

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills)	Date of Meeting:	Tuesday 7 November 2023
Subject:	Green Sefton Annual Review 2023		
Report of:	Assistant Director of People (Operational In-House Services)	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Portfolio:	Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing		
Is this a Key Decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

This report provides an update on the progress of Green Sefton's operational delivery over the last year, and sets the strategic work programme, in line with the new Service Vision 2030, and updated Service Plan for the next year.

Recommendation(s):

- (1) Review the report, and make comment on the issues raised, and the workload planning proposed over the next year.
- (2) That any comments from this committee be referred to the Cabinet Member (Health and Well Being) and the Cabinet Member (Locality Services) for consideration.

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

To provide an annual update on Green Sefton, as good practise and in response to the previous O+S Working Group recommendations.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)

N/A

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

Details of the revenue budget for the service are included within the report.

(B) Capital Costs

Details of the capital programme for the service are included within the report.

Implications of the Proposals:

<p>Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets): The report outlines the need to re-consider the ongoing resources allocated to Green Sefton, and notes that these continue to fail to meet expectations of the community, visitors, and councillors.</p>									
<p>Legal Implications: There are no legal implications with this report.</p>									
<p>Equality Implications: There are no equality implications directly with this report, but Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken for formal Cabinet Member and Committee decisions relating to the service, with resulting actions undertaken accordingly</p>									
<p>Impact on Children and Young People: No</p>									
<p>Climate Emergency Implications: The recommendations within this report will</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Have a positive impact</td> <td>Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Have a neutral impact</td> <td>No</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Have a negative impact</td> <td>No</td> </tr> <tr> <td>The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors</td> <td>Yes</td> </tr> </table> <p>The content of this report sets out the work and projects undertaken by Green Sefton to manage the landscapes within Sefton.</p> <p>Landscape can largely contribute to the climate emergency in terms of mitigation and adaptation:</p> <p>Climate change mitigation broadly refers to limiting the amount and pace of future climate change, by reducing overall greenhouse gas emissions and removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere i.e. by planting more trees, shrubs, wildflowers etc, and by proactively changing the way in which we undertake activities and provide our facilities and services.</p> <p>Climate change adaptation refers broadly to the measures needed to adapt our society to the climate changes that we won't be able to avoid, even with perfect mitigation. These include increases in temperature, more severe weather events, and associated risks to infrastructure, human health, and natural ecosystems – as has been seen in the last year (including flooding, and obvious effects to the landscape such as trees seeing 'false autumn', and summer bough drop during the extended dry periods).</p> <p>The priority works contained within this report set out a structured approach to the</p>		Have a positive impact	Yes	Have a neutral impact	No	Have a negative impact	No	The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Yes
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climate emergency: from the strategic audit of land across the borough to identify new opportunities for projects and initiatives (both that which is managed by the Council and land owned by partners), through to smaller changes to sites managed directly and that by volunteers, and other initiatives such as the 'managed for nature' scheme and the new business supporter scheme which was introduced in 2022.

It is therefore considered that the work of Green Sefton has a positive effect on climate change.

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable:
N/A

Facilitate confident and resilient communities:
Much of the work of the service assists in developing communities' use and engagement with their landscape, its facilities and features, and its ongoing management and maintenance. This includes various models of self-management by groups, and new social investment proposals. All of this contributes to significant health and wellbeing benefits to all.

Commission, broker and provide core services:
The report outlines efforts to explore new ways to deliver services, including relationships with many voluntary and community groups, businesses and other organisations.

Place – leadership and influencer:
The service manages the landscape of the borough, and this report sets out proposals for developing the delivery, management, maintenance of this, including community use, in new ways for the future.

Drivers of change and reform:
The report sets out a new strategic approach for land management which will reform the way in which the landscape is managed in the long term.

Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity:
The report sets out a new strategic approach for land management, and the service is transforming its financial model over time – both reducing the reliance on core budgets, as well as providing new opportunities for community and voluntary groups, businesses and other organisations to deliver their outcomes too (such as the new food and drink concessions being developed on the coast, in parks and on sports facilities etc too).

Fundamentally, it has been widely demonstrated that a good quality landscape contributes massively to people choosing to live, visit and work in an area.

Greater income for social investment:
The service is engaged with the social finance action plan, and in Friends of Groups promoting the Sefton Crowd initiative.

Cleaner Greener:

The service manages the landscape of the borough which contributes significantly to the Cleaner, Greener agenda, together with Climate Change and Biodiversity Emergencies too.

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD.7388/23) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.5588/23) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

N/A

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following the Committee meeting.

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Appendices:

The following appendices are attached to this report:

Appendix A – Green Sefton Annual Review 2023

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

1.0 Introduction:

- 1.1 This report is to update the committee on the performance and development of Green Sefton, identifies areas for improvement and looks forward to informing the service plan and work programme for 2024/25, and in response to the refreshed Green Sefton Service Vision to 2030 (adopted in April 2023).
- 1.2 The full Annual Review is attached as appendix 1 and includes other background information including the newly adopted Service Vision, and Service Plan updates for the three service areas.
- 1.3 This has all been summarised by the following tables, which provides a summary of progress against the Service Plan actions, and the headline actions / priorities as agreed in 2022 with a summary of progress in 2023 and outlines actions planned for 2024 for each of these, together with new actions added to the end.
- 1.4 These are inevitably just some of the headline actions though, with many other issues progressing day to day (for which, regular Cabinet Member papers are presented monthly).
- 1.5 Finally, the headlines detailed in the following table have been populated in an 'importance / urgency' matrix in order to inform the work programme of officers in the coming year.
- 1.6 The workload priority matrix contained in this report will continue to be regularly reported to the Cabinet Member over the next year, as a way to try and formalise and agree the priorities of the service, and avoid distractions from the items which are seen as key to drive us forwards. Although an operational service, and so frequent 'reactive' issues will always arise, it is the larger, proactive areas that will have a more substantial and positive impact in the future and in order to deliver on those, and achieve the Vision set out for 2030, and we must focus our efforts accordingly.
- 1.7 This report is supported by a PowerPoint presentation which will be presented at the meeting. As previous years, a narrated version of this presentation will then be published afterwards, subsequently publicised and promoted via social media etc.

2.0 Summary:

- 2.1 There are many success stories over the last year;
 - overall, and fundamentally, we have delivered landscapes and facilities to hundreds of thousands of residents, and visitors, have enjoyed (to the benefit of their health and wellbeing), whilst protecting these places to the benefit of nature, and for generations to come
 - we have kept visitors, and our staff, as safe as possible by ensuring agreed control measures were implemented, and provided additional facilities and

services as part of our Visitor Action Plan, which was formalised with an ongoing growth in budget agreed at Full Council on 3rd March 2022

- we have thought strategically, and have continued to develop our 'Place Based' approach, with the launch of our 'Managed for Nature' campaign

- we have undertaken major consultations including that for a new major developmental project for Botanic Gardens (with over 1,100 respondents), and for an updated Allotment Strategy

- we have gained pro-procurement approval for the replacement of our aging fleet and machinery, as approved by Cabinet on 27th July 2023, and are currently drafting the tender document which will hopefully see a new supplier in place early in 2024

- we have worked in partnership with many volunteer groups, and external agencies and statutory bodies, including updating and launching the new Volunteer Handbook to further improve the way in which we work with our volunteers

- we have continued to develop innovative new ideas and schemes, all of which have contributed to our 2030 vision; such as the new food and drink concessions returning at Crosby Coastal Park and Ainsdale beach

- we have continued to develop a range of capital, infrastructure and other projects to improve the infrastructure of the landscapes we manage – such as the adoption of the masterplan for Orrell Mount Park in Litherland, the Hesketh Park Legacy project in Southport, and the improvements to Poets Park and the newly named Seaforth Green sites in Bootle

- we have continued to develop innovative funding for facilities, such as Business Case led Driving Range at Bootle Golf Course (which opened Spring 2022)

- we have sought other means of funding such as matching section 106 monies with external grants for Runnells Lane Park, the pre-development bid for a new major scheme at Botanic Gardens, sport related improvements such as the bids to the Football Foundation, and nature based funding such as the Countryside Stewardship funding for the coast

- we have reacted to issues, such as storms affecting flooding and tree management, and heat wave/ drought periods affecting landscape management and some tree issues

- we have led on and co-ordinated the delivery and promotion of the new Coast and Visitor areas Public Space Protection Order that was adopted in July 2022. This is now assisting all land owners on the coast in better managing visitor behaviour on our sensitive landscapes, and will run for three years initially.

- 2.2 However, despite these and other successes, it has been clear that the service has continued to struggle to meet public, councillor and other expectations at times. This is at least in part due to the additional demands being placed on the service, at the same time as resources have never been lower (with ongoing staff absences, aging fleet and machinery etc), but is overall also due to the staffing levels and other operational resources assigned to the service. As such, there have been times when our sites have not looked as we would like, as maintenance activities were re-prioritised accordingly. This all indicates that despite some growth in specific areas in 2022 (play maintenance, and the Coast Visitor Action Plan), reduced budgets overall, and less staffing availability leaves little resilience, and is seeing service standards and infrastructure continuing to decline over time.
- 2.3 Overall, there is much to celebrate though, with 10 formal compliments received (an increase of 9 compared to 2022, and on top of many more informal) and a sense that by and large, the public, residents and visitors really do appreciate the wonderful landscape assets in Sefton like never before. There has been an increase in complaints as some visitors are disappointed with the standards of maintenance being provided however, but this demonstrates visitors passion for our landscapes, and a desire to see improved standards. There have been 183 Stage 1 formal complaints in the last year (compared to 157 in the previous year), with 8 escalating to Stage 2 (compared to 13 the previous year). At the height of summer at times an average of over one complaint per working day were being received (with 27 formal complaints received in June, a similar level to 2022 when 28 were received in July at its peak). These demand a high level of officer support and administration, as few complaints are 'simple' to respond to and resolve. None of these however have then been raised with the Ombudsman in 2023, compared to 1 in the previous year.
- 2.4 Discussions are ongoing to reconsider the staffing, budgetary and other resources available for specific service areas, and it is hoped that these efforts will assist to address any shortcomings, and assist the service to both meet expectations, and develop, moving forwards (although it must be noted that even with some increases in resources being allocated, there are still competing and often contradictory agendas which must be resolved, and the inevitability of the climate and biodiversity emergencies require different approaches to be considered as well). For example, discussions and reviews are ongoing for the management of weeds boroughwide, the coastwide Visitor Action Plan, the grounds maintenance and grave digging in cemeteries and crematoria and more.
- 2.5 In addition, further efforts are being made to provide non-revenue funded resources also, such as the successful 'Binrastructure' bid in 2021, the Countryside Stewardship (Higher Tier) external grant bid (500k over the next 5 years awarded in 2022), the pre-development grant awarded by the Heritage Lottery for Botanic Gardens, and the Levelling Up Fund grant also received in Autumn 2022.

- 2.6 It is also clear that the resources allocated to Green Sefton can no longer provide the same style of landscape management as in times gone by, and the 'place based' strategy (to develop and deliver the 'managed for nature' principles' amongst other approaches, as discussed previously) needs to be prioritised to redesign landscape management in the borough, address the climate and biodiversity emergencies, and to set and communicate the new standards for the future.
- 2.7 The Service Vision, adopted in 2019, was due for a refresh and this took place bearing in mind the committees comments in Autumn/ Winter 2022, and following staff discussions and team exercises. The new Vision was adopted by Cabinet Member in April 2023, and this led to discussions about developing a new Service Plan which was subsequently adopted by Cabinet Member in October 2023. This is now leading to further work to redraft the Key Performance Indicators that the service holds itself to account to, which again will be presented to Cabinet Member shortly, and will be reported upon within the quarterly Performance Reports moving forwards.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 The service has performed well under ongoing challenging circumstances over the last couple of years, as resources available clearly do not allow for service delivery to meet public, councillor, nor our own, expectations. Although there have been challenges at times, there have also been many successes too. Overall, the service (now having completed its 5th year) is now well established and is starting to see the rewards of the PSR project that led to its creation. More work remains yet to be done, and as the report outlines, we must focus on the priority work areas in order to deliver on the Services' own 2030 vision, that ultimately contributes to that of the Council overall. The Service Vision, Service Planning and new KPI's, together with the workload matrix system detailed in the report are all proving a useful tool to manage this, and regular updates will continue to be provided to Cabinet Member throughout the year.

Figure 1 – the new Green Sefton Service Vision, as adopted by Cabinet Member in April 2023:



Green Sefton – Vision to 2030, updated April 2023

GREEN SEFTON – ANNUAL REPORT 2023 HEADLINE ACTIONS OVERVIEW

What we said we would do	What have we done in the last year	What are we going to do in the next year
Delivery and sharing of the service vision 2030 and service plan 2020 – both within, and external to, the service	A narrated version of the power point presentation was made to Cabinet Member, and Overview and Scrutiny (Regeneration and Skills). It was also presented to all Green Sefton staff, and shared on the intranet, and via a newsletter sent to partner agencies	Develop project management style work programming for key actions in the Service Plan to monitor and manage delivery. Develop and adopt KPI's to hold ourselves to account and track performance over time

GREEN SEFTON – ANNUAL REPORT 2023 HEADLINE ACTIONS OVERVIEW

What we said we would do	What have we done in the last year	What are we going to do in the next year
<p>Embedding culture and behaviour change within the team (a focus will need to be supporting the wellbeing of staff in a changing and challenging environment, and to continuing to emphasise the ‘Green Sefton’ approach as opposed to the previous silo mentality)</p>	<p>Regular updates given to team via email</p> <p>Operational team meetings with site-based staff re-introduced (in part stalled due to pandemic).</p> <p>Monthly Microsoft Teams briefings / Q&A sessions with Service Manager have continued</p> <p>Each Service Area conducting own Team meetings.</p> <p>Establishment of several cross-theme working groups to develop key strands of work. E.g. climate working group, information and intelligence, buildings, Health and safety, Golf management ...</p> <p>The pandemic demonstrated people’s willingness to work outside of their own areas which has continued</p>	<p>Continue with efforts to maintain communication flow</p> <p>More effort on developing a single service culture</p> <p>(this also links to getting the place-based strategy agreed and adopted, as this can set what the Green Sefton approach is)</p>

GREEN SEFTON – ANNUAL REPORT 2023 HEADLINE ACTIONS OVERVIEW

What we said we would do	What have we done in the last year	What are we going to do in the next year
<p>Look to increase capacity within the team – by apprenticeships, fixed term posts (funded via income generation, external grants etc), and a review of our approach to seasonal support (gardeners inland, and rangers on the coast)</p>	<p>A review of the recruitment to appointing seasonal posts led to an open advert approach across Autumn/ Winter 2022. Although some lessons learned need to be taken into account, this helped with the interview and recruitment process which will be further developed into 2024</p> <p>Some external monies have been joined with the seasonal budget for 5 coastal rangers – creating 5 full time, but fixed term posts. This has created more attractive posts to applicants, and provided continuity and surety for all involved</p> <p>New projects are seeking additional staffing/ other support, such as the pre-development grant for the major project at Botanic Gardens, the Hesketh Park legacy scheme, the partnership approach with United Utilities for the Crosby Coastal Defence scheme, and more</p> <p>Ranger Boot Camp successfully engaged 5 staff in 2020, but was stalled in 2021 due to the pandemic</p>	<p>Reconsider allocation of funds and numbers of Seasonal Rangers, together with the approach to their recruitment (ideally creating further full time (but fixed term) posts which may be more attractive to applicants</p> <p>Resurrect the ‘Ranger Boot Camp’ as appropriate</p> <p>Continue to explore projects and initiatives to further increase staffing capacity e.g. Love my Beach officer bid with Keep Britain Tidy, and exploring the Kickstart government programme into ‘green’ jobs, that which comes from the Recreation Mitigation Strategy/ elements from the Planning process too</p> <p>FCERM looking at funding resources to support succession planning</p>

GREEN SEFTON – ANNUAL REPORT 2023 HEADLINE ACTIONS OVERVIEW

What we said we would do	What have we done in the last year	What are we going to do in the next year
<p>Look to reduce existing demands on team where appropriate – by examining the work programme, and amending what we manage and how (for example sand clearance on Crosby Promenade, Botanic Gardens aviary etc), and by looking at a ‘Place-Based’ approach to strategically managing sites</p>	<p>Working group set up for Place-Based strategy (stalled due to pandemic and increased demands on resources during summer)</p> <p>Partnership agreement developed with Botanic Gardens Community Association for shared funding and management of the aviary, with an ‘Aviary Committee’ now set up</p>	<p>Ongoing Place-Based strategy working group, and development of a pilot area (Victoria Park, Crosby), together with bearing this in mind when considering other projects (such as the delivery of the Levelling Up grant) – a framework strategy is now proposed to direct the thinking on future strategies and developments, and it is planned to develop and adopt this during 2024</p>

GREEN SEFTON – ANNUAL REPORT 2023 HEADLINE ACTIONS OVERVIEW

What we said we would do	What have we done in the last year	What are we going to do in the next year
<p>Achieve ‘innovation’ income targets</p>	<p>Good progress in many areas incl. Council approval of £679k for development of driving ranges, £352k for development of Ainsdale gateway, market testing of empty buildings leading to several new leases, contracts won for new commercial works, and expansion of Natural Alternatives in progress with a new base developed at Botanic Gardens</p> <p>Many areas slowed / stalled due to pandemic, and so some targets have not been achieved (in particular, those associated with the golf courses, and Natural Alternatives expansion). The Bootle Golf course driving range is completed and opened in Spring 2022, Southport Golf Course future development has been approved by Cabinet for tendering in 2022 (albeit staff capacity has meant this has stalled), and conversations are ongoing with colleagues from Adult Social Care regarding Natural Alternatives.</p> <p>Acknowledging some of the challenges with the ‘innovation’ approach, through the budget setting process, all unachievable income targets were removed from the Green Sefton budgets in March 2023. This has allowed a balanced budget to be presented in 2023/24, and a refocus of our energies, as outlined in the updated Service Vision detailed elsewhere</p>	<p>As resources allow, continue to concentrate on the delivery of existing budget proposals, i.e. to focus on achieving those already in place/ in train such as the Bootle Golf Course driving range business case</p>

GREEN SEFTON – ANNUAL REPORT 2023 HEADLINE ACTIONS OVERVIEW

What we said we would do	What have we done in the last year	What are we going to do in the next year
<p>Develop site-based changes to make best use of available resources and increase wider benefits of sites (e.g. ‘greening up’ agenda, changes to style of management to some sites and features etc)</p>	<p>A new ‘Landscape Development’ Cabinet Member Reference Group has been established to consider future funding for our landscapes, strategic projects, and future management and maintenance arrangements incl specific subjects such as climate change, the biodiversity crisis, and for example encouraging pollinators in landscape management</p> <p>This group is also overseeing the development of the Councils approach to Biodiversity Net Gain, with several pilot sites being surveyed and assessed for potential improvements for nature and to become ‘receptor sites’ for these new monies (which include both capital to make changes and also >30 years of maintenance and management monies too</p>	<p>Continue to explore ways in which to promote the ‘urban greening concept’, and creation of some demonstration areas. (Initial conversations taken place with Highways colleagues regarding alternative land management of highways verges and roundabouts, introduction of green walls and barrier planting etc, with MEAS commissioned to lead on assisting with this work)</p> <p>Support the Landscape Development CMRG in the creation and delivery of and action plan</p>
	<p>Adopt and deliver FCERM strategy, Football Development Plan / contribute to the corporate Playing Pitch Strategy</p>	<p>Adopt and deliver the Allotment Strategy, and Tree Management Strategy</p>

GREEN SEFTON – ANNUAL REPORT 2023 HEADLINE ACTIONS OVERVIEW

What we said we would do	What have we done in the last year	What are we going to do in the next year
	<p>Delivered year 1 works from the external Defra funding (Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier) funding as ‘meanwhile funding for management of the coastal areas (£660k, over the next 5 years). This is in the absence of revenue funding availability, and whilst awaiting the release of the national Environmental Land Management (ELMs).</p> <p>N.B. this funding will not meet the costs of the grazing fencing replacement, which will be needed over the next 3-5yrs at a cost of circa £250k</p>	<p>Deliver the yr 2 projects and targets associated with the CSHT funding</p>
	<p>Consulted on, developing and adopting a vision for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Southport Golf course - Botanic Gardens - Hesketh Park <p>and all four coastal gateways, mapping sessions (to discuss/ set out the competing demands of visitor pressure, nature, and how</p>	<p>Tender for development of Southport Golf Course (course, and / or buildings) as approved by Cabinet Spring 2022, as and when capacity allows</p> <p>Adopt the vision for Botanic Gardens, Churchtown, based on and responding to the recently completed public consultation (with over 1,100 respondents), and develop a new major improvement scheme for Botanic Gardens, with a Stage 1 Heritage Lottery bid</p>

GREEN SEFTON – ANNUAL REPORT 2023 HEADLINE ACTIONS OVERVIEW

What we said we would do	What have we done in the last year	What are we going to do in the next year
	<p>to mitigate this):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Crosby, - Formby (managed by National Trust) - Ainsdale - Southport <p>Adopt a vision for the Hesketh Park scheme, and project manage delivery of agreed, funded, priority items</p> <p>Adopt an agreed masterplan vision for Orrell Mount Park, and explore priority projects, and funding opportunities</p> <p>Develop and deliver projects at Poets Park, and the newly renamed Seaforth Green in Bootle, funded by the government Parks Levelling Up funds received Autumn 2022.</p>	<p>to be submitted in 2024 (subject to match funding being available at that time)</p> <p>Deliver improvements to other coastal gateways, such as new toilet block at South Road entrance at Crosby Coastal Park, refurbish toilets at Ainsdale beach entrance, and tender for new food and drink, beach huts and other concessions coast wide</p> <p>Develop new ‘masterplan’ documents for the four gateways, building upon the recent mapping exercises, and development of action plans for delivery of agreed projects</p> <p>Develop on the agreed masterplan vision for Orrell Mount Park, and explore priority projects, and funding opportunities</p>

GREEN SEFTON – ANNUAL REPORT 2023 HEADLINE ACTIONS OVERVIEW

What we said we would do	What have we done in the last year	What are we going to do in the next year
	<p>In March 2022, Full Council approved a growth in revenue budgets of £300k per year to fund the more successful elements introduced as part of the Visitor Action Plan over the last two years. This enabled the ongoing increase in staffing on the coast in the summer months, the appointment of a new Coast focussed Community Ranger, and other practical elements such as the provision of temporary toilets, improved waste management and cleansing, and the communications plan to encourage responsible visitor behaviour</p> <p>Overall, we have delivered the Coast Visitor Action Plan proposals 2023, providing additional facilities and services to cater for increased visitor pressure coastwide</p>	<p>Continue to meet with the Coast Cabinet Member Reference Group, to oversee the delivery of the Visitor Action Plan, and overall operational delivery on the coast in 2024</p>

GREEN SEFTON – ANNUAL REPORT 2023 HEADLINE ACTIONS OVERVIEW

What we said we would do	What have we done in the last year	What are we going to do in the next year
	<p>Develop funding model for Crosby Flood and Coast Defence Scheme (basic, £23M, works), and secured £600k to undertake project management, and interim works while awaiting the full scheme from 2027 onwards</p> <p>Developed scheme for Making Space for Water in Churchtown and Crossens (along the Pool Watercourse) to relieve flooding in the area. Designed a SuDS scheme to deliver multiple benefits. Begin the public consultation on the scheme.</p>	<p>deliver the interim works, and develop the enhanced scheme proposals.</p> <p>Complete the consultation and secure funding for the scheme and seek to start construction in 2024.</p>
	<p>An aspiration was to develop new processes and systems for recording site inspections and other works – incl new IT systems, and explore the APSE LAMS model, however capacity has meant this has not progressed fully, though some testing of site recording software was undertaken. As such, this will be rolled forward into 2024</p>	<p>Develop new process and systems for asset management, recording site inspections and other works – incl new IT systems, and explore the APSE LAMS model</p> <p>(aspirational item, subject to capacity, and may be postponed until 2025)</p>

GREEN SEFTON – ANNUAL REPORT 2023 HEADLINE ACTIONS OVERVIEW

What we said we would do	What have we done in the last year	What are we going to do in the next year
<p>In 2020 the Cemeteries & Crematorium maintenance was insourced to provide an inhouse provision for the 4 of the 5 Cemetery & Crematorium sites. Southport Crem was also passed over but without any maintenance resource. Green Sefton have managed to cover this by utilising resources from the wider maintenance team but this is unsustainable (and having a negative impact on the wider portfolio).</p>	<p>Funding has been provided for 1.5 posts on a 2-year contract until a full review of the service is undertaken;</p> <p>To deliver routine grounds maintenance for Southport Crematorium along with a draft management plan for the future specification and renovation of the site. Commencing in Oct 2021 – Sept 2023</p>	<p>Seek permanent resolution to the resourcing issues, especially as this is now having a negative effect on resourcing needed elsewhere in the portfolio</p>
	<p>In 2021/22 Green Sefton Land Management team commenced an audit of the machinery and equipment (Capital Asset) with a view of profiling the changes in service delivery and to ensure sufficient resource is still available for future service delivery. This culminated in a pre-procurement report being presented and accepted by Cabinet on 27th July 2023 – tender preparations are ongoing at the time of writing</p>	<p>Tender for a new supplier of fleet and machinery, and report back on possible budgetary implications with a view to having new supplier in place early 2024</p>

GREEN SEFTON – ANNUAL REPORT 2023 HEADLINE ACTIONS OVERVIEW

What we said we would do	What have we done in the last year	What are we going to do in the next year
	<p>Training & Development; In 2020 we identified a serious funding issue with essential training and development funding for the Land Management Team (that require regular/ refresher training and certification & licencing for a range of maintenance activities).</p>	<p>The team are ready to forward an application to the corporate funds at the end of the year with a hope to ring fence further funding. The certifications and licencing are essential to underpinning operational Health and Safety requirements.</p>
	<p>Contribute to Southport Town Deal bid; Ainsdale masterplan, Bootle Town Centre masterplan and other wider issues</p>	<p>See other actions above regarding: Botanic Gardens, Hesketh Park, Southport Golf Course, Southport beach, and Ainsdale beach gateway</p>
	<p>In April 2022, the service was asked to lead on the development of a new Coast and Visitor Areas PSPO, in order to allow the council, emergency services and other land owner partners to better manage visitor behaviour when visiting our sites. This was conceived, consulted on, developed and gained Licencing and regulatory Committee approval before Full Council approval in July 2022.</p>	<p>Although the emergency services and some partners can issue Fixed Penalty Notices immediately, based on pre-authorisation, it was agreed by the Cabinet Member Reference Group (and taking on board the emergency services and other land owners concerns too), that enforcement was not appropriate for Council staff nor was there resource to contract in such support. As such, the PSPO now relies upon engagement and education to encourage appropriate visitor behaviour.</p>

GREEN SEFTON – ANNUAL REPORT 2023 HEADLINE ACTIONS OVERVIEW

What we said we would do	What have we done in the last year	What are we going to do in the next year
	<p>In order to better communicate the service standards that are possible within available resources, officers have begun work on defining these with a draft document for future publication in development</p>	<p>Agree, adopt and publish new ‘Service Standards’ document – starting with inland grounds maintenance works, and rolling out to wider areas of the service in time. To be publicised after the fleet and machinery replacement process has completed, and the resulting resources are known accordingly</p>
	<p>In order to better manage the relationship with community groups, and ensure investment of officer time and resources achieves the best outcomes, officers have refreshed the Volunteer Handbook in 2022</p> <p>Publish and share the updated Volunteer Handbook, including explain to groups the resulting expectations to be placed on them in terms of their lines of communication with officers, the policies and procedures we expect them to follow, together with what they can expect from ourselves moving forwards</p>	<p>Continue to work closely with our many community and volunteer groups, bearing in mind and using the themes within the Handbook</p>

GREEN SEFTON – ANNUAL REPORT 2023 HEADLINE ACTIONS OVERVIEW

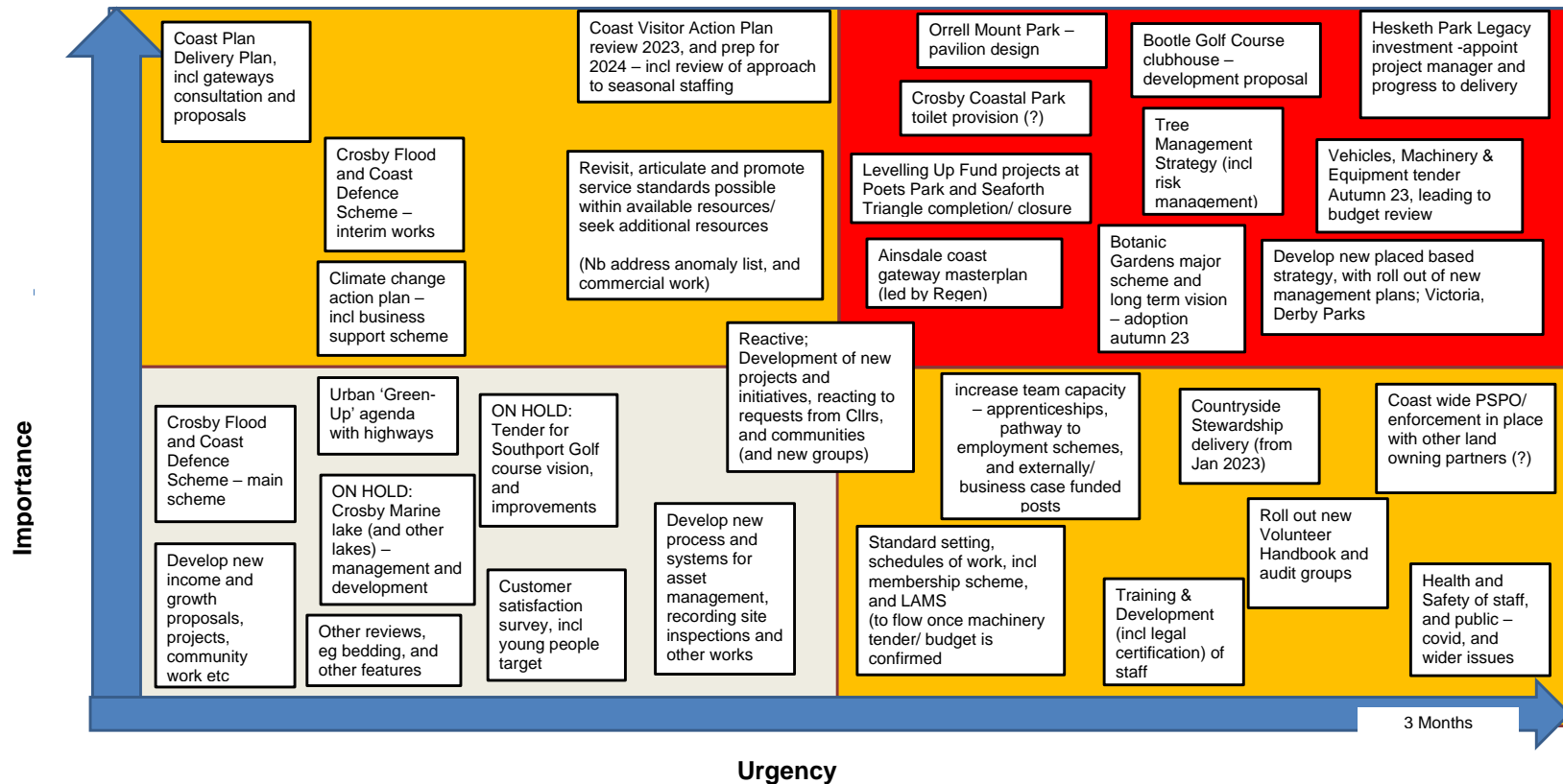
What we said we would do	What have we done in the last year	What are we going to do in the next year
	<p>In March 2022, Full Council approved an increase in the revenue budget for management of play facilities from £45k per year, to £245k. There are 106 such facilities across the borough, and this budget will allow for more frequent inspections to ensure their safety, and quicker response times as and when issues are identified/ when they arise. A priority list has been developed, based on the results of the annual external and independent inspections, for a 7 year plan to strategically address issues. Ward Cllrs have been contacted in relevant areas for the first year of projects, and discussions are ongoing about delivery in Winter 2022. The additional Play Inspector has now been appointed, and joined the team in August 2022</p>	<p>Agree and deliver year 2 priority projects, seeking match funding to maximise the impact of the additional monies and projects possible</p>

Figure 4; GREEN SEFTON STRATEGIC WORKLOAD MATRIX – SEPTEMBER 2023

(to be reported to Cabinet Member on a regular basis, and updated through the year)

GREEN SEFTON STRATEGIC WORKLOAD MATRIX – as presented to O+S Oct/ Nov 22, and updated 25.11.22, 10.2.23, 10.3.23, 25.7.23, 15.9.23

(to be reported to Cabinet Member on a regular basis, and updated through the year)



APPENDIX 1:

GREEN SEFTON

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

1. Background

Green Sefton was formed in 2018, and brings together the former Coast & Countryside, Parks & Greenspaces, Flooding & Coastal Erosion Risk Management services together to ensure a joined-up approach to the vital management, development and oversight of Sefton's coastline, parks and green spaces.

In 2023, after 5 years of operation, officers have reviewed and adopted the Service Vision (following consultation), the Service Plan, and are in the process of updating Key Performance Indicators too.

The service manages circa 6,500ha of the landscape of the borough (32% of the borough, equivalent to 7,800 football pitches!) – its 22 miles of beautiful coast with protected sites, to a range of parks, greenspaces, outdoor sports and recreational sites, street trees etc. The service also insourced the grounds maintenance of the Cemeteries and Crematoria in 2020, which adds additional landscape features to manage.

This landscape defines Sefton, and is treasured by our communities and visitors – as the 2030 vision highlights.

Outcomes

The creation of Green Sefton was part of PSR 7, and its aim was to:

- Improve the way we manage Sefton's natural assets
- Provide a single point of contact and enable more efficient and effective use of resources and offer potential to create new opportunities for income generation
- Enable more community cohesion
- Offer further opportunities for volunteers, residents and other organisations
- Create a more focussed, collaborative approach to the management, development and oversight of our coastline, parks and green spaces.
- Manage all land assets (excluding highways) in one portfolio

As the following sections indicate the service has gone a long way towards addressing these outcomes, and the Service Vision and Service Plan update will direct efforts further moving forwards. This will also include trying to engender a sense of 'pride in place' across the wider council and beyond.

However, it is clear that after significant budget reductions in recent years (circa 75% and 122 FTE staff, managing at least the same portfolio of land, which has actually increased in some areas), the current resources are struggling to meet public, councillor and other expectations. Although there is much to celebrate about achievements made by the team with the resources available, it is also prudent to consider either increasing those resources or undertaking clear communication to manage expectations of what is currently funded and achievable.

2. Summary:

2.1 There are many success stories over the last year;

- overall, and fundamentally, we have delivered landscapes and facilities to hundreds of thousands of residents, and visitors, have enjoyed (to the benefit of their health and wellbeing), whilst protecting these places to the benefit of nature, and for generations to come
- we have kept visitors, and our staff, as safe as possible by ensuring agreed control measures were implemented, and provided additional facilities and services as part of our Visitor Action Plan, which was formalised with an ongoing growth in budget agreed at Full Council on 3rd March 2022
- we have thought strategically, and have continued to develop our 'Place Based' approach, with the launch of our 'Managed for Nature' campaign
- we have undertaken major consultations including that for a new major developmental project for Botanic Gardens (with over 1,100 respondents), and for an updated Allotment Strategy
- we have gain pro-procurement approval for the replacement of our aging fleet and machinery, as approved by Cabinet on 27th July 2023, and are currently drafting the tender document which will hopefully see a new supplier in place early in 2024
- we have worked in partnership with many volunteer groups, and external agencies and statutory bodies, including updating and launching the new Volunteer Handbook to further improve the way in which we work with our volunteers
- we have continued to develop innovative new ideas and schemes, all of which have contributed to our 2030 vision; such as the new food and drink concessions returning at Crosby Coastal Park and Ainsdale beach
- we have continued to develop a range of capital, infrastructure and other projects to improve the infrastructure of the landscapes we manage – such as the adoption of the masterplan for Orrell Mount Park in Litherland, the

Hesketh Park Legacy project in Southport, and the improvements to Poets Park and the newly named Seaforth Green sites in Bootle

- we have continued to develop innovative funding for facilities, such as Business Case led Driving Range at Bootle Golf Course (which opened Spring 2022)
- we have sought other means of funding such as matching section 106 monies with external grants for Runnells Lane Park, the pre-development bid for a new major scheme at Botanic Gardens, sport related improvements such as the bids to the Football Foundation, and nature based funding such as the Countryside Stewardship funding for the coast
- we have reacted to issues, such as storms affecting flooding and tree management, and heat wave/ drought periods affecting landscape management and some tree issues
- we have led on and co-ordinated the delivery and promotion of the new Coast and Visitor areas Public Space Protection Order that was adopted in July 2022. This is now assisting all land owners on the coast in better managing visitor behaviour on our sensitive landscapes, and will run for three years initially.

2.2 However, despite these and other successes, it has been clear that the service has continued to struggle to meet public, councillor and other expectations at times. This is at least in part due to the additional demands being placed on the service, at the same time as resources have never been lower (with ongoing staff absences, aging fleet and machinery etc), but is overall also due to the staffing levels and other operational resources assigned to the service. As such, there have been times when our sites have not looked as we would like, as maintenance activities were re-prioritised accordingly. This all indicates that despite some growth in specific areas in 2022 (play maintenance, and the Coast Visitor Action Plan), reduced budgets overall, and less staffing availability leaves little resilience, and is seeing service standards and infrastructure continuing to decline over time...

Activities undertaken

What we manage:

- circa 6,500ha of the landscape of the borough (32% of the borough, equivalent to 7,800 football pitches!) – its 22m of beautiful coast with protected sites, to a range of parks, greenspaces, outdoor sports and recreational sites, street trees etc.
- Estimated 12M+ visits per year, including 90,000 car visits to the beach car parks

- Revenue budget spend circa £6.5m, with income targets of circa £2.0M, with a net budget of circa £4.5M and a capital programme of around £5.6M (with developmental capital projects in the pipeline, in excess of £30M)

Operations

- Over 1 million operations are undertaken each year, grouped into 500 maintenance types (beach management, conservation, horticulture and gardening, watercourse management, sports pitch maintenance, general cleansing, mowing, repairs, enforcement and engagement etc)
- Approximately 26,000 site inspection sheets are completed each year, accounting for 36,000 maintenance activities, which equates to an average of 682 per week, or 97 per day!
- Over 1,000 formal 'incidents' have been reported on the coast, with the main areas of concern being fundamental visitor behaviour

Trees

- Management of 90,000 trees on the highway, in parks and on the coast

Play facilities

- 106 facilities, including Playgrounds, outdoor gyms, skate parks, multi-use games areas etc.

Sport and recreation facilities

- 91 facilities including Golf Courses, Bowling Greens, Sports pitches (football, rugby, baseball etc.), and tennis courts.
- Over 270 teams making use of these facilities during their respective playing seasons

Buildings

- 140 buildings including community centres, sports pavilions, café's, toilets, conservatory and an astronomical observatory

Cemeteries and crematoria

- Grounds maintenance for the borough's cemeteries and crematoria, including maintenance around 50,000 headstones

Community

- Over 40 community and Friends of groups supported, leading to more than 44,000 hours of volunteer time contributed (excluding sports leagues, clubs etc, but including Natural Alternatives clients, conservation volunteering and more)
- 100's of external event applications that all need scrutinising for safety, insurance, risk and often commercial reasons

Flood management

- 15,000 properties are at risk of internal flooding in Sefton and as the Lead Local Flood Authority we must ensure this risk is managed appropriately.
- Undertake duties under the Flood and Water Management Act to support the Councils emergency response to a flood, and have a duty to investigate a significant flood event and publish our findings
- Ensure we enact action from the Shoreline Management Plan as a Coast Protection Authority

3.0 Annual Review in detail

The following sections provide an update on the development of the service since the last O+S update in November 2022 under the following headings:

3.1 Strategy and Service Planning (incl embedded documents)

3.2 Finance

3.3 Staffing

3.4 Risk Management

3.5 Asset Management

3.6 Community Engagement

3.7 Contractual and Commissioning

3.8 Policy and Procedure

3.9 Health and Safety

3.10 ICT Systems

3.11 Communications

3.12 Challenges

3.13 Conclusions

3.1 Strategy and Service Planning


A Service Vision to 2030 and Service Plan to 2020 were adopted in April 2019, following consultation with Cabinet Member, Overview and Scrutiny (Regeneration and Skills), (most) ward councillors, senior management and staff. This set the overall vision of what Green Sefton aspires to look like in 2030 and gives the road map of how officers are working to get there. These documents were widely shared with Cllrs, officers, friends of, sports and other volunteer groups, with partners to the service and made widely publicly available

The presentation document for each of the Service Vision 2030, and Service Plan 2020 review for Overview and Scrutiny is here:




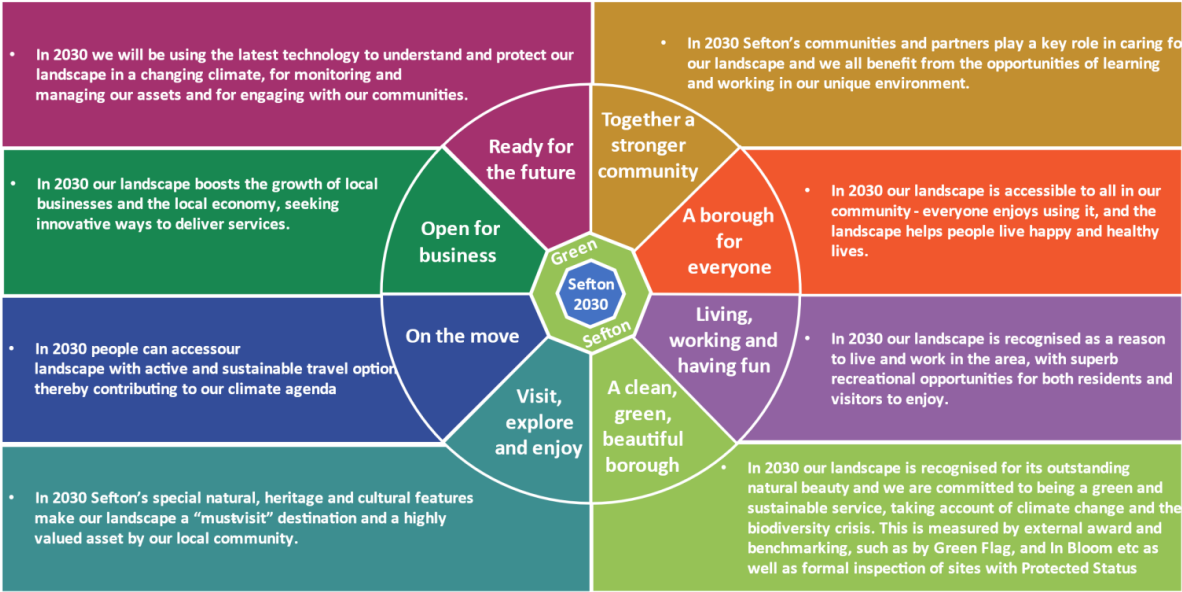
Green Sefton
Service review - O+S

In Spring 2023, Green Sefton had been in place for 5 years, and this seemed an appropriate time to revisit the Vision, check it remains valid, and refresh it accordingly for formal adoption by Cabinet Member – this was adopted in April 2023, and is copied here:





“Improving the quality of ALL life in Sefton”





- Ready for the future**
 - In 2030 we will be using the latest technology to understand and protect our landscape in a changing climate, for monitoring and managing our assets and for engaging with our communities.
- Open for business**
 - In 2030 our landscape boosts the growth of local businesses and the local economy, seeking innovative ways to deliver services.
- On the move**
 - In 2030 people can access our landscape with active and sustainable travel options thereby contributing to our climate agenda
- Visit, explore and enjoy**
 - In 2030 Sefton's special natural, heritage and cultural features make our landscape a "must-visit" destination and a highly valued asset by our local community.
- Together a stronger community**
 - In 2030 Sefton's communities and partners play a key role in caring for our landscape and we all benefit from the opportunities of learning and working in our unique environment.
- A borough for everyone**
 - In 2030 our landscape is accessible to all in our community - everyone enjoys using it, and the landscape helps people live happy and healthy lives.
- Living, working and having fun**
 - In 2030 our landscape is recognised as a reason to live and work in the area, with superb recreational opportunities for both residents and visitors to enjoy.
- A clean, green, beautiful borough**
 - In 2030 our landscape is recognised for its outstanding natural beauty and we are committed to being a green and sustainable service, taking account of climate change and the biodiversity crisis. This is measured by external award and benchmarking, such as by Green Flag, and In Bloom etc as well as formal inspection of sites with Protected Status

Green Sefton – Vision to 2030, updated April 2023



This in turn then informs the Service Plan, and these Annual Reviews undertaken each year too.

The Service Plan has also been reviewed in 2023, and adopted by Cabinet Member in October 2023, as embedded here:



Green Sefton
Service Plan 2023 AS

The existing Service Vision document, and the recent Annual Reviews have been made available on line, and also include some narrated presentations (which have been well received, and referred to), which can be found here;

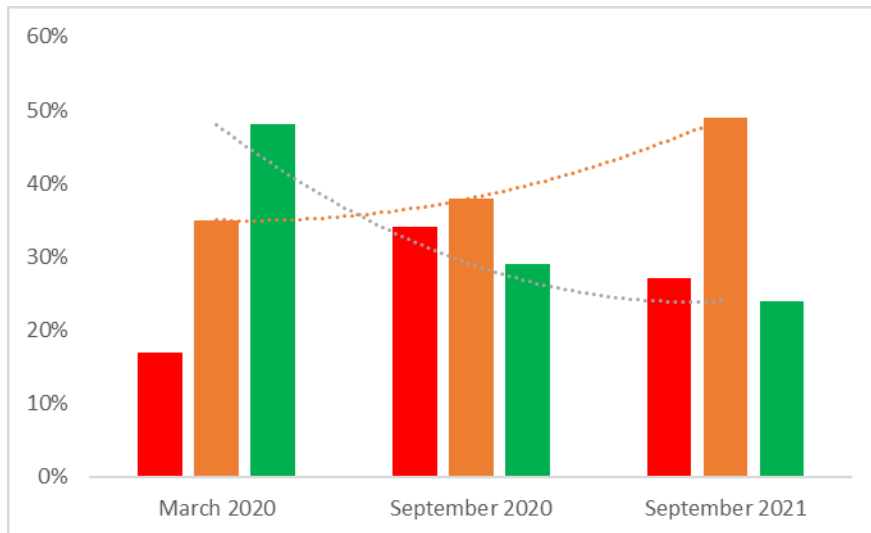
<https://www.sefton.gov.uk/greensefton>

The above detailed update has previously been summarised in the following table, which brings together the separate service plans into one table and suggests scoring against a simple RAG rating, copied here for reference, and to be updated for 2024 once the new Service Plan/ KPIs have time to become effective:

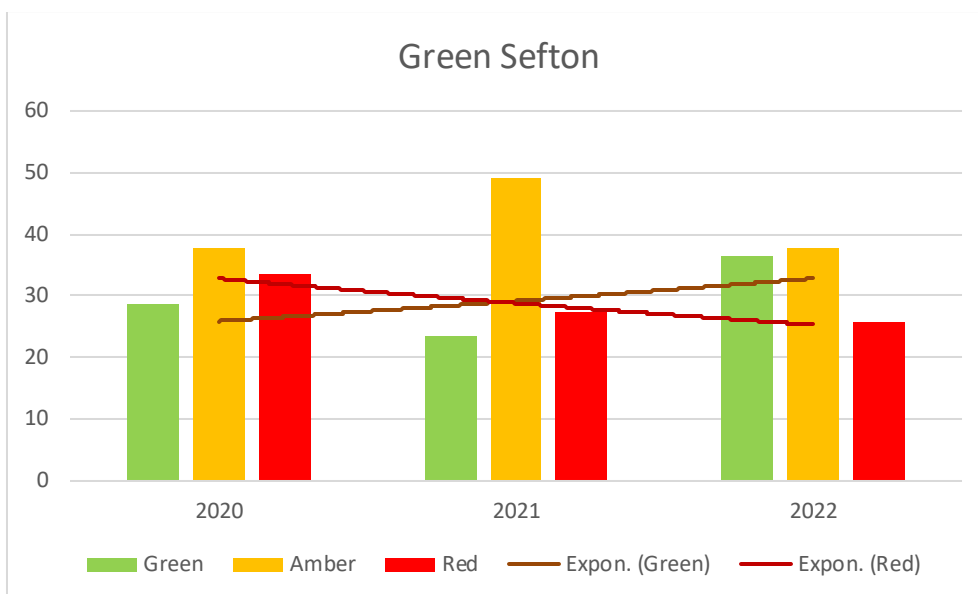
SERVICE AREA	RAG - progress to Sept 2020	Score Sept 2020	RAG - progress to Sept 2021	Score Sept 2021	RAG – progress to Sept 2022	Score Sept 2022
DEVELOPMENT	score		score			
	green count	6	green count	7	green count	7
	amber count	18	amber count	25	amber count	12
	red count	13	red count	5	red count	19
FCERM	score		score		score	
	green count	19	green count	19	green count	14
	amber count	20	amber count	20	amber count	13
	red count	14	red count	14	red count	6
COMMUNITY AND RECOURSES	score		score		score	
	green count	16	green count	13	green count	31
	amber count	23	amber count	35	amber count	20
	red count	13	red count	6	red count	3
LAND MANAGEMENT	score		score		score	
	green count	14	green count	9	green count	13
	amber count	11	amber count	18	amber count	22
	red count	24	red count	30	red count	18
GREEN SEFTON	score		score		score	
	green count	55 (29%)	green count	48 (24%)	green count	65 (37%)
	amber count	72 (38%)	amber count	98 (49%)	amber count	67 (38%)
	red count	64 (34%)	red count	55 (27%)	red count	46 (26%)
				TOTAL	178	

The above can be summarised graphically, as follows, where it is clear that green items are steadily falling, and more and more items become amber as the priorities have become the operational delivery of the service as opposed to proactive, developmental works:

As reported in September 2022, and comparing actions to pre-pandemic times, it was clear at that point that green items were steadily falling, and more and more items become amber as the priorities have become the operational delivery of the service as opposed to proactive, developmental works:



This was addressed in 2022, with an updated graph presented as follows (which will be updated in 2024 once the new Service Plan/ KPI's have time to become effective):



The service is directed by several key council strategies (including the 2030 Vision, and the Local Plan), and has in place some key documents too, such as the Coast Plan, Parks and Greenspaces Asset Management Strategy and Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy and more recently the Climate Emergency Strategy.

Taking these strategies forward will be the development of further sub-strategies and refresh documents including the coast Visitor Management Strategy, Nature Conservation Strategy, and Adaptation Strategy, together with the FCERM Investment Plan and Climate Emergency Action Plan.

Overall, for the Green Sefton portfolio, it will be necessary to begin thinking about how we manage our landscape within our reduced resources, which must be a focus in the coming times.

A place based approach is proposed, considering all landscape in a given area and what facilities would be appropriate to provide for that community, and what should be radically redesigned in order to meet ongoing challenges (including environmental, climate change and social, as well as economic). Progress in this area has included the conversations around Linacre Ward as a pilot for this approach, and more reactively, the development of the 'Green Ribbon' project within the Southport Town Deal bid which has led to several of the larger schemes now in development (Botanic Gardens, Hesketh Park, Southport Golf Course, and Ainsdale beach gateway). However, progress has not been as was hoped, due to staffing capacity, and this will be prioritised in the coming year.

Other strategy work this year has included the resurrection of the Allotment Strategy, being led by a Cabinet Member group, and the Tree Management Strategy, also encouraged by Elected Members. Both of these pieces of work will be progressed in 2024 and will underpin these distinct areas of the service for the future – highlighting the lack of resources available, but setting out a vision, and a framework to prioritise allocation of resources to achieve this over time.

The Playing Pitch Strategy has also been revisited, and adopted in 2023, which now sets out the strategic priorities for provision of sports pitches in the borough, including self management of facilities by clubs, and considering the pathway for engagement in sport generally. The Football Association has identified Sefton as a priority site for development of the sport in the borough, and several Expression of Interests for funding etc have been made in 2023, and will be for development and delivery in 2024.

3.2 Finance

3.2.1 Revenue

The finances of the service have been structured to reflect the structure of the service – Development, Community and Resources, and Land Management.

The PSR workstream required a reduction in revenue spend of circa £1.1M. This, on the back of reductions made since 2010, accounts for a circa 75% reduction in revenue spend on Green Sefton since 2010.

In 2019/20, additional service budget reductions were made with the introduction of additional income targets of £330k, and an additional £98k in 20/21 and £76k in 21/22.

Ongoing income targets associated with Green Sefton are often very weather dependant, such as golf courses and beach car parking. Other pressures on revenue budgets include utility charges, where unexpected increases are placing circa £100k of additional demand. Officers monitor this constantly with colleagues from the Finance team, and make adjustments accordingly – leading to an ongoing freeze on some vacant posts currently, and less allocation of Seasonal Gardeners/ Rangers in 2023 as opposed to 2022.

The internal Audit team identified two specific areas of Green Sefton for consideration in 2022, and audits took place to monitor the cash handling of monies at both the Beach Car Parks, and the two Golf Courses. Both found nothing untoward, but some actions and recommendations are being followed up on and monitored

3.2.2 Budget development and Income

At Full Council in March 2022, an increase in revenue spend was approved for management of our Play Facilities, as well as ‘normalising’ the Coast Visitor Action Plan – these much welcomed developments allowed for an increase in Coastal Season Rangers (including the provision of evening ‘patrols’), a new Coast focussed Community Ranger, and the appointment of an additional Play Inspector, as detailed elsewhere

In March 2023, Full Council in its budget setting removed the previously unachievable income targets, which has allowed the service to present a balanced budget for the next two years at least.

3.2.3 Capital

The service relies on Capital funding to invest in its assets. In 2023 the total capital programme value was £5.6M. Schemes varied from funding investigation and strategies to inform infrastructure improvements to address flooding, through to actual construction works to improve the sites and assets we manage. Without Council funding for such works, we are reliant on Grant in Aid from the Environment Agency and external grants from other organisations, and capacity must be allowed to bid for these, to deliver works, and then to meet contract conditions afterwards.

The major scheme the service is leading on remains the Crosby Flood and Coastal Defence scheme – a total value (incl partner contributions needed) of £23M project to renew the sea defences at the Northern end of the Crosby Coastal Park, also looking to regenerate the area too – this estimate needs revisiting given ongoing inflation rises and likely increases to be planned for. Other schemes include improvements to Southport Golf Course (both buildings and/ or the course itself), the development of a major funding bid for Botanic Gardens, the development of a ‘legacy’ project at Hesketh Park, and more (as detailed in the workload matrix articulated elsewhere)

Other schemes delivered in 2023 include the multi use games area, with new path network and other works completed at Rainbow Park, Melling, and the Parks Levelling

Up Fund works (supported by Ward Member funding) at Poets Park and the newly renamed Seaforth Green.

3.2.4 Insurance:

Insurance claims received during the period Sept to October each year have been tracked:

September 2019 to October 2020 - 19 claims

September 2020 to October 2021 - 30 claims

September 21 to October 2022 - 40 claims

September 22 to October 2023 – 33 claims

Of those received in the last year;

1 was associated with 'Material Damage'

3 were for 'Motor' issues

And 29 were for 'Public Liability' (6 injury & 23 property damage)

These were split as follows in the portfolio:

1 claim on our Coast and Countryside

10 claims were in Parks and Greenspaces

And 22 claims were associated with Trees

The authority successfully defends many of these claims overall, and currently there are 30 'open' cases still being pursued/ investigated and defended

However, a discussion with colleagues in the insurance section has highlighted that the lack of regular, recorded site inspections is making it increasingly difficult to gather data and defend claims – another area to consider developing resources for in the future.

3.3 Staffing

The creation of Green Sefton required a major staffing restructure in 2017/18. The structure was then revisited in 2019/20 as things settled down, and some amendments were made to address areas of inefficiency (for example the repairs and maintenance had been split between contracted and in house works, but were found to be more efficient managed under one team), and to clarify some roles and responsibilities (which were subsequently subject to a further Job Evaluation review). This will again be revisited in Winter 2023 to ensure the structure remains appropriate to deliver the outcomes of the updated Service Vision and Service Plan (bearing in mind requests for further budget reductions over the next three financial years) and will be reported on accordingly.

It should be noted that the combined services had been reduced by 122 staff 2010-2018, although recent efforts have begun to see increases in team numbers again. The land managed and issues dealt with on a daily basis remain much the same however as is the expectations of community's, by statutory bodies and funders. Indeed, the portfolio we manage is actually increasing, as more and more sites/ issues and responses are requested of the team weekly. This, combined with the reduction on other public and emergency services leading to more acute issues associated with anti social behaviour/ vandalism etc, clearly places massive pressure on the remaining staff, impacting on our

ability to move issues along, and to respond to public and councillor queries, complaints, freedom of information requests, and insurance claims.

39 Seasonal Ranger posts were advertised in summer 2023, the same number as 2022, and growing from the 26 posts in summer 2021, an additional 7 seasonal posts beyond those in summer 2019, and 2 more than in 2020. This steady increase (funded from innovations such as the increase in car parking charges, and the Visitor Action Plan monies), has assisted in managing issues on site, but did not cater for the amount of abuse staff received especially on the evening shifts on the coast. As such, some of the posts now created are for a slightly higher grade of officer, as 'Steward Rangers' for the evenings, to deal with inappropriate behaviours more directly. Issues seen in recent years with the recruitment process for seasonal Rangers each year are to be address with a new procedure trialled for 2023, and to be developed further for 2024 – to include earlier advertising, and a 'rolling process' to be employed until all posts are filled.

With an aging workforce, succession planning is key. Four Apprentices were employed within the service in Autumn 18, and it is the intention to seek further funding to employ a further apprentice per team (so a further 7 apprentices). (planning in part for at least three experienced gardeners who have announced their intention to retire over the next 18 months).

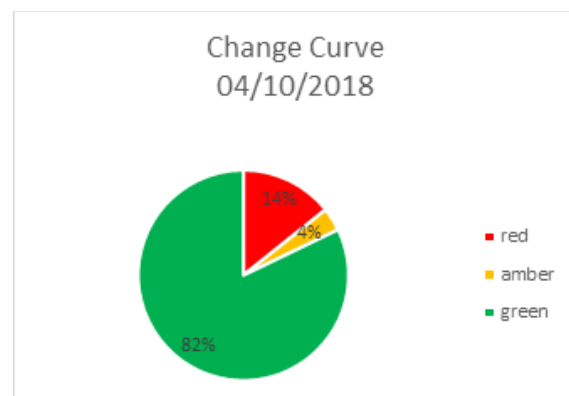
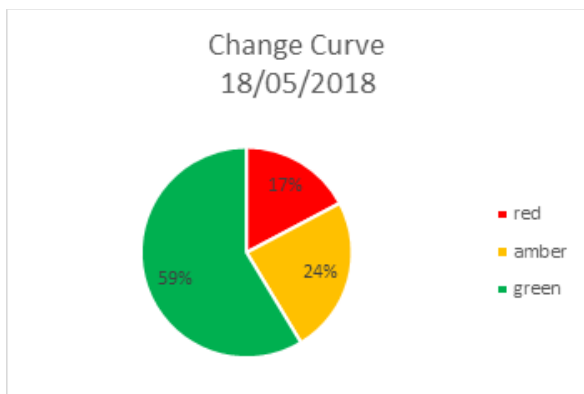
Learning and development of the workforce is fundamental, including the mandatory training and qualifications for undertaking practical works (for example applying chemicals, and driving vehicles and machinery in public places). A training plan has been developed for the service, which will ensure all staff are appropriately trained, and have opportunity to develop their skills and expertise over time. Two members of staff completed their NVQ level 4 or 5 in Leadership and Management, some of the grounds staff are ongoing with training to supervisor level, and further opportunities will be explored also.

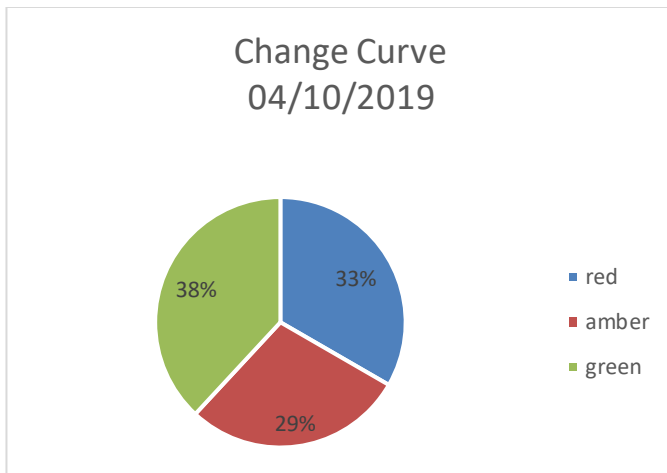
A key aim of the integration of services was to encourage cross skilling, and flexible working. While there have been isolated examples of this working in practise, and the pandemic revealed many examples of people willing to work outside of their normal areas, more can be done to remove the previous silo mentality (there is still a perceived split between the inland and coastal operations). The main challenge to this tough being the persistent capacity issues – every team is stretched beyond capacity and so there is little flexibility to encourage such cross working/ on the job training.

Efforts have been made to engender a new culture within the service – to encourage all staff to understand the wider portfolio, and become ambassadors for Green Sefton (indeed the whole Council/ Borough). This has included several away sessions (pre-pandemic), and regular team updates, team meetings, including face to face catch up's with operational staff, working groups on cross cutting issues, individual 1:1's and more. Monthly Microsoft Teams briefings have continued too – where an update is provided on issues relating to the service and opportunity is given for staff to ask any questions they may have. The refresh of the Service Vision in Autumn 2022 was used as a means to

bring the teams together again and undertake some group exercises to re-look at the overall service again.

An exercise was previously undertaken using a 'change curve of emotions' exercise, as a simple test of how people are feeling about work/ the service etc, this has been summarised as below (with 'negative' emotions grouped as red colour, 'positive' as green, and amber as in between). As can be seen, staff seemed to be feeling increasingly positive about the service as the structure settled in, but by Autumn 2019, maybe the reality of working with stretched resources was taking its toll. The pandemic has stalled further team away sessions, but this exercise was revisited again in preparation for this report in 2022, together with the creation of a staff survey (which attendees of the away session completed at the time, but follow up work is needed with operational staff who were not able to attend – this is ongoing at the time of writing).





3.4 Risk management

The service's three broad areas manage four Risk Registers for Green Sefton, which are reported to Cabinet Member quarterly. This in turn feeds into the Operational In House Services (formerly Locality Services) Risk Register and that in turn escalates to the Corporate Risk Register as needed. The September 2023 update of these is included here:



Green Sefton Risk Register - FCERM ORRegister - DevelopmRegister - CommunitRegister - Land Man:

There are a number of risks that are escalated/ appear on the OIHS Service Risk Register (SRR). Anything with a residual score of over 7 is considered for inclusion in the SRR, officers have then sense checked these items, and the risks that were then escalated to the SRR include (in order of residual score, high to low):

- Failure to ensure safety of highway and other Council owned trees
- Failure to meet commercial/ other innovation income targets for service
- Failure to achieve revenue targets
- Failure to provide (OIHS services) due to staff shortages
- Collapse/failure of northern section of Crosby Seawall and/or breaching of MEPAS rising main sewer and/or loss of access route to Crosby North Pumping station/Hightown.
- Sefton fail to capitalise on the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) legislation
- Failure to achieve statutory requirements for maintenance and management of designated land (e.g. SSSI) on the Coast - must be maintained within agreed performance standards as directed by Natural England/ DEFRA and in legislation
- Cemeteries and Crematorium maintenance 2020 TUPE transfer resulted in Southport crem being transferred with no staffing resource, and no resources for the seasonal maintenance of the other 4 cemetery and crematorium sites, or replacement cycle of fleet and machinery
- Inadequate assets (e.g. vehicles / machinery) to operate effectively
- Failure of Green Sefton, as Lead Local Flood Authority, to manage surface/groundwater water flood risk effectively in Maghull.
- Green Sefton failing to produce service strategy based on a place based approach.

All of the above are a result of a lack of resource/ capacity within the team. As such, there are several discussions ongoing about the resources within the service outlined elsewhere, and a focus and outcome of future income proposals must be to reinvest back into the service – both in terms of staffing as well as revenue budgets.

3.5 Asset Management

The service runs from seven main bases (in alphabetical order):

- Ainsdale Discovery Centre complex, Ainsdale
- Cambridge Road Depot, Crosby
- Derby Park Depot, Bootle
- Hesketh Park, Southport
- Magdalen House, Bootle
- Thornton Garden of Rest, Thornton
- Southport Crematorium

The future alternative use of some of these sites is being discussed (specifically parts of the Ainsdale Discovery Centre, and Derby Park depot), and so potential relocation should be considered moving forwards also.

In order to insource the grounds maintenance function, and now to support the wider service, procurement of fleet, machinery and tools/ equipment has taken place – significant spend on specialist operational machinery and going through the procurement and ordering process is a further spend on fleet (to replace the more expensive leased vehicles).

It is essential these assets remain operational for our delivery, and a planned reinvestment schedule needs to be in place – a focus area for 2022/23, as the original insourcing was in 2017, and it is necessary to consider the long term planning for vehicles and machinery. It must be noted that the service has grown over the last 5 years, and of course cost inflation too will impact on the tendered sum anticipated. The pre-procurement report to tender for ne specialist machinery was approved by Cabinet on 27th July 2023, and the tender is being prepared at the time of writing.

Revenue budgets have reduced by circa 75% which has resulted in reduced funding for routine repairs and maintenance – this has meant much of our hard infrastructure (benches, fencing railings, footpaths, walls (incl sea defences etc) are in a poor state of repair and may be at risk (or pose a risk) without future investment – a key part of the Service Vision and Plan refresh being to focus in such investment projects.

3.6 Community Engagement

It is well understood that the Council's Green Sefton assets contribute to a wide range of outcomes, not least the massive benefits to peoples health and well being. A core outcome of maintaining our sites to appropriate standards, and providing facilities people want to use within them, is to encourage greater use and participation (balancing this with protecting our special habitats and species we are custodians of too).

The Community Engagement team, with support from officers across the service, lead on this engagement. From activities and events, facilitating and supporting volunteering, to seeking quality awards and funding, and enforcement together there are many success stories to reflect on.

In summary, it is recorded that we benefited from circa 44,000 hours of volunteer time per year (pre pandemic) – this equates to around £660k of contribution (or 25 FTE's)! and this excludes the massive contribution volunteers running our sports clubs and leagues offer too!. Although this is a great statistic, the reality is that these efforts are made by the few, not the many. Efforts are to be made to expand the pool of people getting involved – from the range of people in our communities (including businesses), not just the 'traditional volunteer'.

Also, efforts are needed to guide the work undertaken to ensure works undertaken are those that make the biggest positive impact, and do not in fact detract from other outcomes. We have in the past been guilty of allowing some volunteer groups, whilst working with the best of intentions, of undertaking their 'pet project's, often planting inappropriate shrubs/ perennials which ultimately requires increased maintenance (nd especially if the groups subsequently folds, which has happened on occasion).

We have maintained success in working with communities to benchmark and demonstrate quality in land management and the services we provide, such as with the In Bloom campaign, Green Flag, and the proposed Land Audit Management System (LAMS).

However, the integration of services to create Green Sefton included further reductions to staffing level on services which had seen significant reductions already in recent years. As such, opportunities will continue to be explored to seek external funding, and alternative funding mechanisms to increase the staffing resource and therefore exponentially increase the community involvement and offer.

In the meantime, a more strategic approach is needed to assess which groups/ projects offer the greater benefits to the communities we serve (we may have to prioritise some groups ideas, over others where they offer greater benefits). Another consideration are those issues which drain staffing resource, such as the demands of groups when individuals may fall out with each other (such as has happened, with huge staffing capacity (and morale) implications, within the last year).

To assist in this, the Volunteer Handbook was refreshed in 2022, with our expectations of groups more clearly laid out (together with those that they can expect from us) – this includes clear lines of communication, ensuring groups are constituted and have regular AGM's, and that they have appropriate policies and procedures in place too.

The service works in partnership wherever mutually beneficial. For example, the Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership (including the summer 'Multi Agency Group'), the Liverpool City Regions Local Nature Partnership; Nature Connected, the Turning Tides Board, and the symbiotic funding relationship with the Environment Agency relating to flooding issues and more.

Natural Alternatives is Green Sefton's own long-running inclusion programme for adults and young people with additional needs.

Natural Alternatives offers a safe, secure and challenging work environment for participants providing training, education and work experience. Participants undertake conservation and access work as well as horticulture and small maintenance works across Green Sefton on a project basis with community and other groups. A maximum of 15 participants attend per day.

It is proposed to expand this model across the borough, in order to offer further opportunities to 'clients'. The start of this, borne out of the Covid situation, is the relocation of the team to the rear yard at Botanic Gardens, and in time this will have become a second base for the service, allowing for increased participant numbers

3.7 Contractual & Commissioning

Grounds maintenance of cemeteries and crematoria:

The grounds maintenance of Cemeteries and Crematoria were insourced to Green Sefton in April 2020, having been outsourced to contract since CCT in the early 1990's. This occurred just as the national lockdown was imposed for Covid 19, and within weeks the burials and cremations had doubled from previous average years. However, the benefits of insourcing were instantly available, as staff from other parts of the service were able to be quickly trained up to assist.

Some headline info about the insourced cemeteries and crematoria grounds maintenance:

160,000 burial plots, circa 49,000 headstones

Average burials per year 363 (with a team of 4) Although during the pandemic, this has been circa double the average at times. Approximately 1/3rd of these will be hand dug and hand back filled, the others will be dug with the assistance of an excavator with hand dug shaping.

61 hectares of land, equivalent to circa 85 full size football pitches, but with the added complication of the need to trim around 49,000 headstone obstacles, which is no easy task as each one is different and can include floral tributes (that shouldn't be there, but must not be damaged as this causes distress to the mourners).

We are trying to keep to a mowing schedule of every 4 weeks, which breaks down to a team of 3 trying to trim around approximately 4,000 headstones per week each!

This year, a lack of staffing at times, and machinery breakdowns etc, has resulted in complaints and a perceived poor performance; which have on occasion led to complaints and negative press attention

Grounds maintenance in parks and greenspaces:

Green Sefton now manage the parks grounds maintenance that was previously outsourced from the early 1990's until 2017. This continues to prove to be successful, with staff now available to work across the wider portfolio, and not restricted to contract terms and conditions under the previous arrangement. This has been especially useful where staff can be relocated to other service areas such as supporting burials and cremations, and reacting to situations such as fly tipping left from traveller encampments.

Tree and woodland management:

The Arboricultural (tree and woodland management) is outsourced, with a 3+2 year term which started Spring 2019, and focuses mainly on off ground, highways works. In late 2021 though, the contractor announced they were no longer able to hold their contracted rates for the extended term, and so the works required retendering. This took place over Winter 2021, and the new contractor started in June 2022, for a new 5 year term, which is bedding in well.

During this new term, it is intended to upskill the in house team to undertake further 'on ground' works in parks and on the coast.

Leases of land and buildings:

Cabinet Member will be aware from previous reports that we have an extensive portfolio of individuals, community organisations or businesses with a lease, licence or other such management agreement or who aspire to have agreements.

These arrangements have a significant benefit to the Council in helping to manage, promote and improve usage of public land in Sefton.

Devolving land and premises to other parties provides five significant benefits, which will continue to be explored:

- 1) Increased income for the Council.
- 2) Assistance in moving public open spaces closer towards cost neutrality so there is no financial impact on the Council.
- 3) Community involvement, use and interest in Council assets that would otherwise not be achieved.
- 4) Investment in premises and land which would otherwise not be available, in some circumstances this might also mean securing grants for buildings and land to which the Council itself have no access.
- 5) A means of moving liability and risk from the Council.

To this end, a market testing exercise of buildings and land has been undertaken and has revealed several new opportunities that are being explored, such as the old Garage site on Liverpool Road North, Seaforth, the old lodge at the entrance to

Botanic Gardens, and the middle yard in Hesketh Park. The phase 1 exercise has led to several new leases that begun on 2022, such as the developing new base for adults with learning difficulties out of the Hesketh Park middle yard.

3.8 Policy and Procedure

Each staff member has the ambassadorial role emphasised in their job description. Work has commenced to define how that role will manifest itself on a day to day basis. Initial examples have included opportunities to consider frequently asked questions from members of the public whilst carrying out work to see if we can provide a common response/approach. Now that the services have been merged there are a number of opportunities to consider best practice to determine issues such as rota work, distribution of skills etc across the teams

Embedding the need to provide environmental enforcement will also be a focus moving forwards (for example the dog control PSPO, and the new Coast and Visitor Areas PSPO too), and discussions have begun about wider enforcement on our land – both in partnership with the emergency services and others on Council land, and also in supporting the other larger land owners and partners across the borough too.

A number of working groups have been set up to ensure we have a standard and consistent approach across the service such as Health and Safety, asset management, community and communications, operational task group, adaptation to climate change and procurement.

3.9 Health and safety

Covid 19 has presented new challenges for us all in recent times. As such, new Risk Assessments have been created for all operations (whether site based or in the office/ working from home), and for all 140 buildings that the service manages. These have been updated throughout the pandemic, and the outcome communicated to all staff with regular briefings, and posters/ newsletters.

A full review of all 'day to day' Health & Safety procedures and risk assessment has been completed. This process revealed that over 140 risk assessments existed covering Green Sefton's combined operations. This has been used as a basis to form a Green Sefton H&S group who meet regularly to review progress of routine H&S monitoring of Risk Assessments and the development of new procedures.

Inevitably, the portfolio of land managed has inherent risks, but we are managing with limited resources and so a risk management approach has to be taken – albeit, over time, risks will increase as infrastructure starts to fail, inspections are undertaken less frequently etc. Officers are in regular discussion with the Risk Management team, including seeking views and assistance on the management of the Councils tree stock.

Incidents in 2023 have led to two reviews being instigated affecting, but not restricted to, the Green Sefton portfolio – one on Water Safety, and another on the way in which events and activities are booked and managed. These will be concluded in 2024, and reported to Cabinet Member accordingly

3.10 ICT Systems

ICT is considered as essential to support the Service. Agile working is proving successful across the service and seven bases. Further hardware will be necessary to spread this further to include site based staff being able to report issues, feed into systems, and gain access to council emails. It is essential that new IT systems are invested in, in order to enable and support the effective and efficient delivery and growth of the service;

Lack of WiFi at several of the operational bases still presents a barrier, and business cases have been prepared to install this in time

A new inspection/ recording system is being explored for all service areas

Cashless payment system has been procured for the beach car parks, and was successfully operational for 2021 season and onwards (in 2022, around half of all payments were cashless, which we will look to develop)

3.11 Communications

The Communications Plan that was drafted for the launch of the new service remains relevant, and efforts continue to embed 'Green Sefton' into wider consciousness, including:

- Creation of logo/ visual identity, used for uniforms, vehicles, promo material etc:



- Press Releases – to all Media
- Twitter and Facebook posts
- Periodic updates to all Councillors
- Friends groups, volunteers and partner letter and subsequent briefings

Ongoing social media, releases, a weekly column in the midweek Southport Visitor, and a slot on Radio Merseyside all continue to promote the work of the service, and fortnightly meetings take place with the Communications team to monitor all this, and develop both proactive campaigns/ messaging, as well as almost daily contact to respond to reactive press and other queries.

In summary for 2023:

A total of 29 press releases have been issued in 2023 so far (from January to mid-Sept).

Topics covered in the releases include:

- Celebrating parks and greenspaces (Rainbow park new MUGA, Levelling up fund bids, KBT fly tipping stunt, Alex Greenwood project and more)
- Green Sefton staff achievements (Playground accreditation, guided walks and expertise from Community Rangers, pop up events etc)
- Summer coast campaign (water safety inc World Drowning Prevention Day, visitor beach guides, no fires/bbqs, dog control, multi-agency coast releases..)

We have received fewer media enquiries in 2023. This could be as a result of poor weather through the school summer holidays, resulting in a quieter July and August at the coast. We did find that local media outlets were supportive of our press releases, in particular the sharing of important no fires/ no BBQs messaging.

There was media interest received on Southport beach car park in May and the reasons for the reduction of opening hours and closure. This was responded to reactively, with the sentiment being mixed overall – some understood the pressures of high tides and sand conditions.

And when Ainsdale beach car park had reduced capacity in June as a result of soft sand from prolonged dry weather, we did proactive comms to explain this and share widely and frequently to avoid visitors being turned away. E.g. sharing specific posts for horse riders who's horse boxes would not be allowed onto the beach car park.

We didn't receive any enquiries related to washed up animals or substances, which could be a positive sign that comms on this last year has settled people's questions or confusion around this topic. We also didn't receive any litter related enquiries, which again could be down to the coast being less busy over the summer holidays.

A takeaway for next year is to prepare proactive communications and raise awareness of the variety of reasons why beach car parks can have reduced capacity or close and at short notice. This will help the Council keep control of the narrative and get ahead of future media enquiries.

Parks and greenspaces

Love Parks Week content was shared across the Council social media channels along with a press release. We also promoted Green Flag success for the borough via a press release and on social media.

It has been a busy and positive year for parks comms as developments and updates have been shared for Hesketh Park, Rainbow Park, and the Botanic Gardens public consultation. And the KBT fly tipping stunt that took place at Poets Park.

We have also highlighted the Council's commitment to play facilities through both press release and social media by sharing staff accreditation achievements, £200k increased Council funding, and the development of new MUGAs.

Summer Coast campaign overview

In total 18 'reel' videos were posted onto the Council's Instagram account.

Top 2 performing videos:

- Crosby beach not for swimming post reached over 48k accounts, received 276 likes
- Litter picking 'don't be a scruff take home your stuff' video post reached over 44k, and 676 likes

For reference, last summer the total views received across all videos combined was 38k.

There were 11 press releases were issued over the summer.

A big focus of comms was sharing water safety messages, with particular focus on raising awareness to visitors that Crosby is not a bathing beach. RNLI were supportive in sharing this content with their own audiences which was helpful too.

Another priority was to raise awareness that fires and BBQs are not allowed anywhere along the coast, this was particularly important during a prolonged period of dry weather in June. We received support from local media outlets and residents in the sharing of this message, and VMS signs were used at Crosby beach to further push this message, and later in the season a second warning message on sinking sand/mud was added.

Dog behaviour was another focus, and we utilised the work of the Coast focussed Community Ranger, to promote coast pop up events and Green Sefton's partnership with the Dogs Trust. A press release was issued highlighting the safety angle as to why dogs need to be kept under control at the coast which was a different approach to previous comms on dog control.

Signage

New signage was produced for Crosby beach in response to issues with organised balloon releases and fireworks. Two different signage designs have been created and the signage has been up through the summer. The signage used 'what goes up must come down' slogan along with impactful images of animals injured as a result of balloons and fireworks.

This is the early stages of a long-term behaviour change and awareness campaign.

Natural coast and wildlife

We have continued to promote the Sefton coastline as our 'Natural Coast' and highlight the ecological and environmental value of the landscape and wildlife. In developing this further, a new slogan 'rarer than a rainforest' has been used in coast content to which positive feedback has been received from National Trust Formby who have asked if they can use as well.

Raising awareness of the SSSI and other coast accreditations has been central to coast communications, and this has been achieved through regular social media posts and inclusion in beach-guide style articles and press releases.

The Annual Review's are proving a useful tool in our communications efforts too - shared with all staff, Cllrs, friends and voluntary groups, sports and recreation groups, and other partners. A narrated version, together with links to the main reports have been

uploaded each year on the website, and have received positive feedback/ are useful to refer to in discussions.

The Green Sefton web page was updated in 2022, and includes information and links on a range of useful subjects: [Green Sefton](#) and further development work is planned for 2024

4. Challenges and complaints

4.1 Without focussing on the negative, its important to acknowledge our challenges and consider ways to over come these. Some of the ongoing challenges for the service include:

- Capacity to deliver core and routine service, especially when demands are placed to undertake 'non core' and unscheduled works, and noting of course that some works are required under statute
- Capacity to develop new proposals (including capacity from support services, as well as within the team)
- Draw of resource heavy issues (eg sand clearance at Crosby promenade, Botanic Gardens aviary, and friends groups relationships when they have internal arguments)
- Management of expectations of what is deliverable within resources available – of residents/ visitors/ Cllrs and partners
- Succession management planning
- Seasonal staffing (timing of recruitment, and availability of suitable candidates to ensure staffing numbers for April, albeit with new procedures trialled for 2023, and plans for further development in 2024, as outlined above)
- Habitat conservation (insufficient resources to preserve habitats at risk)
- Climate change (peak demands on maintenance during periods of hot weather, increasing occurrences of heavy rainfall and flash flooding, heatwaves and other extreme weather events affecting our landscapes)
- Increase in number of cases of notifiable plants (eg Japanese Knotweed)
- Training and development (resource and capacity)
- Traditional local authority processes and procedures, incompatible with commercial working and development of self funding business cases

4.2 It has been clear that the service has continued to struggle to meet public, councillor and other expectations at times. This is at least in part due to the additional demands being placed on the service, at the same time as resources have never been lower (with ongoing staff absences, aging fleet and machinery etc), but is overall also due to the staffing levels and other operational resources assigned to the service. As such, there have been times when our sites have not looked as we would like, as maintenance activities were re-prioritised accordingly. This all indicates that despite some growth in

specific areas in 2022 (play maintenance, and the Coast Visitor Action Plan), reduced budgets overall, and less staffing availability leaves little resilience, and is seeing service standards and infrastructure continuing to decline over time...

- 4.3 Overall, there is much to celebrate though, with 10 formal compliments received (an increase of 9 compared to 2022, and on top of many more informal) and a sense that by and large, the public, residents and visitors really do appreciate the wonderful landscape assets in Sefton like never before. There has been an increase in complaints as some visitors are disappointed with the standards of maintenance being provided however, but this demonstrates visitors passion for our landscapes, and a desire to see improved standards. There have been 183 Stage 1 formal complaints in the last year (compared to 157 in the previous year), with 8 escalating to Stage 2 (compared to 13 the previous year). At the height of summer at times an average of over one complaint per working day were being received (with 27 formal complaints received in June, a similar level to 2022 when 28 were received in July at its peak). These demand a high level of officer support and administration, as few complaints are 'simple' to respond to and resolve. None of these however have then been raised with the Ombudsman in 2023, compared to 1 in the previous year.

5 Conclusions

This review demonstrates that the service has performed incredibly well to respond to ongoing challenges, keep our sites safe and accessible with limited resources, and still develop the service in many areas.

This has all been summarised by the table shown in the covering report to this document - which provides the headlines actions/ priorities as agreed in 2022 with a summary of progress in 2023 and outlines actions planned for 2024 for each of these, together with new actions added to the end.

These are inevitably just some of the headline actions, with many other issues progressing day to day (for which, regular Cabinet Member papers are presented monthly).

Finally, the headlines detailed in the table have been populated in a 'importance/ urgency' matrix in order to inform the work programme of officers in the coming year. This will again be regularly reviewed, with changes reported and discussed with Cabinet Member regularly too

More work is yet to be done, and as the report outlines, we must focus on these priority work areas in order to deliver on the Services' own 2030 vision, that ultimately contributes to that of the Council overall.

A further Annual Review will be undertaken in Autumn 2024 for further awareness and discussion at that time.