

CABINET MEMBER REPORT

Overview & Scrutiny

Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Paulette Lappin	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services	January 2024

Financial Management

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

The latest budget monitoring position, as at the end of October, was reported to Cabinet in December. This showed a forecast overspend of about £7m, mainly due to a forecast overspend on Children's Social Care (£5m) and the potential impact of the as yet unagreed pay award (an additional £1.5m). There are other budgets under pressure, but the expectation is that services will mitigate these pressures from elsewhere within their budgets. Mitigating actions of nearly £5m had been identified meaning a net position of just under £2.5m was reported. Further work continues to be undertaken to refine forecasts and updated positions will be reflected in the next report to Cabinet in January.

A report on the Medium-Term Financial Plan was presented to Cabinet in September. This outlined the updated position as well as provided some narrative on some other financial issues facing the Council. The MTFP is being refined as more information is received and will help inform the Budget Report in March 2024. The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement is expected to be announced early in the last week before Christmas at which point the funding assumptions for 2024/25 will be refined.

The audit of the draft Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 is nearing completion and is expected to be signed off in the near future (the Chair of Audit and Governance Committee has delegated authority to do this). The audit of the draft Statement of Accounts for 2021/22 is currently in abeyance. EY are waiting on instructions from the Government relating to measures that will be put in place to enable audits to be completed. Depending on what these measures are will determine if further work is required on the audit.

The draft Statement of Accounts for 2022/23 were presented to the Committee on 27 September 2023. The report noted that valuations of the Council's assets hadn't yet been finalised, so the impact had yet to be included in the financial statements. In addition a small number of notes hadn't been completed. The valuations were finalised by late October 2023 and a revised Statement of Accounts, including the impact of the valuations and the missing notes, was published at the beginning of November 2023.

As mentioned above, national discussions by the Government are taking place on what measures might be put in place to ensure sufficient assurance can be gained to ensure audits for 2022/23 can be concluded. Until these discussions have taken place and decisions made the external auditor is unable to formulate their audit plan for the year. Therefore, the majority of the work to be undertaken cannot yet commence. However, some audit work has taken place, particularly around the work required to form an opinion on the Council's Value for Money arrangements.

Customer Centric Services

The Service continues to deal with high workloads; it remains positive that there has been good progress in reducing both volumes outstanding and customer waiting times.

Customer Services

The Council's Customer Services Contact Centre is currently answering approximately 17,500 calls each month. The salutation message that is relayed at the start of each incoming call continues to encourage customers to use the online Council services if they can, allowing for staff to handle calls for Sefton's prioritised services, i.e., Social Care and ELAS.

As is usual, there remains a high volume of enquiries relating to Council Tax; in addition, due to the annual Green Bin collection recently ending, there has been an increase in callers disgruntled about missed bin collections and calls relating to delays in the delivery of new brown bins. There has also been an increase in calls for Highways, with customers complaining about potholes, flooding and various traffic lights at temporary roadworks not working.

Customer demand at the One Stop Shops continues to be high with over 3,000 customers attending Bootle One Stop Shop each month. During November, approximately 800 visitors related to taxi-licensing, just over 1,000 visitors were seeking information or advice relating to Council Tax, benefits or ELAS, with remaining callers requesting general-council advice from the receptionists.

At Southport, each month approximately 550 customers attend the Atkinson to discuss their Council Tax or benefit with the remainder seeking general council-related advice at reception. Service delivery from Southport continues to be reviewed with alternative locations being explored and updates will be provided in due course.

While overall customer contact remains high, enquiries for Social Care and ELAS remain prioritised above all other services that are offered by Customer Services.

Taxi-Licensing

Taxi Licensing workloads and processing times are at an acceptable level.

Taxi Licensing is entering a critical period, with advanced plans in place for implementing a new Taxi Licensing computer system for February 2024. This system will be a significant improvement for the trade and key-stakeholders, allowing for taxi drivers, vehicle owners and operators to upload various evidence documents as well as pay all licensing fees via an online portal. As part of the project implementation, the Council's website has been updated, and will be regularly reviewed, to provide details of the work timetable over coming months [Taxi licensing \(sefton.gov.uk\)](https://www.sefton.gov.uk/taxi-licensing)

Citizen Access - Revenues

Citizen Access-Revenues, a web-based "My Account" portal for Council Tax and Business Rates customers to manage their accounts on-line has recently gone live, initially as a phased approach with a wider roll-out over the next few months. Residents using the service can view their bills online, update household and bank details, and apply for a limited number of discounts.

Changes requested in this way will update the main Council Tax system directly resulting in the faster turnaround of enquiries. It is positive to highlight that from the initial phase, 346 work items have been received, of which 312 (90%) have been automated into the Council Tax processing system, speeding up customer response times. There have been 34 incoming work items for discounts and exemptions that have not been automated and need to be dealt with manually by Council Tax staff.

The team continues to work with colleagues in Communications to promote the service to all residents and businesses.

Risk and Audit

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

- Review of number of Schools.
- Damp and Mould Private Owned and Council Owned Properties
- Grants Management
- ASC – Controls to mitigate market failure
- Pupil Place Planning
- SHOL Governance review
- Sandway Homes finance review
- Assurance Mapping
- Petty cash
- Commissioning - Living Well
- Review into the procurement and management of contracts

We have continued the recruitment of a permanent staff member from February 2023 and were able to appoint a suitable candidate in September 2023 who is due to start in January 2024. We provided a revised Internal Audit plan in September 2024 to reflect the delay in recruitment and the delay in the one FTE staff member due to be transferred on a fixed term basis from Finance.

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

- We have concluded the Council's insurance tender and have selected the successful insurers for each of the lots and are currently completing the renewal process.
- We have identified a cyber insurance option for schools which we are promoting and seeking their individual authority to purchase subject to an application process.
- We have used some of the "free days" as part of the insurance programme risk bursary to undertake a review of Emergency Planning and Business Continuity documentation. The review identified minor changes in the documentation which have been addressed.
- We are currently procuring an Actuarial Report for the Council's Insurance Fund which the Council is required to provide to the external auditors which helps to assess whether the Council's Insurance Fund is suitably funded or whether an injection of funding is required.
- We are working with insurers and the Council's liability insurers to robustly defend claims and in limited circumstances will pursue through the Courts claimants to recover Council costs where the claims are proven to be exaggerated.
- Team continues to work extensively with Service Teams including Highways, Green Sefton and Tourism to improve the management of insurable risk in areas where there are high numbers of claims or areas of concern.

Risk and Resilience Team have developed a Corporate Business Continuity Plan using the existing Service Area Business Continuity (BC) Plans which was with the Executive Director of

Corporate Resources to approve. We will shortly provide this to Executive Leadership Team to comment on and approve. Following the exercise of the Council's BC arrangements in January 2023 which we have subsequently received feedback on we are currently implementing the recommendations from the review. We are planning a subsequent exercise which is likely to be in Q4 of 2024/25. We have recently completed an activation exercise of the Council's Service Business Continuity Plans the results of which we will be sharing with the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services shortly. With the exception of Children's Services the Service Business Continuity Plans are being updated regularly. We are seeking to work with Children's to update their Business Continuity Plan.

The **Risk and Resilience Team** have completed the roll out of training on the Council's Risk Appetite which was presented to the Audit and Governance Committee in March 2023 to all Service Areas. We are waiting on the proposed changes, by Democratic Services, to the Council's Committee header sheet before the risk appetite can be said to be fully implemented.

Other work includes:

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

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

- Continue to review, update and monitor the Health and Safety Standards and Policies, with focus on working from home, display screen and workstation assessments and stress risk assessments.
- Continue to develop the Council-wide training needs assessment which will eventually build into the health and safety training plan and provision.
- Completing a planned review of the Council's Health and Safety Policy and completing the Annual Health and Safety report.
- Focus on improving the accuracy of incident reporting across the Council will continue to ensure incidents of threatening and abusive behaviours towards staff are reported.
- Continue to deliver a health and safety management audit and inspection regime across the Council, to schools with a Service Level Agreement with the Council and those schools where the Council retains responsibility for the health and safety as the employer. This will provide assurance that health and safety management systems are suitable and effective.
- We have been able to appoint to two vacant positions with both candidates due to start in January 2024.
- We have developed with Property Services a revised asbestos policy and training content for all Schools which we are currently implementing following the HSE intervention.

ICT

- The ICT Service continues to work on a number transformation programmes as well as delivering the BAU ICT Service alongside Agilisys. Key projects currently in flight relate to support for the Children's Improvement Programme, Customer Services (CXP), Data

Centre relocation and the Website upgrade. Remedial work for Leisure is now completed with Sefton Arc nearing completion.

- The team is now working hard to implement new Cyber Security features to further strengthen the resilience of the corporate network. For those servers where it does not make economic sense to upgrade, as they are due to be replaced or decommissioned in the future, extended support has been purchased to ensure that the devices still receive critical security updates.
- A key priority for the team moving forward is the contract review and re-procurement of a supplier to deliver ICT Managed Services from October 2025, when the Agilisys Contract ends. A report to Overview and Scrutiny and then Cabinet is on the forward plan for next year and appropriate governance around this programme will be established early next year.
- Data centre rationalisation and right sizing is now completed within the existing Data Centre at St Peters ready for relocation to a new site. Due to the complexities associated with move to Bootle Town Hall the team have worked with property services to identify a suitable space in Magdalen House for the Agilisys Staff, and this is now entering the design stage. The remaining servers and devices will be relocated to a purpose-built data centre within Liverpool City Region, the Sefton Client team is currently chasing a formal contract and timescales for this to be delivered.
- The Cloud telephony project is now closed, and all associated legacy infrastructure is due to be removed from the estate early December 2023.
- The new CXP solution went live across all services in January this year. The last legacy service, Pest Control, is due to go live early December, after which the legacy CRM system will be formally decommissioned. In terms of phase two, work is now well underway to transfer Council e-forms to CXP from the legacy e-forms system, with 20 forms completed to date and a further 3 phases of 20 each to follow. Work is also starting on the configuration and set up of FOI processes in CXP.
- Work has commenced on the upgrade of the Umbraco content management system, which is due to complete before Christmas with testing due to take place in January, go live will be scheduled once User acceptance testing is completed and the product accepted.
- The ICT Procurement team continue to be busy; the forward plan for the next 12-18 months has been agreed by members of ELT and work is underway on several key procurements including the corporate connectivity service, as well as applications for Crems and Crematoria, eLearning, GIS and Leisure.
- The drafting of the new Digital Strategy for Sefton has started, with engagement across the Council to develop a proposal document which, following internal approvals, will go out to consultation early 2024.

Property Services

The Property Services Department are a multi-Disciplinary team delivering various services, professional advice and initiatives across the Borough of Sefton. Below are some examples of ongoing pieces of work throughout the department.

Asset Management

- Ongoing work to deliver approved Asset Disposals with further phases being developed for approval.
- Assisting with the SEND programme.
- Ongoing work supporting Growth Board projects.
- Ongoing work in connection to lease agreements.
- Looking at accommodation options for teams/departments.

Maintenance Management / Building Services & FM

- Delivering a range of schemes in support of Corporate Buildings.
- Delivering a range of schemes in support of Education Capital & SEND programme.
- Delivery of reactive maintenance and statutory compliance services to Corporate and Educational buildings.
- Professional advice and support on a broad range of regeneration programmes.
- Phase 1 essential maintenance delivery plan for corporate buildings progressing with works ongoing/complete.
- Phase 2 essential maintenance – looking to secure funding for this further phase of works.
- Asset survey delivery plan in train alongside the essential maintenance.
- Phase 1 Corporate Landlord implementation in train with ‘go live’ date to be agreed once recruitment has taken place. Phase 1 is centralised statutory compliance. As part of phase 1, Facilities Management now sits within Maintenance Management as opposed to Asset Management.
- A phase 2 Corporate Landlord programme is being developed for consideration. This will encompass wider centralised delivery.
- Delivering services in support of major adaptation to vulnerable and disabled residents.

Project Management

- Provide professional support to Growth Board on several projects.
- Project delivery for various Education capital & SEND schemes.
- Provide support to other teams on Asset Disposal, Building Maintenance, Asset Management, Energy and Statutory Compliance colleagues.

Energy Management

- Sefton Council Retrofit programme* now completed (LAD3, HUG) – an evaluation report will be shared with members shortly. HUG2 is being delivered by LCR with support from Sefton. **Scheme providing insulation to privately owned properties (worst/not insulated & for poorest residents 407).*
- Bid with the LCR for public sector decarbonisation funding (~£8M for 10 buildings) was submitted in November. We will be informed of the outcome in January 2024.
- Bid to MOSL (Market operator water) for £200K for efficiency measures and testing of investment scheme was submitted in November. We will be informed of the outcome in January 2024.
- Purchase of REGO (100% renewable energy certificates) for 2024/5 in progress.
- A programme of work to support schools/ corporate sites is ongoing.
- Climate adaptation work is progressing with Quantum engaged to report on risks to Sefton and support all departments to assess risk/ become more resilient.
- Delivering services in support of affordable warmth to residents is very busy due to cold weather/ financial pressures.

Legal Services

Democratic Services Team – Overview

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

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

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

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

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 28th November 2023 and the Committee considered the following items:

- Petition – The Voice of the Families – EHCPs
- Petition – The Voice of the Families – Public Speaking
- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Children's Services Improvement Programme
- SEND Joint Commissioning Plan
- Performance and Quality
- Consideration of the Terms of Reference and Inclusion of Co-Opted Members
- Work Programme Key Decision Forward Plan

Two items were postponed (Education Score Card and Ofsted Inspections). The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 30th January 2024.

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 7 November 2023. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Bootle Regeneration Strategy – Presentation
- Flood And Coastal Erosion Risk Management Annual Report
- Green Sefton Annual Review Work Programme 2023/24, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan
- Cabinet Member Update Reports

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 16 January 2024. At the time of writing this report the agenda has not been published but it is anticipated, that in accordance with the Committee's Work Programme, that items listed below will be considered by the Committee.

- Update on the progression of the Liverpool City Region Digital Inclusion Strategy
- Update on Operational Activities delivered via Locality Services
- Sefton Economic Strategy for Growth (with a focus on the new Crosby Library project and the Bootle Regeneration Strategy)
- Southport Market Update
- Sandway Homes Limited - 2022/23 Outturn Review of Council Wholly Owned Companies
- Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited (SHOL) - 2022/23 Outturn Review of Council Wholly Owned Companies
- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Work Programme Update

Refuse and Recycling – The Committee has agreed that the first review be on the topic of refuse and waste recycling. The proposal is that Members will undertake a visit to the Gillmoss Recycling Discovery Centre; and following the visit an informal meeting will be held to discuss issues associated with refuse and waste recycling. The visit and informal meeting will be held on 15 January 2024.

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 31 October 2023. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Update on Progress of Liverpool City Region Digital Inclusion Strategy.
- Disposal of Surplus Council Owned Land/Asset -Management Strategy
- Financial Management 2023/24 to 2026/27 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2023/24 – October Update
- Cabinet Member Update Report
- Work Programme Update

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 9 January 2024. At the time of writing this report the agenda has not been published but it is anticipated, that in accordance with the Committee's Work Programme, that items listed below will be considered by the Committee.

- Financial Performance Monitoring
- Review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- Members' Welfare Reform Reference Group – Update
- Air Quality Monitoring
- Armed Forces Covenant
- Corporate Communications Update
- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Work Programme Update

Navigating Finance Scrutiny: A Webinar for Elected Members' - All Members of the Committee were invited to attend a webinar, held on 18 December 2023, hosted by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny on the topic of 'Navigating finance scrutiny: a webinar for elected members'.

- **Executive/Scrutiny Protocol** - The four Overview and Scrutiny Committees, considered, during the September cycle of meetings, a report that sought approval to two additions to the Executive/Scrutiny Protocol in relation to the submission of Plans and Strategies to Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Working Group Reviews/Informal Meetings. The four Committees approved the recommendations contained in the report. Cabinet, at its meeting held on 2 November 2023, also approved the additions and the Protocol has been updated accordingly.

- **Overview and Scrutiny Management Board**

A meeting of the Management Board was held on 7 November 2023. The Management Board considered the following items:

- Broadcasting/Recording of Council Meetings
- Cabinet Member Reports and Questions at Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meetings
- Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Scrutiny Link - Councillor Howard
- Strategic Scrutiny in Practice Network and Basecamp
- Centre for Governance and Scrutiny – Newsletters and Annual Survey
- Update on Informal Meetings/Working Groups
- Children's Services - Additional Management Board Meeting

The last meeting of the Management Board was held on 21 November 2023 to discuss governance and wider member support to Children's Services.

The next meeting of the Management Board will take place on 9 January 2024.

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

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

- Level Four Devolution and the Deeper Devolution Scrutiny Protocol.
- Development of Long Term Skills Plan.
- CA Plan 2021-24: Quarter 2 2023-24 Performance Update.
- Work Programme 2023-24

Investment Zones - Members agreed to undertake an in-depth review into Investment Zones, which would allow Members to understand the IZ process and also undertake a deep dive on a specific IZ project. This meeting was held on 7 December 2023.

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

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

The next meeting of the LCRO&S will be held on 17 January 2024.

School Appeals

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

The school appeal 'high season' started on 10 May and ended on 18 July 2023. In this period over 450 appeals were listed. The levels of school appeal cases remain high. Three days of hearings were held in December, and two days have already been 'pencilled in' for January. In the new year planning will commence for the 2024 'high season'.

Seven official complaints to the Ombudsman / Department of Education and all were successful defended. Each complainant made numerous procedural complaints, but the Investigation Officers did not uphold a single complaint.

Additionally, an Independent Review Panel (exclusion appeal) was held on 23 November, 2023.

Civic and Mayoral Services

- Remembrance Sunday this year was well observed and attended across all sites, despite the inclement weather on the day. All the feedback received has been positive about the event.
- The Mayor of Sefton's Charity 70s Night was a great success, raising over £400.00 for the Mayors Charity Fund.
- Preparation works have now started on the Mayors Gala Charity Ball, which will be held on Saturday 6th April 2024 at Formby Hall, tickets are now on sale at £50.00 per ticket which includes a three-course meal with entertainment.

Member Development

Member Development Programme 2023-2024

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

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

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

4. Mandatory Course Completion Rates (As of 08/12/2023)

Corporate Parenting (Microsoft Teams)	94%
Equality and Diversity Awareness	45%
Information and Compliance – Sharing and Guarding	51%
Safeguarding Adults Awareness	57%
Safeguarding Children and Young People Awareness	57%

Member Development Steering Group

The Member Development Steering Group was established in November 2022. For 2023/24 the Group is comprised of 6 Members and last met on 23 August 2023. The next meeting is scheduled for 20 December 2023.

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

Contract and Commercial

- The team continue to work at a high-level despite being short of both a Senior Lawyer (team manager) and an experienced Lawyer. We have advertised both positions without any applicants to date. The team currently comprises a newly qualified lawyer and trainee with support from a part time locum and from the Principal Lawyer. The Team have had positive feedback from client departments. Examples of the work provided include:
 - Legal support on the Marine Lake Events Centre project: Sefton’s internal legal team continue to support Council officers and the Council’s appointed external legal advisor on the progression of this project
 - Domiciliary Care PDPS: Sefton’s internal legal team have assisted on the procurement of a Sefton run Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System for Domiciliary Care which is aiming to go live in September 2023
 - Legal Support on the Bootle Strand Regeneration Project Sefton’s internal legal team continue to support Council officers and the Council’s appointed external legal advisor on the progression of this project
 - Children’s Residential Care PDPS: Sefton’s internal legal team assisted on the procurement and establishment of a Sefton run Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System for Children’s Residential Care which went live in July 2023

- Legal Support on the Crosby Library Regeneration Project Sefton's internal legal team continue to support Council officers on the progression of this project
- JCT Build Contract support: Sefton's internal legal team have supported on a number of JCT build contracts covering a range of work from minor works to JCT intermediate with contractor's design. For the financial year 2023/24 to date, this has involved the advising on and completion of over 16 separate build contracts. Some of these contracts included more complex arrangements such as the agreement of listed items, performance bonds and a letter of intent to allow a contractor to commence work in advance of contract completion.

Employment Law

- The employment team continue to provide support to the Council and the Schools on a range of contentious and non-contentious matters. Many of the contentious matters are confidential and therefore not suitable for inclusion in this report but further details can be provided on a confidential basis.

Prosecutions Regulatory Team

- The team are short staffed at the moment as there are two team members on maternity leave and their maternity cover have not yet been recruited. However, the team continue to deliver a great service to clients across the Council. The work of the team is extremely varied but includes, prosecutions, litigation, debt recovery, information governance and other regulatory work. Recent highlights include:
 - The litigation team successfully resisted an appeal in the magistrates court against a civil penalty for failing to licence a property under the Housing Act 2004- the penalty of £7,500 was upheld.
 - The litigation team successfully prosecution a man for 11 counts of fly tipping, with a sentence of a fine of £1,166, a victim surcharge of £466, recovery of Legal costs of £1,105.25 and an award of clean-up costs £6,065.
 - The debt recovery team have recovered a care package debt £6,000 and a residential care home debt of £22,500.

Property and Planning Team

- The property team continue to handle a wide and varied caseload of instructions from the Council's estates team for disposals, acquisitions and other property related matters; including the sale of St Annes and St Peters House, and the ongoing Meadows disposal and Sandbrook acquisitions.
- Planning matters have returned after a break, with planning committees progressing again. The property team advise on a range of matters with recent highlights including:
 - Disposal of St Peter's House & St Anne's House: Instructions to dispose of the freehold of both buildings and to grant a 10 year pre-emption for purchase of land at Balliol Road car park. Buyer has been sent associated draft legal documents of contract, transfer deed and pre-emption agreement and is currently undertaking its title investigations before negotiating the legal documents.

- Licence for Car Park: Instructions to grant to the Sefton CCG a licence to occupy the former NALGO Car Park, Trinity Road. The CCG currently occupy part of Magdalen House with its staff being granted informal parking permission at the building. The granting of the NALGO licence will ease operational difficulties at an oversubscribed Magdalen Car Park and despite negotiations with the CCG being protracted, the parties are very close to reaching agreement as to the content of the licence to allow completion.

Childcare

- The Children, Education and Adults legal team remain exceptionally busy. Following two staff members in this teams now securing positions in the legal department as trainee solicitors, two new Senior Legal Assistants have joined the team and are busy providing the necessary support to Children's Social Care.
- The cases being managed by the team continue to be complex in nature often involving several parties and international elements where the team must liaise with Central Authorities worldwide. There has been a slight decrease in the number of children where public law application are being made in respect of care proceedings, but there has been an increase in the number of applications to discharge Care orders, therefore decreasing the number of Children Looked After by the authority.
- The Childrens Services department have taken on a team of Social Workers to identify and undertake this discharge of care order work, and the legal team are providing the legal support in order to achieve this large piece of work.
- Additionally, the team are assisting with high profile cases before the high court. The Adults team remain exceptionally busy as do the Lawyer designated to supporting the Special educational needs department.

PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

Operational Matters

Children's Services – Human Resources Operational Support Team

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

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

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

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

All Other Council Operational HR Business Support

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

Pay & Grading, Job evaluation, policy and projects.

Job evaluation is undertaken relative to all Council and School posts for new or revised roles and relative to any operational and service reviews to maximise efficiencies as part of restructuring exercises across the Council. Team members are involved in service reviews and work to support transformational proposals and potential changes to service delivery.

Officers in this team review safeguarding checks held against posts e.g. Disclosure and Barring Service, Health Care Professional Council (HCPC) etc and the team manages and controls the temporary end dates relative to all fixed term contracts.

Regrading applications and appeals are processed in line with the Council protocol. At the time

of writing the processing of applications for regrading has been somewhat delayed. This is because the previous JE Officer was assigned to alternative duties from February 2023 onwards and then subsequently in June 23 was appointed to another role. The position was advertised within a week and interviews were undertaken as soon as possible after the closing date and a new postholder was secured. However, the new postholder could not take up the post until October 2023.

The team undertakes the review of HAY graded positions for new posts and the evaluation of HAY posts stemming from any revised proposals to the HAY grading structure.

The team manage the Matrix contract relative to the recruitment of Agency workers. Agency recruitment is currently at an all-time high relative to social worker and associated positions especially within Children's Services. Figures for the period

The team manage sickness absence data, including production of management reports, sickness absence analysis and quarterly absence figures for SLT.

Officers are involved with Employment Tribunal claims (approx. 580) relative to employees seeking backdating of amendments to Term Time Only salary calculations. Consultations are ongoing in relation to the potential settlement of these claims following a Court of Appeal case. On 15th March GMB accepted the Council settlement proposal (which covers a very small proportion of the 580 claims. Officers will make settlement offers in relation to GMB legitimate claims, if the claimants withdraw their ET claims.

The team includes a Policy Officer responsible for undertaking reviews of policy, procedures and guidance and introduce new policies as required in line with current legislation. The officer is also involved in Corporate Equalities initiatives, staff support groups, responding to Freedom of Information and subject access requests, and assistance with mandatory training for managers.

Team members are responsible for the production of Agenda and minutes in relation to the Joint Trade Union meetings held on a 2 week cycle.

Service Development, Establishment Control, Transactional HR Payroll & Pension (THRP) Services

There are still some issues with Monthly Data Collection (MDC) for the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) which we are working with Midland HR (MHR) to resolve.

Sefton are now up to date with submission of files to Merseyside Pension Fund (MPF) but continue to press MHR for improvements to the reports provided. An update to MHR software has been implemented and this will hopefully improve reporting from November 2023 onwards.

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

The staff are still learning parts of the new system and there are issues with how long the system is taking to process some records and this has been raised and a fix was put and performance seems to have improved.

There are backlogs in the teams due to process, reporting and resource issues and all work is being prioritised. A fast-track solution to deal with letters for new starters in Schools is being worked on and a review of the backlog of Sefton starters letters is underway.

There are now outstanding pay awards from 1st September 2022 for Soulbury staff and 1st September 2023 for Youth and Soulbury staff.

The pay awards for NJC, Members and Chief Executive from 1st April 2023 and Teachers from 1st September 2023 have been agreed and will be processed in December 2023 pay.

Background data cleansing is underway to review the organisations establishment, to add in Gross budgeted hours and to end or remove posts and positions not in use. This preparation is being undertaken prior to the introduction of reusing positions. This will improve system use, vacancy management and improve the accuracy of data and reports.

The temporary restructure of the Employee Support BSU team is to be made permanent. A separate team has been created with resource to focus on development and reporting, A separate Recruitment Team will be created with resource being split from the THR team to focus entirely on recruitment and onboarding. The new recruitment team will work closely with the Establishment Control team with a common reporting line to bring about greater governance of the organisational structure.

Workforce Learning and Development (CLC)

Apprenticeships

Staff enrolled on the **Level 6 Social Work Apprenticeship Degree, Level 6 Occupational Therapy Degree** and the **Level 7 Senior Leader Apprenticeship Degree programme (MBA)** are continuing with their studies and are making good progress. Our first cohort of Social Work Degree apprentices graduate in January 2024.

We have launched the **Level 5 Operational/Departmental Manager** Apprenticeship standard. The course is aimed at aspiring Middle Managers/Managers and upon successful completion of the qualification candidates will gain two accredited awards: ILM Level 5 Leadership and Management and Operational/Departmental Manager Standard Apprenticeship. 8 managers from across the organisation applied for and gained a place on the course, which commenced from Monday 18th September 2023.

We recently launched the **Level 5 Coaching Professional** standard and 2 staff commenced the course from 1st October 2023.

We are getting ready to launch the **Level 4 Digital Accessibility Specialist** and the **Level 3 Data Technician** standard from 1st January 2024 if not sooner.

Training delivery

The Workforce Learning and Development Team continues to deliver a number of training programmes and initiatives. These include:

- **Corporate Mandatory Training** – this includes Equality and Diversity, Health and Safety, Safeguarding Adults Awareness, Safeguarding Children & Young People Awareness and Climate Change. Monthly reports have recently been updated to include the mandatory courses for managers. Additional courses include Sickness Absence and Equality and

Diversity for Managers eLearning, Recruitment and Selection, Managing Capability and Managing Disciplinary, Grievance and Dignity at Work virtual classroom sessions. The reports are shared with ELT/SLB to encourage staff to complete these courses.

- **Corporate Induction Face to Face session** – the first session was delivered by Phil Porter, CEO on 9th November 2023 and 34 staff were in attendance. The session complements the Corporate Induction eLearning and includes a warm welcome from the CEO and an opportunity to find out more about the organisation. Face to face induction sessions will take place every 10 weeks and new starters will be automatically enrolled onto a session.
- **Information Compliance eLearning** – we have developed a new course and end of module assessment which is due to go live 1st January 2024. The new course includes 7 sections, examples include terminology and legislation, Data Protection Act Principles and Individual Rights, dealing with information requests and sharing information.
- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** training delivery is going well. To date, we have trained 232 Sefton Council and schools' staff. That's an increase of 16 (216) since the previous report.
- **LCRCA Race Equality Training** – working with the LCRCA and neighbouring LAs to develop a training programme to complement existing E&D awareness training. This will include the 'lived experience' to enable us to address the structural and systemic racial biases that exist in some organisations and to challenges micro aggressions and unconscious biases in the workplace. To date we have delivered 7 managers sessions and 8 non-manager sessions, total trained is 370 staff. We have one final non-manager session planned for 11th December 2023 which includes a further 45 places. Planning for phase 2 of the Race Equality Project will commence in January 2024, and further sessions will be made available to staff.
- **Oliver McGowan Autism and Learning Disability eLearning** – we have commenced the roll out of mandatory Oliver McGowan eLearning training for all Adult and Children's Services staff – this includes back office and front-line staff. The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism is the standardised training and is the Government's preferred and recommended training for health and social care staff. The deadline for completion is Wednesday 31st January 2024.
- The development of a **Personalisation Training Programme** for students, ASYEs and for new starters working across Adult Social Care, who have not undertaken this training previously. The go live date for the new training programme is 1st April 2024.
- The development of a **CPD essential training offer** for Adult Social Care staff is currently in development. This will outline the mandatory training requirements for all teams within the Adult Social Care workforce. The target date for completion is 31st January 2024.

Strategic Support

COMMUNICATIONS

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

The team has supported a number of key projects over the last few weeks most notably continuing the support to Children's Services.

Internally, the team continues to support the Chief Executive into his new role and a series of working groups and staff-focused events are now up and running, these will help get people together and have a One Council approach to work.

Procurement

The Procurement Team engagement meetings with Service areas to update the Contract Register; review current workplans and timelines; identify future or prospective projects; and update the Procurement pipeline are almost complete.

Working with colleagues in Strategic Support the team has produced new guidance for maintaining the Contract Register and successfully delivered a number of workshops to managers from across the Council.

Strategic Support

Performance & Business Intelligence

The Business Intelligence team is continuing to support many work streams across the Council including Economic Regeneration, Education Excellence, Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and Public Health Services.

The team continue to develop a new performance reporting for Children's Social Care and Adults Social Care services, using the Data Warehouse and Power BI. Progress continues with the development of the Council's new enterprise data warehouse platform, which will enable cross-Council big data analysis.

The team is also supporting the information requirements for the Children's Social Care Improvement plan, with a focus on improving the 'drill-through' functionality in new Power BI reports to access client level information; this has been termed Data Warehouse & Power BI project Phase.2, and involves significant SQL development.

Consultation & Engagement, Complaints and Information Governance.

The Service continues to support consultation and engagement activities, respond to complaints and subject access requests in a timely manner and provide information, advice, and guidance across the Council on matters relating to information governance and data protection. There is a challenge with capacity in the Complaints team, but the Service is actively recruiting to vacant posts to address the issue.

The team is also supporting the Chief Executive with a number of initiatives including staff induction sessions and the staff survey.

The project to digitise the Council's historic paper records continues at pace, and is nearing an end. All legacy records stored at disparate 3rd party locations have now been moved to the Council's preferred secured storage provider, taking opportunity to destroy legacy records and digitise those that are not required to be kept in original paper format. The team has now completed processing legacy records stored at the former Thomas Gray School site and has begun to review records at Southport Coroner's Office, the former Bootle Play Centre and Beford Road Community Centre.

Strategic Support

The team is now focused to providing support across the various services with policy & strategy development, service reviews and transformation activity, including support for the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan. The team provided logistical support for the Ofsted Monitoring to Children's Social Care.

Work continues on the refresh of the Children & Young People Plan, which will require a significant amount of consultation and engagement with children, young people and partner organisations to influence the priorities to be included in the plan for the next three years.

The team supported LGA Peer Challenge and will support the development of the associated action plan.