

CABINET MEMBER UPDATE REPORT

Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills)

Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
John Fairclough	Cabinet Member Locality Services	March 2023

Port Access

- The new double track section of the rail line at the Port entrance has been operational since September 2021. Improvements to signalling at Earlestown West are included in the works associated with transferring the control of signals from Warrington to Manchester, which is not due to happen until 2029.
- There is little change in the progress of the Port of Liverpool Access scheme. National Highways have confirmed that they are concentrating on updating their traffic modelling to take account of the impact of changes in traffic patterns resulting from Covid. They have confirmed in their latest update, from July 22, that 'this detailed and important work is likely to take approximately 12 months to complete' and therefore they will not be in a position to publish an updated project timeline, including when they intend to formally consult the local community and the wider general public their proposals, until this traffic modelling work is completed. The statutory public consultation needs to be undertaken in advance of the DCO application to the Planning Inspectorate. This is unlikely to take place until late 2023 at the earliest.

LTP and Growth Plan

- Sefton is continuing to work with the LCR Combined Authority/Merseytravel and the other local authorities on the delivery of the transport capital programme. The Council is currently on target to achieve the agreed spend in Year 1 of the programme despite the challenges the increased settlement has created. Recruitment for new staff to help deliver the programme is ongoing.
- Consideration has been given to a programme for 23-24 and beyond to ensure there are no delays in delivery. This programme will be agreed by the LCRCA in March 2023 after which a formal Capital Programme Report will be presented to Cabinet Member for approval.
- **Low Carbon Strategy:** In response to the Council's climate emergency declaration and an increased focus on active travel measures, work is continuing on the development of Low Carbon Transport Strategy for the borough. Some initial baselining work has been completed and a report completed. This, and proposals for future engagement, will be shared initially with Members in advance of Full Council in April. The consultants are also identifying the next steps, which will include an engagement exercise. Progress is also being made on the development of an Active Travel and E-mobility Strategies for the Borough.

- In order to identify potential improvement to the Councils walking and cycling network a local cycling and walking infrastructure plan is being developed. Proposals for stakeholder engagement were presented to the Consultation and Engagement Panel in early November. A number of engagement sessions were held with specific interest groups and some initial plans developed for helping inform the engagement process. Detailed plans for further engagement are being developed.
- **Southport Eastern Access and Maritime Corridor Business Cases:** The detailed design work is now progressing on both schemes and the final drawings will be included within the Full Business Case submission as requested by the LCRCA. Part of the Maritime Corridor scheme is likely to be funded from the Levelling Up Fund, following the success of the transport bid. There is some pressure to have the scheme delivered as soon as the FBC is approved, and therefore procurement options are being examined. It is expected that LUF projects will be delivered by March 25. Some further engagement to ensure that local Members, businesses and residents are sighted on the proposals and have an ability to shape them is planned for May and June 2023. Ward Members will receive a briefing on both schemes shortly.
- **A59 Junctions:** Design work is continuing on improvements at the junctions of Kenyon's Lane and at Hall Lane on the A59 Northway, these will be developed in the context of a wider improvement of the cycle route between Switch Island and Robins Island. A package of funding including Government grant funding for improvements to traffic signals, developer contributions and Sefton transport capital programme will be used to deliver these improvements. ATE are supportive of the project and are encouraging the Council to consider the link to the wider communities and the potential for improvement east and west on the A59. Discussions will have been undertaken with local Ward Members and Maghull Town Council on the details of both schemes and further consultation with the wider public is programmed.
- **Scarisbrick Avenue:** In Southport, improvements to Scarisbrick Avenue in conjunction with the Townscape Heritage Initiative have been completed, including the installation of lighting. Some defect works are planned for completion in January February 2023.
- **Southport Town Deal:** Preliminary Design work on the first phase of public realm project identified within the Southport Town Deal (*Les Transformation de Southport*) has largely been completed. Materials have been proposed and will shortly be signed off, with the detailed design phase started. Targeted consultation with local businesses has been completed and comments have been incorporated within the detailed design. Works has commenced on the review of further phases and some consideration has been given to potential changes to traffic movements to ensure greater pedestrian connectivity.
- **Crosby Town Centre:** Works has commenced on the detailed design of the highway works which will support the development proposed for the Green Car Park. The works are aimed at reducing severance and improving access to the town centre. Discussions are ongoing with relevant authorities over the phasing of the works.
- **Bootle Town Centre:** - Initial work has also been commissioned to review access to the Strand in Bootle, in order to help shape initial work associated with the re-imagining of the centre. A Transport Framework is being established, some detailed work is programmed to look at the servicing of the Strand and some Master planning work will be completed looking at parking and bus waiting facilities.

Local Transport Schemes

- An updated version of the Transportation Capital Programme for 2022/23 will be submitted to Cabinet Member for approval in February.

Sustainable Transport

- **Crosby Coastal Park:** The proposals for a new pedestrian and cycle route through Crosby Coastal Park were not approved by the Council's Planning Department despite the public consultation indicating overall support and safety concerns being addressed by officers. The funding allocated to the scheme will not now be spent. The concern remains over the lack of lighting for people walking to the Lake House at night. Measures will be examined with a view to addressing this.
- **Formby By-pass:** The Department for Transport had previously confirmed that the funding secured through tranche 2 of the Active Travel Fund can be used for proposals to improve the cycle and walking facilities on part of the Formby Bypass. Work commenced on 13 February. Completion is due in early summer 2023.
- **Revenue funding** received from the Active Travel Fund for the development of projects capable to improving cycling and walking throughout the borough. Works is currently progressing the A59 cycleway, the remainder of the A565 corridor to complement the improvement to the links identified above, junction on the A565, including Woodvale and the development of a Local Walking and Infrastructure Plan to compliment the City Region Strategic Plan. Further revenue money has been bid for to continue this work.
- **School Streets:** Consultation work has been undertaken on three School Street Pilot schemes in Southport. The proposals have been reported and a decision is awaited. Funding has been secured to develop other school streets initiatives throughout the borough and a dedicated officer, seconded from Sustrans, has recently commenced the selection and engagement work. A priority list of 10 schools has been chosen for further engagement.
- **Green Bus Corridor:** The LCRCA have commissioned consultants to commence works on the Green Bus Corridor, which includes the consideration of proposals for Bus Priority and active travel on the No 53 bus corridor which includes Stanley Road. Initial proposals have been identified and shared with officers. These plans are being reviewed.
- **Great Georges Road:** A finalisation to the previous cycle lane scheme along Great Georges Road has been agreed and the designs are being completed.
- **Ainsdale Car Park:** In conjunction with the Green Sefton team the design and procurement for a new car park has been completed and tenders will be sought when the various environmental concerns have been addressed. This is expected to be in Autumn in 2023.

Highway Development Control

Planning Applications

- The team continue to process large numbers of planning applications despite ongoing challenges associated with the recent turnover in staffing resources, increased by the fact that no suitable applications were received for the vacant senior highway development engineer post. The applications include sites identified in the Local Plan and continue to involve close liaison with case officers from the planning department. A total of 117 applications have been responded to in December and January 2022/23.

Section 38 Highways Act 1980 legal agreements

- Submissions for s38 agreements have continued requiring the subsequent processing of these at times, lengthy and complex applications, particularly following the approval of planning applications for Local Plan sites.
- The report is as follows: -
 - No of live s38 and current developments subject to a s38 application – 45
 - No of stalled or no activity (on the part of a developer) – 2 where the developer appears to have ceased trading
 - Number of development sites adopted within the last 3 months - 0
 - No of submissions awaiting technical approval – 22
 - Number of new and recent submissions awaiting administrative set up – 1

Section 278 Highways Act 1980 legal agreements

- The numbers of this type of application also remains high, including the approval of planning applications for Local Plan sites. The team are currently managing 69 live s278 HA 1980 highway works schemes in various stages of development on behalf of the Council. The successful delivery of these schemes is dependent on close liaison with the Legal, Finance and Planning Departments.

Public Rights of Way (PROW)

- England Coast Path/Coastal Access - the delivery of the establishment works are continuing but as a result of delays with stretches of the route within Lancashire County Council, alterations to the contract rates add additional works required by Natural England, completion of the works has been delayed until the summer.

Strategic Highways Development and Future Planning

- The team is continuing to work closely with the Planning Department to provide a strategic approach to development to ensure that the necessary new transport infrastructure is in place to support new developments coming forward in future years.
- The team continues to request construction traffic management plans for new developments so that we can manage the highway network efficiently and effectively

with minimum disruption to users of the highway and with the important benefit of highway safety. Once plans have been agreed, the team is collaborating closely with colleagues in network management and planning to ensure that the plans are being adhered to.

Highway Asset Management

Winter Maintenance

- As of 23rd February, we have gritted the carriageways on 47 occasions and the footways 27 times.
- We have had further deliveries of salt in the last week, which ensures that we have now have enough capacity for the remainder of the season.
- Regular financial updates are still being provided to monitor expenditure against the designated budgets.

Street Lighting LED retro fit scheme

- We are now concentrating on replacing the high wattage lamps, in order to maximise energy savings earlier in the programme.
- Orders have been raised and the contractor is expected to begin this phase of works in the next few weeks.

Traffic signals LED retro fit scheme

- The contract has now been signed and an order has been raised for the traffic signals LED scheme.
- We are currently waiting on a detailed programme from the contractor, but we are anticipating that work will commence this financial year.
- The Traffic signals LED scheme will also reduce our energy consumption and provide carbon savings, as well as reducing on-going maintenance costs.

Highway Maintenance

- This year's maintenance resurfacing programme will be completed by the end of March, as forecast.
- Officers are currently working through the maintenance budgets to try and identify savings for the next financial year.

Operational In-House Services

Catering & Building Cleaning Services

Building Cleaning:

Many schools are in the process of reviewing and setting their budgets for 2023/24.

With schools finding their funding stretched more than ever before, in order to balance their budgets, some schools are reviewing their options regarding cleaning provision.

For 2023/24 labour costs will rise by an estimated 14.5% compared to what was charged to schools in 2022/2023. The 2022/23 pay award afforded cleaning staff an increase of over 10%, and we have been advised to build in an estimated 7.5% increase in to costs for 2023/24. Typically, labour costs account for over 90% of the cost of a cleaning contract. Therefore, it is inevitable that with rising labour costs, costs to schools will increase sharply.

In recent years, more schools have moved towards a term time only service with a summer clean, in order to reduce costs. It is anticipated that this trend will continue in 2023/24.

Officers are working with our partners in schools to creatively address the problems they are facing but also supporting staff through what can be an unsettling time. Recruitment of staff remains very difficult in certain parts of the Borough with some posts receiving no applications, causing operational difficulties. It is hoped that the pay award will make such roles more attractive to potential applicants.

Catering:

The service faces the same financial issues as the Building Cleaning Service as regards increasing labour costs at a time when school budgets are so tight.

We are in discussions with several schools regarding the cost of their service for 2023/24, with schools raising significant concerns about being able to afford to remain with our service.

In addition to increased labour costs, food costs remain a significant concern. Price increases from suppliers have already been absorbed and there is every likelihood that further increases will follow in 2023/24

As a member of the TUCO purchasing framework, we are as well placed as we can be to ensure that any future increases are not only justified but also fairly reflect the increases that food producers and distributors are having to bear.

We are also working closely with our operational staff to ensure that they are taking all the necessary steps to reduce food waste.

The current provider of fresh fruit and vegetables to the service has informed us that from March 2023, they will no longer be providing a service to the education sector.

Using the TUCO framework agreement, an alternative supplier has been sourced at no additional cost to the service.

The service is planning to procure an Electronic Communication, Payment and Kitchen Management System, which would enable it to operate in a more efficient manner.

The service has manual systems in place for many of its functions such as menu planning, providing allergen information, the recording of food safety data, providing financial information to schools, the production of management information & the ordering of food.

School kitchens do not currently have access to any electronic communication systems such as email or MS Teams. All communication with the management team and other kitchens is via the telephone and/or site visits. The service was badly exposed during the Covid-19 outbreak when the required speedy and regular communication with kitchen staff was not possible.

The lack of Electronic Communication, Payment and Kitchen Management System results in officers spending excessive time on relatively straight forward tasks.

An Electronic Communication, Payment and Kitchen Management System would benefit all key stakeholders, schools, parents, pupils and catering staff and options for this technology to be procured are now being explored.

The catering section are continuing to support The Council's Obesity strategy. The Service Manager chairs the Live Well subgroup, which is charged with reviewing and refreshing the Council's work to ensure compliance with Food Active's Healthy Weight Declaration accreditation.

Transport & Vehicle Maintenance

The service has recently received a visit by the HSE. It was an unannounced visit to inspect the garage area and workshop.

The Inspector also checked the LOLER inspection regime of equipment and confirmed we are compliant in our processes. They also took the opportunity to speak to a number of Union Officials on site to ensure there were open and accessible lines of communication with Management on site to inform or highlight any H&S concerns.

The Inspector was fully satisfied with the current lines of communication and the open and transparent relationship between both parties on site.

School Crossing Service

The service has recruited 3 new Patrols so far this year. These staff will replace 2 leavers from January and fill 1 of the 11 vacancies currently within the service. Recruitment, whilst difficult, is ongoing.

During January and February, a number of schools have participated in the 'Community Helpers Scheme'. This is an activity in primary schools concentrating on individuals within the local community who provide help and assistance to others.

The School Crossing Patrol staff play a vital role within the community and as such are always asked to attend schools to provide guidance and information for classes and small groups. They also perform activities for the children to engage in. These include role play with a full children's SCP uniform. The children always enjoy the event and it helps to promote the serious message of safety when crossing the road and the importance of using the Patrol.

Burials and Cremations

The service continues to perform well and the staff restructure of 2022 is well embedded.

The service continue to work with Green Sefton to seek improvements to the grounds maintenance provision at all sites and this will be given the relevant focus throughout the grass maintenance season commencing April.

Alternative options for memorial provision are being explored to ensure that there is an affordable offer for all.

Sefton ARC & Careline

The Service has recently benefited from significant ICT improvements which is an on-going project in conjunction with the Council's ICT provider.

Careline: The service continues to work with Adult Social Care to review the service offer that is currently in place and ensure it continues to be fit for purpose and aligned to the technology enabled care agenda.

Specialist Transport Unit

School routes have increased over this past year and there are now up to 16 routes, transporting a total of 114 SEND children to and from school.

The service was provided to Adult Social Care throughout the Christmas 4 day shutdown period to all ASC Day Centres, also providing Bank Holiday transport for service users who were attending Choices Day Centre, who cater for people who have dementia providing continuity and a well-deserved respite for their partners/carers.

Waste Management

The service is continuing to move in the right direction and has recently undertaken a recruitment drive with numerous vacancies on the collection teams filled. This has created resilience within the service and has allowed the resolution of the long standing issues that had previously been faced around capacity to accommodate staff annual leave.

The Christmas period was hugely successful, the collection teams all worked together and maintained collections right throughout the Christmas period with minimal impact to residents and their collections.

Strategically, the Assistant Director continues to attend the LCR Strategic Waste Partnership for future planning regarding the implementation of the waste related aspects of the Environment Act 2021 which is gathering pace.

Street Cleansing

The weed control programme completed it's last spray in October 2022 and will commence the first spray in early Spring 2023. An inspection process was formed to ensure evidence of 'die back' of weeds approximately 10-14 days following scheduled spray. This proved successful in many aspects however, the service will continue to monitor the situation

stringently and will be working closely with the contactor to improve weed control Boroughwide.

The service has introduced new zonal working arrangements for the rear entry teams. Each team have been allocated a zone and they work exclusively within that zone taking ownership and ensuring its continuous maintenance. Feedback received since implementation of zonal arrangements has been positive.

The service is currently undergoing a recruitment drive which will see a number of vacancies filled over the coming weeks and will add much needed capacity to the current operation.