

<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	February 2023

## **Finance**

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

The latest budget monitoring report was presented to Cabinet and Council in February. This highlighted the growing financial pressure that the Council is facing in 2022/2023, particularly relating to 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 Council's annual suite of Budget Reports for 2023/24 have now been published and considered by Overview and Scrutiny and Budget Cabinet. The implications for 2024/25 and 2025/26 are also being considered. These will then be considered by Budget Council on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2023. The final Local Government Finance Settlement was published on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2023 which confirmed the details previously announced in the Provisional Settlement published on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2022. A follow-on report will be published for Budget Council with details of levies and precepts and any other updated information. This will include a draft Council Tax Resolution for agreement by Council.

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 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 are continuing with 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 has experienced an extremely busy start to 2023, dealing with 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**

Customer Services managed a very busy January for call volumes and visits to both One Stop Shops. In total, 18,676 telephone calls were answered, around a 28% increase compared to 14,632 calls answered in January 2022.

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 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. In fact, the Contact Centre handled 1,504 ELAS calls in January 2023 which is the highest volume of monthly calls since it first delivered the service in April 2013. Demand is now exceeding pre-pandemic levels. As at the end of January, the Council has received a total of 12,038 applications for support. 4,143 food vouchers have been issued, 6,443 utility awards and 1,020 essential household goods provided. Staff resource continues to be managed to ensure that claims are processed without delay.

With customer demand at Bootle One Stop Shop increasing week-by-week, the reinstated full drop-in service continues to be very well received by customers who have complex enquiries or requiring financial support.

In January, 2,635 customers attended Bootle One Stop Shop. This included 624 taxi drivers, 126 of which had an appointment and a further 498 who 'dropped in'. There were 1,011 customers who attended with a Council Tax or Benefits enquiry, and 91 customers seeking ELAS support. The remaining 909 customers were seeking general council-related advice at reception.

At Southport, 677 customers attended the Atkinson, with 189 customers booking an appointment to discuss their Council Tax or benefit and the remainder seeking general council – related advice at reception.

While overall customer contact is increasing, enquiries for Social Care and ELAS remain prioritised above all other services that are offered by Customer Services.

## **Recently announced Government Financial Support Schemes**

The Service is preparing to implement two new financial support schemes on behalf of central Government, i.e.:

- Council Tax Support Scheme, i.e., a payment of up to £25 to households in receipt of Council Tax Support to help them pay Council Tax in 2023/24, and proposals for a discretionary scheme will be developed for Cabinet consideration, and,
- Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS) – Alternative Funding, i.e., a one-off £400 non-repayable discount to eligible households who have not received the main EBSS payment automatically to help with their energy bills between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023 but are still facing increased energy costs.

## **Annual Billing 2023/24**

The project to issue all Council Tax and Business Rates bills, and annual benefit letters in March 2023, in respect of 2023/24, is well underway. Testing will take place during February 2023 incorporating the revaluation of all business properties, an amended Retail Hospitality and Leisure relief for eligible businesses, and a new transitional relief scheme to limit the impact of significant increases in rateable value resulting from revaluation.

Testing of the recently announced Council Tax Support Scheme payments of up to £25 to households in receipt of Council Tax Reduction will also take place to enable the payments to be included on the annual bills.

## **Migration of Revenues and Benefits document management system**

The Service successfully achieved a key milestone by going live with a new Revenues and Benefits electronic document management system on 26th January 2023. Planned work is now progressing as expected to migrate approximately 4.5 Million historic customer records and outstanding workloads.

This will bring almost all Revenues and Benefits software under one supplier, NEC (Northgate) to reduce costs and enable greater automation and integration.

There has been an initial impact on increasing outstanding workloads due to the time required for training and as staff become familiar with the system.

## **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
- ASC Debt Management
- Review of number of Schools.
- Risk Management
- Highways Maintenance
- Fleet Management
- SHOL Governance review
- SND Governance review

We have appointed a temporary Principal Auditor to a vacant position and are on track to start the recruitment of a permanent staff member in February 2023.

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

- We have completed the 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. The re-valuations are due to be completed by 30 April 2023 and feed into the September 2023 renewal.
- A paper on the proposed tender for the Council's insurance arrangements is due to be presented to Cabinet in March 2023. Consultation has been started with the Schools. 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, provide training for duty holders and manage contractors on site.

- 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 arranged an exercise of the Council's BC arrangements in January 2023.

The **Risk and Resilience Team** have completed a Severe Weather Protocol and are currently working on the Council's Risk Appetite which is due which is due to complete in March 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
- Loggist training

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

Data centre rationalisation and right sizing is nearing completion within the existing Data Centre at St Peters with planning now starting for a move to Bootle Town Hall during financial year 23/24.

The Cloud telephony project is now closed, the final work to be completed during the next few months is to remove the remaining infrastructure supporting a legacy telephony range which is not linked to the historical Mitel telephony system (which 8x8 replaced). Most of these direct dial numbers are thought to be historical but unfortunately it is not possible to report on the usage of these lines, work is to be planned with Virgin to soft cease these numbers to assess impact prior to removal. Communications will be issued in advance across the Council.

The new CXP solution went live across all services in January this year, and the authority has removed all legacy online services, this reduces the security risk to the authority, due to the fact the old Northgate system is hosted on an operating system which is end of life and no longer receives security updates. The legacy system is still in use as a back-office system for two service areas, due to the complexity of the CXP build, however access is restricted to a handful of key personnel with plans to remove completely as soon as possible.

Work continues the rolling website improvement programme; an external web agency (Ozum) has been commissioned to carry out the required work which is now nearing completion and undergoing user acceptance testing. 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, and the legacy system has been formally decommissioned and removed from the estate

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 7<sup>th</sup> of December, a new forward plan is now under development and will be presented to ELT and the Cabinet member within the next couple of months.

Deployment of Canon devices is now completed across all sites, some sites have had some teething problems affecting a handful of users, resolution of all issues encountered is underway and overall, the project went very well deploying nearly 200 new devices in two weeks prior to the Christmas break.

As per the last update 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 is underway 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. Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) is now deployed for all officers, with Councillors due to go live by the end of January. In addition, Microsoft Defender has been deployed across all end user devices and the authority is now using a Microsoft's web filtering tool rather than a separate third-party product. Finally, defender has now been pushed out to all Council Mobile phones to further protect the estate.

Finally, the ICT client team have worked with Agilisys colleagues to develop a business continuity plan for Power Outages should these occur over the next few months

## **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 approved Asset Disposals with further phases being considered.
- Ongoing work supporting Growth Board projects.
- Asset records input and liaison with Building Maintenance colleagues for new (property based) IT system 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 progressing.
- 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

- Continues to be a 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.

- Sefton Council Retrofit programme (LAD3, HUG) – Providing insulation to privately owned properties (worst/not insulated & for poorest residents). LAD3 (gas heated properties) will be fully delivered 332 homes upgraded HUG 1 (non gas properties) has a target of improving 75 homes currently 40% delivered and efforts to find additional properties continues. A request to extend the scheme and deliver additional work has been submitted to government.
- A programme of work to support schools (after large energy price rises) is underway.
- Feasibility Study for a replacement Wind turbine at Southport Eco Centre is ongoing. Work to establish a land lease and a power purchase agreement is the current focus before the feasibility funding ends 31 March 23.
- Energy price rises are being modelled for the remainder of 2023/24, after the Government price guarantee announcement. Prices are currently falling and it is anticipated that Sefton council will not receive support under the new arrangement from 1 April 23.
- Review of Climate Emergency works required for 2023-26 underway.
- Results of the Climate Emergency Consultation and subsequent action plan to be presented to the Engagement panel and Member Reference group.
- Work to assess the risks around the effects of Climate change e.g. more intense weather events to take place in Spring 23.

## 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 3 January 2023. The following reports were considered at the meeting:

- Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust
- Paediatric Radiotherapy Services
- Cost of Living Crisis
- Winter Plan
- Adult Social Care Local Government Association Peer Review
- National GP Access Survey
- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Sefton – Update Report
- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Sefton - Health Provider Performance Dashboard
- Cabinet Member Reports
- Work Programme Key Decision Forward Plan

- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children’s Services and Safeguarding)**

A meeting of the Committee was held on 31 January 2023. The following reports were considered at the meeting:

- Attendance of Paul Boyce, Improvement Board Chair
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Annual Update
- Sefton Corporate Parenting Board – Annual Report 2022
- Children's Services Improvement Programme Phase 2
- Recruitment and Support for Newly Qualified Social Workers
- Cabinet Member Reports
- Work Programme Key Decision Forward Plan

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

A meeting of the Committee was held on 17 January 2023. The following reports were considered at the meeting:

- Update on the Progression of the Liverpool City Region Digital Inclusion Strategy – Presentation
- Sandway Homes Limited and Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited - 2021/22 Outturn Review of Council Wholly Owned Companies
- Sefton Economic Strategy
- Work Programme
- Cabinet Member Reports

- **Informal Meeting of the Committee – 6 February 2023**

An informal meeting of the Committee was held on 6 February 2023 and undertook scrutiny on matters associated with Housing and considered reports on Leasehold House Sales and an update on the operation of Sandway Homes.

Arrangements are still ongoing to organise an informal meeting to review the adoption of a strategic approach for waste containment/disposal across the borough

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

A meeting of the Committee was held on 10 January 2023. The following reports were considered at the meeting:

- Update on the Progression of the Liverpool City Region Digital Inclusion Strategy – Presentation
- Corporate Communications Update – Presentation
- Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Council Tax Base 2023/24
- Financial Management 2022/23 to 2024/25 and Framework for Change 2020 – Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2022/23 – January Update
- Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Reference Group – Update
- Work Programme
- Cabinet Member report

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

An informal meeting of the Committee was held on 3 February 2023 to review the topic of Corporate Communications and Covid-19. Recommendations from the informal meeting will be reported to the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 28 February 2023 for formal approval

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

A meeting of the Committee was held on 7 February 2023 to consider budget reports prior to their consideration by Cabinet and Council

- **Overview and Scrutiny Management Board**

A meeting of the Management Board was held on 10 January 2023. The following reports were considered at the meeting:

- Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Scrutiny Link - Councillor Christine Howard
- Centre for Governance and Scrutiny – Newsletters
- Strategic Scrutiny in Practice Network
- Updates on Working Groups
- The Management Board also considered issues associated with the Member Development Survey and the scrutiny of Children’s Services



- **Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

A meeting of the Committee was held on 19 January 2023. A summary of the key items considered at the meeting is provided below:

- Combined Authority Budget 2023/24 Corporate Plan 2021-24; Quarter 2 (July to September)
- 2022-23 Performance Update
- Fair Employment Charter: Implementation and Next Steps
- Appointment to the Audit and Governance Committee

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to be held on 1 March 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>

## **School Appeals**

The Section has 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 January and February, 24 LEA appeals were heard, and 1 Diocese (Church of England voluntary aided schools) appeals were scheduled. Five Archdiocese (Catholic voluntary aided schools) appeals were heard.

## **Civic and Mayoral Services**

- The Freedom of the Borough for the NHS Organisations took place on 26<sup>th</sup> January it was very well attended and received by the organisations; the next Freedom Ceremony for HMS Mersey will take place on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> April, followed by a Parade on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> April.
- The Mayor's Charity 80's Night takes place on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> February, this is going to be well attended and will raise money for the Mayor's Charity Fund.

## **Member Development**

### Member Development Steering Group (MDSG)

- 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, extended to 30 January 2023. 26 responses were received and presented to the Member Development Steering Group on 14 February 2023 which made recommendations for implementation in respect of future member development provision.
- The MDSG was also provided mandatory course completion statistics to end of January 2023 and given the poor take-up for some of the courses it was agreed that the Whips for the respective political groups be sent details of non-completion by Councillors to encourage their members to undertake the mandatory courses as soon as possible.

## **Electoral Services**

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

The annual canvass is now complete, and the 2023 register of electors was published on the 1 December 2022. The published electorate figure was 211,916, which is a drop on the December 2021 figure of 214,360 (-2,444). Electorate figures are fluid and peak at times of national elections, so we have seen a drop off since the 2019 General Election, however, changes to way the annual canvass is conducted has also be a contributing factor to the reduction in the electorate. The new reforms make the canvass more cost effective and generate savings, but it is now clear that the new rules have impacted on overall electorate. We expect these figures to pick up again as we move towards the next general election.

### **Elections Act 2022 Voter ID**

We are now in the first phase of Voter ID following its introduction on the 16 January 2023. This includes the ability for those people who do not have photo ID or do wish to use the photo ID they have to apply to the Electoral Registration Officer for a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC). To date we have received 98 applications, 14 of which were not registered to vote, this has now been rectified. 15 applications are currently on hold due the quality of the photograph provided, which did not meet the standard required to produce the certificate.

In addition, the Electoral Commission media campaigns, our local campaign IDeal Time to Vote will go live at the end of February, to encourage voter registration and provide information on the photo ID in polling stations.

It is important to send out the message that Voter ID only applies to those electors who vote in person in polling stations and does not impact on the arrangements for those voters who choose to vote by post.

In addition to Voter ID, the Election Act 2022 will also introduce the following changes to the electoral process over the coming months

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 or electors someone can act as a proxy for – May 2024

### **Local Government & Parish Council Elections – 4 May 2023**

Plans for the Local Government Elections on Thursday 4 May 2023 are now at an advanced stage. Members have been invited to comment on the current polling scheme which had been audited to ensure compliance with new accessibility rules and to ensure that private spaces will be available for those voters who wear face coverings.

Nomination papers will be made available from the week beginning 6 March 2023. New rules have come into force, which now only require the nomination paper to be supported by a Proposer and seconder (in the same way the rules were amended for the 2021 Covid elections).

- Notice of Election will be published on Friday 24 March 2023.
- The nomination period will run from Monday 27 March 2023 to 4pm on Tuesday 4 April 2023.
- The last day to register vote is Monday 17 April 2023.

- The last time to apply for a postal vote is 5pm on Tuesday 18 April 2023
- Postal Ballot packs will be issued from Thursday 21 April 2023
- The last time to appoint a proxy or apply for a Voter Authority Certificate is 5pm on Tuesday 25 April 2023
- Election Day is Thursday 4 May 2023 between the hours of 07.00am and 10.00pm
- The verification and counting of votes will take place after the close of poll on Thursday 4 May 2023 at Aintree Racecourse (Bootle and Sefton Central wards) and Dunes Leisure Centre (Southport Ward)
- The counting of parish council ballot papers will take place at Aintree on Friday 5 May 2023

## **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 a Court of Appeal case.

The team includes a Policy Officer responsible for undertaking reviews of policy, procedures and guidance and introduce new policies as required in line with current legislation. The officer is 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.

Team members are responsible for the production of Agenda and minutes in relation to the Joint Trade Union meetings held on a 2 week cycle.

### **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 (MPF) to resolve. The last file to be sent was for May 2022. A meeting was held with MPF and MHR and meetings have been held and Sefton are currently working on a 7-month return from June to December 2022 which can be submitted to MPF in January 2023 and this will enable Sefton to get up to date.

Teachers Pensions Monthly data collection (MDC) moves to Monthly Contribution Reconciliation (MCR) has been delayed until 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 has been agreed and is being processed in December 2022 pay. The Teachers pay award has also been agreed backdated to 1<sup>st</sup> September 2002 and again is being processed in December 2022.

## **Children's Services**

HR continue to provide a business support model to Children's Social Care during their improvement Journey. HR sits within the membership of the project board for both International Recruitment, which is underway and progressing, and Residential Homes which is currently considering the possibility of opening additional in-house residential care. The Myspace team creation and Business Support review are nearing implementation with HR supporting fully in the final stages of the process. Maintenance of the establishment remains ongoing and imperative to respond to the recruitment and retention Challenges. HR working closely with the department on the introduction and implementation of the amended Recruitment and Retention incentives as approved by Cabinet on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2023, these incentives alongside a review of Recruitment Processes within Sefton, is aimed at responding positively to the workforce challenges that Children Social Care and Education continue to face. It remains an interesting and exciting time and HR will continue to provide the highest level of guidance and support as they the Service moves upwards on its improvement journey.

## **Health Unit**

During December 2022 and January 2023, a total of 130 referrals for SMBC employees were made to the Health Unit. This is an increase of 14.04% when compared to the same period in the previous 12 months in which there were 114 referrals.

Referrals during this latest period included Education Excellence (61.54%), Operational -In-House Services (10.00%) and Children's Services (8.46%). As usual the main reasons were stress and mental health related (46.15%), chronic medical illness (15.38%) and musculoskeletal (13.08%).

Demand for mental health support continues to dominate referrals which only serves to reflect the situation within the local community and countrywide. Referrals of this nature to the Unit area are a mixture of personal and work circumstances both of which exacerbate each other and are difficult to disentangle in many cases. The Unit endeavours to ensure that employees are afforded support as soon as availability allows.

## **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.  
We have now completed Phase 1 of the Race Equality LCR Training Programme. The total number of staff who attended was 145– 70 for non-managers and 75 for managers. 64.44% of available places (225). 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. The target date for completion is 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.
- Developed a **Personalisation Survey** to find out how Adult Social Care have progressed in their Personalisation journey. The aim is to find out how learning is being embedded into everyday practice and any challenges experienced in doing so.

## 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 took place on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> December 2022, and we received excellent feedback from those who attended. The Service Manager session is scheduled to take place on 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> April 2023.
- Finished designing a team building session for Children's Services Service Managers, to be delivered on 31<sup>st</sup> 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. Target date for completion is 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.
- There are two care experienced young people on apprenticeships (1 doing Teaching Assistant Level 3 at Holy Family High) (1 doing Heavy Vehicle Maintenance Level 3 in the depot).
- We are working with the Leaving Care Team to develop a training programme for Care Leavers. This will grant Care Leavers access to selected Mandatory Training courses to provide them with foundation skills and knowledge in each topic. Care leavers will also have access to many other online courses, including external courses provided by Matrix in budget management, voting and LinkedIn.

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**

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, the review of Business Support and process mapping,.

## **Procurement**

It is 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 attending 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**

In February last year (2022), Sefton Council launched a refreshed version of its corporate website. The upgraded site presents a modern, customer friendly design, incorporating imagery of the borough, icon led pages and the integration of the My Services customer experience portal. The upgraded Council website has an accessibility score of 'Good' (67%), from 'Poor' (39%) – this score is set to improve again when further improvements are completed. Improvements to the site will also include a My Sefton news microsite integrated into the homepage, the ability to choose more services from the homepage and an alert banner for breaking news.

The Comms Team has created and launched a Sefton-specific campaign aimed at raising awareness of the need for photo ID when voting in the upcoming elections. The iDeal time campaign is the only local campaign in Merseyside, with all other Local Authorities choosing to simply utilise the national campaign materials.

The Comms team were involved with the announcements of the resignation of the Director of Children's Services and Council Chief Executive, this included follow up media interest, and will continue to support in the recruitment campaigns.

The Mayor's Toy Appeal in 2022 was the most successful to date, thanks in part to the support and activity of the communications team in promoting the appeal.

Members of the team were also present at the Freedom of the Borough ceremony, and generated lots of interest in the social media posts and press release.

The team are now finalising details of the key messages and infographics in anticipation of approval of the 2023/24 budget.

Comms support is being provided to the Sefton Women's Network as they plan to mark their 1-year anniversary, and International Women's Day, on 8<sup>th</sup> March.

The Comms team has already initiated discussions with colleagues from across the Council in relation to any plans to mark the coronation of King Charles III and how we can best support our communities in their plans.

## **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 are currently supporting Children's Services with the preparation for the Ofsted Monitoring Visit.

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 has successfully recruited to vacant posts to address the issue.

Council has recently approved a refreshed Consultation and Engagement Framework.

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.