

**Cabinet Member Brief
Overview & Scrutiny Committee
(Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)
27 February 2024**

Welfare Reform & Anti-Poverty Update

The Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Cabinet Member Reference Group met on 24th January 2024. The following updates were received:

Updates from the Welfare Reform & Anti-Poverty Steering Group

Officers from Public Health provided an update from the partnership steering group meeting held on the 6th of December 2023.

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

- Citizens Advice, Bootle have employed Mind & Money project officer who can help support with ELAS applications. The post provides individuals with 8 hours of help such as setting up bank accounts, budgeting, benefit calculations, setting up online accounts, accessing charitable support, fuel vouchers, PIP applications etc. The request for support surrounding immigration issues and translation services has increased.
- One Vision Housing has advised that the link to their offers will be shared. It will include their Christmas community campaign with prizes given to residents. They also have an energy fund for January 2024 providing six payments of £49 annually.
- Sefton Public Health officers updated the partnership on the Respiratory Pilot, the vacancy has now been filled and the successful candidate is in post and has completed their induction.
- Foodbank and food pantry usage continued to rise and South Sefton more so in the lead-up to Christmas. They have been providing hats, coats, scarves, gloves and energy vouchers. They have predicted that January & February will be difficult months.

Community Pantry Update

Cabinet Members received an update regarding community pantries

The Sustainable Living Network meeting has taken place as well as the Food Strategy Officers Group meeting. Updates included LCR Digital Inclusion Network promoting an offer for foodbanks and pantries to provide re-serviced devices and data SIMS providing 4/5GB of data, to help mitigate digital exclusion. Liverpool Hope presented information suggesting that organisations such as charities are concentrating on front-line services and less on research, reducing the availability of vital information on local government impact. The Sefton Infant Feeding Lead

discussed the extra needs for new and expectant mothers with breastfeeding and is currently collecting data to explore difficulties that families are facing.

Sefton Child Poverty Strategy

Officers from the Public Health team updated Cabinet Members on the Sefton child poverty third event. The event took place at Brunswick Youth & Community Centre on Thursday 18th January 2024, formal evaluation is underway. Initial anecdotal feedback has been positive with 80 plus delegates including schools, businesses, housing and NHS trusts. Public Health have been approached to present at a C&M committee.

Previous consultation took place requesting partners to provide information surrounding their work against the Sefton Child Poverty Strategy objectives. There has been a positive response from partners including how schools can expand cultural experiences for young people, Leisure services review of their pricing policy and concessions that have been introduced; libraries have given examples of surrounding child-dedicated spaces and offers.

Sefton Council Housing update

A written update had been circulated with the meeting pack and highlighted the following:

Homelessness - Sefton is currently experiencing a homeless crisis with approximately 180 households currently in temporary accommodation. The homeless crisis is being 'driven' by two factors: lack of availability and affordability.

Homeless Action Plan - Discussions surrounding Sefton's response to the crisis took place. Previous intervention decisions, in the provision of affordable, stable and high-quality housing through affordable homes developed by Sandway and the new Council Housing Programme, has allowed Sefton to be in the best position possible to respond to the current issues. In addition to responding to the immediate crisis, the overriding intention is to strengthen the borough's ability to deal with any potential future issues.

Homeless Strategy - The Homelessness Act 2002 requires every Local Authority to carry out a homelessness review in its Borough every 5 years. Sefton commissioned consultants Imogen Blood and Associates to carry out the Homelessness Review in early 2023. The consultation started on Monday 30th October 2023 and lasted until Sunday 21st January 2024.

Housing Standards - 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 on December 23.

Warm Hubs

An update on Warm Spaces was provided. Updates included:

Sefton CVS advised on 1st October the Welcome Spaces had changed its name back to Warm Spaces. 41 Warm Spaces are now operating across the borough and they are all logged on the CVS website which is also linked to Sefton Council website and working closely with organisations and in collaboration CVS have provided 536 residents with winter clothing grants.

The Warm Spaces Summary was presented. The report covered the period October to December 2023 with an overview of 38 providers who all provide Warm Hubs. The report highlighted the numbers of monthly attendees, age profiles and included case studies.

ELAS Update

Cabinet Members received an update on ELAS performance for the council's local welfare support scheme. Averaging around 300+ applications per week in January with figures at 318, 362 & 353. The Wednesday after the Christmas/New Year period they were receiving one application per minute.

Potential loss of government funding for household support funds will have an impact. Currently monitoring every week and it was agreed there was no benefit in pausing until funds ran out.

Requests for Action

None noted.