



**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGULATORY,
COMPLIANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES)**

**MEETING HELD AT THE BIRKDALE ROOM, TOWN HALL,
SOUTHPORT
ON TUESDAY 27TH FEBRUARY, 2024**

PRESENT: Councillor Bradshaw (in the Chair)
Councillor Byrom (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Killen, McKee and Sir Ron Watson

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Lappin

45. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D'Albuquerque, Evans (and his substitute member Councillor Dodd), Grace, McGinnity and Murphy (and her substitute member Councillor Christine Maher).

46. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of any disclosable pecuniary interests or personal interests were received.

47. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

48. ANNUAL ICT UPDATE REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services that provided a summary of the performance of the Managed Services ICT Contract over the last 12 months, currently outsourced to Agilisys.

The report provided specific information on the following areas:

1. Agilisys Contract Performance against key performance indicators - during the contract period to date Agilisys had met key performance measures (KPI's) except when exceptional agreed circumstances had prevailed; and customer satisfaction had remained high during the last 12 months, and any scores falling below expected standards were followed up on a case-by-case basis. Performance over the last 12 months was detailed in Appendix A attached to the report;
2. Project Delivery and Security – in respect of project delivery, Agilisys provided a significant volume of ad hoc projects to Sefton,

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in line with the provisions of the Contract; these ranged from system upgrades to major infrastructure programmes; and

In respect of cyber security, risk continued to be significant issue for local authorities across the Country, and the risk of an Information Security Breach due to a cyber-attack featured on the Corporate Risk Register and although Sefton had made significant investment in its security tools, polices, and licenses the threat to the Council network was still significant. Over the last 12 months it was noted that local authorities had been targeted via distributed denial of service attacks. This type of attack flooded the targeted website or online service with traffic (requests) and could overwhelm the service making it unavailable to legitimate users; and

3. the wider work of the ICT Client team in relation to ICT and Digital - the ICT client team had also delivered services and support for ICT across the Council, including specialist ICT Procurement and Contract Management for approximately 250 ICT Contracts; and the team provided a dedicated System development support for both Children's and Adults Social Care, as well as Education functions, supporting both the Children's Improvement Programme, and the SEND improvement programme.

The report concluded that the current contract with Agilisys performed well and had delivered significant savings for the authority compared to the previous contractual arrangement.

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- The % increase in the number of Cyber-attacks per year on Sefton's corporate network
- The failure of Agilisys, in April 2023, to meet the key performance indicator in respect of answering telephone calls made to the Service Desk within an average of 60 seconds of the telephone call first being made
- The office-based location of Agilisys staff

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report detailing the performance of the Managed Services ICT Contract over the last 12 months, currently outsourced to Agilisys, be noted; and
- (2) the Senior Manager ICT & Digital be requested to produce statistics detailing the % increase in the number of Cyber-attacks year on year on Sefton's corporate network.

49. LEVELS OF DISCIPLINARY, GRIEVANCE, DIGNITY AT WORK AND SICKNESS ABSENCE

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services that provided information on the levels of discipline, grievance, dignity at work and sickness absence within the Council (excluding schools).

The report indicated that the management of the workforce was an important activity to ensure outcomes for Sefton's communities were achieved and to ensure that the workforce was appropriately managed and motivated. Specific information was provided on:

- Disciplinary, Grievance and Dignity at Work - the organisation enjoyed a comparatively good level of cases and this reflected on the whole, both the good overall industrial relations environment, the partnership approach that was undertaken and also the work undertaken within departments
- Suspensions - in the period August - December 2023, 10 employees were suspended from duty (not including schools)
- Disciplinary - during the period September – December 2023, there had been 13 disciplinary investigations
- Grievances - during the period October – December 2023, there had been 4 grievances
- Dignity at work - During the period September – December 2023, there had been 7 dignity at work complaints
- Statistical data for Q1 and Q2 2023/2024 (01.04.23 – 30.06.23 and 01.07.23 - 30.09.23) which detailed 'Short Term', 'Long Term' and 'All Absence' data along with previous year's figures for comparison purposes
- The Strategic Leadership Board continuing to monitor and encourage the reduction of levels of both short and long-term absence
- The Occupational Health Unit providing counselling and cognitive behavioural therapy on a face-to-face basis
- Physiotherapy appointments being arranged through the OH Unit as were pension assessments for ill health, ill health pension appeals and deferred pension cases
- The Council's Sickness Absence Policy which operated in a partnership with trade unions

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- Information was sought on the year-on-year statistics on the numbers of staff suspended from duty
- The planned action, and timeframe, for addressing long-term sickness absence

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- The provision of sickness statistics differentiating between office based staff and operational staff
- Benchmarking Sefton's sickness statistics against similar local authorities
- The impact of agile working on sickness absence levels

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report providing information in terms of discipline, grievance, dignity at work and sickness levels be noted; and
- (2) the ongoing work and initiatives to monitor and encourage the reduction of levels of both short and long-term absence be noted.

50. TAXI ISSUES IN SEFTON

Further to Minute No. 16 (2) of the meeting held on 12 September 2023 the Committee considered the report of the Assistant Director of Place (Highways and Public Protection) on wider taxi issues in Sefton including how hackney carriages could be further encouraged within the Sefton area.

The report indicated that the existing numerical restriction applied to hackney carriage vehicle licences had been in place since 1986 when the limit was set at 271; that the Council had discretion to limit the number of hackney carriage vehicles it chose to licence for the purpose of controlling their numbers; that current legislation stated the only reason on which an application for a hackney carriage licence could be refused was that the Council was satisfied that there was no significant demand for hackney carriage services that were not being met; and that this meant that the Council was satisfied that there were enough licensed hackney carriages to serve the public without issuing any more.

To gather evidence on the significant demand for hackney carriage services the Council undertook a hackney carriage demand survey; the last survey was undertaken in 2019 and found that "the overall conclusion is that there is no evidence of council rank-based unmet demand that is significant and that the strong view of the Trade is that the limit should be retained and can be supported"; and that current statistics showed that Sefton currently had 236 active hackney carriage vehicles and 266 licensed drivers (35 vehicle licences were currently 'on hold' with the Council; and that since the 2020 pandemic, hackney carriage driver numbers had steadily reduced leading to vehicle owners being unable to find enough drivers to drive the 271 licensed vehicles.

The report highlighted potential reasons for the decline in numbers; and that the next unmet demand survey was due to be carried out later this year and would include wide ranging consultation across drivers, vehicle owners, users, business owners and trade representatives together with detailed surveys of rank activity across the borough; and that this would

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provide an ideal opportunity to better shape the scope and range of the survey to properly understand and address any issues concerning the hackney carriage trade.

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- The scarcity of London style hackney carriages in the north of the borough and the negative impact this had on the provision of wheelchair accessible licensed vehicles to local residents
- The inclusion of local NHS organisations as consultees in the next unmet demand survey
- The Level 4 Devolution Framework offer to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in connection with improving consistency and efficiency in taxi and private vehicle licensing

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report on taxi issues in Sefton be noted;
- (2) the Assistant Director of Place (Highways and Public Protection) be requested to include local NHS organisations as consultees in the next unmet demand survey; and
- (3) the Assistant Director of Place (Highways and Public Protection) be requested to submit a further report to the Committee following completion of the 2024 unmet demand survey.

**51. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24, SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPICS
AND KEY DECISION FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that sought the views of the Committee on the Work Programme for 2023/24; the identification of potential topics for scrutiny reviews to be undertaken by informal meetings; the identification of any items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan; and that updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Work Programme for 2023/24, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted;
- (2) the request for the Committee to select a topic for review at an informal meeting be noted;
- (3) the Key Decision Forward Plans for the period 1 January 2024 to 30 April 2024 and 1 February 2024 to 31 May 2024, as set out in

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Appendix 3 to the report, be noted; and

- (4) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

**52. MEMBERS' WELFARE REFORM REFERENCE GROUP –
UPDATE**

Further to Minute No. 34 of the meeting held on 9 January 2024 the Committee considered a Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty update of the Head of Health and Wellbeing and Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services.

The update provided information on the latest meeting of the Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty (WRAP) Cabinet Member Reference Group and in particular activities associated with:

- Updates from the Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Steering Group in relating to Citizen's Advice, Bootle; One Vision Housing; Sefton Public Health; and foodbank and food pantry usage
- Community Pantry update
- Sefton Child Poverty Strategy
- Sefton Council Housing update
- Warm hubs
- Emergency limited assistance scheme

Councillor Lappin, Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services presented her update and made particular reference to Sefton currently experiencing a homelessness crisis with approximately 180 households currently in temporary accommodation; and the continuing work being undertaken to reduce the number of long-term vacant homes in the borough.

A Member of the Committee commented on the potential changes to the Homes for Ukraine scheme and impacts this would have on service users in Sefton.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the update on the operation of the Members' Welfare Reform Reference Group be noted;
- (2) the Assistant Director of People (Communities) be requested to submit a report to a future meeting of the Committee on the potential changes to the Homes for Ukraine scheme and impacts this would have on service users in Sefton; and
- (3) Councillor Lappin be thanked for her update.

**53. CABINET MEMBER REPORT - DECEMBER 2023 TO
FEBRUARY 2024**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that included the most recent report from the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services.

A Member of the Committee suggested that that the salutation message relayed at the start of each incoming call to the Council's call-centre, encouraging customers to use online Council services should be changed; as the reason telephone calls were made to the call-centre was because the customers wished to speak to a call-centre operative. It was acknowledged that reducing staff resources necessitated the use of online services; that customers could eventually speak to a call-centre operative if they wished; and that visits could also be made to the Council's One Stop Shops.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the update report from the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services be noted; and
- (2) Councillor Lappin be thanked for her attendance at the meeting.