

Public Document Pack

Sefton Council 

MEETING: CABINET
DATE: Thursday 6 February 2025
TIME: 10.00 a.m.
VENUE: Assembly Hall, Town Hall, Bootle

Member

Cllr. Marion Atkinson (Chair)
Cllr. Liz Dowd
Cllr. Mhairi Doyle, M.B.E.
Cllr. Peter Harvey
Cllr. Christine Howard
Cllr. Paulette Lappin
Cllr. Ian Moncur
Cllr. Diane Roscoe
Cllr. Daren Veidman

COMMITTEE OFFICER: Debbie Campbell, Democratic Services Manager
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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.

We endeavour to provide a reasonable number of full agendas, including reports at the meeting. If you wish to ensure that you have a copy to refer to at the meeting, please can you print off your own copy of the agenda pack prior to the meeting.

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Declarations of Interest

Members are requested at a meeting where a disclosable pecuniary interest or personal interest arises, which is not already included in their Register of Members' Interests, to declare any interests that relate to an item on the agenda.

Where a Member discloses a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, he/she must withdraw from the meeting room, including from the public gallery, during the whole consideration of any item of business in which he/she has an interest, except where he/she is permitted to remain as a result of a grant of a dispensation.

Where a Member discloses a personal interest he/she must seek advice from the Monitoring Officer or staff member representing the Monitoring Officer to determine whether the Member should withdraw from the meeting room, including from the public gallery, during the whole consideration of any item of business in which he/she has an interest or whether the Member can remain in the meeting or remain in the meeting and vote on the relevant decision.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

(Pages 5 - 16)

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2025

4. Appointment of Representatives to Serve on the Ashton Memorial Fund and the Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust - Council of Governors

(Pages 17 - 20)

Report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer

5. Digital Strategy

(Pages 21 - 68)

Report of the Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial

6. Counter Fraud Strategy

(Pages 69 - 82)

Report of the Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial

7. Financial Management 2024/25 to 2027/28 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2024/25 – February Update

(Pages 83 - 120)

Report of the Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial

THE "CALL IN" PERIOD FOR THIS SET OF MINUTES ENDS AT 12 NOON ON WEDNESDAY, 22ND JANUARY 2025. MINUTES NOD. 91 (2) AND (3), AND 92 (2) AND (3) ARE NOT SUBJECT TO "CALL-IN".

CABINET

MEETING HELD AT THE BIRKDALE ROOM, TOWN HALL, SOUTHPORT ON THURSDAY 9TH JANUARY, 2025

PRESENT: Councillor Atkinson (in the Chair)
Councillors Dowd, Doyle, Harvey, Howard, Lappin,
Moncur and Roscoe

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Sir Ron Watson CBE

83. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence due to other Council business was received from Councillor Veidman.

84. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

85. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Decision Made:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

86. GROSS PAYMENTS

The Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director - Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing (Place Director) seeking approval to implement gross payments for Adult Social Care residential and nursing care homes.

Decisions Made:

That

- (1) the implementation of gross payments for Sefton and out-of-borough care homes be approved;
- (2) decisions on the implementation programme plan for gross payments and any future changes to how gross payments are made to care homes, be delegated to the Executive Director - Adult Social

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Care, Health and Wellbeing (Place Director), in consultation with the Cabinet Member - Adult Social Care and Health;

- (3) decisions on any amendments on how gross payments are made, for example the inclusion of any third-party top-up payments, be delegated to the Executive Director - Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing (Place Director), in consultation with the Cabinet Member - Adult Social Care and Health and the Executive Director - Corporate Services and Commercial; and
- (4) the fact that reports on the implementation of gross payments and associated debt impacts and debt recovery work will be submitted to the Cabinet and other Council governance groups as part of wider debt management reporting, be noted.

Reasons for the Decisions:

The rationale for the recommendations within the report had been formulated based on the positive outcomes of the pilot project, and to ensure that Sefton continued to support the Sefton care home market.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

To continue with current payment arrangements – this option had been considered and rejected due to:

- The positive outcomes of the pilot.
- The need to ensure that payment arrangements were compliant with best practice Care Act guidance and reduced the chances of legal challenge/complaint.
- The recommendations enabled the Council to intervene at an earlier stage if client contributions were unpaid, thus reducing the risk of financial abuse.
- The recommendations removed financial matters from the relationship between residents and care homes.
- Improved market oversight of Provider fee levels.
- Reduced the administration burden on care home providers.
- The benefits of paying gross for self-funders who owned property and were taking up a deferred payment agreement with the Council, whereby their placement was commissioned by the Council under contracted rates, ensuring property equity lasted longer.

87. SOUTHPORT RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

The Cabinet considered the report of the Chief Executive that provided a detailed overview of the response to the tragic events of 29 July and the public disorder of 30 July. The report provided:

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- The breadth of the response, including the significant contribution of a range of partners,
 - The key principles of how the response was delivered, was continuing, and would continue to be delivered,
 - The medium, and long-term ambition for recovery including how additional government funding would be used to support this.

The current estimated costs, including how government funding would support the response.

The following Appendix was attached to the report:

- Appendix A - Recovery Structure

The Leader reported that since the tragic events in Southport in July 2024, the Council's focus had been, and would continue to be, the families of Alice da Silver Aguiar, Bebe King and Elise Dot Stancombe. The Council had been engaging with the families to ensure they were at the centre of the recovery plan, as it was vital that the Council represented the voices of those impacted on events. Following the immediate response, the Council was now focusing on plans for longer term support. The £5.6m in combined aid from Central and Local Government would enable continued work with partner agencies to deliver for families and communities. The funding would allow the prioritisation of psychological support for families and those affected; support for schools and education provisions; community cohesion initiatives; and economic support for Southport, including businesses affected. A small, fixed-term Recovery Team had been established to provide a point of contact and co-ordinate the recovery plan and excellent partnership working had taken place over the previous 6 months. The InvestSefton Team had focused on Southport businesses and Alder Hey and MerseyCare NHS Trusts had established a dedicated psychological team, along with support from the Primary Care Network and Southport GPs, whilst volunteers had contributed support for the community. The funding supporting the recovery plan was a huge step in planning for a stronger future, and the future for the town and the wider Borough remained an exciting one with growth and investment that included the Marine Lake Events Centre and the adjacent water and light show. The Southport Town Deal would also help to make the town centre more attractive to residents and visitors. Looking forward, 2025 would see the opening of the Enterprise Arcade and the events programme for 2025 and 2026 would be strengthened, to include the Open Golf Championship in 2026. The Leader concluded that the horrific events of July 2024 would never be forgotten, but the way in which the community had pulled together along with the response from the Council and partners was inspiring.

The Leader also commended officers for the work undertaken on the response and recovery, as reflected within the report now submitted, particularly due to the sensitive nature of the matter.

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Decisions Made:

That

- (1) the contents of the report be noted and the breadth of the community, partnership and Council response be acknowledged;
- (2) the financial plan that underpins both response and recovery, including the use of central government funding, be approved; and
- (3) the longer-term ambition for recovery be approved.

Reasons for the Decisions:

The report examined how Sefton Council, partners, and the community were leading on and would continue to lead on a specialist ongoing recovery operation which focused on helping children and families heal, creating safer and more united communities and assisting businesses to recover economically.

The report, and the funding that supported it, represented a significant step in addressing the emotional, social, and economic impacts of the tragedies, while also planning for a stronger future for Southport.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

There were no alternative options.

88. APPROVAL OF DRAFT LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY

The Cabinet considered the report of the Assistant Director - Economic Growth and Housing indicating that the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Local Nature Recovery Strategy was being prepared by the LCR Combined Authority as the 'responsible body' in line with government deadlines, with public consultation on the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) due to take place from February 2025 and the final Local Nature Recovery Strategy to be approved in mid-2025. Sefton Council as a 'supporting authority' was required to approve both the draft and final Local Nature Recovery Strategy prior to their approval by the Combined Authority. The report sought Council approval of the draft LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy prior to its consideration by the LCR Combined Authority. The LNRS was a cross-cutting theme across several Cabinet Member portfolios and Services.

The following appendices were attached to the report:

- Draft Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Strategy and representational PDF map of Sefton only

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Decisions Made:

That

- (1) the draft Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy be approved for consultation by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, as the responsible body;
- (2) authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member - Housing and Highways, in consultation with the Assistant Director - Economic Growth and Housing or the Chief Planning Officer, to agree any subsequent changes to the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy arising through the supporting authority and Combined Authority approval process; and
- (3) authority be delegated to the Chief Planning Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member - Housing and Highways, to make minor editorial and presentational changes to the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy arising through the supporting authority and Combined Authority approval process.

Reasons for the Decisions:

It was concluded that the Council should approve the draft LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy prior to its consideration by the LCR Combined Authority, in line with the recommendations set out within the report.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None. The LCR Combined Authority had advised that Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) supporting authorities, such as Sefton Council, must agree the draft LNRS prior to its approval by the Combined Authority.

89. GAS SUPPLY CONTRACT RENEWAL

The Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director – Regeneration, Economy and Assets seeking approval for the award of the gas supply contract through the North-East Purchasing Organisation (NEPO) Gas Framework for a three year plus one year contract, in order to secure value for money and excellent customer service.

The following appendix was attached to the report:

Appendix 1 – Evaluation questions and weightings.

Decisions Made:

That

- (1) the Council remain on the North-East Purchasing Organisation (NEPO) framework contract for the supply of gas to cover the

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period 1 April 2026 – 31 March 2029, with a possible 1-year extension to 31 March 2030;

- (2) the Executive Director - Regeneration, Economy and Assets be granted delegated authority to award any extension in consultation with the Cabinet Member - Regeneration, Economy and Skills; and
- (3) authority be delegated to Executive Director - Regeneration, Economy and Assets to approve purchasing decisions and approve any contractual requirements within the contract term, including the signing of all contract documents.

Reasons for the Decisions:

It was recommended that the Cabinet approve the award of the gas supply contract through the NEPO Gas Framework for a three year plus one year contract, in order to secure value for money and excellent customer service. Also, that the recommended delegations of authority be authorised to enable timely contract management.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Option 1

Do nothing – In order to comply with UK Procurement Legislation, and due to the 12- 18-month lead in times, it was necessary to either re-procure the above contract directly to market by Sefton Council via the Public Contract Regulations route, or to receive a supply contract available from a Public Contract Regulations compliant Energy Procurement Framework with a Central Purchasing Body (CPB). Therefore, this option was rejected.

Option 2

Delay the decision - The lead time for making a change to the current gas supply arrangements was significant, so any delay in decision making would shorten the window for purchasing gas in advance. This would reduce the Council's options and increase the risk associated with market conditions during that time. Therefore, this option was rejected.

Option 3

Adopt a different procurement strategy – for example purchasing all gas supplies at a fixed price. Whilst the Council had used this strategy in the past and made savings from it, it did internalise the risk associated with achieving the best prices, increased staff workload and given current volatility in the wholesale gas market increases the risks associated with achieving a competitive price. Therefore, this option was rejected.

90. SEFTON HOSPITALITY OPERATIONS LIMITED - BUSINESS PLAN

The Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director – Regeneration, Economy and Assets providing an update on the

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performance of Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited, with an updated strategy and business plan. The update included an overview on economic and market conditions, as these continued sectoral challenges provided the context for the status and future of the business and its venues. Also included were updates on operational activities, alongside recent and forecast financial performance.

Cabinet Members commended officers for the work undertaken.

Decisions Made:

That

- (1) the outturn for the Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited company for the financial year 2023-24, the forecast for the financial year 2024-25, and the factors influencing those outturns, be noted;
- (2) the continued challenges affecting the economy and the hospitality sector, and future outlook for both, and how they have affected and will continue to affect the company, be noted; and
- (3) the updated strategy and business plan for the company be approved.

Reasons for the Decisions:

The role of Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited (SHOL) remained focused on the delivery of an experience for customers that aligned with the vision and objectives of the Borough and the Council. In addition to the revitalisation of, and the maximisation of opportunity from, underused assets in Sefton, SHOL and its strategy continued to enable support for local people with access to higher-quality career opportunities in the hospitality sector. As previously, this model also delivered best value to the Council (via the removal of the subsidy formerly required to the previous hospitality offer at CLAC). The Council as shareholder remained committed to the long-term future of the company and its operations. With regards to governance and board composition, the Cabinet had delegated powers set out in Chapter 5, Paragraph 40 of the Constitution to appoint the Council's representatives to serve on Outside Bodies.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

No other options were considered by the Council. The company, as part of its strategy and business planning process, had considered options for the business and its current and potential future venues, although some aspects of that review process would be commercially sensitive and confidential.

91. PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS – 2025/26 MUNICIPAL YEAR

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The Cabinet considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer seeking approval of a Programme of Meetings for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

The following Appendices were attached to the report:

- Annex A - Programme of Meetings for the Cabinet in 2025/26
- Annex B - Programme of Meetings for the Council, Members' Briefing Sessions and Regulatory Committees in 2025/26
- Annex C - Programme of Meetings for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in 2025/26
- Annex D - Programme of Meetings for the Public Engagement and Consultation Panel, Sefton Safer Communities Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board in 2025/26
- Calendar of meetings 2025/26

Decisions Made:

That

- (1) the Programme of Meetings for the Cabinet, Public Engagement and Consultation Panel, Safer Sefton Together and the Health and Wellbeing Board for 2025/26, as set out in Annexes A and D of the report, be approved;
- (2) **the Council be recommended to approve** the Programme of Meetings for the Council, Member Briefing Sessions; Regulatory Committees; and Overview and Scrutiny Committees for 2025/26, as set out in Annexes B and C of the report; and
- (3) **the Council be recommended to note** the Programme of Meetings for the Cabinet, Public Engagement and Consultation Panel, Safer Sefton Together and the Health and Wellbeing Board for 2025/26 as set out in Annexes A and D of the report.

Reasons for the Decisions:

To enable the business of the Council and its various Committees/bodies to be conducted during the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None. The Council was required to produce a programme of meetings.

92. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME AND COUNCIL TAX BASE 2025/26

The Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial that provided details of the review of the local

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Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the current year 2024/25 and proposing that there be no change made to the scheme for 2025/26. The report also provided an updated Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish area for 2025/26.

The following Annexes were attached to the report:

- Annex A: Council Tax Base Report 2025/26
- Annex B: Equality Impact Assessment: Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Decisions Made:

That

- (1) the outcome of the review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the current year 2024/25, be noted;

Council

- (2) the Council be recommended to approve the current scheme for 2025/26; and
- (3) the Council be recommended to 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.

Reasons for the Decisions:

As a result of the review undertaken, it was proposed that the Council's local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2025/26 should remain unchanged to help maintain consistency and stability for those using it. The Scheme continued 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 of the report had increased compared to 2024/25 which would assist in closing the budget gap faced by the Council in 2025/26.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None, as following the review, the scheme continued 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.

93. Q1 & Q2 (2024) CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

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Further to Minute No. 26 of 25 July 2024, the Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial indicating that, on 25 July 2024 the Cabinet agreed the Sefton Corporate Plan (2024 to 2027), with revised corporate objectives to deliver the Council's agreed strategic priorities. The Cabinet had also agreed an updated Service Planning and Performance Management framework, aligned to the refresh of the Sefton Corporate Plan (2024 to 2027), for embedding the service level improvements in performance management, and to inform regular, collective, and cross-cutting performance discussions by the Cabinet. The report presented the first Corporate Performance Report at Annex A for Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 of 2024/25 that would be presented to the Cabinet quarterly and which demonstrated performance against the commitments agreed in the Sefton Corporate Plan (2024 to 2027).

The following annex was attached to the report:

- Annex A - the refreshed Corporate Performance Report, including data for operating/fiscal quarters Q1 and Q2 2024.

Reference was made to page 231 of Annex A of the report and the fact that the NEET figure required amendment to read as 6.7% for the Q2 average including July, August, and September performance.

Decision Made:

That the corporate performance report for Quarter 1 and Q 2 of 2024/25, against the Sefton Corporate Plan (2024 to 2027), be received.

Reasons for the Decision:

The refreshed Sefton Corporate Plan 2024 to 2027 stated the specific corporate objectives to deliver the Council's key strategic priorities over the next period and would be used as an opportunity to ensure that underpinning strategies and plans across the organisation also reflected the key priorities of the Council over the next period. It would help to keep the Council priorities front and centre, corporately, with partners, and collectively owned.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None

94. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT 2024/25 TO 2027/28 - REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET UPDATE 2024/25 – JANUARY UPDATE

The Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial informing the Cabinet of:

- 1) The current position relating to the 2024/25 revenue budget.

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- 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.

The following appendix was attached to the report:

- Appendix A – Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2026/27

Decisions Made:

That

Revenue Outturn

- (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 remedial action plan measures previously approved by the Cabinet on 7 November 2024, as outlined in section 3 of the report, be noted;
- (4) 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 be noted;
- (5) the financial risks associated with the delivery of the 2024/25 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;

Capital Programme

- (6) the spending profiles across financial years for the approved capital programme, as set out at paragraph 8.1 of the report, be noted;
- (7) the latest capital expenditure position as at 30 November 2024 of £31.470m, as set out at paragraph 7.3 of the report, and the latest

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full year forecast is £77.937m, as set out at paragraph 7.4 of the report, be noted;

- (8) a supplementary capital estimate of £0.651m and a supplementary revenue estimate of £0.005m for the Local Authority Housing Fund Round 3 funded by grant from MHCLG, as set out at paragraph 7.09 of the report, be approved;
- (9) a supplementary capital estimate of £0.449m for the Network North Roads Resurfacing Fund funded by a grant from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, as set out at paragraph 7.10 of the report, be approved; and
- (10) 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, as set out at paragraphs 7.11-7.13 of the report.

Reasons for the Decisions:

To ensure the Cabinet was 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 were 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 could be applied to capital schemes in the delivery of the Council's overall capital strategy.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.

Report Title: Appointment of Representatives to Serve on the Ashton Memorial Fund and the Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust - Council of Governors

Date of meeting:	6 February 2025
Report to:	Cabinet
Report of:	Chief Legal and Democratic Officer
Portfolio:	Cabinet Member – Communities and Partnership Engagement
Wards affected:	All
Included in Forward Plan:	No
Is this a key decision:	No
Exempt/confidential report:	No

Summary:

To consider the appointment of two additional representatives to serve on the Ashton Memorial Fund; and a change in representation on the Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust - Council of Governors.

Recommendation: That

- (1) Councillor Chris Page and Reverend Dr Matt Davis be appointed as representatives to serve on the Ashton Memorial Fund until 31 May 2027; and
- (2) Councillor Julia Garner replace Councillor Laura Lunn-Bates as the Council’s representative on the Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust - Council of Governors until 1 September 2026.

1. The Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendations

- 1.1 The Cabinet has delegated powers, as set out in Chapter 5, Paragraph 40, of the Council’s Constitution to appoint the Council’s representatives to serve on outside bodies.
- 1.2 At its meeting held on 23 May 2024, the Cabinet considered the annual report to appoint Members to serve on outside bodies.

1.3 Ashton Memorial Fund

As part of the process referred to in 1.2 above, the Cabinet appointed Councillor Killen to serve on the Ashton Memorial Fund until 31 May 2027.

- 1.4 The Charity Commission website indicates that the charitable objects of the Ashton

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Ashton Memorial Fund are for the general benefit of the poor; and that the area the charity can operate in, as set out in its governing document, is Formby St. Luke.

- 1.5 The Council's electronic records show that from 2008/09 to 2010/11, Cabinet appointed three representatives to the charity, one of whom was an elected member.
- 1.6 From the 2011/12 municipal year to date however, Cabinet has only appointed one representative and as mentioned above, the latest appointment is Councillor Killen until 31 May 2027.
- 1.7 A request has now been received from the charity requesting the Council to consider the appointment of two additional representatives to serve on the Ashton Memorial Fund; and that one such representative be Reverend Dr Matt Davis. Contact has been made with Councillor Jan Grace, Labour Group whip and Councillor Chris Page has been nominated.
- 1.8 The purpose of this report is to comply with the request of the charity and to seek the consideration of the appointment of two additional representatives.

1.9 **The Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust - Council of Governors**

As part of the process referred to in 1.2 above, the Cabinet appointed Councillor Lunn-Bates to serve as the Council's representative on the Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust - Council of Governors until 1 September 2026.

- 1.10 A request has now been received from Councillor Jan Grace, Labour Group whip, that Councillor Julia Garner be appointed to replace Councillor Lunn-Bates as the Council's representative on the Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust - Council of Governors.
- 1.11 The purpose of this report is to determine the request of the Labour group whip.

2. **Financial Implications**

None arising directly from this report. Appointments to the Ashton Memorial Fund and the Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust - Council of Governors do not attract any special responsibility allowance. Travel expenses incurred in attending meetings where they are held outside Sefton, may be reimbursed, but this is considered highly unlikely bearing in mind the area within in which the Ashton Memorial Fund charity operates. Any travel expenses incurred in attending Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust - Council of Governors meetings can be contained within existing budgets.

3. **Legal Implications**

The Cabinet has delegated powers, as set out in Chapter 5, Paragraph 40, of the Council's Constitution to appoint the Council's representatives to serve on outside bodies.

4. **Corporate Risk Implications**

None directly. Not approving the recommendation could result in the Council not being represented on the Ashton Memorial Fund and the Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust - Council of Governors.

5 **Staffing HR Implications**

None

6 **Conclusion**

The Cabinet has delegated powers set out in Chapter 5, Paragraph 40 of the Constitution to appoint the Council’s representatives to serve on outside bodies. The Cabinet is requested to comply with the request of the Ashton Memorial Fund and to consider the appointment of two additional representatives to serve on the charity; and the request of the Labour Group whip regarding the change in representation on the Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust - Council of Governors.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

<p>Equality Implications:</p> <p>There are no equality implications.</p>
<p>Impact on Children and Young People:</p> <p>The Ashton memorial Fund and Walton Centre NHS Foundation Trust - Council of Governors could consider matters that affect children and young people.</p>
<p>Climate Emergency Implications:</p> <p>The recommendations within this report will have a Neutral impact.</p> <p>There are no direct climate emergency implications arising from this report.</p>

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD7890/24) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD5990/24) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

Labour Group whip

(B) External Consultations

Ashton Memorial Fund

Implementation Date for the Decision:

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

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

Appendices:

There are no appendices to this report

Background Papers Agenda Item 4

There are no background papers available for inspection.

Report Title: Digital Strategy

Date of meeting:	6 February 2025		
Report to:	Cabinet		
Report of:	Executive Director of Corporate and Commercial Services		
Portfolio:	Corporate Services		
Wards affected:	All		
Is this a key decision:	Yes	Included in Forward Plan:	Yes
Exempt/confidential report:	No		

Summary:

This report seeks to present to Cabinet a revised Digital Strategy for Sefton Council. It sets out how it has been developed and seeks approval for its publication.

Recommendation(s):

That Cabinet approve the publication of the revised Digital Strategy.

1. The Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendations

- 1.1 Sefton published its first Digital Strategy in 2021. Since its launch the Council has achieved a great deal, with the deployment of Cloud Services, a new Customer Experience Platform, and a redesigned website, as well as supporting back-end automation of routine repetitive tasks by deploying RPA (Robotics). The achievements are outlined in full within pages three to five of the enclosed Digital Strategy document (Appendix A).
- 1.2 The pace of change in relation to digital continues to be significant with many experts indicating that the world has been going through its fourth industrial revolution, a term often used to describe the rapid technological advancements we have seen in fields such as artificial intelligence, robotics and the Internet of Things. These changes have not only changed customer expectations but have also provided opportunities for Sefton to transform the way that services are delivered and in turn how residents are supported.
- 1.3 The revised Digital Strategy for Sefton over the next three years is intended to be an overarching plan which articulates the council’s ambitions and is based on key priorities identified within the Corporate Plan.

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1.4 This high-level strategic document is split into five themes

- Developing Sefton as a Digital Place
- Create Strong Digital Foundations
- Supporting an enhanced Customer Journey
- To develop our Data and Intelligence
- Support the Workforce of the Future

1.5 These themes each have priorities within them which seek to

- Ensure that residents and businesses are enabled to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by digital technologies.
- Ensure Sefton has the core infrastructure and associated services in place to maximise the opportunities afforded by digital, including capitalising on existing investments to ensure value for money.
- Make sure that all residents can access services via a method most convenient for their needs.
- Empower our staff to transform data into intelligence by equipping them with the digital tools, skills, and training that they need to make better use of the information and data we collect to inform the delivery of core services and the ambitions within our Corporate Strategy.
- Support staff to achieve their full potential and deliver great outcomes for the residents of the Sefton.

2. Process of Development

2.1 Engagement activity has been undertaken with Executive Directors to ensure alignment of the key priorities within the strategy to core business deliverables and the priorities within the Corporate Plan, Further consultation on the key themes and priorities for delivery has also taken place with officers via our network of ICT Champions.

2.2 To ensure alignment to regional and national strategies work has been undertaken to make sure that the ambitions within Sefton's Digital Strategy align to the regional strategy and projects underway across the Liverpool City Region, including work being undertaken by Integrated Care Board. Links have also been made to national strategies and guidance where these exist for example: NCSC (National Cyber Security Centre) Cyber Guidance, the NHS Digital Strategy and national guidance and strategies from the Local Government Association and the Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation (SOCITM). The document is deliberately a three-year strategy due to the rapid pace of change in this area.

2.3 Over Summer 2024 public consultation took place on the proposed Strategy, with most respondents agreeing with the core themes and issues identified. A summary of the consultation feedback along with the Council's responses to issues raised can be found within Appendix C of this document.

2.4 Over the next three years the delivery of the Strategy will be reflected in the development of key programmes of work and associated governance structures. The progress and impact of the strategy will be driven through a programme boards, which will be accountable for the delivery of the key priorities and projects documented with the strategy. Regular updates on delivery will be

Agenda Item 5

provided directly to the Executive Leadership Team. An annual report on the delivery will also be provided to Overview and Scrutiny alongside the Annual ICT report, with regular updates also provided to the Cabinet Member for Corporate and Commercial Services, with reports to wider Members as required.

3. Financial Implications

There are no direct cost implications due to the delivery of the strategic documentation, where costs are to be incurred for the delivery of specific projects the appropriate decision-making process will be followed to obtain approval for any associated spend.

4. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications

5. Risk Implications

There are no direct risk implications due to the delivery of the strategic documentation, risk in relation to programme delivery will be managed in line with the Council's Risk Management procedure.

6 Staffing HR Implications

There are no direct staffing implications due to the delivery of the strategic documentation, should specific projects have an implication on staffing then the appropriate process will be followed for that specific project.

7 Conclusion

7.1 As highlighted within this report, digital supports many projects within Sefton's Corporate Plan, given the many interdependencies and priorities it is essential for the Council to have a clear strategy and plan, to ensure the delivery of both the technology and cultural changes needed. Thereby ensuring that services can be delivered more efficiently, residents are enabled to take advantage of the potential digital brings both at home and in work and that local businesses are empowered to take advantage of new markets to grow and thrive.

7.2 Following strategy approval each priority will have a programme of work and associated action plan developed, which will include measurable outcomes to evidence impact and improvement. These programmes of work will link to the overarching Liverpool City Region's Digital Strategy, as relevant, thus removing any duplication of effort and ensuring the efficient deployment of local capacity.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Alternative option, not to have a strategy is rejected given that digital is a key enabler for service delivery across the Council.

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Equality Implications:

An equalities impact assessment was completed prior to the formal consultation, this was reported to the Public Engagement and Consultation Panel in May 2024.

It is expected that each programme and project will have its own equalities impact assessment to ensure that each project takes account of protected characteristics as necessary, completion of these will be picked up via the appropriate governance board.

Impact on Children and Young People:

The strategy includes objectives to support the Children's Improvement Plan, the integrated care agenda and a specific aim to support our young people to be ready for the jobs of the future.

Climate Emergency Implications:

The recommendations within this report will have a positive impact. The last iteration of the strategy included core deliverables such as cloud migration, which reduced local emissions associated with the operation of a local data centre. This new strategy includes a specific section to reduce where possible the carbon associated with the delivery of the ICT Service

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD 7884/25) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD 5884/25) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report. In addition, as outlined within section 2.1 of this report wider consultation has taken place with Executive Officers, Staff Groups and members.

Further to the above in line with paragraph 6.13 of the Executive Scrutiny Protocol the revised strategy document, and consultation feedback was presented to Overview and Scrutiny on the 20th of January 2025, where members accepted and noted the contents of the report.

(B) External Consultations

As detailed within section 2.3 of this report public consultation took place over the summer of 2024, the results of which can be found within Appendix C.

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 this report:

Appendix A Sefton's Digital Strategy

Appendix B Sefton's Digital Strategy Easy Read Version

Appendix C Digital Strategy, Consultation Comments and Council Responses from the Questionnaire

Background Papers:

Digital Strategy 2021 – 2023, which can be found within the following location

[Sefton Council Digital Strategy 2020-2023](#)

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Sefton Council's Digital Strategy

Introduction.

Since the release of Sefton’s Digital Strategy in 2021 technology has continued to advance at pace, bringing new opportunities to residents and businesses across Sefton.

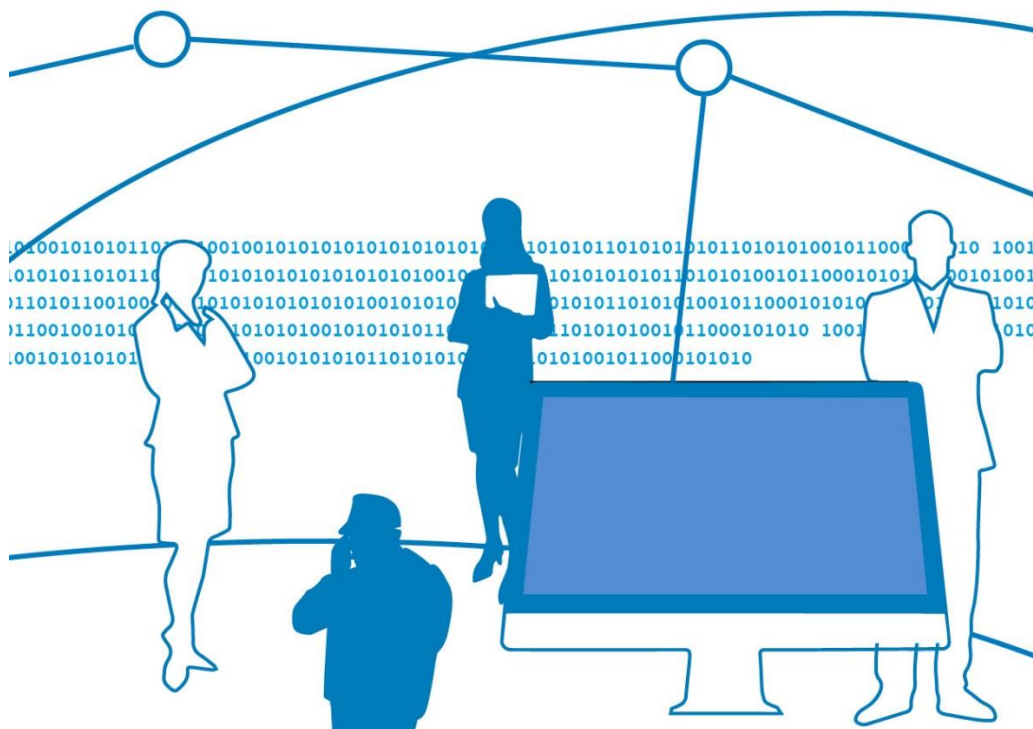
This updated strategy reflects on the progress we have made so far, sets out revised priorities and aims to ensure that Sefton develops as a digital place, with all communities, residents empowered to take advantages of the opportunities afforded by Digital.

Key to our ambitions are strong **digital foundations**, providing secure and robust connectivity across Sefton which reflects and supports our climate pledge as well as enabling and supporting business growth.

As a **Digital Council** we are continuing to develop our digital services, including how we work as a local authority, our information and advice delivered via our council website, and how residents can self-serve online to access services. As well as exploring how as an authority we can work more efficiently across partners to deliver joined up services that reflect the needs of our communities.

Key to developing Sefton as a **Digital Place** is our work around inclusion, that brings together all key partners to ensure that all residents, local partners, and businesses have access to digital skills, devices, and data.

In addition, the management of our **data and intelligence** is essential to proactively plan and deliver responsive services in line with demand, and transforming data into intelligence which is fundamental to service redesign ensuring we meet the requirements of all communities across Sefton.



What have we delivered since 2021?

Theme 1- Connected Council.

- All council staff have access to agile working KIT including, laptops and mobile phones as required, this access includes the provision of touch down spaces in office accommodation as well as support to work from home in line with service delivery requirements.
- Since 2021 the Council's New Ways of working programme has allow the authority to reduce its office footprint by 29%, with further opportunities being explored.
- Sefton has developed its Data and Intelligence tools, moving forwards with the development of a Data Warehouse, bringing together data to inform decision making service design and manage demand. This work has initially focused on supporting Children's Services with further plans in development across the Council.
- The Authority has migrated it's on-premises data centre to the Cloud, upgrading and improving this infrastructure as well as improving operational performance and resilience.
- A training and skills programme has been developed for internal staff to support the deployment digital tools across the Council.
- Gov - Roam has been deployed across office locations, facilitating the co-location of staff across Health and Social Care in line with the development of Integrated Care Teams
- A Cloud Telephony solution has been implemented which has significantly upgraded the Council's voice system as well as supporting agile and mobile working.
- The authority has developed a proactive approach to Cyber Security and participated in several external reviews to provide assurance in terms of the security of the Council's network and the personal data we process.

Theme 2 - Empowered Residents.

- Sefton has redesigned and relaunched its Corporate Website ensuring that it is easy to use and is in line with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.
- The new Customer Experience Platform has been launched, providing improved self-service options for residents across the Sefton.
- A Digital Inclusion Partnership for Sefton is now established with an ambitious Digital Inclusion Strategy for residents launched in in 2022.
- Public devices across Sefton Libraries have been refreshed, and an enhanced offer is also provided in the form of a tablet loan scheme and a targeted databank service in some locations. Public Wi-Fi is also available across all libraries in the Borough.
- The TECS Strategy for Sefton (Technology Enabled Care Strategy) has been launched with a significant number of schemes in development or underway across Sefton, including partners.
- A digital skill and learning forum has been established bringing together representation from Schools, Colleges, the Council, and the wider Liverpool City region to ensure that digital training and education resources are developed and made available across Sefton.
- Sefton is working in partnership with the wider City Region to explore the opportunities afforded by the Internet of Things to develop a Smart Cities approach, discrete programmes are also underway across the borough including Air Quality Sensor deployment.

Theme 3 - Business Growth.

- Sefton has worked in partnership with Liverpool City Region colleagues (LCR Connect) during the build phase of the region's full fibre, ultrafast gigabit capable network.
- The authority is committed to working in partnership with the LCR Connect Team to expand mobile network coverage, including 5G across the Sefton.
- Free public Wi-Fi has been delivered within Bootle Strand
- Sefton has established a Digital Infrastructure Board to ensure alignment of all key digital programmes including Growth with the digital strategy.
- The authority has launched a dedicated Networking Group (Sefton Huddle) for all Digital, Creative and Tech industries located in the Sefton.

- A Digital skills survey developed and planned for release to all businesses, with appropriate follow up support in place.
- Sefton's Economic Forum in June 2023 included Digital innovation as a key theme and the Invest Sefton team has delivered workshops on digital sales & marketing and cyber resilience to Sefton businesses.
- Sefton Economic Strategy was approved by Cabinet on the 3rd November 2022, Digital is a key strand under the Social Inclusion and Access for all strategic objective.

Five Future Themes.

Throughout our work over the last two years the themes and priorities around digital have evolved, following consultation at both a regional and local level the revised five themes for Sefton are:

- Developing Sefton as Digital Place.
- Create strong Digital Foundations.
- Supporting an enhanced Customer Journey.
- To develop our Data and Intelligence.
- Support the Workforce of the Future.

Developing Sefton as a digital place.

Sefton Council is committed to ensuring that all residents and businesses are enabled to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by digital technologies.

Digital Inclusion and Digital Skills.

- We will work with key partners and agencies to deliver the [Sefton Residents Digital Inclusion strategy](#) to develop Sefton as a place where residents and organisations understand the benefits of digital, feel safe and confident online and are supported to develop their skills and thrive in an increasingly digital world.
- Over the last 12 month we have refreshed our publicly accessible machines across libraries, we plan to extend this further with virtual meeting pods, tablet loan schemes and the provision of a databank and device bank service, delivered in partnership with Good Things Foundation.
- We will continue to develop our approach to free access to public Wi-Fi in communal spaces as well as developing our network of Digital Champions to support people to get online.

- We aim to measure and gain greater understanding of who is accessing digital and where. So that we can obtain greater understanding of the barriers to digital participation across the Sefton place.
- To support our young people to be ready for the jobs of the future and create a local pipeline of skilled young people to meet the requirements of businesses across the Region.
- To support those seeking work to develop their digital skills and literacy in line with business demands.
- To ensure that online services provided by Sefton are meeting the needs of residents across the Sefton.

Digital Democracy.

- To explore options for digital democracy, including the ability to join a meeting virtually, to boost participation and as well as enhancing transparency.
- Provide training and guidance to elected members on Cyber Security so that they feel confident in communicating with residents via digital methods.

Business Growth.

The team in Sefton are committed to developing a strong economy that connects Sefton to the Liverpool City Region and beyond. Ensuring that all businesses across Sefton can benefit from high-speed internet connectivity and are empowered to leverage the opportunities afforded by digital technologies are a key foundation to this ambition. We will do this by:

- Support the delivery of the Liverpool City Region Full Fibre network and maximise the benefit of the regional investment for local businesses and residents.
- Continuing to develop and support our Creative, Digital and Tech Sector with the expansion of the popular Sefton Huddle business networking group, bringing together support and advice for these businesses along with the opportunity to develop local networks and peer support.
- Providing opportunities for any Sefton business to attend digital themed events and workshops, in venues across the Sefton. Where appropriate these sessions will be delivered in partnership with specialist agencies including the Northwest Cyber Resilience Operations Centre.

- Engage and support all Sefton businesses to develop their digital skills, firstly by understanding the requirements via a survey and using intelligence from this to connect business to local and national opportunities to ensure they can take advantage of the power of digital.
- Establishing a Digital Incubator Space within Southport, the Enterprise Arcade development will deliver a co-working space and community for our existing and future talent in this sector.
- Supporting the development of Bootle Strand into a community venue, providing free public Wi-Fi as well as access to digital learning resources onsite via the Sefton@work team.
- Supporting the delivery of access to digital learning resources in Southport with the provision of a permanent location for the Sefton at Work Team with the area.

Smart Cities.

Sefton continues to work in partnership with regional colleagues to explore opportunities to deploy smart technology across the place as appropriate, over the next few years we will:

- Learn from our adoption of Air Quality sensors and how such technologies can be linked to traffic flow management to reduce pollution across key areas of the Sefton.
- Embed Cyber resilience guidance for Smart Cities within our local governance.
- Consider the use of new technology to support safer communities, including a review of our existing CCTV infrastructure.
- Continue to explore opportunities at a regional level which meet the strategic aspirations for Sefton.

Developing Strong Digital Foundations.

Ensuring that Sefton has the core infrastructure and associated services in place to maximise the opportunities afforded by digital, including capitalising on existing investments to ensure value for money, the deliverables in this theme include:

Connectivity.

We will:

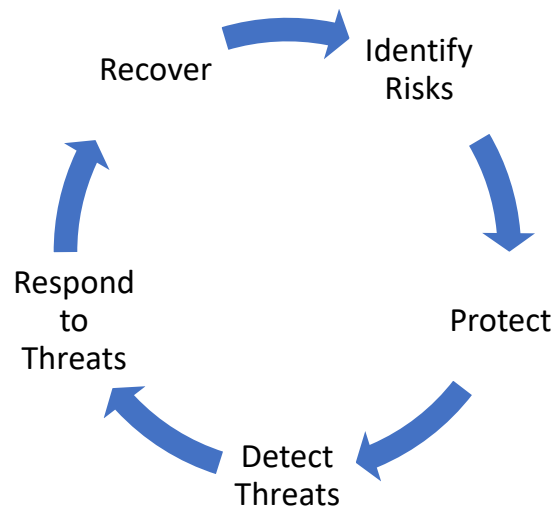
- To build upon the investment made in superfast full fibre across the Liverpool City Region and maximise the use of this network for the benefit of residents, local businesses and to improve connectivity across our public buildings.
- Continue to work in partnership with the wider Liverpool City Region on the deployment of next generation wireless technology to support the Smart Cities Programme including the deployment of 5G networks.

- Explore opportunities to utilise new services such as Gov Wi-Fi to further enhance solutions for integrated working.
- Establish a rolling upgrade programme of the Councils Wi-Fi Services to improve coverage across all Council buildings, including the provision of public access.
- Explore new solutions for Corporate Connectivity such as SDWAN. (Software Defined Wide Area Network)

Cyber Security.

To ensure that all digital services delivered are secure and in line with industry standards and best practice. Making sure that residents and business are confident that the information they share with us is safe, we pledge to:

- Continue to work in partnership with key agencies such as the National Cyber Security Centre, and regional partnerships to ensure we continually develop our cyber security standards in line with emerging threats.
- Continue to develop our cyber security approach and work in line with the following lifecycle.



Governance.

We pledge to be:

- Transparent around the way that the personal data of all residents is used and shared.
- We are committed to the safeguarding of privacy and will therefore ensure that robust information sharing agreements are in place with partners. There will be clear and accessible documentation around the way data is used, shared, and processed is available for all service areas.

Climate Emergency.

In 2019 Sefton declared a Climate Emergency and subsequently published its Climate Emergency Strategy, this Digital Strategy supports the ambitions by setting out the following objectives.

- To procure sustainable carbon neutral equipment where possible and include carbon reduction requirements within all ICT procurement documents.
- To explore innovative approaches to carbon reduction to achieve net zero.
- To explore options to support tracking and reporting of the carbon footprint to measure improvements.
- To be a cloud first authority with all new procurements being based on either SAAS (Software as a Service) services or provision within the Sefton Azure cloud architecture.

Technical Design.

- To have resilient, scalable, and sustainable systems hosted in an appropriate environment, adopting a Cloud First approach to the provisioning of applications, deploying multi cloud as appropriate.
- For all services and systems to be secure by design and in line with Zero Trust principles.
- The authority will adopt Government Digital Standards to ensure that all systems can speak to others as required, fulfilling the requirements of interoperability and integration as appropriate.
- All solutions will be device and internet browser agnostic, meaning that they should work on any Internet browser technology.
- The authority will seek to ensure best value, making use of government procurement frameworks where possible.

Supply chain management.

The authority is committed to ensuring that all suppliers to the council adhere to cyber security standards during the lifetime of their contracts, and to make sure this happens we will:

- Provide appropriate training and support for corporate procurement teams around Cyber Resilience across supply chains.
- Adopt national guidance around supply chain management.
- Set and implement minimum security standards for suppliers.
- Where appropriate the authority will implement continuous reviews of suppliers to identify and close out any vulnerabilities.

Supporting an Enhanced Customer Journey.

Sefton Council is committed to making sure that all residents can access services via a method most convenient for their needs (both on and offline), to support this we will:

- Continue to develop our information and advice services available on the Council Website, ensuring that it is easy to read, understand and meets all accessibility standards.
- Provide more options for residents to complete transactions at a time convenient to them, online 24 hours a day.
- Explore new technologies such as AI to enhance the customer experience both online, in person and via telephone.
- Ensure that new services are developed with the customer at the very centre of the experience to reduce unnecessary contact.

Data and Intelligence.

Data is one of our most valuable assets as a council and is helping to inform how we best design, deliver and transform our services to meet the needs of our communities, to improve outcomes for people in Sefton, and to drive efficiencies within current financial constraints.

Over the next three years we want empower our staff to transform data into intelligence by equipping them with the digital tools, skills, and training that they need to make better use of the information and data we collect to inform the delivery of core services and the ambitions within our Corporate Strategy.

Whilst changes are already happening across the council, with the implementation of a new enterprise data warehouse and the roll-out of the MS Power BI platform to ensure that we have the right technology and infrastructure for the future. So far the focus has been on ensuring continued service reporting, including compliance with national statutory performance reporting requirements, and developing new strategic and operational performance management reporting for Children's Services using interactive Power BI dashboards.

The next steps are to bring our BI and performance resources together; to bring our relevant data together into one place and then to combine and join this data together for data science purposes.

- Develop a culture that recognizes the importance of data science and data quality.
- Expand our data sharing arrangements with other organisations ensuring appropriate two way sharing to support service delivery.
- Build upon our established information governance framework and ethical standards for data processing.
- Develop our organisational data skills and knowledge.

To do this we will:

- Ensure that good quality relevant and timely data and business intelligence is embedded in everything that we do, is at the core of our decision-making and to inform and improve the services we provide to our residents.
- Enhance our reporting, analysis, and forecasting capability by bring together council resources into a single team and investing in business intelligence and data science to increase our data analysis and analytics capability.
- Maximise the opportunities presented by new technologies and infrastructure to enhance automation of operational reporting and focus increasingly on Business intelligence, making increased use of advanced data analysis techniques such as machine learning and data mining to derive greater insight and value from big data.
- Provide data in easy to use, accessible reports and dashboards by establishing a cloud-based data warehouse and adopting a common reporting platform (Power BI).
- Empower staff and develop the knowledge and data skills of our workforce.
- Democratise our data, making it accessible to all those that need it wherever practicable and appropriate, to aid better collaboration across the council and so we can all work more effectively and efficiently.
- Promote the provenance of our data, adopting the principle of using master data sets rather than duplication.
- Take pride in the quality of our data, and take responsibility to ensure it is accurate, complete, consistent, valid, unique, and relevant –particularly when entering data into systems.
- Make use of quality data from external sources, and work with our public sector partners to share data when it is appropriate to do so, to plan and shape the services that we provide and ultimately to enable us to deliver better outcomes.
- Build upon the established data governance arrangement to manage, utilise and care for our data throughout its lifecycle, including for its disposal and archiving where appropriate.
- Justify the collection, use and impact of data, ensuring that we use it ethically and respect people’s privacy, making sure our data are secure and access to sensitive information is controlled via user permissions and appropriate governance.
- Procure interoperable systems which allow data to be linked, allowing deeper insights to be derived from our data.

- Provide open access to data wherever this is both possible and appropriate, allowing our communities to use this for furthering community resilience and outcomes.

Supporting the Workforce of the Future.

The staff within Sefton are our greatest asset and we are committed to supporting them to achieve their full potential and deliver great outcomes for the residents of the Sefton.

To do this we will:

- Equip our staff with appropriate devices and systems which will allow them to work effectively.
- Support hybrid/agile working where appropriate, to ensure colleagues achieve a healthy work life balance.
- Provide opportunities for training and development in both existing and new digital technologies.
- Develop the ICT Champions network to empower staff to take advantage of digital tools.
- Explore the use of new technologies such as robotics and AI to reduce the administrative burden and any duplication of effort across the workforce, thereby ensuring colleagues can focus on key service deliverables.
- Deploy digital technologies at scale to deliver the ambitions of Integrated Care ensuring that Adults, Children and Families within the Borough are informed, empowered, and supported to live safe and independent lives and fulfil their potential.
- Proactively support and develop IT systems and digital services to achieve the outcomes set out within our Children's Services Improvement Plan, improving outcomes for children and their families. Including.
- Delivery of ICT solutions to support SEND services.
- Review and redesign of the Case Management system supporting both Early Intervention, Statutory Children's Social Care and transition to Adult Services.
- Exploring the development and implementation of children's services online portals to allow parental engagement and further information transparency.
- To further develop financial systems to support service delivery.
- To ensure that all systems are supporting the statutory obligations of the Council as these develop nationally.

- Work in partnership with Health and Community care colleagues to deliver the Cheshire and Merseyside strategy for Digital Services across Integrated Care, including the delivery of a Shared Care Record.
- Support the delivery of the Adult Social Care strategy including the implementation of the [Technology Enabled Care Strategy](#)
- To support a review and redesign of Case Management Systems in line with Service redesign including support for Early Intervention Services.
- To further develop financial systems to support service delivery, including the provision of online financial assessments and financial management functionality for citizens.
- To develop online services for Adult Social Care, including launching a citizen self-assessment tool via the online portal.

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Sefton Council. Digital Strategy.



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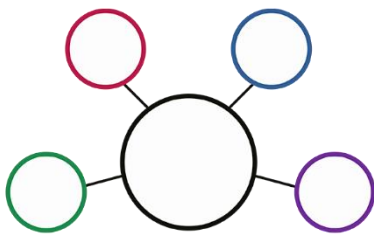
Introduction.



Since 2021, Sefton's Digital Strategy has helped bring new technology to people and businesses in Sefton.

The updated plan for 2024 - 2027 looks at what we have done so far and sets new goals.

We want Sefton to be a digital place where everyone can use new technology.



We need strong digital infrastructure to achieve our climate goals and boost business growth.

Digital infrastructure it is the mix of computers, programs, networks, and buildings that help organisations run its online services.



As a Digital Council, we are improving our online services and making it easier for people to use them.

We also want to work better with other groups to provide services that meet community needs.

Inclusion is important. We want everyone to have access to digital skills, devices, and data.



Managing our information well helps us plan and provide services that people need.

Turning data into useful information helps us redesign services to meet everyone's needs in Sefton.

What have we delivered since 2021?

Theme 1- Connected Council.



- All council staff now have laptops and mobile phones. They can work from home, office or in our communities.
- We have reduced our office space by 29%. We are looking for more ways to save space.



- We are using new tools to help us understand data better. This helps us make good decisions, especially for Children's Services.
- We moved our data to cloud storage. This makes our systems work better and keeps them safe.



- We have a new training programme for our staff. This helps them use digital tools better.
- We have set up Gov-Roam in our offices. This is a system that helps Health and Social Care staff work together.



- We have a new phone system. It helps staff work from anywhere.
- We are very careful about Cyber Security. We have had checks to make sure our data is safe.
- These changes help us work better and keep your information safe.

Theme 2 - Empowered Residents.



- Sefton has made its website easier to use. It now follows rules to help everyone, including people with disabilities. These rules are called the Website Content Accessibility Guidelines.
- A new system is now available. It helps people in Sefton do things online by themselves.
- Sefton has a plan to help people use the internet. This plan started in 2022. Sefton wants everyone to have the skills to use the internet and technology.
- Libraries in Sefton have new computers and free access to the internet over Wi-Fi. Some places also lend tablets and offer internet data.
- Sefton has a plan to use technology in care. Many new projects are starting.
- A group has been made to teach digital skills. This group includes schools, colleges, and the council.
- Sefton is working with nearby areas to start to use the Internet of Things. This uses sensors and information sharing to make the information about our area smarter.



- One project in Sefton is to use sensors to check air quality. This helps keep the air clean.
- The new website and systems make it easier for people to get help and services.

Theme 3 - Business

Growth.



- Sefton has worked with Liverpool City Region colleagues (LCR Connect) to build a fast internet network.
- They want to make mobile networks better, including 5G, in Sefton.



- Free public Wi-Fi is now available in Bootle Strand.
- Sefton has made a Digital Infrastructure Board to manage important digital projects.
- Sefton has also started a Networking Group called Sefton Huddle for Digital, Creative, and Tech industries.



- A survey about digital skills will be sent to all businesses, with information about help that is available.
- In June 2023, Sefton's Economic Forum talked about Digital innovation.

- The Invest Sefton team gave workshops on digital sales, marketing, and cyber safety.
- Sefton's Economic Strategy was approved on 3rd November 2022. Digital is important for Social Inclusion and Access for all in Sefton.



5 Future Themes.



Over the last two years, we have looked at how digital can help Sefton. We talked to people in different areas to find out what is important. We now have 5 main themes for Sefton.



1st We want to make Sefton a Digital Place. This means using technology to make life better for everyone. We will work on making sure everyone can use digital tools.



2nd We need strong Digital Foundations. This means having good internet and technology that works well. We will make sure our digital systems are strong and reliable.



3rd We want to improve the Customer Journey. This means making it easier for people to get help and services online. We will make sure our online services are easy to use.



4th We will develop our Data and Intelligence. This means using information to make better decisions. We will collect and use data to help improve services.



5th We will support the Workforce of the Future. This means helping workers learn new digital skills. We will make sure our staff are ready for the future.

Developing Sefton as a digital place.



Sefton Council wants to make Sefton a digital place. They want everyone to use the technology that is available. This includes people and businesses.

They believe digital tools can help everyone. They want to make sure no one is left out.

Sefton Council will work hard to make this happen. They want everyone to have the same chances.

Digital Inclusion and Digital Skills.



- We want to help people in Sefton use the internet and feel safe online. We will work with others to make this happen.
- In the past year, we have updated computers in libraries. We plan to add more things like tablets and virtual meeting spaces.
- We will keep giving free Wi-Fi in public places. We will also train Digital Champions to help people get online.
- We want to know who is using the internet and where. This will help us understand why some people are not online.
- We want to help young people get ready for future jobs. We will teach them the skills they need for work.
- We will help people looking for jobs to learn digital skills. This will help them find work.





- We will make sure Sefton's online services are good for everyone. We want all residents to use them easily.
- We will work with Good Things Foundation to provide tablets and internet data. This will help more people get online.
- We will create a databank and device bank service. This will give people the tools they need to use the internet.
- We want Sefton to be a place where everyone can use the internet. We will support people to learn and feel safe online.

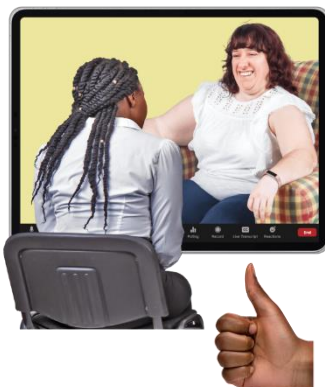


Digital Democracy.



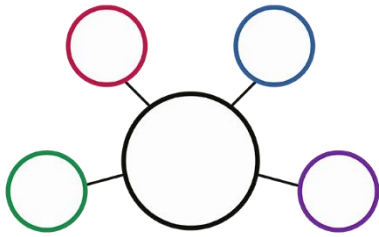
Digital Democracy means using computers and the internet to help people join meetings from home. This can help more people take part and see what is happening.

We want to make it easier for everyone to join in and know what is going on. This way, more people can have their say.



We will teach elected members how to stay safe online. This will help them feel sure when talking to people using computers.

By learning about Cyber Security, elected members can talk to residents safely and easily. This will make it better for everyone to share ideas and information.



Business Growth.

The team in Sefton wants to help the local economy grow. They want to connect Sefton to Liverpool and other places. They believe fast internet is very important for all businesses in Sefton.



They will help build a strong internet network in the Liverpool City Region. This will help local businesses and people in Sefton. They want everyone to benefit from this new internet.



They will support the Creative, Digital, and Technology Sector. They will expand the Sefton Huddle group. This group helps businesses get advice and support from each other.

They will offer events and workshops about digital skills. These will be held in different places in Sefton. Sometimes, experts from other groups will help with these events.



They will ask businesses what digital skills they need. They will use this information to help businesses find local and national opportunities. This will help businesses use digital tools better.

They will create a Digital Incubator Space in Southport. This is a space that will help people in the digital sector work together. It will be a place for new and existing talent.



They will help develop Bootle Strand into a community space. It will have free Wi-Fi and digital learning resources.

The Sefton@work team will help people use these resources in Bootle and Southport.



Smart Cities.

Sefton is working together with other areas to use smart technology in the area.

Over the next few years, they will:



- Learn from using Air Quality sensors. These sensors can help manage traffic and reduce pollution in key areas.



- Include Guidance about Cyber Resilience for Smart Cities in local rules. This will help keep the city area safe from cyber threats.



- Look at new technology to make communities safer. They will also review their current CCTV systems.



- Keep looking for new chances to use smart technology that fits Sefton's goals. This will help improve the area and benefit everyone living in Sefton.



- Work with regional partners to find the best ways to use smart technology. This teamwork is important for success.



Building Strong Digital Foundations and Connectivity.

We want to make sure Sefton has good digital services. This will help us use our money well and make the most of what we already have.

Better Connections.

We will use the super-fast fibre network in Liverpool City Region. This will help people, businesses, and public buildings connect better.

Working Together.

We will work with Liverpool City Region to use new wireless technology. This includes supporting the Smart Cities programme including 5G networks.



New Services.

We will look at using services like Gov Wi-Fi. This will help us work better together.

Wi-Fi Upgrades.

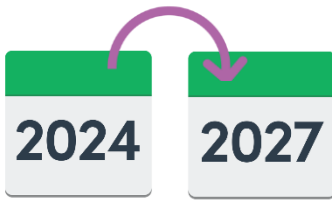
We will keep improving the Council's Wi-Fi. This will make sure all Council buildings have good coverage and public access.

Corporate Connectivity.

We will look at new ways to connect our offices. One option is SDWAN (Software Defined Wide Area Network), which can help us connect better.



Smart Cities and Better Future



All these steps will help Sefton become a smart city. This means better services and connections for everyone. With strong digital foundations, Sefton will be ready for the future. This will help everyone live and work better.

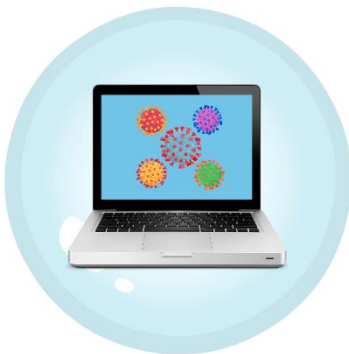
Cyber Security.



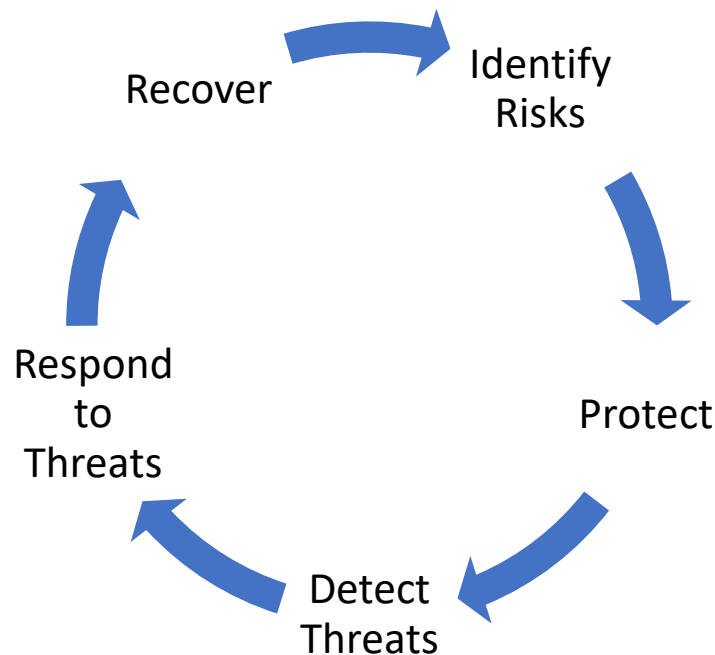
Cyber security means keeping online services safe. We want people to trust that their information is protected.

We promise to:

- Work with important groups like the National Cyber Security Centre. This helps us stay updated on new threats.
- Work with local partnerships to keep up to date with new cyber threats.



We use this way of working to check for cyber threats:



Governance.



We promise to be clear about how we use and share your personal data.

We will make sure we have strong information sharing agreements with our partners.

There will be clear and easy to understand information about the way information is used, shared and available.

Climate Emergency.



In 2019, Sefton Council said there is a Climate Emergency. They planned to help the environment in a document called the Climate Emergency Strategy.

This Digital Strategy helps with the Climate Emergency actions.



We want to buy equipment that does not harm the environment. We will include rules about carbon reduction in all our buying rules.

We will look for new ways to reduce carbon to reach net zero. This means we want to balance the carbon we use with the carbon we save.



We will find ways to track and report their carbon footprint. This helps them see how much they improve.

We want to use cloud services first. This means using online software and storage instead of physical equipment.



Technical Design.

We want our systems to be strong, able to grow, and good for the future. We will use cloud technology to help with this.

All our services and systems will be safe from the start. We will follow our Zero Trust rules.

We will use Government Digital Standards. This means our systems can talk to each other securely when needed.

Our computer systems will work on any device or internet browser. This means you can use them on any computer or phone.

We will make sure we get the best value for money. We will use government buying rules to help with this.

Our goal is to have systems that are strong, safe, and easy to use. We will follow the best rules and use the best tools.



Supply chain management.

We will make sure that all suppliers of digital services to the council follow cyber security standards during the contracts. To make sure this happens we will:

- We will teach our teams who buy services about cyber safety in supply chains.
- We will follow national rules for managing supply chains.
- We will set basic safety rules for suppliers.
- We will check suppliers often to find and fix any problems.

This will help keep everyone safe and secure.





Supporting an Enhanced Customer Journey.

Sefton Council wants to help all people use their services easily. They will do this in multiple ways that work for people. To do this we will:



We will make the information services on Council websites easy to read and understand. It will meet all accessibility rules.

We will let people do things online any time of the day or night. This means 24 hours a day.



We will also look at new technology like AI. Artificial Intelligence is used to help answer questions or give advice. This will help make things better for people online, in person, and on the phone.

The Council will make sure new services are made with the customer in mind. This will help people get what they need easily.

Data and Intelligence.



Data is very important for the council. It helps us plan and improve services for people in Sefton.

We want to help our staff use data better. We will give them tools, skills, and training.

This will help us deliver better services and meet our goals in the Corporate Strategy.



We are already making changes. We have a new way to store data and use Microsoft Power BI (Business Intelligence) to analyse data.

This technology helps us keep up with service reporting and national requirements.



We are also using Power BI dashboards for Children's Services to manage performance. Next, we will bring our BI and performance resources together in one place.

We want to create a culture that values data science and data quality. We will share more data with other organisations.

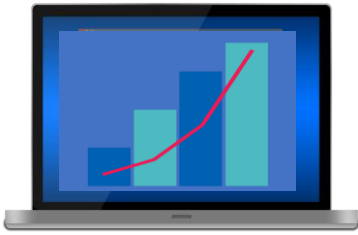
We will build on our information governance and ethical standards for using data.

To do this we will:



- We will use good data to make better choices and improve our services for everyone.
- We will bring our team together to get better at understanding and using data.
- We will make data available to everyone who needs it to work better together.
- We will use new technology to make our work easier and smarter with data.
- We will make reports and dashboards that are easy to use and understand.
- We will use the best data sets to avoid having the same data in many places.
- We will make sure our data is always correct, complete, and useful.
- We will take care of our data from start to finish, including when we no longer need it.
- We will use data in a fair way, respect privacy, and keep data safe.
- We will buy systems that let us link data for better insights.





- We will give open access to data when it is right to do so, helping our communities.
- We will make sure our data is used in a way that helps everyone.
- We will always look for ways to improve how we use data to serve our residents better.

Supporting the Workforce of the Future.



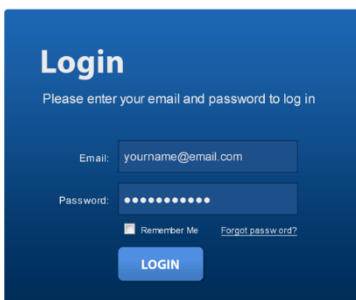
The staff in Sefton are very important to us. We want to help them do their best and help the people in Sefton.

To do this we will:



- We will give our staff the right tools and systems to work well.
- We will support flexible working so staff can have a good balance between work and home life.
- We will offer training in new and existing digital technologies to help staff learn and grow.
- We will build a network of ICT Champions to help staff use digital tools better.
- We will look into new technologies like robots and AI to make work easier and reduce extra tasks.
- We will use digital tools to help Adults, Children, and Families live safe and independent lives.





- We will improve IT systems to help children and their families get better services.
- We will provide ICT solutions to support services for children with special needs.
- We will review and redesign the system that helps children move to adult services.
- We will create online portals for children's services to help parents get more information.
- We will improve financial systems to help with services.
- We will make sure all systems meet the Council's legal duties as they change.
- We will work with Health and Community care to deliver digital services, including a Shared Care Record.
- We will support the Adult Social Care strategy and use technology to help care.
- We will review and redesign Case Management Systems to support Early Intervention Services.
- We will improve financial systems to help citizens manage their money online.
- We will develop online services for Adult Social Care, including a self-assessment tool.



More Information about Sefton's Digital Strategy.

This is the easy read version of the Digital Strategy.

There is a more detailed and technical version for those who would like to see it.

It is available on Sefton Council's website.



[IT and Digital \(sefton.gov.uk\)](http://sefton.gov.uk)



If you want to get in touch about the digital strategy or need an alternative format please contact:

0345 140 0845



Or email: contact@sefton.gov.uk

Sefton's Digital Strategy 2024 - 2027 - Consultation

Comments and Council Responses from the Questionnaire

The activity ran from 15/07/2024 to 18/08/2024 and there were 55 responses to this survey

Who responded - Summary

90.91% of respondents were Sefton residents

5.45% of respondents were from businesses located in Sefton

Just over 50% of respondents were aged between 50 and 70 years of age, with the next two largest cohorts being aged between 70 and 79 (16.36%) and then between the ages of 30 to 39 (12.73%). The gender split between male and female respondents was equal and just over 18% of respondents considered themselves to have a disability.

Summary of Responses to closed questions in relation to the proposed themes

Proposed Themes	Response
Developing Sefton as a Digital Place. This means making sure that all residents and businesses are able to take advantage of technology	80% of respondents agreed that this was an important theme
Create strong Digital Foundations. We want to build strong digital tools. This means Sefton will have the right technology to help people use online services.	83.64% of respondents agreed that this was an important theme
Supporting an enhanced Customer Journey. We aim to improve the customer experience. This means making it easy for everyone to use Council Services	89.09% of respondents agreed that this was an important theme
To develop our Data and Intelligence. We will use our data smartly. This means using information to make our services better for the community.	83.64% of respondents agreed that this was an important theme
Support the workforce of the future. We support our workers in the digital future. This means helping staff do their best and provide great services for Sefton residents.	87.27% of respondents agreed that this was an important theme

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There were several comments received on the proposed themes, all of which were operational in nature and did not require any changes to the strategy documentation. Responses to each will be provided via the Sefton Your Say Consultation Website.

Summary of Responses to closed questions in relation to key issues

Key Issues	Response
More access to digital resources in our libraries and public spaces.	74.54% of respondents agreed that this was important
Provision of free public Wi-Fi.	76.36% of respondents agreed that this was important
Supporting our young people to be ready for the jobs of the future.	90.01% of respondents agreed that this was important
Access to Digital Skills Training for those seeking work.	89.09% of respondents agreed that this was important
Be able to complete transactions (like payments or reporting) online with Sefton Council.	74.54% of respondents agreed that this was important
Access to council meetings and events online.	65.45% of respondents agreed that this was important, however 18.18% of respondents felt it was neither important nor important.
How important it is to provide digital support for local businesses.	61.82% of respondents felt that this was important with over 14.5 % neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the importance and just over 9% stating that they did not know, this may be reflective of the profile of respondents.
Use new technology to make communities safe and healthier.	78.18% of respondents agreed that this was important
Use of technology such as Air Quality sensors. These sensors will help reduce pollution and make the air cleaner	78.18% of respondents agreed that this was important
Working with partners to improve internet and mobile networks. This will help everyone stay connected and access services easily.	83.64% of respondents agreed that this was important
That the Council makes sure that all its digital services are safe and follow national rules.	92.72% of respondents agreed that this was important
For Sefton to use new technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). This will help	This was an incredibly mixed response with just less than 40% of the respondents

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<p>improve customer services and make things easier for everyone.</p>	<p>thinking this was important with 25% saying they didn't think it was important, and over 36% stating they didn't know or that it was neither important nor not important.</p> <p><i>This highlights the important of clear communications and engagement around any use of AI to ensure that residents are informed about its use, the benefits transparency arrangements in place, this will be address via any projects in this space during the life of the strategy</i></p>
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There were a number of comments received in response to the question “Do you think there are other important issues that should be part of Sefton’s Digital Strategy over the next three years?” all of which were operational in nature and did not require changes to the strategic documentation. Responses to each will be provided via the Sefton Your Say Consultation Website.

Feedback Received outside of Formal Consultation

In advanced of formal consultation, the following communication was received via an email to Your Sefton your Say.



Chairman Mr. Brian Stein CBE,

EM Radiation Research Trust, Chetwode House, Leicester Road, Melton Mowbray,
Leicestershire LE13 1GA

For the attention of Sefton Council Councillors

Further to previous emails regarding concerns against the threat of Sefton Council rollout of 5G and the IoT Digital Strategy 2024 -2027 Consultation.

Please find enclosed a new study published on 5G case studies and note that some of the symptoms experienced were so severe causing people to abandon their homes for good.

How will Sefton Councillors deal with claims for compensation if residents are forced to abandon their homes for good due to 5G wireless pole outside their homes?

Please include this information within the consultation.

Press release June 20, 2024

The first study in the world on 5G health risks published

'5G has been rolled out since 2019/2020. A Swedish research team has published the first study to date on how human health is affected by radiation from 5G base stations. The results show that 5G greatly increases radiofrequency radiation exposure and that ill health occurs fairly immediately after 5G is switched on near people's homes. The study also included three children aged four to eight years. In several cases, the symptoms were so severe that people had to abandon their homes for good.

The new study is a compilation of seven previously separate case studies published in 2023 and 2024. All case studies and the new compilation were conducted by physician and researcher Dr Lennart Hardell from the Swedish Environment and Cancer Research Foundation in collaboration with Mona Nilsson from the Swedish Radiation Protection Foundation. During the years 2021-2023, they have studied a total of 16 people's self-assessed health after 5G base stations or masts were established near their homes. Measurements of radiation from 5G have also been carried out in the homes.

The measurements show that 5G gives rise to extremely high exposure to pulsed radio frequency (RF) radiation, significantly higher than from previous generations of mobile telephony. In several cases radiation reached several million microwatts per square meter ($\mu\text{W}/\text{m}^2$) peak levels in the studied homes, which are levels more than 100 000 times higher than the levels recommended as appropriate maximum exposure by other researchers.

These high levels caused symptoms of ill health in several of the people studied within 24 hours after 5G was switched on. The most common and severe symptoms were sleep disturbance, fatigue, headache, irritability, concentration problems, impaired short-term memory and skin problems. These symptoms correspond to the symptoms described more than 50 years ago as an effect of exposure to radiofrequency or microwave radiation, known as microwave syndrome or radiofrequency sickness.

This first and unique study of the health effects of 5G clearly shows that 5G causes ill health in people living within a distance of 3 to 538 meters from 5G base stations/masts, even though the levels of measured RF radiation are significantly lower than the limits adopted by most countries. These limits allow exposure to 10 000 000 $\mu\text{W}/\text{m}^2$ measured as RMS (root mean square) averaged over 6 minutes, that only protects against instantaneous heating (thermal effects) and does not protect against the effects found in the new study. In an apartment only 20 meters from a 5G base station, the maximum measured RF radiation was just over 135 000 $\mu\text{W}/\text{m}^2$ (RMS average over 2 minutes) for the case with by far the highest radiation exposure. This level caused very severe symptoms within a week and the occupant had to leave the apartment for good.

The study also shows that when people moved to another home where the radiation was significantly lower and with no 5G base stations nearby, the symptoms subsided and disappeared completely in most cases after a short period. This reinforces that it was 5G that caused the reported symptoms.

The study confirms the warning of serious potential human health consequences due to the 5G roll out submitted by scientists and doctors in the 5G appeal to the EU (5gappeal.eu) and that the current limits for maximum allowed exposure do not protect against adverse health effects. 259 scientists have called for the limits to be improved (emfscientist.org).

- "5G is a gigantic experiment with public health that is being carried out and is accepted by the authorities and politicians....5G has been rolled out without any research showing that this new technology is not harmful to human health", says Lennart Hardell.

- "These results make it clear that 5G poses health risks to those living near base stations or cell towers because the radiation increases so massively. So far, there is no study of long-term health effects and the consequences could be very serious if people continue to be chronically exposed to these high levels of radiation from 5G", says Mona Nilsson.

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Facts about the new 5G study:

Study published in: Reviews on Environmental Health with open access. Hardell, Lennart and Nilsson, Mona. "Summary of seven Swedish case reports on the microwave syndrome associated with 5G radiofrequency radiation" Reviews on Environmental Health, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1515/reveh-2024-0017>.

Number of people included: 16

Number of case studies on which the study is based: 7

Year the case studies were conducted: 2021-2023

Age of studied persons: 4 - 83 years

Distance to 5G base stations or mobile towers: 3 - 538 m

Highest measured radiation (max peak): >3 180 000 $\mu\text{W}/\text{m}^2$ (microwatts per square meter)

Maximum measured radiation (RMS average over 2 minutes): 135 000 $\mu\text{W}/\text{m}^2$

Most common and severe symptoms during 5G exposure: Difficulty sleeping, fatigue, headaches, irritation, difficulty concentrating, impaired short-term memory, skin problems

Recommended maximum value (Europa EM EMF guidelines): 0.1-100 $\mu\text{W}/\text{m}^2$

Thermal limits (ICNIRP/FCC) adopted by most countries: 10 000 000 $\mu\text{W}/\text{m}^2$

Thermal limits based on: Heating effects observed within 1 hour

EuropaEM EMF guidelines maximum value is based on: demonstrated effects of prolonged whole body exposure'

Download here: <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/reveh-2024-0017/html>

Regards

Eileen O'Connor

Charity Director for the EM Radiation Research Trust

Website address: <https://www.radiationresearch.org/>

Email: eileen@radiationresearch.org

Response from Sefton Council

Sefton Council public health team have consulted with colleagues in the UK Health Security Agency who provide expert guidance on health protection matters, including advice regarding non-ionising radiation impacts on health.

The UK Health Security Agency have reviewed the evidence and provided the information below in relation to the safety and health impacts of radio waves, including 5G.

Review of current evidence

The health effects of exposure to radio waves have been researched extensively over several decades, and very many publications can be found in scientific journals and elsewhere.

Guidelines set by International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) on limiting exposures to electromagnetic fields (EMF) have been developed based on careful analyses of the accumulated evidence. ICNIRP published updated guidelines on exposure to radio waves in 2020.

UKHSA is aware that different groups have concerns about EMFs and where they have proposed alternative limits, these do not appear to have a scientific rationale based on health effects in the same way as the ICNIRP guidelines. In formulating its advice, UKHSA aims to draw out a consensus position based on the totality of the scientific evidence through a process of systematic, critical and impartial review of the published literature.

UKHSA bases its opinion on evidence reviews from authoritative bodies that consider the whole-range of evidence available, taking account of the scientific quality and relevance of individual studies to human health, in developing their conclusions. The typical types of evidence reviewed are the human laboratory and epidemiological studies, animal studies and cellular studies. This is the approach adopted by officially mandated authoritative organisations such as, ICNIRP and the World Health Organization (WHO). UKHSA is not aware, therefore, that these initiatives are driven by any scientific evidence that has been overlooked in its own advice.

Summary of evidence and public health impacts

Many exposure measurements have been made at publicly accessible locations near to base stations and these have consistently been well within the ICNIRP guidelines.

It is possible that there may be a small increase in overall exposure to radio waves when 5G is added to an existing network or in a new area. However, the overall exposure is expected to remain low relative to guidelines and, as such, there should be no consequences for public health.

Further information

Please see the following webpages containing UKHSA's published advice on 5G and mobile phone base stations:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/5g-technologies-radio-waves-and-health/5g-technologies-radio-waves-and-health>.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mobile-phone-base-stations-radio-waves-and-health/mobile-phone-base-stations-radio-waves-and-health>

Report Title:

Counter Fraud Strategy

Date of meeting:	6 February 2025		
Report to:	Cabinet		
Report of:	Executive Director of Corporate Services and Commercial		
Portfolio:	Corporate Services		
Wards affected:	All		
Is this a key decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	Yes
Exempt/confidential report:	No		

Summary:

The Council has carried out a self-assessment against the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) publication “*Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption*” which consists of five principles.

- Acknowledge the responsibility of the governing body for countering fraud and corruption.
- Identify the fraud and corruption risks.
- Develop an appropriate counter fraud and corruption strategy.
- Provide resources to implement the strategy.
- Take action in response to fraud and corruption.

One of the proposed actions that the Council should undertake is the development of a Counter Fraud Strategy which is attached for Members to consider for approval.

CIFAS, a not for profit organisation fighting fraud across the public and private sector, has also provided guidance on how to address fraud risks in the publication “*Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally 2020 is the updated counter fraud and corruption strategy for local government*”. The model outlined in the publication based on five principles, detailed below, and broadly aligned to the CIPFA has been widely used across the Local Government sector.

- Govern
- Acknowledge
- Prevent

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- Pursue
- Protecting itself and residents

The proposed strategy is based on the CIFAS five pillars and includes roles and responsibilities as well as key priorities for the next three years. An action plan has been developed based on the key priorities.

The Council has made some progress on implementing actions to improve the Council's counter fraud approach which will be enhanced with the actions from the proposed Counter Fraud Strategy.

Recommendation(s):

(1) Cabinet to approve the proposed Counter Fraud Strategy and the responsibilities detailed in the document.

(2) Note the progress on implementation of proposed counter fraud actions to date.

1. The Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendations

Introduction

1.1 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy have provided guidance to the public sector on managing the risk of fraud and corruption titled Code of Practice on managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption.

1.2 The document states:

“Leaders of public services organisations have a responsibility to embed effective standards for countering fraud and corruption in their organisations. This supports good governance and demonstrates effective financial stewardship and strong public financial management.”

1.3 The publications sets out that fraud and corruption are ever present risks to all organisations, be they public, private or not-for-profit. Fraud and corruption can have a significant negative impact on organisations through disruption to their services or undermining the achievement of their objectives. Official estimates have assessed the value of fraud loss in the public sector to be significant. Despite the risk, identifying adequate resource to manage the risk is a challenge for many across the public services. To help organisations recognise and address their fraud risks, CIPFA has produced a Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption (“the Code”) which consists of five principles:

- Acknowledge the responsibility of the governing body for countering fraud and corruption.
- Identify the fraud and corruption risks.
- Develop an appropriate counter fraud and corruption strategy.
- Provide resources to implement the strategy.
- Take action in response to fraud and corruption.

2. Current progress

- 2.1 The Council completed in 2020/2021 an assessment against the CIPFA Code of Practice.
- 2.2 This highlighted the following good practice currently operated by the Council on Counter Fraud:
- Council's Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy ('the Policy') has been approved by Cabinet and is regularly reviewed.
 - There is a Policy statement from the Chief Executive
 - The revised Policy includes examples of typical frauds
 - The revised Policy outlines key roles and responsibilities across the organisation
 - The organisation's risk management policy includes generic guidance on risk.
 - There is a framework of policies in place such as whistle blowing, employee behaviour and code of conduct.
 - Awareness of policies and procedures **is via intranet.**
 - Investigations involving Internal Audit are generally effective.
 - The Council is involved with the core National Fraud Initiative and additional optional activities.
- 2.3 The review highlighted the following areas where development was required to meet good practice :
- Training and awareness sessions regarding the risk, prevention and detection of fraud should be undertaken by staff across the Council
 - Fraud Risk Assessments should be undertaken across the Service areas to identify areas vulnerable to fraud and corruption, including for new activities.
 - As part of a Fraud Risk Assessment, it is made clear where the harm caused by fraud lies.
 - The Council should estimate its financial fraud loss from Fraud and Corruption.
 - The organisation needs an up to date Counter Fraud Strategy that has been approved by the governing body which will outline the resources required to implement.
 - Staff undertaking investigation work should have professional accreditation.
 - There should be in place an annual review of the effectiveness of counter fraud activities.
- 2.4 As a result of this, the following progress including a re-structure within the Risk and Audit Team has been made in respect of :
- Developing Fraud Risk Assessments across each Service Area
 - The development and rolling out of two Fraud awareness e-learning packages to all staff members

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- The development with HR of fraud awareness information as part of the induction process
- The Councils Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy was revised in 2023/2024
- Undertaking a benchmarking of resources across the Northwest
- Drafting a Sanction Policy with Legal Services and other relevant Service Areas.
- Developed a Counter Fraud Strategy detailed below.

3. Counter Fraud Strategy

- 3.1 CIFAS, a not for profit organisation fighting fraud across the public and private sector, has also provided guidance on how to address fraud risks in the publication “*Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally 2020 is the updated counter fraud and corruption strategy for local government*”.
- 3.2 The model outlined in the publication based on five principles/ pillars, detailed below and broadly aligned to the CIPFA principles in 1.3, has been widely used across the Local Government sector to be incorporated into Counter Fraud Strategies.



- 3.3 The strategy includes a section on the key roles and responsibilities to enable the strategy to be fully implemented including the role of Cabinet to the Strategy.
- 3.4 The strategy includes key priorities for the financial years 2024-2027, which highlights the proposed actions the Council will implement against the CIFAS five pillars detailed above. An action plan has been developed with action owners and proposed dates for completion.
- 3.5 The Strategy is attached as Appendix A.

2. Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications from the implementation of the strategy. In time through the implementation of an enhanced counter fraud approach where fraud is identified, and recovery action successfully taken or fraud is prevented there may be positive financial benefits to the Council.

3. Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications from the approval of the strategy although Legal Services will be involved in developing the governance framework for counter fraud.

4. Corporate Risk Implications

The risk of fraud is an ever present risk to organisations and companies particularly in the public sector. Enhancing our approach to counter fraud will help to ensure that public monies are spent supporting the Council priorities and not misused. Implementing the Counter Fraud Strategy will as part of many controls within the Council help to reduce the likelihood and impact of the fraud risk over time.

5 Staffing HR Implications

There are no staffing HR implications from the implementation of the strategy.

6 Conclusion

The Council has carried out a self-assessment against the CIPFA Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption. One of the proposed actions that the Council should undertake is the development of a Counter Fraud Strategy which is presented for approval.

The Council has made some progress on implementing actions to improve the Council's counter fraud approach which will be enhanced with the actions from the proposed Counter Fraud Strategy.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not having a Counter Fraud Strategy is one option considered and rejected as the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) have provided guidance to the public sector and failure to follow would likely lead to loss of reputation.

Equality Implications: There are no equality implications.
Impact on Children and Young People: There is no impact to Children and Young People
Climate Emergency Implications: The recommendations within this report will have a neutral impact.

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What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Services & Commercial (FD.7903/25) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.6003/25) have 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.

Contact Officer:	David Eden
Telephone Number:	0151 934 4053
Email Address:	david.eden@sefton.gov.uk

Appendices:

The following appendices are attached to this report:

- Counter Fraud Strategy

Background Papers:

None



Sefton Council Counter Fraud Strategy



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1. Introduction

Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council ("the Council") recognises the potentially significant risk that fraud and corruption pose to the achievement of the Council's aims and objectives, Sefton 2030 Vision, Sefton Council Corporate Plan, and the adverse impact it can have on the provision of public services for the people and communities of Sefton.

The term "fraud" typically describes activities such as theft, corruption, money laundering, conspiracy, bribery and extortion.

The Council has an Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption policy which is the mechanism for achieving the Council's commitment to protecting the public purse and promoting a strong ethical and counter fraud structure.

This Counter Fraud Strategy sets out the Council's approach to combatting fraud and corruption over the next three years.

2. The Strategic Approach

The Council's overarching objective will create a culture where fraud and corruption are unacceptable.

The Council is committed to minimising fraud and corruption through a strategic approach consistent with that outlined in the Local Government Fraud Strategy 'Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally (FFCL) – a strategy for the 2020's', the principles of which are summarised below as the five key pillars of activity.

The pillars

Govern - The Council will:

- Develop robust arrangements and Council wide support to ensure anti-fraud, bribery and corruption measures are embedded throughout the Council.
- Have a holistic approach to tackling fraud which is part of good governance.
- Develop a more effective anti-fraud culture.

Acknowledge - The Council will:

- Assess and understand the fraud risks and ensure that they are communicated to the Strategic Leadership Board and Members.
- Commit the appropriate support and resources to tackling fraud and corruption demonstrating a robust anti-fraud response.
- Communicate the risks to those charged with governance.

Prevent- The Council will:

- Make the best use of information and technology.
- Enhance fraud controls and processes.

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- Assess the full range of fraud risks ensuring that the range of counter fraud measures deployed is appropriate.
- Raise awareness internally and externally, deterring fraudsters, sharing information and celebrating successes.

Pursue - The Council will:

- Prioritise fraud recovery and use of civil sanctions.
- Develop capability and capacity to investigate and punish offenders.
- Collaborate across local authorities and other agencies to aid the ongoing development of the Council's Fraud response.

Protect - The Council will:

- Recognise the harm that fraud can cause to the people and communities of Sefton and protect them from fraud. This will cover protecting public funds and protecting the organisation from fraud and cybercrime.
- Ensure that resources employed on tackling the full range of counter fraud and corruption activity have the appropriate skills and competence.

3. Ownership - Key roles and responsibilities:

Responsibilities for the implementation for the strategy lies with the following:

- **Cabinet** provides formal approval of the Counter Fraud strategy and the Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy.
- **Audit and Governance Committee (A&G):**
 - Consider the Council's internal control systems, risk management and corporate governance issues.
 - Review the assessment of fraud risks and potential harm to the council from fraud and corruption.
 - Monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the Council's policies on whistleblowing, fraud, bribery, corruption, money laundering and the Council's complaints process and review, as necessary.
 - To monitor the counter-fraud strategy, actions and resources.
- **Executive Leadership Team (ELT)** to monitor and to be accountable for the delivery of the strategy.
- **Strategic Leadership Board (SLB)**
 - To cooperate with the counter fraud team to ensure that the councils counter fraud framework is embedded within their areas of responsibility.
 - To undertake planned work to prevent and detect fraud perpetrated against the Council using the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) and other data.
 - Develop a counter fraud improvement plan and provide an annual

- update on performance against the improvement plan.
- Undertake a fraud risk assessment for their area of responsibility, share contents with their teams and refresh on a regular basis.
- Investigate relevant NFI data matches and allow sufficient resources to undertake NFI work.
- Cooperate on cross council counter fraud initiatives.
- Develop a counter fraud culture ensuring that policies and procedures within their areas minimise the risk of fraud.
- **Wholly Owned Companies** – The Council will engage with each of the wholly owned companies to encourage them to adopt the Counter Fraud Strategy reflecting their different operating requirements.
- **Executive Director of Corporate Services and Commercial** is responsible for the maintenance of an Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption policy which should be presented to Cabinet for approval.
- **Chief Internal Auditor** has responsibility for providing strategic direction and monitoring day to day performance of the counter fraud team.
- **Audit Manager** has responsibility for day to day management of the counter fraud function.

4. Key priorities for the financial years 2024-2027

Govern

- **Establish Fraud Awareness and Education:** Introduce regular updates aimed at management teams and develop learning modules for all staff and Elected Members to raise awareness of fraud and corruption risks.
- **Implement Counter Fraud Framework:** Refresh and renew all fraud policies and procedures under a comprehensive Counter Fraud Framework.
- **Set Resilience Goals:** Identify and approve specific goals for the organisation's resilience to fraud and corruption risks.
- **Enhance Communication and Whistleblowing Mechanisms:** Propose a plan to communicate the potential harm from fraud to all stakeholders and evaluate the effectiveness of the Council's whistleblowing arrangements, implementing improvements where necessary.
- **Reporting:** enhance reporting processes for counter fraud through the Council's governance framework.

Acknowledge

- **Fraud Risk Assessment and Resource Utilisation:** Develop a detailed fraud risk assessment in collaboration with SLB and review available Counter Fraud resources to ensure optimal utilisation.
- **Resilience Goals and Risk Management Practices:** Identify specific goals for the organisation's resilience to fraud and corruption risks and establish embedded risk management practices as the key to effective controls.

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- **Addressing fraud and corruption risks:** Identify actions to address key fraud and corruption risks and consider proactive measures for fraud detection and assurance. Develop a fraud risk register based on the output from the fraud risk assessments.
- **Strategy Delivery and Performance Monitoring:** Establish arrangements for regular accounting of the strategy's delivery, enabling performance monitoring and accounting for significant deviations from the strategy.
- **Resources:** Deploy the appropriate resources to deal with the level of fraud risk identified.

Prevent

- **Partnerships and Collaborations:** Develop and enhance relationships with Enforcement Partners and Local Authority neighbours. Identify organisations to work closely with to help prevent fraud risks.
- **Internal Controls and Audit:**
 - Will develop a fraud internal control framework to help prevent fraud occurring and/or to aid early detection.
 - The counter fraud team will undertake ad hoc reviews using NFI data and other information to identify whether fraud has taken place against the organisation and to assess the effectiveness of the fraud internal controls.
 - Will be an annual counter fraud audit undertaken by the internal audit team.
- **Innovative Review:** Consider innovative projects around data sharing with other authorities. We will continue our involvement with the NFI. Review the benefits of fraud forums and benchmarking groups. Will be a range of responses and actions appropriate for the organisation's risks.
- **Publicity and Communication:** Improve publicity by refreshing information on websites, ensuring regular communication of fraud risks, and enhancing the use of social media. Publicise the organisation's anti-fraud and anti-corruption activities, commitment, and outcomes of successful cases to staff, contractors and customers.

Pursue

- **Proactive Programme Development:** Develop a targeted proactive programme of Counter Fraud activities based on identified risks from the Fraud Risk Assessments.
- **Collaborative Efforts:** Develop a programme for closer collaboration with entities such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Police, etc.
- **Sanctions Policy and Approach:** Develop a Corporate Sanctions Policy and consider the organisation's overall approach to sanctions, including the prosecution of offences. Different approaches may be applied for different types of fraud.
- **Case Management and Loss Recovery:** Develop procedures for raising cases and feeding them into reporting mechanisms. Set out the organisation's

overall approach to the recovery of losses resulting from fraud, including the potential recovery of investigation costs.

Protect

- **Formulate a Fraud Response Plan:** Create a comprehensive plan to address fraud, outlining the roles and responsibilities of employees, managers, and the public in case of suspected fraudulent activities.
- **Leverage Legal Powers and Collaborate:** Utilise all legislative powers available to the Council for prosecution, enforcement of penalties and civil recovery. Consider collaboration with other Local Authorities for effective implementation.
- **Establish a Reviewing Body and Link Objectives:** Determine a responsible body for reviewing the strategy's performance and making recommendations. Align this strategy with the organisation's overall business objectives and the goal of enhancing resilience to fraud.
- **Assign Responsibilities:** Designate an individual with the primary responsibility for executing the strategy, along with others, who have the appropriate skills and competence, will play significant roles in its implementation.
- **Review:** A review of the Counter Fraud framework and its implementation to be undertaken by Internal Audit as part of the annual audit plan.

5. Monitoring the Strategy

Monitoring on the implementation of the strategy will take place on a quarterly basis within the Audit and Risk Performance report being presented to ELT and Audit and Governance Committee. An annual report on counter fraud will be provided to ELT and Cabinet outlining performance on counter fraud activities including the implementation of the strategy.

Review Date: June 2027

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Financial Management 2024/25 to 2027/28 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2024/25 – February Update

Date of meeting:	6 February 2025
Report to:	Cabinet
Report of:	Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial
Portfolio:	Corporate Services
Wards affected:	All
Included in Forward Plan:	Yes
Is this a key decision:	Yes
Exempt/confidential report:	No

Summary:

To inform **Cabinet** 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 December 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.
- 4) The latest prudential indicator information for 2024/25 and the current Corporate Risk Register.

Recommendation(s):

Cabinet 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

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November 2024 (outlined in section 3).

- 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) Recognise 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 31 December 2024 of £35.517m (paragraph 7.3); the latest full year forecast is £73.809m (paragraph 7.4).
- 8) Approve a supplementary capital estimate of £0.488m for the Alt Catchment Natural Flood Management Programme funded by external grant from the Environment Agency (paragraph 7.8).
- 9) Approve an increase of £0.724m to the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) block allocation funded by external grant from the Better Care Fund (paragraph 7.9).
- 10) Approve a supplementary capital estimate of £0.300m for DFG Core Grant funded by external grant from the Better Care Fund (paragraph 7.10).
- 11) Approve a supplementary capital estimate of £0.046m for Community Equipment Purchases funded by external grant from the Better Care Fund (paragraph 7.10).
- 12) Approve a supplementary capital estimate of £0.085m for the Retail Model within Health and Wellbeing Hubs funded by external grant from the Better Care Fund (paragraph 7.10).
- 13) 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 7.12-7.14).

Prudential Indicators

- 14) Note the forecasts for the Prudential Indicators relating to capital expenditure and financing as at 31st December 2024.

Risk Management

- 15) Note the latest position relating to key risk management areas.

1. The Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendations

To ensure Cabinet 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.

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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.

To ensure Cabinet are informed of prudential indicators and key risk management areas.

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 seventh 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 7.11 review progress of the capital programme. Finally, paragraphs 7.12 to 7.14 confirm that there are adequate levels of resources available to finance the capital programme.
- 1.5 This report also includes the quarter three position on the Council's Prudential Indicators and the current Corporate Risk Register information. The performance information for the third quarter of 2024/25 will be presented to Cabinet on 6th March 2025.

2. Revenue Budget 2024/25 – Forecast Outturn Position as at the end of December 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 December 2024, the forecast outturn shows a net overspend of **£19.328m**, including the impact of mitigating actions approved at Cabinet on 7th November 2024. This is an increase of **£3.523m** compared to the forest at the end of November 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 £19.328m forecast overspend:

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	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Forecast Variance	Variance to November
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Services				
Strategic Management	4.020	4.020	0.000	0.000
Adult Social Care	122.335	128.687	6.352	3.231
Children's Social Care	82.171	95.986	13.815	0.114
Communities	11.808	11.808	0.000	0.000
Corporate Resources	11.328	10.786	-0.542	-0.160
Economic Growth & Housing	7.065	7.065	0.000	0.000
Education Excellence	18.179	20.725	2.546	0.000
Health & Wellbeing	19.890	19.510	-0.380	-0.007
Highways & Public Protection	11.082	10.664	-0.418	-0.041
Operational In-House Services	18.554	18.304	-0.250	0.000
Property and Building Services	-0.396	-0.396	0.000	0.000
Total Service Net Expenditure	306.036	327.159	21.123	3.137
Council Wide Budgets	10.894	9.852	-1.042	0.178
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	0.747	0.747	0.208
General Government Grants	-95.740	-95.740	0.000	0.000
Total Net Expenditure	258.480	277.808		
<u>Forecast Year-End Deficit</u>			<u>19.328</u>	<u>3.523</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 £6.4m during 2024/25. Previous forecasts have assumed that there will be full achievement of savings proposed by the Service for the year – however, this is no longer the case (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 had 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. As at the end of December, £2.4m of the £4.8m of savings have been delivered. The achievement of these savings has been carefully monitored throughout the year. The current position now reflects the delivery of only £0.5m of the remaining savings rather than being achieved in full. Therefore, there will be a shortfall of £1.9m in the savings approved in the year.

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 adPage 84er pressures or other grant funding would be

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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 has continued to be undertaken to explore options to ensure that any potential overspend is mitigated. Initial work identified potential mitigations of £0.7m which were reflected in the previous reported forecast overspend. However, it is uncertain as to whether these mitigations will now be achieved before the end of the financial year so the forecast overspend reported above no longer assumes this saving will be achieved.

- **Children's Social Care** – The previous forecast reported to Cabinet in January 2025 assumed that the Children's Social Care budget would overspend by £13.7m during 2024/25. The current forecast for the service shows a slight increase in the potential overspend of £13.8m (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 on the requirement for additional staffing (including temporary funding for additional agency costs whilst more permanent staff are recruited to, including International Social Workers and from staff coming through the social work academy) as well as additional resources to reflect the number of packages at the time, some potential growth as well as resource for inflationary pressures. The 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 £10.9m. 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 £7.7m. 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 December there are 92 children in residential placements. With an average placement cost of approximately £0.3m

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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 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** – The Council continues to achieve positive investment returns on its cash balances. It is forecast that there will be additional income of £0.2m in 2024/25.

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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 a forecast surplus that would otherwise be achieved. It is now forecast that the additional costs of borrowing will negate the positive investment returns, with a deficit of £0.2m now being forecast.

3. Revenue Budget Summary 2024/25

3.1 An overspend of £19.328m 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 budget position having worsened by over £11m in the three 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 **Page 87** underspends can be used to contribute to

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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 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. The Government have now announced that they will redistribute £100m from the surplus in the Business Rates Levy Account. Sefton is expected to receive £0.545m, which will be utilised to offset the forecast overspend.

Local Government Pay Award

- 3.11 The 2024/25 budget included a one-off provision of £1.000m as a contingency in case the cost of implementing the April 2024 Local Government Pay Award was in excess of the permanent budget provision. The pay award was agreed at the end of October 2024. The overall costs of the pay award have now been assessed and will be contained within the original budget provision. Therefore, the £1.000 contingency can be released to offset the forecast overspend.

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- 3.12 After the implementation of these remedial actions an overspend of **£17.783m** 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. With the expected release of Earmarked Reserves mentioned in paragraph 3.9, the forecast overspend would reduce to **£12.283m**. This would mean that General Balances would reduce from the budgeted £30.3m to **£18.0m**. 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 these demand led budgets.

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3.13 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 December 2024 is a surplus of £2.571m. 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 (-£0.445m).
- Exemptions and Discounts (including a forecasting adjustment) being lower than estimated (-£0.344m).
- Transactions relating to previous years being higher than estimated (+£0.120m)
- A reassessment of the debt at risk of non-payment due to forecast receipts being higher than estimated (-£1.590m)

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 from the Collection Fund 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.

4.5 A forecast surplus of £3.062m was declared on the 15 January 2025 of which Sefton's share is £2.571m (83.96%). This is the amount that will be recovered from the Collection Fund in 2025/26. Any additional surplus or deficit will be distributed in 2026/27 and future years.

5. Business Rates Income – Update

5.1 Since 1 April 2017, Business Rates income has been shared between the Council (99%) and the Fire and Rescue Authority (1%). The Council's Budget included retained Business Rates income of £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.

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- 5.2 The forecast outturn for the Council at the end of December 2024 is a deficit of +£2.715m 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 (-£0.850m).
 - 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 (+£1.170m).
 - Adjustments relating to prior years (-£0.324m)
 - An increase in the amount estimated for debt at risk (+£0.099m).
- 5.3 When taking into account the change in Section 31 grants due on the additional reliefs, a net deficit of £2.871m 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.

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	£77.188m
2025/26	£107.842m
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 January 2025:
- **Adult Social Care**
 - £0.300m has been rephased to 2025/26 for Chase Heys Fire Alarm and Emergency Lighting due to awaiting decisions to be made about the implementation of works.

- **Communities**

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- £0.651m has been added to the 2025/26 budget for the Local Authority Housing Fund Round 3 following approval by Cabinet in January.
- **Economic Growth & Housing**
 - £1.067m has been rephased to 2025/26 for the Council Housing Scheme at Buckley Hill Lane due to build completion of the apartments being re-forecast for end-May 2025, subject to a Section 38 Highways agreement being in place. There are currently challenges in completing some of the external works to the apartments and getting necessary equipment to the apartment blocks due to challenging site conditions as a result of weather conditions meaning construction has slowed.
- **Highways & Public Protection**
 - £0.449m has been added to the 2024/25 budget for the Network North Roads Fund following approval by Cabinet in January.
 - £0.190m has be rephased to 2025/26 for Accessibility schemes due to rescheduling of start dates on site.
 - £0.050m has been rephased to 2025/26 for Public Rights of Way Improvements due to rescheduling of start dates on site.
 - £0.098m has been rephased to 2025/26 for Kirby to Maghull Cycles Route pending final settlement of land payments.

Budget Monitoring Position to December 2024

7.3 The current position of expenditure against the budget profile to the end of December 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 December	Actual Expenditure to December	Variance to December
	£m	£m	£m
<u>Services</u>			
Adult Social Care	3.992	4.287	0.295
Children's Social Care	0.213	0.318	0.105
Communities	0.655	0.453	-0.202
Corporate Resources	1.082	0.887	-0.195
Economic Growth & Housing	9.049	7.699	-1.350
Education Excellence	3.256	3.353	0.097
Highways & Public Protection	12.016	10.428	-1.589
Operational In-House Services	2.787	3.070	0.283
Property and Building Services	5.017	5.021	0.003
<u>Total Programme</u>	38.068	35.517	-2.551

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	Forecast Outturn	Variance	Budget 2025/26	Budget 2026/27
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m

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Services					
Adult Social Care	8.151	7.812	-0.339	2.761	0.546
Children's Social Care	2.633	2.630	-0.003	-	-
Communities	1.135	1.127	-0.008	1.384	-
Corporate Resources	1.686	1.686	-	0.090	-
Economic Growth & Housing	19.459	19.399	-0.060	52.554	21.281
Education Excellence	6.958	6.766	-0.192	9.916	0.061
Highways & Public Protection	25.828	23.052	-2.776	30.083	10.421
Operational In-House Services	5.628	5.627	-0.001	6.680	1.515
Property and Building Services	5.709	5.709	-	4.374	2.635
Total Programme	77.188	73.809	-3.379	107.842	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 £77.188m with a budgeted spend to December of £33.068m. The full year budget includes exceptional items such as £14.707m for Growth and Strategic Investment projects, £1.732m 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 £74m of capital expenditure would be a significant programme delivered in year- at this stage £38m would need to be spent between now and year-end. Project Managers have confirmed that this will be spent, however, based on experience in previous years, this would be ambitious. 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.

Alt Catchment Natural Flood Management Programme

7.7 Sefton Council is a partner in the Alt Catchment Natural Flood Management Programme that is being led by the Mersey Rivers Trust. £0.040m was added to the budget in June 2024 under delegated authority for Phase 1 of the project, funded by grant from the Environment Agency. This phase, which was to undertake baseline surveys and assessments, is nearing completion.

7.8 Phase 2 of the project has now received approval from the Environment Agency for implementation of these activities, which includes sand dune recharge at Hightown with material relocated from the adjacent Alt channel, and Suds features within open space in Formby. The delivery phase will run over two financial years 2025/26 and 2026/27. Cabinet is therefore requested to approve a supplementary capital estimate of £488,000 for Phase 2 of the scheme, funded by grant from the Environment Agency.

Better Care Fund – Disabled Facilities Grant

7.9 Central Government, in January 2025, announced additional Disabled Facilities Grant funding for the 2024/25 financial year. Of this funding, Sefton's additional allocation is £723,926. Cabinet is therefore requested to approve an increase of £0.723m to the 2024/25 DFG block allocation.

7.10 Cabinet is also requested to approve supplementary capital estimates for increases the following budgets funded from the inc

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- Core DFG - £0.300m
- Community Equipment Purchases - £0.046m
- Retail Model within Health and Wellbeing Hubs - £0.085m

7.11 Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care has delegated authority to approve budgets up to a value of £1m for the Wider Social Care Programme and Community Equipment Stores funded from the Better Care Fund – Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). The list of schemes to utilise the remaining unallocated DFG block allocation for 2024/25 will be fully developed and presented to Cabinet Member for approval.

Programme Funding

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

<u>Source</u>	£m
Grants and Other Contributions	55.259
Prudential Borrowing	16.278
Capital Receipts	5.452
Revenue Contributions	0.198
<u>Total Programme Funding</u>	77.188

7.13 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.

7.14 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.

8. Prudential Indicators 2024/25 – Update to December 2024

8.1 The Authority measures and manages its capital expenditure and financing with reference to the Prudential Indicators approved by Council in February 2024. It is now a requirement of the CIPFA Prudential Code that these are reported on a quarterly basis as part of the budget monitoring process. The actual values for 2023/24 and updated forecasts for the prudential indicators for 2024/25 and future years have therefore been calculated and are presented below for review.

Capital Expenditure:

8.2 The Authority has undertaken and is planning capital expenditure as summarised below.

Capital Expenditure				
	2023/24 £m Actual	2024/25 £m Budget	2025/26 £m Budget	2025/26 £m Budget
TOTAL	40.937	77.188	107.842	36.459

8.3 The estimates of the capital expenditure for the current year and future years have remained within those approved in February although timing differences may be shown due to

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reprofiling of capital expenditure, further details of which are reported to Cabinet on a regular basis as part of the capital programme budget monitoring.

8.4 The main capital projects that have incurred expenditure to date have included:

- Disabled Facilities Grants - £2.372m
- Community Equipment - £0.884m
- Corporate ICT Programme - £0.848m
- Property Acquisition - £4.775m
- Marine Lake Events Centre - £1.697m
- Enterprise Arcade Project - £0.982m
- The Strand Repurposing Programme - £3.423m
- Schools Programme - £2.032m
- Schools Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Programme - £1.236m
- Highways Integrated Transport Programme - £1.560m
- Highways Maintenance Programme - £3.982m
- Urban Traffic Control - £0.801m
- LED Street Lighting Upgrade - £1.720m
- Plant, Vehicle and Equipment Purchases - £1.987m

Capital Financing Requirement:

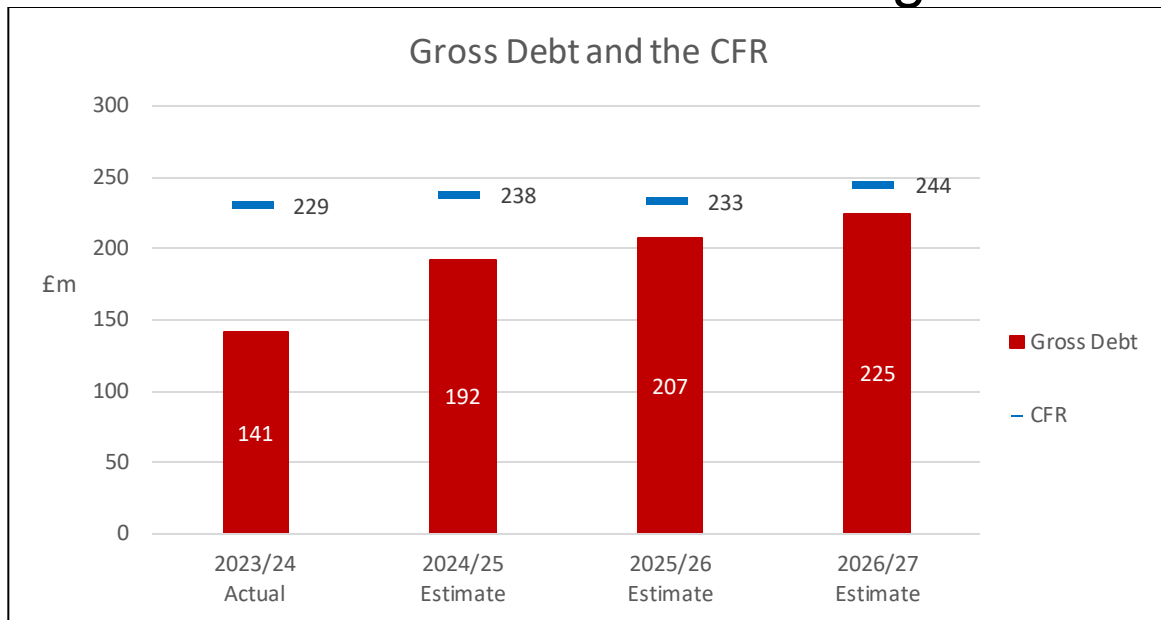
8.5 The Authority's cumulative outstanding amount of debt finance is measured by the capital financing requirement (CFR). This increases with new debt-financed capital expenditure and reduces with Minimum Revenue Provision (the statutory amounts set aside to repay debt).

Capital Financing Requirement				
	31/03/24 £m Actual	31/03/25 £m Forecast	31/03/26 £m Forecast	31/03/26 £m Forecast
CFR	229.472	237.618	232.539	244.385

8.6 The estimates of the CFR over the next three financial years have remained within those approved in February although as mentioned previously, some timing differences between years may be shown due to reprofiling of capital expenditure.

Gross Debt and the Capital Financing Requirement:

8.7 The statutory guidance provided by CIPFA is that debt should remain below the capital financing requirement, except in the short term. The Authority has complied and expects to continue to comply with this requirement in the medium term as is shown below.



Debt and the Authorised Limit and Operational Boundary:

8.8 The Authority is legally obliged to set an affordable borrowing limit (also termed the Authorised Limit for external debt) each year and to keep it under review. In line with statutory guidance, a lower “operational boundary” is also set as a warning level should debt approach the limit. The operational boundary is a management tool for in-year monitoring it is not unusual if the boundary is breached on occasions due to variations in cash flow, and this is not counted as a compliance failure under the CIPFA code.

	Maximum Actual Debt To Date 2024/25 £m	Actual Debt at 31.12.2024 £m	Authorised Limit £m	Operational Boundary £m
Borrowing	168	168	195	170
Other Long-Term Liabilities	4	4	5	5
Total Debt	172	172	200	175

8.9 The table above shows highest level of debt during the year to date (the Maximum Actual Debt) and also the debt position as at 31st December compared to the Authorised Limit and Operational Boundary. Neither indicator has been breached by the end of December, but it is anticipated that temporary borrowing to meet cashflow requirements may take the level of borrowing above the operational limit by the end of the financial year. The level of borrowing will remain with the Authorised Limit.

Net Income from Commercial and Service Investments to Net Revenue Stream:

8.10 This indicator measures the proportion of the authority’s net revenue stream that is derived from non-treasury investments such as service investments (loans to subsidiaries) and commercial investments (investment properties). Commercial investments relate to legacy arrangements such as concessions at Southport seafront, parks and gardens; the freehold interest in the Strand Shopping Centre; rents linked to small retail units; industrial units; clubs; and car park income. The indicator is a measure of the exposure to loss of income should the net return from those investments fall short of the target set in the budget.

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Net Income from Commercial and Service Investments to Net Revenue Stream				
	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Forecast	2025/26 Forecast	2026/27 Forecast
Ratio	1.2%	1.1%	1.0%	0.9%

8.11 As can be seen from the ratios above this is a relatively low percentage of the Council's revenue stream indicating that the Council's budget is not overly reliant on commercial and service investment income. It should be noted that the estimated for 2024/25 reported to Council in February was 1.0% and so a minor variation of 0.1% has occurred due to the forecast for net revenue stream now being lower.

8.12 Variations to planned levels of income are reflected in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan. Should a shortfall in investment income occur then the plan will be adjusted accordingly, and corresponding savings will need to be made to compensate for the loss of income.

Proportion of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream:

8.13 This indicator measures the total capital financing costs of capital expenditure as a proportion of the total level of income from Government Grants, local Council Tax and Business Rates payers. This measure demonstrates the affordability of capital plans by comparing the cost of borrowing undertaken to fund the capital programme (in previous years and for planned expenditure in future years) to the net revenue available to the Council in each of those years.

Financing Costs / Net Revenue Stream				
	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Forecast	2025/26 Forecast	2026/27 Forecast
Ratio	5.3%	5.6%	6.1%	5.6%

8.14 The forecast ratios calculated as at December 2024 are slightly higher than those set at the beginning of the year (2024/25 indicator was set at 5.3%) due to additional borrowing undertaken in 2024/25 to reverse internal borrowing as a result of additional cashflow pressure from the High Needs deficit. The cost of borrowing for the current approved capital programme in 2024/25 still remains affordable however and the additional debt costs have been reported as part of the Council's budget reporting process.

9. Corporate Risk Management

9.1 The Council has an established approach to risk management. As part of that a Corporate Risk Register is maintained and is reported at each quarterly meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee. This Corporate Risk Register has been updated for this three quarter-year review report and the top scoring risks are set out as in Appendix B. These risks should be considered and aligned to the key financial and performance issues within this report.

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

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 £17.783m is currently forecast, which would reduce to £12.283m 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 (FD7934/25).

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The Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD6034/25) 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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Email Address:	Paul.reilly@sefton.gov.uk

Appendices:

The following appendices are attached to this report:

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

APPENDIX B – Corporate Risk Register – December 2024

Background Papers:

None

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	988,022	18,000	-
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	165,010	350,000	-
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	1,229,235	-
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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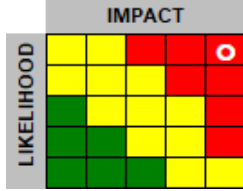
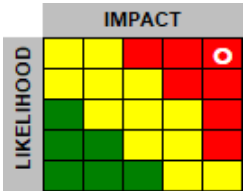
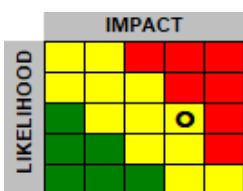
	2024/25 £	2025/26 £	2026/27 £
Brownfield Housing Fund	1,032,281	-	-
Council Housing Early Acquisitions Scheme	-	750,000	-
Council Housing at Buckley Hill Lane	1,013,490	1,068,122	-
Southport Pier	2,706,736	86,580	-
Town Centre Vacant Sites	54,016	-	-
Red Rose Park Works	-	40,000	-
Education Excellence			
Early Years	534,202	-	-
General Planned Maintenance	397,262	-	-
Schools Programme	3,167,831	7,198,364	60,637
Sporting Betterment of Schools	654,045	667,343	-
Special Educational Needs & Disabilities	2,204,321	2,049,812	-
Highways and Public Protection			
Accessibility	302,304	350,000	-
Healthy Lifestyles	167,775	317,570	-
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	5,975,338	-	-
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	283,419	728,241	-
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	51,080	1,211,920	-
- 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	6,810	103,190	-
- Economic Growth	-	-	169,000
- Asset Management	160,000	11,612	-
Sefton Climate & Retrofit Action Project	32,000	-	-
<u>Total Programme</u>	77,187,992	107,842,046	36,459,154

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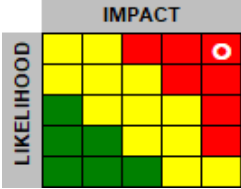
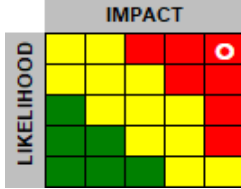
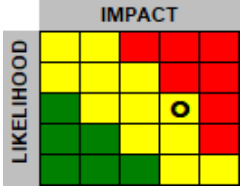
Appendix B - Corporate Risk Register December 2024

Risk Description	Previous risk score	Current risk score	Target risk score
<p>Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Funding for Special Educational Needs is inadequate to meet requirements.</p>			
<p>Causes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Needs budgets are under considerable pressure from increasing numbers of children being diagnosed with complex and life-long SEND related issues. • National funding allocations are not increasing annually at a rate to reflect increases in local population demand and so any additional commissioned places need to be financed from within existing budget envelope. • The number and value of requests from mainstream schools for "top-up" funding (for children with SEND) continues to increase year on year as schools face financial pressures to meet the first £6k of any SEN Support. • Maintained special school provision is full and more children are being placed in independent provision which is more expensive. Whilst this issue is being addressed through extra In-house provision, there remain risks that external placements may continue at high additional cost. • Central Government have advocated parental preference for SEND provision - which has added to the number of children being placed in independent provision - with no additional funding. • The current accounting override whereby the HNF deficit is ringfenced will continue until April 2026, but the increasing accumulative deficit poses a significant financial risk to the council. 		
<p>Result</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sefton's High Needs cumulative budget deficit is £35m at the end of 23/24. • The estimated deficit on the high needs block continues to be held on the Council's Balance Sheet. Whilst the current DfE regulations do not expect the Local Authority's General Fund to cover accumulated deficits, this is still only on a temporary basis until 2026. The council does not have the reserves or balances to meet this deficit if required in 2026 hence the threat to financial sustainability. • This is a significant risk to the council and 6 monthly monitoring statements will continue to be reported to cabinet and council. 		
<p>Current treatment and controls</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting to Cabinet and Council should focus on the work program that seeks to improve the support to children, the demand for the service and the financial forecast- it should also take full account of the progress in the DFEE led Delivering Better Value Programme. • Leadership from Sefton's Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education, Assistant Head of Education and the SEN team Managers on how costs can be contained. • Sufficiency statement produced that will drive future strategy and financial sustainability – build programme under development. • Lobbying and engagement of both DfE and MCCLG on financial impact and the need for increased support or confirmation that this will continue to be a DSG issue post 2026 • Engagement with special schools actively working with individual schools to review impact of any proposed changes to their funding, reviewing three-year financial plans, identifying any strategic savings to mitigate high calls on DSG High Needs funding. • Review of place and top up levels of funding. 		

Appendix B - Corporate Risk Register December 2024

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition, further work is being undertaken on alleviating the barriers to inclusivity within mainstream settings and assessment of effectiveness of capital spend to maximise mainstream settings for children and young people. • Council now part of DfE Delivering Better Value Program-it should be noted however that this is focused on the system and not on delivering financial sustainability therefore the council cannot rely on this programme to meet its key financial objective • Comprehensive 6 monthly reports to be presented to Cabinet and Council on sufficiency, in house provision, funding and deficit to provide rigor, transparency and inform decision making. • As part of the council's transformation programme SEND is a specific transformation project and reflects the 3 key areas of activity each of which will support the service • As part of the annual audit plan a review of the systems and processes within this function has been undertaken to ensure that the overall environment is robust, supports effective decision making and the use of resources- this report will be issued in Q3 of 24/25.
<p>Risk owner</p>	<p>Assistant Director of Education</p>
<p>Proposed actions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the High Needs Review the LA has been working on two specific workstreams with School representatives working on a number of key areas: • Developing a new funding model to support children with EHCPs. • Clarifying high needs funding outside of the EHCP process. • Reviewing provision and placement sufficiency. • Considering new ways of working with SEN children in schools, making them more cost effective and with good outcomes. • Review of the graduated response and supporting SEN leadership in schools. • Sefton has been working in partnership with the DfE since December 2022 to develop solutions to bring the High Needs Budget into a more financially secure position going forward and help to reduce the accumulated deficit over a set period. • The sign off of the High Needs Deficit action plan through the Delivering Better Value Programme was conducted in summer 2023 with a work programme of planned improvements and changes in SEN support for HN children commencing from September 2023.

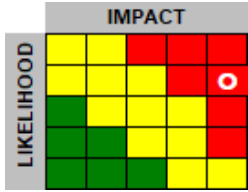
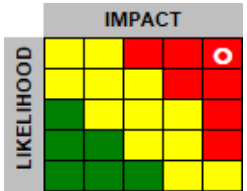
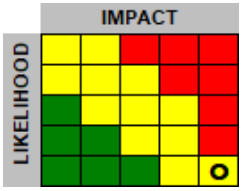
Appendix B - Corporate Risk Register December 2024

Risk Description	Previous risk score	Current risk score	Target risk score
Financial sustainability beyond 2024/25.			
Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The national economy, taking into account inflation and direct government funding, which has been reflected in the financial settlement for 2024/25 and planning assumptions for future years and the demand for services will place substantial strain on the Council's overall medium-term budget. As a result, significant budget and cost reductions will be required. Due to the scale of budget reductions made since 2010 there is a risk that further suitable cost-saving / income generating measures will be difficult to identify. The impact on the financial sustainability of the Council is therefore a key risk. 		
Result	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council will need to identify substantial sustainable savings to meet the funding gap that arises from inflation, potential government grant reductions and increased demand for services. The Budget reductions could have an adverse impact on residents and communities. The reputation of the Council may be compromised. Financial sustainability could be compromised. 		
Current treatment and controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council set a budget for 2024/25 at its meeting on 29 February 2024. Substantial investment has been made into ASC, CSC and Home to School Transport as part of this and this is where the financial risk exists- robust financial management and monitoring will be required for the delivery of the budget within this approved budget. If there are any variations to the approved budget remedial plans will need to be put in place. The Council does have an appropriate level of general fund reserves however these do not offer the scope to address a budget gap similar to that experienced in 22/23 or 23/24, indeed there is no scope to support an overspend from reserves at all. Within that budget report the key issues that need to be addressed within the next MTFP have been identified and work has started on the next 3-year budget plan. This includes refining all budget assumptions and updating the potential budget gap for these next 3 years- this will be reported in a revised MTFP that will be submitted to Cabinet and Council in November following the Autumn Budget - the council has a new transformation programme that has been established and this is the delivery vehicle for the MTFP with the stated aim of helping delivering financial sustainability. This is key to the financial sustainability of the Council with the key risks remaining in Adult Social Care and Children's Services- these have been mitigated for in 24/25 by all budget assumptions having been agreed with the DASS and DCS but that risk remains. 		
Risk owner	ED CS & C		

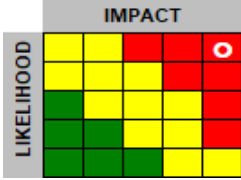
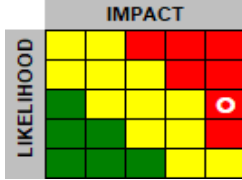
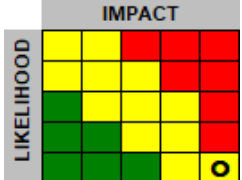
Appendix B - Corporate Risk Register December 2024

Proposed actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Key financial risk for 2024/25 is delivery of savings within Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care delivering services within the budget agreed with DCS - regular and rigorous financial management, monitoring and reporting is required by SLB.• SLB will commence work on the 3-year budget plan for 2025/26 to 2027/28 and an updated MTFP will be presented to Cabinet in November 2024.
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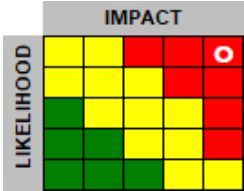
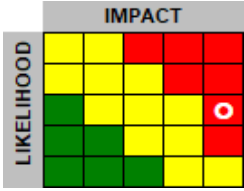
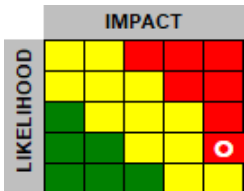
Appendix B - Corporate Risk Register December 2024

Risk Description	Previous risk score	Current risk score	Target risk score
Demand and Cost of Home to School Transport, impact on the financial sustainability of the Council			
Causes	<p>Increasing expenditure is being driven by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising number of children and young people with an Education Health and Care Plan • Rising number of children and young people whose needs are not met in local mainstream provision and placed in educational provision outside the local area. • The rising cost of fuel and living. • Driver and escort shortages, competing for scarce resources. • Parental choice 		
Result	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply unable to match demand. • Increased waiting times for service users, impact on school attendance • Financial and reputational risks, financial sustainability of Council could be compromised, Budget pressure cannot be contained. • Capacity of the workforce to meet this demand. • Potential for poor service delivery • Negative socio-economic impact. • High level of media and public interest in the Council's actions • Loss of reputation 		
Current treatment and controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a specific project that is reviewing each aspect of the Home to School Transport system and this will be reported to Executive Leadership Team in November and then subsequently Cabinet. This aligns with the DBV work and sufficiency of SEND placements within the borough. • The key aspect of this is what is driving the demand for services and how can this be better met – this work is on-going in October and aligns to DBV, therefore engagement with SEND teams on how demand can be contained is fundamental. • The review will include a review of In-House fleet and Post 16 charging policy, on-going review of all provision and Personal Travel Budgets 		
Risk owner	Assistant Director of Education		
Proposed actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive review of the system has commenced including reviewing all commercial arrangements, key cost drivers and all decisions that impact cost. This is due to be completed in the next 6 months. 		

Appendix B - Corporate Risk Register December 2024


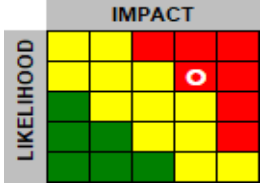
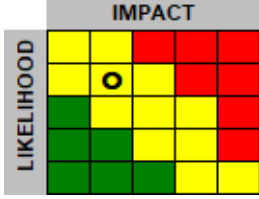
Risk Description	Previous risk score	Current risk score	Target risk score
The Council is the victim of a cyber-attack.			
Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Malware, ransomware, or another virus infects the Council's systems. 		
Result	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services will not have access to systems and data as standard and will have to fall back on non-ICT delivery methods, albeit without access to key data. Data breach occurs. Financial impact of ransom. Reputational damage 		
Current treatment and controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cyberattack prevention measures are in place, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upgraded Council firewalls and active SIEM monitoring service. Anti malware tools Acceptable use policy updated annually LGA Stocktake completed/Cyber 360 completed PSN Accreditation achieved and reviewed annually New security standards for email encryption implemented Further network security in place to reduce risk Back-up disaster recovery facility is in place at a separate site, for both clouds based and on premises systems. Agilisys has a Business Continuity-Disaster Recovery plan in place which covers an action plan for this priority restoration, and the subsequent restoration of all other systems. Ongoing monitoring in in place via ICT governance arrangements. Anti-virus and Malware software is constantly updated across the estate. Communication to employees regarding the rise in cyber-attacks is in place, with an enhanced training offer in place. Review of Cyber Incident planning completed and revised policy released. Removal of unsupported systems from the network and segregation in place as required. 		
Risk owner	ED CR&CS		
Proposed actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ongoing ICT Transformation programme has seen the majority of systems and data migrated to Microsoft Azure cloud hosting, which will reduce the overall risk; and improve Business continuity however further work is underway to improve the current security posture further. Ongoing Cyber Security Improvement plan in place. External validation and assurance ongoing linked to improvement plan. 		

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Risk Description	Previous risk score	Current risk score	Target risk score
<p>Inadequate capability to prepare for and respond effectively to a major incident affecting the Council or occurring in Sefton as per the Council's responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.</p>			
Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A major incident occurs affecting the Council or the Borough 		
Result	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of human life, illness, or serious injury • Major damage or destruction to infrastructure, property and/or the environment • Disruption or loss of critical services such as transport, communications, utility services • Reputational or financial harm to the authority 		
Current treatment and controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency Response Manual and Major Incident Guidance in place. • Revised Command and Control structure in place which defines Strategic and Tactical level officers. • Emergency Duty Co-ordinators (EDCs) are able to access Resilience Direct containing incident response plans. • Relevant training provided to Emergency Duty Co-ordinators and volunteers on an ongoing basis. • Six EDCs have now completed Multi Agency Gold Incident Commander (MAGIC) accredited training. • Attendance and participation in Merseyside Resilience Forum and joint planning across Merseyside. • Humanitarian volunteers in place and regular meetings and training now offered. • Continuous development and review of supporting plans. • Service Level Business Continuity plans now completed. Business Continuity eLearning package available to all staff • Business Continuity risk register completed and review on quarterly basis • Business Continuity Policy and strategy have been devised and approved. • BC exercises completed in January 2023 and March 2024 for Senior Leadership Board • Corporate BC plan drafted and endorsed by ELT in January 2024 		
Risk owner	CEX/ED CS&C		
Proposed actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Business Continuity Management System has been devised and is currently being implemented. This includes the following: • Six monthly review of BC plans and activation exercise undertaken to confirm accuracy of contact details included. • External provider to continually provide support in hosting regular BC exercises for all Exec/Assistant Directors. • Review and update of BC manual ongoing • All SLB members to make arrangements to be MAGIC trained as soon as possible and refresher training must be completed. • SLB to ensure that other training provided by MRF is attended by at least 3 members of SLB e.g. Recovery Training • Update Report on Emergency Planning will be presented to SLB on a quarterly basis that will take account of training, 		

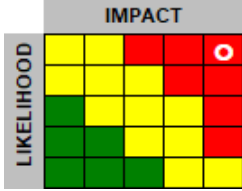
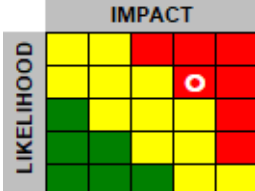
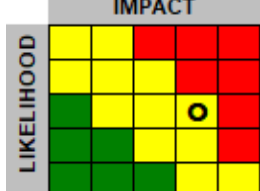
	recent incidents etc.
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Appendix B - Corporate Risk Register December 2024

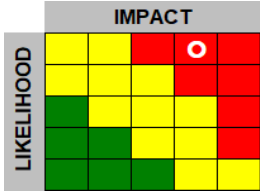
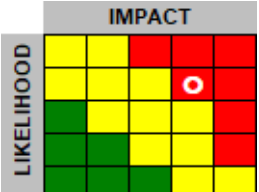
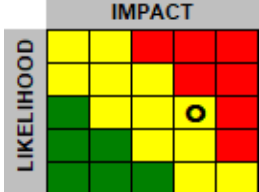
Risk Description	Previous risk score	Current risk score	Target risk score
Market Failure of Social Care Provision across Adults and Children's			
Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce - Capability and capacity of the available workforce to provide domiciliary care and within the care home market • Strategic - Lack of diversity of supply in the market to provide choice and control. COVID legacy effect on Market. 		
Result	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal - Inability to provide packages of care for service users and fulfil statutory duty of care and sufficiency duty. • Strategic - Lack of alternative providers able to support social care. Increase in placing young people within Borough, by other LAs placing additional pressure on ASC markets linked to transitions • Operational and Financial - Poor quality service provision and high costs. Significant increase in unmet needs of service users due to a fragile market that is not developing Strategy 		
Current treatment and controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic - Market Position Statement and refresh of Children's Sufficiency strategy 22-25 allows market management. Strengthen governance via actions and oversight of Executive Commissioning Group/Strategic Commissioning Group. Strategic Commissioning Team more permanent capacity to increase resource. Implementation of Commissioning priorities improvement plan. Delivery of Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2025. Implementation of robust and timely Winter Planning/checklist. Regular review of supply chain contracts. Demand Management Programme embedded in adults and children's. Mitigation of market failure by block purchasing arrangements to support hospital discharge. CQC Assurance preparation. Provider Failure Policy updated, regular Cost of Care exercises and Market Engagement Strategies in production to focus on relationship-based market management. • Operational - Recommissioning of Local Dynamic Purchasing system for Domiciliary Care. Weekly escalation/ visibility of capacity and costs with AD, DASS and wider system. Maximising learning opportunities across C&M DASS group with key areas of focus 		
Risk owner	DCS/DASCH		
Proposed actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational - Strengthened oversight of Quality Assurance (QA) with dedicated Senior Manager support will add the ability to refocus QA resources on identified areas of Market Risk. • Strategic - Continue to focus on strategic plans to current contracts to ensure Value for Money and objectives are met. Gather intelligence to inform risks and ensure resilience and capacity. Development of new opportunities through Sefton Place Based Partnership development. Children's High Risk/High-Cost Project, Commissioning priorities and full work plan. Recruitment campaign developed with Market with ongoing input from Sefton at Work - Workforce Strategy now developed, and subsequent Market Sustainability Plan roll out 2023/24. Work includes use of International Recruitment funding to be allocated to Providers. Links maintained with LCR on key market risks (capacity, workforce, 		

	<p>cost of living, ceasing of covid funding, demand). New Procurement for Domiciliary Care completed. Integrated commission arrangements will develop via new place arrangement. Market Sustainability Plan and Fair Cost of Care Exercise to be sent to Central Government mid Oct. National Government Market Sustainability funding applied to Dom Care and Care Homes 65+. Discharge funding now recurrent through the Better Care Fund. Work continues to mobilise a rapid reablement expansion. Linked to ND review. Work jointly with Health to develop approach to reduction of one-to-one requests. Cost of Care / fee setting work for 2024/25 is commencing, including Care Analytics being commissioned to support with 2024/25 fee setting work, including analysis of impacts of implementing RLW across all ASC sectors. SOP for fee setting in place. Presentation to A&CG by DASS on risk 20 March 2024.</p>
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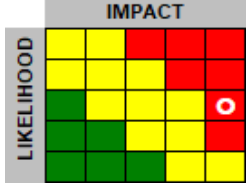
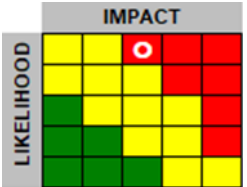
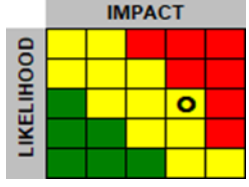
Appendix B - Corporate Risk Register December 2024

Risk Description	Previous risk score	Current risk score	Target risk score
Children’s Services - Impact of Regulatory Framework Outcomes			
Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council's children's services are currently rated as inadequate. As a result, the council is currently delivering its improvement with the support of a commissioner and DFE advisor. 		
Result	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social work practice does not meet the standard required Services are found to not adequately safeguard children Reputational damage to the Council and Statutory partners Loss of confidence in partnership arrangements Workforce and financial pressures develop 		
Current treatment and controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement board established under DfE improvement notice DfE Advisor supporting Improvement Programme Regular reports to Overview & Scrutiny Committee Self-evaluation has been refreshed and updated Comprehensive Performance dashboard developed based on required specification Quality Assurance Framework in place Practice Standards in place Triangulation of evidence through audit and peer review, regular auditing and monitoring of performance Workforce strategy in place and delivering skilled and stable workforce Financial plan in place based on DCS requirement Accommodation in place for consolidated service 		
Risk owner	DCS		
Proposed actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role of Improvement Board to provide oversight, guidance and support will continue and will meet bimonthly The council will continue to Progress the delivery of recommendations made by Children's Commissioner and the improvement plan Report progress and risks to Overview & Scrutiny Committee each cycle, in addition to improvement Board 		

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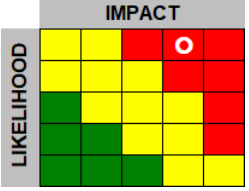
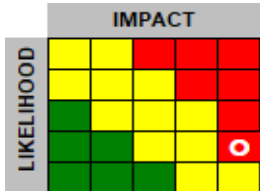
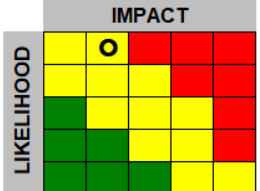
Risk Description	Previous risk score	Current risk score	Target risk score
Increase in academisation of schools within the borough			
Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Agenda DfE sponsored academies for schools in a category. Instability within LA Liverpool Diocese supporting academisation 		
Result	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With Academisation there will be a loss of SLA income which would may require service reductions in Education, corporate services and operational in-house services. With Academisation there will be a loss for the LA ability to monitor educational standards. 		
Current treatment and controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EE team continue to review offer Engaging with academies to encourage purchase of SLAs Promote "Sefton Family of Schools" image- working party established to support schools with decision making and to ensure compliance with academies act Review of traded services offer to all schools and academies Representation by Academy CEOs on School Improvement Board Presentation of this risk to A&G Committee for awareness raising 		
Risk owner	Exec Director CSC & EE		
Proposed actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many of the decisions on academisation are out of council control Individual service areas continue to make attractive and robust SLA offers New AD to reconvene regular CEO meetings 		

Appendix B - Corporate Risk Register December 2024

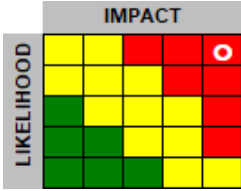
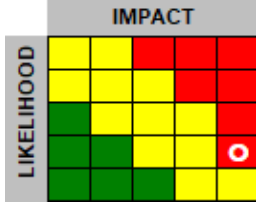
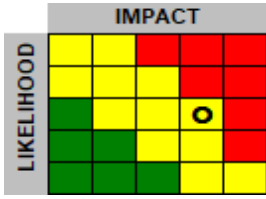
Risk Description	Previous risk score	Current risk score	Target risk score
<p>Failure to Comply with Sections 1 and 10 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000</p>			
<p>Causes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person requesting information from a public authority has a right, subject to exemptions, to be informed by the public authority in writing whether it holds the information, and to have that communicated to him, if the public authority holds it (section 1 of The Freedom of Information Act 2000). Section 10(1) specifies that public authorities must respond to requests within 20 working days. • A public authority which fails to comply with any of the requirements of Part I of the FOIA, may be served with a notice by the Information Commissioner (referred to as an ‘enforcement notice’) requiring the authority ‘to take within such time as may be specified in the notice, such steps as may be so specified for complying with those requirements’ (section 52(1)). • Compliance performance levels differ across the Council, due to the demands on particular service areas. Consistency is required in terms of prioritising responses to FOIA requests so that the Council ensures it responds to requests in a timely way. 		
<p>Result</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to comply with legal requirements; enforcement action by the Information Commissioner’s Office, damage to Council’s reputation; loss of public confidence, diversion of resource and financial consequences 		
<p>Current treatment and controls</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information management and governance, including compliance with the Freedom of Information Act is overseen by the Information Management and Governance Executive Group (IMGEG), which consists of officers with lead responsibilities for key aspects of information compliance (i.e. Data Protection Officer/IG Lead, Senior Information Risk Owner and Chief Legal and Democratic Officer) supported by other officers with key roles relating to IMG. • Each service is responsible for the handling and management of FOIA requests made to their respective service area. • Each service has designated Information Asset Owners and Information Asset Administrators. Policies, procedures, processes and issues are communicated to these officers through the Information Management and Governance Operational Group. • Support, co-ordination, advice and guidance is provided corporately. • The Council has implemented policies, procedures and processes to assist the management of FOIA requests made to the Council. 		
<p>Risk owner</p>	<p>CEX</p>		

<p>Proposed actions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SLB to continue to ensure appropriate resourcing, prioritisation and focus on information management and governance across the Council include the following:• Monthly reports continue to be sent to Heads of Service with lists of any outstanding FOIA requests, to ensure appropriate action across their service.• Monthly monitoring and review by IMG EG of compliance with statutory timescales associated with requests and numbers outstanding.• Set targets to ensure compliance with ICO recommendations (95% or more of requests are responded to within 20 working days = good, 90 to 95% of requests are responded to within 20 working days = adequate, fewer than 90% = unsatisfactory).• Regular reporting by IMG EG to SLB and Audit and Governance Committee, as necessary, as to the Council's compliance with the FOIA. Compliance statistics to be published on a monthly basis on the Council's website. Q1 statistics will be available at the end of June 2024.• Maximise the opportunities from the Council's ICT Transformation to increase and embed effective information management and governance.
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Appendix B - Corporate Risk Register December 2024

Risk Description	Previous risk score	Current risk score	Target risk score
<p>Ability of the Council to recruit to its workforce in order to deliver its Core Purpose</p>			
Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due to the contraction of the labour market both nationally and locally the council cannot recruit sufficiently skilled staff in order to meet business need. At present this is especially acute within social work teams in both Adults and Children Services. 		
Result	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council does not have the capacity to deliver the services it needs to at the pace or standard required Due to the contraction in the market the council cannot recruit to key roles - over the past 12 months this has been evident in Social Care, Regeneration, Procurement, Performance, Property and Finance Such a scenario places increased pressure on the workforce that cannot be maintained over the long term In addition to the lack of candidates in the market seeking permanent employment and a reduction in availability of temporary or agency staff, the cost of bringing in temporary cover is increasing exponentially this creating budget pressure 		
Current treatment and controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council's approach to recruitment and retention has been and will continually be the subject of review. This is a key theme within the recently produced year 2 action plan. The Council is building on the success in some areas will seek to 'grow its own' workforce with the promotion of apprenticeships, the social worker academy and graduate programmes. The Council will seek to continually enhance its culture in order that staff remain in Sefton The Council will work with Liverpool City Region Partners to recruit talent nationally and look at training and development programmes across the region that will be attractive to potential candidates 		
Risk Owner	ED CS&C		
Proposed Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The action plan for the workforce strategy details the key activities that will be undertaken to maximise the council's position in the workforce market. Extensive work has been undertaken within Children services over the last 36 months to ensure that a skilled and stable workforce can be recruited to and retained. This includes a full review of pay and benefits the development of the social worker academy and the recruitment of overseas social workers. this work will continue to support the service and similar activities and innovation will take place across the council Work has commenced with Liverpool John Moore's University to determine how pathways can be opened for graduates to join the council both on interim placements and full-time employment 		

Appendix B - Corporate Risk Register December 2024

Risk Description	Previous risk score	Current risk score	Target risk score
<p>Inability to deliver the requirements and commitments for the Growth Programme and its associated Projects.</p>			
<p>Causes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required Capital and Revenue funding not available to deliver the projects for Economic Recovery and Growth. This can be due to unavailability or timing of funds available. • External pressures affecting the construction sector, leading to challenges to project deliverability, affordability or timescales. This includes inflationary cost pressures; insufficient market capacity, contractor availability and contractor capacity; insufficient availability of materials and/or labour; delayed lead-in times for materials or services; rising prices for services, materials and equipment. • Insufficient internal staffing resource, hindering effective and timely delivery. 		
<p>Result</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased business failure • Reputational Damage especially on projects declared already in the public domain. • Increased unemployment • Financial and reputational risks to the Council • Impact on communities. • Loss of reputation • Impact of wider economic change on residents, particularly the most vulnerable 		
<p>Current treatment and controls</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth Programme and associated Governance and project controls. • Bid process and expertise applied to all existing and new funding opportunities. • Members approval and prioritisation of existing and new projects. • Constant and consistent evaluation and use of Growth Budget. • Opportunities in respect to Capital receipts from asset disposal. 		
<p>Risk owner</p>	<p>ED Regeneration, Economy & Assets</p>		
<p>Proposed actions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # Note - Immediate review of the Government White Paper on Levelling Up to ensure timely advantage taken of any funding opportunity. • Actively pursue all additional funding available in timely and at the earliest opportunity. • Create and make available Bid Team focused on and challenged with successful bids. • Establish Project Review forums and reporting mechanisms for early visibility of reporting of project progress and any emerging issues - on a project-specific and programme-wide basis. • Proactive external engagement with construction sector and key partners (e.g. LCR CA) to ensure visibility and understanding of risks to the sector and potential mitigants. • Develop and implement procurement strategy to ensure sustained competition, robustness of process and suitable partners for project delivery - Currently being actioned. • Further refine and strengthen capital project planning, delivery and governance measures 		