

COUNCIL - 3 MARCH 2022

QUESTIONS RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

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

Subject: Cycle Lane Consultation

The recent consultation process on the proposed cycle lanes/LTN's gave an unequivocal answer from the public and as such have been withdrawn.

Members have been advised that it is the intention to revamp the process to take into account the view that one category of the population in particular did not appear to have taken a particularly active part in the process.

As a consequence proposals are to be brought forward for Formby/Crosby.

Will the Leader of the Council confirm that in respect of the latter whatever new processes are recommended by Officers they will apply to all areas and not just to the situation that arose because of the last consultation exercise?

In addition, will he confirm that the Council will undertake for the first time a consultation exercise on the first set of proposals that were implemented but because of the timescale were not subject to any form of public consultation?

Response:

"Can I thank Cllr Watson for his question and I would like to take the opportunity to wish him a speedy recovery and look forward to seeing him back in the very near future."

"Councillor Fairclough (Cabinet Member for Locality Services) confirmed, following the consultation process, that tranche 2 of the Active Travel won't be used to deliver the proposals on which the consultation was based. The consultation process of any active travel scheme will be determined by the requirements on which the offer was made and the recommendations agreed with the Council's Public Consultation and Engagement Panel.

The details of the monitoring and evaluation process proposals for the temporary proposals implemented using tranche 1 of the fund are being developed. They will involve some consultation."

2. **Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson to the Cabinet Member for Education (Councillor Roscoe)**

Subject: Education

Do we have numbers for 'missing' pupils/students?

This refers to national reports that show that over 100,000 students simply did not return to school so we need to know what action Sefton has taken to identify them and to try and ensure that they re-establish their education.

Response:

CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION: CURRENT POSITION STATEMENT ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION (EHE)

“Since March 2020 the first national lockdown there have been 37 children whose parents have chosen to electively home education citing COVID as a reason.

As with the regional and national picture, though numbers have increased overall during Covid there has been a significant “churn” of pupils returning to school destinations, reflecting the fact that for some EHE has been a temporary intervention until families have felt comfortable in re-engaging with school settings. As a service we have proactively contacted parents who may have opted to home educate temporarily and have provided advice and support on how to request in year school places.

Support Offered

The oversight and support for home educated pupils and their families continues to be provided in several ways:

- There is a concerted response to ensure that data relating to actual and potential risk factors associated with home education is shared. A group of representatives from the wider Monitoring and Placement Group meet termly to track contacts made and share information. Representation is from EHE officers, health, CME Co-ordinator and Career Connect. Examples of risk factors raised include RAG rated of levels of engagement, repeated failure to provide an outline of suitable education provided, unidentified or unmet SEND need or evidence of unsuitable educational provision.
- In addition, there is a standing “Cause for Concern” agenda item for the Monitoring and Placement Group and resulting actions are routinely monitored.
- The Complementary Education Service has a lead officer and a total of three additional staff that liaise with and provide support for families regarding resources, planning educational opportunities, measuring progress, access to examinations and wider support within the community.
- Pupils over the age of 16 are overseen through a Career Connect officer.
- Health outcomes for home educated pupils are overseen and supported by staff from the 0-19 Enhanced Team.
- All the above staff are members of the multi-agency Monitoring and Placement Group which ensures data relating to school notifications of deregistration to home education are routinely monitored to ensure the whereabouts of families are known and tracked.

As a minimum, families are expected to receive an annual visit where educational arrangements are discussed. Staff involved use the information provided by families to ascertain whether the education provided is suitable. Throughout Covid staff have used telephone, email and socially distanced face to face contacts to continue to support our home educating families. In addition, visits and welfare checks are undertaken by a Senior Early Help worker from Schools Attendance.

CHILDREN RECEIVING COMPLEMENTARY EDUCATION:

From March 2020 there have been 70 pupils who have been referred to this service from a medical practitioner who has provided evidence that the child cannot attend mainstream school due to anxiety.

The service: -

- Provides statutory teaching support for primary and secondary age children who are unable to attend school due to medical needs and difficulties.
- Provides teaching support for school age expectant mothers.
- Maintains oversight of those pupils who are electively home educated within Sefton.
- Has a designated member of staff to provide advice and support for schools in respect of BAME pupils and pupils with English as an additional language.
- Provision is based centrally in LA at the Pinefield Centre, Gores Lane, Formby.
- Can be accessed by maintained and academy schools for pupils between KS1-KS4.

The Key functions include:

- Supporting schools in ensuring that they are meeting their responsibilities to pupils who cannot attend due to illness or during a maternity leave.
- Assists the schools in providing the statutory entitlement to education in accordance with medical or psychological advice.
- Works with schools, families and health professionals to produce and implement a support plan to allow pupils to access suitable and flexible education appropriate to their needs, and which is responsive to the demands of their changing medical needs.
- Provides teaching across key stages 1-4 in a variety of settings including the home, the Spinal Injuries Unit, groups at the Pinefield Centre, libraries, children and family centres and within schools.
- Provides supplementary support to the young person via VLE and Distance Learning provision.

- Provides teaching and learning support for pupils at the point of discharge from Tier 4 CAMHS specialist settings.
- Supports the re-integration of pupils into school or their next appropriate educational setting as and when their health allows.
- Provides guidance to schools and families regarding the Education of Sick Children.
- Provides teaching and learning programmes in the subjects of English, Maths and Science for children requiring to be taught in their homes.
- Provides teaching across English, Maths, Science, PSHE and ICT and Computing for pupils in Year 9-11 able to access the small groups in the teaching base at the Pinefield Centre.
- Providing support and advice to schools regarding Minority Ethnic, Traveler, Asylum Seeker and EAL pupils.
- Ensures that there is sufficient oversight of the educational arrangements made by parents and carers for electively home educated pupils.

There is a multi-agency group who meet fortnightly to discuss children missing education and to identify who is the most appropriate professional to take a lead for the case, based on the individual circumstances of the child or young person. There are defined links across the partnership. Membership of the group include CME Co-ordinator, EHE Manager, School Nursing Service, Head teacher, Career Connect, Educational Psychologist and a representative from SEND and Early Help, CAMHS.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

During the two national lockdowns the decision was taken by the government to disapply offences for non-attendance in schools during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

During that time, we had robust procedures in place to monitor and track children including:

FIRST DAY RESPONSE INITIATIVE - CHILDREN WITH A SOCIAL WORKER AND EHCP PLAN

During the national lockdown Sefton put a first day response system in place to safeguard those children subject to a child and family assessment, child in need plan, child protection plan or looked after children. The schools report on a template which children in these groups are absent from school. If the school require a home visit the form must be returned by 10.30am. The function is undertaken by three early help workers and a senior early help worker (school attendance) overseeing the work.

All information is recorded on the Liquid Logic system and social workers are alerted. We have adapted this practice and embedded this into our school attendance model of practice aligned with the new responsibilities for the virtual head teacher.

Building on this model of practice Sefton have recently employed an education worker in the integrated front door. Part of their role will be to alert the business support manager linked to attendance when a child is referred who is a persistent absentee or not attending at all to explore what interventions are needed by the school and any other agencies to secure good attendance.

Sefton schools now have Early Help Worker as a point of contact when the vulnerable families are identified with a specific focus on school attendance. This will facilitate making full use of the support available from the Local Authority's (LA) Early Help offer.

The allocated early help worker will consider the whole needs of the family in determine what support is required to improve the outcomes for children.

LOCAL AUTHORITY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PANEL

Prior to calling the School Attendance Panel meeting, the school must submit evidence to show that they have tried to improve the pupil's attendance. The LA invites the parent and the school to a panel meeting. At the meeting, the School Attendance Lead issues the parent with a formal warning and advises that the LA will instigate legal proceedings if attendance does not improve. The pupil and parents are given the opportunity to explain the reasons for the poor attendance and explore any ways in which the Panel can provide support. Addressing bullying is embedded into this process. The Panel then produces an action plan based on the strengths-based model of practice. If the family are involved with other agencies they are encouraged to attend. It has been observed that the school attendance panel has seen an increase in children attending with anxiety related issues.

There have been 73 children who have been invited to the school attendance panel with 16 of those children presenting with anxiety related issues who are not in school.

There are 14 children who are not currently in school related to COVID and anxiety who are being provided with support by the school including remote learning. Schools and the Local authority are keeping in touch with the families and working together to look at solutions. This group of children have not presented at the school attendance panel.

INFORMATION CHILDREN ON A SCHOOL ROLL WHO HAVE REDUCED PROVISION

There have been in total since September 2021, (current academic year) 111 children who have reduced education provision in Sefton. Some of the cohort have anxiety cited as the reason.

Out of the 111 who have been on reduced education provision in Sefton schools

- **43 have returned to school within 8 weeks 38.7%**
- **28 have extended the period 25.2%**

- **40 are still within the 8 weeks 36.%**

Sefton Council hold all schools including academies attendance data. Reports are extracted on a regular basis so we can monitor, and track attendance. By undertaking this exercise to quality assure children's information it is a further measure to safeguard children."

3. **Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing (Councillor Trish Hardy)**

Subject: Homelessness

- (a) Would the Cabinet Member please provide the latest figures for the homeless and identify the numbers in the two areas into which Sefton is split?
- (b) Would the Cabinet Member provide details of the costs involved for emergency accommodation on a nightly, weekly and monthly basis?
- (c) Will the Cabinet Member confirm that the arrangements with the Britannia Hotel Group have now been terminated and will she confirm the amount of money that they have been paid up to the present time?

Response:

- (a) "Figures below are based on the households accessing emergency temporary accommodation as at 2 March 2022.

| Accommodation | Singles | Families | Total |
|---|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| B&B | 11 | 3 | 14 |
| Self-Contained (AirBnB style) | 8 | 5 | 13 |
| Council Hostel (Lonsdale Homelessness Unit) | 6 | 3 | 11 |
| Excel Housing (Commissioned provider) | 17 | 0 | 17 |
| TOTAL | 42 | 11 | 53 |

Of the total number of households staying in emergency temporary accommodation there are:

- 46 (87%) staying in South Sefton
- 6 (11%) are staying in North Sefton (Southport only).
- An additional 3 cases (2%) have been placed out of borough.

The last settled address for these households, before becoming homeless shows:

- 51% (23) were from South Sefton
- 23% (12) from North Sefton
- 19% (10) from out of borough

- 4% (2) of no fixed abode
- 4% (2) unknown (to be confirmed)

The above cases relate to households that have been assessed as being in 'priority need' thus the Council has a statutory duty to provide this accommodation as per the Homeless Reduction Act (2017).

In addition to these households there are also 11 individuals that are not eligible for assistance from the Council who are accessing night shelter accommodation across Sefton. This equates to 55% in South Sefton and 45% in North Sefton."

- (b) "The cost of emergency temporary accommodation varies and is dependent upon the household make up, the type of accommodation needs, and the availability of accommodation taking into consideration times of high demand.

However, based on 2020/21 information the cost of B&B/AirBnB accommodation roughly equates to:

- Single person/Couple with no children £45 (£315pw)
- Couple/Single plus 1 child £64 (£448pw)
- Couple/Single plus 2 or more children £85pn (£595pw)

The cost of Night Shelter accommodation also varies depending upon the occupancy levels however the Council recently increased the provision from 3 beds (2 South Sefton, 1 North) to 12 beds (6 South Sefton, 6 North Sefton). This was to prevent rough sleeping in Sefton during the cold weather months and runs until the end of March 2022.

The cost of this additional provision from 24 December 2021 – 30 March 2022 is £48,465.72 and is funded from grant funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

I am pleased to report that during our Annual Rough Sleeper Count which took place in November nobody was observed rough sleeping on the streets of Sefton."

- (c) "Sefton Council did not have a formal agreement with the Britannia Hotel Group, who own Pontins, the Prince of Wales Hotel and the Scarisbrick Hotel. However, due to the Government's 'Everyone In' initiative to get rough sleepers off the streets during the Covid 19 pandemic, the Council's Housing Options service did use these hotels, amongst others, to provide interim accommodation for households that are eligible up until 30 September 2021.

Sefton Council's Housing Options service have not placed any other households at these hotels since that date.

Expenditure with Britannia Hotels from March 2020 to August 2021:

| | 2020/2021 | 2021/2022 | Grand Total |
|--|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| Britannia Hotels Ltd – The Prince of Wales Hotel | £ 114,710.16 | £ 59,425.50 | £174,135.66 |
| Britannia Hotels Ltd – The Scarisbrick Hotel | | £ 21,352.38 | £21,352.38 |
| Pontins | £ 846.00 | £ 32,779.00 | £33,625.00 |
| | | | £229,113.04 |

Where possible, only single homeless people are placed in B&B. Housing options always aim to provide family households requiring interim accommodation with cooking facilities, which were available at Pontins during various periods of lockdown.”

4. **Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control (Councillor Veidman)**

Subject: Planning

The changes to the Sefton Constitution as they relate to Planning have significantly reduced the input that Elected Members and Members of the public can have in respect of Planning Applications. The ability for the public to present petitions and for Members to speak on their behalf has been considerably reduced and there are a growing number of examples of where decisions have been taken by Planning Officers under the new delegated powers that have inevitably proved to be controversial.

Would the Cabinet Member please advise the extent to which this syndrome is being monitored and if he has been able to consider any mechanism by which the democratic element that is so important to Sefton residents can be enhanced?

Response:

“I don’t agree with Cllr Watson’s assertion, but if he would like to furnish me with specific examples, I would be happy to look at them.

Public and member participation in the planning process is extremely important and Planning members are aware of the importance and no decisions regarding participation are taken lightly. In addition, constitutional changes are reviewed annually and if it was felt that anyone was being disenfranchised, then we would take steps to remedy that situation.”

5. **Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing (Councillor Trish Hardy)**

Subject: Housing - Sandway Homes

A recent report to the Audit and Governance Committee included for the first time a financial assessment in respect of Sandway Homes.

This showed them operating at a loss but it was readily accepted by Members that hopefully this would be a temporary position until such time as potential profits from new build for sale were able to be reflected in the accounts.

- (a) Would the Cabinet Member however advise the mechanism that Sandway Homes have established in respect of the commissioning of new build for sale properties?

Sefton's experience has clearly shown that using a competitive tender procedure with established builders reduces design costs and capital costs and shortens the development period quite considerably.

- (b) Are Sandway Homes intending to commission on this basis and if not could an explanation be provided as to why such a commercial approach is not considered to be appropriate?

Response:

Financial Assessment

"For the accounting period that was reported at the Audit and Governance Committee it was confirmed that this reflected the pre-construction period of Sandway's Business Plan, and commencement of two of its sites at Meadow Lane and Barton Close. Hence a loss was expected due to professional fees associated with planning and early construction costs. This is expected to reduce as the Company enters into its sales completion phase in 2022-23 with income into the Company increasing.

(a) **Mechanism for commissioning new build for sale**

The Company employs a Managing Director, Financial Controller, Head of Business Operations and Marketing and a Business Operations Executive. The Board comprises a Chair and three other Non-Executive Officers, who meet frequently to monitor progress on site and the wider performance of the Company Business Plan. The Company provides regular updates to the Shareholder and Cabinet.

The Phase 1 Business Plan was developed back in 2019, and subsequently a number of professional and technical consultants were appointed to support the inception and delivery of the schemes. The Company has a dedicated procurement policy which depending upon the value of the works, has strict criteria in terms of the commissioning and appointment of professional services as follows:

- An invitation to tender from a minimum of four written quotations; unless market conditions require the Board to proceed following a reduced number of submitted tenders, whereby invited bidders do not submit.
- Value for money demonstrated through benchmarking, market knowledge or market research that evidences value for money and evidence retained for audit purposes.

The Company currently relies upon external consultancy support from the following disciplines:

- Legal services from practices with Construction, Land Acquisition and Sales/Conveyancing disciplines.
- Technical Design and cost monitoring covering Architectural, Engineer and Quantity Surveying disciplines.

Specialist sales support from an independent Estate Agent who works alongside the Sandway Team

- Ad-hoc services associated with Company branding and marketing including a website, show homes and site signage.

Sales and Marketing

In relation to sales, Sandway are working alongside a Sefton local estate agent (Abode) and legal representatives Weightmans LLP for the conveyancing of the properties.

There are a total of 53 homes for sale across Barton and Meadow, and there will be a further 50 homes for sale at Buckley Hill Lane.

The first phase of homes for sale were released on Rightmove in October 2021. Of the 53 homes available for open market sale on Meadow Lane and Barton Close, all of the Phase 1 releases (21 homes), have been reserved off plan. The second phase of sales plots (which are due to complete later in the year), will be released in April.

- (b) As outlined above, to-date the Company has followed a dedicated procurement process for Phase 1 and will continue to operate in this way for any future procurement requirements.

In addition, and as part of the Business Operations of the Company, a dedicated Balanced Score Card has been agreed which monitors performance against an agreed set of outputs in the following areas:

- Finance
- Sales Performance
- Customer Satisfaction
- Brand
- Social Value

This provides further assurances and transparency to the Board and Shareholder around the Commercial Approach of the Company.”

