

<b>CABINET MEMBER UPDATE REPORT</b>		
<b>Overview and Scrutiny (Regeneration &amp; Skills) report</b>		
<b>COUNCILLOR</b>	<b>PORTFOLIO</b>	<b>DATE</b>
Trish Hardy	Communities and Housing	19 September 2023

### **Cost of Living / Welfare Reform**

#### **Foodbank**

<b>4th April 2023 - 31st June 2023</b>	<b>South Sefton</b>	<b>Southport</b>
Total Vouchers received	1,804	485
Adults Fed	2,287	656
Children Fed	1,292	356
Total Fed	3,579	1,012
Crisis Type	Low income –28 vouchers presented 53 people fed	Cost of living rise: 98 vouchers presented 201 people fed
Family Type	Single 692 vouchers presented 61.73%	Single 348 vouchers presented 71.75%
Age group	Adults Age not specified: 1,399	30-44: 197

#### **Sustainable Affordable Living Coordinator**

The first meeting of Sustainable Affordable Living Network (SALN) has taken place. Reception has been warm, and although there have been several networks, groups and forums that already exist or have existed, members agree that being included in the network will be beneficial.

The network has been informed about the Community Organisations Cost of Living Fund that has been released by Central Government. There is £76m available with bids being accepted between £10,000 - £75,000. Due to the differing capacity and volunteer nature of a lot of organisations contained within the network, the Sustainable Affordable Living Project Coordinator is currently collating opinion about the potential for a network-facilitated bid.

#### **Holiday Activity Fund**

This year's programme is our biggest to date with 46 organisations offering funded HAF places. The team has commissioned 790 sessions creating 28,413 individual sessions and expect over 2000 young people to engage with the programme throughout the holidays.

There are four new clubs delivering sessions this summer: Community Multi Sports Academy, Little Sunshine Yoga, Angling for All and The Inclusion Hub. The new clubs have further expanded the breadth of the programme offering new activities including yoga and fishing and The Inclusion Hub is our first specialist SEND provision.

The HAF coordinator and officers from the Leisure service will continue to offer free swimming lessons for children eligible for free school meals during the summer holidays. Eligible young people are entitled to five free swims across the holidays with under 8's entitled to a free accompanying adult.

## **Community Safety**

A multiagency walk about has taken place on Netherton Park Estate as part of Merseyside Police' Clear Hold Build (CHB) initiative. The walk about was specifically to look at ways to design out crime on the estate, however, several environmental issues were noted and fed back to internal Council departments to address.

The Second Operational Delivery Group meeting for CHB took place on 27<sup>th</sup> July at the Netherton Park Neighbourhood Centre. Partners agreed the Terms of reference and shared information on progress on actions since the last meeting. The group then visited the suggested site for new CCTV cameras and the site for a proposed community garden.

A community walkabout of the Carr Meadow Hey area took place with Police and Crime Commissioner & Ford Ward Councillors on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> July. ASB Officers from Sefton Council and OVH and the housing officer for OVH also attended.

## **Hate Crime**

The Hate Crime JAG (formerly MARAC) meetings continue to take place monthly. The group are aware of increasing reports of far-right graffiti in different parts of the borough and are looking at ways of addressing this. Police have increased patrols and Graffiti is removed as soon as reported.

The Srebrenica Memorial Day this year was marked with messages to staff and the public online via social media and the flying of the Srebrenica Memorial Flag at Bootle Town Hall.

## **Equalities**

The first Sefton Pride event took place on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July. The event was organised through a new CIC and included a parade down Lord and Church Street and a succession of artists performing at the event space inside Southport Market. The event was originally due to take place at Victoria Park but was moved to the market due to the unfavourable weather forecast. Feedback on the day has been extremely positive.

The Navajo reassessment took place over two days, 16<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> August. The assessor was happy with the Councils progress against its Action plan, with fuller and formal update to follow in early October.

Moreover, the first meeting of the Race Equality Monitoring Group took place in August, with terms of reference for the group agreed and the next meeting of the group scheduled for October.

## **Anti-Social Behaviour**

Recruitment to the new Anti-Social Behaviour officer post has been successful and Raphael Munroe has joined the team. Raphael will be working across the south of the Borough. Street drinkers at the Strand, Southport Town Centre and South Road in Waterloo are an ongoing issue. The ASB team has taken part in two "Days of Action" with the Police and Police Licensing in June & July 23. The next "Day of Action" is being arranged for Waterloo and will also include colleagues from the street cleansing team.

## **Youth Service**

One of our Youth Team, Sue, has completed her Level 3 Youth Support Worker Apprenticeship with a distinction. Sue was observed delivering an element of the new ASB Program that has been commissioned via the Safer Sefton Together partnership, which received some useful feedback from the young people and has informed delivery going forward.

## **LIBRARIES**

### **Crosby libraries update**

The Council has stated its commitment to progressing both the innovative new Crosby Village project and to the retention of the existing library in Waterloo. Given our aspirations for Waterloo and Crosby the Council has issued a statement to confirm that it is continuing to pursue both separate schemes.

Engagement with partners and detailed design work for the Crosby Village project continues at pace, and a updated Business Case will be presented to Cabinet in due course. The reports of the Cabinet meeting of 7<sup>th</sup> September 2023 include asking Members to note the procurement of an updated stock condition survey for the existing library.

### **Municipal Journal Awards success**

At this year's Municipal Journal Awards Library Assistant Lizzie Todd beat off all rivals shortlisted to be named MJ Rising Star of 2023. This is a great achievement for her and for Sefton as a whole. The judges noted the huge impact Lizzie had made in the community with her innovative and unusual library projects. They commented on her dedication to the service and on the humble way she approached and delivered her work. At the awards ceremony, the host Huw Edwards also praised the unsung impact of libraries following budget cuts and the effects of the pandemic.

### **Update on the Colour of Pomegranates project**

Using funding from the Future Prosperity Fund, the Colour of Pomegranates project has delivered further support to refugee women based in Sefton. The ladies group of approximately 20 women, plus children, meet fortnightly at Bootle library. They have been working with artist Jessica el Mal and two translators on various creative projects which have helped their conversational English improve. The culmination of these activities has been that the group have created a book of poetry, sayings and songs from their home countries. The ladies have been involved in all aspects of creating the text, which was produced in Farsi, Arabic and English with a book launch in July. A bid to fund this project for a further 3 years has been submitted to the National Lottery.

### **Further funding success**

A new funding stream became available for public libraries to bid for called the Library On Fund. This is a British Library funding stream with a funding pot of £1.1 million available for projects which improve the digital presence of libraries. Most library services applied for funding, and Sefton submitted 2 bids. Both Sefton's bids made it to the second round of assessment, and 1 of the bids was ultimately successful. This was for £30,000 to create a digital advert for Sefton's Libraries which can be used on digital billboards, on social media and on screens in the libraries themselves. Only 30 library services in the country were successful and Sefton's bid was the only one in the LCR to achieve success.

### **New service innovation being rolled out in Libraries**

During lockdown the library service subscribed to PressReader, which provides 7000 digital daily newspapers, published on PressReader before they go to paper print. Library members can access these digital newspapers via the library service website and the service has proved popular with a limited number of users. Some paper copies of newspapers are still provided and are still popular with a certain type of customer, often digitally excluded by choice. However, newspapers are becoming increasingly expensive to purchase in hard copy form and in some places they are no longer delivered. It would be beneficial for the customer and the library service if they all used the digital version.

To encourage our reluctant customers to become digitally included, some large screen tablets have been purchase using external funding, to provide a virtual newspaper reading experience in each library. The tablets are locked down so only PressReader can be accessed via them. The paper copy readers will be targeted and shown the benefits of PressReader and how using

the tablets mean they can increase font size and have access to significantly more newspaper titles than in paper form.

### **Funding bids make it to round two**

The Libraries latest funding bids have both successfully made it to round two of the bid stage. The bids were for £75,000 to National Lottery Reaching Communities fund to support sanctuary seekers work at Bootle Library and extend the work to Netherton Library. The second bid was for £75,000 to the Library Improvement Fund to improve access for children to Bootle Library and improve the outside space, both identified as a need by library users.

Most bids don't make it past round 1, and a full bid for round 2 of the assessment process will now be submitted.

## **THE ATKINSON**

### **Theatre Programme**

The performance spaces went 'dark' for most of August to enable cleaning, repairs and maintenance to the theatre and studio in preparation for the autumn season. From September the programme relaunches with its usual mix of music, comedy, talks and family shows. Highlights include comedian Rhys James' *Spilt Milk* (9 Sept) and Townsend Theatre's production of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (27 Sept).

### **Exhibitions Programme**

#### **Colourscape**

The Atkinson's Landing space currently features an exhibition from Carole Dawber, a multi-disciplinary artist who creates colourful and abstract landscapes. Experimentation and evolution are important features of her process and the catalyst behind 'Colourscape' came during lockdown excursions along the coast. Constructing an abstracted narrative Carole captures the tones and textural details of the region to induce both feelings of nostalgia and escapism. A practising artist ever since graduating from Liverpool College of Art in 1978 Carole was subsequently elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. The exhibition continues until 23 September 2023

#### **Quilt/Grid/Pattern**

A new multimedia exhibition commences from 16 September. Artists Kevin Laycock and Christopher Harris have reinterpreted historic quilt making through abstract painting and mixed media artworks. The exhibition also showcases examples of British 19th century quilt making and the artists' responses to the patterns and structures contained within them. Gawthorpe Textiles Collection provided the touchstone for Harris and Laycock's latest work. Housed at the National Trust's Gawthorpe Hall, the collection includes over 11,000 items of textile history.

#### **Make It! Creative Sessions**

This was the second year of Young Curator Summer activities. The programme included weekly Make It! Sessions starting with a science workshop linked to the galleries' Herbert Ponting Exhibition. Sixteen young people aged 14-18 participated with a further four returning Young Curators joining the group. The group has contributed to the planning for Heritage Open days in September.

### **Other news**

#### **Pocklington Trust**

To review its offer to customers with visual impairments the Atkinson met with representatives from The Pocklington Trust. Training sessions will be arranged with staff to raise awareness and a couple of 'mystery shopping' sessions will also take place. They will provide feedback on

the approach to the building, accessibility within the building, and movement between the galleries and museum. <https://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/>

### **The Atkinson – 10<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebrations**

The 10th anniversary of The Atkinson's re-opening is a perfect opportunity to celebrate The Atkinson's achievements, and to re-introduce ourselves to our local community across Sefton and West Lancs.

Communications around The Atkinson's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary began in May 2023 with an introduction in The Atkinson's Apr-Jun quarterly listing guide. This was followed by a bespoke video created in collaboration with Southport BID, a sponsored article in Lancashire Evening Post (online & print), and a feature on Stand up for Southport.

An ongoing digital campaign across The Atkinson's social media channels and e-newsletters asks audiences to share their memories and photographs. There is also an ongoing digital campaign celebrating The Atkinson's team, with professional portraits taken and personal statements written. Inside the Centre, digital screens have been animated with visitor comments and historic photographs.

A publicity campaign will focus on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary date of 28 November 2013. It will celebrate the Atkinson's continued value to the local community, its impact on the cultural landscape and contribution to the growth of Sefton's visitor economy.

### **Imagine Bamboo is Everywhere**

This cultural project took place as a series of free events across the Liverpool City Region (LCR) throughout August, with the Sefton event delivered on Saturday 26 August at King's Gardens in Southport.

Strong and flexible, bamboo is used internationally in a range of ways, from small domestic utensils to significant construction projects. It has tremendous carbon absorption properties and as such offers many ecological benefits. This project used a non-invasive bamboo species, called Borinda, which has been harvested from Ness Gardens on the Wirral.

Activities included family craft workshops, dance, circus skills and music performances featuring Liverpool-based Pagoda Arts. Bamboo featured as a core material for all the activities, as well as the creation of original and striking sculptures by local artists, inspired by different places in Merseyside. This included local fabricator Julian Taylor, who runs a studio in Bootle. His construction was a bamboo stage entitled 'Under the Sea' with rotating components to reflect the rhythms of Sefton's coast.

The project was supported with funding from the Arts Council and was delivered in partnership between the LCR authorities. The Sefton event was a great success. With a constant stream of visitors, we estimate that over a thousand people engaged in the activities across the day.

## HOUSING

### Property Pool Plus Implementation Update

The revised Property Pool Plus policy and associated updated IT system is due to be introduced later this year, with a scheduled implementation date of Monday 6th November 2023.

In advance of the implementation there is a need to undertake marketing and communication activities with existing customers and the wider public to raise awareness of the forthcoming changes.

This marketing and comms activity began on Wednesday 2nd August 2023, across the region with a planned schedule of messaging which has been developed into a PPP Toolkit and which will be sent to all Councillors before the launch of the marketing activity.

A fully Accessible Frequently Asked Questions document will be placed onto the Property Pool website. This clearly explains the changes people will see as a result of the new PPP policy.

#### Pause In Activity

To assist with the transition to the revised scheme there is a planned closure of the existing scheme to new applications from 7th October 2022.

There will also be a short pause in property advertising for two weeks from 23rd October 2023. This will allow time for all of the administration teams across the region to undertake the required preparations for the implementation of the new scheme.

Details of the planned closure will be clearly communicated to customers including clear information on the website providing detail to assist with preparation for submitting a new application when the scheme reopens on 6th November 2023.

*Anyone who is homeless will be advised to contact the Housing Options Team for emergency assistance.*

#### **Affordable Housing Delivery**

Affordable Housing delivery in the borough remains good with 159 properties completed in 2022/23 against a target set in the Local Plan of 150. In addition, the pipeline for new affordable properties looks positive.



However, facilitating Affordable Housing delivery in the borough remains a priority for the service for a number of reasons:

- Interest rate rises, construction cost inflation and a shortage of skilled trades is making the development market extremely challenging and we cannot assume that pipeline schemes will be delivered as planned.
- The trend of increasing private rents seen over the last few years has accelerated in the last 12 months, partly due to rising mortgage interest rates, further increasing the cost-of-living pressures on residents. The Council has no powers to regulate private rent levels in the borough.

In some cases rising mortgage interest rises, along with forthcoming changes to Capital Gains Tax regulations and propose regulation of the sector has led a number of landlords to exit the market. This has led to an increase in homeless presentations from tenants issued with Section 21 'no fault' Eviction Notices by their landlords.

As colleagues will know this Council has already taken steps to directly intervene to deliver new housing in the borough through the creation of Sandway Homes which is in the process of completing the development of two sites in the borough, at Meadows Lane in Ainsdale, and Barton's Close in Crossens. Both sites are approaching the end of their development programmes and in addition to 53 new homes for sale, both sites will provide an additional 25 new high quality Affordable Homes for residents of the borough. As outlined to Cabinet in May on each of the next three Sandway sites the Council intends to retain the Affordable Homes for use as Council Housing, providing approximately and additional 47 further affordable homes in the borough.

I am happy to report that the Council's arrangements to provide high quality management of these properties is also progressing. Following a comprehensive tender exercise a local provider of social housing, who is registered with the Regulator for Social Housing has been selected as the Council's Managing Agent.

A very positive Inception Meeting has been held and work is now underway to get them into contract and to action a number of tasks that need to be done before properties can be onboarded:

- Regulator approval to the appointment
- Policy Development – as a Registered Social Housing Provider Sefton Council is required to hold a suite of relevant policies relating to the management of socially rented housing. Because of the close alignment in values between our Managing Agent and the Council it is hoped that this process can be quickly achieved by adopting their existing policies. However, these need to be reviewed and formally adopted by Cabinet
- Procedures – we are currently working with the Managing Agent to map the 'customer's journey' to ensure that Sefton tenants get the best possible service. Branding of correspondence and standard customer letter templates also has to be developed
- Tenancy Agreement – a new Sefton Council Tenancy Agreement needs to be developed and adopted by Cabinet
- Governance – as a local authority with less than 1000 units in management there is no requirement to have a separate board/committee to provide governance for the stock. The council's existing governance arrangements are more than satisfactory for this purpose. However, there is still work to do to document and share with Cabinet how both decision making will be

managed and how customer's will be able to engage in the management of their homes

I have discussed with officers the need to meet all housing need in the borough, including providing aspirational housing for those who wish to own a stake in their homes and I am happy to report that the first purchase through the low cost home ownership initiative First Homes is progressing in the borough. Officers continue to work with a range of providers to maximise the amount of affordable outright rental properties and those for low-cost ownership and the Strategic Housing Team is working with colleagues in Property Services to review Council owned land in the Phase IV Disposal Schedule to see what opportunities there might be to develop affordable housing rather than simply disposing of sites to the market individually.

### **Housing Standards Team**

The new 5 year Selective and Additional (HMO) Licensing Schemes commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2023. Since the start of the new scheme over 1,000 licence applications have been submitted processing of the applications and compliance visits are being carried out. In the first quarter of the municipal year 65 compliance visits, and 242 inspections were undertaken by the team, 142 hazards were removed from rented properties.

The team have been successful at a Housing Tribunal appeal mediation session, where the Landlord appealed against their Civil Penalty Fine for failing to licence 2 properties during the 2018-2023 scheme. The Civil Penalty was upheld at the mediation session with an agreed reduced fine. There are a further 3 appeal cases and 1 criminal prosecution pending for failure to licence properties.

The service has recently prosecuted a private landlord who failed to licence their privately rented property in Bootle. The fact that the property was being rented came to our attention following a fire which occurred in the property in late 2022, caused by a number of safety issues in the property. The Court Hearing took place on the 25<sup>th</sup> July and the judge ruled in the council's favour. A fine of £35k was granted, the application to include the council's costs was approved in full, as well as a victim surcharge payment.

Where landlords fail to comply with informal action, the team continue to take formal enforcement action. During June & July this has included the service of 2 x Emergency Prohibition Orders, 4 x Improvement Notices and 3 x Intention to Serve Civil Penalty Notices for breaches of Additional (HMO) Licencing conditions and failure to comply with an Improvement Notice.

Work to reduce the number of long-term vacant homes has continued, and in the first quarter of the year 25 actions were taken by the team against owners of empty properties in the borough.

Management of the Council's Gypsy and Traveller site continues. There have been 3 Unauthorised Gypsy & Traveller encampments in Sefton during June & July.

### **Sandbrook Road Extra Care scheme**

I am happy to report that disposal of the former Adult Education Centre in Ainsdale to Riverside Housing to develop 90 Extra Care Homes, 40 for Affordable Rent and a Short-Term Assessment Unit (STAU) has been approved by Cabinet. The STAU will be retained by the Council and will be a valuable asset to assess adults with learning difficulties. Construction is expected to commence before the end of the month.



