

<b>CABINET MEMBER REPORT</b>		
<b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) -</b>		
<b>Councillor</b>	<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>Period of Report</b>
Paulette Lappin	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services	February 2022

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 a number of key issues, namely

- 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; and,
- Reviewing the Budget Plan for 2021/2022 and the Medium-Term Financial Plan, including the potential ongoing impact of COVID-19.

From July reports have been, and will continue to be, presented to Cabinet on monitoring the Council's revenue and capital budgets for 2021/2022, including the impact of COVID19, and outlining new funding streams being made available to the Council.

The latest report (position as at the end of December) was presented to Cabinet on 3<sup>rd</sup> February and indicated that an underspend of £1.946m is currently forecast against the Council's revenue budget. The final monitoring report of 2021/2022 will be presented to Cabinet on 10<sup>th</sup> March.

The suite of budget reports was presented to Cabinet on 10<sup>th</sup> February (and Overview and Scrutiny on 8<sup>th</sup> February) and will be presented to Budget Council on 3<sup>rd</sup> March. As in previous years a follow-on report will be published in the week before Cabinet to include details of levies and precepts as well as any updates to grant allocations and the capital programme.

The draft Statement of Accounts for 2020/2021 was published at the end of July with the final Statement of Accounts being presented to Audit and Governance Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> December. The audit is still to be completed (although nearly all work has been finalised) but should any further amendments be required since that Committee, the Chair has been granted delegated authority to approve the final Statement of Accounts following these changes.

The work to close the accounts for 2021/2022 will commence shortly, with the revenue and capital outturn position to be reported to Cabinet in July.

### **Customer Centric Services**

The outbreak of the Omicron variant resulted in a significant increase in workloads across Customer Centric Services leading up to the Christmas period and into January 2022; workloads were re-prioritised to prepare for payment of the latest round of Government-funded grant payments to leisure and hospitality businesses affected by the Omicron restrictions. The Benefits service has experienced a further significant increase in applications for support payments from residents told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace.

The scheme is currently due to end on 31st March 2022. As at January 24, 2022 a total of 7,630 claims have been received, with decisions made in 6,474 cases, i.e. 1,603 mandatory awards, 1,572 discretionary awards and 3,299 refusals. Total payments made to date are £801,500 mandatory payments and £786,000 discretionary payments.

## **Customer Services**

Following the shutdown period, the Contact Centre experienced a high volume of telephone calls in January, with 14,500 telephone calls being handled.

With a high volume of Customer Service staff suffering with COVID-related sickness or having to self-isolate, staffing levels were reduced. Consequently, the telephony emergency message was relayed during the busier times of the month, with priority given to enquiries relating to Adult and Children's Social Care, ELAS and COVID.

As Sefton residents struggled to pay for food and utility bills, there was a notable spike in the number of ELAS telephone calls that were handled. The number of COVID-related calls also increased in January due to the fast spread of the Omicron variant with most enquiries relating to Test and Trace Self-Isolation support payments.

There was an increase in calls for Cleansing services as clinical waste collections suffered a significant disruption due to collections not taking place for a week in January. An increase in enquiries was also received due to flyers being posted to residents who are still on weekly sack collections asking for their input into a consultation about whether to introduce wheelie bins and / or communal euro bins to areas in Bootle and Waterloo.

There was an increase in telephone calls for Blue Badges (190 telephone calls in December compared to 446 telephone calls in January) with a high volume of customers progress chasing discretionary Blue Badges applications.

The busiest Council service within the Contact Centre relates to Council Tax enquiries. As Council Tax recovery resumed after a pause in December, call volumes, email and Webchat contact was high as customers respond to payment reminders and summons.

In general, contact by social media continues to increase significantly with more customers utilising the digital contact options available. Webchat continues to be well utilised, enabling Customer Service advisors to signpost customers to the relevant area on the Council website.

In January, over 2,100 customers attended Bootle One Stop Shop. This included 318 taxi drivers who were offered an appointment and 380 appointments that were offered for customers with Council Tax, Benefits, ELAS, Blue Badge and Parking enquiries. The remaining 1,403 customers were seeking general council-related advice at reception.

Southport One Stop Shop, at the Atkinson, received 441 visitors. 138 attended with a pre-booked appointment for Council Tax or Benefit enquiries and a small number for Blue Badge and Parking enquiries, while 303 customers were seeking general council – related advice at reception.

## **Annual Billing**

Preparation and testing are well underway for the issue of approximately 135,000 annual Council Tax and Business Rates bills and benefit notifications in respect of 2022/23.

## **Support for Energy Prices - Council Tax Rebate**

On 3rd February 2022, the Chancellor provided some initial information about support for households due to the Energy Price Cap increase, i.e. a one-off £150.00 rebate payment that will operate outside of the council tax system but council tax lists should be used to identify eligible households. In addition, discretionary funding will be provided to councils to support households not eligible for the rebate. Further detailed guidance is expected before implementation plans are confirmed.

## **Risk and Audit**

The **Internal Audit** team are continuing to work on delivering the internal audit plan with a current focus on reviews of:

- Fostering,
- Sandway Homes,
- Homelessness,
- Schools Finance,
- AGS follow up,
- Operational In-House Services,
- Council Tax,
- Performance Management,
- Public Health Grant
- Grants assurance and a review of number of Schools.

The team are working with colleagues across the Liverpool City Region so that there is a consistent approach to counter fraud steps that should be in place. We have successfully recruited to the second of the two temporary Principal Auditors positions with the staff member starting in December 2021.

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

- As highlighted in the previous update, the revaluation of a further sample of properties was completed in December 2021. Insurers are working closely with us to identify how we can use the two sampling exercise results to extrapolate across the rest of the Council's buildings.
- We have used some of the "free" as part of the insurance programme risk bursary days to develop an e-learning risk management course and are currently working with the provider to change some of the content.
- 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. We have been successful in two recent claims.
- Team continues to work extensively with Service Teams including Highways, Green Sefton and Tourism to improve the management of insurable risk in areas where there are high numbers of claims or areas of concern.
- We are currently ensuring that outstanding risk actions from surveys completed by the material damage insurer have been implemented which will help the renewal in 2022.

The **Risk and Resilience Team**. The Emergency Planning focus during the previous quarter was on following up on the training for the loggists and volunteers. We have organised follow up training for the loggists in March 2022 and have carried out an initial recruitment exercise for the loggists and expect to be able to improve our capacity to respond. There is now a training plan in place with regular meetings and training sessions for the volunteers. We are currently seeking to

improve the numbers of volunteers available to provide additional capacity. Service Area Business Continuity Plans have been completed and we are now working through a planned programme of refreshing the existing plans as well as bringing forward plans to identify each Service Area's key ICT software and identify the Business Continuity Plan arrangements for key suppliers. We have carried out an activation plan of a number of are shortly to begin the testing of the activation of each of the Service Area's Business Continuity Plans and undertake exercises.

The **Risk and Resilience Team** are currently working on the planning for the Council's Risk Appetite which is due to take place in March/April 2022 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 revised Emergency Plan for the 2022 Grand National

The **Assurance Team** have been seconded to the Business Grants Team to provide support and assistance for the delivery of grants to local businesses until the end of June 2022.

In the programme for the current year is the completion of the Council's Counter Fraud Strategy with consultation with the Strategic Leadership Board with final approval of the Cabinet later in the financial year.

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.
- Undertaking a planned review of the Council's Health and Safety Policy and completing the Annual Health and Safety report.
- 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.

## **ICT**

The ICT Service continues to work on a number of significant transformation programmes as well as delivering the BAU ICT Service alongside Agilisys

The Cloud Migration project is well underway, Wave one migrations are now completed, this wave consisted of primarily test systems, it completed on time and approval was granted for payment in line with the milestone payment plan. Wave 2 has now commenced and we have our first live systems now deployed in our cloud environment, however we are now experiencing some delays

due to work not completed at the discovery stage by Agilisys. Remediation is underway but there is now an impact on the delivery schedule and planned migrations. It is likely that the overall plan will be impacted by a number of weeks with some deployments now scheduled for early April. Work is also underway to plan the move of those live systems which are public facing and further communication will be issued both internally and externally well in advance of the work taking place.

Cloud Telephony deployment is nearing completion new handsets are now being deployed across all locations, including schools. We are still experiencing a delay with some KIT required for completion of the project due to the worldwide issues with stock.

Further deployment of the new CXP solution is now planned for the forthcoming period. Dedicated capacity for CXP development has now joined the team, with the focus being on the migration of the legacy services from the Northgate CRM system. Processes for Abandoned Vehicles, Electoral Registration, Sharps and Bins not emptied are all awaiting sign off prior to deployment into live.

Further to the above the team has supported the migration and upgrade of the corporate website to the Umbraco platform. The redesigned website went live on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January. The external audit agency Allable reports that the new design has resolved many of the web accessibility issues raised by the Cabinet office, and a plan is being developed to resolve the remaining issues.

Schools ICT – implementation of the new Connectivity Service for schools is now nearing completion, for those schools who have taken the SLA for Connectivity. 38 of the 41 sites are now complete with work scheduled for the remainder. Work is ongoing around the Schools Contract for support of the SIMS/FMS System (management information systems previously supplied by Capita) The new provider ESS has changed the terms of the contract and arrangements for schools which are currently under review by our legal team.

The team is also supporting the implementation of the new Bulk Print Contract and also the onboarding of a new BACs provider, both of which will deliver savings to the authority once they are live.

Procurement activity continues to be a challenge, unfortunately the Procurement consultant engaged did not have sufficient experience and we have had to release him from his contract after just three weeks. The team is now working with the Central procurement team and an external provider to push forward with the two key procurements underway; Managed Print and Corporate Connectivity. However the gap in capacity has meant that we have had to realign resources to key Council wide projects and some of the smaller procurement projects have had to be put on hold. A permanent post is now out to advertisement.

## **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 / FM**

- Ongoing work to deliver Phase 1 Asset Disposals.
- Work on the re location of Parking Services contractor as part of Pavilion Buildings disposal.

- Additional disposal and report to Cabinet Member for Lease of a vacant plot at Southport Business Park.
- Negotiations with Landlord of Magdalen House for the re gear of the Lease
- Commissioning market valuations for Council Assets for Homeless Hostels proposal and site in Southport.
- Asset records input and liaison with Building Maintenance colleagues for new (property based) IT system in support of Corporate Landlord Implementation Ongoing. Property Management Assistant appointed to assist with input work
- Agreement of terms and reporting for Lease of various assets ongoing at Crosby Lakeside for Hospitality Company.
- Assistance with Lease terms for inclusion in Expression of Interest documentation for procurement of an operator for Crown Buildings Enterprise Centre in conjunction with Regeneration colleagues

### Project Management

- Provide professional support to Growth Board on several projects.
- Project manage various Education capital schemes.
- Provide support to other teams on Asset Disposal, Building Maintenance, Asset Management, Energy and Statutory Compliance colleagues.
- Provide support for new ways of working agile model proposal.

### Energy Management

- Busy period for the affordable warmth team, supporting residents without adequate heating for range of reasons. Additional funding secured to help repair boilers or provide emergency top ups for gas/electricity meters.
- Local Authority Delivery of Green homes Grant (LAD, GHG) – Providing insulation to privately owned properties (worst/not insulated & for poorest residents)
  - LAD1b works concluding and will be fully wrapped up by 31 March 2022. (30 properties)
  - LAD2 direct award of funding from the CA to Sefton to retrofit 190 low income private homes. Works have begun after a delayed start. Two contractors are operating to complete the 190 properties plus an additional 20. An extension has been granted to deliver works until 30 June 2022, however all homes must be identified for works by 31 March 2022.
  - LAD3 & Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) – Now called ‘Sustainable warmth’ competition. A consortium bid led by the LCR was successful and Sefton have been awarded funding for an additional 307 properties with a delivery period of 1 Jan 2022 – 31 March 2023.
  - ERDF – Sefton have been offered up to £4M ERDF underspend to continue the retrofit works of RP properties. Officers are working to identify potential programmes of work across the LCR. Delivery is 2022/23.
- Works to upgrade roof insulation and improve glazing at Southport and Bootle Town Halls will conclude in Spring. All works apart from the BTH ballroom window will be completed by 31 March 2022, A full restoration and insulation of the ballroom window will entail an additional 8-9 week extension.
- Work on a Heat Decarbonisation Plan for 18 of Sefton’s buildings has been awarded to GEP and is progressing well.
- Work on the Low carbon Community Energy fund, (Net Zero LCR and NW Energy Hib) to fund a consultation & feasibility study for wind power / ground source heat at Southport (to feed Eco Centre and Dunes) with community benefits from ownership of the asset. Is progressing well. Phase 1 feasibility is complete with a report due shortly and a bid will be submitted for Stage 2 feasibility in Feb/March 2022. A presentation to members would be welcome.

- Retender of electricity contract 2023 – 2027 complete and COR will follow with options on securing 100% green electricity.
- Retender of water utilities will be brought to Cabinet March 2022.
- Climate Emergency – review of progress has been undertaken and works for 2022/23 prioritised including risk assessment of Climate and adaptation measures, community consultation and progressing existing action plan.
- Air Quality Education and behaviour change. Southport Eco Centre – Immersive room installed. Launch event delayed due to increased Covid rates, but planned for Spring 2022. Work ongoing to promote the clean air crew website to schools across Sefton. Sefton are part of a developing LCR bid to DEFRA for funding to develop safer streets, will involve providing educational day visits at Eco Centre and producing educational materials – awaiting decision due February 2022.
- Salix funding secured to provide low energy lighting at the Atkinson, Southport, with works due to be complete by 31 March 2022.

## **Legal Services**

### **Prosecutions Team**

The team successfully applied for a warrant to enable environmental health officers to access and carry out works to a rear garden of a property in Maghull. The property has been overgrown and used as a dumping ground for waste for some time which was providing harbourage to rats and mice.

The team have responded to an appeal lodged by a landlord in the First Tier Property Tribunal. The landlord is appealing two civil penalties which the Housing Standards team imposed upon the landlord for failing to licence two properties within a Sefton selective licencing area.

The team represented the planning department at a first hearing in the Magistrates Court, the Council is prosecuting a landowner for failure to comply with an enforcement notice. The Defendant pleaded not guilty and the Trial has been listed for early March 2022.

The team delivered training to two substitute members of Licencing and Regulatory Committee.

The debt recovery service continue to enjoy success and bring in considerable sums to the Council. Including: business rates recovery of £110,569.91, a care charge debt of £210,000 and sundry debt recovery of £28,000.

### **Contract and Employment**

The Legal Contracts team remains extremely busy at working at full capacity, especially advising on the Council's major projects under the Growth Programme, in particular the high profile MLEC project under the Southport Town Deal (which continues to demand a huge amount of time and resource on what is a complex and ever-evolving structure with many parties and many challenges) and continue to advise of the Crosby Lakeside Activity Centre project (including the recent high-profile termination of the main contractor Crossfield and the resulting restructure of the project delivery methodology from the original design & build contracting model to a different model involving many more procurements and direct contracts, which is complex and requires careful thought).

The team continues to support a broad spectrum of Council operations and advise on a wide range of transactions, schemes and collaborations for all departments including social care, public health, highways (including the continuing response to VIAM's recent administration), public realm.

The team continues to be heavily involved in advising on the Council's commercialisation ventures including initiatives, and the nuanced issues around how the Council interacts with its wholly-owned companies such as SHOL, Sandway, SND. The team is also advising on the Council's initiatives to re-enter the council housing market including potential grant funding from Homes England, and on the subsidy control aspects of many funding schemes including the Government's 'Levelling Up' agenda.

The Covid pandemic continues to impact the Council's procurement and contracting activity which Legal Contracts supports, including ongoing variations reacting to the pandemic, extensions of existing contracts to endure service continuity (in a sub-optimal market for fresh procurement) and numerous post-Covid recovery schemes particularly around social care provision, work restart schemes, mental health schemes, etc.

Brexit also continues to have a transformative effect on the Council's contracting and procurement activity and Legal Contracts continues to provide proactive advice around forthcoming changes to the UK's public procurement regime (both the general regime, and the proposals for a bespoke health and social care regime) and new subsidy control (formerly state aid).

The Legal Contracts team also continues to provide strategic advice on best practice and risk mitigation on governance in particular around the Council's development and regeneration projects including advising commissioners on procurement best practice to mitigate scope for procurement challenges.

The team provides high quality employment law advice on a range of day to day and strategic matters for both the Council and the schools in the Borough. The team also have conduct of all of the Council's employment tribunal cases and a broad range of cases for schools under service level agreements.

## **Property & Planning**

Entering the new year, the property team remain busy continuing to support the Council's estates team and property portfolio dealing with all manner of disposals, acquisitions and other property related matters, as well as advising on initial points as the Council looks to re-enter the Council housing market. Planning matters also continue at pace including the high-profile win, defending the Council's grant of Planning Permission in the High Court on the Sainsburys (Meols Cop) (since appealed to the Court of Appeal).

## **Children's and Adults Social Care Team**

The Children's and Adults Social Care Team have worked through a very difficult period for the client departments and continues to face unprecedented levels of demand on the service. The impact of the pandemic has brought increased pressures and there has been a significant rise in court proceedings which has been a very challenging time for the team. Nationally there has been a significant and sustained rise in children being deemed at risk during Covid and Sefton have had a rise in care proceedings during this period which together with cases not being able to be concluded due to Covid restrictions has brought increased workloads for the team. There also continues to be a rise in international cases.

- **Registrars**

The Registration service is required to submit an Annual Performance Report to the General Register Office (GRO) each April and the following response was received from GRO –



*“We would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank Sefton registration service for the hard work undertaken during 2020/21 and for the continued effort to maintain service delivery in the face of the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about.*

*Your continued meeting of the KPT for death registrations is appreciated, particularly when considering the numerous challenges local registration services have faced as a result of the pandemic and the move to an electronic process for registering deaths. We acknowledge the difficulties in meeting the target for birth registrations and the impact that the postponement of birth registrations has had in this regard. Your progress in reducing volumes of outstanding birth registrations during this extended period is noted.*

*We recognise the unprecedented recovery challenges around births, marriages/civil partnerships facing the service this operational year as a result of the pandemic.”*

The service is continuing to see an increase in the number of death registrations compared to previous years. Death registrations are still being conducted over the phone rather than face to face as per the Coronavirus legislation.

363 wedding ceremonies were conducted at Sefton's Town Halls and Approved Venues between 1.6.21 and 30.9.21 – an increase of 14 compared to the same period in 2019.

- **Coroners**

The Coroner has held several jury inquests since the beginning of September, including some longstanding cases and the team are working hard to reduce the backlog of inquests.

## **Electoral Services**

Key dates in the election timetable are

Publication of Notice of Election	Monday 28 March 2022
Receipt of Nominations	4:00 pm Tuesday 5 April 2022
Withdrawal of Candidate	4:00 pm Tuesday 5 April 2022
Publication of Statements of Persons Nominated	4:00 pm Wednesday 6 April 2022
Last Date for Registration	Thursday 14 April 2022
Receipt of Postal Vote Applications	5:00 pm Tuesday 19 April 2022
Receipt of Proxy Vote Applications	5:00 pm Tuesday 26 April 2022
Appointment of Poll and Count Agents	Wednesday 27 April 2022
Day of Poll May 2022	7:00 am to 10:00 pm Thursday 5

Postal ballot packs will be issued on Thursday 21 April 2022 and Postal Vote opening sessions will commence week beginning 25 April 2022.

Counting of votes will take place immediately after the close of poll at 10.00pm on Thursday 5 May 2022. All Bootle and Sefton Central wards will be counted at Aintree Racecourse. Southport wards will be counted at Dunes Leisure Centre.

The new Election Bill is progressing through Parliament and it is expected to receive Royal Assent by June 2022. This will introduce Voter Identification at polling stations and make changes to postal voting and voting by British citizens living overseas. A detailed briefing paper will be made available to Members in due course.

## **Democratic Services Team – Overview**

- Due to increases in the rate of Covid infections in Sefton, the meetings of the Cabinet and Council held in January were held with reduced memberships whilst still complying with quoracy and political proportionality rules. The 4 Overview and Scrutiny Committees held in January were held remotely and on an informal basis to help stop the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Adult Social Care and Health)**

Committee Members met on 4 January 2022 when representatives of Liverpool University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (LUFT) attended to report on the most recent Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection report. The Chief Officer of the Sefton Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Health submitted a joint report on the Integrated Intermediate Care Strategy. The Clinical Commissioning Groups presented an Update Report and the Health Provider Performance Dashboard. Cabinet Member Update Reports were also considered. Rather than establish a traditional working group during 2021/22, Members of the Committee have previously agreed to participate in workshops on the Integrated Care Partnership.

A Special Meeting of the Committee on 31 January considered the proposals in relation to the next phase of clinical service integration for a number of services delivered by LUFT and agreed that the proposals constitute a substantial development / variation in services for Sefton residents. A Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee will now be established with representatives of Knowsley, Liverpool and Sefton Councils, to consider the proposals in greater detail.

- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)**

The Committee has been busy reviewing the update from the Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Reference Group along with scrutinising the progress of recommendations made by the Digital Inclusion Working Group. The Committee has requested that scoping documents be produced relating to the topics of cyber security; and Corporate Communications and Covid-19. The scoping documents will be considered at the meeting to be held on 1 March 2022. The budget meeting of the Committee was held on 8 February 2022.

- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills)**

The Committee's Working Groups in relation to (1) Housing Services for Vulnerable People and (2) Effectiveness of the Council's Enforcement Activity, completed their work and the Final Reports were approved by Cabinet and Council at their meetings held on 7 October 2021 and 18 November 2021 respectively. A Special meeting of the Committee was held in December 2021 to consider a called in item relating to Revised Recreation Pressure Information Note - Draft for Consultation and Development Management Purposes. The meeting to be held on 8 March 2022 will also consider a called-in item relating to Knob Hall Lane.

- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding)**

A briefing/training session of Committee Members took place recently to consider Children's Social Care Improvement in Sefton.

Committee Members met on 25 January 2022, when the Committee received a presentation by the Sefton Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) that provided an update

on actions undertaken since the Care Quality Commission (CQC) review of health services for children looked after and safeguarding in Sefton. A joint report from the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Health and the Interim Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education, provided the latest update regarding the development of Sefton Place Based Partnership for Health and Social Care. The Interim Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education submitted reports on the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Continuous Improvement Plan; and an overview of the Children's Services Improvement Journey. The latest Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT), showing data with narrative, was attached to the agenda for information. The usual Cabinet Member Reports were considered, and Members reviewed the Work Programme, including an update on the work of the Impact of Covid 19 on the Primary Curriculum Working Group.

- **School Appeals**

In addition to the provision of administrative support for meetings of the Council, Cabinet, and Committees, the Section has also continued to organise and clerk school admission appeal hearings and school exclusion reviews.

Admission appeals continue to be busy for the Clerk to the Education Appeal Panel. During January we had three days of appeals, two for the LEA and one for the Archdiocese. Additionally, two days of LEA appeals are scheduled for the week commencing 07 February.

Preliminary preparations are underway for the inundation of admission appeals that follow the allocation of school places (1 March for Secondary and 19 April for Primary). This period is the busiest time of year for school admission appeals and presents very many challenges for the team in terms of time, resources, and general logistics.

The Independent Review Panel, which consider appeals against school exclusions considered an exclusion in January. Two more appeals have been submitted in the last week and arrangements are being made for Panels to consider these two separate hearings, most likely during February.

The legislation that enables school appeals to be heard remotely was brought in under Covid rules and is due to expire on 30 September 2022. Remote hearings have proved popular with Panel members and officers, additionally there has been no negative feedback from parents/guardians. In the coming months, we will be seeking the views of parents relating to remote hearings as part of a consultation process that propose to give LEAs the option to hold hearings remotely or in person on a permanent basis.

- **Civic & Mayoral**

The next main event in the Mayoral Calendar will be the Gala Charity Ball which takes place on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> March in the Bliss Hotel, Southport, all the focus is currently switched on to this event to ensure its success.

We are currently also making preliminary works into the Mayor's Civic Heads Day which is scheduled for Monday 25<sup>th</sup> April and will give the mayor an opportunity to showcase the best of our borough to our neighbouring authorities.

- **Member Development**

The Member Development Programme 2021-2022 has run throughout the year with Members invited to attend Courses listed in the Member Development Handbook. A copy of the Handbook is located in the Mod Gov Library. Courses are held in a variety of formats, namely E-learning remotely via Microsoft Teams, and face-to-face, though the Covid

pandemic has limited opportunities for face-to-face learning. The programme has been adapted over the year and new courses added on request by Members. Some of the sessions have been repeated to give Members further opportunities to attend if they have not previously been able to attend sessions. (e.g. Corporate Parenting and Accessible Information Awareness).

Member attendance at sessions is notified to the Corporate Learning Centre and added to Members' learning records. Members can access their individual learning records of courses attended. Members are encouraged to complete course evaluation feedback forms at the end of each session and subsequent sessions adapted accordingly if required.

An on-line feedback survey for whole of the Member Development Programme 2021/2022 was circulated to Members in December 2021. The deadline for completion of the survey was originally 10 December 2021, but due to poor response rates, was subsequently extended to 31 January 2022. The purpose of the survey is to inform development of the 2022-2023 Member Development Programme. The results of the survey will be published as part of a report Cabinet Member report on the Member Development Programme. Work is also currently being undertaken in collaboration with North-West Employers with a view to the Council working towards the achievement of a Member Development Charter.

## ***PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT***

### **Operational Issues**

Advice and support are provided to all service areas regarding employment/staffing matters. Work continues in Children's Social Care and a number of key recruitments have taken place as well as guidance on staffing matters in order to help workforce improvements. The Personnel team has formed a distinct Business Support Unit which is providing support on a number of operational and HR related matters. Work in relation to Children's Social Care is providing a challenge to some other resources.

Guidance and support relative to the Coronavirus pandemic and the impact on resources in terms of staffing and service provision is also on-going. This is particularly the case in terms of the new variant and the organisation is following the pre-determined strategy.

Where possible and in accordance with operational requirements and risk assessments, employees are working from home with agile working at office sites as required, with social distancing measures in place. However, there has been an increase in the requirement for staff in Children's Social Care to attend at office sites with appropriate risk assessments being undertaken. Advice to staff generally is that working from home is to continue as was before.

Matters relating to disciplinary, grievance and dignity at work have been lesser than usual, 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 is being taken where appropriate via Microsoft Teams.

Operational Teams appreciate the need for sensitive advice given the pressures on Employees and the Authority.

### **Pay & Grading and Establishment Control Team**

Job evaluation is undertaken relative to all Council and School posts for new or revised roles and relative to any operational and service reviews to maximise efficiencies as part of restructuring

exercises across the Council. Team members are involved in service reviews and work to support transformational proposals and potential changes to service delivery.

The Establishment Control team are responsible for building any revised structures and changes to reporting hierarchies into the Councils operating systems. The team members have been heavily involved in the project of implementing the new iTrent Payroll and HR system. The Managers Self Service (MSS) module has been issued to Sefton Central managers, with the exception of Children's services (which is awaiting a full review of structure) and consequently managers should be able to access all their direct reports. Queries relative to managerial hierarchy stemming from the implementation of the new iTrent system have been raised with the Establishment Control team who will investigate these and make any amendments to the structure as appropriate. Discussions are ongoing with members of the iTrent project team and Establishment control in respect of methodology for managing and maintaining employee data within iTrent going forward.

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 Councils Establishment. All establishment changes are mapped to ensure correct payments are made, hierarchical organisational structures are appropriate and operational processes are effectively maintained.

Establishment Control review safeguarding checks held against posts e.g. Disclosure and Barring Service, Health Care Professional Council (HCPC) etc. with Heads of Service and amend as required. The team 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 team manage the Matrix contract relative to the recruitment of Agency workers. Agency recruitment is currently at an all-time high to deal with the demands across Children's Services and the new Government initiative Kickstart programme offering 6-month job placements for young people aged 17-24 on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment.

The team manage sickness absence data, including production of management reports, sickness absence analysis and quarterly absence figures for SLT. A review of the sickness absence system is ongoing with officers from ICT coordinating the link between the sickness Absence feeder system with the new iTrent payroll and HR system. The link between the two systems has resulted in officers from the team having to manually input 1000s on lines of data to the Sickness Absence Feeder system to ensure that both systems work in synergy.

The JE officer working with colleagues from ICT to implement the required link between the JE database and the iTrent system. This matter is still in progress and has not yet been finalised. In addition, the JE officer is working with officers from the iTrent project team relative to the application of JE numbers within iTrent.

### **Transactional HR Payroll & Pension (THRP) Services**

THRP went live in the new system (MHR iTrent) in a staggered approach in July and August 2021. They have now processed September 2021 to January 2022 pay and are currently processing February pay.

There were issues with some of the processes in the new system, 3<sup>rd</sup> party payments and Monthly Data Collection (MDC) for Teachers Pension and these are now mainly resolved. There are still

issues with Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) MDC which we are working with MHR and Merseyside Pension Fund to resolve.

The staff are still learning the new system are still working extremely hard and long hours to ensure all staff are paid on time and have provided some training to colleagues in HR Operational Services and Finance.

Most THRP staff are continuing to work from home this has gone 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.

Employee Self Service (ESS) has been rolled out to the majority of employees, for viewing of payslips and to amend address, bank details etc. and paper payslips have been produced for staff who are unable to access the Internet.

Claiming expenses via ESS and approved via Manager Self Service (MSS) is now live and being promoted to staff to use.

The team are currently looking at Year End Processing, Teachers Pensions Monthly data collection (MDC) moving to Monthly Contribution Reconciliation (MCR) from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 and the Local Government pay award from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 which is still to be agreed.

## **Occupational Health**

### **Health Unit**

1. During December 2021 and January 2022, a total of 113 referrals for SMBC employees were made to the Health Unit. This is approximately 35% more than the same period 12 months previously.
2. The majority of referrals during this period were from Education Excellence (47.8%), Locality Services (12.4%) and Adult Social Care (11.5%). As usual the main reasons were stress and mental health related (53.9%), chronic medical illness (17.7%) and musculoskeletal (12.4%).
3. Services provided via the Health Unit continue to be provided by a mixture of telephone and video consultations and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

## **Workforce Learning and Development (CLC)**

### **Apprenticeships**

Staff enrolled on the **Level 6 Social Work Apprenticeship Degree** and the **Level 7 Senior Leader Apprenticeship Degree programme (MBA)** are continuing with their studies and are making good progress.

We booked in some briefing sessions in December for the **Level 6 Occupational Therapy Apprenticeship Degree**. An existing employee based in Adult Social Care met the pre-requisites and was successful at internal interview stage. The applicant is currently undergoing the universities assessment procedures and will more than likely commence the course from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

We commenced a procurement exercise in September 2021 using the YPO Framework. The re-procurement will identify apprenticeship training providers to deliver a range of apprenticeship standards (qualifications), to meet the Council's on-going business/organisational requirements.

The procurement exercise will be completed by end of February 2022 and new providers will be appointed/ready to deliver apprenticeship qualifications from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022.

## **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:

- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** training delivery is going well. To date, we have trained 66 Sefton Council and schools' staff and have arranged for a further 26 sessions to be delivered from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022. We were also allocated some funding from Public Health to offer one free place on MHFA to all Sefton schools and private nurseries from January 2022.
- **My Sefton My Space Performance Development Review (PDR) template, Employee Preparation Guide and the Conversation Tool** was launched on Monday 9th August, followed by **eLearning for Staff and Managers eLearning**. The eLearning will help staff get the most out of the new PDR process including how to have an authentic conversation with others. To date, 247 staff have completed the staff eLearning and 136 managers have completed the manager's course.
- Sefton's **Training Needs Analysis (TNA)** was launched on the 5<sup>th</sup> October 2021 to capture learning and development needs for all staff/service areas from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022. TNA submissions are being reviewed and will help us to plan and commission training programmes that are specific to each individual service area.

## **Workforce/Organisational Development**

Currently supporting Children's Social Care to deliver on a number of identified improvements following the recent Ofsted Inspection, this includes the development of a People's Workforce Development Strategy and a refreshed induction booklet/guidance. We are also involved in the Council of 2023 programme, have launched the new PDR process called My Sefton, My Space and are preparing to launch an Induction eLearning programme for new starters joining the organisation.

We're developing a refreshed Adult and Children's Social Care progression policy to enable Social Workers to work towards Experienced / Senior Social Worker status. This can take up to 12 months to allow for the Social Worker to build experience.

We delivered a Culture session to SLB members to explore our culture and our teams from different perspectives (organisational, own peer group, service areas) and looking to the future which included the positive elements of Sefton's culture now. We are planning to replicate these sessions with Senior Managers from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022.

## **Strategic Support Business Intelligence**

The Business Intelligence team is 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. A priority for the service is the redevelopment of reports and provision of information for Children's Social Care, supporting the ongoing service review and Ofsted

inspection preparedness, whilst also addressing the increasing demands for data from the Adults Social Care for inspection preparedness.

The service continues to provide regular analysis of Covid-19 pandemic data, including specifically the immunisation take-up, whilst also continuing to respond to government requests for information (e.g., submission of vulnerable children & young people returns to the DfE).

In the last quarter the Service has begun to refresh the JSNA chapters Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) (sefton.gov.uk) , the Sefton People and Place Profile <https://www.sefton.gov.uk/media/1061/seftonpeopleandplaceprofile.pdf>, Sefton Ward profiles Borough & Ward Profiles (sefton.gov.uk) and the Family Wellbeing Centre profiles Site Search (sefton.gov.uk) .

The team is supporting the Integrated Care System (ICS) and leading on Population Health Management workstream.

Progress continues with the implementation of the Council's new enterprise data warehouse platform, which will enable big data analytics. Staff are being trained on the new tools and the team in working with the ICT Client and Agilisys to consider the most appropriate deployment of Power B.I. reporting and interactive visualisation software for creating reports and dashboards. However, with increasing demands capacity in the Business Intelligence team remains a concern.

The Service continues to support consultation and engagement activities, respond to complaints and subject access requests in a timely manner and provide information, advice, and guidance across the Council on matters relating to information governance and data protection.

The project to digitise the Council's historic paper records continues at pace, with work ongoing to move records stored at disparate locations to the Council's contracted 3<sup>rd</sup> party secured storage provider, taking opportunity to destroy legacy records and digitise those that are not required to be kept in original paper format.

## **Strategic Support**

The Strategic Support team continue to support the delivery of COVID testing in the borough, including surge testing and testing in schools where required.

The team leads on the promotion and use of accessible information and advocate numbers continue to grow in the workplace. Workshops with Members have continued and further workshops are being planned throughout the year.

As part of the support provided to the Demand Management programme of work, the team has been providing project support to Adult Social Care for Day Opportunities and are now reviewing the feedback from the recent consultation exercise.

The team is also providing support to Children's Services around their staffing structure, inspection readiness and planning for Foster Care service developments. The team is supporting with consultations for the Education Strategy and the Early Years and Childcare Sufficiency Statement.

## **Communications**

The Communications team continue to be at the heart of all activity across the Council and is 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 team has worked closely with ICT and Agilisys colleagues to progress the website reskin project resulting in the launch of the new design on 26<sup>th</sup> January. The team is developing a forward plan for further enhancements, additional functionality and evolving design of the new site.

Under the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018, all public sector bodies are required to provide evidence of accessibility compliance for all websites and mobile applications. Therefore, the Communications team commissioned external web accessibility auditors, All Able, to carry out a full accessibility audit of the new site, assessing compliance against the WCAG 2.1 AA criteria. This was done on 31<sup>st</sup> January, with a draft report made available on 1<sup>st</sup> February. This identified 33 accessibility “failures”, down from 55 in April 2021. However, just 3 of the 33 issues identified were considered to be high priority requiring urgent attention.

An updated accessibility statement is being written, with support from All Able, to address how the Council intends to remedy these failures. The work required will be factored into the development plan with ICT and Agilisys for the coming months.

The Communications Team have been providing significant support to colleagues in Children’s Services; mostly focused on social worker recruitment marketing and foster carer recruitment marketing. Two campaigns were launched in January, “Everyday Angels” fostering Campaign, and “Make A Difference” social worker recruitment campaign. Already these have delivered positive results, and have received overwhelmingly positive feedback, and are starting to have an impact; with 38 prospective job applicants attending the first ever virtual recruitment fair on 9<sup>th</sup> February, organised and hosted by the communications officer.

The 2022/23 budget is currently working its way through the sign off process, with the Communications Team pulling together key messages for a range of stakeholders in relation to any potential changes to Council Tax and/or Business Rates.

The team is working closely with colleagues in Democratic Services, preparing for the upcoming local elections in May. Changes are being made to the website so that elections information, and results, can be more clearly displayed and easily understood.

## **Procurement**

The Procurement Team continues to play a key role in many initiatives across the Council. The proposal to invest in Procurement resources is currently being progressed through Cabinet and Council.

Social Value continues to be a core part of the procurement process which is being further developed to add more value and to ensure these processes are embedded into our contracts, with suppliers being held accountable to their commitments and delivery