

CABINET MEMBER UPDATE REPORT

Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills)

COUNCILLOR	PORTFOLIO	DATE
Ian Moncur	Health and Well Being	October 2022

GREEN SEFTON

In addition to the Annual Review, which is elsewhere and to be discussed on this agenda:

Overview

Overall, the service continues to perform well under the pressures of expectation on service delivery, within the resources made available, and in the context of the ongoing pandemic situation still affecting staffing levels availability.

It is clear that several areas of the service are struggling to meet expectations / basic standards within resources available and efforts are being made to address this. This has resulted in further increase in complaints, and negative press coverage for several areas of the service.

To start to address this, an increase in revenue budget was approved by Full Council as part of the budget setting process for an additional £200k into the management of play areas / facilities from 2022/23 onwards (increasing the budget from £45k per year), and for several of the actions from the Coast Visitor Action Plan for the delivery of those actions on a permanent basis with a further £300k annual uplift – to include additional daytime and evening ranger staff, a full time Community Ranger for the Coast, increased litter management at key gateways, ongoing provision of temporary toilets at beach entrances, and a communications plan to encourage appropriate visitor behaviour.

In addition, to develop the service / and undertake improvements, external grants and other funding are being sought such as;

- the 500k Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier funding for conservation works over the next 5 years along the coast was accepted in February 2022
- a major bid for Botanic Gardens is in early development, with a Task Group set up (chaired by Cabinet Member, and with ward councillors and community reps), and approval to consult publicly given at the Consultation and Engagement Panel in March 2022.
- consultation has been completed for the allocation of 'legacy' monies left for Hesketh Park in a residents will, and cost estimate / details for priority projects have been developed and a contract is being drafted to formalise this suite of projects to be developed and delivered

- Cabinet gave formal approval to seek tenders for the future investment in Southport Golf Links in March 2022. Tenders for both the While House Café building, and the course itself are now in development
- the FCERM team continue to work with the Environment Agency and other partner agencies on seeking capital monies to reduce flood risk.

Further areas of the service will also need resource consideration in the coming times – both in terms of ongoing revenue, and other capital schemes too.

What is performing well

A narrated version of the 2021 Annual Review has been published on the website, and can be found here: www.sefton.gov.uk/greensefton , and the 2022 Annual Review is elsewhere on this agenda

This was promoted via a newsletter which was shared in the community, with all ward councillors, with our ‘Friends of’ and other volunteer groups, sports clubs and leagues, other landowners and partner agencies including statutory and government bodies.

Highlights from the last quarter include:

- The service continues to work in partnership with many other organisations, partner agencies, and of course fundamentally our communities – supporting around 40 ‘Friends of’, In Bloom and other volunteer groups, together with 300+ sports clubs and leagues that utilise our facilities;
- The service has undertaken significant formal consultations recently including an overall customer satisfaction survey for the service, and site / project specific consultations such as for Ainsdale Beach gateway, Hesketh Park and the proposed Coast and Visitor Areas PSPO;
- The development of a Coast and Visitor Areas PSPO was a new item added to the services work programme this year – formally approved at Full Council, this will enable better management of visitor behaviour, and address anti social behaviours in the designated locations.
- Bootle Driving Range is now operational and exceeding initial expectations, albeit with some operational challenges that the service are learning from
- A new Visitor Action Plan for 2022 is being enacted. The Multi Agency Group with other landowners and emergency services etc. also resumed in March.

What requires improvement and what action is being taken

Overall work programming

The Annual report highlighted the tracking of the services overall performance against the actions contained within the Service Plan which has been RAG rated over the last two years. This clearly shows that many actions have slowed down or stalled since the pandemic started due to a reduced staffing capacity to deal with developmental issues, and new operational demands being placed upon services as the ‘staycation’ phenomena resulted in massive increases in visitor numbers and other pressures on our sites.

The action taken to address this has been to develop a more sophisticated work programming approach for the service, with an 'urgency / importance' matrix developed. This was presented to O&S Committee within the Annual Review, but has also led to each sub-team within Green Sefton creating their own version, with updates being discussed at team meetings, and individual monthly 1:1's. The overall team matrices were initially presented to Cabinet Member in January 2022 and now also form part of regular updates.

Working with Volunteers

A specific challenge over the last quarter has been ongoing issues arising with some of our volunteer groups. Probably symptomatic that the service no longer undertakes land management and maintenance to the standards previously seen, and that there is less officer capacity available to respond to complaints, nurture groups, and pro-actively keep them aligned – several groups have become dissatisfied with the Council and / or have suffered from internal issues leading to corporate complaints being raised.

The action taken to address this is to refresh the 'Friends of' Handbook – this guiding document introduces volunteers to setting up a group, however it will now go much further in terms of expectations to be placed on volunteers about their Policies and Procedures expected of a group, including Equality and Diversity, Safeguarding, and overall Code of Conduct – both in terms of the way volunteers treat each other, and also about how they deal and interact with Council officers.

The updated Handbook was approved by Cabinet Member in September 2022 meeting, and final amendments are being made before releasing this in the coming months.

Defining Standards

As part of addressing some of the frustrations from the community referred to above, we have also instigated a piece of work to define our maintenance service standards that we are currently resourced to provide. This is initially being prioritised on the inland parks and greenspaces maintenance aspects of the service, but team leaders are working up thoughts on defining standards across wider areas too.

The first draft of this new document has been shared with Cabinet Member, and final amendments are being made before releasing this in the coming months.