

<b>CABINET MEMBER REPORT 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	July - August 2023

### **Financial Management**

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

Following the approval of the 2023/24 budget, budget adjustments have been incorporated into each service's budget to form the initial budget for the year. This has been loaded into the Council's Financial Management System.

The Council's revenue outturn position has been finalised and was reported to Cabinet in July - the overall position was balanced with no call on the Council's General Balances. The position was reported alongside the Capital outturn position and performance information for 2022/2023.

The first budget monitoring position, as at the end of June, was also reported to Cabinet in July. This showed a forecast overspend of about £7m, mainly due to a forecast overspend on Children's Social Care (£5m) and the potential impact of the as yet unagreed pay award (an additional £1.5m). There are other budgets under pressure, but the expectation is that services will mitigate these pressures from elsewhere within their budgets. Further work is being undertaken to refine forecasts and updated positions will be reflected in future reports.

A report on the Medium-Term Financial Plan will be presented to Cabinet in September. This will outline the updated position (as reported to Informal Policy Cabinet) as well as provide some narrative on some other financial issues facing the Council.

As reported to Audit and Governance in July, the draft Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 and 2021/22 are still be audited by EY. These audits are close to completion with the hope that the final audit results reports for both years will be presented to Audit and Governance before the end of September 2023. It should be noted that no major issues appear to have been found.

Due to the delays in finalising the audit of the 2020/21 and 2021/22 Statement of Accounts the production of the Statement of Accounts for 2022/23 has been delayed. Officers are in the process of producing the accounts and hope to publish them as soon as possible. The audit of the accounts for 2022/2023 is expected to commence later in the year.

### **Customer Centric Services**

All areas of the service are dealing with high workloads, it remains positive that there continues to be progress in reducing volumes outstanding. It is however acknowledged that work must continue over coming months to further reduce customer waiting times, with clearing work backlogs in Council Tax being the highest priority. However, as at the end of July, the overall outstanding workload has reduced by 32.0% since 1 May 2023.

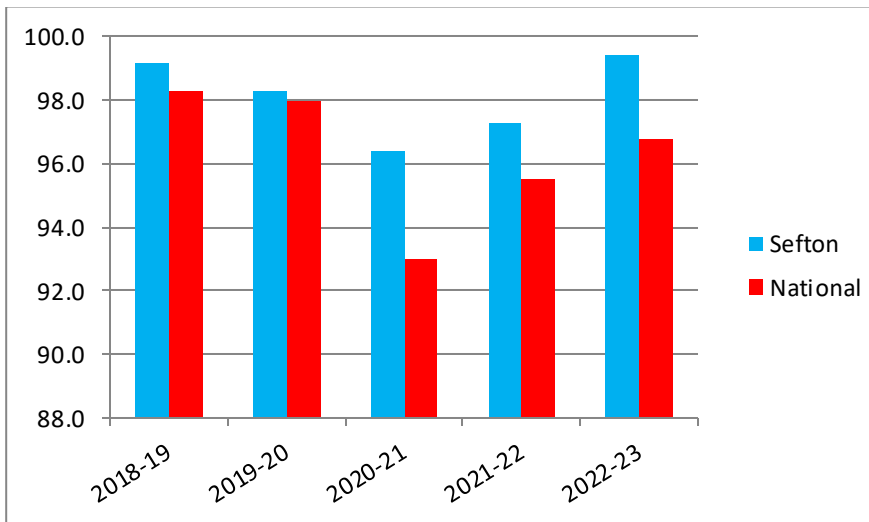
## National Collection Performance 2022/23

The Government released the data on all English councils' Council Tax and Business Rates collection performance for 2022/23 on 21 June 2023. The data analysis shows that Sefton is performing well in relation to other metropolitan councils, and the councils in the Liverpool City Region.

### Business Rates

Sefton was the best performing council of the 36 metropolitan authorities with a published collection rate of 99.4%. Collection improved by 2.1% on the published performance for 2021-22 compared to an average increase of 0.8% amongst metropolitan councils and 1.3% nationally.

Sefton has consistently outperformed against national average collection over the last five years as illustrated in the chart below:

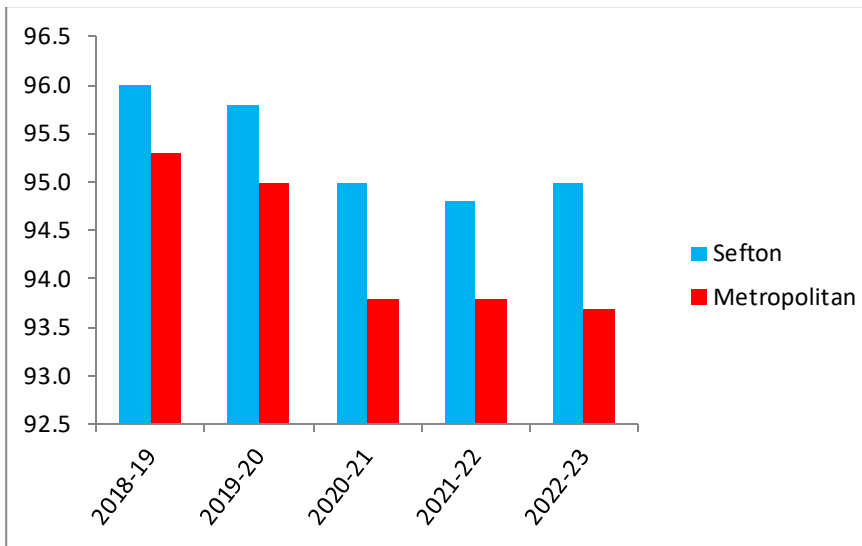


### Council Tax

Sefton's published collection rate was 95.0%. This places Sefton 12<sup>th</sup> amongst metropolitan councils, the same position as 2021/22, maintaining its position as the best performing council in the Liverpool City Region.

Collection improved by 0.2% on the published performance for 2021/22 compared to an average increase of 0.1% amongst metropolitan councils and an average decrease of 0.1% nationally.

Sefton has consistently outperformed against the average collection amongst metropolitan Councils over the last five years as illustrated in the chart below: -

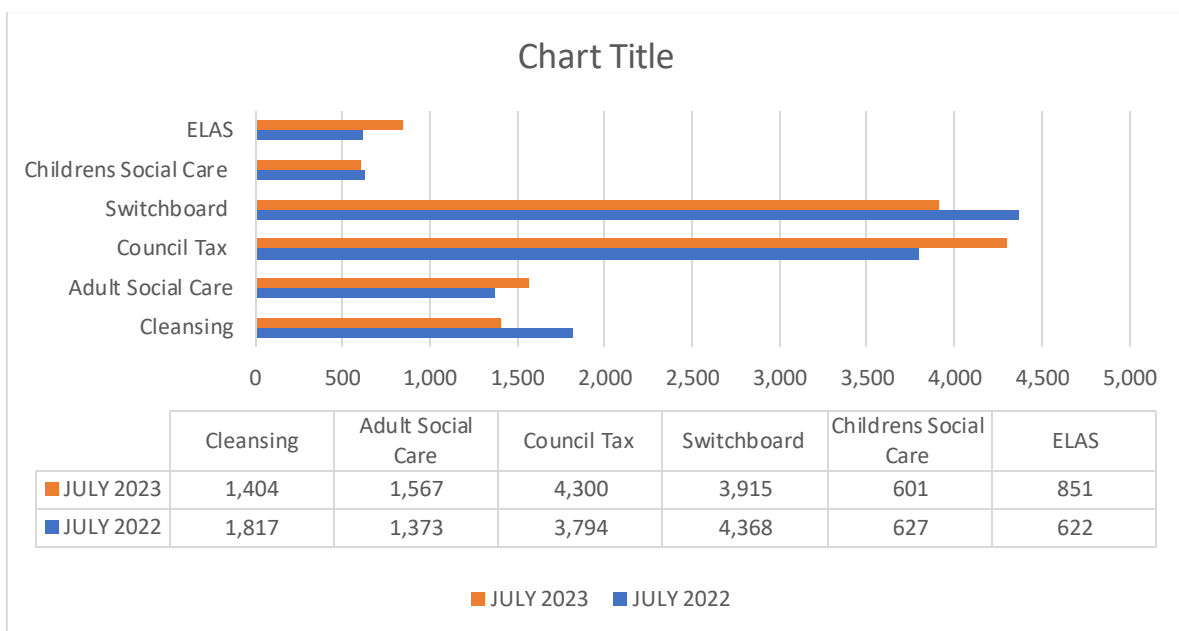


### Customer Services

The Council’s Customer Services Contact Centre is currently answering approximately 18,000 calls each month, which is about 82% of all calls received, with 18% being abandoned.

It should be noted that the salutation message that is relayed at the start of each incoming call continues to encourage customers to use the online Council services if they can, allowing for staff to handle calls for prioritised services, i.e., Children’s Social Care and ELAS, so many customers opt to abandon the call and go online instead.

The table below compares the number of telephone calls that were answered for the high call volume services and prioritised services in July 2022 and July 2023. For the high call volume services, customers calls will always be answered if they are prepared to wait on the line, unless in the very rare circumstances that the emergency message is being relayed.



Council Tax continues to be the busiest service for telephone calls handled by the Contact Centre. Customers seeking financial support is the primary reason for the constant high volumes, however the regular cycle of reminder and summons runs also contributes to high call volumes.

Customer demand at the One Stop Shops continues to be high; in July 2,971 customers attended Bootle One Stop Shop, this included 916 taxi drivers, 277 of which had an appointment and a further 639 “drop-ins”. There were 955 customers who attended with a Council Tax or benefits enquiry and 36 customers were assisted in completing an ELAS application. The remaining 1,064 customers were seeking general council-related advice at reception.

At Southport, 600 customers attended the Atkinson, with 186 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 remains high, enquiries for Social Care and ELAS remain prioritised above all other services that are offered by Customer Services.

### **Taxi-Licensing**

The processing of all Taxi Licensing general enquiry e-mails and new/renewal vehicle plates continues to be very good, with most of the workloads currently being processed within 5 days of receipt.

Progress with New Driver e-mail applications is currently excellent, although this is not reflected with the number of new licences that are being issued each month. Drivers who submit their application are contacted by telephone call in the first instance and are offered an appointment at Bootle One Stop Shop to submit their qualifying evidence. Once the evidence is submitted and checked, they are then offered an appointment for a knowledge test.

Unfortunately, drivers are failing to attend their appointment and there are also drivers failing to attend their knowledge test. This is obviously a significant waste of Council resources; therefore, those drivers are now being asked to resubmit a new application and once received, they go to the back of the waiting list. At the end of the month, a meeting was held with Delta, Sefton’s main taxi operator, they have committed to assisting with preparing their drivers for the appointment and knowledge test.

### **Citizen Access - Revenues**

A project is well underway to introduce a web-based citizen access portal for Council Tax and Business Rates customers to manage their accounts on-line, allowing greater self-serve options. The first phase is expected to go-live in September 2023.

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

The transition to the new Revenues and Benefits NEC document management system continues to go well. In July, 4.8million historical Revenues and Benefits documents were successfully migrated from the Civica electronic document management Revenues and Benefits system. A small number of general documents still need to migrate and then the service will work with the ICT Client team to de-commission the Civica system.

## **Risk and Audit**

The **Internal Audit** team are continuing to work on delivering the 2023/24 internal audit plan with a current focus on reviews of:

- ASC Finance Budget Management
- Sefton New Direction Governance review
- Review of number of Schools.
- Highways Maintenance Procurement
- SHOL Governance review
- Sandway Homes finance review
- Assurance Mapping
- Petty cash

We have continued the recruitment of a permanent staff member in February 2023 however we have not found any suitable candidates so far to interview.

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

- 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 has concluded and the results fed into the Council's insurance tender and September 2023 renewal.
- We have concluded the Council's insurance tender and have selected the successful insurers for each of the lots.
- We have used some of the "free days" as part of the insurance programme risk bursary to provide training for duty holders and manage contractors on site at schools and corporately.
- 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.

## **Risk and Resilience Team.**

We are continuing to develop a Corporate Business Continuity Plan using the existing Service Area Business Continuity (BC) Plans. Following the exercise of the Council's BC arrangements in January 2023 which we have subsequently received feedback on we are currently implementing the recommendations from the review. We have revised the Council's BC Strategy and Policy. The Policy is due to be presented to Cabinet during October 2023.

The **Risk and Resilience Team** are currently rolling out training on the Council's Risk Appetite which was presented to the Audit and Governance Committee in March 2023 as well as facilitating the updates of the Council's Corporate Risk Register for Audit and Governance Committee in September 2023. Other work includes:

- Working with the Merseyside Resilience Forum
- Development of a Shoreline Pollution Plan
- Review of the Council's emergency facilities
- Working on Sefton events

For the **Health and Safety Team** there will be a continued focus during the next quarter of delivering the Health and Safety Improvement Plan.

- 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. Key projects currently in flight relate to support for the Children's Improvement Programme, Customer Services (CXP), Data Centre relocation, Sefton Arc and Leisure ICT Improvements as well as Cyber Security.
- There have been challenges obtaining the larger volumes of ICT KIT required to finish the backfilling of all desks at Magdalen House, however the team are pleased to report that this work is now completed. In addition, devices have been deployed across Southport Town Hall to support the Adult Social Care teams located in this space.
- Data centre rationalisation and right sizing is now completed within the existing Data Centre at St Peters ready for a move to Bootle Town Hall during financial year 23/24. Conversations are ongoing around options for the location of the new data centre, given the complexity of the design, an options paper is in development and due to be finalised within the next couple of weeks.
- 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. This has been slightly delayed due to the need to move one Library which is currently on a direct dial number, this is now completed. The soft cease will be planned in during September to avoid the busy summer weeks and ensure we capture any lines still required.

- The new CXP solution went live across all services in January this year, with the final elements of phase one (migration of legacy processes) nearing completion. There is only one remaining legacy service, Pest Control, to be completed, which is well underway once complete, the legacy CRM system can be formally decommissioned. In terms of phase two, work is now underway to transfer Council eforms to CXP from the legacy eforms system, and work is also starting on the configuration and set up of FOI processes in CXP. Initial scoping of future process builds is being prepared, most notably for Registrars and for internal Establishment Control.
- The website improvement programme work is now completed. Work has commenced on the upgrade of the Umbraco content management system and governance is now in place to manage any web developments moving forwards.
- The ICT Procurement team continue to be busy; the team have successfully closed out several contract awards recently including the Contact Centre Telephony Solution and Capita One. Consultation on the new forward plan has taken place with corporate procurement colleagues and work allocations completed the draft report is now awaiting approval prior to its release.
- 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, in the interim Cabinet have now approved a direct award with Virgin to ensure continuity of the existing service whilst options are reviewed, this contract award will complete in August.
- 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. Work is underway on a full security review linked to Zero Trust networking, with proposals to follow in relation to potential security improvements. During July the team re-visited the Microsoft CSAT assessment and we have seen a marked improvement on our maturity, with the authorities overall score rising from 2.5 from a possible 4 in 2022 to 3.6 this year.
- The drafting of the new Digital Strategy for Sefton has started, with engagement across the Council to develop a proposal document which, following internal approvals, will go out to consultation in Autumn this year.

## **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 developed for approval.
- Assisting with the SEND programme.
- Ongoing work supporting Growth Board projects.
- Ongoing work in connection to lease agreements.

## Maintenance Management & Building Services

- Delivering a range of schemes in support of Corporate Buildings.
- Delivering a range of schemes in support of Education Capital & SEND 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.
- Phase 1 essential maintenance delivery plan for corporate buildings progressing with works ongoing/complete. Looking to source funding for further phases.
- 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 delivery for various Education capital & SEND schemes.
- Provide support to other teams on Asset Disposal, Building Maintenance, Asset Management, Energy and Statutory Compliance colleagues.

## Energy Management

- Sefton Council Retrofit programme (LAD3, HUG) – Providing insulation to privately owned properties (worst/not insulated & for poorest residents 407). This has been extended and the completion date is now September 2023.
- A programme of work to support schools (after large energy price rises) is ongoing.
- Feasibility Study for a Wind turbine is ongoing.
- Sefton have transferred electricity provider. Post 1 April, all Council buildings and streetlights are 100% renewable energy powered.
- Energy prices (gas and electricity) continue to be high, due to the government support having been removed.
- Work on the next phase of the Climate Emergency programme is progressing.

## **Legal Services**

### Democratic Services Team – Overview

#### **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Adult Social Care and Health)**

At the time of drafting this report, the next meeting of the Committee will be held on 5 September 2023 and the following items will be considered at the meeting:

- Liverpool Clinical Services Review
- Domestic Abuse Update
- Report for Information on Vaping Amongst Young People



- GP Patient Survey (2023) - Sefton Place
  - NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Sefton - Update Report
  - NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Sefton - Health Provider Performance Dashboard
  - Executive/Scrutiny Protocol
  - Cabinet Member Update Reports
  - Work Programme Update
- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding)**

At the time of drafting this report, the next meeting of the Committee will be held on 26 September 2023 and it is anticipated that the following items will be considered at the meeting:

- Cabinet Member Reports
- Domestic Abuse
- Report for Information on Vaping Amongst Young People
- Children's Services Improvement Programme
- Children's Social Care Overview of Practice and CHAT
- Executive/Scrutiny Protocol
- Work Programme Key Decision Forward Plan

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

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 19 September 2023. At the time of writing this report the agenda for the meeting has not been published but it is anticipated that the Committee will consider the following items:

- Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority – Service Delivery Plan 2023/24
- Domestic Abuse update
- Riverside Dispersed Accommodation Update
- Winter Maintenance Policy and Operational Plan
- Executive/Scrutiny Protocol
- Work Programme 2023/24, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan
- Cabinet Member reports

Arrangements are being put in place to arrange an informal meeting of the Committee to review the topic of refuse and waste recycling and in respect of this matter a visit will also be arranged to the Gillmoss Recycling Discovery Centre.

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

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 12 September 2023. At the time of writing this report the agenda for the meeting has not been published but it is anticipated that the Committee will consider the following items:

- Customer Contact Centre Activity – Presentation
- Levels of Disciplinary, Grievance, Dignity at Work and Sickness Absence
- Executive/Scrutiny Protocol
- Work Programme 2023/24, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan

- Cabinet Member report
- **Overview and Scrutiny Management Board**  
The next meeting of the Management Board will be held on 12 September 2023. At the time of writing this report the agenda for the meeting has not been published but it is anticipated that the Committee will consider the following items:
  - Overview and Scrutiny Contribution Towards Improvements in Children's Services
  - Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Scrutiny Link - Councillor Howard
  - Strategic Scrutiny in Practice Network and Basecamp
  - Centre for Governance and Scrutiny – Newsletters and Annual Survey
  - Update on Informal Meetings/Working Groups
  - Update on Actions Taken Arising from the Last Meeting
- **Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The next meeting of the of the LCRO&S will be held on 6 September 2023. At the time of writing this report the agenda for the meeting has not been published. An update will be provided as part of the next Cabinet Member report.

The Committee is made up of 3 elected Members from each of the constituent Local Authorities of the LCR Combined Authority, along with one elected Member from both the Liverpool City Region Liberal Democrat Group and the Liverpool City Region Conservative Group.

Sefton's appointed Members are Councillors Desmond, Hart and Howard. Councillor Howard is Sefton's Scrutiny Link.

## **School Appeals**

The Section has continued to organise and clerk school admission appeal hearings and school exclusion reviews.

The busiest time of year in the school appeals calendar for the Clerk to the Education Appeal Panel continued with Primary school hearings commencing on 26 June 2023, and following with final 'wash up' dates dealing with late appeals and in-year transfers hearings which took us through to 18 July 2023 which was the last day of the school term. Between 26 June and 18 July 2023, 94 LEA appeals were listed/heard and 34 Archdiocese (Catholic voluntary aided schools) appeals were listed/heard. This involved 12 days of hearings over the 17-day period and included appeals for 39 different schools.

## **Civic and Mayoral Services**

- The Mayor will be holding Three Charity Nights during her term of office, a Divas Night on 14 October 2023, a 1970s Night on 18 November and the Gala Charity Ball on 6 April 2024. Tickets are now on sale for both the Divas & 70's Nights.
- Work has now commenced on the 2023 Remembrance Sunday Events and operational meetings will be taking place during week commencing 28 August 2023.

## Member Development

### Member Development Programme 2023-2024

The Member Development Programme is now well underway with training being provided to relevant Committee Members.

1. The mandatory Planning Committee Training session took place on 24 May and was well received by Members and Substitute Members of Planning Committee. The session was attended by all of 15 of the Planning Committee Members and 11 of the 15 Substitute members. A special “mop-up” training session took place on 3 July 2023.
2. Mandatory Licensing and Regulatory Committee training took place on 12 June 2023.
3. Overview and Scrutiny Committee training - Democratic Services have been working closely with the LGA for the provision of the following training for Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members:
  - On 30 May 2023 the first of three sessions for Members and Substitutes of Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Children’s Services and Safeguarding took place. The second training session took place on 25 July 2023 and the third session will take place on 2 October 2023.
  - Two training sessions for all Overview and Scrutiny Members and Substitutes were held at Bootle Town Hall on 15 June 2023.
  - Arrangements have been made for the provision of training for all the O&S Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs and for mentoring support for the Chair of the O&S Committee (Children’s Services and Safeguarding).
  - Negotiations are currently underway with the LGA for the provision of dedicated training for O&S Adult Social Care and Health Committee members and substitutes.

Mandatory Corporate Parenting training– Following the return of the Council’s Corporate Parenting Officer, the mandatory Corporate Parenting Course will continue to be provided in-house, supported by the Cabinet Member - Children’s Social Care. During 2023-24 the training will be provided on 4 separate occasions to maximise take-up.

Accessible information training took place on 14 June 2023 and Values and Behaviours – Understanding your Role as a Councillor was held on 18 July 2023.

### Member Development Steering Group

The Member Development Steering Group was established in November 2022. For 2023/24 the Group is comprised of 6 Members met on 23 August 2023.

The Members of the Steering Group act as Member Development Champions for their respective political groups and are responsible for providing feedback on the Member Development Programme.

## **Contract and Commercial**

- Legal support on the Marine Lake Events Centre project: Sefton's internal legal team continue to support Council officers and the Council's appointed external legal advisor on the progression of this project
- Domiciliary Care PDPS: Sefton's internal legal team have assisted on the procurement of a Sefton run Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System for Domiciliary Care which is aiming to go live in September 2023
- Legal Support on the Bootle Strand Regeneration Project Sefton's internal legal team continue to support Council officers and the Council's appointed external legal advisor on the progression of this project
- Children's Residential Care PDPS: Sefton's internal legal team assisted on the procurement and establishment of a Sefton run Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System for Children's Residential Care which went live in July 2023
- Legal Support on the Crosby Library Regeneration Project Sefton's internal legal team continue to support Council officers on the progression of this project
- JCT Build Contract support: Sefton's internal legal team have supported on a number of JCT build contracts covering a range of work from minor works to JCT intermediate with contractor's design. For the financial year 2023/24 to date, this has involved the advising on and completion of 16 separate build contracts. Some of these contracts included more complex arrangements such as the agreement of listed items, performance bonds and a letter of intent to allow a contractor to commence work in advance of contract completion

## **Property**

- The Property team continue to handle a wide and varied caseload of instructions from the Council's estates team for disposals, acquisitions and other property related matters; including
  - the sale of Pavilion Buildings to JD Wetherspoons,
  - lease of Viking Golf Lease to Pleasureland,
  - and the ongoing Meadows / Sandbrook disposal
- Planning matters will continue following the summer with planning committees back on in September, and continuing support to the Highways team in relation to numerous developments in the Borough.

## **Prosecutions**

- The team provided support Council officers and the Council's appointed external legal advisor on the major Uber v Sefton Council litigation
- The team successfully prosecuted a landlord who failed to licence his property from March 2018 – December 2022 (when the property was prohibited due to a fire), he was sentenced to a fine of £35,000, the Council was awarded its full costs

- The team continues to prosecute unlicensed private hire operators and where appropriate revoke private hire driver's licence with some notable recent successes
- The team have advised the licensing sub-committee at four hearings required to be held under the Licensing Act 2003 during July and August. In particular, much time was spent on the review of the Oath Lounge Southport which attracted a lot of media attention
- The debt recovery sub-team continues to recover significant debts owed to the Council

### **Employment**

- The Employment team continue to support Council Officers on a wide range of contentious and non-contentious employment law matters

### **Childrens**

- The Children Adults and Education team remains exceptionally busy given the pressures on the CSC and ASC teams locally and nationally. Children's Social Care are supported by 10 Lawyers, 8 Senior Legal Assistants and 2 legal Assistants. The staffing has increased in the last 2 years to meet the demands and the pressures currently being experienced by Sefton Children Social Services. One of the Lawyers is currently dedicated to advising on discharging care orders to significantly decrease the number of looked after children who have been identified as no longer requiring a public Law order to ensure their safety. The number of children being subject to pre-proceedings has increased with care applications consistently high with court compliance timetables being 26 weeks from application to final order where this is practicable to ensure that the needs of Sefton Children are met in a timely manner.
- The Education SEN Lawyer has seen an increase in the amount of appeals to the SEN tribunal this year, currently 23 appeals compared to 21 for the year 2022 and the Adults team comprising of 2 Lawyers and 1 Senior Legal Assistant are similarly extremely busy with Court of Protection work.

### **Support to Schools**

Legal Services provide advice to Sefton Schools under service level agreements across a range of matters, including employment matters, education related queries, contracts and a variety of other legal matters

### **Registration Service**

- From 1 April to 25 August, 80 less deaths have been registered in Sefton than in the equivalent period in 2022.
- Number of civil ceremonies which have taken place in Sefton's Town Halls and Approved Premises between 1.4.23 and 29.8.23 increased by 53 in comparison to the same period in 2022.

## **PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT**

### **Operational Issues**

Advice and support are provided to all service areas regarding employment/staffing matters.

Predominantly, work issues and support is 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 matters. The challenge continues to be the recruitment and retention of Social Work staff combined with developing improvements in the service area overall. Arrangements are in place to establish a central recruitment team to support the transformation improvements in CSC.

The majority of the HR team are agile working, combining working from home and at office sites as required. HR teams are meeting in Magdalen once a week to maintain contact and social interaction.

Matters relating to disciplinary, grievance and dignity at work continue to be lesser than pre-covid period. Formal meetings continue to be held via Microsoft Teams, although in person meetings are taking place 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 or in person as necessary.

Operational Teams appreciate the need for sensitive advice given the pressures on Employees and the Authority.

### **Pay & Grading, Job evaluation, policy and projects.**

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.

Officers in this team 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.

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. On 15<sup>th</sup> March GMB accepted the Council settlement proposal (which covers a very small proportion of the 580 claims). Officers will make settlement offers in relation to GMB legitimate claims, if the claimants withdraw their ET claims.

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.

### **Health Unit**

1. During the period 1<sup>st</sup> June to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2023, a total of 125 referrals for SMBC employees were made to the Health Unit (HU). This is an increase when compared to the same period in the previous 12 months in which there were 117 referrals.
2. Referrals during this latest period included Education Excellence (43.2%), Children's Services (3.2%), Operational-In-House Services (4.8%), and ASC (6.4%). As usual the main reasons were stress and mental health related (42.4%), chronic medical illness (20%) and musculoskeletal (10.4%).
3. Delivery of all the OH services continue to be offered via a mixture of telephone and video calls, and face-to-face appointments. This arrangement is working extremely successfully, as it enables flexibility for both managers and employees, but consideration is being given to increasing the number of face-to-face appointments following feedback from service providers and managers. However, the HU will continue to triage referrals based on the condition rather than any other factors.

### **Transactional HR Payroll & Pension (THRP) Services**

There are still some issues with Monthly Data Collection (MDC) for the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) which we are working with Midland HR (MHR) to resolve. Sefton are now up to date with submission of files and have submitted the June 2023 file to Merseyside Pension Fund (MPF). .

Teachers Pensions Monthly data collection (MDC) moves to Monthly Contribution Reconciliation (MCR) has been postponed until 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 as the iTrent software has several known issues.

The staff are still learning parts of the new system and there are issues with how long the system is taking to process some records and this has been raised and is being investigated by MHR.

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.

There are now outstanding pay awards from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022 for Soulbury staff and 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 for NJC staff, Councillors and Chief Executive pay.

The Teachers Pay award for 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023 is currently being agreed and is expected to be received around October/November 2023

MHR rolled out MFA (multi factor authentication) and THRP have held drop-in sessions in Bootle, Southport and Hawthorne Road Depot to help staff access ESS.

## **Workforce Learning and Development (CLC)**

### **Apprenticeships**

Staff enrolled on the **Level 6 Social Work Apprenticeship Degree**, **Level 6 Occupational Therapy Degree** and the **Level 7 Senior Leader Apprenticeship Degree programme (MBA)** are continuing with their studies and are making good progress.

We have procured a training provider called Solace who specialises in Public Sector Leadership and Management qualifications to deliver the **Level 5 Operational/Departmental Manager Apprenticeship standard**. The course will be aimed at aspiring Middle Managers/Managers and upon successful completion of the qualification candidates will gain two accredited awards: ILM Level 5 Leadership and Management and Operational/Departmental Manager Standard Apprenticeship. 10 managers from across the organisation applied for the programme all they all gained a place to commence from Monday 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

We are working with an apprenticeship training provider called Multiverse, who specialise in the delivery of data apprenticeships at levels 2,3 and 6. Following a recent data skills analysis of which 545 staff responded, we will be rolling out the **Level 3 Data Technician Apprenticeship standard** from the beginning of September 2023. The course will benefit staff who work with data spreadsheets and forecast business outcomes.

We have launched another higher level apprenticeship called **the Level 6 Environmental Health Practitioner Degree**, and a member of staff from the public health team will join the course the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of September 2023.

### **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 have recently been updated to include the mandatory courses for managers. Additional courses include Sickness Absence and Equality and Diversity for Managers eLearning, Recruitment and Selection, Managing Capability and Managing Disciplinary, Grievance and Dignity at Work virtual classroom sessions. The 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 216 Sefton Council and schools' staff. That is an increase of 6 staff since the previous report.
- **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. To date we have delivered 7 managers sessions and 8 non-manager sessions, total trained is 212 staff. Further sessions for September and October 2023 are currently being planned.
- The development of a **Personalisation Training Programme** for students, ASYEs and for new starters working across Adult Social Care, who have not undertaken this training previously. The target date for completion is 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023.

## **Workforce/Organisational Development**

Other workforce actions include the following:

- We submitted a nomination to Inclusive Companies with the support of the CEG to demonstrate how our E&D training offer has developed and expanded over the previous 3 years.
- Developed a CPD training offer for Children's Services which includes essential training for Social Workers and Managers. This will be reviewed quarterly, and any updates included. This was officially launched on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> July and will be reviewed quarterly.
- Work has commenced work on a CPD offer for Adult Social Care, which includes essential training for all staff who work in this area. Target date for completion is January 2024.
- We worked with the Leaving Care Team to develop a training programme for Care Leavers. Following consultation with the Making a Difference Group, the programme is now and is being made available to all current and former care experienced young people.
- We are worked with HR and Legal to develop a 3 hour Managing Performance Training session. This was an action identified in the Children's Services improvement plan. The aim of the course is to provide managers with the tools to consistently apply performance management across Children's Services, and to recognise their role and contribution to effectively manage performance. To date, we have trained 60 Service/Team Managers, that's an increase of 20 managers since the last report.

## **Strategic Support**

### **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 is also supporting the information requirements for the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan, with a focus on improving the 'drill-through' functionality in new Power BI reports to access client level information.

### **Consultation & Engagement, Complaints and Information Governance.**

The teams continue 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 team is actively recruiting to vacant posts to address the issue.

Working with the Learning & Development team the team has developed Accessible Information eLearning to help all staff to support people in Sefton who have different communication needs. This short and positive course provides learners with the understanding why we must adapt how we communicate and the skills and resources to do it.

Learning outcomes include:

1. Explain what Accessible information is.
2. Understand why we need to provide accessible information.
3. Explain how we can provide different methods of accessible information.
4. Identify what support is available to help employees to make information more accessible.

The project to digitise the Council's historic paper records continues at pace. All legacy records stored at disparate 3<sup>rd</sup> part 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 now completed processing legacy records stored at the former Thomas Gray School site and has begun to review records at Southport Coroner's Office, the former Bootle Play Centre and Beford Road Community Centre.

### **Strategic Support**

The team is now focused to providing support across the various services with policy & strategy development, service reviews and transformation activity, including supporting the Children's Improvement Plan, ([Sefton Children's Improvement Plan Phase 3](#) ). The team recently provided logistical support for the Ofsted Monitoring Visit. Work has begun on the refresh of the Children & Young People Plan, which will require a significant amount of consultation and engagement with children, young people and partner organisations to influence the priorities to be included in the plan for the next three years.

Work has also commenced on the preparation for the Local Government Association Peer Challenge which is scheduled to take place in November 2023.

### **Procurement**

Formal Procurement team engagement meetings continue with Service areas to update the Contract Register; review current workplans and timelines; identify future or prospective projects; and update the Procurement pipeline.

The team is also using these reviews as opportunities to encourage support for our early payment programme and to identify opportunities to incorporate Social Value initiatives.

## **Communications**

The team has seen some personnel changes, most notably the departure of Corporate Communications Manager. Her replacement will join the team in September. Until that time, Communications Team Leader Martin Driver is Interim Corporate Communications Manager while Ollie Cowan is acting up temporarily into Martin's role.

Also, two new additions joined Communications in July. a new Social Media Officer focusing on raising the Council's profile across social media channels and increasing engagement. Plus a Videographer who will be increasing filmed output, in line with the fact that more people, particularly young people, are accessing their news and information through video these days.

The Digital Communications Officer has continued to develop the website and create more microsites to make service easy to find from easy-to-use landing pages. MySefton news is now firmly established and integrated into the Council website giving the team greater control and creativity over how stories are displayed.

The team has continued provide support to colleagues across the Council including on communications in a wide range of areas including developments in Children's Services and Adult Social Care, recent events at Salt and Tar and the Council's participation in Liverpool Pride. We have also been working with Chief Executive Phil Porter as he introduces himself to the organisation.

And Graphic Designers have produced materials for a wide range of projects. They will also be preparing material for the LGA Peer Challenge in November.