

Cabinet Member Brief
Overview & Scrutiny Committee
(Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)

13 June 2023.

Welfare Reform & Anti-Poverty Update

The Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Cabinet Member Reference Group met on 26th April 2023. The following updates were received:

Updates from the Welfare Reform & Anti-Poverty Steering Group

Officers from Public Health provided an update from the Partnership Steering Group meeting held on 13th April 2023.

The Cost-of-Living Crisis was discussed. Updates included:

- A warm space update. During October 2022, grant funding totalling £73,000 was awarded to 24 organisations to deliver Warm Space sessions across 32 sites in Sefton throughout the winter period. During the reporting period, 698 Warm Space sessions were held.
- Officers from the DWP advised eligible individuals are entitled to up to 3 Cost of Living Payments of £301, £300 and £299 if they get any of the following benefits or tax credits:
 - income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
 - income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
 - Income Support
 - Pension Credit
 - Universal Credit
 - Child Tax Credit
 - Working Tax Credit

The payment will be made separately from their benefit payments. People will not get a payment if they are only getting New Style ESA, contributory ESA, or New Style JSA.

The first payment is due between 25th April-7th May.

- Sefton Officers reported that the open access support fund application opened in January 2023 and closed in March 2023, with over 1100 applications and made payments of £150,000. The 2023/2024 application is now live with a continuation process, currently taking applications.

Period Poverty - A Sefton Update

Cabinet Members received an update regarding Period Poverty in Sefton. Sefton currently offers sanitary products at a cost via vending machines, the aim is to get stock in all Sefton spaces and then to look at how we can make it free through

charitable donations to cover the cost of stock. Leisure and community staff exploring how this could be delivered and more affordable.

Sustainable Food

The Executive Director shared the Sustainable Food report with members. The report was commissioned by the combined authority.

Community Pantry Update

Cabinet Members received an update regarding Community Pantries. A report was shared with members, the report includes more case studies to illustrate the impact of interventions. The Councils Communities team will be taking over the facilitation and management of the Foodbank and Pantry Network from CVS. The aim is to ensure the sustainability of the food banks and pantries by sharing best practices, embedding ICT support, and enhancing funding opportunities.

The report highlights South Sefton foodbank increased by 40%, and North Sefton is up 26%. This is despite having a range of pantries across the borough. This presents a significant challenge in supporting the community.

Foodbanks are not reporting any significant stock issues, apart from infant formula. Local reports suggest families are finding the costs of infant formula prohibitive. Breast-feeding rates are low but have seen improvement in the last few years. Sefton has a duty of care to its mothers and ensures formula is used appropriately, while still promoting breastfeeding.

Sefton Child Poverty Launch Event

Officers from the Public Health Team updated Cabinet Members on the Sefton Child Poverty follow-up event. The conference takes place on 29th June 2023.

A save-the-date notification has been sent to guests. The formal event will start at 1:30pm. Provider marketplace will occur so a good networking opportunity.

Speakers include Deputy Chief Executive of CVS who will discuss early years and accessible and affordable childcare. LJMU Professor Joe Yates who will cover access to education and the links through health, transport, and employment. Sefton's executive directors will cover social value, procurement from a place perspective and how we can build community wealth and regeneration through training and employment opportunities.

Sefton Council Housing - cost of living challenges

Cabinet Members received an update on the cost-of-living crisis and how it is affecting housing. It was reported that Sefton is seeing a high level of homelessness. The housing Options team is supporting those under the threat of homelessness.

The team is collaborating positively with Homes England, discussing funding for temporary accommodation, and ensuring safe, high quality and low-cost temporary accommodation.

Members were aware that although numbers rough sleeping in Sefton is small, outreach work is still ongoing. Other homelessness initiatives include Housing First Initiative, which provides wrap-around accommodation for potential rough sleepers with complex needs. This initiative has been shortlisted for Northwest Housing Awards.

Other grants include the Social Housing Decarbonization Fund which saw the City Region being awarded £31.7m on top of £11.1m which was approved in 2022.

Sefton Council has employed two full-time officers to enforce MEES (the minimum energy efficiency standard) regulation in private sector properties.

Warm Hubs

Cabinet Members received an update on Sefton Warm Hubs. Both Warm Hubs and the Sefton Winter Clothes project is funded through household support fund. A spend profile has been agreed upon, ensuring Sefton now has an annual programme rather than a six-month program.

Sefton Council has confirmed with CVS an extension of Warm Hubs and Winter Clothes. This will change from Warm Hubs to Welcome Hubs for the summer period and will extend into providing access to swimming costumes and targeted initiatives through holiday activity-funded programs and free school meal vouchers.

ELAS Update

Cabinet Members received an update on ELAS performance for the Council's local welfare support scheme. It was reported that ELAS volumes are very high, but manageable from an operational perspective averaging around 200 applications each week with the majority of ELAS applications seeking support for utilities.

January 2023 saw over 15,000 ELAS applications annually, compared to the end of January 2022 at just over 7000 applications. 5200 support requests for food provision saw an increase of 41% compared to 2022. 811 Utility support requests were made, this has risen by 41%, a large increase in all areas and averaging 300 applications a week

Requests for Action

None noted