

<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	November 2022

## **Finance**

Within the finance service, there has been significant activity on a number of key issues:

The latest budget monitoring report will be presented to Cabinet and Council in November. This highlights the growing financial pressure that the Council is facing in 2022/2023, particularly in Children's Social Care, the pay award offer and energy. There is a remedial action plan agreed to meet the majority of the current forecast pressure in 2022/2023 – however, this is mainly through utilising one-off funding (e.g., general balances and earmarked reserves) which isn't a sustainable solution to the ongoing impact of these pressure in future years. In addition, the Council has introduced a recruitment freeze across a number of service areas, as well as identifying areas of non-essential spend to try to offset some of the pressures being faced.

The implications on the Medium-Term Financial Plan will also be reported to Cabinet and Council in November, in terms of the overall pressures and what is permanent or temporary, and proposals are currently being formulated to enable to the Council to set a robust and sustainable budget in 2023/2024. The implications for 2024/25 and 2025/26 are also being considered.

The draft Statement of Accounts for 2020/2021 was published at the end of July 2021 with the final Statement of Accounts being presented to Audit and Governance Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> December. However, 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 consulted on a practical solution that would enable audits to be completed. However, the consultation was inconclusive, so no solution has been proposed – CIPFA plan to consult on the issue again in the near future. 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 was completed, with the revenue and capital outturn position reported to Cabinet in July. The draft Statement of Accounts for 2021/2022 have been published. Officers met with our external auditors in early September to discuss their plans for the audit. Some audit work has now started with the main work expected to start in November.

## **Customer Centric Services**

The Service continues to manage high workloads, especially relating to Council Tax, with outstanding work volumes starting to reduce, albeit slowly.

New staff recruited to the Contact Centre earlier this year to manage the peak of Energy Rebate calls are now being trained, and gaining experience, in handling a range of enquiries for other Council services to help to reduce customer delays. Staff in Revenues and Benefits continue to work extra hours at weekends to reduce work volumes.

## **Council Tax Energy Rebate**

Administration of the Government's Council Tax Energy Rebate scheme has been a priority for the Service for the last six-months. The main Council Tax Energy Rebate scheme closed on 30th

September 2022. Over 110,000 households in Band A-D properties, payments totaling approximately £16.5m, have now received the automatic £150 energy rebate.

In addition to the main £150 Energy Rebate scheme, the Council was allocated a discretionary fund from Government of £708,150. The discretionary scheme is due to close on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022. By the end of September 2022, approximately £593,000 has been awarded to targeted groups, e.g., households in receipt of means-tested Council Tax Reduction, households where a severe mental impairment exemption has been granted. An application process is now open until the end of October 2022, to consider awards for the remaining amount, approximately £115,000. The Communications team has issued press releases and social media posts to promote and publicise the availability of the fund.

### **COVID Additional Relief Fund (CARF)**

The Government provided CARF to support to businesses that did not qualify for any previous reliefs announced as part of the business support response to COVID-19.

During September 2022, the CARF work was completed by the Business Rates team. Due to the lower-than-expected volumes of applications the total value of relief awarded was £1.3 million from the £4.4 million made available.

All applicants were awarded 100% relief for 2021/22. Where this has resulted in a credit for that year it has been offset against the 2022/23 liability.

### **Customer Services**

The Contact Centre continues to handle telephone calls from an increasing number of residents stating that they are unable to pay their monthly Council Tax due to the cost-of-living crisis. To assist customers, Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Payments, ELAS applications and extended instalment payment plans are being offered.

ELAS enquiries remain high, with over 100 calls per day being received on some days in September. With further ELAS funding being secured and residents allowed an increase in the number of claims that they can make over a 12-month rolling period, it is expected that the increase will continue month-on-month as energy bills start to rise during the winter season.

By the end of September 2022, the Benefits team processing the ELAS claims has considered 6,569 applications for support since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022. 2,121 food vouchers have been issued, 3,176 utility awards and 584 essential household goods provided. Staff resource in both the Contact Centre and the Benefits team is managed to ensure that ELAS enquiries and claims are handled without delay.

In addition, the Council awarded payments from the latest round of Government Household Support funding to support pensioners in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. Approximately 10,000 pensioner households received a payment of £80.00. The Contact Centre experienced a spike in calls when payment notifications were issued with most callers checking the validity of the payment or enquiring if a third party acting on behalf of the recipient could cash the payment at the Post Office.

Contact by social media continues to increase with more customers using the digital contact options that are available. Over 1,837 e-mails were processed in September with a two-day turnaround.

During September 2022, 2,733 customers attended Bootle One Stop Shop, this included 536 taxi drivers, with 428 'dropping-in' and 108 who had appointments. Aside from taxi's, drop-in arrangements (rather than pre-booked appointments) have been reinstated at Bootle One Stop

each Wednesday and Thursday which are popular with residents. 729 customers dropped-in to discuss a wide range of Council Tax, benefits, ELAS, parking and Blue Badges enquiries.

At Southport, 673 customers attended the One Stop Shop service at the Atkinson, with most customers attending with a Council Tax or benefits enquiry. There were also a small number of enquiries for Blue Badges and parking matters. Due to the small and restricted area that the service is delivered from at the Atkinson, it is not possible to offer any form of drop-in service, so this location remains by appointment only.

### **Taxi-Licensing**

Progress with Taxi Licensing continues to be particularly good, with the licensing of vehicle plates being processed within 3– 4 days of receipt.

It is pleasing to report that with effect from 13th September 2022, the Council has reinstated a Taxi Licensing service from the Atkinson in Southport each Tuesday and Thursday. A soft launch has been implemented with current customer demand low. Space restrictions mean that an appointment-only service is in place.

Key-stakeholders and trade representatives from Taxi Licensing requested a meeting in September to discuss the Council's approach to the processing of New Driver applications. Their preference is for the Council to only consider applications that had been received in the last 3-months and to ignore and delete the 4,700 applications that were received during the period September 2020 to June 2022. In addition to an overhaul of the New Driver application, the Taxi-trade has formally asked for Taxi Licensing to be delivered independently from a stand-alone location, and for staff resources to be significantly increased to cope with customer demand – they have offered to pay for the additional resources and for the costs associated to any relocation. All agenda items discussed at the meeting are currently being considered by the Council's Licensing department.

### **Risk and Audit**

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

- Beach Car Parking,
- Golf Income,
- Business Rates
- Schools Finance Budget
- Performance Management,
- Corporate Governance review
- Grants assurance and a review of number of Schools.
- Climate Change
- Risk Management
- Highways Maintenance
- Covid Grants (
- Payroll
- Integrated Care
- Energy price cap payments

We have appointed a temporary Principal Auditor to a vacant position and will consider recruiting permanently to the post in the New Year.

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

- We are at the initial stage of the procurement for the re-valuation for insurance purposes of the remaining Council properties which have not been subject to a re-valuation in the past two years.
- We have completed the insurance renewal for the Council for 2022/23 and are considering the next stages of completing the proposed tender for the Council's insurance arrangements to be completed by September 2023. The insurance market remains focused on technical pricing to achieve profit rather than in the past focused on market share.
- We have used some of the "free days" as part of the insurance programme risk bursary to examine how the Council's trees are managed effectively in accordance with our legal responsibilities. Other days have been used to look at the Council's Highways Winter Service Policy.
- 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.
- 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 the Risk Improvement 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 Monarch's death in September 2022.

Business Continuity we are reviewing the current Service Area Business Continuity Plans with the teams and are looking to undertake another activation test of the BC plans. We have arranged a exercise of the Council's BC arrangements in January 2023.

The **Risk and Resilience Team** are currently working on the Council's Risk Appetite which is due which is due to complete in October 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
- Development of a Shoreline Pollution Plan
- Development of Severe Weather Protocol

The **Assurance Team** were 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. Subsequently two of the Team were seconded to Revenues and Benefits to provide additional support to the Team.

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. A key priority over the last period has been to support the moves of Children's Services into Magdalen House and ensuring the delivery and installation of all ICT equipment. There have been some challenges with obtaining equipment in a timely fashion due to worldwide supply issues, but we are now pleased to be able to now report that the Children's moves are completed, and the focus is now upon moving Revenues and Benefits teams from St Peters as well as Adult Social Care back into Magdalen. The final step will be to backfill the remaining desks in Magdalen House with Keyboards, Mice, Monitors and docking stations to support hotdesking.

Much of the Cloud Migration project is now completed, the remaining work ongoing includes the migration of the Liquid Logic system to its new environment, which is being supported by the vendor. This is well underway, with Test and Training Servers already located in the Cloud and go live planned for the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of October. In addition, the Net loans system (in libraries) is also planned in with the supplier. Work is now focused on the Data Centre Rationalisation and Right sizing, ready for an eventual move to Bootle Town Hall.

Cloud Telephony deployment is now completed with number porting from the Virgin Contract to 8x8 in progress, the first (smaller phase) is now done with no issues reported. There have been some delays with the second round of porting due to a dependency on BT for legacy lift and alarm lines, this is now planned in for November.

Further deployment of the new CXP solution is now planned for the forthcoming period. 9 processes are now live, with a further 8 due to go-live imminently, 6 legacy processes are built and in various stages of final configuration and testing, with 4 remaining legacy processes to be built. Support has been requested from back-office teams to prioritise testing of all processes so that we can complete migration in advance of the Christmas break, as the server for the legacy Northgate system reaches end of extended support in January 2023 and will need to be decommissioned.

Work continues the rolling website improvement programme. An external web agency (Ozum) has been commissioned to carry out the required work. In addition, quotes have been requested for the upgrade of the Umbraco web content management system (to be planned in next year). Alongside this, the Communications team continues with an ongoing content review and is also reviewing ancillary sites to see if any of these should be incorporated into the main Council website.

The migration of legacy bulk print jobs to the Council's new bulk print provider continues, some contingency has been built in to allow for the testing of complex print runs during November, with the legacy system due to be decommissioned prior to Christmas.

Procurement activity continues to be a challenge, a new procurement forward plan has been developed to take account of the reduced resource. The agency support secured for Procurement

is supporting the work around the iTrent renewal, ESP (Leisure system procurement), the Mobile Phones contract and Capita One at present, with potential to also work on the lone worker system procurement (pending service approval to release to market). Recruitment activity for a permanent officer is also underway.

Procurement is now completed for Managed Print, with an award to Canon, Xerox devices will be replaced from Autumn. Procurement is well underway for Corporate Connectivity, with evaluators now reviewing the bids received, the next projects will include ESP for Leisure and the Mobile Phones Contract which is up for renewal next year.

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 risk. Recently Sefton commissioned Microsoft to complete a Cyber Security Assessment, our result was positive with Sefton scoring above average based on the scores of other local authorities assessed however a full action plan is now in development to work through the improvements recommended. In addition, the LGA will be completing a Cyber 360 in October this year, the results of which will also feed into our continuous Cyber Security improvement plan.

## **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.
- Ongoing work supporting Growth Board projects.
- Asset records input and liaison with Building Maintenance colleagues for new (property based) IT system.
- Agreement of terms and reporting for Lease of various assets ongoing.
- Reoccupation of Magdalen House to accommodate future ways of working nearing completion.
- Working in conjunction with Children's Services to support their accommodation strategy.

### Maintenance Management & 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 & Education Properties.
- 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.

## 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) LAD2 has now completed with 222 homes improved. LAD3/HUG is currently being delivered – an additional £1M (100 homes) has been awarded to Sefton (Oct 2022).
- Working with the LCRCA on an extension of the Retrofit for the future to improve social housing across the LCR.
- Works to upgrade roof insulation and improve glazing at Southport and Bootle Town Halls are complete.
- 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.
- Energy price rises are being modelled for the remainder of 2022/23, after the Government price guarantee announcement. Prices for 23/24 also being modelled and shared with finance dept.
- Review of Climate Emergency works required for 2023-26 underway.

## **Legal Services**

### Democratic Services Team – Overview

#### **Overview and Scrutiny**

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

A meeting of the Committee was held on 6 September 2022. A summary of the key issues considered at the meeting is provided below:

- **Domestic Abuse Update** - the Committee considered a report updating on Sefton's strategic approach to tackling domestic abuse, including an overview of the Domestic Abuse Act and work of the Sefton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to date. The report set out the background to the matter; an overview of the Domestic Abuse Act; local authority statutory duties within the Act; the roles and responsibilities of the Sefton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board; links to other national/statutory guidance; and cross-partnership collaboration.
- **Sefton Partnership Development Update** - the Committee considered a report that provided an update on the establishment of a Sefton Partnership. This was as a result of the Royal assent given to the Health and Care Act 2022 in April 2022, and the Act introduced significant reforms to the organisation and delivery of health and care services in England. The report set out the background to the matter; provided key updates; together with guidance on the role of Overview and Scrutiny.
- **Overview & Scrutiny Mental Health Review** - the Committee considered a report that presented the progress on implementation of the findings and recommendation of the former Mental Health Issues Working Group. The findings and recommendations from the Working Group were being taken forward as part of the Sefton Mental Health Programme Task and Finish Group which consisted of key representatives from Sefton Council, Sefton Clinical Commissioning Groups, Mersey Care NHS Foundation, Sefton CVS and the wider Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector. The report set out progress updates against each of the recommendations made by the Working Group.
- **NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Sefton - Update Report** - the Committee considered a report that provided an update about the work of NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Sefton.

- **Sefton Clinical Commissioning Groups - Health Provider Performance Dashboard** - the Committee considered a report that provided data on key performance areas, together with responses for the Friends and Family Test for both Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust and Liverpool University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (LUHFT). Information on the monitoring of the 7-day GP extended access scheme, and ambulance response times were also included within the data.
  - **Cabinet Member Update Reports** - the Committee considered, as is the usual practice, the most recent reports from the Cabinet Members for Adult Social Care, and Health and Wellbeing.
  - **Work Programme** – the report sought the views of the Committee on the Work Programme for 2022/23; reported on progress of the Mental Health Issues Working Group; reported on progress of informal briefing sessions for Committee Members to be held during 2022/23; the identification of items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan; updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee; updated on progress made by the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee in considering proposals for the reconfiguration of the hyper-acute stroke services across North Merseyside and West Lancashire; updated on progress made by the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee in considering proposals in relation to clinical service integration for a number of services delivered by Liverpool University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (LUFT); updated on progress of the Joint Cheshire and Merseyside Scrutiny Committee, established to scrutinise the work of the Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board; and submitted an update by Healthwatch Sefton.
- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children’s Services and Safeguarding)**  
A meeting of the Committee was held on 27 September 2022. A summary of the items considered at the meeting is provided below.
    - **Domestic Abuse Update** - the Committee considered a report updating on Sefton’s strategic approach to tackling domestic abuse, including an overview of the Domestic Abuse Act and work of the Sefton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to date. The report set out the background to the matter; an overview of the Domestic Abuse Act; local authority statutory duties within the Act; the roles and responsibilities of the Sefton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board; links to other national/statutory guidance; and cross-partnership collaboration.
    - **Children's Services Improvement Programme** - the Committee considered a report that updated on progress made and presented the Performance Dashboard for consideration. The report set out details of progress and priorities for the next quarter.
    - **Early Help Services** - the Committee considered a report that provided an update on the work to review Early Help Services and set out an approach to present to Members of the Committee. The report detailed the background and current position.
    - **Education Excellence Strategy for Sefton 2022-2027** - the Committee considered a report that presented the Education Excellence Strategy for Sefton 2022-2027. The development of the Strategy, together with the proposed next steps in terms of programme development were also set out. The report would also be considered by the Cabinet at its next meeting.
    - **Ofsted Inspection Reports** - the Committee considered a report updating on recent Ofsted Inspection Reports and the work of the School Improvement Team.
    - **Cabinet Member Update Reports** - the Committee considered, as is the usual practice, the most recent reports from the Cabinet Members for Children’s Social Care and – Education.
    - **Work Programme** – the report sought the views of the Committee on the Work Programme for 2022/23; noted the progress of the Impact of Covid 19 on the Primary Curriculum Working Group; sought the views of the Committee on the re-establishment of the Secondary School Performance and Attainment Working Group; sought the views of the



Committee on holding informal briefing sessions during 2022/23, rather than establish a traditional working group; requested the identification of any items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the latest Key Decision Forward Plan; updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and noted the position of the Parent Governor Representatives that sat on the Committee.

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

A meeting of the Committee was held on 28 September 2022. A summary of the key issues considered at the meeting is **provided** below:

- **Domestic Abuse Update** - the Committee considered a report updating on Sefton's strategic approach to tackling domestic abuse, including an overview of the Domestic Abuse Act and work of the Sefton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to date. The report set out the background to the matter; an overview of the Domestic Abuse Act; local authority statutory duties within the Act; the roles and responsibilities of the Sefton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board; links to other national/statutory guidance; and cross-partnership collaboration
- **Winter Maintenance Policy and Operational Plan** – the Committee gave consideration to the revised Winter Maintenance Policy and Operational Plan policy document for 2022/23. The Committee endorsed the policy
- **United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund** – the Committee considered a report that provided an update on the United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the potential implications of the introduction of this funding for Sefton and the Liverpool City Region (LCR). With regard to the nominal allocations per local authority area as detailed in paragraph 2.1 of the report, the Committee asked that Sefton's representatives on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to seek clarification from the Combined Authority on the funding formula resulting in Sefton receiving 16.8% of the total allocation, in comparison with Liverpool's receipt of 33.2%.
- **Housing Support Services to Vulnerable People Working Group** - the Committee considered a report setting out progress made against each of the recommendations formulated by the Housing Support Services to Vulnerable People Working Group and approved by Cabinet and Council.
- **Effectiveness of the Council's Enforcement Activity Working Group** - the Committee considered a report setting out progress made against each of the recommendations formulated by the Effectiveness of the Council's Enforcement Activity Working Group and approved by Cabinet and Council. The Committee were not satisfied with some of the responses contained in the report and asked that the Cabinet Member – Locality Services and the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services to give further consideration to the implementation of the recommendations referred to in the report and report their findings to the next meeting of the Committee
- **Work Programme** - the report sought the views of the Committee on the Work Programme for 2022/23; the identification of potential topics for scrutiny reviews to be undertaken by a Working Group(s) appointed by the Committee; the identification of items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan; updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and updated on issues considered at previous meetings of the Committee.

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

A meeting of the Committee was held on 22 September 2022. A summary of the key items considered at the meeting is provided below:

- **Member Development Programme** - a presentation on Members' training and development that provided information on E-learning courses that lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour; shorter courses offered by Sefton Corporate Learning Centre that

lasted 30 minutes; how to enrol on an E-learning course; difficulties experienced by Members logging onto Me-Learning and help that could be provided via the Member Development Handbook; and password requirements in accordance with the ICT Acceptable Use Policy

- **Levels of discipline, grievance, dignity at work and sickness absence** - The report indicated that the management of the workforce was an important activity to ensure outcomes for Sefton's communities were achieved and to ensure that the workforce was appropriately managed and motivated
  - **Financial Management 2022/23 to 2024/25 and Framework for Change 2020 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2022/23 – September Update** – this was the usual report submitted to each meeting setting out the latest position with regards to the Council's revenue budget and capital programme
  - **Work Programme** - the report sought the views of the Committee on the Work Programme for 2022/23; the identification of potential topics for scrutiny reviews to be undertaken by a Working Group(s) appointed by the Committee; the identification of items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan; updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and updated on issues considered at previous meetings of the Committee.
  - **Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Reference Group** - The update provided information on the latest meeting of the Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty (WRAP) Cabinet Member Reference Group and in particular on activities associated with the cost-of-living crisis; community pantry; childhood poverty in Sefton; feedback from Marmot work; council tax energy rebate; Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme; child poverty and children entering care; household support grant; healthy start voucher uptake; a request for action that period poverty be discussed at the next WRAP meeting
  - **Cabinet Member Update Report** - The Committee considered, as is the usual practice, the most recent report from the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services.
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- **Overview and Scrutiny Management Board**

The last meeting of the Management Board, scheduled to be held on 13 September 2022 was cancelled. The matters discussed at the meeting prior to this on 21 June 2022 were reported as part of the last cabinet Member update. The next meeting of the Management Board will be held on 8 November 2022.
  - **Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

A meeting of the Committee was held on 7 September 2022. A summary of the key items considered at the meeting is provided below:

    - Portfolio Holder Update - Business Support
    - Race Equality Programme
    - Recommendations of the Improving Disability Employment Opportunities in the Liverpool City Region Task and Finish Group
    - Work Programme Update

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to be held on 9 November 2022. Information on all meetings and membership of the LCRCAO&S can be obtained using the following link

<https://moderngov.merseytravel.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=365&Year=0>

At the Council meeting held on 29 September 2022, Councillor Howard was appointed as the Council's Scrutiny Link on the Committee in place of Councillor Waterfield.

The Section has also continued to organise and clerk school admission appeal hearings and school exclusion reviews.

The start of the new academic year continues to be an extremely busy time for the Clerk to Education Appeals. Between September and October 66 LEA appeals were scheduled, and 4 Diocese (Church of England voluntary aided schools) appeals were scheduled. Two full days (potentially 20 appeals) for Archdiocese (Catholic voluntary aided schools) appeals are scheduled for the week commencing 31 October 2022.

The Local Government Ombudsman can investigate complaints about 'maladministration' and 'service failure'. In July 2022, following an unsuccessful appeal to an Archdiocese school, a parent submitted a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman regarding their appeal, alleging the Panel did not properly consider their appeal for a place for her child, and that the system 'failed her'.

The Ombudsman conducted an initial assessment, based on:

- the parents' complaint;
- the Clerk's notes of the hearing; and
- the Clerk's letter containing the decision of the Panel.

The Ombudsman concluded that they will not conduct a full investigation into the complaint as 'It is unlikely the Ombudsman would find fault which caused them to lose out on a school place.'

Legislation that enabled school appeals to be heard remotely were brought in under Covid rules. Initially this change was due to last until 30 September 2022. However, following consultation, the changes to school appeals have been made permanent and they will continue to be held remotely. The arrangements proved popular with Panel members and officers with virtually no negative feedback from parents/guardians.

## • **Civic and Mayoral Services**

The Mayoral Office was extremely busy following the sad death of Queen Elizabeth II on 8 September 2022 and was heavily involved in the Council's activities undertaken under Operation London Bridge along with other officers across the various Council departments.

The key activities undertaken by the Mayoral Office were:

- Setting up of Books of Condolence in Bootle Town Hall and The Atkinson, Southport.
- Arrangements for the raising and lowering of the Union Flags at Bootle Town Hall, Southport Town Hall, and Waterloo Town Hall at the key times during the plan.
- Co-ordination of the attendance of the Mayor and other Council representatives at the following events in liaison with the Merseyside Lieutenancy Office:
- Merseyside Proclamation by the High Sheriff of Merseyside at the Liverpool Parish Church on 11 September 2022 and the reading out of the Proclamation by the Mayor at Bootle Town Hall and Southport Town Hall on the same day.
- the Requiem Mass for Her Late Majesty at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, Liverpool on 13 September 2022.
- the Service of Celebration for Her Late Majesty at the Liverpool Cathedral on 18 September 2022.
- the 'Memorial on the Mersey' event on 14 September 2022 with the Mayors' of all the Merseyside local authorities, when 20 ships on the River Mersey sounded their horns in sync, in honour of Her Late Majesty.

The Mayoral Office is currently preparing the arrangements for the following Civic events:

- Mayoral Charity Quiz Night at the Albion Pub, Bootle on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2022.

- Charity World Cup Sweepstake, which will be launched on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022.
- Organisation of the four main Remembrance Sunday Services on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2022 at Bootle, Five Lamps, Crosby and Southport and the attendance of Council representatives at the 7 other locations.
- Production and circulation of Mayoral Christmas Cards.
- Freedom of the Borough event at Bootle Town Hall on 26 January 2023 for the four Hospital NHS Foundation Trusts for both providing key services within the Borough of Sefton and for their response during the pandemic.

- **Member Development**

1. Member Development Programme

The recent feedback report on the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Re-visit in April 2022 commended the various steps that had taken place since the last Peer Challenge visit to support Member Development more widely across the Council and in particular on the member induction programme and Planning Committee training was very pleasing to see.

2. Member Development Steering Group

The LGA welcomed the establishment of the cross-party Member Development Steering Group which would provide additional cross-party input and focus and could be a real strength for the Council.

Membership of the Steering Group has been finalised comprising representatives from each Political Group on the Council and the first meeting will held on 1 November 2022.

## **Electoral Services**

### **Annual Canvass of the Register of Electors**

The annual canvass to update the register of electors is underway and initial contact has been made with the 130,500 residential properties on our register database. Work will continue through the autumn months to update the register with those areas with substantial new developments being targeted as well as promoting electoral registration with young people. The new 2023 Register of Electors will be published on the 1 December 2022.

### **Linacre Ward**

Following the passing of Councillor Gordon Friel, there is a vacancy for the office of Councillor in Linacre Ward. The Returning Officer has now published a Notice of Vacancy. A by-election will be held if the Returning Officer receives a request from two local government electors from within the area of Sefton. If no requests are received, then the vacancy will be filled at the next round of local elections on Thursday 4 May 2023.

### **Elections Act 2022**

Progress of the Elections Act 2022 has been relatively slow, despite a huge amount of work being undertaken to develop policy to introduce each new element of the Act. This was also impacted by Ministerial changes. The new Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities is The Rt Hon Greg Clark MP with strategic oversight of the Department's business. The Minister of State at the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for London: Paul Scully MP with responsibility for the Electoral Integrity Programme.

Ministers have made some key decisions which are summarised below:

1. Voter identification implementation has been moved from December 2022 to January 2023. The policy will be in place for scheduled polls in May 2023 and the voter card application service is expected to go live in January 2023.
2. Postal vote handling and secrecy measures will now be implemented after the May 2023 polls. They will most likely come into force in Autumn 2023.

3. The voter card, or electoral identification document, could be an A4 paper-based document with inherent security features, such as watermarks and holograms.
4. The voter card application deadline will be six working days ahead of a poll. This will enable central production and delivery management, removing pressure on local authorities in the immediate lead-up to a poll.
5. Electoral Registration Officers will be able to appoint an emergency proxy up until 5pm on polling day for electors whose photo ID is no longer available to them after the application deadline (in the case of their voter id being lost or destroyed).

The delay in pushing back the implementation of Voter ID to January 2023 will have a significant impact on preparations for the May 2024 elections as its introduction will coincide with other key time events in the run up to the elections.

A Voter ID card will only be required if electors don't hold requisite means of photographic identification. Further details will emerge once secondary legislation is in place and guidance issued on implementation of this part of the Act.

Other measures which will be introduced:

1. Change of voting and candidacy rights for EU citizens – June 2023
2. Online Postal Vote Applications – July 2023
3. Remove the 15-year ceiling for overseas electors – July 2023
4. Requirement for existing postal voters to re-apply every 3 years – January 2024
5. Limit the numbers of electors someone can act as a proxy for – May 2024

## **Boundary Reviews**

The Boundary Commission for England have now confirmed that an electoral review of Sefton will take place starting in March 2023

It is nearly 20 years since our last review, which culminated in all-out elections in 2004. The outcome of the review will be the Commission recommending to government the number of councillors we have and the number and geographical make-up of the wards in the borough. The Commissioners will consider the warding arrangements in the borough based on the principles of equality of electors, community identity and the effectiveness and convenience of local government. Interestingly, unlike parliamentary reviews which are based on factual evidence from an earlier point in time, they will base their recommendations on the estimated borough population in 2029.

The process will start in March 2023 with final recommendations going to government in April 2024 in time for all-out elections in 2026 (we have a fallow year in 2025).

The Boundary Commissioners will brief all Members on 17 November 2022 via a Teams meeting. The Council have recently received a request from Thornton Parish Council to undertake a Community Governance Review to consider proposals to extend the existing parish boundaries. In light of the Boundary Commission undertaking a review of Sefton, Thornton Parish Council have been advised that their request and any similar requests to create new parish or amend existing boundaries will be postponed until the Boundary Commission final recommendations have been agreed and actioned.

The Parliamentary Boundary Review is still scheduled to be completed in July 2023. The next Parliamentary General Election must be called no later than December 2024.

## **Legal Services**

- **Children and Social Care Team**

The Children's and 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 cases with an international element.

- **Contracts**

The Legal Contracts team remains extremely busy, uniquely supporting procurement and contracting activity across the entire spectrum of Council departments and services and having to prioritise limited resource based on the complexity/value/risk of particular projects and contracts.

The team continues to provide essential legal support and play a key role in helping to shape and structure major development and regeneration projects under the Growth Plan, in particular the MLEC project, other regeneration projects in Southport and Bootle, and the continuing transformation of the CLAC. An increasing amount of capacity is being dedicated to the Council's efforts to transform its social care and public health services, including reviewing the positions under existing contracts/services and proactively helping to structure new services including the Council's first ventures into establishing its own tailored frameworks/dynamic purchasing systems.

The team continues to be busy advising on a stream of ICT-related work, often to very tight timeframes where service continuity is essential. The stream of highways and infrastructure work continues apace in particular advising around the latest round of LCRCA grant funding on various highway schemes, and also many works/construction-type projects both for the Council itself and for schools which are very often critical in nature and risk even if modest in value.

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 and advising on the pros and cons of different commercialisation options, e.g. proposals for food & drink concessions involving SHOL.

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 other housing support programmes, and on the subsidy control aspects of many funding schemes including the Government's 'Levelling Up' agenda. The after-effects of 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 in light of the Caller Report, especially around the Council's development and regeneration projects including advising commissioners on procurement best practice to mitigate scope for procurement challenges.

- **Prosecutions and Regulation**

The Litigation and Regulatory team continue to be busy working across a range of prosecution, regulation, information and compliance issues supporting a wide range of Council functions. The Prosecution team successfully resisted an appeal against refusal of a taxi licence in the magistrates' court, obtained two warrant of entry's and the sundry debt team recovered £11,271.53, giving a total of £145,5021.16 recovered this year.

The team also provides 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. The team has been providing strategic support on high profile employment work including recruitment issues and incentives in Children's Services and a proposal to apply for immigration sponsorship licenses for overseas social workers.

- **Property and Planning**

The Property team continue to have a heavy caseload, and have by way of example, just concluded 2 large projects with sizable capital receipts for the Council, namely the sale of land at Holgate netting £6,195,077.00 (50% received now, £3,097,538.50 (50%) deferred, and paid in 12 months' time. And sale of the Bates Dairy (Broome Road) site which has netted an additional £225,000; and nearly £15,000 in legal fees combined.

## ***PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT***

### **Operational Issues**

Advice and support are provided to all service areas regarding employment/staffing matters.

Predominantly, work and support are focused on Children's Social Care. There is a small, dedicated HR team in Children's Social Care providing advice and guidance on all staffing issues. The challenge continues to be the recruitment and retention of Social Work staff combined with developing improvements in the service area overall.

The majority of the HR team are working from home with agile working at office sites as required and in accordance with the advice and guidance from the Health and Safety team.

Matters relating to disciplinary, grievance and dignity at work continue to be lesser than usual. Formal meetings are being held via Microsoft Teams, although in person meetings are arranged as necessary. Advice and support in the management of sickness absence continues and formal action under the sickness absence policy is being taken, again via Microsoft Teams but can be arranged in person as necessary.

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 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.

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. A review of the EC forms used by managers has been completed and a revised suite of forms and guidance is now available for use.

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.

Officers are involved with Employment Tribunal claims (approx. 580) relative to employees seeking backdating of amendments to Term Time Only salary calculations. Consultations are underway in relation to the potential settlement of these claims following the recent Court of Appeal case.

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**

There are still issues with Monthly Data Collection (MDC) for the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) which we are working with MHR and Merseyside Pension Fund to resolve. The last file to be sent was for April 2022. Issues have also been found with Teachers MDC and a meeting is to be held with MHR regarding resolving issues.

The staff are still learning the new system are still working extremely hard and long hours to ensure all staff are paid on time.

There are backlogs in the teams due to process and resource issues and all work is being prioritised. The service is currently looking at the feasibility of bring in some additional resources (temporarily for 12 months) to try to clear the backlogs being caused by issues with the new system. There will then be a structural review of the resources required for the service, based on the appropriate knowledge transfer having taken place.

Teachers Pensions Monthly data collection (MDC) move to Monthly Contribution Reconciliation (MCR) has been delayed until 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and a further delay may be requested as the iTrent software has several known issues.



The Local Government pay award from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 is still to be settled and is expected to be agreed end of October and if this is the case it will be processed in December 2022 with back pay from April 2022.

### **Children's Services.**

A designated Children's Services Team has been established within Corporate HR. Working as Business partners the team will provide professional HR support and advice to Children's Social Care, Education Excellence and Sefton Schools.

Children's Social care is continuing with their improvement journey and the team are also continuing to support in a number of different projects including; recruitment activities and incentives, reviews of teams and establishment, the launch of the Social Work Academy, exploration of International Social Workers and many more. The team is also supporting with exit and movement interviews with an aim to gather some current data that will support improvement and recruitment and retention moving forward. The Learning and Development team have supported the Service areas in the creation and launch of an induction policy specifically for the Service which compliments Sefton's generic induction programme.

Education Excellence functions are being reviewed and is due to undergo an SEN inspection in spring. The team will support the service area with anything that may arise out of either.

The Schools Team operate an SLA with Sefton schools and receive 100% buy back demonstrating the value of the service. There are three Sefton Schools who are due to academies, two voluntarily and under an academy order. Unfortunately the team have received notice to end the SLA's as the trusts that the schools are joining have their own HR. Working closely with Sefton Legal Services work is underway however to introduce a disengagement free for schools opting to convert to academies.

### **Health Unit**

During August and September 2022, a total of 108 referrals for SMBC employees were made to the Health Unit. This is a decrease of 11.34% when compared to the same period in the previous 12 months in which there were 97 referrals.

Referrals during this latest period included Education Excellence (28.70%), Operational In House Services (25.93%), and Adult Social Care (12.96%). As usual the main reasons were stress and mental health related (53.70%), musculoskeletal (24.07%) and chronic medical illness (16.67%).

Face to face appointments for the OH Nurse commenced in August and OH Physician appointments are due to resume on 17 November. Both clinicians will offer a hybrid service via telephone and video calls and face to face appointments all of which will be triaged based on the nature and the circumstances of individual cases.

It is hoped that face to face counselling and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy sessions will follow fairly quickly.

### **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 recruited two Occupational Therapy (OT) trainees in September 2022 to join the **Level 6 Occupational Therapy Degree** in March 2023. The degree will take 3 years to complete and on completion the trainees will be able to register with the Health and Care Professions (HCPC) Council.

## Training delivery

The Workforce Learning and Development Team continues to deliver a number of training programmes and initiatives. These include:

- **Corporate Mandatory Training** – this includes Equality and Diversity, Health and Safety, Safeguarding Adults Awareness, Safeguarding Children & Young People Awareness and Climate Change. Monthly reports are shared with ELT/SLB to encourage staff to complete these courses.
- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** training delivery is going well. To date, we have trained 200 Sefton Council and schools' staff, an increase of 47 since the previous report (August 2022).
- **Training Needs Analysis / Performance Development Review** – the PDR cycle for 2022/23 begins 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022. To support this year's process, we produced an online survey to capture staff L&D needs and requirements – this was circulated with SLB on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022. To support the PDR, we are producing an online reporting tool to capture the total number of PDR returns by service area.
- **LCRCA Race Equality Training** – working with the LCRCA and neighbouring LAs to develop a training programme to complement existing E&D awareness training. This will include the 'lived experience' to enable us to address the structural and systemic racial biases that exist in some organisations and to challenges micro aggressions and unconscious biases in the workplace. Sefton was allocated 225 places for the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of the training to commence December 2022, this will include a cross section of middle managers and hard to reach groups.
- **Corporate Induction** eLearning was launched on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> August. The eLearning will be for new starters joining the organisation and includes 3 modules: Module 1 provides an overview of the landscape and the people of Sefton; Module 2 includes the services provided by the Council and Module 3 provides information that supports employees initial period with the Council e.g., a range of services and resources available for new starters. 87 new starters have completed the course since its launch.

## Workforce/Organisational Development

We have been supporting Children's Social Care with a number of workforce development actions following the recent Ofsted inspection:

- Produced a Corporate Induction Booklet specifically for Children's Services new starters.

We are supporting CSC senior management team to roll out a training programme to support the implementation of the Leeds Family Valued Model. This includes:

- **Relational Leadership Management Programme** to discuss and reflect on practice and management issues, and how to progress their own and their team members' understanding and application of a restorative practice approach.
- **Core Components for Effective Team Leadership** - Provides opportunities to focus on particular themes, which highlights findings from Ofsted reports, audits, case reviews and research continuously highlight as areas for improvement.

- **Restorative Practice Awareness / Principles into Practice** – this will introduce the main features of Restorative Practice and further develop restorative approaches in key areas of practice.
- **A series of Practitioner Briefings / Practice Forums** – provides opportunities to explore a specific piece of research or practice in depth e.g., Reimagining Child Welfare. Values and Principles and using Language.
- **Series of Practice Forums** which include SMART Planning and Review of Impact Plans, Restorative Practice Approach to Domestic Violence, Family Led Decision Making, Voice of the Child.

Courses are being added to Me Learning and we are sending out comms to various audiences to ensure staff sign up to the programmes that are relevant to them.

We delivered a Culture session to a cross section of Senior Managers 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 a cross section of middle managers some time in the Autumn of 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. The team have developed a new performance framework for Children's Social Care and Adults Social Care services, using the recently implemented Data Warehouse and Power BI.

The team continues to support the Integrated Care System (ICS), leading on Population Health Management workstream and has now completed 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, whilst continuing to develop 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. All legacy records stored at disparate 3<sup>rd</sup> party locations have now been moved to the Council's preferred 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 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 supporting the Children's Social Care Improvement plan.

Members of the team are also supporting Children's Services team with the actions in the Improvement Plan and associated review work.

## Procurement

The Council Social Value Policy, having been approved is being rolled out, as appropriate, across our Procurement tendering processes. The team is currently waiting for the new Procurement Legislation to be finalised in Parliament, so we may ensure our Procurement Team are ready to adopt the changes in legislation to enable the Council to be fully compliant in our procurement procedures.

## Communications

The Communications team were integral in ensuring the smooth rollout of the Council's plans for "Operation London Bridge", the plans for the Queen's passing and funeral arrangements.

The team also supported colleagues in Tourism in helping to promote the Musical Fireworks event in Southport, and were on hand when the decision was made to cancel the final night due to inclement weather.

The new Web Content Officer continues to make good progress on updating and reconfiguring the Council website.

A specific area of the website which captures all the information and advice residents may need about the Cost-of-Living support available has been created, along with a helpful factsheet for community leaders and elected members to share with Sefton Residents. [Factsheet \(sefton.gov.uk\)](#)

The Communications Team have been providing significant support to colleagues in Children's Services; most recently with support to launch the Children's Services Academy and the ongoing recruitment drive.

The team have been liaising with external partner agencies to implement "Operation Banger", the police-led operation in relation to Mischief Night, Halloween and Bonfire Night.

The team were delighted to support in the promotion of Sefton being awarded the Navajo Charter Mark for displaying good practice and commitment towards its LGBT+ staff and community.

Bootle and England football legend Alex Greenwood has now been immortalised with a huge mural in the heart of her hometown. The 29-year-old Euro 2022 winning Lioness said she was honoured to have a mural commemorating her sporting successes painted onto the front of 320 Stanley Road in Bootle, thanks to joint funding from Sefton Council and REPT Sports. The Comms Team will be integral to plans for an official unveiling in the coming weeks.

The team now looks ahead to plans to mark Remembrance Sunday, and the annual Mayor's Christmas Toy Appeal, along with a host of other Winter-related messages.