

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



**MEETING HELD AT THE COMMITTEE ROOM, TOWN HALL BOOTLE  
ON TUESDAY 9TH JANUARY, 2024**

PRESENT: Councillor Bradshaw (in the Chair)  
Councillor Byrom (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors Grace, Killen, McGinnity, Murphy, Shaw  
and Sir Ron Watson

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Lappin

**26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Evans and McKee.

**27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**28. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

**29. CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE**

The Committee received a presentation from Andrew Daniels, Corporate Communications Manager that updated on the work of the Corporate Communications team during 2023.

Mr Daniels provided information on the following:

- Changes to the team including the appointment of a new manager and digital skills enhancements with new appointments of a videographer and a social media officer.
- The work areas covered by the team.
- Support offered to major developments in Sefton related to Bootle Strand, Marine Lake Events Centre, Crosby town centre, Maghull Health Park and Salt and Tar.
- The open and transparent approach taken and the managed sensitive issues in the media relating to the Southport Pier closure.
- Work on the cost-of-living crisis.
- Celebrated civic events relating to King Charles' coronation, Liverpool Pride, Alex Greenwood – Freedom of the Borough, HMS Mersey parade and Remembrance Sunday.

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- The promotion of Sefton's tourism offer.
- Support offered to Children's Services.
- Work undertaken on the LGA Peer Review.
- Methods used to keep colleagues informed.
- Information connected to the corporate website and that Unique page views in the last quarter totalled 1,454,887.
- Social media activity.
- E-shot email marketing tool for residents.
- Graphic design.
- Proposals for 2024 which included updating the communications framework, refreshing the approach to social media, new internal communications action plan, audit of channels to ensure we are reaching the digitally excluded and impact-led approach

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

- How statistics referred to in the presentation compared to other Liverpool City Region local authorities
- The ideal frequency for social media press releases
- Press releases issued may not represent the views of all of the Council's elected Members
- A cover image on a recent ward analysis document did not depict a true representation of Sefton's population
- Press releases issued using vimeo went direct into Member's junk email

RESOLVED:

That Andrew Daniels be thanked for his informative presentation.

### **30. AIR QUALITY UPDATE 2023**

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Director of Place (Highways and Public Protection) that updated on local air quality management activities/actions in Sefton during 2023.

The report indicated that the Environment Act 1995 (the Act) placed a statutory duty on all Local Authorities to regularly review and assess air quality in their areas and produce a yearly Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR) and implement actions/interventions to improve air quality where poor air quality existed; that evidence had shown that certain atmospheric pollutants were linked to poor health; that the Air Quality Regulations made under the Act specified the pollutants that must be considered against set standards and objectives, referred to as National Air Quality Standard (NAQS) Objectives; and Table 1 in the report detailed the 2 pollutants that were of concern in Sefton, namely Nitrogen Dioxide and Particulate Matter PM<sub>10</sub>.

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The report also detailed that where monitoring/modelling showed an exceedance of the NAQS, an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) must be declared by the Local Authority; that through air pollution monitoring and modelling four localised areas in South Sefton had been identified where levels of Nitrogen Dioxide had exceeded or were close to the annual average limit of  $40 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ; and that AQMA's had been declared in the four locations at:

- Princess Way, Seaforth
- Millers Bridge, Bootle
- Crosby Road North/South Road, Waterloo
- Hawthorne Road/Church Road junction, Litherland

The report also provided information on:

- The location of real time automatic monitoring stations; and the use of diffusion tubes to measure monthly  $\text{NO}_2$  levels at 82 sites across the Borough
- Results of particulate matter monitoring
- $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  monitoring
- A summary of monitoring results in 2023
- Actions to improve air quality which included Sefton Clean Air Plan Outline Business Case, Joint Sefton/ Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) Emissions Enforcement Project, School Streets air quality monitoring, traffic signal upgrade/incorporation of AQ sensors, and SCOOT (Split Cycle and Offset Optimisation Technique), Validation and Strategy Development Project

The report concluded that air quality in the majority of Sefton was within NAQS, but that the main on-going priority in Sefton for the coming years was to fully understand the effects that the predicted increase in HGVs due to port expansion would have on air quality and how this could be mitigated; that the development of the Outline Business Case for a Sefton based Clean Air Zone (CAZ) under the overarching Clean Air Plan was complete and had demonstrated that a corridor HGV charging CAZ covering the A5036 and A565 could achieve significant air quality improvements within the CAZ boundary and wider borough; and the progression of the CAP scheme to the next stage, i.e. Full Business Case, would depend on a number of factors, which included key risks and constraints identified in the OBC work along with identification of a funding source.

The Committee also received a presentation from Peter Moore, Assistant Director of Place (Highways and Public Protection) and Greg Martin, Principal Environmental Health Officer on local air quality management activities/actions in Sefton during 2023.

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

- Any scrutiny of CAZ should be deferred until the Cabinet had agreed its way forward on the issue
- The Government should consider a tax on old and polluting HGV's
- Peel Ports had an obligation to contribute to CAZ and should have a responsibility for its tenants on the port estate to reduce their activity causing pollution. Better cooperation with Peel Ports was required as pollution did not stop at the dock gate.
- The increasing popularity of wood burning stoves had led to an increase in PM<sub>2.5</sub> pollution levels; and that the use of such stoves that complied with DEFRA standards should be promoted
- It was acknowledged that trees/green barriers did not solve atmospheric pollution levels entirely but nonetheless, they were a low cost and visually aesthetic way to reduce levels
- The urban greenway strategy currently being developed could help to reduce pollution levels
- National air quality standards may be being met but it did not necessarily mean that we had healthy air
- Reference was made to Sefton's Public Health Annual Report 2018/19 "Air Quality and Health in Sefton"

RESOLVED: That:

- (1) the report updating on local air quality management activities/actions in Sefton during 2023 be noted; and
- (2) Peter Moore and Greg Martin be thanked for their informative presentation.

**31. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME AND COUNCIL TAX  
BASE FOR 2024/25 AND REVIEW OF COUNCIL TAX PREMIUMS FOR  
LONG-TERM EMPTY PROPERTIES**

Further to Minute No. 107 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 4 January 2024 the Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services that provided details of the review of the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the current year, 2023/24; recommending to Cabinet that a change be made to the scheme with effect from 1st April 2024 for working-age households, in employment, in receipt of Universal Credit; that proposed the introduction of new discretionary council tax premiums on 'dwellings left empty for 1 year or more' from 1 April 2024 and on 'dwellings occupied periodically' (second homes) from 1 April 2025; that provided feedback received on recent consultations undertaken on changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and on the proposals to introduce new discretionary council tax premiums along with the associated equality impact assessments; and

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that provided an updated Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish area for 2024/25.

Annex A to the report detailed the Council Tax Base for 2024/25; Annex B detailed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25, including consultation summary and equalities impact assessment; whilst Annex C detailed the proposed introduction of new council tax premiums on 'dwellings left empty for 1 year or more' and on 'dwellings occupied periodically', including consultation summary and equalities impact assessment.

The Committee was advised that the Cabinet, at its meeting held on 4 January 2024 resolved (Minute No. 107) that:

- (1) the content of the review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the current financial year, 2023/24 be noted;
- (2) the outcome of the public consultation exercise be noted and the Council be recommended to approve that a change be made to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for working-age households, in employment, also in receipt of Universal Credit with effect from 1 April 2024;
- (3) Council be recommended to approve the introduction of a 100% council tax premium on dwellings left empty for 1 year or more from 1 April 2024;
- (4) Council be recommended to approve the introduction of a 100% council tax premium on dwellings occupied periodically from 1 April 2025; and
- (5) the Council be recommended to approve the relevant Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish Area for 2024/25 as set out in Annex A of the report.

The report required approval by Council at its meeting to be held on 18 January 2024.

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

- Had investigations taken place to find out how other local authorities addressed the problem of empty homes and their re-occupation
- What could be done to address the problem of properties remaining vacant due to litigation issues that spanned many years and left homes vacant, to the detriment of local residential amenity
- Did properties that were the subject of probate still incur the council tax premium or were exemptions in place?

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- Reference was made to the Sefton Council Empty Homes Plan 2019 – 2024
- Were any assumptions made in the calculation of the second homes figure?
- Potential of second homes being let as holiday homes and therefore business rates paid rather than council tax
- Was there a statutory definition of “working age households”
- Holiday lets were not a bad thing per se as they could aid the tourist industry which had a positive benefit to the local economy
- Administrative functions associated with the council tax rebate system

RESOLVED:

That the report updating on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax Base 2024/25 be noted.

**32. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT 2023/24 TO 2026/27 - REVENUE  
AND CAPITAL BUDGET UPDATE 2023/24 - JANUARY UPDATE**

Further to Minute No. 91 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 7 December 2023 the Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services that advised of:

- (1) the current position relating to the 2023/24 revenue budget;
- (2) the current forecast on Council Tax and Business Rates collection for 2023/24; and
- (3) the monitoring position of the Council’s capital programme to the end of November 2023 in respect of:
  - the forecast expenditure to year end;
  - variations against the approved budgets and an explanation of those variations for consideration by Members; and
  - updates to spending profiles and proposed amendments to capital budgets necessary to ensure the efficient delivery of capital projects are also presented for approval.

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

- a concern was raised that exact figures for various schemes/projects (Crosby new library, Bootle Strand, Marine Lake Events Centre, Southport Market, Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited and Sandway Homes) were not available yet decisions were expected to be made on such schemes

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- this report looked back at the position to the end of November 2023; and that the opportunity to look at detailed budget proposals would be provided when the Committee met on 6 February 2024

RESOLVED:

- (A) That in respect of the Revenue Budget:
- (1) the current position relating to the 2023/24 revenue budget be noted;
  - (2) the actions being taken to refine forecasts and identify mitigating efficiencies to ensure each service achieves a balanced position be noted; and
  - (3) the financial risks associated with the delivery of the 2023/24 revenue budget be recognised and it be acknowledged that the forecast outturn position will continue to be reviewed, and remedial actions put in place, to ensure a balanced forecast outturn position and financial sustainability can be achieved; and
- (B) That in respect of the Capital Programme:
- (1) the spending profiles across financial years for the approved capital programme (paragraph 7.1) be noted;
  - (2) the latest capital expenditure position as at 30 November 2023 of £21.514m (paragraph 7.5) and the latest full year forecast is £55.117m (paragraph 7.6) be noted; and
  - (3) It be noted that capital resources will be managed by the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services to ensure the capital programme remains fully funded and that capital funding arrangements secure the maximum financial benefit to the Council.

**33. 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.

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RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Work Programme for 2023/24, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted;
- (2) the report on the Armed Forces Covenant be considered at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 27 February 2024;
- (3) the request for the Committee to select a topic for review at an informal meeting be noted;
- (4) 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 Appendix 3 to the report, be noted; and
- (5) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

**34. WELFARE REFORM AND ANTI-POVERTY REFERENCE GROUP  
- UPDATE**

Further to Minute No. 7 of the meeting held on 13 June 2023 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:

- the cost-of-living crisis
- period poverty – a Sefton update
- Sefton Youth Making Better Opportunities with Leaders (SYMBOL) report
- Community pantry update
- Sefton child poverty strategy
- Respiratory pilot
- Sefton Council housing update
- Warm hubs
- Emergency limited assistance scheme update

Councillor Lappin, Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services presented her update.

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

- Period poverty and the removal of VAT on sanitary products



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- In connection with the section in the report relating to Sefton Youth Making Better Opportunities with Leaders (SYMBOL), a comment was made that following SYMBOL representatives' presentation to Members at the pre-Council briefing held on 16 November 2023, contact was made with the SYMBOL co-ordinator offering advice and suggestions. However, the Member had not received a response.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the update on the operation of the Members' Welfare Reform Reference Group be noted; and
- (2) Councillor Lappin be thanked for her update.

**35. CABINET MEMBER REPORT - OCTOBER 2023 TO DECEMBER 2023**

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.

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

- A concern was expressed that the recorded message, when calling the Customer Services Contact Centre, immediately suggested going online to access services; yet the reason customers telephoned was to speak to a person to resolve their problem. It was suggested that the recorded message be revised
- Reference was made to the fact that the report headings were referred to in the update on the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board but that no details were provided on the decisions made
- In respect of Member Development reference was made to the mandatory course completion rates and particularly that high numbers of Members were not participating in the courses; was there a breakdown of statistics by political party; and that the courses were more relevant to officers than elected Members. reference was also made to the Local Government Association's input into training courses.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the update report from the Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services be noted; and

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- (2) Councillor Lappin be thanked for her attendance at the meeting.