

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

(Regeneration and Skills)

| Councillor | Portfolio | Date |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Daren Veidman | Cabinet Member for Highways, Housing, Planning and Building Control | September 2024 |

Strategic Housing

Strategic Housing Partnership – Care Leavers

As reported during my July update the Strategic Housing Team has recently held the borough's first Strategic Housing Partnership meeting. This group brings together key stakeholders responsible for the delivery of the borough's Housing Strategy, including housing providers.

The meeting on the 13th June at the Lake House was themed around Care Leavers, as part of a wider Action Plan to ensure that when our children leave care and transition into homes of their own that they have choice in where they live, experience a smooth transition into independent living, and continue to feel supported. A key output from the event was agreement from providers to enter into a Housing Charter for Care Leavers.

In order to progress the actions discussed during the event, including finalising the new charter, I am pleased to report that a Task and Finish Group has been established with housing providers. I look forward to reporting on progress of this work as it is finalised before the end of the year.

Green Housing

As reported at the last meeting at my briefing in July officer presented a draft plan to ensure that we minimise the impact that the borough's housing stock has on the environment, and crucially supports residents who are still experiencing high energy costs.

I was happy to approve the plan and I look forward to providing colleagues with regular updates on this crucial area of work.

Homelessness Update

Homeless Pressures

Demand for the service remains consistently high and the service is receiving continuing presentations due to section 21 evictions as the reason for homelessness and continue to offer prevention appointments to support Sefton residents who have received statutory notice. To ensure every effort is made to prevent homelessness at the earliest stage the Housing Options Team have reallocated a member of the team from a Duty Officer to a Statutory Prevention Officer; this member of staff will work through all prevention cases that have received statutory notice to support and advise them accordingly.

The total number of Priority Need households in temporary accommodation is 203. This is the highest number of cases that Housing Options have ever had in Temporary Accommodation.

Strategic Housing are leading the Property Pool Plus (PPP) Contract Board in changing the existing PPP Policy to allow Local Authorities to introduce periods of Direct Matches, which the old PPP Policy had. Sefton took advantage of Direct Matching before the old policy ended to introduce a period of Direct Matching from November 2023 to April 2024. This allowed Housing Options to match those people and families in temporary accommodation into those empty social housing being provided to Property Pool Plus. In total Housing Options received 140 properties from various Registered Providers (RPs) to match to homeless households in TA, which was a considerable saving to the Council.

Riverside Families Support Service

Since 2019, Riverside Housing Group have delivered an award-winning service for homeless families to provide intensive support in the first 12 months whilst accommodated in a Riverside property.

This service was found to be an exemplar in the recent Homeless Review in which it was recommended that the service be extended and replicated across different cohort also.



In July, I approved the awarding of contract to Riverside to provide a service that not only provides this service but builds on it in order to support existing families in social housing who are at risk of homelessness.

The service will provide:

- Nine houses that must be within the borough of Sefton, either 2- or 3-bedroom houses per year, over the next three years (27 in total).
- In addition to this, Riverside must also provide one 1- or 2- bedroom property within the borough of Sefton in each of the three years that could be used for people moving on from RSAP (Rough Sleeper) accommodation. If a 2-bedroom is provided, then sharing the property on licence could be considered (3 in total).
- An Intensive Floating Support service for families must also be available so that Sefton's Housing Options Team can refer up to ten additional families per year, who are in social housing but struggling to maintain their tenancy, so that the Intensive Floating Support Service can stabilise that tenancy and prevent homelessness (30 families in total).

The support will enable people to identify the reasons for becoming homeless in order to avoid these in the future. Staff will work on tenancy sustainment and resilience with families in order to ensure future or repeated homelessness is avoided.

The service is to be provided over the next three years and Sefton has the option to extend by a further two years.

Annual Rough Sleeper Count 2024 Date

Each year each Local Authority is obliged to advise the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) as to the extent of Rough Sleeping in the borough on an annual basis. The Council can do so by way of a formal Count; by way of an estimate, or, an estimate based on a spotlight count.

The estimate is based on a single, typical night between 1 October and 30 November and as we have done in previous years the Councils within the Liverpool City region co-ordinated our Counts on the same night. As it is undertaken on one night it can only demonstrate a snapshot of the extent of Rough Sleeping, which can change on a daily basis. The 'typical night' chosen for the estimate was the evening of the 22nd November to the morning of the 23rd November.

The Local Authorities within the Liverpool City Region have agreed that the Count will take place from Midnight on the Tuesday 12th November into the early hours of Wednesday 13th November.

The Count is usually undertaken by Rough Sleeper Outreach staff, Council staff and Homeless Provider staff. I will update the Group on the results of the Count.

The numbers of rough sleepers in Sefton since 2012 are:
2012 (4), 2013 (7), 2014 (11), 2015 (4), 2016 (4), 2017 (9), 2018 (11), 2019 (2), 2020 (3), 2021 (0), 2022 (0), 2023 (3).

Council Housing Programme

Phase 1

I updated during the last report that the Council Housing Programme had achieved a significant milestone in securing approval from Homes England for £1.098m of grant funding through the Affordable Homes Programme to support the acquisition of 18 apartments at Buckley Hill Lane.

This is the Council's first application to the Affordable Homes Programme and I'm pleased to report that the grant agreement is now fully signed and executed. Given the Council are acquiring complete properties, the grant will be drawn down around acquisition and practical completion of the properties. Officers will now meet regularly with Homes England to update on progress with the development.

The homes at Buckley Hill Lane are due for handover early 2025 and contracts are separately being negotiated with Sandway in respect of the purchase.

Alongside the acquisition work, work is progressing to ensure that the Council is operationally ready to become a landlord and to take handover of the first properties. Members will recall a report considered at Cabinet in April setting out proposed governance arrangements for the management of the Council's homes by creating a Housing Advisory Board. Work is ongoing to create this board to ensure it is in place and ready to meet by the time the first properties are handed over.

A report is due to be taken to Cabinet in October 2024 detailing the requirements for the Council to appoint a Member Responsible for Complaints. This is a new role which is required by the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code and which the Council as a landlord of social housing will need to comply with.

A significant piece of work ongoing at the moment is to prepare a suite of necessary policies which will need to be in place ready for handover of the properties. The April Cabinet report delegated authority for the adoption of these policies and this formal adoption will take place once the work is complete.

Regular meetings with our appointed Housing Management Agent are taking place with officers and contracts now being finalised. The Council needs to seek approval from the

Regulator of Social Housing to enter into a management agreement and officers are currently in the process of engaging with the Regulator in advance of making a formal application.

Phase 2

In parallel with the work underway to deliver the approved Phase 1 Business Plan work is also underway to develop a Business Plan proposal for a further phase of the programme, which would add an additional 250 properties to the Council Housing stockbase by 2030.

I am happy to report that this work is progressing well and the current focus is on a more diverse mix of properties in Phase 2, including housing for older people and Supported Living.

Extra Care Housing

As colleagues are aware the Council has a target to deliver 1306 new Extra Housing units before 2036. In addition to evaluating the direct delivery of Extra Care Housing we continue to engage the market to meet the need for this type of accommodation and work continues to progress on a number of schemes across the borough:

- Sandbrook Road (Riverside 90 x Extra Care, 40 General Needs, 8 Learning Disability) – Construction is now underway with anticipated completion expected in March 2026.
- 503 Hawthorne Road (91 x Extra Care, 67 General Needs Housing 21/Onward) - the provider is currently in the process of discharging the pre-commencement planning conditions and the intention is to start on site over the coming months. A progress meeting was held with the council in July with a new anticipated start on site expected early 2025.
- Damfield Lane and Kew (Torus) – Torus are now in control of both sites and are progressing their planning amendments for both sites with a view to starting construction in Q4 24/25 on Kew and subject to new planning application approval early 2025 on Damfield.
- Safe Regeneration have reported that they are progressing with a new planning application which is anticipated to be submitted over the coming months. They are also now working with a local Registered Provider Plus Dane. Officers have met with both SAFE and Plus Dane to further understand the contractual arrangements in relation to delivering the scheme and further updates will be forthcoming in relation to this.
- Park House Waterloo (Anchor Housing) had revisited their plans to enable an Extra Care Scheme to be delivered at this site. Work was also underway to provide the CA with information to enable the approval of Brownfield Land grant however the availability of Homes England grant within the current allocation period has now put the plans on hold until the future funding round is announced.

Officers continue to look at alternative delivery options across Sefton in order to meet our needs.

Housing Standards Team

As of 20 August 2024, we have received 2801 licence applications, which is 81% of the expected number of applications. 1477 licences have been issued and 519 compliance inspections have been carried out with many landlords seeking to apply for property accreditation.

The team has taken a very strict approach with landlords that provide properties or services that fall below the expected standards, and we have had a successful prosecution for breach of an Emergency Prohibition Order (where a landlord has placed tenants in a property that was closed due to severely dangerous conditions). Sentencing for this offence is scheduled for September. There are a further 6 prosecutions pending for a large portfolio landlord, for their failure to licence properties and provide documents. We also have 4 appeals that remain pending at the First Tier Property Tribunal, where Landlords have appealed against enforcement action, including a Prohibition Order and Civil Penalty Fines for breaches of licence conditions.

There have been 63 requests for service relating to poor housing standards received between 25 June 2024 and 20 Aug 2024. Where landlords fail to comply with informal action, the team continue to take formal enforcement action. Since 24 June 2024 this has included the service of 1 Emergency Prohibition Order on a property that was unsafe to live in, and 1 Intention to serve a civil penalty Notice for failure to licence 3 properties within the Selective Licensing Area.

Work to reduce the number of long-term vacant homes has continued, with responses to 8 new Service Requests relating to problematic empty homes.

Management of the Council's Gypsy and Traveller site continues. There have been 18 unauthorised Gypsy & Traveller encampments in Sefton since 1 April 2024.

Planning and Building Control

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 reduced to below pre-Covid levels
- 100% of Major and Minor applications we determined 'in time' between January – March 2024, and 99% of 'Other' applications (mainly householder)
- This high level of performance is dependent on staff agreeing 'Extensions of Time'. The previous Government proposed to severely restrict these, but this proposal has been dropped by the current Government. Notwithstanding this, we are actively seeking ways to improve performance without the need to seek EoTs although this is more difficult for 'Majors' which are often complex and require more time to address key planning issues.
- Without using EoTs, our performance would be 9% of Majors (national target 60%); 37% of Minors (target 65%); 75% of 'Other' applications (target 80%).
- The number of complaints received by the Enforcement Team in the first quarter of 2024-25 is 179. Most have been dealt with without resorting to formal action.

Key Challenges

- The Government's proposed planning reforms mean a significantly higher housing target for Sefton. This will lead to applications for planning permission for housing on land within the current Green Belt which will be designated as 'Grey Belt'. These are likely to be strongly opposed by local communities and, if refused, could lead to 'planning by appeal'. The anticipated rise in applications will put pressure on staff resources, especially as many of the applications are likely to be controversial.
- 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 August 2024, the Building Control Team held interviews for two vacant permanent Building Control Officer position, and it is hoped that the two successful candidates will be in post by October 2024.

Key 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 as the effects of losing staff to the private sector continue to be felt. It is envisaged that as the Team comes back to full establishment, performance levels will improve.
- One of the biggest challenges being faced by the Team 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. Steady progress has been made in this area and it is hoped that all Building Control Staff will have been successfully assessed by the end of the current year.
- Sefton's Building Control Team is due to be assessed by the newly established Building Safety Regulator in 2024/25 in order to confirm they can continue to operate as a Building Control Body, and work is currently being undertaken by the Team to ensure a successful assessment.

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.

- However, the government is proposing to change the method for calculating the housing requirement for each local authority. This gives a significantly higher housing requirement for Sefton and, if confirmed, would mean Sefton would struggle to demonstrate adequate housing supply in future years,
- A number of Supplementary Planning Documents are currently being progressed, with two to be adopted in October. These are:
 - Boundary Treatments
 - Short Term Holiday Lets
- The Combined Authority (CA) are working towards the next stage of a Spatial Development Strategy. The policy team continue to work closely with colleagues at the CA to progress this.
- Bootle Area Action Plan - The publication draft of the AAP was approved in July and is to be published for public comment in September. It is anticipated this will be submitted for examination later this year.
- 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.
- The Local Plan team are also helping to support the CA in developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which is due to be published soon.

Key challenges

- Publishing and promoting the Bootle Area Action Plan for comments, submitting the AAP following an 8-week period for consultation period and preparing for a public examination.
- Assessing the recently published government proposals to update the National Planning Policy Framework and the approach to calculating housing needs; briefing senior leaders and members of the proposal; and drafting and submitting a response to that consultation.
- If those changes are made, dealing with the implications and making plans for a new Local Plan under the new system.

4. Heritage and Conservation

- Southport Townscape Heritage Project – Grants given for 6 retail units and upper floors repaired and reinstated. A further 9 units and upper floors in progress and extension given from Lottery Fund for a further 12 months. Additional Heritage open days being planned for October.
- Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans – Lydiate Hall and Chapel Conservation Area under initial draft
- Development Management and Enforcement – For last three months 80 DM consultations undertaken. Continuing to work with enforcement to resolve outstanding heritage cases.

Key Challenges

- To unlock difficult Heritage at Risk development sites and facilitate their sustainable future.
- Progress delivery of remaining large scale Townscape Heritage Projects.

- Loss of staff and ensure adequate levels of staffing and recruitment.

5. Technical Support

- Performance in completing searches has been consistently above target throughout the last quarter.
- Performance in validating major applications in the last quarter is below target. This shortfall is due to the resignation of a key member of staff and the sickness absence of another. We are currently in the process of recruiting for the staff vacancy and we are undertaking training for new recruits.
- A key success has been consistently in the HMLR gold standard of best performing Local Authorities for maintaining the Local Land Charges register.

Key Challenges

- Ensuring adequate staff levels and training over next 12 months
- Implementing a biodiversity net gain monitoring system and the validation of biodiversity net gain metrics.

Annex 1 – ‘Responsible Body’ for Biodiversity Net Gain - Proposal

A report on this issue is due to be presented to Cabinet on 5th September and to Council on 12th September.

The Environment Act (2021) brought in the new requirement for all development that requires planning permission (with a few minor exceptions) to deliver 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). The approach ensures that development leaves biodiversity in a measurably better state than it was prior to development by replacing habitats lost to development and creating new habitats e.g. creating new wildflower meadow from a frequently mown grassy area or creating new ponds on low quality land.

Development can provide BNG both on and offsite. Offsite habitat provision will be required for many developments where the requirement cannot be met within the development area. The way in which this can be done to meet local needs is through creation of local BNG habitat banks¹. There are currently no private or commercial habitat banks within the Liverpool City Region (LCR) and this increases the risk to development. Therefore, provision of habitat banks by Local Authorities is an essential element of the offsite BNG provision and provides the opportunity to drive the outcomes for the benefit of neighbourhoods and local communities.

The issue presented to Local Authorities, including Sefton, is that all offsite habitat banks must be legally secured for 30 years either through a S106 agreement or a Conservation Covenant. Planning regulations do not allow a Local Authority to enter into a S106 with themselves for this purpose. Conservation Covenant Responsible Bodies can fulfil this function for a Local Authority.

¹ Habitat banks is the term given to a site which provides offsite biodiversity net gain which developers can purchase in the form of Biodiversity units to satisfy their BNG requirements. For example, 1 biodiversity unit could equal 0.5ha of species rich grassland creation and could cost a developer £25,000.

However, there are currently no Responsible Bodies within the LCR available to Sefton and the other Local Authorities.

MEAS, a joint service hosted and located within the Economic Growth and Housing Directorate, proposes to apply to become a Responsible Body to provide this function. There is support for this approach from Sefton Council officers in Planning, Economic Growth, Transportation and Legal and all the LCR local authorities.

The report to Cabinet and Council seeks approval to submit a Responsible Body application to Defra.

Quarterly Update Highways Maintenance August 2024

Since 1st April 2024 which coincides with the start of the new financial year, planned & routine maintenance operations are progressing well and in accordance with allocated programming timeframes.

To date key maintenance improvements have been completed which include the following:

Completion of carriageway Surface Dressing programme which is a recognised preventative type of treatment covering approximately **76,000m²** of carriageway. Invoiced values to date amount to **£430,000.00** which is anticipated to rise to **£520,000.00** following completion of road markings reinstatements.

Resurfacing which involves the removal of one or more surfacing layers in the carriageway has been completed, totalling approximately **70,000 M²** with a spend value of **£2,300,000.00**.

Routine safety inspections and other maintenance functions such as grass cutting, and drainage renewals continue to operate daily which identifies isolated defects and repairs in accordance with the council's safety inspection policies and other industry guidelines. The volume and value of work does fluctuate with an average monthly spend value of **£150,000.00**.

It should be noted that recent budget savings imposed on the department totalling approximately **£315,000.00** will undoubtedly impact on the completion of carriageway schemes listed in the councils 2024/25 Highway Maintenance Programmes.

Winter Maintenance

- The annual winter maintenance consultation exercise has now been completed and a report is being taken to Overview and Scrutiny committee on 17th September with next year's policy for approval.
- Preparations have now commenced to ensure that the salt stock is replenished and vehicles and equipment will be ready for the start of the season.
- The contract for winter forecasting and bureau services expires in July 2025. This is a joint contract with the LCR authorities and a new tender is being prepared with the lead being taken by the Combined Authority.

Public Protection

- In partnership with Merseyside Police and colleagues in Green Sefton, Comm's and community Safety a Sefton Dog related incident reduction strategy has been launched. The action plan has involved significant publicity on social media in May 2024 to raise awareness and promote the requirements of the newly extended Public Spaces Protection Order - 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 and advice provided and where offences observed FPN's have been issued. Further planned Joint enforcement have been impacted by the recent events in Southport.
- We have worked along with Knowsley, St Helen, Liverpool and Halton Councils with Merseyside Police to develop a draft Memorandum of Understanding in relation to dog control and responsibilities and protocols for dealing dog related issues including prohibited breeds such as XL bully dogs. It is anticipated this will be signed off in the near future but in practical terms is now in operations.
- Following short notice from the existing stray dog Collection & Kennelling Contractor that they did not wish to be considered for future tenders and the breakup of an existing collaboration with other Merseyside local authorities, a procurement exercise was undertaken and contractors successfully appointed. The contract has been in operations 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. It was launched at an event in Sefton in Quarter 2 (July) and runs through the summer months.
- Following a successful application for Grant funding from DEFRA we have been awarded £50,000 to undertake a Fly tipping intervention project. This #WFT?- Why Fly tip project is intended to provide hard hitting messages and will focus on waste in shared rear entries in parts of Derby/ Linacre ward. The project was launched at the beginning of July, running for a two-month period.
- 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 regulation & Compliance Apprentices who has worked within the Environmental Enforcement team, there is currently no funding to retain them. The Environmental Enforcement team continues to be overstretched with the issue of tackling fly tipping remaining high on the public & political agenda.

