

<b>O &amp; S (Regen and Skills) Update Report</b>		
<b>Councillor</b>	<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>Date</b>
Peter Harvey	Cabinet Member Cleansing & Street Scene	September 2024

**Sefton Arc & Sefton Careline**

Sefton Arc & Careline strategy 2024-2027 is now complete. The strategy is intended to demonstrate that Sefton ARC, Careline, Electrical & Alarms Services continue to develop, diversify, and grow its current offerings in accordance with the Council’s vision and core purpose and in alignment with other strategies and policies. This strategy is intended to reinforce the importance of these services. It aims to build on this determination for continuous improvement, and to outline areas of opportunity and action in this respect. The strategy focuses on each of the services provided within Sefton ARC and how it can continue to invest in its future.

Careline has now transitioned to the ELM’s database which will provide more accurate and reflective information relating to Careline allowing future growth for the service. The service has recently reduced the requirement for bulk purchases of lifeline equipment through more efficient recycling of existing equipment and a competitive pricing model. Careline Services have now introduced automated telephony which provides a more efficient service delivery, allowing the service to handle a large volume of calls simultaneously, helping communicate better with clients.

The service continues to focus and support the transition of analogue to digital equipment as part of the switchover, this work is being undertaken daily and numbers continue to fall in terms of replacing the old analogue kit as part of the digital switchover for clients.

Careline has supported other service areas throughout the council with sourcing new lone worker devices. By working with our telecare suppliers this has allowed the service to introduce equipment to service users to provide technology that is designed to deliver monitoring through our Sefton Careline Team via an alert system to ensure lone worker safety. The most basic function of a lone worker device is to raise an SOS alarm when the user needs help, for example if they are in danger, suffer an injury or feel threatened. The Careline team, upon an activation of the alarm, will then follow the process agreed with management at the setup of the lone worker agreement.

A procurement exercise is underway through YPO (Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation) for the provision of services and maintenance of public conveniences boroughwide. A tendering exercise will be followed to allow a competitive process of the services available in the market, ensuring the council is receiving value for money.

It is several years since this facility provision has been tested on the open market. Sefton ARC have recently welcomed Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service (MFRS) to a site visit to the premises to demonstrate the services provided and how MFRS can utilise those services when visiting vulnerable tenants across the borough. Likewise, Sefton ARC & Careline will be able to signpost any concerns they have when visiting properties within core works with referrals to MFRS if required. The meetings so far have been positive, and MFRS will be returning to Sefton ARC to deliver a training session for staff which outlines areas of vigilance that staff need to be aware of when visiting properties. MFRS have been provided with promotional material relating to Careline services to share with vulnerable people within the Sefton community.

Sefton ARC & Careline have been invited to provide a stand for freshers' fair at Hugh Baird College, Bootle, this month (September). This is a fantastic opportunity for the ARC and Careline to demonstrate the services we deliver and how we support apprentices employed within the service. This is the first time Sefton ARC has been invited to the freshers' fair, and the team is looking forward to the new experience. This is following on from a site visit to Hugh Baird and their staff visiting Sefton ARC, as we continue to further develop relationships with clients and support potential new recruitment opportunities.

## **Building Cleaning Service**

### Building Cleaning

The service continues to perform well both financially and operationally. Schools continue to support the service despite increased costs and the fact that school budgets are under significant pressure.

### Pope Francis Multi Academy Trust (MAT) Cleaning Contract

The above MAT has two schools within Sefton and has put its cleaning services out to competitive tender. The council currently holds the contract for one of the schools, The Salesian Academy of St John Bosco, Bootle. The trust plans to have up to 28 schools in the MAT in the coming years.

### Summer Events – Southport

Where required, the service continues to support colleagues organising the major summer events in Southport such as the air show, flower show, etc, by providing a cost-effective cleaning service.

## **Catering Service**

### Financial Position

2023/24 was a difficult year financially for the service. Although the service achieved a break-even position, this was only possible by increasing charges to schools in September 2023. This understandably was met with some resistance by schools, as charges were increased mid-year at a time when school budgets are stretched. The financial position for 2024/25 is more stable and the service is on track to meet its financial targets.

#### Increase in the price of a school meal

The recommended price for a school meal was increased from April 2024 as follows:

- The cost a set meal provided to all primary schools was increased by 4.5% from £2.42 to £2.53
- The cost of a set meal provided to all secondary schools was increased from £2.63 to £2.75

This decision was made following consultation with the Sefton Association of Primary Headteachers and will help to reduce the cost of the subsidy amount that schools pay to support their lunchtime service. Meal numbers have remained stable compared to the corresponding period for 2023.

#### Food Costs

In recent years the cost of the service to schools has increased as food costs have risen. However, the food market now appears to be less volatile. This, together with the introduction of a new Electronic Kitchen Management System, is enabling the service to better manage food costs and this will in turn mean that savings can be passed to schools in next year's SLA's.

#### Pope Francis Multi Academy Trust Catering Contract

As with Building Cleaning, the MAT has put its catering contract out to tender. At this stage it only involves one school, Sacred Heart Catholic Academy, Crosby. The service currently operates this contract and, as with building cleaning, with more schools expected to join the MAT, it is a contract that we are keen to retain.

#### Southport Education Group Award

The service has for many years had an excellent relationship with local colleges, to enable staff to undertake training to further their knowledge and skills, increasing their opportunities to advance in the service. This year, the service was nominated and successfully won the Southport Education Group's award for Hospitality and Catering Apprenticeship Employer of the year 2024. A fantastic achievement.

Members of the service's management team attended the award ceremony in July 2024 and the award is testament to the benefits that the service has gained through the hard work of staff undertaking further training at the college.

#### The Council's Obesity Strategy

The catering service continue to support the Council's Obesity Strategy. The Service Manager chairs the 'Live Well' subgroup, which is charged with reviewing and refreshing the council's work to ensure compliance with Food Active's Healthy Weight Declaration accreditation. Progress on this work will form part of a forthcoming report taken to the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing.

### **Transport & Vehicle Maintenance (T&VM)**

The Transport and Fleet Service continue to provide a full maintenance and fleet compliance service to all departments who operate fleet within the authority. The rating from the Traffic Commissioners Office remains green, the highest standard on the rating system.

The service continues to provide a full MOT service to both internal and external customers and remains 100% compliant with inspections and services. T&VM is working on the fleet renewal programme with departments, providing further advanced EV options. As part of the services commitment to reducing carbon emissions they are working closely with colleagues in the Energy Team to discuss the decarbonisation of the council's fleet in the future. Due to increases in technology, the EV market has improved significantly. Work has commenced in identifying areas within the fleet that will require additional resource such as improved infrastructure for EV charging points at council depots and any alternatives to vehicles 3.5t and over.

The service continues with the additives to all fleet vehicles which has reduced emissions by up to 60%. In some cases, it has helped reduce vehicle downtime and improved fuel efficiency. Whilst trials are ongoing early indications are positive, showing an average reduction in emissions by 25% on HGV diesel vehicles.

The service and industry as a whole is struggling to employ mechanics. The private sector has surpassed Local Government in its wage increases over recent years and applicants find the private sector more lucrative in terms of remuneration. At present the service has 4 x vacancies for fully trained mechanics. Following several recent recruitment campaigns the service still holds these vacancies. Discussions with colleagues in HR have commenced to look at potential solutions to help assist with recruitment and retention.

### **School Crossing Service (SCP)**

All School Crossing Patrol staff have returned from their summer break. During August SCP's over the age of 65 undergo their annual medical as part of their conditions of service. The medical service offered has proven invaluable to both service and individual staff. Often during their annual medical, staff are alerted to sight issues or hearing issues that may have deteriorated with time and because of the Health Unit checks they catch them early so the necessary intervention can take place to ensure they are fit and well and able to continue in their role.

Work continued throughout the summer to try and recruit more staff. The service currently has 5 vacancies, 3 in the south of the borough and 2 in the north. The service gives thanks to all patrol staff for the hard work and commitment they demonstrate - past and present - in keeping the children and pedestrians safe whilst crossing the busy roads of Sefton.

### **Specialist Transport Unit (STU)**

The Specialist Transport Unit provides home-to-school and day-centre travel for the most vulnerable in our community. The service currently operates 17 x school routes and 9 x adult social care (ASC) routes. The service is working closely with colleagues in ASC regarding the provision of transport for customers to and from day centres in the south of the borough.

The STU currently provide transport for 131 x SEND service users each day and 52 x ASC service users to and from their destination. The service users are among some of the most vulnerable in our community who need the support and extra care that the STU in-house service provide.

The in-house fleet consists of both Sefton owned vehicles and leased vehicles. The service has recently commenced the procurement of renewing its fleet of vehicles. These vehicles will be custom built minibuses, 2 of which will be fully electric, supporting a boroughwide reduction in carbon emissions. Plans are underway to increase the EV charging capacity at Hawthorne Road Depot, Bootle, to accommodate these vehicles.

### **Burials and Cremations Update**

The Burials and Cremations Service continue to provide a range of bereavement services to the community of Sefton. It recently provided one of the funeral services of the Southport victims with staff opening up the crematoria venue specifically to meet the requirements of the family on a Sunday.

The service was well attended, and staff were very supportive to ensure that the funeral service went ahead as planned without issue or concern. Staff showed unity and commitment at a difficult time to ensure a high-quality service was provided to the bereaved.

The service has recently been working collaboratively with Natural Alternatives (Green Sefton) who have undertaken a variety of required works in Bootle Cemetery. This is continuing to improve the outlook of the cemetery for visitors throughout the year. Work such as the restoration of memorial benches and flower bed maintenance has been undertaken to improve the aesthetics of the site.

Consideration is being given to changing operating hours at Thornton Crematorium to offer a greater selection of booking times. More service times can accommodate requests made by families via funeral directors. It is proposed that the wider variety of time slots will be available from 1st October 2024. This will not have any impact on staff working hours as staff are already available for the duration of the newly proposed booking slots.

A wider range of staff are currently being trained in crematorium technician duties to provide greater resilience within the service which ensures service continuity for the future.

## **Waste Management**

The service is currently under significant pressure from a resource perspective. In addition to seasonal pressure due to increased holiday requests, there has been a 16% absence rate within this service over recent weeks. This has impacted upon collections of all waste streams and is being closely managed, with available resource to clear any backlog/outstanding service requests. Social media updates have been issued to keep the public informed of the challenges, and the impact on residents.

To address the high sickness absence issue, an enhanced occupational health offer has been requested corporately that will be specific to Operational In-House Services for a 3-month trial period, predominately the Waste Service and based at Hawthorne Road Depot, Bootle. The service is currently awaiting a commencement date for this uplifted OH service.

Both Portfolio Holder and Assistant Director continue to attend their respective meetings of the LCR Strategic Waste Partnership. This autumn will see a move towards regional decision making regarding the future collection and disposal route of recyclate waste streams and agreement around fleet and food caddy procurement ahead of the implementation of food waste collections in April 2026.

## **Street Cleansing**

The service has recently offered significant support following the incidents in Southport, both in terms of a role in the clean-up following the riots and assisting with managing tributes at various sites and movement of expired flowers to the designated composting site in Hesketh Park, Southport, working collaboratively with colleagues from Green Sefton. Significant resource was also deployed from the south of the borough to Southport in preparation for both the royal visit and ensuring that the funeral routes were cleansed. In addition, the service has supported recent events such as the Southport Flower Show and the music concerts at Salt & Tar, Bootle.

## **Public Protection**

In partnership with Merseyside Police and colleagues in Green Sefton, Communications and Community Safety, a Sefton dog-related incident reduction strategy has been launched. The action plan has involved extensive publicity on social media in May 2024 to raise awareness and promote the requirements of the newly extended Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) - Dog Control. This has been successfully followed up with joint enforcement patrols in parks & greenspaces across the borough with Merseyside Police and our environmental enforcement contractor (ACPOA).

Dog walkers have been engaged with and advice offered, and where offences have been observed fixed penalty notices (FPNs) have been issued. Further planned joint enforcement has been impacted by the recent events in Southport.

We have worked along with Knowsley, St Helens, Liverpool and Halton authorities with Merseyside Police to develop a draft Memorandum of Understanding in relation

to dog control and responsibilities and protocols for dealing with dog-related issues including prohibited breeds such as XL bully dogs. It is anticipated this will be signed off soon, but in practical terms is now in operations.

Following short notice from the existing stray dog collection and kennelling contractor that they did not wish to be considered for future tenders, and the break-up of an existing collaboration with other Merseyside local authorities, a procurement exercise was undertaken and contractors successfully appointed. The contract has been in operation since the end of May 2024 and the process for collection & kennelling including out of hours appears to be performing well so far. However, the procurement of stray dog collection and kennelling to ensure compliance with statutory duties did prove challenging as there is a limited market with very few providers. This may prove problematic in future procurement of services before the end of May 2025. Careful monitoring of expenditure throughout this year will be necessary to minimise risk of potential over spends.

We have worked with partners to develop a Taking the Lead Campaign which is being supported by Merseyside Dog Safety Partnership (MDSP), the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Blue Cross, Alder Hey Children's Hospital, University of Liverpool, Royal Mail, the Communication Worker Union (CWU) and other local councils. The aim of Taking the Lead is to offer important safety tips to all dog owners in Merseyside about looking after their pet, especially around children, which could prevent serious injuries. Merseyside Police said there were 469 injuries involving dogs last year, up by more than 21% on the year before. PSPOs are in place at 11 parks in Sefton in a bid to make them safer. It was launched at an event in Southport in July to run through the summer months and secured media coverage, including BBC and Liverpool Echo.

Following a successful application for £50,000 grant funding from DEFRA, the council launched a fly tipping intervention project in July. This two-month #WFT? Why Fly Tip? Project provided hard-hitting messages and has focused on waste in shared rear entries in parts of Derby/Linacre wards in Bootle. The launch featured on BBC Radio Merseyside, BBC Online, the Liverpool Echo and other media outlets, and has been promoted extensively on Sefton Council's social media platforms.

Two regulation and compliance apprentices within the environmental Enforcement and Trading Standards Teams have recently passed their apprenticeships, both with distinctions. However, despite the successes of one of the apprentices who has worked within the Environmental Enforcement team, there is currently no funding to retain them. The team continues to be overstretched with the issue of tackling fly tipping remaining high on the public and political agenda.