

<b>CABINET MEMBER UPDATE REPORT</b> <b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills – 16<sup>th</sup> January 2024)</b>		
<b>COUNCILLOR</b>	<b>PORTFOLIO</b>	<b>DATE</b>
Trish Hardy	Communities and Housing	16 <sup>th</sup> January 2024

### **COMMUNITY SAFETY AND ENGAGEMENT TEAM**

The Executive Director for People and the Community Safety and Engagement team are developing a plan that will see covid memorials in open spaces across the Borough. 5 parks and open spaces have been identified in the 5 township areas. A full consultation has been carried out to gather residents feedback on the plans and locations. At the time of preparing this report there had been over 90 responses.

#### **Christmas Activities 2023**

##### **Marian Square - Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> November switch on 6.30pm – Event organised by Feelgood Factory and St Oswalds Councillors**

Approximately 300 people attended on the night, residents enjoyed the entertainment consisting of Go Karts, Santas Grotto and DJ. No issues reported.

##### **Hightown - Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> November switch on 6.50pm – Event organised by Hightown Parish Council**

Residents enjoyed mulled wine and mince pies at the Hightown Pub followed by music from the Salvation Army band before the Xmas light switch on at 6.50pm and the Village singers led the carol singing, which was enjoyed by all. No issues reported.

##### **South Rd - Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> November switch on 4.45pm – Event organised by Crosby Housing & Waterloo Town Team**

Approx 350 people attended. The Event had a grotto, market stalls, music and children's entertainment. Loan shark information was available for residents and a visit from Sharkie kept the kids entertained. Children were provided with sausage rolls and 235 selection boxes were handed out in the grotto. No issues reported.

##### **Thornton - Friday 24<sup>th</sup> November switch on 6pm – Event organised by Thornton Parish Council**

Approx 300 people attended. The Nags Head Pub hosted the event and gave out refreshments. Music from Quay Notes Ukulele band, Thornton Community Choir and dancing from Ford Gems Morris Dancers. Face painting for the kids and balloon modelling plus a visit from Santa and the Grinch! Special appearance from the Mayor of Sefton and Deputy Lord Lieutenant. No issues reported.

##### **Bispham Rd - Friday 24<sup>th</sup> November switch on 5.30pm – Event organised by High Park Project & Norwood Councillors**

Around 300 attended, event included carol singers, brass band, Santas Grotto, Christmas messages from the church and a light switch on.

Several of the businesses on Bispham Rd also participated through selling traditional festive food and drink. No issues reported.

## **Crosby Village - Friday 24<sup>th</sup> November switch on 5pm – Event organised by local business & Blundell Sands & Victoria Councillors**

Approx. 500 people attended this event. 4 children from local primary schools switched the Xmas lights on and the Jacob Billington Trust arranged for local young artists and groups to perform. Activities included fairground rides and visit from Santa. No issues reported.

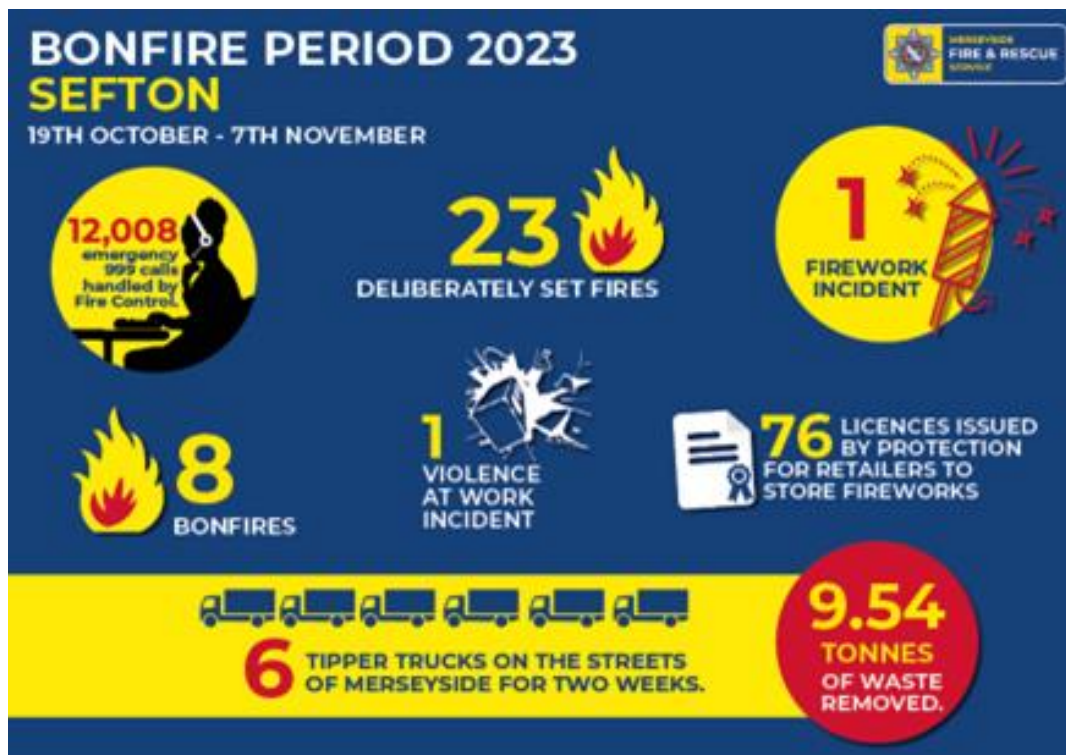
## **Bootle Strand - Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> November switch on 5pm – Event organised by Bootle Together community group.**

Approx 3000 people attended this event. The event included a fun fair on the Salt & Tar site along with market stalls inside the Strand Shopping Centre and a Santas Grotto and a Christmas Light switch on at the tree on Stanley Rd. 1,000 free selection boxes were given out during the event. Only issue reported was a blown electrical fuse which turned the lights off for a few hours, but this has now been rectified and all lights are working and lit.

## **Community Safety**

A Police Meet and Great session was held for the South Sefton Councillors in Bootle Town Hall on the 10<sup>th</sup> November. Another session will be organised for the Spring and discussions about replicating the event in the North and central areas of the borough are ongoing.

There has not been a full debrief from the Bangor period, however, Merseyside Fire and Rescue have shared their initial statistics with us.



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

### **Sustainable Affordable Living Coordinator**

The coordinator has secured training places for Healthy Start uptake via Feeding Liverpool and Dr Naomi Maynard. Libraries have also agreed to host facilitation sessions using their IT Assets which means for those Food Banks & Pantries without IT equipment we can still sign residents up.

Allotment groups have been asked about their relationships with Food Banks and how much produce they donate, from this information we can set a baseline from which we'll be able to implement the Sefton Allotment Strategy, Co-Terminus with that of the LCR Strategy on Sustainable Affordable Food.

LCR has asked for contributions relating to the City Region Food Strategy which has implications not only for Local Authorities but also for the Combined Authority itself, the Private Sector and the VCF Sector. Pushed out to wider comment from the SAL Network as it affects stakeholders and received feedback from some members which was forwarded back to the LCR.

### **Holiday Activity Fund (HAF)**

All HAF funding has been allocated for our winter provision with 35 holiday camps offering free places this year, compared to 23 in 2022. The funding has created 5,927 individual sessions for young people, and we expect to reach almost 2000 children across the Christmas holidays. Sessions will run from the week leading up to Christmas with most provision taking place during the first week of January. Almost all of our providers are offering four days of face-to-face provision this year with a couple opting to offer two days complimented by activity and food hampers.

The HAF Coordinator continues to work with the leisure team to offer eligible families free swimming – young people in receipt of benefits related free school meals are eligible for one swim during the Christmas holidays and under 8's can bring an accompanying adult for free.

### **Hate Crime**

The Hate Crime JAG (formerly MARAC) meetings continue to take place monthly. The JAG supported a walkabout in the Stanley Road area around the Strand Shopping Centre during National Hate Crime Awareness Week in October. This was in response to reports of street drinkers racially abusing shopkeepers in the area.

### **Equalities**

Two sessions on the Equality Act 2010 and equality impact assessments were held online for elected members as part of their annual training programme.

A submission was made for inclusion in the Inclusive Companies Top 50 Employers list, and although not making the top 50 the Council scored well in their first submission. Feedback will be used to improve our future performance.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour**

David Chambers (ASB officer north) Has resigned and will leave Sefton on 31/12/23. Recruitment for a replacement ASB Officer will take place in January 2024

Temporary work distribution will be:

Simon Evans (Senior ASB Officer North & Central)

Maghull, Waterloo, Aintree, Melling, Little Crosby village, Lunt, Thornton Lydiate Southport, Birkdale, Ainsdale, Formby, Freshfields, Crosby, High town, Ince Blundell,

Raph Munro (ASB officer south)

Netherton, Bootle, Seaforth, Litherland

### **Youth Service**

The team celebrated Youth Work Week (6<sup>th</sup> Nov – 10<sup>th</sup> Nov). The theme this year was Youth Work in Every Place and Every Space. We shared different types of youth work in different places and spaces across social media, using the hashtags #YWW23 #YouthWork #YouthWorkWeek #YWW2023. The National Youth Agency informed us that this Youth Work week was the biggest yet *'with social media activity reaching a whopping 6.2 million people through 8,100 shares and 12,200 campaign interactions across the country and beyond.'*

## **DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICE**

A new service aimed at providing a single point of access to Domestic Abuse victims, their families, friends and colleagues as well as professionals has launched. The Council has commissioned Sefton Women & Children's Aid (SWACA) to deliver the service over a 12 month period. The service provides a helpline (0151 394 1400) 8am-6pm Monday to Friday where trained staff can offer practical and emotional advice and support and link you with a range of services depending on your situation. There is also a series of drop ins, taking place once a week in each of the 3 localities as well as providing therapeutic counselling to those that require it in order to build resilience and aid recovery from the long-term effects of domestic abuse. The service will address a number of the priorities outlined in the action plan accompanying the Domestic & Sexual Abuse Strategy 2023-2028

### Refuge

The new refuge providing accommodation and support to women and their children fleeing Domestic Abuse in Sefton has opened. The refuge is provided by One Vision Housing and the support services are provided by SWACA who have been commissioned by Sefton Council. The refuge provides 5 self contained units that provide a range of bed spaces from 2-5 beds. The refuge also provides accessible accommodation for those women who may have a physical disability. SWACA provide a 24/7 on site support to the residents.

### White Ribbon Campaign

A programme publicising the range of services available to victims of Domestic or Sexual Abuse, including the new Sefton Domestic Abuse Service, took place over the 16 days of action following White Ribbon Day on 25 November 2023.

All information relating to Domestic Abuse can be found on the Council's Domestic Abuse Microsite [Domestic Abuse \(sefton.gov.uk\)](https://sefton.gov.uk/domestic-abuse)

## **LIBRARIES**

### **What Stories Make Worlds – Netherton based engagement project**

As part of libraries engagement in Netherton, a new arts engagement project has been delivered based on film. The What Stories Make Worlds project has worked with 20 residents to produce a new work combining 16mm film, photography and sounds collected in the Netherton. The film produced in collaboration with residents is a meditative journey tracking the seasonal changes in the area and exploring the huge array of plant and animal life that lives in Netherton, both on and off the canal. As well as providing suggestions for the content and feel of the film, they also learnt how to film, edit and add special effects to create a 1970's feel to the film – a nod to the creation of Sefton in 1974. This is one a new exploratory way of engaging with residents. The final edit of the film can be found at <https://vimeo.com/859402329> . Password: Netherton

### **Reaching Communities bid success**

The latest libraries bid to the National Lottery Reaching Communities fund has been successful and the full bid amount of £75,000 has been awarded. This bid was to fund the continuation of the Colour of Pomegranates project which provides activities and support to migrant and refugee women in Sefton. The funding is over a 3-year period, with £25,000 allocated each year by Reaching Communities for this project. The funding will not only allow the project to continue, but the artists that have been engaged for the project plan to introduce new themes and activities to match the changing migrant demographic in Sefton. The project team already partner with Venus who run their International Café from Bootle Library, and discussions are underway to explore other opportunities of engaging with the migrant community in new ways.

## **Netherton Library joins the National Databank**

A submission to the Good Things Foundation for Netherton Library to join the National Databank has been approved. This means that free data and sims will be available to residents who can't afford broadband and have no access to the internet. Library staff will issue the free data and manage the process so a sustainable supply of data is available on request. Netherton Library is the latest site in Sefton to become a National Databank site, joining Bootle and Crosby Libraries who piloted the scheme as early adopters

## **£125,000 secured from the Youth Investment Fund**

The Youth Investment Fund have now sent Sefton an offer for funding up to £125,000 to support youth work on the back of replacing the glazing in the community rooms at the Atkinson. Listed Building Consent has already been approved and now a selective tender will be carried out in consultation with the Conservation Officer, to secure an approved supplier of the glazing. Now that the funding is secured, the project has been handed over to The Atkinson for the delivery phase. Once the works have been completed, The Atkinson plans to set up a new youth curatorial scheme and will work with Youth Services to maximise the impact of the scheme.

## **Escape Room Pilot**

Something new happened at Crosby Library in the October half term – an Escape Rooms event. A new event was created to engage with a key target group for libraries: teenagers. The Community Room in the library was taken out of action for the week and during that time converted into a travelling art gallery to fit in with the Escape Room's Halloween themed plot. The staff wrote the scenario, planned and created the clues and puzzles in their own time. In the half term, the event was run over 3 days with 10 sessions, and was fully booked in advance. The project also allowed us to test our new events calendar and self-service event booking system which worked really well. Although the project was specifically targeting teenagers, most bookings were by family groups. The Escape Room has now been dismantled, but it was designed to be boxed up and moved to a new site, so planning is now taking place for it to reappear at Bootle Library and efforts will be doubled to promote it to the target audience. Now the pilot has been successfully delivered when it Once it is ready to be run again, the Youth Team will be contacted to see if it can be used to positively engage with specific groups they are working with.

## **Update on library engagement in Netherton**

- Libraries have undertaken a lengthy period of research and learning around the Netherton area, learning a lot from other community groups and venues and responding to needs which have been communicated by the local community. We're looking to extend the programme out in several ways:
- A screening of What Stories Make Worlds, a community produced short film and soundtrack, was held in the library The project was led by the At The libraries team during a series of 6 workshops. 18 people attended the sessions.
- In October, Netherton library hosted a series of sessions led by Abi Horsfield from Collective Encounters. The group explored placemaking with participants through writing and light-touch performance.
- We are developing an offer for adults which will take the basic structure of a reading group as a means to explore the area through shared storytelling and workshops.
- A regular series of work with younger people, based around movement is planned. Young Families Producer and artist Nicki McCubbing's has worked with the programming team and librarians to build on the library's Young Families programme, responding to the needs and wants of local families gleaned from our research. A regular Tuesday morning slot will see local dance group – Sole Rebel, working with very young families leading up to a pre-

Christmas performance. We are also looking to work with families to create simple handmade ceramic items which could be gifted at Christmas, helping to alleviate some of the pressure to go out and buy gifts

### **Formby Library garden developments**

To support the council's green agenda Formby Library have been developing its community garden with some additional funding from Formby Parish Council. The library has now developed new accessible community vegetable planters and have built up a volunteer group to help maintain them. A fruit press has also been purchased and the library hosted its first fruit pressing event which saw residents bring fallen fruit from their own gardens to be pressed for apple juice. This means that instead of being discarded, fallen fruit is utilised and waste reduced.

## **HOUSING**

### **Homelessness**

The council continues to experience significant homeless pressures with approximately 180 households in Temporary Accommodation at the end 2023. This is something that all local authorities are dealing with and is the result of a reduction in the turnover of social housing stock, and rent rises and landlords exiting the private rented sector because of mortgage rises and government policy changes.

I have asked officers to undertake a full and detailed analysis of the causes of the crisis and start to formulate options to help address it. Although the high numbers of homeless cases we are seeing in the borough is shocking I believe that Sefton is well placed to deal with them. We took a decision in 2018 to start Sandway Homes, and the first two sites have now been completed, with the third site having now started.

The benefits of this direct intervention approach are greater than just the 78 new homes for sale and the 25 affordable homes we have built, and the additional 18 council owned properties which are currently being developed. Sandway facilitates the creation of our new Council Housing Programme and officers have formulated plans to for more ambitious direct delivery of a range of council housing in the borough in response to the homeless challenges we face.

Speed of response is key and the actions that are being developed include a number of innovative approaches to ensure that we can address these problems as quickly as possible.

### **Council Housing Programme**

Following the approval of the revised scheme proposal at Buckley Hill Lane the grant application to Homes England is being finalised. It is anticipated that a decision will be known in the new year. The commencement of the Buckley Hill Lane site is an exciting milestone for the Council Housing Programme and I very much look forward to welcoming our new tenants once their new homes are completed.

There is great deal of work to facilitate this which is progressing behind the scenes and legal consultants Freeths are supporting the Council on the details of the draft Development Agreement with Sandway for the purchase of the properties at Buckley Hill Lane and good progress has been made in concluding this. An exciting next step is for them to help us draft the tenancy agreement we will use for our new council housing stock.

Work to onboard our Managing Agent is also progressing well with a full policy review, and work to develop our governance and tenancy engagement approach. Ensure that the voice of the tenant is heard is central to the approach that we are taking with the programme.

## **Property Pool Plus**

I am delighted to report that the new Property Pool Plus Allocations System went live on the 8<sup>th</sup> January. The new system, along with the new social housing allocations policy which it supports ensures that the council is meeting its statutory duty to ensure that social housing is allocated fairly and efficiently.

## **Housing Standards Team**

It is now more than 12 months since the shocking details of the death of Awaab Ishak from mould inhalation in a property in Rochdale. Since this time I have asked officers to undertake a review of the service and as part of this an internal audit has recently been carried out on the damp and mould response of the Housing Standards Team. I am happy to report that this only identified minor areas for improvement and on the whole the team has responded well to the increased pressures put upon it following the report into Awaab's tragic death.

Another major area of work last year was the launch of our new 5 year Selective and Additional (HMO) Licensing Schemes which commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2023.

As at 30/11/23 we have received 2174 licence applications, which is 63% of the expected number of applications. 592 licences have been issued and 304 compliance inspections have been carried out with many landlords seeking to apply for property accreditation.

The team has taken a very strict approach with landlords that provide properties or services that fall below the expected standards and there are currently 4 appeal cases pending at the First Tier Property Tribunal. 2 appeals are against Civil Penalty Notices served for failure to licence properties, 1 for a Civil Penalty served for breach of HMO Management Regulations, and 1 appeal against an Improvement Notice.

There have been 92 requests for service relating to poor housing standards or poor housing management have been received between 1 Nov 2023 and 13 Dec 2023. Where landlords fail to comply with informal action, the team continue to take formal enforcement action. Since 1 Nov 2023 this has included the service of 1 Emergency Prohibition Order, 1 x Prohibition Order, 2 x Improvement Notices and 7 Notices for failure to have smoke alarms fitted.

Work to reduce the number of long-term vacant homes has continued, with responses to 11 new Service Requests relating to problematic empty homes. One Enforced Sale has progressed to auction in December.

Management of the Council's Gypsy and Traveller site continues. There have been no unauthorised Gypsy & Traveller encampments in Sefton in the last quarter of 2023.

## **Extra Care Housing**

As colleagues are aware the Council has a target to deliver 1306 new Extra Housing units before 2036.

Work continues to progress on a number of schemes across the borough and I am delighted to report to members that all the legal agreements are now in place for a major Extra Care scheme in Ainsdale. The Riverside scheme on the site of the former Adult Education Centre off Sandbrook Road will provide 90 Extra Care properties, 40 new affordable homes and an 8 bedspace Short Term Assessment Unit for adults with learning difficulties. The Short Term Assessment Unit will be retained by the Council and managed by the Adult Social Care Department.

The new scheme not only provides much needed specialist and affordable housing in the north of the borough it will also see the empty and derelict former Adult Education Centre demolished and the site brought back into use, something that I understand residents who live close by are delighted to see.