

Cabinet Member Brief
Overview & Scrutiny Committee
(Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)
10 January 2023.

Welfare Reform & Anti-Poverty Update

The Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Cabinet Member Reference Group met on 11th November 2022. The following updates were received:

Updates from the Welfare Reform & Anti-Poverty Steering Group

Officers from Public Health provided an update from the Partnership Steering Group meeting held 22nd October 2022.

The Cost-of-Living Crisis was discussed. Updates included:

- feedback on a number of interventions funded by the Council and delivered by CVS and partners, e.g. Warm Clothing initiative. Warm Spaces network providing hot refreshments and an enhanced warm hub providing hot food. Most locations are available 7 days a week, with good geographical coverage.
Full details can be accessed at <https://seftoncv.org.uk/warmspaces/>
- Household Support Fund 3 came into force at the beginning of October 2022. This aims to support vulnerable households with food, energy, and other household bills.
- Work continues around the provision of free school meals during holiday periods.
- One Vision Housing offer includes a social media 'Here to Help' campaign, comprising of email and text messages.
This promotes support around housing payments and signposts to additional support on the Council website.
- Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) is in the process of advertising for another debt caseworker role and welfare benefits advisor. Funding received from Trussell Trust means that CAB is attending the south Sefton food banks 5 days a week.

Period Poverty - A Sefton Update

Cabinet Members received an update regarding Period Poverty in Sefton. A survey of schools in the borough confirmed most schools have applied for the Period

Poverty grant. Schools made this a priority and have benefited from supplies of products that are being well utilised.

Community Pantry Update

Cabinet Members received an update on Community Pantries. Pantry Network meeting took place noting an increase in usage. Stock levels are adequate, and officers advised that the network is strong and building. Mental Health First Aid courses are being considered for Community pantry volunteers who are reporting having to deal with service users who are distressed.

Food banks now provide debt advice, money, and management.

A Sustainable Affordable Living Officer post now created via Household Support fund, to find sustainable solutions to current gaps. The role involves undertaking activities to understand the full picture of the cost-of-living crisis and investigate current resources and areas of deficiency. The hope is to develop long-term solutions.

Sefton Child Poverty Launch Event

Officers from the Public Health Team updated Cabinet Members on the Sefton Child Poverty Launch Event. The official event launch takes place on 1st December 2022.

Speakers include Dr Ian Sinha, a paediatrician from Alder Hey. He will be looking at the impact of poverty on child health, such as respiratory issues, poor nutrition, and housing. Dr Tammy Boyce from the University College London Health Equity Team to give insight into Inequalities in health.

Stephen Watson from Sefton Council along with John McCluskie from Southport & Ormskirk NHS Trust, will be discussing how good employment policies can support ending poverty.

Cabinet members were advised that the Public Health Team will be focused on how we can practically self-assess against the strategy. They will be looking at some of the considerations around implementation, enabling the system to make changes and keep them in place.

Members noted that there needs to be a sophisticated communications strategy, worked on collaboratively to support the strategy up until 2030. This will provide examples of progress other teams are doing to make their services more effective in preventing and limiting child poverty based on what is in the strategy.

Sefton Council Housing - cost of living challenges

Cabinet Members received an update on the cost-of-living crisis and how it is affecting housing. Housing has convened a working group to explore how they can provide specific support and mitigate risks of the cost of living.

Cabinet members were made aware that homeless presentation numbers are currently stable, at around 175 a month, however, they had increased to 200 in August 2022. The housing options team expect a surge in numbers coming into winter.

Sefton Housing Retrofit program is delivering significant investment to the housing stock. They have recently completed the Local Authority Delivery 2 project, improving 222 properties, from an investment of £2.2 million, saving £551 a year per property, and saving £26,000 across the borough in fuel costs.

This winter everyone will be offered accommodation and aiming to put property pool plus advisors on the front line to support this. The team has recently created additional posts within the Housing Options and Welfare Rights team to cover anticipated increases.

ELAS Update

Cabinet Members received an update on ELAS performance for the Council's local welfare support scheme up to October 2022. It was reported that ELAS volumes are very high, but manageable from an operational perspective.

End of October 2022, 7500 applications were processed, compared to just over 4000 applications end of October 2021. Over 80% increase in 12 months.

ELAS continues to provide utility support, financial support to food banks, individual family foodbank vouchers as well as essential white goods.

Additional household support funding has been received, meaning the ELAS fund is able to deal with the level of demand, however, will be monitored closely.

Requests for Action

None noted