

Overview
& Scrutiny



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

DATE: Tuesday 9th January, 2024

TIME: 6.30 pm

VENUE: Committee Room, Town Hall Bootle

Member

Substitute

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Councillor | Councillor |
| Councillor Bradshaw (Chair) | Councillor Harrison |
| Councillor Byrom (Vice-Chair) | Councillor Carragher |
| Councillor D'Albuquerque | Councillor Shaw |
| Councillor Evans | Councillor Shaw |
| Councillor Grace | Councillor Catie Page |
| Councillor Killen | Councillor Myers |
| Councillor McGinnity | Councillor Thomas |
| Councillor McKee | Councillor Roche |
| Councillor Murphy | Councillor Christine Maher |
| Councillor Sir Ron Watson | Councillor Prendergast |

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 - 10)

Minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2023

4. Corporate Communications Update

To receive a presentation from Andrew Daniels, Corporate Communications Manager

5. Air Quality Update 2023

(Pages 11 - 32)

Report of the Assistant Director of Place (Highways and Public Protection)

6. Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax Base for 2024/25 and Review of Council Tax Premiums for Long-Term Empty Properties

(Pages 33 - 98)

Report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services

- 7. Financial Management 2023/24 to 2026/27 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2023/24 - January Update** (Pages 99 - 116)
Report of the **Error! Unknown document property name.**
- 8. Work Programme 2023/24, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan** (Pages 117 - 150)
Report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer
- 9. Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Reference Group - Update** (Pages 151 - 154)
Briefing note of the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services
- 10. Cabinet Member Report - October 2023 to December 2023** (Pages 155 - 178)
Report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer

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THIS SET OF MINUTES IS NOT SUBJECT TO "CALL IN".

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

MEETING HELD AT THE BIRKDALE ROOM, TOWN HALL,
SOUTHPORT
ON TUESDAY 31ST OCTOBER, 2023

PRESENT: Councillor Bradshaw (in the Chair)
Councillors Evans, Grace, Killen, McKee and
Sir Ron Watson

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Lappin

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Byrom (and his substitute Member Councillor Carragher), D'Albuquerque (and his substitute Member Councillor Shaw), McGinnity and Murphy (and her substitute Member Councillor Chris Maher).

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of any disclosable pecuniary interests or personal interests were received.

20. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

21. UPDATE ON PROGRESS OF LIVERPOOL CITY REGION DIGITAL INCLUSION STRATEGY

The Committee received a presentation from Andrea Watts, Executive Director of People, that updated on the Liverpool City Region Digital Inclusion Strategy (the Strategy). Ms. Watts indicated that further to the presentation made to this Committee in January 23, which set out the initial first steps in bringing to life the framework for LCRCA Digital Inclusion Strategy and which included an overview of Sefton's Digital strategy linked to connected Council, empowered residents and business growth; this presentation would detail the progress of Digital Inclusion from a Combined Authority perspective. Ms. Watts highlighted the following matters:

- A reminder of the key components of connectivity – barriers being availability and cost; equipment; and skills
- The developed key workstreams of Digital Inclusion Alliance Network; Digital Champions Model; and Digital Support Intervention Pilots

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- In respect of the Digital Support Intervention Pilots the Digital inclusion Initiative was an industry led programme to tackle digital exclusion; and LCRCA were facilitating the roll-out of 4500 free android tablets, accompanied by 6 months of free Vodaphone mobile connectivity and free in person digital skills training. Wave 1.1 was launched in August 2023 and focused on the DWP Restart Scheme and Ways to Work; and that working with the Digital Inclusion Network members the aim was to continue to support residents between now and July 2024
- Wave 1.2 would take place between November 2023 and January 2024 and would target the roll-out of 600+ devices and sims across the six LCRCA local authority areas and cohorts could include digitally excluded individuals across numerous groups
- Wave 1.3 onwards was to distribute the remaining 3900 devices and feedback would be crucial to assess what was working well with the programme and what was not
- In addition, informed by data and local authority colleagues, other areas of intervention would be explored that helped to target digital exclusion –e.g., social broadband tariffs, recycled digital kit or free mobile data for those most in need
- Other Sefton initiatives to increase the number of public access computers and other devices available to residents and organisations

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

- The age range of participants in the Digital Inclusion Initiative
- The availability of statistics on the number of Sefton residents who did not have internet access
- Did, and how, was contact maintained with cohorts
- The extent of take-up of social broadband tariffs

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Executive Director of People be requested to provide responses to the comments/questions raised by members; and
- (2) Andrea Watts be thanked for her informative presentation.

22. ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY/DISPOSAL POLICY - PRESENTATION

The Committee received a presentation from Paul Reilly, Service Manager - Finance, on the Asset Management Strategy/Disposal Policy. Mr. Reilly 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

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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 and the Asset Disposal Policy; and that an annual review for above documents would be conducted with the next formal review being 6 January 2024; that the policies aligned with the Framework for Change and new capital strategy; and that the documents went through the Council's formal governance process including Cabinet and Council.
- elected Member engagement in the decision-making process and the legislation that provided the framework within which the council operated within.
- Phase 1 asset disposals approved by Cabinet in January 2020; and that further phases were being considered and would progress as a continuous programme subject to necessary approvals.

A Member of the Committee acknowledged that assets were technically classed as such on the Council's Balance Sheet and information was sought on how the Council distinguished between assets and liabilities since some assets required ongoing investment.

RESOLVED:

That Paul Reilly be thanked for his informative presentation.

23. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT 2023/24 TO 2026/27 - REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET UPDATE 2023/24 - OCTOBER UPDATE

Further to Minute No. 70 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 5 October 2023 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 2023/24 revenue budget;
- (2) the current forecast on Council Tax and Business Rates collection for 2023/24; 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.

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

- financial problems were self-evident and information was sought on when solutions would be identified to achieve a balanced budget
- when schemes associated with the Southport Town Deal would be referenced in the capital programme

RESOLVED:

(A) That in respect of the Revenue Budget:

- (1) the current position relating to the 2023/24 revenue budget be noted;
- (2) the actions being taken to refine forecasts and identify mitigating efficiencies to ensure each service achieves a balanced position be noted; and
- (3) the financial risks associated with the delivery of the 2023/24 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

(B) That in respect of the Capital Programme:

- (1) the spending profiles across financial years for the approved capital programme (paragraph 7.1) be noted;
- (2) the latest capital expenditure position as at 31 August 2023 of £11.047m (paragraph 7.16) and that the latest full year forecast is £66.536m (paragraph 7.7) be noted; and
- (3) 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.

24. 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 the views of the Committee on the Work Programme for 2023/24; the identification of potential topics for scrutiny reviews to be undertaken by informal meetings; the identification of any items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan; and that

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updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Work Programme for 2023/24, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted;
- (2) the request for the Committee to select a topic for review at an informal meeting be noted;
- (3) the Key Decision Forward Plans for the period 1 November 2023 to 29 February 2024 and 1 December 2023 to 31 March 2024, as set out in Appendix 3 to the report, be noted; and
- (4) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

25. CABINET MEMBER REPORT - AUGUST 2023 TO OCTOBER 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 number of taxi licence appointments at the One-Stop Shops
- Information was sought on the terms of the petition submitted by “The Voice of the Families” as referred to in the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children’s Services and Safeguarding) update

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the update report from the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services be noted;
- (2) the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer be requested to circulate information to Committee members on the terms of the petition submitted by “The Voice of the Families”; and
- (3) Councillor Lappin be thanked for her attendance at the meeting.

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|--------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Report to: | Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) | Date of Meeting: | 9 th January 2024 |
| Subject: | Air Quality Update 2023 | | |
| Report of: | Assistant Director of Place (Highways and Public Protection) | Wards Affected: | (All Wards); |
| Portfolio: | Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services | | |
| Is this a Key Decision: | No | Included in Forward Plan: | No |
| Exempt / Confidential Report: | No | | |

Summary: To provide an update on local air quality management activities and air quality improvement actions underway in Sefton during 2023

Recommendation(s):

That the report be noted

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

To provide an update to members on the ongoing Local Air Quality Management activities (monitoring and improvement actions) that have taken place in Sefton during 2023.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: N/A

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

There are no direct revenue costs associated with the recommendations in this report.

(B) Capital Costs

There are no direct capital costs associated with the recommendations in this report.

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Implications of the Proposals:

| | |
|---|---|
| Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets): | |
| None – update report only | |
| Legal Implications: | |
| None - update report only | |
| Equality Implications: | |
| There are no equality implications. | |
| Climate Emergency Implications: | |
| The recommendations within this report will | |
| Have a positive impact | Y |
| Have a neutral impact | N |
| 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: Poor air quality can have a major impact on health particularly those already vulnerable e.g. young children, the elderly and those with existing respiratory problems. Measures being implemented to improve air quality therefore contribute to this core purpose</p> |
| <p>Facilitate confident and resilient communities: Interventions to improve air quality, taken by the Local Authority, partners, and the community, demonstrate that mitigation against poor air quality is possible and the interventions actively support making better choices and behavioural change. Improving air quality contributes to improved health, wellbeing, economic activity/productivity and increased personal and community resilience.</p> |
| <p>Commission, broker and provide core services: Local Air Quality Management is a statutory responsibility for the Council</p> |
| <p>Place – leadership and influencer: The management and improvement of air quality is a key aspect of place leadership and creating cleaner, greener and healthier places</p> |
| <p>Drivers of change and reform: The Council continues to explore innovative approaches to monitoring and mitigating poor air quality and encouraging behaviour change. Some of these approaches are set out in the report.</p> |
| <p>Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: There is an established link between poor air quality, poor health, the ability to work/remain economically active and productive. Improving air quality can therefore</p> |

| |
|---|
| contribute to improved productivity and economic prosperity. |
| Greater income for social investment: N/A |
| Cleaner Greener: Poor air quality is an indication of environmental damage and any mitigation measures reduce the impact of this damage. |

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD7471/23) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD5571/23) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

Not applicable

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following the committee meeting.

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Contact Officer: | Greg Martin |
| Telephone Number: | 07971623489 |
| Email Address: | greg.martin@sefton.gov.uk |

Appendices:

There are no appendices to this report

Background Papers:

Sefton's Annual Air Quality Status Reports - <https://www.sefton.gov.uk/environment/air-quality/>

Background

1. Air pollution is associated with a number of adverse health impacts. It is recognised as a contributing factor in the onset of heart disease and cancer. Additionally, air pollution particularly affects the most vulnerable in society: children, the elderly, and those with existing heart and lung conditions. There is also often a strong correlation with equalities issues because areas with poor air quality are also often less affluent areas.
2. The Environment Act 1995 places an ongoing **statutory duty** on Local Authorities to review and assess air quality in their areas, produce a yearly Air

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Quality Annual Status Report (ASR) and implement actions/interventions to improve air quality where poor air quality exists.

- The Air Quality Regulations made under the Act specify the pollutants that must be considered and set standards and objectives for each of the pollutants, which are referred to as National Air Quality Standard (NAQS) Objectives. These are detailed below with the 2 pollutants still of concern in Sefton shown in red text.

The pollutants that must be considered are shown in table 1 below:

Table 1 National Air Quality Standard Objectives

| Pollutant | Description | National Air Quality Standard Objective (NAQS) |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| Benzene | An organic chemical compound emitted by some industrial processes and a constituent of petrol | 5 µg/m³ (Annual Mean) |
| 1,3 Butadiene | A Hydrocarbon based gas released from car exhausts | 2.25µg/m³ (Annual Mean) |
| Carbon Monoxide | An odourless colourless gas produced by incomplete combustion | 10mg/m³ (8 hour mean) |
| Lead | A heavy metal emitted by certain industrial processes | 0.25µg/m³ (Annual Mean) |
| Nitrogen Dioxide | A gas produced by internal combustion engines | 200µg/m³ (1hr mean) not to exceeded more than 18 times per annum. 40µg/m³ (Annual mean) |
| Particulate Matter PM ₁₀ | Particulates less than 10µm in diameter produced by industry and road traffic. | 50µg/m³ (24hr mean) not to be exceeded more than 35 times per annum. 40µg/m³ (Annual mean) |
| Sulphur dioxide | A gas which can be produced when burning fossil fuel and or heavy fuel oil | 266µg/m³ (15 min mean) Not to be exceeded more than 35 times a year 350µg/m³ (1hr mean) Not to be exceeded more than 24 times per year 125µg/m³ (24hr mean) Not to be exceeded more than 3 times a year |

- Where it has been determined that NAQS objectives have been exceeded or are likely to be exceeded an Air Quality Management Area must be declared.
- Through the ongoing review and assessment process it has been concluded that for the following pollutants, Benzene, 1,3 Butadiene, Carbon Monoxide, Lead and Sulphur Dioxide, the NAQS objectives will **not** be exceeded in Sefton and no additional localised actions are required with regard to these pollutants.

6. Additionally evidence obtained through ongoing monitoring, modelling and assessment, shows that air quality in the majority of Sefton (with reference to NO₂ and PM) is deemed to be of a good standard with levels of these pollutants well within the NAQS Objectives given above.
7. There are however areas in the south of the Borough, where due to high levels of traffic and congestion along with other localised pollution sources, levels of NO₂ are above or close to the NAQS limit.

Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs)

8. As reported previously where monitoring/modelling shows an exceedance of the NAQS, an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) must be declared by the Local Authority. Through air pollution monitoring and modelling Four (4) localised areas in South Sefton have been identified where levels of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) have exceeded or are close to the annual average limit of **40 µg/m³**. AQMA's have been declared in these locations as detailed/shown below:

AQMA 2 - Princess Way, Seaforth.

AQMA 3 - Millers Bridge, Bootle.

AQMA 4 - South Road/Crosby Road North, Waterloo.

AQMA 5 - Hawthorne Road, Litherland.

Map 1 Showing Location of Sefton's AQMAs



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AQMA 2-Princess Way, Seaforth

9. AQMA 2 - Princess Way was declared for NO₂ exceedances. The main source of NO₂ in this AQMA is related to HGV traffic. The deep-water berth at the Port of Liverpool is now complete and HGV traffic is anticipated to increase as a result. A major highways scheme is currently being considered by National Highways to accommodate the increase in road traffic because of the port expansion.
10. Several successful air quality actions have been implemented by Sefton to reduce levels of NO₂ in this area. These include assisting in the development and ongoing refinement of port booking systems, development of Sefton's ECOstars fleet recognition scheme, supporting the work to develop the redesigned roundabout improvements and ongoing joint emissions monitoring/enforcement work with the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA).
11. It is recognised, however, that dealing with road traffic related emissions in this area with the potential increase in HGV port traffic is extremely challenging and alternative/innovative measures need to be considered.

AQMA 3 Millers Bridge

12. AQMA 3 - Millers Bridge - was identified for exceedances of the PM₁₀ and NO₂ NAQS objectives. The main contributors to the emissions in this area are HGVs and industrial processes in and around the dock estate.
13. Several successful measures have been implemented in this area as part of the action plan to reduce emissions. Officers continue to work jointly with the Environment Agency to ensure industrial emissions are monitored and controlled effectively in this area, a HGV hurry call system has also been introduced which gives priority to HGV's heading up Millers Bridge, reducing the need for stopping at the traffic lights thus reducing emissions. This major junction has also recently been redesigned as part of the North Liverpool Key Corridor Improvement Scheme to improve traffic flow and reduce waiting times at the traffic lights.
14. As a result of these measures the NAQS objective for PM₁₀ has consistently been met for a number of years. However, this will be kept under review as the port expands in the future.
15. With regard to NO₂ in this AQMA the results of monitoring continue to show some exceedances of the annual NAQS objective. Dealing with NO₂ exceedances in this location is again challenging due to the level of traffic that passes through the junction, physical characteristics of the area and high background levels of pollutants due to its proximity to the port. Any future increase in traffic resulting from the port expansion could also lead to additional exceedances in this area.

AQMA 4 Crosby Road North, South Road Waterloo

16. AQMA 4 was identified for exceedances of the NO₂ NAQS objective. As part the Action Plan to address this exceedance, improvements to the South Road and Haigh Road junction were agreed to improve traffic flow. The junction improvement works have now been completed and the ongoing effectiveness of these in terms of reducing levels of NO₂ in the AQMA is being monitored using diffusion tubes. Monitoring results show that levels of NO₂ in the AQMA have now reduced, to below, the national limit and have remained compliant for the last 3 years. This AQMA is unlikely to be impacted significantly by increasing port related traffic and as such it is likely that the Council will be in a position to revoke this AQMA in the near future.

AQMA 5 Hawthorne Road, Church Road Junction Litherland

17. AQMA 5 was identified for NO₂ NAQS objective exceedances. The main source of the emissions at this location is road traffic. For the last 5 years this AQMA showed compliance with the annual NAQS objective for NO₂. However as with AQMA 2, this site may be affected by the increased emissions due to HGV traffic because of the port expansion and will remain in place.

Air Quality Monitoring

18. To provide accurate data on pollution levels in Sefton and as part of our ongoing duties, officers continue to undertake extensive air pollution monitoring using both DEFRA approved real time automatic monitoring systems and diffusion tubes which provide average annual levels.

19. Sefton operates one of the largest monitoring networks in the City Region with officers consistently review monitoring locations and activities to ensure the air quality situation in the borough is effectively captured.

20. Sefton has recently supplemented its monitoring capability with a number of lower cost air pollution sensors which, although not approved by DEFRA, do provide real time air pollution data so we can better understand air pollution patterns/issues in a given area. We have installed these to support several initiatives, including the school streets project which is discussed later in the report.

21. As Sefton has to comply with DEFRA's monitoring requirements the latest ratified monitoring results are for the year 2022. Monitoring for 2023 has only just been completed (last diffusion tube collected in January 2024) and as such this data is currently being checked and ratified.

Automatic Monitoring

22. Sefton currently monitors air pollution at 5 key locations using DEFRA approved automatic equipment. The location, justification for its siting and pollutants monitored are provided in table 2.

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Table 2 Location of automatic monitoring stations

| Monitor Location | Justification for Location | Pollutants Monitored |
|---|---|--|
| Waterloo Primary School, Crosby Road North, Waterloo. | Within previous AQMA1 Crosby Road North. Proximity to Road/Sensitive Receptor | PM ₁₀ NO ₂ |
| Hawthorne Road opposite KFC, Litherland | Within AQMA 5 Church Road Junction- Proximity to Road Junction/Sensitive Receptor | NO ₂ , PM ₁₀ |
| Lathom Close, Seaforth | Within AQMA 2. Proximity to Road/Docks/Sensitive Receptor | PM ₁₀ PM _{2.5} NO ₂ |
| Millers Bridge, Bootle | Within AQMA 3. Proximity to Road Junction/ Docks and Sensitive Receptor. | PM ₁₀ PM _{2.5} NO ₂ |
| Regent Road Crosby (installed summer 2020) | Background Particulate Levels in suburban area | PM ₁₀ PM _{2.5} |

Diffusion tube monitoring

23. In addition to the real-time monitors, Sefton measures monthly NO₂ levels at 82 sites across the Borough using diffusion tubes. The diffusion tubes are located in areas that have already been identified as AQMA's or are located in areas in close proximity to sensitive premises where additional data and monitoring is required to assess current/future NO₂ levels as part of the ongoing Review and Assessment process. The monthly results from these tubes are combined to enable comparison with the annual mean NAQS objective for NO₂.

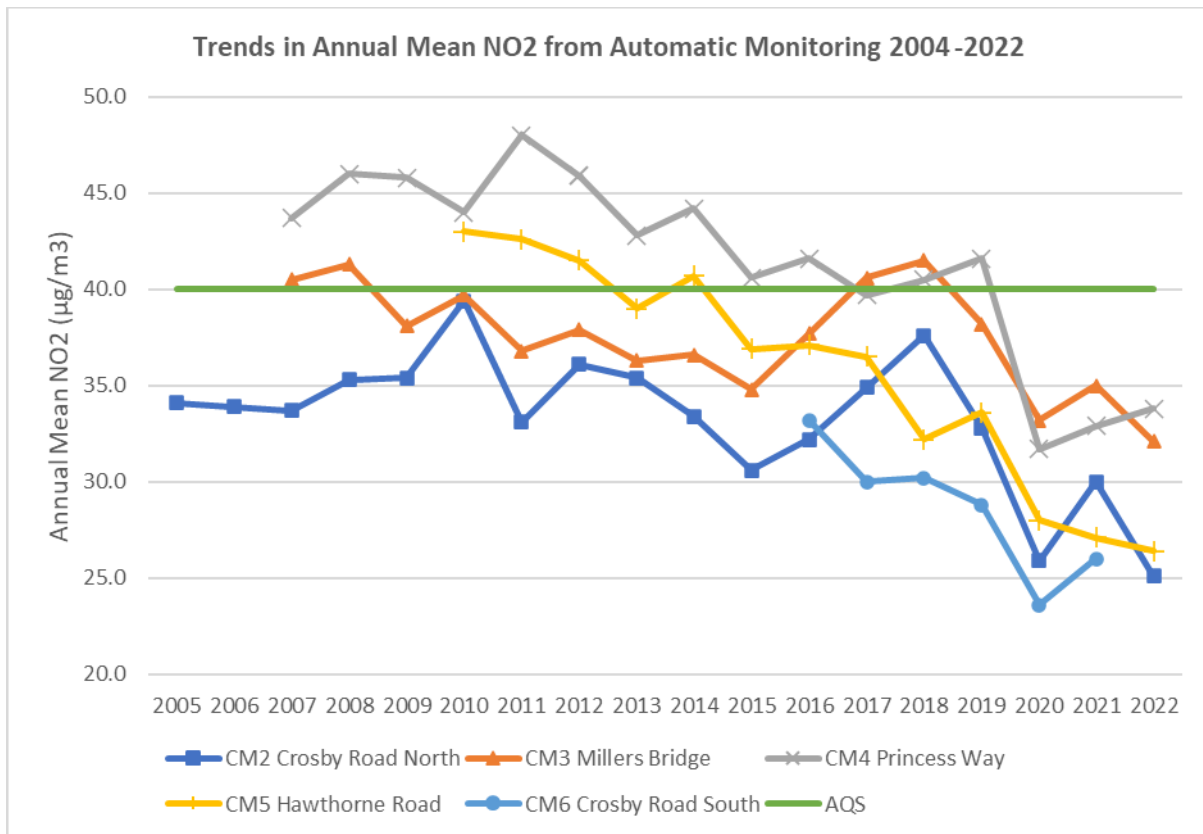
24. Several sites have also been added recently to assess the impact the port expansion will have on NO₂ levels. The location of these is reviewed annually to ensure all areas of concern are monitored.

NO₂ Automatic Monitoring Results

Table 3 - NO₂ Annual Mean results (limit 40 µg/m³)

| Site | NO ₂ Annual Mean µg/m ³ | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
| Crosby Road North | 36.1 | 35.4 | 33.4 | 30.6 | 32.2 | 34.9 | 37.6 | 35.0 | 25.9 | 30.0 | 25.1 |
| Millers Bridge | 37.9 | 36.3 | 36.6 | 34.8 | 37.7 | 40.6 | 41.5 | 38.2 | 33.2 | 35.0 | 32.1 |
| Princess Way | 45.9 | 42.8 | 44.2 | 40.6 | 41.6 | 39.7 | 40.5 | 41.6 | 31.7 | 32.9 | 33.8 |
| Hawthorne Road | 41.5 | 39.0 | 40.7 | 36.9 | 37.1 | 36.5 | 32.2 | 33.6 | 28.0 | 27.1 | 26.4 |
| Crosby Road South | | | | 34.6 | 33.2 | 29.6 | 30.2 | 28.8 | 23.6 | 26.0 | N/A |

Graph Showing NO₂ Trends at Automatic Stations.



25. levels of NO₂ at all automatic monitoring sites again showed compliance with the NO₂ annual mean NAQS objective in 2022 (at the monitoring location) with the highest monitored level of 33.8 µg/m³ recorded at Princess Way.

26. Sites CM2 (Crosby Road North), CM3 (Millers Bridge) and CM5 (Hawthorne Road) have shown reductions in NO₂ levels compared to those observed in 2021 and currently show no indication that they are returning to pre pandemic levels observed in 2019.

27. CM4 (Princess Way) is the only site to report an increase from 2021 with concentrations over the past two years showing a rising trend since the covid pandemic. Notwithstanding this NO₂ levels at this location are still much reduced compared to those observed in 2018 and 2019 and it does appear that the legacy of the Covid pandemic is having an ongoing positive effect on air quality in the borough.

28. There were no exceedances of the NO₂ 1-hour mean objective at any of the automatic monitoring sites.

29. Whilst it is obviously positive to see that levels of NO₂ at the automatic stations are within the NAQS, it is still unclear whether this trend will continue and there is

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ongoing concern that increases in port related traffic will impact on pollution levels in the AQMA's and surrounding locality.

30. Automatic monitoring will continue at these sites to enable future trends to be observed.

Diffusion tube NO₂ results

31. During 2022, 78 diffusion tube sites reported a decrease and four reported increases in NO₂ levels when compared to 2021. Notably there was only one exceedance of the annual mean NO₂ NAQS objective of 40 µg/m³, this was at site ID BR Derby Road within the Millers Bridge AQMA with a NO₂ level of 41.0 µg/m³. This was also the maximum concentration reported in 2022.
32. As this site recorded a NO₂ annual mean concentration in exceedance of the air quality objective at a monitoring site which is not representative of public exposure, the concentration at the nearest receptor for this location was estimated using the distance correction via the Defra diffusion tube processing tool. This showed the estimated concentration of 38.6 µg/m³ just below the NAQS objective.
33. In line with the automatic results it does appear the legacy of the Covid pandemic is having a lasting positive effect on NO₂ levels in the Borough with no indication that concentrations are returning to those observed pre pandemic. It is likely the declining trend in concentrations is due to changes in commuting habits since COVID resulting in less peak time travel therefore less congestion and overall emissions.

Particulate Matter Results

Table 4 PM₁₀ Annual Mean 2012-2021 (Limit 40 µg/m³)

| Site | PM ₁₀ Annual Mean µg/m ³ | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
| Crosby Road North | 25.4 | 28.3 | 23.6 | 23.7 | 17.0 | 21.1 | 19.9 | 26.2 | N/A | N/A | 26.5 |
| Millers Bridge | 26.1 | 28.1 | 28.8 | 28.7 | 25.4 | 23.9 | 20.1 | 17.6 | 16.1 | 19.5 | 19.9 |
| Princess Way | 24.9 | 26.5 | 26.5 | 26.7 | 23.8 | 23.1 | 22.6 | 16.9 | 20.0 | 17.5 | 17.2 |
| Hawthorne Road | | | | | | 23.9 | 21.2 | 23.7 | 20.3 | 18.7 | 21.5 |
| Regent Road | | | | | | | | | 13.2 | 9.5 | 12.9 |

34. The table above shows the measured levels of PM₁₀ at each of the continuous monitoring sites since 2012. The national limit is 40 µg/m³ and whilst the monitors are not located exactly at the receptor locations, they provide an accurate indicator of PM₁₀ levels in the locality.

35. All areas are now consistently compliant with the PM₁₀ NAQS objective with annual levels well within the standard. The number of daily exceedances is also consistently below the standard of 35 exceedances per year. Monitoring of PM₁₀ will however continue to assess the impact the port expansion may have on particulate emissions.

PM_{2.5} Monitoring

36. Although Sefton Council monitors PM₁₀ at several locations in the Borough, there is now clear evidence that even smaller particles with an aerodynamic diameter of 2.5µm or less, known as PM_{2.5}, have a greater impact on human health.

37. Unlike Nitrogen Dioxide particulate matter emissions are caused by a number of different sources, including the burning of domestic solid fuel, degradation of vehicle tyres and brakes and to a lesser degree combustion engines. As such tackling PM_{2.5} emissions is likely to be challenging.

38. To gather information on current PM_{2.5} levels in Sefton three dual PM₁₀ / PM_{2.5} monitors have now been installed in the Borough, the latest being at Princess way and was commissioned in Autumn 2022.

39. The national standard for PM_{2.5} has recently been reduced from 25 µg/m³ to 10 µg/m³ due to the health-related concerns regarding this pollutant. The results below show that monitored levels in Sefton are within the target limit.

Table 5 PM_{2.5} monitoring results.

| Year | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Millers Bridge PM _{2.5} Annual Mean µg/m ³ | 7.1 | 8.9 | 10.0 | 7.8 | 9.6 | 9.7 |
| Regentroad Crosby PM _{2.5} Annual Mean µg/m ³ | | | | 7.3 | 5.9 | 8.1 |
| Princess Way PM _{2.5} Annual Mean µg/m ³ | | | | | | 9.5 |

40. In line with our other LAQM duties local authorities are expected to work towards reducing emissions and concentrations of PM_{2.5} (particulate matter with an aerodynamic diameter of 2.5µm or less). There is clear evidence that PM_{2.5} has a significant impact on human health, including premature mortality, allergic reactions, and cardiovascular diseases. Whilst monitoring shows levels in Sefton are below the target limit the development of air quality improvement actions to tackle particulate emissions continues and are discussed later in the report.

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Summary of monitoring results 2022

41. During 2022, all NO₂ automatic monitoring sites within Sefton showed compliance with the NAQS objective with no indication that levels are returning to those observed pre pandemic.
42. All passive monitoring (diffusion tubes), except one location, were compliant with the NO₂ NAQS objective in 2022. With the majority of sites reporting decreases from 2021. The decrease in NO₂ concentrations from 2021 at 95% of sites suggests that the legacy of changed transport habits during the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with fleet improvement, has continued to have a positive effect on Sefton's air quality in 2022, as overall levels have still not returned to pre-pandemic levels. There was one reported exceedance of the annual mean NO₂ AQS objective of 40 µg/m³ within Sefton, which was at monitoring location BR-Derby Road (41.0 µg/m³), located in AQMA 3-Millers Bridge. BR (41.0 µg/m³) is not at a location of relevant exposure, and once fall-off with distance calculations have been carried out to predict the concentration at the nearest relevant receptor, the estimated concentration is 38.6 µg/m³.
43. Levels of Particulate Matter have increased slightly compared to 2021, but as in previous years all AQMA's show compliance with the PM₁₀ national air quality standard objective by some margin.
44. The extensive air pollution monitoring will continue in 2024 and beyond to determine future trends and compliance in Sefton.

Actions to Improve Air Quality

45. Notwithstanding the improvements we are currently observing in air quality as a result of changing commuter habits and fleet improvements the main on-going priority in Sefton for the coming years is to fully understand the effects that the predicted increase in HGVs due to port expansion will have on air quality and how this can be mitigated.
46. This is undoubtedly the most significant challenge for the Council in terms of air quality impact in the Borough at the present time, due to the scale of the expansion and the potential for this to impact on air quality in existing AQMA's and also impact on public exposure receptor residential locations on port access routes.
47. A number of specific AQ actions are already underway to improve air quality in the AQMA's and wider borough, along with the development of Sefton's Strategic Clean Air Plan (CAP) where we are considering in detail various air quality intervention options to deal with the predicted increase in emissions, including a HGV Charging Clean Air Zone (CAZ).

48. An update is provided below on the current ongoing air quality improvement actions.

Sefton Clean Air Plan (CAP)

49. As reported previously Cabinet gave approval for Officers to progress the development of a detailed Outline Business Case (OBC) for the creation of a Sefton Based CAZ, in line with the approach recommended by DEFRA. AECOM were commissioned in 2020 to undertake the additional air quality and transport modelling work needed and prepare a draft OBC in conjunction with Council officers.
50. The development of the CAP OBC forms part of the Council's wider AQ programme overseen by the AQ Cabinet Member Reference Group.
51. The OBC proposal, in the main, comprises a HGV Charging CAZ scheme that aims to address persistent air quality issues identified within Sefton in the shortest time possible. The CAZ scheme preferred option (referred to as 'Option 2A') features a charging CAZ applied to non-compliant HGVs (Euro 5 and older) that cross into a designated section of the Sefton highway network. The preferred option HGV CAZ is focused on the A565 and A5036 corridors, incorporating all four of the existing Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs). Incorporating the A5036 within the CAZ requires entry and exit signs and enforcement cameras to be installed on the National Highways network and would require a co-operative approach between Sefton Council and National Highways on this issue.
52. The Outline Business Case for the potential implementation of a HGV CAZ sets out the rationale for the whole project and provides more detail about the proposals, including clear strategic objectives for the proposals.
53. The objective of the Clean Air Plan is to address persistent air quality issues within Sefton which occur in some of the most income/health deprived areas in the borough.
54. The key case for change is that the Government, and Local Authorities, in accordance with their local air quality management responsibilities, are required to meet air quality limit values in the shortest possible time. Within Sefton, this is also supported by a local desire to go further ('beyond compliance') to improve air quality and public health and well-being.
55. The strategic objectives of the Clean Air Plan are:
- To improve air quality in the shortest time possible in known hotspot areas in Sefton's four AQMAs and achieve compliance with national standards in the shortest time possible.
 - To promote improved air quality in the wider area (outside the four declared AQMAs) through more rapid switchover to vehicles with minimal exhaust emissions.
 - To reduce human exposure to air pollution, and thus improve public health, particularly for areas of Sefton with high levels of deprivation.

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- To reduce emissions relating to the A5036 for HGV vehicle traffic, particularly around high-density residential areas.

Outline Business Case – Conclusions of CAP OBC

56. The OBC evidence-base indicates that significant air quality benefits within the CAZ Boundary area (Port Routes/AQMAs) and wider AQ improvements can potentially be achieved if the Council proceeds to the implementation of a HGV Corridor Charging CAZ, subject to the development of a Full Business Case (FBC). Furthermore, the air quality benefits of the Preferred HGV CAZ Option are concentrated in areas with some of the highest levels of income/health deprivation – locally and nationally i.e. parts of Bootle, Litherland, Seaforth.
57. The case for change is strong because the OBC evidence base indicates the persistence of poor air quality at discrete locations and future risks due to increased traffic, particularly associated with HGVs on key Port routes (A5036/A565). In addition, HGVs are disproportionately high emitters of both NO_x and PM and the Preferred HGV Charging CAZ which targets key Port routes (A565/A5036) provides the best value option when balanced against the option assessment criteria.
58. The estimated scheme costs (Capital and Operating) for the Preferred CAZ Option are provided within the OBC, but further work would be required at FBC stage to develop the cost estimates, particularly through detailed design work and engagement with potential suppliers and contractors. In addition, funding for potential mitigation costs for financial support for businesses and scheme development and consultation costs require consideration.
59. As Sefton isn't mandated by government to implement a CAP / CAZ, funding sources are yet to be identified for the progression of the OBC to FBC and/or any CAZ implementation. Key risks and measures to mitigate and manage those risks have been identified within the Management Case. Key stakeholders are identified, and consultation has been undertaken throughout the OBC development process, initially to share the high-level objectives, proposals and rationale for the CAZ scheme and more recently to share the outcomes of the OBC.

Outline Business Case – Key Stakeholder Engagement

60. External communication and engagement has focussed to date on key external stakeholders, as follows:
- National Highways - given the implications of the proposals for the A5036 Strategic Road Network.
 - Liverpool City Council - given they are an adjoining local authority who were legally mandated by Government in 2018 to produce a Clean Air Plan to identify how Nitrogen Dioxide levels could be reduced in the shortest time possible.
 - Peel Ports - given the anticipated growth in port-related HGV traffic and the implications of the proposals for key port routes.

- Joint Air Quality Unit (*oversight board for managing DEFRA's/DfT's NO₂ reduction programme*) – given the potential to explore any appropriate funding source for the Clean Air Plan implementation.

Outline Business Case – Recommendations of CAP OBC

61. Through a structured Options Appraisal process, the CAP OBC has assessed four short-listed HGV Charging CAZ Boundary Options. The preferred CAZ boundary option (Option 2A) consists of a Charging HGV CAZ including both the A565 and A5036 corridors, thus including all of the existing AQMAs and focusing on areas of greatest concern. It was also recommended that a reserve option (Option 2B -A565 corridor only) is retained, subject to discussions with JAQU/National Highways regarding the proposal (under Option 2A) to include the A5036 (route managed by National Highways) within the CAZ.
62. The progression of the CAP scheme to the next stage, i.e. Full Business Case, will depend on a number of factors, which include key risks and constraints identified in the OBC work. The decision about whether to proceed to the FBC needs to take account of all these key issues. Additionally the delivery of the CAP has several key dependencies / interdependencies, including:
- The need to identify a funding source for the implementation of the scheme, including provision for mitigation – noting that any funding sourced via JAQU may result in a mandate and requirements may be specified which differ from the Council's priorities and objectives.
 - Agreement with JAQU/National Highways is required for the inclusion of the A5036, approvals of the proposed CAZ scheme, powers and consents (including the requirement of a Charging Scheme Order under section 168 Transport Act 2000).
 - The neighbouring Liverpool City Council Clean Air Plan, which may have direct impacts on any scheme implemented in Sefton, which must be understood and accounted for.
63. In addition to these key issues/dependencies/interdependencies, it is important to recognise that the implementation of a CAZ is not in itself an all-encompassing solution for air quality issues, either within or outside the CAZ. The modelling analysis for the preferred CAZ option suggests that even with the CAZ scheme in place some existing exceedances will remain at a small number of discrete locations. The ongoing expansion of the Port of Liverpool and changes in the commercial operations at the Port may result in changes in background concentrations of NO₂, which is particularly relevant to the A565 corridor which contains three of the AQMAs. The successful implementation of the CAP therefore requires synergy with ongoing Council policies and initiatives with respect to air quality, as well as the Port Air Quality Strategy, and collaboration with key stakeholders such as the National Highways and neighbouring authorities within the city region.

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Outline Business Case – Next Steps for the CAP OBC

64. Based on the OBC outcomes, a number of potential pathways have been identified. Table 6 below shows the different pathways available for Cabinet consideration, to determine the next steps for the CAP OBC.

65. The primary decision for Cabinet is whether to proceed to the preparation of a Full Business Case or not, but there are different approaches that can be taken depending on the primary decision and these are summarised below (Note – a funding source would need to be identified for Options 2 - 4).

Table 6 -Potential CAP OBC Pathways

| A. Do not proceed to FBC for charging CAZ: | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1 | Business As Usual (BAU) approach | Due to generally improving air quality situation and likely compliance with national thresholds within the next few years and the significant costs of implementing a charging CAZ - <i>Maintain current initiatives and monitoring.</i> |
| 2 | BAU <i>plus</i> Option 2A Corridor focussed measures <i>i.e. a Non-Charging CAZ (in AQ hotspots)</i> | Focus available resources on <i>additional and targeted measures to improve air quality in the proposed CAZ corridors</i> , for example supporting a vehicle upgrade programme. |
| 2+ | BAU <i>plus</i> Option 2A Corridor focussed measures <i>plus wider measures i.e. a Non-Charging CAZ (in AQ hotspots) plus wider area measures</i> | <i>As for 2 but allocate additional resources for wider measures</i> to improve air quality across south Sefton and expand to include carbon reduction initiatives targeted at the freight sector. |
| B. Proceed to FBC for a charging CAZ along the A565 and A5036: | | |
| 3 | FBC for Charging CAZ (<i>if can gain JAQU/NH support</i>) | Only if JAQU support is gained through exploring/securing funding opportunities based on OBC outcomes i.e. <i>begin approach for JAQU liaison now</i> – understand current funding position / prepare submission. |
| 4 | FBC for Charging CAZ (<i>Council funded</i>) | Decision about submission to <i>JAQU to be made at a later date</i> i.e. Council fund FBC. <i>But also need to consider implementation/consultation/mitigation funding needed – recommend funding secured prior to proceeding to FBC.</i> |

66. An ‘OBC information’ Report has been presented to Cabinet. The purpose of the report was:

- To advise Cabinet on outcomes of the CAP OBC,
- To seek approval of the OBC findings and recommendations
- To agree release of OBC into the public domain
- To agree further engagement with key stakeholders
- To share potential OBC pathway options for Cabinet to consider, as set out in **Table 6**.

67. Cabinet gave approval to the recommendations and the stakeholder engagement has been ongoing to respond to and effectively communicate technical queries and considerations.
68. A number of observations and challenges have been raised by the key stakeholders on the preferred option which required further detailed consideration by officers.
69. In response, additional technical studies and assessments have been undertaken including an updated Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) study to determine the current make up and age of Sefton's vehicle Fleet and an updated natural compliance assessment to determine when the predicted NO₂ exceedances would become naturally compliant.
70. The outcome of the stakeholder engagement and analysis of the additional studies indicates that progression to Full Business Case for a HGV Charging CAZ would be extremely challenging and consideration of alternative Non-CAZ measures/interventions is also necessary.
71. Officers have presented the outcome of the stakeholder engagement and additional assessments to Cabinet Members for their consideration. Members have requested more information on the possible non-CAZ measures to enable a final decision to be made as to what pathway to progress i.e. CAZ or Non-CAZ approach.
72. Officers are in the process of finalising the detailed list of potential non-CAZ measures for consideration.
73. A Cabinet 'decision' report will then be prepared to formalise the decision.
74. As well as the strategic high-level work underway as part of the Clean Air Plan detailed above Officers are continually looking at ways to further improve air quality and several actions are currently underway which are discussed in more detail below.

DVSA/Sefton HGV emission monitoring/enforcement Project

75. Officers from Sefton working in collaboration with Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) Inspectors have now undertaken 3 joint vehicle emissions monitoring/enforcement activities, in Dec 2021, Sept 2022 and most recently in September 2023 to identify HGV's travelling along the A5036, A565 and motorway network which were emitting unacceptable levels of air pollution thus potentially indicating emission control system tampering or faults.
76. During the most recent exercise in September 2023 sophisticated air pollution monitoring equipment was installed in DVSA stop cars and levels of NO_x and PM were monitored in live traffic to detect suspect vehicles.
77. The DVSA were also testing a new Particulate Monitor (Total Particle Count) in anticipation of bringing in HGV particulate emission limits as part of the HGV MOT.

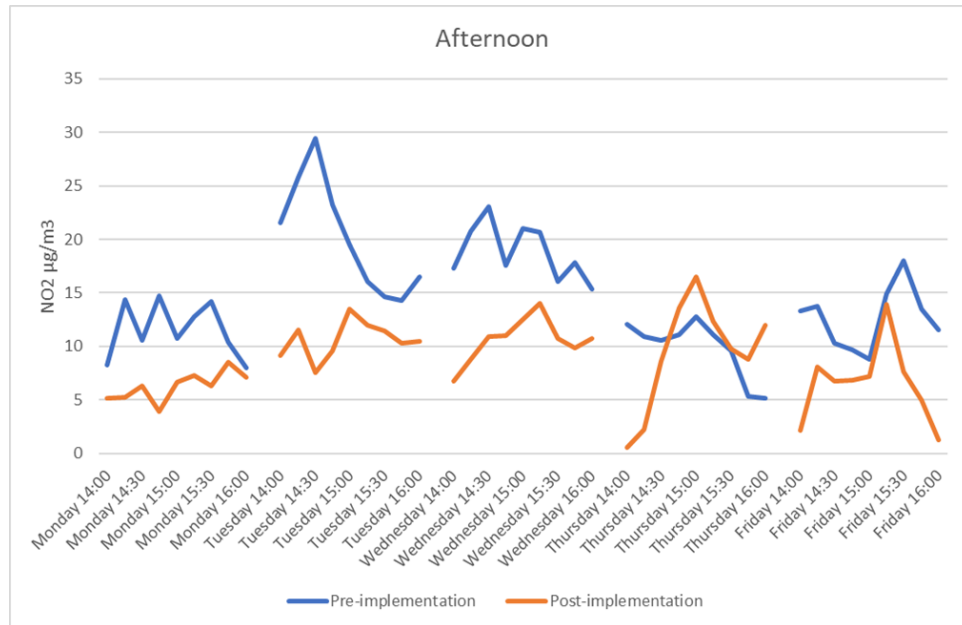
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78. Exhaust plume emissions from 230 vehicles were monitored over the 2-day project. 11 suspect vehicles were stopped at the switch Island DVSA inspection site and subject to further detailed examination by DVSA inspectors. Unexpectedly only 1 vehicle was found to have a fault with the emission control system. All other vehicles stopped were operating within acceptable parameters for the age of vehicle.
79. Compared to previous years very few HGVs were identified for high NO_x emissions and those stopped did not show faults. More HGVs were identified for high PM emissions when followed but when tested using the DVSA MOT Particulate monitor they were found to be within acceptable parameters for the age of the vehicle.
80. The study suggests that less HGV's are operating with cheat devices/emission control faults than previous years which is obviously positive and may be one of the factors that has led to the reductions in NO₂/PM observed when analysing the monitoring data.
81. To ensure this trend continues further joint work is being considered, potentially targeting LGVs / private cars and exploring the use of remote sensors/roadside monitoring equipment to detect suspect vehicles.

School Streets AQ Monitoring

82. Officers from Highways and Environmental Health are currently working on a joint air quality monitoring project as part of Sefton's School Streets initiative to help evaluate the effectiveness of the School Street restrictions. (A School Street is a road outside a school with a temporary restriction on motorised traffic at school drop-off and pick-up times. The restriction applies to school traffic and through traffic. The School Street schemes offer a proactive solution for school communities to tackle air pollution, poor health and road danger reduction)
83. Four lower cost automatic air quality sensors have been installed to monitor air quality levels around schools participating in the project.
- Stanley High School-Marshside Road (Sensor installed June 2022)
 - Birkdale High School-Windy Harbour Road (Sensor installed June 2022)
 - Greenbank High School-Hastings Road (Sensor installed June 2022)
 - Bedford Primary-Quarry Road (June 2023)
84. AQ levels have been monitored initially prior to the restrictions coming into force to allow effective evaluation of the measures.
85. Analysis of the air quality monitoring results at Greenbank and Birkdale show noticeable differences between pre implementation and post implementation with short term levels of NO₂ during drop off/pick up times notably higher prior to school streets restrictions coming into force compared to levels following the implementation of the measures. See graph below:

Graph showing Monitoring data - Greenbank High School Afternoon Period –Pre SS implementation (26th-30th June 2023) compared with Post implementation (3rd –7th July 2023)



86. The results to date show that the restrictions are having a positive effect on improving short term air quality in the locality and will form part of the more extensive overall project evaluation which will follow.

87. Officers are looking to include further sensors at schools as the roll out of the project continues.

Traffic signal upgrade/incorporation of AQ sensors

88. As part of a City Region traffic signal upgrade project, funding for 7 air quality sensors (Earthsense Zephyr) was secured which are now operational. The sensors are located at 7 key traffic light junctions in the Borough and integrated into Sefton’s traffic signal control system.

89. Real time air pollution data is now available from the sensors at these key locations, which can also be used to trigger specific traffic signal strategies to alleviate congestion if levels of localised pollution are of concern. Officers from Highways and Environmental Health are currently working together to develop potential traffic light strategies based on the sensor outputs.

SCOOT Validation and Strategy Development Project

90. Officers from Environmental Health are currently working with Highways Officers/Yunex Traffic on a joint project which will entail the revalidation of the SCOOT (Split Cycle and Offset Optimisation Technique) urban traffic light control system at 20 key traffic light controlled junctions and 9 crossings situated on

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Moor Lane, Crosby Road North, Derby Road, Dunnings Bridge Road, Southport Road and Northway.

91. Surveys will be carried out at each of the key junctions/crossings to determine how effectively the junction is currently functioning in terms of traffic flow and minimising air pollution.
92. Based on the outcome of the surveys new strategies will be developed aimed at improving traffic flow and managing the air quality issues in the locality. The new strategies will be incorporated into Sefton's SCOOT/STRATOS system and then tested for effectiveness.

Conclusions

93. Whilst air quality in the majority of the Borough is within NAQS objectives, the main on-going priority in Sefton for the coming years is to fully understand the effects that the predicted increase in HGVs due to port expansion will have on air quality and how this can be mitigated.
94. As detailed within this report the development of the Outline Business Case for a Sefton based CAZ under the overarching Clean Air Plan is complete and has demonstrated that a corridor HGV charging CAZ covering the A5036 and A565 could achieve significant air quality improvements within the CAZ boundary and wider borough.
95. The progression of the CAP scheme to the next stage, i.e. Full Business Case, however, will depend on a number of factors, which include key risks and constraints identified in the OBC work along with identification of a funding source.
96. A number of potential CAP OBC pathways have been presented to Cabinet (Table 6) and key stakeholder engagement (LCC, National Highways, Peel Ports, Joint Air Quality Unit) has taken place along with additional technical assessments.
97. The results of the stakeholder engagement and technical reports have been presented to Cabinet Members and it is considered that progression to FBC would be very challenging. To assist in the decision-making process, officers have been developing a list of possible non-CAZ measures that could be implemented to improve air quality.
98. Officers are in the process of finalising the detailed list of potential non-CAZ measures for consideration. A Cabinet 'decision' report will then be prepared to formalise the decision. Further update reports specifically on the OBC will be provided in line with the communication and engagement strategy.
99. In addition to the strategic work associated with the CAP, officers continue to explore other innovative actions and activities to improve Sefton's air quality across the Borough and these will be reported at future meetings. The extensive

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air pollution monitoring will also continue in 2024 to determine future trends and compliance in Sefton.

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| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|---|
| Report to: | Cabinet Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) Council | Date of Meeting: | 4 January 2024 9 January 2024 18 th January 2024 |
| Subject: | Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax Base for 2024/25 and Review of Council Tax Premiums for Long-Term Empty Properties | | |
| 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 2023/24. It also proposes that there is a change made to the scheme with effect from 1st April 2024 for working-age households, in employment, in receipt of Universal Credit.

In addition, the report proposes to introduce new discretionary council tax premiums on 'dwellings left empty for 1 year or more' from 1 April 2024 and on 'dwellings occupied periodically' (second homes) from 1 April 2025.

A summary is provided of the feedback received on recent consultations undertaken on changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and on the proposals to introduce new discretionary council tax premiums along with the associated equality impact assessments.

Finally, the report provides an updated Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish area for 2024/25.

Recommendation(s):

Cabinet

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1. Note the content of the review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the current year, 2023/24.
2. Note the outcome of the public consultation exercise and recommend to Council that a change is made to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for working-age households, in employment, also in receipt of Universal Credit with effect from 1st April 2024.
3. Recommend that Council approves the introduction of a 100% council tax premium on dwellings left empty for 1 year or more from 1 April 2024
4. Recommend that Council approves the introduction of a 100% council tax premium on dwellings occupied periodically from 1 April 2025
5. Recommend that Council approves the relevant Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish Area for 2024/25 as set out in Annex A.

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

That the report be noted.

Council

1. Note the content of the review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the current year, 2023/24.
2. Note the outcome of a public consultation exercise and approve a change to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for working-age households, in employment and in receipt of Universal Credit with effect from 1st April 2024.
3. Approve the introduction of a 100% council tax premium on dwellings left empty for 1 year or more from 1 April 2024.
4. Approve the introduction of a 100% council tax premium on dwellings occupied periodically from 1 April 2025.
5. Approve the relevant Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish Area for 2024/25 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 2024/25 Council Tax Reduction Scheme by 11 March 2024, 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 for the current year, and also provides details of a public consultation exercise that has recently been undertaken to seek views on making a change to the scheme affecting working-age households, in employment, also in receipt of Universal Credit. After consideration of the factors outlined later in the report it is proposed that the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25 is changed for working-age households, in employment, in receipt of Universal Credit.

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 2024/25 before 31st January 2024.

Introducing a premium on dwellings left empty for 1 year or more

The Council already applies a 100% premium on properties left empty for 2 years or more. Extending this premium to dwellings left empty for 1 year or more would 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.

Introducing a premium on dwellings that are occupied periodically

Introducing a premium on dwellings that are occupied periodically (second homes) would encourage owners of these homes to make these available for sale or rent which would increase the amount of housing available to local residents. Any additional income raised from the premium will help support the provision of Council services.

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

Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Council may decide to leave the Council Tax Reduction Scheme unchanged for 2024/25. Without a change to the scheme, households in employment moving from legacy state-benefits to Universal Credit are likely to face frequent changes to their entitlement, with the knock-on effect being frequently changing Council Tax bills and payment-plans, as well as an expected additional administrative burden for the Council.

Introducing a premium on dwellings left empty for 1 year or more

The Council could choose not to introduce the premium; however, this would not provide any additional incentive for owners of these long-term empty homes to bring them back into use. Alternatively, the Council could choose to introduce a lower premium percentage (25%, 50%, or 75%), however, this would provide a lower level of incentive and reduce the amount of additional council tax income available to support local services.

Introducing a premium on dwellings that are occupied periodically

The Council could choose not to introduce the premium; however, this would not provide any additional incentive for owners of these properties to make them available for occupation by local residents. Alternatively, the Council could choose to introduce a

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lower premium percentage (25%, 50%, or 75%), however, this would provide a lower level of incentive and reduce the amount of additional council tax income available to support local services.

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2024/25

It is difficult to forecast the impact of the proposal to change the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, however, it is not anticipated to result in a material increase in the cost of discounts and should reduce the cost of administration.

Introducing a premium on dwellings left empty for 1 year or more

Extending the long-term empty homes premium of 100% to properties that have been empty for one year or more from 1 April 2024 could increase total Council Tax income by approximately £500,000 in 2024/25 (Sefton's share £420,000).

Introducing a premium on dwellings that are occupied periodically

Introducing a 100% premium on second homes from 1 April 2025 could increase Council Tax income by approximately £383,000 in 2025/26 (Sefton's share £320,000).

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 2024/25. 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 2023/24 and 2024/25, based on the 2023/24 Council Tax Band D charge:

| Council Tax Income | Sefton Council £ million | Police & Crime £ million | Fire & Rescue £ million | Combined Authority £ million |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Option A | 1.054 | 0.143 | 0.050 | 0.011 |
| Option B | 1.474 | 0.200 | 0.070 | 0.015 |

Option A assumes no change in empty homes premiums in 2024/25.

Option B assumes that an empty homes premium of 100% will be charged on dwellings left empty for 1 year or more in 2024/25.

(B) Capital Costs

No capital costs applicable.

Implications of the Proposals:

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

Changes to both the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax premiums 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 March in the financial year preceding that for which the revision or replacement is to have effect.
- 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.
- d. Before revising its scheme or making a replacement scheme, an authority must:
 - i. Consult any major precepting authority which has power to issue a precept to it.
 - ii. Publish a draft scheme in such manner as it thinks fit, and
 - iii. Consult other such persons as it considers are likely to have an interest in the operation of the scheme.

Council Tax Premiums

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, introduced new regulations that allow billing authorities to charge a premium of up to 100% on homes that have been empty for one year or more from 1 April 2024, as well as a premium of up to 100% on dwellings that are occupied periodically (second homes) from 1 April 2025. The later date for second homes is because the Act requires authorities to provide 12 months-notice to second homes prior to implementation. These are discretionary powers, and it is up to local authorities to decide what level of premium (if any) is appropriate in their area.

Equality Implications: The equality implications have been identified and mitigated. Equality Impact Assessments are provided at Annexes B and C.

Impact on Children and Young People: Indirectly - in that the changes proposed to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme are intended to provide working-age households/families in employment, also in receipt of Universal Credit, with stability when managing household finances and budgeting for Council Tax payments.

Climate Emergency Implications:

The recommendations within this report will

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Have a positive impact | N/A |
|------------------------|-----|

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| | |
|---|-----|
| Have a neutral impact | Yes |
| Have a negative impact | N/A |
| The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors | Yes |

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

| |
|---|
| Protect the most vulnerable: The Council Reduction Scheme proposed for 2024/25 will help to maintain fairness, consistency and an element of stability when managing household finances. The scheme provides support to those experiencing financial hardship as well as supporting those making the transition to Universal Credit. |
| Facilitate confident and resilient communities: the introduction of discretionary Council Tax premiums for empty properties is intended to encourage owners to bring properties back in to use and help to ease housing supply pressures, reduce negative impacts such as anti-social behaviour, reductions in rental & market values on surrounding properties, desirability of an area, and generate revenue that will be used to support essential council services. |
| Commission, broker and provide core services: Not applicable |
| Place – leadership and influencer: Not applicable |
| Drivers of change and reform: Not applicable |
| Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: 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 (FD.7455/23) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.5555/23) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

The Public Engagement and Consultation Panel approved proposals to undertake two consultations at its meeting on 8th September 2023 as follows:-

- 1) Proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme from 1st April 2024 for working-age households in employment also in receipt of Universal Credit. This consultation was open for the period 11th September – 13th October 2023, and

- 2) Proposals to introduce new premiums in line with new discretionary powers introduced in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, commenced on 11th September 2023 and ended on 27th October 2023.

In addition, details of the review of the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme, the proposed scheme for 2024/25, the Council Tax Base and the proposed introductions of Council Tax premiums 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.

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 18th January 2024.

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Contact Officer: | Diane Turner |
| Telephone Number: | 0151 934 3481 |
| Email Address: | diane.turner22@sefton.gov.uk |

Appendices:

Annex A: Council Tax Base Report 2024/25

Annex B: Proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25, including consultation summary and equalities impact assessment.

Annex C: Proposed introduction of new council tax premiums on ‘dwellings left empty for 1 year or more’ and on ‘dwellings occupied periodically’, including consultation summary and equalities impact assessment.

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

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

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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. The Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25 must be agreed by Council by 11th March 2024.

2. Review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24

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

- Claimant caseload
- Scheme expenditure
- Impact on most vulnerable claimants
- Council Tax collection, including Attachment of Benefits
- Review of the Council's principles for the Scheme
- Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Fund.

2.2 Claimant Caseload

The table below shows the caseload data at 30th September 2023 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 | 31.03.23 | 10,053 | 14,712 | 24,765 | -395 |
| 2023/24 | 30.09.23 | 9,970 | 14,591 | 24,561 | -204 |

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 |

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| | | | | | |
|---------|----------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| 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 | 31.03.23 | 1,081 | 13,631 | 14,712 | -205 |
| 2023/24 | 30.09.23 | 1,050 | 13,541 | 14,591 | -121 |

2.3 Pensioner Claimants: Since the initial implementation of the scheme in 2013/14 the number of Pensioner Claimants has declined in every year. Pensioner claimant numbers have continued to fall in 2023/24.

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 2022/23 and have continued to reduce in 2023/24. However, the current economic climate is uncertain, and we could see this trend reverse.

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 | RO Return | 12,037 | 13,585 | 25,622 | -221 |
| 2023/24 | 30.09.23 | 12,527 | 14,320 | 26,847 | +1,225 |

Note:

2023/24 Estimate: The costs recorded at 30 September 2023 have been split based on the Pensioner & Working Age weekly costs recorded on the monthly NEC (Northgate) CTR304 reports.

2.6 Council Tax Collection

The table below shows the amount of Council Tax billed and collected during 2022/23:

| | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Recorded at 31 March 2023 | Liability Raised | Received In Year | Collection Rate |
|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|

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| | £000 | £000 | % |
|----------------------------|---------|---------|-------|
| CTRS Cases - Working Age | 4,794 | 3,416 | 71.3 |
| CTRS Cases - Pensioner Age | 1,560 | 1,857 | 119.0 |
| Other Council Tax Payers | 180,618 | 172,345 | 95.4 |
| Total (in-year collection) | 186,972 | 177,618 | 95.0 |

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 93.7% in 2022/23.

Current Year Council Tax Collection: 2023/24

As at 31st October 2023, the in-year Council Tax collection figure was 62.24% compared to 62.99% in 2022/23. It should be noted that the collection figure for 2022/23 was inflated due to £150.00 payments made to households as part of the Government's Council Tax Energy payments scheme. Figures for 2021/22 are therefore shown below for more representative comparison.

| | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| 31/10/23 | 62.24% |
| 31/10/22 | 62.99% |
| 31/10/21 | 62.91% |

2.7 Impact on the most vulnerable claimants

The local Council Tax Reduction Scheme continues to address 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 Support Fund for 2023/24, whereby a payment of £25.00 was made to Council Tax households in receipt of Council Tax Reduction where there was still a remaining payment liability.
- Provision of an Exceptional Hardship Fund (see Section 2.10 below)
- Easing the transition for households claiming Universal Credit by treating notifications received from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 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.
- 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 Tax payers and taking 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 to include feedback from Sefton Citizen's Advice. In addition, there is a co-ordinated working relationship between the Council's contracted Enforcement Agents and Citizens Advice 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.
- The Debt Respite Scheme (Breathing Space) which started on 04th May 2021 gives someone with debt problems the right to legal protections from recovery activity. Standard breathing space lasts for 60-days and can be extended if the customer is receiving mental health crisis treatment. This enables a debt advice provider time to arrange an appropriate debt solution. During the period 1st November 2022 – 31st October 2023, the Council has received notification of 150 customers in Breathing Space of which 116 have now expired. Over 95% of these applications were in respect of Council Tax debt only.

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 for benefit claimants is to apply for an Attachment of Benefit (AOB) via the courts. Under this option, the following deductions from benefits may be applied:-

- For claimants of Job Seeker's Allowance/Income Support/Employment Support Allowance/Pension Credit the weekly deduction is £4.25.
- For single claimants under 21 on Universal Credit, the deduction is £16.75 per 4 weeks, rising to £18.44 per 4 weeks for those aged over 21.
- For couples over 21 on Universal Credit, the deduction is £28.94 per 4 weeks.
- 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.
- 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.

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- Many new claimants for local Council Tax Reduction have already accrued debts before an AOB can be considered.
- 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 2023: -

| | 31.10.20 | 31.10.21 | 31.10.22 | 31.10.23 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| AOB in payment | £1,011,275 | £1,170,127 | £1,719,777 | £2,012,354 |
| Number of cases | 4,528 | 5,002 | 7,524 | 7,715 |
| AOB Pending | £4,425,238 | £4,868,797 | £5,897,664 | £7,441,760 |
| Number of cases | 18,076 | 17,101 | 20,008 | 22,649 |

2.9 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 | 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, and to support those working households making the transition from legacy state-benefits to Universal Credit. |
| 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 are regularly 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</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| | available to those in the greatest financial need with fair and transparent criteria for awards. |
| The Council will continue to recognise the additional needs of families with children | <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 takes 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 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> |
| The Council supports households staying together to make better use of housing in Sefton and reduce homelessness. | 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. |
| The Council will continue to have due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant | 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. |

2.10 Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Fund (EHF)

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

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

The total fund for 2023/24 is £360,483, this includes the £170,000 annual EHF and agreed carry over from 2022/23. As at 01/11/23, £160,592 has been awarded, leaving £199,891 available for the remainder of the year.

2.11 Summary of local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Review 2023/24

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The forecast cost of the scheme has increased by £1.225m (4.8%) in 2023/24 to £26.847m (at 30/09/23). This is largely due to an average council tax increase of 5.11% being offset by a small reduction in claimants.

3. Council Tax Reduction Scheme - Consultation

3.1 A public consultation was carried out during the period 11th September – 13th October 2023 to seek feedback on a proposed change to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme with effect from 1st April 2024 affecting working-age households in employment and receiving Universal Credit.

3.2 Working age households in receipt of Universal Credit, which is administered by the DWP, must still claim Council Tax Reduction from their local council. Data-sharing arrangements in place mean that the DWP provide details of Universal Credit entitlement to local authorities to support the administration of Council Tax Reduction. In principle, this arrangement is beneficial as local authorities receive timely notifications of Universal Credit changes but in reality, the majority of changes are small and insignificant meaning that a household can receive multiple revised Council Tax bills and differing amounts to pay towards their Council Tax during the course of the year, e.g., if a claimant earns a different amount each month their Universal Credit will automatically adjust to reflect the amount they earn during that month, triggering a typically minimal change to Council Tax Reduction.

3.3 The Council's Benefits service, responsible for administering Council Tax Reduction, is already dealing with a high volume of work resultant from small, insignificant changes to Universal Credit. As more households move to Universal Credit from legacy DWP-benefits the workload, and administrative demands, will further increase.

3.4 It is proposed to make an administrative change to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme with effect from 1st April 2024 for working age households, in employment, in receipt of Universal Credit whereby monthly notifications of small changes in Universal Credit received from the DWP, triggered by a small change in someone's earnings (e.g., they have worked a few hours extra or overtime or less) are not actioned.

3.5 Changes, or representations, notified to the Council by the householder themselves will continue to be accepted and processed as they are currently. Processes will also remain in place to identify and deal with significant changes in Universal Credit entitlement, e.g.,

- Someone stops working.
- Universal Credit payments stop.
- Someone changes jobs or get a second job.
- Someone moves house, or someone joins or leaves a household.

3.6 The proposal is intended to make the level of Council Tax Reduction more stable, making budgeting easier and reduce unnecessary administration and associated costs.

3.7 Details of the consultation are found at Annex B. In summary, 150 responses were received, with 90% of respondents agreeing with the proposal.

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 as part of the review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the proposed change for 2024/25, and is available at Annex B. The assessment found that there are no disproportionate impacts; mitigating actions remain effective and valid continuing to support working families and vulnerable residents as follows:-

- The Council continues to provide a discretionary Exceptional Hardship Fund to assist financially vulnerable working age households and families as described in paragraph 2.10 above.
- Procedures and processes for collection of non-payment of Council Tax as set out at paragraph 2.7 above help to ensure that there is no disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable households.
- The Council continues to support the five principles set out for the Scheme as can be seen at the table at paragraph 2.9 above.
- Legislation remains in place to protect low-income pensioners from any reduction in support brought about by the introduction of the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

5. Conclusion – Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme

As a result of the work undertaken, it is proposed that the Council's local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25 will change for working age households in employment in receipt of Universal Credit as described above. The Scheme continues 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.

6.0 New Council Tax Premiums

6.1 Background

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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 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 Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, introduced new regulations that allow billing authorities to charge a premium of up to 100% on homes that have been empty for one year or more from 1 April 2024, as well as a premium of up to 100% on dwellings that are occupied periodically (second homes) from 1 April 2025. The later date for second homes is because the Act requires authorities to provide 12 months-notice to second homes prior to implementation. These are discretionary powers, and it is up to local authorities to decide what level of premium (if any) is appropriate in their area.

6.3 Long-Term Empty Homes

Across the borough there are currently around 2,100 homes that have been empty for six months or longer (excluding those which are exempt from paying Council Tax); of these, nearly 1,400 have been empty for one year or more. In a time when demand for housing is increasing this is a significant wasted resource.

On 31 October 2023, there were 815 long-term empty dwellings paying a premium of at least 100%. Applying the premium on properties that have been empty for one year, rather than two, would mean that a further 570 properties would have to pay a 100% premium unless the owners took action to bring those properties back into use.

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.

6.3 Dwellings that are occupied periodically (second homes)

On 3 October 2023, there were more than 405 properties liable for Council Tax in the borough registered as second homes. Such properties are likely to be empty for long periods of the year and, like other empty homes, could be viewed as a wasted resource in a time of high demand for housing.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 introduces new regulation that allows councils in England to charge a premium of up to 100 per cent on second homes. The legislation requires that a billing authority's first determination under this section must be made at least one year before the beginning of the financial year to which it relates. This is required to give second homeowners 12 months' notice of the change. As a result of this clause the earliest date the premium could be applied is 1 April 2025.

6.4 Exceptions

In July 2023, the Government published a consultation which set out a number of exceptions that billing authorities would need to apply when charging a premium under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

These exceptions included in the consultation are highlighted below:

| <u>Exception</u> | <u>Applies to</u> |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. Properties Undergoing Probate | Both |
| 2. Properties being actively marketed for sale or let | Both |
| 3. Empty properties undergoing major repairs | long-term empty homes |
| 4. Annexes forming part of, or being treated as part of, the main dwelling | second homes |
| 5. Job-related dwellings | second homes |
| 6. Occupied caravan pitches and boat moorings | second homes |
| 7. Seasonal homes | second homes |

It was proposed that exception 1 should apply for a maximum of 12 months and that exceptions 2 and 3 apply for a maximum of 6 months. The exceptions 4, 5, 6, and 7 are not time limited. These exceptions would provide council taxpayers time to sell or let their properties without having to pay the premium. The Government has not yet published the outcome of the consultation.

6.5 Budget Pressures

Due to rising costs as a result of inflation, the energy crisis, and rising demand for services such as caring for vulnerable adults and children, the Council needs to make difficult decisions about increasing income and/or amending service provision. The changes to Council Tax premiums outlined above would raise additional Council Tax income and therefore help the Council to balance its budget in 2024/25 and 2025/26.

6.6 Proposed Change from 1 April 2024

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It is proposed that the Council introduce a 100% premium charge on 'properties that have been left empty for 1 years or more' (rather than the current 2 years) in-line with the maximum allowable under the new legislation from 1 April 2024.

The aim of this increase would be to 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.

This would give the following forecast increase in Council Tax income in 2024/25:

| | 2023/24 Band D Charge £ | Additional Band D Equivalents | 2024/25 Additional Income £ million |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Sefton Council | 1,853.90 | 226.9 | 0.420 |
| Police & Crime Commissioner | 251.97 | 226.9 | 0.057 |
| Fire & Rescue Authority | 88.61 | 226.9 | 0.020 |
| Combined Authority | 19.00 | 226.9 | 0.004 |
| Total | 2,213.48 | 226.9 | 0.500 |

The forecast assumes a 25% reduction in the number of homes that have been empty for 1 years or more is achieved in 2024/25 and that 25% would be exempt from the premium as a result of Government imposed exceptions. The actual number of properties brought back into use or subject to exceptions could be higher or lower than forecast and will be reflected in future tax base calculations.

6.7 Proposed Change from 1 April 2025

It is proposed that the Council introduce a 100% premium charge on 'dwellings that are occupied periodically' in-line with the maximum allowable under the new legislation from 1 April 2025.

The aim of this increase would be to further incentivise owners of second homes to make these available for sale or let. 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.

This would give the following increase in Council Tax income in 2025/26:

| | 2023/24 Band D Charge £ | Additional Band D Equivalents | 2024/25 Additional Income £ million |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Sefton Council | 1,853.90 | 173.0 | 0.320 |
| Police & Crime Commissioner | 251.97 | 173.0 | 0.044 |
| Fire & Rescue Authority | 88.61 | 173.0 | 0.015 |
| Combined Authority | 19.00 | 173.0 | 0.003 |
| Total | 2,213.48 | 173.0 | 0.383 |

The forecast assumes a 25% reduction in the number of second homes is achieved by 1 April 2025 and that 25% would be exempt from the premium as a result of Government imposed exceptions. The actual reduction in second homes or subject to exceptions could be higher or lower than forecast and will be reflected in future tax base calculations.

6.8 Consultation

The Council undertook a public consultation on proposals to introduce the new discretionary premiums in-line with powers introduced in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, which ran from 11th September to 27th October 2023.

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

The Cabinet is recommended to consider the outcome of the consultation before deciding whether to recommend to Council the proposed premiums be introduced from 1st April 2024 (Long-Term Empty) and 1st April 2025 (Second Homes).

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SETTING THE COUNCIL TAX BASE FOR 2024/25

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 2024.
- 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 long-term collection rate of 97.25% in 2024/25, which is an increase of 0.25% from the rate assumed in 2023/24.
- 1.4 The Council currently applies a 100% premium on homes left empty for 2 years or more. The Council has the option to apply this premium on homes left empty for 12 months or more from 1 April 2024. 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 continues to apply only after 2 years or more.

Option B: the premium is applied after 12 months or more.

2. Council Tax Base for Sefton Council in 2024/25

- 2.1 An analysis of the changes between the 2023/24 and the 2024/25 tax base is provided in the table below:

| Tax Base for Sefton Council | | Band D Equivalentents | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | | 2023/24 | 2024/25 | Change |
| H | <u>Chargeable Dwellings</u> | | | |
| | Dwellings on the Banding List | 112,838.2 | 113,369.8 | 531.6 |
| | Exempt Dwellings | -2,235.2 | -2,426.9 | -191.7 |
| | Disabled Persons Reductions | -152.8 | -159.7 | -6.9 |
| | | 110,450.2 | 110,783.2 | 333.0 |
| Q | Discounts | -10,468.0 | -10,593.4 | -125.4 |
| E | Empty Homes Premium | 898.8 | 890.2 | -8.6 |
| J | Adjustments | -506.0 | -398.6 | 107.4 |
| Z | Council Tax Support Scheme | -12,070.3 | -12,019.2 | 51.1 |
| B | Collection Rate Adjustment | -2,649.1 | -2,438.2 | 210.9 |
| | MOD Properties | 8.0 | 8.0 | 0.0 |
| | Council Tax Base (Option A) | 85,663.6 | 86,232.0 | 568.4 |

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| | | | | |
|---|--|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | Continued from previous page | | | |
| E | Premium of 100% applied on homes left empty for 12 months from 1 April 2024. | 0.0 | 226.9 | 226.9 |
| | Council Tax Base (Option B) | 85,663.6 | 86,458.9 | 795.3 |

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 558 (+0.4%) in the year.

Exempt Dwellings (A-W): The number of dwellings subject to an exemption increased by 217 (8.0%). The largest increases 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 361 (+0.7%).

Empty Homes Premium: The number of dwellings left empty for more than two years has reduced by 31 (-3.7%).

Adjustments: The taxbase forecast assumes a lower level of growth in discounts and exemptions over the next year.

Council Tax Support Scheme (CTRS): The number of pension age claimants has reduced 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 2024/25. The following tables provide details of the proposed new tax base for each parish compared to 2023/24 under both alternative options:

| Tax Base for Parish Areas (Option A) | Band D Equivalentents | | | % |
|---|-----------------------|---------|--------|--------|
| | 2023/24 | 2024/25 | Change | Change |
| Parish of Aintree Village | 2,056.7 | 2,073.2 | 16.5 | 0.8% |
| Parish of Formby | 9,154.4 | 9,200.1 | 45.7 | 0.5% |
| Parish of Hightown | 867.6 | 872.5 | 4.9 | 0.6% |
| Parish of Ince Blundell | 173.1 | 173.7 | 0.6 | 0.3% |
| Parish of Little Altcar | 434.0 | 449.6 | 15.6 | 3.6% |
| Parish of Lydiate | 2,109.2 | 2,104.9 | -4.3 | -0.2% |
| Parish of Maghull | 6,878.1 | 6,914.3 | 36.2 | 0.5% |
| Parish of Melling | 1,098.0 | 1,117.0 | 19.0 | 1.7% |
| Parish of Sefton | 324.7 | 327.2 | 2.5 | 0.8% |
| Parish of Thornton | 778.9 | 771.1 | -7.8 | -1.0% |

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| Tax Base for Parish Areas (Option B) | Band D Equivalents | | | % |
|---|--------------------|---------|--------|--------|
| | 2023/24 | 2024/25 | Change | Change |
| Parish of Aintree Village | 2,056.7 | 2,079.9 | 23.2 | 1.1% |
| Parish of Formby | 9,154.4 | 9,222.3 | 67.9 | 0.7% |
| Parish of Hightown | 867.6 | 874.0 | 6.4 | 0.7% |
| Parish of Ince Blundell | 173.1 | 174.0 | 0.9 | 0.5% |
| Parish of Little Altcar | 434.0 | 450.5 | 16.5 | 3.8% |
| Parish of Lydiate | 2,109.2 | 2,110.2 | 1.0 | 0.0% |
| Parish of Maghull | 6,878.1 | 6,920.9 | 42.8 | 0.6% |
| Parish of Melling | 1,098.0 | 1,118.2 | 20.2 | 1.8% |
| Parish of Sefton | 324.7 | 327.6 | 2.9 | 0.9% |
| Parish of Thornton | 778.9 | 772.5 | -6.4 | -0.8% |

- 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 Melling parish areas are due to housing development. The reductions in Lydiate and Thornton Parish Areas are due to growth in exemptions in those areas.

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3. Consultation analysis...*Page 12*
4. Equality Impact Assessment...*Page 14*

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1. Introduction

The Council is proposing to make changes to the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme in April 2024 for people who are working, but also receiving Universal Credit. Households that are on a low income can apply for Council Tax Reduction. This means that they pay less in Council Tax.

The Government makes the rules for how much Council Tax Reduction that low-income pensioners (people aged 66 or over) could get. Sefton Council makes the rules for how much Council Tax Reduction that working age customers (under 66 years old) on a low income could get under its local Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

There are nearly 15,000 people in Sefton getting help with their Council Tax through Council Tax Reduction as they have a low income.

Sefton's local Council Tax Reduction scheme contains rules for many different circumstances that people may have, including those who are:

- Single
- Married or living together as a couple.
- Have children
- Have other people living with them
- a carer
- Living with ill health or have a disability
- Working
- Looking for work
- Claiming Universal Credit
- Claiming other benefits or tax credits.
- Have other types of income (e.g., pensions)

What is Universal Credit?

Universal Credit is a government benefit paid to low-income people that is paid by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), designed to help people on a low income pay for:

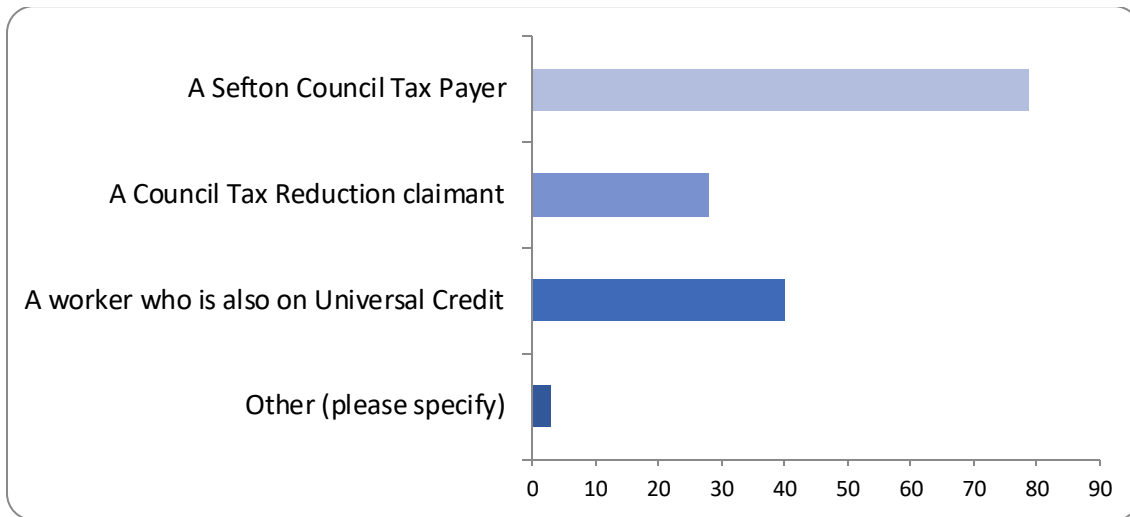
- Daily living costs for the customer and their family such as food and household bills.
- Housing costs such as rent, service charges or mortgage interest.
- Childcare costs
- Most new benefit claims for people under the age of 66 will be for Universal Credit.

Sefton Council carried out a public consultation seeking views from residents from 11th September 2023 to 13th October 2023. This was hosted on the Council's Citizen Space website, with paper copies of the survey available upon request.

2. Main Report from Citizen Space Website showing questions asked and responses received: Proposed changes to Council Tax Reduction Scheme from 1 April 2024

Responses to this survey: **150**

1: Are you responding to this survey as?



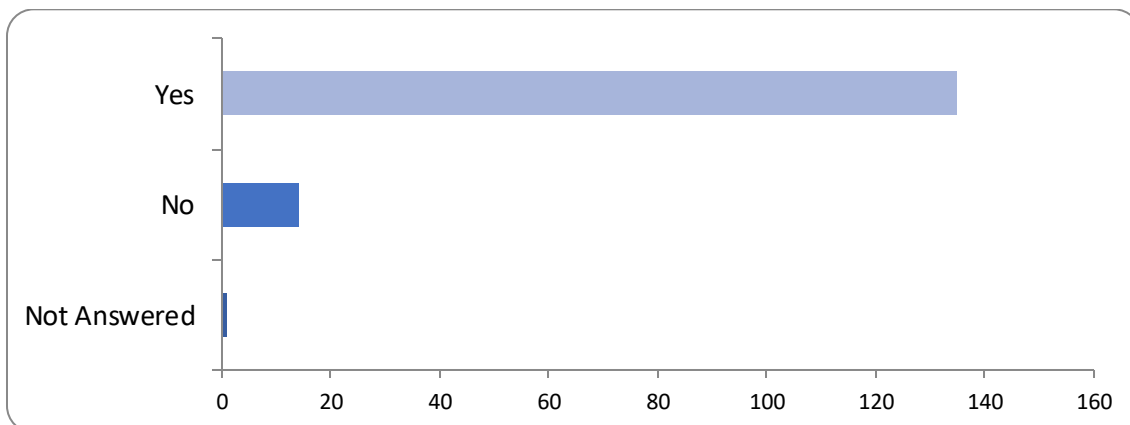
| Option | Total | Percent |
|--|-------|---------|
| A Sefton Council Taxpayer | 79 | 52.67% |
| A Council Tax Reduction claimant | 28 | 18.67% |
| An elected Member | 0 | 0.00% |
| A worker who is also on Universal Credit | 40 | 26.67% |
| A local charity, voluntary or community organisation | 0 | 0.00% |
| Other (please specify) | 3 | 2.00% |
| Not Answered | 0 | 0.00% |

2: What is the first part of your home postcode (for example: L20; PR8)?

There were 150 responses to this part of the question detailing various postcodes throughout the borough.

3: Do you agree with proposals?

There were 149 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|--------------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 135 | 90.00% |
| No | 14 | 9.33% |
| Not Answered | 1 | 0.67% |

Any other comments?

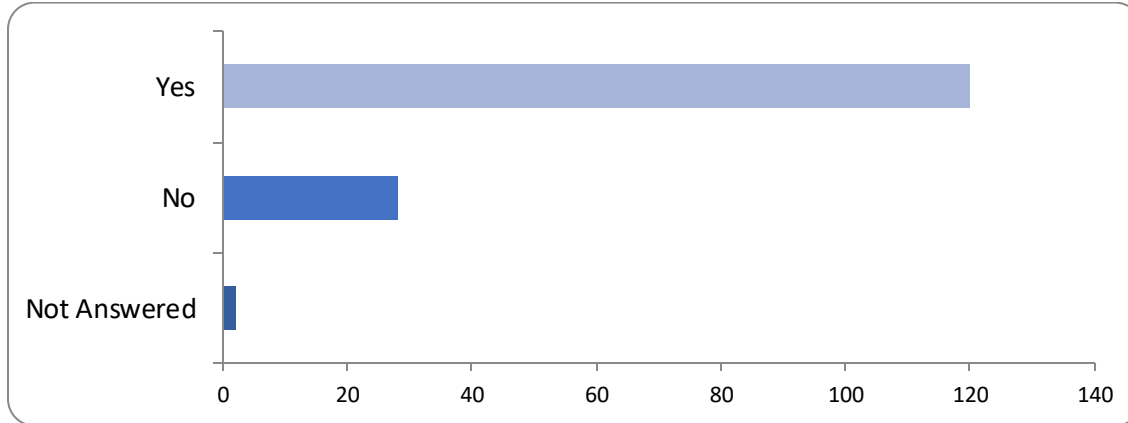
3

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There were 39 responses to this part of the question. See Page 13 for analysis of these comments.

4: Do you give consent to providing your details, in accordance with the Privacy Notice?

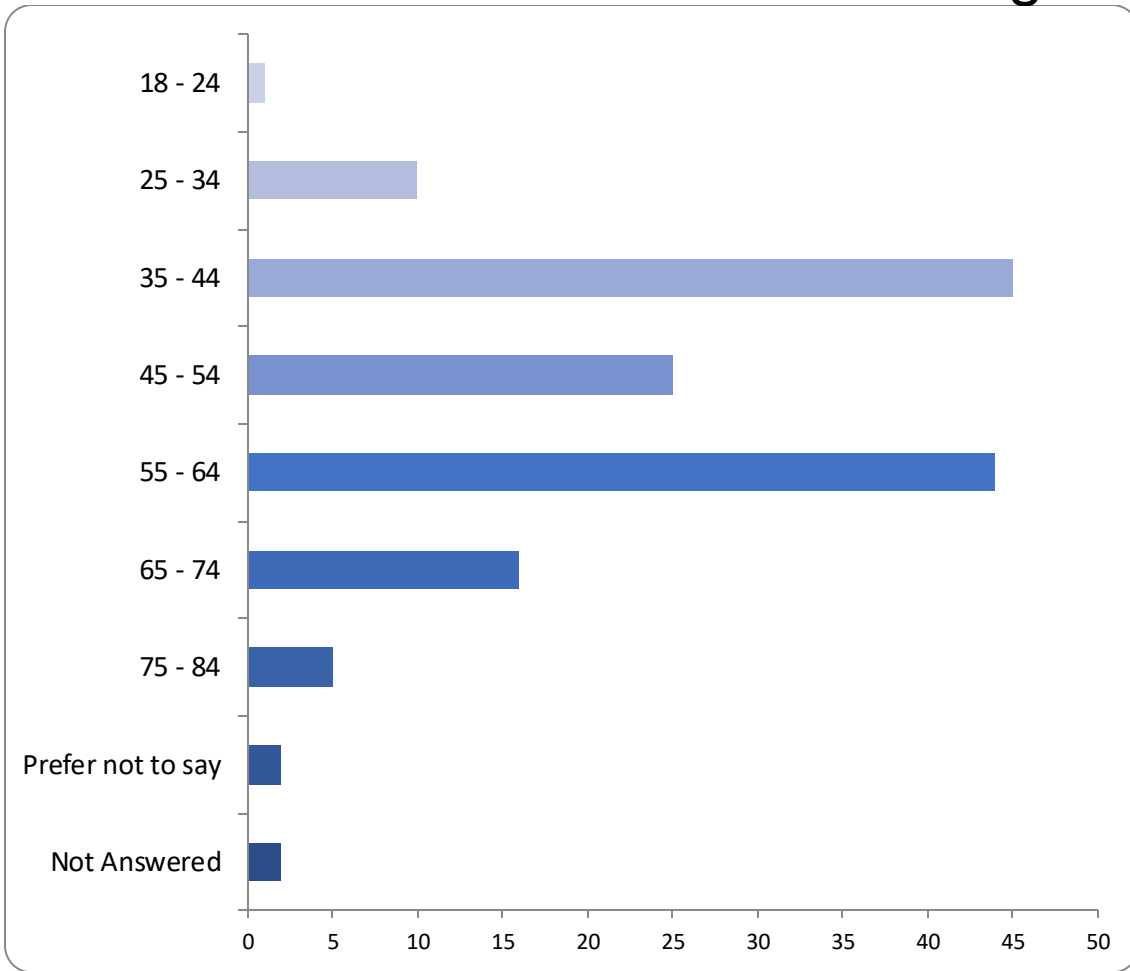
There were 148 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|--------------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 120 | 80.00% |
| No | 28 | 18.67% |
| Not Answered | 2 | 1.33% |

5: How old are you?

There were 148 responses to this part of the question.

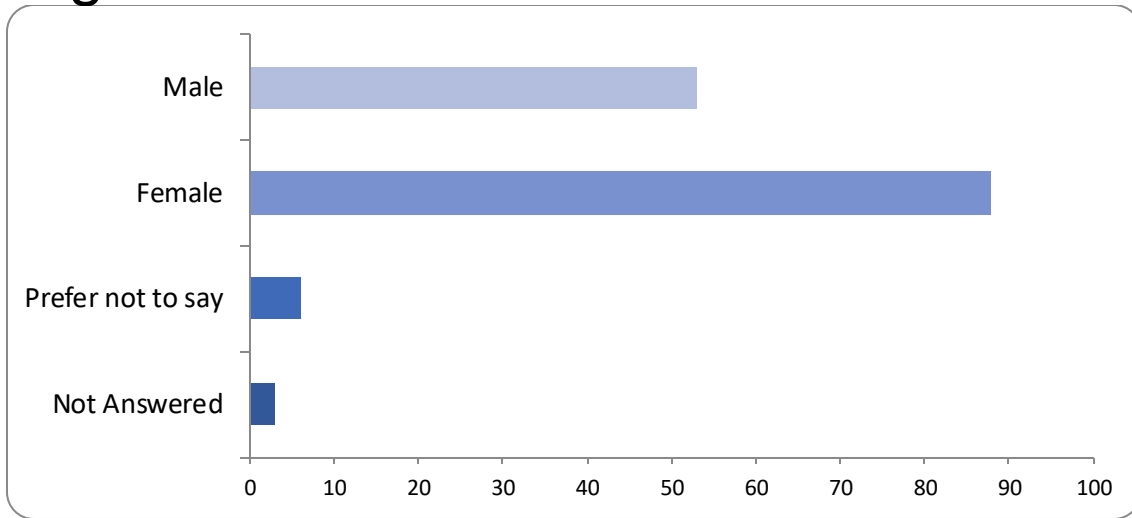


| Option | Total | Percent |
|-------------------|-------|---------|
| Under 18 | 0 | 0.00% |
| 18 - 24 | 1 | 0.67% |
| 25 - 34 | 10 | 6.67% |
| 35 - 44 | 45 | 30.00% |
| 45 - 54 | 25 | 16.67% |
| 55 - 64 | 44 | 29.33% |
| 65 - 74 | 16 | 10.67% |
| 75 - 84 | 5 | 3.33% |
| 85+ | 0 | 0.00% |
| Prefer not to say | 2 | 1.33% |
| Not Answered | 2 | 1.33% |

6: What is your sex?

There were 147 responses to this part of the question.

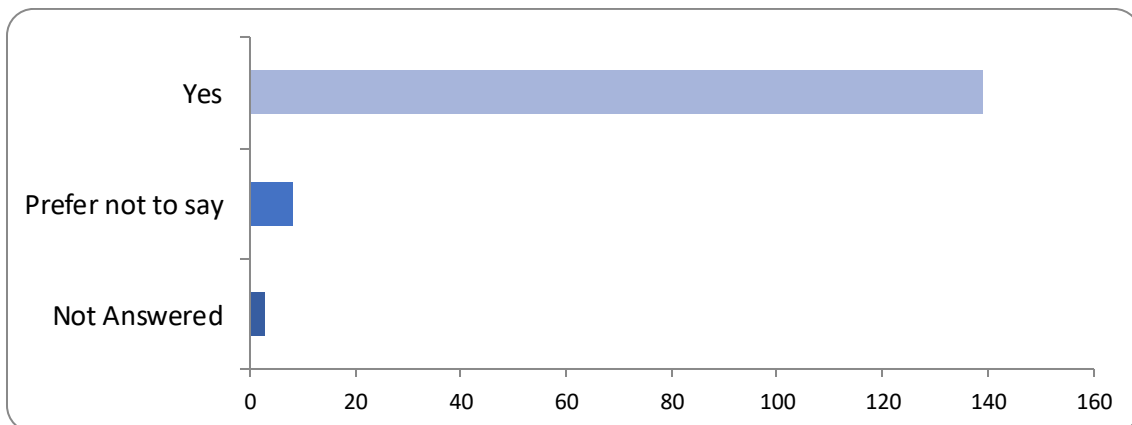
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| Option | Total | Percent |
|-------------------|-------|---------|
| Male | 53 | 35.33% |
| Female | 88 | 58.67% |
| Prefer not to say | 6 | 4.00% |
| Not Answered | 3 | 2.00% |

7: Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?

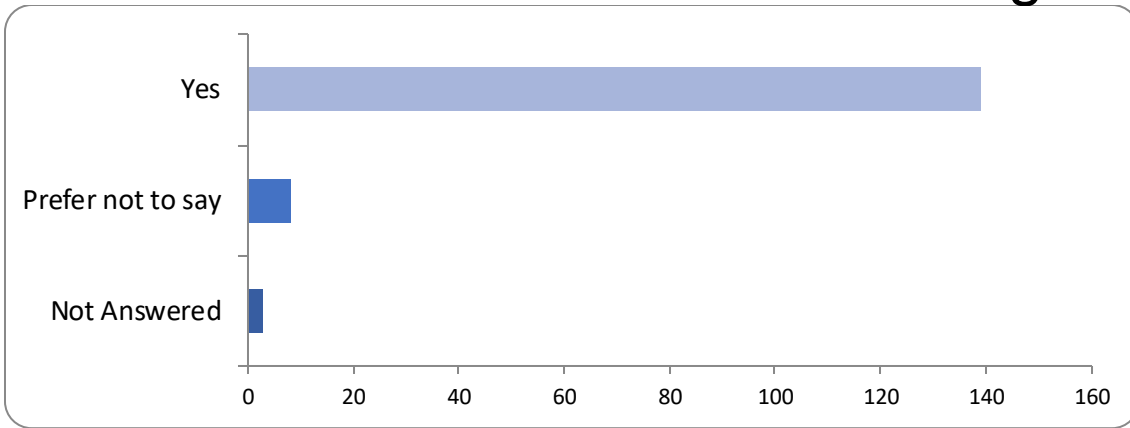
There were 147 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|-------------------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 139 | 92.67% |
| No | 0 | 0.00% |
| Prefer not to say | 8 | 5.33% |
| Not Answered | 3 | 2.00% |

8: Do you currently live as your birth sex?

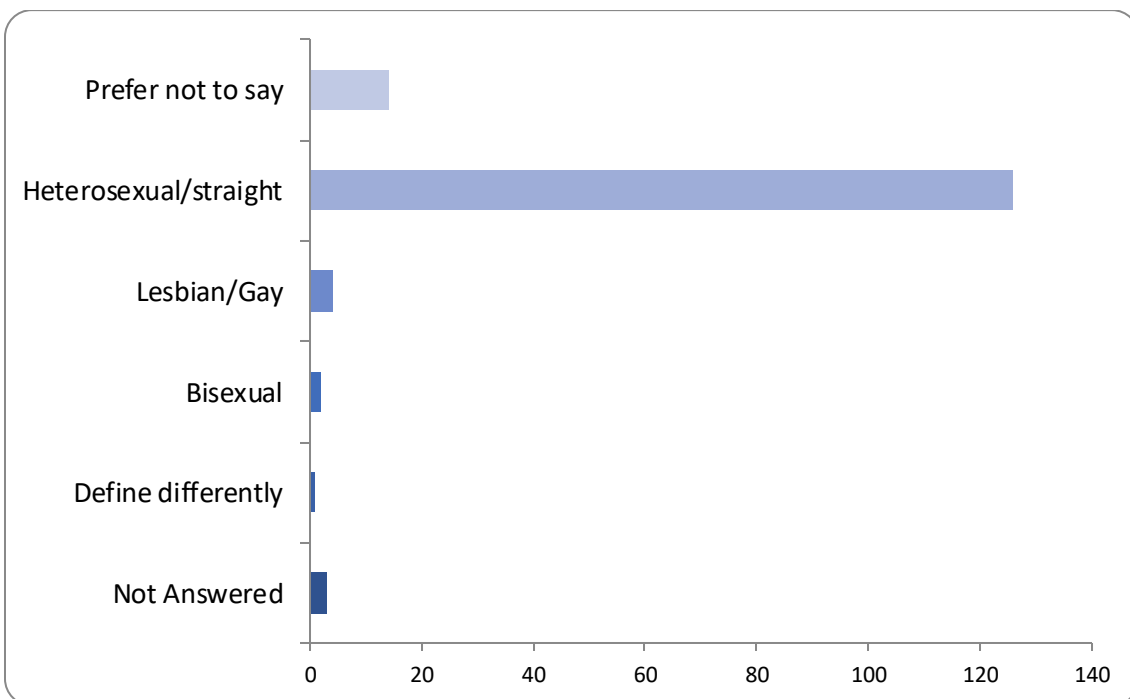
There were 147 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|-------------------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 139 | 92.67% |
| No | 0 | 0.00% |
| Prefer not to say | 8 | 5.33% |
| Not Answered | 3 | 2.00% |

9: How would you describe your sexual orientation?

There were 147 responses to this part of the question.

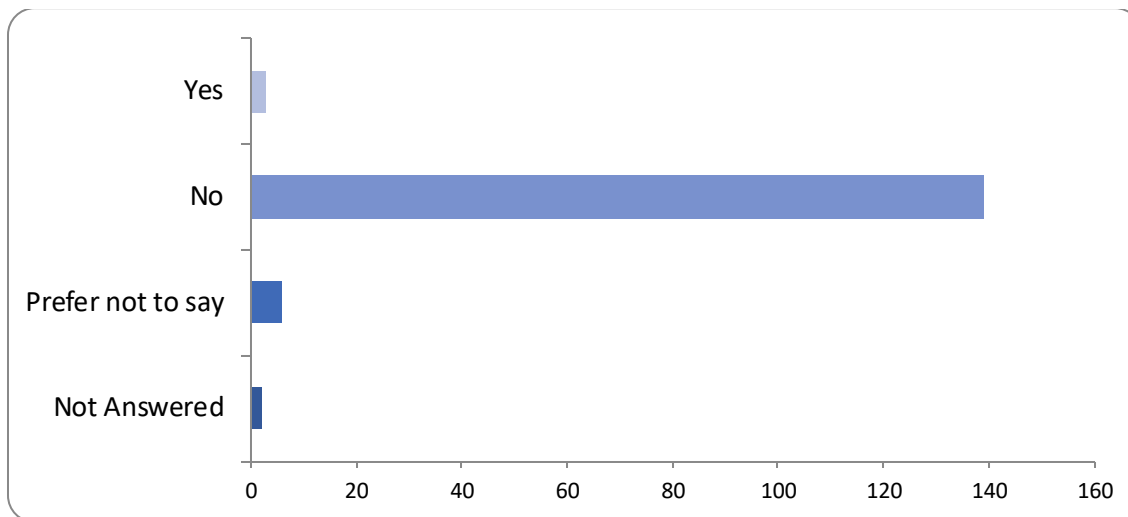


| Option | Total | Percent |
|-----------------------|-------|---------|
| Prefer not to say | 14 | 9.33% |
| Heterosexual/straight | 126 | 84.00% |
| Lesbian/Gay | 4 | 2.67% |
| Bisexual | 2 | 1.33% |
| Define differently | 1 | 0.67% |
| Not Answered | 3 | 2.00% |

10: Are you currently cared for by Sefton Council?

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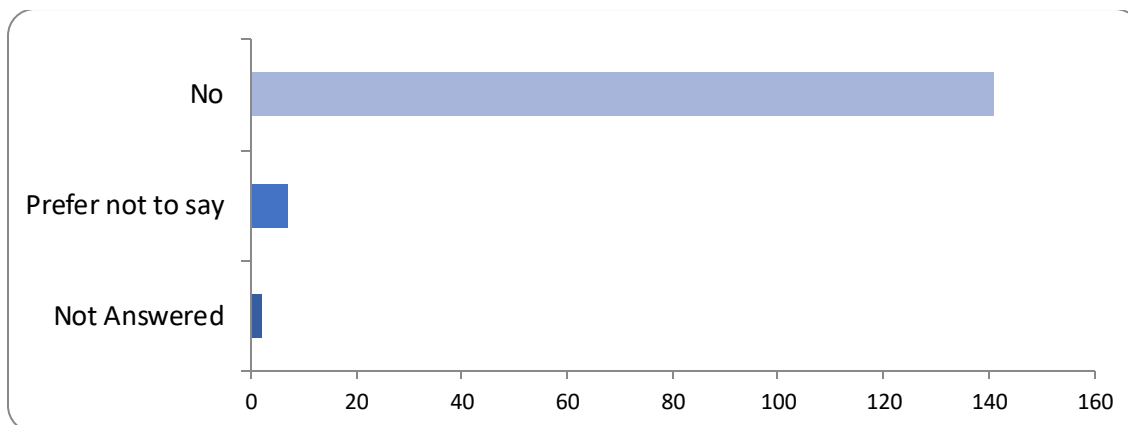
There were 148 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|-------------------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 3 | 2.00% |
| No | 139 | 92.67% |
| Prefer not to say | 6 | 4.00% |
| Not Answered | 2 | 1.33% |

11: Have you ever been cared for as a child by Sefton Council or another Local Authority?

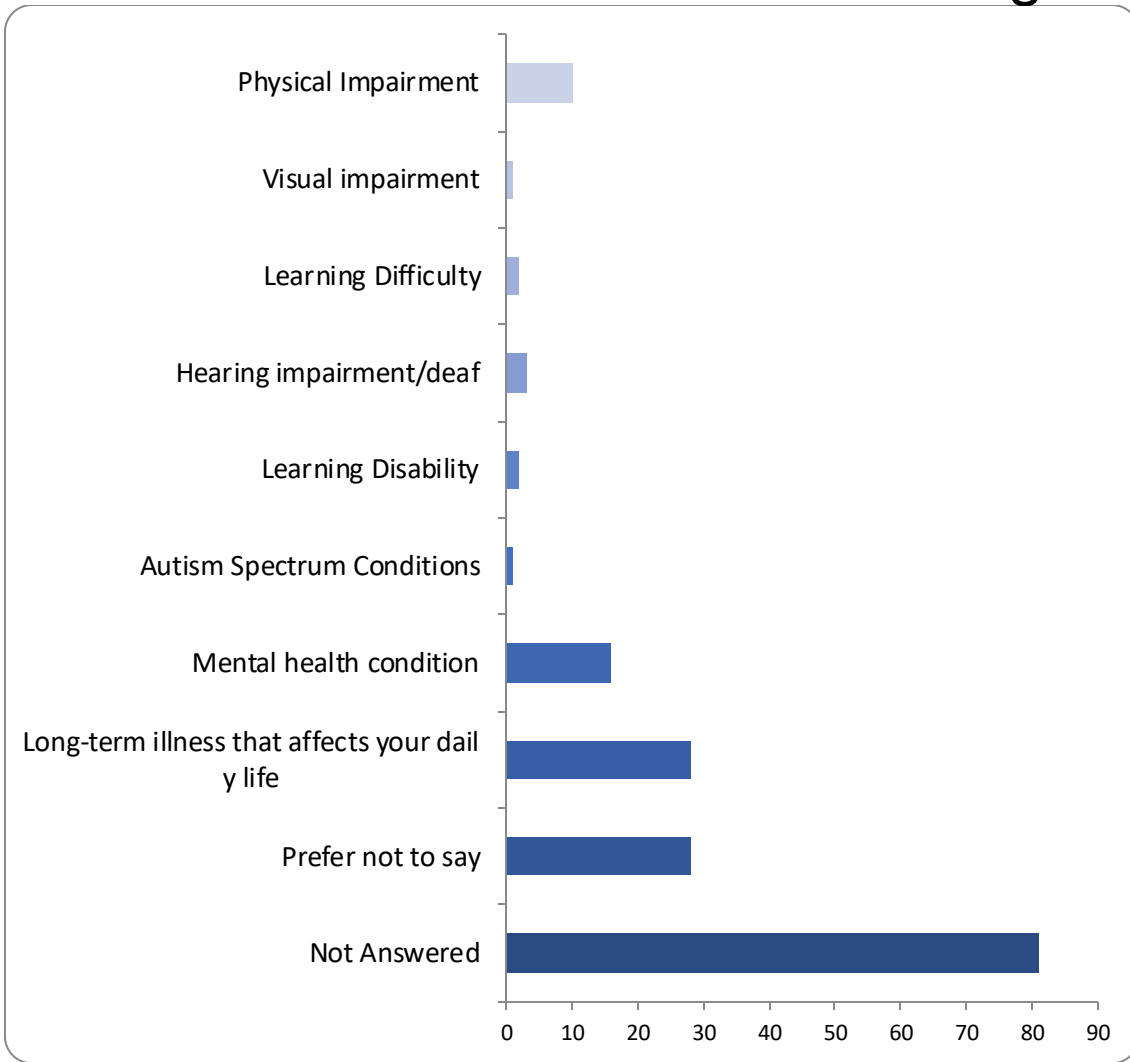
There were 148 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|-------------------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 0 | 0.00% |
| No | 141 | 94.00% |
| Prefer not to say | 7 | 4.67% |
| Not Answered | 2 | 1.33% |

12: Disability: Do you have any of the following (please tick all that apply):

There were 69 responses to this part of the question.

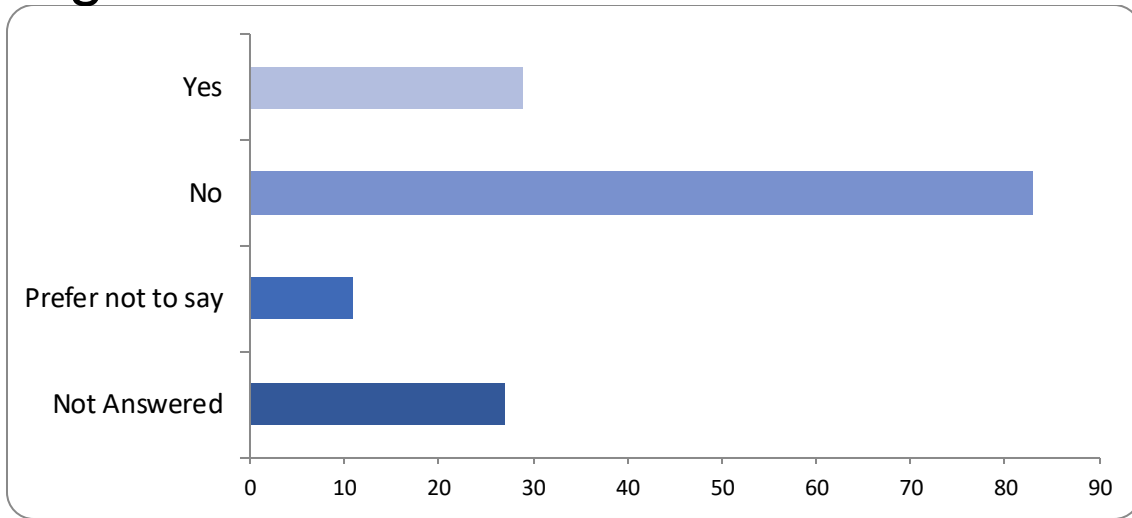


| Option | Total | Percent |
|--|-------|---------|
| Physical Impairment | 10 | 6.67% |
| Visual impairment | 1 | 0.67% |
| Learning Difficulty | 2 | 1.33% |
| Hearing impairment/deaf | 3 | 2.00% |
| Learning Disability | 2 | 1.33% |
| Autism Spectrum Conditions | 1 | 0.67% |
| Mental health condition | 16 | 10.67% |
| Dementia | 0 | 0.00% |
| Long-term illness that affects your daily life | 28 | 18.67% |
| Prefer not to say | 28 | 18.67% |
| Not Answered | 81 | 54.00% |

13: If you have ticked any of the boxes above, or you have cancer, diabetes or HIV this would be classed as 'disability' under the legislation. Do you consider yourself to be 'disabled'?

There were 123 responses to this part of the question.

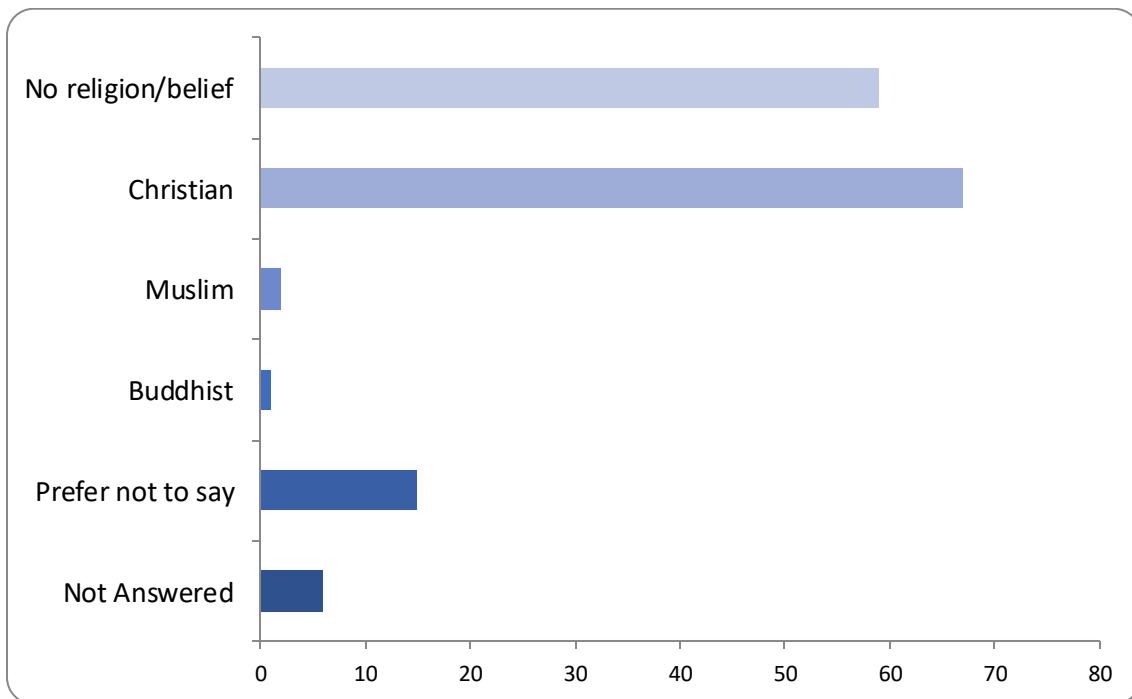
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| Option | Total | Percent |
|-------------------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 29 | 19.33% |
| No | 83 | 55.33% |
| Prefer not to say | 11 | 7.33% |
| Not Answered | 27 | 18.00% |

14: What is your religion/belief?

There were 144 responses to this part of the question.



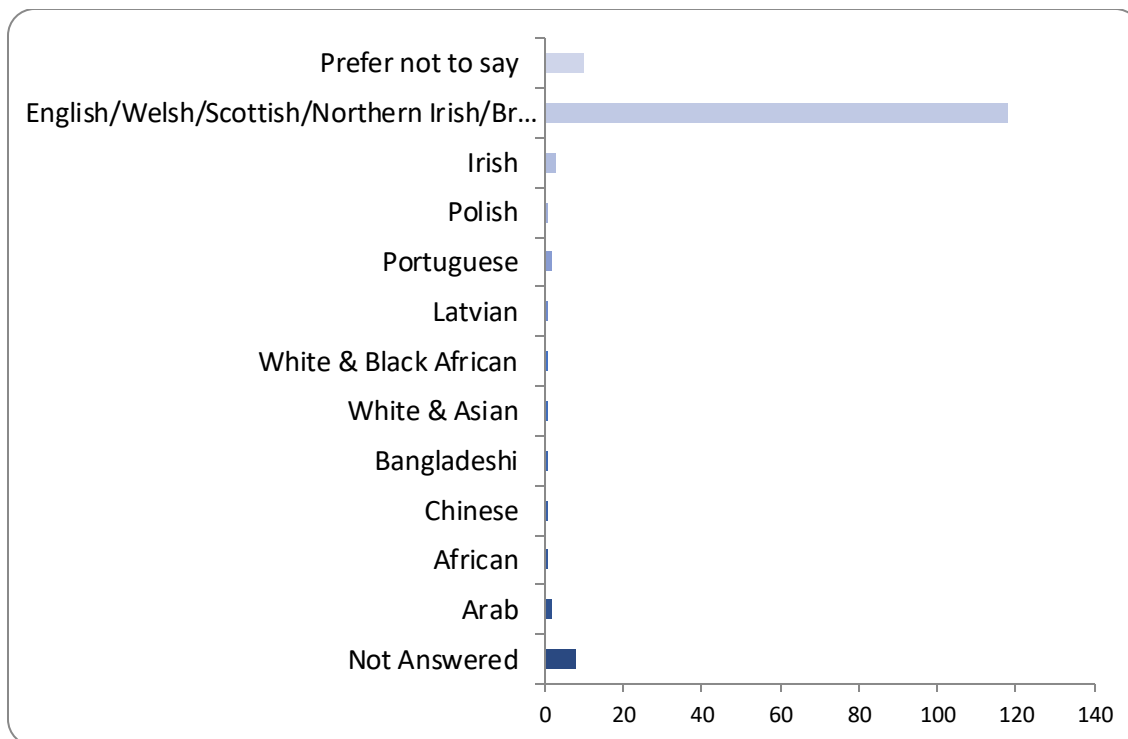
| Option | Total | Percent |
|--------------------|-------|---------|
| No religion/belief | 59 | 39.33% |
| Christian | 67 | 44.67% |
| Hindu | 0 | 0.00% |
| Muslim | 2 | 1.33% |
| Jewish | 0 | 0.00% |

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| | | |
|-------------------|----|--------|
| Sikh | 0 | 0.00% |
| Buddhist | 1 | 0.67% |
| Prefer not to say | 15 | 10.00% |
| Not Answered | 6 | 4.00% |

15: Race/Ethnicity (please note that Sikh and Jewish are collected in the Religion/Belief Section above) – do you identify as:

There were 142 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|---|-------|---------|
| Prefer not to say | 10 | 6.67% |
| English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British | 118 | 78.67% |
| Irish | 3 | 2.00% |
| Gypsy or Irish Traveller or Roma | 0 | 0.00% |
| Polish | 1 | 0.67% |
| Portuguese | 2 | 1.33% |
| Latvian | 1 | 0.67% |
| Lithuanian | 0 | 0.00% |
| White and Black Caribbean | 0 | 0.00% |
| White & Black African | 1 | 0.67% |
| White & Asian | 1 | 0.67% |
| Indian | 0 | 0.00% |
| Pakistani | 0 | 0.00% |
| Bangladeshi | 1 | 0.67% |
| Chinese | 1 | 0.67% |

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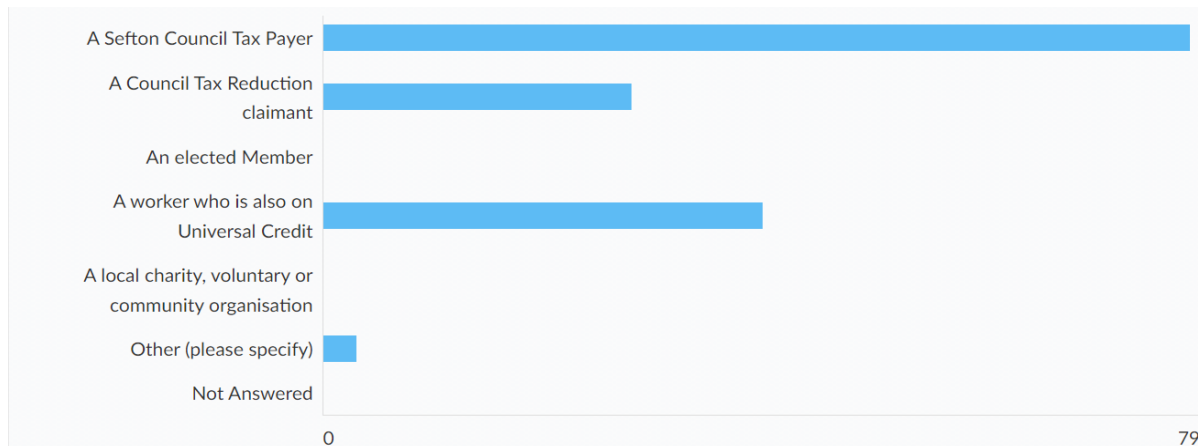
| | | |
|--------------|---|-------|
| African | 1 | 0.67% |
| Caribbean | 0 | 0.00% |
| Arab | 2 | 1.33% |
| Not Answered | 8 | 5.33% |

3. Consultation Analysis

CTRS Consultation Summary

Total of 150 submissions. 135 (90.00%) agreed with the proposal, with 1 (0.67%) not responding at all before submitting.

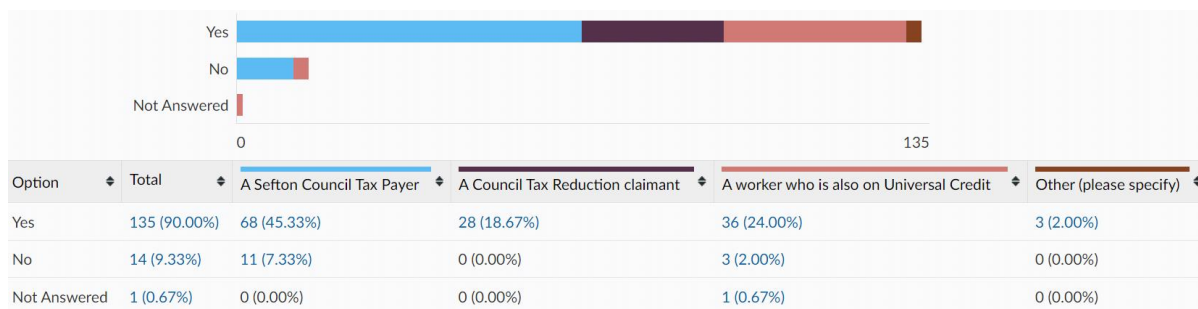
Respondents answering Question 1 identified themselves as:



The percentage breakdown of these respondents is as follows:

| Option | Total | Percent |
|--|-------|---------|
| A Sefton Council Tax Payer | 79 | 52.67% |
| A Council Tax Reduction claimant | 28 | 18.67% |
| An elected Member | 0 | 0.00% |
| A worker who is also on Universal Credit | 40 | 26.67% |
| A local charity, voluntary or community organisation | 0 | 0.00% |
| Other (please specify) | 3 | 2.00% |
| Not Answered | 0 | 0.00% |

The specific Agree/Disagree answer each respondent submitted was broken down into their separate groups.



- The biggest response was from Council Tax Payers answering the question 'Do you agree with Proposals' seeing 79 in total. Of these 79 respondents, 68 (45.33% of total respondents) agreed with the proposal.

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- Second biggest number of responses were from Workers in receipt of UC, totalling 40. Of this amount, 36 (24.00% of total respondents) agreed with proposals.
- The third biggest number of responses was from 28 CTR claimants, all of whom agreed with the proposal (18.67% of total respondents).
- Finally, 3 responded as 'Other' ('Exempt from Council Tax', 'Retired Pensioner' and 'Independent man'), all of whom agreed (2.00% of total respondents).

Of those 14 who did not agree with the proposals (9.33%), the biggest number came from 'Council Tax Payers' with 11 (7.33% of total respondents) and a further 3 from 'Workers in receipt of UC' (2.00% of total respondents).

The reasons for CT Payers selecting 'No' included concerns over:

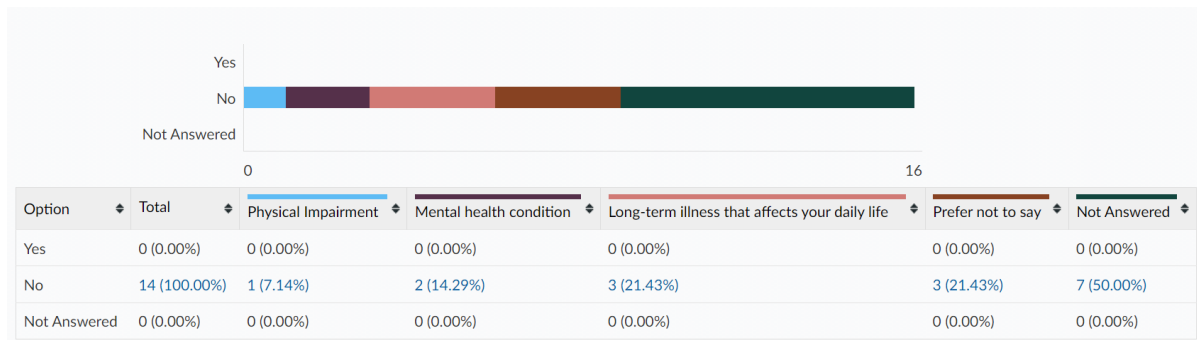
- properties only being empty because of probate,
- it being a bad time to sell,
- people who claim CTR contributing less and people being able to hide their earnings.

Analysis shows that several of these comments are related to concerns over Council Tax for these individuals, rather than the proposed changes to the CTR scheme as detailed in this consultation.

It therefore appears that some customers have applied their comments to the incorrect consultation; the proposed changes to the CTR Scheme, rather than the concurrent Exempt and Empty properties consultation.

Further analysis of these responses (where the customer also gave permission to share their details via the privacy notice) shows several disabilities also detailed.

Please note that this question allowed multiple responses, so there appears to be extra 'No' responses (16) than the previously stated 14.



There is only 1 comment related to this specific question for those who indicated a disability:

Answer

I'm responsible for Council Tax on my late father's property. It's a bad time to sell. I can't afford increased charges on his empty flat. It's in probate. It isn't my fault that the property is empty.

It therefore could be possible through this specific instance and cross referencing them with the wider number of 'No' comments that a number of these responses were made in error through customers misunderstanding the question and mistaking this consultation for another.

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4. Equality Impact Assessment

Equality Analysis Report – Changes to Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2024/25

Details of proposal: Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25

Sefton Council is looking to make a change to its established local Council Tax Reduction scheme regarding how it processes some changes in circumstances for working-age Universal Credit households, in employment, that also claim Council Tax Reduction. The change, if agreed, will be effective from 1st April 2024.

What the change is/what's proposed

Council Tax Reduction currently supports just under 25,000 Sefton households who are on a low income with the cost of their council tax.

Around 14,500 claimants are of working age (60% of households using the scheme) and the remaining 10,000 (40%) are pension age.

There are almost 1100 working-age people in Sefton who are in low paid work and who are also claiming Universal Credit to top up their wages.

The Council Tax Reduction 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:

Summary of Council Tax Support available to assist Council Taxpayers who are in receipt of a low income for 2024/25

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 proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme with effect from 1st April 2024 have been considered 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.

The proposed change will affect working age households in employment in receipt of Universal Credit. It is proposed that with effect from 1st April 2024 minor changes in the amount of the Universal Credit award will not be actioned. It is intended that this change will introduce more financial stability to these households when budgeting for Council Tax payments, as opposed to Council Tax bills payments changing each time there is a minor change in the amount of the Universal Credit award.

Examples of when recalculations will take place include when a customer:

- stops working.
- has their Universal Credit payments stop.
- changes jobs or get a second job.
- moves home, or someone joins or leaves their household.

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. The proposed change to Sefton's Council's scheme from 1st April 2024 will only affect working-age households, and so will have no effect on people of pensionable age.

People with a Disability

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

The proposed changes will have no impacts specific to this equality group.

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.

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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 (84%) according to ONS 2021.

The proposed changes will have no impacts specific to this equality group.

Sexual Orientation

No impacts identified specific to this equality group.

Pregnancy and Maternity

We do not have sufficient evidence, but females are disproportionality affected and are more likely to be single parents.

Mitigation in place to support the additional needs of households with children includes:

- 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 for 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 the Council Tax reduction.
- Procedures are regularly reviewed for the collection of non-payments of Council Tax and signposting to Exception Hardship Fund to ensure non-disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable household.

The proposed changes will have no impacts specific to this equality group.

Mitigations in place to support the Council's principals of the scheme

Financially Vulnerable People:

The Council has put the following mitigation in place: -

- Provision of a discretionary Exceptional Hardship Fund to provide additional support to those financially vulnerable to struggling to pay Council Tax
- For working age people, allowing a Universal Credit notification, received from the 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.

- Establishing a 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.
- 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.
- Participating in the Council'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, this includes signposting customers to emergency support for food, heating, essential household goods and provide practical support such as signposting claimants for winter coats, school uniforms.
- The Council attends various customer representative events and hard to reach groups to raise awareness of Council Tax support available, i.e., Pensioner and Disability forums, Sefton Citizens Advice surgeries.

Care Leavers

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

Armed Forces Covenant

The Council has identified that there are 16 households in Sefton claiming support from Council Tax Reduction and 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 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:

A public consultation has been carried out to seek views on the proposed change. The consultation run from 11/09/2023 to 13/10/2023, and it was hosted on the Council's Citizen Space Website with alternative paper copies available on request.

The consultation had 150 responses. Of these 90% agreed with the proposal, with 9.33% disagreeing. A further 0.67% stated they didn't know.

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

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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.*

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

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

As a result of the consultation, monitoring, and analysis undertaken, it is proposed that a change is made to the Council's local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) for 2024/25, regarding working-age Universal Credit income households in employment. The change is designed to make the CTRS calculation more stable and consistent for households by ignoring some of the information provided by the DWP relating to Universal Credit income. The change includes ignoring when a customer:

- Works a few extra hours one month.
- Receives a back-dated pay rise.

Applying these changes to the scheme will ensure that it will:

- Make it more straightforward for low-income households to budget household finances for Council Tax payments
- Reduce confusion for customers, and
- Reduce the council's administration costs.

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.

Annex C: Consultation – proposal to introduce new Council Tax Premiums for Empty Properties and those Periodically Occupied (second homes)

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Main Report from Citizen Space Website...*Page 2*
3. Consultation analysis...*Page 14*
4. Equality Impact Assessment...*Page 19*

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1. Introduction

The Government is bringing in new rules to allow councils to introduce new discretionary Council Tax premiums affecting properties that have:-

- been left empty for a year or more (known as long term empty properties).
- properties that are only lived in sometimes (known as second homes or holiday homes).

It is proposed that changes for properties that have been empty for a year or more will happen from 1st April 2024, and the proposed changes for properties that are only lived in sometimes will happen from 1st April 2025.

The new discretionary rules mean that :-

- Councils can charge double Council Tax on properties that have been left empty for 1 year. (This is called a premium charge of an extra 100% on top of the normal charge).
- Councils can charge double Council Tax for properties that are only lived in sometimes. (This is called a premium charge of an extra 100% on top of the normal charge).

A public consultation seeking views from residents about the introduction of these charges was carried out from 11th September 2023 to 27th October 2023.

The consultation was hosted on the Council's Citizen Space website, with paper copies of the survey available upon request. In addition, it should be noted that approximately 1,500 direct mailshot letters were issued to owners of empty properties (as people potentially directly affected by the proposal) to alert them to the consultation for them to provide their feedback if they wished.

Long Term Empty Properties and Secondary Homes

This consultation was about properties that have no furniture or only a small amount of furniture in them (called 'empty properties') and homes that are furnished but not lived in (called 'second homes').

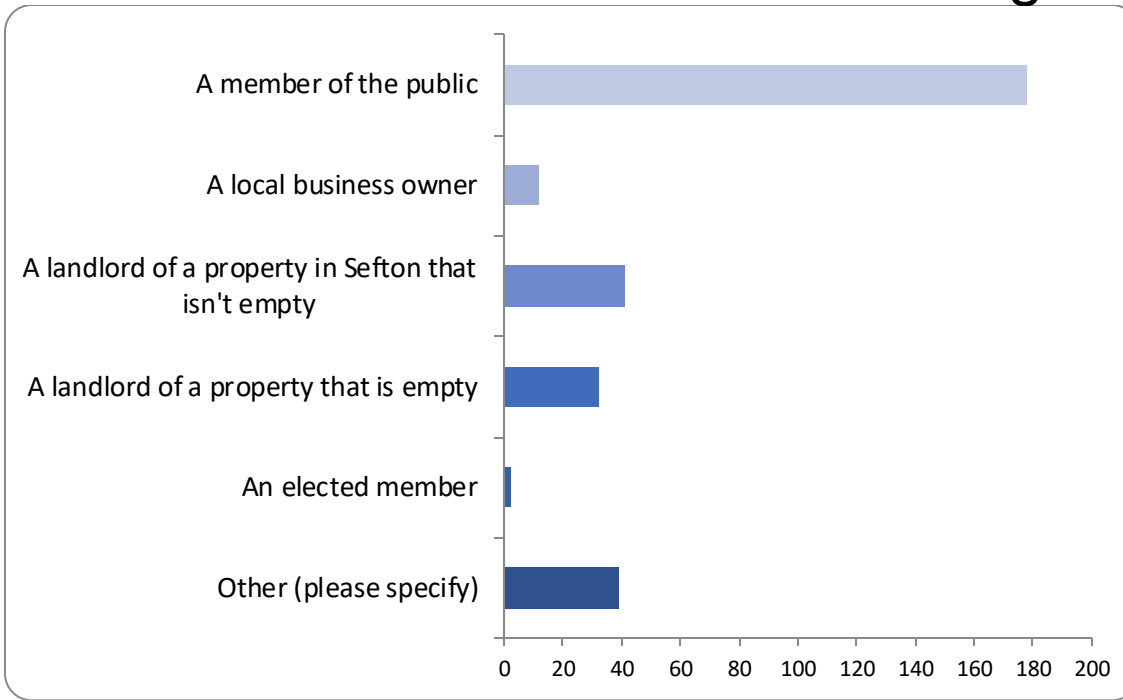
Currently, if a long-term empty property has been left empty for 2 years or more, the Council Tax charged is doubled. The consultation asked if the Council Tax should be doubled if the property has been left empty for 1 year instead of the 2 years it is now.

The consultation also asked should the Council Tax be doubled for secondary homes.

2. Main Report – Citizen Space Website

Responses to this survey: **264**

1: Are you responding to this survey as?



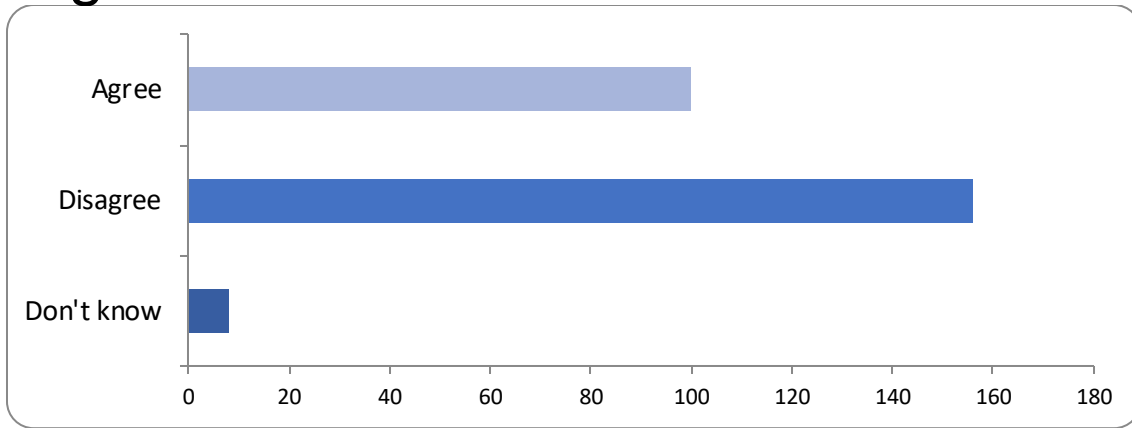
| Option | Total | Percent |
|---|-------|---------|
| A member of the public | 178 | 67.42% |
| A local business owner | 12 | 4.55% |
| A landlord of a property in Sefton that isn't empty | 41 | 15.53% |
| A landlord of a property that is empty | 32 | 12.12% |
| An elected member | 2 | 0.76% |
| A local charity, voluntary or community organisation | 0 | 0.00% |
| Other (please specify) | 39 | 14.77% |
| Not Answered | 0 | 0.00% |

2: What is the first part of your home Postcode (for example: L20; PR8)?

There were 264 responses all detailing several various postcodes across the borough.

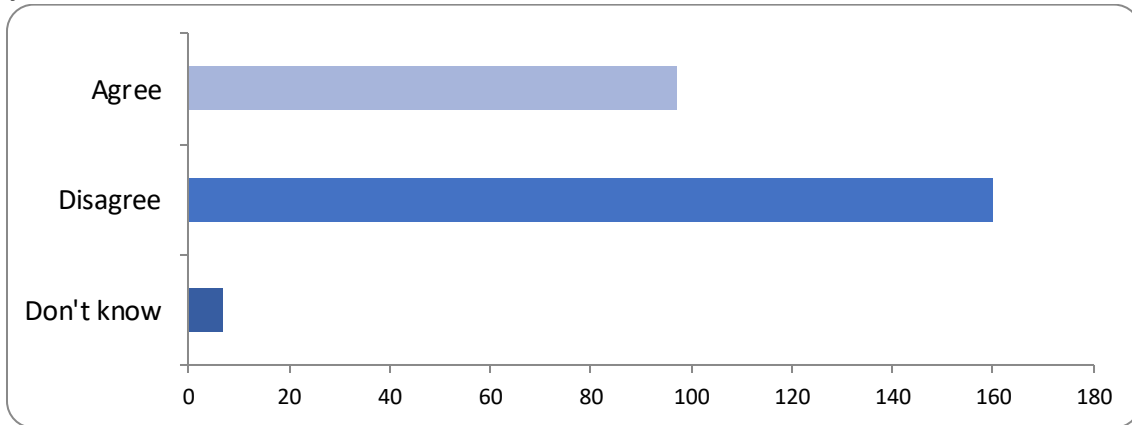
3: Do you think the extra 100% Council Tax should be charged for homes that are empty after 1 year instead of the 2 years it is now?

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| Option | Total | Percent |
|--------------|-------|---------|
| Agree | 100 | 37.88% |
| Disagree | 156 | 59.09% |
| Don't know | 8 | 3.03% |
| Not Answered | 0 | 0.00% |

4: Do you think that an extra 100% Council Tax should be charged on homes that are empty but furnished after 1 year



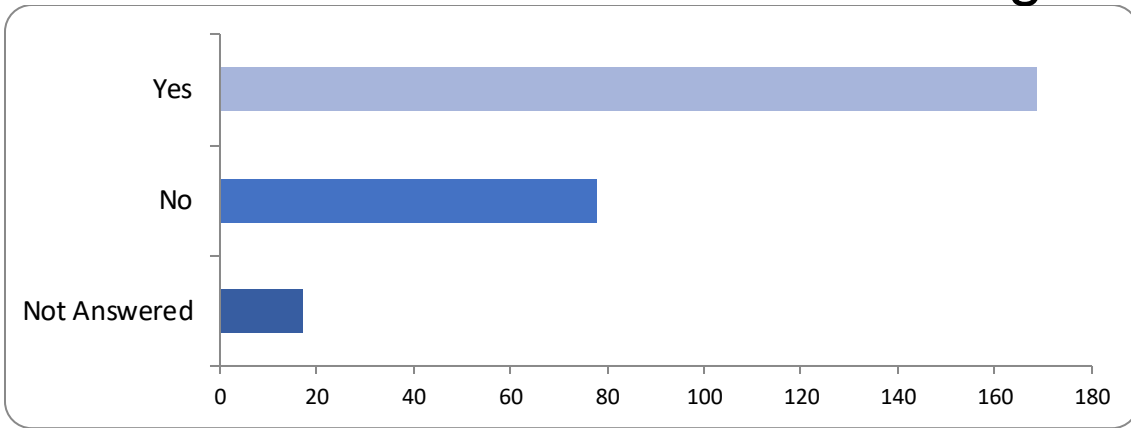
| Option | Total | Percent |
|--------------|-------|---------|
| Agree | 97 | 36.74% |
| Disagree | 160 | 60.61% |
| Don't know | 7 | 2.65% |
| Not Answered | 0 | 0.00% |

5: Do you have any comments related to this proposal?

There were 190 responses to this part of the question. Analysis of these comments can be found on Page 15.

6: Do you give consent to providing your details, in accordance with the Privacy Notice?

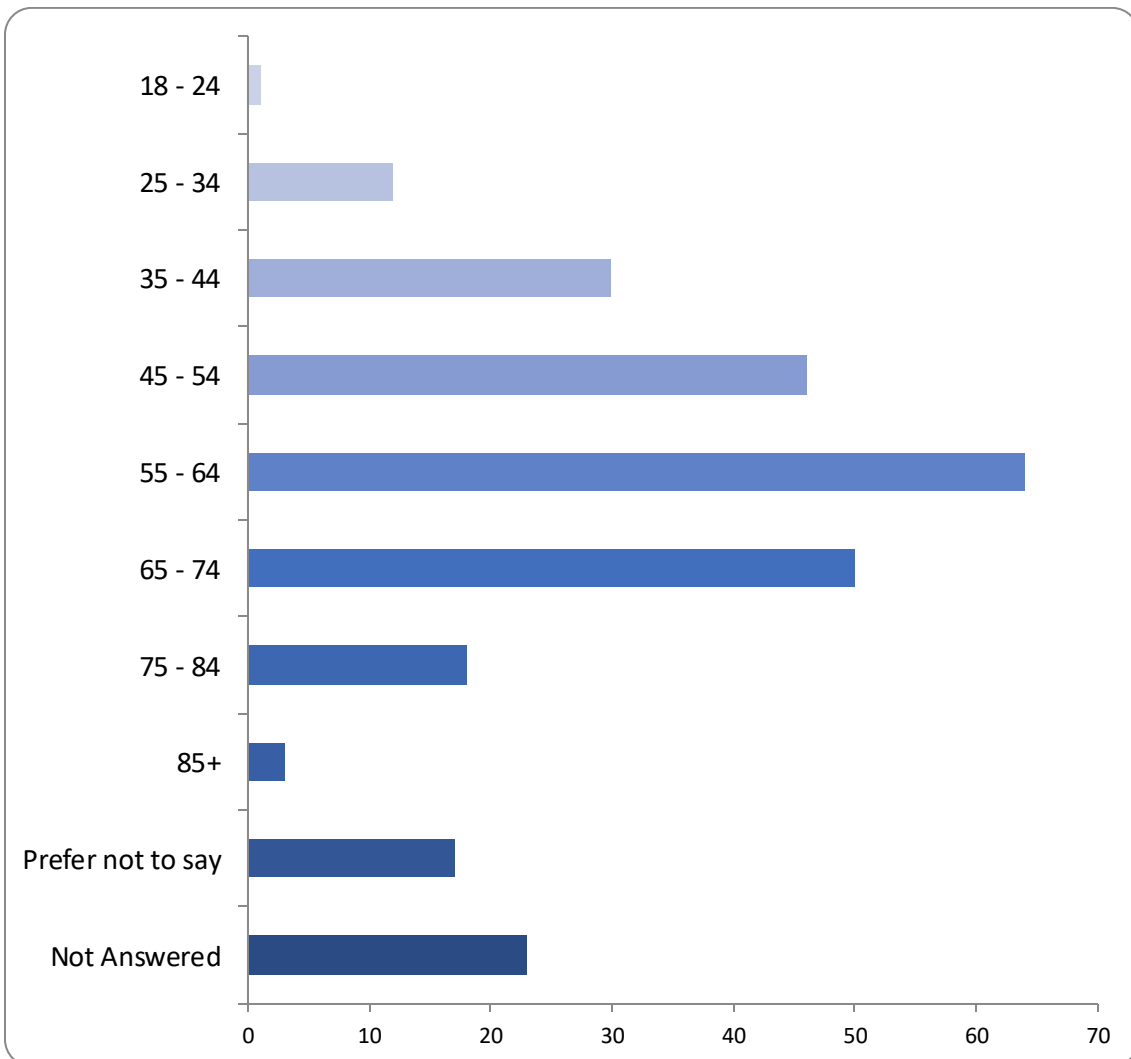
There were 247 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|--------------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 169 | 64.02% |
| No | 78 | 29.55% |
| Not Answered | 17 | 6.44% |

7: How old are you?

There were 241 responses to this part of the question.



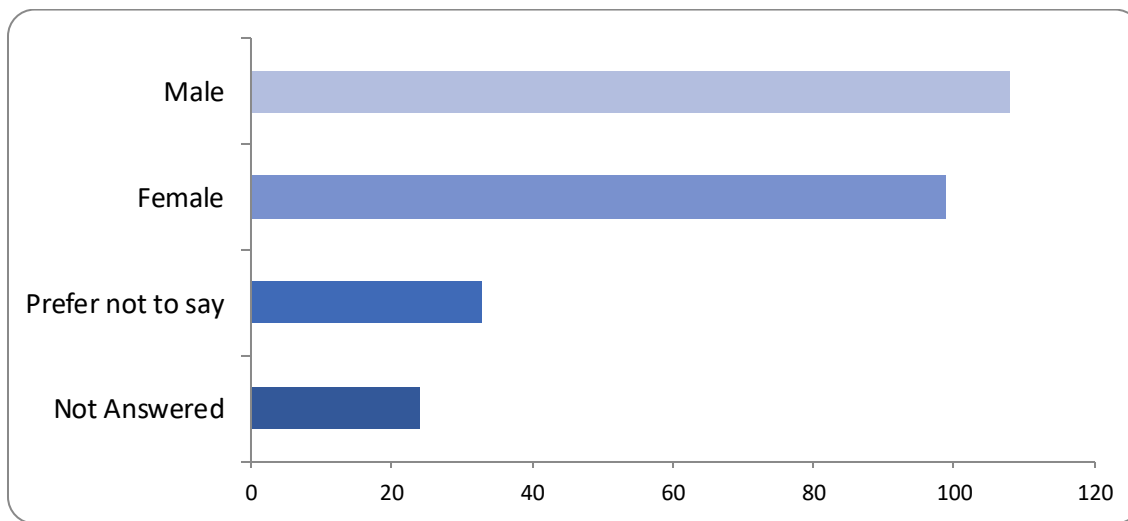
| Option | Total | Percent |
|----------|-------|---------|
| Under 18 | 0 | 0.00% |

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| | | |
|-------------------|----|--------|
| 18 - 24 | 1 | 0.38% |
| 25 - 34 | 12 | 4.55% |
| 35 - 44 | 30 | 11.36% |
| 45 - 54 | 46 | 17.42% |
| 55 - 64 | 64 | 24.24% |
| 65 - 74 | 50 | 18.94% |
| 75 - 84 | 18 | 6.82% |
| 85+ | 3 | 1.14% |
| Prefer not to say | 17 | 6.44% |
| Not Answered | 23 | 8.71% |

8: What is your sex?

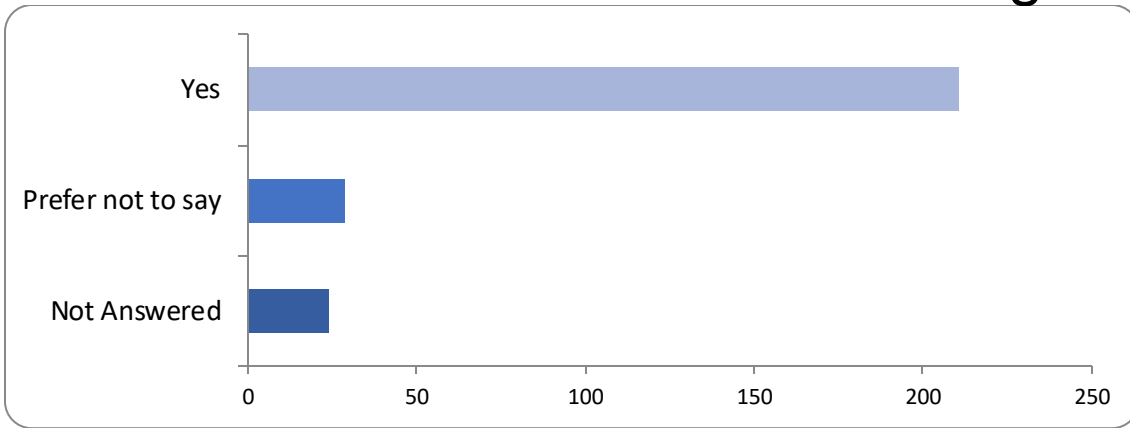
There were 240 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|-------------------|-------|---------|
| Male | 108 | 40.91% |
| Female | 99 | 37.50% |
| Prefer not to say | 33 | 12.50% |
| Not Answered | 24 | 9.09% |

9: Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?

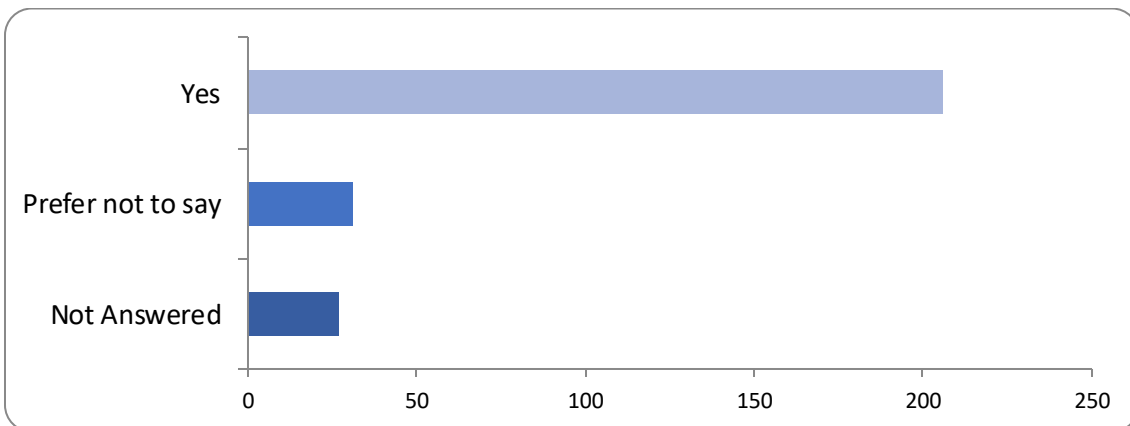
There were 240 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|-------------------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 211 | 79.92% |
| No | 0 | 0.00% |
| Prefer not to say | 29 | 10.98% |
| Not Answered | 24 | 9.09% |

10: Do you currently live as your birth sex?

There were 237 responses to this part of the question.

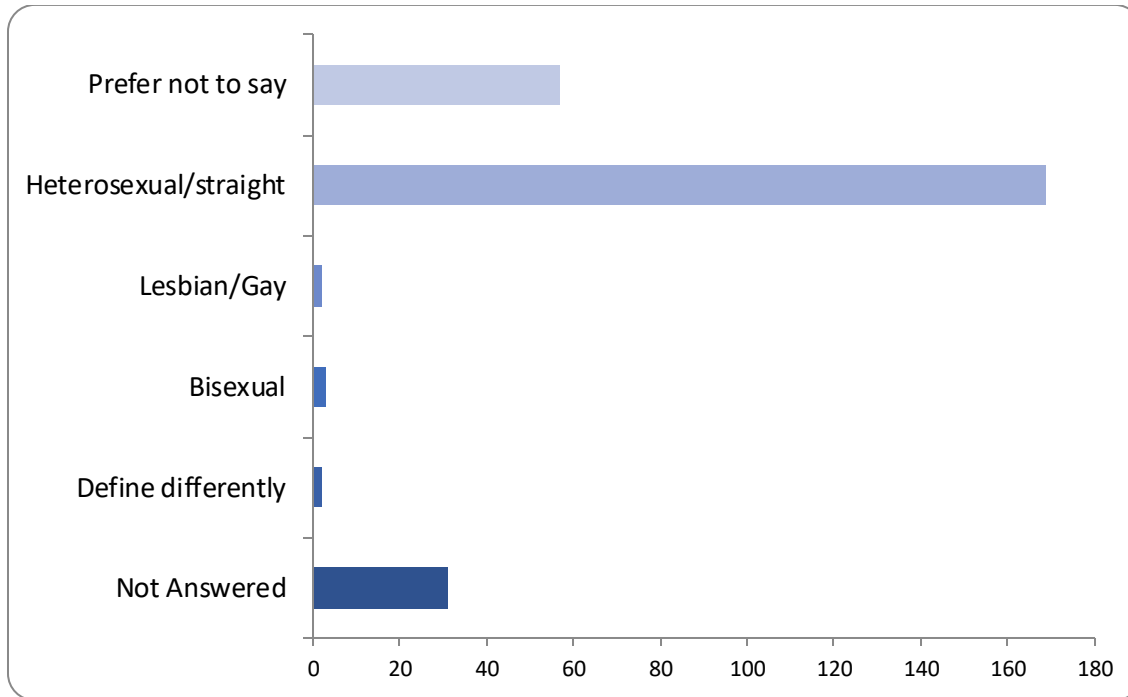


| Option | Total | Percent |
|-------------------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 206 | 78.03% |
| No | 0 | 0.00% |
| Prefer not to say | 31 | 11.74% |
| Not Answered | 27 | 10.23% |

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11: How would you describe your sexual orientation?

There were 233 responses to this part of the question.

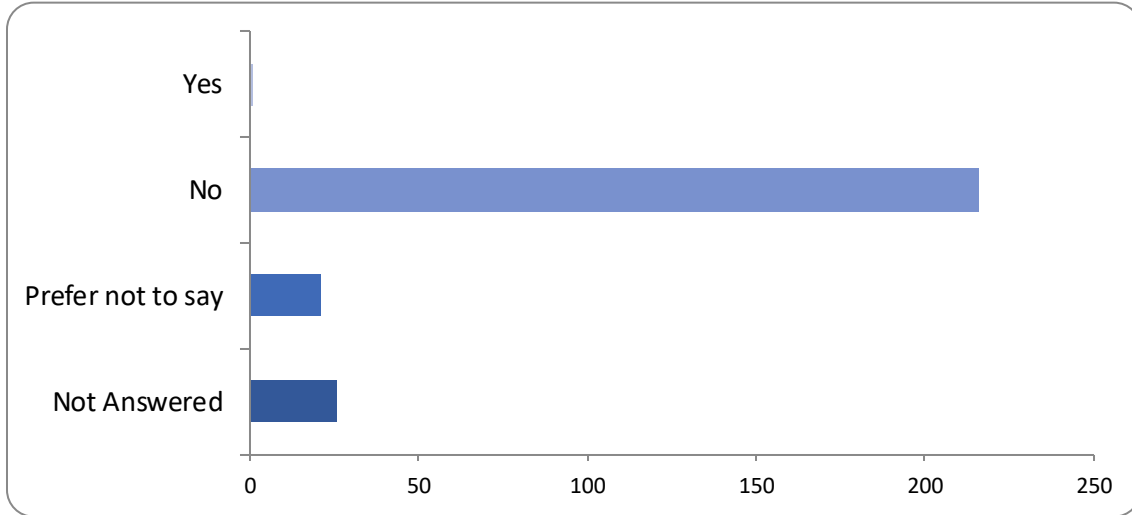


| Option | Total | Percent |
|-----------------------|-------|---------|
| Prefer not to say | 57 | 21.59% |
| Heterosexual/straight | 169 | 64.02% |
| Lesbian/Gay | 2 | 0.76% |
| Bisexual | 3 | 1.14% |
| Define differently | 2 | 0.76% |
| Not Answered | 31 | 11.74% |

12: Are you currently cared for by Sefton Council?

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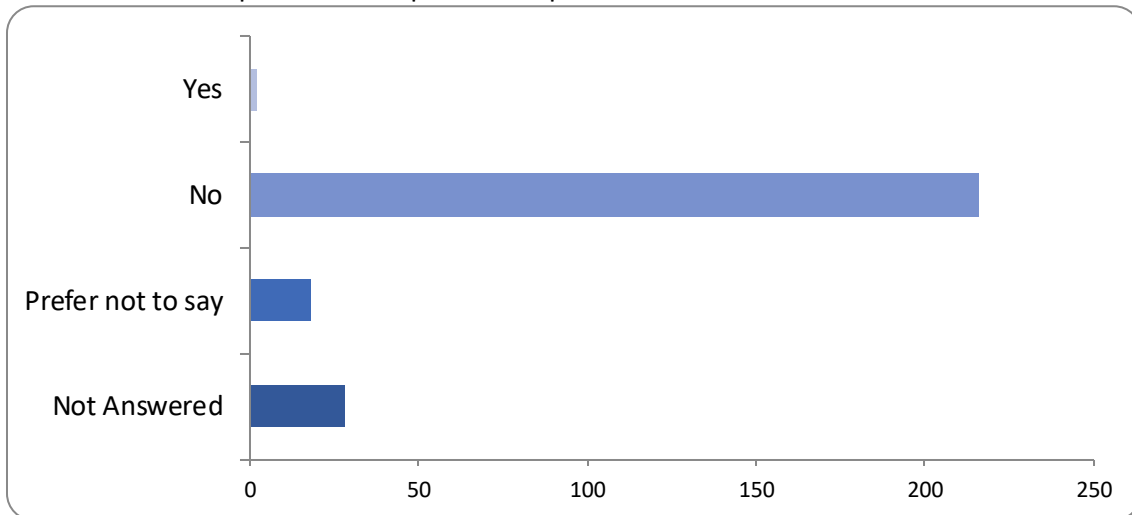
There were 238 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|-------------------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 1 | 0.38% |
| No | 216 | 81.82% |
| Prefer not to say | 21 | 7.95% |
| Not Answered | 26 | 9.85% |

13: Have you ever been cared for as a child by Sefton Council or another Local Authority?

There were 236 responses to this part of the question.

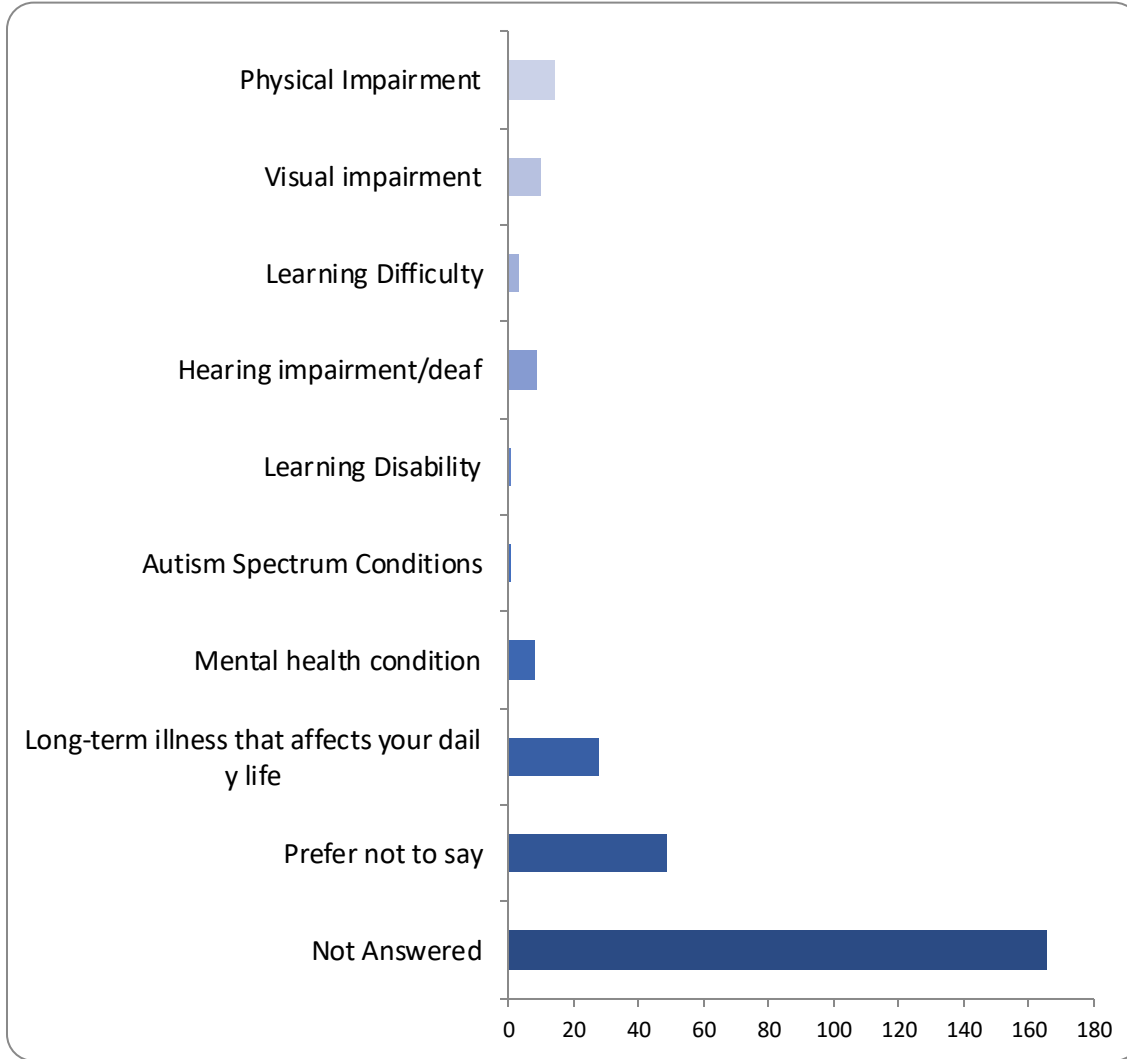


| Option | Total | Percent |
|-------------------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 2 | 0.76% |
| No | 216 | 81.82% |
| Prefer not to say | 18 | 6.82% |
| Not Answered | 28 | 10.61% |

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14: Disability: Do you have any of the following (please tick all that apply):

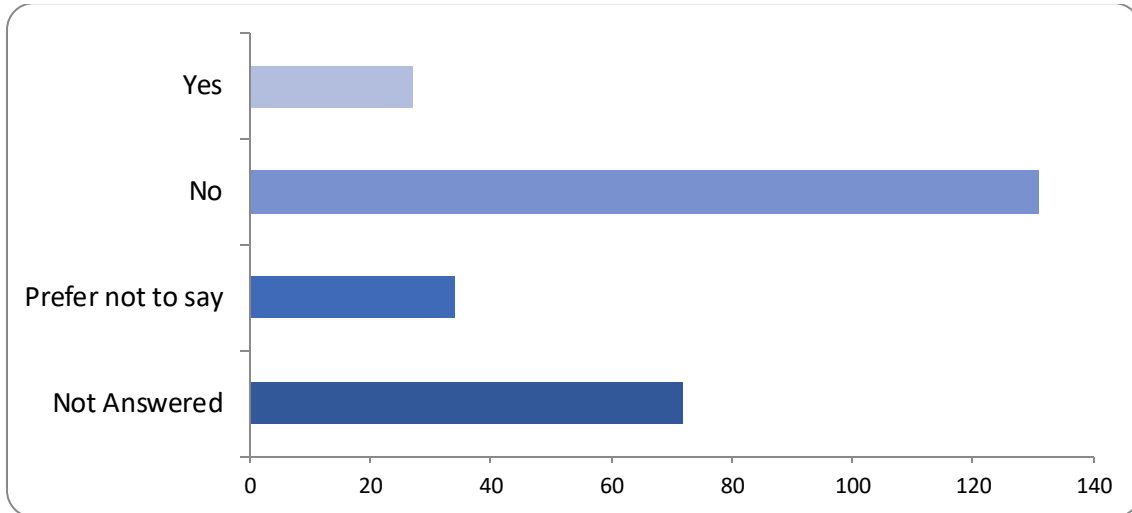
There were 98 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|--|-------|---------|
| Physical Impairment | 14 | 5.30% |
| Visual impairment | 10 | 3.79% |
| Learning Difficulty | 3 | 1.14% |
| Hearing impairment/deaf | 9 | 3.41% |
| Learning Disability | 1 | 0.38% |
| Autism Spectrum Conditions | 1 | 0.38% |
| Mental health condition | 8 | 3.03% |
| Dementia | 0 | 0.00% |
| Long-term illness that affects your daily life | 28 | 10.61% |
| Prefer not to say | 49 | 18.56% |
| Not Answered | 166 | 62.88% |

15: If you have ticked any of the boxes above, or you have cancer, diabetes, or HIV this would be classed as 'disability' under the legislation. Do you consider yourself to be 'disabled'?

There were 192 responses to this part of the question.

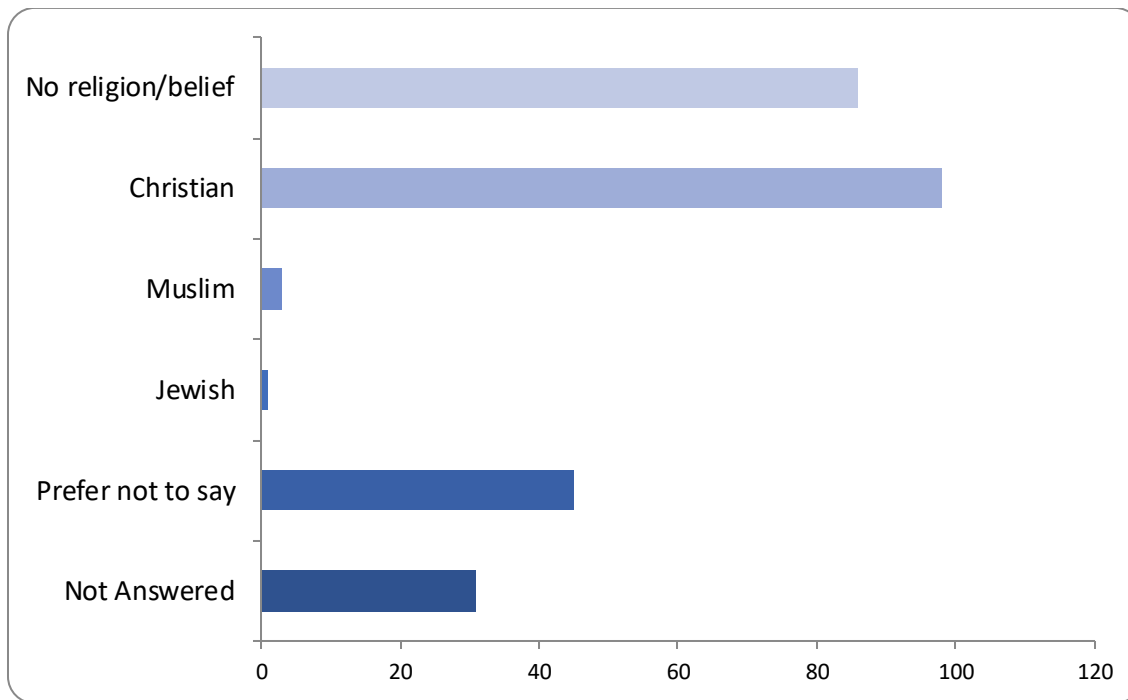


| Option | Total | Percent |
|-------------------|-------|---------|
| Yes | 27 | 10.23% |
| No | 131 | 49.62% |
| Prefer not to say | 34 | 12.88% |
| Not Answered | 72 | 27.27% |

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16: What is your religion/belief?

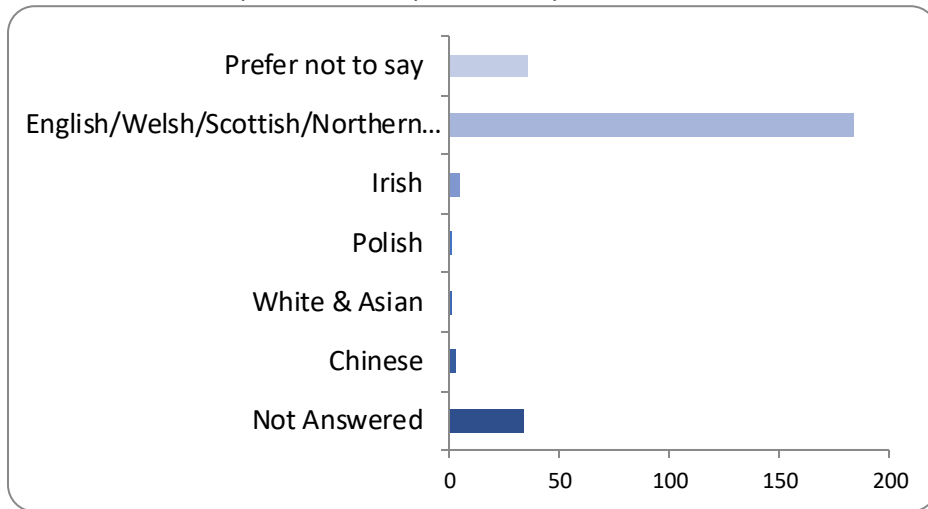
There were 233 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|--------------------|-------|---------|
| No religion/belief | 86 | 32.58% |
| Christian | 98 | 37.12% |
| Hindu | 0 | 0.00% |
| Muslim | 3 | 1.14% |
| Jewish | 1 | 0.38% |
| Sikh | 0 | 0.00% |
| Buddhist | 0 | 0.00% |
| Prefer not to say | 45 | 17.05% |
| Not Answered | 31 | 11.74% |

17: Race/Ethnicity (please note that Sikh and Jewish are collected in the Religion/Belief Section above) – do you identify as:

There were 230 responses to this part of the question.



| Option | Total | Percent |
|---|-------|---------|
| Prefer not to say | 36 | 13.64% |
| English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British | 184 | 69.70% |
| Irish | 5 | 1.89% |
| Gypsy or Irish Traveller or Roma | 0 | 0.00% |
| Polish | 1 | 0.38% |
| Portuguese | 0 | 0.00% |
| Latvian | 0 | 0.00% |
| Lithuanian | 0 | 0.00% |
| White and Black Caribbean | 0 | 0.00% |
| White & Black African | 0 | 0.00% |
| White & Asian | 1 | 0.38% |
| Indian | 0 | 0.00% |
| Pakistani | 0 | 0.00% |
| Bangladeshi | 0 | 0.00% |
| Chinese | 3 | 1.14% |
| African | 0 | 0.00% |
| Caribbean | 0 | 0.00% |

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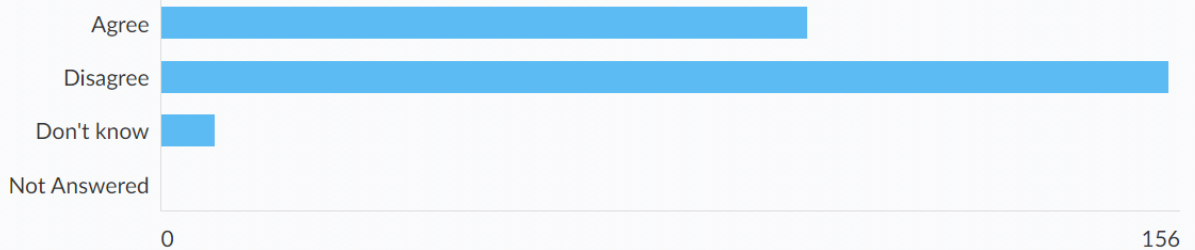
| | | |
|--------------|----|--------|
| Arab | 0 | 0.00% |
| Not Answered | 34 | 12.88% |

3. Consultation Analysis

The consultation received 264 responses. For analysis purposes, this document has separated the responses for Q3 and Q4.

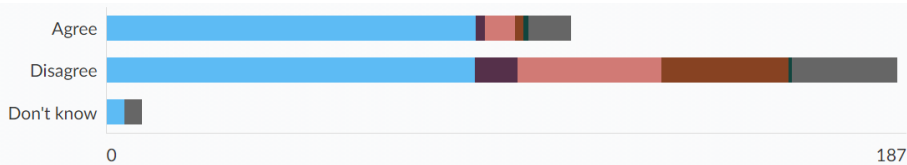
Focus on Q3

Question 3: Do you think the extra 100% Council Tax should be charged for homes that are empty after 1 year instead of the 2 years it is now?



| Option | Total | Percent |
|--------------|-------|---------|
| Agree | 100 | 37.88% |
| Disagree | 156 | 59.09% |
| Don't know | 8 | 3.03% |
| Not Answered | 0 | 0.00% |

For Q3 only, the breakdown of respondents was as follows:



| Option | Total | A member of the public | A local business owner | A landlord of a property in Sefton that isn't empty | A landlord of a property that is empty | An elected member | Other (please specify) |
|--------|--------------|------------------------|------------------------|---|--|-------------------|------------------------|
| Agree | 100 (37.88%) | 87 (32.95%) | 2 (0.76%) | 7 (2.65%) | 2 (0.76%) | 1 (0.38%) | 10 (3.79%) |

- Based on answers, the highest number of Agree responses came from 'members of the public' with 87 (32.95% of total respondents).
- Second highest number of Agree responses was 10 from those who listed themselves under 'Other' (3.79%).
- Thirdly, 7 of those who listed themselves as 'Landlord of a Property in Sefton that isn't empty' (2.65%) agreed with Q3.
- The fourth highest number of agreements came jointly from 'Local Business Owners' and 'Landlord of a Property that is empty' with 2 each (0.76%).
- Finally, a single 'Elected Member' agreed (0.38%).

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| Option | Total | A member of the public | A local business owner | A landlord of a property in Sefton that isn't empty | A landlord of a property that is empty | An elected member | Other (please specify) |
|------------|--------------|------------------------|------------------------|---|--|-------------------|------------------------|
| Disagree | 156 (59.09%) | 87 (32.95%) | 10 (3.79%) | 34 (12.88%) | 30 (11.36%) | 1 (0.38%) | 25 (9.47%) |
| Don't know | 8 (3.03%) | 4 (1.52%) | 0 (0.00%) | 0 (0.00%) | 0 (0.00%) | 0 (0.00%) | 4 (1.52%) |

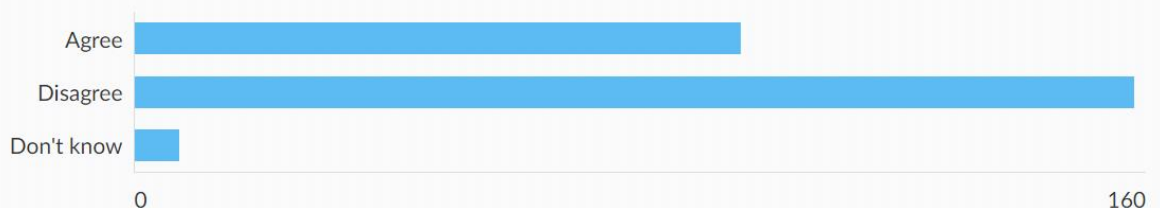
- Moving on to those who disagreed with the proposal, the highest number came from 87 'Members of the public' (32.95%). As noted above, this is the same number of the public who agreed with the proposal.
- The second highest number came from 34 of those who identified as 'Landlord of a property in Sefton that isn't empty' (12.88%).
- This was closely followed in third by 'Landlord of a Property that is empty' with 30 (11.36%).
- 25 respondents identified as 'Other' (9.47%).
- The fifth highest number was from 10 'Local Business Owners' (3.79%).
- Finally, 1 Elected Member disagreed with the proposal (0.38%).

In addition, there was 8 respondents (3.03%) who selected 'Don't Know'. This was 4 apiece of 'Members of the Public' and 'Other' (1.52% each).

Although an even split among members of the public, a high proportion of collective 'landlords' disagreed with the proposals than those landlords who agreed with it.

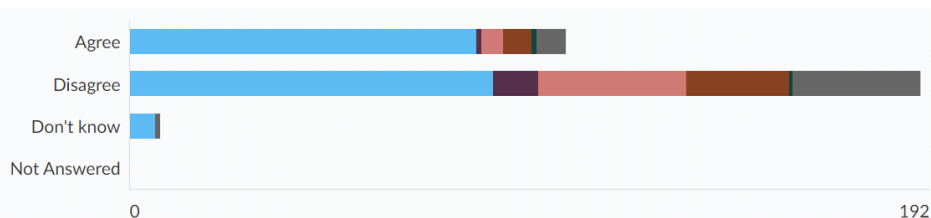
Focus on Q4

Question 4: Do you think that an extra 100% Council Tax should be charged on homes that are empty but furnished after 1 year?



| Option | Total | Percent |
|------------|-------|---------|
| Agree | 97 | 36.74% |
| Disagree | 160 | 60.61% |
| Don't know | 7 | 2.65% |

For Q4 only, the breakdown of respondents was as follows:



| Option | Total | A member of the public | A local business owner | A landlord of a property in Sefton that isn't empty | A landlord of a property that is empty | An elected member | Other (please specify) |
|--------|-------------|------------------------|------------------------|---|--|-------------------|------------------------|
| Agree | 97 (36.74%) | 84 (31.82%) | 1 (0.38%) | 5 (1.89%) | 7 (2.65%) | 1 (0.38%) | 7 (2.65%) |

- The highest number of respondents came from 'Members of the Public' with 84 in agreement (31.82%).

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- The joint second highest came from ‘A landlord of a property that is empty’ and those listed as ‘other’ with 7 apiece (2.65%).
- Thirdly, ‘Landlord of a property in Sefton that isn’t empty’ came in with 5 (1.89%).
- Finally, 1 ‘Elected Member’ and 1 ‘Local Business Owner’ agreed (0.38%).

| Option | Total | A member of the public | A local business owner | A landlord of a property in Sefton that isn't empty | A landlord of a property that is empty | An elected member | Other (please specify) |
|------------|--------------|------------------------|------------------------|---|--|-------------------|------------------------|
| Disagree | 160 (60.61%) | 88 (33.33%) | 11 (4.17%) | 36 (13.64%) | 25 (9.47%) | 1 (0.38%) | 31 (11.74%) |
| Don't know | 7 (2.65%) | 6 (2.27%) | 0 (0.00%) | 0 (0.00%) | 0 (0.00%) | 0 (0.00%) | 1 (0.38%) |

- For those that disagreed, the highest number came from ‘Members of the Public’ with 88 (33.33%).
- The second highest number came from 36 ‘Landlords of a property in Sefton that isn’t empty’ (13.64%).
- Following in on third was those listed as ‘Other’ with 31 (11.74%).
- The fourth highest was from ‘Landlords of a Property that is empty with 25 (9.47%).
- The fifth highest was from ‘Local Business Owners’ with 11 (4.17%).
- Finally, there was 1 ‘Elected Member’ (0.38%) in disagreement.

In addition to the above, there was also 6 ‘Members of the Public’ (2.27%) and 1 ‘Other’ (0.38%) who did not know whether to agree or disagree.

Comments

Disagreement

For those in Disagreement with Q3 & Q4, common themes could be seen among the groups...

Examples of the concerns of Members of the public included:

Don't like this idea think second homes not an issue in this area and this would just hit people who have had to move and struggling to sell.
If no one living in house then not using council services so why should they be charged double.

100% is excessive!!, even the rich in Abersoch are charged 50%. the levy is meant for problem areas like Cornwall, which sefton isn't. You need affordable housing what if the house exceeds the average affordability bracket?.

Council tax surely is based on usage of services by the residents of a property. Why would you charge double for services which are not being used in the first place?

If homes are not lived in the owners are not accessing local facilities .

Council just wanting more money as council tax is expensive enough as it is.

Why pay more when no one's living there ? We've just bought a house. Completely had to renovate it while still living at home with parents. No water no toilets no walls nothing in the house but we still have to pay £200 a month!

Why pay a charge when they are not using any services. It's like paying for gas and electricity and not using it

Seeking to tax unfairly people who have holiday or 2nd homes and who can bring in money and support the community, will back fire – they can sell up and leave. Sefton should be attracting people, not driving them away.

Common themes in the concerns of members of the public were centred around personal budgets and potentially increased council tax bills for individuals, together with the cost of services available to the public and whether they offer value or not.

Examples of the concerns left in the comments from 'Landlords in Sefton with a property that isn't empty' included:

So this seems like a financial penalty for those with a little bit of extra assets and income. What are the 525 homes as a percentage of the total number of homes in Sefton? Why don't you build more homes ?

I believe Landlords are having a very difficult time with the interest rate uo. Most landlords do try to fill an empty property as quickly as possible, they can not afford to refit the property to a rentable position??

If we purchase a property that has been empty, a premium could start straightaway and more likely if you shorten the time. Need protection where we are actively selling, advertising let and carrying out works, including scope and quote.

My holiday home brings income to area. Mortgage trebled, struggling, proposals will destroy business. Run maintained, realistically priced rental properties. Takes time to prepare properties & find tenant. Landlords will sell up.

The council doesn't appear to take into consideration landlords and developers taking dilapidated or empty properties that need long periods of construction into account with CT exemption.

Common themes include fears of the impact those proposals could have on their business, both economically and in the viability of investing in new properties within the Sefton area.

Examples of the concerns left in the comments from 'Landlord of a property that is empty':

I can't sell my late xhusband flat, lost 2 offers. Im a pensioner and pay CT, service charge, utility bills out of my pension. I think its very unfair to expect double council tax as my flat is empty and costing the council nothing.

Very penal on probate sales

Why should Sefton charge more when owners are already paying Council Tax? If a house is empty there are no residents using any of the Councils services and yet the Council is already receiving substantial revenue from that property.

The property is empty because of no fault of mine.. the last tenants trashed it and I'm trying to make it rentable again .. the cost of this is huge and as my husband recently passed away it's a slow process

Yes if property has been inherited and need time to grieve should consider the current housing market making it v.hard to sell, why should you be penalised for over 1yr
cost of living crisis that extra amount could send someone into debt

Concerns in this area stem from having increased bills at times of unforeseen circumstances determining if a property is empty (such as passing of a relative or tenants unexpectedly vacating). In addition there are similar concerns to 'Members of the public', such as paying more for local services, or local services not being used.

Agreement

For those in Agreement with Q3 & Q4, common themes could be seen within groups:

Members of the public...

The revenue raised could offset the CT reduction scheme for locals who contribute permanently to the local economy. We have 2 affordable properties perfect for young locals just lying idle as little-used second homes/investments.

Anyone who has left their home unattended because they are caring for someone else in their own home should not be included in this; they shouldn't be penalised for their kindness/sense of duty.

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I live next door to a property that is derelict and been empty for almost 4 years. It has been used as a cannabis farm. I am sick to death of it. Charge as much as possible

According to Shelter there are 250,000 homeless people in the uk & 1 million empty homes.
I fully support any measure designed to tackle these issues & prevent profiteering from people's misfortune & misery.

Too many properties are standing empty. We wouldn't have to build so many new houses if empty houses could be brought into use by making it too expensive to just leave them to rot.

There is a housing shortage for families who need a residence, this is worsened by Rich people who buy homes as accessories-This needs to stop!
I support the council gaining some needed funds by taxing this wealthy strata of society.

Common themes for the public stem from the potential for charges to be used to improve areas suffering from anti-social behaviour due to empty properties attracting crime, and freeing up empty homes to tackle issues such as homelessness via the council gaining funds through the proposals to improve services.

Landlords in Sefton with a property that isn't empty...

As a landlord I am required to pay council tax after 1 month once the residential poroeprty becomes vacant.

Why not other landlords who abuse the system for profit

Same rules should apply to commercial premises on our high streets.

I feel there should be a flexible approach from Sefton council, after 12 months empty, pending on circumstances and valid reasons for a property remaining empty.

Analysis of this smaller number of submitted comments indicates a common theme of 'fairness' being applied for landlords who agree with the proposals.

Landlord of a property that is empty...

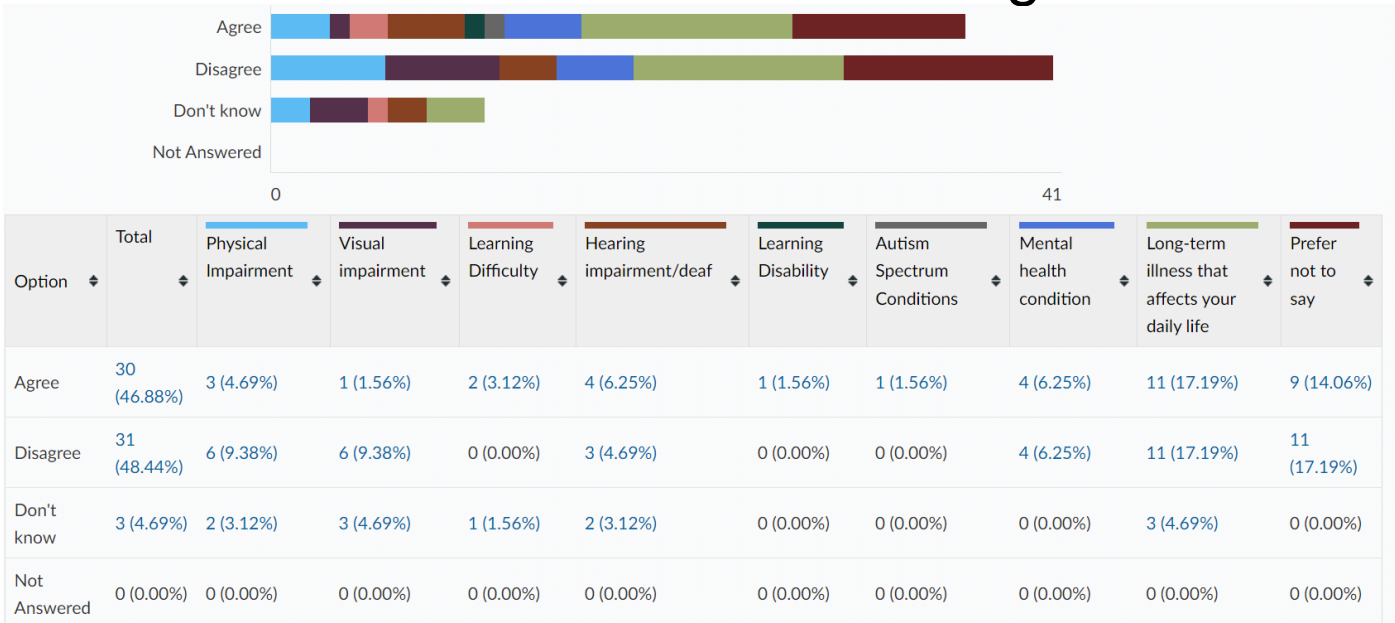
Discretion given to rental properties up for sale but not selling after 12 months.
Not applicable for properties where work is being undertaken to update/improve for say 3 months?

Only 1 comment supplied from this group. Although agreeing to the proposals, they feel there should be scope for ensuring there are certain exceptions based on specific circumstances. This is similar to landlords who disagreed, in that they were worried that the proposals were unfair to properties in specific circumstances.

Equalities

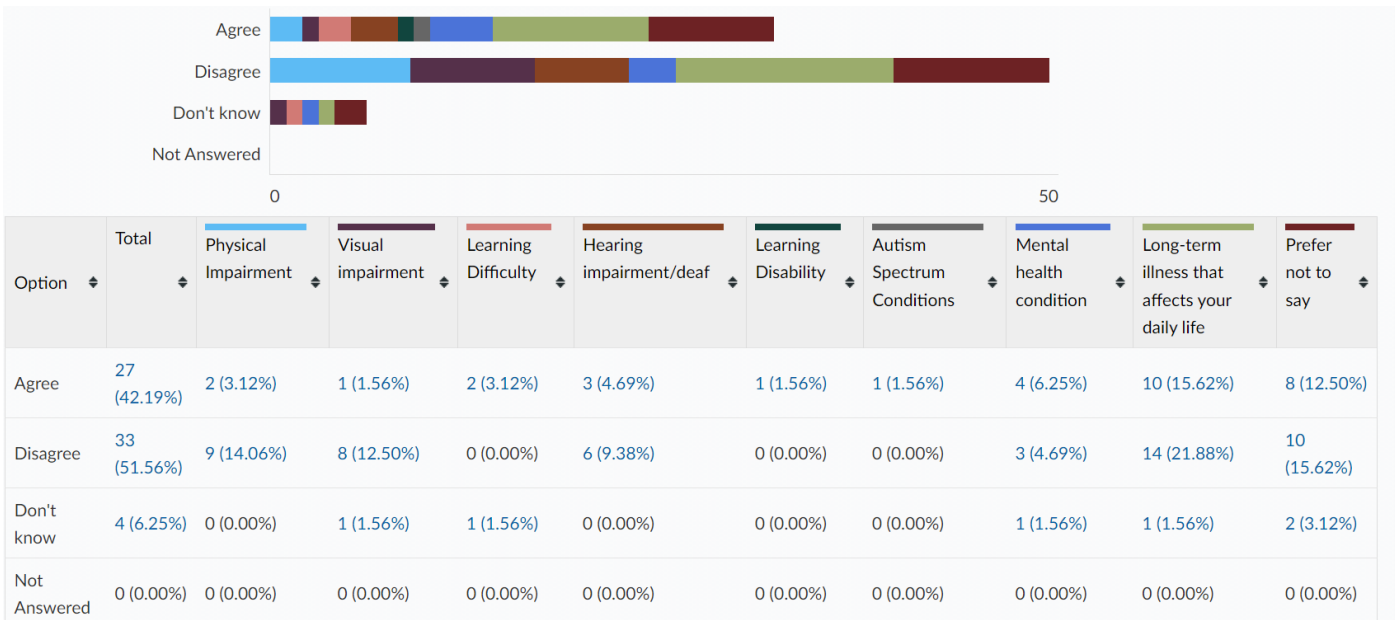
Out of the 264 responses, 64 responses (where permission was given to share information from the Equalities Questionnaire) detailed a disability. For Q3 this was broken down into the following:

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Agree and disagree were close in comparison with 30 to 31 respectively (46.88% and 48.44%).

For Q4, and for the same 64 as gave permission in Q3, agree/disagree was broken down as follows:



33 respondents (51.56%) disagreed with the proposal to 27 (42.19%).

4. Equalities Impact Assessment

Equality Analysis Report – Empty Properties and Council Tax

Details of proposal: Proposal to introduce new discretionary Council Tax Premiums on Empty Properties and Periodically Occupied Properties

Council Tax is a local tax on domestic properties which helps to pay for local services, such as social services and refuse and recycling collections, as well as contributing towards police

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and fire services. The amount payable depends on the property banding. There is also a range of discounts and exemptions available to reduce payable liability.

The Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwelling) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2012 have allowed billing authorities in England, to decide what level of Council Tax to charge owners of empty property from April 2013.

The Local Government Finance Act 2012 was also amended from April 2013, enabling billing authorities to charge an empty homes premium in respect of properties that have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for two years or more.

Across Sefton there are currently around 2,100 homes that have been empty for six months or longer (excluding those which are exempt from paying Council Tax); of these, nearly 1,400 have been empty for one year or more. In a time when demand for housing is increasing this is a significant wasted resource.

On 31 October 2023, there were 815 long-term empty dwellings paying a premium of at least 100%. Applying the premium on properties that have been empty for one year, rather than two, would mean that a further 570 properties would have to pay a 100% premium unless the owners took action to bring those properties back into use.

On 3 October 2023, there were more than 405 properties liable for Council Tax in the borough registered as second homes. Such properties are likely to be empty for long periods of the year and, like other empty homes, could be viewed as a wasted resource in a time of high demand for housing.

The proposed new premiums give local authorities a legislative tool to incentivise owners to bring unoccupied dwellings back into use.

Ramifications of Proposal:

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill received Royal Assent in October 2023, and gives additional discretionary powers to billing authorities to:

- Reduce the time period in which a Council Tax premium can be charged on empty homes from 2 years to 1 year from April 2024
- Charge a premium in respect of empty properties that are unoccupied and furnished (often referred to as second homes) from April 2025.

The proposals to exercise the new discretionary powers put forward as part of this annual review of Sefton's Council Tax Discount Schemes for 2024/25, has the following key aims:

- To encourage empty properties back in to use
- Ease housing supply pressures
- Reduce negative impacts, such as anti-social behaviour, reductions in rental & market values on surrounding properties, desirability of an area.
- Generate additional revenue that will be used to support the provision of council services.

Exceptions:

In July 2023, the Government published a consultation which set out a number of exceptions that billing authorities would need to apply when charging a premium under the Levelling Up

and Regeneration Act 2023.

These exceptions included in the consultation are highlighted below:

| Exception | Applies to |
|--|-----------------------|
| 1. Properties Undergoing Probate | Both |
| 2. Properties being actively marketed for sale or let | Both |
| 3. Empty properties undergoing major repairs | long-term empty homes |
| 4. Annexes forming part of, or being treated as part of, the main dwelling | second homes |
| 5. Job-related dwellings | second homes |
| 6. Occupied caravan pitches and boat moorings | second homes |
| 7. Seasonal homes | second homes |

It was proposed that exception 1 should apply for a maximum of 12 months and that exceptions 2 and 3 apply for a maximum of 6 months. The exceptions 4, 5, 6, and 7 are not time limited. These exceptions would provide council taxpayers time to sell or let their properties without having to pay the premium. The Government has not yet published the outcome of the consultation.

The proposal to introduce new discretionary Council Tax Premiums has been carried out mindful of 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)

A range of statutory Council Tax discounts and exemptions are available including means tested support, single person discounts, disabled persons relief. These are not within the scope of these changes and so will continue to be awarded in respect of occupied properties, along with those that are relevant to homes that have been left empty, for example to provide or receive care.

Discretionary support may be available where hardship is demonstrated under the Council's Exceptional Hardship Fund policy.

No impacts identified specific to this equality group.

Age (Pensionable age)

See above.

No impacts identified specific to this equality group.

People with a Disability

With consideration given to people with disabilities, there is no evidence which would suggest that the changes will have a disproportionate impact on this group.

Gender Reassignment

No impacts identified specific to this equality group.

Marriage and Civil Partnership

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No impacts identified specific to this equality group.

Race

No impacts identified specific to this equality group.

Religion or Belief

No impacts identified specific to this equality group.

Sex

No impacts identified specific to this equality group.

Sexual Orientation

No impacts identified specific to this equality group.

Pregnancy and Maternity

No impacts identified specific to this equality group.

Mitigation factors to minimise negative impacts

The Council has put the following mitigation in place:

- Provision of a discretionary Exceptional Hardship Fund that may provide additional support to those financially vulnerable to struggling to pay Council Tax
- Offering 12-month (rather than 10-month) instalment payments to Council Tax payers to help ease payment difficulties.
- Establishing a 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.
- 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.

Care Leavers

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.

No further impacts identified specific to this group.

Armed Forces Covenant

Provisions exist for members of the armed forces who live in and pay Council Tax for a property which their employer requires them to occupy, and they are liable for Council Tax on a second furnished property, a discount of 50% may apply. The job related second home discount will apply to either:

- The job-related dwelling if it is the second home of the householder or their spouse/civil partner (not their main home), or
- Another dwelling if the job-related dwelling is the main residence of the householder or their spouse/civil partner and they have another dwelling that is therefore a second home.

One of the properties must also fall into the following class:

- C – i.e., in the armed forces and have their main residence in the UK in Ministry of Defence accommodation which is exempt from Council Tax under Class O.

Members of HM forces are sometimes obliged through the nature of their occupation to reside in accommodation provided by their employers, both in the UK and whilst serving overseas.

Current Council Tax legislation does provide for taxpayers to be liable at more than one address. Living accommodation for UK armed forces, including barrack and other accommodation, which is owned by the Secretary of State is exempt from Council Tax and contributions in lieu of Council Tax (CILOCT) are payable by the Ministry of Defence to broadly match the amount of Council Tax that would otherwise have been payable. These contributions are passed on by the MOD through averaged additions to the accommodation charges of service personnel.

No further impacts identified specific to this equality group.

Consultation:

A public consultation has been carried out to seek views on the proposed change. A direct mailshot was issued to the owners of approximately 1,500 empty properties in Sefton to alert them to the consultation for them to provide their views if they wished.

The consultation ran from 11/09/2023-27/10/2023. It was hosted on the Council's Citizen Space Website with alternative paper copies available on request.

There were 264 responses to the consultation, with the questions broken down as follows.

Question 3 – 'Do you think the extra 100% Council Tax should be charged for homes that are empty after 1 year instead of the 2 years it is now' had an agreement rate of 37.88% and a disagree rate of 59.09%, with 3.03% who did not know.

Question 4 – 'Do you think that an extra 100% Council Tax should be charged on homes that are empty but furnished after 1 year' had an agreement rate of 36.74% and a disagree rate of 60.61%, with 2.65% who did not know.

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

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.*

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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.*

The Council has set out in the sections above how it meets its equalities duties in relation to the proposed introduction of new discretionary Council Tax Premiums for empty properties and those periodically occupied.

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

Applying the premium on properties that have been empty for one year, rather than two, would mean that a further 570 properties would have to pay a 100% premium unless the owners took action to bring those properties back into use.

A premium of up to 100 per cent will be applied on second homes. The legislation requires that a billing authority's first determination under this section must be made at least one year before the beginning of the financial year to which it relates. This is required to give second homeowners 12 months' notice of the change. As a result of this clause the earliest date the premium could be applied is 1 April 2025.

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| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Report to: | Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) | Date of Meeting: | 9 January 2024 |
| Subject: | Financial Management 2023/24 to 2026/27 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2023/24 – January Update | | |
| 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:

To inform **Overview and Scrutiny** of:

- 1) The current position relating to the 2023/24 revenue budget.
- 2) The current forecast on Council Tax and Business Rates collection for 2023/24.
- 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.

Recommendation(s):

Overview and Scrutiny is recommended to:

Revenue Budget

- 1) Note the current position relating to the 2023/24 revenue budget.
- 2) Note the actions being taken to refine forecasts and identify mitigating efficiencies to ensure each service achieves a balanced position.
- 3) Note the financial risks associated with the delivery of the 2023/24 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.

Capital Programme

- 4) Note the spending profiles across financial years for the approved capital programme (paragraph 7.1).
- 5) Note the latest capital expenditure position as at 30 November 2023 of £21.514m (paragraph 7.5); the latest full year forecast is £55.117m (paragraph 7.6).
- 6) 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 7.9-7.11).

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

To ensure Overview and Scrutiny are informed of the current position in relation to the 2023/24 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 2023/24 and agreed allocations for future years.

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

To keep members informed of 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 2023/24 following the implementation of the recommendations contained in this report that an overspend position of £2.184m is currently forecast and that further work is being undertaken to refine forecasts and identify mitigating efficiencies to ensure each service achieves a balanced position. Further mitigating actions are proposed in this report 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 may need to be used.

(B) Capital Costs

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The Council's capital budget in 2023/24 is £55.191m. As at the end of November 2023 expenditure of £21.514m has been incurred and a full year outturn of £55.117m is currently forecast.

Implications of the Proposals:

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

Currently an overspend position of £2.184m is currently forecast for 2023/24, pending further work to refine forecasts and identify mitigating efficiencies. Further mitigating actions are proposed in this report to ensure the Council returns to a balanced forecast outturn position. However, it should be noted that significant pressure and risk remains in a number of areas, particularly relating to Children's Social Care. If 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.

Legal Implications:

None

Equality Implications:

There are no equality implications.

Impact on Children and Young People: Yes

The report highlights the current financial position relating to services provided for Children and Young People.

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 |

The allocations of capital funding outlined in section 7 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.

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.

Protect the most vulnerable:

See comment above

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| |
|--|
| <u>Facilitate confident and resilient communities:</u> See comment above |
| <u>Commission, broker and provide core services:</u> See comment above |
| <u>Place – leadership and influencer:</u> See comment above |
| <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 7475/23)

The Chief Legal and Democratic Officer has been consulted and has no comments on the report (LD 5574/23).

(B) External Consultations

N/A

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following Committee

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 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 2023/24 to 2025/26

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 2 March 2023, Members approved the Budget for the financial year 2023/24. 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, as reported in the Robustness Report also presented to Budget Council.
- 1.2 This report is the sixth of the Council's monthly budget monitoring reports and updates the revenue forecast outturn position for all services, including the pressures that have materialised since the budget was set.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 The capital section of the report informs Members of the latest estimate of capital expenditure for 2023/24 and forecast expenditure for 2024/25 and 2025/26. The capital budget to date is presented in paragraph 7.1. Paragraphs 7.2 to 7.8 review progress of the capital programme, including additional capital schemes. Finally, paragraphs 7.9 to 7.11 confirm that there are adequate levels of resources available to finance the capital programme.

2. Revenue Budget 2023/24 – Forecast Outturn Position as at the end of November 2023

- 2.1 Members are provided with updates of the Council's forecast financial revenue position each month during the financial year from July. As would be expected as the forecast develop through the year, they become more robust and can inform decision making. The Council adopted this approach by developing its in year remedial budget actions on the back of the mid-year review position and this report builds on that.
- 2.2 As at the end of November 2023, the forecast outturn shows a net overspend on services of **£6.979m**, the majority of which relates to potential additional pressure within Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care and Education Excellence as well as the impact of the local government pay award. It should be noted that the majority of services are reporting a balanced position or are implementing local remedial actions to return a balanced position at this stage. 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. Actions to meet some of the forecast overspend were approved as part of a previous report in November. These totalled £4.795m so the net overspend position is £2.184m.
- 2.3 The table below highlights the variations across services that make up the £2.184m forecast overspend, including approved mitigating actions:

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| | Budget | Forecast Outturn | Variance | Variance to October |
|---|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| | £m | £m | £m | £m |
| <u>Services</u> | | | | |
| Strategic Management | 3.936 | 4.036 | 0.100 | 0.001 |
| Adult Social Care | 110.394 | 111.394 | 1.000 | 0.000 |
| Children's Social Care | 80.150 | 85.183 | 5.033 | 0.000 |
| Communities | 11.494 | 11.359 | -0.135 | 0.000 |
| Corporate Resources | 6.196 | 5.986 | -0.210 | 0.000 |
| Economic Growth & Housing | 6.410 | 6.410 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| Education Excellence | 15.303 | 16.732 | 1.429 | -0.075 |
| Health & Wellbeing | 19.620 | 18.837 | -0.783 | 0.000 |
| Highways & Public Protection | 10.679 | 10.577 | -0.102 | -0.055 |
| Operational In-House Services | 16.182 | 16.325 | 0.143 | 0.064 |
| Energy Costs | 4.200 | 4.200 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| Additional Pay Award Provision | 4.333 | 5.833 | 1.500 | 0.000 |
| Total Service Net Expenditure | 288.897 | 296.872 | 7.975 | -0.065 |
| Mitigating Actions approved in November | 0.000 | -4.795 | -4.795 | 0.000 |
| Council Wide Budgets | 14.113 | 13.117 | -0.996 | -0.164 |
| Levies | 36.193 | 36.193 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| General Government Grants | (84.086) | (84.086) | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| Total Net Expenditure | 255.117 | 257.301 | | |
| <u>Forecast Year-End Deficit</u> | | | <u>2.184</u> | <u>-0.229</u> |

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

- **Adult Social Care** – The previous forecasts assumed that the Adult Social Care budget will break-even during 2023/24. However, there are a number of significant assumptions and uncertainties that could impact on this position before the year-end. The service has also committed to a number of efficiencies and savings that amount to £5.7m, in order to meet the savings approved as part of the approved 2023/24 budget plus additional savings to meet the additional budgetary pressures arising from the increases in provider fees approved at Cabinet meetings in June 2023. The achievement of these savings will be carefully monitored throughout the year. At this time over £5m of the £5.7m of savings have been delivered.

Like all councils, the Service is experiencing growth pressure with demand for services and are seeking to meet the cost of this within the resources available,

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including taking account of the additional funding from Central Government that is being made available to councils to meet increases in demand and financial pressure including those that maybe experienced during winter and in respect of discharges. Given the pressures being faced a forecast overspend of £1.000m was reported last month. However, a number of upward pressures within the Service have continued and could result in the forecast overspend position increasing by a further £1.6m. Further work is being undertaken to understand the pressures and refine forecasts. Work will also continue to explore options to ensure that any potential overspend is reduced. As would be expected with a budget of this size and volatility, this remains a key risk during the current year.

- **Children's Social Care** – The current forecast for the service shows a potential overspend of £5.033m. However, there are a number of significant assumptions and uncertainties that could impact on this position before the year-end. A number of upward pressures within the Service have materialised and could result in the forecast overspend position increasing by a further £0.7m. Further work is being undertaken to understand the pressures and refine forecasts.

Members will be aware that the 2023/24 approved budget included an additional £21m of investment in the service based on the requirement for additional staffing (including temporary funding for additional agency costs whilst more permanent staff are recruited to, including International Social Workers and from staff coming through the social work academy) as well as additional resources to reflect the number of packages at the time, some potential growth as well as resource for inflationary pressures.

The current forecast for staffing is an overspend of £0.660m. This will require robust monitoring through the year. There are a clear set of assumptions driving this forecast in terms of when expensive project/court teams will leave the Council as new staff are onboarded from the International Social Worker cohort and the academy. If these assumptions change then the forecast will be revised with additional pressure being experienced. At present the forecasts reflect that position but this is continually being reviewed and is the key risk area for the Council, therefore if this position previously reported to members changes then this will need to come back for further decision. This is also a key aspect of budget setting and medium-term financial planning.

Certain areas of accommodation and support packages are forecast to overspend by £3.472m, partly due to additional packages in the late part of 2022/23 and early part of 2023/24. As mentioned in reports last year, packages initially have been at a higher cost than previously seen. However, recently improvements in practice have resulted in more children being placed in more appropriate settings at a lower cost. This is expected to continue throughout the year. Work is currently being undertaken to review forecasts for all types of care settings based on a number of children being in higher cost settings for shorter periods, which is expected to significantly impact on the forecast. In addition, where numbers and costs of Children with Disabilities has increased, specialist work is being undertaken to ensure health are making the appropriate contributions to the cost of care.

This is the key aspect of this financial forecast- the service is stabilising and as this takes place the review of placements will also be undertaken. At present the assumption is that all support, unless known otherwise, will continue for the whole

of the financial year and for a number of placements this will not be the case. Senior managers are reviewing these, and the forecast will be updated accordingly.

Members will recall that in the budget reports it was advised that a tolerance of 5% on the budget could be expected based on advice from the DfE commissioner-based on the service budget that would amount to £4m. This current forecast is slightly higher than that at present before the outcome of the additional reviews is to be built in.

In considering this forecast, work will also be undertaken to determine if any of this pressure is temporary or permanent in nature and needs reflecting in future budget setting processes. At present as a lot of this pressure arose from 22/23 and the start of the financial year it is estimated that the future years impact is modest at this stage, but this will be the subject of further review as the budget setting process continues.

- **Corporate Resources** – The service had previously forecast a balanced position. However, in light of the overall budget position, the Service reviewed budgets further to identify areas where savings could be made. The forecast was therefore revised last month to an underspend of £0.210m. Based on the latest information, functions within the service are therefore forecasting an underspend of £0.834m. However, there is pressure within the ICT budget from inflation on contracts that is in excess of the provision made and a loss of income from School SLAs as a result of a change in the contractual arrangement enforced by the provider for which the Council has no control. These two pressures amount to £0.624m, which is offset by the underspends across the Service. As stated, all services are underspent, and significant cost control will continue to be required between now and the year end to deliver the current forecast position.
- **Economic Growth and Housing** – The service is showing a balanced position. However, based on the latest information, functions within the service are forecasting an overspend of £0.490m, although the service are currently examining forecasts. Additional cost control will be required between now and the year end to deliver that balanced position and this position will be updated in future reports.
- **Education Excellence** – The current forecast shows a potential net overspend of £1.429m, this relates to the provision of additional SEND staff and Home to School Transport. The service is reviewing all forecasts to identify areas that will offset costs of the additional SEND staff. Members will recall that in the budget substantial funding was added to the Home to School Transport budget, but this budget has come under further pressure due to the increase in the number of EHCPs being completed and the resulting pressure in the Service.
- **Operational In-House Services** The current forecast shows a potential overspend of £0.143m which is a slight worsening on the previous month. This relates to a number of areas across the Service, but mainly in Catering and the security service. The service is reviewing all forecasts to identify areas that may be able to offset these additional pressures, including from recharging additional costs being incurred.

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- **Additional Pay Award Provision** – The approved Base Budget included a provision for the 2023/234 pay award of around 4.5%. This was line with most other local authorities who had budgeted for similar amounts. The offer from the National Employers for local government services body is for a fixed increase of £1,925, with a minimum of 3.5% (similar to the increase in 2022/23). For Sefton, this equates to an increase in the pay bill of about 6.0% or an additional £1.500m above the amount included in the 2023/24 budget. It should be noted that this offer has now been accepted by trade unions.

3. Revenue Budget Summary 2023/24

- 3.1 An overspend of **£2.184m** is currently forecast. However, as mentioned in section 2, this is a forecast based on a number of uncertainties and assumptions, particularly around Adult and Children’s Social Care which it is estimated could add £2.3m to the current forecast. Additional work will continue to be undertaken across service areas to refine the forecasts and identify mitigating efficiencies to ensure each service achieves a balanced budget position. In Children’s Social Care forecasts will be refined to take into account the improvements in practice that have seen children being placed in more appropriate settings, as well as the anticipated reduction in the number of Looked After Children, however the key risk is the staffing budget with the timing of transition between project/court teams and new permanent staff that will support a skilled and stable workforce the key variable that could impact the budget.
- 3.2 As mentioned, the Council must achieve an overall balanced position to ensure its financial sustainability. As an overall forecast overspend remains a remedial action plan to meet the residual balance has been produced and is presented below for members’ approval.

Proposed Remedial Actions

- 3.3 After the mitigating actions approved by Cabinet in November 2023 there is still a forecast overspend of **£2.184m**. 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. This will include cost control in relation to recruitment, non-essential expenditure and no further growth items / additionality.

Summary 2022/23

- 3.4 An overspend of **£2.184m** is currently forecast. As mentioned above, there is further potential pressure of £2.3m on Adult and Children’s Social Care. The Council is reviewing a number of areas that would generate one-off mitigating measures of £2.6m – if the social care pressures materialise then a balance estimated at up to £2.0m will remain 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, further remedial action will be required. As a result of using the options above, there is no flexibility left for the use of existing reserves or general balances- as a result this pressure, and any further pressure, will need to be met from within the existing Council budget and delivery monitored carefully and reported to Cabinet.
- 3.5 Should there still be a residual overspend at year end, this will need to be funded by general balances and as part of the budget process for 2024/25 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.

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 £160.236m for 2023/24 (including Parish Precepts), which represents 84% of the net Council Tax income of £191.139m.
- 4.2 The forecast outturn for the Council at the end of November 2023 is a surplus of £0.109m. This variation is primarily due to: -
- The surplus on the fund at the end of 2022/23 being higher than estimated (-£0.314m).
 - Gross Council Tax Charges in 2023/24 being higher than estimated (-£0.492m).
 - Exemptions and Discounts (including a forecasting adjustment) being higher than estimated (+£0.697m).
- 4.3 Due to Collection Fund regulations, the Council Tax surplus will not be transferred to the General Fund in 2023/24 but will be carried forward to be recovered in future years.
- 4.4 A forecast surplus of £2.045m was declared on the 17 January 2023 of which Sefton's share is £1.716m (83.9%). This is the amount that will be recovered from the Collection Fund in 2023/24. Any additional surplus or deficit will be distributed in 2024/25 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 £62.388m for 2023/24, which represents 99% of the net Business Rates income of £63.018m. 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 2023 is a surplus of -£10.797m on Business Rates income. This is due to:
- The surplus on the fund at the end of 2023/24 being higher than estimated (-£9.916m).
 - Reduction in the gross charge on rateable properties (+£0.167m).
 - A number of reliefs announced for 2023/24 were assumed in the NNDR1 return with the loss of income as a result of these reliefs covered by Section 31 grant

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payments. It is now forecast that the value of these reliefs will be less than anticipated (-£0.494m).

- Adjustments relating to prior years (-£0.554m)

5.3 When taking into account the lower Section 31 grants due on the additional reliefs, a net surplus of £9.857m is forecast.

5.4 Due to Collection Fund regulations, a Business Rates deficit will not be transferred to the General Fund in 2023/24 but will be carried forward to be recovered in future years.

5.5 A forecast surplus of £12.836m was declared in January 2023. Sefton's share of this is £12.708m. This is the amount that will be distributed from the Collection Fund in 2023/24. Any additional surplus or deficit will be distributed in 2024/25 and future years.

6. High Needs Budget

6.1 Cabinet and Council have agreed to receive quarterly reports from the Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education and the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Education) 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.

6.2 The latest report was presented to Cabinet in July, providing detail on the current monitoring position relating to the High Needs budget. A further report will be presented to a future meeting of Cabinet.

7. Capital Programme 2023/24 – 2025/26

Capital Budget

7.1 The Capital Budget and profile of expenditure for the three years 2023/24 to 2025/26 is as follows:

| | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| 2023/24 | £55.191m |
| 2024/25 | £47.922m |
| 2025/26 | £47.141m |

7.2 The following updates have been made to the capital programme budget since the previous budget report to Cabinet in December:

- **Communities** – a new £0.120m project to replace windows to improve energy efficiency at The Atkinson has been added to the programme under delegated authority and is fully funded by grant from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport.

- **Economic Growth & Housing** – £0.712m has been phased to 2024/25 for the Enterprise Arcade project. The cashflow forecast has been amended to reflect the selected contractor’s projected spend profile for the works. Strip out works are due to commence in the new year rather than late 2023 as original anticipated. This impacts the expenditure profile for 2023/24. The contractors programme assumes a nine-month contract period with the main refurbishment work elements reprofiled into the 2024/25 financial year.
- **Education Excellence** – £0.368m has been phased to 2024/25 for ground works and a two story four classroom mobile block at Holy Family High School.
- **Operational In-House Services** - £0.382m has been phased from 2024/25 to 2023/24 for the purchase of new vehicles and equipment.

Capital Funding for Childcare Expansion

- 7.3 The Department for Education has in November confirmed Sefton’s allocation of Childcare Capital Expansion Grant for 2023/24. The funding can be used to increase the physical capacity of early years and wraparound provision in local areas where demand is likely to exceed existing supply. It has been apportioned at a national level with £80m for the early years’ entitlement and £20m for wraparound provision.
- 7.4 As reported to Cabinet in December, planning is underway in Sefton to, in the first instance, increase the finance support with the increase in entitlements. In the longer term, resources will be put in place to support childminders and start up nurseries. Sefton’s capital allocation for 2023/24 is £534,202 and Cabinet is therefore recommended to approve a supplementary capital estimate for inclusion in the Capital Programme.

Budget Monitoring Position to November 2023

- 7.5 The current position of expenditure against the budget profile to the end of November 2023 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.

| | Budget to November | Actual Expenditure to November | Variance to October |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| | £m | £m | £m |
| <u>Services</u> | | | |
| Adult Social Care | 3.560 | 3.158 | -0.402 |
| Children’s Social Care | 0.284 | 0.357 | 0.073 |
| Communities | 0.454 | 0.469 | 0.015 |
| Corporate Resources | 1.502 | 1.531 | 0.029 |
| Economic Growth & Housing | 4.802 | 4.349 | -0.453 |
| Education Excellence | 2.959 | 3.174 | 0.215 |
| Highways & Public Protection | 8.045 | 7.962 | -0.083 |

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| | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Operational In-House Services | 0.479 | 0.513 | 0.034 |
| <u>Total Programme</u> | 22.086 | 21.514 | -0.572 |

Capital Programme Forecast Outturn 2023/24

7.6 The current forecast of expenditure against the budget profile to the end of 2023/24 and the profile of budgets for future years is shown in the table below:

| | Budget 2023/24 | Forecast Outturn | Variance | Budget 2024/25 | Budget 2025/26 |
|-------------------------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| | £m | £m | £m | £m | £m |
| <u>Services</u> | | | | | |
| Adult Social Care | 7.505 | 7.501 | -0.004 | 2.675 | 1.850 |
| Children's Social Care | 0.602 | 0.727 | 0.125 | 0.100 | - |
| Communities | 2.009 | 2.049 | 0.040 | 0.405 | - |
| Corporate Resources | 2.597 | 2.523 | -0.073 | 0.023 | - |
| Economic Growth & Housing | 10.640 | 10.614 | -0.025 | 22.481 | 43.977 |
| Education Excellence | 8.755 | 8.597 | -0.157 | 8.253 | - |
| Highways & Public Protection | 20.234 | 20.242 | 0.008 | 8.453 | 0.322 |
| Operational In-House Services | 2.850 | 2.863 | 0.013 | 5.532 | 0.993 |
| <u>Total Programme</u> | 55.191 | 55.117 | -0.073 | 47.922 | 47.141 |

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

7.7 The current 2023/24 budgeted spend is £55.191m with a budgeted spend to October of £22.086m. The full year budget includes exceptional items such as £8.544m for Growth and Strategic Investment projects, £1.082m for the Brownfield Housing Development fund, £0.760m for Sustainable Warmth Schemes, £1.300m for the Local Authority Housing Fund, £1.583m for Sporting Betterments at Schools, a £1.000m project for Southport Pier Decking, and a scheme to upgrade to LED Street Lighting (£3.606m).

7.8 Typically, on an annual basis the capital programme spends in the region of £25-30m. Given this typical annual level of spend, and although in 2023/24 there are a number of exceptional items as described above, it is likely that reprofiling of spend into 2024/25 will occur as the year progresses.

Programme Funding

7.9 The table below shows how the capital programme will be funding in 2023/24:

| <u>Source</u> | £m |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| Grants | 42.610 |
| Prudential Borrowing | 5.454 |
| Capital Receipts | 4.874 |
| Contributions (including Section 106) | 2.252 |
| <u>Total Programme Funding</u> | 55.191 |

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7.10 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.

7.11 The Executive Director of 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.

APPENDIX A – Capital Programme 2023/24 to 2025/26

| <u>Capital Scheme</u> | Budget | | |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | 2023/24 £ | 2024/25 £ | 2025/26 £ |
| Adult Social Care | | | |
| Disable Facilities Grants – Core Grants (DFGs) | 3,000,000 | - | - |
| Occupational Therapy Support for DFGs | 663,774 | - | - |
| ICT Development & Transformation | 927,573 | 307,067 | 2,708 |
| ICT Connectivity in Care Homes and Support Living | 65,000 | 35,000 | - |
| Fall Prevention Schemes | 45,000 | - | - |
| Care Home Improvements | 475,449 | 200,000 | - |
| Changing Places | 51,327 | - | - |
| Integrated Health and Wellbeing on the High Street | - | 400,000 | - |
| Short Term Assessment Unit | 506,846 | 1,213,154 | 1,847,000 |
| New Directions Programme | 200,038 | 201,000 | - |
| Technology Enabled Care | 329,449 | 124,184 | - |
| Community Equipment Provision | 400,000 | - | - |
| Double to Single Handed Care Equipment Provision | 150,000 | - | - |
| Community Equipment – Specialist Projects | 232,435 | - | - |
| Community Equipment Stores Improvements | 65,000 | - | - |
| Programme Support | 122,922 | - | - |
| Digitising Social Care | 260,000 | 195,000 | - |
| Community Based Falls Equipment | 10,200 | - | - |
| Children's Social Care | | | |
| Support for Fostering Placements | 99,370 | 100,000 | - |
| Community Equipment Provision | 270,000 | - | - |
| ICT Development & Transformation | 133,545 | - | - |
| Springbrook Refurbishment | 28,923 | - | - |
| Springbrook Vehicle | 70,000 | - | - |
| Communities | | | |
| Atkinson Arts Centre – Infrastructure & Windows | 24,553 | 170,993 | - |
| Leisure Centres – Essential Works | 293,748 | 103,000 | - |
| Libraries Projects | 309,623 | 131,017 | - |
| Neighbourhoods Projects | 80,886 | - | - |
| Local Authority Housing Fund | 1,300,000 | - | - |
| Corporate Resources | | | |
| Council Wide Essential Maintenance | 1,762,785 | 23,000 | - |
| Sustainable Warmth Schemes | 760,092 | - | - |

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|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| ICT Transformation | 73,812 | - | - |
| Economic Growth & Housing | | | |
| Cambridge Road Centre Redevelopment | 227,069 | - | - |
| Crosby Lakeside Redevelopment | 673,935 | 33,219 | - |
| Strategic Acquisitions – Ainsdale | 350,000 | 526,303 | - |
| Marine Lake Events Centre | 4,863,327 | 16,770,090 | 43,205,556 |
| The Strand – Maintenance and Improvements | 110,000 | 305,000 | 75,000 |
| Enterprise Arcade | 521,691 | 1,105,078 | - |
| | 2023/24 | 2024/25 | 2025/26 |
| | £ | £ | £ |
| Transformations de Southport | 303,937 | 1,500,000 | 696,063 |
| Bootle Canal Side Business Plan | 813,867 | - | - |
| The Strand – Repurposing Programme | 680,000 | - | - |
| Housing Investment | - | 33,960 | - |
| Social Housing Allocations Scheme | 13,590 | - | - |
| Brownfield Fund for Housing Development | 1,082,336 | - | - |
| Southport Pier | 1,000,000 | 2,148,267 | - |
| Town Centre Vacant Sites | - | 58,764 | - |
| Education Excellence | | | |
| General Planned Maintenance | 365,605 | 30,249 | - |
| Schools Programme | 3,336,810 | 7,098,925 | - |
| Sporting Betterment of Schools | 1,583,215 | - | - |
| Special Educational Needs & Disabilities | 3,469,082 | 1,123,624 | - |
| Highways and Public Protection | | | |
| Accessibility | 668,143 | - | - |
| Healthy Lifestyles | 387,263 | - | - |
| Road Safety | 157,638 | - | - |
| A565 Route Management and Parking | 1,114,674 | - | - |
| A59 Route Management Strategy | 1,065,000 | 2,100,426 | 322,000 |
| Strategic Planning | 4,041,090 | - | - |
| Traffic Management and Parking | 67,000 | - | - |
| Highway Maintenance | 6,329,191 | - | - |
| Bridges and Structures | 475,000 | 1,900,000 | - |
| Drainage | 443,181 | - | - |
| Street Lighting Maintenance | 326,823 | - | - |
| LED Street Lighting Upgrade | 3,605,580 | 3,662,630 | - |
| Urban Traffic Control | 1,513,249 | - | - |
| Completing Schemes and Retentions | 40,000 | - | - |
| Transport Growth Programme | - | 789,813 | - |
| Operational In-House Services | | | |
| Coastal Erosion and Flood Risk Management | 1,342,664 | 1,924,673 | 898,000 |
| Countryside Stewardship | 11,659 | - | - |
| Crosby Marine Lake Improvements | 10,803 | - | - |
| Parks Schemes | 301,430 | 955,107 | - |
| Tree Planting Programme | 222,565 | 190,764 | 94,879 |
| Golf Driving Range Developments | 2,197 | 280,280 | - |
| Ainsdale Coastal Gateway | 438,186 | 427,989 | - |

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|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Green Sefton – Vehicles, Plant & Machinery | 48,335 | 101,152 | - |
| Refuse Collection & Recycling | - | 345,000 | - |
| Vehicle Replacement Programme | 472,166 | 1,307,328 | - |
| <u>Total Programme</u> | 55,190,651 | 47,922,056 | 47,141,206 |

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| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Report to: | Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) | Date of Meeting: | 9 January 2024 |
| Subject: | Work Programme 2023/24, 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 2023/24; identify potential topics for scrutiny reviews to be undertaken by informal meetings; identify any items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan; and to update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendation:

That:

- (1) the Work Programme for 2023/24, 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 report on the Armed Forces Covenant be considered at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 27 February 2024;
- (3) consideration be given as to whether the Committee would like to select a topic for review at an informal meeting of the Committee;
- (4) 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 Committee and any agreed items be included in the Work Programme referred to in (1) above; and
- (5) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

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Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

To determine the Work Programme of items to be considered during the Municipal Year 2023/24 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. | |
| Impact on Children and Young People: There are no direct implications for impacting on children and young people arising from this report. Any impact on children and young people 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. | |
| 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 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. | |

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

| |
|---|
| Protect the most vulnerable: None directly applicable to this report. However, any 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. |
| 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. |
| Cleaner Greener: As above. |

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.

(B) External Consultations

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

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 2023/24 – Appendix 1
- Criteria Checklist for Selecting Topics for Review – Appendix 2
- Latest Key Decision Forward Plan items relating to this Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Appendix 3

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

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Introduction/Background

1. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

- 1.1 The Work Programme of items to be submitted to the Committee for consideration during the Municipal Year 2023/24 was approved by the Committee on 13 June 2023 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report. The programme has been produced in liaison with the appropriate Assistant Directors, 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 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 2023/24 and updated, as appropriate.
- 1.4 The Work Programme indicates that a report would be considered at this meeting on the Armed Forces Covenant. This report is not yet ready for submission and it is recommended that it be considered at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 27 February 2024.

2. SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPICS 2023/24

- 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 meeting held on 13 June 2023 the Committee agreed that any future reviews during the year be dealt with by informal meetings of the Committee rather than via Working Groups.
- 2.3 The Committee's views are sought on the selection of a topic(s) for consideration by an informal meeting(s) of the Committee.
- 2.4 A criteria checklist for selecting and rejecting potential topics to review is attached at Appendix 2.

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 3 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.
- 3.6 In respect of pre-scrutiny the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board at its meeting held on 20 June 2023 noted that often strategies and plans were included on the Forward Plan but that rarely were they submitted to Overview and Scrutiny for comment prior to their submission to Cabinet/Council; and suggested that officers should plan more time into the process for formulating plans and strategies to enable Overview and Scrutiny to have an input and provide comments to Cabinet/Council.

As Members will be aware, a report was considered at the last meeting of the Committee and a recommendation approved that Cabinet be requested to approve changes to the Executive/Scrutiny Protocol and that Executive Directors and Assistant Directors, whose responsibilities fall within the remit of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, be requested to seek the views of the Committees on all strategies and plans prior to submission to Cabinet and Council; and that if it is not possible, due to time constraints, to submit the final strategy or plan for consideration, then an outline or synopsis be submitted to the Committees to allow an oversight of the proposals to be considered and commented upon; and Section 6 of the Protocol relating to pre-scrutiny be amended accordingly.

- 3.7 The report referred to in paragraph 3.6 above was considered and approved by the four Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the September cycle of meetings; and also by Cabinet at its meeting to be held on 2 November 2023.

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 an update 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.

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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 Desmond, Hart and Howard. 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 Councillor serving on Liverpool City Council has been appointed Chair for the 2023/24 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 6 December 2023. The Committee considered the following items:

Agenda Item 8

- Level Four Devolution and the Deeper Devolution Scrutiny Protocol.
- Development of Long Term Skills Plan.
- CA Plan 2021-24: Quarter 2 2023-24 Performance Update.
- Work Programme 2023-24

4.10 The Committee is requested to note the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGULATORY, COMPLIANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES) WORK
PROGRAMME 2023/24**

| Tuesday, 13 June 2023, 6.30 p.m., Town Hall, Southport | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Report/Item | Report Author/Organiser |
| Members' Welfare Reform Reference Group – Update | Margaret Jones |
| Debt Management | Stephan Van Arendsen/Diane Turner |
| Cabinet Member Update Reports | Paul Fraser |
| Work Programme Update | Paul Fraser |

| Tuesday, 12 September 2023, 6.30 p.m., Town Hall, Bootle | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Report/Item | Report Author/Organiser |
| Financial Performance Monitoring | Stephan Van Arendsen/Paul Reilly |
| Customer Contact Centre Activity - Presentation | Stephan Van Arendsen/Diane Turner |
| Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures and Sickness Absence Monitoring | Paul Cunningham/Marie Lambert |
| Members' Welfare Reform Reference Group – Update | Margaret Jones |
| Cabinet Member Update Reports | Paul Fraser |
| Work Programme Update | Paul Fraser |

| Tuesday, 31 October 2023, 6.30 p.m., Town Hall, Southport | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Report/Item | Report Author/Organiser |
| Financial Performance Monitoring | Stephan Van Arendsen/Paul Reilly |
| Disposal of Surplus Council Owned Land/Asset -Management Strategy | Stephan Van Arendsen/Dom Ellis |
| Members' Welfare Reform Reference Group – Update | Margaret Jones |
| Update on Progress of LCR Digital Inclusion Strategy | Andrea Watts |
| Cabinet Member Update Reports | Paul Fraser |
| Work Programme Update | Paul Fraser |

| Tuesday, 9 January 2024, 6.30 p.m., Town Hall, Southport | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Report/Item | Report Author/Organiser |
| Financial Performance Monitoring | Stephan Van Arendsen/Paul Reilly |
| Review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme | Stephan Van Arendsen/Diane Turner |
| Members' Welfare Reform Reference Group – Update | Margaret Jones |
| Air Quality Monitoring | Peter Moore/Greg Martin |
| Armed Forces Covenant | David McCullough |
| Corporate Communications Update | Martin Driver |
| Cabinet Member Update Reports | Paul Fraser |
| Work Programme Update | Paul Fraser |

| Tuesday, 6 February 2024, 6.30 p.m., Budget Meeting - Town Hall, Bootle | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Report/Item | Report Author/Organiser |
| Budget Report 2024/25 to 2027/28 | Stephan Van Arendsen/Paul Reilly |
| Financial Performance Monitoring | Stephan Van Arendsen/Paul Reilly |
| Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities – Prudential Indicators | Stephan Van Arendsen/Graham Hussey |
| Treasury Management Policy and Strategy | Stephan Van Arendsen/Graham Hussey |
| Capital Strategy 2024/25 and Future Years | Stephan Van Arendsen/Andrew Bridson |
| Asset Management Strategy and Asset Disposal Policy – Update Position | Stephan Van Arendsen |
| Robustness of the 2024/25 Budget Estimates and the Adequacy of Reserves – Local Government Act 2003 – Section 25 | Stephan Van Arendsen |

| Tuesday, 27 February 2024, 6.30 p.m. Town Hall, Southport | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Report/Item | Report Author/Organiser |
| Annual ICT Update Report (Performance of Agilisys) | Helen Spreadbury |
| Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures and Sickness Absence Monitoring | Paul Cunningham/Marie Lambert |
| Members' Welfare Reform Reference Group – Update | Margaret Jones |
| Hackney Carriage Licensing Issues in Sefton (added at meeting on 12 September 2023) | Mark Toohey |
| Cabinet Member Update Reports | Paul Fraser |
| Work Programme Update | Paul Fraser |

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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. |

Agenda Item 8

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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APPENDIX 3

SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

FOR THE FOUR MONTH PERIOD 1 JANUARY 2024 - 30 APRIL 2024

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:-

Agenda Item 8

APPENDIX 3

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.

Phil Porter
Chief Executive

APPENDIX 3

FORWARD PLAN INDEX OF ITEMS

| Item Heading | Officer Contact |
|---|--|
| Annual Health and Safety Report | David Eden david.eden@sefton.gov.uk |
| Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax Base for 2024/25 and Review of Council Tax Premiums for Long-Term Empty Properties | Diane Turner diane.turner22@sefton.gov.uk |
| Financial Management 2023/24 to 2026/27 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2023/24 – January Update | Paul Reilly paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4106 |
| Vine House Disposal | Lee Payne lee.payne@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4842 |
| Financial Management 2023/24 to 2026/27 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2023/24 – February Update | Paul Reilly paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4106 |
| MOSL Market Innovation Fund (acceptance of funding) | Stephanie Jukes stephanie.jukes@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4552 |
| Prudential Indicators 2024/25 | Graham Hussey graham.hussey@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4100 |
| Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2024/25 | Graham Hussey graham.hussey@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4100 |
| Robustness of the 2024/25 Budget Estimates and the Adequacy of Reserves – Local Government Act 2003 - Section 25 | Paul Reilly paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4106 |
| Revenue and Capital Budget Plan 2024/25 – 2026/27 and Council Tax 2024/25 | Paul Reilly paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4106 |
| Capital Strategy 2024/25 | Andrew Bridson andrew.bridson@sefton.gov.uk |
| ICT Managed Service Contract | Helen Spreadbury helen.spreadbury@sefton.gov.uk |
| Financial Management 2023/24 to 2026/27 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2023/24 – March Update | Paul Reilly paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4106 |

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APPENDIX 3

SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

| | | | | |
|---|--|-----|------------------|-----|
| Details of Decision to be taken | Annual Health and Safety Report | | | |
| Decision Maker | Cabinet | | | |
| Decision Expected | 4 Jan 2024 Decision due date for Cabinet changed from 07/12/2023 to 04/01/2024. Reason: Work is ongoing on finalising the annual report | | | |
| 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 | Corporate Health and Safety Committee, SLB and Cabinet Member | | | |
| Method(s) of Consultation | Meetings and emails | | | |
| List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker | Annual Health and Safety Report | | | |
| Contact Officer(s) details | David Eden david.eden@sefton.gov.uk | | | |

APPENDIX 3

SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|-----|------------------|-----|
| Details of Decision to be taken | <p>Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax Base for 2024/25 and Review of Council Tax Premiums for Long-Term Empty Properties</p> <p>The report provides details of a review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the current year, 2023/24, and proposals for the Scheme for 2024/25. It also provides information about the Council Tax Base for 2024/25. Finally it provides information regarding a review of Council Tax Premiums charged for long-term empty properties.</p> | | | |
| Decision Maker | <p>Cabinet</p> <p>Council</p> | | | |
| Decision Expected | <p>4 Jan 2024</p> <p>18 Jan 2024</p> | | | |
| 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 | <p>Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services</p> <p>Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services</p> | | | |
| Persons/Organisations to be Consulted | Public consultation, and consultation with precepting authorities. | | | |
| Method(s) of Consultation | <p>A report was presented to the Public Engagement and Consultation Panel on 8th September 2023 for approval to run public consultation exercises regarding:- a proposed change to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25, and also a proposed change to the Council Tax Premium for long-term empty properties with effect from 1st April 2024. Online surveys are in place, as well as a range of communication and information about how/where the public may express their views, e.g. via the Council's Contact</p> | | | |

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|---|---|
| | Centre, One Stop Shops. Precepting authorities are consulted regarding the Council Tax Base and proposed Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25. |
| List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker | Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax Base for 2024/25 and Review of Council Tax Premiums for Long-Term Empty Properties |
| Contact Officer(s) details | Diane Turner diane.turner22@sefton.gov.uk |

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SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

| | | | | |
|---|--|-----|------------------|-----|
| Details of Decision to be taken | Financial Management 2023/24 to 2026/27 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2023/24 – January Update Financial updates and Policy decisions relating to the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan, including the monthly Revenue and Capital budget monitoring reports | | | |
| Decision Maker | Cabinet | | | |
| Decision Expected | 4 Jan 2024 | | | |
| 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 2023/24 to 2026/27 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2023/24 – January 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 | Vine House Disposal Approval of the terms of disposal of the Council owned tower block Vine House, Kepler Street, Seaforth. | | | |
| Decision Maker | Cabinet | | | |
| Decision Expected | 1 Feb 2024 Decision due date for Cabinet changed from 07/12/2023 to 01/02/2024. Reason: the process of negotiation with the proposed purchaser is taking longer than originally expected following completion of their survey of the building | | | |
| Key Decision Criteria | Financial | Yes | Community Impact | No |
| Exempt Report | Part exempt (Paragraph 3) | | | |
| Wards Affected | Linacre | | | |
| Scrutiny Committee Area | Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services | | | |
| Lead Director | Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services | | | |
| Persons/Organisations to be Consulted | Not applicable | | | |
| Method(s) of Consultation | Not applicable | | | |
| List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker | Vine House Disposal | | | |
| Contact Officer(s) details | Lee Payne lee.payne@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4842 | | | |

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SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

| | | | | |
|---|---|-----|------------------|-----|
| Details of Decision to be taken | Financial Management 2023/24 to 2026/27 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2023/24 – February Update Financial updates and Policy decisions relating to the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan, including the monthly Revenue and Capital budget monitoring reports | | | |
| Decision Maker | Cabinet | | | |
| Decision Expected | 1 Feb 2024 | | | |
| 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 2023/24 to 2026/27 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2023/24 – February 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

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|---|--|-----|------------------|-----|
| Details of Decision to be taken | MOSL Market Innovation Fund (acceptance of funding) To accept any offer of funding from the MOSL Market innovation fund, which is 100% grant funding for water saving interventions. A decision on funding is due January 2024 with work to start in April 2024. | | | |
| Decision Maker | Cabinet Council | | | |
| Decision Expected | 8 Feb 2024 29 Feb 2024 | | | |
| 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 Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services | | | |
| Persons/Organisations to be Consulted | MOSL, United Utilities, Water Plus and key site managers. | | | |
| Method(s) of Consultation | Meetings have been held with MOSL, United Utilities, Water Plus and key site managers. Emails and documentation containing details of the bid have also been shared. | | | |
| List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker | MOSL Market Innovation Fund (acceptance of funding) | | | |
| Contact Officer(s) details | Stephanie Jukes stephanie.jukes@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4552 | | | |

APPENDIX 3

SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

| | | | | |
|---|--|-----|------------------|----|
| Details of Decision to be taken | Prudential Indicators 2024/25 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 | 8 Feb 2024 29 Feb 2024 | | | |
| 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 2024/25 | | | |
| Contact Officer(s) details | Graham Hussey graham.hussey@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4100 | | | |

Agenda Item 8

APPENDIX 3

SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

| | | | | |
|---|---|-----|------------------|----|
| Details of Decision to be taken | Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2024/25 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 | 8 Feb 2024 29 Feb 2024 | | | |
| 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 2024/25 | | | |
| Contact Officer(s) details | Graham Hussey graham.hussey@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4100 | | | |

APPENDIX 3

SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

| | | | | |
|---|--|-----|------------------|-----|
| Details of Decision to be taken | <p>Robustness of the 2024/25 Budget Estimates and the Adequacy of Reserves – Local Government Act 2003 - Section 25</p> <p>To comply with statute, the Chief Financial Officer is required to report to Council prior to the approval of the budget and the setting of the Council Tax, to give assurance that the budget is robust and that there are adequate reserves and balances. The report is based on the proposals presented in the main budget report</p> | | | |
| Decision Maker | Cabinet Council | | | |
| Decision Expected | 8 Feb 2024 29 Feb 2024 | | | |
| 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 | <p>Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services</p> <p>Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services</p> | | | |
| 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 | Robustness of the 2024/25 Budget Estimates and the Adequacy of Reserves – Local Government Act 2003 - Section 25 | | | |
| 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 | Revenue and Capital Budget Plan 2024/25 – 2026/27 and Council Tax 2024/25 The report sets out the financial strategy of the Council and the national and local financial context within which it is operating. The Council has a statutory requirement to remain financially sustainable and to balance its budget every year. The report sets out the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme for 2024/25 as well as the Council Tax level for 2024/25 | | | |
| Decision Maker | Cabinet Council | | | |
| Decision Expected | 8 Feb 2024 29 Feb 2024 | | | |
| 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 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 | Revenue and Capital Budget Plan 2024/25 – 2026/27 and Council Tax 2024/25 | | | |
| Contact Officer(s) details | Paul Reilly paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4106 | | | |

APPENDIX 3

SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

| | | | | |
|---|---|-----|------------------|-----|
| Details of Decision to be taken | <p>Capital Strategy 2024/25</p> <p>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.</p> | | | |
| Decision Maker | <p>Cabinet</p> <p>Council</p> | | | |
| Decision Expected | <p>8 Feb 2024</p> <p>29 Feb 2024</p> | | | |
| 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 | <p>Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services</p> <p>Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services</p> | | | |
| Persons/Organisations to be Consulted | N/A | | | |
| Method(s) of Consultation | None | | | |
| List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker | Capital Strategy 2024/25 | | | |
| Contact Officer(s) details | Andrew Bridson andrew.bridson@sefton.gov.uk | | | |

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APPENDIX 3

SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

| | | | | |
|---|--|-----|------------------|----|
| Details of Decision to be taken | ICT Managed Service Contract This report seeks approval to go to market to secure a service provider to deliver ICT Managed Services to Sefton from the 1st of October 2025. | | | |
| Decision Maker | Cabinet | | | |
| Decision Expected | 7 Mar 2024 | | | |
| 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 | Assistant Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (Strategic Support) | | | |
| Persons/Organisations to be Consulted | Internal consultation has already taken place with members of ELT and further consultation is planned with the Portfolio holder for Corporate Resources and Customer Services, the Central Procurement team, Legal Services, Human Resources and Payroll and members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Consultation will also take place with trade unions as in when required | | | |
| Method(s) of Consultation | Consultation will be completed via the delivery of papers and attendance and meetings, the circulation of the report for comments and by seeking feedback from subject matter experts. | | | |
| List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker | ICT Managed Service Contract | | | |
| Contact Officer(s) details | Helen Spreadbury helen.spreadbury@sefton.gov.uk | | | |

APPENDIX 3

SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

| | | | | |
|---|--|-----|------------------|-----|
| Details of Decision to be taken | Financial Management 2023/24 to 2026/27 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2023/24 – March Update Financial updates and Policy decisions relating to the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan, including the monthly Revenue and Capital budget monitoring reports | | | |
| Decision Maker | Cabinet | | | |
| Decision Expected | 7 Mar 2024 | | | |
| 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 2023/24 to 2026/27 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2023/24 – March Update | | | |
| Contact Officer(s) details | Paul Reilly paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4106 | | | |

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**Cabinet Member Brief
Overview & Scrutiny Committee
(Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)**

Welfare Reform & Anti-Poverty Update

The Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Cabinet Member Reference Group met on 25th October 2023. 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 on 12th October 2023.

The cost-of-living crisis was discussed. Updates included:

- Sefton Food Banks advised that they have seen an increase of 40% of self-referrals from last year. They are applying for funding for additional staff, as currently unable to cope with capacity. They are realigning the services in St. Leonards and other premises due to the loss of the premises in The Strand. Pantry numbers are still increasing week by week with a new pantry in St Paul, Hatton Hill being opened at the end of October.
- Officers from the Citizens Advice Bureau advised that they have employed Mind & Monday project officers who can help support with ELAS applications and things such as setting up bank accounts, budgeting, benefit calculations, PIP applications etc. Request for support surrounding immigration issues and translation services has increased.
- Officers from Riverside Housing advised that they have referred over 1000 tenants for financial inclusion support and have raised over £500,000 for these residents. They have a debt freeze programme currently, with around 200 households taking part in the programme.

Period Poverty - A Sefton Update

Cabinet Members received an update regarding period poverty in Sefton. The Department of Education now provide funding for sanitary products, this is an application process for schools to receive their allocation. Sefton Council officers are in the process of reminding schools to apply and assisting with the application process.

SYMBOL report

The Executive Director shared the SYMBOL report with members. SYMBOL is the Sefton Youth Making Better Opportunities with Leaders. Being a part of a SYMBOL activity means

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young people can play a role in their community, with a direct line of communication with key decision-makers. Cabinet Members were advised of possible changes around fees and charges within leisure, the change could add funds to the system to reduce the cost of swimming lessons for children accessing free school meals.

Community Pantry Update

Cabinet Members received an update regarding community pantries. The Council's Communities team has established a cost-of-living support group, with an aim to collate all cost-of-living schemes within the borough of Sefton. A report plus a live resources document is to be shared with members at the next meeting.

Cabinet Members were advised that an October harvest food drive took place in Magdalen House. It had a very positive response and discussions now taking place surrounding Christmas across the borough.

Sefton Child Poverty Strategy

Officers from the Public Health team updated Cabinet Members on the Sefton child poverty follow-up event. The conference takes place on 18th January 2024. It is being held this time in the Brunswick Youth and Community Centre, in Bootle.

A save-the-date notification has been sent to guests. The formal event will start at 1:30pm. Speakers include Dr Ruth Hussey, High Sheriff of Merseyside, Michael Chang, Senior Lead, Planning, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, and Stephen Watson, Executive Director (Place), Sefton MBC.

The focus is on 'Place' and will be looking at areas of planning, housing, poverty proofing and inclusive streets.

Respiratory Pilot

Officers from Public Health provided members with an overview of the respiratory pilot. This is a 12-month pilot that aims to enhance respiratory health by improving the respiratory health and wellbeing of children by connecting parents to holistic interventions providing advice, signposting, and education.

The proposal has been developed as a collaboration with statutory partners in Sefton Council and includes Public Health, Housing, and Early Years, acute sector collaboration with Alder Hey Children's Hospital, and the VCF in Sefton including CVS and Parenting 2000.

Sefton Council Housing update

Cabinet Members received an update on the cost-of-living crisis and how it is affecting housing. It was reported that homelessness in Sefton is still challenging, and significant numbers of people are in temporary accommodation each week.

The largest factor influencing homelessness are changes in the private rented sector, with landlords selling properties due to interest rate rises and greater regulations such as the hold on the private renting reform bill.

Sefton Council Housing is working hard to reverse trends, including through a council housing programme. Sefton has not owned or managed council housing since 2006 when all the council's housing stock was transferred to One Vision Housing. However, in response to the housing crisis Cabinet has made a decision that Sefton is to re-enter the social housing market once again, and we are currently developing a programme which will see us acquire properties from the council's house building company Sandway homes to use as council housing. The first of these will be 18 properties acquired from Sandway on their Buckley Hill Lane site in Netherton which are expected to be completed in late 2024. This stock is to be managed by an existing Registered Provider of Social Housing on behalf of the council.

Cabinet Members were advised that a main priority is preparing for winter as it is the most challenging period around damp condensation.

Warm Hubs

Cabinet Members received an update on Sefton Warm Hubs, called 'Welcome Spaces' during the summer period. The updated information is from May to August 2023.

14 organisations provided Welcome Spaces with 346 sessions held, and 5152 individuals attended with a common age profile of 65-75.

Sefton Localities Team advised members that there is a network of providers providing spaces during the winter. Funding has been extended via the Household Support Fund, through to March 2024. Currently, 22 providers with services having just been recommissioned, are expected to expand to 40 providers.

All branding now changed back from Welcome Spaces to Warm Spaces, from 1st October 2023 until 31st March 2024.

ELAS Update

Cabinet Members received an update on ELAS performance for the council's local welfare support scheme. The Open Access household support fund online application scheme has received just over 5000 applications since April 2023. 3,500 awards have been provided to

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individuals, equating to nearly £800,000. There are around 200 to 300 applications a week, for the scheme.

ELAS applications are around 200 a week. From the end of September 2023, 2,000 food vouchers have been issued, 2,500 utility awards issued and supported over 600 items of essential household items. There is an expected increase in utility vouchers as we come into winter.

Requests for Action

None noted.

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Report to: | Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) | Date of Meeting: | 9 January 2024 |
| Subject: | Cabinet Member Report – October 2023 to December 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 2023 to December 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. | |
| Impact on Children and Young People: No There are no direct children and young people implications arising from this report. Any children and young people implications arising from the consideration of reports referred to in the Cabinet Member update will be contained in such reports when they are presented to Members at the appropriate time. | |
| 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 |
| 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 Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services is attached.

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| CABINET MEMBER REPORT | | |
|--------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| Overview & Scrutiny | | |
| Councillor | Portfolio | Period of Report |
| Paulette Lappin | Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services | January 2024 |

Financial Management

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

The latest budget monitoring position, as at the end of October, was reported to Cabinet in December. This showed a forecast overspend of about £7m, mainly due to a forecast overspend on Children’s Social Care (£5m) and the potential impact of the as yet unagreed pay award (an additional £1.5m). There are other budgets under pressure, but the expectation is that services will mitigate these pressures from elsewhere within their budgets. Mitigating actions of nearly £5m had been identified meaning a net position of just under £2.5m was reported. Further work continues to be undertaken to refine forecasts and updated positions will be reflected in the next report to Cabinet in January.

A report on the Medium-Term Financial Plan was presented to Cabinet in September. This outlined the updated position as well as provided some narrative on some other financial issues facing the Council. The MTFP is being refined as more information is received and will help inform the Budget Report in March 2024. The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement is expected to be announced early in the last week before Christmas at which point the funding assumptions for 2024/25 will be refined.

The audit of the draft Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 is nearing completion and is expected to be signed off in the near future (the Chair of Audit and Governance Committee has delegated authority to do this). The audit of the draft Statement of Accounts for 2021/22 is currently in abeyance. EY are waiting on instructions from the Government relating to measures that will be put in place to enable audits to be completed. Depending on what these measures are will determine if further work is required on the audit.

The draft Statement of Accounts for 2022/23 were presented to the Committee on 27 September 2023. The report noted that valuations of the Council’s assets hadn’t yet been finalised, so the impact had yet to be included in the financial statements. In addition a small number of notes hadn’t been completed. The valuations were finalised by late October 2023 and a revised Statement of Accounts, including the impact of the valuations and the missing notes, was published at the beginning of November 2023.

As mentioned above, national discussions by the Government are taking place on what measures might be put in place to ensure sufficient assurance can be gained to ensure audits for 2022/23 can be concluded. Until these discussions have taken place and decisions made the external auditor is unable to formulate their audit plan for the year. Therefore, the majority of the work to be undertaken cannot yet commence. However, some audit work has taken place, particularly around the work required to form an opinion on the Council’s Value for Money arrangements.

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Customer Centric Services

The Service continues to deal with high workloads; it remains positive that there has been good progress in reducing both volumes outstanding and customer waiting times.

Customer Services

The Council's Customer Services Contact Centre is currently answering approximately 17,500 calls each month. The salutation message that is relayed at the start of each incoming call continues to encourage customers to use the online Council services if they can, allowing for staff to handle calls for Sefton's prioritised services, i.e., Social Care and ELAS.

As is usual, there remains a high volume of enquiries relating to Council Tax; in addition, due to the annual Green Bin collection recently ending, there has been an increase in callers disgruntled about missed bin collections and calls relating to delays in the delivery of new brown bins. There has also been an increase in calls for Highways, with customers complaining about potholes, flooding and various traffic lights at temporary roadworks not working.

Customer demand at the One Stop Shops continues to be high with over 3,000 customers attending Bootle One Stop Shop each month. During November, approximately 800 visitors related to taxi-licensing, just over 1,000 visitors were seeking information or advice relating to Council Tax, benefits or ELAS, with remaining callers requesting general-council advice from the receptionists.

At Southport, each month approximately 550 customers attend the Atkinson to discuss their Council Tax or benefit with the remainder seeking general council-related advice at reception. Service delivery from Southport continues to be reviewed with alternative locations being explored and updates will be provided in due course.

While overall customer contact remains high, enquiries for Social Care and ELAS remain prioritised above all other services that are offered by Customer Services.

Taxi-Licensing

Taxi Licensing workloads and processing times are at an acceptable level.

Taxi Licensing is entering a critical period, with advanced plans in place for implementing a new Taxi Licensing computer system for February 2024. This system will be a significant improvement for the trade and key-stakeholders, allowing for taxi drivers, vehicle owners and operators to upload various evidence documents as well as pay all licensing fees via an online portal. As part of the project implementation, the Council's website has been updated, and will be regularly reviewed, to provide details of the work timetable over coming months [Taxi licensing \(sefton.gov.uk\)](https://www.sefton.gov.uk)

Citizen Access - Revenues

Citizen Access-Revenues, a web-based "My Account" portal for Council Tax and Business Rates customers to manage their accounts on-line has recently gone live, initially as a phased approach with a wider roll-out over the next few months. Residents using the service can view their bills online, update household and bank details, and apply for a limited number of discounts.

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Changes requested in this way will update the main Council Tax system directly resulting in the faster turnaround of enquiries. It is positive to highlight that from the initial phase, 346 work items have been received, of which 312 (90%) have been automated into the Council Tax processing system, speeding up customer response times. There have been 34 incoming work items for discounts and exemptions that have not been automated and need to be dealt with manually by Council Tax staff.

The team continues to work with colleagues in Communications to promote the service to all residents and businesses.

Risk and Audit

The **Internal Audit** team are continuing to work on delivering the 2023/24 internal audit plan with a current focus on reviews of:

- Review of number of Schools.
- Damp and Mould Private Owned and Council Owned Properties
- Grants Management
- ASC – Controls to mitigate market failure
- Pupil Place Planning
- SHOL Governance review
- Sandway Homes finance review
- Assurance Mapping
- Petty cash
- Commissioning - Living Well
- Review into the procurement and management of contracts

We have continued the recruitment of a permanent staff member from February 2023 and were able to appoint a suitable candidate in September 2023 who is due to start in January 2024. We provided a revised Internal Audit plan in September 2024 to reflect the delay in recruitment and the delay in the one FTE staff member due to be transferred on a fixed term basis from Finance.

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

- We have concluded the Council's insurance tender and have selected the successful insurers for each of the lots and are currently completing the renewal process.
- We have identified a cyber insurance option for schools which we are promoting and seeking their individual authority to purchase subject to an application process.
- We have used some of the "free days" as part of the insurance programme risk bursary to undertake a review of Emergency Planning and Business Continuity documentation. The review identified minor changes in the documentation which have been addressed.
- We are currently procuring an Actuarial Report for the Council's Insurance Fund which the Council is required to provide to the external auditors which helps to assess whether the Council's Insurance Fund is suitably funded or whether an injection of funding is required.
- 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.

Risk and Resilience Team have developed a Corporate Business Continuity Plan using the existing Service Area Business Continuity (BC) Plans which was with the Executive Director of

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Corporate Resources to approve. We will shortly provide this to Executive Leadership Team to comment on and approve. Following the exercise of the Council's BC arrangements in January 2023 which we have subsequently received feedback on we are currently implementing the recommendations from the review. We are planning a subsequent exercise which is likely to be in Q4 of 2024/25. We have recently completed an activation exercise of the Council's Service Business Continuity Plans the results of which we will be sharing with the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services shortly. With the exception of Children's Services the Service Business Continuity Plans are being updated regularly. We are seeking to work with Children's to update their Business Continuity Plan.

The **Risk and Resilience Team** have completed the roll out of training on the Council's Risk Appetite which was presented to the Audit and Governance Committee in March 2023 to all Service Areas. We are waiting on the proposed changes, by Democratic Services, to the Council's Committee header sheet before the risk appetite can be said to be fully implemented.

Other work includes:

- Working with the Merseyside Resilience Forum
- Development of a Shoreline Pollution Plan
- Review of the Council's emergency facilities
- Review of approach of volunteers
- Working on Sefton events

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

- 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.
- We have been able to appoint to two vacant positions with both candidates due to start in January 2024.
- We have developed with Property Services a revised asbestos policy and training content for all Schools which we are currently implementing following the HSE intervention.

ICT

- The ICT Service continues to work on a number transformation programmes as well as delivering the BAU ICT Service alongside Agilisys. Key projects currently in flight relate to support for the Children's Improvement Programme, Customer Services (CXP), Data

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Centre relocation and the Website upgrade. Remedial work for Leisure is now completed with Sefton Arc nearing completion.

- The team is now working hard to implement new Cyber Security features to further strengthen the resilience of the corporate network. For those servers where it does not make economic sense to upgrade, as they are due to be replaced or decommissioned in the future, extended support has been purchased to ensure that the devices still receive critical security updates.
- A key priority for the team moving forward is the contract review and re-procurement of a supplier to deliver ICT Managed Services from October 2025, when the Agilisys Contract ends. A report to Overview and Scrutiny and then Cabinet is on the forward plan for next year and appropriate governance around this programme will be established early next year.
- Data centre rationalisation and right sizing is now completed within the existing Data Centre at St Peters ready for relocation to a new site. Due to the complexities associated with move to Bootle Town Hall the team have worked with property services to identify a suitable space in Magdalen House for the Agilisys Staff, and this is now entering the design stage. The remaining servers and devices will be relocated to a purpose-built data centre within Liverpool City Region, the Sefton Client team is currently chasing a formal contract and timescales for this to be delivered.
- The Cloud telephony project is now closed, and all associated legacy infrastructure is due to be removed from the estate early December 2023.
- The new CXP solution went live across all services in January this year. The last legacy service, Pest Control, is due to go live early December, after which the legacy CRM system will be formally decommissioned. In terms of phase two, work is now well underway to transfer Council e-forms to CXP from the legacy e-forms system, with 20 forms completed to date and a further 3 phases of 20 each to follow. Work is also starting on the configuration and set up of FOI processes in CXP.
- Work has commenced on the upgrade of the Umbraco content management system, which is due to complete before Christmas with testing due to take place in January, go live will be scheduled once User acceptance testing is completed and the product accepted.
- The ICT Procurement team continue to be busy; the forward plan for the next 12-18 months has been agreed by members of ELT and work is underway on several key procurements including the corporate connectivity service, as well as applications for Crems and Crematoria, eLearning, GIS and Leisure.
- The drafting of the new Digital Strategy for Sefton has started, with engagement across the Council to develop a proposal document which, following internal approvals, will go out to consultation early 2024.

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

- Ongoing work to deliver approved Asset Disposals with further phases being developed for approval.
- Assisting with the SEND programme.
- Ongoing work supporting Growth Board projects.
- Ongoing work in connection to lease agreements.
- Looking at accommodation options for teams/departments.

Maintenance Management / Building Services & FM

- Delivering a range of schemes in support of Corporate Buildings.
- Delivering a range of schemes in support of Education Capital & SEND programme.
- Delivery of reactive maintenance and statutory compliance services to Corporate and Educational buildings.
- Professional advice and support on a broad range of regeneration programmes.
- Phase 1 essential maintenance delivery plan for corporate buildings progressing with works ongoing/complete.
- Phase 2 essential maintenance – looking to secure funding for this further phase of works.
- Asset survey delivery plan in train alongside the essential maintenance.
- Phase 1 Corporate Landlord implementation in train with ‘go live’ date to be agreed once recruitment has taken place. Phase 1 is centralised statutory compliance. As part of phase 1, Facilities Management now sits within Maintenance Management as opposed to Asset Management.
- A phase 2 Corporate Landlord programme is being developed for consideration. This will encompass wider centralised delivery.
- Delivering services in support of major adaptation to vulnerable and disabled residents.

Project Management

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

Energy Management

- Sefton Council Retrofit programme* now completed (LAD3, HUG) – an evaluation report will be shared with members shortly. HUG2 is being delivered by LCR with support from Sefton. **Scheme providing insulation to privately owned properties (worst/not insulated & for poorest residents 407).*
- Bid with the LCR for public sector decarbonisation funding (~£8M for 10 buildings) was submitted in November. We will be informed of the outcome in January 2024.
- Bid to MOSL (Market operator water) for £200K for efficiency measures and testing of investment scheme was submitted in November. We will be informed of the outcome in January 2024.
- Purchase of REGO (100% renewable energy certificates) for 2024/5 in progress.
- A programme of work to support schools/ corporate sites is ongoing.
- Climate adaptation work is progressing with Quantum engaged to report on risks to Sefton and support all departments to assess risk/ become more resilient.
- Delivering services in support of affordable warmth to residents is very busy due to cold weather/ financial pressures.

Legal Services

Democratic Services Team – Overview

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 17 October 2023 and the Committee considered the following items:

- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Sefton - Update Report
- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Sefton - Health Provider Performance Dashboard
- Performance Report Review
- Melling Surgery Closure
- Health Substantial Reconfiguration Proposals
- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Work Programme Update

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 23 January 2024. The meeting was scheduled for 2 January, but this has now been identified as part of the Christmas/New Year shutdown and the meeting has been re-arranged.

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 28th November 2023 and the Committee considered the following items:

- Petition – The Voice of the Families – EHCPs
- Petition – The Voice of the Families – Public Speaking
- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Children's Services Improvement Programme
- SEND Joint Commissioning Plan
- Performance and Quality
- Consideration of the Terms of Reference and Inclusion of Co-Opted Members
- Work Programme Key Decision Forward Plan

Two items were postponed (Education Score Card and Ofsted Inspections). The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 30th January 2024.

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 7 November 2023. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Bootle Regeneration Strategy – Presentation
- Flood And Coastal Erosion Risk Management Annual Report
- Green Sefton Annual Review Work Programme 2023/24, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan
- Cabinet Member Update Reports

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 16 January 2024. At the time of writing this report the agenda has not been published but it is anticipated, that in accordance with the Committee's Work Programme, that items listed below will be considered by the Committee.

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- Update on the progression of the Liverpool City Region Digital Inclusion Strategy
- Update on Operational Activities delivered via Locality Services
- Sefton Economic Strategy for Growth (with a focus on the new Crosby Library project and the Bootle Regeneration Strategy)
- Southport Market Update
- Sandway Homes Limited - 2022/23 Outturn Review of Council Wholly Owned Companies
- Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited (SHOL) - 2022/23 Outturn Review of Council Wholly Owned Companies
- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Work Programme Update

Refuse and Recycling – The Committee has agreed that the first review be on the topic of refuse and waste recycling. The proposal is that Members will undertake a visit to the Gillmoss Recycling Discovery Centre; and following the visit an informal meeting will be held to discuss issues associated with refuse and waste recycling. The visit and informal meeting will be held on 15 January 2024.

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 31 October 2023. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Update on Progress of Liverpool City Region Digital Inclusion Strategy.
- Disposal of Surplus Council Owned Land/Asset -Management Strategy
- Financial Management 2023/24 to 2026/27 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2023/24 – October Update
- Cabinet Member Update Report
- Work Programme Update

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 9 January 2024. At the time of writing this report the agenda has not been published but it is anticipated, that in accordance with the Committee's Work Programme, that items listed below will be considered by the Committee.

- Financial Performance Monitoring
- Review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- Members' Welfare Reform Reference Group – Update
- Air Quality Monitoring
- Armed Forces Covenant
- Corporate Communications Update
- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Work Programme Update

Navigating Finance Scrutiny: A Webinar for Elected Members' - All Members of the Committee were invited to attend a webinar, held on 18 December 2023, hosted by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny on the topic of 'Navigating finance scrutiny: a webinar for elected members'.

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- **Executive/Scrutiny Protocol** - The four Overview and Scrutiny Committees, considered, during the September cycle of meetings, a report that sought approval to two additions to the Executive/Scrutiny Protocol in relation to the submission of Plans and Strategies to Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Working Group Reviews/Informal Meetings. The four Committees approved the recommendations contained in the report. Cabinet, at its meeting held on 2 November 2023, also approved the additions and the Protocol has been updated accordingly.

- **Overview and Scrutiny Management Board**

A meeting of the Management Board was held on 7 November 2023. The Management Board considered the following items:

- Broadcasting/Recording of Council Meetings
- Cabinet Member Reports and Questions at Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meetings
- Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Scrutiny Link - Councillor Howard
- Strategic Scrutiny in Practice Network and Basecamp
- Centre for Governance and Scrutiny – Newsletters and Annual Survey
- Update on Informal Meetings/Working Groups
- Children's Services - Additional Management Board Meeting

The last meeting of the Management Board was held on 21 November 2023 to discuss governance and wider member support to Children's Services.

The next meeting of the Management Board will take place on 9 January 2024.

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

The last meeting of LCRO&S was held on 6 December 2023. The Committee considered the following items:

- Level Four Devolution and the Deeper Devolution Scrutiny Protocol.
- Development of Long Term Skills Plan.
- CA Plan 2021-24: Quarter 2 2023-24 Performance Update.
- Work Programme 2023-24

Investment Zones - Members agreed to undertake an in-depth review into Investment Zones, which would allow Members to understand the IZ process and also undertake a deep dive on a specific IZ project. This meeting was held on 7 December 2023.

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

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

The next meeting of the LCRO&S will be held on 17 January 2024.

School Appeals

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

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The school appeal 'high season' started on 10 May and ended on 18 July 2023. In this period over 450 appeals were listed. The levels of school appeal cases remain high. Three days of hearings were held in December, and two days have already been 'pencilled in' for January. In the new year planning will commence for the 2024 'high season'.

Seven official complaints to the Ombudsman / Department of Education and all were successful defended. Each complainant made numerous procedural complaints, but the Investigation Officers did not uphold a single complaint.

Additionally, an Independent Review Panel (exclusion appeal) was held on 23 November, 2023.

Civic and Mayoral Services

- Remembrance Sunday this year was well observed and attended across all sites, despite the inclement weather on the day. All the feedback received has been positive about the event.
- The Mayor of Sefton's Charity 70s Night was a great success, raising over £400.00 for the Mayors Charity Fund.
- Preparation works have now started on the Mayors Gala Charity Ball, which will be held on Saturday 6th April 2024 at Formby Hall, tickets are now on sale at £50.00 per ticket which includes a three-course meal with entertainment.

Member Development

Member Development Programme 2023-2024

The Member Development Programme is now well underway with training being provided to relevant Committee Members.

1. The mandatory Planning Committee Training session took place on 24 May and was well received by Members and Substitute Members of Planning Committee. The session was attended by all of 15 of the Planning Committee Members and 11 of the 15 Substitute members. A special "mop-up" training session took place on 3 July 2023.
2. Mandatory Licensing and Regulatory Committee training took place on 12 June 2023.
3. Overview and Scrutiny Committee training - Democratic Services have been working closely with the LGA for the provision of the following training for Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members:
 - On 30 May 2023 the first of three sessions for Members and Substitutes of Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Children's Services and Safeguarding took place. The second training session took place on 25 July 2023 and the third session took place on 2 October 2023.
 - Two training sessions for all Overview and Scrutiny Members and Substitutes were held at Bootle Town Hall on 15 June 2023.
 - Arrangements have been made for the provision of training for all the O&S Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs and for mentoring support for the Chair of the O&S Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding).
 - Negotiations are currently underway with the LGA for the provision of dedicated training for O&S Adult Social Care and Health Committee Members and Substitutes.

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

4. Mandatory Course Completion Rates (As of 08/12/2023)

| | |
|---|------------|
| Corporate Parenting (Microsoft Teams) | 94% |
| Equality and Diversity Awareness | 45% |
| Information and Compliance – Sharing and Guarding | 51% |
| Safeguarding Adults Awareness | 57% |
| Safeguarding Children and Young People Awareness | 57% |

Member Development Steering Group

The Member Development Steering Group was established in November 2022. For 2023/24 the Group is comprised of 6 Members and last met on 23 August 2023. The next meeting is scheduled for 20 December 2023.

The Members of the Steering Group act as Member Development Champions for their respective political groups and are responsible for providing feedback on the Member Development Programme.

Contract and Commercial

- The team continue to work at a high-level despite being short of both a Senior Lawyer (team manager) and an experienced Lawyer. We have advertised both positions without any applicants to date. The team currently comprises a newly qualified lawyer and trainee with support from a part time locum and from the Principal Lawyer. The Team have had positive feedback from client departments. Examples of the work provided include:
 - Legal support on the Marine Lake Events Centre project: Sefton’s internal legal team continue to support Council officers and the Council’s appointed external legal advisor on the progression of this project
 - Domiciliary Care PDPS: Sefton’s internal legal team have assisted on the procurement of a Sefton run Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System for Domiciliary Care which is aiming to go live in September 2023
 - Legal Support on the Bootle Strand Regeneration Project Sefton’s internal legal team continue to support Council officers and the Council’s appointed external legal advisor on the progression of this project
 - Children’s Residential Care PDPS: Sefton’s internal legal team assisted on the procurement and establishment of a Sefton run Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System for Children’s Residential Care which went live in July 2023

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- Legal Support on the Crosby Library Regeneration Project Sefton's internal legal team continue to support Council officers on the progression of this project
- JCT Build Contract support: Sefton's internal legal team have supported on a number of JCT build contracts covering a range of work from minor works to JCT intermediate with contractor's design. For the financial year 2023/24 to date, this has involved the advising on and completion of over 16 separate build contracts. Some of these contracts included more complex arrangements such as the agreement of listed items, performance bonds and a letter of intent to allow a contractor to commence work in advance of contract completion.

Employment Law

- The employment team continue to provide support to the Council and the Schools on a range of contentious and non-contentious matters. Many of the contentious matters are confidential and therefore not suitable for inclusion in this report but further details can be provided on a confidential basis.

Prosecutions Regulatory Team

- The team are short staffed at the moment as there are two team members on maternity leave and their maternity cover have not yet been recruited. However, the team continue to deliver a great service to clients across the Council. The work of the team is extremely varied but includes, prosecutions, litigation, debt recovery, information governance and other regulatory work. Recent highlights include:
 - The litigation team successfully resisted an appeal in the magistrates court against a civil penalty for failing to licence a property under the Housing Act 2004- the penalty of £7,500 was upheld.
 - The litigation team successfully prosecution a man for 11 counts of fly tipping, with a sentence of a fine of £1,166, a victim surcharge of £466, recovery of Legal costs of £1,105.25 and an award of clean-up costs £6,065.
 - The debt recovery team have recovered a care package debt £6,000 and a residential care home debt of £22,500.

Property and Planning Team

- The property team continue to handle a wide and varied caseload of instructions from the Council's estates team for disposals, acquisitions and other property related matters; including the sale of St Annes and St Peters House, and the ongoing Meadows disposal and Sandbrook acquisitions.
- Planning matters have returned after a break, with planning committees progressing again. The property team advise on a range of matters with recent highlights including:
 - Disposal of St Peter's House & St Anne's House: Instructions to dispose of the freehold of both buildings and to grant a 10 year pre-emption for purchase of land at Balliol Road car park. Buyer has been sent associated draft legal documents of contract, transfer deed and pre-emption agreement and is currently undertaking its title investigations before negotiating the legal documents.

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- Licence for Car Park: Instructions to grant to the Sefton CCG a licence to occupy the former NALGO Car Park, Trinity Road. The CCG currently occupy part of Magdalen House with its staff being granted informal parking permission at the building. The granting of the NALGO licence will ease operational difficulties at an oversubscribed Magdalen Car Park and despite negotiations with the CCG being protracted, the parties are very close to reaching agreement as to the content of the licence to allow completion.

Childcare

- The Children, Education and Adults legal team remain exceptionally busy. Following two staff members in this teams now securing positions in the legal department as trainee solicitors, two new Senior Legal Assistants have joined the team and are busy providing the necessary support to Children's Social Care.
- The cases being managed by the team continue to be complex in nature often involving several parties and international elements where the team must liaise with Central Authorities worldwide. There has been a slight decrease in the number of children where public law application are being made in respect of care proceedings, but there has been an increase in the number of applications to discharge Care orders, therefore decreasing the number of Children Looked After by the authority.
- The Childrens Services department have taken on a team of Social Workers to identify and undertake this discharge of care order work, and the legal team are providing the legal support in order to achieve this large piece of work.
- Additionally, the team are assisting with high profile cases before the high court. The Adults team remain exceptionally busy as do the Lawyer designated to supporting the Special educational needs department.

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PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

Operational Matters

Children's Services – Human Resources Operational Support Team

A dedicated HR Team for Children's Social Care and Education, provide advice and support regarding all employment and staffing matters to all areas of Children's Services including Schools. Recently the team has successfully recruited to a vacancy and with effect from 1st December 2023 have additional support in the form of a Senior HR Business Partner, which will predominately benefit Children's Social Care and Education Excellence.

Current priorities, in addition to business-as-usual focuses on supporting the Executive Director for Children's Social Care and Education on all staffing issues. Sefton School prioritises support to schools' to proposed Academy transfers, along with commencing our 3 yearly HR Support for Schools Service Level Agreement cycle in which history demonstrates 100% buy in. The challenges in recruitment and retention continue within Children's Social Care and SEN. Some interim employment arrangements have been put in place to support SEN with ongoing improvement and pending SEN inspection. Interim arrangements continue with a central recruitment team to provide additional support the transformation improvements in Children's Social Care.

There has recently been an increase into matters relating to managing sickness absence within Children's Services, which is a positive, and the team will be designing and delivering training in relation to the managing absence over the coming months. Following the design and roll of training to Children's Services in relation to managing performance, we have seen a slight increase in supporting Children's Social Care in this area, including formal processes. Formal meetings continue to be held via a combination of Microsoft Teams and in person meetings as required.

Whilst considering the pressures that are placed on Employees and the Authority, the team mindful of sensitivity when providing advice and do so empathetically, at the same time ensuring that the right support and advice is given, and the appropriate processes are actioned accordingly.

All Other Council Operational HR Business Support

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

Pay & Grading, Job evaluation, policy and projects.

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.

Officers in this team 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.

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

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of writing the processing of applications for regrading has been somewhat delayed. This is because the previous JE Officer was assigned to alternative duties from February 2023 onwards and then subsequently in June 23 was appointed to another role. The position was advertised within a week and interviews were undertaken as soon as possible after the closing date and a new postholder was secured. However, the new postholder could not take up the post until October 2023.

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. Figures for the period

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 a Court of Appeal case. On 15th March GMB accepted the Council settlement proposal (which covers a very small proportion of the 580 claims. Officers will make settlement offers in relation to GMB legitimate claims, if the claimants withdraw their ET claims.

The team includes a Policy Officer responsible for undertaking reviews of policy, procedures and guidance and introduce new policies as required in line with current legislation. The officer is 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.

Team members are responsible for the production of Agenda and minutes in relation to the Joint Trade Union meetings held on a 2 week cycle.

Service Development, Establishment Control, Transactional HR Payroll & Pension (THRP) Services

There are still some issues with Monthly Data Collection (MDC) for the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) which we are working with Midland HR (MHR) to resolve.

Sefton are now up to date with submission of files to Merseyside Pension Fund (MPF) but continue to press MHR for improvements to the reports provided. An update to MHR software has been implemented and this will hopefully improve reporting from November 2023 onwards.

Teachers Pensions Monthly data collection (MDC) moves to Monthly Contribution Reconciliation (MCR) has been postponed until 1st April 2024 as the iTrent software has several known issues. Sefton have engaged with MHR to ensure the system is configured correctly for testing and go live. Initial meetings have started with MHR consultants to progress MCR

The staff are still learning parts of the new system and there are issues with how long the system is taking to process some records and this has been raised and a fix was put and performance seems to have improved.

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There are backlogs in the teams due to process, reporting and resource issues and all work is being prioritised. A fast-track solution to deal with letters for new starters in Schools is being worked on and a review of the backlog of Sefton starters letters is underway.

There are now outstanding pay awards from 1st September 2022 for Soulbury staff and 1st September 2023 for Youth and Soulbury staff.

The pay awards for NJC, Members and Chief Executive from 1st April 2023 and Teachers from 1st September 2023 have been agreed and will be processed in December 2023 pay.

Background data cleansing is underway to review the organisations establishment, to add in Gross budgeted hours and to end or remove posts and positions not in use. This preparation is being undertaken prior to the introduction of reusing positions. This will improve system use, vacancy management and improve the accuracy of data and reports.

The temporary restructure of the Employee Support BSU team is to be made permanent. A separate team has been created with resource to focus on development and reporting, A separate Recruitment Team will be created with resource being split from the THR team to focus entirely on recruitment and onboarding. The new recruitment team will work closely with the Establishment Control team with a common reporting line to bring about greater governance of the organisational structure.

Workforce Learning and Development (CLC)

Apprenticeships

Staff enrolled on the **Level 6 Social Work Apprenticeship Degree, Level 6 Occupational Therapy Degree** and the **Level 7 Senior Leader Apprenticeship Degree programme (MBA)** are continuing with their studies and are making good progress. Our first cohort of Social Work Degree apprentices graduate in January 2024.

We have launched the **Level 5 Operational/Departmental Manager** Apprenticeship standard. The course is aimed at aspiring Middle Managers/Managers and upon successful completion of the qualification candidates will gain two accredited awards: ILM Level 5 Leadership and Management and Operational/Departmental Manager Standard Apprenticeship. 8 managers from across the organisation applied for and gained a place on the course, which commenced from Monday 18th September 2023.

We recently launched the **Level 5 Coaching Professional** standard and 2 staff commenced the course from 1st October 2023.

We are getting ready to launch the **Level 4 Digital Accessibility Specialist** and the **Level 3 Data Technician** standard from 1st January 2024 if not sooner.

Training delivery

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

- **Corporate Mandatory Training** – this includes Equality and Diversity, Health and Safety, Safeguarding Adults Awareness, Safeguarding Children & Young People Awareness and Climate Change. Monthly reports have recently been updated to include the mandatory courses for managers. Additional courses include Sickness Absence and Equality and

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Diversity for Managers eLearning, Recruitment and Selection, Managing Capability and Managing Disciplinary, Grievance and Dignity at Work virtual classroom sessions. The reports are shared with ELT/SLB to encourage staff to complete these courses.

- **Corporate Induction Face to Face session** – the first session was delivered by Phil Porter, CEO on 9th November 2023 and 34 staff were in attendance. The session complements the Corporate Induction eLearning and includes a warm welcome from the CEO and an opportunity to find out more about the organisation. Face to face induction sessions will take place every 10 weeks and new starters will be automatically enrolled onto a session.
- **Information Compliance eLearning** – we have developed a new course and end of module assessment which is due to go live 1st January 2024. The new course includes 7 sections, examples include terminology and legislation, Data Protection Act Principles and Individual Rights, dealing with information requests and sharing information.
- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** training delivery is going well. To date, we have trained 232 Sefton Council and schools' staff. That's an increase of 16 (216) since the previous report.
- **LCRCA Race Equality Training** – working with the LCRCA and neighbouring LAs to develop a training programme to complement existing E&D awareness training. This will include the 'lived experience' to enable us to address the structural and systemic racial biases that exist in some organisations and to challenges micro aggressions and unconscious biases in the workplace. To date we have delivered 7 managers sessions and 8 non-manager sessions, total trained is 370 staff. We have one final non-manager session planned for 11th December 2023 which includes a further 45 places. Planning for phase 2 of the Race Equality Project will commence in January 2024, and further sessions will be made available to staff.
- **Oliver McGowan Autism and Learning Disability eLearning** – we have commenced the roll out of mandatory Oliver McGowan eLearning training for all Adult and Children's Services staff – this includes back office and front-line staff. The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism is the standardised training and is the Government's preferred and recommended training for health and social care staff. The deadline for completion is Wednesday 31st January 2024.
- The development of a **Personalisation Training Programme** for students, ASYEs and for new starters working across Adult Social Care, who have not undertaken this training previously. The go live date for the new training programme is 1st April 2024.
- The development of a **CPD essential training offer** for Adult Social Care staff is currently in development. This will outline the mandatory training requirements for all teams within the Adult Social Care workforce. The target date for completion is 31st January 2024.

Strategic Support

COMMUNICATIONS

The team will be looking at refreshing the communications strategy/framework to provide a clear plan going forwards as to how we can continue to ensure the team helps the organisation in delivering on its priorities and enhancing our reputation in the local community.

The team has supported a number of key projects over the last few weeks most notably continuing the support to Children's Services.

Internally, the team continues to support the Chief Executive into his new role and a series of working groups and staff-focused events are now up and running, these will help get people together and have a One Council approach to work.

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Procurement

The Procurement Team engagement meetings with Service areas to update the Contract Register; review current workplans and timelines; identify future or prospective projects; and update the Procurement pipeline are almost complete.

Working with colleagues in Strategic Support the team has produced new guidance for maintaining the Contract Register and successfully delivered a number of workshops to managers from across the Council.

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 continue to develop a new performance reporting for Children's Social Care and Adults Social Care services, using the Data Warehouse and Power BI. Progress continues with the development of the Council's new enterprise data warehouse platform, which will enable cross-Council big data analysis.

The team is also supporting the information requirements for the Children's Social Care Improvement plan, with a focus on improving the 'drill-through' functionality in new Power BI reports to access client level information; this has been termed Data Warehouse & Power BI project Phase.2, and involves significant SQL development.

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 team is also supporting the Chief Executive with a number of initiatives including staff induction sessions and the staff survey.

The project to digitise the Council's historic paper records continues at pace, and is nearing an end. 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 now completed processing legacy records stored at the former Thomas Gray School site and has begun to review records at Southport Coroner's Office, the former Bootle Play Centre and Belford Road Community Centre.

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. The team provided logistical support for the Ofsted Monitoring to Children's Social Care.

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Work continues on the refresh of the Children & Young People Plan, which will require a significant amount of consultation and engagement with children, young people and partner organisations to influence the priorities to be included in the plan for the next three years.

The team supported LGA Peer Challenge and will support the development of the associated action plan.

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