

## CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

### Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills)

Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Trish Hardy	Communities and Housing	January 2021

#### Area Co-ordination

A date has been set for the re-start of the Environmental Awareness Days in partnership with OVH, Merseyside Police, Merseyside Fire & Rescue, SMBC Cleansing and SMBC Environmental Enforcement. The days aim to educate residents around the dangers of fly tipping in their rear alleyways and look to gather evidence to take forward for prosecution if necessary. The first event will take place on Tuesday 19th January 2021 in Clemmey Drive and there will also be a community skip on site.

The installation of a Living Wall to the front of Bootle Strand is complete. The unveiling by colleagues from Linacre Ward took place on Friday 18th December 2020 and a plaque was installed.

I am pleased to report that a total of £5,525 has been awarded to the Mayors Toy Appeal from the 22 ward budgets. £3000 worth of toys were purchased from B&M by Neighbourhood Officers. I asked officers to ensure we kept some of the money in the Borough and £2,000 worth of books and gifts from local shops was also purchased. The remainder of the funds were contributed towards an Argos order in partnership with budgets held by our Troubled Families Team. All the independent businesses gave a discount or additional items as a donation towards the appeal. B&M also gave a 10% discount.

#### Christmas 2020.

To support our communities during this unprecedented year, I asked the Neighbourhoods team to supply additional seasonal decoration across the borough.

Below is a table showing the locations for the additional decorations:

LOCATION	VOLUME REQUIRED
Bootle Strand	18 units
Seaforth Rd	6 units
Sefton Rd	8 units
Kirkstone Rd North	6 units + 208l/m fascia lighting
Marion Square	6 units + 300l/m fascia lighting
St Johns Rd	12 units

And 26ft Cut trees were placed outside Bootle Strand and in Crosby Village.

#### Welfare Reform

##### **Council provided 'much-needed' Christmas school holiday meal vouchers to eligible local families**

Sefton Council will be providing meal vouchers over the Christmas holidays for families in Sefton who receive free school meals.

The Council will be using part of its Winter Grant Scheme allocation to provide schools with vouchers that can be allocated to eligible families. As with the October half-term scheme, the vouchers will be valid to buy food in-store and online at local supermarkets.

It will not be possible to use the vouchers to buy alcohol, tobacco, lottery tickets, phone top ups or stamps. In October, the Council stepped in at short notice to provide local families with food vouchers and by the second day of the scheme was dealing with more than 2,500 applications. During the half-term week, the Council team was processing around 1,000 applications per day. **In total**, the Council funded meal vouchers for around 8,500 children during the half-term holiday.

Local businesses and voluntary organisations, which were already being hit by the Government’s COVID restrictions also pitched in by providing packed lunches, food hampers and meals to local families.

Families across Sefton who do not currently receive free school meals but think they might be eligible can visit [www.sefton.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals](http://www.sefton.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals) to find out whether they qualify and how to apply.

### **Additional funding allocated to South and North Foodbanks**

Through the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) grant from government, I asked that additional funding was allocated to our two main foodbanks to ensure that they are able to continue to support our most vulnerable residents.

### **Winter Grant Scheme**

Through the Winter Grant Scheme funding, services will be providing additional vouchers and food hampers to families known to the council through early help and social care and to families and individuals known to the council’s homeless services. The 3 Family Wellbeing Centres will remain open throughout Christmas holidays for any families in need and they will be able to support those families to access basic food and utility needs if required. Those centres are Marie Clarke Family wellbeing centre, Netherton Family wellbeing centre and Talbot Family wellbeing centre. Additional funding has also been allocated to our Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme (ELAS) who will operate more flexible criteria during the winter months to ensure that all residents in need of basic support receives it.

### Food bank

1 April 2020 – 31 November 2020	South Sefton	Southport
Total Vouchers received	3811	1242
Adults Fed	4803	1673
Children Fed	3155	1239
Total Fed	7958	2912
Crisis Type	Low income – 2373 vouchers presented 5026 people fed	Low income – 652 vouchers presented 1601 people fed
Family Type	Single 2108 vouchers presented 55.31%	Single 617 vouchers presented 49.68%
Age group	25-64: 4185	25 – 64: 1409

### **Hate Crime**

The Hate Crime MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) has changed its title to Hate Crime JAG (Joint Action Group). The change reflects the title used for similar groups across the City Region and the country. The meetings continue to take place on Microsoft Teams and are well attended.

## **Equalities**

The Equalities officer has been working with colleagues in education and with Sefton CVS giving advice on the acceptable use of language in schools.

## **Domestic Abuse**

We have received some additional funding from the Ministry of Justice via the Police & Crime Commissioners Office to complement the funding they provided earlier in the year as part of the Covid response. We have used this funding to provide an adolescent child on parent scheme through Domestic Abuse charity SWACA. The funding will increase capacity in the service to allow direct work to be undertaken with the harmer as well as support for the parents and siblings affected by the abuse.

## **Integrated Youth Service**

### Youth Offending Team (YOT)

Comparing 2017 figures for reoffending to 2018, there has been an increase of 5.6%, meaning that our reoffending rate is 50%. The YOT family average was 42.6%, Merseyside 46.2% and England with 39.2%, therefore our rate is higher.

During January to March 2018 the number of reoffences committed per reoffender in Sefton were an increase compared with 3.42 during Jan to March 2017. To increase our understanding to why the increase has occurred, YOT is in the process of developing an in-depth cohort profile which will inform case study analysis to highlight the areas the YOT need to focus on. A new operational group has been agreed (Operational Partnership Group) which will consider these matters.

The First Time Entrants (FTE) rate has decreased by 15 young people comparing figures from 2017-18 and 2018-19. However, there has been a significant increase in out of court disposals and also an increase in the seriousness of offences being dealt with using this method.

Out of court disposals enables YOT to take a more constructive, prevention focused approach particularly where the young person is understood to have experienced past trauma, rather than managing the young person through a statutory order, although statutory assessments are being considered for the more serious cases so as to enable a greater level of analysis to inform the support plan for the young person.

Sefton does not currently have any young people in custody.

### Operational Partnership Group

The first Operational Partnership Group met on the 9<sup>th</sup> December. The group will be planning youth justice priorities for the year ahead and will develop strategies to strengthen partnerships, focusing on how to engage young people back in to education, employment and training.

### New YOT Interventions

Sefton YOT will be delivering two new levels of interventions from January 2021. Firstly, Operation Inclusion is an Out of Court Disposal designed to prevent and address the escalation of street-based offending associated with drug and violent crime. This caters for more serious offences and offers a more intensive intervention without criminalising a young person. The target cohort for is 13 to 17 years olds at risk of receiving a Youth Conditional Caution or an initial Referral Order.

The programme is supported by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Merseyside Police, as it supports the partnership commitment to tackle Child Criminal Exploitation. The Youth Justice Board has also shown support regarding its aim of reducing first time entrants as it provides giving young people an opportunity to engage with YOTs in an intensive intervention as an alternative to a statutory order.

Outcome 22 offers another layer of intervention and provides an opportunity for YOTs to put in place an individualised programme of diversionary and educational activity to prevent re offending. As opposed to Operation Inclusion this intervention will be used for low level offences where it is assessed that the incident can be dealt with via such interventions as Restorative Justice, Mediation, or Education and it is not in the public interest to take any further action.

Examples of when Outcome 22 is likely to be used may be for first time possession of cannabis offences if the young person agrees to engage with We Are With You (WAWY, previously Addaction) or for minor criminal damage which could be resolved through a restorative meeting with the victim or where the young person writes a letter of apology.

### Work with Victims

Sefton YOT has continued to work with victims of offences caused by young people throughout 2020, although because of Covid restrictions it has not been possible to carry out the usual face to face work. All victims who provided permission were contacted and their views considered when decisions were being made about how young people should repair the harm caused by their offending.

Between January and November, 19 victims of young people sentenced to statutory Court Orders engaged with YOT's Victim Worker. Some victims simply want their voices heard at the time of sentencing where others want regular updates about the young person's progress throughout the entire order.

In the same period 27 victims of young people subject to Out of Court Disposals agreed to engage with YOT, ensuring that their voices were heard through the Victim Worker at the Out of Court Disposal decision making panel.

Victim involvement ensures that young people are given the opportunity to fully understand the impact their offence has had on of their victim. It also provides young people with the opportunity to offer some form of apology. So far, this year 11 victims have requested and received letters of apology from young people.

### VRP Funded Clinical Psychologist Support and Training

Merseyside VRP have funded clinical supervision from a psychologist who supports staff regarding trauma informed assessment and therapeutic intervention, which has proven useful when staff are managing young people with complex issues. This offer has enabled staff to access specialist resources to use with young people who have experienced attachment disorder, gender dysphoria and other forms of trauma.

### Youth Service

The youth bus is out in the community four evenings each week with staff supporting some of the commissioned groups in delivering youth work safely in social bubbles. Staff are also engaging with young people and communities outside of the bus whilst following all National Youth Agency guidelines and using appropriate PPE.

The Youth Service are continuing to deliver a range of projects despite the Covid related restrictions, including the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and the Open Eye project.

New Beginnings have supported young people who have experienced mental health issues during lockdown and have offered one to one support as well as group on line sessions.

Staff have continued to work in partnership in high priority areas such as Dukes Park and the site of Southport Skate Park which is presently closed for refurbishment. As skaters are now using areas within the town centre causing problems for residents and shoppers, an alternative venue is being sought with staff supporting both the young people and local residents.

### Libraries

#### Free Online creative writing courses

In partnership with Wirral libraries and ReadNowWriteNow. Libraries are happy to be able to offer six creative writing courses for beginners to our local residents, thanks to funding by Arts Council England.

All the courses will be led by author Charlie Lea who will guide new writers in how to write a short story of their own. The stories will then be included into a published anthology. Sessions will be delivered via Zoom and are designed to be fun, informal and informative. The courses are inspired by the BBC's project *Novels that Shaped our World* and examples from some of these books will be used during the workshops. The courses will last 8 weeks and started in October, with 30 places available for Sefton Residents.

### Libraries publish Sefton at War booklet

During the first lockdown from March, library staff have been helping research a booklet to commemorate the end of World War II. Library activities had been planned for May and August but as these could not take place the funder Heritage Lottery approached the team to see how we could adapt the funded plans. They agreed a booklet and social media posts was the best way forward. Library staff volunteered to help with research which could be carried out from home and each person was assigned a specific research task. The results of these were then formed into social media posts in time for posting on the week of VE Day, and these were later adapted into a booklet format. The aim was to launch the booklet in time for Armistice Day and this was achieved in good time, even with the second Lockdown. Each school in Sefton was gifted 2 copies, with the rest being sold with the aim to generate income to fund a further publication in 2021 and to provide a donation to the Royal British Legion.

### Libraries reopen again

Following the second lockdown, Libraries once again opened their doors to the public on the 4<sup>th</sup> December. At present, staffing levels and the need to reduce contact means that only a blended offer is currently possible. Libraries will offer public browsing on some days and a restricted click and collect on other days. So far public response has been positive, with a general feeling of relief that libraries have reopened. So far library members have behaved in a responsible manner, and at present there have been no identified incidents of Covid infection originating from a library. The risk assessments have been updated and are constantly being monitored.

### Future bids

As part of Libraries forward planning, 2 bids for external funding are being progressed. In 2021, it will be the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the May blitz in Bootle and to commemorate that, libraries plan to run a series of activities, partnered with the Bootle Local History Group and Bedford Road Primary school.

Held in the council archive is an unpublished manuscript of Major Salt, Bootle's ARP Officer in World War II, which provides a unique insight into how Bootle prepared for the war. It is proposed to use this manuscript as the basis for public activities and ultimately publish it for the first time. A Heritage Lottery grant of £10,000 has been applied for.

A second bid is also being submitted to the Arts Council to hire a Digital Producer to upgrade and improve the Libraries digital presence and develop a number of activities to support improving the borough's digital inclusion.

### **The Atkinson**

#### LCR Culture and Creativity Awards

The Atkinson has been shortlisted for two awards at the Liverpool City Region Culture & Creativity Awards - the People's Choice and Covid-Response (Organisation) categories. With almost 700 entries across 15 categories competition for these awards has been high. It is a testament to the calibre of the Atkinson's programmes to have distinguished itself in such a high-quality field.

The awards team at the Combined Authority will arrange for a short film to be recorded for the 6 People's Choice finalists. Voting will open to the public from 5th January 2021 and this will be a tremendous opportunity to showcase all the wonderful things that take place at the Atkinson. Further details on the voting process will be circulated in the new year.

That the Atkinson is one of three finalists shortlisted for the Covid-Response category for organisations reflects the dedication shown towards keeping the Centre as safe and welcoming a venue as it can be. In addition to building preparations for re-opening a model for socially distanced theatre has been developed, which is compliant with UK Theatre's *See it Safely* campaign.

The team has learnt how to curate and deliver digital exhibitions and events within virtual spaces, and co-ordinated projects for young people to express their feelings during the lockdown experience. The response has been determined and practical, caring and creative.

The award winners will be announced at a digital event on Friday 19 February.

### Exhibitions

Two inspiring new exhibitions open at The Atkinson in January.

**16 Jan to 3 April: 'Wilhemina Barns- Graham - Inspirational Journeys'** features paintings by one of the great British painters of the St Ives group that included artists like Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth. Willie, as the artist was known, painted semi-abstract views inspired by the Grindewald Glacier in Switzerland. Late in life her creativity was re-ignited by the volcanic scenery of Lanzarote.

**23 Jan to 27 March: 'Rui Matsunaga – Paintings and Prints'** is an exhibition of startlingly original recent work by Japanese artist Rui Matsunaga. Rui's work addresses environmental issues and combines influences from myth, folklore, Japanese scroll painting and popular culture including manga and science fiction.

## HOUSING

### **Rough Sleepers and Homeless services**

In my last (November) report to this Committee, I described the activities we had undertaken to assist homeless people over the Covid period and the use of emergency temporary accommodation in particular. As more people have been assisted to move on we were able to close the emergency accommodation schemes by the end of October.

Since then one of the properties, at a former guest house in Southport, has had a planning application approved to become a homeless hostel. This means we can continue to make use of the 15 (extra) rooms it provides and work with the commissioned homeless agency to make improvements to the building.

Each year every Local Authority is obliged to advise the MHCLG as to the extent of Rough Sleeping in the borough by way of a formal **Rough Sleeper Count**. The count is based on a single, typical night between 1 October and 30 November and as we have done in previous years the Councils within the Liverpool City Region co-ordinated our Counts on the same night. As it is undertaken on one night it can only demonstrate a snapshot of the extent of Rough Sleeping, which can change on a daily basis in reality. The 'typical night' chosen for the estimate was the evening of the 10th November to the morning of the 11th November. The total number of rough sleepers in Sefton on the chosen typical night was **three (3)**. Disappointingly this is actually an increase of one compared to the 2019 figure (of 2), but that was the lowest figure recorded for over 7 years. This sustained low number has been largely achieved through the initiatives which Sefton has introduced over the last two years specifically for rough sleepers.

Through the recent Govt/MHCLG Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP homeless funding), we were successful in obtaining £522,000 for different service interventions aimed at providing continued temporary accommodation and move on services.

This includes funding to allow us to block book 15 rooms at a hotel in Southport from end of October to end of March, which will be used as our **winter shelter provision**, replacing the night shelter sit up service we would normally have in place (but closed due to Covid restrictions). MHCLG also announced a £10 million Cold Weather Fund for all local authorities to bring forward COVID-secure accommodation this winter. The maximum available for Sefton to claim is £10,000. MHCLG have agreed that this funding can be used for the purchase of additional hotel spaces in order to complement the current 15 rooms we have block booked, should we need more capacity.

The LCR CA are leading on the **Housing First homeless initiative**. This is a Housing and Support service model for homeless people with multiple and complex needs, that existing services are unable to effectively support. Unlike a traditional homeless service approach, clients will be assisted to move directly into their own home and receive adequate support for as long as they require. The CA have an overall target of 360 individuals being housed and supported by the end of the pilot in August 2022, across the whole LCR region.

From October 2020, the CA are implementing a full roll out of their service. They have recruited more support staff and are also localising their services. A team of 6 support workers and a senior has been placed in and dedicated to Sefton, providing support services for 20 to 30 clients, and working more closely with our own Housing Options Service and commissioned homeless service providers. A multi-disciplined panel has been formed and will be led by Sefton's Housing Options team, through which referral into the Housing First service will be managed.

### Private Rented Sector

Our **3 private landlord licensing schemes** went live on the 1st of March 2018 focusing on the licensing of all private landlords in Bootle, but developing stronger 'Additional HMO' licensing schemes to cover more types of HMO properties for Southport and Waterloo.

Over the Covid period officers have not undertaken License compliance visits unless necessary to address serious concerns. Instead officers have focused on undertaking desktop street surveys to identify potential unlicensed properties in the selective licensing areas. In total 564 unlicensed properties have potentially been identified and have been sent final warning letters (allowing 21 days to make an application, if applicable). This work is identifying significant number of unlicensed premises each week and has led to an increase in new license applications of 508. There has also been a focus on processing license applications. Since lockdown began 696 new licenses have been issued and the backlog of license applications at the start of the Covid lockdown has also reduced by 690.

By mid-November 2020, the total license scheme figures stood at:

	<u>Estimated Numbers of licensable properties at the scheme outset</u>	<u>ALL</u>		<u>Selective Licensing</u>		<u>Additional HMO Licensing</u>
		<u>3000</u>	<u>Selective</u>	<u>2800</u>	<u>Additional</u>	<u>200</u>
<u>Percentage &amp; Number of Apps received</u>	<u>Total No</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Total to date (valid forms received)</u>	<u>3164</u>	<u>105</u>	<u>2740</u>	<u>98</u>	<u>254</u>	<u>127</u>
<u>Total including partial/submitted apps</u>	<u>3274</u>	<u>109</u>	<u>2834</u>	<u>101</u>	<u>260</u>	<u>130</u>

The actual numbers of license applications received exceeds the number of private rented sector properties we estimated at the start of the Licensing schemes by 5%.

The housing licensing team have also initiated an exercise to address significant increase of cases and the amount of household refuse, appliances and furniture being discarded in the street and the alleyways around Smollett Street, Waller Street, and Prior Street, Bootle. Letters were sent to residents and landlords to remind them of their obligations under their tenancy agreements and Licenses respectively. Positive feedback was received from some residents and landlords. In addition, some landlords and agents have reported that they have contacted their tenants to remind them of the consequences to their tenancy if such anti-social behaviour continued. The outcome has seen a decrease in the number of reported incidents.

The licensing team has also;

Removed 991 hazards under the Housing Health and Safety System from properties where licensing compliance visits had been undertaken before Covid restrictions. Of the 29 hazards that can be identified, Excess Cold, Fire safety, Falls between levels, Falls on stairs, Damp and Mould and Electrical hazards were the hazards most commonly identified. Since the schemes began, 157 properties have had serious Category 1 hazards removed.

Found 472 properties to have had no gas safety checks along with 74 having no smoke detection and 229 with no Energy Performance Certificates along with an additional 100 with an EPC rating of an F or G which does not comply with The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015.

Out of 421 properties found to be non-compliant on the first visit, 248 were then compliant on the second visit following the licensing team's intervention

Served 60 Final Civil Penalty Notices on landlords for "operating an unlicensed, licensable property" a number of these are awaiting appeal, which due to the Coronavirus restrictions has been delayed.

Revoked 1 Selective licence due to the proposed licence holder being determined as not being fit and proper to hold a licence

Continued to work with the ASB Team and Merseyside Police, a number of landlords have been contacted about the behaviour of their tenants and positive engagement and co-operation with the landlords led to a decrease in complaints about those properties.

**Enforcement activities carried out by the Housing Standards Team** has included:

- successfully won a housing enforcement case at the First Tier Tribunal, who have upheld the decision of our Housing Standards team to issue a Civil Penalty Notice on a landlord for "failure to supply an electrical safety certificate for a HMO"
- completed 1 successful prosecution (with a second being adjourned until December, both for Offences under Section 16 (2)(a) of Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976
  - 4 properties have been prohibited from use due to serious defects,
  - 1 property had its prohibition lifted, following resale and full refurbishment
  - 5 landlords were served a Smoke & Co Alarm Regs Remedial Notice
  - A further 68 Notices were served including to provide Notice of Entry, Hazard Awareness, Statutory Nuisance, Requests for information/documentation
  - 2 Rent Repayment Orders were granted, 1 of which is awaiting an appeal to the Upper Tier Tribunal,  
a date for the hearing has been set for early next year.

**Empty property activities** include;

- completed the enforced sale of two long term problematic vacant properties. New owners should refurbish these properties for future occupation.
- commenced enforced sales processes on five further long-term empty properties

The Government are undertaking a **Consultation on Improving the Energy Performance of Privately Rented Homes**. This consultation seeks views on the government's proposal to amend the *Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015*. The proposed amendments would significantly improve the energy performance of private rented sector homes in the 2020s. The PRS Regulations currently set a minimum energy performance standard of EPC Band E for domestic private rented property. The requirement that a property must be EPC Band E has applied since 1 April 2018 to properties let on new tenancies (including renewals), and since 1 April 2020 has applied to all privately rented properties (even where there has been no change in tenancy). Landlords of F and G rated homes are required to invest, or co-invest, in improving the energy performance of these properties to EPC Band E, unless it is not technically advisable, or financially feasible, to bring those properties up to an EPC E rating.

The Government propose raising the energy performance standard to Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) energy efficiency rating (EER) Band C; based on a phased trajectory for achieving the improvements for new tenancies from 2025 and all tenancies from 2028.

Through our Selective Licensing scheme we know that 68% of the privately rented properties in this area of Sefton are at a Band C or below. This is an extremely high percentage of properties that will require remedial works in order to comply with these new proposed PRS Regulations. While the new regulations could lead to significant improvements in the quality of this PRS housing stock, in turn they will likely require a significant amount of additional enforcement action by the Housing Standards Team from 2025, which would require additional resources.

I will be submitting a consultation response for Sefton.



Government is planning to publish its Response to this consultation in spring 2021 and is planning to lay regulations in the autumn of 2021 which would amend the current PRS Regulations.

### **Social Housing Allocations (Property Pool Plus)**

Sefton participates in the Property Pool Plus scheme along with Liverpool, Wirral, Knowsley and Halton Councils, as well as the participating housing associations. The Local Authorities have collectively reviewed the current Policy and associated service arrangements.

An external consultant (Neil Morland & Co) has been appointed to undertake this exercise, and the consultant has worked with the LAs to produce a new Policy and Procedure. This will be subject to a 12-week consultation which commenced on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November. Further information can be found at; [www.sefton.gov.uk/PPP-HaveYourSay](http://www.sefton.gov.uk/PPP-HaveYourSay)

### **Liverpool City Region**

I represent the Council on the Sub-Regional Housing and Spatial Planning Advisory Group, which feeds into the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Combined Authority Strategic Agenda. I have been re-appointed as the Vice Chair of this Advisory Group, for 2021-21. I hope to use this position to have greater influence across the LCR.

The role of the CA is having a growing significance, in particular when the Govt allocate resources to the CA for the whole of the LCR. The CA have been working with Homes England to secure resources to help bring forward development of brownfield sites across the sub-region. We are supporting this exercise.

The LCR CA's City Region Housing Statement recognises the need to increase housing supply to support economic growth. The Statement also committed partners to prepare a joint investment plan with Homes England to guide and shape investment in housing. Since the publication of the Housing Statement, work has been undertaken by the local authorities, in partnership with the Combined Authority and Homes England, on preparing a pipeline of housing development sites. This pipeline is allowing partners to take a truly City Region approach to identifying sub-regional housing markets, identify strategic sites, and to inform and support bids into funding and investment programmes.

A Brownfield Land Fund of £45m has been allocated directly to the Liverpool City region CA. The funding will start to be allocated this financial year and is expected to deliver 3,000 to 4,000 homes which start on site by 31st March 2025 at the latest. Sefton have put forward 2 stalled sites for consideration under this programme, and we expect funding to be confirmed soon for the first of these. Other sites will be referred to the CA should there be opportunity for securing funding under this programme.

The Strategic Housing, Infrastructure & Land Fund (SHILF) programme is anticipated to be managed by Homes England. The LCR LAs have collaborated with the CA to produce an indicative list of schemes from the pipeline schedule, which will be used to develop funding bids once the SHILF Funds are made available.

During the discussions with the CA on the projects and bids to be developed the issue of capacity and technical skills within the LAs has arisen, particularly with the impact of COVID-19. The CA are working with the LAs to ensure that appropriate support in both staff and consultancy expertise are available. The CA will soon employ 2 additional members of staff who will work with the LAs to help develop schemes.

### **COUNCIL HOUSING**

I have been keen to look at the Council providing its own social/council housing in future. We are considering acquiring the affordable housing that Sandway Homes (our development company) will provide at their Buckley Hill site in Netherton. Sandway Homes have applied for planning permission for developing this site, and if this is approved they will be required to provide affordable housing under their planning obligations. Officers are currently preparing a report to present to Cabinet in January, in order that Members can formally consider taking these steps.

Further to the above, I am pleased that Cabinet approved the purchase of our first council homes from Sandways at Buckley Hill in St. Oswalds ward and agreed a plan to get us ready for owning and managing council homes again.