

## COUNCIL - 18 APRIL 2024

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

1	<b><u>Question submitted by Councillor Evans to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)</u></b>
	<b>Subject: Live Streaming of Meetings</b>
	Could the Leader of the council confirm the council's position on live streaming of meetings and if she agrees with her predecessor's policy objecting to its implementation?
	<b>Response:</b>
	<p>"It is not correct to say that my predecessor had a policy of objecting to the streaming of meetings; it was a case of having no funding to purchase such a system.</p> <p>Officers are in the process of evaluating various options and will report on their findings at the appropriate time.</p>
2	<b><u>Question submitted by Councillor Brough to the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing (Councillor Moncur)</u></b>
	<b>Subject: Healthy Eating</b>
	"Sefton Cabinet on 4 April 2024 is recommending a policy for healthier food and drink advertising so could the Cabinet Member explain what our position is on the foods that will be promoted commercially at the Salt & Tar Food and Drink venue at Bootle and other outlets controlled by Sefton Council?"
	<b>Response:</b>
	<p>"The policy on healthy advertising is focused on restricting the most harmful types of advertising from town centre banners, digital screens, and bus stop adverts, not in hospitality venues, at Salt and Tar or other events, or in Southport market. It offers no bar to any company and, nationally, such policies have been shown to have a strong influence not only on what companies choose to advertise, but also the nature of the products they choose to sell.</p> <p>Sefton's strategic direction of travel includes our commitment to the Healthy Weight Declaration which works with food businesses that sell healthier food options, helping Sefton become a healthier and more sustainable food borough, and this new policy will support these activities.</p> <p>Since food is more than nourishment, and is indeed part of who we are, it is important that aggressive and unhealthy marketing is not dictated or forced upon our communities. We recognise that healthy options are already available in community settings such as Southport Market, and this policy is simply a way of enabling and empowering people to have the opportunity to play an active role in their well-being by having a range of choices.</p> <p>We also recognise that people enjoy hospitality venues, and the policy does not prevent or discourage any change to how those venues operate. The policy is simply encouraging venues to advertise alternatives, for example, promoting non-alcoholic options to those who do not drink alcohol, and offering a wide range of choices where possible.</p> <p>This policy is about setting positive examples for everyone, ensuring Sefton's residents and</p>

	particularly children and parents are not inundated by aggressive promotion of unhealthy, unsustainable food and drink. The policy will not undermine the performance and success of Sefton Council's hospitality events, or venues, or its hospitality company, but each of these will continue to work with Public Health colleagues to identify opportunities to support achievement of the objectives above."
3	<b><u>Question submitted by Councillor Halsall to the Cabinet Member for Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services (Councillor Lappin)</u></b>
	<b>Subject: Pensions</b>
	Do Sefton Council have pensions invested in any weapons or military equipment companies, and if so, can a list be provided of these companies?
	<b>Response:</b>
	<p>"Sefton Council makes contributions to the Merseyside Pension Fund (MPF) on behalf of its employees. MPF have advised the Council that it takes its responsibilities as an asset owner seriously. Their policy of Responsible Investment (RI) arises from the belief that ESG factors can materially affect investment performance. They place great importance on active ownership as their means of managing and shaping ESG matters and are mindful of the responsibility of investors to respect human rights as set out in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.</p> <p>MPF have also advised that they have investments, both directly and indirectly, with companies classified as operating in the Aerospace and Defence sector. However, not all of these companies specifically produce weapons or military equipment."</p>
4	<b><u>Question submitted by Councillor Halsall to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)</u></b>
	With the change in leadership, does Sefton Council remain committed to tackling the climate emergency?
	<b>Subject: Climate Emergency</b>
	<b>Response:</b>
	"Yes"
5	<b><u>Question submitted by Councillor Prendergast to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)</u></b>
	<b>Subject: Children and Young Persons Care</b>
	<p>The Council found itself in the position of having to spend some £26m of accrued reserves to meet the deficiencies in this Service, most of which were outlined in some detail in 2 highly critical Ofsted reports.</p> <p>Would the Leader of the Council please confirm the loss of interest up to now that has resulted in depleting the reserves to this extent and what is the projection for future years bearing in mind the need to replace these balances to ensure the financial viability of the Council?</p>

	<b>Response:</b>
	‘The council manages its cash balances at a portfolio level across the financial year during which interest rates can fluctuate considerably. It is, therefore, not possible to attribute a loss or gain of interest to any specific activity. It should be noted that during 2023/24 the council has made substantial additional income from cash deposits that have taken advantage of higher interest rates and these have been reported to Cabinet.’
6	<b><u>Question submitted by Councillor Prendergast to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Skills (Councillor Howard)</u></b>
	<b>Subject: Southport Market</b>
	<p>There is significant anecdotal evidence to show that visitors to the Town in particular are confused over the Southport Market as they expect it to be a market in the traditional sense, whereas it is now in essence a restaurant with various types and varieties of meals on offer.</p> <p>A recent independent report on the Market indicated that what is referred to as the ‘coffee service’ are very poor with high prices, poor quality containers and very loud music.</p> <p>To what extent have changes been made and when can the financial impact of any changes be anticipated?</p>
	<b>Response:</b>
	<p>“Previous feedback has been provided on the same question, including on the branding work done in advance of opening. This included definition of the word “market”, but also the common trait of how venues retain their old names and brands regardless of such changes. We are not aware of any volumes of feedback relating to the name of Southport Market, nor any impacts on its performance. The thousands of visitors to the Market over the Easter Holidays did not seem to be confused. It also worth highlighting the function and roles of Market Halls have changed, it does not mean the name needs to change to keep up with consumer demands.</p> <p>With regard to the offer, this is continually under review, from the Council’s and the traders’ individual and collective perspective.</p> <p>The hospitality sector has continued to face exceedingly difficult trading conditions and therefore a pragmatic approach continues to be taken which balances the cost and quality of the offer. It is also extremely disappointing to see local independent (and start up) businesses located in the Market being publicly criticised in this way, we should be celebrating their success of creating jobs and helping to attract new visitors to the town while also providing great new offerings for the local population.”</p>
7	<b><u>Question submitted by Sir Ron Watson to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)</u></b>
	<b>Subject: Volunteer Groups</b>
	Sefton is fortunate in having a wide range of Voluntary Groups operate throughout the Borough, although there is some variation in different parts of Sefton.

	<p>One of the main concerns for the public relates to what can be described as ‘Public Order’ issues and does the Leader of the Council consider that there would be merit in Sefton seeking to co-ordinate a Group drawn from retired members of the Police Service, the Fire and Rescue Service, and the Ambulance Services with a view to assisting the Police in known areas of difficulty?</p> <p>Those categories of people indicated could bring huge experience and expertise to this critical area and have a detailed knowledge of society in many parts of the Borough and many of them have in various capacities with charities shown their willingness to assist.</p> <p>Bringing them together in the manner suggested could be a significant benefit to the community as a whole and as such is the Leader of the Council prepared to advance this suggestion as a priority?</p>
	<p><b>Response:</b></p>
	<p>“We would support any individual who wishes to give up their free time to assist our communities. Merseyside Police offer a wide variety of volunteering roles that are available on their website for those with a specific interest in this area and ensure that any necessary training and checks are undertaken. In addition, Sefton Council commissions Sefton CVS to provide our Volunteer Centre which provides a wide range of volunteering opportunities throughout the borough for a range of activities.”</p>
8	<p><b><u>Question submitted by Councillor Prendergast to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)</u></b></p>
	<p><b>Subject: Children’s and Young People Care Services - Accommodation</b></p>
	<p>The Council recognises there is clearly a problem with Children and Young People being sent to Sefton from other areas for accommodation purposes.</p> <p>There are instances where because of the background moving children and teenagers in particular from their environment where gang issues can be prevalent can in itself be beneficial.</p> <p>However, it is becoming increasingly clear that one of the main motivations from other authorities, particularly in the London area, is based not on need but on cost and where the cost of provision for accommodation in boroughs such as Sefton is very much lower.</p> <p>The Councils in question have to remit to Sefton the accommodation costs involved but there is no provision in any sense for the added strains on the Education Service, Social Services and the NHS and the financial burden therefore falls on those responsible on the area to which the Children and Young People are sent.</p> <p>Will the Leader of the Council advise what representations Sefton has made to the Local Government Association in particular to stress the difficulties that the policies followed by others are causing and whether any proposals from the LGA based on the experience such as boroughs like Sefton have been made on our behalf to alleviate what is becoming an increasing problem?</p>

	<b>Response:</b>
	<p>“The LGA are aware of the challenges all councils are facing across the country in Childrens and Adult Services due to the market being geared toward profiteering from the most vulnerable. This was debated at the ALC LGA conference in February 2024.</p> <p>This is a national challenge and something national bodies such as the competition and market authority have called for greater national government control off in terms of greater control of the market.</p> <p>It should be noted that of the Children placed in our borough from outside of Sefton, 64% of them are in fact from the Liverpool City region and 1.5% from London and the South. With the remaining majority coming from the wider Northwest and North Wales. There is also ongoing work with the Cabinet Member for Planning to develop an approach whereby we are clear in our local plan what developments are needed and communicating the need to providers that they provide a commitment to supporting Sefton Children.”</p>
9	<b><u>Question submitted by Councillor Prendergast to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)</u></b>
	<b>Subject: Staff Vacancies</b>
	<p>Will the Leader of the Council advise the number of posts that have been vacant for 12 months or more and give the figure for the financial provision that has been made in the budget for 2024/2025?</p> <p>Would the Leader please give the actual figures and not references to any particular report submitted, particularly to the Cabinet.</p>
	<b>Response:</b>
	<p>“It will take a period of time to determine the exact number of budgeted posts that have been vacant for in excess of 12 months across the council however, there is no budget proposal within the 2024/25 budget for the retention of vacancies to support the wider budget.”</p>
10	<b><u>Question submitted by Sir Ron Watson to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)</u></b>
	<b>Subject: Empty Shops</b>
	<p>Whilst the retail economic environment shows significant signs of recovery there are always shop premises of various sizes and locations that are empty. The areas concerned suffer from the fact that this is very obvious and would the Leader of the Council agree to enter into discussions as below to seek to resolve some of the issues:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agree with leaflet distribution companies not to put material through letterboxes where it is obvious that the premises are empty?</li> <li>2. Seek agreement with the Post Office not to deliver mail where the same criteria as above applies? The Post Office has a statutory obligation to deliver but</li> </ol>

	<p>thought does need to be given to the circumstances as outlined by them in particular.</p> <p>3. Use the empty shop windows, with agreement from the owners, for posters to be used giving details of local services, amenities and events to the benefit of the public?</p>
	<b>Response:</b>
	“The council cannot mandate any of these organisations or landowners to do this but will explore the use of its existing officer channels and relationships to identify if any of these parties are happy to discuss potential options.”
11	<b><u>Question submitted by Sir Ron Watson to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)</u></b>
	<b>Subject: The Strand</b>
	<p>Many Backbench Members believe that an update on The Strand is now overdue. Would the Leader of the Council please confirm the following information and where specific requests are made for actual figures these are provided and not answered by referencing to any particular individual report.</p> <p>This request is made on the basis that there are now over 1000 pages of reports that have been produced where much of the information has been denied to all Members, except those on the Cabinet, and where redacted copies have been requested these have been provided with many blacked out pages either in full or in part which means it is not possible to give an informed view on any decisions which have been made.</p> <p>Members would benefit, however, from the following:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An update of the revenue loss to Sefton council taxpayers since The Strand was purchased.</li> <li>2. An update on the figures projected for the next 5 years for losses likely to be incurred.</li> <li>3. The number of agreements that have been made with private sector retail to take space in The Strand building.</li> <li>4. The arrangements made with Marks &amp; Spencer who decided on commercial grounds that The Strand was not viable and actually paid the Council a sum of money to release them from the lease. Up to now the figure has been withheld but is it now possible as arrangements have been completed for Members of the Council to know the amount that Marks &amp; Spencer were prepared to pay to leave The Strand.</li> <li>5. The number of public sector organisations that have agreed to take space and the extent to which in percentage terms they have been offered subsidised rental figures.</li> </ol>
	<b>Response:</b>
	1. “Prior year financial performance has been provided previously, most recently in response to the same question at the Council meeting of 18 <sup>th</sup> January 2024.

	<p>2. The latest business plan for the Strand Shopping Centre - together with the business case for the Transformation Programme - was approved by Cabinet on Thursday, 7th December, 2023 10.00 am. The relevant information can be found in section 2 of the report regarding the projections for 2023/24 to 2027/28 (report linked below). <a href="http://smbc-modgov-03/documents/s120649/02%20The%20Strand%20-%20Phase%201%20FBC%20and%20BP%2023-24%20Report%20Oct%202023%20v1.0.pdf">http://smbc-modgov-03/documents/s120649/02%20The%20Strand%20-%20Phase%201%20FBC%20and%20BP%2023-24%20Report%20Oct%202023%20v1.0.pdf</a></p> <p>This was provided in response to the same question at the Council meeting of 18<sup>th</sup> January 2024.</p> <p>3. The question is not clear in respect of timescales, whether historic or with the future of the centre in mind. If this clarity can be provided to officers, they will be able to advise to the extent possible.</p> <p>4. This remains commercially sensitive and confidential, under the terms of the agreement with Marks &amp; Spencer.</p> <p>5. The question is not clear in respect of timescales, whether historic or with the future of the centre in mind. If this clarity can be provided to officers, they will be able to advise to the extent possible.”</p>
12	<p><b><u>Question submitted by Cllr Pugh to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Skills (Councillor Howard)</u></b></p>
	<p><b>Subject: Tender for Marine Lake Event Centre</b></p>
	<p>A) What has been the result of the tendering process for the construction of the Marine Lake Event Centre following the removal of Kier as a preferred contractor?</p> <p>B) What contract price has now been agreed and how does it differ from the previous estimates?</p>
	<p><b>Response:</b></p>
	<p>A) “It was decided not to enter into a main contract with Kier after the Pre-Construction Service Agreement concluded. The agreed approach following this was to split the works into two packages, enabling and demolition as the first package and main contract as the second package. The procurement of the enabling and demolition contractor has concluded, and the appointment will follow shortly. The procurement of the main contractor is currently underway.</p> <p>B) No contract price has been agreed as the procurement of the main contractor is underway. The contract value of the enabling and demolition works will be published once the contract has been engrossed.”</p>