

CABINET MEMBER REPORT Overview & Scrutiny		
Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Paulette Lappin	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services	February 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 December 2023, was reported to Cabinet in February 2024. This showed a forecast overspend of about £9m, mainly due to a forecast overspend on Children's Social Care (£6.1m), Adult Social Care, (£2.5m) and the impact of the agreed pay award (an additional £1.4m). There are other budgets under pressure, but the expectation is that services will mitigate these pressures from elsewhere within their budgets. Mitigating actions have been approved by Cabinet which reduces the forecast overspend to just under £1.0m. Work continues to be undertaken to refine forecasts and updated positions will be reflected in the next report to Cabinet in March 2024.

The overall Budget Report (and associated supporting reports) have been presented to Overview and Scrutiny and Budget Cabinet and will be considered at Budget Council on 29th February 2024, when the budget for 2024/25 will be set along with the Council Tax for the year.

The audit of the Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 has now been completed and the audit certificate has been issued by EY. The audit of the Statement of Accounts for 2021/22 by EY is currently in abeyance as the firm considers the latest Government consultation and guidance on how audits will be completed.

Due to the delays in finalising the audit of the 2020/21 and 2021/22 Statement of Accounts the production of the Statement of Accounts for 2022/23 were delayed. Draft accounts were produced in mid-September and were presented to Audit and Governance at the end of September. Updated accounts were published in November 2023. Although some initial audit work has been undertaken by EY, the main audit has yet to commence for the same reasons as above.

The Council's auditors will be Grant Thornton from the 2023/24 financial year. Officers have had an initial contact meeting, with further meetings scheduled to discuss matters related to the audit of the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts.

Customer Centric Services

All areas of the service continue to deal with high workloads, whilst it remains positive that there continues to be progress in reducing volumes outstanding, it is acknowledged that work must continue over coming months to further reduce customer waiting times, with clearing work backlogs in Council Tax remaining the highest priority.

Annual Billing for Council Tax and Business Rates

Preparations have gathered pace for the issue of annual bills for Council Tax and Business Rates for 2024/25. Testing is underway with ICT and service areas, including changes to Council Tax Premiums and Business Rates. Associated documentation has been reviewed and completed ready for the test files due to be produced mid-February. It has been agreed that a Council Tax Booklet will be issued with this year's bills, so work is taking place with the Communications Team and our printing supplier for the initial drafts to be produced.

Customer Services

The Council's Customer Services Contact Centre continues to answer approximately 17,000 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 staff to handle calls for Sefton's prioritised services, i.e., Social Care and the Councils' Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme (ELAS).

During the winter months, the team has dealt with a high volume of enquiries relating to cost-of living financial support, i.e. the Council's ELAS and the Household Support Fund. As expected, there has also been an increase in weather-related calls, i.e. the high winds resulted in calls from residents complaining about wheelie bins being blown over and rolling down roads; the heavy snowfall, followed by bursts of rain, resulted in a surge of telephone calls from people concerned about traffic lights not working and flooded roads being blocked.

Telephone enquiries for Adult Social Care remain consistently high as residents and families progress chase on outstanding assessments and care packages.

Demand at the One Stop Shops continues to be high, with approximately 2,700 visitors to Bootle One Stop Shop in January; approximately 1,000 people were seeking general council-related advice at reception, 670 had a taxi-licensing enquiry, with a further 1,000 attending with Council Tax, Parking/ Blue Badge or benefits enquiries.

At Southport, 584 customers attended the Atkinson in January, with 163 customers booking an appointment to discuss their Council Tax or benefit and the remainder seeking general council-related advice at reception. Service delivery from Southport continues to be reviewed with alternative locations being explored. Positive discussions have been held with colleagues in the Assets and Property service, however further updates are not expected to be provided until the end of February at the earliest following discussion with the new Assistant Director for Communities.

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 is at a critical period of time, with advanced plans in place for implementing a new Taxi Licensing software system by April 2024. The 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.

Over recent months, the priority has been to ensure that all existing drivers had their current licence renewed and all new/transfer/renewal vehicle plates have been processed in a quick and timely manner.

The new online portal was issued to the Council on Monday 29th January 2024, with a testing period of at least three weeks. A demonstration of the system will be provided to taxi-trade representatives mid-February at Bootle One Stop Shop. Following that, the trade will be given a period of offsite front-end user testing before a go-live date is mutually agreed.

With this being a very critical period for Taxi Licensing, a clear communication strategy has been put in place. The Council website continues to be regularly updated and the trade have been receiving a weekly update on processing timescales and progress with the portal. The current website update can be found at [Taxi licensing \(sefton.gov.uk\)](https://www.sefton.gov.uk/taxi-licensing)

In January 2024, a total of 68 Knowledge tests have been offered, with 20 new drivers licensed. The Knowledge test pass rate remains very poor (40%); however, the trade has agreed to support new applicants with preparing for the Knowledge test and providing assistance for drivers accessing the portal.

The trade has recently requested for a scaled down service similar to Bootle One Stop Shop to be reinstated from a Southport location. This has already been discussed with Sefton's Assets and Property Services and will be considered at the same time as the request to relocate all services currently offered from The Atkinson.

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.
- ASC Controls to mitigate market failure
- SHOL Governance review
- Pupil Place Planning Assurance Mapping
- Petty cash
- Leisure Centres
- Waste Management
- Commissioning - Living Well
- Review into the procurement and management of contracts

We have continued the recruitment of a permanent staff member in February 2023 and were able to appoint a suitable candidate in September 2023 who started in January 2024.

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 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 outcome was shared with the Audit and Governance Committee. We are currently using some free insurance days to assess the Council's risk management framework.
- 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.
- To assist with risk management, the Team have developed a pilot report for Highways detailing claims numbers, values and outcomes, and areas where the concentration of claims is the highest. Once agreed with the service area, it is hoped that this can be developed and rolled out to others appropriately
- 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.

The **Risk and Resilience Team**.

We have developed a Corporate Business Continuity Plan using the existing Service Area Business Continuity (BC) Plans which is currently with the Executive Leadership Team to 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. A follow up exercise is due to take place in March 2024. We have revised the Council's BC Strategy and Policy and the Policy was presented to Cabinet and approved in September 2023.

The **Risk and Resilience Team** have completed the training on the Council's Risk Appetite which was presented to the Audit and Governance Committee in March 2023 to all Service Areas as well as facilitating the updates of the Council's Corporate Risk Register for Audit and Governance Committee in December 2023. 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
- Training for loggists and planning an exercise to enhance their experience
- 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.
- One new staff member started in January 2023 and a second staff member due to start in March 2024.

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. The Sefton Arc and Leisure ICT Improvements are now complete, with further developments underway to improve Sefton's Cyber Security capabilities.
- 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 are planning to move the existing comms capacity to Magdalen House with the remaining small data centre footprint to be moved to a dedicated Data Centre within the Liverpool City Region. The Agilisys staff will be relocated within Magdalen House.
- The Cloud telephony project is now closed, the legacy Mitel Infrastructure is now removed from the estate. Work is ongoing across teams to identify any telephony lines commissioned by departments directly so that these can be removed, and the users transferred to the corporate system.
- The new CXP solution is now live across all service areas and the legacy CRM system has been 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 4 phases of 20 each

underway. Work is also starting on the configuration and set up of FOI processes in CXP.

- The website improvement programme work is now completed. Work is in progress to upgrade the Umbraco content management system; governance is in place to manage any web developments moving forwards.
- 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 has completed on several key procurements including the corporate connectivity service and the application for Crems and Crematoria, eLearning, GIS, and Leisure are all underway at present.
- The threat level in relation to Cyber Security remains high and the team are working hard to implement new technologies and tools to stay one step ahead of the risk.
- 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 in later this year. Alongside this the ICT Client team is exploring opportunities around products such as AI and a policy document on the use of these next generation technologies will be released shortly.
- Due to the Agilisys contract ending on the 30th of September 2025 work is now underway regarding the procurement of a Managed Service provider for ICT from October 2025, with a report due to be tabled at Cabinet for decision in March this year.

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.

Maintenance Management, Building Services & FM

- Facilities Management (FM) have recently moved under the management of Maintenance Management and building Services.
- 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.
- RAAC Study/Surveys – following an exercise across Sefton Corporate buildings and Sefton Maintained schools, Engineers have confirmed that they have not found any RAAC to be present.
- 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 (this is funded under the essential maintenance programme).
- Delivering services in support of major adaptation to vulnerable and disabled residents.
- Looking at accommodation options for teams/departments.

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 (LAD3, HUG) – Providing insulation to privately owned properties (worst/not insulated & for poorest residents 407). This has been extended with imminent completion.
- A programme of work to support schools (after large energy price rises) is ongoing.
- Sefton have transferred electricity provider. Post 1 April, all Council buildings and streetlights are 100% renewable energy powered.
- Energy prices (gas and electricity) continue to be high, due to the government support having been removed. Efficiency savings being considered.
- Work on the next phase of the Climate Emergency programme is progressing.
- Delivering services in support of affordable warmth to residents.

Legal Services

Democratic Services Team – Overview

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

At the time of drafting this report, the next meeting of the Committee will held on 23 January 2024 and the Committee will considered the following items:

- Melling Surgery Closure Update
- Cancer Alliance Update
- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Sefton Place - Update Report
- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Primary Care Update

- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, Sefton - Health Provider Performance Dashboard
 - Public Health Performance Framework
 - Adult Social Care Data Review
 - Winter Planning 2024
 - Serious Violence Duty
 - Cabinet Member Update Reports
 - Work Programme Update
- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding)**

At the time of drafting this report, the next meeting of the Committee will be held on 30 January 2024 and the Committee will consider the following items:

- Cabinet Member Reports
 - Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement
 - Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2023
 - Sefton Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education - Annual Report 2022-2023
 - Serious Violence Duty
 - Education Scorecard
 - Ofsted Inspections
 - Work Programme Key Decision Forward Plan
- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills)**

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 16 January 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Update on the Progression of the Liverpool City Region Digital Inclusion Strategy - Presentation
 - Serious Violence Duty
 - A Cultural Strategy for Sefton
 - Southport Market - 2 Year Review
 - Sefton Economic Strategy Update
 - Sandway Homes - 2022 / 23 Outturn Review of Council Wholly Owned Companies
 - Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited (SHOL) - 2022 / 23 Outturn Review of Council Wholly Owned Companies
 - Work Programme 2023/24, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan
 - Cabinet Member Reports - November 2023 to January 2024
- **Informal Meeting of the Committee – 15 January 2024**

Refuse and Recycling – The Committee agreed that a review be undertaken on the topic of refuse and waste recycling. Accordingly, Members undertook a visit to the Gillmoss Recycling Discovery Centre; and following the visit an informal meeting was held to discuss issues associated with refuse and waste recycling.

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 9 January 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Corporate Communications Update - Presentation
- Air Quality Update 2023
- Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax Base for 2024/25 and Review of Council Tax Premiums for Long-Term Empty Properties
- Financial Management 2023/24 to 2026/27 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2023/24 - January Update
- Work Programme 2023/24, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan
- Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Reference Group – Update
- Cabinet Member Report - October 2023 to December 2023

- **Overview and Scrutiny Management Board**

The Management Board does not have any formal decision-making powers. Accordingly, any recommendations suggested by the Management Board must be submitted to the appropriate decision-making body for consideration.

A meeting of the Management Board was held on 9 January 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Public Engagement and Consultation Panel
- Centre for Governance and Scrutiny - Newsletters and Annual Survey
- Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Scrutiny Link - Councillor Christine Howard
- Update on Informal Meetings and Working Groups
- Executive/Scrutiny Protocol

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 12 March 2024.

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

The last meeting of LCRO&S was held on 17 January 2024. The Committee considered the following items:

- Mayoral Combined Authority Budget 2024-25
- Towards a Spatial Development Strategy for the Liverpool City Region – Engagement
- Work Programme Update 2023-24
- Bus Service Improvement Plan Update
- Transport Matters – verbal update

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.

Council appointed Councillors Desmond, Hart and Howard as Members of the LCRCA O&S Committee; and appointed Councillor Howard as Sefton's Scrutiny Link. However, as Councillor Howard has now been appointed as Cabinet Member – Regeneration and Skills, she can no longer serve on Overview and Scrutiny Committees. It is anticipated that Council at its meeting to be held on 29 February 2024 will appoint a new Member to serve on the LCRCA O&S Committee and a new Scrutiny Link.

The next meeting of the LCRO&S will be held on 28 February 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 27 September 2023 (late appeals). In this period over 450 appeals were listed. The levels of school appeal cases remain high. Three days of hearings were held in January, and two days have already been 'pencilled in' for February.

Planning for the 2024 'high season' started in December 2023. Early responses from Panel Members highlight this year will be particularly difficult due to a shortage of Members. A few Panel Members have retired, other authorities have block booked Panel Members for the summer period, and there are difficulties in recruiting new volunteers.

The section will host a training event for new and existing Panel Members in March. We hope to enlist a few new Panel Members at these events

Civic and Mayoral Services

The Mayor's Christmas Toy Appeal was launched in November and as always, the appeal received an astounding response from Sefton's businesses and residents. Despite the ongoing cost of living crisis, the appeal successfully provided toys for 700 families within the borough.

Preparations are in full swing for the Mayors Gala Charity Ball, scheduled for Saturday 6th April 2024 at Formby Hall. Several businesses have already secured the corporate package at £1500. The corporate package includes:

- Table for 10 guests
- Discounted Hotel Room Rate
- VIP Drinks Reception on Arrival from 6pm-7pm
- £300 Bar Tab in Main Room with a Three Course Meal + Tea/Coffee

- Premium Seating in the Main Room
- Advertising in the Event Brochure and on Presentation Screen on night as Sponsor

The Mayor also attended the funeral of former Mayor of Sefton, Jim Hayes.

Member Development

Mandatory Committee Training

Mandatory training sessions for Members of Planning and Licensing Committees took place in May and June 2023.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Training

Three training sessions have been provided by the Local Government Association (LGA for Members and substitutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding).

On-going mentoring support is being provided for the Chair of the O&S Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding).

The LGA will be providing dedicated training for Members and Substitutes of the O&S Committee (Adult Social Care and Health) on 25 January 2024 at 6.00 p.m.

Mandatory Corporate Parenting training

The mandatory Corporate Parenting Course will continue to be provided in-house, supported by the Cabinet Member - Children's Social Care. During 2023/24 three training sessions have been held to date. At the time of drafting this report, a further training session is planned, as follows:-

- 24 January 2024, 4.00 p.m.

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 20 December 2023. The next meeting is scheduled for 21 February 2024.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 are responsible for the production of the Council's Annual Pay Policy and publication of the Gender Pay GAP reporting.

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

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 have settled the GMB legitimate claims via COT 3 agreements. The remaining claims are the subject of ongoing discussions and potential settlement arrangements.

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. The policy officer has recently launched the Council's Guaranteed Interview Scheme for Care Experienced People, and is involved in the implementation of a staff survey.

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 continue to press MHR for improvements to the reports provided and fortnightly meetings continue with MHR to address issues.

Teachers Pensions Monthly data collection (MDC) moves to Monthly Contribution Reconciliation (MCR) has been postponed until 1st July 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 and this work is ongoing

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.

The 1st April 2023 for NJC staff, Councillors and Chief Executive pay were agreed and processed in December 2023 pay. The pay awards from 1st September 2022 and 1st September 2023 for Soulbury staff were agreed and processed in January 2024 and the pay award from 1st September 2023 for Youth staff was agreed and processed in January 2024.

The Teachers Pay award for 1st September 2023 was agreed and was processed in December 2023.

Development work is ongoing to enhance automation of the DBS process using the robotics blue prism software. Mail merge development is underway to address backlogs of letters from THR. Reusing positions has been in place for 1 month which has provided improved data accuracy within iTrent. NB: No data cleansing has been done for CSC as this service is under ongoing structural review.

Workforce reporting is being maintained as BAU, a review of existing Payroll Q&A reports is underway to enhance and speed up final accuracy checks before each Pay date. Financial workforce data reporting is ongoing to enhance data sharing between iTrent and collaborative planning.

Requests have been made to ICT to enable use of the MS power platform applications (power apps/power automate and Azure functions) this future development work plan will allow us to review processes across Employee support, Recruitment, HR, and Establishment Control to enable automation and bring efficiencies across services.

Health Unit

1. During December 2023 and January 2024 a total of 131 referrals for SMBC employees were made to the Health Unit. This is virtually identical to the figure for the same period in the previous 12 months in which there were 130 referrals.
2. Referrals during this latest period included Education Excellence (55.7%), Communities (12.9%), and Children's Services (9.95). The main reasons were stress and mental health related (45.8%), musculoskeletal (19%), and chronic medical illness (9.9%).
3. Delivery of OH services continue to be offered via a mixture of telephone and face-to-face appointments, enabling flexibility for both employees and managers, however, there has been an increase in the request for face-to-face appointments for not only the Occupational Health Nurse and Physician, but also for Counselling services.

Workforce Learning and Development (CLC)

Apprenticeships

We have 4 cohorts of staff enrolled on the **Level 6 Social Work Apprenticeship Degree** – all are progressing well with their studies and our first of these cohorts (3 staff from Adult Social Care and 3 from Children's Services) have just finished with their grades due imminently.

Staff enrolled on **Level 6 Occupational Therapy Degree** are progressing well and 6 Senior Managers have now completed the **Level 7 Senior Leader Apprenticeship Degree programme (MBA)**, and 2 Senior Managers are continuing with their studies and are making good progress.

8 Managers are enrolled on the **Level 5 Operational/Departmental Manager Apprenticeship standard** and are making good progress. We are planning a second cohort for March 2024 and will be meeting with the L&D Board end of January 2024 to review the Training Needs Analysis, to inform our planning and next steps.

We have 1 member of staff from the Public Health Team enrolled on the **Level 6 Environmental Health Practitioner Degree** and they are making good progress.

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.
- **Information Compliance eLearning** – we have developed a new course and end of module assessment which went live in 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 241 Sefton Council and schools' staff. An increase of 25 since the last 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 trained 404 staff across the organisation. The LCR Race Equality Hub are looking into options for the delivery of further sessions during 2024/25.
 - 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.

Strategic Support

COMMUNICATIONS

We have continued to provide support right across the council on key projects, including the LGA Peer Review, the work to make repairs to Southport Pier, the latest Ofsted monitoring visit and preparation for the budget setting.

We also played a role in the Mayor's Christmas Toy Appeal, which helped to ensure every child in Sefton had a gift to open on Christmas Day.

A key piece of work has been reviewing the internal communications channels following a number of staff listening sessions that were held prior to Christmas. It is important that staff are kept informed about what is happening and a refreshed, consistent set of channels will be used going forward.

The team is starting the refresh of 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. This will incorporate the work on internal communications as well as digital content.

Over the next period we will be supporting the work to ensure people understand their council tax bills, what support is available and how they can pay. And we will be encouraging residents who are not signed up to register to vote and remind everyone of the voter ID requirements.

Procurement

The Procurement Team engagement meetings with Service areas to update the Contract Register has been concluded. The follow up to this process, for continuity of the process, will be for our Procurement Category Managers to attend Service Teams DMT meetings in order to identify future or prospective projects and update the Procurement pipeline to ensure accuracy and compliance.

The Council are experiencing an increase in uptake of our early payment programme, partly due to these reviews. We have carried out some benchmarking to understand how we can increase sign up levels by suppliers. Consequently, we will be increasing levels of communications within the Council of the benefits of encouraging suppliers to sign up to our early payment programme.

Procurement have been working closely with Legal, Finance and ICT to introduce DocuSign into the Council. This will increase efficiency in the process of signing and storing documents, but also significantly reducing the amount of printing required, with its associated costs. We are planning a targetted rollout in February 2024.