



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGENERATION AND SKILLS)

**MEETING HELD AT THE TOWN HALL, BOOTLE
ON TUESDAY 16TH JANUARY, 2024**

PRESENT: Councillor Dowd (in the Chair)
Councillor Howard (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Harvey, Lloyd-Johnson, McKee,
Catie Page and Webster

ALSO PRESENT: Cllr. Marion Atkinson
Cllr. Paulette Lappin

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Corcoran, Christine Maher and Sir Ron Watson.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Member	Minute No.	Nature of Interest
Councillor Howard	Minute No. 35 - Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited (SHOL) - 2022 / 23 Outturn Review of Council Wholly Owned Companies	Stakeholder representative on the SHOL Board

28. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

29. UPDATE ON THE PROGRESSION OF THE 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
- 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 Vodafone 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:

- How under-represented groups were targeted to tackle digital inclusion.
- Measures to keep residents safe online, particularly vulnerable residents.

RESOLVED:

That Andrea Watts be thanked for her informative presentation.

30. SERIOUS VIOLENCE DUTY

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Director of People (Communities) updating on the serious violence duty which came into force in January 2023 and required specified authorities to publish a strategy by January 2024, to prevent and reduce serious violence; and which indicated that work in preparing the strategy on Merseyside had been coordinated by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The report indicated that following public consultation in July 2019, the Government announced that it would introduce legislation relating to a serious violence duty; that this aimed to ensure that relevant services worked together to share information to target interventions, where possible through existing partnership structures, to prevent and reduce serious violence within their local communities; that the Government also announced that it would amend the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to ensure that serious violence was an explicit priority for Community Safety Partnerships and by making sure they had a strategy in place to explicitly tackle serious violence; and that whilst the guidance did not specify a particular partnership to lead, given the categories classed as “Serious Violence” were contained within the Community Safety Strategy, it made sense that the Safer Sefton Together (SST) was the partnership lead body for Sefton.

Appendix 1 to the report provided a timeline of the work undertaken within the last year relating to the readiness assessment, which identified a need to support the relevant authorities across Merseyside to facilitate stronger co-production across existing governance structures; and the consultation exercise undertaken to understand the perception of the problem, causes and consequences.

The draft Serious Violence Strategy document was attached as Appendix 2 to the report.

The report also provided information on the local delivery plan that was more specific for Sefton’s communities; and advised that the first draft of the delivery plan was currently being developed and would be mapped against the high level strategic aims of the strategy but also cross-referenced to the priorities contained within the Safer Sefton Together Strategy 2023-26 and would be reviewed through 2024; but however, there was no additional funding for LA’s to deliver the duty and therefore the delivery plan would reflect the work already underway in preventing and reducing serious violence in our communities.

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The report concluded by seeking the views of the Committee on the draft strategy and the local delivery plan.

The report would also be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees (Children's Services and Safeguarding) and (Adult Social Care and Health).

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

- The rationale, at a Merseyside strategic level, that domestic abuse would not form part of the serious violence definition for the purpose of the Duty; and the Home Office view of this decision. It was also noted that this matter could be raised at the Merseyside Police and Crime Panel
- The draft Strategy was excessively heavy with jargon and could this be amended to benefit the Strategy's target audience.
- Reasons for the poor response numbers (only 139 respondents to the universal questionnaires (adult and school)) and which was replicated across the other Merseyside LA's.
- The weekly, confidential reports submitted to Members by Merseyside Police indicated that 90-95% of crime was gang/drug related; that particular problems were experienced on Merseyside because of the influx of drugs into the area; yet no additional funding was provided to Merseyside to combat such problems; although it was noted that the Police and Crime Commissioner had made representations to the Home Office about this.
- The statistics from Merseyside Police, Emergency Departments, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and the North West Ambulance Service were referred to which all recorded a reduction in incidents linked to serious violence from 2021/22 to 2022/23.
- How targets and outcomes in the draft strategy would be measured and evaluated.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report updating on the serious violence duty be noted; and
- (2) the Committee welcomes the opportunity to take part in the annual review of the strategy.

31. A CULTURAL STRATEGY FOR SEFTON

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of People advising that a steering group comprising Council officers, and representatives from the creative and voluntary sector, had been working towards the development of a Cultural Strategy for Sefton (the Strategy); that a draft strategy document had been prepared using the evidence base from consultation and engagement activity; that further engagement between January to March 2024 was proposed to develop an Action Plan, with objectives for delivery between 2024 and 2030 and that this would be co-produced between the Council and wider representation from cultural stakeholders; and that once the Action Plan was complete, any outstanding elements of the strategy document would be finalised, leading to the publication of a final strategy from which the activities would commence.

The report indicated that the strategy would be a key step in Sefton's planning towards Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture celebration ; and that the purpose of the Strategy was to:

- Develop a shared vision for culture in Sefton.
- Support development of the local infrastructure for culture and creative engagement.
- Strengthen relationships between Sefton and the wider professional sector for culture and creativity.
- Reveal, celebrate and promote opportunities for cultural and creative participation across the Borough.
- Provide a strategic context in support of stakeholder bids for external funding.

The draft Culture Strategy document was attached as an appendix to the report.

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

- We should celebrate the hugely diverse borough in which we live.
- The provision of alternative and complementary events at the Salt and tar venue such as opera.
- Had a swot analysis been undertaken into the gaps in performance spaces, especially for large crowds, in Sefton.
- A recognition was made of the potential for more outdoor cultural activity and opportunity on Sefton's coast but it was acknowledged that any enhancements must be designed to safeguard and preserve the delicate ecosystem of the coast.
- Positive to hear about the opportunities in respect of Sefton's cultural access and cultural education to tackle educational attainment gaps, particularly in respect of young people on leaving FE/HE and aspiring Young Creatives.

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- The negative impact of austerity that had reduced youth provision across the borough.
- How the Cultural Partnership would set its vision, co-ordinate resources and plan at a strategic level and how it would make applications for funding to achieve its aims.
- Social barriers to culture were acknowledged and information was sought on how hard to reach children could be encouraged to engage in cultural activity.

RESOLVED:

That the progress towards the development of the Cultural Strategy for Sefton be noted.

32. SOUTHPORT MARKET - 2 YEAR REVIEW

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Place that outlined the year 2 performance of Southport Market (the Market), that was repurposed into a food and drink market and opened in July 2021.

The report indicated that in year 2, hospitality experts Hotel Audit undertook a Customer Experience and operational view of the Market and the report detailed their main recommendations and responses to them; detailed the financial performance of the Market in respect of Year 1 v Year 2 (Food and Drink Performance), Year 2 Food and Drink Rental Performance v Business Plan Targets, Year 2 Expenditure v Business Plan Targets, Year 2 Actual v Business Plan, and Revised Year 2 Actuals V Business Plan; detailed the continuing sector pressures and that the trading environment for the hospitality sector in year 2 saw significant changes and challenges due to the cost-of-living crisis; and provided information on the events space to the rear of the Market which continued to be a great success with multiple sell out events throughout year and that the event space was also used for free events along with large numbers of private bookings.

The report concluded that overall year 2 of the Market had been successful in achieving its business plan numbers for the food and drink offer, despite economic and sector conditions; that the events space continued to improve with income 28% up year on year, with the overall market up 38% turnover year on year; and it was recommended that the year 3 business case targets be reviewed, considering the continued utility pressures and limits on outdoor markets until Market Street and King Street public realm works were completed; and that a revised Business Plan for Southport Market would be developed and presented to the Cabinet Member – Regeneration and Skills in due course.

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

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- The good news in respect of the events space continuing to improve with income 28% up year on year, with the overall market up 38% turnover year on year.
- The contrast with other food and drink market operations and Southport Market's themed hall concept.
- Southport Market's dedicated website.
- The use of free events space for community groups was welcomed.
- Was there a network of operators of venues such as Southport Market to share best practice? It was noted that there was no official group; and it was acknowledged that 15 other local authorities had visited the Market to view its operation.
- The potential use of solar panels at the Market to reduce utility bills.

RESOLVED:

That the report providing a 2 Year Review of the operation of Southport Market be noted.

33. SEFTON ECONOMIC STRATEGY UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Director of Place (Economic Growth and Housing) that updated on, and sought comments on, progress with the Sefton Economic Strategy Action Plan (with a focus on the new Crosby Library project and the Bootle's Regeneration).

The report indicated that on 3 November 2022 Cabinet approved the final version of the Sefton Economic Strategy for publication; noted further work scheduled for 2023 on the development of an associated Action Plan and appropriate monitoring points; delegated authority to the Assistant Director of Place (Economic Growth and Housing), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Skills, to approve the Action Plan and Monitoring Reports as set out under the recommendations; and that the Cabinet Member subsequently approved the proposed process and method for implementing the Action Plan in March 2023.

The report also provided information on:

- Governance and reporting processes
- Economic dashboard that provided a summary of quarter 2 (Jul-Sept 2023) economic performance against each of the four key strategic objectives and sub-sets
- Sefton Economic Strategy Action Plan-Key highlights in relation to Business Growth and Investment, business enquiries, Sefton Economic Forum /Business events and workshops, future funding via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and inward investment at Mersey Reach, Land North of Formby, Atlantic Park, Southport Business Park, Key Account Management and GSI Information Management

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- Employment and Access to Work in relation to Sefton@work - Ways to Work continuation/interim funding, Ways to Work – UKSPF funding for 2024/25, LCR-CA Mayoral Young Persons Guarantee, Sefton@work Service Updates, Voluntary Routeway, Mental Health Awareness Raising, Digital Inclusion, New Employment opportunities, New Agreement with Citizens Advice, Client Feedback, Social Value – Sainsbury’s Southport recruitment, National Recognition for Social Mobility and the Sefton Caring Business Charter Update
- Sefton Adult Community Learning Service
- NEET Reduction and Early Intervention Service
- Regenerated Places which included a range of projects being supported through Southport Town Deal and that formed part of the Southport Town Deal programme for generating economic growth; Bootle Strand Repurposing; Ainsdale Coastal Gateway - Ainsdale Beach Improvement Works; Ainsdale Toilet Refurbishment and Changing Places Toilets; former Sands Public House, Ainsdale; and Ainsdale Neighbourhood Centre, Sandbrook Way
- Housing issues including the delivery of housing development targets and on Sandway Homes’ developments at Hey Farm Gardens (Barton’s Close, Crossens) and Sandy Brook (Meadow Lane, Ainsdale)
- Tourism activity associated with Destination Marketing, Major Events, Conferences and Sales, Salt & Tar, Seafront Operations, Southport Market, Visitor Economy Strategy and Visitor Economy led regeneration projects such as MLEC
- Planning activity in relation to the delivery of a wide range of regulatory performance indicators and that for the purposes of the economic strategy these focussed on increased employment floorspace for industrial and storage uses; social value opportunities generated from planning applications and contributions to new employment; and that there was also a shared Sefton Key Performance Indicator with housing for new net dwellings built per annum
- Social Inclusion and Access for All which included the establishment of a Corporate Equality Group to support the Council with its commitment to integrate equality and diversity throughout its services and to help secure its vision of creating stronger, more resilient communities
- Sustainable travel in respect of the Low Carbon Transport Strategy and the Maritime Corridor
- Net Zero/Low Carbon and that the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority had set a target of net zero for all parts of the economy to be net zero by 2040; and that this would require all Sefton businesses to halt the use of gas, diesel and oil and only use energy from renewable resources by 2040
- Health & Wellbeing - this was a new subset introduced to the economic strategy and reflected its importance in terms of sustaining and growing a healthy economy; and that the

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dashboard provided a wide range of health determinants drawn from both the Public Health performance and Child Poverty Accountability and progress frameworks

- Digital - that the Council had an existing digital strategy which had been aligned with the economic strategy demonstrating clear synergies and shared objectives

At the request of the Committee specific information was provided on:

- The Crosby New Library project – the Council had announced it was pursuing the futures of both Crosby Village and Waterloo Library as two separate schemes in August 2023; that the Council was committed to the exciting and innovative project in Crosby Village to help secure a successful and robust future for the village; that in December 2023 Cabinet considered an update report on the outline business case; and that the planning application was submitted in September for works to Crosby village car park and an outline planning application for the new library is awaiting determination
- Bootle Area Action Plan - the recent Bootle Area Action Plan preferred options had completed its consultation stage and would help inform the wider town centre strategy; further work was needed however to review market conditions and key sector information on demand; to identify key areas of opportunity and how these could be combined to bring forward viable investment and development propositions, including wider city region identified opportunities for growth and economic development and how this could help support Bootle's transformation programme.

The Sefton Economic Strategy Action Plan dashboard - Q2 (July-September 2023) was attached as an appendix to the report.

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

- Consultation and engagement with residents of Strand House in connection with the operation of Salt and Tar.
- In respect of the inclusion of a health facility in the Crosby New Library Project, the impact on the business case for the proposal if an additional health facility opened in Crosby village prior to that in the new library project.
- Information was sought on the reasons for scaling back the number of apartments included in the Crosby New Library Project, particularly the reasons associated with amenity space.
- The current rental market and condition of office space in Bootle town centre and how this may impact on the aims of the Bootle Area Action Plan.

RESOLVED: That

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- (1) the report updating on the Sefton Economic Strategy Action Plan (with a focus on the new Crosby Library project and the Bootle's Regeneration) be noted; and
- (2) future updates be submitted to the Committee on progress of the Sefton Economic Strategy Action Plan including a planned review and refresh in 2024.

34. SANDWAY HOMES - 2022 / 23 OUTTURN REVIEW OF COUNCIL WHOLLY OWNED COMPANIES

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

The report provided information on the aims of the Sandway Homes Annual Report; expected outcomes; the Council's objectives for the company; the Council's governance arrangements including the governance arrangements in place for the company in 2022/23; the key objectives for the Company as per the Business Plan in 2022/23; a review of performance for 2022/23; key areas of risk during the year; evaluation of performance in 2022/23 compared to Council objectives for setting up the company and the approved Business Plan for the year; and the Delivery and Improvement Plans for 2023/24.

The Committee was requested to:

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

Councillor Lappin was in attendance at the meeting in hr capacity as shareholder representative of Sandway Homes Limited Board and Sandway (ACS) Holding Company Ltd (Sefton Housing Development Company).

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

- the high demand for bungalows and their availability within Sandway Homes' portfolio

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- the revision in the shareholder dividend down to £300,888 in July 2023 was referred to and information was sought about adequate plans being put in place in respect of future downgradings.
- Affordable and social housing within Sandway schemes.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report on Sandway Homes Limited - 2022/23 Outturn Review of Council Wholly Owned Companies be noted; and
- (2) Councillor Lappin be thanked for her attendance at the meeting.

35. SEFTON HOSPITALITY OPERATIONS LIMITED (SHOL) - 2022 / 23 OUTTURN REVIEW OF COUNCIL WHOLLY OWNED COMPANIES

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

The report provided information on the aims of the SHOL Annual Report; expected outcomes; the Council's objectives for the company; the Council's governance arrangements including the governance arrangements in place for the company in 2022/23; the key objectives for the Company as per the Business Plan in 2022/23; a review of performance for 2022/23; financial performance for 2022/23; key areas of risk during the year; evaluation of performance in 2022/23 compared to Council objectives for setting up the company and the approved Business Plan for the year; and the Delivery and Improvement Plans for 2023/24.

The Committee was requested to:

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

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

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- Further to the introduction of additional lighting on the Crosby coastal park, the potential to provide an improved physical link between the Lake House and the retail/leisure establishments on South Road.
- The introduction of new lighting at Crosby coastal park was greatly welcomed as it enhanced the access to the Lake House and increased safety in the area overall; and that improvements to the pathways leading to the venue would be also welcomed.
- Reference was made to the statistic that 49% of Lake House and White House employees were Sefton residents; and whilst acknowledging the need to comply with employment law, what measures could be put in place to increase the numbers of Sefton residents employed at the venues. It was noted that Sefton@Work could play a role in this matter; and it was welcomed that opportunities were provided for Sefton's older looked-after children and care leavers.
- The previous business plan anticipation for the repayment of the shareholder loan, and any dividends, commencing from year 6 of the business (financial year 2026-27 onwards).

RESOLVED:

That the report on Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited - 2022/23 Outturn Review of Council Wholly Owned Companies be noted.

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

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that sought views on the Work Programme for 2023/24; the identification of potential topics for scrutiny reviews to be undertaken by informal meetings of the Committee; the identification of any items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan; and 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) approval be given to the inclusion in next year's Work Programme of an invitation being made to the Liverpool City Region Strategic Waste Partnership Manager to attend the Committee to provide details about the changes in waste legislation and what that will mean due to the statutory requirement for the collection of food waste in 2026;
- (3) the request for the Committee to select a topic for review at an informal meeting be noted;

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- (4) the Key Decision Forward Plan as set out in Appendix 3 to the report be noted; and
- (5) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

37. CABINET MEMBER REPORTS - NOVEMBER 2023 TO JANUARY 2024

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

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Cabinet Member - Communities and Housing; Locality Services; Health and Wellbeing (Green Sefton element); Planning and Building Control; and Regeneration and Skills reports relating to the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted; and
- (2) Councillor Atkinson be thanked for her attendance at the Committee.