

CABINET MEMBER REPORT

Overview & Scrutiny

Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Christine Howard	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services	May 2024

Financial Management

Within the Financial Management service, there has been significant activity on a number of key issues:

The overall Budget Report (and associated supporting reports) were approved at Budget Council on 29th February 2024, when the budget for 2024/25 was set along with the Council Tax for the year.

Work has been ongoing to work with services to set individual budgets, especially in complex areas, including Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care. The first monitoring position will be established as at the end of June 2024, and reported to Cabinet at the end of July.

Initial work has been undertaken on updating and expanding the Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2025/26 – 2027/28.

The Council's revenue outturn position for 2023/24 is close to being finalised and will be reported to Cabinet at the end of July 2024.

The audit of the Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 was completed and the audit certificate was 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.

The audit of the Statement of Accounts for 2022/23 by EY is also currently in abeyance. Although some initial audit work has been undertaken by EY, the main audit has yet to commence for the same reasons as above.

The production of the Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 is being finalised and will be published by 31st May 2024 in line with the statutory deadlines. The Council's auditors will be Grant Thornton from the 2023/24 financial year. Initial work has been undertaken by them including for informing the Council's Value for Money assessment. The main work on auditing the Statement of Accounts will commence in late June and is expected to be completed in mid-September. The audited Statement of Accounts is expected to be presented to Audit and Governance Committee in last September 2024 for approval.

Customer Centric Services

All areas of the service are continuing to deal with high volumes of work as is typical and expected at this stage in the year following the issue of annual bills for Council Tax, Business Rates and benefit annual uprating notification letters. Annual Billing for 2024/25 ran successfully and to plan in March with 130,617 bills being raised for Council Tax and 7,926 bills being raised for Business Rates.

The focus for coming months is to deal with workloads in a timely manner to reduce customer waiting times whilst maintaining collection for Council Tax and Business Rates.

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).

Advanced plans were made to cope with the high volume of enquiries expected during the main billing period for Council Tax. With bills being staggered and sent out from 11th March to 5th April 2024, automated messages were relayed on the telephony software confirming the dates of dispatch, where financial support was available and the benefits of setting up an account through Citizens Access – Revenues My Account Portal to enable residents to view and manage their Council Tax account online.

Data available at the end of April 2024, shows that in just over six-months, since the My Account Council Tax and Business Rates portal went live in October 2023, almost 14,000 households and businesses have successfully registered to view their account online.

Over 20,200 households and 320 businesses are signed up for paperless billing via the portal. Since go-live almost 12,000 work items have been submitted via the Council Tax portal, e.g. new requests /amendments for discounts, Direct Debits, contact details, with approximately 58% of those work items automatically updating Council Tax records instantly upon receipt and without manual intervention; with the remaining items being manually processed within 2 weeks of receipt due to level of checks required.

During March and April, almost 16,000 bills have been viewed online and almost 90,000 log ins have been reported via My Account. This will include multiple login's i.e. by the same resident who have viewed the account summary page that shows their balance and payment due date and amount etc. The team continues to work with Customer Services and the Communications team to promote the portal to encourage further sign-up.

After a five-month break over the winter-period, the resumption of the green bin collections started in early March, however there was some confusion with calendar dates displayed online. While this was quickly rectified, the Contact Centre did have to deal with a steady influx of calls. A message confirming the correct collection dates was then prepared and relayed to customers, with call volumes then reducing consequently.

In April, the Contact Centre set-up telephony for the Election service, allowing residents easier access to speak to a Customer Service Advisor. In total, 315 Election calls were handled with the main enquiries relating to customers checking to see if they were registered to vote, enquiring about the exact locality of their polling station and querying to why they hadn't received their voting pack. The telephony functionality for this service has now been removed, however it will return when confirmation of the date for the General Election is released.

Demand continues to be high at the One Stop Shops, with approximately 2,800 customers attending Bootle One Stop Shop in April; this included approximately 560 taxi drivers, and 1,100 who attended with Council Tax, Parking or benefits enquiries, with the remaining 1,100 customers seeking general council-related advice at reception.

At Southport, 758 customers attended the Atkinson, with 163 customers booking an appointment to discuss their Council Tax or benefit and the remainder seeking general council-related advice at reception.

Taxi-Licensing

The new Taxi Licensing system consisting of an online portal went live on Tuesday 2nd April 2024. The new system allows taxi drivers, vehicle owners and operators to upload various evidence documents as well as pay all licensing fees via an online portal.

After an initial difficult first couple of weeks, staff and customers are now more familiar with the new way of working. Online support is being provided in the self-serve area at Bootle One Stop Shop, and Sefton's Adult Education Team are considering how they can offer support.

The Council's priority is to ensure that all current Sefton licence holders continue to be licensed in a timely manner. At present, there are no delays to the business-as-usual workloads, such as vehicle plates and the renewal of driver's badges, with all processes being completed within two-days of receipt. A work-plan is in place to deal with new applications for Sefton licences received in 2023.

A communication plan is in place with regular updates provided to taxi trade representatives. In addition to the current support, a video confirming how to access and use the new portal has been uploaded onto the Council's website, with detailed frequently asked questions also available.

The Council's website continues to be regularly updated, and this can be accessed, as well as the new video at [Taxi licensing \(sefton.gov.uk\)](https://www.sefton.gov.uk/taxi-licensing)

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.
- Annual Governance Statement and Corporate Governance Review
- ASC Controls to mitigate market failure
- Pupil Place Planning
- Fuel Cards
- Credit Cards
- Waste Management
- Risk Management review
- High Needs Funding

We have recruited two temporary internal auditors one of whom started in April 2024 and the other in May 2024.

Insurance Team have completed and are working on the following initiatives to improve the Council's risk management.

- We are currently working on the insurance renewal for September 2024. The insurance market is much more benign this year although there remains pressure in motor insurance premiums which reflects cost of claims increases, supply chain issues and repairs affecting electric vehicles.

- We have used some of the “free days” as part of the insurance programme risk bursary to undertake a review of the Council’s risk management framework as well as arranging a horizon scanning session for ELT.
- 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. This has now been rolled out to other teams.
- The Team assisted in arranging material damage cover for 25 Catholic schools where the Diocese was unable to offer terms from their existing insurer.
- 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 March 2024 which we have subsequently received feedback on we are currently implementing the recommendations from the review. We are currently facilitating the refreshing of a number of Business Continuity Plans that are being updated by Assistant Directors.

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 March 2024 and for the next meeting in June 2024. 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.
- Assisting Property Services in the review of management of asbestos in both schools and other Council owned properties.
- 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.
- A new staff member started 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 contract with Liverpool is now in place for the Data Centre and work is progressing at pace on the work required to move the Comms Room including moving all existing campus dark fibre links in Bootle and procuring the necessary appliances and equipment including, but not limited to Switches, UPS and Air Conditioning.
- The Cloud telephony project is now closed, the legacy Mitel Infrastructure is now removed from the estate and work is in progress to collect all legacy equipment across sites including handsets. 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. In addition, the team are completing a proof-of-concept in relation to Teams Telephony to inform the strategy moving forwards.
- The Council's CXP solution continues to be developed. Changes have been made to the look and feel of the CXP solution to make it more consistent with the Council website. Work has begun on improving reporting functionality. Furthermore, new processes have been requested for Registrars, Stray Dogs, Electric Vehicles and Sefton Arc, amongst others. Scoping is underway to make Contact Centre-only processes available online. Phase 3 of the eforms migration is in progress, as is the initial configuration of a new FOI module. Regular changes and improvements to existing processes are ongoing.
-
- The upgrade of the Umbraco content management system used to manage www.sefton.gov.uk is nearing completion; testing is in progress and go-live is expected in June 2024. The number of requests from departments for new and/or improved websites has increased, and a web governance board, chaired by the Communications Team, is in place to manage this work moving forwards.

- The ICT Procurement team continue to be busy; work has completed two key procurements including the the new corporate eLearning product, and the Microsoft Enterprise Agreement for all licencing, GIS, and Leisure are 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 completed with members of ELT and IPC, with a proposal for external consultation is due to be consider at Consultation and Engagement Panel on the 3rd of June. Sefton now has in place clear policy document on the use of next Gen AI tools and officers continue to maintain a watching brief in this space.
- 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 Following approval from Cabinet in March to release the opportunity to market the ICT client team is working with officers across the Council as well as external legal colleagues to finalise the contractual and tender documents required by early June. The ICT client has already held an open day with interested suppliers with 14 attending in person and a further 3 expressing an interest to receive the information. At the time of writing Sefton has issued a formal notice so that suppliers can formally express an interest in bidding, only these suppliers will receive the tender documentation once released in June.

Legal Services

Democratic Services Team – Overview

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 20 February 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Shaping Care Together Update
- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside – Sefton Place Update
- Health Provider Performance Dashboard
- 2022/23 Outturn Review of Wholly Owned Council Companies – New Directions
- Carers Strategy
- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Work Programme Update

The next meeting of the Committee, the first of the new municipal year, will be held on 18 June 2024.

- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children’s Services and Safeguarding)**

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 12 March 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Attendance of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Childrens Services Improvement Programme
- Summary of Recent Audit Activity
- Education Scorecard

- Ofsted Inspections
- Review of the Operation and Terms of Reference of the Committee
- Work Programme Key Decision Forward Plan

The next meeting of the Committee, the first of the new municipal year, will be held on 4 June 2024.

- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills)**

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 5 March 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Housing Standards Team - Damp Mould and Condensation
- Sefton Economic Strategy Update (March 2024)
- Social Value and the Growth and Strategic Investment Programme
- Refuse and Waste Recycling
- Work Programme 2023/24, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan
- Cabinet Member Reports - January 2024 to March 2024

The next meeting of the Committee, the first of the new municipal year, will be held on 25 June 2024 and will consider its Work Programme for 2024/25 and the identification of topics for review by informal meetings of the Committee.

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

The last ordinary meeting of the Committee was held on 27 February 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Annual ICT Update Report
- Levels of Disciplinary, Grievance, Dignity at Work and Sickness Absence
- Taxi Issues in Sefton
- Work Programme 2023/24, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan
- Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty Reference Group – Update
- Cabinet Member Report - December 2023 to February 2024

The next meeting of the Committee, the first of the new municipal year, will be held on 11 June 2024 and will consider its Work Programme for 2024/25 and the identification of topics for review by informal meetings of the Committee.

- **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 12 March 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Scrutiny Link - Councillor Hart
- Broadcasting/Recording of Council Meetings
- Review of the Operation and Terms of Reference for Children's Services

- Update on Informal Meetings and Working Groups
- Centre for Governance and Scrutiny - Newsletters and Annual Survey
- Strategic Scrutiny in Practice Network
- Update on Called-in Items to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills)

The next meeting of the Management Board will take place on 18 June 2024.

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

The last meeting of LCRO&S was held on 28 February 2024. The Committee considered the following items:

- Verbal Update from Mayor Steve Rotheram
- Progress Update on the LCR Combined Authority Five Year Climate Action Plan
- Work Programme Update 2023-24

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.

Sefton's appointed Members are Councillors Desmond, Hart and Hinde. Councillor Hart is Sefton's Scrutiny Link.

The next meeting of the LCRO&S will be held on 19 June 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 08 May and will end in July 2024 (possibly subject to some late appeals in September). In this period over 200 appeals will have been listed and heard. The number of appeals are lower than recent years, with more applicants being offered schools from their initial preferences.

The section will hosted a training event for new and existing Panel Members in March. We enlisted a few new Panel Members at these events.

Civic and Mayoral Services

The Mayor's Gala Charity Ball was held on 6 April 2024 and raised over £6,000 for the Mayor's Charity Fund.

On 16 May 2024, Cllr June Burns continued into a fourth term of office, and the Charity Events for that term have now been released. There will be a charity cabaret night on 19 October 2024, a Charity Burns Night on 25 January 2025, and the Gala Charity Ball on 26 April 2025

The Mayor's Office has also launched a Charity Sweepstake for Euro 2024, with all 24 slots being taken within 3 days.

Member Development

Mandatory Committee Training

A mandatory training session for Members of Planning Committee took place on the 21 May 2024 and was well attended. A number of Members gave apologies and have been offered follow up training on Wednesday 29 May 2024.

At the time of drafting this report, mandatory training for the Licensing and Regulatory Committee is due to take place on 10 June 2024.

Member Development Steering Group

The Member Development Steering Group was established in November 2022. The Group is comprised of 6 Members and last met on 21 February 2024. The next meeting is scheduled for 27 June 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.

Regulatory and Other Committees:

Audit and Governance Committee

At the time of drafting this report, the last meeting of the Committee was held on 20 March 2024 and the Committee considered the following items:

- Corporate Risk Management
- ICT Acceptable Usage Policy – Yearly Review
- Treasury Management Position to January 2024
- Sefton Assurance Map
- Risk and Audit Service Performance
- Internal Audit Charter and Annual Audit Plan
- Grant Thornton External Audit Progress Report and Sector Update – February 2024
- Review of Whistleblowing Policy and Review of Whistleblowing Referrals 2022 – 2023
- Review of Terms of Reference
- Guidance for Council Appointed Directors
- Audit and Governance Committee Self-Assessment 2023/2024
- Audit and Governance Committee Member Training and Development
- Audit and Governance Committee Work Programme 2024-2025
- Audit and Governance Committee – Work Programme Update Report
- Unrecoverable Debts over £10,000
- Write-off of irrecoverable retail-related arrears with balances over £10,000

Health and Wellbeing Board

The last meeting of the Board was held on 6 March 2024 and the Board considered the following items:

- Anchor Charter

- Merseyside and Isle of Man Child Death Overview Panel Annual Report 2022-23
- Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment 2025-28 development process and scope report
- Progress update on the Sefton Child Poverty Strategy
- Sub-Group Updates

Licensing and Regulatory Committee

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 11 March 2024 and the Committee considered the following items:

- Petitions - Revised Licensed Driver Convictions Policy
- Revised Licensed Driver Convictions Policy
- Local Licensing Fees and Charges
- Continuation of the Public Spaces Protection Order – Dog Control

PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

Operational Matters

All Other Council Operational HR Business Support

Advice and support are provided to all service areas regarding employment/staffing matters.

In addition to business as usual:

HR are supporting with the development and implementation of the new Learning Disability and Autism Team within the Adult Social Care Department. This was created following the recommendation of the 2022 Local Government Association Peer Review.

The team are going to go live on the 3 June 2024, and we currently have 1 x team manager, 1 x LP, 5 x SW, 2 x CA, 1 x transition coordinator. All the LD and Autism cases will transfer into the new team on a phased basis and will alleviate the waiting list in the community teams.

Children's Services – Human Resources Operational Support Team

A Business Partner Model continues to support Children's Services, including all maintained schools, with all People matters.

In addition to business-as-usual there are clear focus on the following priorities.

- Children's Social Care Whole Service review and restructure. The team has supported the Executive Director (ED) with all the HR elements to this process, which was approved by Cabinet on 23rd May 2024.
- Recruitment and Appointment of Assistant Director of Education Excellence. The team has supported the Employment Procedures Committee in the appointment and onboarding to this post.

- Academisation of 18 Maintained Schools. The team continues to support the Education Excellence department and the individual schools with the process of academisation including TUPE.
- Collaborative Working between Children's Services (excluding Schools) and Corporate Resources. With a bid to improve collaboration between Childrens Services and Corporate Resources, the HR Manager - Childrens Social Care and Education is working closely with the Executive Director of Corporate Services and the Service to improve collaborative working between both departments, with the aim to improve outcomes for Children, Young People and Families.

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. Work is currently being undertaken in relation to the Childrens services Review.

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. Recent Hay reviews include HAY positions associated with the Childrens Services Review.

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. Officers have settled the GMB legitimate claims via COT 3 agreements. (which covers a small proportion of the 580 claims). In March 2024 the Council and UNISON reached agreement to take forward an overarching settlement process to enable individual settlement offers to be calculated. Unisons officers are seeking instructions on the offers and terms from individual claimants. It is anticipated that it will be possible to conclude matters without the need for a full Employment Tribunal.

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 is involved in the implementation of a staff survey which went live on 15.4.24 with a closing date of 3.5.24. Following this the officer will be involved in the insight meetings, analysis of data and review and feedback of information to ELT/SLB.

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 Midland HR (MHR) for improvements to the reports provided and fortnightly meetings continue with MHR to address issues. These have now been escalated within MHR and further meetings are scheduled.

Teachers Pensions Monthly data collection (MDC) moves to Monthly Contribution Reconciliation (MCR) has been postponed until further notice 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 2024 for NJC staff, Councillors, Coroners and Chief Executive have not yet been agreed.

The Pay award for minimum wage and apprentices was implemented on 1st April 2024

Cleaning staff had an inhouse ICT database to provide a payroll file to payroll for changes to pay required and this has been replaced by an alternative solution which has been welcomed by the Cleansing Officers. This has been subject to a parallel run and has gone live Monday 6th May 2024.

Development work is ongoing to enhance automation of the DBS process using the robotics blue prism software and this is currently being tested and is expected to go live in June24.

Mail merge development is underway to address backlogs of letters from THR, these have been reviewed by contract type and establishment and will be distributed by June24.

Reusing positions has been in place for 4 to 5 months and this has provided improved data accuracy within iTrent. NB: No data cleansing has been done for CSC as this service is under ongoing structural review.

Scoping to record and maintain annual PDR's and monthly 1:1/supervision meetings is underway with the intention to develop and build electronic forms into employee self-service and Managers self-services to enable greater accessibility and reporting using the iTrent platform.

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 the period April 2024 to 28th May 2024, a total of 140 referrals for SMBC employees were made to the Health Unit. This is a very slight decrease in comparison to the same period in the previous 12 months in which there were 144 referrals.
2. Referrals during this latest period included Education Excellence (34.7%), Operational Services (26.3%), and Adult Social Care (8.5%). The main reasons were stress and mental health related (46.4%), musculoskeletal (20%), and chronic medical illness (15.7%).
3. Delivery of OH services continue to be offered via a mixture of telephone and face-to-face appointments, and there continues to be a high number of requests for face-to-face appointments for the Occupational Health Nurse and Physician, and for Counselling services.
4. The HU continues to receive referrals from schools, specifically those moving to or considering, academy status.

Workforce Learning and Development (CLC)

Apprenticeships

All existing apprenticeship contracts have now been renewed for the period 1st April 2024 – 31st March 2026. We continue to procure new apprenticeship standards via the YPO portal to support succession planning. The latest standards procured include the **Playworker Level 2** and **Youth Support Worker Level 3**.

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 their degree. 3 staff successfully gained a 1st Class Honours degree.

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 September 2024. We met with the L&D Board end of January 2024 to review the Training Needs Analysis to inform our planning for both apprenticeships and training requests that were discussed and identified during Performance Development Reviews (PDRs).

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:

- **Me Learning Implementation** – we are in the process of implementing an upgraded version of the Me Learning training booking system. The estimated go live date is scheduled for Monday 8th July 2024.
- **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 highlight compliance and to encourage staff to complete these courses.
- **Introduction to Management eLearning Refresh** – The current Introduction to Management eLearning programme is being updated and will include 11 bite sized modules that aspiring managers/managers can complete to support their on-going CPD. Modules include:
 1. The Role of the Manager
 2. Management Styles
 3. Managing Teams
 4. Managing Change
 5. Communication
 6. Motivation
 7. Delegation and Allocation.
 8. Time Management
 9. Managing Workload
 10. Managing Performance
 11. Understanding your organisation (a review of Sefton's structure).

The revised programme should be ready to go live early Summer 2024 and the L&D Board agreed to make this mandatory for new managers joining the organisation. Existing managers will be encouraged to complete too.

- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** training delivery is going well. To date, we have trained 252 Sefton Council and schools' staff. An increase of 10 since the last report.
- **LCRCA Race Equality Training** – we have secured 2 additional dates for further delivery of this training on the following dates:
 - Race Equality Training for Managers; 9:30am – 1pm; Sefton Corporate Learning Centre; Tuesday 21st May 2024.
 - Race Equality Training for Non-Managers; 1pm – 4:30pm; Bootle Town Hall Assembly Room; Tuesday 28th May 2024.
 - A further date is being planned for end of June 2024.

The LCR Race Equality Hub are continuing to explore options for the delivery of bespoke and targeted sessions for different cohorts of staff e.g., those who are hard to reach and/or require more flexible sessions early morning or late evening.

- 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 programme was launched in May 2024 and includes the following three courses:
 - Care Act 2014
 - Assessment of Needs and Determination of Eligibility
 - Recording in Social Care.

A series of comms will be shared with the Adult Social Care workforce during May 2024, to encourage staff to book onto the training.

Strategic Support

Performance & Business Intelligence

The Business Intelligence team is continuing to support many work streams across the Council including Economic Regeneration, Education Excellence, SEND, Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and Public Health Services. The team continue to work closely with Children's Social Care and Adults Social Care services to develop their performance reporting, using the new Data Warehouse and Power BI, including adding 'drill-through' functionality into new Power BI reports to access client level information. The team have been involved in analysing financial data for ASC, Children's Social Care and SEND, aligning client numbers and financial spend to aid financial forecasting and change linked to the new transformation programme. Work is ongoing with the Chief Executive to review our capacity and capability to deliver better quality information and analysis as part of the wider transformation programme, under the banner of 'Set up to Succeed.' This project aims to build on the work of recent years to ensure that the Council continues to improve performance management, has the required skills in the organisation and that there is a clear vision and approach agreed. One of the first deliverables for this project is a new planning and performance framework for the council, which we are aiming to deliver by July 2024.

Consultation & Engagement, Complaints and Information Governance.

The Service continues to support consultation and engagement activities, respond to complaints and subject access requests in a timely manner and provide information, advice, and guidance across the Council on matters relating to information governance and data protection. The consultation and engagement on the refresh of the Children & Young People's Plan is particularly noteworthy, with engagement across all Sefton schools and FE colleges, targeted engagement and workshops with specific groups of children and young people (0-6, Cared for, Care Experiences, SEND, etc.) and wider consultation with key partners, the social care workforce, the corporate workforce and other stakeholders, including parents, carers and residents. This consultation recently ended, and the team is about to start the analysis of the responses, which will be presented to the next meeting of the Children & Young People Partnership Board to inform the next version of the Sefton Children and Young People Plan.

There is a considerable challenge with capacity in the Complaints team, consequently this is increasing the risk of not responding to complaints within standards, but the Service is actively recruiting to vacant posts to address the issue and hoping to be at fully capacity before the end of June 2024. The Chief Executive and Executive Directors for ASC and Children's Services have been considering the arrangements for administering complaints in these areas specifically, with a

view to improving performance. This will require change in the way the council manages and resolves complaints, ensuring a future function and form that is sustainable, improves the number of complaints resolved first time, increases satisfaction amongst complainants, and improves staff engagement with the complaints process.

The project to digitise the Council's historic paper records continues at pace, and is nearing an end. All legacy records stored at disparate third-party locations have now been moved to the Council's preferred secured storage provider, taking opportunity to destroy legacy records and digitise those that are not required to be kept in original paper format. The team has now completed processing legacy records stored at the former Thomas Gray School site and has begun to review records at Southport Coroner's Office, the former Bootle Play Centre and Beford Road Community Centre.

Strategic Support

The team continues to provide support across the various services with policy & strategy development, service reviews and transformation activity, but most of the resource continues to be directed to support children and young people, particularly Children's Social Care improvement and SEND. Officers in the team have been aligned to provide project support to each of the six key transformation projects identified under the theme of 'Better outcomes, sustainable services' including 1) SEND, 2) H2S transport, 3) CSC, 4) Better at Home, 5) Housing and 6) Operational In-House Services. Officers have supported the development of the Project Initiation Documents (PIDs), clearly defining project scope, rationale, objectives/deliverables, key stakeholders, timescales and finances. The financial information (savings, reduces pressures and cost to deliver change) is being analysed and presented to inform the development of the medium-term financial plan (MTFP) for 2025/26 to 2027/28. As the new transformation programme is developed the Senior Leadership Team will need to agree a set of priorities for the short, medium and long term, and review the current capacity within the Strategic Support team, to support the transformation programme, including roles and responsibilities within the individual services.

COMMUNICATIONS

We have continued to provide support right across the council on key projects, including the local elections, major development projects and promotion of the spring and summer events.

Internally, the team has been supporting the promotion of the staff survey and subsequent actions with the staff listening sessions taking place throughout May and June.

The team is refreshing 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 and communications planning and evaluation.

Over the next period our priorities will shift towards encouraging people to vote at the General Election and to inform residents and visitors about what they can do in the borough over the summer period.

Procurement

The Procurement Act 2023 will become live from 28 October 2024. This will directly impact on the running of our contracts due to the significant changes which are being imposed. It is essential to reduce the risk to Sefton from these legislative changes by ensuring staff involved in Procurement, Legal, contract evaluations, contract management, KPI and Social Value delivery attend the

appropriate training allocated to them. All members of staff have now been advised of their appropriate training schedule and the timeline allocated.

Procurement have been working closely with Legal, Finance and ICT to introduce DocuSign into the Council in order to increase efficiency in the process of signing and storing documents to significantly reduce the amount of labour and printing required, with its associated costs. There have been several technical issues which have been addressed. The training requirements are being rolled out from May 2024.

Procurement and Finance are in the process of implementing a financial recovery audit using a software model designed by Oxygen Finance, the same organisation which supports Sefton with the early payment programme. While we believe our finance systems are robust this will be a test of the controls in place at nil cost to Sefton. Any funds which may be recovered will be split on a gainshare at 70/30 in Sefton's favour.