

CABINET

MEETING HELD AT THE COMMITTEE ROOM, BOOTLE TOWN HALL ON THURSDAY 7TH APRIL, 2022

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Maher (in the Chair)
Councillors Atkinson, Cummins, Doyle, Fairclough, Lappin, Roscoe, Moncur and Veidman

123. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Hardy.

124. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of any disclosable pecuniary interests or personal interests were received.

125. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Decision Made:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2022 be approved as a correct record.

126. NEW REALITIES 2022

The Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director – People seeking approval of a revised New Realities Protocol which had been co-produced with the Voluntary, Community and Faith (VCF) Sector.

A copy of the New Realities Protocol was attached to the report.

Decision Made:

That the Council be recommended to approve the revised new realities protocol for adoption.

Reasons for the Decision:

To approve a revised New Realities protocol.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

The Council is not obliged to have a protocol in place but it is recommended best practice.

127. ACTIVATION OF THE EXTENSIONS TO THE COMMUNITY INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL SERVICE CONTRACT

The Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director – People seeking approval of the activation of the extensions to the Community Infection Prevention and Control Service Contract.

Decision Made:

That subject to continued satisfactory delivery of the Service against the service specification and annual work programme, the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Cabinet Member - Health and Wellbeing, be granted delegated authority to activate the 2 x 12-month Community Infection Prevention and Control Service contract extension clauses; the first contract extension to be activated on the 1st September 2022; and the second contract extension clause to be activated on 1st September 2023.

Reasons for the Decisions:

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent increased requirement for the Community Infection Prevention and Control Services in Sefton. The Service was reviewed in 2020 and an expanded Service Specification was developed with a corresponding increase to funding for this Service.

Additional demands on the Service have continued with both responsive work due to outbreaks and additional expert infection prevention and control advice and support across the community health and care sector to support quality and safety for those receiving care in Sefton.

The Service continues to deliver against the additional priorities identified during the Service review in 2020:

- Management and prevention of outbreaks in complex community settings, cases
- Clusters and outbreaks involving people in vulnerable groups
- Increasing skills and knowledge in community settings around prevention in order to reduce the number of community outbreaks in Sefton

The Service has continued to perform well against the agreed annual work plan, supporting community providers to improve quality, through supportive visits, advice and guidance, audit, and training.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

The alternative option is not to extend the current contract with the Service and move to procure a new Community Infection Prevention and Control Service with a contract start date of 1st September 2022.

Moving to a procurement exercise has the potential to destabilise current Service delivery and to stall progress against agreed workplan objectives.

Additionally, there would be an opportunity cost associated with the officer time required for a procurement which would reduce capacity to deliver against key priorities in Sefton. This would include an impact on health protection capacity within the Sefton Council Public Health team.

128. WATER SELF SUPPLY SERVICES (2022 - 2025)

The Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services seeking approval of the continuation of water utility 'self-supply' arrangement with the support of the existing Managing Agent after a positive evaluation of the initial first full year of operation; and requesting Members to note the investment in 'mobile data loggers' as a cost-effective approach to address 'unaccounted water losses' to net financial/environmental benefit across the Council portfolio (Corporate, Schools and New Directions).

Decision Made:

That:

- (1) the continuation of the wholesale contract, which is deemed to be 'rolling' (without end date); and that the contract can only be terminated should Sefton Council choose to revoke its licence or break the terms of business be noted; and
- (2) authority be granted for the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services, to directly award the Contract for a managing agent to Waterscan, for a maximum period of 4 years comprising an initial 3 year period with an option to extend for up to 1 period of 12 months.

Reasons for the Decisions:

Current arrangements expire on 30 September 2022. All options available to the Council have been assessed and the option of self-supply with a managing agent is recommended based on an assessment of the first full year of operation which highlighted:

- A substantial increase in reliable/real meter readings. This reduces the reliance on estimated readings being used for billing, keeping expenditure in line with water consumption
- A data cleanse and monthly billing tariff analysis (yielding £25K of savings/refunds) and ongoing financial benefits
- Ongoing/real time proactive support to manage high/unaccounted for (e.g. leaks) water consumption

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Option 1

Do nothing – Under self-supply, the wholesale contract would not expire under the terms of the licence agreement. Sefton would still be required to operate under the terms of the licence. Allowing the current Managing Agent contract to expire (30 September 2022) would mean Sefton Council would operate under self-supply unsupported as there is no in-house capacity to deliver this service. This would expose the Council to significant risk of (a) paying water and sewerage charges without validation and (b) breaching licence conditions which could lead to significant financial, legal and operational demands and risks. Therefore, this option was rejected.

Option 2

Exit self-supply and return to the retail market – Existing retailers could displace all retail functions (meter readings, billing and customer service). However, under the current arrangement, Sefton have experienced benefits in improved data collection, financial savings and now has a 'voice in the market'. Returning to the retail market would mean Sefton would lose these benefits. Therefore, this option was rejected.

Option 3

Carry out an open procurement exercise for the appointment of a managing agent – This is not an option available to Sefton currently. Only one suitably qualified managing agent operates in the market (Waterscan) as confirmed by OFWAT and the market operator MOSL.

129. BUSINESS RATES - COVID ADDITIONAL RELIEF FUND

The Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services seeking consideration of the adoption of a local discretionary business rates policy – the COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF); indicating that the policy would provide for the award of relief from business rates for one year only; that relief would be applied retrospectively to the 2021/22 Rate liability in accordance with guidance issued by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; and that Sefton Council had been allocated £4,447,663 by Government to disburse in relief.

Decision Made:

That:

- (1) the COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund Policy referred to in Appendix 1 to the report be adopted as Council Policy;
- (2) the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services, be delegated authority to administer the scheme;

- (3) any variance to the awards of relief set out in Section 4 of the policy document be delegated to the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services, where the number of applications received would result in an underspend or overspend of the funds allocated; and
- (4) it be noted that the proposal was a Key Decision but it had not been included in the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions. Consequently, the Leader of the Council and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services had given their consent under Rule 29 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules of the Constitution for these decisions to be treated as urgent on the basis that determination of applications must be completed within regulatory timescales.

Reasons for the Decisions:

- (1) Government has allocated funds to each local authority to assist businesses that otherwise have missed out on alternative business rates reliefs allocated to aid them through the COVID-19 pandemic. Relief will be granted using discretionary relief powers under section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 that require individual billing authorities to adopt a local scheme.
- (2) It is expected that there will be several hundred applications. Delegating administration of the scheme will allow officers to make decisions in line with other business rates relief.
- (3) The business rates database does not contain information that would enable the Council to accurately predict how many businesses may apply and qualify for the additional relief. When the application window has closed and applications have been reviewed, detailed calculations of the awards can be made. However, to comply with business rates regulations referred to in (1) above decisions on awarding relief must be made no later than 30 September 2022. Delegating a decision to vary the awards will enable businesses to receive the awards earlier.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.