



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

**MEETING HELD AT THE BIRKDALE ROOM, TOWN HALL,
SOUTHPORT
ON TUESDAY 13TH JUNE, 2023**

PRESENT: Councillor Bradshaw (in the Chair)
Councillors Evans, Grace, Christine Maher,
McGinnity, McKee, Shaw and Sir Ron Watson

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Lappin

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair, Councillor Bradshaw, welcomed Members to the first meeting of Sefton Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) in the 2023/24 municipal year; especially welcomed Councillors Evans, McKee, Murphy and Sir Ron Watson as newly appointed members of the Committee; and expressed her thanks to Councillors Carlin, Robinson and Shaw and former Councillor Bennett for their help and involvement on the Committee during the previous year.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Byrom, D'Albuquerque, Killen and Murphy.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

5. DEBT MANAGEMENT

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services that detailed the steps being taken to manage uncollected debt owed to the Council; indicating that the Audit and Governance Committee would be asked to recommence considering write-offs of bad debt over £10,000, with the S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer reviewing requests under £10,000; and which provided an update on performance information relating to the Council's contracted Enforcement Agents.

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The report indicated that Sefton Council raised a significant proportion of its total income through local taxes and charges and had a duty to recover sums outstanding; that at a time of significant financial pressure for the Council, income collection was particularly important to ensure that valuable frontline services continued; that the management of this income was a key business area for the Council; and that the report sought to provide insight into the debt position and the risks associated with it.

The report also provided information on the Corporate Debt Policy, annual charges raised, current arrears outstanding, Council Tax and Business Rates collection performance, bad debt for write off including enforcement agent performance, bad debt provisions and future service enhancements.

Attached as Appendix 1 to the report was the Corporate Debt Policy – Revised May 2023.

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

- The management of debt relating to schemes supported by the Government
- The operation of the payment hotline that was available 24 hours a day 7 days a week
- The special payment arrangements which must be made with the agreement of the Council and could only be accepted by Direct Debit
- Regarding the Exceptional Hardship Payment Fund, who decided the criteria of “exceptional circumstances” when a claimant was seeking a reduction of their Council Tax with a discretionary award
- Did the Council have a percentage of debt write-off that it would not exceed
- The rate of increase in the amount of Sundry Debt as detailed in Table 3.2 of the report
- Was there a de minimis for pursuing council tax debt for example, if someone owed 80p would the formal process of writing to them take place

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report detailing the steps being taken to manage uncollected debt owed to the Council be noted;
- (2) it be noted that the Audit and Governance Committee would be asked to recommence reviewing requests to write-off bad debts over £10,000, with the S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer reviewing requests under £10,000;
- (3) the information detailing the performance of the Council’s contracted Enforcement Agents up to 31st March 2023 be noted;

and

- (4) the Corporate Debt Policy attached as Appendix 1 to the report be noted.

6. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24, SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPICS AND KEY DECISION FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that sought views on the draft Work Programme for 2023/24, the identification of potential topics for scrutiny reviews to be undertaken by a Working Group(s) appointed by the Committee or by informal meetings of the Committee; the identification of any items for pre-scrutiny from the Key Decision Forward Plan; updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and sought views on training for Members on IT and cyber security in particular, during 2023/24.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Work Programme for 2023/24, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved;
- (2) it be agreed that any future reviews during the year be dealt with by informal meetings of the Committee rather than via Working Groups; and consideration be given to the selection of a topic(s) for review at the next meeting of the Committee; and
- (3) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

7. WELFARE REFORM AND ANTI-POVERTY REFERENCE GROUP - UPDATE

Further to Minute No. 33 of the meeting held on 10 January 2023 the Committee considered a Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty update of the Head of Health and Wellbeing and Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services.

The update provided information on the latest meeting of the Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty (WRAP) Cabinet Member Reference Group and in particular on activities associated with:

- the cost-of-living crisis
- period poverty – a Sefton update
- Sustainable food
- Community pantry update
- Sefton child poverty launch event
- Sefton Council housing – cost-of-living challenges
- Warm hubs

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- Emergency limited assistance scheme update

Councillor Lappin, Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services presented her update.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the update on the operation of the Members' Welfare Reform Reference Group be noted; and
- (2) Councillor Lappin be thanked for her update.

8. CABINET MEMBER REPORT - FEBRUARY 2023 TO JUNE 2023

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.

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

- The high volume of Cleansing related telephone calls received by the Customer Services Contact Centre
- Calls received by the Customer Services Contact Centre in relation to voter ID requirements at the recent local elections
- Reference was made to the 18% of calls to the Customer Services Contact Centre that were abandoned
- The operation of the One Stop Shop from The Atkinson;
- With regard to taxi licensing, concern was expressed at the low number of "black hackney cab" vehicles operating in the Southport area; and that this could impact on residents needing to use such vehicles rather than saloon type hackney vehicles
- Elected Member attendance on courses as part of the Member Development Programme; and that the description of some courses being labelled "mandatory" was not helpful
- Reasons for the delays in finalising the audit of the 2021/2022 Statement of Accounts

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the update report from the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services be noted;
- (2) Councillor Lappin be thanked for her attendance at the meeting; and
- (3) the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services be requested to make a presentation to the next meeting of the Committee on Customer Services Contact Centre related activity including:

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- What activities are undertaken
- How has this changed since Covid-19 pandemic
- What volumes go through
- other performance information
- Why is there a difference between activity at Bootle and Southport
- What channel shift activity is ongoing