

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

**Welfare Reform & Anti-Poverty Update**

The Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Cabinet Member Reference Group met on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023. The following updates were received:

**Updates from the Welfare Reform & Anti-Poverty Steering Group**

Officers from Public Health provided an update from the partnership steering group meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023.

The cost-of-living crisis was discussed. Updates included:

- Sefton Food Banks advised that they have seen an increase of 40% of self-referrals from last year. They are applying for funding for additional staff, as currently unable to cope with capacity. They are realigning the services in St. Leonards and other premises due to the loss of the premises in The Strand. Pantry numbers are still increasing week by week with a new pantry in St Paul, Hatton Hill being opened at the end of October.
- Officers from the Citizens Advice Bureau advised that they have employed Mind & Monday project officers who can help support with ELAS applications and things such as setting up bank accounts, budgeting, benefit calculations, PIP applications etc. Request for support surrounding immigration issues and translation services has increased.
- Officers from Riverside Housing advised that they have referred over 1000 tenants for financial inclusion support and have raised over £500,000 for these residents. They have a debt freeze programme currently, with around 200 households taking part in the programme.

**Period Poverty - A Sefton Update**

Cabinet Members received an update regarding period poverty in Sefton. The Department of Education now provide funding for sanitary products, this is an application process for schools to receive their allocation. Sefton Council officers are in the process of reminding schools to apply and assisting with the application process.

**SYMBOL report**

The Executive Director shared the SYMBOL report with members. SYMBOL is the Sefton Youth Making Better Opportunities with Leaders. Being a part of a SYMBOL activity means

young people can play a role in their community, with a direct line of communication with key decision-makers. Cabinet Members were advised of possible changes around fees and charges within leisure, the change could add funds to the system to reduce the cost of swimming lessons for children accessing free school meals.

### **Community Pantry Update**

Cabinet Members received an update regarding community pantries. The Council's Communities team has established a cost-of-living support group, with an aim to collate all cost-of-living schemes within the borough of Sefton. A report plus a live resources document is to be shared with members at the next meeting.

Cabinet Members were advised that an October harvest food drive took place in Magdalen House. It had a very positive response and discussions now taking place surrounding Christmas across the borough.

### **Sefton Child Poverty Strategy**

Officers from the Public Health team updated Cabinet Members on the Sefton child poverty follow-up event. The conference takes place on 18th January 2024. It is being held this time in the Brunswick Youth and Community Centre, in Bootle.

A save-the-date notification has been sent to guests. The formal event will start at 1:30pm. Speakers include Dr Ruth Hussey, High Sheriff of Merseyside, Michael Chang, Senior Lead, Planning, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, and Stephen Watson, Executive Director (Place), Sefton MBC.

The focus is on 'Place' and will be looking at areas of planning, housing, poverty proofing and inclusive streets.

### **Respiratory Pilot**

Officers from Public Health provided members with an overview of the respiratory pilot. This is a 12-month pilot that aims to enhance respiratory health by improving the respiratory health and wellbeing of children by connecting parents to holistic interventions providing advice, signposting, and education.

The proposal has been developed as a collaboration with statutory partners in Sefton Council and includes Public Health, Housing, and Early Years, acute sector collaboration with Alder Hey Children's Hospital, and the VCF in Sefton including CVS and Parenting 2000.

## **Sefton Council Housing update**

Cabinet Members received an update on the cost-of-living crisis and how it is affecting housing. It was reported that homelessness in Sefton is still challenging, and significant numbers of people are in temporary accommodation each week.

The largest factor influencing homelessness are changes in the private rented sector, with landlords selling properties due to interest rate rises and greater regulations such as the hold on the private renting reform bill.

Sefton Council Housing is working hard to reverse trends, including through a council housing programme. Sefton has not owned or managed council housing since 2006 when all the council's housing stock was transferred to One Vision Housing. However, in response to the housing crisis Cabinet has made a decision that Sefton is to re-enter the social housing market once again, and we are currently developing a programme which will see us acquire properties from the council's house building company Sandway homes to use as council housing. The first of these will be 18 properties acquired from Sandway on their Buckley Hill Lane site in Netherton which are expected to be completed in late 2024. This stock is to be managed by an existing Registered Provider of Social Housing on behalf of the council.

Cabinet Members were advised that a main priority is preparing for winter as it is the most challenging period around damp condensation.

## **Warm Hubs**

Cabinet Members received an update on Sefton Warm Hubs, called 'Welcome Spaces' during the summer period. The updated information is from May to August 2023.

14 organisations provided Welcome Spaces with 346 sessions held, and 5152 individuals attended with a common age profile of 65-75.

Sefton Localities Team advised members that there is a network of providers providing spaces during the winter. Funding has been extended via the Household Support Fund, through to March 2024. Currently, 22 providers with services having just been recommissioned, are expected to expand to 40 providers.

All branding now changed back from Welcome Spaces to Warm Spaces, from 1st October 2023 until 31st March 2024.

## **ELAS Update**

Cabinet Members received an update on ELAS performance for the council's local welfare support scheme. The Open Access household support fund online application scheme has received just over 5000 applications since April 2023. 3,500 awards have been provided to

individuals, equating to nearly £800,000. There are around 200 to 300 applications a week, for the scheme.

ELAS applications are around 200 a week. From the end of September 2023, 2,000 food vouchers have been issued, 2,500 utility awards issued and supported over 600 items of essential household items. There is an expected increase in utility vouchers as we come into winter.

### **Requests for Action**

None noted.