



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGENERATION AND SKILLS)

**MEETING HELD AT THE TOWN HALL, SOUTHPORT
ON TUESDAY 17TH JANUARY, 2023**

PRESENT: Councillor Dowd (in the Chair)
Councillor Howard (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Corcoran, Dodd, Hansen, Chris Maher,
Page, Sir Ron Watson and Webster

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Atkinson and Hardy

27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Myers.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with Paragraph 9 of the Council's Code of Conduct, the following declaration of personal interest was made and the Member concerned remained in the room but took no part in the consideration of the item and did not vote:

Member	Minute No.	Nature of Interest
Councillor Howard	Minute No. 32 - Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited - 2021/22 Outturn Review of Council Wholly Owned Companies	Is a board member of Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited

29. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

30. UPDATE ON THE PROGRESSION OF THE LIVERPOOL CITY REGION DIGITAL INCLUSION STRATEGY - PRESENTATION

The Committee received a presentation from Andrea Watts, Executive Director of People that updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (CA) Digital Inclusion Strategy (the Strategy).

Ms. Watts advised the Committee:

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- About the key components of connectivity, equipment and skills
- That Digital inclusion was a priority set out in the CA's Corporate Plan; and that the CA's Digital Infrastructure project included a substantial social value element that had significant ambitions towards supporting digital access and inclusion, as well as jobs and apprenticeships
- Work to date which included the proposals being formulated that would deliver the Digital Inclusion workstream, with the aim of targeting provision, providing a joined-up approach with other programmes, and ensuring that residents across Liverpool City Region had the abilities, access and support needed to take part in a modern digital life
- About the Digital Inclusion Alliance Network whose premise was to build a membership network that would drive the Digital Inclusion agenda from a strategic perspective, harnessing a range of key sector representatives both from statutory services, but also bring in employers, community groups, housing providers, education providers and health to name but a few
- About the Digital Inclusion Pledge and that as part of the membership of the Digital Alliance Network, members would be invited to sign a Digital Inclusion Pledge that would commit organisations to supporting digital inclusion efforts and would be co-designed via the Taskforce underpinned by a number of principles
- About the Digital Champions Model that built upon former schemes and would include support through trained LCR Digital Champions. This would enable volunteers to be trained who would provide holistic support and guidance to individuals who were digitally excluded, helping them get online and make the most of a modern digital life
- About Digital Support Intervention Pilots that informed by data and local authority colleagues, other areas of intervention would be explored that helped target digital exclusion –e.g., social broadband tariffs, recycled digital kit or free mobile data for those most in need
- About the next steps which included the inaugural Digital Inclusion Taskforce Meeting on 23rd January 2023; the completion of several surveys gathering lived experience of digital inclusion through programmes including Households into Work and the Department for Work & Pension's Restart Scheme; working closely with UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) colleagues in the Combined Authority; funding that was expected to be committed by the end of the financial year.

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

- Areas of the borough with high populations of residents in their "third age" and efforts to promote digital inclusion
- Barriers to digital inclusion due to financial constraints associated with the cost of ICT equipment and broadband contracts

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- Digital exclusion accessing health services online
- Good work undertaken by Library Service staff helping service users with the use of ICT equipment
- Cross-generational support offered by schools to help residents with ICT skills such as “silver surfer clubs”
- Recycling of out-of-date ICT equipment

RESOLVED:

That Ms Watts be thanked for her informative presentation.

31. SANDWAY HOMES LIMITED - 2021/22 OUTTURN REVIEW OF COUNCIL WHOLLY OWNED COMPANIES

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services the aim of which was to allow Members to carry out effective scrutiny of the Council company Sandway Homes Limited to provide a level of assurance that both the Council's interests and the services or products provided by the company to our residents, were safe and well managed and offered good value for money.

The report provided information on the aims of the Sandway Homes Annual Report; expected outcomes; the Council's objectives for the company; the Council's governance arrangements including the governance arrangements in place for the company in 2021/22; the key objectives for the Company as per the Business Plan in 2021/22; a review of performance for 2021/22; key areas of risk during the year; evaluation of performance in 2021/22 compared to Council objectives for setting up the company and the approved Business Plan for the year; and the Delivery and Improvement Plans for 2022/23.

The Committee was requested to:

- provide feedback on key issues arising from the report and to advise on further information that would support the scrutiny review in future years
- provide feedback on current performance (operational and financial) and how this supported the Council's strategic aims and ambitions and aligned with the objectives and reasons for setting up the companies; and
- seek clarification or additional information from officers in order to carry out the scrutiny function

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

- the alleged imposition of charges to obtain copies of annual reports and audit of accounts of wholly owned Council companies

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- the potential for elected Members who were not board members of Council wholly owned companies to attend board meetings
- it was stated and noted in response that lots of private companies receive major public funding but that did not give the public the right to attend such companies' board meetings
- bearing in mind the wholly owned companies were 100% underwritten by the Council it would be beneficial for non-Cabinet elected Members to have access to information about the companies
- it was stated that as part of good governance, accountability and transparency regular information was provided to members through Cabinet as the shareholder via the annual business plan update which is in the public domain and providing this report for scrutiny by members
- members were advised that should there be a material variation to the delivery of the business plan that this would be reported at the earliest opportunity to cabinet in the first instance
- commissioning and tendering procedures undertaken by the company
- the dichotomy of the company operating under private sector rules but being wholly public funded
- if local authorities were adequately funded by Government then Councils would not need to operate such schemes
- cashflow being heavily predicated on sales income, and it was noted that this would continue to be a significant consideration for the Company in the next period
- the current position in respect of open market sales and market fluctuations that could impact the company

RESOLVED:

That the report on Sandway Homes Limited - 2021/22 Outturn Review of Council Wholly Owned Companies be noted.

32. SEFTON HOSPITALITY OPERATIONS LIMITED (SHOL) - 2021/22 OUTTURN REVIEW OF COUNCIL WHOLLY OWNED COMPANIES

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services the aim of which was to allow Members to carry out effective scrutiny of the Council company Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited to provide a level of assurance that both the Council's interests and the services or products provided by the company to our residents, were safe and well managed and offered good value for money.

The report provided information on the aims of the Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited Annual Report; expected outcomes; the Council's objectives for the company; the Council's governance arrangements including the governance arrangements in place for the company in

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2021/22; the key objectives for the Company as per the Business Plan in 2021/22; a review of performance for 2021/22; financial performance 2021/22; key areas of risk during the year; evaluation of performance in 2021/22 compared to Council objectives for setting up the company and the approved Business Plan for the year; and the Delivery and Improvement Plans for 2022/23.

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

- in respect of the Business Plan and company's projected loss during 2021-22 of £178,350; and the cessation of the previous annual subsidy from the Council to CLAC of £250,000 per annum and the potential impact this may have on the Council's revenue budget
- how the company was supported or underwritten by the Council
- the low level of staff turnover and the high percentage of staff employed at the Lake House being Sefton residents
- the successful operation of the Lake House since opening and particularly over the recent Christmas period
- bookings already being taken for Christmas 2023
- positive Lake House customer feedback

RESOLVED:

That the report on Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited 2021/22 Outturn Review of Council Wholly Owned Companies be noted.

33. SEFTON ECONOMIC STRATEGY

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Director of Place (Economic Growth and Housing) that updated on the outcome of the Sefton Economic Strategy (the Strategy) consultation and next steps.

The report advised that the Strategy was last produced in 2018 and that the subsequent Action Plan was approved by Cabinet Member – Regeneration and Skills in December 2019; that the delivery of the Action Plan was almost immediately disrupted in March 2020 with the outbreak of

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the Covid-19 pandemic and part of the emergency response was the production of the Council's Sefton Strategic Recovery Plan to help the Council prioritise its emergency support activities; that Sefton had since commissioned Mickledore to undertake further work in the refresh and repurposing of the Strategy in 2022; and that this followed previous well received work undertaken by Mickledore during the pandemic which resulted in a Covid-19 Response report and Sefton Prospectuses outlining key opportunities for attracting new inward investment with a specific focus on Bootle and Southport.

The report also provided information on the Strategy consultation and annex A attached to the report detailed a summary of the results of the consultation exercise.

The Sefton Economic Strategy-final version, that was approved by Cabinet at its meeting held on 3 November 2022, was attached to the report as annex B. The key headlines of the Strategy related to:

- Economy and income levels
- Business activity
- Out-commuting
- Employment and skills
- Place
- Disparities in Sefton

The report concluded that the Strategy would focus on the four key thematic objectives of employment and opportunities for work, business growth and investment, regenerated places and social inclusion and access for all; and that the next steps would include:

- further consultation with the Health and Wellbeing board in January 2023, to ensure that key aspects of Health and Wellbeing objectives were integrated in the development of specific actions and projects
- ensuring that Net Zero and Sustainability links were identified in the relevant actions
- the production of a detailed Performance framework in the form of an Excel Spreadsheet that would include all the actions necessary to deliver the objectives of the Strategy

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

- external funding elements of the Strategy
- had the Council made applications for Levelling-Up funding to contribute to capital projects that support the Strategy. It was noted that Sefton had been placed by the Government in category 3, the lowest level of priority for such funding; that two Council bids for funding in round 1 had been unsuccessful and that feedback was awaited from Government on two bids submitted for round 2

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- the Council was progressing the Strategy in the face of 50% reductions to its budget
- encouragement and promotion of Sefton to harness the spending power of disabled households known as the “purple pound”, building on existing engagement with stakeholders and community groups
- potential actions to bring back into use vacant and underutilised floorspace (vacant shops /offices etc) to support other uses and the need to work with the private sector to achieve these aims given private sector ownership of the assets in question
- unemployment and its impact on mental health and wellbeing, particularly parents/carers leaving the job market to look after children in their care
- women leaving the job market due to medical issues such as the menopause
- the Strategy document was a great framework to support the growth of the borough’s economy

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report updating on the outcome of the Sefton Economic Strategy consultation and next steps be noted; and
- (2) further updates on progress for the Sefton Economic Strategy Action Plan be submitted to the Committee when appropriate.

34. 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 any items for pre-scrutiny from the Key Decision Forward Plan; that updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee; that sought consideration of the views of the Cabinet Member – Locality Services and the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services in response to a request of the Committee concerning the implementation of recommendations arising from the Effectiveness of the Council’s Enforcement Activity Working Group; that sought approval to no further updates being provided on the implementation of recommendations arising from the Digital Inclusion Working Group; and that updated on issues associated with the reporting on the implementation of recommendations arising from the Digital Inclusion Working Group.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Work Programme for 2022/23, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved;
- (2) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted;

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- (3) in respect of the implementation of recommendations arising from the Effectiveness of the Council's Enforcement Activity Working Group:
 - (a) the views of the Cabinet Member – Locality Services and the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services be noted;
 - (b) the Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services be requested to provide a more complete response to the next meeting of the Committee; and
 - (c) Councillor Lappin be invited to the next meeting of the Committee to discuss this matter;
- (4) no further updates be provided on the implementation of recommendations arising from the Digital Inclusion Working Group;
- (5) the presentation by the Chief Executive of the Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority on the Service Delivery Plan 2022/23 be made to the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 7 March 2023; and
- (6) the informal meeting of the Committee to review the adoption of a strategic approach for waste containment/disposal across the borough, scheduled to be held on 23 January 2023, be postponed and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer be requested to arrange a fresh informal meeting.

35. CABINET MEMBER REPORTS - OCTOBER 2022 TO JANUARY 2023

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that included the most recent reports from the Cabinet Members for Communities and Housing; Health and Wellbeing (Green Sefton element); Locality Services; Planning and Building Control; and Regeneration and Skills.

Councillor Hardy, Cabinet Member – Communities and Housing presented her report and highlighted the issue of damp mould and condensation and that a review of the Housing Enforcement Policy would be undertaken.

Councillor Atkinson, Cabinet Member – Regeneration and Skills presented her report and highlighted the following issues:

- NEET Reduction and Early Intervention Service

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- Sefton's success in winning the Federation of Small Businesses award for the best NW Council response to Covid support for businesses

RESOLVED: That:

- (1) the update reports from the Cabinet Members for Communities and Housing; Health and Wellbeing (Green Sefton element); Locality Services; Planning and Building Control; and Regeneration and Skills be noted;
- (2) congratulations be extended to the Assistant Director of Place (Economic Growth and Housing) and his team for their achievement in winning the Federation of Small Businesses award for the best NW Council response to Covid support for businesses; and
- (3) Councillors Atkinson and Hardy be thanked for their attendance at the meeting.