

CABINET MEMBER REPORT		
Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) -		
Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Paulette Lappin	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services	January 2023

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 January. This highlights the growing financial pressure that the Council is facing in 2022/2023, particularly in Children's Social Care, the pay award 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 was 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 service is currently assessing the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement which was published on 19th December 2022. The MTFP will then be refined and form the basis for the Budget Report to be presented to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny in February and Council in March (alongside the other annual budget / strategy related reports required).

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 15th December. However, although nearly all work has been finalised, the audit is still to be completed. This is mainly due to a technical valuation issue that needed to be resolved at a national level – the Government has now introduced legislation that will allow councils to resolve the issue. Officers are working with the Council's external auditors to understand what changes, if any, are required. 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. The Council's external auditors have now commenced their audit, It is anticipated that this will be completed in time for the accounts to be approved at Audit and Governance Committee in March 2023.

Customer Centric Services

The Service continues to manage high workloads, especially relating to Council Tax. Staff continue to work extra hours at weekends to reduce customer waiting times and processing delays.

Customer Services

The Contact Centre is continuing to receive a high volume of telephone calls from residents stating that they are unable to pay their monthly Council Tax due to the cost-of-living crisis and their outgoing financial priorities being elsewhere. All residents are being offered as much support as possible, including access to ELAS, Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and Exceptional Hardship Fund (EHF). Extended payment plans are also being offered to residents who have recently received a reminder, or a summons and they are being encouraged to visit Bootle One Stop Shop should they need access to any digital support.

Demand for ELAS is high, with the teams in both the Contact Centre and the Benefits service dealing with a significant increase in customer enquiries and applications. Demand is now at a level consistent with pre-pandemic. As at the end of November, the Council has received a total of 8,568 applications for support. 2,855 food vouchers have been issued, 4,417 utility awards and 799 essential household goods provided. Staff resource is managed to ensure that claims are processed without delay.

Customer demand at Bootle One Stop Shop is increasing, a full drop-in service has now been reinstated from Monday to Friday during the hours of 9.00 am and 5.00 pm. In November, 2,931 customers attended the One Stop Shop, this included 592 taxi drivers, 165 of which had an appointment and a further 427 who 'dropped in'. There were a further 994 customers who attended with Council Tax, Benefits and ELAS enquiries, with a small number of customers attending to discuss Business Rates, Blue Badge and Parking enquiries. The remaining 1,345 customers were seeking general council-related advice at reception.

At Southport, 636 customers attended the one-stop shop service based at the Atkinson, with 183 customers booking an appointment to discuss their Council Tax or benefit and the remaining customers seeking general council – related advice at reception.

Council Tax Energy Rebate

For most of 2022, the Service has had to prioritise the processing of the Government's Council Tax Energy Rebate. The Scheme closed on 30th November 2022: -

- Approximately 110,000 households living in Band A-D properties have received the automatic £150 rebate, totalling approximately £16.5Million, and
- Over 25,000 households have received a discretionary award, totalling approximately £701,000.

The final reconciliation and government return has been completed in early-December.

Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS) Alternative Funding

The Department of Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) has provided some initial information about the EBSS Alternative Funding Scheme that they have asked local authorities to work with them to deliver. Further guidance and information are still to be provided detailing administrative requirements. It is expected that the scheme will run for a period of approximately three-months from 23rd January – 30th April 2023, to provide energy support payments to households that have missed out on the main EBSS, e.g., households with no domestic electricity supply, park home residents or those living in caravans or houseboats on registered sites.

Migration of Revenues and Benefits document management system

Priority preparation work is well underway to migrate Revenues and Benefit customer records from Civica electronic document management system (EDMS) to NEC (Northgate) EDMS with go-live planned for January 2023. A significant amount of development work and testing is underway. Staff training is also planned for January.

Annual Billing 2023-24

The project to issue all Council Tax and Business Rates bills, and annual benefit letters has commenced with preparation and planning underway for bills and letters for 2023/24 to be issued in March 2023.

Risk and Audit

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

- Covid Grants assurance,
- ASC Finance Budget Management
- Performance Management,
- Review of number of Schools.
- Climate Change
- Risk Management
- Highways Maintenance
- Payroll
- Energy price cap payments
- Key Management Waste Management
- Fleet Management

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 have undertaken a procurement exercise 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 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.

The **Risk and Resilience Team.**

Business Continuity we are reviewing the current Service Area Business Continuity Plans with the Service Area to develop be spoke power outage BC plans. We have arranged an 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 January 2023 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 until the end of March 2023.

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.
- Completing 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 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 most moves are completed, and the focus is now upon backfilling the remaining desks in Magdalen House with Keyboards, Mice, Monitors and docking stations to support hotdesking.

The Cloud Migration project is now complete, including the migration of the Liquid Logic System to its new infrastructure. Following a further review, it has been decided to leave the Libraries

Netloans system on premise due the large amount of reconfiguration that would be required on the public network, this will be reassessed when a new solution for connectivity is in place and the Netloans product comes up for contract review. Data centre rationalisation and right sizing is now well underway, ready for an eventual move to Bootle Town Hall.

Cloud Telephony deployment is now complete with number porting from the Virgin Contract to 8x8 completed, formal project closure is now underway, following which we will consider the remaining infrastructure on IPVN connections which have to be removed prior to 2025. The majority of this is thought to be legacy but as it is impossible to report on these historical number ranges (which we believe not to be in use) we will have to develop a plan to remove.

The deployment of the new CXP solution is nearing completion with 16 processes already live and migrated from the Front Office system. For the remaining 11 processes, 5 will be live prior to the 10th of January 2023 and contingency processes will be in place for the final 6 ready for the front office system (self service element) to be decommissioned on the 10th of January next year.

Work continues the rolling website improvement programme; an external web agency (Ozum) has been commissioned to carry out the required work which is well underway. 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 is now completed, with the legacy system due to be decommissioned prior to Christmas.

Procurement activity continues to be a challenge; however, the team is pleased to report that we have now appointed a new permanent ICT Category Manager into the team, and he started with the authority on the 7th of December, a new forward plan will be developed in the new year based on the new capacity in the team.

Procurement is now completed for Managed Print, with an award to Canon, deployment of Canon devices is now well underway across all sites. Unfortunately, the procurement for Corporate Connectivity did not complete with a successful outcome, with no bidders meeting the requirements of the authority. The Client team is now exploring alternative routes to market, with a potential for joint procurement across the Liverpool City Region, a Cabinet member report will be presented in the new year outlining next steps to ensure continuity of the existing service whilst options are reviewed.

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, the majority are now completed. In addition, the LGA completed a Cyber 360 for Sefton in October this year, the results of which we are still awaiting but this 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 progressing well.
- Ongoing work supporting Growth Board projects.
- Asset records input and liaison with Building Maintenance colleagues for new (property based) IT system nearing completion.
- 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 nearing completion.
- Managing remedial works scheme
- Phase 1 essential maintenance delivery plan for corporate buildings underway.
- 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).
- 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. This is evolving and therefore continuous monitoring is required.
- Review of Climate Emergency works required for 2023-26 underway.
- Working with all areas of property to look at savings options to in part counter the rise in energy costs.

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 18 October 2022. A summary of the key issues considered at the meeting is provided below:

- **Liverpool University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust – Update** - the Committee received a presentation from Dr. Clare Morgan, Director of Strategy, Liverpool University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, on recent developments at the Trust.
- **Safeguarding Update** - the Committee considered a report that sought to provide an update on current safeguarding activity across the Sefton Borough and to provide assurance on the actions being taken to mitigate risk and investigate safeguarding concerns.
- **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); reported 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 7 November 2022. A summary of the items considered at the meeting is provided below.

- **Summer 2022 Data** - the Committee considered a report that updated on summer 2022 test and examination data. The report set out the background to the matter and referred to the current position and next steps regarding the possibility of re-establishing the Secondary School Performance and Attainment Working Group.
- **Integrated Care Systems and Start Well Update** - the Committee considered a report that provided a brief overview of the Integrated Care System development through the Sefton Partnership and provided specific detail on the Start Well Plan and its delivery. The report set out the background to the matter; an overview of the Start Well Plan; next steps, and key updates.

- **Children's Services Improvement Programme** - the Committee considered a report that updated on progress made against the Children's Improvement Plan. The report set out details of progress and priorities for the next quarter.
- **Performance Dashboard** - the Committee considered a report that provided an overview of the September performance dashboard.
- **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 a review of health services for children in Sefton; noted the progress of informal briefing sessions for Committee Members to be held during 2022/23, and the intention to hold an informal briefing session on the Leeds Family values in due course; noted the intention to hold a site visit for Committee Members to meet with Children's Services Teams at Magdalen House, Bootle, in due course; noted that there were no 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 formally approved the nomination of a new Parent Governor Representative and a new Archdiocese Representative to sit on the Committee.

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

A meeting of the Committee was held on 8 November 2022. A summary of the key issues considered at the meeting is provided below:

- **Southport Market** - the Committee considered a report on the first year of operation, focused on the period during the financial year 2021-2022, of Southport Market. The report indicated that Cabinet at its meeting on 3rd September 2020 approved the delivery of a fully refurbished Market Hall with a focus on food and drink incorporating a flexible events space that would support the wider visitor economy; that the new Market opened in July 2021 after undergoing the £1.4m refurbishment (funded totally from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and Town Deal Acceleration Fund); and that the Market now had a central bar, 8 hot food units, 2 cold food units, a butcher and events space to the rear. Since opening in late July 2021, the Market had been a great success; that by the year ending in 21/22 it had met its business plan targets in an 8-month trading period; and that the food and drink offer had exceeded expectations
- **Flood And Coastal Erosion Risk Management Annual Report To Overview And Scrutiny 2021-2022** - the Committee considered a report advising that the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 previously required that arrangements be made to review and scrutinise the exercise by the Council as a Lead Local Flood Risk Authority of its flood risk management functions and coastal erosion risk management functions; that following the cessation of this requirement, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had requested that an annual Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management review be submitted to it.
- **Green Sefton Annual Review 2022** - the Committee considered a report that provided an update on the progress of Green Sefton's operational delivery over the last year, and setting out the strategic work programme, in line with the Service Vision 2030, and Service Plan for the next year; and which proposed a refresh of the Vision and Service Plan and sought the Committee's comments on these documents for submission to the Cabinet Member - Health and Well Being and the Cabinet Member - Locality Services.
- **Digital Inclusion Working Group – Update on Recommendations** - the Committee considered a report setting out progress made against each of the recommendations formulated by the Digital Inclusion Working Group and approved by Cabinet. The Committee agreed that no further update reports be submitted to the Committee subject to

assurances that the actions identified in the report are continued and become “business as usual” operational matters.

- **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. Following a request from the informal meeting of the Committee (referred to below) the Committee agreed that a review of the adoption of a strategic approach for waste containment/disposal across the Borough be dealt with at an informal meeting of the Committee rather than establishing a Working Group to review the topic.

- **Informal Meeting of the Committee – 20 October 2022**

An informal meeting of the Committee was held on 20 October 2022 and undertook scrutiny on matters associated with weed control, street cleansing provision and waste containment consultation; and the Green Sefton Annual Review 2022.

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

A meeting of the Committee was held on 1 November 2022. A summary of the key items considered at the meeting is provided below:

- **New Ways of Working** - The Committee received a presentation on the Council’s new ways of working. Ms. Hopkin updated on Phase 1 – Asset maximisation, locality working and ICT transformation which enabled the start of agile working and which was completed in 2017-2019; Phase 2 - further development of Agile Working arrangements to support business need and health and wellbeing of staff, and which took account of changes arising from the pandemic and the further rationalisation of buildings which delivered further budget savings and that this project was nearing completion; and Phase 3 – the longer-term review of Bootle estate linked to Bootle Town Hall, the Strand and lease on Magdalen House - 2022-2032.
- **Disposal of Surplus Council Owned Land/Asset -Management Strategy** - the Committee received a presentation on the Asset Management Strategy/Disposal Policy identifying issues associated with the Council’s Asset Base; the relevant policies such as the Asset Management Strategy; the Asset Disposal Policy; updates to provide strategic framework for decisions; alignment with Framework for Change and new capital strategy; elected Member engagement in the decision-making process and the legislation that provided the framework within which the council worked; Phase 1 asset disposals approved by Cabinet in January 2020; and the Strategy supporting the Framework for Change.
- **Elections Act 2022** - the Committee considered a report that provided an update on the implications of the Elections Act 2022 on the conduct of future elections in Sefton. The Chief Legal and Democratic Officer has been requested to submit a further report to the Committee once the Elections Act 2022 secondary legislation has been passed and the implications for the Council become clearer; and to arrange a presentation for all Members of the Council to raise their awareness of the issues associated with the Elections Act 2022
- **Digital Inclusion Working Group – Update on Recommendations** - the Committee considered a report setting out progress made against each of the recommendations formulated by the Digital Inclusion Working Group and approved by Cabinet. The Committee at its next meeting will be requested to give consideration, to be consistent with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills), as detailed above, that no further update reports be submitted to the Committee subject to assurances that the actions identified in the report are continued and become “business as usual” operational matters.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Overview and Scrutiny Management Board**

A meeting of the Management Board was held on 8 November 2022. A summary of the key items considered at the meeting is provided below:

 - **2021/22 Outturn Review of Council Wholly Owned Companies** - the Management Board considered a report the aim of which was to allow Members to carry out effective scrutiny of council companies which gave a level of assurance that both the Council's interests and the services or products provided by companies to our residents, were safe and well managed and offered good value for money. It was noted that following consideration of the consolidated report for the 3 companies at the meeting the extract for each company would be considered by the respective individual Overview and Scrutiny Committees in the next cycle.
 - **Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Scrutiny Link - Councillor Howard** - The Management Board considered a briefing from Councillor Christine Howard, Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee (LCRO&S) – Scrutiny Link that provided an update on the recent activities of the LCRO&S.
 - **Centre For Governance and Scrutiny – Newsletters** - The Management Board considered a briefing note that updated on the latest three Centre for Governance and Scrutiny's Newsletters received during the September/October 2022 period.
 - **Update on Working Groups** - The Management Board considered a briefing note that updated on the current position of on-going Working Groups established by the four Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- **Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

A meeting of the Committee was held on 1 December 2022. A summary of the key items considered at the meeting is provided below:

- Development of the next Local Transport Plan for the Liverpool City Region
- Work Programme Update

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to be held on 19 January 2023. 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.

School Appeals

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

The academic year continues to be a busy time for the Clerk to Education Appeals. Between November and December, 20 LEA appeals were heard, and 4 Diocese (Church of England voluntary aided schools) appeals were scheduled. Ten Archdiocese (Catholic voluntary aided schools) appeals were heard.

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.

Following the permanent exclusion from Maricourt Catholic High School, at the request of the pupil's parent, an Independent Review Panel (IRP) has been convened for 16 December, 2022. The IRP is an impartial body convened to review the head teacher's decision to permanently the pupil. In reviewing the decision, the IRP consider the interests and circumstances of the excluded pupil, including the circumstances under which the pupil was excluded, and have regard to the interests of other pupils and people working at the school.

The IRP may:

- uphold the exclusion decision
- recommend that the governing body reconsiders its decision
- quash the decision and direct that the governing body considers the exclusion again.

An IRP does not have the power to reinstate an excluded pupil. Nor does it have the power to remove the exclusion from a pupil's record. The Independent Review Panel's decision is binding upon the pupil, parents, governing board, head teacher and local authority

Civic and Mayoral Services

- The Charity Quiz Night on 3rd November was a great success raising just under £600 on the night,
- Following the quiz night, the next large event was Remembrance Sunday once again this was impeccably observed across the borough with another large public attendance.
- The Mayor's Christmas Toy Appeal was launched on 21st November and will run until 22nd December, as always, the response to the appeal is always fantastic even in the current cost of living crisis.
- Planning is now very much underway for the first of three Freedom of the Borough Presentations to be held in 2023 with the first being on Thursday 26th January for the NHS Organisations. The HMS Mersey presentation will follow on 13th April and then Alex Greenwood's Presentation on a date yet to be confirmed.
- We have also launched the next two charity events, the first is on 80's night on Saturday 18th February, and the second is the Gala Charity Ball that takes place on Saturday 1st April, tickets are available now for both events

Member Development

Member Development Steering Group (MDSG)

The MDSG held its first meeting on 1 November 2022 and considered reports on (i) MDSG Terms of Reference, (ii) Member Development in Sefton Council - the Current Position; and (iii) Member Development in Sefton – Next Steps. The MDSG is leading the Council's application for the North-West Charter for Elected Member Development and the Council on 19 January 2023 will be requested to give approval to the Leader of the Council signing the Declaration of Commitment to the principles included in the Charter and its intention to achieve Level 1 Member Development Charter Status.

A survey on Member Development was circulated to all Members of the Council prior to Christmas for completion on the **Your Sefton Your Say** feedback system by 23 January 2023. The results of the survey will be submitted the next meeting of the Steering Group on 14 February 2023.

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, the vacancy for the office of Councillor in Linacre Ward was filled by Cllr Daniel McKee (Labour).

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.

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. Service managers are responsible for advising the Establishment control officers of these changes.

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 ongoing 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 May 2022. A meeting is scheduled with MPF to see if a 6-month return can be submitted to enable Sefton to get up to date.

Issues were also found with Teachers MDC and a meeting was held and the issues are now resolved.

Teachers Pensions Monthly data collection (MDC) moves to Monthly Contribution Reconciliation (MCR) has been delayed until 1st July 2023 and a further delay may be requested as the iTrent software has several known 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, reporting and resource issues and all work is being prioritised.

Some THRP staff are continuing to work from home and more staff are coming into the office. Some processes have had to be changed and the staff have embraced these changes. The number of staff going into the office is still being closely monitored.

The Local Government pay award from 1st April 2022 has been agreed and is being processed in December 2022 pay. The Teachers pay award has also been agreed backdated to 1st September 2022 and again is being processed in December 2022.

Children's Services.

HR continue to support Children's Social Care as they continue to move along in their improvement Journey. Ongoing support involves supporting them to maintain and control their establishment in order to have the right people in the right posts to support Sefton's Children and Families. Work continues on the development of new teams, such as the Complex Safeguarding Hub, named My Space by Sefton's Young People along with Targeted Family Support, and ongoing work with the potential re-opening of Cherry Road Children's Home. A Business Support Services review continues, supported jointly by Strategic Support and HR with the aim of reforming the Service area to provide more effective Business Support Services. Recruitment and Retention incentives have been reviewed and work is ongoing to strengthen the effectiveness of these. Recruitment continues to the posts with the Academy only a very small number of which remain vacant. The development remains an interesting time and HR will continue to be there to provide the right support for growth on their improvement journey.

Health Unit

During October and November 2022, a total of 151 referrals for SMBC employees were made to the Health Unit. This is a decrease of 14.69% when compared to the same period in the previous 12 months in which there were 177 referrals.

Referrals during this latest period included Education Excellence (54.97%), Adult Social Care (11.26%) and Communities 9.93%). As usual the main reasons were stress and mental health related (49.68%), chronic medical illness (21.85%) and musculoskeletal (12.58%).

Face to face appointments for counselling and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy support are due to resume in January 2023. An exact start date is yet to be confirmed but like the other support provided through the Health Unit these therapies will also be available via telephone and video calls. Employees will be able to choose which they prefer.

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, they were successfully interviewed by Sheffield Hallam University and were offered a place on the course. 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 170 Sefton Council and schools' staff.
- **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. To date, 125 staff have attended and completed the course, further sessions are being planned from May 2023.
- The development of a **Personalisation Training Programme** for students, ASYEs and for new any starters working across Adult Social Care, who have not undertaken this training previously.
- Working with senior managers in Adult Social Care to develop a training programme for the Learning Disabilities Team.

Workforce/Organisational Development

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

- Commissioned Insights Leadership Training for Children's Services Directors and Service Managers. The Director training is scheduled to take place on 14th and 15th December 2022. The Service Manager session is scheduled to take place on 26th and 27th April 2023.
- Designed a team building session for Children's Services Service Managers, to be delivered on 31st January 2023. The aim of the session is to build collaborative working relationships across the service, to prepare the managers for their Insights Leadership training scheduled to take place in April 2023.
- Developing a core training offer for Children's Services which will include an essential training for Social Workers and Managers.

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 sometime in January/February 2023.

Strategic Support

Performance & 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. Progress continues with the development of the Council's new enterprise data warehouse platform, which will enable cross-Council big data analysis.

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.

Consultation & Engagement, Complaints and Information Governance.

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. There is a challenge with capacity in the Complaints team, but the Service is actively recruiting to vacant posts to address the issue.

The project to digitise the Council's historic paper records continues at pace. All legacy records stored at disparate 3rd 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 Children's Social Care Improvement plan. This extends to the options appraisal for In-House Children's Residential Homes, organising Christmas events for Cared for and Cared Experience Young People, plus supporting the Mayor's Christmas Toy appeal.

Procurement

It is now anticipated that the new Procurement Legislation will be finalised in Parliament late 2023. It is understood that the Cabinet Office will be facilitating Procurement Policy training at that time which the Procurement Team will be required to attend. This will enable the Council to adopt the changes in legislation to ensure the Council is fully compliant in our Procurement Procedures and Regulations which will require updating at that time.

The Council Social Value Policy is being followed up with over sixty members of staff being enrolled during January 2023 to understand how to practically apply the policy in tender evaluations, measuring the delivery of Social Value through Contract Management and Reporting.

Communications

The Communications team continue to develop the main Council website, and noticeable improvements have been made, with even more developments due to go live in the New Year. Changes to the recruitment pages of the website will support a refreshed approach to marketing and promotion of job vacancies, particularly for niche roles.

The email marketing system, e-shot, has now gone live and is being used to update residents. Businesses and elected members of key news stories and updates from across the Council.

Communications officers have been supporting colleagues on regeneration projects across the borough, from [Carnegie Library in Crosby](#), to [Bootle Strand](#) and Canalside, to the new [Marine Lake Events Centre](#), Southport.

The recent cold snap meant that a high volume of Winter messaging was put on to the Council's main social media channels and website(s). The launch of the [Sefton Warm Places](#) scheme came just in time, complemented by the continued posting of the [Cost of Living messages](#) alongside shared messaging from Health partners (Sefton Partnership) regarding access to services, vaccinations and pharmacies.

The Communications Team have been providing significant support to colleagues in Children's Services; mainly with the Mayor's Christmas Toy Appeal, recruitment and organising a Christmas Event for Care Experienced Young People. The team handled media enquiries in relation to the appointment of the Children's Commissioner.

To support with Member Development the team has organised a series of media training sessions for elected members and Senior Officers to take place in 2023.