

CABINET MEMBER REPORT

Overview & Scrutiny

Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Paulette Lappin	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services	October 2023

Financial Management

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

The latest budget monitoring position, as at the end of August, was reported to Cabinet in October. This showed a forecast overspend of about £6m, 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 the next report to Cabinet in November which will also outline some mitigating actions, including the use of Earmarked Reserves, to offset some of the overall pressure.

A report on the Medium-Term Financial Plan was presented to Cabinet in September. This will outline the updated position as well as provided some narrative on some other financial issues facing the Council. The MTFP is being refined as more information is received.

The draft Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 and 2021/22 are still be audited by EY (there are some issues to be finalised on the existence of assets). These audits are very close to completion – updated Statement of Accounts and the draft audit results reports for both years were presented to Audit and Governance at 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 were delayed. Draft accounts were produced in mid-September and were presented to Audit and Governance at the end of September. There were still some items to finalise (relating to the valuation of assets) so the draft accounts will be updated once these valuations have been completed. The audit of the accounts for 2022/2023 is expected to commence later in the year.

Customer Centric Services

All areas of the service continue to deal 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 remaining the highest priority.

Customer Services

The Council's Customer Services Contact Centre is currently answering approximately 17,500 calls each month. 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 Sefton’s prioritised services, i.e., Social Care and ELAS.

With 6-months of the 2023/24 financial year complete, all high call volume services have experienced an increase in telephone calls answered, compared to last year, except for Cleansing. The below table compares the number of telephone calls answered and confirms the percentage of calls that were abandoned. It should be noted that for 2022, this total also includes over 17,500 telephone calls answered for the £150.00 Government Energy Rebate payment.

	Number of calls answered	% of calls answered	% of calls abandoned
April 22 to September 22	113,419	78.5%	21.5%
April 23 to September 23	106,801	82.7%	17.3%

Customer demand at the One Stop Shops continues to be high with 3,061 customers attending Bootle One Stop Shop in September. This included 841 taxi drivers, 40 of whom had an appointment and a further 801 who ‘dropped in’. There were also 979 customers who attended with Council Tax, Parking or benefits enquiries and 51 customers who were assisted with completing an ELAS application. The remaining 1,190 customers were seeking general council-related advice at reception.

At Southport, 505 customers attended the Atkinson, with 144 customers booking an appointment to discuss their Council Tax or benefit and the remainder seeking general council-related advice at reception.

A drop-in surgery for Blue Badge customers was arranged with the Alzheimer’s Society at the Atkinson for Friday 1st September. Twelve customers attended; advice regarding the application process was given, and several new Blue Badge applications were completed with the customer present. For those who failed to provide the required evidence, an appointment was made to attend the Atkinson later.

Service delivery from Southport continues to be reviewed with alternative locations being explored and updates will be provided in due course.

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

Taxi Licensing general enquiry e-mails and transfer/new/renewal vehicle plates, timescales are at a very acceptable level. All new/transfer/renewal of vehicle plates are currently being processed within two-working days of receipt, however general e-mails are taking a little longer to be processed due to the extremely high volumes of evidence and queries that are being received from drivers whose new application is presently in progress.

Taxi Licensing will be entering a very critical period of time, with advanced plans in place for implementing a new Taxi Licensing computer system for February 2024. This system will be a significant improvement for the trade and key-stakeholders, allowing for taxi drivers, vehicle owners and operators to upload various evidence documents as well as pay all licensing fees via an online portal.

The implementation of the new system will however mean some short-term changes to normal service delivery timescales, and the Council will be encouraging all applicants to prepare for this. In order to provide a smooth and successful transition, existing records, evidence and information will be transferred in phases:

1. The priority will be all current Sefton licence holders.
2. The second phase of the transition will include all new applicants who have submitted an application, attended their initial appointment, provided all requisite evidence and successfully satisfied all relevant checks by 31st October 2023 – these applicants will be invited to sit a Knowledge Test prior to 24th November 2023.
3. The next stage of the transition will include all new applicants who have submitted an application, prior to 1st August 2023, attended their initial appointment but have not provided all requisite evidence and satisfied relevant checks or passed a Knowledge Test by 31st October 2023. At this stage, the Council is unable to confirm timescales for this stage.
4. The final stage of the transition will include all new applicants who have submitted an application on or after 1st August 2023. Again, at this time the Council is unable to confirm timescales for this stage.

Due to the complexity of transferring vast quantities of data and evidence, each new phase will not begin until the previous phase has been completed in its entirety. Regular progress updates will be provided on Sefton Council's Taxi licensing webpages. All other Taxi Licensing workloads are expected to be processed in line with the timescales currently displayed on the website. Should they change, the website will immediately be updated.

Citizen Access - Revenues

Plans are in place during October to launch Citizen Access-Revenues, initially to a small group of Sefton residents. Citizen Access-Revenues is a web-based portal for Council Tax and Business Rates customers to manage their accounts on-line, allowing greater self-serve options. Over the next few months, it will be rolled out to residents who have already signed-up to receive electronic Council Tax bills. A communication campaign is also planned to encourage residents to sign-up, only if they would like to, so that in future they will receive bills and manage their accounts online.

Migration of Revenues and Benefits document management system

The transition to the new Revenues and Benefits NEC document management system is now complete with over 5million documents being successfully migrated from the former-Civica electronic document management Revenues and Benefits system.

The Service continues to work closely with software supplier, NEC, to identify solutions and future enhancements within the new 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:

- Review of number of Schools.
- Highways Maintenance Procurement

- SHOL Governance review
- Sandway Homes finance review
- Assurance Mapping
- Petty cash
- Review into the procurement and management of contracts

We have continued the recruitment of a permanent staff member in February 2023 and were able to appoint a suitable candidate in September 2023.

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 and are currently completing the renewal process.
- We have used some of the "free days" as part of the insurance programme risk bursary to undertake a review of Emergency Planning and Business Continuity documentation.
- 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.

The **Risk and Resilience Team**.

We have developed a Corporate Business Continuity Plan using the existing Service Area Business Continuity (BC) Plans which is currently with the Executive Director of Corporate Resources to approve. 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 and the Policy was presented to Cabinet and approved in September 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 to all Service Areas as well as facilitating the updates of the Council's Corporate Risk Register for Audit and Governance Committee in December 2023. Other work includes:

- Working with the Merseyside Resilience Forum
- Development of a Shoreline Pollution Plan
- Review of the Council's emergency facilities
- Review of approach of volunteers
- 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.
- Ongoing recruitment to two vacant positions.

ICT

- The ICT Service continues to work on a number 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 and the Website upgrade. The Sefton Arc and Leisure ICT Improvements are nearing completion, with further developments planned to improve Sefton's Cyber Security capabilities.
- The team have now deployed all new Canon MFD devices, with most legacy Xerox printers now removed from the estate.
- Data centre rationalisation and right sizing is now completed within the existing Data Centre at St Peters ready for relocation to a new site. Due to the complexities associated with move to Bootle Town Hall the team are exploring options to move the existing comms capacity to Magdalen House with the remaining small data centre footprint to be moved to a dedicated Data Centre.
- 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, Sefton has now completed an exercise to soft cease these numbers for a 4-week period prior to removal. The soft cease was completed during the 2nd week of September with no issues reported to date. Work is also underway to remove legacy Mitel lines no longer in use before the entire legacy system and associated infrastructure is removed from the estate.
- 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 well underway to transfer Council e-forms to CXP from the legacy e-forms system, with 20 forms completed to date and a further 4 phases of 20 each to follow. Work is also starting on the configuration and set up of FOI processes in CXP.

- The website improvement programme work is now completed. Work has commenced on the upgrade of the Umbraco content management system, which is due to complete in November this year, governance is now in place to manage any web developments moving forwards.
- The ICT Procurement team continue to be busy; the forward plan for the next 12-18 months has been agreed by members of ELT and work is underway on several key procurements including the corporate connectivity service, as well as we applications for Crems and Crematoria, eLearning, GIS and Leisure.
- 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
- 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 later this year. Alongside this the ICT Client team is exploring opportunities around products such as AI and the potential use of solutions from Microsoft including PowerApps and Co-pilot.

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.
- Looking at accommodation options for teams/departments.

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.
- Phase 2 essential maintenance – looking to secure funding for this further phase of works.
- Asset survey delivery plan in train 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 with imminent completion.
- A programme of work to support schools (after large energy price rises) 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. Efficiency savings being considered.
- Work on the next phase of the Climate Emergency programme is progressing.
- Delivering services in support of affordable warmth to residents.

Legal Services

Democratic Services Team – Overview

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 17 October 2023 and the Committee considered the following items:

- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Sefton - Update Report
- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Sefton - Health Provider Performance Dashboard
- Performance Report Review
- Melling Surgery Closure
- Health Substantial Reconfiguration Proposals
- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Work Programme Update

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 23 January 2024. The meeting was scheduled for 2 January, but this has now been identified as part of the Christmas/New Year shutdown and the meeting has been re-arranged.

- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding)**

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 26 September 2023 and the Committee considered the following items:

- Petition – The Voice of the Families
- Cabinet Member Reports
- Report for Information on Vaping Amongst Young People
- Domestic Abuse Update
- Children's Social Care Overview of Practice
- Children's Services Improvement Programme
- Executive/Scrutiny Protocol
- Work Programme Key Decision Forward Plan

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 14 November 2023.

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 19 September 2023. The Committee considered the following items:

- Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority – Service Delivery Plan 2023/24 – Presentation from the Chief Executive of the MRWA
- 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 Gillmoor Recycling Discovery Centre. It is anticipated that this meeting/visit will take place in November/early December.

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 7 November 2023.

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 12 September 2023; and the Committee considered the following items:

- Customer Contact Centre Activity – Presentation
- Levels of Disciplinary, Grievance, Dignity at Work and Sickness Absence
- Executive/Scrutiny Protocol
- Financial Management 2023/24 to 2026/27 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2023/24 – September Update
- Work Programme 2023/24, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan
- Cabinet Member report

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 31 October 2023.

- **Executive/Scrutiny Protocol** - The four Overview and Scrutiny Committees, considered, during the September cycle of meetings, a report that sought approval to two additions to the Executive/Scrutiny Protocol in relation to the submission of Plans and Strategies to Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Working Group Reviews/Informal Meetings. The four Committees approved the recommendations contained in the report. Following on from this, a report will be submitted to the Cabinet on 2 November 2023, seeking formal approval of the proposals and that the Protocol be updated accordingly.

- **Overview and Scrutiny Management Board**

The last meeting of the Management Board was held on 12 September 2023. The Management Board considered 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

The next meeting of the Management Board will take place on 7 November 2023.

• **Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The last meeting of the LCRO&S was held on 6 September 2023. The Committee considered the following items:

- LCR Investment Zone update
- Development of the Next LCR Place-Based Pipeline
- Work Programme 2023/24

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.

The next meeting of the LCRO&S will be held on 25 October 2023.

School Appeals

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

The school appeal 'high season' started on 10 May and ended on 18 July. In this period over 450 appeals were listed. The levels of school appeal cases remain high. Over 60 appeals have been heard in September, many of these were late transition appeals. Four full days of appeals have already been 'pencilled in' for October.

Additionally, an Independent Review Panel (exclusion appeal) has been listed for 27 September 2023.

Civic and Mayoral Services

- At the time of drafting this report, the Freedom of the Borough Ceremony for Alex Greenwood is due to take place on Thursday 19 October at Bootle Town Hall.
- The Mayor of Sefton's Civic Sunday on 10th September was very well attended by fellow Sefton Councillors, MP's and Mayors from other boroughs of Merseyside.

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 took 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 and last met on 23 August 2023. The next meeting is scheduled for 20 December 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

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

Prosecutions Regulatory Team

- The prosecution and regulatory team have successfully resisted an appeal in the first tier property tribunal against a civil penalty under the Landlord Licensing Scheme , which upheld the Council's decision to award a £3000 penalty to a landlord.
- Advice was provided to a primary school in relation to a claim incorrectly brought by a contractor in the County Court for defamation. Legal's response to the claim resulted in the claim being struck out by the Court. Successfully resisted an appeal made by a private hire driver against our decision to revoke his licence. We had revoked on the basis that the driver had been dishonest with both the Police and licensing officers when interviewed under caution about a speeding offence.
- Successful prosecution of an individual who has remained in occupation of a property which is in a dangerous and hazardous condition despite the Council serving a prohibition order prohibiting the residential use of the property and support offered by both housing options and social services.
- The Debt recovery team within Legal recovered £106,000 since cabinet member report in July 2023

Property and Planning Team

- 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 St Annes and St Peters House, and the ongoing Meadows disposal and Sandbrook acquisitions.
- Planning matters will return after a break, with planning committees in October being the first held since July, and Highways with legal agreements progressing to support the numerous developments ongoing in the Borough.

PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

Operational Matters

Children's Services – Human Resources Operational Support Team

A dedicated HR Team for Children's Social Care and Education, provide advice and support regarding all employment and staffing matters to all areas of Children's Services including Schools. Recently the team has successfully recruited to a vacancy and with effect from 1st December 2023 have additional support in the form of a Senior HR Business Partner, which will predominately benefit Children's Social Care and Education Excellence.

Current priorities, in addition to business-as-usual focuses on supporting the Executive Director for Children's Social Care and Education on all staffing issues pending Ofsted monitoring visit due in November. Sefton School prioritises support to schools' to proposed Academy transfers, along with commencing our 3 yearly HR Support for Schools Service Level Agreement cycle in which history demonstrates 100% buy in. The challenges in recruitment and retention continue within Children's Social Care and SEN. Some interim employment arrangements have been put in place to support SEN with ongoing improvement and pending SEN inspection. Interim arrangements continue with a central recruitment team to provide additional support the transformation improvements in Children's Social Care.

There has recently been an increase into matters relating to managing sickness absence within Children's Services, which is a positive, and the team will be designing and delivering training in relation to the managing absence over the coming months. Following the design and roll of training to Children's Services in relation to managing performance, we have seen a slight increase in supporting Children's Social Care in this area, including formal processes. Formal meetings continue to be held via a combination of Microsoft Teams and in person meetings as required.

Whilst considering the pressures that are placed on Employees and the Authority, the team mindful of sensitivity when providing advice and do so empathetically, at the same time ensuring that the right support and advice is given, and the appropriate processes are actioned accordingly.

All Other Council Operational HR Business Support

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

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 15th 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.

Service Development, Establishment Control, 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 to Merseyside Pension Fund (MPF) but continue to press MHR for improvements to the reports provided.

Teachers Pensions Monthly data collection (MDC) moves to Monthly Contribution Reconciliation (MCR) has been postponed until 1st April 2024 as the iTrent software has several known issues. Sefton have engaged with MHR to ensure the system is configured correctly for testing and go live.

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 a fix was put and performance seems to have improved.

There are backlogs in the teams due to process, reporting and resource issues and all work is being prioritised.

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

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

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 launched the **Level 5 Operational/Departmental Manager Apprenticeship standard**. The course is 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. 8 managers from across the organisation applied for and gained a place on the course, which commenced from Monday 18th September 2023.

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 joined the course the 2nd week of September 2023.

Three new Level 7 apprenticeships have been launched in **Human Resources, Learning and Development** and **Organisational Development**. We are looking into options to offer these courses from January 2024.

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.
- **Information Compliance eLearning** – we have developed a new course and end of module assessment which is due to go live end of October 2023. The new course includes 7 sections, examples include terminology and legislation, Data Protection Act Principles and Individual Rights, dealing with information requests and sharing information.
- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** training delivery is going well. To date, we have trained 216 Sefton Council and schools' staff. No change 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 have been planned and courses are gradually filling up.
- 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 30th September 2023.

Strategic Support

COMMUNICATIONS

The team is now fully staffed with the new Corporate Communications Manager, Andrew Daniels, starting at the end of September. The two new roles of Social Media Officer and Videographer have been bedding in well and the quality of content in those areas has improved as a result. We have also continued to make improvements with the website content with the accessibility score at 86% the highest it has been.

The team will be looking at refreshing the communications strategy/framework to provide a clear plan going forwards as to how we can continue to ensure the team helps the organisation in delivering on its priorities and enhancing our reputation in the local community.

The team has supported a number of key projects over the last few weeks most notably continuing the support to Children’s Services by highlighting the work the team is doing to support our young people, celebrating the achievements of our very own Alex Greenwood, who received her Freedom of the Borough award, and highlighting the support available to families through the cost of living crisis.

Internally, we have supported the Chief Executive into his new role and a series of working groups are up and running looking at how we can deliver staff-focused events that will help get people together and have a One Council approach to work. This month there will be a particular focus on supporting the LGA Peer Review and ensuring colleagues understand what it is and why we are taking part in it.

Procurement

The Procurement Team engagement meetings with Service areas to update the Contract Register; review current workplans and timelines; identify future or prospective projects; and update the Procurement pipeline are almost complete. The final Service areas to engage with on Contract Register matters are Adults and Children Services. These reviews are scheduled during October 2023.

The Procurement Team are experiencing an increase in uptake of our early payment programme, partly due to these reviews. We are currently benchmarking with other Local Authorities to understand how we may ramp up the engagement by contractors to our early payment programme which could contribute to our income stream

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; this has been termed Data Warehouse & Power BI project Phase.2, and involves significant SQL development.

Consultation & Engagement, Complaints and Information Governance.

The Service continues 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 Service is actively recruiting to vacant posts to address the issue.

The project to digitise the Council's historic paper records continues at pace, and is nearing an end. All legacy records stored at disparate 3rd party 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 Belford 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 support for the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan. The team will provide logistical support for the next Ofsted focused visit to Children's Social Care. 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.

The team are also supporting the self-evaluation statement and preparation for the LGA peer review.