

CABINET MEMBER REPORT

Overview & Scrutiny

Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Christine Howard	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services	August 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 continues 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 as at the end of June 2024, was reported to Cabinet at the end of July. The second report showing the July position is currently being finalised and will be reported to Cabinet on 4th September.

Work is also being undertaken on updating and expanding the Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2025/26 – 2027/28.

The Council's revenue outturn position for 2023/24 has been finalised and was reported to Cabinet at the end of July 2024.

The audit of the Statement of Accounts for 2021/22 and 2022/23 by EY is currently in abeyance as the firm considers the latest Government proposed legislation and guidance on how audits for years prior to 2023/24 can be completed. The intention from the Government is for a "backstop" date to be introduced for early December 2024 by which time audit certificates will need to be issued for all outstanding audits. As the audits for 2021/22 and 2022/23 will not have been fully completed, the audits opinions will be qualified on that basis.

The production of the Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 was finalised and published by 31st May 2024 in line with the statutory deadlines. The Council's new auditors, Grant Thornton from the 2023/24 financial year, have been undertaking the audit since then, including work for informing the Council's Value for Money assessment. Significant progress has been made and the main work on auditing the Statement of Accounts is expected to be completed in mid-September.

An update on the position with the various audits will be presented to Audit and Governance Committee on 3rd September 2024. A special meeting of Audit and Governance is currently scheduled for 25th September to consider the Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 and the audit findings to date. However, given the position with the 2021/22 and 2022/23 the audit for 2023/24 won't be able to be finalised – it is anticipated that a special meeting off Audit and Governance Committee will be required in January 2024 to approve the final, fully audited, Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 in advance of the "backstop" date for that year.

Customer Centric Services

The service continues to deal with high workloads but has made great progress in recent months to reduce both outstanding volumes and customer response times.

National Collection Performance 2023/24

In June, the Government released the data on all English councils' Council Tax and Business Rates collection performance for 2023/24. The data analysis shows that Sefton is performing very well in relation to other metropolitan councils, and the councils in the Liverpool City Region.

The tables below shows Sefton's performance compared to both the national average for all English authorities, and the average for metropolitan authorities:-

- Sefton is the best performing Metropolitan authority for Non-Domestic Rates collection at 2.1% above the Met average, and 1.6% above the national average.
- Council Tax collection is 1.3% above the average for Metropolitan authorities and has consistently remained 1% below the national average for the past 5-years.

Council Tax	Sefton	National	Metropolitan
2019-20	95.8	96.8	95.0
2020-21	95.0	95.7	93.8
2021-22	94.8	95.9	93.8
2022-22	95.0	96.0	93.7
2023-24	94.9	95.9	93.6

NNDR	Sefton	National	Metropolitan
2019-20	98.3	98.0	97.4
2020-21	96.4	93.0	91.6
2021-22	97.3	95.5	95.4
2022-22	99.4	96.8	96.2
2023-24	98.8	97.2	96.7

Customer Services

The Council's Customer Services Contact Centre continues to answer approximately 16,000 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).

Enquiries relating to Cleansing issues, e.g. the availability of brown bins, missed bin collections, bulky item collections, remain consistently high. Various telephony messages are prepared and relayed to inform customers when their revised collection is due to be made, however a number of customers insist on staying on the line to speak to a Customer Service Advisor.

As expected, calls relating to Elections significantly increased in the lead-up to the General Election with enquiries generally following similar themes: i.e. not received postal vote, registration requirements for proxy vote, location of Polling station and identification documents that would be accepted to vote in person.

My Account Portal - Council Tax / Business Rates

Since the Council Tax and Business Rates online account portal went live in October 2023, there has been a month-on-month increase in the volume of registrations with around 16,800 households and businesses now successfully signed-up for My Account, and around 21,500 households and businesses signed up for paperless billing.

Since go-live approximately 19,500 work items have been submitted via the Council Tax portal, e.g. new requests /amendments for discounts, Direct Debits, contact details etc. with approximately 57% of those work items automatically updating Council Tax records instantly upon receipt and without manual intervention; with the remaining items being manually processed within two-weeks of receipt due to level of checks required. Both the Customer Services and the Communications teams continue to promote and publicise the portal to encourage further sign-up.

Demand continues to be high at the One Stop Shops, with approximately 2,500 customers attending Bootle One Stop Shop each month. Consistently, the team deal with a high volume of taxi license applications and related enquiries, Council Tax, Parking or benefits enquiries, with the remaining customers seeking general council-related advice at reception.

At Southport, approximately 500 customers attended the Atkinson each month, booking an appointment to discuss their Council Tax and/or benefit, with others seeking general council-related advice at reception.

Taxi-Licensing

The new Taxi Licensing system consisting of an online portal went live at the beginning of 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 some initial difficulties in the first couple of weeks, staff and customers are now more familiar with the new way of working. At present, there are no delays to the business-as-usual workloads, such as the processing of vehicle plates and the renewal of driver's badges, with all work being completed within two-days of receipt.

It is taking longer to deal with applications for new drivers; however, for drivers who upload all the required evidence in a timely manner and pass their knowledge test first time, they can expect to be licensed within 4 – 6 weeks of submitting their application via the portal. It is evident that a number of drivers are experiencing issues accessing the portal and creating an e-mail account. Technical support remains available at Bootle One Stop Shop and a Frequently Asked Question section has been uploaded onto the Council's website. Weekly Knowledge tests are now being offered at Bootle One Stop Shop and these will increase as more drivers provide all the required evidence and are ready to be licensed

Weekly internal meetings between Customer Services and Taxi Licensing continue and the trade are given regular updates on progress. The Council's website continues to be regularly updated, and this can be accessed at [Taxi licensing \(sefton.gov.uk\)](https://sefton.gov.uk)

Risk and Audit

The **Internal Audit** team are continuing to work on delivering the 2024/25 internal audit plan with a current focus on reviews of:

- Review of number of Schools.
- Fuel Cards
- Procurement New Legislation
- ASC – Inspection Preparation
- Sefton New Directions 22/23
- Risk Management Health Check
- Tree Management (External Review)
- Code of Conduct
- Credit and Debit Cards
- ASC recruitment and retention
- CSC Procurement
- Marine Lakeside Event Centre

- Bulky Waste
- Planning Financials
- Sundry Debtors
- Council Tax
- Children with disabilities
- Home to School transport
- Out of Area Placements- ASC
- Home to School Transport

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

Following a re-structure a Trainee ICT Auditor has been appointed and is due to start in September 2024 and a Principal Auditor post is currently being advertised.

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 and have received positive feedback.
- The Team assisted in arranging material damage cover for 25 Catholic schools where the Diocese was unable to offer terms from their existing insurer. Currently consulting on a re-valuation of the schools to ensure that the properties have accurate re-building costs which will help to prevent under insurance and potential restrictions of cover in the event of a claim.
- Team continues to work extensively with Service Teams including Highways on car parking, 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 September 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.
- Completing a review of the Council's grey fleet driving standards to ensure compliance with the Council's statutory responsibilities to ensure that staff are eligible to drive and have vehicles that are insured and safe to be on the road.
- 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. Further developments are underway to improve Sefton's Cyber Security capabilities and the team has also initiated an improvement programme to upgrade and refresh the corporate Wi-Fi across the estate over the next 18-24 months.
- 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 move of the existing comms capacity to Magdalen House is well underway, this includes the reconfiguration of all dark fibre connections in Bootle and

the installation of new air conditioning and UPS systems. The Agilisys team will move out of St Peters House and into their new office location within Magdalen during August. Plans are also in progress to move the remaining small data centre footprint within St Peters to a purpose-built data centre in Liverpool, all the new equipment is ordered with the only outstanding piece being a firm timeline for the connectivity from Virgin, which is being actively chased.

- The Cloud telephony project is now closed, the team has completed the identification of telephony lines commissioned by departments directly and work is underway to transfer these to the corporate system (less than 30 lines). In addition, the team have completed a positive a proof-of-concept in relation to Teams Telephony to inform the strategy moving forwards, a further report will be made available regarding this during Autumn.
- The Council's CXP solution continues to be developed. A new internal data breach process is due to go live mid-August. A new ELAS process is in development. Work continues on making Contact Centre-only processes available online, with the first of these (Traffic) currently in UAT. Work on the configuration of the new FOI process is progressing well, with testing projected to commence over the new two months. Phase 3 of the eforms migration will commence in September. New processes have been requested for Registrars, Trees & Sefton Arc amongst others. 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 due to go-live on 23 August 2024, the go live was delayed from June due to the General Election and then recent events in Southport. The web governance board, chaired by the Communications Team, continues to meet to evaluate and prioritise new requests; current projects in flight include sites for Public Health, Sefton@Work and Active Sefton.
- The ICT Procurement team continue to be busy; work has completed on several key procurements including the network connectivity for schools, the Microsoft Enterprise Agreement for all licencing and GIS with Leisure also nearing completion. A forward plan has been developed in partnership with central procurement colleagues and work has now started on procurement for Payroll and HR, Fleet Management and Egress (secure email).
- The ICT client is working in partnership with Agilisys colleagues to deliver a refresh programme for desktops and laptops that will not meet the requirements of Windows 11 next year (approximately 600 devices are impacted). Windows 10 will be end of life in October 2025 and the team is already testing Windows 11 deployments with a view to migration of all staff prior to this date. As part of this project, we are taking the opportunity to upgrade the standard specification for laptops and desktops purchased by the authority to ensure that our devices are fit for purpose over the next 3 – 5 years.
- 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. A Cyber Security briefing was completed for Full Council during July.
- The new Digital Strategy for Sefton is now out for external consultation, which closes on the 18th of August. Responses will then be reviewed, and a final version of the strategy will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet during Autumn.
- Due to the Agilisys contract ending on the 30th of September 2025 work is underway to procure a Managed Service provider for ICT from October 2025. The tender documents

were released to suppliers in July this year with a deadline of the 8th of August for bid submissions. Evaluation of bids will take place during August/September with a report recommending preferred bidder due to Cabinet in December this year.

Legal Services

Legal Services continue to busy providing support across a range of areas including: Childrens' and Adults' Social Care; Contracts and Commercial; Property and Planning and Prosecutions and Regulations and Employment Law. In addition to business as usual there follows some highlights:

- School academisations : The Legal Team have assisted colleagues across the legal department in the negotiation of Commercial Transfer Agreements and Property Agreements relating to the academisation of a number of schools within the borough.
- The Principal Lawyer has led on a project to ensure compliance with HMRC's off payroll working rules.
- The Contracts and Commercial team assisted with the procurement and appointment of 15 law firms to the Northwest Legal Consortium. This consortium provides a framework under which various public bodies can appoint law firms across the Northwest region. The Contracts and Commercial team has also been assisting the procurement department in preparing for the implementation of the new Procurement Act which is due to come into force in October of this year and has led on a project to redraft the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. The Team continues to assist colleagues with a range of projects including the Marine Lake Events Centre, the Strand Transformation Project and in relation to the delivery of new Council housing.
- The Property team continue to handle a wide and varied caseload of instructions from the Councils estates team for disposals, acquisitions and other property related matters; including the large number of schools transferring over to Multi-Academy Trusts, and the recent re-acquisition of Magdalen House.
- The Planning team continue to progress a large number of legal 106 agreements as well as all the work required to progress all the new Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) legal agreements that will soon be required by the implementation of the Environment Act 2021, making BNG applicable to all new planning permissions granted in England (with a few exemptions) since Q2 2024.
- The Childrens' Social Care legal team - the cases being managed by the team continue to be complex in nature, often involving several parties and international elements where the team must liaise with Central Authorities worldwide. The team have recently successfully defended a Judicial Review in the high Court on behalf of Children's social Care.
- The Lawyer designated to supporting the Special Educational Needs department with a rise in cases before the Special Educational Needs tribunal seen during this academic year.
- The Prosecution team have had some great success in obtaining some convictions for failing to comply with school attendance orders, with quite large fines and costs of £1,000 per parent. The team also worked in partnership with the Police in order to obtain a warrant to enter a hotel that was suspected run as a House in Multiple Occupation and as a result the police have pursued prosecutions after drugs and other offences had been committed.

- The Prosecution team has also issued proceedings for orders of removal of travellers on 18 occasions across the Borough. They have successfully resisted an appeal against the revocation of a taxi drivers licence, the outcome was reported in the Liverpool Echo. <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/mum-knew-exactly-what-uber-29105770>. The team had also provided training for the licensing and regulatory committee and advised on various licensing sub committees in relation to the grant and review of premises and personal alcohol licences.
- The Debt Recovery team has recovered £436, 251.00 since April (£136,000) since the beginning of August. A debt recovery lawyer has now been appointed within the team and it is anticipated that the recovery figures will reflect the new resource from when they are in post in early October.

Democratic Services Team – Overview

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 18 June 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside – Sefton Place Update
- Health Provider Performance Dashboard
- Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment
- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Work Programme Update

The next meeting of the Committee, the first of the new municipal year, will be held on 3 September 2024.

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 4 June 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Children’s Services Improvement Programme
- Summary of Recent Audit Activity
- Petition FASD
- Petition – Complaints
- Petition – Views of Voice of the Families
- Family Hubs
- Work Programme Key Decision Forward Plan

The next meeting of the Committee, the first of the new municipal year, will be held on 24 September 2024.

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 25 June 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Council Housing Programme
- Work Programme 2024/25, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan
- Cabinet Member Report – March 2024 to June 2024

The Committee agreed to hold an informal meeting to consider the provision of housing for former looked after children who were now care leavers; and that it was agreed that the informal meeting be held using Microsoft Teams. At the time of writing this report it is anticipated that the informal meeting will be held in late August.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 17 September 2024.

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

The last ordinary meeting of the Committee was held on 11 June 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Changes to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and Potential Impacts on Service Users in Sefton
- Annual Progress Report Climate Emergency
- Work Programme 2024/25, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan
- Cabinet Member Report – February 2024 to June 2024

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 10 September 2024.

At the meeting of the Committee held on 11 June 2024 it was agreed to hold an informal meeting to review the topic of “Customer Journey/Channel Shift”. This related to the review of statistical data showing trends in contact by each channel over the past several years; how this could be compared to show how the situation had changed as more services offered online options; and to identify improvements to the service.

During production of the scoping document for the meeting it became apparent that the Committee would be duplicating work, as the work programme, agreed at the meeting in June 2024, included an item that the Committee, at its meeting to be held on 10 September, receive a presentation about Customer Contact Centre Activity. The information to be considered at both the informal meeting and the meeting on 10 September 2024 would be very similar.

Following consultation with Councillor Bradshaw, Chair of the Committee, it was agreed to defer the arrangement of the informal meeting pending the meeting of the Committee on 10 September; and that it be recommended that the topic for review of “Customer Journey/Channel Shift” be no longer pursued.

A report and presentation regarding Customer Contact Centre Activity will be included on the agenda for the meeting to be held on 10 September 2024.

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

- Terms of Reference for the Management Board
- Executive/Scrutiny Protocol
- Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report to Council
- Centre for Governance and Scrutiny - Annual Survey of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government in 2023/24
- Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Scrutiny Link - Councillor Hart
- Update on Informal Meetings and Working Groups
- Centre for Governance and Scrutiny - Newsletters
- Strategic Scrutiny in Practice Network
- Scrutiny Training for Chairs and Vice-Chairs 2024/25

The next meeting of the Management Board will take place on 12 September 2024.

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

Since the last Cabinet Member update of the LCRO&S has met twice and details of matters considered at the meetings are set out below:

3 July 2024

- Appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair Councillors Steve Radford and Pat Moloney were appointed Chair and Vice-Chair respectively
- Work Programme Update 2024-25
- Appointments of Scrutiny Members to the Audit & Governance Committee 2024/25

31 July 2024

- Verbal Update from Mayor Steve Rotheram
- Uk Shared Prosperity Fund – Update
- Review of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Interim Report
- Work Programme Update 2024-25

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 11 September 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 ended in July 2024 (possibly subject to some late appeals in September). In this period over 200 appeals have been listed and heard. The

number of appeals is lower than in recent years, with more applicants being offered schools from their initial preferences.

The Section hosted a training event for new and existing Panel Members in March, and a few new Panel Members are enlisted at these events.

Civic and Mayoral Services

The Mayor's Charity Sweepstake for Euro 2024 raised £240.00 for the Fund, congratulations to all the prize winners.

Tickets will shortly be on sale for the Mayors Charity Cabaret Night on 19th October 2024 and the Burns Night on 25th January 2025.

Member Development

Mandatory Committee Training

A mandatory training session for the Licensing and Regulatory Committee took place on 10 June 2024 and was well attended. A mop-up session took place on 27 June 2024 via Microsoft Teams.

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 27 June 2024. The next meeting is scheduled for 23 October 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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 19 June 2024 and the Committee considered the following items:

- Annual Report and Opinion of the Chief Internal Auditor
- Corporate Risk Management
- Risk and Audit Performance
- External Audit Plan 2023/2024
- Draft Statement of Accounts 2023/2024
- Financial Management Code
- Treasury Management Position to May 2024
- Sending / Discussing Personal Information Policy
- Unreasonably Persistent and Unacceptable Behaviour Policy
- Work Programme Update Report

Health and Wellbeing Board

The last meeting of the Board was held on 5 June 2024 and the Board considered the following items:

- Children and Young People's Respiratory Improvement Plan
- Health Inequalities Investment Fund Summary
- Sub-Group Updates

Licensing and Regulatory Committee

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 10 June 2024 and the Committee considered the following items:

- Taxi Licensing Annual Report 2023/2024
- Local Licensing Annual Report
- Proposed Traffic Regulation Orders – Southport Town Centre – Receipt of Objections
- Hastings Road and Windy Harbour Road Southport, School Street Traffic Regulation Order
- Birkdale, Weld Road Accessibility Improvements
- Southport Eastern Access Highway Improvements

PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

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. Authorisation has been given to temporarily increase the team by 1 FTE Senior HR Business Partner until the turn of the year to support the delivery of all priorities for the Children's Social Care.

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.

All permanent Assistant Directors have been assimilated into posts, along with Service Managers. There are 3 FTE Service Manager posts to be recruited to permanently, 2 of which are covered currently by interim workers. Decisions on recruitment will be taken once the DCS returns from leave. Currently on Assistant Director position remains covered by an interim worker and decisions will be taken with regards to recruitment activity for this post, once the DCS returns.

The next stage of implementation will focus on posts graded J, K, L within **Early Help, Youth Justice, MYSPACE & VAS (consultation meetings with staff 22nd August)** and all posts within **Support & Protect teams, TAB and Court Advisory (Consultation with staff between 28th – 30th August).**

A number of teams within Support and Protect will temporarily remain vacant with some social worker posts temporarily transferring to other teams temporarily. The teams to remain vacant are Teams 3, 5 and 10, this will allow focus to be maintained on filling all posts in teams where Team Manager assimilation is anticipated to occur.

Following consultation and assimilation, recruitment will take place for vacant posts with the aim to fill them permanently.

- Onboarding events were arranged and took place for Agency Social Workers within Children's Social Care. Unfortunately, we did not see any positive impact from our efforts. However, we have managed to onboard a number of Early Help Workers who were initially engaged as agency workers which will see salary costing reduce.
- A Recruitment Campaign commenced for Social Workers within Children's Social Care. The campaign centered around 'growing our own' and focuses on the success of the Academy. Whilst previously Academy Social Workers have been additional to the establishment, under this approach, they will make up part of the establishment and will be placed as Academy teams in the service area that holds vacancies. With 15 Applications being received.

The Assistant Director of Education Excellence commenced employment on 1st August and support was given surrounding her induction.

- Academisation of 18 Maintained Schools remains on track with once school converting on 1st August 2024 and 11 due to convert on 1st September 2024. The team continues to support the Education Excellence department and the individual schools with the process of academisation including TUPE.
- A report/presentation will be presented to Children's Services SLT in September on the proposals and agreements surrounding Collaborative Working between Children's Services (excluding Schools) and Corporate Resources. The team working with Corporate Leading and Development colleagues is working on the design and delivery of a training passport for managers for delivery to Children's Social Care Managers as a pilot.

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 Children's services Review.

Officers in this team review safeguarding checks held against posts e.g. Disclosure and Barring Service, Health Care Professional Council (HCPC) etc.

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 Children's Services Review.

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

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

There are backlogs in the teams due to process, reporting and resource issues. Additional temporary resource has been taken on within the Recruitment team and THR to address the backlog and a plan is being put in place to ensure this is being brought up to date within the next 6 months. This plan will sit alongside business as usual work which is being prioritised.

The 1st April 2024 pay awards for NJC staff, Councillors, Coroners and Chief Executive have not yet been agreed.

The 1st April 2024 pay award for JNC Chief Officers was agreed and processed in August 2024 pay

The role of Establishment Control has expanded to include the management and control of the temporary end dates relative to all fixed term contracts.

The Recruitment Team and Establishment Control Team have also taken on management of the Matrix contract relative to the recruitment of Agency workers. Agency recruitment continues to be at an all-time high relative to social worker and associated positions especially within Children's Services

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. There have been a number of teething issues with the payroll file and these appear to have been addressed.

Development work for automation of the DBS process using the robotics blue prism software has been completed and this has been live since June 24.

Reusing positions has been in place 6 months plus and this has provided improved data accuracy within iTrent. NB: Data cleansing remains outstanding for CSC as this service is still under ongoing a full structural review.

Development work to relaunch Managers Self Service is planned by the end of September to enable managers to see more information about their own teams and to be more proactive when managing future expected changes.

Development work to start at the end of August on an electronic Establishment Control form, this is expected to take around 6 months to scope, build, test and roll out across the business using Granicus CXP.

Scoping to record and maintain annual PDR's and monthly 1:1/supervision meetings has commenced with MHR 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. The build and test period will overlap with the PDR schedule this year, therefore it is expected that PDR forms will be completed outside of the system but managers will be able to upload these and report on their teams objectives and completion dates.

Workforce reporting is being maintained as BAU, a review of existing Payroll Q&A reports is ongoing 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. ICT have been working on a Service framework for this functionality to ensure Security within the system.

Workforce Learning and Development (CLC)

Apprenticeships

We continue to procure new apprenticeship standards via the YPO portal to support succession planning. The latest standards procured include the **Fraud Investigator Level 4** and we are looking into options to deliver a new apprenticeship called **Artificial Intelligence for Business Value Level 4**.

We have 3 cohorts of staff enrolled on the **Level 6 Social Work Apprenticeship Degree** – all are progressing well with their studies, and we are planning to recruit a further 6 apprentices (3 staff from Adult Social Care and 3 from Children's Services) who will commence their studies in January 2025.

Staff enrolled on **Level 6 Occupational Therapy Degree** are progressing well and 3 Senior Managers will undertake the new **Public Management and Leadership Level 7 Apprenticeship** at the University of Birmingham from 1st October 2024. The 2 year programme aims to support Senior Managers/Leaders to gain the practical knowledge and skills required to be an effective and dynamic leader across the public sector.

8 Managers are enrolled on the **Level 5 Operational/Departmental Manager Apprenticeship standard** and are making good progress. We have agreed a second cohort with LCR colleagues and 2 managers will commence the programme in September 2024.

We have 1 member of staff from the Public Health Team enrolled on the **Level 6 Environmental Health Practitioner Degree** and they are continuing to make 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 was scheduled for Monday 8th July 2024 but due to system issues out of control, the revised go live date is now Monday 16th September 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 January 2025.

- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** training delivery is going well. To date, we have trained 269 Sefton Council and schools' staff. An increase of 17 since the last report.

- **LCRCA Race Equality Training** – we delivered a further four Race Equality Training sessions for staff and managers in May, June and July 2024. We have two further manager/non manager sessions planned for September 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.
- **Oliver McGowan (OMMG) Training** – We are continuing to roll out OMMG Tier 1 eLearning to ALL staff across Adult and Children’s Services. A total of 301 staff have completed to date. The next phase of the training will be to deliver Tier 1 (3 hour training) and Tier 2 (1 day training) to back office and front line staff and to assist with this, we have produced an options paper which includes different delivery options to be presented to Adult Social Care and Children’s Services Senior Leadership Teams for review and signoff.
- Staff have been supporting **Adult Social Care** to prepare for CQC inspection since we were informed the inspection is imminent. We provided all relevant evidence to support the self-assessment process, and this included supporting the development/sign off of the ASC Workforce Strategy and the four pillars of the HR/Workforce delivery plan. We worked closely with colleagues in HR to ensure evidence was provided to support elements of the delivery plan which focused on recruitment, retention and data.
- A meeting is planned with **Children’s Services** on Thursday 22nd August to review their CPD offer and training priorities going forward.

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 continue to support the detailed analysis 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.

The team had recently supported the development of the new Corporate Performance framework (aligned to the new Corporate Plan) and is developing the data collection and analysis for the first performance report to be presented to Cabinet in November 2024.

Consultation & Engagement.

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 findings of the extensive consultation and engagement on the refresh of the Children & Young People’s Plan 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. The team continues to service the Public Engagement and Consultation Panel, and support the Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnership Engagement, in their role as Chair.

Information Governance, Complaints and Subject Access.

The Service continues to provide comprehensive support, information, advice, and guidance across the Council on all matters relating to information governance, data sharing and data protection and managing data security breaches. The team continues to co-ordinate and provide timely advice and guidance relating to the responses to information requests covered by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. The team also continues to respond to request from individuals who wish to access and receive a copy of their personal data as held by Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care; and other supplementary information that the Council holds, diligently and sensitively along with disclosure requests from the Police, NHS partners, solicitors and other Local Authorities.

Despite recruiting to a vacant post in the team, there remains considerable challenge with capacity in the Complaints team, consequently this is increasing the risk of not responding to ASC, CSC and SEND complaints within standards. The Chief Executive and Executive Directors for ASC and Childrens Services are considering the arrangements for administering complaints in these areas specifically, with a view to improving performance, improving the number of complaints resolved first time, increases satisfaction amongst complainants, and improving 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. Colleagues in this team have also provided support to the Access to Files Officers. Once their contracts end in December of this year, capacity within Access to Files team may be challenged, resulting in delays with meeting statutory deadlines.

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/Ofsted readiness and SEND. The team also provided support to Adult Social Care, identifying gaps in processes and mapping end to end pathways. This work contributed towards CQC readiness.

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, and have been heavily involved in analysing financial savings, mitigations and costs to deliver change, informing the development of the medium-term financial plan (MTFP) for 2025/26 to 2027/28.

Additionally, linked to the project support outlined above, the team have developed an overarching Transformation Plan aligned to the Corporate plan and Council's priorities. The plan clearly outlines the Council's objectives, financial sustainability and provides a breakdown of the programme of work – particularly focussed on the four pillars of change (Everyday Excellence, Better Outcomes, Sustainable Services, Setting us up to Success and Growth – Redefining Place. The team has recently supported the development of the new Corporate Plan, which sets out the Council priorities for the next four years, 'What we want to see' (Our Ambitions aligned to the 2030

Vision), 'So Far We Have' (Our Progress over the last 12 months), 'Next We Will' (Our Priorities for the next 4 years), Performance (Our measure of Success).

Good service planning is a cornerstone of effective performance management, and a great service plan provides a solid foundation, keeping priorities and principles firm, even in times of change. The team is currently supporting the development of new Service Planning Guidance and Templates to be used across the Council.

Finally, the team are supporting the production of the next iteration of the Sefton Children and Young Peoples' Plan, using the extensive information gathered through the consultation and engagement activity to shape the priorities for all agencies delivering services to children, young people and their families.

Corporate Communications

In the last period the team's work has largely focussed on supporting the response to the tragic incident in Southport and the team is now heading up one of the recovery subgroups to help the community during what has been a very difficult time. The team dealt with dozens of media enquiries from across the world, supported live news reports, helped organised press events and ensured timely and accurate information was shared with the community. We have also supported schools with their messaging to families and will continue that support as the new term begins.

Prior to that the team had been supporting the development of the new corporate plan, has played a part in supporting major events such as Southport Air Show and the Salt and Tar Music Weekender and has continued the communications around major projects such as the Southport Town Deal, the Marine Lake Events Centre and Bootle Strand.

We have also helped the preparation of key documents for the Care Quality Commission assessment and will continue that support throughout the next quarter,

Procurement

The Procurement Act 2023 implementation is currently scheduled for 28 October 2024. The Procurement and Legal Teams have been working closely to ensure we are prepared for the step changes being implemented by the new legislation. Good progress is being made by staff on the Government Commercial College training programmes with several members of both teams already confirmed on the final specialist training course known as the "Deep Dive". We are also engaged with DLA Piper to support the Council with significant changes and updates to our Contract Procedure Rules (CPR) and Financial Procedure Rules (FPR) to ensure we are fully compliant and on time.

Procurement have been working closely with Legal, Finance and ICT to rollout DocuSign to increase efficiency in the process of signing and storing documents to significantly reduce the amount of labour and printing required. There continues to be technical and annual leave issues which we are working through with an anticipated rollout late August through September 2024.

Procurement and Finance now have a contract in place with Oxygen Finance to enable them to carry out a financial recovery audit at Sefton using specialist software. While we believe our finance systems are robust this will be a test of the financial controls in place at nil cost to Sefton.

While Sefton have a Social Value Policy which we are compliant to, we are not receiving the level of uptake we had anticipated on the offer we are facilitating to our suppliers and contractors. Working with Social Value Portal, a market leader in this specialist area, we are currently

conducting a trial in anticipation we will gain a higher level of support for the Social Value programme. The results of this trial will be available from October 2024.