

Overview
& Scrutiny



MEETING: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGULATORY,
COMPLIANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES)

DATE: Tuesday 10th January, 2023

TIME: 6.30 pm

VENUE: Committee Room, Town Hall Bootle

Member

Councillor
Councillor Bradshaw (Chair)
Councillor Byrom (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Bennett
Councillor Carlin
Councillor D'Albuquerque
Councillor Grace
Councillor Killen
Councillor McGinnity
Councillor Robinson
Councillor Shaw

Substitute

Councillor
Councillor Murphy
Councillor Irving
Councillor Page
Councillor Jones
Councillor Roche
Councillor Chris Maher
Councillor Myers
Councillor Thomas
Councillor Evans

COMMITTEE OFFICER: Paul Fraser
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Telephone: 0151 934 2068
E-mail: paul.fraser@sefton.gov.uk

If you have any special needs that may require arrangements to facilitate your attendance at this meeting, please contact the Committee Officer named above, who will endeavour to assist.

We endeavour to provide a reasonable number of full agendas, including reports at the meeting. If you wish to ensure that you have a copy to refer to at the meeting, please can you print off your own copy of the agenda pack prior to the meeting.

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Declarations of Interest

Members are requested at a meeting where a disclosable pecuniary interest or personal interest arises, which is not already included in their Register of Members' Interests, to declare any interests that relate to an item on the agenda.

Where a Member discloses a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, he/she must withdraw from the meeting room, including from the public gallery, during the whole consideration of any item of business in which he/she has an interest, except where he/she is permitted to remain as a result of a grant of a dispensation.

Where a Member discloses a personal interest he/she must seek advice from the Monitoring Officer or staff member representing the Monitoring Officer to determine whether the Member should withdraw from the meeting room, including from the public gallery, during the whole consideration of any item of business in which he/she has an interest or whether the Member can remain in the meeting or remain in the meeting and vote on the relevant decision.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

(Pages 5 - 14)

Minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2022

4. Update on the Progression of the Liverpool City Region Digital Inclusion Strategy - Presentation

Presentation by the Executive Director of People

5. Corporate Communications Update - Presentation

Presentation by the Corporate Communications Manager

6. Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Council Tax Base 2023/24

(Pages 15 - 72)

Report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services

7. Financial Management 2022/23 to 2024/25 and Framework for Change 2020 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2022/23 - January Update

(Pages 73 - 94)

Report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services

- 8. Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Reference Group - Update** (Pages 95 - 98)
Briefing Note of the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services
- 9. Work Programme 2022/23, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan** (Pages 99 - 134)
Report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer
- 10. Cabinet Member Report - October 2022 - January 2023** (Pages 135 - 158)
Report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer

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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.

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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.

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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.

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Report to:	Cabinet Overview & Scrutiny (Regulatory, Compliance & Corporate Services) Council	Date of Meeting:	5 th January 2023 10 th January 2023 19 th January 2023
Subject:	Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Council Tax Base 2023/24		
Report of:	Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services	Wards Affected:	All Wards
Portfolio:	Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services		
Is this a Key Decision:	Yes	Included in Forward Plan:	Yes
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

The purpose of this report is to provide details of the review of the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the current year, 2022/23, and to recommend that there is no change to the scheme for 2023/24 for working age claimants.

The report also proposes an increase in the long-term empty homes premium from 200% to 300% on dwellings that have been empty for 10 years or more from 1 April 2023.

Finally, the report provides an updated Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish area for 2023/24.

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Recommendation(s):

Cabinet:

- 1) Notes the content of the review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the current financial year, 2022/23.
- 2) Recommend to Council that there are no changes to the existing Scheme for 2023/24 for working age claimants.
- 3) Considers the Equality Impact Assessment in respect of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme at Annex C.
- 4) Recommend that Council approves an increase in the Long-term Empty Homes Premium on dwellings that have been left empty for 10 years or more, from 200% to 300%, from 1 April 2023.
- 5) Recommend that Council approves the relevant Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish Area for 2023/24 as set out in Annex A.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services):

- 1) That the report be noted.

Council:

- 1) Notes the content of the review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the current financial year, 2022/23.
- 2) Approve that there are no changes to the existing Scheme for working age claimants for 2023/24.
- 3) Notes the Equality Impact Assessment in respect of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme at Annex C.
- 4) Approve an increase in the Long-term Empty Homes Premium on dwellings that have been left empty for 10 years or more, from 200% to 300%, from 1 April 2023.
- 5) Approve the relevant Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish Area for 2023/24 as set out in Annex A of the report.

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Each financial year, the Council must consider whether to revise or replace its local Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The Council must approve and adopt the 2023/24 Council Tax Reduction Scheme by 11 March 2023, as set out in the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2017.

The report provides an update on key aspects of the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme. An Equalities Impact Assessment has also been produced that details how the Council meets both its equalities duties and the Council's principles set out for the scheme.

After consideration of the factors outlined later in the report, and in the Equalities Impact Assessment, it is proposed that the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24 remains unchanged for working age claimants.

Increasing Premium on dwellings left empty for 10 years or more

Increasing the long-term empty homes premium on dwellings left empty for 10 years or more is intended to encourage owners of these homes to bring them back into use. Any additional income raised from the premium will help support the provision of Council services.

Council Tax Base

In accordance with Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, as amended, the Council is required to set a tax base for both Sefton Council and for each Parish Area for 2023/24 before 31st January 2023.

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

Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme was last revised in 2018/19 following a public consultation process. The Scheme continues to be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that it remains fit for purpose by addressing the Council's priorities to meet its equalities duties, minimise the impact on vulnerable residents whilst striking a balance with Council financial priorities. For these reasons, no alternative options have been considered for 2023/24.

Increasing Premium on dwellings left empty for 10 years or more

The Council could choose not to increase the long-term empty homes premium; however, this would not provide any additional incentive for owners of long-term empty homes to bring them back into use or any additional income to help meet budget pressures in 2023/24.

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24

There would be no additional revenue implications as a result of a decision to retain the current scheme. The cost of the current council tax reduction scheme discounts has been reflected in the council tax base.

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Increasing Premium on dwellings left empty for 10 years or more

Increasing the empty homes premium from 200% to 300% on dwellings left empty for 10 years or more is forecast to increase Council Tax income by £116,900 in 2023/24 (Sefton's share £98,000). This income is built into Council Tax Base Option B and will be distributed between Sefton Council and its major preceptors.

Council Tax Base

Changes to the council tax base will have an impact on the level of Council Tax income transferred from the Collection Fund to the Council's General Fund in 2023/24. It will also impact on the amounts due to the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Fire and Rescue Service, and the Combined Authority.

The following table shows the estimated increase in council tax income as a result of changes to the tax base between 2022/23 and 2023/24, based on the 2022/23 Council Tax Band D charge:

Council Tax Income	Sefton Council £ million	Police & Crime £ million	Fire & Rescue £ million	Combined Authority £ million
Option A	2.539	0.341	0.120	0.027
Option B	2.637	0.354	0.125	0.028

Option A assumes no change in the level of empty homes premium in 2023/24.

Option B assumes that the empty homes premium charged on dwellings left empty for 10 years or more will increase from 200% to 300% in 2023/24.

(B) Capital Costs

No capital costs applicable.

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets):

The local Council Tax Reduction Scheme will continue to be administered from existing resources.

Legal Implications:

Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme

By Section 5 of Schedule 1A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended by the Local Government Finance Act 2012) for each financial year each billing authority must:

- a. Consider whether to revise its Council Tax Reduction Scheme or to replace it with another scheme
- b. Make any revision to its scheme, or any replacement scheme, no later than 11

<p>March in the financial year preceding that for which the revision or replacement is to have effect.</p> <p>c. If any revision to a scheme, or any replacement scheme, has the effect of reducing or removing a reduction to which any class of person is entitled, the revision or replacement must include such transitional provision relating to that reduction or removal as the authority thinks fit.</p> <p>d. Before revising its scheme or making a replacement scheme, an authority must:</p> <p>i. Consult any major precepting authority which has power to issue a precept to it.</p> <p>ii. Publish a draft scheme in such manner as it thinks fit, and</p> <p>iii. Consult other such persons as it considers are likely to have an interest in the operation of the scheme.</p>								
<p>Equality Implications: The equality implications have been identified and mitigated. An Equalities Impact Assessment is included at Annex C.</p>								
<p>Climate Emergency Implications:</p> <p>The recommendations within this report will</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Have a positive impact</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">N</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Have a neutral impact</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Y</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Have a negative impact</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">N</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Y</td> </tr> </table> <p>There is no Climate Emergency impact resultant from the recommendations of this report.</p>	Have a positive impact	N	Have a neutral impact	Y	Have a negative impact	N	The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Y
Have a positive impact	N							
Have a neutral impact	Y							
Have a negative impact	N							
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Y							

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

<p>Protect the most vulnerable: The Council Tax Reduction Scheme proposed for 2023/24 will continue to help maintain fairness and consistency. The Scheme provides support to those experiencing financial hardship as well as supporting those making the transition to Universal Credit.</p>
<p>Facilitate confident and resilient communities: Not applicable</p>
<p>Commission, broker and provide core services: Not applicable</p>
<p>Place – leadership and influencer: Not applicable</p>
<p>Drivers of change and reform: Not applicable</p>

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Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: Provide support to those in financial hardship as well as supporting people into work.
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 is the author of this report (FD7054/22).

The Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD5254/22) has been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

Details of the review of the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the Council Tax Base are provided to the precepting bodies, i.e., the Police and Crime Commissioner, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

Empty Homes Premium

A public consultation on proposals to increase the empty homes premium in-line with new discretionary powers introduced in the Rating (property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018, ran for 5 weeks from 29th October 2018 to 3rd December 2018. The Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside supported the Council's proposals to increase the empty homes premium in-line with the new legislation.

Implementation Date for the Decision

Following the expiry of the "call-in" period for the Minutes of the Cabinet recommendation to Council and approval by Council on 19th January 2023.

Contact Officer:	Diane Turner, Customer Centric Services Manager, Corporate Resources
Telephone Number:	0151 934 3481
Email Address:	diane.turner22@sefton.gov.uk

Appendices:

Annex A: Council Tax Base Report 2023/24

Annex B: A summary of feedback from the 2018 consultation on increasing the Council Tax Long term empty Homes Premium and the associated equalities impact assessment

Annex C: Equalities Impact Assessment in respect of Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

1. Introduction/Background

Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme

1.1 Introduction/Background

1.2 Local Council Tax Reduction replaced Council Tax Benefit (CTB) from 1st April 2013. The Council Tax Reduction Scheme is a discount awarded to households on a low income to help towards Council Tax payments. The amount awarded is based on a person's household and income. The local scheme rules only apply to working-age Council Taxpayers. Pensioners are protected by legislation and must be provided with the level of Council Tax support specified by the Government.

1.3 The grant transferred to the Council, Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire Service in 2013/14, £24.2M; to fund the local scheme was £3M lower than had previously been provided to fund CTB in 2012/13. The Council therefore had to introduce changes to the national default Council Tax Support Scheme to ensure that the local scheme was cost neutral. As the Government had specified the level of support that had to be provided to pensioners, the saving requirement had to be met by reducing the level of support available to working age claimants and through changes to Council Tax empty property discounts.

1.4 The Council is required, by law, to review the Scheme each year irrespective of whether it is being amended.

1.5 The Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24 must be agreed by Council by 11th March 2023.

2. Review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2022/23

2.1 To satisfy the requirement to review the Scheme, the following areas have been evaluated:

- Claimant caseload
- Scheme expenditure
- Council Tax collection
- Attachment of Benefits
- Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Fund
- Review of the Council's five principles for the Scheme
- An Equality Impact Assessment has been produced, setting out the impact on the most vulnerable groups using the scheme.

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2.2 Claimant Caseload

The table below shows the caseload data at 30th September 2022 compared to caseload data at the end of each year since the Council Tax Reduction Scheme was introduced in 2013/14:

Year	Date	Pensioners	Working Age	Total	Change
2013/14	03.04.14	14,655	16,025	30,680	n/a
2014/15	01.04.15	13,925	15,349	29,274	-1,406
2015/16	31.03.16	13,206	14,886	28,092	-1,182
2016/17	31.03.17	12,541	14,524	27,065	-1,027
2017/18	31.03.18	11,970	14,005	25,975	-1,090
2018/19	31.03.19	11,404	14,160	25,564	-411
2019/20	31.03.20	10,871	14,326	25,197	-367
2020/21	31.03.21	10,491	15,519	26,010	+813
2021/22	31.03.22	10,243	14,917	25,160	-850
2022/23	30.09.22	10,125	14,496	24,621	-539

The working age caseload can be split further:

Year	Date	Employed	Other	Total	Change
2013/14	03.04.14	2,874	13,151	16,025	n/a
2014/15	01.04.15	2,748	12,601	15,349	-676
2015/16	31.03.16	2,504	12,382	14,886	-463
2016/17	31.03.17	2,193	12,331	14,524	-362
2017/18	31.03.18	1,900	12,105	14,005	-519
2018/19	31.03.19	1,597	12,563	14,160	+155
2019/20	31.03.20	1,268	13,058	14,326	+166
2020/21	31.03.21	1,070	14,449	15,519	+1,193
2021/22	31.03.22	1,126	13,791	14,917	-602
2022/23	30.09.22	1,082	13,414	14,496	-421

2.3 Pensioner Claimants

Since the initial implementation of the scheme in 2013/14 the number of Pensioner Claimants has declined in every year. Claimant numbers reduced by -248 between 2020/21 and 2021/22. Pensioner claimant numbers have continued to fall in 2022/23.

2.4 Working Age Claimants

Claimant numbers increased significantly in 2020/21 as a result of the economic impact of Covid-19. Claimant numbers reduced in 2021/22 and have continued to reduce in 2022/23. However, the current economic climate is uncertain, and a recession could see this trend reverse.

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2.5 Scheme Expenditure

The following table shows the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Expenditure reported in the Revenue Outturn Return compared to the mid-year estimate for 2022/23:

Year	Source	Pensioners £000	Working Age £000	Total £000	Change £000
2013/14	RO Return	13,305	9,907	23,212	n/a
2014/15	RO Return	12,152	10,364	22,516	-696
2015/16	RO Return	11,895	9,760	21,655	-861
2016/17	RO Return	11,540	10,559	22,099	+444
2017/18	RO Return	11,378	10,948	22,326	+227
2018/19	RO Return	11,695	11,069	22,764	+438
2019/20	RO Return	11,790	11,784	23,574	+810
2020/21	RO Return	11,898	13,414	25,312	+1,738
2021/22	RO Return	12,020	13,823	25,843	+531
2022/23	Estimate	12,047	13,512	25,559	-284

Note: 2022/23 Estimate: The costs recorded at 30 September 2022 have been split based on the Pensioner & Working Age weekly costs recorded on the monthly Northgate CTR304 reports.

2.6 Council Tax Collection

The table below shows the amount of Council Tax billed and collected during 2021/22:

Recorded at 31 March 2022	Liability Raised £000	Received In Year £000	Collection Rate %
CTRS Cases - Working Age	4,635	3,271	70.6
CTRS Cases - Pensioner Age	1,503	1,588	105.70
Other Council Tax Payers	172,988	164,980	95.4
Total (in-year collection)	179,126	169,839	94.8

The in-year collection rate reduced from 97.2 % in 2012/13 under the council tax benefit system to 96.2% in 2013/14 when council tax support was localised. The in-year collection rate subsequently reduced to 95.0% in 2020/21 and 94.8% in 2021/22 as a result of the impact of Covid-19. Sefton's in-year collection rate remains higher than the average for Metropolitan Districts which was 93.8% in 2021/22.

2.7 Council Tax Collection for the Current Year, 2022/23

As at 31st October 2022, the in-year Council Tax collection figure was 62.99% compared to 62.91% in 2021/22.

Collection rates in 2022/23 are currently impacted positively by the £150 Council Tax Energy Rebate. If customers did not nominate bank accounts to receive the Energy Rebate payment it has been offset against the Council Tax account. Approximately 10,100 payments were offset with the majority of those payments in respect of Council

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Tax Reduction claimants and for whom £150 paid a substantial portion of their annual liability.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council adopted a more sensitive approach to Council Tax collection. During 2022, as restrictions have eased, the Council has transitioned back to a regular programme of recovery and enforcement, albeit with a wide range of support measures in place to help residents experiencing financial difficulties; a greater awareness of vulnerability has meant that as soon as an issue is identified, in most cases, recovery action is placed on hold whilst the vulnerability aspect is assessed. It may result in the Council entering payment arrangements which take slightly longer to repay because of a genuine financial vulnerability being identified.

2.8 Attachment of Benefits

Since the introduction of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme in April 2013 the number of working age claimants falling into arrears continues to grow. One recovery option open to the Council in respect of benefit claimants is to apply for an Attachment of Benefit (AOB) via the courts. Under this option the Council can now require a payment of £3.75 per week to be made by the DWP directly from the claimant's benefits to meet Council Tax arrears. The rate for Universal Credit claimants is £20.89 per month.

Payments by AOB do provide some certainty to both the Council and the debtor. For the Council, the payments do guarantee regular income from the debtor. For the debtor, there is the security of knowing that a debt is being paid by a deduction from their benefit.

However, AOB is not a perfect solution to the problem of growing debt for the following reasons: -

- An AOB cannot be applied without first having taken the debtor to court to obtain a Liability Order. Due to the need to follow the correct legislative timeline for obtaining a Liability Order, payment by AOB cannot commence until part-way through the year. Typically for a bill issued in March the first payments would not be made by the DWP until August of the same year.
- Many debtors have arrears outstanding for multiple years Council Tax. An AOB can only be used to collect one debt at a time. In addition, current legislation does not allow the Council to take any other form of debt recovery (e.g., use of Enforcement Agents) whilst an AOB is in place. To mitigate this, letters have been issued to people on AOB asking them to contact the Council for advice, to make alternate payment arrangements or seek financial advice from Citizens Advice Sefton. However, this initiative met with only a few people contacting the Council to make payment arrangements.
- Collection of Council Tax debt by way of AOB is not the highest priority of debt administered by the DWP. The level of recovery will therefore be affected when a person has multiple debts, e.g., rent and energy debts are given higher priority. Whilst the number of these applications decreased during the COVID period, numbers have now increased. Between November 2021 and October 2022, the number of cases subject to an attachment increased from 5,000 to 7,500.
- Many new claimants for local Council Tax Reduction have already accrued debts

before an AOB can be considered.

- At the commencement of the scheme in 2013 the maximum deduction of £3.70 was lower than the minimum weekly Council Tax charge for all property bands. The minimum contribution of 20% towards the Council Tax was greater than the amount that could be collected within the year by AOB. This created a problem of debt being carried forward to the following year. Therefore, whilst debt payments were being collected regularly the amount of debt at the end of each year kept growing.
- To try and break the cycle of debt, the Council Tax Reduction Scheme was amended with effect from 1st April 2016 to reduce the minimum contribution rate to 16%. This rate was calculated so that the then AOB payment rate of £3.70 per week was more than would be due from Council Tax for many of the claimants.
- A significant number of customers have arrears for more than one financial year. As only one AOB order may be deducted at a time there has been a significant increase in the number of pending cases. These cases are effectively stacked up until an earlier order is paid. No recovery action may be taken in the interim and the value of such cases is increasing year on year.
- The following table shows the amount of debt being recovered by AOB, and the amount of debt still waiting recovery by AOB as at 31st October 2022: -

	01.04.20	31.10.20	01.04.21	31.10.21	31.10.22
AOB in payment	£1,160,881	£1,011,275	£976,248	£1,170,127	£1,719,777
Number of cases	5,803	4,528	4,442	5,002	7,524
AOB Pending	£4,382,203	£4,425,238	£4,278,022	£4,868,797	£5,897,664
Number of cases	18,163	18,076	17,215	17,101	20,008

2.9 Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Fund

The Council provides Exceptional Hardship Funding of £170,000 each year. The fund aims to help vulnerable working age people experiencing financial hardship by reducing their Council Tax bill. Each year, approximately £20,000 is used to fund council tax discounts for care leavers.

In addition, for 2022/23, following a review conducted by the Ministry of Justice it was identified that fees of £3.00 paid to the Magistrates Court for each case summonsed to appear for non-payment of Council Tax were in excess of the actual costs incurred. Consequently, those fees were reduced to £0.50 per case retrospectively resulting in the Council receiving a refund of £223,692.76.

Issuing a summons is an indicator that the recipient could be falling into debt with other bills. A substantial number of summonses are issued to taxpayers in receipt of Council Tax Reduction and in many cases state benefits. These are also the taxpayers most likely in need of additional assistance. Consideration was given to refunding the

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overpayments to those who had been issued with a summons, but this was deemed too costly and impractical to implement. Therefore, in light of the increasing cost of living and potential fuel poverty issues Cabinet approved that the refunded amount be added to the Exceptional Hardship Fund thereby allowing additional assistance to be offered to those most needy and vulnerable residents.

The fund is administrated within an agreed policy, the Discretionary Reduction in liability policy, approved by Cabinet Member for Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services.

2.10 Impact on the most vulnerable claimants

The local Council Tax Reduction Scheme addresses the Council's priorities to minimise the impact on the most vulnerable, by seeking to strike a balance between dealing with Council priorities whilst supporting those experiencing financial challenges. The Council, having recognised the impact on communities, has introduced a range of mitigating actions, including:

- Administration of the Government's Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme. The Scheme was announced by the Chancellor in February 2022 whereby a one-off payment of £150 was made to Council Tax households in Bands A-D. Payments have been made to around 110,000 eligible Sefton households, totalling approximately £16.5Million. In addition, a discretionary fund of £708,150 was provided. The Council's approach, in the main, has been to provide targeted discretionary support to households in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.
- Provision of an Exceptional Hardship Fund, as described at 2.9 above.
- Allowing a Universal Credit notification, received from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), to be treated as a claim for local Council Tax Reduction, thus removing the need for those working age people in receipt of Universal Credit to have to make a separate claim for support towards their Council Tax.
- Making provision in the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for awards to be backdated for up to 6-months for working-age vulnerable claimants.
- Deciding that the Council's local Council Tax Reduction scheme for working-age families should not replicate the rules that are in place in the national Housing Benefit scheme and the Council Tax Reduction Pensioner scheme whereby the removal of the family premium and the "2-child" rule restrict the level of award.
- Continuing to disregard the whole of a war pension as part of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, including War Disablement Pensions, War Widows Pensions, and any corresponding pensions payable to a widower or surviving civil partner. For those claimants also in receipt of Housing Benefit, the Council also fully disregards War Disablement Pension and War Widow's Pension; with the cost of the first £10 disregard met by the Government as part of the Housing Benefit subsidy claim and the remainder of costs covered by the Council.
- Offering 12-month (rather than 10-month) instalment payments to Council

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Tax payers.

- Adopting a sensitive approach to enforcement action to consider the potential vulnerability of Council Tax Reduction claimants. Before cases are referred to Enforcement Agents a vetting stage has been introduced and cases are dealt with under a separate debt recovery process to minimise potential increases in debt.
- In response to the cost-of-living crisis, the procedures for negotiating payments have been reviewed and updated. Sefton Citizen's Advice provided current information and feedback regarding their clients that was considered as part of the review. Updated guidance has been circulated amongst staff in the front and back offices and also to Citizen's Advice Sefton.
- Establishing a co-ordinated working relationship between the Council's contracted Enforcement Agents and Citizens Advice Sefton to support people in debt. Citizens Advice Sefton has direct lines of communication with the Enforcement Agents and can arrange for recovery action to be placed on hold whilst discussing and agreeing affordable payment arrangements.
- Participating in the Debt Respite Scheme (Breathing Space) which started on 04th May 2021. The scheme gives someone in problem debt the right to legal protections from creditor action, including most enforcement action, contact from creditors and freezing most interest and charges on debts. This enables a debt advice provider, who must be authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority, who wants to set up a breathing space for their client, time to arrange an appropriate debt solution. Standard breathing space, i.e., up to 60-days, is available to anyone with problem debt. A mental health crisis breathing space is available to a client who is receiving mental health crisis treatment. If an Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) certifies a client is in mental health crisis treatment, the client or someone else might apply for a mental health crisis breathing space on the client's behalf. The mental health crisis breathing space has some stronger protections than the standard breathing space. It lasts as long as the client's mental health crisis treatment, plus 30 days (no matter how long the crisis treatment lasts).
 - Upon receipt of notifications, all areas dealing with debt recovery in the Council, including Council Tax, Business Rates, Sundry Debt, Housing Benefit Overpayments and Parking Services receive notifications to hold action on any recovery activity for at least 60 days.
 - During the period 1st November 2021 – 31st October 2022, the Council has received notification of 190 customers in Breathing Space of which 149 have now expired. Over 95% of these applications were in respect of Council Tax debt only.
- Implementing processes for Council staff to refer claimants to the Money Advice and Pension Service, or Citizens Advice Sefton for help and support with debt/budgeting advice or making/maintaining their Universal Credit claim.
- Putting an escalation process in place for the debt advisor based at South Sefton foodbank to contact nominated Council Tax staff to request a hold on recovery action or discuss affordable payment arrangements.

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- Participating in Sefton’s Welfare Reform Anti-Poverty Partner’s Group – staff from the Council’s Council Tax and Benefit team, work with partner organisations and other Council services to support residents suffering financial vulnerability and to provide practical support such as signposting claimants for winter coats, school uniforms.

2.11 Review of Scheme Principles

The local Council Tax Reduction Scheme is based on five principles and the review is summarised below:

Principle	CTRS working for non-pensioner claimants?
The Council will continue to support work incentives	<p>Yes – The Council continues to operate a system which disregards certain amounts of money from customers earnings through employment and self-employment when calculating entitlement.</p> <p>This results in some additional support to those customers receiving Universal Credit who are in low paid work, following the removal of UC work allowances from April 2016</p>
The Council will continue to recognise the additional needs of our most vulnerable residents.	<p>Yes – The Council continues to make additional allowances and give additional support to those receiving certain DWP sickness benefits, disability benefits and benefits for Carers when calculating entitlement.</p> <p>Additionally, the Council continues to disregard certain disability benefits as income when calculating entitlement</p> <p>Procedures were reviewed for the collection of non-payment of Council Tax to ensure non-disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable households. Also budgeting support and advice is made available to all claimants.</p> <p>The Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Fund is available to those in the greatest financial need with fair and transparent criteria for awards.</p>

<p>The Council will continue to recognise the additional needs of families with children</p>	<p>Yes – Child Benefit and Child Maintenance payments are not considered as income when calculating entitlement to CTRS.</p> <p>Additional allowances are given when calculating entitlement for where there is a disabled child in the family.</p> <p>The CTRS also mirrors provisions in the Housing Benefit scheme by taking childcare costs into account for low income working families</p> <p>The Council continues to include the Family Premium when calculating the Council Tax Reduction. This has been removed for all new Housing Benefit claims from May 2016. The Council has also chosen not to mirror the Housing Benefit scheme which restricts the amount of support given to families with more than two children within its CTRS;</p>
<p>The Council supports households staying together to make better use of housing in Sefton and reduce homelessness.</p>	<p>Yes - The amount of Council Tax Reduction taken away from a customer when other adults live in the household (known as a non-dependant deduction), was reduced in 2013 and remains at those lower levels.</p>
<p>The Council will continue to have due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant</p>	<p>Yes – War Disablement and War Widows pensions in calculating CTRS, including any Armed Forces compensation in accordance with the covenant is disregarded. This also includes the service attributable element of the armed forces pension could also be disregarded as income when calculating entitlement. In addition, where there is a Housing Benefit eligibility, the Council disregards the full amount of such income when calculating entitlement.</p>

2.12 Summary of local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Review 2022/23

The forecast cost of the scheme has reduced by £0.284m (-1.1%) in 2022/23 to £25.559m (at 30/09/22). This is due to a reduction in both pensioner and working age claimant numbers offsetting an average council tax increase of 3.1%.

3. Council Tax Reduction Scheme - Consultation

The statutory provisions are silent on the consultation required when a council is not proposing to change its Council Tax reduction scheme.

Letters will be issued to the precepting authorities – Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority notifying them that no change is being proposed.

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4. Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme - Equality Impact Assessment

Department for Communities and Local Government issued a report in February 2014 reminding local authorities of their key duties when deciding on local Council Tax Reduction Schemes:

- Public Sector Equality Duty (The Equality Act 2010)
- Duty to mitigate the effects of child poverty (The Child Poverty Act 2010)
- The Armed Forces Covenant
- Duty to prevent Homelessness (The Housing Act 1996).

An equality impact assessment has been undertaken (at Annex C) in line with the above key duties and the Council's five principles for the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

Mitigating actions in place to support working families and vulnerable residents are regularly monitored to ensure that they remain relevant and fit for purpose.

5. Conclusion

As a result of the work undertaken, it is proposed that no changes are made to the Council's local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24. Maintaining the Scheme will continue to address the Council's focus to minimise the impact on the most vulnerable households by striking a balance between collecting Council Tax whilst supporting those experiencing financial challenges.

In addition, there would be no additional revenue implications because of a decision to retain the current scheme, with the cost of the current Scheme discounts reflected in the council tax base.

6. Proposal to Increase the Long-Term Empty Homes Premium to 300% on dwellings that have been left empty for 10 Years or more

6.1 Background

Since 1st April 2013, Councils have been able to charge a Council Tax premium on unfurnished properties that have been left empty for more than two-years as a means of incentivising owners of these properties to bring them back into use. The maximum allowable premium percentage was set at 50% between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2019.

The premium cannot be applied to homes that are empty due to the occupant living in armed forces accommodation for job-related purposes, or to annexes being used as part of a main property. Furthermore, the Council Tax system provides statutory exemptions for properties left empty for a specific purpose – for example, when a person goes into care. However, there is no statutory exemption from the premium for properties that are genuinely on the market for sale or letting. Councils also have powers to apply discretionary discounts in cases where homes are empty due to special circumstances – for example, financial hardship, fire or flooding.

The premium may be applied when a property has been empty for two years, irrespective of how long its current owner has owned it. Therefore, it is possible for an individual to buy a property which has already been empty for two years and be liable for the premium immediately. This scenario may occur if, for instance, the individual does not occupy the property immediately because they wish to extend or renovate the property. If the long-term empty property is occupied for a period of 6 weeks or less it is regarded as not having been occupied for the purposes of the two-year period. Occupancy of a long-term empty property for more than 6 weeks “resets the clock” for this purpose.

6.2 Legislative Changes from 2019/20 onward

On 1 November 2018, the Government introduced legislation that would allow local authorities to increase the empty homes premium from 50% up to 300% over a three-year period with effect from 1st April 2019. The Rating (property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018, allows local authorities to charge the following maximum amounts of Council Tax empty homes premium:

- 100% premium from 1st April 2019 on properties empty for 2 years or more;
- 200% premium from 1st April 2020 on properties empty for 5 years or more;
- 300% premium from 1st April 2021 on properties empty for 10 years or more.

These are the maximum allowable empty homes premium charges.

The Government introduced this change because there is a serious shortage of decent, affordable housing, and tackling the issue of empty homes, while also seeking to ensure that we respect the rights of property-owners, is part of the solution. There are currently more than 200,000 properties standing empty in England. As well as being a blight on the local community and attracting squatters, vandalism and anti-social behaviour, long-term empty properties are a wasted resource when 1.16 million households are on social housing waiting lists. Increasing the premium will allow local authorities to strengthen the incentive for owners of empty homes to bring them back into use.

The Government recognises that a one-size-fits-all approach is inappropriate, given that different areas will have different housing needs and different numbers of long-term empty homes. That is why they are keeping the premium as a discretionary discount, allowing local authorities to decide whether it is appropriate for their areas, and what level of premium should be charged.

6.3 Long-term Empty Homes in Sefton

On 3 October 2022, there were 836 long-term empty properties paying a premium in Sefton. Of these 94 had been empty for ten years or more. This is expected to increase to 104 properties by 1 April 2023.

Following a public consultation, Sefton Council approved an increase in the premium from 50% to 100% with effect from 1st April 2019 on properties left empty for 2 years or more. A further increase from 100% to 200% was introduced from 1st April 2020 on properties left empty for 5 years or more. The aim of the increases was to encourage more empty properties to be brought back into use.

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A decision to increase the premium on properties left empty for 10 years or more from 200% to 300% was deferred as a result of the impact of Covid-19 on the housing market.

As well as charging the empty homes premium, there are other Council initiatives to help bring empty homes back into use, this includes offering advice to owners through sending regular letters and the Council's property accreditation scheme that helps empty homeowners find tenants for their property. The Council's Housing Standards Team will also work with owners to bring their properties back into use. However, in some cases enforcement action is required when the property is causing a statutory nuisance and the owner is uncooperative or untraceable.

6.4 Proposed Change from 1 April 2023

It is proposed that the Council further increase the premium charge from 200% to 300% for properties empty for 10 years or more in-line with the maximum allowable under the new legislation from 1 April 2023.

The aim of this increase would be to further incentivise owners of long-term empty properties to bring them back into use. This will increase the stock of available housing in the borough, which would assist in achieving the aims of the local development plan. It will also increase the amount of Council Tax income raised from those that continue to leave their properties empty.

Making this change would bring Sefton into line with other councils in the Liverpool City Region (Halton, Knowsley, St Helens, and Wirral) who have already implemented this change.

6.5 Revenue Implications

The proposed change in the long-term empty homes premium from 200% to 300%, on 'dwellings left empty for 10 years or more' is forecast to increase the 2023/24 tax base by 55.5 Band D equivalents.

This would give the following increase in Council Tax income in 2023/24:

	2022/23 Band D Charge £	Additional Band D Equivalents	2023/24 Additional Income £
Sefton Council	1,765.78	55.5	98,000
Police & Crime Commissioner	236.97	55.5	13,200
Fire & Rescue Authority	83.61	55.5	4,600
Combined Authority	19.00	55.5	1,100
Total	2,105.36	55.5	116,900

The forecast assumes a 16% reduction in the number of homes that have been empty for 10 years or more is achieved in 2023/24. The actual number of properties brought back into use could be higher or lower than this and will be reflected in future tax base calculations.

6.6 Consultation

The Council undertook a public consultation on proposals to increase the empty homes premium in-line with new discretionary powers introduced in the Rating (property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018, which ran for 5 weeks from 29th October 2018 to 3rd December 2018.

The Cabinet is recommended to consider the outcome of the consultation before deciding whether to recommend to Council the proposed further increase in the long-term empty homes premium from 1st April 2023.

Consultation findings and Equality Impact Assessment can be found at Annex B.

7.0 Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill

The Council currently charges a 100% Council Tax premium for homes that have been empty for over two years (with the premium rising the longer the home remains empty). Under proposals contained in the government's Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, local authorities will be able to charge a premium after one year, as well as introduce a premium on second homes.

When the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill is enacted, it is intended that relevant approval will be sought to undertake a public consultation before a decision is made to implement the new premiums to ensure that views of all stakeholders such as those council taxpayers affected, other council taxpayers, service users, and local preceptors are considered before the decision is made. The outcome of the consultation will be reported back to the Council in due course.

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ANNEX A

SETTING THE COUNCIL TAX BASE FOR 2023/24

1. Setting the Council Tax Base

1.1 The council tax base is the link between the Council's budget and the level of council tax. The tax base will be used to calculate the council tax in Sefton, once the Council's budget has been agreed. The Council is required to calculate its own tax base as well as the tax base for each parish council within its boundary and have them approved by the 31 January 2023.

1.2 The calculation of the council tax base takes into account many factors such as the rate of new building and the trends in people living on their own (Sole Occupier Discounts).

1.3 The tax base calculation assumes a collection rate of 97.0% in 2023/24, which is unchanged from the rate applied in 2022/23.

1.4 The Council has the option to increase the premium charged on homes left empty for 10 years or more from 200% (current level) up to 300% from 1 April 2023. The implications of this option are considered elsewhere in this report. Two alternative tax base figures for Sefton Council and each parish area are presented below:

Option A: the premium remains at 200%.

Option B: the premium is increased to 300%.

2. Council Tax Base for Sefton Council in 2023/24

2.1 An analysis of the changes between the 2022/23 and the 2023/24 tax base is provided in the table below:

Tax Base for Sefton Council		Band D Equivalents		
		2022/23	2023/24	Change
H	<u>Chargeable Dwellings</u>			
	Dwellings on the Banding List	112,241.1	112,838.2	597.1
	Exempt Dwellings	-2,313.0	-2,235.2	77.8
	Disabled Persons Reductions	-148.7	-152.8	-4.1
		109,779.4	110,450.2	670.8
Q	Discounts	-10,405.8	-10,468.0	-62.2
E	Empty Homes Premium	707.3	830.6	123.3
J	Adjustments	-376.8	-495.0	-118.2
Z	Council Tax Support Scheme	-12,938.7	-12,070.3	868.4
B	Collection Rate Adjustment	-2,603.0	-2,647.4	-44.4
	MOD Properties	8.0	8.0	0.0
	Council Tax Base (Option A)	84,170.4	85,608.1	1,437.7

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	<u>Continued from previous page</u>			
E	Premium on homes left empty for 10 years or more increased from 200% to 300% from 1 April 2023	0.0	55.5	55.5
	Council Tax Base (Option B)	84,170.4	85,663.6	1,493.2

2.2 The main reasons for the changes in the tax base are:

Dwellings on the Banding List: The number of properties on the Banding List has increased by 643 (+0.5%) in the year.

Exempt Dwellings: The number of dwellings subject to an exemption reduced by 86 (-3.1%). The largest reductions were in the number of Class F exemptions (dwellings left empty by deceased persons) and Class E exemptions (an unoccupied dwelling which was previously the sole or main residence of a person who has moved into a hospital or care home).

Sole Occupier & Status Discounts: The number of dwellings receiving a 25% discount due to single occupancy has increased by 235 (+0.5%).

Empty Homes Premium: The number of dwellings left empty for more than two years has increased by 135 (+19.0%).

Adjustments: The taxbase forecast assumes that exemptions will return to their previous higher level over the next year.

Council Tax Support Scheme (CTRS): The number of working age claimants has continued to reduce over the last 12 months.

3. Council Tax Base in Parish Areas for 2023/24

3.1 There are also new tax base figures for each parish area in 2023/24. The following tables provide details of the proposed new tax base for each parish compared to 2022/23 under both alternative options:

Tax Base for Parish Areas Option A	Band D Equivalent			%
	2022/23	2023/24	Change	Change
Parish of Aintree Village	2,029.6	2,055.4	25.8	1.3%
Parish of Formby	9,071.9	9,153.1	81.2	0.9%
Parish of Hightown	859.3	867.1	7.8	0.9%
Parish of Ince Blundell	165.9	173.1	7.2	4.3%
Parish of Little Altcar	336.6	434.0	97.4	28.9%
Parish of Lydiate	2,085.2	2,109.2	24.0	1.2%
Parish of Maghull	6,798.9	6,875.5	76.6	1.1%
Parish of Melling	1,092.0	1,097.4	5.4	0.5%
Parish of Sefton	278.2	324.7	46.5	16.7%
Parish of Thornton	777.0	778.9	1.9	0.2%

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Tax Base for Parish Areas Option B	Band D Equivalents			%
	2022/23	2023/24	Change	Change
Parish of Aintree Village	2,029.6	2,056.7	27.1	1.3%
Parish of Formby	9,071.9	9,154.4	82.5	0.9%
Parish of Hightown	859.3	867.6	8.3	1.0%
Parish of Ince Blundell	165.9	173.1	7.2	4.3%
Parish of Little Altcar	336.6	434.0	97.4	28.9%
Parish of Lydiate	2,085.2	2,109.2	24.0	1.2%
Parish of Maghull	6,798.9	6,878.1	79.2	1.2%
Parish of Melling	1,092.0	1,098.0	6.0	0.5%
Parish of Sefton	278.2	324.7	46.5	16.7%
Parish of Thornton	777.0	778.9	1.9	0.2%

- 3.2 The tax base calculation for each of the parish areas is based on the same assumptions made in the calculation for Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council.
- 3.3 The higher percentage increases in Little Altcar and Sefton parish areas is due to housing development in those areas.

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Increase in Long-Term Empty Homes Premium Consultation Findings

1. Background

A public consultation ran for 5 weeks from 29th October 2018 to 3rd December 2018.

The consultation requested views on the proposal to increase the premium charge from 50% to 100% from 1 April 2019.

It also asked for views on further options to increase the premium charged on properties that have been empty for longer than 5 years to 200% from 1 April 2020 and those empty for 10 years or more to 300% from 1 April 2021.

The consultation was available online and by paper form to download where required. Direct mailing was used to contact all Council Tax payers currently liable to pay the Empty Homes Premium, and the consultation was promoted internally through the service, including the Council's Empty Homes Team.

Letters about the consultation were also sent to various stakeholders including private and registered social landlords and our major preceptors Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner, and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

Information about the survey was also available at the Sefton Borough libraries and our One Stop Shops. The Council also promoted the Consultation on its website, intranet, via a press release and Sefton Council's social media.

The aim of the survey is to ensure that the views of those Council Tax payers affected, other stakeholders and members of the public are considered before the decision is made to implement the premium from 1 April 2019 and that any exceptions to the premium be considered.

1. Consultation Options

The options consulted on were as follows,

Question 1 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposals to double the Council tax premium on properties that have been left empty for more than 2 years from 50 per cent to 100 per cent.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

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Question 2 Do you have any comments relating to this proposal? You may wish to highlight any circumstances where this premium should not apply other than those examples mentioned earlier that are already exempt from Council Tax.

Question 3 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the potential future changes to increase the premium to 200 per cent on homes left empty from 5 to 10 years from April 2020 and to 300 per cent on those empty for more than 10 years from 1 April 2021?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Question 4 Do you have any comments relating to the potential future changes to increase the premium to 200 per cent on homes left empty from 5 to 10 years from April 2020 and to 300 per cent on those empty for more than 10 years from 1 April 2021? You may wish to highlight any circumstances where this premium should not apply other than those examples mentioned earlier that are already exempt from Council Tax.

3. Analysis of survey results

- In total, there were 129 responses to the on-line consultation, which is relatively substantial for a premium affecting only 645 properties.
- Details of the capacity in which those who responded to the on line survey are listed in the table below: -

(a)	A Member of the public	78
(b)	A Local business owner	2
(c)	A landlord of a property in Sefton that isn't empty	24
(d)	A landlord of a property that is empty	17
(e)	An elected Member	0
(f)	A local charity, voluntary or community organisation	0
(g)	Other (please specify) Executor	4
	No response provided	4

- 3.3 Of the 129 respondents to the online Questionnaire, the following postcodes were submitted

Postcode breakdown					
Outside Sefton	L20	L21	L22	L23	L30
9	11	7	6	9	2
L31	L37	L38	PR8	PR9	Not

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					Completed
3	7	1	19	19	36

3.4 Responses to questions

Question 1 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposals to double the Council tax premium on properties that have been left empty for more than 2 years from 50 per cent to 100 per cent.

Strongly agree	51
Agree	15
Neither agree nor disagree	7
Disagree	12
Strongly disagree	43
No response provided	1

Question 2 Do you have any comments relating to this proposal? You may wish to highlight any circumstances where this premium should not apply other than those examples mentioned earlier that are already exempt from Council Tax.

	Comment
L20	<p>Most Landlords don't deliberately leave property's empty for more than a year.</p> <p>As a property owner, I'm trying to find a tenant. Increased council tax penalises me for this.</p> <p>I agree that increasing the council tax on long term empty properties is a fair approach as long as constructive advice is available from the council. I feel that the initial exemption of one month for vacant unfurnished properties should be extended to two months.</p> <p>There may also be economic reasons for the property being empty. Only if the owner does not cooperate with the Council to change this should the premium may be in place.</p> <p>Monies raised should be put towards social housing care.</p> <p>Why should anyone have to be "incentivised", or to put it another way, bullied and forced into occupying, or putting their property up for rent, or even for sale, just because it has been empty for a certain length of time? It is THEIR house, NOT a COUNCIL house, and therefore it is the OWNER's right to choose what they do with their property, as long as it is not illegal or anti-social, and all the bills are paid. It is irrelevant how long a private house stays empty,</p>

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as long as it is kept in a reasonable state of repair and is not causing any problems to the neighbours, so therefore, the owner should only have to pay the standard rate of Council Tax like other property owners, NOT an inflated rate. It is not up to private property owners to solve the Council's housing problem, nor is it up to them to be an easy target to solve Sefton Council's financial problems. The Council should be targeting those who deliberately evade paying Council tax, not ripping off those who do pay - this proposal is just wrong. Just because somebody owns a property does not mean that they are rich. I inherited my house from my parents who worked extremely hard to buy a house which they would eventually leave to me; they were very proud of being able to do this for me. As well as having a strong emotional attachment to the house, I am disabled, on a very low income, and therefore unable to renovate the house myself, or pay for a builder to do it. Why should I be penalised by having to pay a huge premium? I have done nothing wrong, I am not a scrounger who expects something for nothing; I pay all the bills on the property. Likewise, somebody who is working and on a low income cannot afford to pay a builder to renovate their property and so would have to do it themselves at weekends and after work - a long job. Why should they be penalised with a huge premium?

An excellent proposal. The Council needs to generate revenue in any way possible.

The refurbishment of this property is progressing well & being done to a high standard. This is taking longer & costing more than we anticipated, but the property is in good repair & not causing any nuisance or issue for neighbours (with whom we are on very good terms) or Sefton Council. The additional imposition of Council Tax costs would inevitably lead to financial pressures which could offset completion of refurbishment works. We are retired people who are doing our best to look after a house that has been in our family since 1941.

My property was seriously vandalised by last council tax tenant and I just haven't got the funds (in excess of £3000) required for repair and replacement.

As a private landlord with one property, our former home, the additional financial burden of having an empty property was not one I was expecting. Unfortunately, tenants are not perfect and I have suffered through non-payment of rent, eviction costs and extensive repairs of damage caused by the tenant.

So, despite having to meet the mortgage on the property while it is empty, and pay for repairs the recent changes in council tax cause further burden. Originally a 6 month exemption period applied to empty properties. That has now reduced to one month. The increase in premiums adds further to my financial issues.

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	<p>It is not my intention that the property remains empty, why would it? But additional council tax premiums simply prevent or delay the necessary work required to get the property in rental condition.</p>
L21	<p>If a property is up for sale they should not have to pay the charges.</p> <p>Your proposal would punish people who are already punished and will do nothing to improve the poor housing situation. There are many reasons for houses to be left unoccupied for a length of time and none of these are to benefit the owner. Your proposal, and indeed your current policy, merely compounds the financial hardship. It would be far more effective to offer help to the owners of long term occupied homes to get them ready for sale/rental. Loans and grants should be available. Compulsory purchase could also be an option should the owners keep a property empty for two years or, perhaps, a commandeering of the property to be rented to deserving people with the equivalent of social rent only going to the owners. There are many solutions to the housing shortage and the number of unoccupied homes and none of them involve imposing what amounts to monthly fines.</p> <p>Sometimes people own properties that have fallen into disrepair and they do not have the funds to renovate it.</p> <p>I think this possibly to apply to landlords, however I wouldn't agree with it for our circumstances. My mother passed away and we have been trying to sell her bungalow. Naturally it's in our interests to get rid as soon as possible but it's not been as easy as it sounds. The property has sold 6 times, but the sale has been withdrawn for one reason or another (not due to anything wrong with the property) so here we are over 12 months down the line. We are constantly worried about the property being broken into because there are no police to deal with that. I have emailed many times about recruiting more police but she doesn't reply. The fact is that your council probably owns many of the empty properties anyway.</p>
L22	<p>If someone can afford to leave a property empty for that length of time they're clearly able to afford it, so the charges are an entirely appropriate incentive to correct the commercial priorities.</p> <p>Unfortunately, I am unaware of all the reasons that people have for not paying their council tax on an empty property but the existing exclusions should remain.</p> <p>For small landlords, this is a crippling double penalty when added to the already lost the rental income. Landlords with large portfolios (exceeding £1 million) who might have property for investment purposes can afford to pay 100%.</p> <p>No one should be expected to pay more than 100% charge. The</p>

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	<p>services for the property are the same for everyone whether the property is empty or occupied. In fact, empty properties are not impacting on Sefton Council services for a property.</p> <p>The property needs work and this further expense would further delay the work going ahead If the owner is living on a pension may be some assistance could be provided.</p>
L23	<p>As a landlord in Sefton I have previously been impacted by the 50% additional charge. I have purchased empty properties which have required full renovations before I could find tenants. As one property had already exceeded the 2 years of being empty when I purchased it I was liable for the additional council tax charges. This I felt was unfair. Surely taking a property which is not liveable and has been empty for some time and doing the necessary renovations to provide additional affordable homes in the area is a good thing and should be rewarded and not punished. That said I agree that properties should not be kept empty and a penalty should be in place for those who sit on empty properties. I am aware that this can be a problem in some areas I think a fair addition to the new rules would be to reset the clock one these properties when newly purchased to provide landlords like myself the opportunity and incentive to improve living standards within Sefton.</p> <p>There are a number of unused/ derelict buildings and it would be a positive result if an increased council tax payment forced the owners into letting or selling them, to bring vibrancy to the area. However, those with legitimate reasons for leaving the property empty should not be penalised.</p> <p>I think the 100% charge should be applied after 6 months of being empty. It is inappropriate to leave a property empty while so many people need a home and councils are having financial difficulties.</p> <p>It might make the owner make more of an effort to get the property occupied.</p> <p>It is crucial that people do not continue to have incentives to leave houses empty by the current lower council tax rate, given the numbers of homeless people and others who may be living in cramped conditions. This increase would hopefully be some deterrent.</p> <p>I think you should look at the finances of the owners of these properties. If they live elsewhere it's possible that they can't afford more council tax and by taking them to court you would waste even more money. I don't think it should be a complete ban on the exemption of the 50% tax as it is now. I even think that is too much - isn't the tax for facilities used and if no-one lives there they don't use any facilities!</p>

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I would suggest the increase should be even larger, say to 200%, to have a greater effect on the situation.

It is immoral for people to have unused living accommodation while there are so many families without a home.

I feel that a lot of people for good reasons could have a property for 2 or 3 years empty so 50% seems fairer

Where probate has been granted and the property is for sale

My parents are stuck living next door to an empty property that has been that way in excess of 10 years. Owners refuse to sell yet put solar shades on a roof that is in a bad state of repair? My elderly parents are petrified that squatters will move in and we have no way of contacting these selfish owners. My parents and their neighbours try to keep the front of the house tidy so it isn't obvious what the situation is but are too elderly to continue to keep that up. It is a disgrace the place is left to rot. Hit the owners where it hurts - in their pocket and this will hopefully make them do something about the property.

The government and local authorities are taking a totally simplistic view and failing to understand the complex series of factors that can cause properties to remain empty, including for example, simple lack of market demand, or lack of financial resource on the part of the owner to bring dilapidated properties back from the brink back into use.....even just these two example factors can have a complex inter-relationship, with one interacting on the other. The proper and productive approach to this problem would be to abandon the stick (or at least not make it any bigger) and throw a carrot or two at it.

I understand why the proposal would be implemented for empty properties that could be brought back into use. However, this should not apply to circumstances such as the one that I am in. I am executor to my mother's will - she died in January 2015 and probate was obtained in May 2015, since when the property has been up for sale. It is a one bedroomed retirement shared ownership flat in XX. It went on the market at £65,000 and has been reduced over time to its current asking price of £44,950 and has been on the market with two estate agents. The shared ownership is with a Housing Association and they are difficult to deal with and I have lost one buyer due to their incompetence. In the meantime, not only do I have to pay council tax at an additional 50% rate, but I shall have to pay monthly service charges and a sinking fund charge if ever it is sold. There will be very little money left by the time this all happens. I feel very strongly that I should not be having to pay any council tax, as I receive no services

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	<p>whatsoever, never mind an additional premium. Due to myself spending lots of my time caring for my mother, I managed to keep her out of Sefton's Social Services system, and she never needed any additional support from the Council. Also, the Council itself does nothing to help me sell the flat - sale boards are not allowed outside the listed building. I am unable to bring the flat into use unless it is sold, one of the conditions of the lease is that I am unable to rent it out. I am extremely concerned whether there will be sufficient funds if the council tax charge is further increased. In circumstances where an executor to a will is unable to sell or rent a property and can prove that they have done everything possible to sell it, there should be an exemption.</p> <p>For someone who is already paying nearly £250.00 a month taking it to nearly £400.00 a month is just too much.</p>
L30	<p>If a property is up for sale, I can't see how you can penalise people who want to sell the property but it is taking longer than they wanted.</p> <p>Property's that are up for sale should be exempt from the increase.</p> <p>We have had the house up for sale for 2 years but can't sell it. Properties that are on the market and empty should be exempt from this.</p> <p>When properties are left empty when owners have gone into care the council should check that they are indeed empty and should take the waived council tax payments from the estate when the property is sold.</p> <p>I strongly disagree with this proposal for the following reasons. I realise that everyone's circumstances are different but mine are as follows. I inherited the house when my father passed away. After being unable to find a buyer for the house I realised that I would have to complete some work on the house in order to bring it up to a standard to allow me to either sell or rent the property. As I have a home, wife and a young family which I need to support finances are quite tight. I agree that as I own the empty property I should contribute towards the council but asking for double or treble the council tax will not only make the payments impossible to afford and so just cause stress and anxiety and the possibility of court action for not being able to pay and also make it more difficult to pay to renovate the house</p>
L31	<p>I believe the premium should rise due to the current housing shortage and this increase may persuade private landlords to sell properties that they cannot rent.</p>
L37	<p>I think owners should have an opportunity to make a case to the Council to use its discretion to waive the premium where they have been unable to sell or bring their properties back into use due to</p>

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	<p>other circumstances out of their control. The Council should also take the opportunity to provide help and support to owners of long-term empty homes to assist them in bringing these properties back into use. The Council should not waive the premium where owners are marketing their property at an inflated price as this will not help to increase the supply of affordable homes.</p> <p>Without room for discretion this is a very unfair tax to increase to 100%. not all property is just kept empty sometimes there are issues which mean you cannot get a new tenant and therefore are being unfairly penalised.</p> <p>Maybe it will force a few sales and reduce pressure on the precious B Green Belt you seem so keen to destroy</p> <p>Council tax should be paid by all if empty or not.</p> <p>Sheer extortion! An ill-considered 'blanket' approach. Appalling because you seem to want to penalise the very people who are trying to do the right thing. Our property is vacant again and we (3 beneficiaries) want to sell the retirement flat and that has been our desire since 2004. It has been marketed for sale continuously, through estate agents. For a period of about 5 years we rented it to a tenant (who has died). The flat is empty again and it is being marketed for sale, yet again. Try as we might we cannot sell the property which is in a block of retirement flats where other flats are regularly up for sale. We are competing with other flat owners (sellers) on the same site. The residents are all elderly so any would-be buyers have to be over 60 thereby creating a 'niche' market.</p> <p>It should be imposed after 1 year. 2 years is far too generous.</p> <p>I believe that a 50% initial increase is sufficient.</p> <p>When a property has genuinely been on the market with local estate agents the extra premium should not apply. When you are paying over £200 a month in management fees there is absolutely no reason to keep a property empty, which has been my personal experience. "Largely unfurnished" is too open to personal interpretation by council staff.</p>
PR8	<p>Awaiting planning permission (this process can sometimes be protracted and out of the control of the property owner)</p> <p>If somebody can afford to have an empty house they should be able to afford to contribute to the council tax fund also.</p> <p>There are too many vacant properties in the Borough, I also think if a property has been vacant for 5 years or more, the owners should lose the right to ownership and it automatically transfers to the Council, this if obviously where the owner can't be bothered to deal</p>

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<p>with any issues with the property</p> <p>Instead of increasing to 100% make it 150 - 200% This will force owners to get tenants or sell. Why does Sefton Council not Compulsory Purchase empty homes to use for homeless?</p> <p>This proposal, and the current 50% premium does NOT incentivise home owners of empty properties to "bring them back into use" as: You are charging more tax, therefore the owner has LESS money to sort their house out and 'bring it back into use'. Therefore, prolonging the period of time that the house will be empty. I believe that if the owner of the property is renovating it BEFORE they live in it or consequently sell the property, they should be exempt as the long-term plan is to "bring the property back into use". To ensure that this is true, council inspectors or a written council policy to state that all work undertaken on the property has to be evidenced and sent to the council.</p> <p>Strongly object as purchased with intent to downsize but having to wait to move as husband became ill and would not be suitable, will move to property on husband's death. Your proposal is just a punishment for anyone trying to plan responsibly.</p> <p>What about an empty property that is up for sale but is not selling? They should not be penalised because of stagnant housing market.</p> <p>We would not have properties standing empty for no reason, it would be either because there was work needed doing to it or we were unable to find a tenant, the fact that we have to pay council tax from day 1 is already crippling without increasing it further</p> <p>As a Expat visiting my own fully furnished property for family visits as well as family members using it , If the council puts up the taxes I shall have to let it out for shorts lets which benefits neither I nor the Council. As someone using less public services the extra surcharge is unfair. This is our only home in the UK. Mine is not empty but is taxed as if it was.</p> <p>I can accept that an empty property may warrant a 100% tax as the council is losing income on empty properties.</p> <p>I (together with my brother) purchased an apartment on Lord Street for my mother to live in when she was in her 80s. She died, aged 101, 18 months ago and the property has been for sale since that time. The lease prevents us from letting it, or from selling it to someone under 55, or from selling it to a third party (eg the Council). We have offered it to the ground landlord without success. Each month it is unsold we have to pay approx. £500 Service Charge plus 100% Council Tax even though we receive no services from either RSL or the Council. I am a resident of Sefton</p>

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	<p>and also pay full Council tax on the house I share with my wife. We have had the apartment redecorated to a high standard and we do use it whilst we are overnighting in Southport but we wish to sell. The purpose of the legislation is presumably to bring unused property to the market. We have been trying to sell for 18 months; it is currently listed at a price lower than others in the building. You should either target the ground landlords who enforce the restrictive conditions in the lease or make an exception for "very sheltered accommodation".</p> <p>I just need to know if I can no longer manage the property will you take it off me. I have no other income but my husbands and disability pips. I have mental health issues, at the moment my husband is my carer. I do not come under the heading without capacity though if I am sick I would come under that category. I own no other property. The flat I own is not occupied but I would say it is my second home should I become homeless for whatever reason. I did approach your offices for help but they told me if no one was living there it was empty (however, it is furnished) so I would just have to carry on paying council tax. I don't really know what to do. I can't sell it the lady in the flat below has a life threatening illness. They have told me so over a period of several years. I find it difficult to cope.</p> <p>I always considered that a tax or rate had to be fair. If you are using the facilities you should pay for them. I already pay rates to Sefton as I live in their Borough. I have another property that I purchased to house my elderly mother who was a war widow. She died late last year and I put the flat up for sale. It will not sell because there are a number for sale and the service charge is so high. I don't use the council's facilities and I am desperately trying to sell but nobody wants to buy. I am currently paying 50% rates for a flat that nobody lives in nor uses any of the services that the Council provide. To increase the empty rate from 50% to 100% (and subsequently 200% and 300%) on a property that I am desperately trying to sell is patently unfair. The proposed increase was to target landlords who are deliberately leaving properties empty and not renting them out to tenants. This isn't the case with my circumstances. I know that Councils are strapped for cash and they will simply introduce this measure to increase revenue. I have the feeling that anything I write will eventually be ignored as raising money is paramount. I simply reiterate that the tax/rates must be fair.</p> <p>I cannot afford the mortgage I have on the property let alone increased council tax.!</p>
PR9	I would love you to raise it to 100% considering the empty flat I am trying to sell is costing me 150% of the rateable value into the second year of being on the market.

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Authorities should be allowed to take all necessary steps to bring empty properties back into use. This should include compulsory purchase rather than increased Council Tax where property has been empty for 5 years or more.

The whole point of council tax is to charge an occupant for using council services. If the property is empty there should actually be a nil charge never mind a 100% charge because there are no costs to the council.

I am becoming elderly with an elderly husband and mobility problems and increasingly struggle to manage the only flat I own that is attached to and accessed via my own flat entrance. I have had really bad tenants and am reaching the point of not feeling able to go on renting emotionally and physically. If these council tax changes come into effect I will have to choose between bills I would struggle to pay, continuing to rent regardless of my health or selling the whole property.

Great care must be taken to ensure the owner is not vulnerable. Penalties should be in place for any council staff member who fails to exercise due diligence.

I have been trying to sell my house for 3 yrs over this period I have reduced the price by 80k in a desperate effort to sell. Some understanding from the council for those actively trying to sell would help enormously. I do agree those empty houses not for sale should have incentives to bring them back into homes. But this blunt instrument without some consideration for those of us already stressed about when will this house stop eating into my pension may just be seen as yet another way of bleed the tax payer.

Empty properties often fall into disrepair and neglect, and are not nice to see.

If not exempt and unwilling to sell or rent out, then the premium seems fair. Perhaps consideration should be given for discretion to waive the premium in genuine cases of inability to sell or rent out a property.

This is daylight robbery ! Sefton council still get paid the council tax whether the building is empty or not ? It should infect be reduced for empty properties as none of the services are being used if the property is empty ! Just sheer greed!

I think this is an excellent proposal as homes left empty for that long will tend to be neglected damaging the neighbourhood

There is a housing crisis whilst some of the wealthiest people are leaving properties to lay empty and unused, accumulating personal

wealth at the expense of the majority. I fully support increasing the council tax levied. The only slight disagreement I have is the suggestion that this is a doubling of the council tax levied. What it is is a removal of a discount in council tax that has previously been applied.

Three years would be fairer than two. My property is empty because I cannot sell it at a reasonable price due to Brexit uncertainty. It remains on the market, but I have had few viewings and fewer offers, all well below comparable prices.

As an owner of a Residential Care Home we have a Cottage in the grounds. We cannot just rent this property out to anyone. The tenant has to have an enhanced DBS check, related somehow to the business i.e. a member of staff. This significantly reduces the chance of renting out this property. CQC would not allow us to rent the property out to anyone due to the Vulnerability of the elderly people living in the Care Home. The cottage is also connected with all Fire related incidents. We test the Fire alarm weekly at the Care Home which is also sounded in the Cottage. If the Fire alarm went off it would also go off in the cottage. There are lots of issues associated with the suitability of the Tenant. We manage a retirement complex of 37 rental properties which have on average five or six empty at any one time. These properties are advertised weekly but it does not result in the properties all being let. We pay out enough in council tax already and to increase this further would be being penalised for a lack of suitable tenants that fit the criteria.

My mother owns a flat in XX. Mum is 86 years old and she lives in a care home as she has dementia. I have an Order from the Court of Protection which allows me to act for Mum and part of that regime is that I need to show that I have acted in Mum's best interest and taken advice where necessary. Father passed away in 2007. Both Mum and Dad worked hard and saved in order that they would be reasonably if modestly provided in their later years. Part of the planning was the purchase of the flat. Over the past year I consulted with a financial adviser and Mum's solicitor. As a result, I concluded that there is little point as in selling the flat as interest rates are so low. The flat needs major improvements, particularly in the bathroom and the kitchen. If Mum funded these improvements and let the flat, it would take quite a while to recover the outlay. In addition, the cost of the works would deplete the pool of money Mum has to pay for her care. Currently Mum pays the standard levy plus 50%. The proposal is that she now pay even more council tax. Mum is basically confined to her care home and uses very little of the services provided by the local authority, but the proposal is for Mum to pay a further increased penalty simply because she has poor health.

This must rank as the most ill thought out proposal since the

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	<p>bedroom tax. If you have a property to sell with a registered estate agent, why should you be penalised, because the market is suppressed and is difficult to sell. Unless you sell under market value, which I did, after trying to sell for two and a half years, paying 50% extra tax, just to get rid.</p> <p>The Empty Homes premium should be 100% only and should be for properties of £100,000 or over, not for property less than that amount as you are punishing poor people.</p>
<p>Outside Sefton</p>	<p>If the home is being advertised for rent, then this should not apply. I have a house that is in very good condition (newly refurbished), but still we are having trouble finding a tenant.</p> <p>Empty retirement flat belonging to my deceased father has been on market for 2 years - have reduced price but still no sale - I am paying maintenance charges and council tax outside my own area out of my savings - whilst I understand basic council tax has to be paid I think it is unfair to expect executors to pay an additional premium when there is nothing more they can do to sell the property.</p> <p>As a landlord if we had an empty property we would still have a mortgage to pay, and I feel it would be unfair to punish us further.</p> <p>Fully in agreement if no effort is being made to have the property occupied. However, I have had the property in Sefton on the market for sale ever since my mother passed away in May 2017. The lease does not allow me to let the apartment, and it can only be occupied by someone over 50. To charge 200% of the Council Tax seems totally unfair when I am doing everything I can to sell it. Surely in these circumstances, empty properties should also be exempt.</p> <p>I most certainly agree considering that Sefton is at present charging me 150% rates for an empty flat that I am desperately trying to sell. A 100% rate would be a relief to this pensioner.</p> <p>Depends on the circumstances as to why a property is unoccupied. An increase is unfair to those who intend to live in the property but can't at present due to extensive renovations to make a property habitable (council tax deductions with his regard are currently not sufficient with respect to the period of availability). Therefore, this only extends the period the property is uninhabitable and vacant due to unavailable cashflow to do the work.</p>

Question 3 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the potential future changes to increase the premium to 200 per cent on homes left empty from 5 to 10 years from

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April 2020 and to 300 per cent on those empty for more than 10 years from 1 April 2021?

Strongly agree	48
Agree	15
Neither agree nor disagree	9
Disagree	10
Strongly disagree	46
No response provided	1

Question 4 Do you have any comments relating to the potential future changes to increase the premium to 200 per cent on homes left empty from 5 to 10 years from April 2020 and to 300 per cent on those empty for more than 10 years from 1 April 2021? You may wish to highlight any circumstances where this premium should not apply other than those examples mentioned earlier that are already exempt from Council Tax.

	Comment
L20	<p>how many council houses are empty.</p> <p>There is no reason for properties to be left empty for extended periods.</p> <p>Positive proposals work better than simply "fine". I suppose landlords/owners have no real reason to have property empty.</p> <p>How can you charge for a property that isn't using any services?</p> <p>All the points that I have made in the previous question apply equally to this question. Also, the proposal to charge such inflated premiums is not only morally wrong, but will not work anyway: On one hand, you say that you are trying to encourage property owners to put more homes back into use. On the other hand, you say that you want to raise more money from the owners of empty properties- you are contradicting yourselves! If more properties get put back into use, you will get LESS money as the occupiers will only be paying Council Tax at the standard rate; not at the ridiculously inflated premiums that you are proposing if the properties were to remain empty - it doesn't work both ways!!</p> <p>An excellent proposal. The Council needs to generate revenue in any way possible.</p> <p>We think it would be helpful to consider properties on a case by case basis. It should be used to target those properties which are in poor repair and/or causing issues for neighbouring properties, the local community or the Council. We do not think that these costs should go over 150% for properties like ours which are in good repair &</p>

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	<p>undergoing further renovations as we are doing our very best to carry out improvements as effectively & efficiently as possible.</p> <p>If council tax is paid I can see no justification to double or treble that.</p>
L21	<p>If a property is up for sale they should not have to pay the charges. It is unfair for people who are actively trying to sell their empty property to impose these high charges when they may already be paying a mortgage and council tax on the empty property AND the property they live in.</p> <p>Your proposal would punish people who are already punished and will do nothing to improve the poor housing situation. There are many reasons for houses to be left unoccupied for a length of time and none of these are to benefit the owner. Your proposal, and indeed your current policy, merely compounds the financial hardship. It would be far more effective to offer help to the owners of long term occupied homes to get them ready for sale/rental. Loans and grants should be available. Compulsory purchase could also be an option should the owners keep a property empty for two years or, perhaps, a commandeering of the property to be re-rented to deserving people with the equivalent of social rent only going to the owners. There are many solutions to the housing shortage and the number of unoccupied homes and none of them involve imposing what amounts to monthly fines</p> <p>I feel that increasing the premium would result in landlords creating fake tenancies in order to avoid making payment.</p>
L22	<p>If someone can afford to leave a property empty for that length of time they're clearly able to afford it, so the charges are an entirely appropriate incentive to correct the commercial priorities.</p> <p>Unfortunately, I am unaware of all the reasons that people have for not paying their council tax on an empty property but the existing exclusions should remain.</p> <p>The increase in costs will mean rents for everyone will have to go up.</p>
L23	<p>As a landlord in Sefton I have previously been impacted by the 50% additional charge. I have purchased empty properties which have required full renovations before I could find tenants. As one property had already exceeded the 2 years of being empty when I purchased it I was liable for the additional council tax charges. This I felt was unfair. Surely taking a property which is not liveable and has been empty for some time and doing the necessary renovations to provide additional affordable homes in the area is a good thing and should be rewarded and not punished. That said I agree that properties should not be kept empty and a penalty should be in place for those who sit on empty properties. I am aware that this can be a problem in some</p>

areas I think a fair addition to the new rules would be to reset the clock on these properties when newly purchased to provide landlords like myself the opportunity and incentive to improve living standards within Sefton.

There are a number of unused/ derelict buildings and it would be a positive result if an increased council tax payment forced the owners into letting or selling them, to bring vibrancy to the area. However, those with legitimate reasons for leaving the property empty should not be penalised.

I think the 100% charge should be applied after 6 months of being empty. It is inappropriate to leave a property empty while so many people need a home and councils are having financial difficulties.

It might make the owner make more of an effort to get the property occupied.

It is crucial that people do not continue to have incentives to leave houses empty by the current lower council tax rate, given the numbers of homeless people and others who may be living in cramped conditions. This increase would hopefully be some deterrent.

I think you should look at the finances of the owners of these properties. If they live elsewhere it's possible that they can't afford more council tax and by taking them to court you would waste even more money. I don't think it should be a complete ban on the exemption of the 50% tax as it is now. I even think that is too much - isn't the tax for facilities used and if no-one lives there they don't use any facilities!

I would suggest the increase should be even larger, say to 200%, to have a greater effect on the situation.

It is immoral for people to have unused living accommodation while there are so many families without a home.

I feel that a lot of people for good reasons could have a property for 2 or 3 years empty so 50% seems fairer.

Where probate has been granted and the property is for sale

My parents are stuck living next door to an empty property that has been that way in excess of 10 years. Owners refuse to sell yet put solar shades on a roof that is in a bad state of affair? My elderly parents are petrified that squatters will move in and we have no way of contacting these selfish owners. My parents and their neighbours try to keep the front of the house tidy so it isn't obvious what the situation is but are too elderly to continue to keep that up. It is a

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	<p>disgrace the place is left to rot. Hit the owners where it hurts - in their pocket and this will hopefully make them do something about the property.</p> <p>The government and local authorities are taking a totally simplistic view and failing to understand the complex series of factors that can cause properties to remain empty, including for example, simple lack of market demand, or lack of financial resource on the part of the owner to bring dilapidated properties back from the brink back into use.....even just these two example factors can have a complex inter-relationship, with one interacting on the other. The proper and productive approach to this problem would be to abandon the stick (or at least not make it any bigger) and throw a carrot or two at it.</p> <p>I understand why the proposal would be implemented for empty properties that could be brought back into use. However, this should not apply to circumstances such as the one that I am in. I am executor to my mother's will - she died in January 2015 and probate was obtained in May 2015, since when the property has been up for sale. It is a one bedroomed retirement shared ownership flat in XX. It went on the market at £65,000 and has been reduced over time to its current asking price of £44,950 and has been on the market with two estate agents. The shared ownership is with a Housing Association and they are difficult to deal with and I have lost one buyer due to their incompetence. In the meantime, not only do I have to pay council tax at an additional 50% rate, but I shall have to pay monthly service charges and a sinking fund charge if ever it is sold. There will be very little money left by the time this all happens. I feel very strongly that I should not be having to pay any council tax, as I receive no services whatsoever, never mind an additional premium. Due to myself spending lots of my time caring for my mother, I managed to keep her out of Sefton's Social Services system, and she never needed any additional support from the Council. Also, the Council itself does nothing to help me sell the flat - sale boards are not allowed outside the listed building. I am unable to bring the flat into use unless it is sold, one of the conditions of the lease is that I am unable to rent it out. I am extremely concerned whether there will be sufficient funds if the council tax charge is further increased. In circumstances where an executor to a will is unable to sell or rent a property and can prove that they have done everything possible to sell it, there should be an exemption.</p>
L30	<p>If a property is up for sale, I can't see how you can penalise people who want to sell the property but it is taking longer than they wanted.</p> <p>Property's that are up for sale should be exempt from the increase.</p> <p>We have had the house up for sale for 2 years but can't sell it. Properties that are on the market and empty should be exempt from this.</p>

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	<p>When properties are left empty when owners have gone into care the council should check that they are indeed empty and should take the waived council tax payments from the estate when the property is sold.</p>
L31	<p>I believe the premium should rise the current housing shortage and this increase may persuade private landlords to sell properties that they cannot rent</p>
L37	<p>I think owners should have an opportunity to make a case to the Council to use its discretion to waive the premium where they have been unable to sell or bring their properties back into use due to other circumstances out of their control. The Council should also take the opportunity to provide help and support to owners of long-term empty homes to assist them in bringing these properties back into use. The Council should not waive the premium where owners are marketing their property at an inflated price as this will not help to increase the supply of affordable homes.</p> <p>Without room for discretion this is a very unfair tax to increase to 100%. not all property is just kept empty sometimes there are issues which mean you cannot get a new tenant and therefore are being unfairly penalised.</p> <p>Maybe it will force a few sales and reduce pressure on the precious B Green Belt you seem so keen to destroy</p> <p>Council tax should be paid by all if empty or not</p> <p>Sheer extortion! An ill-considered 'blanket' approach. Appalling because you seem to want to penalise the very people who are trying to do the right thing. Our property is vacant again and we (3 beneficiaries) want to sell the retirement flat and that has been our desire since 2004. It has been marketed for sale continuously, through estate agents. For a period of about 5 years we rented it to a tenant (who has died). The flat is empty again and it is being marketed for sale, yet again. Try as we might we cannot sell the property which is in a block of retirement flats where other flats are regularly up for sale. We are competing with other flat owners (sellers) on the same site. The residents are all elderly so any would-be buyers have to be over 60 thereby creating a 'niche' market.</p> <p>Make it 200% after 2 years</p> <p>Other measures should be put into place to bring the properties back into use, looking at the reasons why the properties remain empty rather than just applying a financial penalty.</p>
PR8	<p>Awaiting planning permission (this process can sometimes be</p>

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protracted and out of the control of the property owner)

If somebody can afford to have an empty house the. They should be able to afford to contribute to the council tax fund also.

There are too many vacant properties in the Borough, I also think if a property has been vacant for 5 years or more, the owners should lose the right to ownership and it automatically transfers to the Council, this if obviously where the owner can't be bothered to deal with any issues with the property

Instead of increasing to 100% make it 150 - 200% This will force owners to get tenants or sell. Why does Sefton Council not Compulsory Purchase empty homes to use for homeless?

This proposal, and the current 50% premium does NOT incentivise home owners of empty properties to "bring them back into use" as: You are charging more tax, therefore the owner has LESS money to sort their house out and 'bring it back into use'. Therefore, prolonging the period of time that the house will be empty. I believe that if the owner of the property is renovating it BEFORE they live in it or consequently sell the property, they should be exempt as the long-term plan is to "bring the property back into use". To ensure that this is true, council inspectors or a written council policy to state that all work undertaken on the property has to be evidenced and sent to the council.

Strongly object as purchased with intent to downsize but having to wait to move as husband became ill and would not be suitable, will move to property on husband's death. Your proposal is just a punishment for anyone trying to plan responsibly.

What about an empty property that is up for sale but is not selling? They should not be penalised because of stagnant housing market.

I strongly disagree with both these proposals as it is exorbitant. Why should you be penalized unfairly for owning a property that you do not want to rent out because of all the problems that this may entail (watch channel 5) or sell because of the state of the current housing market where we are likely to lose money. The property in question was purchase from our pensions and savings for one of our daughter who was going to get a mortgage and repay us. However, she has since married and purchased a property with her husband having taken out a large mortgage. All the costs of the property in question has reverted to us, her parents, who are pensioners and do not want to get into renting. Why should we be penalised further if we pay 100% Council Tax. It certainly will not win you or the government any votes. I'm totally disillusioned with you all so expect that this is just a way of telling us what you intend to do no matter what is said.

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	<p>It would be more equitable if the Council compulsorily purchased such accommodation.</p>
PR9	<p>I would love you to raise it to 100% considering the empty flat I am trying to sell is costing me 150% of the rateable value into the second year of being on the market.</p> <p>Authorities should be allowed to take all necessary steps to bring empty properties back into use. This should include compulsory purchase rather than increased Council Tax where property has been empty for 5 years or more.</p> <p>The whole point of Council Tax is to charge an occupant for using council services. If the property is empty there should actually be a nil charge never mind a 100% charge because there are no costs to the council.</p> <p>I am becoming elderly with an elderly husband and mobility problems and increasingly struggle to manage the only flat I own that is attached to and accessed via my own flat entrance. I have had really bad tenants and am reaching the point of not feeling able to go on renting emotionally and physically. If these council tax changes come into effect I will have to choose between bills I would struggle to pay, continuing to rent regardless of my health or selling the whole property.</p> <p>Great care must be taken to ensure the owner is not vulnerable. Penalties should be in place for any council staff member who fails to exercise due diligence.</p> <p>I have been trying to sell my house for 3 yrs over this period I have reduced the price by 80k in a desperate effort to sell. Some understanding from the council for those actively trying to sell would help enormously. I do agree those empty houses not for sale should have incentives to bring them back into homes. But this blunt instrument without some consideration for those of us already stressed about when will this house stop eating into my pension may just be seen as yet another way of bleed the taxpayer.</p> <p>Empty properties often fall into disrepair and neglect, and are not nice to see.</p> <p>If not exempt and unwilling to sell or rent out, then the premium seems fair. Perhaps consideration should be given for discretion to waive the premium in genuine cases of inability to sell or rent out a property.</p> <p>This is daylight robbery! Sefton council still get paid the council tax whether the building is empty or not? It should in fact be reduced for empty properties as none of the services are being used if the</p>

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	<p>property is empty! Just sheer greed!</p> <p>I think this is an excellent proposal as homes left empty for that long will tend to be neglected damaging the neighbourhood.</p> <p>There is a housing crisis whilst some of the wealthiest people are leaving properties to lay empty and unused, accumulating personal wealth at the expense of the majority. I fully support increasing the council tax levied. The only slight disagreement I have is the suggestion that this is a doubling of the council tax levied. What it is is a removal of a discount in council tax that has previously been applied.</p> <p>Three years would be fairer than two. My property is empty because I cannot sell it at a reasonable price due to Brexit uncertainty. It remains on the market, but I have had few viewings and fewer offers, all well below comparable prices.</p> <p>As mentioned we are very limited to whom we can rent the property to due to the exceptional circumstances related to the "ideal tenant". I think this needs to be looked into in much more detail and not just a blanket increase which suits all as this is not the case. If this did happen then the cost would be passed onto our service users which I do not think is fair.</p> <p>Most responsible landlords do their best to let properties to suitable tenants if a property has been empty as long as ten years it is most likely derelict. Taxpayers are disgruntled at paying 50% Premium Tax. Can't see collection rates rising if Premium Tax is increased excessively.</p>
Outside Sefton	<p>If the home is being advertised for rent, then this should not apply. I have a house that is in very good condition (newly refurbished), but still we are having trouble finding a tenant.</p> <p>Empty retirement flat belonging to my deceased father has been on market for 2 years - have reduced price but still no sale - I am paying maintenance charges and council tax outside my own area out of my savings - whilst I understand basic council tax has to be paid I think it is unfair to expect executors to pay an additional premium when there is nothing more they can do to sell the property.</p> <p>As a landlord if we had an empty property we would still have a mortgage to pay, and I feel it would be unfair to punish us further.</p> <p>Fully in agreement if no effort is being made to have the property occupied. However, I have had the property in Sefton on the market for sale ever since my mother passed away in May 2017. The lease does not allow me to let the apartment, and it can only be occupied by someone over 50. To charge 200% of the Council Tax seems</p>

	<p>totally unfair when I am doing everything I can to sell it . Surely in these circumstances, empty properties should also be exempt.</p> <p>I most certainly agree considering that Sefton is at present charging me 150% rates for an empty flat that I am desperately trying to sell. A 100% rate would be a relief to this pensioner.</p> <p>Depends on the circumstances as to why a property is unoccupied. An increase is unfair to those who intend to live in the property but can't at present due to extensive renovations to make a property habitable (council tax deductions with his regard are currently not sufficient with respect to the period of availability). Therefore, this only extends the period the property is uninhabitable and vacant due to unavailable cash flow to do the work.</p>
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3.5 Summary Table - Questions 1 & 3

	Agree/Agree strongly	Neither agree / disagree	Disagree / Strongly disagree	No response
Question 1	66	7	55	1
Question 3	63	9	56	1

2. Equality Impact Assessment

4.1. Introduction

Any change to function, provision or policy that may have an effect on people is automatically subject of the Equality Act 2010. As such the 'decision makers' have a statutory duty to pay 'due regard' to equality legislation and the potential discriminatory impact that changes have on service users. To inform decision makers, an 'equality analysis report' is submitted to them at the time of decision making in order for them to consider equality implications as part of their final decision making.

In order to meet equality legislation public bodies have to consider Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:-

- (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- (b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and person who do not share it.

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4.2 Protected Characteristics

Equality Law (Equality Act 2010) is clear that there are particular characteristics intrinsic to an individual against which it would be easy to discriminate. Section 149 (the Public-Sector Equality Duty) sets the goals of the Act and the characteristics, known as 'protected characteristics' against which we have to test for discrimination. These characteristics are gender, race/ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity and disability.

4.3 Consultation

Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council (Sefton MBC) is considering increasing the Council Tax homes premium from April 2019 on homes left empty and substantially unfurnished for over 2 years. This will help to reduce the number of long term homes and bring them back into use through sale or renting. Any additional income raised from the premium will help support the provision of Council services.

As part of the consultation, equality questions were asked in connection to gender, age, disability and ethnicity.

The main issues that we have to consider in relation to the proposed changes to the scheme in relation to equality and diversity are:

Disabled people, on very low income, who are unable to carry out the necessary renovations to properties themselves or pay someone to do it for them.

Where owners are struggling to cope with managing the property they own.

4.4 Impacts

The tables below highlight what evidence we have on how the proposed changes will affect different groups and communities in relation to equalities and human rights. Where numbers are presented which refer to the survey, this relates to the number of people who responded to the equality questions in the survey, and aligned to the question on impacts. People who responded to the survey and reported any impacts, whether this was a lot of impact or no impact, did so from an individual perspective. The table recognises the responses to the survey but also considers any detrimental impact on the protected characteristic as a whole and includes the mitigations the Council has in place.

Breakdown of respondents by Gender

In terms of the 129 respondents to the eConsult Questionnaire 52 females, 40 males, 2 preferred not to say and 35 not completed returns.

Breakdown of respondents by Age ranges

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In terms of the 129 respondents to the eConsult Questionnaire, 94 gave the following age ranges, cross matched against gender.

Age Ranges				
	Female	Male	Not declared	Total
18-29	2	0	0	2
30-39	5	2	1	8
40-49	10	6	0	16
50-59	13	13	1	27
60-69	12	11	1	24
70-79	7	7	1	15
85+	2	0	0	2

Breakdown of respondents by Postcode

In terms of the 129 respondents to the eConsult Questionnaire, the following postcodes were submitted:

Postcode breakdown					
Outside Sefton	L20	L21	L22	L23	L30
10	10	7	4	17	1
L31	L37	L38	PR8	PR9	Not Completed
3	6	2	15	16	38

Breakdown of respondents by Equality Data

Respondents were asked to indicate answers against Equality data questions, the breakdown of which is:

Disability

4 indicated a Hearing Impairment, 5 indicating a Long-Term Illness Affecting Daily Activity, followed by 4 indicating Mental Health/Distress, a further 7 indicating a Physical impairment and 2 with a visual impairment.

Ethnicity/ Religion or Belief

79 of our 129 respondents who answered indicated they were "White British" or "White English" in terms of ethnicity, with fewer numbers for the other classifications.

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Ethnicity - do you identify as...	Total
White British	55
White English	25
White Irish	2
White Polish	1
White Welsh	1
Black British	1
Asian Indian	1
Other White background	2
Other Chinese background	1
Prefer not to say / no response	40

Sexual Orientation

On Sexual Orientation, 78 out of 129 respondents who answered indicated they were Heterosexual, 2 Bisexual and 49 Prefer not to say / or did not respond

Heterosexual	78
Bisexual	2
Prefer not to say / no response	49

Religion / Belief

42 out of 129 who answered indicated they were Christian, 1 Buddhist, 86 no religion / did not respond / prefer not to say.

Gender at birth

85 of the 129 respondents who answered the question indicated that they currently live in the gender given to them at birth. 1 respondent was not in the gender given at birth. 43 prefer not to say / no response.

4.5 Impacts table

Protected Characteristic	
Gender	No inadvertent bias on the basis of gender is indicated. We have not identified any impacts that need mitigation.
Race/Ethnicity	No inadvertent bias on the basis of race/ethnicity is indicated. The proposals do not treat people of different race/ethnicity groups any differently and we have not identified any impacts that need mitigation.
Religion and Belief	No inadvertent bias on the basis of religion or belief. The proposals do not treat persons of different religions or beliefs any differently and we have not identified any impacts that need mitigation.
Sexual Orientation	No inadvertent bias on the basis of sexual orientation is indicated. The proposals do not treat persons of different

	sexual orientation any differently. We have not identified any impacts that need mitigation.
Age	No inadvertent bias on the basis of age is indicated. Young people looking to join the property ladder or rent an affordable property may be affected as more empty properties are made available. We have not identified any impacts that need mitigation.
Gender Reassignment	No inadvertent bias on the basis of gender reassignment age is indicated in the proposals. We have not identified any impacts that need mitigation.
Pregnancy and Maternity	No inadvertent bias on the basis of pregnancy and maternity is indicated. We have not identified any impacts that need mitigation.
Disability	No inadvertent bias on the basis of disability is indicated. However, the consultation results indicate that disability is also relevant to the proposals as people felt that there should be mitigations in place for owners who are unable to manage their affairs or circumstances where disability prompts a need to change property and reduces the ability to carry out the work required to an empty property.

4.6 Mitigations

Key measures in place

- Consideration to be given to whether any additional exemptions under which the Empty Homes Premium should not apply, for example where an owner is living elsewhere to receive care or resident in a nursing home etc.
- Any short term financial hardship or other exceptional circumstances affecting a person's ability to pay will be addressed by the Council's Discretionary Reduction in Liability Policy, and the promotion of that policy, so additional support can be provided for those in exceptional need.
- Sefton MBC will continue to maintain its good track record of providing proactive and tailored support for those Council Tax payers who struggle to make payments and will continue to ensure our recovery procedures identify cases where additional support might be required.
- A proactive approach will be taken to identify persons meeting the severe mental impairment conditions set out in the Council Tax Regulations with a view to exempting them from paying Council Tax.
- We will continue working with and supporting customers whose first language is not English.
- Customers affected by the proposals will be contacted directly and provided with clear explanation and offers of advice and support.
- The Council's website information will be updated to reflect the key changes and any issues identified.

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Equality Analysis Report - Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Details of proposal: Council Tax Reduction Scheme – Annual review for 2023/24

Sefton Council is reviewing its local Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme that currently supports around 25,000 households who are on a low income with the cost of their council tax.

Around 14,500 claimants are of working age (59% of households using the scheme) and the remaining 10,125 (41%) are pension age.

The scheme is a means tested discount. It should be noted that pension age recipients are protected from any reduction in support under rules that are set out in national regulations.

Ramifications of Proposal:

Sefton Council's local Council Tax Reduction Scheme is based on five principles: -

1. The Council will continue to support work incentives
2. The Council will continue to recognise the additional needs of our most vulnerable residents
3. The Council will continue to recognise the additional needs of families with children
4. The Council supports households staying together to make better use of housing in Sefton and reduce homelessness
5. The Council will continue to have due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant.

The review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme has been carried out mindful of those principles and the Council's equalities duties.

Are there any protected characteristics that will be disproportionately affected in comparison to others?

The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are:

Age (working age)

The Council's local Council Tax Reduction scheme affects working age people and has a financial impact on households who already have a low income.

Age (Pensionable age)

People over pensionable age are supported with Council Tax Reduction, but this is via the national prescribed scheme and local authorities are not permitted to change this.

People with a Disability

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In Sefton, around 53% of pensioners receiving Council Tax Reduction have a disability income, and 41% of working aged people receiving Council Tax Reduction have a disability income.

The Council recognises that additional expenses may be incurred relating to disability and has put the following mitigations in place: -

- Continuing to make additional allowances and give additional support to those receiving certain DWP sickness benefits, disability benefits and benefits for Carers when calculating entitlement
- Disregarding certain disability benefits as income when calculating entitlement
- Providing signposting and support to people to claim other reductions of Council Tax liability where appropriate, e.g., discount in respect of severe mental impairment, disabled banding reductions.

Gender Reassignment

No impacts identified specific to this equality group.

Marriage and Civil Partnership

No impacts identified specific to this equality group.

Race

No impacts identified specific to this equality group. Calculation of entitlement to Council Tax Reduction does not refer to race and is not impacted by it.

Religion or Belief

No impacts identified specific to this equality group.

Sex

Women are generally more likely to be single parents in the first place (90%) according to ONS 2019. Locally, when looking at Sefton's Council Tax Reduction caseload there are 4,026 single parents, 3,756 (93.3%) of whom are female.

Sexual Orientation

No impacts identified specific to this equality group.

Pregnancy and Maternity

We do not have sufficient evidence of pregnancy and maternity in the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme data held, but caseload data shows that females are disproportionately affected and are more likely to be single parents.

The Council has mitigation in place to support the additional needs of households with children including:

- Deciding that the Council's local Council Tax Reduction scheme for working-age families should not replicate the rules that are in place in the national Housing Benefit scheme and the Council Tax Reduction Pensioner scheme whereby the removal of the family premium and the "2-child" rule restrict the level of award

- Child Benefit and Child Maintenance payments are not taken into account as income when calculating entitlement to Council Tax Reduction
- Additional allowances are given when calculating entitlement where there is a disabled child in the family
- The scheme also mirrors provisions in the Housing Benefit scheme by taking childcare costs into account for low income working families
- The Council continue to include the Family Premium when calculating Council Tax reduction
- Procedures are regularly reviewed for the collection of non-payment of Council Tax and signposting to Exception Hardship Fund to ensure non-disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable household including those with children.

Mitigations in place to support the Council's principles for the Scheme

Financially Vulnerable People:

The Council has following mitigation in place: -

- Provision of a discretionary Exceptional Hardship Fund to provide additional support to those financially vulnerable struggling to pay Council Tax
- For working aged people, allowing a Universal Credit notification, received from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), to be treated as a claim for local Council Tax Reduction thus removing the need for those in receipt of Universal Credit to have to make a separate claim for support towards their Council Tax
- Making provision in the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for awards to be backdated for up to 6-months for working-age vulnerable claimants
- Offering 12-month (rather than 10-month) instalment payments to Council Tax payers to help ease payment difficulties.
- Adopting a sensitive approach to enforcement action to consider the potential vulnerability of Council Tax Reduction claimants. Before cases are referred to Enforcement Agents a vetting stage is in place and cases are dealt with under a separate debt recovery process to minimise potential increases in debt
- An established, co-ordinated working relationship between the Council's contracted Enforcement Agents and Citizens Advice Sefton to support people in debt, ensuring that Citizens Advice Sefton has direct lines of communication with the Enforcement Agents and can arrange for recovery action to be placed on hold whilst discussing and agreeing affordable payment arrangements
- An escalation process for the debt advisor based at South Sefton foodbank to contact nominated Council Tax staff to request a hold on recovery action or discuss affordable payment arrangements
- Participating in the Council's Welfare Reform Anti-Poverty Partners' Group, working with partner organisations and other Council services to support residents suffering financial vulnerability. This includes signposting customers to emergency support for food, heating, essential household goods and other available practical support such as winter coats and school uniforms
- Attending various customer representative events and hard to reach groups to raise awareness of Council Tax support available, i.e., Pensioner and Disability forums. Recent topical events include "Keep warm and well" events in Bootle and Southport organised by Sefton OPERA (Older Persons Enabling Resource & Action) in partnership with the Council's Affordable Warmth team.

Care Leavers

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- The Council provides up to 100% Council Tax discount to support to young people leaving local authority care up to the date of their 25th birthday.

Armed Forces Covenant

- The Council has identified that there are less than 100 households in Sefton claiming support from Council Tax Reduction and/or Housing Benefit and also in receipt of War Disablement, War Widows pension including any Armed Forces compensation. The Council fully disregards this income when calculating entitlement. Also disregarded is the service attributable element of the armed forces pension.

Supporting Households to Stay Together, Making Better Use of Housing and Reducing Homelessness

- The Council has decided that the amount of Council Tax Reduction taken away from a customer's entitlement when other adults live in the household (known as a non-dependant deduction), should remain at a reduced level
- The Council uses the powers available to it to charge a premium on long-term empty properties to encourage owners to bring them back into use. The premium cannot be applied homes that are empty due to the occupant living in armed forces accommodation or for job-related purposes. Also, the Council Tax system makes provision for statutory exemptions for properties left empty for a specific purpose, e.g., when a person goes into care.

Consultation:

- No additional consultation has been carried out as part of the preparation of this report or analysis.

Is there evidence that the Public Sector Equality Duties will be met?

- The Council has set out in the sections above how it meets its equalities duties in relation to the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

The Equality Act 2010 requires that those subject to the Equality Duty must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- 1. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.*
- 2. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.*
- 3. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.*

The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- *Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected*

characteristics.

- *Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.*
- *Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.*

What actions will follow if proposal accepted by Cabinet and Council?

The current local Council Tax Reduction Scheme will continue for 2023/24.

As a result of the review, monitoring and analysis undertaken, it is proposed that no changes are made to the Council's local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24. Maintaining the Scheme will continue to address the Council's focus to minimise the impact on the most vulnerable households by striking a balance between collecting Council Tax whilst supporting those experiencing financial challenges.

The Council will continue to monitor and analyse the support provided by the local Council Tax Reduction scheme to ensure that it remains relevant to support low-income households.

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Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)	Date of Meeting:	10 January 2023
Subject:	Financial Management 2022/23 to 2024/25 and Framework for Change 2020 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2022/23 – January Update		
Report of:	Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Portfolio:	Leader of the Council		
Is this a Key Decision:	Yes	Included in Forward Plan:	Yes
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

To inform **Overview and Scrutiny** 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.
- 3 The monitoring position of the Council's capital programme to the end of November 2023:
 - The forecast expenditure to year end.
 - Variations against the approved budgets and an explanation of those variations for consideration by Members.
 - Updates to spending profiles and proposed amendments to capital budgets necessary to ensure the efficient delivery of capital projects are also presented for approval.

Recommendation(s):

Overview and Scrutiny is recommended to:

Revenue Budget

- 1) Note the current position relating to the 2022/23 revenue budget.
- 2) Note the actions being taken to offset the budget pressures being faced in 2022/23.
- 3) Note the financial risks associated with the delivery of the 2022/23 revenue budget and acknowledge that the forecast outturn position will continue to be reviewed, and remedial actions put in place, to ensure a balanced forecast

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outturn position and financial sustainability can be achieved.

- 4) Note the current position relating to the High Needs budget 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.

Capital Programme

- 5) Note the spending profiles across financial years for the approved capital programme (paragraph 7.1).
- 6) Note the latest capital expenditure position as at 30 November 2022 of £22.639m (paragraph 7.16); the latest full year forecast is £47.141m (paragraph 7.17).
- 7) Note that capital resources will be managed by the Executive Director 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 (paragraphs 7.20-7.22).

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

To ensure Overview and Scrutiny are informed of the current position in relation to the 2022/23 revenue budget.

To provide an updated forecast of the outturn position with regard to the collection of Council Tax and Business Rates.

To keep members informed of the progress of the Capital Programme against the profiled budget for 2022/23 and agreed allocations for future years.

To progress any changes that are required in order to maintain a relevant and accurate budget profile necessary for effective monitoring of the Capital Programme.

To approve any updates to funding resources so that they can be applied to capital schemes in the delivery of the Council's overall capital strategy.

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

N/A

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

The report indicates that for 2022/23 an overspend position of £2.792m is currently forecast and that further mitigating actions will be required to ensure the Council returns to a balanced forecast outturn position-if these actions are not available within the approved budget, existing reserves and balances maybe used.

(B) Capital Costs

The Council's capital budget in 2022/23 is £47.089m. As at the end of November 2022 expenditure of £22.639m has been incurred and a full year outturn of £47.141m is currently forecast.

Implications of the Proposals:

<p>Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets): Currently an overspend position of £2.792m is forecast for 2022/23. Therefore, further mitigating actions will be required to ensure the Council returns to a balanced forecast outturn position. However, it should be noted that significant pressure and risk remains, particularly relating to Children’s Social Care and energy costs. If these budgets experience further demand and inflationary pressure during the remainder of the year further corresponding savings or financial contributions will need to be identified and approved by members.</p>									
<p>Legal Implications: None</p>									
<p>Equality Implications: There are no equality implications.</p>									
<p>Climate Emergency Implications:</p> <p>The recommendations within this report will</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Have a positive impact</td> <td>N</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Have a neutral impact</td> <td>Y</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Have a negative impact</td> <td>N</td> </tr> <tr> <td>The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors</td> <td>N</td> </tr> </table> <p>The allocations of capital funding outlined in section 8 may be spent on projects that will have a high climate change impact as they could relate to new build, rebuild, refurbishment, retrofit and demolition proposals. Environmental consideration will be taken into account when specific projects are designed and tendered – which will help to mitigate negative impacts.</p>		Have a positive impact	N	Have a neutral impact	Y	Have a negative impact	N	The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	N
Have a positive impact	N								
Have a neutral impact	Y								
Have a negative impact	N								
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	N								

Contribution to the Council’s Core Purpose:

Effective Financial Management and the development and delivery of sustainable annual budgets support each theme of the Councils Core Purpose.

<p><u>Protect the most vulnerable:</u> See comment above</p>
<p><u>Facilitate confident and resilient communities:</u> See comment above</p>
<p><u>Commission, broker and provide core services:</u> See comment above</p>
<p><u>Place – leadership and influencer:</u> See comment above</p>

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<u>Drivers of change and reform:</u> See comment above
<u>Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity:</u> See comment above
<u>Greater income for social investment:</u> See comment above
<u>Cleaner Greener:</u> See comment above

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources & Customer Services is the author of the report (FD 7068/22)

The Chief Legal and Democratic Officer has been consulted and has no comments on the report (LD 5268/22).

(B) External Consultations

N/A

Implementation Date for the Decision

Following the expiry of the “call-in” period for the Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting

Contact Officer:	Paul Reilly
Telephone Number:	Tel: 0151 934 4106
Email Address:	paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk

Appendices:

The following appendix is attached to this report:

APPENDIX A – Capital Programme 2022/23 to 2024/25

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

1. **Introduction**

- 1.1 On 3 March 2022, Members approved the Budget for the financial year 2022/23. This budget was developed throughout the preceding nine months and took account of all known issues. Within that report, and as with previous years, the inherent financial risk within the budget, especially with respect to Children's Services, was identified. This was further reflected within the reserves' strategy for the Council.
- 1.2 A report to June's Cabinet and Council on 14 July, provided an update for Members of the financial position with the Council for events that had materialised since the budget was approved in March, including the increased cost of providing Children's Services and the increase in energy costs affecting the Council from global price increases. A remedial action plan was presented in the report and approved by Council.
- 1.3 The report to July's Cabinet outlined that those pressures continued across a number of service areas, that an overspend in the region of £2.2m was forecast. The report to September's Cabinet outlined that pressures had increased further, primarily as a result of the impact of the initial offer for the local government pay award and further pressure within Children's Social Care. A further remedial action plan was presented in the report and approved by Council. This took the total value of pressure that had been met in year to in excess of £20m.
- 1.4 This report includes the latest Council budget monitoring report as at November and thereby updates the revenue forecast outturn position for all services, including the pressures previously identified in the previous reports. It is this position that also informs next year's budget setting process in terms of financial issues that will continue into the next year and need to be addressed.
- 1.5 The report also outlines the current position regarding key income streams for the Authority, namely Council Tax and Business Rates. Variations against expected receipts in these two areas will also affect the Council's financial position in future years.
- 1.6 The capital section of the report informs Members of the latest estimate of capital expenditure for 2022/23 and forecast expenditure for 2023/24 and 2024/25. The capital budget to date is presented in paragraph 7.1. Paragraphs 7.16 to 7.19 review progress of the capital programme. Finally, paragraphs 7.20 to 7.22 confirm that there are adequate levels of resources available to finance the capital programme.

2. **Revenue Budget 2022/23 – Forecast Outturn Position as at the end of November 2022**

- 2.1 Members are provided with updates of the Council's forecast financial revenue position each month during the financial year from July.
- 2.2 The report to Cabinet in June 2022 highlighted the significant financial pressures being faced by the Council relating to Children's Social Care and energy costs that were unforeseen at the time of setting the budget. A remedial action plan was

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approved to meet these estimated costs during 2022/23. These are included in the forecast outturn position below.

- 2.3 The report to Cabinet in July 2022 outlined that pressures had continued in several service areas and a net overspend of £2.197m was forecast. The report to September's Cabinet outlined that pressures had increased further, primarily as a result of the impact of the initial offer for the local government pay award and Children's Social Care. A forecast overspend of £7.743m was reported. A further remedial action plan was approved to meet these estimated costs during 2022/23. At this point the total value of these remedial plans is in excess of £20m for the year. However, it was acknowledged that pressures might increase further, particularly relating to assumptions around high-cost accommodation charges and the cost of agency staffing within Children's Social Care which required further financial modelling in order that a further accurate figure could be provided. It was also outlined that if these pressures materialised additional remedial actions would need to be implemented to ensure a balanced forecast outturn position, potentially including the adoption of financial principles used in previous years.
- 2.4 Since September's monitoring, there has been a worsening of the position relating to Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care but a reduction in forecast energy costs as well as savings across a number of other service areas. As at the end of November 2022, the forecast outturn shows a net overspend of **£2.792m**. As with all organisations at this time, the Council is operating in a very challenging financial environment. However, it is vital that the Council achieves a balanced forecast outturn position to ensure its financial sustainability. Proposed actions to meet this forecast overspend are outlined in paragraphs 2.8 to 2.11.
- 2.5 The table below highlights the variations across services that make up the £2.792m forecast overspend:

	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance	Variance to October
	£m	£m	£m	
Services				
Strategic Management	4.024	4.032	0.008	-0.001
Adult Social Care	102.090	103.490	1.400	0.000
Children's Social Care	52.069	69.046	16.977	0.970
Communities	17.591	16.625	-0.966	-0.178
Corporate Resources	5.559	4.965	-0.594	-0.099
Economic Growth & Housing	6.583	6.545	-0.038	0.018
Education Excellence	11.299	12.921	1.622	-0.008
Health & Wellbeing	19.349	18.615	-0.734	-0.012
Highways & Public Protection	11.214	10.815	-0.399	-0.063
Operational In-House Services	15.013	15.681	0.668	0.030
Energy Costs	0.000	2.100	2.100	0.000
Additional Pay Award Provision	0.000	4.100	4.100	0.000

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Total Service Net Expenditure	244.791	268.935	24.144	0.657
Council Wide Budgets	0.076	-1.076	-1.152	-0.362
Levies	35.222	35.222	0.000	0.000
General Government Grants	(72.356)	(72.356)	0.000	0.000
Remedial Action Plan - June	0.000	-12.500	-12.500	0.000
Remedial Action Plan – September	0.000	-7.700	-7.700	0.000
Total Net Expenditure	207.733	210.525		
<u>Forecast Year-End Deficit</u>			<u>2.792</u>	<u>0.295</u>

2.6 The key areas relating to the outturn position are as follows:

- **Adult Social Care** – Previous forecasts have assumed that the Adult Social Care budget will break-even during 2022/23. However, it was reported in December that there are some significant financial pressures arising due to increases in numbers of clients in nursing and residential as well as overspends in Supported Living and Day Care. Additional pressures including agency and consultancy costs are also being seen. It is currently forecast that there will be a net overspend of £1.400m. Further work is being undertaken to refine the forecasts, including around client numbers and associated income levels, as well as the achievement of savings from the Demand Management programme.
- **Children’s Social Care** – The current forecast for the service shows a potential overspend of £16.977m, an increase in the figure reported to Cabinet in December of £0.970m.

This increase since last month has been driven by the following:-

1. £0.600m increase in Independent Residential Placements – this is as a result of new placements, changes of provider and increased costs of existing accommodation placements.
2. £0.236m increase in secure accommodation in relation to three children; and,
3. £0.100m increase in Special Guardianship Order allowances following a review of payments made to date and the production of a revised forecast for the remainder of the year.

Overall, the overspend is made up of the following key areas:-

- Due to a significant number of vacancies within the service, especially with regard to Social Workers, the expenditure on agency staff has been £6.2m over the staffing budget. Within this £3.5m relates to managed teams.
- At the start of the financial year as inflation took hold in the UK, unbudgeted for inflation on accommodation costs has resulted in an overspend of £1.2m; and,
- Since the July report a number of additional complex and high-cost placements have had to be entered into which have led to an overspend on

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this budget of £7.5m. Since the budget was set in March there has been an increase in Independent Residential Placements from 69 to 78. In addition, there are now more cases requiring high-cost accommodation and support than previously, and the costs of these have also risen significantly. Some new cases are now initially costing substantial amounts per week.

Members will be familiar from previous reports that the service are working through options to address each of these issues. The introduction of the social worker academy with an annual cohort of 30 staff and the proposal to bring to the Council 25 international social workers will reduce the reliance on expensive agency workers and proposals around supporting children and development of in-house accommodation will support future budget planning and control in respect of accommodation costs.

- **Education Excellence** – The current forecast shows a potential net overspend of £1.622m, with an overspend of £1.769m relating to Home to School Transport forecast. There has been an increase in the number of children being transported, especially relating to out of borough placements. In addition, there has been an increase in the cost of providing the transport, particularly from September.
- **Operational In-House Services** The current forecast shows a potential overspend of £0.668m. This relates to a number of areas across the Service, including forecast shortfalls in income on Burials and Cremations, Catering, Green Sefton activities (mainly golf courses) and vehicle maintenance.
- **Energy Costs** – As reported in June, the global increase in energy prices is having a significant impact on the Council's energy and fuel costs. As reported last month, the Council has received updated information from the Council's framework providers on the fees being paid, as well as the potential benefit from the energy price cap for organisations. It is estimated that the net impact will be £2.100m. This will continue to be closely monitored as more information becomes available, including impact of the energy price cap. It should be noted that energy is a national issue affecting all local authorities. However, the Government have advised that no additional funding will be made available for local government, despite representations made both nationally and locally.
- **Additional Pay Award Provision** – The approved Base Budget included a provision for the 202/23 pay award of 3%. This was line with most other local authorities who had budgeted for between 2.5% and 3% (and when the Spending Review 2021 was published, the Office for Budget Responsibility was forecasting inflation to be 4% in 2022). On 1 November 2022, trade unions accepted the offer from the National Employers for local government services body of a fixed increase of £1,925 (plus an additional day's annual leave from April 2023). For Sefton, this equates to an increase in the pay bill of about 6.5% or an additional £4.100m above the amount included in the 2022/23 budget. As previously mentioned for energy costs, this is a national issue for local government however Government have made it clear that no additional funding will be made available.

From the above it can be seen that additional pressures of about £24.1m are being experienced and this mainly reflects the pressure in Children's Social Care and that

experienced from energy costs and the additional pay award. Although many of the causes of pressures on children services are being seen nationally, there are many which are Sefton specific e.g., increases in numbers of Looked After Children and increases in accommodation and agency costs), however the energy and pay award pressures of £6.2m are impacting on all local authorities. These costs were not reflected in the funding provided as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2022/2023 and the Government has made it clear that no additional funding will be made available, meaning the Council needs to make remedial plans to meet these pressures.

It can be seen from the Cabinet reports presented each month that the forecast overspend position on Children's Social Care has increased each month. The information provided in this report is based on the latest information provided by the service, however in light of the month on month increase this year there is a significant risk that this position will worsen further in the remaining four months of the year. Work has been done within the service to ensure that the decision-making controls are robust and effective to support financial control around agency expenditure and accommodation costs and it is essential that these are maintained and continually reviewed due to the unprecedented position that the service and the council is in. Work is being undertaken by the service to determine if further financial pressure is anticipated and this will be reflected in the next monitoring exercise that takes place.

Proposed Remedial Actions

- 2.7 As reported in the last three months, given there is still a forecast deficit it is proposed to undertake a number of remedial actions, including the adoption of financial principles used in previous years, to enable a balanced forecast outturn position to ensure its financial sustainability. The proposed / implemented actions are:

Recruitment Freeze

- 2.8 The Council has introduced a recruitment freeze until the end of the financial year. This will apply to all services across the Council with the exception of Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, Cleansing, Early Help and Special Educational Needs and Disability. Savings from non-recruitment of current vacant posts are now built into the forecast outturn position. Savings from the non-recruitment to posts as they become vacant across the remainder of the year will be built into future forecasts.

No Further Overspend in any Service

- 2.9 All services must manage their budgets to ensure that their forecast outturn position does not worsen from that currently reported.

No Further Growth Items or Additionality

- 2.10 All services to pause any requests for growth or additionality, even if it could be funded from current forecast underspends or further underspends compared to the current forecast position. This will ensure that any further underspends can be used to contribute to mitigating the Council's overall financial position. This doesn't apply to expenditure that can be fully met from external funding received by the Council.

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Non-Essential Expenditure

- 2.11 A full review is currently being undertaken of all budgets across the Council to identify any areas of non-essential spend that could be stopped. This includes reviewing progress on spending in all areas to identify options for where additional expenditure commitments could be paused. This will identify further underspends that can be used to contribute to mitigating the Council's overall financial position. These options / areas of non-essential expenditure identified to date include:
- Health and Wellbeing – the forecast underspend currently reported excludes potential underspends on various contracts agreed for the year. These will be evaluated to assess the potential in-year savings, but it is anticipated this could be in the region of £0.750m.
 - Agile / Hybrid Working – the Council set aside resources to fund changes to office accommodation for the move towards Agile / Hybrid working. As the works are nearly complete it is anticipated that some of these resources can be credited back to the revenue budget – current estimate is that £0.300m can be released.
 - New Burdens funding – the Council has received new burdens funding relating to activity it has been asked to undertake on the Government's behalf. Whilst some has been required to fund additional costs incurred, some is effectively to fund activity undertaken by existing staff. Therefore, £0.100m is available to offset the existing forecast outturn position.
 - Energy Reductions – given the additional pressures relating to energy costs the Council is reviewing various measures to reduce its energy consumption.

Summary 2022/23

- 2.12 After the implementation of the previously agreed remedial actions, an overspend of **£2.792m** is currently forecast. The proposed actions in paragraphs 2.8 to 2.11 will be fully evaluated and their financial impact will be reported to Cabinet in January – at this stage it is anticipated that the actions proposed will meet a proportion of the current forecast overspend, with a balance estimated at up to £1.6m remaining to be funded. However, this represents the current position that has been forecast to the year end- in the event that further pressure is experienced, particularly in respect of Children's Social Care, further remedial action or off-setting measures will be required. As a result of using the options previously approved in June and September, there is no flexibility left for the use of general balances in year- as a result this and any further pressure, will need to be met from within the existing Council budget and delivery monitored carefully and reported to Cabinet.
- 2.13 Should there still be a residual overspend at year end, this will need to be funded by reserves or general balances and as part of the budget process for 2023/24 the Council will need increase these back to the previous level taking into account the risks faced by the Council and the assessment of their adequacy as described in the S151 Officer's Robustness report. As stated, further work will be carried out on the remedial plan and a detailed position will be reported in the next cycle.

3. Medium Term Financial Planning

- 3.1 The report to Cabinet in June / Council in July highlighted that the pressures in Children's Social Care, as well as increased Energy costs, would have a significant ongoing impact on the Council's budget in 2023/24 and 2024/25. Whilst some of this pressure was considered to be temporary, much would be permanent.
- 3.2 The report also highlighted that there would be additional pressures from 2023/24 as a result of potential increases in the National Living Wage and the impact that this would have on both the Council pay structure as well as external providers, particularly in Adult Social Care. In addition, the current high levels of inflation would lead to significant pressure on many areas of the Council.
- 3.3 The ongoing impact of the current 2022/2023 pay award offer will now also need to be met in 2023/24 given it has been funded from one-off resources in 2022/23. In addition, the Council will need to assess the ongoing impact of the additional pressures reported this month in Children's Social Care as well as other service areas.
- 3.4 Based on all of these issues, the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) has been refined and updated with the potential scale of the funding gap, in the absence of any further central government funding for this year being clear based on the information in this report. As a result, based on this update, budget proposals will need to be developed for implementation from April 2023 (pending further Central Government advice on future funding levels) in order that the Council maintains financial sustainability. This will not be easy with extremely tight financial constraints being in existence and demand for Council services increasing continually (and councils being asked to carry out more functions); however, it is essential that this planning commences from this point. The annual comprehensive Medium-Term Financial Plan update was presented to Cabinet and Council in November 2022.

4. **Council Tax Income – Update**

- 4.1 Council Tax income is shared between the billing authority (Sefton Council) and the three major precepting authorities (the Fire and Rescue Authority, the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Combined Authority – Mayoral Precept) pro-rata to their demand on the Collection Fund. The Council's Budget included a Council Tax Requirement of £150.008m for 2022/23 (including Parish Precepts), which represents 84% of the net Council Tax income of £178.590m.
- 4.2 The forecast outturn for the Council at the end of November 2022 is a surplus of -£2.438m. This variation is primarily due to:
 - The surplus on the fund at the end of 2021/22 being higher than estimated (-£0.517m).
 - Gross Council Tax Charges in 2022/23 being higher than estimated (-£0.362m).
 - Exemptions and Discounts (including a forecasting adjustment) being lower than estimated (-£1.559m).

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- 4.3 Due to Collection Fund regulations, the Council Tax surplus will not be transferred to the General Fund in 2022/23 but will be carried forward to be recovered in future years.
- 4.4 A forecast surplus of £2.022m was declared on the 15 January 2022 of which Sefton's share is £1.699m (84.1%). This is the amount that will be recovered from the Collection Fund in 2022/23. Any additional surplus or deficit will be distributed in 2023/24 and future years.

5. **Business Rates Income – Update**

- 5.1 Since 1 April 2017, Business Rates income has been shared between the Council (99%) and the Fire and Rescue Authority (1%). The Council's Budget included retained Business Rates income of £56.664m for 2022/23, which represents 99% of the net Business Rates income of £57.236m. Business Rates income has historically been very volatile making it difficult to forecast accurately.
- 5.2 The forecast outturn for the Council at the end of November 2022 is a surplus of - £4.999m on Business Rates income. This is due to:
- The deficit on the fund at the end of 2022/23 being lower than estimated (-£0.091m).
 - Increase in the gross charge on rateable properties (-£0.520m).
 - A number of reliefs announced for 2022/23 were assumed in the NNDR1 return with the loss of income as a result of these reliefs covered by Section 31 grant payments. It is now forecast that the value of these reliefs will be less than anticipated (-£5.290m).
 - Adjustments to the Appeals Provision relating to prior years (+£0.902m)
- 5.3 When taking into account the lower Section 31 grants due on the additional reliefs, a net surplus of £0.615m is forecast.
- 5.4 Due to Collection Fund regulations, a Business Rates deficit will not be transferred to the General Fund in 2022/23 but will be carried forward to be recovered in future years.
- 5.5 A forecast deficit of £18.702m was declared in January 2022. Sefton's share of this is £18.515m. This is the amount that will be distributed from the Collection Fund in 2022/23. Any additional surplus or deficit will be distributed in 2023/24 and future years.

6. **High Needs Budget**

- 6.1 A report was presented to Cabinet in July with regard to the High Needs budget and the changes that are proposed, details of sufficiency planning, the Council's engagement on the Delivering Better Value Programme and the current high needs deficit and the risk around future central government decision making in respect of this deficit.

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- 6.2 In light of these factors, the SEND green paper, the commencement of the Delivering Better Value Programme and the potential changes to accounting treatment of these high needs deficits that exist in a substantial number of councils in England, it was proposed that a monthly financial forecast be presented to Cabinet each month that reflects financial performance against budget and remedial planning - this would be considered alongside the wider quarterly performance report that will be presented to Cabinet and Council.
- 6.3 The High Needs Quarterly Update report presented to Cabinet in July outlined that the overspend on the High Needs budget in 2021/2022 was £4.2m resulting in an accumulated deficit of £12.5m at the end of 2021/22. The report also highlighted that a deficit for 2022/23 was forecast to be between £2.3m - £4.0m.
- 6.4 Given continued increases in the number of children requesting Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP's) and SEND placements in November 2022, the current forecast overspend will be at least £5.1m, despite the creation of additional in-house places at Sefton schools from September. Between April and September, there was an increase of 52 children placed at Sefton specialist schools / SEND resource units, 172 additional EHCPs (total now 2,437 with 150 in progress) and a further 18 out of borough placements and this figure continues to increase.
- 6.5 The position could be exacerbated further due to the additional cost pressures from the approved pay awards for 2022/23 which are significantly higher than used for the new SEND Funding Model. Initial calculations show that the new pay awards have added at least an additional £0.900m cost pressure across specialist SEND placements and although no additional funding has been allocated to schools in the 2022/23 funding formula to reflect this increase it is something that has been raised by schools and will be discussed with Members as part of the next High Needs monitoring report in February 2023.
- 6.6 The approved NJC pay awards for 2022/23 will also add an additional cost pressure on non-specialist 1:1 provision in all primary and secondary schools in Sefton. Any additional pay uplift costs should be met from the High Needs budget as schools are only required to make a fixed contribution per qualifying pupil. However, currently no increases in High Needs funding allocations have been provided to schools and the higher costs are currently increasing day to day cost pressures to school budgets.
- 6.7 The accumulative deficit position on the High Needs budget is estimated to be of £17.6m based on the current SEND numbers but these continue to increase.
- 6.8 In light of the current position officers are reviewing all options available to the Council to mitigate this additional pressure during the current year and to reduce the impact on the High Needs deficit. This will include accelerating the proposals reported to members in the July Cabinet paper and determining new proposals to improve sufficiency. In addition, discussions as part of the Council's participation in the Delivering Better Value Programme will be assessed as to their impact on the forecast deficit position. An update will be provided to Cabinet as a separate report in February 2023.
- 6.9 In August the Council responded to central government's call for evidence on how High Needs deficits should be considered going forward, especially in respect of

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the potential for the ringfence of this deficit to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) to come to an end from April 2023. The Government has now announced that the statutory override will continue for another three years to March 2026.

7. Capital Programme 2022/23 – 2024/25

Capital Budget

7.1 The Capital Budget and profile of expenditure for the three years 2022/23 to 2024/25 is as follows:

2022/23	£47.089m
2023/24	£51.241m
2024/25	£45.190m

7.2 The updates listed below have been made to the Capital Programme budget since the previous budget reported to Cabinet in December:

- **Adult Social Care:**

- Short Term Assessment Unit - £0.860m has been phased to 2023/24 to allow for the completion of the final design and specification of the scheme. The final costs, land sale and development agreement are expected to be agreed by March 2023 and it is anticipated that work will start on site in Quarter 1 of next financial year.
- New Directions Programme Development - £0.184m has been phased to 2023/24 due to the time needed to complete a full tender package for the project.

- **Corporate Resources:**

- £0.339m and £0.694 has been added to the programme for the Brownfield Land Fund for sites at Bootle High School, Netherton and Bentham's Way, Southport following approval by Cabinet in December. The projects are fully funded by external grant from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.
- £0.565m has been phased to 2023/24 for the Essential Maintenance Programme. Re-profiling has been primarily due to delays in issuing the tender package for Cambridge Arcade / Southport Town Hall. Although the scheme is at an advanced design stage, consultation with leaseholders and other interested parties has taken longer than expected.

- **Education Excellence –**

- Melling Primary New Pupil Places - £0.140m has been added to the budget funded by Section 106 contributions following approval by Cabinet in December.
- Cabinet Member for Education has, under delegated authority, approved the following amounts funded from the High Needs Provision Capital Allocation grant for 2022/23:

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School	Project	Estimated Budget Requirement £
Formby High	Conversion and extension of caretaker's house for special needs provision	210,000
Crosby High School	Additional mobile classroom	10,770
Rowan Park	Additional mobile classroom on Rowan High site	20,754
Newfield (St Teresa's)	Conversion of existing primary school to special school site for KS1 and 2 provision	500,000
Marshside Primary	Alterations to IT classroom to convert to ASD classroom	25,000
Pinefield	Relocation of Complementary Education. from Pinefield to Litherland Moss site - internal alterations to building	500,000
Freshfield Primary	Extension to expand SEND provision and create additional class	331,903
Rowan Park	Two classroom extension to replace mobile classroom	521,000
The Grange Primary	One classroom extension to create additional class	45,687
Redgate Primary	Convert former music service classrooms to resourced base classroom provision	312,000
Rowan Park	New access door and corridor	40,000
Crosby High	New footpath to access mobile class	12,500

- **Economic Growth and Housing:**

- Enterprise Arcade – £0.473m reprofiled to 2023/24. Stage 3 design work has taken longer than anticipated to complete and is awaiting input from the proposed operator. This means that the project timescales have slipped and rather than commence works early 2023 with completion in September, this has been pushed back to commencement spring 2023 with completion by the end of the financial year 2023/24.
- Transformations de Southport – £0.153m reprofiled to 2022/23 and £0.500m reprofiled to 2024/25. Following further consultation, the main works programme will now take place in Autumn 2023 to minimise the impact/disruption during the summer tourism season.

- **Highways and Public Protection:**

- Crosby Coastal Park - £0.400m has been phased to 2023/24 as the start of construction has been delayed by planning issues.
- Active Travel Routes - £0.378m has been phased to 2023/24 due to delays at the tender stage of the project.
- A59 Kenyons Lane - £0.589m has been phased to 2023/24 due to delays in confirming contributions from the Active Travel Fund and Key Route Network which has led to delays in the design and development of the overall scope of the project, which will now not commence on site until next financial year

- **Communities** – the following budgets (funded by prudential borrowing) have been added to the programme following approval by Council in November:

- Bootle Leisure Centre – Lift Replacement £0.38m
- Bootle Leisure Centre Roof – Replacement £0.209m

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- Netherton Activity Centre – New Fencing £0.103m.
- **Operational In-House Services:**
 - £0.063m has been added to the programme, approved under delegated authority, for Rainbow Park improvement works funded by Section 106 contributions.
 - £0.067m has been added to the programme for the Parks Levelling Up Fund, approved under delegated authority and funded by external grant from DLUHC.
 - £1.666m for the Vehicle Replacement Programme has been phased to 2023/24 due to delayed orders this year due to the need to maximise routes to ensure procurement matches service requirements.

Additional Capital Funding for Schools to Improve Energy Efficiency

- 7.3 The government has made available to eligible schools and sixth-form colleges in England an allocation from an additional £447 million in capital funding in 2022-23 for capital improvements to buildings and facilities, prioritising works to improve energy efficiency. This is part of an additional £500 million in capital funding for schools and further education institutions.
- 7.4 The additional funding is a school level allocation issued under similar terms to the Devolved Formula Capital Grant for 2022/23. Schools can therefore decide how best to invest the capital funding on energy efficiency measures.
- 7.5 Cabinet has been requested to approve a supplementary capital estimate of £779,362 for Sefton's maintained schools for inclusion in the capital programme fully funded by external grant.

Ainsdale Coastal Gateway

- 7.6 The Sefton Coast Plan recognises the need to create high quality visitor infrastructure at a number of access points, known as coastal gateways, along Sefton's Coast. The purpose is to drive growth within the visitor economy to the benefit of local businesses, provide a high-quality visitor experience at these access points, and reduce visitor pressure on areas of high conservation value and on local residents. Ainsdale-on-Sea has been recognised as one of these coastal gateways.
- 7.7 The area is formally protected as internationally important dune habitat and supporting many rare and important species of flora and fauna. It is designated as an SSSI, SAC, SPA, Ramsar site and Local Nature Reserve. The area includes natural sand dune, a "good" bathing water quality beach, and is one of the key bases for Green Sefton. It also contains a number of buildings that are owned by Sefton, including Toad Hall, and the former Sands public house.
- 7.8 Consultation relating to this project has taken place as part of the Southport Town Deal bid (Summer 2020). As a response to theme three: Stronger Economy, the investment in Ainsdale-on-Sea Visitor Hub featured as the third most popular option. It was suggested that Ainsdale-on-Sea is in need of investment.

- 7.9 A number of operational changes to the way visitors were welcomed to the coast were introduced in the summers of 2020 and 2021. These included the increasing of staffing, including into the evening when the car park was then closed, the engagement of volunteers as ‘ambassadors’, the introduction of free bin bags, and the introduction of skips/ euro bins. The existing toilets were closed during the Covid pandemic, with temporary portaloos provided during this period. Basic improvements to the toilets were carried out while they were closed, and they were reopened for the summer of 2022.
- 7.10 A further consultation exercise completed in the summer of 2021, built on the comments received from the Town Deal consultation, the operational changes that have taken place over the last two years, and the developments planned for the area. These helped inform proposals for a number of longer-term development projects. These include:
- External artwork on Toad Hall (now completed).
 - Toilet and wash facility improvements, including introducing a Changing Places toilet unit.
 - A new seasonal pop-up food and drink facility off beach, in the picnic area.
 - Improved off-beach car parking, with pedestrian and cycle access improvements, and EV charging points.
 - A suite of other infrastructure improvements, such as fencing to guide visitors appropriately, new signage and picnic area improvements.
- 7.11 The improved off-beach car parking facility will generate new income to Green Sefton that would cover all operational and revenue costs for the project. Mitigations measures will be expected by Natural England as part of their consent for such works to go ahead.
- 7.12 A project budget of £0.352m was previously approved by Council in January 2021 funded by Prudential Borrowing. Approval has been sought for a further supplementary capital estimate of £0.540m to implement the improvements outlined above funded by £0.490m of Capital Receipts and £0.050m from Changing places grant for the changing places toilet unit. Contributions to the scheme will also be made as part of the Council’s approved Highways Capital Programme.

Sustainable Warmth Programme

- 7.13 Cabinet in November was requested to approve a supplementary capital estimate funded by external grant, to continue the Sustainable Warmth Funding work (in line with the recommendations set out in the report to Council “Sustainable Warmth Funding 2022-2023” in January 2022), pending formal confirmation of the award and receipt of the Grant Funding Agreement (GFA) from the Combined Authority.
- 7.14 Following receipt of the GFA, and confirmation of final grant allocations on the previous delivery scheme (LAD2), an update to sustainable warmth capital budgets is now required to include in the capital programme the full allocation of grant that has been secured from the Combined Authority.
- 7.15 Cabinet has been requested requested to approve a supplementary capital estimate of £860,597 for the Sustainable Warmth Programme.

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Budget Monitoring Position to November 2022

7.16 The current position of expenditure against the budget profile to the end of November 2022 is shown in the table below. It should be noted that budgets are profiled dependent upon the timing of when works are to be carried out and the anticipated spend over the financial year. The budget to date in the table below reflects the profiles of each individual scheme.

Service Area	Budget to Nov-22	Actual Expenditure to Nov-22	Variance to Nov-22
	£m	£m	£m
Adult Social Care	2.363	2.242	-0.121
Children's Social Care	0.155	0.166	0.011
Communities	0.586	0.640	0.054
Corporate Resources	3.996	4.088	0.092
Economic Growth & Housing	5.873	5.471	-0.401
Education Excellence	2.473	2.604	0.130
Highways & Public Protection	6.727	6.608	-0.119
Operational In-House Services	0.902	0.820	-0.082
Total Programme	23.075	22.639	-0.436

Capital Programme Forecast Outturn 2022/23

7.17 The current forecast of expenditure against the budget profile to the end of 2022/23 and the profile of budgets for future years is shown in the table below:

Service Area	Full Year Budget 2022/23	Forecast Out-turn	Variance to Budget	Full Year Budget 2023/24	Full Year Budget 2024/25
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Adult Social Care	4.898	4.893	-0.005	4.101	1.610
Children's Social Care	0.450	0.430	-0.020	0.100	-
Communities	1.442	1.449	0.006	0.232	-
Corporate Resources	6.580	6.683	0.103	1.548	-
Economic Growth & Housing	10.431	10.586	0.156	22.284	38.585
Education Excellence	4.206	4.015	-0.191	11.861	0.007
Highways & Public Protection	16.989	16.992	0.003	6.241	3.663
Operational In-House Services	2.094	2.094	-	4.874	1.326
Total Programme	47.089	47.141	0.052	51.241	45.190

A full list of the capital programme by capital scheme is at **appendix A**.

7.18 The current 2022/23 budgeted spend is £47.089m with a budgeted spend to November of £23.075m. The full year budget includes exceptional items such as £5.439m for Green Homes and Sustainable Warmth schemes, £9.472m for Growth and Strategic Investment projects, previously approved amounts for essential

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repairs and maintenance (£1.164m) and a significant scheme to upgrade to LED Street Lighting (£3.887m).

7.19 The current year end forecast is based on information provided by project managers that the above projects will be fully delivered in 2022/23. In a typical year however, the capital programme spends in the region of £25m. Given this typical annual level of spend it is likely that further reprofiling of spend into 2023/24 will occur as the year progresses. It is proposed that a fundamental review of all projects in year expenditure be carried out at three quarter review.

Programme Funding

7.20 The table below shows how the capital programme will be funding in 2022/23:

Source	£m
Grants	36.780
Prudential Borrowing	5.912
Capital Receipts	1.735
Contributions (incl. Section 106)	2.662
Total Programme Funding	47.089

7.21 The programme is reviewed on an ongoing basis to confirm the capital resources required to finance capital expenditure are in place, the future years programme is fully funded, and the level of prudential borrowing remains affordable.

7.22 The Executive Director Corporate Resources and Customer Services will continue to manage the financing of the programme to ensure the final capital funding arrangements secure the maximum financial benefit to the Council.

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APPENDIX A – Capital Programme 2022/22 to 2024/25

Capital Project	Budget		
	2022/23 £	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Adult Social Care			
Digitising Social Care	50,000	405,000	-
Core DFG Programme	2,000,000	-	-
Occupational Therapy Support for DFGs	603,774	-	-
ICT Development & Transformation	535,705	392,851	-
Care Home Improvements	437,559	550,000	-
Changing Places	92,507	-	-
Retail Model within Health and Wellbeing Hubs	-	450,000	-
Extra Care Housing	-	750,000	750,000
Short Term Assessment Unit	-	860,000	860,000
New Directions Programme	10,962	379,038	-
Technology Enabled Care	270,806	163,750	-
Sefton Carers Centre	30,000	-	-
Community Equipment Provision	300,000	-	-
Double to Single Handed Care Equipment	150,000	-	-
Community Equipment Stores	250,000	100,000	-
Programme Support	166,625	50,000	-
Children's Social Care			
Support for Fostering Placements	100,000	100,000	-
Community Equipment – Children's	250,000	-	-
Springbrook Refurbishment	100,000	-	-
Communities			
Dunes Splashworld – Essential Repairs	546,226	43,781	-
Dunes Splashworld – Health and Safety Works	270,000	-	-
Bootle Leisure Centre – Lift Replacement	38,000	-	-
Bootle Leisure Centre – Roof Replacement	209,000	-	-
Netherton Activity Centre – New Fencing	103,000	-	-
Libraries - Centres of Excellence	90,000	188,019	-
Section 106 Funded Projects	185,990	-	-
Corporate Resources			
Council Wide Essential Maintenance	485,838	1,547,897	-
STCC Essential Maintenance	54,650	-	-
Victoria Baths Essential Works	76,960	-	-
Bootle & Southport Town Hall Retrofit Energy Saving	29,950	-	-
Green Homes Grant Sustainable Warmth Schemes	5,438,882	-	-
ICT Transformation	493,281	-	-
Economic Growth & Housing			
Strategic Acquisitions - Bootle	17,620	-	-
Cambridge Road Centre Development	53,930	-	-
Crosby Lakeside Development	1,715,913	-	-
Town Centre Commission Bootle Canal Side	240,263	-	-
Bootle Canal Side Business Plan	556,862		

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	2022/23 £	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Southport Market Redevelopment	47,335	-	-
Strategic Acquisitions - Ainsdale	90,600	836,423	-
Marine Lake Events Centre	6,369,392	13,268,773	37,948,199
Enterprise Arcade	187,500	1,245,000	61,500
Transformations De Southport	153,000	1,847,000	500,000
Strand Business Plan	40,000	375,000	75,000
Strand Repurposing Project	-	680,000	-
Housing Investment	33,960	-	-
Brownfield Fund for Housing Development	537,790	1,032,281	-
Social Housing Allocations Scheme	65,000	-	-
Southport Pier	321,822	3,000,000	-
Education Excellence			
Schools Programme	3,364,286	9,122,577	7,055
Planned Maintenance	429,902	50,000	-
Special Educational Needs & Disabilities	411,607	2,688,090	-
Highways and Public Protection			
Accessibility	989,402	-	-
Healthy Lifestyles	790,000	-	-
Road Safety	120,000	-	-
A565 Route Management Strategy	1,571,027	778,014	-
A59 Route Management Strategy	250,000	589,000	-
Strategic Planning	1,510,634	-	-
Traffic Management & Parking	55,000	-	-
Highway Maintenance	5,600,454	-	-
Bridges & Structures	517,921	-	-
Drainage	337,340	-	-
Street Lighting Maintenance	327,400	-	-
LED Street Lighting Upgrade	3,886,920	3,605,580	3,662,630
Urban Traffic Control	902,830	-	-
Transport Growth Schemes	-	1,268,620	-
Completing Schemes / Retentions	130,000	-	-
Operational In-House Services			
Burials & Cremation Service – Vehicles & Equipment	47,713	-	-
Coastal Erosion and Flood Risk Management	908,473	2,252,701	1,306,000
Parks Schemes	223,149	110,919	-
Tree Planting Programme	134,505	19,769	19,769
Golf Driving Range Developments	9,988	280,280	-
Ainsdale Coastal Gateway	27,712	300,000	-
Crosby Marine Lake Improvements – Phase 1	30,339	-	-
Green Sefton – Plant & Machinery	-	131,152	-
Vehicle Replacement Programme	366,835	1,779,494	-
Wheeled Bins	345,000	-	-
TOTAL PROGRAMME	47,089,139	51,241,009	45,190,153

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Cabinet Member Brief
Overview & Scrutiny Committee
(Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)
10 January 2023.

Welfare Reform & Anti-Poverty Update

The Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Cabinet Member Reference Group met on 11th November 2022. The following updates were received:

Updates from the Welfare Reform & Anti-Poverty Steering Group

Officers from Public Health provided an update from the Partnership Steering Group meeting held 22nd October 2022.

The Cost-of-Living Crisis was discussed. Updates included:

- feedback on a number of interventions funded by the Council and delivered by CVS and partners, e.g. Warm Clothing initiative. Warm Spaces network providing hot refreshments and an enhanced warm hub providing hot food. Most locations are available 7 days a week, with good geographical coverage.
Full details can be accessed at <https://seftoncv.org.uk/warmspaces/>
- Household Support Fund 3 came into force at the beginning of October 2022. This aims to support vulnerable households with food, energy, and other household bills.
- Work continues around the provision of free school meals during holiday periods.
- One Vision Housing offer includes a social media 'Here to Help' campaign, comprising of email and text messages.
This promotes support around housing payments and signposts to additional support on the Council website.
- Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) is in the process of advertising for another debt caseworker role and welfare benefits advisor. Funding received from Trussell Trust means that CAB is attending the south Sefton food banks 5 days a week.

Period Poverty - A Sefton Update

Cabinet Members received an update regarding Period Poverty in Sefton. A survey of schools in the borough confirmed most schools have applied for the Period

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Poverty grant. Schools made this a priority and have benefited from supplies of products that are being well utilised.

Community Pantry Update

Cabinet Members received an update on Community Pantries. Pantry Network meeting took place noting an increase in usage. Stock levels are adequate, and officers advised that the network is strong and building. Mental Health First Aid courses are being considered for Community pantry volunteers who are reporting having to deal with service users who are distressed.

Food banks now provide debt advice, money, and management.

A Sustainable Affordable Living Officer post now created via Household Support fund, to find sustainable solutions to current gaps. The role involves undertaking activities to understand the full picture of the cost-of-living crisis and investigate current resources and areas of deficiency. The hope is to develop long-term solutions.

Sefton Child Poverty Launch Event

Officers from the Public Health Team updated Cabinet Members on the Sefton Child Poverty Launch Event. The official event launch takes place on 1st December 2022.

Speakers include Dr Ian Sinha, a paediatrician from Alder Hey. He will be looking at the impact of poverty on child health, such as respiratory issues, poor nutrition, and housing. Dr Tammy Boyce from the University College London Health Equity Team to give insight into Inequalities in health.

Stephen Watson from Sefton Council along with John McCluskie from Southport & Ormskirk NHS Trust, will be discussing how good employment policies can support ending poverty.

Cabinet members were advised that the Public Health Team will be focused on how we can practically self-assess against the strategy. They will be looking at some of the considerations around implementation, enabling the system to make changes and keep them in place.

Members noted that there needs to be a sophisticated communications strategy, worked on collaboratively to support the strategy up until 2030. This will provide examples of progress other teams are doing to make their services more effective in preventing and limiting child poverty based on what is in the strategy.

Sefton Council Housing - cost of living challenges

Cabinet Members received an update on the cost-of-living crisis and how it is affecting housing. Housing has convened a working group to explore how they can provide specific support and mitigate risks of the cost of living.

Cabinet members were made aware that homeless presentation numbers are currently stable, at around 175 a month, however, they had increased to 200 in August 2022. The housing options team expect a surge in numbers coming into winter.

Sefton Housing Retrofit program is delivering significant investment to the housing stock. They have recently completed the Local Authority Delivery 2 project, improving 222 properties, from an investment of £2.2 million, saving £551 a year per property, and saving £26,000 across the borough in fuel costs.

This winter everyone will be offered accommodation and aiming to put property pool plus advisors on the front line to support this. The team has recently created additional posts within the Housing Options and Welfare Rights team to cover anticipated increases.

ELAS Update

Cabinet Members received an update on ELAS performance for the Council's local welfare support scheme up to October 2022. It was reported that ELAS volumes are very high, but manageable from an operational perspective.

End of October 2022, 7500 applications were processed, compared to just over 4000 applications end of October 2021. Over 80% increase in 12 months.

ELAS continues to provide utility support, financial support to food banks, individual family foodbank vouchers as well as essential white goods.

Additional household support funding has been received, meaning the ELAS fund is able to deal with the level of demand, however, will be monitored closely.

Requests for Action

None noted

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Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)	Date of Meeting:	10 January 2023
Subject:	Work Programme 2022/23, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan		
Report of:	Chief Legal and Democratic Officer	Wards Affected:	All
Cabinet Portfolio:	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services		
Is this a Key Decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

To seek the views of the Committee on the Work Programme for 2022/23, identify potential topics for scrutiny reviews to be undertaken by a Working Group(s) appointed by the Committee; identify any items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan; to update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee; to seek a course of action on the operation of the Corporation Communications and Covid-19 Working Group; to update on issues associated with the reporting on the implementation of recommendations arising from the Digital Inclusion Working Group; and to update on the "Tool Kit" for Armed Forces Covenant.

Recommendation:

That:

- (1) the Work Programme for 2022/23, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be considered, along with any additional items to be included and thereon be agreed;
- (2) the Air Quality update report be deferred and considered at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 28 February 2023;
- (3) consideration be given to whether the Committee would like to select a further topic for a Working Group review;
- (4) consideration be given to the future of the Corporate Communications and Covid-19 Working Group and whether the topic would be better dealt with at an informal meeting of the Committee rather than via Working Group meetings;
- (5) consideration be given to items for pre-scrutiny from the Key Decision Forward Plan as set out in Appendix 3 to the report, which fall under the remit of the

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Committee and any agreed items be included in the Work Programme referred to in (1) above;

- (6) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted;
- (7) to be consistent with a decision of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills) no further updates be provided on the implementation of recommendations arising from Digital Inclusion Working Group; and
- (8) the update on the “Tool Kit” for Armed Forces Covenant be noted.

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

To determine the Work Programme of items to be considered during the Municipal Year 2022/23 and identify scrutiny review topics which would demonstrate that the work of the Overview and Scrutiny ‘adds value’ to the Council.

The pre-scrutiny process assists Cabinet Members to make effective decisions by examining issues before making formal decisions.

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

No alternative options have been considered as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee needs to approve its Work Programme and identify scrutiny review topics.

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any financial implications arising from the consideration of a key decision or relating to a recommendation arising from a Working Group review will be reported to Members at the appropriate time.

(A) Revenue Costs – see above

(B) Capital Costs – see above

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets): None	
Legal Implications: None	
Equality Implications: There are no equality implications.	
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	Yes

report authors	
<p>There are no direct climate emergency implications arising from this report. Any climate emergency implications arising from the consideration of reports referred to in the Work Programme will be contained in such reports when they are presented to Members at the appropriate time.</p>	

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

<p>Protect the most vulnerable: None directly applicable to this report but reference in the Work Programme to the approval of, and monitoring of recommendations contained in Digital inclusion Working Group Final Report will help with the aim of ensuring that people have the capability to use the internet to do things that benefit them on a day-to-day basis - whether they be individuals, businesses or other entities e.g. the voluntary sector; and aim to reduce digital exclusion and the digital divide that can exist within society for a variety of reasons.</p>
<p>Facilitate confident and resilient communities: None directly applicable to this report. The aim of the Corporate Communications and Covid-19 Working Group is to assess the changes instigated by in communicating with residents during the Covid-19 pandemic; the impact the changes have had; and how such changes shape the future of the Council communicating with its communities. See reference to the Digital Inclusion Working Group referred to above.</p>
<p>Commission, broker and provide core services: None directly applicable to this report but reference in the Work Programme to the presentation on the update on the Commissioning and the Procurement Policy will raise awareness of associated issues with Members. The Working Group established by the Committee to review the Council's Ethical Business Practices will look into ethical procurement. See also reference to the Digital Inclusion Working Group referred to above.</p>
<p>Place – leadership and influencer: None directly applicable to this report.</p>
<p>Drivers of change and reform: None directly applicable to this report. See reference to the Digital Inclusion Working Group referred to above.</p>
<p>Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: None directly applicable to this report. See reference to the Digital Inclusion Working Group referred to above.</p>
<p>Greater income for social investment: None directly applicable to this report.</p>
<p>Cleaner Greener: None directly applicable to this report but reference in the Work Programme to the submission of the report on Air Quality Monitoring will raise awareness of associated issues with Members.</p>

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

This report is not subject to LD and FD comments. Any specific financial and legal implications associated with any subsequent reports arising from the report will be included in those reports as appropriate.

Assistant Director of Place (Economic Growth and Housing)
Assistant Director of Place (Highways and Public Protection)

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(B) External Consultations

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
Sefton CVS

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following the Committee meeting.

Contact Officer:	Paul Fraser
Telephone Number:	0151 934 2068
Email Address:	paul.fraser@sefton.gov.uk

Appendices:

The following appendices are attached to this report:

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2022/23
- Criteria Checklist for Selecting Topics for Review
- Corporate Communications and Covid-19 Working Group Scoping Document
- Latest Key Decision Forward Plan items relating to this Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

Introduction/Background

1. WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

- 1.1 The Work Programme of items to be submitted to the Committee for consideration during the Municipal Year 2022/23 was approved by the Committee on 14 June 2022 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report. The programme has been produced in liaison with the appropriate Heads of Service, whose roles fall under the remit of the Committee.
- 1.2 The Work Programme has been produced based on items included in last year's Programme.
- 1.3 **Air Quality Monitoring**

The Work Programme indicates that a report would be submitted to this meeting of the Committee on the topic of Air Quality Monitoring. The Assistant Director of Place (Highways and Public Protection) has advised that the report cannot be submitted to this meeting because one of the key priority work streams to be reported on as part of the Air Quality Update is in relation to Sefton's Outline Business Case (OBC) for a Clean Air Plan, which specifically focuses on a HGV Clean Air Zone (CAZ). Following completion of the OBC, a report on the key outcomes and possible CAZ / non-CAZ options was presented to Cabinet for their consideration. Following this, to help inform the decision-making process, Cabinet requested detailed engagement takes place with key stakeholders –

including National Highways, Defra's Joint Air Quality Unit, Peel Ports and Liverpool CC.

This critical stakeholder engagement is currently underway and as such it is requested that the Air Quality update report be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 28 February 2023. This will enable the outcome of any completed engagement to be included appropriately within the report, for the benefit of the Members.

- 1.4 Members are requested to consider whether there are any other items that they wish the Committee to consider, that fall within the terms of reference of the Committee. The Work Programme will be submitted to each meeting of the Committee during 2022/23 and updated, as appropriate.

2. SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPICS 2022/23

- 2.1 It is usual practise for the Committee to appoint a Working Group(s) to undertake a scrutiny review of services during the Municipal Year.
- 2.2 At its last meeting held on 14 June 2022 the Committee agreed to establish a Corporate Communications and Covid-19 Working Group.
- 2.3 The Committee is requested to consider whether a further Working Group should be selected.
- 2.4 A criteria checklist for selecting and rejecting potential topics to review is attached at Appendix 2, to assist the Committee in selecting topics and appointing Working Group(s) for the Municipal Year.

2.5 Corporate Communications and Covid-19 Working Group

As referred to above, at its meeting held on 14 June 2022 the Committee agreed to establish a Corporate Communications and Covid-19 Working Group. The aim of the Working Group was to assess the changes instigated by Corporate Communications in communicating with residents during the Covid-19 pandemic; the impact the changes have had; and how such changes shaped the future of the Council communicating with its communities.

Councillors Bradshaw, Byrom, Carlin and Robinson had agreed to serve on the Working Group.

2.6 Problems Arranging Working Group Meetings

Four attempts have been made to arrange the first meeting of the Working Group. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to find a mutually agreeable date between Members.

Following consultation with the Chair of the Committee it has been agreed that the Committee consider holding an informal meeting to review the topic of Corporate Communications and Covid-19; rather than via Working Group meetings.

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If agreed, the informal meeting would adhere to the Working Group scoping document and would consider appropriate reports submitted by officers. A copy of the scoping document is attached as Appendix 3.

The views of the Committee are sought on this matter.

3. PRE-SCRUTINY OF ITEMS IN THE KEY DECISION FORWARD PLAN

- 3.1 Members may request to pre-scrutinise items from the Key Decision Forward Plan which fall under the remit (terms of reference) of this Committee. The Forward Plan which is updated each month, sets out the list of items to be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration during the next four-month period.
- 3.2 The pre-scrutiny process assists Cabinet Members to make effective decisions by examining issues beforehand and making recommendations prior to a determination being made.
- 3.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board has requested that only those key decisions that fall under the remit of each Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be included on the agenda for consideration.
- 3.4 The latest Forward Plan is attached at Appendix 4 for this purpose. For ease of identification, items listed on the Forward Plan for the first time appear as shaded.
- 3.5 Should Members require further information in relation to any item on the Key Decision Forward Plan, would they please contact the relevant Officer named against the item in the Plan, prior to the Meeting.

4. LIVERPOOL CITY REGION COMBINED AUTHORITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 4.1 As Members will be aware, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and the four Overview and Scrutiny Committees considered a report on the guidance produced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government relating to Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities following on from the Communities and Local Government Select Committee's inquiry into Overview and Scrutiny.
- 4.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and the four Overview and Scrutiny Committees all agreed the recommendations contained in the report, one of which being that updates on Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee (LCRCAO&S) be included in the Work Programme report considered at each Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.
- 4.3 In accordance with the above decision, information on the LCRCAO&S is set out below.
- 4.4 **Role**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was established by the Combined

Authority in May 2017 in accordance with the Combined Authorities Order 2017.

The role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to:

- Scrutinise the decision and actions taken by the Combined Authority or the Metro Mayor;
- Provide a 'critical friend to policy and strategy development;
- Undertake scrutiny reviews into areas of strategic importance for the people of the Liverpool City Region; and
- Monitor the delivery of the Combined Authority's strategic plan.

4.5 **Membership**

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 Hansen, Howard and Waterfield. Councillor Howard is Sefton's Scrutiny Link.

4.6 **Chair and Vice-Chair**

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the LCRCAO&S cannot be Members of the majority group. Councillor Steve Radford, a Liberal Party and Independent Group Councillor serving on Liverpool City Council has been appointed Chair for the 2022/23 Municipal Year; and Councillor Pat Moloney, a Liberal Democrat Councillor serving on Liverpool City Council has been appointed Vice-Chair.

4.7 **Quoracy Issues**

In the past a high number of meetings of the LCRCAO&S have been inquorate.

The quorum for meetings of the LCRCAO&S is 14, two-thirds of the total number of members, 20. This high threshold is not set by the Combined Authority but is set out in legislation.

4.8 **Meetings**

Information on all meetings and membership of the LCRCAO&S can be obtained using the following link

<https://moderngov.merseytravel.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=365&Year=0>

4.9 The last meeting of the LCRCAO&S was held on 1 December 2022. The Committee considered the following items:

- Development of the Next Local Transport Plan for the Liverpool City Region
- Work Programme Update

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- 4.10 The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to be held on 19 January 2023.
- 4.11 The Committee is requested to note the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5. DIGITAL INCLUSION WORKING GROUP

- 5.1 In June 2017 the Committee established a joint working Group with Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills) to review the topic of Digital Inclusion. The final report of the Working Group was approved by Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet in late 2018.
- 5.2 As is the usual practice reports have been submitted to Overview and Scrutiny setting out progress made against each of the recommendations contained in the final report. The last of 4 update reports was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in the November 2022 committee cycle.
- 5.3 When such report was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills) on 8 November 2022, it was agreed that “no further update reports be submitted to the Committee subject to assurances that the actions identified in the report are continued and become “business as usual” operational matters”.
- 5.4 Contact has been made with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, Sefton CVS and the Assistant Director of Place (Economic Growth and Housing) who have responsibility for implementing the recommendations. All have confirmed that the actions identified in the report are continued and have become “business as usual” operational matters.
- 5.5 Sefton CVS have advised that in the areas of work that are relevant to them they will continue to deliver as “business as usual” in the context of the following information:

Recommendation	Update
Using the Poverty Modelling and Digital Inclusion “Mosaic” data, areas of high unemployment be targeted to enable those Sefton residents excluded from the labour market to develop their ICT skills to improve their opportunities for gaining future employment	<p>Our Include-IT Mersey (Building Better Opportunities) D.I. project is in the process of being extended post-ESF/Lottery funding, through the UK-SPF from April 2023.</p> <p>Annual funding and volumes are lower than the current equivalent annual amount through BBO (59% in 2023/24, rising to 76.5% in 2024/25); and funding/volumes have to be split across boroughs in line with UK-SPF funding allocations (Sefton 16.79% of LCR). Therefore volumes are proportionally lower compared to previously and, importantly, are relatively low in relation to the continuing scale of the issue.</p>

Current approximate targets (TBC with the

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LCR CA) are for only 35 Sefton participants in 2023/24 and 45 in 2024/25. We will, however, endeavour to exceed these by as much as possible within the funding constraints.

We also plan to continue the volunteer-led digital surgeries (drop-ins) currently in operation across the borough through the current BBO project (again, subject to agreement by the LCR CA), which will assist many more Sefton residents with basic digital skills and knowledge over the coming two years; providing a place that people can go to get support with using their digital devices.

Given the modest volumes our funding is likely to be able to support, additional basic digital skills provision through, for example, Sefton Adult Learning Service would be beneficial.

If further opportunities arise for a roll out of the IncludeIT project and to support the objectives of recommendation 2 then Sefton CVS be requested to consider such roll out to the priority areas identified within the Poverty Modelling and Digital Exclusion document Digital Inclusion research

We will continue to target/ deliver in the priority wards in the Bootle, Netherton and Southport areas. We will explore potential for delivery in the Ravenmeols ward, subject to the fit of the population demographics in terms of digital exclusion with UK-SPF delivery priorities.

VOLA recently undertook a research project for the LCR CA to map community-based DI provision across the LCR, including Sefton. We liaised with relevant Sefton MBC Officers:

- As part of the planning process to ensure the fitness for purpose of the survey/ proposed data to be captured, to ensure that it met Sefton MBC needs, in addition to those of the LCR CA;
- And in undertaking the research itself, capturing Sefton Library Services and Adult Learning Service DI provision, as well as sense-checking the responses in terms of respondents.

Prior to this LCR research commission by the CA, Sefton MBC was intending to

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Digital connectivity in community-based facilities

undertake its own, similar research into the same subject. Through our liaison, the relevant council officer was happy to use the results/info/ data from our research rather than duplicate effort.

The final report and online map of DI services is soon to be published by the LCR CA, which we will share with Sefton MBC, along with the background data.

VOLA will be running a grants programme through the UK-SPF aimed at improving and/or creating community (VCFSE sector) facilities where people can go to 'get online'.

The aim of the programme will be to provide funding and support to:

1. Upgrade outdated and poor quality digital kit and/or improve broadband connectivity where current connections are poor;
2. Increase capacity, by providing funding to purchase more devices, where current facilities are insufficient to meet demand; and
3. Target neighbourhoods where there is currently a lack of community based digital facilities to help local community-based organisations to set up new drop-ins.

Priorities and investment decision will be driven and informed, in part, by the recent DI research that VOLA undertook for the LCR CA. CVS Funding Officers will be involved in the assessment of applications and a LA Officer will be asked to sit on the Steering Group along with the Sefton CVS' CEO.

The same % borough splits will apply as for Include-IT Mersey project above (Sefton 16.79% - as set by UK-SPF). £219k will be distributed in grants over the funding period.

The first grant application round will run from January to March 2023 to meet UK-SPF year 1 spend targets, with 4 further

rounds over 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years.

The LCR CA has requested that the maximum grant amount will initially be set at £10k for round 1 (can/will be reviewed for future rounds).

Assuming an average grant award of £10k, this will result in 22 grants being distributed across Sefton. Ultimately, more than 22 may be achieved if the average grant award is lower than £10k. Equally, if the maximum grant level is increased in years 2 or 3, it could possibly be slightly lower.

I hope you and Sefton MBC agree that this is very much welcomed investment into community-based DI facilities in the borough.

- 5.6 To be consistent with a decision of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills); and taking into account the assurances of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, Sefton CVS and the Assistant Director of Place (Economic Growth and Housing) no further updates be provided on the implementation of recommendations arising from Digital Inclusion Working Group.

6. "TOOL KIT" FOR ARMED FORCES COVENANT

- 6.1 The Work Programme indicates that an update on the "Tool Kit" for Armed Forces Covenant be submitted to this meeting.
- 6.2 At present there is not much to report since the last update in respect of the Armed Forces Covenant Toolkit Document. However, following the introduction of legislation (the Armed Forces Act 2021) which came into force in November 2022 local authorities are now legally required to provide support to the Armed Forces Community in terms of housing, healthcare and education. Accordingly, Sefton will be looking to re-sign its Armed Forces Covenant document in 2023 and this will be the subject of a re-launch. Further updates will be provided following the re-launch of the Covenant.

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**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGULATORY, COMPLIANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES) WORK
PROGRAMME 2022/23**

Tuesday, 10 January 2023, 6.30 p.m., Town Hall, Bootle

No.	Report/Item	Report Author/Organiser
1.	Review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme	Stephan Van Arendsen/Diane Turner
2.	Financial Performance Monitoring	Stephan Van Arendsen/Paul Reilly
3.	Air Quality Monitoring	Peter Moore/Greg Martin
4.	“Tool Kit” for Armed Forces Covenant	Shaun Pimblett
5.	Members’ Welfare Reform Reference Group – Update	Margaret Jones
6.	Cabinet Member Update Reports	Paul Fraser
7.	Work Programme Update	Paul Fraser
8.	Corporate Communications Update - Presentation	Elena Lloyd
9.	Update on Progress of LCR Digital Inclusion Strategy	Andrea Watts

Tuesday, 7 February 2023, 6.30 p.m., Budget Meeting - Town Hall, Bootle

No.	Report/Item	Report Author/Organiser
1.	Budget Report 2023/24 to 2026/27	Stephan Van Arendsen/Paul Reilly
2.	Financial Performance Monitoring	Stephan Van Arendsen/Paul Reilly
3.	Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities – Prudential Indicators	Stephan Van Arendsen/Paul Reilly
4.	Treasury Management Policy and Strategy	Stephan Van Arendsen/Paul Reilly
5.	Capital Strategy 2023/24 and Future Years	Stephan Van Arendsen/Paul Reilly
6.	Asset Management Strategy and Asset Disposal Policy – Update Position	Stephan Van Arendsen/Paul Reilly
7.	Robustness of the 2023/24 Budget Estimates and the Adequacy of Reserves – local Government Act 2003 – Section 25	Stephan Van Arendsen/Paul Reilly

Tuesday, 28 February 2023, 6.30 p.m. Town Hall, Southport		
No.	Report/Item	Report Author/Organiser
1.	Annual ICT Update Report (Performance of Agilisys)	Helen Spreadbury
2.	Ethical Business Practices Working Group – Update on Recommendations	Paul Fraser
3.	Members’ Welfare Reform Reference Group – Update	Margaret Jones
4.	Cabinet Member Update Reports	Paul Fraser
5.	Work Programme Update	Paul Fraser

APPENDIX 2

CRITERIA CHECKLIST FOR SELECTING TOPICS FOR REVIEW

Criteria for Selecting Items
▪ Issue identified by members as key issue for public (through member surgeries, other contact with constituents or volume of complaints)
▪ Poor performing service (evidence from performance indicators/benchmarking)
▪ Service ranked as important by the community (e.g. through market surveys/citizens panels)
▪ High level of user/general public dissatisfaction with service (e.g. through market surveys/citizens panels/complaints)
▪ Public interest issue covered in local media
▪ High level of budgetary commitment to the service/policy area (as percentage of total expenditure)
▪ Pattern of budgetary overspends
▪ Council corporate priority area
▪ Central government priority area
▪ Issues raised by External Audit Management Letter/External audit reports
▪ New government guidance or legislation
▪ Reports or new evidence provided by external organisations on key issue
▪ Others

CRITERIA FOR REJECTION

Potential Criteria for Rejecting Items
▪ Issue being examined by the Cabinet
▪ Issue being examined by an Officer Group : changes imminent
▪ Issue being examined by another internal body
▪ Issue will be addressed as part of a Service Review within the next year
▪ New legislation or guidance expected within the next year
▪ Other reasons specific to the particular issues.

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APPENDIX 2

SCRUTINY CHECKLIST DO'S AND DON'TS

DO
◆ Remember that Scrutiny <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Is about learning and being a "critical friend"; it should be a positive process◆ Is not opposition
◆ Remember that Scrutiny should result in improved value, enhanced performance or greater public satisfaction
◆ Take an overview and keep an eye on the wider picture
◆ Check performance against local standards and targets and national standards, and compare results with other authorities
◆ Benchmark performance against local and national performance indicators, using the results to ask more informed questions
◆ Use Working Groups to get underneath performance information
◆ Take account of local needs, priorities and policies
◆ Be persistent and inquisitive
◆ Ask effective questions - be constructive not judgmental
◆ Be open-minded and self aware - encourage openness and self criticism in services
◆ Listen to users and the public, seek the voices that are often not heard, seek the views of others - and balance all of these
◆ Praise good practice and best value - and seek to spread this throughout the authority
◆ Provide feedback to those who have been involved in the review and to stakeholders
◆ Anticipate difficulties in Members challenging colleagues from their own party
◆ Take time to review your own performance

◆ DON'T
◆ Witch-hunt or use performance review as punishment
◆ Be party political/partisan
◆ Blame valid risk taking or stifle initiative or creativity
◆ Treat scrutiny as an add-on
◆ Get bogged down in detail
◆ Be frightened of asking basic questions
◆ Undertake too many issues in insufficient depth
◆ Start without a clear brief and remit
◆ Underestimate the task
◆ Lose track of the main purpose of scrutiny
◆ Lack sensitivity to other stakeholders
◆ Succumb to organisational inertia
◆ Duck facing failure - learn from it and support change and development
◆ Be driven by data or be paralysed by analysis - keep strategic overview, and expect officers to provide high level information and analysis to help.

APPENDIX 2

KEY QUESTIONS

Overview and Scrutiny Committees should keep in mind some of the fundamental questions:-

Are we doing what users/non users/local residents want?
Are users' needs central to the service?
Why are we doing this?
What are we trying to achieve?
How well are we doing?
How do we compare with others?
Are we delivering value for money?
How do we know?
What can we improve?

INVESTIGATIONS:-

To what extent are service users' expectations and needs being met?
To what extent is the service achieving what the policy intended?
To what extent is the service meeting any statutory obligations or national standards and targets?
Are there any unexpected results/side effects of the policy?
Is the performance improving, steady or deteriorating?
Is the service able to be honest and open about its current performance and the reasons behind it?
Are areas of achievement and weakness fairly and accurately identified?
How has performance been assessed? What is the evidence?
How does performance compare with that of others? Are there learning points from others' experiences?
Is the service capable of meeting planned targets/standards? What change to capability is needed.
Are local performance indicators relevant, helpful, meaningful to Members, staff and service users?

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SEFTON COUNCIL



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

(Corporate Communications and Covid-19 Working Group)

Agenda Item 9

APPENDIX 3

MEMBERSHIP

Members nominated by the O&S Committee

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND OBJECTIVES

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) has agreed to establish a Working Group to assess the changes instigated by Corporate Communications in communicating with residents during the Covid-19 pandemic; the impact the changes have had; and how such changes shape the future of the Council communicating with its communities.

In the context of Council activity, the purpose of Corporate Communications is to inform (or even signpost and warn) our internal and external audiences (staff, stakeholders, partners and communities). Many behaviour-change campaigns have also been delivered by the Corporate Communications Team.

It will be necessary for the Working Group to explore:

- The range of communications activity the Council is responsible for;
- The purposes and objectives of the communications activity;
- Who the intended audience is;
- The nature of any potential and actual impact (positive or negative), from the communications activity
- The effectiveness of communications activity, such as changes in behaviour
- How we influence behaviour change in the community through standard channels

It will be necessary for the Working Group to consider:

- How and what the Council has communicated with stakeholders (staff, residents and partners) during the pandemic
- How the Council communicated with hard-to-reach communities and what lessons can be learnt for maintaining and improving these channels in the future
- Accessibility of communications activity and channels
- How we communicate with young people, given that this audience does not want to follow the council on social media, so what alternative communications channels should be used to get messages to this group.

It will be necessary for the Working Group to review:

- Current Sefton Corporate Communications Activity
- Areas of good practise within the Council
- Good practise within other local authorities or similar organisations
- Areas for improvement within the Council's policies and practise
- Recommendations for improving the Council's policies and practise

APPENDIX 3

HOW WILL THE REVIEW CONTRIBUTE TO CLIMATE CHANGE EMERGENCY MOTION

(Note: the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, at its meeting on 10 September 2019, agreed that Working Group Scoping documents should include a section providing details of how each review would contribute to the terms of the [Climate Change Emergency motion](#))

Not applicable

METHODS OF ENQUIRY

Dependent upon the refined scope of the review, to include:

- Analysis of current Sefton practice
Available statistics on current Sefton practice such as social media reach and website traffic
- Desktop research into practise elsewhere
- Witness interviews with officers, stakeholders, experts and other organisations
- Surveys – did an intended audience see a Council message and did they do or change as a result
- Possible site visits / conference calls with other teams such as the contact centre, experts and other organisations

TIMESCALES

To commence in June 2022

To be completed in June 2023

OFFICER SUPPORT

Lead Officer: Elena Lloyd (Corporate Communications Manager)

Democratic Services Officer: Paul Fraser

OTHERS WHO WILL BE INVOLVED

The review is likely to involve the following witnesses and sources of information and advice

- Council Officers such as Martin Driver, (Communications Team Lead), Jayne Vincent (Engagement Lead), One member of the Accessible Information Group (TBC), One Young Advisor (TBC)
- Members
- Experts and representatives from other Councils or similar organisations

APPENDIX 3

ARRANGEMENTS FOR REPORTING TO CABINET/COUNCIL

Timetable of committees, link into the planning chart, type of report/minute

PLANNING CHART

The Planning Chart is an example of the way reviews could/should be planned.

It is recommended that realistic time frames in which to carry out tasks should be considered including possible delays for public holidays and Council business. Effective planning suggests that more planning time be built into the chart.

Activity	MONTH												
	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June
Scoping													
Considerments													
Visits													
Site Visits													
Initial Findings													
Draft Report													
O&S Cttee Considers													
Submit to Cabinet (if appropriate)													

APPENDIX 3

Ten Step Process Flow Chart

Committee agrees Working Group membership and appoints Chair/Lead Member

Working Group complete scoping document determining terms of reference & timetable.

Working Group submit scoping paperwork to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for approval.

Background research undertaken and evidence collected.

Working Group meet to determine questions they wish to ask witnesses.

Working Group make any necessary visits & additional evidence obtained.

Witness hearings take place & responses written up by support officer.

Working Group review headings for the final report.

Working Group and support officer draft final recommendations and approve final report.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives final report and recommendations and how they should be taken forward.



SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

FOR THE FOUR MONTH PERIOD 1 FEBRUARY 2023 - 31 MAY 2023

This Forward Plan sets out the details of the key decisions which the Cabinet, individual Cabinet Members or Officers expect to take during the next four month period. The Plan is rolled forward every month and is available to the public at least 28 days before the beginning of each month.

A Key Decision is defined in the Council's Constitution as:

1. any Executive decision that is not in the Annual Revenue Budget and Capital Programme approved by the Council and which requires a gross budget expenditure, saving or virement of more than £100,000 or more than 2% of a Departmental budget, whichever is the greater;
2. any Executive decision where the outcome will have a significant impact on a significant number of people living or working in two or more Wards

Anyone wishing to make representations about any of the matters listed below may do so by contacting the relevant officer listed against each Key Decision, within the time period indicated.

Under the Access to Information Procedure Rules set out in the Council's Constitution, a Key Decision may not be taken, unless:

- it is published in the Forward Plan;
- 5 clear days have lapsed since the publication of the Forward Plan; and
- if the decision is to be taken at a meeting of the Cabinet, 5 clear days notice of the meeting has been given.

The law and the Council's Constitution provide for urgent key decisions to be made, even though they have not been included in the Forward Plan in accordance with Rule 26 (General Exception) and Rule 28 (Special Urgency) of the Access to Information Procedure Rules.

Copies of the following documents may be inspected at the Town Hall, Oriel Road, Bootle L20 7AE or accessed from the Council's website: www.sefton.gov.uk

- Council Constitution
- Forward Plan
- Reports on the Key Decisions to be taken
- Other documents relating to the proposed decision may be submitted to the decision making meeting and these too will be made available by the contact officer named in the Plan
- The minutes for each Key Decision, which will normally be published within 5 working days after having been made

Some reports to be considered by the Cabinet/Council may contain exempt information and will not be made available to the public. The specific reasons (Paragraph No(s)) why such reports are exempt are detailed in the Plan and the Paragraph No(s) and descriptions are set out below:-

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APPENDIX 4

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)
4. Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the Authority
5. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings
6. Information which reveals that the authority proposes a) to give under any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or b) to make an order or direction under any enactment
7. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime
8. Information falling within paragraph 3 above is not exempt information by virtue of that paragraph if it is required to be registered under—
 - (a) the Companies Act 1985;
 - (b) the Friendly Societies Act 1974;
 - (c) the Friendly Societies Act 1992;
 - (d) the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts 1965 to 1978;
 - (e) the Building Societies Act 1986; or
 - (f) the Charities Act 1993.
9. Information is not exempt information if it relates to proposed development for which the local planning authority may grant itself planning permission pursuant to regulation 3 of the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992
10. Information which—
 - (a) falls within any of paragraphs 1 to 7 above; and
 - (b) is not prevented from being exempt by virtue of paragraph 8 or 9 above, is exempt information if and so long, as in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings of the Cabinet and Council which are held at the Town Hall, Oriel Road, Bootle or the Town Hall, Lord Street, Southport. The dates and times of the meetings are published on www.sefton.gov.uk or you may contact the Democratic Services Section on telephone number 0151 934 2068.

NOTE:

For ease of identification, items listed within the document for the first time will appear shaded.

Dwayne Johnson
Chief Executive

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FORWARD PLAN INDEX OF ITEMS

Item Heading	Officer Contact
Sandbrook Way, Ainsdale - Acquisition and Development Brief	Steve Power steve.power@sefton.gov.uk
Land at Foul Lane, Southport	Suzanne Rimmer suzanne.rimmer@sefton.gov.uk
Financial Management 2022/23 to 2024/25 and Framework for Change 2020 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2022/23 – February Update	Paul Reilly paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4106
Sale of Ainsdale ATC and the Meadows Ainsdale	Suzanne Rimmer suzanne.rimmer@sefton.gov.uk
Capital Strategy 2023/24 to 2027/28	Graham Hussey graham.hussey@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4100
Prudential Indicators 2023/24	Graham Hussey graham.hussey@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4100
Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2023/24	Graham Hussey graham.hussey@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4100
Southport Theatre & Convention Centre – Disposal of Fixtures and Fittings	Paul Reilly paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4106
Climate Emergency Update report	Stephanie Jukes stephanie.jukes@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4552

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APPENDIX 4

SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

Details of Decision to be taken	Sandbrook Way, Ainsdale - Acquisition and Development Brief To note project progress and seek approval to a development brief to support the acquisition of properties, for potential compulsory purchase purposes (CPO)..			
Decision Maker	Cabinet			
Decision Expected	2 Feb 2023 Decision due date for Cabinet changed from 05/01/2023 to 02/02/2023. Reason: work is on-going on the proposal			
Key Decision Criteria	Financial	Yes	Community Impact	Yes
Exempt Report	Open			
Wards Affected	Ainsdale			
Scrutiny Committee Area	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services			
Lead Director	Assistant Director of Place (Economic Growth and Housing)			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	Consultation to date has included Cabinet members, Ward Councillors and local groups.			
Method(s) of Consultation	As part of the Option Appraisal Process officers have formally consulted with Cabinet Members, Ward Councillors, and local interest groups.			
List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker	Sandbrook Way, Ainsdale - Acquisition and Development Brief			
Contact Officer(s) details	Steve Power steve.power@sefton.gov.uk			

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SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

Details of Decision to be taken	Land at Foul Lane, Southport To seek approval to the Heads of Terms for the proposed sale of land at Foul Lane, Southport.			
Decision Maker	Cabinet			
Decision Expected	2 Feb 2023 Decision due date for Cabinet changed from 05/01/2023 to 02/02/2023. Reason: negotiations are still ongoing on the proposal			
Key Decision Criteria	Financial	Yes	Community Impact	No
Exempt Report	Part exempt (Paragraph 3)			
Wards Affected	Norwood			
Scrutiny Committee Area	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services			
Lead Director	Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	SCIG - Strategic Capital Investment Group			
Method(s) of Consultation	Meetings			
List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker	Land at Foul Lane, Southport			
Contact Officer(s) details	Suzanne Rimmer suzanne.rimmer@sefton.gov.uk			

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SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

Details of Decision to be taken	Financial Management 2022/23 to 2024/25 and Framework for Change 2020 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2022/23 – February Update Financial updates and Policy decisions relating to the Council's Framework for Change 2020, including the monthly Revenue and Capital budget monitoring reports			
Decision Maker	Cabinet			
Decision Expected	2 Feb 2023			
Key Decision Criteria	Financial	Yes	Community Impact	Yes
Exempt Report	Open			
Wards Affected	All Wards			
Scrutiny Committee Area	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services			
Lead Director	Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	Cabinet, Chief Executive, Strategic Leadership Board, Trade Unions, Staff and relevant organisations as appropriate			
Method(s) of Consultation	Individual budget saving options / amendments to the budget will be subject to consultation – internal and external to the Council (as appropriate).			
List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker	Financial Management 2022/23 to 2024/25 and Framework for Change 2020 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2022/23 – February Update			
Contact Officer(s) details	Paul Reilly paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4106			

APPENDIX 4

**SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
FORWARD PLAN**

Details of Decision to be taken	Sale of Ainsdale ATC and the Meadows Ainsdale Seek Cabinet approval to the terms and conditions for the disposal of the premises			
Decision Maker	Cabinet			
Decision Expected	2 Feb 2023 Decision due date for Cabinet changed from 05/01/2023 to 09/02/2023. Reason: work is ongoing on details that will inform the cost of the Short Term Assessment Unit			
Key Decision Criteria	Financial	Yes	Community Impact	Yes
Exempt Report	Part exempt (Paragraph 3)			
Wards Affected	Ainsdale			
Scrutiny Committee Area	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services			
Lead Director	Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	Councillors as part of the above			
Method(s) of Consultation	Updates on disposal previously reported to Cabinet			
List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker	Sale of Ainsdale ATC and the Meadows Ainsdale			
Contact Officer(s) details	Suzanne Rimmer suzanne.rimmer@sefton.gov.uk			

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SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

Details of Decision to be taken	Capital Strategy 2023/24 to 2027/28 The Capital Strategy sets out the long-term context in which capital expenditure, borrowing and investment decisions are made and considers the impact of these decisions on the priorities within the Council's Core Purpose and Framework for Change Programme and the promises made in the 2030 Vision for Sefton.			
Decision Maker	Cabinet Council			
Decision Expected	9 Feb 2023 2 Mar 2023			
Key Decision Criteria	Financial	Yes	Community Impact	No
Exempt Report	Open			
Wards Affected	All Wards			
Scrutiny Committee Area	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services			
Lead Director	Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	N/A			
Method(s) of Consultation	None			
List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker	Capital Strategy 2023/24 to 2027/28			
Contact Officer(s) details	Graham Hussey graham.hussey@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4100			

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SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

Details of Decision to be taken	Prudential Indicators 2023/24 This reports sets the prudential indicators for the forthcoming and following years to enable the Council to effectively manage its Capital Financing activities and comply with the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities.			
Decision Maker	Cabinet Council			
Decision Expected	9 Feb 2023 2 Mar 2023			
Key Decision Criteria	Financial	Yes	Community Impact	No
Exempt Report	Open			
Wards Affected	All Wards			
Scrutiny Committee Area	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services			
Lead Director	Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	N/A			
Method(s) of Consultation	None			
List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker	Prudential Indicators 2023/24			
Contact Officer(s) details	Graham Hussey graham.hussey@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4100			

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SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

Details of Decision to be taken	Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2023/24 This report sets out the following proposed policy and strategy documents: a) Treasury Management Policy b) Treasury Management Strategy c) Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement			
Decision Maker	Cabinet Council			
Decision Expected	9 Feb 2023 2 Mar 2023			
Key Decision Criteria	Financial	Yes	Community Impact	No
Exempt Report	Open			
Wards Affected	All Wards			
Scrutiny Committee Area	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services			
Lead Director	Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	N/A			
Method(s) of Consultation	None			
List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker	Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2023/24			
Contact Officer(s) details	Graham Hussey graham.hussey@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4100			

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SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

Details of Decision to be taken	Southport Theatre & Convention Centre – Disposal of Fixtures and Fittings Financial updates and Policy decisions relating to the Council's Framework for Change 2020, including the monthly Revenue and Capital budget monitoring reports			
Decision Maker	Cabinet			
Decision Expected	9 Mar 2023			
Key Decision Criteria	Financial	Yes	Community Impact	Yes
Exempt Report	Open			
Wards Affected	All Wards			
Scrutiny Committee Area	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services			
Lead Director	Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	Cabinet, Chief Executive, Strategic Leadership Board, Trade Unions, Staff and relevant organisations as appropriate			
Method(s) of Consultation	Individual budget saving options / amendments to the budget will be subject to consultation – internal and external to the Council (as appropriate).			
List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker	Financial Management 2022/23 to 2024/25 and Framework for Change 2020 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2022/23 – March Update			
Contact Officer(s) details	Paul Reilly paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4106			

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SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

Details of Decision to be taken	Climate Emergency Update report Update on progress during phase 1 (3 year period) and plans for Phase 2 and 3 - taking us to 2030			
Decision Maker	Cabinet Council			
Decision Expected	9 Mar 2023 20 Apr 2023			
Key Decision Criteria	Financial	No	Community Impact	Yes
Exempt Report	Open			
Wards Affected	All Wards			
Scrutiny Committee Area	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services			
Lead Director	Assistant Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (Strategic Support) Assistant Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (Strategic Support)			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	Not applicable			
Method(s) of Consultation	Not applicable			
List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker	Climate Emergency Update report			
Contact Officer(s) details	Stephanie Jukes stephanie.jukes@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4552			

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)	Date of Meeting:	10 January 2023
Subject:	Cabinet Member Report – October 2022 to January 2023		
Report of:	Chief Legal and Democratic Officer	Wards Affected:	All
Cabinet Portfolio:	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services		
Is this a Key Decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

To submit the Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services report for the period October 2022 to January 2023 relating to the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendation:

That the Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services report relating to the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

Reasons for the Recommendation:

In order to keep Overview and Scrutiny Members informed, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board has agreed for relevant Cabinet Member Reports to be submitted to appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

No alternative options have been considered because the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board has agreed for relevant Cabinet Member Reports to be submitted to appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

Any financial implications associated with the Cabinet Member report that are referred to in this update are contained within the respective reports.

(A) Revenue Costs – see above

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(B) **Capital Costs** – see above

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets):	
Legal Implications:	
Equality Implications: There are no equality implications.	
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
There are no direct climate emergency implications arising from this report. Any climate emergency implications arising from matters referred to in the Cabinet Member report will be contained in reports when they are presented to Members at the appropriate time.	

Contribution to the Council’s Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable: None directly applicable to this report. The Cabinet Member update provides information on activity within Councillor Lappin’s portfolio during a previous two/three-month period. Any reports relevant to her portfolio considered by the Cabinet, Cabinet Member or Committees during this period would contain information as to how such reports contributed to the Council’s Core Purpose.
Facilitate confident and resilient communities: As above
Commission, broker and provide core services: As above
Place – leadership and influencer: As above
Drivers of change and reform: As above
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: As above

Greater income for social investment: As above
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Cleaner Greener: As above

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Cabinet Member Update Report is not subject to FD/LD consultation. Any specific financial and legal implications associated with any subsequent reports arising from the attached Cabinet Member update report will be included in those reports as appropriate

(B) External Consultations

Not applicable

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following the Committee meeting.

Contact Officer:	Paul Fraser
Telephone Number:	0151 934 2068
Email Address:	paul.fraser@sefton.gov.uk

Appendices:

Cabinet Member - (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) update report

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1 In order to keep Overview and Scrutiny Members informed, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board has agreed for relevant Cabinet Member Reports to be submitted to appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- 1.2 The most recent Cabinet Member report for the Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services is attached to the report.

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CABINET MEMBER REPORT		
Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) -		
Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Paulette Lappin	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services	January 2023

Finance

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

The latest budget monitoring report will be presented to Cabinet and Council in January. This highlights the growing financial pressure that the Council is facing in 2022/2023, particularly in Children’s Social Care, the pay award and energy. There is a remedial action plan agreed to meet the majority of the current forecast pressure in 2022/2023 – however, this is mainly through utilising one-off funding (e.g., general balances and earmarked reserves) which isn’t a sustainable solution to the ongoing impact of these pressure in future years. In addition, the Council has introduced a recruitment freeze across a number of service areas, as well as identifying areas of non-essential spend to try to offset some of the pressures being faced.

The implications on the Medium-Term Financial Plan was reported to Cabinet and Council in November, in terms of the overall pressures and what is permanent or temporary, and proposals are currently being formulated to enable to the Council to set a robust and sustainable budget in 2023/2024. The implications for 2024/25 and 2025/26 are also being considered. The service is currently assessing the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement which was published on 19th December 2022. The MTFP will then be refined and form the basis for the Budget Report to be presented to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny in February and Council in March (alongside the other annual budget / strategy related reports required).

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 have now commenced their audit, It is anticipated that this will be completed in time for the accounts to be approved at Audit and Governance Committee in March 2023.

Customer Centric Services

The Service continues to manage high workloads, especially relating to Council Tax. Staff continue to work extra hours at weekends to reduce customer waiting times and processing delays.

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Customer Services

The Contact Centre is continuing to receive a high volume of telephone calls from residents stating that they are unable to pay their monthly Council Tax due to the cost-of-living crisis and their outgoing financial priorities being elsewhere. All residents are being offered as much support as possible, including access to ELAS, Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and Exceptional Hardship Fund (EHF). Extended payment plans are also being offered to residents who have recently received a reminder, or a summons and they are being encouraged to visit Bootle One Stop Shop should they need access to any digital support.

Demand for ELAS is high, with the teams in both the Contact Centre and the Benefits service dealing with a significant increase in customer enquiries and applications. Demand is now at a level consistent with pre-pandemic. As at the end of November, the Council has received a total of 8,568 applications for support. 2,855 food vouchers have been issued, 4,417 utility awards and 799 essential household goods provided. Staff resource is managed to ensure that claims are processed without delay.

Customer demand at Bootle One Stop Shop is increasing, a full drop-in service has now been reinstated from Monday to Friday during the hours of 9.00 am and 5.00 pm. In November, 2,931 customers attended the One Stop Shop, this included 592 taxi drivers, 165 of which had an appointment and a further 427 who 'dropped in'. There were a further 994 customers who attended with Council Tax, Benefits and ELAS enquiries, with a small number of customers attending to discuss Business Rates, Blue Badge and Parking enquiries. The remaining 1,345 customers were seeking general council-related advice at reception.

At Southport, 636 customers attended the one-stop shop service based at the Atkinson, with 183 customers booking an appointment to discuss their Council Tax or benefit and the remaining customers seeking general council – related advice at reception.

Council Tax Energy Rebate

For most of 2022, the Service has had to prioritise the processing of the Government's Council Tax Energy Rebate. The Scheme closed on 30th November 2022: -

- Approximately 110,000 households living in Band A-D properties have received the automatic £150 rebate, totalling approximately £16.5Million, and
- Over 25,000 households have received a discretionary award, totalling approximately £701,000.

The final reconciliation and government return has been completed in early-December.

Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS) Alternative Funding

The Department of Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) has provided some initial information about the EBSS Alternative Funding Scheme that they have asked local authorities to work with them to deliver. Further guidance and information are still to be provided detailing administrative requirements. It is expected that the scheme will run for a period of approximately three-months from 23rd January – 30th April 2023, to provide energy support payments to households that have missed out on the main EBSS, e.g., households with no domestic electricity supply, park home residents or those living in caravans or houseboats on registered sites.

Migration of Revenues and Benefits document management system

Priority preparation work is well underway to migrate Revenues and Benefit customer records from Civica electronic document management system (EDMS) to NEC (Northgate) EDMS with go-live planned for January 2023. A significant amount of development work and testing is underway. Staff training is also planned for January.

Annual Billing 2023-24

The project to issue all Council Tax and Business Rates bills, and annual benefit letters has commenced with preparation and planning underway for bills and letters for 2023/24 to be issued in March 2023.

Risk and Audit

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

- Covid Grants assurance,
- ASC Finance Budget Management
- Performance Management,
- Review of number of Schools.
- Climate Change
- Risk Management
- Highways Maintenance
- Payroll
- Energy price cap payments
- Key Management Waste Management
- Fleet Management

We have appointed a temporary Principal Auditor to a vacant position and will consider recruiting permanently to the post in the New Year.

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

- We have undertaken a 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.
- We considering the next stages of completing the proposed tender for the Council's insurance arrangements to be completed by September 2023. 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 examine how the Council's trees are managed effectively in accordance with our legal responsibilities. Other days have been used to look at the Council's Highways Winter Service Policy.
- 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.

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The Risk and Resilience Team.

Business Continuity we are reviewing the current Service Area Business Continuity Plans with the Service Area to develop be spoke power outage BC plans. We have arranged an exercise of the Council's BC arrangements in January 2023.

The **Risk and Resilience Team** are currently working on the Council's Risk Appetite which is due which is due to complete in January 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
- Development of Severe Weather Protocol

The **Assurance Team** were seconded to the Business Grants Team to provide support and assistance for the delivery of grants to local businesses until the end of June 2022. Subsequently two of the Team were seconded to Revenues and Benefits to provide additional support to the Team until the end of March 2023.

For the **Health and Safety Team** there will be a continued focus during the next quarter of delivering the Health and Safety Improvement Plan and also the ongoing recovery programmes from COVID-19 with planned priorities –

- Continue to support to assist Managers with the recovery programmes from COVID-19.
- 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. A key priority over the last period has been to support the moves into Magdalen House and ensuring the delivery and installation of all ICT equipment. There have been some challenges with obtaining equipment in a timely fashion due to worldwide supply issues, but we are now pleased to be able to now report that most moves are completed, and the focus is now upon backfilling the remaining desks in Magdalen House with Keyboards, Mice, Monitors and docking stations to support hotdesking.

The Cloud Migration project is now complete, including the migration of the Liquid Logic System to its new infrastructure. Following a further **Page 142**s been decided to leave the Libraries

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Netloans system on premise due the large amount of reconfiguration that would be required on the public network, this will be reassessed when a new solution for connectivity is in place and the Netloans product comes up for contract review. Data centre rationalisation and right sizing is now well underway, ready for an eventual move to Bootle Town Hall.

Cloud Telephony deployment is now complete with number porting from the Virgin Contract to 8x8 completed, formal project closure is now underway, following which we will consider the remaining infrastructure on IPVN connections which have to be removed prior to 2025. The majority of this is thought to be legacy but as it is impossible to report on these historical number ranges (which we believe not to be in use) we will have to develop a plan to remove.

The deployment of the new CXP solution is nearing completion with 16 processes already live and migrated from the Front Office system. For the remaining 11 processes, 5 will be live prior to the 10th of January 2023 and contingency processes will be in place for the final 6 ready for the front office system (self service element) to be decommissioned on the 10th of January next year.

Work continues the rolling website improvement programme; an external web agency (Ozum) has been commissioned to carry out the required work which is well underway. In addition, quotes have been requested for the upgrade of the Umbraco web content management system (to be planned in next year). 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.

The migration of legacy bulk print jobs to the Council's new bulk print provider is now completed, with the legacy system due to be decommissioned prior to Christmas.

Procurement activity continues to be a challenge; however, the team is pleased to report that we have now appointed a new permanent ICT Category Manager into the team, and he started with the authority on the 7th of December, a new forward plan will be developed in the new year based on the new capacity in the team.

Procurement is now completed for Managed Print, with an award to Canon, deployment of Canon devices is now well underway across all sites. Unfortunately, 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, a Cabinet member report will be presented in the new year outlining next steps 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. Recently Sefton commissioned Microsoft to complete a Cyber Security Assessment, our result was positive with Sefton scoring above average based on the scores of other local authorities assessed however a full action plan is now in development to work through the improvements recommended, the majority are now completed. In addition, the LGA completed a Cyber 360 for Sefton in October this year, the results of which we are still awaiting but this will also feed into our continuous Cyber Security improvement plan.

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.

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Asset Management / FM

- Ongoing work to deliver Phase 1 Asset Disposals progressing well.
- Ongoing work supporting Growth Board projects.
- Asset records input and liaison with Building Maintenance colleagues for new (property based) IT system nearing completion.
- Agreement of terms and reporting for Lease of various assets ongoing.
- Reoccupation of Magdalen House to accommodate future ways of working nearing completion.
- Working in conjunction with Children's Services to support their accommodation strategy.

Maintenance Management & Building Services

- Delivering a range of schemes in support of Corporate Buildings.
- Delivering a range of schemes in support of Education Capital 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.
- Development and implementation of a new coordinated (property based) IT system in support of Corporate & Education Properties nearing completion.
- Managing remedial works scheme
- Phase 1 essential maintenance delivery plan for corporate buildings underway.
- Formulating asset survey delivery plan alongside the essential maintenance.
- Delivering services in support of major adaptation to vulnerable and disabled residents.

Project Management

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

Energy Management

- Busy period for the affordable warmth team, supporting residents without adequate heating for range of reasons. Additional funding secured to help repair boilers or provide emergency top ups for gas/electricity meters.
- Local Authority Delivery of Green homes Grant (LAD, GHG) – Providing insulation to privately owned properties (worst/not insulated & for poorest residents) LAD2 has now completed with 222 homes improved. LAD3/HUG is currently being delivered – an additional £1M (100 homes) has been awarded to Sefton (Oct 2022).
- A programme of work to support schools (after large energy price rises) is being developed to be delivered this year.
- Feasibility Study for a replacement Wind turbine at Southport Eco Centre is ongoing.
- Energy price rises are being modelled for the remainder of 2022/23, after the Government price guarantee announcement. Prices for 23/24 also being modelled and shared with finance dept. This is evolving and therefore continuous monitoring is required.
- Review of Climate Emergency works required for 2023-26 underway.
- Working with all areas of property to look at savings options to in part counter the rise in energy costs.

Legal Services

Democratic Services Team – Overview

Overview and Scrutiny

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

A meeting of the Committee was held on 18 October 2022. A summary of the key issues considered at the meeting is provided below:

- **Liverpool University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust – Update** - the Committee received a presentation from Dr. Clare Morgan, Director of Strategy, Liverpool University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, on recent developments at the Trust.
- **Safeguarding Update** - the Committee considered a report that sought to provide an update on current safeguarding activity across the Sefton Borough and to provide assurance on the actions being taken to mitigate risk and investigate safeguarding concerns.
- **NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Sefton - Update Report** - the Committee considered a report that provided an update about the work of NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Sefton.
- **Sefton Clinical Commissioning Groups - Health Provider Performance Dashboard** - the Committee considered a report that provided data on key performance areas, together with responses for the Friends and Family Test for both Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust and Liverpool University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (LUHFT). Information on the monitoring of the 7-day GP extended access scheme, and ambulance response times were also included within the data.
- **Cabinet Member Update Reports** - the Committee considered, as is the usual practice, the most recent reports from the Cabinet Members for Adult Social Care, and Health and Wellbeing.
- **Work Programme** – the report sought the views of the Committee on the Work Programme for 2022/23; reported on progress of the Mental Health Issues Working Group; reported on progress of informal briefing sessions for Committee Members to be held during 2022/23; the identification of items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan; updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee; updated on progress made by the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee in considering proposals for the reconfiguration of the hyper-acute stroke services across North Merseyside and West Lancashire; updated on progress made by the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee in considering proposals in relation to clinical service integration for a number of services delivered by Liverpool University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (LUFT); reported on progress of the Joint Cheshire and Merseyside Scrutiny Committee, established to scrutinise the work of the Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board; and submitted an update by Healthwatch Sefton.

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

A meeting of the Committee was held on 7 November 2022. A summary of the items considered at the meeting is provided below.

- **Summer 2022 Data** - the Committee considered a report that updated on summer 2022 test and examination data. The report set out the background to the matter and referred to the current position and next steps regarding the possibility of re-establishing the Secondary School Performance and Attainment Working Group.
- **Integrated Care Systems and Start Well Update** - the Committee considered a report that provided a brief overview of the Integrated Care System development through the Sefton Partnership and provided specific detail on the Start Well Plan and its delivery. The report set out the background to the matter; an overview of the Start Well Plan; next steps, and key updates.

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- **Children's Services Improvement Programme** - the Committee considered a report that updated on progress made against the Children's Improvement Plan. The report set out details of progress and priorities for the next quarter.
- **Performance Dashboard** - the Committee considered a report that provided an overview of the September performance dashboard.
- **Cabinet Member Update Reports** - the Committee considered, as is the usual practice, the most recent reports from the Cabinet Members for Children's Social Care and – Education.

Work Programme – the report sought the views of the Committee on the Work Programme for 2022/23; noted the progress of the Impact of Covid 19 on the Primary Curriculum Working Group; sought the views of the Committee on the re-establishment of the Secondary School Performance and Attainment Working Group; sought the views of the Committee on a review of health services for children in Sefton; noted the progress of informal briefing sessions for Committee Members to be held during 2022/23, and the intention to hold an informal briefing session on the Leeds Family values in due course; noted the intention to hold a site visit for Committee Members to meet with Children's Services Teams at Magdalen House, Bootle, in due course; noted that there were no items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the latest Key Decision Forward Plan; updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and formally approved the nomination of a new Parent Governor Representative and a new Archdiocese Representative to sit on the Committee.

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

A meeting of the Committee was held on 8 November 2022. A summary of the key issues considered at the meeting is provided below:

- **Southport Market** - the Committee considered a report on the first year of operation, focused on the period during the financial year 2021-2022, of Southport Market. The report indicated that Cabinet at its meeting on 3rd September 2020 approved the delivery of a fully refurbished Market Hall with a focus on food and drink incorporating a flexible events space that would support the wider visitor economy; that the new Market opened in July 2021 after undergoing the £1.4m refurbishment (funded totally from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and Town Deal Acceleration Fund); and that the Market now had a central bar, 8 hot food units, 2 cold food units, a butcher and events space to the rear. Since opening in late July 2021, the Market had been a great success; that by the year ending in 21/22 it had met its business plan targets in an 8-month trading period; and that the food and drink offer had exceeded expectations
- **Flood And Coastal Erosion Risk Management Annual Report To Overview And Scrutiny 2021-2022** - the Committee considered a report advising that the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 previously required that arrangements be made to review and scrutinise the exercise by the Council as a Lead Local Flood Risk Authority of its flood risk management functions and coastal erosion risk management functions; that following the cessation of this requirement, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had requested that an annual Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management review be submitted to it.
- **Green Sefton Annual Review 2022** - the Committee considered a report that provided an update on the progress of Green Sefton's operational delivery over the last year, and setting out the strategic work programme, in line with the Service Vision 2030, and Service Plan for the next year; and which proposed a refresh of the Vision and Service Plan and sought the Committee's comments on these documents for submission to the Cabinet Member - Health and Well Being and the Cabinet Member - Locality Services.
- **Digital Inclusion Working Group – Update on Recommendations** - the Committee considered a report setting out progress made against each of the recommendations formulated by the Digital Inclusion Working Group and approved by Cabinet. The Committee agreed that no further update reports be submitted to the Committee subject to

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assurances that the actions identified in the report are continued and become “business as usual” operational matters.

- **Work Programme** - the report 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; updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and updated on issues considered at previous meetings of the Committee. Following a request from the informal meeting of the Committee (referred to below) the Committee agreed that a review of the adoption of a strategic approach for waste containment/disposal across the Borough be dealt with at an informal meeting of the Committee rather than establishing a Working Group to review the topic.
- **Informal Meeting of the Committee – 20 October 2022**
An informal meeting of the Committee was held on 20 October 2022 and undertook scrutiny on matters associated with weed control, street cleansing provision and waste containment consultation; and the Green Sefton Annual Review 2022.
- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)**
A meeting of the Committee was held on 1 November 2022. A summary of the key items considered at the meeting is provided below:
 - **New Ways of Working** - The Committee received a presentation 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.
 - **Disposal of Surplus Council Owned Land/Asset -Management Strategy** - the Committee received a presentation on the Asset Management Strategy/Disposal Policy identifying issues associated with the Council’s Asset Base; 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; 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 the Strategy supporting the Framework for Change.
 - **Elections Act 2022** - the Committee considered a report that provided an update on the implications of the Elections Act 2022 on the conduct of future elections in Sefton. The Chief Legal and Democratic Officer has been 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; and to arrange a presentation for all Members of the Council to raise their awareness of the issues associated with the Elections Act 2022
 - **Digital Inclusion Working Group – Update on Recommendations** - the Committee considered a report setting out progress made against each of the recommendations formulated by the Digital Inclusion Working Group and approved by Cabinet. The Committee at its next meeting will be requested to give consideration, to be consistent with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills), as detailed above, that no further update reports be submitted to the Committee subject to assurances that the actions identified in the report are continued and become “business as usual” operational matters.
 - **Financial Management 2022/23 to 2024/25 and Framework for Change 2020 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2022/23 – September Update** – this was the usual report

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submitted to each meeting setting out the latest position with regards to the Council's revenue budget and capital programme

- **Work Programme** - the report 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; updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and updated on issues considered at previous meetings of the Committee.
- **Cabinet Member Update Report** - The Committee considered, as is the usual practice, the most recent report from the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services.
- **Overview and Scrutiny Management Board**

A meeting of the Management Board was held on 8 November 2022. A summary of the key items considered at the meeting is provided below:

 - **2021/22 Outturn Review of Council Wholly Owned Companies** - the Management Board considered a report the aim of which was to allow Members to carry out effective scrutiny of council companies which gave a level of assurance that both the Council's interests and the services or products provided by companies to our residents, were safe and well managed and offered good value for money. It was noted that following consideration of the consolidated report for the 3 companies at the meeting the extract for each company would be considered by the respective individual Overview and Scrutiny Committees in the next cycle.
 - **Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Scrutiny Link - Councillor Howard** - The Management Board considered a briefing from Councillor Christine Howard, Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee (LCRO&S) – Scrutiny Link that provided an update on the recent activities of the LCRO&S.
 - **Centre For Governance and Scrutiny – Newsletters** - The Management Board considered a briefing note that updated on the latest three Centre for Governance and Scrutiny's Newsletters received during the September/October 2022 period.
 - **Update on Working Groups** - The Management Board considered a briefing note that updated on the current position of on-going Working Groups established by the four Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- **Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

A meeting of the Committee was held on 1 December 2022. A summary of the key items considered at the meeting is provided below:

 - Development of the next Local Transport Plan for the Liverpool City Region
 - Work Programme Update

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to be held on 19 January 2023. Information on all meetings and membership of the LCRCAO&S can be obtained using the following link

<https://moderngov.merseytravel.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=365&Year=0>

At the Council meeting held on 29 September 2022, Councillor Howard was appointed as the Council's Scrutiny Link on the Committee in place of Councillor Waterfield.

School Appeals

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

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The academic year continues to be a busy time for the Clerk to Education Appeals. Between November and December, 20 LEA appeals were heard, and 4 Diocese (Church of England voluntary aided schools) appeals were scheduled. Ten Archdiocese (Catholic voluntary aided schools) appeals were heard.

Legislation that enabled school appeals to be heard remotely were brought in under Covid rules. Initially this change was due to last until 30 September 2022. However, following consultation, the changes to school appeals have been made permanent and they will continue to be held remotely. The arrangements proved popular with Panel members and officers with virtually no negative feedback from parents/guardians.

Following the permanent exclusion from Maricourt Catholic High School, at the request of the pupil's parent, an Independent Review Panel (IRP) has been convened for 16 December, 2022. The IRP is an impartial body convened to review the head teacher's decision to permanently the pupil. In reviewing the decision, the IRP consider the interests and circumstances of the excluded pupil, including the circumstances under which the pupil was excluded, and have regard to the interests of other pupils and people working at the school.

The IRP may:

- uphold the exclusion decision
- recommend that the governing body reconsiders its decision
- quash the decision and direct that the governing body considers the exclusion again.

An IRP does not have the power to reinstate an excluded pupil. Nor does it have the power to remove the exclusion from a pupil's record. The Independent Review Panel's decision is binding upon the pupil, parents, governing board, head teacher and local authority

Civic and Mayoral Services

- The Charity Quiz Night on 3rd November was a great success raising just under £600 on the night,
- Following the quiz night, the next large event was Remembrance Sunday once again this was impeccably observed across the borough with another large public attendance.
- The Mayor's Christmas Toy Appeal was launched on 21st November and will run until 22nd December, as always, the response to the appeal is always fantastic even in the current cost of living crisis.
- Planning is now very much underway for the first of three Freedom of the Borough Presentations to be held in 2023 with the first being on Thursday 26th January for the NHS Organisations. The HMS Mersey presentation will follow on 13th April and then Alex Greenwood's Presentation on a date yet to be confirmed.
- We have also launched the next two charity events, the first is on 80's night on Saturday 18th February, and the second is the Gala Charity Ball that takes place on Saturday 1st April, tickets are available now for both events

Member Development

Member Development Steering Group (MDSG)

The MDSG held its first meeting on 1 November 2022 and considered reports on (i) MDSG Terms of Reference, (ii) Member Development in Sefton Council - the Current Position; and (iii) Member Development in Sefton – Next Steps. The MDSG is leading the Council's application for the North-West Charter for Elected Member Development and the Council on 19 January 2023 will be requested to give approval to the Leader of the Council signing the Declaration of Commitment to the principles included in the Charter and its intention to achieve Level 1 Member Development Charter Status.

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A survey on Member Development was circulated to all Members of the Council prior to Christmas for completion on the **Your Sefton Your Say** feedback system by 23 January 2023. The results of the survey will be submitted the next meeting of the Steering Group on 14 February 2023.

Electoral Services

Annual Canvass of the Register of Electors

The annual canvass to update the register of electors is underway and initial contact has been made with the 130,500 residential properties on our register database. Work will continue through the autumn months to update the register with those areas with substantial new developments being targeted as well as promoting electoral registration with young people. The new 2023 Register of Electors will be published on the 1 December 2022.

Linacre Ward

Following the passing of Councillor Gordon Friel, the vacancy for the office of Councillor in Linacre Ward was filled by Cllr Daniel McKee (Labour).

Elections Act 2022

Progress of the Elections Act 2022 has been relatively slow, despite a huge amount of work being undertaken to develop policy to introduce each new element of the Act. This was also impacted by Ministerial changes. The new Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities is The Rt Hon Greg Clark MP with strategic oversight of the Department's business. The Minister of State at the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for London: Paul Scully MP with responsibility for the Electoral Integrity Programme.

Ministers have made some key decisions which are summarised below:

1. Voter identification implementation has been moved from December 2022 to January 2023. The policy will be in place for scheduled polls in May 2023 and the voter card application service is expected to go live in January 2023.
2. Postal vote handling and secrecy measures will now be implemented after the May 2023 polls. They will most likely come into force in Autumn 2023.
3. The voter card, or electoral identification document, could be an A4 paper-based document with inherent security features, such as watermarks and holograms.
4. The voter card application deadline will be six working days ahead of a poll. This will enable central production and delivery management, removing pressure on local authorities in the immediate lead-up to a poll.
5. Electoral Registration Officers will be able to appoint an emergency proxy up until 5pm on polling day for electors whose photo ID is no longer available to them after the application deadline (in the case of their voter id being lost or destroyed).

The delay in pushing back the implementation of Voter ID to January 2023 will have a significant impact on preparations for the May 2024 elections as its introduction will coincide with other key time events in the run up to the elections.

A Voter ID card will only be required if electors don't hold requisite means of photographic identification. Further details will emerge once secondary legislation is in place and guidance issued on implementation of this part of the Act.

Other measures which will be introduced:

1. Change of voting and candidacy rights for EU citizens – June 2023
2. Online Postal Vote Applications – July 2023
3. Remove the 15-year ceiling for overseas electors – July 2023
4. Requirement for existing postal voters to re-apply every 3 years – January 2024
5. Limit the numbers of electors someone can act as a proxy for – May 2024

Boundary Reviews

The Boundary Commission for England have now confirmed that an electoral review of Sefton will take place starting in March 2023

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It is nearly 20 years since our last review, which culminated in all-out elections in 2004. The outcome of the review will be the Commission recommending to government the number of councillors we have and the number and geographical make-up of the wards in the borough. The Commissioners will consider the warding arrangements in the borough based on the principles of equality of electors, community identity and the effectiveness and convenience of local government. Interestingly, unlike parliamentary reviews which are based on factual evidence from an earlier point in time, they will base their recommendations on the estimated borough population in 2029.

The process will start in March 2023 with final recommendations going to government in April 2024 in time for all-out elections in 2026 (we have a fallow year in 2025). The Boundary Commissioners will brief all Members on 17 November 2022 via a Teams meeting. The Council have recently received a request from Thornton Parish Council to undertake a Community Governance Review to consider proposals to extend the existing parish boundaries. In light of the Boundary Commission undertaking a review of Sefton, Thornton Parish Council have been advised that their request and any similar requests to create new parish or amend existing boundaries will be postponed until the Boundary Commission final recommendations have been agreed and actioned.

The Parliamentary Boundary Review is still scheduled to be completed in July 2023. The next Parliamentary General Election must be called no later than December 2024.

Legal Services

- **Children and Social Care Team**

The Children's and Social Care Team have worked through a very difficult period for the client departments and continues to face unprecedented levels of demand on the service. The impact of the pandemic has brought increased pressures and there has been a significant rise in court proceedings which has been a very challenging time for the team. Nationally there has been a significant and sustained rise in children being deemed at risk during Covid and Sefton have had a rise in care proceedings during this period which together with cases not being able to be concluded due to Covid restrictions has brought increased workloads for the team. There also continues to be a rise in cases with an international element.

- **Contracts**

The Legal Contracts team remains extremely busy, uniquely supporting procurement and contracting activity across the entire spectrum of Council departments and services and having to prioritise limited resource based on the complexity/value/risk of particular projects and contracts.

The team continues to provide essential legal support and play a key role in helping to shape and structure major development and regeneration projects under the Growth Plan, in particular the MLEC project, other regeneration projects in Southport and Bootle, and the continuing transformation of the CLAC. An increasing amount of capacity is being dedicated to the Council's efforts to transform its social care and public health services, including reviewing the positions under existing contracts/services and proactively helping to structure new services including the Council's first ventures into establishing its own tailored frameworks/dynamic purchasing systems.

The team continues to be busy advising on a stream of ICT-related work, often to very tight timeframes where service continuity is essential. The stream of highways and infrastructure work continues apace in particular advising around the latest round of LCRCA grant funding on

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various highway schemes, and also many works/construction-type projects both for the Council itself and for schools which are very often critical in nature and risk even if modest in value.

The team continues to be heavily involved in advising on the Council's commercialisation ventures including initiatives, and the nuanced issues around how the Council interacts with its wholly-owned companies such as SHOL, Sandway, SND and advising on the pros and cons of different commercialisation options, e.g. proposals for food & drink concessions involving SHOL.

The team is also advising on the Council's initiatives to re-enter the council housing market including potential grant funding from Homes England and other housing support programmes, and on the subsidy control aspects of many funding schemes including the Government's 'Levelling Up' agenda. The after-effects of Covid pandemic continues to impact the Council's procurement and contracting activity which Legal Contracts supports, including ongoing variations reacting to the pandemic, extensions of existing contracts to endure service continuity in a sub-optimal market for fresh procurement) and numerous post-Covid recovery schemes particularly around social care provision, work restart schemes, mental health schemes, etc.

Brexit also continues to have a transformative effect on the Council's contracting and procurement activity and Legal Contracts continues to provide proactive advice around forthcoming changes to the UK's public procurement regime (both the general regime, and the proposals for a bespoke health and social care regime) and new subsidy control (formerly state aid).

The Legal Contracts team also continues to provide strategic advice on best practice and risk mitigation in light of the Caller Report, especially around the Council's development and regeneration projects including advising commissioners on procurement best practice to mitigate scope for procurement challenges.

- **Prosecutions and Regulation**

The Litigation and Regulatory team continue to be busy working across a range of prosecution, regulation, information and compliance issues supporting a wide range of Council functions. The Prosecution team successfully resisted an appeal against refusal of a taxi licence in the magistrates' court, obtained two warrant of entry's and the sundry debt team recovered £11,271.53, giving a total of £145,5021.16 recovered this year.

The team also provides employment law advice on a range of day to day and strategic matters for both the Council and the schools in the Borough. The team also have conduct of all of the Council's employment tribunal cases and a broad range of cases for schools under service level agreements. The team has been providing strategic support on high profile employment work including recruitment issues and incentives in Children's Services and a proposal to apply for immigration sponsorship licenses for overseas social workers.

- **Property and Planning**

The Property team continue to have a heavy caseload, and have by way of example, just concluded 2 large projects with sizable capital receipts for the Council.

PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

Operational Issues

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

Predominantly, work and support are 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 issues. The challenge continues to be the recruitment and retention of Social Work staff combined with developing improvements in the service area overall.

The majority of the HR team are working from home with agile working at office sites as required and in accordance with the advice and guidance from the Health and Safety team.

Matters relating to disciplinary, grievance and dignity at work continue to be lesser than usual. Formal meetings are being held via Microsoft Teams, although in person meetings are arranged 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 but can be arranged in person as necessary.

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

Pay & Grading and Establishment Control Team

Job evaluation is undertaken relative to all Council and School posts for new or revised roles and relative to any operational and service reviews to maximise efficiencies as part of restructuring exercises across the Council. Team members are involved in service reviews and work to support transformational proposals and potential changes to service delivery.

The Establishment Control team are responsible for building any revised structures and changes to reporting hierarchies into the Councils operating systems. Service managers are responsible for advising the Establishment control officers of these changes.

The Establishment Control deal with all requests in relation to the release of vacancies, changes of hours, temporary arrangements. These changes are mapped to ensure correct payments are made, hierarchical organisational structures are appropriate and operational processes are effectively maintained. A review of the EC forms used by managers has been completed and a revised suite of forms and guidance is now available for use.

Establishment Control review safeguarding checks held against posts e.g. Disclosure and Barring Service, Health Care Professional Council (HCPC) etc and the team manages and controls the temporary end dates relative to all fixed term contracts and provides establishment control information reports for the Council and schools.

Regrading applications and appeals are processed in line with the Council protocol.

The team undertakes the review of HAY graded positions for new posts and the evaluation of HAY posts stemming from any revised proposals to the HAY grading structure.

The team manage the Matrix contract relative to the recruitment of Agency workers. Agency recruitment is currently at an all-time high relative to social worker and associated positions especially within Children's Services

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The team manage sickness absence data, including production of management reports, sickness absence analysis and quarterly absence figures for SLT.

Officers are involved with Employment Tribunal claims (approx. 580) relative to employees seeking backdating of amendments to Term Time Only salary calculations. Consultations are ongoing in relation to the potential settlement of these claims following the recent Court of Appeal case.

Within the Policy unit the officers undertake regular reviews of policy, procedures and guidance and introduce new policies as required in line with current legislation. They are also involved in Corporate Equalities initiatives, staff support groups, responding to Freedom of Information and subject access requests, and assistance with mandatory training for managers.

Transactional HR Payroll & Pension (THRP) Services

There are still issues with Monthly Data Collection (MDC) for the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) which we are working with MHR and Merseyside Pension Fund to resolve. The last file to be sent was for May 2022. A meeting is scheduled with MPF to see if a 6-month return can be submitted to enable Sefton to get up to date.

Issues were also found with Teachers MDC and a meeting was held and the issues are now resolved.

Teachers Pensions Monthly data collection (MDC) moves to Monthly Contribution Reconciliation (MCR) has been delayed until 1st July 2023 and a further delay may be requested as the iTrent software has several known issues.

The staff are still learning the new system are still working extremely hard and long hours to ensure all staff are paid on time.

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.

The Local Government pay award from 1st April 2022 has been agreed and is being processed in December 2022 pay. The Teachers pay award has also been agreed backdated to 1st September 2022 and again is being processed in December 2022.

Children's Services.

HR continue to support Children's Social Care as they continue to move along in their improvement Journey. Ongoing support involves supporting them to maintain and control their establishment in order to have the right people in the right posts to support Sefton's Children and Families. Work continues on the development of new teams, such as the Complex Safeguarding Hub, named My Space by Sefton's Young People along with Targeted Family Support, and ongoing work with the potential re-opening of Cherry Road Children's Home. A Business Support Services review continues, supported jointly by Strategic Support and HR with the aim of reforming the Service area to provide more effective Business Support Services. Recruitment and Retention incentives have been reviewed and work is ongoing to strengthen the effectiveness of these. Recruitment continues to the posts with the Academy only a very small number of which remain vacant. The development remains an interesting time and HR will continue to be there to provide the right support for growth on their improvement journey.

Health Unit

During October and November 2022, a total of 151 referrals for SMBC employees were made to the Health Unit. This is a decrease of 14.69% when compared to the same period in the previous 12 months in which there were 177 referrals.

Referrals during this latest period included Education Excellence (54.97%), Adult Social Care (11.26%) and Communities 9.93%). As usual the main reasons were stress and mental health related (49.68%), chronic medical illness (21.85%) and musculoskeletal (12.58%).

Face to face appointments for counselling and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy support are due to resume in January 2023. An exact start date is yet to be confirmed but like the other support provided through the Health Unit these therapies will also be available via telephone and video calls. Employees will be able to choose which they prefer.

Workforce Learning and Development (CLC)

Apprenticeships

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

We recruited two Occupational Therapy (OT) trainees in September 2022 to join the **Level 6 Occupational Therapy Degree** in March 2023, they were successfully interviewed by Sheffield Hallam University and were offered a place on the course. The degree will take 3 years to complete and on completion the trainees will be able to register with the Health and Care Professions (HCPC) Council.

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 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 170 Sefton Council and schools' staff.
- **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, 125 staff have attended and completed the course, further sessions are being planned from May 2023.
- The development of a **Personalisation Training Programme** for students, ASYEs and for new any starters working across Adult Social Care, who have not undertaken this training previously.
- Working with senior managers in Adult Social Care to develop a training programme for the Learning Disabilities Team.

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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 Director training is scheduled to take place on 14th and 15th December 2022. The Service Manager session is scheduled to take place on 26th and 27th April 2023.
- Designed a team building session for Children's Services Service Managers, to be delivered on 31st January 2023. The aim of the session is to build collaborative working relationships across the service, to prepare the managers for their Insights Leadership training scheduled to take place in April 2023.
- Developing a core training offer for Children's Services which will include an essential training for Social Workers and Managers.

We delivered a Culture session to a cross section of Senior Managers to explore our culture and our teams from different perspectives (organisational, own peer group, service areas) and looking to the future which included the positive elements of Sefton's culture now. We are planning to replicate these sessions with a cross section of middle managers sometime in January/February 2023.

Strategic Support

Performance & Business Intelligence

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 continues to support the Integrated Care System (ICS), leading on Population Health Management workstream and has now completed population health profiles for each Sefton Ward.

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. The team has recently begun to process legacy records stored at the former Thomas Gray School site.

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 the Children's Social Care Improvement plan. This extends to the options appraisal for In-House Children's Residential Homes, organising Christmas events for Cared for and Cared Experience Young People, plus supporting the Mayor's Christmas Toy appeal.

Procurement

It is now anticipated that the new Procurement Legislation will be finalised in Parliament late 2023. It is understood that the Cabinet Office will be facilitating Procurement Policy training at that time which the Procurement Team will be required to attend. This will enable the Council to adopt the changes in legislation to ensure the Council is fully compliant in our Procurement Procedures and Regulations which will require updating at that time.

The Council Social Value Policy is being followed up with over sixty members of staff being enrolled during January 2023 to understand how to practically apply the policy in tender evaluations, measuring the delivery of Social Value through Contract Management and Reporting.

Communications

The Communications team continue to develop the main Council website, and noticeable improvements have been made, with even more developments due to go live in the New Year. Changes to the recruitment pages of the website will support a refreshed approach to marketing and promotion of job vacancies, particularly for niche roles.

The email marketing system, e-shot, has now gone live and is being used to update residents. Businesses and elected members of key news stories and updates from across the Council.

Communications officers have been supporting colleagues on regeneration projects across the borough, from [Carnegie Library in Crosby](#), to [Bootle Strand](#) and Canalside, to the new [Marine Lake Events Centre](#), Southport.

The recent cold snap meant that a high volume of Winter messaging was put on to the Council's main social media channels and website(s). The launch of the [Sefton Warm Places](#) scheme came just in time, complemented by the continued posting of the [Cost of Living messages](#) alongside shared messaging from Health partners (Sefton Partnership) regarding access to services, vaccinations and pharmacies.

The Communications Team have been providing significant support to colleagues in Children's Services; mainly with the Mayor's Christmas Toy Appeal, recruitment and organising a Christmas Event for Care Experienced Young People. The team handled media enquiries in relation to the appointment of the Children's Commissioner.

To support with Member Development the team has organised a series of media training sessions for elected members and Senior Officers to take place in 2023.

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