

CABINET MEMBER REPORT		
Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) - 14 June 2022		
Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Paulette Lappin	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services	June 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:

The suite of budget reports was presented to presented to Budget Council on 3rd March. The service has been building the 2022/2023 revenue and capital budgets to reflect the approved budgets. From July reports will presented to Cabinet on monitoring the Council's revenue and capital budgets for 2022/2023, including any ongoing impact of COVID19, outlining new funding streams being made available to the Council, as well as any other financial matters.

The service has been assessing the impact of a number of emerging budgetary pressures in 2022/2023, including energy price increases and the cost of Children's Social Care. A report will be taken to Cabinet in June (and Council in July) outlining the pressures and proposals for meeting these pressures.

The Medium-Term Financial Plan is also being updated to reflect these issues.

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 15th December. Although nearly all work has been finalised, the audit is still to be completed. This is mainly due to an emerging technical valuation issue that needs to be resolved at a national level – CIPFA are currently consulting on a practical solution that will enable audits to be completed. Should any further amendments be required since the December 2021 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 is nearly complete, with the revenue and capital outturn position to be reported to Cabinet in July. The draft Statement of Accounts is expected to be published by the end of July.

Customer Centric Services

All areas of the service are dealing with high volumes of work as is typical and expected at the start of the financial year following the issue of approximately 135,000 annual bills for Council Tax, Business Rates and benefit entitlement annual notification letters. However, the priority this year has been the extensive work required to make payments for the Energy Rebate Scheme, announced by the Government in February 2022.

Council Tax Energy Rebate

The Council is required to administer two aspects of the Government's Energy Rebate Scheme to support households with the rising costs of energy bills, i.e., the Council Tax Energy Rebate and a discretionary Energy Rebate fund.

The Council Tax Energy Rebate requires the Council to make a one-off payment of £150.00 to approximately 110,000 households in the borough in Council Tax bands A-D. So far, approximately 65,000 payments have been made to households that pay Council Tax by Direct Debit where bank details are held. For those households where bank details are not held, or where there has been a mismatch between the name on the Council Tax account and bank details held, a letter has been issued requesting that bank details are confirmed securely online.

As of 27th May 2022, approximately 21,000 households have responded to the letter and the team is now undertaking validation checks, as required by the Government, before payment is issued, which is anticipated to be in week commencing 6th June 2022.

Reminder letters will also be issued to those households that have not responded to the first request. Where there is no response by 30th June 2022, the payment will be credited to the household's Council Tax account.

The Customer Services team is providing support to customers who are digitally excluded via the Contact Centre and the One Stop Shop service in Bootle and The Atkinson, Southport. A comprehensive set of frequently asked questions and answers is available on the Council's website, is reviewed, and updated regularly. Press releases and social media have also been used to keep residents as up to date as possible.

The Government has also provided discretionary funding to the Council of £708,150. The team is finalising proposals for the Council's discretionary scheme and is preparing a report for approval by the Council's Cabinet at its June meeting. It is anticipated that scheme will be live from 1 July 2022 subject to approval.

Customer Services

The Contact Centre is handling a high volume of telephone calls, e-mail enquiries and social media contact. Priority service continues to be provided for customers calling with Social Care and ELAS enquiries.

Typically, April is a busy month as residents receive their annual Council Tax bills and benefit entitlement notifications. This year, as calls for annual bills reduced, enquiries relating to Council Tax Energy Rebate payments increased. Calls peaked at the end of April as the first batch of payments for direct debit payers started to be paid. Customer Service advisors handling calls reported that the frequently asked questions available on the Council's website provided answers to almost all enquiries.

In the One Stop Shops, progress with Taxi Licensing slowed as drivers failed to attend appointments and struggled to familiarise themselves with the recently introduced HMRC requirement to complete a Conditionality Tax Code Check in advance of their renewal appointment. Over 70% of all drivers failed to provide the required evidence at their appointment, resulting in follow-up appointments being required and the overall workload for Taxi Licensing increasing. Staff from Taxi Licensing and Customer Services are meeting with trade representatives to seek their support to try to bring some resolution to the matter.

The Council's Communications team is reviewing the renewal letter and the website has been updated detailing the requirements of the tax check-code and a link to the HMRC website.

Council Tax workloads

The Council Tax team is experiencing increased workloads and there are delays in responding to customer enquiries.

During the pandemic, traditional activities and workloads were replaced by the need to prioritise work to provide support to residents and businesses requiring financial help and assistance. Consequently, a backlog of work has accrued, and the position is compounded with the need for the Council to administer the £150 Council Tax Energy Rebate on behalf of the Government. Extra staff have been brought in and overtime working is in place to reduce work volumes and customer waiting times.

Customer Service Excellence (CSE) Accreditation

Customer Centric Services and Transactional HR and Payroll have again achieved the CSE accreditation, as has been the case for the last few years, following an external assessment in March 2022.

The team is currently working through the assessment report that highlights many positives and some areas to continue to drive improvements in future.

Risk and Audit

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

- Operators Licence,
- Annual Governance Statement,
- Corporate Governance Review
- Operational In-House Services,
- Council Tax,
- Performance Management,
- Grants assurance and a review of number of Schools.
- Climate Change
- SEND Transport

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 first of two permanent Principal Auditors positions with the staff member starting in July 2022.

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 and undertake a review of tree management by the Council.
- 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 the Ukraine refugees, the Pollution incident on the Irish Sea coast and responding to Storms within February. Work was carried out on the Grand National at Aintree. Planning has started on the Air Show as well as developing a revised Operational Shoreline Pollution Plan.

Follow up training for the loggists in March 2022 took place as well as for Volunteers in May 2022. 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 Council's Risk Appetite which is due which is due to complete in June 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

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 with 56 servers now located in the Cloud. Due to the Jubilee Bank holiday week the overall plan has slipped into June, with completion now planned for end June 2022. Once completed the project will move onto Data Centre rationalisation and rightsizing, ready for an eventual move of the Data Centre to Bootle Town Hall.

Cloud Telephony deployment is nearing completion new handsets are now being deployed across all locations, including schools. All ICT stock is now delivered and the project is moving to the final phases prior to closure of the Virgin Contract.

Further deployment of the new CXP solution is now planned for the forthcoming period. Processes for Abandoned Vehicles and Electoral Registration are now Live, process for Sharps are due to be deployed alongside within the next two weeks. In addition Planning and building regulations process are built and ready for deployment. Four further processes for Pollution will be ready for User Acceptance testing within the next two weeks. Work continues on the Bins not emptied process.

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 25th of January. The Web team now working on content. Further reviews are underway of ancillary sites.

Schools ICT – implementation of the new Connectivity Service for schools is now completed across all Schools, with positive feedback regarding performance already received. The issues with the Contract for support of the SIMS/FMS system (management information systems previously supplied by Capita) are now resolved. A revised SLA is now in place for schools who have elected to continue to take support from Agilisys.

The onboarding of our new BACs provider is now completed and the team continues to support the implementation of the new Bulk Print Contract.

Procurement activity continues to be a challenge, unfortunately the Procurement consultant engaged did not have sufficient experience and the recent recruitment activity was also unsuccessful in securing a suitable candidate. 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.

The threat level in relation to Cyber Security remains high and the team are working hard to implement new technologies and tools to stay one step ahead of the threat. Recently Sefton has deployed new licences across all Office 365 users and deployed additional protections within our email system, namely Safe Attachments, Safe links and enhanced anti-phishing rules. Further work is planned over the forthcoming period.

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.
- Negotiations with Landlord of Magdalen House for the re gear of the Lease nearing completion.
- Asset records input and liaison with Building Maintenance colleagues for new (property based) IT system in support of Corporate Landlord Implementation Ongoing.
- New Strategic Asset Manager appointed.
- Agreement of terms and reporting for Lease of various assets ongoing.
- Reoccupation of Magdalen House to accommodate future ways of working underway.
- Working in conjunction with Children's Services to support their accommodation strategy.

Maintenance Management and Building Services

- Delivering a range of schemes in support of Corporate Buildings.
- Delivering a range of schemes in support of Education Capital programme.
- Delivery of reactive maintenance and statutory compliance services to Corporate and Educational buildings.
- Professional advice and support on a broad range of regeneration programmes.
- Development and implementation of a new coordinated (property based) IT system in support of Corporate Landlord Implementation.
- Managing remedial works scheme
- Formulated phase 1 essential maintenance delivery plan for corporate buildings.
- Formulating asset survey delivery plan alongside the essential maintenance.
- Delivering services in support of major adaptation to vulnerable and disabled residents.

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 NOW CLOSED (29 properties received insulation – EWI, CW, LI)
 - LAD2 works continuing with an end date for works of 30 June 2022. Two contractors are operating to complete the 190 properties plus an additional 20.
 - LAD3 and 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 £5M ERDF underspend to continue the retrofit works of RP properties. However, due to staff leaving, officers are working with the LCR CA to take over delivery of the programme to ensure the funding is not lost to the LCR.
- Works to upgrade roof insulation and improve glazing at Southport and Bootle Town Halls is complete apart from works to restore/insulate the BTH ballroom window will be completed by August 2022.
- A programme of work to support schools (after large energy price rises) is being developed to be delivered this year.
- Feasibility Study for a replacement Wind turbine at Southport Eco Centre is ongoing. Sefton officers are working on providing a long land lease and power purchase agreement to support the project.
- Climate Emergency – Annual report has been produced and will go to Cabinet/Council in June/July. Steady progress made this year – focus for coming year is community engagement, adaptation and project development.
- Air Quality Education and behaviour change. Southport Eco Centre – Immersive room launch event 23 June 2022.

Legal Services

Democratic Services Team – Overview

- All meetings are now being held in person.
- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Adult Social Care and Health)**

The Committee at its meeting to be held on 21 June 2022 will consider the Work Programme for 2022-23. As part of this process the Committee will be requested to hold informal briefings around the Integrated Care Programme and developments in health and social care, rather than establish a working group review. The Committee will also consider the Public Health Performance Framework.

Representatives of the Committee will continue their work on Joint Health Scrutiny Committees for both Hyper Acute Stroke Services and the Liverpool University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (LUFHT) Clinical Services Reconfiguration, during 2022/23.

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

The Committee at its meeting to be held on 14 June 2022 will consider the Work Programme for 2022-23. As part of this process the Committee will also select one of the following topics of cyber security; and Corporate Communications and Covid-19 for review by a Working Group. The Committee will also consider an update from the Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Reference Group and receive a presentation providing an overview and security update about the Cloud.

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

The Committee at its meeting to be held on 28 June 2022 will consider the Work Programme for 2022-23 and potential topics to be the subject of review by Working Groups. At the time of writing this update it is anticipated that the Committee will also consider reports about Riverside Dispersed Accommodation Pilot; Southport Market Update; and Housing Support Services to Vulnerable People Final Report - Update on Recommendations.

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

A briefing/training session of Committee Members took place recently to consider the Ofsted Report and Improvement Plan, in relation to Children's Services in Sefton.

The Committee at its meeting to be held on 5 July 2022 will consider the Work Programme for 2022-23. As part of this process the Committee will be requested to hold further informal briefings, particularly around the Children's Services Improvement Plan, rather than establish a working group review. The Committee will also receive an update on the latest position in relation to the Improvement Plan.

- **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.

Admission appeals following the allocation of secondary school places on 1 March are now underway. 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. Hearings commenced on 10 May 2022 and 212 appeals for 10 High Schools have been scheduled during the period 10 May to 17 June 2022.

The Independent Review Panel, which consider appeals against school exclusions considered two exclusions in February and May.

As the legislation that enables school appeals to be heard remotely brought in under Covid rules continues until 30 September 2022. Appeals continue to be held remotely and this is still proving popular with Panel members and officers and with no negative feedback from parents/guardians.

- **Civic and Mayoral**

The Mayor of Sefton's Gala Charity Ball held on 26th March was a great success with over 180 people in attendance, £7,775 raised from the ball which is a fantastic amount for the Mayor of Sefton's Charity Fund.

On Monday 25th April, the Mayor of Sefton welcomed all our neighbouring authority Mayor's to the Sefton Borough for her Civic Heads Day, as part of the day we visited Altcar Training Camp for a full tour of the facilities there and also to learn about what they do, and the day concluded with a visit to the Plaza Cinema for an afternoon of entertainment that helps with social isolation and raises funds for Alzheimer's, the day was enjoyed by all.

On Thursday 19th May at the Annual Council Meeting, Councillor Carragher was sworn in for a second term as Mayor of Sefton for municipal year 2022/23.

- **Member Induction and Member Development**

Member Induction took place during the week commencing 9 May 2022 beginning with one-to-one meetings between new Members and Democratic Services Officers where new members were provided with a comprehensive induction pack containing useful information to help them in their first weeks new councillors - including requisite forms to ensure they received their Members allowances, ID passes and parking passes and for their details, including their declarations of interest to be uploaded on the Councillor website. The new Members were also provided 2 key documents – namely the Guidance for Councillors Handbook 2022-2023 and the Member Development Handbook 2022-2023. The Member Induction Event took place on 12 May 2022. This was held on Teams and involved introductions to the Chief Executive and Executive Directors and Heads of Service. The Chief Legal and Democratic Officer provided a comprehensive introduction to the service areas falling within his remit (Corporate Legal Services, Democratic Services, Electoral Services, Registrar Services and Coroner Services). He also provided information about the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor Register/Declarations of Interest, the Nolan Principles and Scheme of Members' allowances. The Senior Manager – ICT and Digital provided an introduction to the use of ICT, contacting the Helpdesk and so on. Members were also provided with a brief guide to accessing the intranet and enrolling on Member Development courses via the Corporate Learning Centre.

Member Development Programme

A report on the Member Development Programme 2021-2022 was considered by Council on

22 April 2022 and approval was given for the programme to roll forward to 2022-2023.

Council approval was given for the **Equality and Diversity Awareness** course to be added to the list of mandatory courses and for following courses to continue to be designated mandatory:

- Information and Compliance
- Safeguarding Adults
- Safeguarding Children and Young People
- Corporate Parenting

Paper copies of 2 documents - the Guidance for Councillors Handbook 2022-2023 and the Member Development Handbook 2022-2023 were provided to new Members at their induction and continuing Members at the Annual Council meeting on 19 May 2022. Copies of both documents have also been emailed to Members and can also be viewed in the Mod Gov Library.

The Member Development Programme 2022-2023 will run throughout the year, with Members being invited to attend Courses listed in the Member Development Handbook. Courses will be held in a variety of formats, namely, E-learning; remotely via Microsoft Teams; and face-to-face. Some of the Teams and face to face sessions will be provided at a number of alternative dates and times of the day to give Members plenty of opportunity to attend (e.g. Corporate Parenting and Accessible Information Awareness).

Member attendance at sessions is notified to the Corporate Learning Centre (CLC) and added to Members' learning records. Member take-up statistics for courses run in 2021-2022 can be viewed in the Mod Gov Library at the following link: [Member Development Programme](#)

Members can access their individual learning records of courses attended by logging onto the CLC Me-Learning website. Members are encouraged to complete course evaluation feedback forms at the end of each session and subsequent sessions adapted accordingly if required. Feedback on courses held remotely in 2021-2022 can be viewed in the Mod Gov Library at the following link [Member Development Feedback](#)

The feedback survey for whole of the Member Development Programme 2021/2022 was provided to full Council on 22 April 2022 and informed development of the 2022-2023 programme. The Survey results can be viewed at the following link. [Survey Results 2021 2022.pdf](#).

The full Council also gave approval for the formation of Member Development Steering Group by the Cabinet Member Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services, which will begin work towards the achievement of a Sefton Council Member Development Charter. A Cabinet Member report on proposals for the Member Development Steering Group will be published in due course.

Electoral Services

Elections 2022

The 2022 Local Government Elections were contested by 81 Candidates

- Labour 22
- Conservative 21
- Liberal Democrat 12

- Green 11
- Independent 10
- Formby Residents Action Group 2
- Workers Party of Britain 2
- Northern Independence 1

St Oswald Ward was uncontested, and therefore Cllr Carla Thomas was re-elected without contest

The total number of people eligible to vote in the 21 contested wards was 205,271 of which 41,680 were issued with postal ballot packs.

- The number of electors voting in Polling Stations was 38,821
- Percentage turnout in Polling Stations was 23.7%
- Total number of Postal Votes verified and counted 26,036
- Percentage turnout of Postal Votes was 62.5%

Overall turnout at the election was 31.6%

Seats won by were as follows

Party	Seats for Re-election	Seats won
Labour	14	17
Conservative	4	3
Liberal Democrat	2	2
Independent	2* * Labour wins at 2018 election	0

The table below shows the swing and change in majorities since the equivalent round of elections in 2018

Ward	Party	2018 Majority	Party	2022 Majority	+/- Change
Ainsdale	Conservative	807	Conservative	33	748
Birkdale	Liberal Democrat	267	Liberal Democrat	425	+ 158
Blundellsands	Labour	861	Labour	1510	+ 649
Cambridge	Conservative	73	Conservative	25	48
Church	Labour	1747	Labour	1850	+ 103
Derby	Labour	1671	Labour	1757	+ 86
Dukes	Conservative	130	Conservative	255	+ 125
Ford	Labour	1484	Labour	918	566
Harrington	Conservative	457	Labour	62	395
Kew	Labour	436	Labour	721	+ 285
Linacre	Labour	1428	Labour	1320	108
Litherland	Labour	1659	Labour	1418	241
Manor	Labour	937	Labour	1149	+ 212
Meols	Liberal Democrat	325	Liberal Democrat	123	202

Molyneux	Independent (Labour)	1296	Labour	924	372
Netherton & Orrell	Labour	1794	Labour	1739	55
Norwood	Labour	657	Labour	1062	+ 405
Park	Labour	867	Labour	787	80
Ravenmeols	Labour	263	Labour	1106	+ 843
St Oswald	Labour	1503	Labour	0	0
Sudell	Independent (Labour)	954	Labour	264	690
Victoria	Labour	1794	Labour	1268	526

Election Act

The Elections Bill received Royal Assent on the 28 April 2022.

The Elections Act will:

- Allow electors to apply for a postal or proxy vote online through a new online system for absent voters. These measures will introduce safeguards against the abuse of postal voting.
- Introduce photographic identification for voting in polling stations in Great Britain.
- Changes the voting system for mayoral and PCC elections to First Past the Post, meaning that the candidate who wins the most votes in each constituency is elected.
- Require authorities to provide voters with disabilities with specialist equipment to support them to vote if need and allow anyone over the age of 18 to accompany disabled voters in the polling station.
- Removes the 15-year limit on British citizens overseas voting in UK Parliamentary elections, allowing any British citizen previously registered or resident in the UK to register to vote.
- Introduce a new electoral sanction for those convicted of intimidation against a candidate, campaigner or elected office holder. The sanction would ban offenders from standing for election for 5 years, as well as the punishment for the underlying criminal offence which can include a fine or imprisonment, depending on the severity of the intimidation.
- Update undue influence to include a wide range of harms, such as physical violence, damage to a person's property or reputation, undue spiritual pressure and injury, or inflicting financial loss.
- Update the political finance regulatory framework, by increasing transparency, fairness, and strengthening controls against ineligible foreign spending on electoral campaigning.
- Introduce a new digital imprints regime that will go much further than the print imprint regime, increasing transparency and empowering voters to make informed decisions about the material they see online.

Although the Act has received Royal Assent, important policy decisions are still being discussed, which is delaying secondary legislation. This is significantly affecting planning and implementation on how key processes will be delivered.

Projected timelines give little time for the Electoral Commission to draft guidance for Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers, candidates, and agents.

It is expected that secondary legislation will be discussed in Parliament in July with statutory instruments being in place by November 2022 to bring Voter ID in polling stations into force, with the online application portal for Voter ID cards going live in December 2022.

There is a schedule in place to implement the rest of the Act by 2024. The government will meet the cost of the new requirements which arise from the Act.

Annual Canvass of the Register of Electors

Preparations are now underway to conduct the annual canvass of the register of electors. Our current electorate hovers around 213,500, which has seen a drop of around 5,000 over the last 2 years. This is not unusual as the electorate will rise significantly at the time of General Elections but tend to drop away afterwards during the midterm.

New rules to reform the way the annual canvass is run were introduced prior to the 2020 canvass. The new rules were aimed at reducing the number of communications sent to properties which, following a national data match with DWP records. Those properties that came back with a positive match now only require a light touch approach.

We feel this has had an impact on the electorate causing under registration, particularly in the number of new registrations for 16 and 17year-olds. It is our intention to try and look at ways, within the new rules, to address this, particularly in light of the introduction of Voter ID in polling stations.

Our national data match takes place on the 4 July 2022 and the annual canvass will conclude with the publication of the 2023 Register of Electors on the 1 December 2022.

Review of Parliamentary Boundaries

The Boundary Commission for England has now closed its secondary consultation on new constituency boundaries, which concluded on 4 April 2022. Final recommendations are expected in July 2023.

The initial proposals were to decrease the number of constituencies in the North West region from 75 to 73. By law, every constituency must contain between 69,724 and 77,062 Parliamentary electors (as calculated on 2 March 2020).

Proposals and responses to the consultation can be viewed at <https://www.bcereviews.org.uk/node/6487>

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 impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on staffing and service provision is on-going, albeit this is much less than in previous reports.

Arrangements are being made with regard to a planned return to work in accordance with the advice and guidance from the Health and Safety team and risk assessments are being undertaken

in this regard. Most staff are continuing to work from home with agile working at office sites as required.

Matters relating to disciplinary, grievance and dignity at work continue to be lesser than usual, but where necessary, formal meetings have been held via Microsoft Teams. Advice and support in the management of sickness absence continues and 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 and 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 was rolled out in April 22 to include Children's services following a full review of the CS 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 CS structure will be raised with the Establishment Control team who will investigate these and make any amendments to the structure as appropriate.

The Establishment Control deal with all requests in relation to the release of vacancies, changes of hours, temporary arrangements. These 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 and 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 relative to social worker and associated positions especially within Children's Services

The team manage sickness absence data, including production of management reports, sickness absence analysis and quarterly absence figures for SLT.

Work with colleagues from ICT to implement the required linkage between the JE database and the iTrent system has now been completed.

Within the Policy unit the officers undertake regular reviews of policy, procedures and guidance and introduce new policies as required in line with current legislation. They are also involved in

Corporate Equalities initiatives, staff support groups, responding to Freedom of Information and subject access requests, and assistance with mandatory training for managers.

Transactional HR Payroll & Pension (THRP) Services

THRP are now live in ITrent

There are still issues with resolved. There are still issues Monthly Data Collection (MDC) for the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) 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.

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 roiled out to all Sefton 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 have now nearly completed, Year End Processing (P60s etc), Teachers End of Year Certificates and NHS annual Pension returns.

Teachers Pensions Monthly data collection (MDC) move to Monthly Contribution Reconciliation (MCR) from 1st April 2022 has been delayed until later in the year.

The Local Government pay award from 1st April 2021 was agreed on 28th February 2022 and new rates and back pay were paid in April 2022 and the pay award from 1st April 2022 is still to be agreed.

Occupational Health

Health Unit

During February, March and April 2022, a total of 229 referrals for SMBC employees were made to the Health Unit. This is approximately 31% more than the same period in the previous 12 months.

The majority of referrals during this period were from Education Excellence (51.09%), Locality Services (16.16%) and Adult Social Care (9.61%). As usual the main reasons were stress and mental health related (47.59%), chronic medical illness (23.14%) and musculoskeletal (10.91%).

Face to face Physiotherapy clinics will start up in the Health Unit at Magdalen House on 15 June 2022. Once these are re-established the Unit will look at resuming the other services as quickly as possible.

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 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 was completed end of February 2022 and new providers were appointed from 1st 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 146 Sefton Council and schools' staff and have arranged for a further 26 sessions to be delivered from 1st 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, 267 staff have completed the staff eLearning and 142 managers have completed the manager's course.
- Sefton's **Training Needs Analysis (TNA)** was launched on the 5th October 2021 to capture learning and development needs for all staff/service areas from 1st 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.
- Launched an **MBL webinar portal** for Sefton Council employees, granting free access to over 1,371 webinars across a wide range of different practice areas. Examples include Finance, HR, Law, Human Rights, Data Protection and Commissioning and Procurement

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 – both documents have now been approved. We are working closely with Children's Social Care on the Leeds Practice Model and the new training offer for the workforce.

We are developing a refreshed Adult and Children's Social Care progression policy to enable Social Workers to work towards Experienced / Senior Social Worker status – this has been signed off for the Children's Social Care workforce.

We are preparing to launch an Induction eLearning programme for new starters joining the organisation – go live date July 2022.

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 1st July 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.

Following the recent inspection of Children's Services, the team are re-developing performance report for the new Executive Director Children's Social Care and Education and his leadership team. In parallel the team is also supporting the development of a new performance framework for data Adults Social Care for inspection preparedness.

The team is supporting the Integrated Care System (ICS) and leading on Population Health Management workstream. In the last quarter the Service has begun to produce population health profiles for each Sefton Ward.

Progress continues with the implementation of the Council's new enterprise data warehouse platform, which will enable big data analytics. Staff have now been trained on the new tools and the team is beginning to inspect and wrangle the data that has been copied from the live systems into the new data warehouse, with the objective of developing new data models that can be reported through Power BI.

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 3rd party secured storage provider, taking opportunity to destroy legacy records and digitise those that are not required to be kept in original paper format. The team has recently begun to process legacy records stored at the former Thomas Gray School site.

Strategic Support

The team has supported the decommissioning of the COVID testing sites across the borough, as is now focused to providing support across the various services with policy & strategy development, service reviews and transformation activity, including support for the Council 2023 and the Demand Management programmes of work and supporting the Children's Social Care Improvement plan.

Members of the team are also supporting Children's Services team in developing the Improvement Plan following the inspection and associated review work.

Procurement

The investment approved by the Council for additional Procurement resources is being progressed with adverts for the new roles now posted to fulfil the requirements of the new structure of the Procurement Team. Interviews will be carried out during June and July in order to bring the Team up to strength as soon as possible.

The re-structure has created an opportunity to review our Procurement Strategy. This is part of the preparation for the new Procurement legislation which is anticipated in 2023. The implementation of the new legislation will require a considerable amount of time invested by the Procurement Team to ensure we are prepared for the changes anticipated and fully compliant.

The Council Social Value Policy is expected to be considered in June 2022 after which the Procurement Team will take a lead in rolling out the Policy across the Council. During May a series of Social Value training courses have been completed by over forty members of staff across the Council as part of the preparation for the Social Value Policy rollout.

Communications

The Communications team continues 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 developed a forward plan for further enhancements, additional functionality and evolving design of the new Sefton Council website. As Agilisys have identified that they are unable to deliver all of the work identified in the forward plan, the ICT Client Team and the Comms Team have met with external web developers/agencies who may be able to carry out this work on our behalf. Still awaiting final quotes for work before we appoint the successful supplier.

A new Web Content Officer has now joined the Comms Team, who will work closely with Customer Service colleagues, and others across all areas of the Council, to ensure that content is clear, accessible and consistent in language and tone across the website. This post is initially on a 12-month Fixed Term Contract until 31 March 2023. This new role will initially focus on high traffic webpages and high-volume Contact Centre contacts, to try to reduce the number of some call types into the Contact Centre.

The Communications Team have been providing significant support to colleagues in Children's Services; most recently with support following the publication of the Ofsted report.

Social worker recruitment marketing and foster carer recruitment marketing have also been significant projects. The "Make A Difference" social worker recruitment campaign continues to deliver positive results and has received overwhelmingly positive feedback. "Foster Care Fortnight" has been a success on our social media channels.

The team supported colleagues in Democratic Services, with comms associated with the local elections in May, making changes to the website so that elections information, and results, were able to be more clearly displayed and easily understood.

Two consultations have been launched recently with support from the Team.

Stunning new images of the proposed Southport Marine Lake Events Centre and accompanying Water and Light Show was launched in the media and on social media, inviting people to have their say on the plans. People are being asked to help shape proposals to transform Orrell Mount Park in Bootle. Based on a community-inspired masterplan, the plans include new space for dog walking, improved children's play area facilities and a refurbishment of the park's iconic Pavilion, to complement a proposed full sized, 3G football pitch at the site. As part of work to encourage people to participate in the consultation, the Communications team produced a video featuring Bootle's very own Jamie Carragher to help.

Bin collections and Council Tax Energy Rebate payments are two areas that have attracted a lot of public attention and Communications has worked closely with both teams to provide regular updates and advice. This has included regular press releases and social media messages and frequent updates of web information and online FAQs to reduce numbers of call to the Council's Contact Centre. A condemnation of threats and insults to Council employees over bins collections was also issued.

Responding to the Homes for Ukraine scheme, the team has also helped create a useful a Welcome Pack and online information resource for people in Sefton kindly offering space in their homes and for Ukrainian visitors.