

CABINET MEMBER REPORT		
Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) -		
Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Paulette Lappin	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services	January 2021

Corporate Resources and Customer Services

During the last 2 weeks the service, as with the rest of the council has been focussed on supporting members, staff, residents and business in responding to and dealing with the pandemic.

Finance

Within the finance service, there has been significant activity on five key issues, namely

- Monitoring the Council's overall budget, excluding the impact of COVID-19;
- Understanding issues relating to COVID-19 that need to be met from the emergency fund and other funding sources provided by the Government;
- Understanding the impact of COVID-19 and lockdown on the Council's income sources;
- Updating the Medium-Term Financial Plan, including the potential ongoing impact of COVID-19; and,
- Supporting the implementation of new Government grant schemes which offer financial assistance to individuals who are self-isolating and businesses that are forced to close or face significant financial challenges due to local lockdown.

Since June, reports have been presented to each Cabinet meeting on the first three issues. These have highlighted:

- Due to the early identification of financial pressures within some services, mitigating actions have been taken to ensure the majority of these pressures can be met, with only a relatively small overall net overspend currently being forecast.
- The Council has currently received £23.7m of emergency funding to meet the cost and loss of income in the current year. Overall expenditure pressures relating to COVID-19 forecast to be £16.0m at this stage.
- The loss of income from sales, fees and charges is currently estimated to be £14.9m. The Government has introduced a compensation scheme whereby Councils can claim for certain types of lost income for which the Government will provide funding for a proportion. It is estimated that after this Government funding, the Council's share of the loss of income from fees and charges will be in the region of £9.3m. This also needs to be met from the emergency funding.
- The loss on income from Council Tax and Business Rates is currently estimated to be £11.3m. This would normally have to be funded in the 2021/2022 financial year, however, under new regulations being proposed this deficit could be funded across three financial years. There may be further support from the Government to help mitigate some of these losses as part of the 2020 Spending Review.

In October, Cabinet was presented with a report updating the MTFP for 2021/2022 to 2023/2024. Due to a number of uncertainties, particularly around Government funding, at this stage there is a range of potential budget gaps that are currently being forecast – between £13.5m to £23.2m in 2021/2022 and between £25.5m to £44.2m across the three years (before any decisions are made about potential increases in Council Tax).

The audit of the Council's Statement of Accounts for 2019/2020 by EY will be completed in early December. The Accounts are set to be approved at Audit and Governance Committee on 16th December.

Customer Centric Services

The focus for the service since October 2020 has been supporting residents and businesses affected by the pandemic and restrictions imposed in the Liverpool City Region and then at national level.

The Business Rates team is working with colleagues in Invest Sefton to provide grant-support to businesses forced to close due to restrictions in line with the Local Restrictions Support Grant guidance issued by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

The Benefits Service has started processing Test and Trace Support Payments to residents unable to work from home if they are told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace and will lose income as a result. The payments are designed to help ensure that people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and their close contacts self-isolate for the required period to stop the onward spread of the virus.

Customer Services has handled a high volume of COVID-related enquiries from customers asking about how and where to get a COVID-test and the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme. The team also supported a Council-initiative during the October half-term to provide vouchers to school children in receipt of free school meals.

For the month of October, Bootle One Stop Shop handled a total of 1,177 appointments, the majority of which were for Taxi Licensing. Bootle One Stop Shop has remained open since the national lockdown started on 5th November to continue to provide a taxi-licensing service with enquiries for all other council services being handled by the Contact Centre or online. Preparations are also underway to make grant payments to taxi-drivers from funding provided by the Liverpool City Region COVID-19 Taxi-Support fund.

Risk and Audit

The **Internal Audit** team are continuing to work on delivering the internal audit plan with a current focus on providing assurance on the Covid related business grants that have been provided to local businesses. Work is continuing with the Locality Services Procurement and Conduct Review, with two internal audit staff involved. A recently completed audit was the Ethics and Code of Conduct (graded as Major audit risk opinion) review which identified that the area requires improvement to ensure that it was effective in managing the risks surrounding employee conduct in the public sector.

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

- Completed the renewal of the insurance portfolio for the Council and associated subsidiary companies (Sefton New Directions, Sandway Homes) took place on 29 September 2020 with negotiations proving to be challenging and protracted between the Council's Insurance Broker and panel of insurers.
- The team has completed a tender exercise to value a sample of Council properties for insurance purposes to ensure that the current rebuild values used are accurate and will protect from insurers using average clause in the event of major loss.
- We are working with insurers and the Council's liability insurers to robustly defend claims and in limited circumstances will pursue through the Courts claimants to recover Council costs where the claims are proven to be exaggerated
- Team also continues to work extensively with Service Teams including Highways and Tourism to improve the management of insurable risk in areas where there are high numbers of claims or areas of concern.

- The Team continue to develop an approach for the Council's Maintained Schools which is designed to be attractive against the Government's Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) scheme and is to be shared for consultation with the Schools Forum in December 2020.

The **Risk and Resilience Team** have been actively involved in the initial Covid-19 response and have been involved in a number of cells within Sefton (Business Continuity and Death Management). There has been a focus this years during the pandemic of working on the development of Service Business Continuity Plans across the organisation enhancing the existing planning framework.

The **Risk and Resilience Team** are also working on developing a proposal for the Council's Risk Appetite as well as facilitating the updates of the Council's Corporate Risk Register working with the Risk Owners to update the risk register. Other work includes:

- Working with the Merseyside Resilience Forum
- Developing plans for the winter period

The Assurance team have been involved in the development of fraud risk assessments following the self-assessment against the CIPFA Code of Practice on Fraud for each Service Area. The team have also been involved in providing support to Internal Audit in a review of the Business Grant review undertaking some sampling of grant applications.

A range of assurance checks continues to be undertaken across Customer Centric Services, which includes refunds, Council Tax discounts and exemptions, Business Rates Reliefs and Exemptions, including Small Business Rates Relief. This work complements any audit activity undertaken during the year.

A Counter Fraud Profession pilot is being undertaken in the North West, which will deliver Apprenticeship Levy Funded Counter Fraud Training. The training is due to commence in January 2021 and Sefton has nominated a member of the Audit team to take part. Sefton's Learning and Development team have been assisting in the process.

The Council's Counter Fraud Strategy is in development and consultation with the Strategic Leadership Board will be commence after December 2020 with a projected timescale for Cabinet approval of the Strategy in April/May 2021.

For the Health and Safety Team there will be a continued focus during the next quarter of delivering the Health and Safety Improvement Plan and also the ongoing recovery programmes from COVID-19 with planned priorities –

- Continue to support to assist Managers with the recovery programmes from COVID-19.
- Continue to review, update and monitor the Health and Safety Standards and Policies, with focus on working from home, display screen and workstation assessments and stress risk assessments.
- Continue to develop the Council-wide training needs assessment which will eventually build into the health and safety training plan and provision.
- Continuing the delivery of risk assessment training for the managers who have responsibility to undertake risk assessments, in collaboration with the Corporate Learning Centre. Following up with the managers who have not responded to the initial request for their risk assessments and evaluating the quality of the risk assessments.
- Focus on improving the accuracy of incident reporting across the Council will continue to ensure incidents of threatening and abusive behaviours towards staff are reported.

- Continue to deliver a health and safety management audit and inspection regime across the Council, to schools with a Service Level Agreement with the Council and those schools where the Council retains responsibility for the health and safety as the employer. This will provide assurance that health and safety management systems are suitable and effective.

The Council has a contract with its liability insurers which includes an allocation of free training or service days to assist with implementing effective risk management across the Council. Health and Safety, including COVID-Secure audit support and school Governor training is planned for late 2020.

ICT

The ICT Service continues to respond to changing business requirements in line with the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic. As well supporting the establishment of the local Test and Trace team the ICT client team has also facilitated the setup of the local mass testing centres with the provision of tactical solutions to deliver connectivity requirements. In addition, the team have deployed mobile telephones as scale to support agile working.

We continue to encounter challenges with the capacity of the corporate network due to the significant increase in network traffic, as a result of increased agile working and the use of Microsoft teams. Emergency work has been completed on the network to alleviate the issues whilst work is underway to complete split tunnelling on the network. This split tunnelling will redirect all Microsoft traffic away from the corporate network for all staff working from home thereby maximising the use of corporate networks for critical applications located in the data centre, testing of these solutions are now underway.

Alongside core business activity the team have completed a full technical review of the Cloud migration strategy and have worked alongside colleagues in Microsoft and Agilisys to firm up proposals, which will support the migration of the data centre out of St Peters to the Azure Cloud. Proof of concept work is due to commence in January and will last approximately 5 weeks.

Procurement of a new Cloud Based Telephony solution is well underway and it is hoped we will be able to award a contract to the successful supplier by the end of January 2021.

Schools ICT is also a key priority and we have procurement activity ongoing for a new Schools Connectivity Service, which will significantly improve the service offer to Schools in the Borough. In addition, the Procurement and Contracts team within the ICT Client have now established a Procurement roadmap to ensure delivery of critical services for Sefton, at the time of writing the team are supporting; HR and Payroll, Revs and Bens and Sefton at Work colleagues to procure new ICT solutions in line with business requirements.

Property Services

The Property Services Department are a Multi-Disciplinary team delivering various services, professional advice and initiatives across the Borough of Sefton. Below are some examples of ongoing pieces of work throughout the department.

Asset Management

- Ongoing work to deliver Phase 1 Asset Disposals
- Considering Phase 2 Asset Disposals
- Asset records input and liaison with Building Maintenance colleagues for new (property based) IT system in support of Corporate Landlord Implementation
- Agreement of terms and reporting for Lease of various assets
- Ongoing management of 'day to day FM operations' to also include the COVID-19 measures and management within buildings.

Maintenance Management & Building Services

- Delivering a range of schemes in support of Corporate Buildings
- Delivering a range of schemes in support of Education Capital programme
- Delivery of reactive maintenance and statutory compliance services to Corporate and Educational buildings
- Professional advice and support on a broad range of regeneration programmes
- Development and implementation of a new coordinated (property based) IT system in support of Corporate Landlord Implementation
- Delivering services in support of major adaptation to vulnerable and disabled residents

Project Management

- Provide professional support to Growth Board on several projects
- Completed various projects despite the current constraints.
- Provide support to other teams on asset disposal, Building Maintenance, Asset Management and Statutory Compliance colleagues.

Energy Management

- Continued active support of those in fuel poverty and the most vulnerable – taking place remotely.
- Bid for Grant funding to target the worst performing homes.
- Running switch off fortnight campaign for schools in November
- Skills bid for decarbonisation of public buildings submitted.
- Working on the 10 year Carbon plan.
- Managing energy and water contracts.

Legal and Democratic Services

Legal Services

- Continuing to advise on Covid-response contractual variations, extensions, emergency/extraordinary procurements, including advising on the applicable procurement regime, often in novel and evolving ways in addition to advising on sensitive Council projects negatively impacted by Covid which has often required early and extensive support senior legal support in evaluating the risks, opportunities and the viability of proposals
- Implementation of central Government schemes/funding which are being deployed via the local authority sector with advice around complex state aid issues
- Continuing advice on major projects (including supporting the Growth Investment Plan, Sandway Homes, construction & development projects etc.)
- Advising on and successfully concluding a number of keystone grant funding agreements with LCRCA (including Crosby Lakeside and Southport Pleasureland) and other Governmental departments/agencies including DHSC and Homes England
- The Childcare Team has seen a rise in care proceeding of 38% which has seen a corresponding increase in all aspects of the work that the Team carries out
- An increase in international cases which are legally challenging; this is expected to increase as we move towards the EU exit
- Planning committees continue virtually and more frequently to clear delays caused by the initial COVID-19 lockdown. And currently a large amount of attention is presently drawn to delivering a robust defence of a number of Judicial Review challenges whilst maintaining normal operational capacity
- Sefton Magistrates Court started hearing prosecution matters again 25 August 2020 after delays relating to Covid-19. The Team has prosecuted a backlog of matters this has resulted in a number of successful prosecutions with awards of fines and costs in relation to: counterfeit cigarettes and alcohol, trading standards, fly tipping, taxi licensing, landlord licensing, planning enforcement notices and a health and safety prosecution for a Southport hotel
- The team is providing continuing legal advice in relation to the interpretation and enforcement of the new Covid Regulations, which has included serving a direction upon a hairdressers and beauty salon in Bootle to close.
- The Team's specialised debt recovery team has recovered over £200K this financial year. The team has also started to recover charges from enforced sales. In addition to recovering money for the Authority it means that empty / derelict properties are back in the system which brings direct benefits to communities

Electoral Services

- The Electoral Services team have now completed the annual canvass for the 2021 Register of Electors which was published on the 1 December 2020. Preparations for the combined Local Government, Police & Crime Commissioner and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Mayoral elections, which will take place on Thursday 6 May 2021.

- All aspects of the election have been evaluated in line with the current situation and restrictions in place. Each element of the elections has been assessed and some areas will require changes to be made to the process to ensure it is compliant, but ensuring transparency and the secrecy of the ballot are maintained.
- The team have now commenced the annual process of refreshing and update the details of those electors who vote by post and have done for the last five years.

Personnel

Operational Issues

Advice and support continues to be provided to all service areas. Predominantly, issues have been, and continue to be, related to the Coronavirus pandemic and the impact on resources in terms of staffing and service provision in all areas. Regular discussions are taking place at departmental management team meetings and with the trade unions. Meetings are being conducted through Microsoft Teams.

The majority of staff are working from home with occasional agile working at office sites as required, with social distancing measures in place. Reviews and restructures across the organisation relative to budget savings have been put on hold, with the exception of Customer Centric Services, where consultation with the trade unions regarding this review has recommenced.

Matters relating to disciplinary, grievance and dignity at work have been less over the past few months, but where necessary, formal meetings have been held via Microsoft Teams. Advice and support in the management of sickness absence, particularly Covid-19 related absences, has been the main focus. Formal action under the sickness absence policy and procedures was put on hold during April to June, but where action is considered necessary this is now being gradually addressed. Support is also being provided in respect of the temporary redeployment of staff during the restrictions placed on the Authority for certain services.

Pay & Grading and Establishment Control Team

Job evaluation continues relative to all Council and School posts for new or revised roles. Job evaluations are also conducted relative to any operational and service reviews to maximise efficiencies as part of restructuring exercises across the Council. The Establishment Control team are then responsible for building any revised structures and changes to reporting hierarchies into the Councils operating systems.

The Establishment Control Panel takes place every 2 weeks to consider requests in relation to the release of vacancies and the approval of any changes to the Establishment held in ResourceLink. All changes to the Establishment are mapped to ensure correct procedures are followed.

Establishment Control review safeguarding checks held against posts e.g. Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS formally CRB), Health Care Professional Council (HCPC) etc. with Heads of Service and amend as required. This now includes safer recruitment checks. Guidance for managers on all aspects of safeguarding has been produced and is available to managers to ensure that the adequate checks are carried out on all roles. The team also manages and controls the temporary end dates relative to all fixed term contracts and provides establishment control information reports for the Council and schools.

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

The team undertakes the review of HAY graded positions for new posts and the evaluation of HAY posts stemming from any revised proposals to the HAY grading structure.

The National Joint Council for Local Government Services have amended the National Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Service relative to the calculation of Term-time only (TTO) salaries. Team members were involved in the adoption of the NJC advisory model and the revised calculations have been processed from September 2020.

Consideration of new case law on holiday pay is also taking place.

Team members are involved in service reviews and work to support transformational proposals and potential changes to service delivery

The team manage the Matrix contract relative to the recruitment of all Agency workers.

The team manage sickness absence data, including production of management reports, sickness absence analysis and quarterly absence figures for SLT. Team members have been heavily involved in COVID 19 testing administration via the Government portals and the production of managers guidance relative to track and trace, isolations requirements etc.

Transactional HR Payroll & Pension (THRP) Services

ResourceLink is the Payroll/HR system used by the Council and the current contract expires 30th September 2021, so in conjunction with other HR colleagues the procurement process is progressing and a decision is to be taken later in 2020.

Since March 2020 many of the staff have move to working from home and this has gone really well. Some processes have had to be changed and the staff have embraced these changes There are some staff who have to still go into the office due to various issues, Internet, paper etc. The number of staff going into the office is being closely monitored.

The Team have recently processed:

- Teachers Pay award backdated to 1st September 2020 in November 2020
- Youth Pay award backdated to 1st September 2020 in November 2020

They are currently looking at the following:

- Christmas processing
- Shut down working/refunds
- Weekly to monthly pay on 1st February 2021

The team are looking at a solution for removing the need for paper claim forms and this is in the early stages of development and will hopefully be trialled in Leisure Centres first, due to their high volume of paper claims.

The Team are also working on a pilot with Merseyside Pension Fund (MPF) to produce a monthly data file to replace the year end return for all members of LGPS. The files from April 2020 to September 2020 have been sent to MPF and the initial feedback from MPF is good.

The Pensions Officer is looking at the recent changes to legislation regarding the £95K exit cap and how this will impact on the Council and employees. The Pensions policies and discretions will need to be updated once further detail is received from the Government and MPF.

Occupational Health

Health Unit

During October 2020, a total of 50 referrals for SMBC employees were made to the Health Unit. This is significantly less than the 73 referrals made within the previous October and has obviously been affected by the current pandemic.

Referrals during this month were from Education Excellence (58.0%), Adult Social Care (12.0%) and Communities (10%). This is the first time for several years where the number of referrals from Locality Services has not featured in the top two departments. As usual the main reasons were stress and mental health related (70.0%), acute medical illness (10.0%) and musculoskeletal and bereavement (8.0%).

The Health Unit, together with Public Health has been asked by the Council's Learning & Development Section to be involved in a number of short on-line sessions to promote the support available to Council employees during the current pandemic. The first of these has been scheduled for 26 November.

Workforce Learning and Development (CLC)

Apprenticeships

The Corporate Apprenticeship Team met the 2.3% apprenticeship levy target for 2019/20. A report was recently submitted to the Education and Skills Funding Agency detailing our performance and this was shared with the Chief Personnel Officer, Director for Corporate Resources and the Cabinet Member.

There are currently 9 managers enrolled on the **Level 7 Senior Leader Apprenticeship Degree programme (MBA)**, delivered by Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU). 4 managers have progressed to semester 2, 4 managers are returning to university following a break in learning to re-take semester 1 (covid-19 related) and 1 manager has requested a break in learning until January 2021 due to workload (covid-19 related).

Semesters 1 and 2 commenced from September 2020 and all modules are being delivered virtually until December 2020 at the earliest. LJMU are hoping to resume classroom training from January 2021 however this will depend on Covid-19 and if there are further lockdown restrictions.

We will be offering the **Level 6 Social Work Apprenticeship Degree** from January 2021. The contract was awarded to the University of Chester and LJMU under the YPO framework and 6 staff (3 from Adult's and 3 from Children's Social Care/Early Help) will be joining the three-year programme from January 2021.

Training delivery

The Workforce Learning and Development Team have worked incredibly hard since the Covid-19 outbreak to adapt the way we deliver classroom training – this includes offering virtual training using MS Teams and adapting existing classroom courses to eLearning, pre-recorded webinars, self-help guides and commissioning new eLearning courses. Examples include:

- **Safeguarding Adults and Children's training** was converted to pre-recorded webinars back in April 2020 and are available on Me Learning.
- **Health and Safety Awareness** will be available as an eLearning course from October 2020. We have worked with our H&S team to launch a number of other eLearning titles that fit within our Health and Safety offer.
- **Equality and Diversity** - We purchased Equality and Diversity eLearning for a period of 6 months (to begin with) and have now extended this until June 2021.

- **Unconscious Bias** – The course proved to be very popular, over 400 staff completed this course during the month of June 2020, we have commissioned this course until October 2021.
- **Coronavirus Awareness training** – sourced free Coronavirus awareness eLearning for Sefton Council employees, schools and partners.
- **Adult, Children's and Early Help Case Management Training** sessions have/are being delivered virtually to staff and partners.
- Produced **9 eLearning packages** for the Educational Psychology Team to enable Teachers and those supporting the education system to help transition children and young people back into schools.
- **Domestic Abuse Awareness training** – we've worked with SWACA to provide virtual classroom Domestic Abuse training sessions. More sessions are planned for the autumn due to popular demand.
- **Child Exploitation (CE) Assessment Tool virtual briefing** – we developed and delivered a virtual briefing and systems demo to staff in CSC, Early Help and YoT to launch the pan Merseyside Child Exploitation Policy and introduce the new CE Assessment Tool.
- We're currently delivering essential **First Aid and Fire Warden** socially distanced classroom training in line with current Covid-19 guidelines.

We continue to work closely with the Care Homes cell to develop an **Education and Training Programme** for Care Homes, Community Services and recipients of direct payment affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The programme includes local and national resources covering the following topics:

- Infection, Prevention and Control
- Medication
- End of Life Care
- Bereavement
- Moving and Handling
- Look after You – Health and Wellbeing Resources
- Further sources of support

The resources are updated on a fortnightly basis and are available in PDF format and as separate eLearning modules on Me Learning.

We also worked with the Care Homes Cell to coordinate and submit a bid to Health Education England (HEE) to deliver an End of Life Education and Training programme to Care Homes working across Sefton. Unfortunately, the bid wasn't successful however we were given the opportunity to re-submit. We've informed HEE we will re-submit our bid in the next couple of weeks.

Strategic Support

The Communications team continue to be at the heart of all activity across the Council and are playing a critical role in supporting all areas of the Council in order to ensure that residents and business are informed at the earliest opportunity of all key issues and information is provided in a clear and concise manner. All internal and external communication channels are being used extensively.

The Procurement team is playing a key role in many initiatives across the Council including the procurement the HR/Payroll system. Work on the Procurement Strategy is underway but has been delayed as a result of capacity required to support the Council's response to the pandemic. Work relating to providing an effective mechanism for improving the social impact/social value from our contracted providers, particularly its focus on "Achieving Community Benefit", which includes "obtaining social value has continued. This work has included:

- The development of question banks which include for example questions on employability and local supply chain
- Securing access to the use of the Social Value Portal
- Identification of training opportunities and associated delivery – the Procurement Manager has completed the CIPS Ethical Test

The team will prioritise this work over the coming months as it will play a key part in recovery.

Business Intelligence team are continuing to support many work streams across the Council including Economic Regeneration, Education Excellence, Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and Public Health Services. Key areas of work include daily analysis of Covid-19 pandemic data, processing of National Shielding Service referrals and submission of vulnerable children & young people returns to the DfE. Another key area of work is collating local data in respect of the national immunisation preparation. Furthermore, the teams continue to deal with complaints, subject access requests, consultation & engagement activities and managing the project to digitise the Council's historic paper records.

The Commissioning team are working with Children's and Adults Services as would be expected in order that both services can respond effectively by supporting care providers. Again this will be a critical function and activity as the Council responds to the protection of its most vulnerable.

The Strategic Support team continue to support the delivery of COVID testing in the borough, supporting the Outbreak Management Board and has been working with colleagues from Learning and Development to develop Accessible Information eLearning training for Council staff that will be introduced shortly. The team continue to support the Demand Management programme of work.