

CABINET MEMBER UPDATE REPORT		
Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills)		
<i>COUNCILLOR</i>	<i>PORTFOLIO</i>	<i>DATE</i>
Ian Moncur	Health and Well Being	February 2023

GREEN SEFTON

Overview

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

It is clear that several areas of the service are struggling to meet expectations / basic standards within resources available and efforts are being made to address this. This has resulted in further increase in complaints, and negative press coverage for several areas of the service in 2022/23.

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

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

- the 500k Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier funding for conservation works over the next 5 years along the coast was accepted in February 2022

- a major bid for Botanic Gardens is in early development, with a Task Group set up (chaired by Cabinet Member, and with ward councillors and community reps), and approval to consult publicly given at the Consultation and Engagement Panel in March 2022. Further, a successful pre-development bid to the HLF has provided resource and capacity to lead and deliver this consultation in Winter 2022/ Spring 2023, and to undertake the required surveys and analysis etc, all in order to be able to make a bid some time afterwards (whenever match funding has been secured). In the last quarter, a consultant has been appointed to give capacity and expertise to launching this consultation in November, and further efforts are taking place on the pre-development work to understand the scale and scope of the project also.

- consultation has been completed for the allocation of 'legacy' monies left for Hesketh Park in a residents will, and cost estimate / details for priority projects have been developed and a contract is being drafted with the trustees to formalise this suite of projects to be developed and delivered
- Cabinet gave formal approval to seek tenders for the future investment in Southport Golf Links in March 2022. Tenders for both the While House Café building, and the course itself remain in development
- the FCERM team continue to work with the Environment Agency and other partner agencies on seeking capital monies to reduce flood risk.

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

What is performing well

The 2022 Annual Review was presented to an Informal meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny (regeneration and skills) committee in October, and with a formal presentation at the November meeting. This was well received, and outlined some of the successes for the service in the last year, and also explained some of the challenges. A narrated version of the presentation has been uploaded on the website here: www.sefton.gov.uk/greensefton

This will be promoted via a newsletter which was shared in the community, with all ward councillors, with our 'Friends of' and other volunteer groups, sports clubs and leagues, other landowners and partner agencies including statutory and government bodies as part of launching the Service Vision refresh early in 2023.

Highlights from the last quarter include:

- The service continues to work in partnership with many other organisations, partner agencies, and of course fundamentally our communities – supporting around 40 'Friends of', In Bloom and other volunteer groups, together with 300+ sports clubs and leagues that utilise our facilities;
- The service co-ordinated the In Bloom competition again this year, with 37 awards being received, and Southport winning Gold, and its category for Large Coastal resort
- The development of a Coast and Visitor Areas PSPO was a new item added to the services work programme this year – approved at Full Council in July, this will enable better management of visitor behaviour, and address anti social behaviours in the designated locations. Officers are now in discussion with other land owners and the emergency services to ensure a 'one coast/ one sefton' approach to rolling this out, incl engagement and enforcement. This work was also nominated in the MJ Journal awards, the results of which will be announced later in 2023.
- Bootle Driving Range is now operational and exceeding initial expectations, albeit with some operational challenges that the service are learning from (including an international shortage of range balls)
- The suite of short term improvement works to Ainsdale Gateway continue to progress; a project management consultant has been engaged to deliver a full refurbishment of the toilet block (including the reintroduction of shower and

drinking water facilities, together with the creation of a Changing Places unit within the improved building. The off beach car park has been delayed, in order to allow more time to undertake the ecological surveys and assessments required to gain Planning Permission.

- The Visitor Action Plan for 2022 has been reviewed. The Multi Agency Group with other landowners and emergency services etc. continue to meet and are now planning for the upcoming 2023 season, which will again include a pre, mid, and post season briefing will all coastal ward councillors.

What requires improvement and what action is being taken

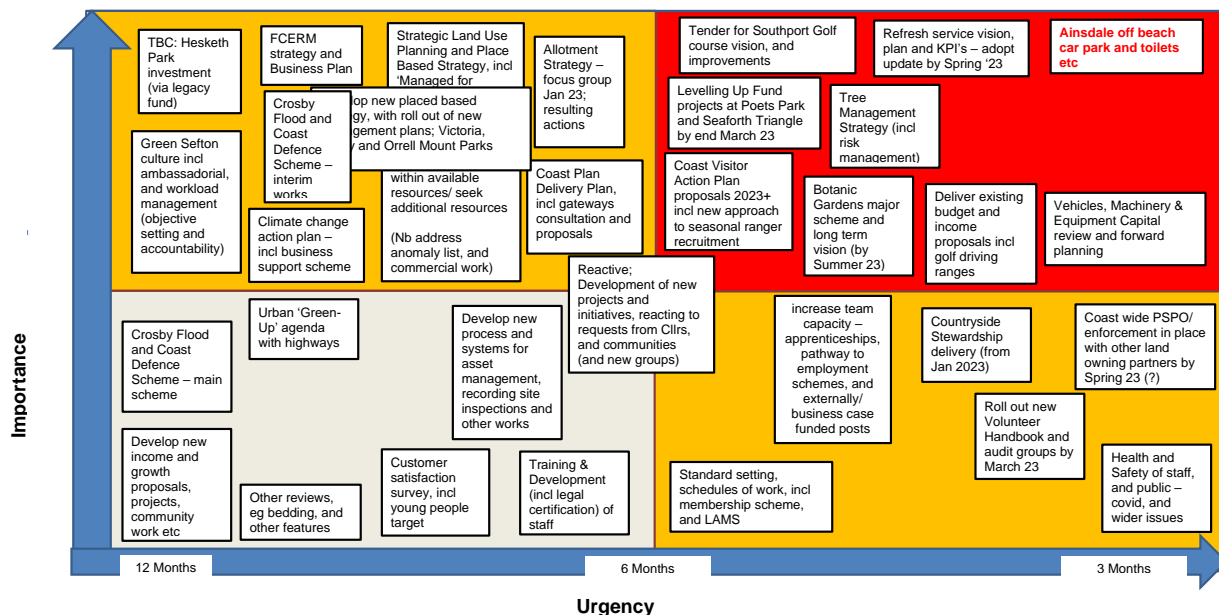
Overall work programming

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

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

GREEN SEFTON STRATEGIC WORKLOAD MATRIX – as presented to O+S Oc/ Nov 22, and updated 25.11.22, and 10.2.23

(to be reported to Cabinet Member on a regular basis, and updated through the year)



Working with Volunteers

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

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

The first draft of this refresh was discussed with Cabinet Member at the April 2022 meeting, and following comments received (including those from CVS, legal and personnel colleagues), the final version was approved by Cabinet Member in September. This has now been shared with all volunteer groups, with a request that they sign up to the updated document, and expectations contained therein.

Defining Standards

As part of addressing some of the frustrations from the community referred to above, we have also instigated a piece of work to define our maintenance service standards that we are currently resourced to provide. This is initially being prioritised on the inland parks and greenspaces maintenance aspects of the service, but team leaders are working up thoughts on defining standards across wider areas too. The first draft of this new document was shared with Cabinet Member at the April 2022 meeting, and final amendments are being made before releasing this in the coming months.