

# CABINET MEMBER UPDATE REPORT

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills)

COUNCILLOR	PORTFOLIO	DATE
Daren Veidman	Cabinet Member Highways and Housing	25 June 2024

The Planning Service is set up to operate the Council's regulatory functions in relation to the development and use of land. The report looks at key areas of activity and successes over the past 3 – 6 months and challenges for the few months ahead.

A Planning Services Charter was published in May 2024 [Planning Services Charter 2024 \(sefton.gov.uk\)](https://sefton.gov.uk). This sets out our values, our service standards, our priorities and how we are accountable.

### 1. Development Management

- Numbers of planning applications have settled at just below pre-Covid levels
- 100% of major and minor applications we determined 'in time' between January – March 2024, and 98% of 'Other' applications (mainly householder)
- This high level of performance is dependent on staff agreeing 'Extensions of Time' which the Government is proposing to severely restrict
- Without using EoTs, our performance would be 24% of Majors (national target 60%), 'Minors', 39% against a target of 65%, 'Other' applications 61% against a target of 80%.
- The number of complaints received by the Enforcement Team in 2023-24 has increased to 697. Most have been dealt with without resorting to formal action.

### Challenges

- If the Government's reforms are introduced this will limit then opportunity to negotiate improvements to schemes and is likely to lead to more refusals. This could damage our reputation with agents as agents they would either have to appeal our decision (which is time-consuming) or submit a fresh application
- We regularly receive proposals for children's homes which are often difficult to resist purely on purely planning grounds but pose challenges corporately. We are working closely with colleagues in Children's Social Services to improve how we respond to these proposals.
- Securing fast responses from statutory consultees, in particular some of our internal consultees

## 2. Building Control

- The Building Control Team continues to meet its key statutory targets in relation to plan-checking, carrying out of site inspections and percentage applications given full or conditional approval.
- The Team's market share remains just above the national average for local authority building control teams.
- In June 2024, the Building Control Team is to hold interviews, for a vacant permanent Senior Building Control Officer position. A further vacancy has arisen for a Building Control Officer and it is hoped that this post will be advertised and filled in July/August 2024.

### Challenges

- The Team is struggling to meet its locally set plan-checking targets due to long-term staff absence and dealing with on-going staffing vacancies. Over the last 12 months, market share has reduced with the recent loss of some key members of staff to private sector and taking key clients with them.
- The biggest challenge is the implementation of the Building Safety Act, which requires all Building Control Bodies and their individual team members, to undergo an assessment of competency, which needs to be completed by 6<sup>th</sup> July 2024.
- Sefton's Building Control Team is due to be assessed by the newly established Building Safety Regulator, sometime in mid-2024, in order to confirm they can continue to operate as a Building Control Body.

## 3. Local Planning

- The Council, in its recent Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), have been able to demonstrate a 8.7 year supply of deliverable housing land significantly exceeding the Government's required 5 year supply.
- Sefton have also recently passed the latest Housing Delivery Test (published December 2023), having had 142% of the required homes completed over the previous 3 years.
- A number of Supplementary Planning Documents are currently being progressed:
  - Developer Contributions to Southport Tourist Infrastructure
  - Nature (update)
  - Boundary Treatments
  - Short Term Holiday Lets
- The Combined Authority have recently published a draft Spatial Development Strategy. The policy team co-ordinate a Sefton response which was submitted to the Combined Authority in February.
- Bootle Area Action Plan - The policy team is assessing all comments submitted and will use these to help update the final draft of the Bootle AAP which is planned to be taken to Council for approval in July.
- The Local Plan team have recently completed its second Movers' Survey. This looks at where people moved to newly built homes in Sefton and why.

### Key challenges

- Getting the Bootle Area Plan finalised, approved for publication, submitted to the Secretary of State and examined in public
- Taking account of the various government guidance in relation to planning and plan-making.

### **4. Heritage and Conservation**

- 10 Listed Buildings were removed from the Listed Buildings at Risk register through enforcement, repair and restoration as part of development proposals.
- Site surveys of 152 Listed Buildings and Heritage at Risk Assessments were carried out - this amounted to 27% of the total Listed Buildings within the Borough, exceeding the target of 20% per year.
- The capital build part of the Southport Townscape Heritage project is progressing - 509-515 Lord Street, a long term vacant grade 2 Listed Building, has been restored and repaired and removed it from the Council's Buildings at Risk Register. The second project has now been completed at 4a Bold Street including a new traditional shopfront and tidying up the verandah

### Challenges

- The key challenge is to unlock difficult Heritage at Risk development sites and facilitate their sustainable future.

### **5. Technical Support**

- Performance in completing searches has been consistently above target throughout the year until a slight reduction in performance in quarter 4 here due to staff availability in other feeder departments
- Performance in validating major applications in quarter 4 is below target. This shortfall is due to the retirement of a key member of staff. We are currently in the process of recruiting for this post
- A key success has been consistently in the HMLR gold standard of best performing Local Authorities for maintaining the Local Land Charges register.

### Challenge

- The key challenge for the Technical Support team over the next 12 months are ensuring adequate staff levels and training.