



**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGULATORY,
COMPLIANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES)**

**MEETING HELD AT THE BIRKDALE ROOM, TOWN HALL,
SOUTHPORT
ON TUESDAY 1ST NOVEMBER, 2022**

PRESENT: Councillor Bradshaw (in the Chair)
Councillor Byrom (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Bennett, Grace, Killen, Robinson and
Shaw

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Lappin

16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

18. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

19. NEW WAYS OF WORKING

The Committee received a presentation from Stephanie Hopkin, Facilities Manager, on the Council's new ways of working. Ms. Hopkin updated on Phase 1 – Asset maximisation, locality working and ICT transformation which enabled the start of agile working and which was completed in 2017-2019; Phase 2 - further development of Agile Working arrangements to support business need and health and wellbeing of staff, and which took account of changes arising from the pandemic and the further rationalisation of buildings which delivered further budget savings and that this project was nearing completion; and Phase 3 – the longer-term review of Bootle estate linked to Bootle Town Hall, the Strand and lease on Magdalen House - 2022-2032.

Ms. Hopkin also provided additional information on Phase 2 relating to:

- progress made on agile working as the new way of working and how Covid-19 accelerated this progress; significant further investment in ICT infrastructure, kit, licensing and mobile phones; employees embracing the change in a challenging environment; and that COVID-19 related measures were monitored via building risk assessments

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- what Phase 2 looked like which included the reduction in the building footprint, which linked to the Asset Management and Climate Change Strategies; the achievement of carbon savings through reduced electricity and gas consumption in buildings and the reduction of commuter and business travel; proposals for St. Peter's House and St. Anne's House; lease issues on both 3rd and 4th floors of Magdalen House relating to Children's Services operational requirements which in turn allowed for a review of wider assets; and that the regearing of the Magdalen lease had resulted in lower revenue cost, a rent free period and options around the mothballing of wider assets as well as supporting a critical Children's Services revised operating model.
- Moving forward and the full and continual engagement with trade unions; reviews undertaken in respect of HR policies, ICT solutions and guides for staff; the provision of home kit and individual health and safety risk assessments; office environments being set up to meet the agile needs of staff; the average time for workers attending the office being 1-2 days per week and that attendance in corporate buildings was in line with service requirements for such things as elected member governance meetings; car parking proposals; team and 1:1 staff meetings to discuss business need; and that Phase 3 proposals were now being developed

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- The working arrangements of staff who were wholly office based, wholly working from home or who worked as part of a hybrid model
- The dialogue between managers and staff to ensure that the business needs of the authority could be maintained whilst also meeting the personal circumstances of staff whilst agile working
- The benefits to staff who worked using the hybrid model
- The wellbeing of staff should be ensured whilst working from home to combat isolation issues
- Security issues associated with ICT equipment to ensure confidentiality was maintained when staff were dealing with very sensitive issues such children's social care matters
- The potential economic impact on businesses in office quarters due to reduced footfall
- The potential requirement to look at land use in office quarters as employment trends change due to staff hybrid working or working from home

RESOLVED:

That Stephanie Hopkin be thanked for her informative presentation.

20. DISPOSAL OF SURPLUS COUNCIL OWNED LAND/ASSET - MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Committee received a presentation from Stephan Van Arendsen, Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services, on the Asset Management Strategy/Disposal Policy. Mr. Van Arendsen updated on:

- the Council's Asset Base - a robust strategic approach was required to ensure assets were maximised and informed decisions could be made and that this was achieved via a centralised approach; and that there was a need to critically evaluate the use, value and benefit that could be derived from council assets
- the relevant policies such as the Asset Management Strategy; the Asset Disposal Policy; updates to provide strategic framework for decisions; alignment with Framework for Change and new capital strategy that was required; documents went through the council's formal governance process including Cabinet and Council; documents and processes were recently audited; and that an annual review for the strategy and policy documents was conducted and that the next formal review would be in March 2023
- elected Member engagement in the decision-making process and the legislation that provided the framework within which the council worked
- Phase 1 asset disposals approved by Cabinet in January 2020; and that sites were being disposed of across a 3-year programme
- Strategy supporting the Framework for Change which included asset maximisation; partnering opportunities; agile working; alignment with ICT / Digital Strategy; key enabler to Public Sector Reform projects and reform for service delivery; strategic investment; and the key enabler- direct contributor to growth programme

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- Consideration given by the Council prior to the disposal of an asset to ascertain whether an option of renting or leasing the asset would be more preferable
- The maintenance of assets and grounds deemed surplus to operational requirements
- The undertaking of self-insurance by the Council
- The insurance management of the Council's whole asset portfolio and the insurance of specialised assets

RESOLVED:

That Stephan Van Arendsen be thanked for his informative presentation.

21. ELECTIONS ACT 2022

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (Strategic Support) that provided an update on the implications of the Elections Act 2022 on the conduct of future elections in Sefton.

The report indicated that on 28 April 2022, the Elections Act 2022 received Royal Assent and that the Act sought to:

- require voters to show photo ID at polling stations before a ballot paper is issued
- require Electoral Registration Officers (ERO) based in local authorities to issue free electoral identification documents – which was now called a 'Voter Authority Certificate' to eligible electors who applied for one
- require postal voters to reapply for a postal vote every three years, replacing current rules of refreshing their signature every five years
- restrict the handling of postal votes, including limiting the number of postal votes an individual could hand in at a polling station or council office
- further limit the number of people someone may act as proxy for
- extend accessibility to elections including requiring EROs to take all reasonable steps to provide support for those with a disability in polling stations
- simplify and clarify the offence of undue influence
- change the voting and candidacy arrangements for EU voters
- allow all British citizens living overseas to vote in UK Parliamentary elections, regardless of when they left the UK

and that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) was still developing the policy and secondary legislation, and at this time, it was expected that Secondary legislation would pass through Parliament around the 6 November 2022.

The report focussed on voter identification in polling stations and accessibility to elections requiring Returning Officers (RO) to provide support for those with a disability in polling stations as it was known that these issues would come into effect for May 2023 and with proposed funding to support such issues; but also provided information on:

- New Burdens Funding
- Communication about the new requirements
- Polling day implications
- Impacts for Elected Members

The report concluded that the Elections Act would present numerous challenges for the RO, ERO, Elections Team, the wider council, Elected

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Members, candidates and election agents; that challenges that may be faced in recruiting enough polling station staff especially, suitably qualified staff, would also need to be considered along with an appropriate rate of pay to recognize the increased responsibility; that it had long been the case that electoral services teams could continue to work in isolation due to the ever-growing scale and complexity of elections; and that the Elections Act further cemented the need to review our approach to elections to ensure all aspects of the Act were successfully implemented.

Appendix A attached to the report further detailed the New Burdens that would take effect after May 2023.

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- How the new voter ID proposal will be publicised in Sefton's communities, including the funding request to government for the provision of a household notification letter; and the Electoral Commission materials that will be used by the Council
- The use of concessionary travel passes at polling stations as a valid form of voter ID
- People being encouraged more to apply for a postal vote rather than having to use voter ID at a polling station
- The potential of polling station staff being abused whilst rightly undertaking their duties and refusing to issue a ballot due to the elector not having any or the correct voter ID
- The steps being implemented to combat the build up of queues at polling stations due to the additional burdens on staff having to validate voter ID
- Concerns were expressed that the additional burdens placed on electors, especially if they had to obtain a voter authority certificate, may dissuade them from taking part in the democratic process
- Regarding accessibility issues a concern was expressed at the distances that some people had to walk to reach their polling station
- The administrative arrangements associated with the Presiding Officer refusing to issue a ballot paper if they had reasonable doubt that the photographic identification did not look like the elector, or if it was suspected that the voter ID was forged
- The ticketing system used at busy polling stations when queues formed near the 10.00 p.m. close of poll deadline
- The new arrangement to send every elector a A4 size letter detailing the new arrangements and polling station information rather than the previous A5 poll card
- Bearing in mind the implications of the Elections Act it was suggested that a presentation should be made to all Members of the Council to raise their awareness of the issues

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RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report updating on the implications of the Elections Act 2022 on the conduct of future elections in Sefton be noted;
- (2) the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer be requested to submit a further report to the Committee once the Elections Act 2022 secondary legislation has been passed and the implications for the Council become clearer;
- (3) the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer be requested to arrange a presentation for all Members of the Council to raise their awareness of the issues associated with the Elections Act 2022; and
- (4) the thanks of the Committee be extended to the Elections Team for their professionalism in administering elections in Sefton over many years.

**22. DIGITAL INCLUSION WORKING GROUP – UPDATE ON
RECOMMENDATIONS**

Further to Minute No. 14 of 14 September 2021 the Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer setting out progress made against each of the recommendations formulated by the Digital Inclusion Working Group and approved by Cabinet.

A table attached to the report set out each recommendation and an accompanying update on the action taken to implement each recommendation.

RESOLVED:

That the report setting out progress made against each of the recommendations formulated by the Digital Inclusion Working Group and approved by Cabinet be noted.

**23. WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23, SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPICS
AND KEY DECISION FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that sought the views of the Committee on the Work Programme for 2022/23; the identification of potential topics for scrutiny reviews to be undertaken by a Working Group(s) appointed by the Committee; the identification of items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan; and an update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Work Programme for 2022/23, as set out in Appendix 1 to the

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report, be noted;

- (2) no further working groups be established until the completion of the current Corporate Communications and Covid-19 Working Group; and
- (3) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

24. CABINET MEMBER REPORT - AUGUST 2022 TO OCTOBER 2022

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that included the most recent report from the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the update report from the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services be noted; and
- (2) Councillor Lappin be thanked for her attendance at the meeting.

25. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT 2022/23 TO 2024/25 AND FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE 2020 - REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET UPDATE 2022/23 - OCTOBER UPDATE

Further to Minute No. 67 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 6 October 2022 the Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services that advised of:

- (1) the current position relating to the 2022/23 revenue budget;
- (2) the current forecast on Council Tax and Business Rates collection for 2022/23; and
- (3) the monitoring position of the Council's capital programme to the end of August 2023 in respect of:
 - the forecast expenditure to year end;
 - variations against the approved budgets and an explanation of those variations for consideration by Members; and
 - updates to spending profiles and proposed amendments to capital budgets necessary to ensure the efficient delivery of capital projects are also presented for approval.

The Cabinet had resolved (Minute No. 67):

That in respect of the Revenue Budget:

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- (1) the current position relating to the 2022/23 revenue budget be noted;
- (2) the actions being taken to offset the budget pressures being faced in 2022/23 be noted;
- (3) the financial risks associated with the delivery of the 2022/23 revenue budget be recognised and it be acknowledged that the forecast outturn position will continue to be reviewed, and remedial actions put in place, to ensure a balanced forecast outturn position and financial sustainability can be achieved; and
- (4) the current position relating to the High Needs budget be noted and that officers are currently reviewing all options available to the Council to mitigate the additional pressure and to make the overall High Needs budget financially sustainable; and
- (5) approval be given to decisions on the use of the Household Support Fund being delegated to the Executive Director - People in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing, and it be noted that any discretionary element that will not be passported to vulnerable families and individuals in line with the grant conditions will be approved in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules.

That in respect of the Capital Programme

- (1) the spending profiles across financial years for the approved capital programme be noted;
- (2) the latest capital expenditure position as of 31 August 2022 of £10.191m and the latest full year forecast of £56.651m be noted;
- (3) the explanations of variances to project budgets be noted; and
- (4) it be noted that capital resources will be managed by the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services to ensure the capital programme remains fully funded and that capital funding arrangements secure the maximum financial benefit to the Council.

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- the potential for the government to relax the cap by which local authorities could raise Council Tax to minimise reductions in budgets and services
- it was noted that in general, due to the higher numbers of Band A properties in northern authorities, percentage Council Tax increases

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in northern authorities produced a lot less income than in southern authorities

- the potential for the recruitment freeze, as described in paragraph 2.8 of the report, coupled with a public sector pay cap and a buoyant job market, could hinder recruitment to specialist public sector positions and also lead to public sector workers moving to the private sector

RESOLVED:

That the financial monitoring report and the decision taken by Cabinet in respect of this matter be noted.