

COUNCIL – 12TH SEPTEMBER 2024

QUESTIONS RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

1	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Prendergast to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)</u>
	Subject: Children’s Services
	<p>“A further monitoring visit from OFSTED, has revealed that there are still ongoing problems with Leadership within Sefton Children’s Services Department.</p> <p>There are also still ongoing criticisms about the pace of improvement, both of which are very concerning given that we are now more than two and a half years on from when the Service was first graded as ‘Inadequate’.</p> <p>In light of the further and ongoing problems identified by OFSTED, can the Leader of the Council answer the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. What steps has she taken, since becoming Leader of the Council to tackle the ongoing issues around Leadership that are continually raised by OFSTED?b. What steps has she taken since becoming Leader of the Council to quicken the pace of improvement within the Department and how does this differ from what the previous Leader of the Council did?c. Since being graded as Inadequate by OFSTED, how much funding has been spent (as opposed to allocated) on financing the Department?d. When, in her opinion, will the recurring issues in relation to Leadership and the pace of improvement be resolved”?
	Response:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. As Leader I have initiated and undertaken regular challenge and review meetings with the Department of Education Commissioner, Chief Executive and the Director of Children’s Services. <p>“I have also amalgamated the roles of Cabinet Member for Education and Cabinet Member for Children’s Social Care into a new Lead Member role for Children, Schools and Families to giving better oversight over all services for children and families.</p> <p>Most recent OSFTED visits had highlighted the stable improvement in children services and had identified new leadership as an effective mechanism for this improvement. The OFSTED monitoring letter from March 2024 stated, “More recently, there has been a positive step change at a strategic level. A new chief executive officer brings a clear understanding of the council’s corporate responsibilities and a determination to meet these for children and young people. A new resolute and child-focused leader of the council is supporting this approach. A change in Director of Children’s Services, and two new interim Assistant Directors, has brought new ideas, a clarity of vision and greater ambition for Sefton’s care leavers.”</p> <p>The new DCS continually pushes for a supportive yet challenging culture within</p>

	<p>the senior leadership team which recognises the need to individual capability and where necessary development plans for these critical roles”.</p> <p>b. “I have recognised that improvement to children services require systemic transformation change.</p> <p>I am directly involved in critical progress and improvement meetings across all of children services. Ranging from my role on the Corporate Parenting board, input into the Children’s Social Care improvement board and regular meetings with critical figures in our improvement journey including the DfE commissioner”.</p> <p>c. “By the end of 2024/25 (from April 2022) the Council will have spent £256m on the Children’s Social Care service”.</p> <p>d. “The new DCS has recognised that the previous staff structure was not appropriate for the pace of improvement that was necessary across children services. This was agreed at Cabinet and is being implemented and will bring improved oversight, challenge and support to front line practitioners, enabling us to improve the pace of improvement.</p> <p>There is still more to be done, but there is close working and clear alignment across political and officer leadership in the council, and with the DfE Commissioner, about the scale of the challenge, the key issues and the work we need to do continue and complete the improvement journey.</p>
2	<p><u>Question submitted by Councillor Prendergast to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economy and Skills (Councillor Lappin)</u></p>
	<p>Subject: Southport Marine Lake</p>
	<p>“The marine lake in Southport is one of the largest in the region and hosts a range of water sports and activities available to the general public and the many organisations that use the lake and it forms an integral part of the works being undertaken as part of the Town Deal funding.</p> <p>At present though, there are no changing facilities or toilets available to those who use the lake. The launch area is also in a poor state of repair with large amounts of bird excrement, litter/broken glass, damaged wood edgings and slippery wooden surfaces.</p> <p>All of this presents a barrier to those who might want to take part in activities on the lake and does not present the town in the best possible light.</p> <p>Taking into account the above, can the Cabinet Member set out what measures, if any, that Sefton Council are proposing to take in order to:</p> <p>a. Provide appropriate changing/toilet facilities for those who use the lake, including providing suitable facilities for those with disabilities?</p> <p>b. Tackle the litter/broken glass and bird excrement, on a regular basis, that not only detracts from the appearance of the launch area but also presents a hazard to those who use the lake?</p> <p>c. The damaged wood edgings on the launch area and the slippery surfaces that,</p>

	again, detract from the appearance and presents a barrier to those who might want to use the lake?"
	Response:
	<p>a. "Marine Lake is leased out to a concession who has overall lake management responsibility while utilising the lake for leisure facilities. There are several clubs around the lake who have separate agreements and leases. These clubs provide changing and toilet facilities for their users. To ensure safe usage of the Lake and due to the lease in place, members of the public cannot turn up and use the lake for their own purposes if not part of one of the clubs or have a licence to do so from the lake concessionaire.</p> <p>b. The revetment edge has recently been jet washed and cleaned at considerable cost. Unfortunately, we cannot communicate with the swans to ask them to defecate elsewhere.</p> <p>c. Work is undertaken all year around to repair damage edgings, this is done on a priority basis working with the lake users' group. Work has also been done to install matting where appropriate at entry points again in consultation with the lake users. The Seafront budget covers multiple areas and has to be managed efficiently".</p>
3	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Prendergast to the Cabinet Member for Cleansing and Street Scene (Councillor Harvey)</u>
	Subject: Household Bin Collections
	<p>Over the last few months many residents across Sefton have seen a deterioration in the regularity and reliability of household waste collections by Sefton Council. Issues with staffing and resource shortfalls have been highlighted on council social media channels as reasons for this.</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member highlight in greater detail what these issues are for members and also set out what steps are being taken to tackle these issues and when it is expected that the service will return to a level of normality?</p>
	<p>Response:</p> <p>"The service is currently under significant pressure from a staff resource perspective, in addition to the challenge of managing the seasonal increase in holiday requests.</p> <p>However, backlogs of collections have now been successfully addressed through weekend deployments. I recognise the impact to residents across the borough, and their patience and understanding has been appreciated. Affected neighbourhoods have been kept informed via social media channels.</p> <p>To address resource challenges, arrangements have been put in place for an enhanced occupational health offer that is specific to Operational In-House Services. This will be for a three-month trial and is based at the Hawthorne Road depot in Bootle. This service will feature a medical professional and a physiotherapist. The additional support is to ensure that staff are assessed swiftly, and appropriate support is fast-tracked to minimise absence. The new service is expected to start imminently".</p>

4	<p><u>Question submitted by Councillor Sammon to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)</u></p>
	<p>Subject: Support for Local Businesses in Southport</p>
	<p>“I am hearing from the local business community in Southport that many have had a tough month with a stark drop in footfall and bookings since the tragic incident of 29th July in Hart Street. Can you tell me what Sefton Council is doing to support local businesses to help them recover and are you speaking with the Government to gain further support?”</p>
	<p>Response:</p>
	<p>As you will no doubt be aware, discussions with Government commenced in the immediate aftermath of the tragic events, the Prime Minister visited twice during that week (and other members of his Cabinet, senior civil servants, and the MetroMayor visited) and engaged with the Leader of Sefton Council and the Executive Team. This dialogue continues. The families affected remain our priority, but the impact upon the economy and upon businesses has also featured in these discussions, reflecting the impacts on the wider town.</p> <p>The Council’s Invest Sefton team has been out speaking to businesses in Hart Street and St Lukes Rd to establish the immediate needs of those specific business communities, and on the back of this have devised a package of support measures. These support measures include financial assistance for businesses affected by these events, via the introduction of a Southport Business Recovery Fund (which is to be considered on tonight’s agenda). While business and economic considerations may be wider and longer-term as well, the immediate focus of this fund is proposed to be on businesses and organisations located in the Hart Street and St Lukes Road areas. The Council will distribute resources to businesses over two rounds of funding: firstly, to businesses directly affected by closure on Hart Street, St Luke’s Road and Sussex Road, followed by businesses in the wider immediate area that were otherwise affected.</p> <p>At the same time the Council, the Combined Authority and Southport BID have worked together to send out an online questionnaire to the wider business community to establish the immediate and projected impacts, support needs and business intelligence. This has been sent initially to over 750 BID businesses/levy payers, over 100 responding within a week. Initial results have been collated and reported, a further survey will be sent to other businesses (outside of the BID boundary), and the Council has also had teams across the Economic Growth and Housing Service holding detailed discussions with particularly impacted sectors and specific businesses. The combination of which provides invaluable intelligence to progress ‘evidence-led’ discussions about the ongoing priority actions, resources and investments needed to support businesses and the wider economy in the short, medium and longer term.</p> <p>The Marketing Southport campaign has been adapted and refocussed, sensitive to the impacts of the events.”</p>
5	<p><u>Question submitted by Councillor Prendergast to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)</u></p>
	<p>Subject: Council Tax Discount</p>
	<p>Can the Leader of the Council confirm that there are no plans to abolish or reduce</p>

	the amount of Council Tax discount that is currently available for single person households and can she also confirm that there are no plans to reduce or abolish any of the other Council Tax exemptions/discounts that are currently available?
	Response:
	“The council does not set the amount of council tax discount for single person households and has no plans to reduce or abolish any other exemptions or discounts”.
6	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Shaw to the Spokesperson for Merseytravel (Councillor Carragher)</u>
	Subject: Train times in September
	<p>1) Would the spokesperson please advise me of the normal fastest times for trains on the northern line:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Southport to Liverpool Central in September 2023 2. Southport to Liverpool Central in September 2024 3. Southport to Hunts Cross in September 2023 4. Southport to Hunts Cross in September 2024 <p>2) Would the spokesperson please advise me what plans, if any, there are to address the issue raised in 1 above?</p>
	Response:
	<p>1)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Southport to Liverpool Central in September 2023 - 46 min 2. Southport to Liverpool Central in September 2024 - 50 min 3. Southport to Hunts Cross in September 2023 - 64 min 4. Southport to Hunts Cross in September 2024 - 73 min with 5 min change at Liverpool Central <p>Section time is slower due to a number of factors, these are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary Timetable adjustments to allow work on installing beacons to prepare for the 8 cart service on Southport to Hunts Cross. 8 cars cannot currently work South of Liverpool central. The beacons will allow automatic selective door operation which is required for certain platforms. • Without these adjustments there would be capacity issues between Southport and Liverpool Central. The introduction of the 8 cart services will alleviate the capacity issues. • 777 are still working on the 50 percent Timetable. Once the optimal conditions are in place the Timetable will be reset and trains will operate to a faster Timetable than the 50 percent. • Temporary infrastructure fault in Hall Road area means units are not currently able to draw full power. Working is ongoing with Network Rail to resolve this problem. • Every Autumn the timetable is adjusted to give the trains more resilience in poor railhead conditions. The Autumn Timetable has been brought forward a month early to avoid multiple changes.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journey time from Ormskirk Hunts Cross is now 55min down from 57 with 4 min change. <p>2) The above is a necessary temporary adjustment for the next phase rollout of 8 carts. Once the beacons have been installed and the testing and training has been completed the previous timetable will be introduced.</p> <p>During this period of adjustment, the performance of the 8 cart operation will be monitored to assist in the performance of 8 cart operation. This is necessary to help build a robust and reliable 8 cart 777 timetable.</p> <p>Autumn Timetable adjustments are built into this development period. Once the autumn period is over, the risk to services because of railhead conditions reduces and faster Timetables can be reintroduced”.</p>
7	<p><u>Question submitted by Councillor Doolin to the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing (Councillor Doyle)</u></p>
	<p>Subject: Crosby Coastal Pathway</p>
	<p>Given the Crosby Coastal Pathway between South Road and the Radar Station (known locally as (The Prom) is unusable for pedestrians, cyclists and others due to a build-up of sand over several years, can the Cabinet Member update me on Sefton's current plans for the pathway, to ensure it is again suitable for public use?</p>
	<p>Response:</p>
	<p>“Sand clearance at Crosby involves ‘excavating’ the coast footpath, which was formerly on top of the seawall. The majority of which is now buried under the sand dunes that have naturally formed (accreted) over time. The volume of build-up is beyond any real practical reality of returning to a clear seawall footpath, as the level of the beach would need to be lowered. Cleared sand has to be relocated within the dune system and is typically dumped within close proximity to the work area as access allows. The cleared material combined with the accretion increases the volume of blown sand exponentially.</p> <p>The Council has tried to keep these pathways clear of blown sand, but this has become increasingly difficult primarily due to the beach level rise. Several of the paths have been abandoned in terms of clearance as excavating some would leave very steep sided and unsecured sand hills, which would simply collapse back onto the path under unrestricted use and recover the cleared paths in no time, destabilisation causing a significant risk.</p> <p>The natural processes at work are extremely powerful and we will continue to do the best we can and we have recently received some new equipment and allocated some additional staffing resource for Winter 2024/25.</p> <p>Our main priority is maintaining Mariners Road as an access point to the foreshore, the path nearest the Peel Port boundary - which are essential access for our colleagues in the emergency services attending beach related incidents.</p> <p>Signs have been placed recently to direct people to an alternative route, should they need wheeled access”.</p>

8	Question submitted by Councillor Doolin to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnership Engagement (Councillor Dowd)
	Subject: Crosby Library
	In 2023 Sefton Council agreed a plan to demolish Crosby Library in Waterloo and move library services to a new HUB in Crosby Village. However, due to a popular campaign and petitions signed by thousands of local residents, Sefton Council cancelled the library's demolition and guaranteed its future. Can I ask the Cabinet Member how plans are progressing to upgrade the physical structure of Crosby Library and ensure it is able to serve the local community for decades to come?
	Response:
	<p>“Crosby Library is a fantastic facility providing not only books and reading materials, but also access to the internet, information, printing facilities, a warm friendly space and a range of community groups and activities for people of all ages and abilities. We know that access to such facilities is greatly valued by the community and can support children and young people by encouraging a lifelong love of reading.</p> <p>It should also be noted that Crosby Library is a large, ageing building that needs investment. To understand the scale of investment needed, a series of detailed condition surveys have been commissioned, the findings of which will help the council to decide what is needed to support the longer-term provision of this valuable service in the community”.</p>
9	Question submitted by Councillor Pugh (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) to the Cabinet Member for Cleansing and Street Scene (Councillor Harvey)
	Subject: Sefton Cemeteries
	What percentage of Sefton cemeteries have been given over to wildlife and fall outside the maintenance contract?
	Response:
	<p>“We recognise that cemeteries can be a sanctuary for wildlife, and we support and encourage biodiversity across our sites. Our cemeteries attract visits from deer, red squirrels, foxes, hedgehogs, and other animals.</p> <p>Small sections of two of our cemeteries are utilised as wildlife/wildflower areas with low-level maintenance. These are at Duke Street, Southport, and Liverpool Road, Birkdale. In percentage terms, the areas would cover no more than an estimated 10% of either cemetery. There are no designated areas at Southport Crematorium, Thornton Garden of Rest or Bootle Cemetery.</p> <p>While older areas of a graveyard are more suitable for the suspension of grass-mowing to encourage wildflowers, the overall tidiness of a cemetery, especially for regular visitors to more recent graves, is a priority. Pathways to war graves are always maintained, even if they are within a meadow.</p> <p>This balancing act between supporting biodiversity and maintaining a tidy, safe, and respectful cemetery is managed by staff. I would welcome any suggestions about how we can further encourage biodiversity in our council-run cemeteries while</p>

	maintaining this balance.”
10	Question submitted by Councillor Brodie-Brown to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Highways (Councillor Veidman)
	Subject: EV Charging
	Government grants have been available to Local Authorities to assist with the installation of EV charging. Please list the dates when Sefton MBC has applied for these grants.
	Response:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “In 2014 the Council, through the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, bid for and secured funds for the delivery of a limited number of public and private charging points. • For 2022-2025, through the Combined Authority, capability funding has been secured to fund Liverpool City Region staff to allow capacity building for EV charging infrastructure. • In 2023 the Combined Authority secured £9.647m of capital funding, to be distributed between the Local Authorities for the delivery of public charging points”.
11	Question submitted by Councillor Brodie-Brown to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economy and Skills/Deputy Leader (Councillor Lappin)
	Subject: Sir Ian McKellen Visit to Southport
	Sir Ian has let it be known in an interview in The Times that he wants to bring his present production of Henry IV part 1 and 2 with its message of "hope and belief" to Southport. What action has the Council taken to ensure that his generous offer is accepted.
	Response:
	“We have reached out to Sir Ian McKellen’s promoters seeking a discussion, and look forward to hearing from his team at the earliest opportunity”.
12	Question submitted by Councillor Lloyd Johnson to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Highways (Councillor Veidman)
	Subject: Planning Comments Being Publish on Planning Portal
	<p>'We have been told that it is now the policy of the Planning Department not to publish comments made by members of the public on the Planning Portal. Can the member tell me;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. On what date did this become the department's policy? b. Who was consulted before this decision was made? c. What was the rationale behind this decision?'
	Response:
	a. “We stopped publishing neighbour comments on line in April 2024.

	<p>b. The decision to stop publishing neighbour comments on line was taken by the Chief Planning Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member. The reasons for the decision are set out below.</p> <p>c. Publishing comments made by members of the public is not a statutory requirement in the processing and determination of planning applications. The concept was introduced at Sefton Council in February 2021 on a trial basis. However, since its introduction it has caused significant problems for the Council. There is a substantial amount of redacting required to comply with the GDPR, which is compounded by the need to further redact inappropriate comments and statements made by the public of a derogatory and libellous nature, which if not redacted could create significant community unrest. The portal is also being used by some individuals to lobby support for their views and opinions, often based on inaccurate and unfounded statements, which is unhelpful. It is clear that the costs and time involved in supporting this platform is unsustainable, particularly at a time of significant budget restraint and cannot continue to be supported.</p> <p>Comments from statutory consultees, based on professional judgement and expertise, will continue to be posted on-line, and these should form a reliable basis for members of the public to form their own responses. It is a statutory requirement to keep all comments made on planning applications in hard copy format on the Part 2 register, which is kept by the Local Planning Authority at Magdalen House. This can be inspected by appointment, by any member of the public, where all documentation is available to view. In addition to this, all comments made by the public, where material to planning, are summarised on all reports for each application, which brings such comments into the public domain”.</p>
13	<p>Question submitted by Councillor Sammon to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Skills/Deputy Leader (Councillor Lappin)</p>
	<p>Subject: ‘The White House’ at Southport Municipal Golf Links</p>
	<p>On 18th July ‘The White House’ at Southport Municipal Golf Links posted on their Facebook page that due to essential maintenance works in their kitchen, they will be closed for a few weeks. I understand they are now back open, but the restaurant is still not serving cooked food. What exactly are these kitchen works and when will the restaurant be back to a full menu?</p>
	<p>Response:</p>
	<p>“The maintenance works related to minor plumbing issues that have now been resolved. The strategy (including any menu changes) for the future of the venue is under review and will be communicated to customers in due course”.</p>
14	<p>Question submitted by Councillor Sammon to the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing (Councillor Doyle)</p>
	<p>Subject: Swans on Southport Marine Lake</p>
	<p>A resident has informed me that this year no swan cygnets have survived at Southport Marine Lake. Can you confirm if this is true and what the reason might be?</p>

	Response:
	<p>“Management of the Marine Lake is not something we influence or are directly involved in, although I must add tourism operations manager Steve Irwin and his team, plus concessionaires, have been most understanding about keeping craft and disturbance away from the northern-most island which is now an important site for rare breeding and wintering species of birds including egrets.</p> <p>Mute Swan cygnets are often the subject of high mortality for a variety of reasons including disturbance, food supply, predation, weather conditions and avian flu (which is unfortunately endemic in the bird population of the UK now). Some amount of mortality is natural amongst all young wild birds.</p> <p>Sometimes diet can play a part even when food appears to be abundant - if visitors feed the birds bread for example, the swans will happily eat it, but it is extremely bad for them.</p> <p>That said, it would be hard to ascribe a cause without knowing the full details of the factors affecting the lake this summer.”</p>