

Overview
& Scrutiny



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

DATE: Tuesday 14th January, 2025

TIME: 6.30 pm

VENUE: Committee Room, Town Hall Bootle

Member

Substitute

Councillor	Councillor
Councillor Bradshaw (Chair)	Councillor Harrison Kelly
Councillor Byrom (Vice-Chair)	Councillor Carragher
Councillor Brodie - Browne	Councillor Evans
Councillor McNabb	Councillor Porter
Councillor Murphy	Councillor Johnson
Councillor Catie Page	Councillor Myers
Councillor Parker	Councillor Killen
Councillor Shaw	Councillor Evans
Councillor Thomas	Councillor Roche
Councillor Sir Ron Watson	Councillor Morris

COMMITTEE OFFICER: Paul Fraser
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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.

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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 22 October 2024

4. Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax Base 2025/26 (Pages 11 - 32)

Report of the Executive Director of Corporate Services and Commercial

5. Counter Fraud Strategy (To Follow)

Report of the Executive Director of Corporate Services and Commercial to follow

6. Financial Management 2024/25 to 2027/28 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2024/25 – January Update (Pages 33 - 52)

Report of the Executive Director of Corporate Services and Commercial

7. Work Programme 2024/25, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan (Pages 53 - 84)

Report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer

8. Cabinet Member Report - October 2024 to December 2024

(Pages 85 -
110)

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 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.

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Report Title **Council Tax Reduction Scheme & Council Tax Base 2025/26**

Date of meeting:	9 January 2025 14 January 2025 16 January 2025
Report to:	Cabinet Overview & Scrutiny (Regulatory, Compliance & Corporate Services) Council
Report of:	Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Commercial
Portfolio:	Corporate Services
Wards affected:	All
Included in Forward Plan:	Yes
Is this a key decision:	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 2024/25. Following the review, it is proposed that there is no change made to the scheme for 2025/26.

The report also provides an updated Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish area for 2025/26.

Recommendation(s):

Cabinet

1. Notes the outcome of the review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the current year 2024/25.
2. Recommend that Council approve the current scheme for 2025/26.
3. Recommend that Council approves the relevant Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish Area for 2025/26 as set out in Annex A.

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Overview & Scrutiny Committee

That the report is noted.

Council

1. Note the outcome of the review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the current year 2024/25.
2. Approve the current scheme for 2025/26.
3. Approve the relevant Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish Area for 2025/26 as set out in Annex A of the report.

1. The Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendations

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 Authority in 2013/14 to fund the local scheme was £24.2M; this was £3M lower than had previously been provided to fund CTB in 2012/13. The Council therefore had to 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 2025/26 must be agreed by Council by 11th March 2025.

2. Review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25

- 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 2024 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	31.03.24	9,874	14,456	24,330	-435
2024/25	30.09.24	9,853	14,249	24,102	-228

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
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	31.03.24	1,039	13,417	14,456	-256
2024/25	30.09.24	971	13,278	14,249	-207

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 2024/25, however, the rate of decline has slowed.

2.4 Working Age Claimants: Claimant numbers increased significantly in 2020/21 as a result of the economic impact of Covid-19. Claimant numbers have reduced each year since 2021/22. 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 2024/25:

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Year	Source	Pensioners £000	Working £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	RO Return	12,468	14,254	26,722	+1,100
2024/25	Estimate	12,962	14,673	27,635	+913

Note: The forecast increase in the cost of the scheme in 2024/25 of £0.913m (3.4%) is largely due to an average council tax increase of 4.87% being offset by a reduction in claimants.

2.6 Council Tax Collection

The table below shows the amount of Council Tax billed and collected during 2023/24. At national level, it should be noted that Council Tax collection in Sefton was 1.3% above the average for Metropolitan authorities, with Sefton also being the strongest performer in the Liverpool City Region for in-year collection.

Recorded at 31 March 2024	Liability Raised £000	Received In Year £000	Collection Rate %
CTRS Cases - Working Age	4,405	3,106	70.5
CTRS Cases - Pensioner Age	1,436	1,707	118.9
Other Council Tax Payers	190,762	181,674	95.2
Total (in-year collection)	196,603	186,487	94.9

Current Year Council Tax Collection: 2024/25

As at 31st October 2024, the in-year Council Tax collection figure was 62.39% compared to 62.24% in 2023/24. Collection compares favourably to the same point in 2023/24, particularly as the Council is part way through a Single Occupier Discount Review that has increased the net collectible debit for the year by around £317,000.

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,

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- 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 Council is taking a sensitive approach with Council Tax collection for households in the Southport area who may have been affected by the tragic incident in July with a hold being placed on recovery action.
- Council Tax support has been provided to households in Bootle that were affected by flooding at the end of September 2024. A discretionary award has been made through the Exceptional Hardship Fund to cover Council Tax payments.
- The Debt Respite Scheme (known as Breathing Space), which started in May 2021, gives a person with debt problems the right to legal protections from recovery activity. Standard breathing space lasts for 60-days and can be extended if the person is receiving mental health crisis treatment. This enables a debt advice provider time to arrange an appropriate debt solution. During the period 1st November 2023 – 31st October 2024, the Council has received notification of 205 customers in Breathing Space of which 180 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 £4.55.

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- For single claimants under 25 on Universal Credit, the deduction is £15.58 per 4 weeks, rising to £19.67 per 4 weeks for those aged over 25.
- For couples over 25 on Universal Credit, the deduction is £30.88 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 people 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.
- 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 2024:-

	31.10.21	31.10.22	31.10.23	31.10.24
AOB in payment	£1,170,127	£1,719,777	£2,012,354	£2,238,654
Number of cases	5,002	7,524	7,715	8,089
AOB Pending	£4,868,797	£5,897,664	£7,441,760	£8,624,268
Number of cases	17,101	20,008	22,649	24,693

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	Yes – The Council continues to make additional

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

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

The EHF aims to help vulnerable working age people experiencing financial hardship by reducing their Council Tax bill.

The total fund for 2024/25 is £277,034, this includes the £170,000 annual EHF and agreed carry over from 2023/24. As at 1st November 2024, £184,684 EHF has been awarded, leaving £92,349 available for the remainder of the year.

Each year, EHF of approximately £33,000 is used to fund Council Tax discounts for care leavers. The Council provide up to a 100% discount of Council Tax to care leavers aged 18 or over, up to the date of their 25th birthday, who live in Sefton and who are looked after by the Council.

3. Council Tax Base 2025/26

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 2025/25 before 31st January 2025.

The proposed council tax base for Sefton Council and the Parish Areas is set out in Annex A of this report.

4. Financial Implications

Council Tax Reduction Scheme

There would be no additional revenue implications as a result of a decision to retain the current scheme, with the cost of the current Scheme discounts are reflected in the draft council tax base set out in Annex A of this report.

Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Fund

This report contains no proposals to change Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Fund budget for 2025/26 so there are no financial implications. However, it should be noted that as the amount of reserves available to carry forward has reduced in 2024/25 there will be less funding available in 2025/26 to meet the cost of EHF awards.

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 2025/26. 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 2024/25 and 2025/26, based on the 2024/25 Council Tax Band D charge:

Council Tax Income	Sefton Council £ million	Police & Crime £ million	Fire & Rescue £ million	Combined Authority £ million
Draft Tax Base	1.769	0.241	0.083	0.017

5. 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:

- (1) Consider whether to revise its Council Tax Reduction Scheme or to replace it with another scheme.
- (2) 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.
- (3) 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.
- (4) 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.

6. Corporate Risk Implications

The Council's Internal Audit team have carried out two reviews relevant to this report: a review of Housing Benefit / Council Tax Reduction Scheme administration (June 2023) and also a review of Council Tax collection / debt management (July 2024). The aim of both reviews was to provide senior managers in Corporate Resources with assurance that risks are being appropriately managed and mitigated. In both cases, the risk was determined as being minor.

7. Staffing HR Implications

The local Council Tax Reduction Scheme will continue to be administered from existing resources.

8. Conclusion

As a result of the review undertaken, it is proposed that the Council's local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2025/26 will remain unchanged to help maintain consistency and stability for those using it. 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.

The council tax base set out in Annex A has increased compared to 2024/25 which will assist in closing the budget gap faced by the Council in 2025/26.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

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None, as following review, the 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.

Equality Implications:

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 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.

Impact on Children and Young People:

One of the Council's key principles for the Scheme is to recognise the additional needs of families with children. A summary of support provided by the Scheme is set out at in the table at 2.9 above.

In addition, the Council's Exceptional Hardship Fund provides Council Tax support to young people leaving care provided by Sefton Council as set out at 2.10 above.

Climate Emergency Implications:

The recommendations within this report will have a Neutral impact.

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Commercial (FD.7885/24) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.5985/24) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

Details of the review of the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme, the proposed scheme for 2025/26 and the Council Tax Base 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 16th January 2025.

Contact Officer:	Diane Turner
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Appendices:

Annex A: Council Tax Base Report 2025/26

Annex B: Equality Impact Assessment: Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Background Papers: Not applicable.

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Annex B

Equality Impact Assessment – Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/26

Details of proposal: Council Tax Reduction Scheme – No change to Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2025/26

It is proposed that there will be no changes made to the Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme for 2025/26. The scheme provides support to around 24,000 households who are on a low income with Council Tax payments.

There are around 14,200 households of working age, with the remainder of pension age.

The current scheme is a means tested discount; pension age recipients are protected from any reduction in support under a scheme that is 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 2025/26

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

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.

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.

People with a Disability

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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

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.

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.

No impacts identified 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 disproportionately 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.

No further impacts identified specific to this equality group.

Mitigations in place to support the Council’s principles 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 aged people, allowing a Universal Credit notification, received from the Department for Work and Pensions (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 with Council anti-poverty initiatives, e.g. 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.

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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.

Armed Forces Covenant

The Council has identified that there are less than 100 households in Sefton claiming support from Council Tax Reduction and/or Housing Benefit 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:

There has been no public consultation exercise as there are no changes proposed for the Council Tax Reduction scheme for 2025-26.

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.*
- 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?

No changes to the Council Tax Reduction scheme for 2025-26.

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SETTING THE COUNCIL TAX BASE FOR 2025/26

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 2025.
- 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) as well as forecast long-term collection rates.

2. Council Tax Base for Sefton Council in 2025/26

- 2.1 An analysis of the changes between the 2024/25 and the 2025/26 tax base is provided in the table below:

Tax Base for Sefton Council		Band D Equivalents		
		2024/25	2025/26	Change
H	<u>Chargeable Dwellings</u>			
	Dwellings on the Banding List	113,369.8	114,056.0	686.2
	Exempt Dwellings	-2,426.9	-2,778.6	-351.7
	Disabled Persons Reductions	-159.7	-160.4	-0.7
		110,783.2	111,117.0	333.8
Q	Discounts	-10,593.4	-10,521.9	71.5
E1	Empty Homes Premium	1,356.8	1,142.8	-214.0
E2	Second Homes Premium	0.0	368.9	368.9
J	Adjustments	-631.9	-337.3	294.6
Z	Council Tax Support Scheme	-12,019.2	-11,847.0	172.2
B	Collection Rate Adjustment	-2,444.6	-2,562.8	-118.2
	MOD Properties	8.0	8.0	0.0
Council Tax Base		86,458.9	87,367.7	908.8

- 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 738 (+0.6%) in the year.

Exempt Dwellings (A-W): The number of dwellings subject to an exemption increased by 409 (14.2%). The largest increases were in the number of Class B exemptions (owned by a charity), Class N exemptions (Student Households), and Class U exemptions (Severely Mentally Impaired).

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Sole Occupier & Status Discounts: The number of dwellings receiving a 25% discount due to single occupancy has decreased by 825 (-1.7%). However, this has been offset by an increase in the number of dwellings receiving status discounts and Class C empty property discounts.

Empty Homes Premium: The number of dwellings left empty for more than one year has reduced by 259 (-18.7%).

Second Homes Premium: This is a new premium applied from 1 April 2025.

Adjustments: The taxbase forecast assumes a higher level of housing growth over the next year. The adjustments have also reduced as a result of removing the banding list reductions / prior year adjustments forecast in 2025/26, the collection rate adjustment has been increased to compensate for this.

Council Tax Support Scheme (CTRS): The number of both pension and working age claimants has reduced over the last 12 months.

Collection Rate Adjustment (CRA): The provision for non-collection has been reduced from -2.75% to -2.50%, however, a new adjustment for changes to prior year net charges of -0.35% has been added in 2025/26 which has changed the total CRA by -0.1% from -2.75% to -2.85%. The prior year adjustment was previously included in Item J (Adjustments).

3. Council Tax Base in Parish Areas for 2025/26

- 3.1 There are also new tax base figures for each parish area in 2025/26. The following tables provide details of the proposed new tax base for each parish compared to 2024/25:

Tax Base for Parish Areas	Band D Equivalents			%
	2024/25	2024/25	Change	Change
Parish of Aintree Village	2,079.9	2,089.3	9.4	0.5%
Parish of Formby	9,222.3	9,277.5	55.2	0.6%
Parish of Hightown	874.0	870.0	-4.0	-0.5%
Parish of Ince Blundell	174.0	171.7	-2.3	-1.3%
Parish of Little Altcar	450.5	480.5	30.0	6.7%
Parish of Lydiate	2,110.2	2,137.0	26.8	1.3%
Parish of Maghull	6,920.9	7,066.5	145.6	2.1%
Parish of Melling	1,118.2	1,129.6	11.4	1.0%
Parish of Sefton	327.6	335.7	8.1	2.5%
Parish of Thornton	772.5	800.4	27.9	3.6%

- 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 reductions in Hightown and Ince Blundell Parish Areas are largely due to an increase in exemptions in those areas.

4. New Second Homes Premium and Premium Exceptions introduced in 2025/26

- 4.1 At its meeting on 18 January 2024, the Council approved the introduction of a 100% council tax premium on dwellings occupied periodically (the Second Homes Premium) from 1 April 2025. The impact of this new premium has been built into the tax base forecasts presented in this report.
- 4.2 Some second homeowners are expected to take action to avoid the premium when it applies, and an adjustment has been made in Item J of the taxbase calculation to take account of this. However, as this is the first year that the second homes premium will apply there is significant uncertainty over the level of avoidance that might occur in 2025/26.
- 4.3 In October 2024, the Government made new regulations that introduced a number of new exceptions that will apply to either or both the long-term empty homes and second homes premiums. The exceptions which come into force from 1 April 2025 are listed in the table below:

<u>Class</u>	<u>Exception</u>	<u>Applies to</u>
G	Dwellings being actively marketed for sale	Both
H	Dwellings being actively marketed for let	Both
I	Dwellings which have fallen in Class F of the Exempt Dwellings Order and have undergone probate.	Both
J	Dwellings which are periodically occupied in certain job-related circumstances.	Second Homes
K	A pitch occupied by a caravan, or a mooring occupied by a boat	Second Homes
L	Dwellings where a planning condition prevents permanent occupancy.	Second Homes
M	Vacant dwelling which requires or is undergoing major repair work to make it habitable, or structural alterations.	Empty Homes

Exceptions G, H and I will apply for a maximum of 12 months. These exceptions are intended to allow council taxpayers time to sell or let their properties without having to pay the premium. Exceptions J, K, L, and M are not time limited.

- 4.4 An adjustment has been made in Item J of the taxbase calculation to take account of the potential impact of the new exceptions. However, as this is the first year that the exceptions will apply there is significant uncertainty over the level of premium income that might be lost in 2025/26.
- 4.5 The parish area tax base forecasts have also been adjusted to take account of the impact of the premium exceptions.
- 4.6 The application of the premium exceptions is expected to make future council tax income more volatile and therefore more difficult to forecast. The Cabinet and Council are provided with regular monthly updates of council tax income forecasts during the year. Any significant variation from the tax base forecast presented in section 2.1 above will be reported during 2025/26.

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Report Title: Financial Management 2024/25 to 2027/28 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2024/25 – January Update

Date of meeting:	14 th January 2025		
Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)		
Report of:	Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial		
Portfolio:	Corporate Services		
Wards affected:	All		
Is this a key decision:	Yes	Included in Forward Plan:	Yes
Exempt/confidential report:	No		

Summary:

To inform **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)** of:

- 1) The current position relating to the 2024/25 revenue budget.
- 2) The current forecast on Council Tax and Business Rates collection for 2024/25.
- 3) The monitoring position of the Council's capital programme to the end of November 2024:
 - 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 Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) is recommended to: -

Revenue Outturn

- 1) Note the current position relating to the 2024/25 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 remedial action plan measures previously approved by Cabinet on 7th November 2024 (outlined in section 3).

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- 4) Note the intention to review and release Earmarked Reserves to support the additional in-year budget pressure and reduce the call on the Council's General Balances.
- 5) Note the financial risks associated with the delivery of the 2024/25 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 outturn position and financial sustainability can be achieved.

Capital Programme

- 6) Note the spending profiles across financial years for the approved capital programme (paragraph 8.1).
- 7) Note the latest capital expenditure position as at 30 November 2024 of £31.470m (paragraph 7.3); the latest full year forecast is £77.937m (paragraph 7.4).
- 8) Note 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 7.11-7.13).

1. The Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendations

To ensure Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) are informed of the current position in relation to the 2024/25 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 2024/25 and agreed allocations for future years.

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

To approve any updates to funding resources so that they can be applied to capital schemes in the delivery of the Council's overall capital strategy.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 29 February 2024, Members approved the Budget for the financial year 2024/25. This budget was developed throughout the preceding nine months and took account of all known issues with services identifying and agreeing the resources that they would require for the following year, especially those with demand led budgets. Within that report, and as with previous years, the inherent financial risk within these budgets, especially with respect to Adult Social Care, Children’s Services and Education Excellence (Home to School Transport), 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 for 2024/25 and provides the forecast outturn position for all services following a continuing review of forecasts, 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 2024/25 and forecast expenditure for 2025/26 and 2026/27. The capital budget to date is presented in paragraph 7.1. Paragraphs 7.2 to 7.10 review progress of the capital programme. Finally, paragraphs 7.11 to 7.13 confirm that there are adequate levels of resources available to finance the capital programme.

2. Revenue Budget 2024/25 – Forecast Outturn Position as at the end of November 2024

- 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 develops 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 is the first step that will lead to that.
- 2.2 As at the end of November 2024, the forecast outturn shows a net overspend of **£15.805m**, including the impact of mitigating actions approved at Cabinet on 7th November 2024. This is an increase of **£3.829m** compared to the forest at the end of October 2024. The forecast overspend relates to additional pressures within Adult Social Care, Children’s Social Care and Education Excellence (School Travel Support). 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.
- 2.3 The table below highlights the variations across services that make up the £15.805m forecast overspend:

	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Forecast Variance	Variance to October
	£m	£m	£m	£m
<u>Services</u>				
Strategic Management	4.020	4.020	0.000	0.000
Adult Social Care	122.310	125.431	3.121	0.867
Children's Social Care	82.171	95.872	13.701	2.729
Communities	11.809	11.809	0.000	-0.280
Corporate Resources	10.941	10.941	-0.382	-0.132

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Economic Growth & Housing	7.065	7.065	0.000	0.000
Education Excellence	18.090	20.636	2.546	0.000
Health & Wellbeing	19.891	19.518	-0.373	0.000
Highways & Public Protection	11.081	10.704	-0.377	-0.127
Operational In-House Services	18.668	18.418	-0.250	0.000
Property and Building Services	-0.396	-0.396	0.000	0.000
Total Service Net Expenditure	306.032	324.018	17.986	3.057
Council Wide Budgets	10.898	9.678	-1.220	0.233
Levies	37.290	37.290	0.000	0.000
Recruitment Freeze	0.000	-1.000	-1.000	0.000
Non-Essential Expenditure cessation / deferral	0.000	-0.500	-0.500	0.000
Approved mitigating actions now recorded within services	0.000	0.539	0.539	0.539
General Government Grants	-95.740	-95.740	0.000	0.000
Total Net Expenditure	258.480	274.285		
<u>Forecast Year-End Deficit</u>			<u>15.805</u>	<u>3.829</u>

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

- Adult Social Care** – Current forecasts are that the Adult Social Care budget will overspend by £3.1m during 2024/25 and reflects an assumption that there will be full achievement of savings proposed by the Service for the year (see below). However, there are a number of significant assumptions and uncertainties that could impact on this position before the year-end. As stated previously, the service has committed to a number of efficiencies and savings that amount to £4.8m, in order to meet the savings approved as part of the approved 2024/25 budget, plus additional savings to meet the additional budgetary pressures arising from the increases in provider fees approved at Cabinet meetings in May 2024. The achievement of these savings will be carefully monitored throughout the year. As at the end of November, £2.4m of the £4.8m of savings have been delivered. The current position reflects the delivery of these savings in full during this year which the Service has confirmed.

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. As would be expected with a budget of this size and volatility, this remains a key risk during the current year, with the added uncertainty of whether additional winter pressures or other grant funding would be received in year. Work will continue to be undertaken throughout the year to understand the pressures arising and refine forecasts. As an adverse forecast outturn position is currently forecast work will continue to be undertaken to explore options to ensure that any potential overspend is mitigated. Initial work has identified potential mitigations of £0.7m which are reflected in the forecast overspend reported above.

- Children's Social Care** – The previous forecast reported to Cabinet in December 2024 assumed that the Children's Social Care budget would overspend by £11.0m during 2024/25. The current forecast for the service shows a potential overspend of £13.7m (see below). However, there are a number of significant assumptions and uncertainties that could impact on this position before the year-end. Further work continues to be 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 Page 36 requirement for additional staffing (including

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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 2024/25 approved budget included a further additional £3m to reflect the number of packages at the time as well as resource for inflationary pressures.

The current forecast for staffing is an overspend of £3.7m. A report to Cabinet in May 2024 approved a new staffing structure within the Service, with the cost of the new structure being £2.450m more than the existing staffing budget. Cabinet approved the virement of £2.450m, to fund the increased cost of the new structure, from the Residential Care budget to the staffing budget based on the forecast reduction in packages across the year provided by the Service based on the improvement work that they are undertaking and the performance information that they produced. However, as the new structure is recruited to with permanent staff, significant numbers of existing high-cost agency placements have continued to be required, resulting in a significant overspend being forecast.

Certain areas of accommodation and support packages are now forecast to overspend by £10.8m. The report to Cabinet in May 2024 outlined that budget realignment would be undertaken to ensure budgets reflected the packages in place at the start of 2024/25 as well as the anticipated reduction in Residential Care packages across the year. This was possible because of continuing improvements in practice which have resulted in more children being placed in more appropriate settings at a lower cost. However, the Service has seen additional children having to be placed in a residential setting resulting in a forecast overspend of £7.6m. In addition, the costs of packages for Children with Disabilities had increased, although specialist work continues to be undertaken to ensure health are making the appropriate contributions to the cost of care. These were the two main areas driving the initial forecast overspend.

It was previously assumed that the increase in Residential Care packages would be short-term. However, further work has been undertaken to assess each case and the assumptions made which has identified that some placements will continue for longer than originally assumed. In addition, some further placements, and increases in package costs, have resulted in further spending pressure. At the start of the financial year there were 80 children in residential placements, and this was forecast to decrease to 71 by the end of November (and to 65 at the end of the financial year). However, at the end of November there are 92 children in residential placements. With an average placement cost of approximately £0.3m per year, it is clear what is driving the budget pressure. There has also been an increase in the number of packages for Children with Disabilities.

Further work has also been undertaken to assess each individual case across the different care settings. This forensic analysis will continue each month to ensure forecasts for each individual case are as robust as possible.

As an adverse forecast outturn position is currently forecast work will continue to be undertaken to explore options to ensure that any potential overspend is mitigated. Initial work has identified potential mitigations of £0.5m which are reflected in the forecast overspend reported in the table above.

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 it is considered that some of the increase in cost of Residential Care packages is short-term in 2024/25 due to forecast activity in 2025/26, and so it is estimated that the future years impact will be less significant at this stage. Together with Adult Social Care and Home to School Transport this is clearly the biggest risk to the Council's budget and a

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comprehensive review of all residential and other placements, and all agency staff, will continue to be undertaken in order to inform revised forecasts in future months.

This is the most significant budget issue within the Council with pressure of £13.7m. Whilst some mitigations are possible, this will require a substantial call on the Council's General Balances. The Service, in working within this environment, are undertaking the following to ensure that children receive the right support, to enable the right outcomes and invariably deliver the service at a lower cost:

- The DCS signing off on all residential placements after following the key stages of an agreed process.
 - Consideration of residential placements at a weekly External Placement Panel
 - Consideration of care packages at a fortnightly Care Package Review Meeting.
 - A review of applications into care at a weekly SARC Panel
- **Education Excellence** - The current forecast shows a potential net overspend of £2.5m, which mainly relates to Home to School Transport. Members will recall that in this budget, and in previous years' budgets, substantial funding was added to the Home to School Transport budget. However, this budget has come under further pressure due to the significant increase in the number of EHCPs being completed which result in travel support, including more expensive travel relating to out of borough placements.
 - **Other Service Areas** – Most other service areas are currently showing a balanced position. However, based on the initial monitoring undertaken some services are forecasting minor overspends. Work will continue to refine forecasts as more information on expenditure and income becomes available. Services will need to ensure that additional cost control measures are in place between now and the end of the year, and mitigating savings are made to offset any forecast overspend, to ensure each service delivers a balanced position. As part of the remedial action plan approved by Cabinet in November 2024, four services had identified mitigating actions within their areas that could partially contribute to the Council's overall position. These have now been built into individual service forecasts shown in the table above (see paragraph 3.6). In addition, the remedial action plan included savings from a recruitment freeze and a cessation / deferral of non-essential expenditure (see paragraphs 3.4 and 3.8). The impact of these actions has yet to be built into individual service forecasts.
 - **Corporate Budgets** – Whilst the Council continues to achieve positive investment returns on its cash balances. It is forecast that this will achieve additional income of £0.2m in 2024/25. However, due to the impact on cash balances of the High Needs deficit, the Council has had to take out additional borrowing earlier than previously planned for, which is significantly impacting on the forecast surplus that would otherwise be achieved. It is now forecast that the additional costs of borrowing will negate the positive investment returns, with no overall surplus being achieved.

3. Revenue Budget Summary 2024/25

- 3.1 An overspend of £15.805m is currently forecast. However, as mentioned in section 2, this is a forecast based on a number of uncertainties and assumptions, particularly around Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, and Education Excellence (Home to School Transport), which all remain volatile. 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.
- 3.2 As mentioned, the Council must strive to achieve an overall balanced position to ensure its financial sustainability. Given the overall forecast overspend, a remedial action plan to reduce the residual balance was approved by Cabinet on 7th November 2024, and with the

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budget position having worsened by over £8m in the two months since the measures were approved, it is essential that this is delivered without exception.

Remedial Action Plan

- 3.3 Cabinet on 7th November 2024 approved a number of remedial actions, including the adoption of financial principles used in previous years, to reduce the forecast overspend position to ensure its continued financial sustainability. Based upon the forecast pressure increasing by over £8m in the two months since the measures were approved, it is critical that these measures are delivered without exception. The approved actions are:

Recruitment Freeze

- 3.4 The Council has implemented a recruitment freeze until the end of the financial year. This will apply to all services across the Council with the exception of Children's Social Care. Savings from non-recruitment of current and future vacant posts are estimated to be £1.0m before the end of the financial year.

No Further Overspend in any Service.

- 3.5 All services must manage their budgets to ensure that their forecast outturn position does not worsen from that currently reported.

Remedial Measures within Services.

- 3.6 Measures to achieve savings have been proposed within certain service areas to help to mitigate the financial pressures being experienced by the Council. The anticipated savings from these measures (which are built into the service forecasts) are:

Service:	Proposed Savings:
	£m
Corporate Resources	0.250
Health & Wellbeing	0.100
Highways & Public Protection	0.250
Operational In-House Services	0.250
	0.850

No Further Growth Items or Additionality

- 3.7 All services to pause any requests for growth or additionality, even if it could be funded from current forecast underspends or further underspends compared to the current forecast position. This will ensure that any further underspends can be used to contribute to mitigating the Council's overall financial position. This doesn't apply to expenditure that can be fully met from external funding received by the Council.

Non-Essential Expenditure

- 3.8 A full review is currently being undertaken of all budgets across the Council to identify areas of non-essential spend that could be stopped. This includes reviewing progress on spending in all areas to identify options for where additional expenditure commitments could be paused. This will identify further underspends that can be used to contribute to mitigating the Council's overall financial position. It is estimated that savings of £0.5m can be achieved before the end of the financial year.

Earmarked Reserves

- 3.9 In a previous report, it was outlined that a further review of Earmarked Reserves had identified a reserve that could now be released to support the forecast outturn position (£0.320m). Following the deterioration of the forecast a further review will be undertaken and any reserves that do not come with a specific legal requirement to hold or are not grant funding with no flexibility for use, will be presented to Members for decision on releasing to

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support the in-year position. This will mean that activity previously assumed to be funded will need to be met from service budgets in future years or funded in an alternative way. Based on initial work this may release £5.5m to support the forecast outturn position.

Additional In-Year Funding

- 3.10 Any additional in-year funding that is made available by the Government will be utilised to offset the spending pressures being experienced.

Summary 2024/25

- 3.11 After the implementation of these remedial actions an overspend of **£15.805m** is currently forecast. Whilst remedial actions will continue to be explored to reduce this further, a residual overspend is expected at year-end. Based on this forecast, and in advance of any review of earmarked reserves, this would need to be funded by General Balances. This would reduce these General Balances from the budgeted **£30.3m** to **£14.5m**, which is a 50% reduction and is not sustainable in the immediate or medium term. With the expected release of Earmarked Reserves mentioned in paragraph 3.9, General Balances would be **£20.0m**, still a reduction of one-third. The Council in 2024/25 increased its General Balances by £14m to improve its financial sustainability as it acknowledged that the environment within which it was working continued to pose increased risk and it held at that time a lower level of balances and reserves than many comparator authorities. This increase took account of that forecast risk, benchmarking against other councils, together with best practice and put the Council in a much more robust financial position. In potentially using this level of General Balances, the overall level will reduce to the previous value and will therefore place the Council at increased financial risk, hence the need for this forecast position provided by services to be worked to and delivered in the current year in order that there is no further call on the residual amount. Any further demand on General Balances will further compromise the Council's financial sustainability hence the importance of robust monitoring between now and the end of the year, recruitment and expenditure cessation and critically ensuring expenditure control in those demand led budgets.
- 3.12 As part of the budget setting process for 2025/26 to 2027/28, the Council will need to develop a strategy to increase General Balances back to the level they would have been if they hadn't been utilised to fund an overspend and this may include the repayment of balances by services who have utilised them where appropriate. This strategy will need to take into account the risks faced by the Council and the assessment of their adequacy as described in the S151 Officer's Robustness report.

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 £169.759m for 2024/25 (including Parish Precepts), which represents 84% of the net Council Tax income of £202.200m.
- 4.2 The forecast outturn for the Council at the end of November 2024 is a surplus of £0.676m. This variation is primarily due to: -
- The surplus on the fund at the end of 2023/24 being higher than estimated (-£0.312m).
 - Gross Council Tax Charges in 2024/25 being higher than estimated (-£0.458m).

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- Exemptions and Discounts (including a forecasting adjustment) being lower than estimated (-£0.157m).
 - Transactions relating to previous years being higher than estimated (+£0.251m)
- 4.3 Due to Collection Fund regulations, the Council Tax surplus will not be transferred to the General Fund in 2024/25 but will be carried forward to be recovered in future years.
- 4.4 A forecast surplus of £1.548m was declared on the 16 January 2024 of which Sefton's share is £1.299m (83.9%). This is the amount that will be recovered from the Collection Fund in 2024/25.

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 £65.692m for 2024/25, which represents 99% of the net Business Rates income of £66.356m. 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 2024 is a deficit of +£2.181m on Business Rates income. This is due to:
- The surplus on the fund at the end of 2024/25 being lower than estimated (+£2.620m).
 - Increase in the gross charge on rateable properties (-£1.175m).
 - A number of reliefs announced for 2024/25 were assumed in the NNDR1 return with the loss of income as a result of these reliefs covered by Section 31 grant payments. It is now forecast that the value of these reliefs will be more than anticipated (+£1.006m).
 - Adjustments relating to prior years (-£0.270m)
- 5.3 When taking into account the change in Section 31 grants due on the additional reliefs, a net deficit of £2.085m is forecast.
- 5.4 Due to Collection Fund regulations, a Business Rates deficit will not be transferred to the General Fund in 2024/25 but will be carried forward to be recovered in future years.
- 5.5 A forecast surplus of £11.119m was declared in January 2024. Sefton's share of this is £11.008m. This is the amount that will be distributed from the Collection Fund in 2024/25. Any additional surplus or deficit will be distributed in 2025/26 and future years.

6. **High Needs Budget**

- 6.1 Cabinet and Council have agreed to receive regular 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 A separate report on the High Needs funding position of the Council was presented to Cabinet in July 2024, with the next report due in the first quarter of 2025.

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7. Capital Programme 2024/25 – 2026/27

Capital Budget

7.1 The Capital Budget and profile of expenditure for the three years 2024/25 to 2026/27 is as follows:

2024/25	£78.554m
2025/26	£105.376m
2026/27	£36.459m

7.2 The following updates have also been made to the capital programme budget since the previous budget report to Cabinet in December 2024:

- **Communities**

- £0.578m has been phased to 2025/26 for the Local Authority Housing Fund. Work is continuing to deliver 12 homes for refugee occupation and 1 temporary accommodation dwelling utilising grant funding through the Local Authority Housing Fund Round 2. Seven homes have been acquired so far. The registered housing providers participating in the project have found market conditions challenging with few suitable properties coming to market during Quarter 3 2024/25. It is anticipated that the market should pick up during Quarter 4 and the remaining 5 acquisitions completed within the first half of 2025/26.

- **Economic Growth & Housing**

- The Strand Repurposing Programme budget has been further refined since the initial estimates reported to Cabinet and Council in January 2024. The updated 2024/25 and 2025/26 allocations can be found in Appendix A and these updated estimates have been reported to MHCLG as part of regular monitoring of the Towns Fund grant.

- **Education Excellence**

- £0.244m has been phased to 2025/26 for Linaker Primary School Re-Pitched Roof due to Academisation of school.
- £0.230m has been phased to 2025/26 for Freshfield Primary Modular Classroom and Resources due to the schedule of works.
- £0.533m has been phased to 2025/26 for Holy Family High Ground Works and Two Storey Four Classrooms due to delays with the planning of works.
- £0.450m has been phased to 2025/26 for Marshside Primary Modular Classroom, Groundworks and Resources due to other schemes taking priority.
- £0.215m has been phased to 2025/26 for Merefield Modular Classroom and Resources due to other schemes taking priority.
- £0.228m has been phased to 2025/26 and £0.061m to 2026/27 for Birkdale Primary Pitched Roofs, Fire Precaution, Windows and Brickwork following the agreement of contracts and confirmation of schedule of works.

- **Highways & Public Protection:**

- £0.129m has been phased to 2025/26 for Public Rights of Way Improvements due to a revised forecast for completion of the scheme into the following financial year.
- £0.609m has been phased to 2025/26 for the LED Street Lighting Upgrade project due to extended completion times from a number of recently installed work items that are awaiting District Network Operator (DNO) jointing connections to allow them to be claimed for as completed work activities. This is because the DNO have had to

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prioritise works following significant storm damage to the network, therefore the contractor has implemented mitigation procedures to reduce further delays by making direct appointments of alternative subcontract jointers to work under a tripartite agreement to deliver the outstanding and future programme of works as quickly as possible.

- **Property and Building Services**

- £0.032m has been added to the 2024/25 budget for the Sefton Climate and Retrofit Action Project funded by grant from the National Lottery following approval by Cabinet in November.
- Work has been undertaken to further refine the phase two Corporate Essential Maintenance programme that is anticipated to deliver a number of schemes over 2024/25 to 2026/27 financial years. A breakdown of the revised phase two allocations is provided below and these updated estimated have been included in the capital programme budgets reported above:

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
	£	£	£
Corporate Buildings	70,000	2,425,000	2,366,296
Other Civic Buildings	39,893	1,223,107	-
Adult Social Care	30,000	168,464	-
Car Parks	20,000	80,000	-
Leisure, Health & Wellbeing	210,000	204,000	-
Green Sefton	30,000	70,000	-
Localities	-	110,000	-
Economic Growth	-	-	169,000
Asset Management	160,000	11,612	-
TOTAL	559,893	4,292,183	2,535,296

Budget Monitoring Position to November 2024

- 7.3 The current position of expenditure against the budget profile to the end of November 2024 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 November
	£m	£m	£m
<u>Services</u>			
Adult Social Care	3.287	3.259	-0.028
Children's Social Care	0.313	0.301	-0.013
Communities	0.630	0.368	-0.263
Corporate Resources	0.902	0.751	-0.151
Economic Growth & Housing	8.088	7.330	-0.758
Education Excellence	3.021	3.035	0.014
Highways & Public Protection	10.078	8.556	-1.522
Operational In-House Services	2.641	2.887	0.246
Property and Building Services	5.000	4.984	-0.016
<u>Total Programme</u>	33.961	31.470	-2.491

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Capital Programme Forecast Outturn 2024/25

- 7.4 The current forecast of expenditure against the budget profile to the end of 2024/25 and the profile of budgets for future years is shown in the table below:

	Budget 2024/25	Foreca st Outturn	Varianc e	Budget 2025/26	Budget 2026/27
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
<u>Services</u>					
Adult Social Care	8.479	8.377	-0.103	2.433	0.546
Children's Social Care	2.633	2.633	-	-	-
Communities	1.135	1.127	-0.008	0.733	-
Corporate Resources	1.686	1.686	-	0.090	-
Economic Growth & Housing	20.526	20.466	-0.060	51.487	21.281
Education Excellence	7.059	6.923	-0.135	9.815	0.060
Highways & Public Protection	25.717	25.406	-0.311	29.745	10.421
Operational In-House Services	5.627	5.627	-	6.681	1.515
Property and Building Services	5.691	5.691	-	4.392	2.635
<u>Total Programme</u>	78.554	77.937	-0.617	105.376	36.459

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

- 7.5 The current 2024/25 budgeted spend is £78.554m with a budgeted spend to November of £33.961m. The full year budget includes exceptional items such as £14.707m for Growth and Strategic Investment projects, £3.377m for new Council Housing schemes, £10.487m for major Highways projects, a £2.707m project for Southport Pier Decking, a one-off budget for a major property acquisition (£4.775m), a scheme to upgrade to LED Street Lighting (£2.850m), and £2.000m for Transformation Projects.
- 7.6 It should be noted that based on evidence from previous years, it is likely that further reprofiling of spend into 2025/26 will occur as the year progresses, as £80m of capital expenditure would be a significant programme delivered in year- it is therefore essential that all projects are reviewed in a robust manner in order that informed decision making in respect of financial management and member decision making can be undertaken.

Local Authority Housing Fund Round 3

- 7.7 In September 2023 Council approved a capital allocation of £1.3m for the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) Round 2 to deliver 12 homes and 1 temporary accommodation unit funded by grant from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The LAHF helps UK councils to provide accommodation to families with housing needs who have arrived in the UK through Afghan resettlement and relocation schemes and who are accessing bridging hotel accommodation. The intention of the LAHF round two was to address immediate pressures as well as increasing the stock of affordable homes for the future.
- 7.8 Sefton has now been granted funding under round three of the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF). The funding will be utilised under the same premise as round two and is expected to deliver a total of five homes and temporary accommodation unit. The Resettlement

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cohort, Afghan refugees under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme, that will occupy these homes will also enable the Council to claim additional revenue grant to support community integration.

- 7.9 The Council has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the MHCLG in order to release the funding. Cabinet has therefore been requested to approve a supplementary capital estimate for £651,000 to include the scheme in the capital programme for 2025/26 and a supplementary revenue estimate of £4,700 for inclusion in the revenue budget.

Network North Roads Resurfacing Fund

- 7.10 Cabinet in June 2024 approved an allocation of grant from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) for the Network North Roads Resurfacing Fund for inclusion in the 2024/25 Highways Capital Programme. A further round of funding has now been confirmed by the LCRCA for the continuation of this scheme and Cabinet has therefore been requested to approve a supplementary capital estimate of £449,302 for the additional grant.

Programme Funding

- 7.11 The table below shows how the capital programme will be funding in 2024/25:

<u>Source</u>	£m
Grants and Other Contributions	56.643
Prudential Borrowing	16.278
Capital Receipts	5.434
Revenue Contributions	0.198
<u>Total Programme Funding</u>	78.554

- 7.12 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.
- 7.13 The Executive Director of Corporate Services and Commercial will continue to manage the financing of the programme to ensure the final capital funding arrangements secure the maximum financial benefit to the Council.

2. Financial Implications

All financial implications are reflected within the report.

3. Legal Implications

None

4. Corporate Risk Implications

This report highlights the financial position of the Council in 2024/25, which supports its Financial Sustainability in 2024/25 and future years.

5. Staffing HR Implications

None

6. Conclusion

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Based on current forecasts, the Council is again faced with a challenging financial environment during 2024/25 as a result of pressures within Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and Education Excellence (Home to School Transport). A revenue overspend of £15.805m is currently forecast, which would reduce to £10.305m with the forecast release of Earmarked Reserves to support the budget position.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

Equality Implications: There are no equality implications.
Impact on Children and Young People: None
Climate Emergency Implications: The recommendations within this report will have a Neutral impact. 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.

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Services and Commercial is the author of this report (FD7899/24).

The Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD5999/24) has been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

None

Implementation Date for the Decision:

Following the expiry of the "call-in" period for the Cabinet decision.

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Appendices:

The following appendices are attached to tPage 46

APPENDIX A – Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2026/27

Background Papers:

None

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APPENDIX A – Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2026/27

Capital Scheme	Budget		
	2024/25 £	2025/26 £	2026/27 £
Adult Social Care			
Disabled Facilities Grants	3,500,000	-	-
Occupational Therapist Support	636,359		
ICT Development & Transformation	1,006,022	-	-
ICT Connectivity in Care Homes and Support Living	20,000	-	-
Care Home Improvements	529,038	-	-
Integrated Health and Wellbeing on the High Street	100,000	-	-
Short Term Assessment Unit	500,000	2,393,034	546,034
New Directions Programme	475,010	40,000	-
Technology Enabled Care	330,250	-	-
Programme Support	127,900	-	-
Changing Places	36,071	-	-
Falls Prevention Schemes	100,000	-	-
Digitising Social Care	136,393	-	-
Mobile Clinic	89,000	-	-
Community Equipment	893,000	-	-
Children’s Social Care			
Support for Fostering Placements	50,000	-	-
Special Guardianship Order – Property Purchase Grant	100,000		
Community Equipment	410,000	-	-
Springbrook Works and Vehicle	73,017	-	-
Children's Social Care Transformation	2,000,000	-	-
Communities			
Atkinson Arts Centre – Infrastructure & Windows	169,555	-	-
Local Authority Housing Fund	718,765	578,235	-
Leisure Centres – Essential Works	135,445	15,566	-
Libraries Projects	86,445	139,361	-
Neighbourhoods Schemes	24,869	-	-
Corporate Resources			
ICT Development & Transformation	688,498	-	-
ICT Data Centre Relocation	400,000	-	-
ICT Equipment Refresh	360,000	90,000	-
Committee Meeting Live Streaming System	147,806	-	-
Community Recovery Fund	90,000	-	-
Economic Growth & Housing			
Cambridge Road Centre Redevelopment	170,983	-	-
Strategic Acquisitions – Ainsdale	155,000	469,303	-
Marine Lake Events Centre	5,651,282	37,866,796	21,280,701
Enterprise Arcade	1,252,977	35,418	-
The Strand – Maintenance & Improvements	120,330	-	-
The Strand – Repurposing Programme	7,192,768	12,237,724	-
Changing Places Facilities	109,168	-	-

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	2024/25 £	2025/26 £	2026/27 £
Brownfield Housing Fund	1,032,281	-	-
Council Housing Early Acquisitions Scheme	-	750,000	-
Council Housing at Buckley Hill Lane	2,080,462	1,150	-
Southport Pier	2,706,736	86,580	-
Town Centre Vacant Sites	54,016	-	-
Red Rose Park Works	-	40,000	-
Education Excellence			
Early Years	534,202	-	-
General Planned Maintenance	397,262	-	-
Schools Programme	3,248,730	7,117,465	60,637
Sporting Betterment of Schools	654,045	667,343	-
Special Educational Needs & Disabilities	2,224,321	2,029,812	-
Highways and Public Protection			
Accessibility	452,304	200,000	-
Healthy Lifestyles	356,125	129,220	-
Road Safety	194,956	-	-
A565 Route Management and Parking	300,500	-	-
A565 Northern Key Corridor Improvements	96,369	-	-
A59 Route Management Strategy	1,280,000	3,563,357	-
Strategic Planning	3,368,053	4,084,779	-
Traffic Management & Parking	39,000	1,067,000	-
Southport Eastern Access	2,285,636	8,879,030	8,805,334
Maritime Corridor	4,771,239	7,531,761	-
Highway Maintenance	5,526,036	-	-
Bridges & Structures	685,143	1,750,000	-
Drainage Improvement	278,672	-	-
Street Lighting	300,000	-	-
Street Lighting LED Upgrade	2,850,183	608,565	-
Urban Traffic Control	1,317,160	315,018	-
Highways Capitalisation	1,616,000	1,616,000	1,616,000
Operational In-House Services			
Coastal Erosion and Flood Risk Management	1,603,392	1,551,809	1,420,273
Countryside Stewardship	1,740	-	-
Parks Schemes	282,643	729,017	-
Tree Planting Programme	574,072	94,879	94,879
Golf Driving Range Developments	2,197	280,280	-
Ainsdale Coastal Gateway	543,739	-	-
Green Sefton – Vehicles, Plant & Machinery	1,670,000	326,237	-
Refuse Collection & Recycling	345,000	2,644,182	-
Vehicle Replacement Programme	604,610	1,054,494	-
Property and Building Services			
Acquisition of Magdalen House	4,775,400	-	-
Council Wide Essential Maintenance	324,070	100,000	100,000
<u>Council Wide Essential Maintenance Phase 2:</u>			
- Corporate Buildings	70,000	2,425,000	2,366,296

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	2024/25 £	2025/26 £	2026/27 £
- Other Civic Buildings	39,893	1,223,107	-
- Adult Social Care	30,000	168,464	-
- Car Parks	20,000	80,000	-
- Leisure, Health & Wellbeing	210,000	204,000	-
- Green Sefton	30,000	70,000	-
- Localities	-	110,000	-
- Economic Growth	-	-	169,000
- Asset Management	160,000	11,612	-
Sefton Climate & Retrofit Action Project	32,000	-	-
<u>Total Programme</u>	78,554,138	105,375,598	36,459,154

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Work Programme 2024/25, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan

Date of meeting:	14 January 2025		
Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)		
Report of:	Chief Legal and Democratic Officer		
Portfolio:	Corporate Services Communities and Partnership Engagement		
Wards affected:	All		
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 2024/25; to identify potential topics for scrutiny reviews to be undertaken by informal meetings of the Committee; to identify any items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan; to update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and to provide reasons for the deferral of a number of items at the previous meeting of the Committee.

Recommendations:

That:

- (1) the Work Programme for 2024/25, 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 reasons for the deferral of a number of items at the previous meeting of the Committee, as detailed in paragraph 1.1.5 of the report, be noted;
- (3) consideration of the Transformation Programme Update and Air Quality Monitoring reports be deferred to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 4 March 2025;
- (4) the Corporate Communications Strategy be removed from the Committee's Work Programme for 2024/25 and that the Corporate Communications Manager be requested to update the Strategy for 2025/26 and that a presentation be made to the Committee during that municipal year on the updated Strategy;

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- (5) consideration be given to the selection of a topic(s) for review by either a Working Group or at informal meetings of the Committee as detailed in section 2 of the report;
- (6) 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
- (7) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

1. The Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendations

1.1 Work Programme 2024/25

- 1.1.1 The Work Programme of items to be submitted to the Committee for consideration during the Municipal Year 2024/25, as approved by Committee in June 2024, is set out in Appendix 1 to the report. The programme had been produced in liaison with the appropriate Executive Directors/Assistant Directors, whose roles fall under the remit of the Committee.
- 1.1.2 The Work Programme was produced based on items included in last year's Programme.
- 1.1.3 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 2024/25 to provide Members with the opportunity to add items to the Programme.
- 1.1.4 The Work Programme indicates that presentations would be made to this meeting of the Committee on the Corporate Communications Strategy and an Update on Progress of LCR Digital Inclusion Strategy; and that a report would be submitted on Transformation Programme Update. It is now recommended that these presentations and the report be made/submitted to the meetings to be held on 14 and 20 January 2025.
- 1.1.5 **Deferred Items from Previous Meeting**

At its last meeting the Committee deferred a number of items for consideration at future meetings. The Committee asked for the reasons why the matters were deferred; and that the reasons be included in this report. Details are set out below.

Corporate Communications Strategy Presentation

This presentation should have been made to the meeting on 10 September 2024. However, lots of Communications Team resources leading up to September was targeted at dealing with and supporting activities following the terrible incidents in Southport at the end of July. Furthermore, it was considered that the events arising from the incidents could change the focus of what would be included in the Communications Strategy. This delayed the presentation to the meeting in September. The presentation was not ready to be made to the October meeting due to consultation continuing on the Strategy.

The Corporate Communications Manager has now requested that the Corporate Communications Strategy be removed from the agenda for this municipal year because his Team's focus has been on the continued working on the communications strategy for the Southport recovery; and that this will be reported to Cabinet in January 2025 as part of the wider Southport recovery update.

It is recommended that the Corporate Communications Manager consult with the Cabinet Member – Corporate Serv

with a view to updating it for 2025/26.

Update on Progress of LCR Digital Inclusion Strategy

The officer to present the update was unavailable to attend the meeting as she was away at an LGA conference. Furthermore, this matter is a cross-cutting issue with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills). The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills) work programme indicated that a presentation/update would be made to that meeting on 21 January 2025. Deferring the item therefore also had the benefit of both Committees considering this matter in the same cycle of meetings.

Transformation Programme Update

The Transformation Plan had been produced for sign-off by the Executive Leadership Team. However, both Children's Services and Adult Social Care had requested changes to the Programme. This resulted in a delay which meant that the changes would not be ready until after the publication date of the agenda. However, due to on-going work with the Executive Leadership Team and Cabinet Members on the programme delivery, the report is still not ready for publication. Accordingly, it is recommended that the report be again deferred to the meeting to be held on 4 March 2025.

Air Quality Monitoring

The annual Air Quality Monitoring report should have been considered at this meeting of the Committee. However, the Assistant Director – Highways and Public Protection has requested that due to unexpected recent staff sickness, the resultant knock on resource impacts for the Service Manager and highly technical nature of the report, it be deferred to the next Meeting of the committee to be held on 4 March 2025.

1.2 Scrutiny Review Topics 2024/25

- 1.2.1 It has been usual practise for the Committee to appoint a Working Group(s) to undertake a scrutiny review of services during the Municipal Year.
- 1.2.2 However, over the last number of years the Committee agreed to hold informal meetings to consider topics for review rather than establishing Working Groups.
- 1.2.3 The Committee's views are therefore sought on topics for review by informal meetings of the Committee.
- 1.2.4 For the information of Members, a criteria checklist for selecting and rejecting potential topics to review is attached at **Appendix 2**.

1.3 Pre-Scrutiny of Items in the Key Decision Forward Plan

- 1.3.1 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.
- 1.3.2 The pre-scrutiny process assists Cabinet Members to make effective decisions by examining issues beforehand and making recommendations prior to a determination being made.
- 1.3.3 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.

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- 1.3.4 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.
- 1.3.5 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.

1.4 Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 1.4.1 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. This Committee considered the matter at its meeting held on 22 October 2019 (Minute No. 20).
- 1.4.2 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 updates 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.
- 1.4.3 In accordance with the above decision, information on the LCRCAO&S is set out below.
- 1.4.4 **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.

1.4.5 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 Hinde. Councillor Hart is Sefton's Scrutiny Link.

1.4.6 Chair

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The Chair of the LCRCAO&S cannot be a member of the majority group. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee for 2024/25 are Councillors Steve Radford and Pat Moloney respectively.

1.4.7 Quoracy Issues

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. This has on occasion caused meetings to be inquorate.

1.4.8 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>

Since the last meeting the LCRO&S has met on two occasions and details of matters considered at the meeting are set out below:

23 October 2024

- Draft Local Transport Plan
- Active Travel - Progress Report
- Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (Levi)
- Social Value Update
- Digital Connectivity Vision & Roadmap
- Delivery Planning and Performance Reporting
- Work Programme 2024-25

27 November 2024

- Mayors Update - Devolution and Local Growth Plans
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-26 Update
- Financial Performance Report and Mid-Year Treasury Management Strategy Update
- Performance Reporting on the Combined Authority Corporate Plan
- Work Programme 2024-25

1.4.9 The next meeting of the LCRCAO&S will be held on 22 January 2025. At the time of writing this report the agenda for the meeting on 22 January 2025 has not been published. Details will be provided as part of the next Work Programme update report.

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

2. Financial Implications

2.1 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/informal meeting review will be reported to Members at the appropriate time.

(A) **Revenue Costs** – see above

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(B) Capital Costs – see above

3. Legal Implications

3.1 None. Any legal implications arising from the consideration of a key decision or relating to a recommendation arising from a Working Group/informal meeting review will be reported to Members at the appropriate time.

4. Risk Implications

4.1 None. Any risk implications arising from the consideration of a key decision or relating to a recommendation arising from a Working Group/informal meeting review will be reported to Members at the appropriate time.

5. Staffing HR Implications

5.1 None. Any staffing/HR implications arising from the consideration of a key decision or relating to a recommendation arising from a Working Group/informal meeting review will be reported to Members at the appropriate time.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The Committee is requested to determine the Work Programme of items to be considered during the Municipal Year 2024/25 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

No alternative options have been considered as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee needs to approve its Work Programme and identify scrutiny review topics.

Equality Implications:

There are no equality implications. Any equality implications arising from the consideration of a key decision or relating to a recommendation arising from a Working Group/informal meeting review will be reported to Members at the appropriate time.

(Please note that Council have agreed care experience should be treated like a protected characteristic.)

Impact on Children and Young People:

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 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 Neutral impact.

There are no direct climate emergency implications arising from this report. Any climate

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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.

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.

Executive Director – Regeneration, Economy and Assets
Assistant Director - Highways and Public Protection
Executive Director - Corporate Services and Commercial
Assistant Director - Strategic Support
Chief Personnel Officer

(B) External Consultations

None.

Implementation Date for the Decision:

With immediate effect.

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 2024/25
- Criteria Checklist for Selecting Topics for Review
- Latest Key Decision Forward Plan items relating to this Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

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**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGULATORY, COMPLIANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES) WORK
PROGRAMME 2024/25**

Tuesday, 11 June 2024, 6.30 p.m., Town Hall, Southport	
Report/Item	Report Author/Organiser
Members' Welfare Reform Reference Group – Update	Margaret Jones/Helen O'Reilly
Homes for Ukraine Scheme (potential changes to the Homes for Ukraine scheme and impacts this would have on service users in Sefton)	Mel Ormesher/Allan Glennon
Climate Emergency Annual Report	Stephanie Jukes
Cabinet Member Update Reports	Paul Fraser
Work Programme Update	Paul Fraser

Tuesday, 10 September 2024, 6.30 p.m., Town Hall, Bootle	
Report/Item	Report Author/Organiser
Financial Performance Monitoring - Finance, Performance and Risk	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
Corporate Communications Strategy	Andrew Daniels
Members' Welfare Reform Reference Group – Update	Margaret Jones/Helen O'Reilly
Cabinet Member Update Reports	Paul Fraser
Work Programme Update	Paul Fraser

Tuesday, 22 October 2024, 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 (this matter is now the responsibility of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills))	Stephan Van Arendsen/Dom Ellis
Update on Progress of LCR Digital Inclusion Strategy	Andrea Watts
Transformation Programme Update	Stephan Van Arendsen/Wayne Leatherbarrow
Members' Welfare Reform Reference Group – Update	Margaret Jones/Helen O'Reilly
Corporate Communications Strategy	Andrew Daniels
Cabinet Member Update Reports	Paul Fraser
Work Programme Update	Paul Fraser

Tuesday, 14 January 2025, 6.30 p.m., Town Hall, Bootle	
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/Helen O'Reilly
Air Quality Monitoring – recommendation to defer to 4 March 2025 meeting	Peter Moore/Greg Martin
Annual ICT Update Report (Performance of Agilisys) – deferred to 20 January 2025 meeting	Helen Spreadbury
Transformation Programme Update - deferred from 22 October 2024 meeting; recommendation to defer to 4 March 2025 meeting	Stephan Van Arendsen/Wayne Leatherbarrow
Corporate Communications Strategy - deferred from 22 October 2024 meeting. Recommendation to defer to 2025/26 municipal year	Andrew Daniels

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Cabinet Member Update Reports	Paul Fraser
Work Programme Update	Paul Fraser
Monday, 20 January 2025, 6.30 p.m., Town Hall, Bootle – SPECIAL MEETING	
Report/Item	Report Author/Organiser
Annual ICT Update Report (Performance of Agilisys)	Helen Spreadbury
Update on Progress of LCR Digital Inclusion Strategy	Andrea Watts
Digital Strategy	Helen Spreadbury

Tuesday, 11 February 2025, 6.30 p.m., Budget Meeting - Town Hall, Bootle	
Report/Item	Report Author/Organiser
Budget Report 2025/26 to 2028/29	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 2025/26 and Future Years	Stephan Van Arendsen/Andrew Bridson
Asset Management Strategy and Asset Disposal Policy – Update Position	Stephan Van Arendsen/Dom Ellis
Robustness of the 2025/26 Budget Estimates and the Adequacy of Reserves – Local Government Act 2003 – Section 25	Stephan Van Arendsen

Tuesday, 4 March 2025, 6.30 p.m. Town Hall, Southport	
Report/Item	Report Author/Organiser
Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures and Sickness Absence Monitoring	Paul Cunningham/Marie Lambert
Members' Welfare Reform Reference Group – Update	Margaret Jones/Helen O'Reilly
Financial Performance Monitoring - Finance, Performance and Risk	Stephan Van Arendsen/Paul Reilly
Unmet Demand Survey of Hackney Carriages – Update Report on Results of Survey	Mark Toohey
Public Engagement and Consultation Panel Annual Report 2024	Jayne Vincent
Transformation Programme Update - deferred from 14 January 2025 meeting	Stephan Van Arendsen/Wayne Leatherbarrow
Air Quality Monitoring - deferred from 14 January 2025 meeting	
Cabinet Member Update Reports	Paul Fraser
Work Programme Update	Paul Fraser

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.

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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 FEBRUARY 2025 - 31 MAY 2025**

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, Oriol 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

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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:-

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

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FORWARD PLAN INDEX OF ITEMS

Item Heading	Officer Contact
UK Investment Bank Loan Approval (PSDS & Solar Works)	Stephanie Jukes stephanie.jukes@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4552
Counter Fraud Strategy	David Eden david.eden@sefton.gov.uk
Financial Management 2024/25 to 2027/28 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2024/25 – February Update	Paul Reilly paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4106
Digital Strategy	Helen Spreadbury helen.spreadbury@sefton.gov.uk
Capital Strategy 2025/26	Andrew Bridson andrew.bridson@sefton.gov.uk
Robustness of the 2025/26 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 2025/26 – 2027/28 and Council Tax 2025/26	Paul Reilly paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4106
Prudential Indicators 2025/26	Graham Hussey graham.hussey@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4100
Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2025/26	Graham Hussey graham.hussey@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4100
Annual Health and Safety Report	David Eden david.eden@sefton.gov.uk
Corporate Health and Safety Policy	David Eden david.eden@sefton.gov.uk
Q3 (2024) Corporate Performance Report	Wayne Leatherbarrow wayne.leatherbarrow@sefton.gov.uk
Financial Management 2024/25 to 2027/28 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2024/25 – March Update	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	UK Investment Bank Loan Approval (PSDS & Solar Works) Works part funded under the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) and solar PV repairs require matched funding. As agreed in principle with the LCR Combined Authority, funding has been secured via the UK Investment bank. This report seeks approval for accepting the loan to progress the associated works.			
Decision Maker	Cabinet Council			
Decision Expected	6 Feb 2025 27 Feb 2025			
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 – Regeneration, Economy and Assets Executive Director – Regeneration, Economy and Assets			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	Graham Hussey, Finance. Paul Bowe/ Dominic Ellis, Property. Lucca Biagioni, Terry Burke, Combined Authority.			
Method(s) of Consultation	Meetings and emails with finance, property, Combine Authority colleagues.			
List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker	UK Investment Bank loan approval (PSDS & Solar works)			
Contact Officer(s) details	Stephanie Jukes stephanie.jukes@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4552			

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SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

Details of Decision to be taken	Counter Fraud Strategy Provide a Counter Fraud Strategy for decision detailing the proposed activity to improve the Council's approach to detect and prevent fraud.			
Decision Maker	Cabinet			
Decision Expected	6 Feb 2025 Decision due date for Cabinet changed from 09/01/2025 to 06/02/2025. Reason: to allow the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) to give consideration to the Strategy			
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 – Corporate Services and Commercial			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	Executive Leadership Team, Cabinet Member – Corporate Services			
Method(s) of Consultation	Meetings			
List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker	Counter Fraud Strategy			
Contact Officer(s) details	David Eden david.eden@sefton.gov.uk			

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SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

Details of Decision to be taken	Financial Management 2024/25 to 2027/28 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2024/25 – 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	6 Feb 2025			
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 – Corporate Services and Commercial			
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 2024/25 to 2027/28 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2024/25 – 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

Details of Decision to be taken	Digital Strategy To submit for approval the Councils Digital Strategy for the next three years			
Decision Maker	Cabinet			
Decision Expected	6 Feb 2025 Decision due date for Cabinet changed from 07/11/2024 to 06/02/2025. Reason: Work is ongoing on the preparation of the digital strategy			
Key Decision Criteria	Financial	No	Community Impact	Yes
Exempt Report	Open			
Wards Affected	All Wards			
Scrutiny Committee Area	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services			
Lead Director	Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	Officers - Executive Leadership Board and wider staff via ICT Champions and Digital working groups Members - all via IPC Members of the public via formal consultation			
Method(s) of Consultation	The digital strategy has been circulated to all members of ELT via Executive Board meetings, comment has also been sought on draft copies via Informal Policy Cabinet. Staff consultation has been completed with all officers involved in the delivery of key digital strands and wider staff engagement has been completed via ICT Digital Champions Meetings Formal public consultation on the proposed strategy took place over summer 2024, with 55 responses received both electronically and via hard copy			
List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker	Digital Strategy			
Contact Officer(s) details	Helen Spreadbury helen.spreadbury@sefton.gov.uk			

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SEFTON METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

Details of Decision to be taken	Capital Strategy 2025/26 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 continued financial sustainability of the Council and how they support the promises made in the 2030 Vision for Sefton.			
Decision Maker	Cabinet Council			
Decision Expected	13 Feb 2025 27 Feb 2025			
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 – Corporate Services and Commercial Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	None			
Method(s) of Consultation	N/A			
List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker	Capital Strategy 2025/26			
Contact Officer(s) details	Andrew Bridson andrew.bridson@sefton.gov.uk			

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Details of Decision to be taken	Robustness of the 2025/26 Budget Estimates and the Adequacy of Reserves – Local Government Act 2003 - Section 25 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			
Decision Maker	Cabinet Council			
Decision Expected	13 Feb 2025 27 Feb 2025			
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 – Corporate Services and Commercial Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial			
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 2025/26 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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Details of Decision to be taken	Revenue and Capital Budget Plan 2025/26 – 2027/28 and Council Tax 2025/26 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 2025/26 as well as the Council Tax level for 2025/26			
Decision Maker	Cabinet Council			
Decision Expected	13 Feb 2025 27 Feb 2025			
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 – Corporate Services and Commercial			
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 2025/26 – 2027/28 and Council Tax 2025/26			
Contact Officer(s) details	Paul Reilly paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4106			

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Details of Decision to be taken	Prudential Indicators 2025/26 This report details a number of measures / limits / parameters (Prudential Indicators) that are required to be set each financial year to help ensure that the Council complies with relevant legislation, is acting prudently and that its capital expenditure proposals are affordable.			
Decision Maker	Cabinet Council			
Decision Expected	13 Feb 2025 27 Feb 2025			
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 – Corporate Services and Commercial Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	N/A			
Method(s) of Consultation	None			
List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker	Prudential Indicators 2025/26			
Contact Officer(s) details	Graham Hussey graham.hussey@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4100			

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Details of Decision to be taken	Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2025/26 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	13 Feb 2025 27 Feb 2025			
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 – Corporate Services and Commercial Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial			
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 2025/26			
Contact Officer(s) details	Graham Hussey graham.hussey@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4100			

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Details of Decision to be taken	Annual Health and Safety Report Provide an annual health and safety report to Cabinet for noting the Council's embedding of health and safety across the Council's operations.			
Decision Maker	Cabinet			
Decision Expected	6 Mar 2025			
Key Decision Criteria	Financial	Not a Key Decision – Submitted to Cabinet as a matter of local choice	Community Impact	Not a Key Decision – Submitted to Cabinet as a matter of local choice
Exempt Report	Open			
Wards Affected	All Wards			
Scrutiny Committee Area	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services			
Lead Director	Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	Cabinet Member and ELT			
Method(s) of Consultation	Cabinet Member and ELT prior to Cabinet			
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			

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Details of Decision to be taken	Corporate Health and Safety Policy Approve a revised Corporate Health and Safety Policy			
Decision Maker	Cabinet			
Decision Expected	6 Mar 2025			
Key Decision Criteria	Financial	No	Community Impact	Yes
Exempt Report	Open			
Wards Affected	All Wards			
Scrutiny Committee Area	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services			
Lead Director	Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	Unions/ employees			
Method(s) of Consultation	To be consulted with employees through unions on the Corporate Health and Safety Committee in January 2024.			
List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker	Corporate Health and Safety Policy			
Contact Officer(s) details	David Eden david.eden@sefton.gov.uk			

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Details of Decision to be taken	Q3 (2024) Corporate Performance Report Corporate Performance report showing performance for Q3 (October 2024 to December 2024) against the Corporate Plan and Council priorities			
Decision Maker	Cabinet			
Decision Expected	6 Mar 2025			
Key Decision Criteria	Financial	Not a Key Decision – Submitted to Cabinet as a matter of local choice	Community Impact	Not a Key Decision – Submitted to Cabinet as a matter of local choice
Exempt Report	Open			
Wards Affected	All Wards			
Scrutiny Committee Area	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services			
Lead Director	Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial			
Persons/Organisations to be Consulted	Executive Leadership Team and Strategic Leadership Board			
Method(s) of Consultation	Meetings and briefings			
List of Background Documents to be Considered by Decision-maker	Q3 (2024) Corporate Performance Report			
Contact Officer(s) details	Wayne Leatherbarrow wayne.leatherbarrow@sefton.gov.uk			

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Details of Decision to be taken	Financial Management 2024/25 to 2027/28 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2024/25 – 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	6 Mar 2025			
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 – Corporate Services and Commercial			
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 2024/25 to 2027/28 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2024/25 – March Update			
Contact Officer(s) details	Paul Reilly paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk Tel: 0151 934 4106			

Cabinet Member Report – October 2024 to January 2025

Date of meeting:	14 January 2025		
Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)		
Report of:	Chief Legal and Democratic Officer		
Portfolio:	Corporate Services		
Wards affected:	All		
Is this a key decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt/confidential report:	No		

Summary:

To submit the Cabinet Member - Corporate Services report for the period October 2024 to January 2025 relating to the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendation(s):

That the Cabinet Member - Corporate Services report relating to the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

1. The Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendations

- 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 Corporate Services is attached.
- 1.3 Contained within the Cabinet Member report are details of matters considered by the Council's four Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Management Board. However, questions should only be raised on matters within the remit of this Committee. If Members would like to obtain information on operational matters associated with the Management Board (not in relation to the remit of this Committee), or the Overview and Scrutiny Committees Adult Social Care and Health, Children's Services and Safeguarding or Regeneration and Skills then Members are respectfully

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requested to contact the appropriate Executive Director/Assistant Director.

2. Financial Implications

2.1 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

(B) **Capital Costs** – see above

3. Legal Implications

3.1 Any legal implications associated with the Cabinet Member report that are referred to in this update are contained within the respective reports.

4. Risk Implications

4.1 Any legal implications associated with the Cabinet Member report that are referred to in this update are contained within the respective reports.

5. Staffing HR Implications

5.1 Any staffing HR implications associated with the Cabinet Member report that are referred to in this update are contained within the respective reports.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board has agreed for relevant Cabinet Member Reports to be submitted to appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committees. This report has therefore been submitted to comply with the decision of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

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.

Equality Implications:

There are no direct equality implications. Any equality implications arising from the consideration of any decisions contained in the update would have been/will be reported to members at the appropriate time.

(Please note that Council have agreed care experience should be treated like a protected characteristic.)

Impact on Children and Young People:

There are no direct children and young people implications. Any children and young people implications arising from the consideration of any decisions contained in the update would have been/will be reported to members at the appropriate time.

Climate Emergency Implications:

The recommendations within this report will have a Neutral impact.

There are no direct climate emergency implications arising from this report. Any climate emergency implications arising from the consideration of any decisions contained in the update would have been/will be reported to members at the appropriate time.

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 :

With immediate effect.

Contact Officer:	Paul Fraser
Telephone Number:	0151 934 2068
Email Address:	paul.fraser@sefton.gov.uk

Appendices:

Cabinet Member - (Corporate Services) update report.

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

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CABINET MEMBER REPORT		
Overview & Scrutiny		
Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Christine Howard	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services	December 2024

Financial Management

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

The latest budget monitoring report, showing the October position, was reported to Cabinet on 5th December 2024. The next report to Cabinet in January will show the November position.

A report presenting an updated Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2025/26 – 2027/28 was presented to Cabinet on 7th November 2024 and Council on 14th November. Work continues to be undertaken on updating and expanding the MTFP. This includes an assessment of any potential ongoing issues from the 2024/25 budget as well as new pressures. Officers are currently assessing the Local Government Finance Policy paper, which was published on 28th November and provided additional information on the announcements made in the Chancellor’s Autumn Budget Statement on 30th October 2024. However, the full impact on the financial position of the Council is unlikely to be known until the Local Government Finance Settlement is announced later in December (expected to be the 19th).

The Government has now implemented legislation for “backstop” date to be introduced for early December 2024 by which time audit certificates will need to be issued for all outstanding audits up to 2022/23. A special meeting of Audit and Governance took place on the 28th November 2024 to approve the Statement of Accounts for 2021/22 and 2022/23, as well as consider the external auditor’s report (EY). Officers are currently working with the external auditors, EY, to finalise their audit opinions for the two open audits. As the work on these audits won’t be fully complete the audit opinions will be qualified on that basis. This will be in line with many other outstanding audits across local government.

The production of the Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 was finalised and published by 31st May 2024 in line with the statutory deadlines. The Council’s new auditors, Grant Thornton from the 2023/24 financial year, have been undertaking the audit since then, including work for informing the Council’s Value for Money assessment. Significant progress has been made to date and will recommence in January 2025 once all work on 2021/22 and 2022/23 has been completed by the Council’s previous external auditors. Audit and Governance Committee will meet in February 2025 to approve the final, fully audited, Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 in advance of the “backstop” date for that year.

Customer Centric Services

The Service continues to deal with high workloads but has made great progress in recent months to reduce both outstanding volumes and customer response times, especially in the Council Tax team.

For the Contact Centre, the ongoing progress to reduce Council Tax priority workloads is also having a positive impact in reducing customer contact as set out in the table below. The salutation

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message continues to encourage customers to go online if they are able to do so and to register for 'My Account.'

Year	Council Tax call volumes
1.4.23 to 31.10.23	29,242
1.4.24 to 31.10.24	22,287
Reduction	6,955 (-23.78%)

Customer Services

The Contact Centre team continues to handle in the region of 17,000 calls each month. The torrential rain across the borough that resulted in various roads being closed and houses being flooded generated a high volume of telephone calls for Environmental Services and Highways.

With the garden waste collections ending in November until March 2025, Cleansing enquiries increased with customers calling to confirm the exact date of their last green bin collection. In addition, customers called to enquire about the calendar for the Leafing Program that started on 14th October and the various bulky items that had failed to be collected throughout the month.

Various customer enquiries were received for the Election service. At the start of October, the annual canvass of 84,254 e-mails and 49,075 letters were dispatched. The communication requests households to check the names registered to vote are correct and to add or delete names to their household if necessary.

The salutation message that is relayed at the start of each incoming call encourages customers to use online Council services if they can, allowing staff to handle calls for Sefton's prioritised services, i.e., Social Care and the Councils' Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme (ELAS).

Demand continues to be high at the One Stop Shops, with approximately 2,500 customers attending Bootle One Stop Shop each month. Typically, the team continues to deal with a high volume of taxi license applications and related enquiries, Council Tax, Parking or benefits enquiries, with the remaining customers seeking general council-related advice at reception.

At Southport, approximately 500 customers attended the Atkinson each month, booking an appointment to discuss their Council Tax and/or benefit, with others seeking general council-related advice at reception.

Taxi-Licensing

Good progress continues with taxi-licensing workloads. Taxi-licensing webpages have been updated on the Council's website, providing clearer information to answer frequently asked questions. The link to the website has been shared with trade representatives and they have been complimentary of the changes that have been made. The website will be updated each week with progress on all Taxi Licensing workloads and can be found at [Taxi Licensing](#)

The team are making advanced contact with all drivers whose driver/vehicle licence is due to expire during the Council's shutdown period and through to mid-January, ensuring that they are licenced to drive over the busiest time of the year.

Some drivers continue to experience issues accessing the on-line taxi-licensing portal and creating an e-mail account. Technical support remains available at Bootle One Stop Shop and assistance is also being provided by trade representatives at selected garages.

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A review of fees for a vehicle licence and driver licence is underway. Work is being undertaken to assess the time and effort it takes to produce each licence. When this has been done, the new fees will then be calculated, and a proposal will be put to the trade by Licensing colleagues. In addition to the new licence fees, a £50.00 non-refundable application fee was introduced from 25th November 2024.

Regular meetings between Customer Services and Taxi Licensing continue and the trade are given regular updates on progress.

Council Tax Sole Occupier Discount Review

At the end of August 2024, the Council commenced a Council Tax Sole Occupier Discount review to help ensure that households are being charged correctly for Council Tax. A review letter was issued to just under 50,000 households asking them to report any household changes by 30th September if they were no longer the only occupier. Changes reported by 30th September were applied from the date that the change was reported.

By the end of September 2024, almost 1,300 households cancelled their Sole Occupier Discount. The majority used the online My Account Council Tax portal to cancel the discount which automated a revised Council Tax bill in 87% of cases notified this way.

The Council Tax team is now working with software provider, NEC, for the next phase of the review. NEC use credit records to check how many adults might be living in properties claiming Sole Occupier Discount. NEC has recently written to approximately 10,000 households, where the information held does not appear to be correct to check whether they are still eligible for the discount. Further updates will be provided.

Advice and guidance has been provided to householders contacting the Council to enquire about entitlement to other available discounts, e.g. student discounts.

Southport Business Improvement District (BID)

The Business Rates team within the Revenues service is responsible for the billing and collection of the BID levy.

Following the ballot for the new 5-year Southport BID term from 1st November 2024 to 31st October 2029, the service has now completed the Annual Billing exercise with 714 bills being generated.

Open Access Household Support Fund

Further to the Government announcement that the Department for Work and Pensions would continue to provide Household Support Funding to local councils to support communities during the winter period from October 2024 – March 2025, colleagues in Communities, in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Communities & Partnership Engagement, have decided that £1,210,000 of the funding should be available through the application scheme which is administered by the Benefits team in Customer Centric Services.

The Open Access application element of the Household Support Fund re-opened on 14th October. There was an immediate surge of applications. By the end of November, just over 5,800 applications have been received with over 3,400 awards so far made through the Post Office Pay Out service which enables the recipient to redeem a voucher for cash at their local Post Office.

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During the last two iterations of Household Support Fund, the application scheme has closed early due to funding running out. This time, the amount of award per application has reduced in order to ensure that the budget lasts for the whole six-months winter period, which is likely to be the hardest season for Sefton's most vulnerable households. The award levels are set out in the table below:-

Original		New
Amount	Description	Amount
£150	Single	£75
£200	Couple	£100
£250	Family 2 or less children	£125
£300	Family 3 or more children	£150

The Benefits team has worked with Communications and the Council's website has been updated to reflect the current version of the scheme: [Household Support Fund](#)

Risk and Audit

The **Internal Audit** team are continuing to work on delivering the 2024/25 internal audit plan with a current focus on reviews of:

- Review of number of Schools.
- Risk Management Health Check
- Code of Conduct
- Credit and Debit Cards
- ASC recruitment and retention
- CSC Procurement
- Sefton New Directions
- Major Capital Schemes Procurement
- Supplier Management
- Bulky Waste
- Planning Financials
- Bootle Golf Club
- Alleyway Waste Management
- Children with disabilities
- Out of Area Placements- ASC
- Childrens Placements
- CSC Market Sustainability
- ASC Market Sustainability

Following a re-structure a Trainee ICT Auditor has been appointed and started in September 2024 and a Principal Auditor post is currently being advertised.

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

- The Team have finalised the insurance renewal for September 2024. The insurance market is much more benign this year although there remains pressure in motor insurance premiums which reflects cost of claims increases, supply chain issues and repairs

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- affecting electric vehicles. The renewal figures increased in line with expectations although there were reductions in costs to reflect a number of schools that transferred to Academies.
- The Team have proposed the use of some of the “free days” as part of the insurance programme risk bursary to undertake a review of the Council’s risk management framework as well as arranging a horizon scanning session for ELT.
 - The Team 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.
 - The Team have developed a report for various service areas detailing claims numbers, values and outcomes, and areas where the concentration of claims is the highest. This has been completed for 2023/24 and provided to service areas.
 - The Team assisted in arranging material damage cover for 25 Catholic schools where the Diocese was unable to offer terms from their existing insurer. A re-valuation of the affected schools to ensure that the properties have accurate re-building costs is currently being undertaken and due to finish by 31 December 2024. This will help to prevent under insurance and potential restrictions of cover in the event of a claim.
 - The Team continues to work extensively with Service Teams including Highways on car parking, to improve the management of insurable risk in areas where there are high numbers of claims or areas of concern.
 - The current contract with the Council’s Insurance Brokers expires on 31 March 2025. The Team are shortly to commence a procurement exercise, in line with current Contract Procedure Rules, to test the market and obtain value for money.
 - An exercise will also shortly be undertaken to gain quotes from various Insurance Brokers to enable an Actuarial Report to be undertaken on the Council’s insurance claims. This is a requirement of the Council’s External Auditors and will provide an analysis of current claims reserves, a forecast of expected ultimate losses after allowing for volatility and will also comment on emerging risks within the sector. Ultimately it will determine if the Insurance Fund has sufficient reserves to fund current and future claims that may be presented.

The Risk and Resilience Team.

The Team have developed a Corporate Business Continuity Plan using the existing Service Area Business Continuity (BC) Plans which is currently with the Executive Leadership Team to approve. Following the exercise of the Council’s BC arrangements in March 2024 which we have subsequently received feedback on we are currently implementing the recommendations from the review. We are currently facilitating the refreshing of a number of Business Continuity Plans that are being updated by Assistant Directors.

The Risk and Resilience Team are currently

- Working with the Merseyside Resilience Forum on a number of work plan initiatives
- Development of a Shoreline Pollution Plan
- Review of Major Emergency Guidance
- Review of the Council’s emergency facilities
- Review of approach of volunteers
- Training for loggists and planning an exercise to enhance their experience
- Working on Sefton events
- Working on the Southport Recovery Cell

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

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- 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.
- Completed a planned review of the Council's Health and Safety Policy which is due to be presented to Cabinet in the next quarter
- Completed a review of the Council's grey fleet driving standards to ensure compliance with the Council's statutory responsibilities to ensure that staff are eligible to drive and have vehicles that are insured and safe to be on the road. Further guidance will be provided to colleagues across the Council.
- Assisting Property Services in the review of management of asbestos in both schools and other Council owned properties.
- 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.

The **Counter Fraud** function has been focused on improving the governance and counter fraud during the quarter including:

- An action plan has been drawn up to implement the outstanding actions from the CIPFA Fraud self-assessment.
- A draft Counter Fraud Strategy has been developed and will be presented to ELT/ Cabinet Member and Cabinet over the next three months.
- Research on a sanctions policy has been undertaken with Legal Services
- Evaluation of a benchmarking exercise to determine proposals on resourcing for Counter Fraud and qualifications for the Counter Fraud Investigator has been shared with management.
- Shared training resources from a neighbouring local authority enabled us to set up two fraud awareness eLearning courses:
 - Introduction to fraud and
 - Introduction to Bribery and Corruption
- Requests for completion of Fraud Risk Assessments has been provided to all Assistant Directors and the wholly owned companies. We have had documents from the majority of the Assistant Directors or a timescale when they have been completed and are following up the outstanding areas.
- Internal Audit are including an aspect of fraud assessment within each audit that is undertaken.
- We have worked with colleagues in HR to incorporate counter fraud as a topic in the induction process and promote the fraud related eLearning training courses found in the Me Learning library.
- We have worked with Communications team to advertise the fraud awareness eLearning training as well as Fraud Awareness Week in November 2024.
- We have developed a Communication Plan to raise awareness of counter fraud in the organisation.
- National Fraud Initiative (NFI) privacy notice compliance exercise completed in August 2024.
- Data upload submissions completed for the NFI National Exercise 2024/25 for the following datasets:
 - Council Tax Reduction Scheme

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- Housing Waiting List
- Payroll
- Pensions
- Resident Parking Permits
- Taxi Driver Licences
- Trade Creditors
- Reviewed the allocation of the NFI matches to individual staff members and evaluate the work completed.
- NFI Procurement Matches: Payroll to Companies House matches investigated in relation to declarations of interest under the Code of Conduct.
- Involvement with the Mersey Region Fraud Group (MRFG) sharing information and ways of working.
- A suspected fraud issue found relating to a leisure activity.
- A review of all council tax accounts with a Sole Occupier Discount (SOD) took place in September 2024. As a result of the review almost 1300 households have cancelled their SOD.

The focus on the next quarter is to:

- Work with the Communications team to develop a fraud newsletter we can circulate regularly.
- Work with Legal Services and other colleagues to develop a draft Sanctions Policy for consideration by ELT before presentation to Cabinet.
- Obtain the outstanding Fraud Risk Assessments and evaluate the information provided.
- Research and develop a Fraud Risk Register from the completed Fraud Risk Assessments.
- Progress the action plan from the CIPFA Self – assessment on fraud.
- Work with Communications team to develop a fraud awareness campaign for the upcoming National Fraud awareness week.

ICT

- The ICT Service continues to work on a number of 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), and Data Centre relocation. Further developments are underway to improve Sefton's Cyber Security capabilities, and the team has also initiated an improvement programme to upgrade and refresh the corporate Wi-Fi across the estate over the next 18-24 months.
- The team have experienced some capacity issues over the last few months due to the sickness absence of three colleagues and the further absence of our ICT Procurement lead due a HR matter. We have recently recruited two further staff into the team to support Service Delivery and the Contracts and Procurement function.
- A platform is now ready for the implementation of Power Apps across the Council, the first development proposal has been received from HR and once the relevant staff in the service area have completed training, we should be able to pilot the use of these additional services within HR.
- Data centre rationalisation and right sizing is complete within the existing Data Centre at St Peters ready for relocation to a new site. The move of the main comms room for the council to Magdalen House is now completed and the Agilisys team have now successfully relocated into their new office location within Magdalen House. Plans are well underway to

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move the remaining small data centre footprint within St Peters to a purpose-built data centre in Liverpool, all configuration work has been completed as required by the Sefton team but there have been significant challenges in scheduling the Virgin works, due to civils necessitating a road closure and access required to ducting out of hours. We continue to work in partnership with Virgin and colleagues in Liverpool to schedule these works but seasonal events in the city and prior commitments of the LCR team have made this incredibly challenging, we are now looking at dates in the new year. The Property team in Sefton are fully sighted on these issues and as far as we are aware there is no current impact on the sale of St Peters House.

- The Cloud telephony project is now closed, the team has completed the identification of telephony lines commissioned by departments directly and work is underway to transfer these to the corporate system (less than 30 lines). In addition, the team have completed a positive a proof-of-concept in relation to Teams Telephony to inform the strategy moving forwards, a further report will be made available regarding this during Autumn, the report is slightly delayed due to capacity issues in the team as mentioned above and will now be ready in Spring.
- The Council's CXP solution continues to be developed. A new internal data breach process is now live, and a new ELAS process is in development and ready for testing. Work on the configuration of the new FOI process is progressing well, with testing now in progress with the service lead. Phase 3 of the eforms migration is now underway and the final phase (phase 4) in scoping. Work on Registrars is due to commence December 2024 and should complete by the end of the year. Funding for the member of staff seconded from Agilisys into the ICT client to support implementation will end on the 31st of December, with this colleague returning to their substantive post within Agilisys. Further works required will be commissioned as projects from Agilisys in line with the terms of the ICT Support Contract.
- The ICT Procurement team continue to be busy; and the team has been impacted by the loss of the ICT Procurement lead, work has been reallocated in partnership with the central procurement team and key procurements are in progress.
- The ICT client is working in partnership with Agilisys colleagues to deliver a refresh programme for end user devices that will not meet the requirements of Windows 11 next year (approximately 600 devices are impacted). Windows 10 will be end of life in October 2025 and the team has now tested Windows 11 deployments with a view to migration of all staff prior to this date. As part of this project, we are taking the opportunity to upgrade the standard specification for laptops and desktops purchased by the authority to ensure that our devices are fit for purpose over the next 3 – 5 years. The first batch of new devices is now ordered and will be delivered prior to Christmas, it is likely that deployment will now start in January after the Christmas break.
- The threat level in relation to Cyber Security remains high and the team are working hard to implement new technologies and tools to stay one step ahead of the risk, deployment of the new backup and recovery solution for Sefton is nearing completion and further work is ongoing in line with the Cyber Improvement plan.
- Consultation on the new Digital Strategy for Sefton is now complete, all responses have been reviewed and the final version of the strategy will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet during Autumn. This was deferred to February 2025 due to staff availability in Autumn.

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- Due to the Agilisys contract ending on the 30th of September 2025 procurement activity is now completed to secure a Managed Service provider for ICT from October 2025. A report recommending preferred bidder will be presented to Cabinet on the 5th of December.
- In the new year the team will establish a project team which will start to review opportunities to pilot AI across Sefton, this will include a number of proof of concept exercises to assess the potential use cases technologies such as Microsoft Co-Pilot and Transcription tools. To inform this work the team have engaged with colleagues within Microsoft to complete an AI readiness assessment.

Legal Services

Legal Services continues to be busy, providing support across a range of areas including: Children's and Adults' Social Care; Contracts and Commercial; Property and Planning and Prosecutions and Regulations and Employment Law. In addition to business as usual, there follows some highlights:

- The Principal Lawyer has led and continues to advise on a project to ensure HMRC compliance in terms of off-payroll working arrangements. This has been a significant audit and is nearly complete. Further work continues on developing controls to manage HMRC compliance have been developed and are in the process of being rolled out, including a new off-payroll policy, an off-payroll panel and training.
- School academisations: The Legal Team have assisted colleagues across the legal department in the negotiation of Commercial Transfer Agreements and Property Agreements relating to the academisation of a number of schools within the borough. This has been a significant amount of work all to tight deadlines set by the Department for Education. There are 18 schools that have indicated they will transfer to Multi Academy Trusts this financial year. The Team have recently completed the documentation on a further three academy conversions. One of the academy conversions required extensive advice, with complex and bespoke drafting to protect the Council's position.
- The Property Team continue to handle a wide and varied caseload of instructions from the Councils estates team for disposals, acquisitions and other property related matters including supporting on academies as above. In Planning we are now starting to have to actively deal with applications subject to the new Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) regime as required by the Environment Act 2021, as well as getting to grips with the myriad of changes being proposed by the new government in regards to grey-belt (reforming green belt policy), new NPPF revisions and reversion back to mandatory housing targets.
- The Contracts and Commercial team continue to support the Council on a range of commercial matters. Particular highlights include:
 - North West Legal Consortium Framework. In addition to assisting with the procurement and appointment of law firms to this framework, the contracts team have also led on the agreement and signing of collaboration agreements for 44 public sector members. This consortium provides a framework under which various public bodies can appoint law firms across the North West region.
 - Procurement Act/Contract Procedure Rules. The team continues to assist the procurement department in preparing for the implementation of the new Procurement Act which has now been delayed to February 2025. This preparation work includes working with colleagues and external advisors to re-draft the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

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- Project Support Work. The team continues to assist colleagues with a range of projects including the Marine Lake Events Centre, the Strand Transformation Project and in relation to the delivery of new Council housing.
- Subsidy Control. The team have seen an increase in queries relating to subsidy control legislation and the navigation of it by various departments across the Council.
- The Children, Education and Adults legal team remain exceptionally busy, the team of 23 is now fully staffed following recruitment for a legal Assistant and a Senior Legal Assistant. 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. Case being presented to the court in respect of care proceedings remain consistent together with an increase in the number of children on care orders being discharged because of the work of the discharge team in Children' Social Care together with their partnership with legal services. The Children subject to pre-proceedings planning also remains consistent. Additionally, the team have a duty helpline which is available from 9-5 Monday to Friday which is open to Childrens Social Care, Education and the Sefton Schools who have a service level agreement with Legal Services for legal advice. This provides access to an experienced Lawyer who will be able to assist our client departments with their legal queries.
- The Adults team remain exceptionally busy as does the Lawyer designated to supporting the Special educational needs department. This year has seen a steep rise in cases before the Special Educational Needs tribunal which would appear to be a trend nationally.
- The Prosecution team have had some great successes. Highlights include:
 - advising the licensing sub-committee on three hearings required pursuant to the Licensing Act 2003;
 - securing the conviction of a managing agent convicted of two counts of managing a property without a licence, the sentencing hearing is to be held next month;
 - successfully resisted an appeal of a taxi driver who had been revoked following conviction for plying for hire;
 - representing the Council in the first-tier property tribunal – appeal of a Community Protection Notices for a landlord's breach of the HMO management regulations.
- The employment team continue to provide day to day advice, for example, three settlement agreements on termination of employment and providing advice on several dismissals/appeals. The employment lawyers support the Council and schools on a number of sensitive employment law issues, which are confidential in nature, further details can be provided on request but are not suitable for inclusion in this report.
- The debt recovery team have had some notable successes including: recovered debts of £13,246; obtained court orders for removal of travellers from two encampments; drafted a high hedge remedial notice; and the debt recovery team continues to recover significant sums in unpaid debts.

Democratic Services Team – Overview

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 15 October 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- North West Ambulance Service Update

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- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside – Sefton Place Update
- Health Provider Performance Dashboard
- Adult Social Care Performance Data Review
- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Work Programme Update

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 7 January 2025.

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 12 November 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Children’s Services Improvement Programme
- Quality Assurance Practice and Improvement
- Children, Schools and Families - SEND Data
- Work Programme Key Decision Forward Plan

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 28 January 2025.

- **Children’s Services and Safeguarding Parents/Carers Sub-Committee**

The last meeting of the Sub-Committee was held on 17 September 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Attendance of Parents/Carers - Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

The next meeting of the Sub-Committee will be held on 10 December 2024.

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

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 25 November 2024. At the time of writing this report the agenda has been published but the meeting has not taken place. The following items will be considered at the meeting.

- Selective and Additional Licensing Schemes - Anti-Social Actions of Littering and Dumping Rubbish in Rear Entries
- Recycling & Waste Containment
- Local Plan Policy – Provision of Community Recycling Facilities in Development Proposals
- 2023/2024 Flooding and Coastal Erosion Annual Report
- Southport Market Update
- Social Value Outcomes from the Growth and Strategic Investment Programme
- Sefton Economic Strategy Action Plan Update
- Work Programme 2024/25, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan
- Cabinet Member Report – June 2024 to September 2024

The Committee has agreed that following the submission of cleansing related reports over the next two meetings, consideration be given at the March 2025 meeting to arranging an informal meeting to look into cleansing services.

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

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The last ordinary meeting of the Committee was held on 22 October 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Financial Management 2024/25 to 2027/28 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2024/25 - October Update
- Work Programme 2024/25, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan
- Cabinet Member Report – June 2024 to September 2024

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 14 January 2025.

- **Overview and Scrutiny Management Board**

The Management Board does not have any formal decision-making powers. Accordingly, any recommendations suggested by the Management Board must be submitted to the appropriate decision-making body for consideration.

A meeting of the Management Board was held on 12 November 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Cabinet Member - Corporate Services Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)
- Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Scrutiny Link - Councillor Hart
- Executive/Scrutiny Protocol - Clarification
- Update on Informal Meetings and Working Groups
- Centre for Governance and Scrutiny - Newsletters
- Strategic Scrutiny in Practice Network

The next meeting of the Management Board will take place on 7 January 2025.

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

Since the last Cabinet Member update of the LCRO&S has met once on 23 October 2024. Details of matters considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Draft Local Transport Plan
- Active Travel - Progress Report
- Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (Levi)
- Social Value Update
- Digital Connectivity Vision & Roadmap
- Delivery Planning and Performance Reporting
- Work Programme 2024-25

On the 23 October 2024 a LCRO&S Knowledge Briefing was also held that provided a background and overview of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's Commercial Investment Funds.

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. The Chair of the LCRCOA&S cannot be a member of the majority group. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee for 2024/25 are Councillors Steve Radford and Pat Moloney respectively.

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Sefton's appointed Members are Councillors Desmond, Hart and Hinde. Councillor Hart is Sefton's Scrutiny Link. Councillor Hart and Councillor Desmond have been appointed to the Audit and Governance Committee. Councillors Desmond and Hart have been appointed as Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee respectively.

The next meeting of the LCRO&S will be held on 27 November 2024. At the time of writing this report the agenda for the meeting has not been published but details of this meeting will be provided as part of the next update report.

School Appeals

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

The school appeal 'high season' started on 08 May and ended 18 July 2024. In this period over 200 appeals were listed and heard. The number of appeals was lower than in recent years, with more applicants being offered schools from their initial preferences. However, a number of late appeals and a backlog of in-year transfers meant that 7 days of appeals have were listed in September. An additional 7 hearing days were listed during October – November, which included further late transfer and in-appeals. Four days of appeals have already been booked for December 2024. These appeals are mid-year transfers, or children returning to school after a period of being home educated.

An Independent Review Panel (exclusion appeal) has been listed for 19 November 2024.

Planning for the 2025 'high season' will start in December.

Civic and Mayoral Services

Tickets are now on sale for the Mayors Charity Burns Night on 25 January 2025 at Waterloo Rugby Club, and ticket prices are £25 which include a 2 course Burns supper.

On 25 – 28 October, we welcomed a delegation from our twinned city of Mons to Sefton. The purpose of the visit was to further develop the projects planned for 2026 & 2027. The group visited a rehearsal by Sefton Schools Music Service and visited Salt & Tar to look at the development there, along with the future of the Strand and the Mons Square redevelopment project.

Remembrance Sunday Events took place across the Borough on Sunday, 10 November. All services were very well attended and organised, despite the early rain before the services.

Electoral Services

The annual canvass of the register of electors is now in its final stages before publication of the update 2025 version on the 1 December 2024. Current canvass rules make evaluation difficult to assess compared to previous methods of conducting the canvass, however in the areas that can be measured, there has been a positive 3,5% increase in registrations compared to this time last year.

The review of EU Citizens registration status is also in its final stages and work is about to begin on the review of electors who are currently registered to vote by post. This along with the forthcoming review of polling districts and polling stations following the final recommendations of the Boundary Commission review of Sefton will be the main focus of the electoral services team in the first half of 2025 before preparations start for the all-out elections in May 2026.

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Initial work is also starting to look at the new Government manifesto commitments to introduce Votes at 16 and Automatic Voter Registration,

PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

Children's Services – Human Resources Operational Support Team

A business partner model continues to support Children's Services, including all maintained schools, with all people matters.

Unfortunately, we have been unable to secure an agency worker to give the team much needed capacity support, however we are now confident after speaking to a supplier that we will be able to do so in the new year. Once appointed to this post will provide day to day operational support to Children's Services freeing up the two permanent Senior Business Partners to focus more on concluding the remaining elements of the restructure and implementing the strategy agreed for improved collaborative working between Corporate Resources and Children's Services.

In addition to business-as-usual there are clear focus on the following priorities.

- Children's Social Care Whole Service review and restructure.
 - Implementation to the remaining Early Help, Youth Justice, MYSPACE and VAS along with Sefton Safeguarding Partnership and CWCN will be taken to JTU on 11th December with staff consultation and assimilation/recruitment following.
- Reducing Agency
 - Movement of Academy Graduate Teams into vacant posts.
 - New ASYE Academy Teams into Vacant Teams
 - 5.5 FTE Personal Advisor posts filled with agency to permanent conversations, onboarding is ongoing.
 - Appointment to Safeguarding Service Manager and Service Manager CWCN have been made and onboarding is well underway. Both appointments are from staff currently working for Sefton in different roles on an interim basis.
- The posts of Service Manager – Cared for and Cared Experience release of advert has been delayed, considerations are being given to how this post is best filled.
- 2 Schools converted to academies further School set to go in December 2024. 2 other schools remain on the watch list for academisation, although currently they are not progressing.

Pay & Grading, Job evaluation, projects and Occupational Health Unit.

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. Work is currently being undertaken in relation to the Childrens services Review.

Officers in this team review safeguarding checks held against posts e.g. Disclosure and Barring Service, Health Care Professional Council (HCPC) etc.

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

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 are responsible for the production of the Council's Annual Pay Policy and publication of the Gender Pay GAP reporting.

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. The Council and UNISON reached an agreement in March 24 to take forward an overarching settlement process. Individual settlement offers have been formulated in accordance with this agreement. Unisons officers are seeking instructions on the offers and terms from individual claimants. It is anticipated that it will be possible to conclude matters without the need for a full Employment Tribunal hearing.

The Senior HR business partner and the newly recruited HR business partner that make up the policy team responsible for undertaking reviews of policy, procedures and guidance and introduce new policies as required in line with current legislation have been transferred under the remit of the HR Operational Support Team.

Officers have recently been involved with supporting employing departments with amendments to pay calculations for Auto fitters within Operational in-house services and Term time only contracted Tutors within Community Learning.

A report has been taken to the Joint Trade Union Forum relative to the implications of the Holiday pay entitlement reforms which has been accepted. Work will now progress with Payroll in terms of implementation of the holiday pay reforms and employee communications explaining the revised processes.

The Occupational Health Unit manages the Councils OH provision for Council employees and schools. The unit has contracts with Premier Physical for Physio services, and Listening Ear for Counselling, and CBT services.

The former contract for the provision of OH Dr appointments, and pension assessments has been terminated and a procurement waiver is now in place with an alternative service provider – NATION Occupational Health Services. This provision has now been extended on a trial basis to provide direct Occupational Health Services at the Hawthorn Road Depot within Operational in house services division.

Service Development, Reporting, Establishment Control, Recruitment, and Transactional HR Services.

Development of iTrent to include PDR's and monthly 1:1/supervision meetings has been implemented and has gone partially live from 4th November 2024. This will be extended to include electronic form completion in 2025. Communication has been shared across the council with targeted messages to managers along with the production of written guidance, instruction videos and several lunchtime live help sessions presented to operational managers. The timing overlap of the build and test period with the PDR schedules this year has meant that the PDR forms for 2024 will be completed outside of the system but managers have been asked to upload completed forms and to report on their teams' objectives within the usual completion period.

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Development work to relaunch Managers Self Service (MSS) has been completed and has introduced new desktop reports and dashboards, these allow managers to view their team structure and give them immediately visible detail on temporary arrangement end dates and key visa and right to work end dates. Workflow reminders also prompt managers to be more proactive when managing future expected changes reducing the impact on chasing outstanding actions.

Workforce information and statutory returns continue to be delivered and maintained as BAU alongside FOI data requests. The review of existing Payroll Q&A reports continues ensure final accuracy. Financial workforce data reporting is ongoing to enhance data sharing between iTrent and collaborative planning.

Proposals to commence development using the MS power platform applications (power apps/power automate and Azure functions) have been submitted. Development will follow a structured framework to maintain the integrity and security of systems and data and staff will be required to have attained the relevant qualification status before being authorised to commence any build work. This development work plan will allow us to review processes across Employee support, Recruitment and HR, particularly a replacement ECF process which is currently being scoped. The introduction of new E-forms and automation will bring efficiencies across services.

Development and restructuring of the SharePoint systems used across Employee Support and HR will enable a more efficient and logical more streamlined central data repository of data, THR and Recruitment and Pension teams have already moved with Establishment Control, Payroll and the Development team scheduled in for early 2025.

There are letter backlogs on the recruitment and THR teams due to process and system changes, additional temporary resource has been taken on within the Recruitment team and THR to address the backlog and a plan is in place to ensure this is being brought up to date by the end of March 25. This plan will sit alongside BAU work which is being prioritised.

Knowledge transfer has been rolled out to the Recruitment Team on the Matrix system as they support the administration of the reminders to managers who have agency worker placements coming to an end.

Establishment Control continue to maintain ongoing requests for change but have taken on the administration of the Absence Feeder System for the council and school establishments. EC are also supporting CSC and operational HR with the ongoing restructure of the service, which will mean major changes in the iTrent structures and the Absence Feeder system.

Employee Support – Payroll and Pensions

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 continue to press Midland HR (MHR) for improvements to the reports provided and fortnightly meetings continue with MHR to address issues. These have now been escalated within MHR and further meetings are scheduled.

Teachers Pensions Monthly data collection (MDC) move to Monthly Contribution Reconciliation (MCR) has been postponed until further notice 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 and this work is ongoing.

There are backlogs sending pension leaver forms to Local Government Pension funds and these are being worked on and are reducing, each week.

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The 1st April 2024 pay awards for NJC staff and Chief Executive was agreed on 22nd October 2024 and was processed for November 2024 pay

The 1st April 2024 pay increase for Councillors has been agreed and will be processed in December 2024 pay

The 1st April 2024 pay increase for Coroners has not yet been agreed.

The 1st September 2024 pay award for Teachers is now agreed and will be processed in December 2024 pay.

The 1st September 2024 pay award for Soulbury and Youth workers is still to be agreed.

HMRC came to Sefton 17th September 2024 to discuss National Minimum Wage (NMW) and National Living Wage (NLW) compliance. HMRC have requested a follow up meeting on Friday 22nd November 2024 and HMRC is going to request a 6-year compliance check.

HMRC wrote to Sefton querying the apprentice levy payments from April 2020 to March 2024 and Sefton responded, saying we believe we have overpaid. HMRC have accepted the response from Sefton and Sefton is currently requesting refunds for each financial year from HMRC. Sefton has raised a call with MHR (the payroll software supplier) as the functionality is not working as it should and we continue to overpay for 2024/2025.

Sefton's date for Pension Cyclical Auto Enrolment (every 3 years) is 1st April 2025 so work has started now to implement as required.

12 schools transferred to academies on 1st September 2024 and 5 have requested Sefton continue to provide payroll and pension services. These 5 schools are part of Mersey View Learning Trust.

Health Unit

During the period 1st October to 30th November 2024, a total of 126 referrals for SMBC employees were made to the Health Unit (HU). This is an increase of 28.6% when compared to approximately the same period in the previous 12 months in which there were 98 referrals.

Referrals during this latest period included Education Excellence (42.1%), CSC (13.4%), ASC (11.9%), and Corporate Resources (9.5%). As usual the main reasons were stress and mental health related (47.6%), chronic medical illness (19.8%) and musculoskeletal (18.3%).

Delivery of all the OH services continue to be offered via a mixture of telephone and face-to-face appointments, with the arrangement working successfully, however following an increase in requests, more appointments are taking place face-to-face.

Due to difficulties with performance, the contract with Optima, the organisation providing OH Physician cover, has been mutually terminated. This was facilitated with the assistance of the council's Legal and Procurement teams. Provision of a new Occupational Health provider has been secured through assistance of the Procurement team.

The Health Unit's long-serving OH Nurse retired at the end of November. Following an unsuccessful first round the recruitment and selection process is being used again to secure a replacement. Fortunately, short-term cover has been arranged through the same organisation providing the OH Physician.

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Workforce Learning and Development (CLC)

Apprenticeships

We continue to procure new apprenticeship standards via the YPO portal to support succession planning. The latest standards procured includes the **Level 6** Youth Worker qualification.

We have 4 cohorts of staff enrolled on the **Level 6 Social Work Apprenticeship Degree** – all are progressing well with their studies, and we have recruited a further 5 apprentices (1 from Adult Social Care and 4 from Children’s Services) who will commence their studies in January 2025. 2 staff from Adult Social Care are due to qualify in January 2025.

Staff enrolled on **Level 6 Occupational Therapy Degree** are progressing well and 2 Senior Managers commenced their studies on the **Public Management and Leadership Level 7 Apprenticeship** at the University of Birmingham from 1st October 2024. The 2 year programme aims to support Senior Managers/Leaders to gain the practical knowledge and skills required to be an effective and dynamic leader across the public sector.

8 Managers are enrolled on the **Level 5 Operational/Departmental Manager Apprenticeship standard** and are making good progress. A 2nd second LCR cohort started in September 2024 and 2 managers from Sefton joined this programme.

We have 1 member of staff from the Public Health Team enrolled on the **Level 6 Environmental Health Practitioner Degree** in September 2023 and are continuing to make good progress. A further member of staff joined the September 2024 cohort and is making good progress.

Training and development activities

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 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 highlight compliance and to encourage staff to complete these courses.
- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** training delivery is going well. To date, we have trained 249 Sefton Council and school staff.
- **LCRCA Race Equality Training (Embrace)** – The LCR Race Equality Hub will shortly commence a procurement exercise for phase 2 of the Embrace Race Equality Training Programme. This will include the following activity:
 - Further Race Equality face to face training sessions for managers and non-managers.
 - Learning Library, Refreshers, Workbooks, Bite Size e-learning opportunities.
 - Reciprocal mentoring programme for leaders.

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- Race equality / Anti racist conferences across the Liverpool City Region.

The programme is expected to go live from 1st April 2025.

- **Oliver McGowan (OMMG) Training** – We are continuing to roll out OMMG Tier 1 eLearning to ALL staff across Adult and Children’s Services. A total of 343 staff have completed to date. The next phase of the training will be to deliver Tier 1 (3 hour training) and Tier 2 (1 day training) to back office and front line staff. Delivery will commence for Tier 1 and Tier 2 training from February 2025.
- **Succession Planning** – we are developing a succession planning process to support departments to find people with the right skills to fill key positions. This will include evaluating individual skills and identifying potential successors within and outside the organisation.
- **Adult Social Care** - Staff in the team continue to support Adult Social Care to prepare for CQC inspection. We continue to be fully engaged in the Strategic Workforce and Adult Social Care Improvement Board meetings to ensure workforce activity regarding learning and development needs, recruitment and retention data is captured. We also attend the Quality, Safety and Practice Assurance group with senior managers to respond to any identified learning needs.
- **Children’s services** - We have agreed quarterly meetings with the Principal Social Worker to review and identify training opportunities linked to the transformation programme. This will allow us to refresh the CPD and training priorities going forward which includes working with staff to access Me Learning, the Council’s training booking system.
We recently supported Practice Month by collaborating with colleagues in Children’s services and ensured that session attendance and evaluations have been captured.
- **NQSW/ASYE** - We continue to support our NQSWs (Newly Qualified Social Workers) to complete their ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) and continued progression of our social workers through a panel process.
- **Social Work Teaching Partnership** - We continue to actively participate in several workstreams within the Cheshire and Merseyside Social Work Teaching Partnership as primary members. This brings us many benefits including the opportunity to train up to 20 new Practice Educators and also management training for early career managers.

Strategic Support

Performance & Business Intelligence

The Business Intelligence team continues to support many work streams across the Council including Economic Regeneration, Education Excellence, SEND, Adult Social Care, Children’s Social Care and Public Health Services. The team continue to work closely with Children’s Social Care and Adults Social Care services to develop their performance reporting, using the new Data Warehouse and Power BI, including adding ‘drill-through’ functionality into new Power BI reports to access client level information. This new technology is being adopted to support the development of the new council wide Corporate Performance framework (aligned to the new Corporate Plan) and following extensive consultation and co-production with the council’s Strategic Leadership Board, the first iteration of the new performance report showing performance for Q1 & Q2 2024 is scheduled to be presented to Cabinet in January 2025. The team is continuing to support the detailed analysis financial data for ASC, Children’s Social Care and SEND, aligning client numbers and financial spend to aid financial forecasting and change linked to the new transformation programme. They are also continuing to support schools to interpret their data booklets which help the LA, school improvement groups and schools understand the statistics comparative performance in education attainment across the borough, regionally and nationally.

The team have been supporting the Southport Recovery Programme, gathering, analysing and presenting data in the ‘Southport Profile’ which shows baseline data that typically explains the

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demography and economic context for Southport, and is now gathering quantitative & qualitative data/insight that demonstrates the impact that recent events. A key part of this work will be qualitative social research and analysis to gather insights collected through interviews, focus groups, surveys, and observations. It is intended that the profile will inform the Council's community impact assessment and recovery planning.

Work continues with the Chief Executive and senior managers across the Council as part of the transformation programme to review our capacity and capability to deliver better quality information and analysis. The project group are exploring the gaps across specific services and the opportunities to align existing data analysis and performance resources with the corporate team to improve performance management, to develop skills, create opportunities for growth, and to retain staff.

Key areas of focus for December are supporting the ASC CQC inspection scheduled for December/January and supporting detailed analysis of the demand and cost of Children's residential social care, using regression analysis to inform forecasting and predictive modelling.

Consultation & Engagement.

The Service continues to support consultation and engagement activities across the Council and is providing support to teams on accessible information and co-production. The findings of the extensive consultation and engagement on the refresh of the Children & Young People's Plan were presented to the Children & Young People Partnership Board in August to inform the next version of the Sefton Children and Young People Plan and shared with the Public Engagement and Consultation Panel in November and the Sefton Health and Wellbeing Board in December. The team continues to service the Public Engagement and Consultation Panel and support the Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnership Engagement, in their role as Chair and are currently in the process of writing the Panel's Annual Report. In October, the team held another Accessible Information awareness training for elected members. The team are also supporting Adult Social Care prepare some of the CQC inspection materials into accessible formats and have set up a feedback form for service users, carers, and professionals to complete, following their contact with the service.

Information Governance, Complaints and Subject Access.

The Service continues to provide comprehensive support, information, advice, and guidance across the Council on all matters relating to information governance, data sharing and data protection and managing data security breaches. The team continues to co-ordinate and provide timely advice and guidance relating to the responses to information requests covered by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. The team also continues to respond to request from individuals who wish to access and receive a copy of their personal data as held by Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care; and other supplementary information that the Council holds, diligently and sensitively along with disclosure requests from the Police, NHS partners, solicitors and other Local Authorities.

The challenge of increasing demand and complexity of ASC, CSC and SEND complaints continues to pose a risk to complaints not being responded to within agreed and published standards, which in turn poses a reputational risk to the Council. The Chief Executive and Executive Directors for ASC and Children's Services have considered the arrangements for administering complaints in these areas specifically, with a view to improving performance, improving the number of complaints resolved first time, increases satisfaction amongst complainants, and improving staff engagement with the complaints process. Capacity to demand with the volume and complexity of ASC, CSC and SEND complaints is a current concern, which

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poses a risk to achieving statutory compliance and possible reputational damage from customer dissatisfaction with the timeliness of responses.

The project to digitise the Council's historic paper records continues at pace and is nearing an end. All legacy records stored at disparate third-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 Beford Road Community Centre. Colleagues in this team have also provided support to the Access to Files Officers. Once their contracts end in December of this year, capacity within Access to Files team may be challenged, resulting in delays with meeting statutory deadlines.

Strategic Support

The team continues to provide support across the various services with policy & strategy development, service reviews and transformation activity universally across the council, which demand and prioritisation being business led. Previously officers in the team have been aligned to provide project support to each of the four key transformation projects identified under the theme of 'Better outcomes, sustainable services' including 1) CSC, 2) Better at Home, 3) Housing and 4) Operational In-House Services. The OIHS project, looking specifically at waste collection and resource optimisation has been renamed to 'Cleaner Sefton.' The SEND and H2S transport projects have been collapsed into the Children's Services Transformation Programme, with H2S transport now renamed to Transport Support. Children's Services has received additional resources and is in the process of recruiting additional capacity to support the delivery of its transformation intentions.

However, the strategic support team have now been directed to specifically supporting the ASC CQC Inspection, and Children's Services inspection readiness and improvement activity for the 12-week period (3 months) from the 2nd December 2024 to 2nd March 2025, which is likely to continue to the end of the current financial year on the 31st March 2024. Focussing the full capacity in the team to support these two services should help to drive improvement and change at pace in the short-term, but it is expected that in the new financial year the focus will be re-balanced to support the council wider transformation intentions universally across the Council.

Communications

The Communications Service continues to support the leader of the Council, elected members, executive leaders, senior leaders, managers and officers across the Council on all communication matters. The service is making positive progress at pace to develop the Council's internal communication strategy and approach, making significant improvements in addressing cultural differences and barriers to internal communications, developing a culture of sharing information, choosing technology tools strategically to allow distribution of comms across multiple channels to reach all employees quickly and easily and acting on regular feedback. The Service also continues to maximise the impact of social media and new technologies in sharing key messages and engaging with our communities.

The Service continues to provide ongoing communications support relative to aiding the recovery from the unfortunate incidents in Southport in July 2024, including responding quickly to combat the spread of inaccurate or misleading information and 'fake news' intended to cause harm or to stir up racism and hatred against a person or group.

The team is also supporting the communication of the new corporate plan, the transformation plan, and the new service planning guidance and templates. The team is also supporting the preparation of key documents for the Care Quality Commission assessment of ASC, and will continue that support throughout the inspection process.

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Moving forward the Service will play an increasingly key role acting as a trusted advisor, navigator and leader in helping to transform our relationship with our residents and communities in Sefton and strengthening our relationships with citizens, stakeholders and staff. To do so we will continue to ensure that our Communications Service has regular access to the leader, chief executive and key decision making forums, whilst developing our corporate communications strategy and annual campaign plan, with an initial focus on developing/improving internal communications. On the back of the Staff Survey 2024 the Service will also play a pivotal role in introducing a new staff recognition scheme for the Council that is fair, fiscally effective and helps employees to understand the value of every role in the Council.

Procurement

The Service continue working updating the Councils' Procurement Strategy and Contract Procedure Rules (CPR) incorporating the new Procurement Act 2023 legislation changes, the Transforming Public Procurement (TPP) programme, and changes to the threshold and applicability of procurement waivers. The Act is now expected to come into force in 24 February 2025, and all procurements started after that date will have to comply with the new rules. The team is continuing to work with law firm DLA Piper (who are supporting the roll-out of the Act) so that the key officers across Council understand these new rules and the various steps required to run a successful and fully compliant procurement.

With the rules governing public procurement changing, this is likely to place increased demand on the procurement team to ensure readiness for implementing the new regime, to familiarise themselves and advice others with the new regime, understand potential impact on procurements scheduled to commence under the new Act, and address these eventualities. Officers in the corporate team continue to assist in providing guidance on the new Act and promoting best procurement practice within the Council.

The Service continues to develop Council's Contract Register and consider the most appropriate option for the Council to manage its contracts and contract pipeline effectively and transparently to the standard required for PA23 compliance and beyond. The Contracts Pipeline will inform potential suppliers of any upcoming contracts and allow members of the public to see what we plan to spend money on. This will extend to a review and update the Tenders and Contract pages of the Council website in-line with the rollout of the Council's new Contract Procedure rules and are PA23 requirements to make it easier for organizations to 'do business with the Council.' Notwithstanding the additional burdens associated with the implementation of PA23, the Service is continuing to monitor the waivers being raised and intervene where necessary to reduce the number of waivers wherever possible. Furthermore, the Service remains focused on maximising savings opportunities through its early payments programme, and promoting Social Value in procurement.

Finally, the organisational structure of the Procurement Service has been reviewed to ensure it has the necessary capability to support the changes associated with the implementation of PA23, and proposed changes to roles have been shared with the HR Service for consideration.