



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

**MEETING HELD AT THE BIRKDALE ROOM, TOWN HALL,
SOUTHPORT
ON TUESDAY 22ND OCTOBER, 2024**

PRESENT: Councillor Bradshaw (in the Chair)
Councillor Byrom (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Brodie - Browne, Johnson, McNabb,
Catie Page, Parker, Thomas and Sir Ron Watson

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Howard

17. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Murphy.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

19. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

**20. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT 2024/25 TO 2027/28 - REVENUE
AND CAPITAL BUDGET UPDATE 2024/25 - OCTOBER UPDATE**

Further to Minute No. 54 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 3 October 2024 the Committee considered the report of the Executive Director - Corporate Services and Commercial that advised of:

- (1) the current position relating to the 2024/25 revenue budget;
- (2) the progress made on transformation within Sefton New Directions;
- (3) the current forecast on Council Tax and Business Rates collection for 2024/25; and
- (4) the monitoring position of the Council's capital programme to the end of August 2024 in respect of:
 - the forecast expenditure to year end;
 - variations against the approved budgets and an explanation of those variations for consideration by

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Members; and

- updates to spending profiles and proposed amendments to capital budgets necessary to ensure the efficient delivery of capital projects; and

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

- the delivery of Adult Social Care savings of £1.6m to the end of August 2024
- 14 additional children having to be placed in a residential setting at a cost of £0.090m per week
- problems attracting social workers and the resultant use of high-cost social worker agency placements; the recruitment and retention of permanent council social worker staff; and the possibility of making savings on the use of agency staff by paying permanent council staff at a higher rate. Information was sought on the comparable grades of social worker posts in neighbouring authorities and whether this had a detrimental impact on the recruitment and retention of staff
- the recruitment of international social workers and the retention of staff coming through the social work academy
- many local authorities faced difficulties in the recruitment and retention of social workers and maybe a collegiate approach across authorities could help resolve issues
- It was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding) had given lots of attention to the issue of social worker recruitment and retention; and in respect of this, a comment was made that this Committee was delving into operational matters that were not its responsibility
- budgetary risks associated with home to school transport
- The Dilnot Commission on how to deliver a fair, affordable and sustainable funding system for social care in England promised solutions but required major financial investment to do so

RESOLVED:

- (A) That in respect of the Revenue Budget:
- (1) the current position relating to the 2024/25 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;
 - (3) the financial risks associated with the delivery of the 2024/25

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revenue budget be recognised and it be acknowledged that the forecast outturn position will continue to be reviewed, and remedial actions put in place, to ensure a balanced forecast outturn position and financial sustainability can be achieved; and

- (4) the progress made on transformation within Sefton New Directions be noted; and that it also be noted that a detailed report will be submitted to Cabinet, as shareholder, to its meeting to be held on 7 November 2024 outlining how a sustainable budget will be set for 2025/26 and how this will enable financial sustainability in the long term; and
- (B) That in respect of the Capital Programme:
- (1) the spending profiles across financial years for the approved capital programme (paragraph 8.1) be noted;
 - (2) the latest capital expenditure position as at 31 August 2024 of £19.011m (paragraph 8.08); the latest full year forecast of £88.566m (paragraph 8.7) be noted; and
 - (3) it be noted that capital resources will be managed by the Executive Director - Corporate Service and Commercial to ensure the capital programme remains fully funded and that capital funding arrangements secure the maximum financial benefit to the Council (paragraphs 8.10-8.12).

**21. WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25, 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 2024/25; 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 from the Key Decision Forward Plan; that updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee; that advised of a change to responsibility for consideration of matters associated with asset management; and that advised of a date for a special meeting of the Committee to be held.

A member of the Committee enquired about the reasons why various presentations and reports, scheduled in the work programme to be considered at this meeting, were deferred to future meetings.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Work Programme for 2024/25, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted;

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- (2) it be noted that responsibility for asset management issues now rests with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills) and therefore, reference to the Disposal of Surplus Council Owned Land/Asset - Management Strategy should be deleted from the Work Programme;
- (3) the presentation on the Corporate Communications Strategy be made to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 14 January 2025;
- (4) the report on the Transformation Programme Update be submitted to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 14 January 2025;
- (5) the presentation on the Update on Progress of LCR Digital Inclusion Strategy be made to the special meeting of the Committee to be held on 20 January 2025;
- (6) the reasons why various presentations and reports, scheduled in the work programme to be considered at this meeting, were deferred to future meetings be reported to the next meeting of the Committee;
- (7) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted; and
- (8) It be noted that a special meeting of the Committee will be held on 20 January 2025.

**22. CABINET MEMBER REPORT - SEPTEMBER 2024 TO
OCTOBER 2024**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that included the most recent report from the Cabinet Member – Corporate Services.

Councillor Howard, Cabinet Member – Corporate Services presented her report and referred to the success of the council tax sole occupier discount review which would result in £635,000 additional Council Tax income in a full year; and indicated that 87% of contacts in respect of the scheme were made online but stressed that other channels were still available for those customers who preferred to not use digital services.

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

- a Member commented that he had received lots of representations from constituents who did not use online services; and a suggestion was made that the salutation message relayed at the start of each incoming call to the Council's call-centre, encouraging customers to use online Council services should instead be made at the end of the message

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- In respect of the council tax sole occupier discount review, 1,299 households had cancelled their discount, and information was sought on the anticipated increase in Council Tax income arising from this
- In respect of taxi licensing when and by whom was the £50.00 non-refundable application fee agreed; the anticipated income from the introduction of the £50.00 non-refundable application fee; and had the trade given any indication that they would wish to increase fare tariffs to recoup this fee; and if so, by how much
- a comment was made that Sefton had an excellent working relationship with the licensed taxi trade
- As part of the delivery of the 2024/25 internal audit plan had the reviews highlighted to be undertaken been prioritised
- reference was made to staff undertaking the Public Management and Leadership Level 7 Apprenticeship at the University of Birmingham; and information was sought on whether there were other education establishments situated nearer to Sefton that staff could attend
- the insurance renewal for September 2024

Motion by Councillor Sir Ron Watson, seconded by Councillor Brodie-Browne:

That Cabinet be recommended to oppose any proposals to remove the council tax sole occupier discount.

Following a show of hands the Chair declared that the Motion was lost 2 votes to 4, with 3 abstentions.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the update report from the Cabinet Member – Corporate Services be noted; and
- (2) Councillor Howard be thanked for her attendance at the meeting.