closely with the LGA for the provision of the following training for Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members:
 - On 30 May 2023 the first of three sessions for Members and Substitutes of Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Children’s Services and Safeguarding
 - Two training sessions for all Overview and Scrutiny Members and Substitutes will be held at Bootle Town Hall on 15 June 2023.
 - Arrangements have been made for the provision of training for all the O&S Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs and for mentoring support for the Chair of the O&S Committee (Children’s Services and Safeguarding) following the confirmation of Committee appointments by Council on 18 May 2023.
 - Negotiations are currently underway with the LGA for the provision of dedicated training for O&S Adult Social Care and Health Committee members and substitutes.

Mandatory Corporate Parenting training– Following the return of the Council’s Corporate Parenting Officer, the mandatory Corporate Parenting Course will continue to be provided in-house, supported by the Cabinet Member - Children’s Social Care. In 2023-24 the training will be provided on 4 separate occasions to maximise take-up.

PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

Operational Issues

Advice and support are provided to all service areas regarding employment/staffing matters.

Predominantly, work issues and support is focused on Children’s Social Care. There is a small, dedicated HR team in Children’s Social Care providing advice and guidance on all staffing matters. The challenge continues to be the recruitment and retention of Social Work staff combined with developing improvements in the service area overall. Arrangements are in place to establish a central recruitment team to support the transformation improvements in CSC.

The majority of the HR team are agile working, combining working from home and at office sites as required and following advice from the Health and Safety team.

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Matters relating to disciplinary, grievance and dignity at work continue to be lesser than pre-covid period. Formal meetings continue to be held via Microsoft Teams, although in person meetings are taking place as necessary. Advice and support in the management of sickness absence continues and formal action under the sickness absence policy is being taken, again via Microsoft Teams or in person as necessary.

Operational Teams appreciate the need for sensitive advice given the pressures on Employees and the Authority.

Health Unit

During the period 1 April to 31 May 2023, a total of 144 referrals for SMBC employees were made to the Health Unit (HU). This is a slight decrease in comparison to the same period in the previous 12 months in which there were 151 referrals.

Referrals during this latest period included Education Excellence (45.82%), Children's Services (13.89%) and Operational-In-House Services (9.72%) and ASC (9.72%). As usual the main reasons were stress and mental health related (54.86%), chronic medical illness (19.44%) and musculoskeletal (15.97%).

3. Delivery of all the OH services are now offered via a mixture of telephone and video calls and face to face appointments. This arrangement appears to be working extremely successfully and enables flexibility for both managers and employees. It is especially beneficial to those employees who are nor absent or who are located in Southport as it can reduce the amount of time away from work to attend. The HU will, however, to continue to triage referrals based on the condition rather than any other factors.

Transactional HR Payroll & Pension (THRP) Services

There are still some issues with Monthly Data Collection (MDC) for the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) which we are working with Midland HR (MHR) and Merseyside Pension Fund (MPF) to resolve. Sefton have now submitted MDC files up to Match 2023 to enable MPF ort issue annual benefit statements to members.

Teachers Pensions Monthly data collection (MDC) moves to Monthly Contribution Reconciliation (MCR) has been delayed until 1st September 2023 as the iTrent software has several known issues.

The staff are still learning parts of the new system and there are issues with how long the system is taking to process some records and this has been raised and is being investigated by MHR.

There are backlogs in the teams due to process, reporting and resource issues and all work is being prioritised.

Some THRP staff are continuing to work from home and more staff are coming into the office. Some processes have had to be changed and the staff have embraced these changes. The number of staff going into the office is still being closely monitored.

There are now outstanding pay awards from 1st September 2022 for Soulbury staff and 1st April 2023 for NJC staff, Councillors and Chief Executive pay.

MHR have rolled out MFA (multi factor authentication) and THRP are receiving lots of queries form employees trying to access their Employee Self Service (ESS) record. Most queries have now

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been dealt with and THRP are going to hold drop-in sessions in Bootle, Southport and Hawthorne Road Depot to help staff access ESS.

Workforce Learning and Development (CLC)

Apprenticeships

Staff enrolled on the **Level 6 Social Work Apprenticeship Degree**, **Level 6 Occupational Therapy Degree** and the **Level 7 Senior Leader Apprenticeship Degree programme (MBA)** are continuing with their studies and are making good progress.

We have procured a training provider called Solace who specialises in Public Sector Leadership and Management qualifications to deliver the **Level 5 Operational/Departmental Manager Apprenticeship standard**. The course will be aimed at aspiring Middle Managers/Managers and upon successful completion of the qualification candidates will gain two accredited awards: ILM Level 5 Leadership and Management and Operational/Departmental Manager Standard Apprenticeship. A total of 12 places will be available and the course will commence 1st September 2023.

We have launched another higher level apprenticeship called **the Level 6 Environmental Health Practitioner Degree**. A selection process is underway, with one place available for a September 2023 start.

Training delivery

The Workforce Learning and Development Team continues to deliver a number of training programmes and initiatives. These include:

- **Corporate Mandatory Training** – this includes Equality and Diversity, Health and Safety, Safeguarding Adults Awareness, Safeguarding Children & Young People Awareness and Climate Change. Monthly reports have recently been updated to include the mandatory courses for managers. Additional courses include Sickness Absence and Equality and Diversity for Managers eLearning, Recruitment and Selection, Managing Capability and Managing Disciplinary, Grievance and Dignity At Work virtual classroom sessions. The reports are shared with ELT/SLB to encourage staff to complete these courses.
- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** training delivery is going well. To date, we have trained 210 Sefton Council and schools' staff. That is an increase of 34 staff since the previous report.
- **LCRCA Race Equality Training** – working with the LCRCA and neighbouring LAs to develop a training programme to complement existing E&D awareness training. This will include the 'lived experience' to enable us to address the structural and systemic racial biases that exist in some organisations and to challenges micro aggressions and unconscious biases in the workplace. To date we have delivered 4 managers sessions, (76 managers have attended) and 4 non-managers sessions, (71 staff have attended). We recently advertised a further 4 sessions (2 manager / 2 non-manager sessions) across May and June 2023 (120 places in total). Delivery is underway therefore attendance figures will be included in the next Cabinet update report.

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- The development of a **Personalisation Training Programme** for students, ASYEs and for new starters working across Adult Social Care, who have not undertaken this training previously. The target date for completion is 1st September 2023.
- Developed a **Personalisation Survey** to find out how Adult Social Care have progressed in their Personalisation journey. The aim was to find out how learning is being embedded into everyday practice and any challenges experienced in doing so. 57 staff responded to the survey and the findings will help inform future training and development in this area.

Workforce/Organisational Development

We have been supporting Children's Social Care with a number of workforce development actions following the recent Ofsted inspection:

- Commissioned Insights Leadership Training for Children's Services Directors and Service Managers. The Service Manager took place on 26th and 27th April 2023 and 19 managers were in attendance. The session was well received, and positive feedback was shared with Children's Services Senior Leadership Team.
- Developed a CPD training offer for Children's Services which includes essential training for Social Workers and Managers. This will be reviewed quarterly, and any updates included.
- We are working with the Leaving Care Team to develop a training programme for Care Leavers. This will grant Care Leavers access to selected Mandatory Training courses to provide them with foundation skills and knowledge in each topic. We attended the Making a Difference Group on Wednesday 17th May to present the training programme/consult with young people to ask for their views including ideas to enhance the offer. The training programme was well received, and we came away with some actions which included sourcing social media aware awareness training.
- We are worked with HR and Legal to develop a 3 hour Managing Performance Training session. This was an action identified in the Children's Services improvement plan. The aim of the course is to provide managers with the tools to consistently apply performance management across Children's Services, and to recognise their role and contribution to effectively manage performance. To date, we have trained 40 Service/Team Managers and have scheduled a further two mop up sessions in June.

Communications

The team supported the elections providing on the day coverage.

The website continues to be developed and improved, with the migration of the My Sefton news microsite complete. It is anticipated that this will increase traffic to the Council website.

Procurement

Formal engagement meetings have taken place with service areas. Their purpose is to update the Contract Register across all Service Teams; review current workplans and timelines; identify future or prospective projects; and update the Procurement pipeline. These sessions will be held on a regular basis/

The rollout Social Value training has continued.

Performance & Business Intelligence

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The Business Intelligence team is continuing to support many work streams across the Council including Economic Regeneration, Education Excellence, Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and Public Health Services. The team have developed a new performance framework for Children's Social Care and Adults Social Care services, using the recently implemented Data Warehouse and Power BI. Progress continues with the development of the Council's new enterprise data warehouse platform, which will enable cross-Council big data analysis. The team is also supporting the information requirements for the Children's Social Care Improvement plan. A key focus in the next quarter is to reproduce the Education chapter of the Council's JSNA.

Consultation & Engagement, Complaints and Information Governance.

The Service continues to support consultation and engagement activities, respond to complaints and subject access requests in a timely manner and provide information, advice, and guidance across the Council on matters relating to information governance and data protection. There is a challenge with capacity in the Complaints team, but the Service is actively recruiting to vacant posts to address the issue.

The project to digitise the Council's historic paper records continues at pace. All legacy records stored at disparate 3rd party locations have now been moved to the Council's preferred secured storage provider, taking opportunity to destroy legacy records and digitise those that are not required to be kept in original paper format.

Strategic Support

The team is now focused to providing support across the various services with policy & strategy development, service reviews and transformation activity, including support for Children's Social Care Improvement plan.