

## COUNCIL - 16 SEPTEMBER 2021

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

1. **Question submitted by Councillor Doyle to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing (Councillor Hardy)**

**Subject: Support for Afghanistan Families and Individuals**

“How is Sefton Council supporting Afghanistan families and individuals following the traumatic evacuations witnessed this summer?”

“Could the Cabinet member advise how we can all help with this effort of support and solidarity to any families that arrive in Sefton?”

**Response:**

“The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) offers eligible current or former locally employed staff who are assessed to be under serious threat to life priority relocation to the UK. Since the first flight landed on 22 June, around 7,000 Locally Employed Staff and their families have been welcomed to the UK under the ARAP scheme, including around 5,000 people who were evacuated during August. Sefton volunteered to be part of the scheme in January 2021 and this was approved by Cabinet on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

South Sefton Housing Group (SSHG) are delivering our resettlement on our behalf in a similar way that they deliver the Syrian Resettlement scheme which includes not just the basic elements including housing but practical support with getting to know the local area, access to health services and GP’s and school places for children.

SSHG have commenced sourcing accommodation and local Registered Providers have been asked to help in identifying properties as well. We are working with Colleagues across the City Region to share best practice and experiences.

The Sefton Afghan appeal was launched on 2/9/21 and has been a huge success. Sefton residents can support the appeal by donating via Sefton CVS’s fundraising platform Sefton 4 Good or by donating newly-bought goods - clothing and shoes for babies, children and adults and toiletries. There are collection points throughout the borough including Sefton’s libraries”.

2. **Question submitted by Councillor Blackburne to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing (Councillor Hardy)**

**Subject: Support for School Children in the Borough**

“Can you advise how school children in the Borough have been supported this year in relation to access to food, educational support and access to expensive school uniforms?”

## **Response:**

“In relation to school uniforms we have supported 768 families to purchase school uniforms. We have also supported a number of families through our uniform bank.

We have used the Covid Winter Grant funding to provide supermarket vouchers to 8966 children eligible for free school meals over October half term, Christmas holidays, February half term, Easter Holidays, May half term and the six-week summer break.

As we know, that many families struggle to purchase the additional groceries required over the school holidays. In addition to this, the Covid Winter grant supported families and children with additional provisions such as pyjamas, warm blankets and household aids to tackle warmth poverty such as radiator reflectors and draft excluders.

In March 2020, the Education Secretary announced the closure of all schools in the UK in response to the ongoing Covid 19 Pandemic for all in person teaching, except for children of key workers and those considered vulnerable.

In April 2020, the Department for Education announced that they were providing digital devices (laptops, tablets and 4G routers) to children with a social worker, care leavers and disadvantaged year 10 students. The devices were provided to support remote education, as well as enabling virtual contact between children, their social worker and other services during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Sefton were allocated 1020 digital devices (laptops), comprising of 903 laptops/tablets for children with a social worker and care leavers, 117 laptops for disadvantaged year 10 students in Sefton maintained schools (including special schools and Pupil Referral Units). Sefton also received 132 4G wireless routers for those children who didn't have internet access. **NOTE: Academies also received devices for their disadvantaged year 10 students.**

### **Sefton Council agreed to purchase an additional 50 digital devices.**

During the Covid-19 pandemic we had to adapt rapidly to keep children safe, secure and supported. One of the biggest challenges has been trying to encourage those parents to send their children to school who are eligible to have a place. Parents have been genuinely worried about sending their children into school. For professionals involved with vulnerable children it has been challenging balancing the risks of children contracting and/or spreading Covid-19, with counteracting risks of children's learning loss.

In response to this, a first day response initiative model of practice was designed and delivered at both pace and scale across Sefton. It was put into place to support children with a social worker and those who are supported by an Education, Health and Care plan.

A multi-disciplinary team was put together to deliver this initiative. This included staff from early help school attendance, Virtual School, children's social care, family support fostering, early years, virtual school and the community Adolescent Team. Sefton invested in putting administrative support in place to support the initiative. A similar initiative was also rolled out across Early Years settings to help support our youngest children.

We have an Early Help link worker assigned to each school and setting offering support when problems begin to emerge for children and families. These staff have frequent meetings with designated lead to discuss concerns and provide early support. In addition to this, a number of evidence-based interventions have been delivered within schools such as ACE's, Triple P and Relax Kids, with positive impacts and feedback.

Throughout the pandemic Family Wellbeing Centres continued to operate in each Locality. From here support was offered to children and families on a needs-led basis. Families in need were supported in many ways including delivery of food parcels, activity packs and ongoing support either virtually or face-to-face.

Children and families have also been able to access activities and food through access and delivery of HAF funding. 28 organisations across the Borough offered support to Children eligible to free school meals via the Government Holiday Activity Fund. The number of places being offered was over 1500. Feedback from providers is that the scheme has been very successful.

The Council has also delivered the Summer Food programme working with colleagues from the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector. Over 3000 meals were provided to families delivered through Family Wellbeing Centres and community groups.

Sefton have not ceased any of their statutory functions in relation to children coming into the borough. Children have all been placed in a timely manner. School appeals have also continued throughout the whole of the pandemic.

During full lockdown the most vulnerable pupils including SEND and LAC pupils attended school or were monitored by the relevant team to ensure they could access quality remote education provision provided by each individual school from the safety of their home.

The Local Authority audited the quality of remote education in terms of curriculum coverage and accessibility for ALL pupils. The offer varied from school to school in terms of using Google Classroom, DFE recommended resources such as Oak Academy and BBC Bitesize. A balance of lessons could be viewed live virtually.

On returning to more wider opening of schools, DFE guidelines were followed and pupils accessed the same education they would have been doing without Covid within a Covid safe environment e.g. class bubbles.

Gaps in learning are being assessed and some schools have accessed DFE funding to support catch up programmes. Summer schools were also offered to some pupils.

Following the full opening of schools, schools operate a full curriculum and have made provision for pupils who may be absent due to Covid, but not unwell to continue accessing the school curriculum online as per Government guidance.

Notwithstanding the comprehensive support offered to school children in the Borough over the last year, as a result of the unprecedented times experienced due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the impact upon welfare reform and anti-poverty has been felt across Sefton's communities.

The Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Partnership (WRAP) and Cabinet have been, and continue to be, responsive to community needs and have been considering the evidence base and impact of child poverty within Sefton. At its meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2021, the Cabinet considered an evidence base on child poverty within Sefton and resolved to develop a Child Poverty Strategy, with partners”.

3. **Question submitted by Councillor John Kelly to the Cabinet Member for Locality Services (Councillor Fairclough)**

**Subject: A5036**

“Given the importance of the A5036 as a gateway route for Sefton and its close proximity to residents along Church Road corridor, does the Cabinet Member agree that National Highways has failed in its responsibilities again this year in relation to maintenance of the road in terms of weeds and road surface matters?

Can the Cabinet Member advise how this issue has been raised with National Highways on behalf of the Council and the communities it serves?”

**Response:**

“Thank you for your question. I do agree that National Highways have failed in its responsibilities regarding maintenance of the A5036. The condition of the landscaping, verges and the extensive weed growth is appalling and unacceptable. I wrote to the Operations Division Director on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2021 reminding him that the A5036 is a significant gateway into and corridor through our borough and that the wholly inadequate maintenance regime gives a very poor impression to residents, visitors and potential investors, and is damaging to the reputation of the Borough.

I also advised him that the failure to adequately maintain the landscaping, verges and the insufficient weed control, hinders us in our task of litter-picking and street cleansing.

I have received a response from National Highways which, in my view, seeks to blame the Council for National Highways’ failure to address weed growth on this stretch of road and makes no commitment to increase the level of routine maintenance.

This is of course not the first time this failure has been highlighted to National Highways and their predecessor organisations. The Council and our residents have raised their concerns and dissatisfaction regarding the poor standards of maintenance on the A5036 with National Highways every year for many years, but no sustained improvement has yet been delivered.

The National Highways Operations Division Director has committed to working with the Council to establish a maintenance agreement for the A5036, clarifying the roles of National Highways and the Council and the frequency of tasks but, so far, no commitment to increase the level of maintenance has been received. This commitment is welcome, and officers hope to establish a regime whereby National Highways and Council resources can be coordinated to attempt to deliver a better outcome for our communities.

I have asked officers to continue to work with National Highways to put a maintenance Agreement in place and we will continue to lobby for an improved maintenance regime and performance”.

4. **Question submitted by Councillor Bradshaw to the Cabinet Member for Education (Councillor Roscoe)**

**Subject: Pupil Premium Funding**

“How will the change in census date for how the government allocates Pupil Premium funding affect young people in Sefton?”

**Response:**

“The number of children eligible for Free School meals registered on the October School Census return is normally lower than the number registered on the following January School Census return, which is currently used to calculate Pupil Premium Allocations for schools.

Using the last set of data available to make this comparison - October 2020 and January 2021 Sefton Schools would have potentially lost £710,300 of PPG this financial year if the October census numbers had been used rather than the January census numbers.

The loss of funding would have been calculated as follows:

Primary Census data +401 increase by January, so potential loss of PPG x £1,345 = £539,345

Secondary Census data +179 increase by January, so potential loss of PPG x £955 = £170,945

Total loss of funding to Sefton Schools/Sefton pupils based on the census data from October and January (including academy schools) = £710,290.

In May, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Education expressing my concern and pointing out that Sefton has some of the poorest wards in the country, and that the schools in those wards will inevitably lose out the most. As more families fall into poverty, this change will only add to the challenges that those pupils and schools face. I asked for a real commitment to levelling up for all our young people.

I have received a response, but I do not feel that that response addressed my concerns as stated in my letter.”

5. **Question submitted by Councillor Spencer to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Skills (Councillor Atkinson)**

**Subject: Marian Square Shopping Centre Lease**

“Why won’t the Council sign the lease for 100 years with LCP for Marian Square Shopping Centre in Netherton?”

## Response:

“Ward councillors will be aware I met with representatives from LCP in 2015 when LCP took over the then lease with an approximate 50-year term remaining on it from Mars Pensions. At that meeting, LCP confirmed they were fully committed to the shopping centre and wanted to invest. I welcomed their intentions. At that same meeting I asked LCP to consider their short, medium and long-term plans and to hold further discussions in relation to those plans with the Council as soon as possible. I believed the shopping centre had had very limited investment over the years. The model for long term leases had not substantively benefited the communities in that area. Several years passed with no firm proposals received from LCP, no planning applications submitted and, more importantly, no apparent tangible investment in the shopping centre.

Six years later, and despite LCP generating significant yield on their asset through rent from large and small businesses in the area, including through the Covid period, the work carried out has been minimal. A small clean-up of the rear of the centre in 2016 and refurbishing of canopies in 2021. I have also received feedback that once the painting of the canopies had commenced the businesses in the area were served with an ongoing quarterly maintenance charge with some costing thousands of pounds to cover the costs of the work. Nonetheless, LCP are entitled to do to this notwithstanding the strains on businesses in the centre.

As a Labour controlled Council, we have continued to play our part - in very challenging financial circumstances - to invest in the area:

- Community garden: With funding support from the Council and Public Health.
- Cleansing: The area is cleansed with a small mechanical brush every morning from Monday to Friday.
- CCTV: Sefton invested a further £1,800 into repairs for the CCTV.
- Marian Gardens: St Oswald ward members agreed a refit to the play area totalling £70,000 from their S106 budget in March 2020.
- Fly Tipping: Although fly tipping in the area has declined due to the opening of the community garden, council cleansing teams remove fly tipping from the rear of the shops when reported.
- Businesses: Local businesses have been supported by Neighbourhood Officers and Sefton Business Support and Investment Team throughout the Covid period with help that has included grants and assistance with issues businesses have had over Covid related matters when opening back up. The small independent businesses were also supported by these departments to apply for small grants of up to £4,000.
- Post Office: Support was given by Neighbourhood Officers when a small local business decided to take over the running of the Post Office when it was threatened with closure.
- Christmas Lights: Sefton last year installed new canopy lighting and streetlighting for over the Christmas period.
- Christmas Tree: Sefton supported the purchase and installation of the living Christmas tree at the location. We also have the tree lights installed and removed during the Christmas period.

- Christmas/Easter/Market Events: Sefton support local businesses in any events they hold in the Marian Square. Support is given by way of funding and/or advise on any licences required, H&S issues and plans for the event.
- Traders Association: Sefton supported the local businesses in 2018 in setting up the first traders association in the shopping centre. This support continues to this day.

In addition to the above, further strategic investment from the public purse via Sefton Council, Police and Fire services that, whilst protecting the public, also rightly helps to protect the shopping centre and, therefore, LCP's asset.

LCP have requested a lease for a further 100 years. Unsurprisingly, this would immediately enhance the value of the Marian Square shopping centre for LCP but not necessarily for the surrounding community nor the businesses that serve them. The income generated to the Council from a lease extension would not be significant.

For context, in their public reporting, LCP indicate:

“The Group has a turnover of £136million and remains committed to improving asset growth through the intensive management and development of properties within our portfolio. Whilst also considering opportunities to acquire or dispose of properties where these activities offer opportunities to use our key strengths to deliver growth.”

A portion of the significant profits and dividends LCP have reported in the preceding last six years, and those likely in the future arising from a remaining 44-year lease, I believe, could be invested into the shopping centre. The remaining years on their current lease gives them an opportunity to show their commitment to us, as a Council, you as a ward councillor and, most importantly, the community we represent. However, it is a matter for LCP where and how they wish to invest.

I am aware that LCP has a responsibility to act in its own best interests, but its interests are not necessarily compatible with the interests of the Council. Equally, the Council has a fiduciary duty to the taxpayer to use its assets in taxpayers' interests in the short, medium and long term. It is not the role of the Council to simply acquiesce to requests from a private company, or vicariously others, to extend a lease without taking into full account its responsibilities to the taxpayer to get best value in the use of its assets which I am sure LCP will fully acknowledge in the current strained environment in relation to the public finances in general and that of this Council in particular”.

6. **Question submitted by Councillor Halsall to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Skills (Councillor Atkinson)**

**Subject: Southport Market**

“First of all may I congratulate you on the opening of the market. Can I ask you to elaborate on the facilities for those with disabilities who may want to use it?”

**Response:**

“Southport Market has a brand-new Changing Places Facility, the facility is a purpose-built facility meaning the facilities are of excellent quality and has been praised by access groups, families and used as a case study by the company who installed the facility.

The Changing Places facility in the market is a large accessible toilet for people who cannot use standard accessible toilets, with equipment such as hoist, curtains, adult-sized changing benches, and space for carers.

Over 250,000 people in the country need these facilities to enable them to get out and about and enjoy the day-to-day activities many of us take for granted.

After meeting Southport Access For Everyone further additions will take place. We will have similar facilities in the new Events Centre, Crosby Lakeside Adventure Centre, and we are actively pursuing funding for more of these facilities across Sefton. The Market’s accessible toilet has been refurbished and a standalone baby change facility also built. Also, despite the building being old, ramped access is provided and the specific layout means that around the apron and the bar, there is ample space to manoeuvre wheelchairs, mobility scooters and other aids, buggies prams and trollies, all of which have been evident since the market re opened and highlights the inclusive nature of the operation and the mixed demographic of the customers”.

7. **Question submitted by Councillor Myers to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Skills (Councillor Atkinson)**

**Subject: Southport Market**

“Having visited with my family on a couple of occasions so far since the re-opening and judging by how busy it was, Southport Market’s revamp appears to have been very well received by the public. Could the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Skills Cllr Atkinson give us a flavour of how well the new food hall approach is doing?”

**Response:**

“Since its opening in late July the repurposed Market has been a huge success with tens of thousands of people visiting and experiencing the offer. It is also evident that many of the visitors are residents who have been desperate for this type of investment in the Town, early evidence suggests many of the local visitors had maybe stopped coming into the Town Centre. It is also clear that The Market is attracting repeat visits from not only residents but also from visitors further afield.

There has been a great momentum of social media positivity around the Market with many people commenting it’s one of the best things to happen to Southport in many years. What is also reassuring that since its opening new independent businesses are opening on Market and King Street. We are less than 3 months into our 3-year business plan with lots more planned to expand the offering over the next few months that will drive further footfall not only into the market but the Town also.

Due to its popularity we now also have a waiting list of traders wanting to set up new businesses in The Market”.

8. **Question submitted by Councillor Myers to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Skills (Councillor Atkinson)**

**Subject: Southport Market**

“I noticed that Southport's MP has appeared keen to bask in the warm glow of the Council's great work in relation to the market revamp - I must confess though that I don't recall his having anything in the way of direct input in it at all. Would the Cabinet Member be able to enlighten us on the topic?”

**Response:**

“The direct input i.e. evidence gathering, site visits, feasibility studies, scoping, design, business case, was carried out by a Labour-led Sefton Council. The fact that we carried on with this work despite the continued protests from Conservative and Liberal Democrat Councillors meant we had an 'oven ready' project which allowed us to take advantage of Labours LCR Metro Mayor Town centre fund and Government funding”.

9. **Question submitted by Councillor Blackburne to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Skills (Councillor Atkinson)**

**Subject: Southport Market**

“How do you think Southport Market will contribute to the regeneration of the town - particularly regarding the potential of the entertainment space?”

**Response:**

“One of the main objectives of the refurbishment and repurposing of the Southport Market was for it to be a catalyst for the wider regeneration of Southport. The Market has only been open since late July, in that time two long term empty retail units on Market Street have become occupied while two other units are undergoing refurbishment. A long-standing empty unit on King Street is now also occupied by a coffee shop and bar while the old McDonalds unit that has been vacant for 7 years is about to be occupied with circa £500k investment.

There are more plans for the market, and this will continue to be implemented in a phased approach that will bring more added benefits. The events space is due to be completed in October bringing more footfall to both the Market and the surrounding area, again it is hoped this will not only generate extra footfall for the existing businesses but act as a reason for more private sector investment into the area and Southport Town Centre”.

10. **Question submitted by Councillor Waterfield to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Skills (Councillor Atkinson)**

**Subject: Southport Market**

“What are the plans for the community space and what is its earning potential, and how will it integrate with the overall cultural offer in the town?”

**Response:**

“The events space is an integral part of The Market and key to the overall business case. When complete in the next few weeks the events space will be capable of holding a large range of events including food and drink festivals, comedy nights, cabaret, immersive events, themed markets, tasting events, Christmas events and much more. It is also the plan to allow community groups to use the space for events such as dance classes, book groups, fitness groups, art classes and choirs. All these uses will further support The Market becoming a hub for Southport Town Centre”.

11. **Question submitted by Councillor Waterfield to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Skills (Councillor Atkinson)**

**Subject: Southport Market**

“How is the outdoor market fairing?”

**Response:**

“The outdoor market is a partnership with The Makers Market, since launch this has been hugely successful and continues to grow. Working with The Makers Market there is a long-term plan to grow this monthly market and to also extend it onto King Street.

A new Events and Sales Officer is due to start in post in October that will allow more outdoor and indoor markets to develop”.

12. **Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson CBE to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care (Councillor Cummins)**

**Subject: Residents with Limb Disabilities**

“At the last Council Meeting I asked a question concerning facilities in respect of those Sefton residents with a particular form of disability.

I was advised that as the Cabinet Member was not available the question could not be answered at the Council itself but that I would receive a written reply.

I can find no trace of having received such a reply and I would be grateful for an explanation as to why this is the case and also that the answer now be provided as per the original question”.

**Response:**

“It’s my understanding that Cllr Sir Ron has now received a response. I chased this up, recently, as I realised he had not been supplied with the reply promised. I’m happy to answer any supplementary at Council if required”.

13. **Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson CBE to the Cabinet Member for Locality Services (Councillor Fairclough)**

**Subject: Chewing Gum**

“The Cabinet Member will no doubt be aware that there are proposals for chewing gum removal squads to be set up as part of a £10m national task force scheme aimed at cleaning up our pavements.

No doubt the Member will be aware of the fact that major chewing gum manufacturers have agreed to help fund this welcome initiative.

The Cabinet Member will also be aware that it has been estimated while each piece of gum costs in the region of 3p to buy it costs council tax payers £1.50 to clean up each square metre of pavement.

Will the Cabinet Member confirm that Sefton has made a detailed application to benefit from this new scheme which is crucially important to improve our environment, particularly in respect of the major development areas in Southport that are receiving significant funding for major capital schemes and where the overall environment is crucial to the success of the tourism and leisure sector in particular”.

**Response:**

“The £10m national task force scheme aimed at cleaning pavements is being administered on behalf of the Government by Keep Britain Tidy.

The Head of Operational In-House Services has been in contact with KBT regarding this and registered Sefton’s interest.

The scheme is not yet in a format that can be shared with local authorities in terms of qualifying criteria, availability of grants or timescales for applications.

However, once this information is finalised KBT will contact all local authorities who have registered an interest.

The Head of Operational In-House Services will update the Cabinet Member through the Cabinet Member briefing process when more information is available”.

14. **Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson CBE to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Maher)**

**Subject: Full Council Meetings - Absent Members**

The Leader of the Council will be aware that a question directed at a Cabinet Member is not in fact answered unless the Cabinet Member is actually present at the meeting.

Would the Leader of the Council agree that this is not satisfactory and would he arrange for any procedural change that may be necessary to ensure that another Member is delegated to answer the question on the night?

**Response:**

“No”

