

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGULATORY,
COMPLIANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES)**



**MEETING HELD AT THE COMMITTEE ROOM, TOWN HALL BOOTLE
ON TUESDAY 10TH JANUARY, 2023**

PRESENT: Councillor Bradshaw (in the Chair)
Councillor Byrom (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Bennett, Grace, Killen, Page and
Robinson

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Lappin

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Carlin.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

28. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

**29. UPDATE ON THE PROGRESSION OF THE LIVERPOOL CITY
REGION DIGITAL INCLUSION STRATEGY - PRESENTATION**

The Committee received a presentation from Andrea Watts, Executive Director of People that updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (CA) Digital Inclusion Strategy (the Strategy).

Ms. Watts advised the Committee:

- About the key components of connectivity, equipment and skills
- That Digital inclusion was a priority set out in the CA's Corporate Plan; and that the CA's Digital Infrastructure project included a substantial social value element that had significant ambitions towards supporting digital access and inclusion, as well as jobs and apprenticeships
- Work to date which included the proposals being formulated that would deliver the Digital Inclusion workstream, with the aim of targeting provision, providing a joined-up approach with other programmes, and ensuring that residents across Liverpool City Region had the abilities, access and support needed to take part in a modern digital life
- About the Digital Inclusion Alliance Network whose premise was to build a membership network that would drive the Digital Inclusion

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agenda from a strategic perspective, harnessing a range of key sector representatives both from statutory services, but also bring in employers, community groups, housing providers, education providers and health to name but a few

- About the Digital Inclusion Pledge and that as part of the membership of the Digital Alliance Network, members would be invited to sign a Digital Inclusion Pledge that would commit organisations to supporting digital inclusion efforts and would be co-designed via the Taskforce underpinned by a number of principles
- About the Digital Champions Model that built upon former schemes and would include support through trained LCR Digital Champions. This would enable volunteers to be trained who would provide holistic support and guidance to individuals who were digitally excluded, helping them get online and make the most of a modern digital life
- About Digital Support Intervention Pilots that informed by data and local authority colleagues, other areas of intervention would be explored that helped target digital exclusion –e.g., social broadband tariffs, recycled digital kit or free mobile data for those most in need
- About the next steps which included the inaugural Digital Inclusion Taskforce Meeting on 23rd January 2023; the completion of several surveys gathering lived experience of digital inclusion through programmes including Households into Work and the Department for Work & Pension's Restart Scheme; working closely with UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) colleagues in the Combined Authority; funding that was expected to be committed by the end of the financial year.

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- Cross-generational support offered by schools to help residents with ICT skills such as “silver surfer clubs”
- The current operation of 3tc, the Merseyside-based technology charity offering ICT services, ICT Training and Conference Facilities
- Recycling of out-of-date ICT equipment
- The lost opportunity to access the Digital Europe Programme following the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU
- How residents could access the provision of ICT services offered by Sefton CVS
- The provision of ICT services by Sefton's library service

RESOLVED:

That Ms Watts be thanked for her informative presentation.

30. CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE - PRESENTATION

The Committee received a presentation from Elena Lloyd, Corporate Communications Manager that updated on corporate communications within the Council.

Ms. Lloyd updated the Committee on:

- Statistics associated with the Sefton Council website which contained over 2000 pages; and received 4,893,924 unique page views last year
- The new website design
- MySefton which received 174,229 unique page views last year
- Sefton's Facebook page that had 14,237 followers which was an increase of nearly 27% on the previous year; and detailed the top proactive and reactive posts
- Sefton having 25,959 Twitter followers (up 8.1%); and detailed the top proactive and reactive posts
- Sefton having 5332 followers on Instagram (up 20% on last year); and detailed the top 3 posts
- Sefton having 8,663 followers on Linked In (27.3% increase on 2021); and detailed the top 3 posts
- The email marketing system, e-shot that was launched in June and was being used to update residents, businesses and elected members of key news stories and updates from across the Council
- The Communications Team, by the end of 2022, having issued approaching 341 releases and dealt with over 120 incoming media enquiries
- Major communications issues during the year which included a United Utilities burst water main; Operation London Bridge associated with the death of Queen Elizabeth II; Children's Services & Ofsted; Homes for Ukraine; and the cost-of-living crisis

A Member of the Committee asked a question on the following issue:

- How the success of Sefton's corporate communications operation was measured and compared with other local authorities

RESOLVED:

That Ms Lloyd be thanked for her informative presentation.

31. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME, COUNCIL TAX BASE 2023/24

Further to Minute No. 102 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 5 January 2023 the Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services that provided details of the review of the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the current year,

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2022/23, and recommending to Cabinet that there was no change to the scheme for 2023/24 for working age claimants; that proposed an increase in the long-term empty homes premium from 200% to 300% on dwellings that have been empty for 10 years or more from 1 April 2023; and that provided an updated Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish area for 2023/24.

Annex A to the report detailed the Council Tax Base for 2023/24; Annex B provided a summary of feedback from the 2018 consultation on increasing the Council Tax Long term empty Homes Premium and the associated equalities impact assessment; whilst Annex C provided an equalities impact assessment in respect of Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

The Committee was advised that the Cabinet, at its meeting held on 5 January 2023 resolved (Minute No. 102) that:

- (1) the content of the review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the current financial year, 2022/23 be noted;
- (2) the Council be recommended to make no changes to the existing Scheme for 2023/24 for working age claimants;
- (3) the Equality Impact Assessment in respect of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme at Annex C of the report be noted;
- (4) the Council be recommended to approve an increase in the Long-term Empty Homes Premium on dwellings that have been left empty for 10 years or more, from 200% to 300%, from 1 April 2023; and
- (5) the Council be recommended to approve the relevant Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish Area for 2023/24 as set out in Annex A of the report.

The report required approval by Council at its meeting to be held on 19 January 2023.

RESOLVED:

That the report updating on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax Base 2023/24 be noted.

**32. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT 2022/23 TO 2024/25 AND
FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE 2020 - REVENUE AND CAPITAL
BUDGET UPDATE 2022/23 - JANUARY UPDATE**

Further to Minute No. 104 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 5 January 2023 the Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services that advised of:

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- (1) the current position relating to the 2022/23 revenue budget;
- (2) the current forecast on Council Tax and Business Rates collection for 2022/23; and
- (3) the monitoring position of the Council's capital programme to the end of November 2022 in respect of:
 - the forecast expenditure to year end;
 - variations against the approved budgets and an explanation of those variations for consideration by Members; and
 - updates to spending profiles and proposed amendments to capital budgets necessary to ensure the efficient delivery of capital projects are also presented for approval.

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- The £17m potential overspend in children's social care brought about by increases in the number of looked after children and accommodation costs, the significant number of vacancies and the resultant need to use agency staff, and increases in legal costs
- The introduction of the social worker academy and the proposal to bring to the Council international social workers to reduce the reliance on expensive agency workers
- Whether the Commissioner who produced the independent report on the delivery of children's services in Sefton had made any comments on the financial aspects of Sefton's children's social care service
- Noted the requirement of the Council to meet its statutory responsibilities regarding the provision of children's social care services
- That the overspend Children's Social Care and Government underfunding needed to be identified as part of the wider budget setting process

RESOLVED:

- (A) That in respect of the Revenue Budget:
 - (1) the current position relating to the 2022/23 revenue budget be noted;
 - (2) the actions being taken to offset the budget pressures being faced in 2022/23 be noted;
 - (3) the financial risks associated with the delivery of the 2022/23 revenue budget be recognised and it be acknowledged that the

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forecast outturn position will continue to be reviewed, and remedial actions put in place, to ensure a balanced forecast outturn position and financial sustainability can be achieved; and

- (4) the current position relating to the High Needs budget be noted and that officers are currently reviewing all options available to the Council to mitigate the additional pressure and to make the overall High Needs budget financially sustainable; and
- (B) That in respect of the Capital Programme:
 - (1) the spending profiles across financial years for the approved capital programme be noted;
 - (2) the latest capital expenditure position as at 30 November 2022 of £22.639m and the latest full year forecast is £47.141m be noted; and
 - (3) it be noted that capital resources will be managed by the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services to ensure the capital programme remains fully funded and that capital funding arrangements secure the maximum financial benefit to the Council.

**33. WELFARE REFORM AND ANTI-POVERTY REFERENCE GROUP
- UPDATE**

Further to Minute No. 14 of the meeting held on 22 September 2022 the Committee considered a Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty update of the Head of Health and Wellbeing and Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services.

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
- period poverty – a Sefton update
- Community pantry update
- Sefton child poverty launch event
- Sefton Council housing – cost-of-living challenges
- Emergency limited assistance scheme update

Councillor Lappin, Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services presented her update and made particular reference to the Sefton child poverty launch event.

A Member of the Committee commented on the following issue:

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- The increasing use of foodbanks and community pantry in more affluent areas of the borough

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the update on the operation of the Members' Welfare Reform Reference Group be noted; and
- (2) Councillor Lappin be thanked for her update.

**34. WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23, SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPICS
AND KEY DECISION FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that 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 any 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; sought a course of action on the operation of the Corporation Communications and Covid-19 Working Group; updated on issues associated with the reporting on the implementation of recommendations arising from the Digital Inclusion Working Group; and updated on the "Tool Kit" for Armed Forces Covenant.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Work Programme for 2022/23, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted;
- (2) the Air Quality update report be deferred and considered at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 28 February 2023;
- (3) that the Corporate Communications and Covid-19 Working Group be no longer continued and the topic be dealt with at a remote, informal meeting of the Committee;
- (4) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted;
- (5) to be consistent with a decision of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills) no further updates be provided on the implementation of recommendations arising from Digital Inclusion Working Group; and
- (6) the update on the "Tool Kit" for Armed Forces Covenant be noted.

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**35. CABINET MEMBER REPORT - OCTOBER 2022 - JANUARY
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The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that included the most recent report from the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the update report from the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services be noted; and
- (2) Councillor Lappin be thanked for her attendance at the meeting.