



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

**MEETING HELD AT THE BIRKDALE ROOM, TOWN HALL,
SOUTHPORT
ON TUESDAY 13TH JUNE, 2017**

PRESENT: Councillor Bradshaw (in the Chair)
Councillor Byrom (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Booth, Linda Cluskey, Grace, Jamieson,
Daniel Lewis, McCann and Sayers

ALSO PRESENT: Cllr Paulette Lappin

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors McKinley and Owens.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

**4. ASSET MANAGEMENT AND THE ACCOMMODATION
STRATEGY**

The Committee was advised that due to officer unavailability it was recommended that consideration of the presentation from the Head of Corporate Resources on Asset Management and the Accommodation Strategy be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation from the Head of Corporate Resources on Asset Management and the Accommodation Strategy be made to the next meeting of the Committee

**5. ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY/AGILE WORKING WORKING
GROUP**

Further to Minute No. 7 (3) of 21 June 2016 the Committee considered the report of the Head of Regulation and Compliance that presented formally

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the final report of the Accommodation Strategy/Agile Working Working Group.

The report indicated that the Committee had established the Working Group to agree and confirm the approach to the delivery of the Council's Accommodation Strategy for the period 2016/17 to 2020 and the Working Group had met on numerous occasions to perform this task; and the Working Group's Final Report together with associated recommendations was attached to the report.

Councillor Pitt, the Lead Member of the Working Group was unavailable to attend the Committee but wished to place on record his thanks and appreciation to all Members of the Working Group for their commitment and contribution to the production of the Final Report.

Members asked questions/raised issues on the following matters:-

- The Final Report would help the Council with property, personnel and ICT issues associated with agile working
- The Final Report will help with the reduction in the Council's office portfolio and thereby reduce overheads and achieve savings

RESOLVED:-

That-

- (1) It be noted that the following activity has already commenced within the Council in respect of:-
 - Developing a bespoke agile working solution that is tailored to the Council's needs as part of the Public Sector Reform Project 'Asset Maximisation'; and
 - Engaging with Senior Management of the Council to ensure that buy-in to the project is maximised as this will be critical to delivering the required cultural change;
- (2) the contents of the Accommodation Strategy/Agile Working Group Final report and recommendations be supported and accordingly, the Head of Corporate Resources be requested to implement the following recommendations:-
 - (a) Mobilise an Implementation Team across the following key disciplines in order to support project delivery:-
 - Property
 - Human Resources
 - ICT
 - Communications / Transformation;

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- (b) Develop systems to address the business storage requirements to facilitate a paper-less/paper-lite office and support business transformation;
 - (c) Develop as part of the Asset Maximisation Programme, a full business case taking account of the financial and non-financial benefits for each proposal;
 - (d) Develop a Communications Plan that can be disseminated throughout the Council;
 - (e) Develop a policy and create protocols and engagement with the workforce to ensure operational discipline;
 - (f) Continue to work with and monitor progress in service areas that have already adopted elements of Agile Working;
 - (g) Consider the development of a demonstration area (mock-up of accommodation) that can trial the proposals made and encourage staff to embrace a new way of working;
 - (h) Investigate training for managerial staff in changes of management style required for the new method of working and supervision thereof; and
 - (i) Identify areas of benefit / improvement from other corporate environments to:-
 - Continue to explore experience of other organisations including Local Authorities
 - Monitor / Measure / Adapt - baseline how we work now and review once Agile Working is implemented; and
- (3) the Head of Corporate Resources be requested to submit a monitoring report to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Resources to be held on 16 January 2018, setting out progress made against each of the recommendations set out in the report and that thereafter, monitoring reports be submitted to the Committee on a six monthly basis.

6. UPDATE ON UNIVERSAL CREDIT AND FULL SERVICE SEFTON M.B.C

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Corporate Resources that set out progress in rolling out Universal Credit (UC) in Sefton; updating on Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) new funding arrangement for Full Service due to commence in Sefton Jobcentre Plus

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offices in October 2017; and UC implementation locally and the support arrangements that would be introduced to support Sefton residents claiming UC.

The report indicated that UC helped ensure customers were better off in work than they were on benefits; that UC provided support to help people prepare for work, move into work or earn more; and that UC was a means-tested benefit that was intended to replace all of the following means-tested benefits (that top up existing income) with a single monthly payment and that the benefits and tax credits that fall within scope of the UC were:

- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Child Tax Credits
- Working Tax Credits
- Housing Benefit for working age.

The report provided details on the revised timescales of the UC national roll-out; that in Sefton, UC Live Service was introduced in Job Centre Plus (JCP) offices for single newly out-of-work people from 30th June 2014 and that this was expanded to couples from 28th July 2014 and rolled out to families from January 2015; that as at March 2017, there were 4,155 UC claims in Sefton, of which 1,124 were claiming council tax reduction (CTR) with the Council; and the work undertaken to implement UC in Sefton relating to the Council's Benefits Service Back Office, the Council's One Stop Shops and Personal Budgeting Support by the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

The report also provided details on the award by the Council of 208 UC customers with a discretionary housing payment; work undertaken with partners and key stakeholders such as Private Landlord Forums and Registered Social Landlords; UC Benefit Service workload for Live Service; and UC Benefit Service operational issues raised with DWP.

The report concluded by detailing that the UC Full Service was due to commence in Sefton Jobcentre Plus offices in October 2017 and that the Full Service would form part of the DWP's digital solution and that customers would use this solution for claiming and maintaining their UC claim online; that this would bring about a cultural and behavioural shift for claimants as the transition to monthly payments and direct payment of housing costs required them to be responsible for managing their money and paying their bills; and that the move to UC Full Service also meant that UC was delivered predominately via self-serve using the internet and that some claimants would need help with this.

Members asked questions/raised issues on the following matters:-

- The resistance by claimants to using the new online service – Based on the age profile of current UC claimants evidence had

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shown that generally, new and younger claimants were more knowledgeable in making their claims. However, from October 2017 when all claims were to be made online it was anticipated that lots more help and support would be required for claimants; and the DWP would provide a telephone help line service as part of this process for claimants without the skills or support to make their claim online

- A “friendly” easy access online application form was required – So far Council staff had only seen a demonstration of the DWP digital system for Full Service and Council staff would have to be trained to use it. The Council would continue to regularly feedback to the DWP any problems encountered by claimants
- It was noted that disability assessments and interviews would still be required outside of the online claims process
- Regarding personal budgeting how had claimants coped with the change from fortnightly to monthly payments? – There had been problems and Citizens Advice Sefton had been helping claimants with personal budgeting support. Council colleagues administering the in the Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme have also reported an increase in requests for support.
- Have any suggested changes been made to the DWP for the UC service? – Yes, issues and suggestions have been raised in relation to operational procedures causing the Council issues when dealing with Council Tax support claims
- How was assistance give to claimants with disabilities or language issues? – Language Line, translation services, Easy read, home visits and allowing the use of claimant representatives were some of the processes used; and improvements to possible further assistance would be identified via training
- Concern was raised about the direct payment of rent to claimants rather than landlords – The DWP have arrangements in place for alternative payment arrangements in some situations, such as claimants with addiction problems, a history of rent arrears.

RESOLVED: That:-

- (1) the report updating on Universal Credit and Full Service in Sefton be noted; and
- (2) the Head of Corporate Resources be requested to submit an update report on the Full Service roll-out in Sefton Job Centre Plus offices to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 16 January 2018.

7. DISCRETIONARY RELIEF FOR BUSINESS RATES FOLLOWING THE REVALUATION OF 2017

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Corporate Resources on the Discretionary Rate Relief for Business Rates following the Revaluation of 2017; that detailed the process of adopting the powers

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provided by the Government for distributing Business Rates Locally Administered Discretionary Revaluation relief and setting out guidance for the award of relief to organisations that have had a significant increase in their Business Rates liability consequential from the Government's revaluation effective from 2017; and providing details of other Government announcements regarding discretionary rate relief for Local Newspapers, Public Houses and small businesses ('Support to Small Business') encountering a large increase in Business Rates.

The report indicated that the Government determined to revalue Business Rates properties taking effect from 2017 based on 2015 values; that the review was not intended to raise additional revenue, but rather to update rental values for properties and that it was therefore intended to be 'fiscally neutral' nationally. However regionally and at an individual taxpayer level the effect varied, such that some Business Rate payers had encountered significant increases and decreases and that a system of transitional relief applied such that the gains and losses to individual taxpayers were limited in any one year and introduced over a five year period; the Government had recently determined that Local Authorities could also make available additional discretionary relief to properties affected by significant increases in their Business Rates via a £300m fund which it had introduced for this purpose and announced as part of the Spring Budget ;and that Sefton's allocation of the Government funding for discretionary rate relief was expected to be £945,838 spread across the next 4 years.

Attached as Appendix A to the report was the draft guidance in respect of the Locally Administered Discretionary Revaluation Relief scheme that was to be considered by Cabinet on 27 July 2017.

Members asked questions/raised issues on the following matters:-

- Would there be similar schemes across the Liverpool City Region?
– The Government's broad view on the parameters for applicants was that the formula for grant allocations related solely to increases for those properties with a rateable value of less than £200,000 with an increase of 12.5% or more. There is a requirement to consult major Precepting Authorities(Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner) and the Combined Authority regarding the scheme.
- Supporting Small Business Relief - It is likely that in the region of 53 businesses are affected in Sefton and we have already contacted them to provide advice about this scheme and will be contacting them again as and when the Government provides more information about the scheme. Should any ratepayer subsequently be successful in challenging their new rateable value, due to a mistake made by the Valuation Office Agency when compiling the rating list, the level of any discretionary rate relief provided by the Council would be adjusted accordingly.
- How the Council's Revenue Service liaised with the Planning and Licensing Services to be advised of changes to properties. There is

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an effective process in place for the sharing of information to support Business Rate maximisation, identifying new properties and changes in use etc.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the draft guidance in respect of the Locally Administered Discretionary Revaluation Relief scheme to be considered by Cabinet on 27 July 2017 be noted;
- (2) It be noted that the Council will be asked to adopt a scheme at their meeting on 21 September 2017 and utilise its powers under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to apply this relief;
- (3) It be noted that the Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services will be asked to utilise powers under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act to support Public Houses under the terms of the relief introduced by Government in the 2017 Spring Budget (to be subsequently detailed in relevant Government guidance);
- (4) It be noted that the Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services will be asked to utilise powers under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act to provide "Supporting Small Business Rate Relief" under the terms of the relief introduced by Government in the 2017 Spring Budget (to be subsequently detailed in relevant Government guidance); and
- (5) It be noted that that the Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services will be asked to utilise powers under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act to provide "Local Newspaper Relief" under the terms of the relief for Local Newspapers introduced by Government in the March 2016 Budget and subsequent consultation from 1 April 2017.

**8. WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18, SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPICS
AND KEY DECISION FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Regulation and Compliance that sought the views of the Committee on the draft Work Programme for 2017/18, the identification of potential topics for scrutiny reviews to be undertaken by a Working Group appointed by the Committee and the identification of any items for pre-scrutiny scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan.

Councillor Bradshaw, Chair of the Committee, referred to the on-going Area Committees Working Group and indicated that following his selection as Mayor, Councillor Robinson was no longer a member of the Working Group. In order to keep the political balance on the Working Group,

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Councillor Bradshaw suggested the nomination of a Labour Member to serve on the Working Group.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) The Work Programme for 2017/18, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved;
- (2) the establishment of a Working Group to review the topic of “Digital Inclusion” be approved;
- (3) following the conclusion of the Digital Inclusion Working Group a Working Group be established to review the topic of the Council’s Ethical Business Practices;
- (4) the Head of Regulation and Compliance be requested to contact Members to seek their interest in serving on the Working Group referred to in (2) above;
- (5) Councillor Byrom be appointed to serve on the Area Committees Working Group

9. CABINET MEMBER REPORT - 1 FEBRUARY 2017 TO MAY 2017

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Regulation and Compliance that included the most recent report from the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services.

Councillor Lappin, Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services presented her report and drew attention, in particular, to the following issues:-

- The continuation of the roll-out of the Pre-paid cards system
- The work of the Council’s Procurement Team
- The work of the Council’s Pay and Grading Team
- Asset disposal
- Councillor Robinson’s selection as Sefton’s Mayor for 2017/18

Councillor Lappin referred particularly to the outstanding work undertaken by the Council’s Electoral Services Team in administering the Liverpool City Region Mayoral election and the snap General Election.

Members of the Committee asked questions on the following topics:-

- The securing of discretionary discount on surface water drainage charges for schools.
- When would the wind turbine on the Eco Centre be fixed and operational? – Jill Coule, Head of Regulation and Compliance indicated that she would provide an answer to this question

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- The commercial acquisition of the Strand shopping centre, Bootle; and when would details of the acquisition be made public? - Jill Coule, Head of Regulation and Compliance indicated that there was a commitment to produce a public report on this issue but due to the current commercially sensitive nature of the acquisition no specific date could yet be given

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the update report from the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services be noted;
- (2) Councillor Lappin be thanked for her attendance at the meeting; and
- (3) the Committee places on record its appreciation of the outstanding work undertaken by the Council's Electoral Services Team in administering the Liverpool City Region Mayoral election and the snap General Election.