



**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGULATORY,
COMPLIANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES)**

**MEETING HELD AT THE COMMITTEE ROOM, TOWN HALL BOOTLE
ON TUESDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER, 2024**

PRESENT: Councillor Byrom, Vice-Chair (in the Chair)
Councillors Catie Page, Johnson, Parker, Thomas
and Sir Ron Watson

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Howard

9. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bradshaw and Murphy.

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with Paragraph 9 of the Council's Code of Conduct, the following declaration of personal interest was made and the Member concerned remained in the room during the consideration of the item:

Member	Minute No.	Nature of Interest
Councillor Johnson	Minute No. 15 – Cabinet Member Report – June – September 2024	He is employed by a taxi business

11. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

12. CUSTOMER SERVICES ACTIVITY

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial that provided details of customer activity to the Council's Contact Centre and One Stop Shop service. The report outlined the variety of access channels for customers, including web-based services, and how the Council continued to improve the quality and consistency of services. Importantly, it provided clarity on the measures in place to deliver customer service excellence for those using the range of services. The report also set out actions and recommendations as to the direction that the Council's customer services would take in the future in response to both the availability of more access channels, and customer expectations that councils were providing web-

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based services. A presentation was attached at Appendix 1 to the report, providing a summary overview of service delivery and volumetric data.

The presentation outlined:

- Customer Services – Customer Contact Activity
- Contact Centre – Activities
- Contact Centre – Telephone calls
- Contact Centre – Switchboard Service
- Contact Centre Monthly Call Volumes 2022/23 v 2023/24
- Contact Centre – Average Wait Time for Calls to be Answered for Prioritised Services 01.01.24 to 31.07.24
- Contact Centre – Emails and Webchat
- Contact Centre – Taking Payments for Council Services
- Contact Centre – Triaging Corporate Complaints
- Contact Centre – Social Media Enquiries
- One Stop Shop – Activities
- One Stop Shop – Face to Face Enquiries
- One Stop Shop – Reception Service
- Bootle and Southport Enquiries from 2022/23 to 2024/24
- One Stop Shop – Payments for Council Services
- Payment Kiosk and Online Payment Analysis
- One Stop Shop – Customer Satisfaction Survey
- Recent Improvements
- Other Matters for Consideration.

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- The use of direct messaging via social media as a method of contacting the Council.
- Good news stories.
- Repercussions in the event of lack of response taken by Teams within the Council following enquiries being forwarded by the Contact Centre.
- The possible integration of different portals in the future and mitigating circumstances in case of problems by portals, particularly within the Liverpool City Region.
- Waiting times for telephone enquiries and calls not answered.
- The Council's Digital Strategy and whether individuals who preferred not to make contact on-line were being excluded. Questions were raised as to how many residents had access to the internet in Sefton and how many did not. Further information would be provided.
- Expectations held by the public of services provided.
- Thanks and continued support be extended to the Customer Services Team.

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RESOLVED: That

- (1) the current position of customer services provided by the Council as set out within the report and presentation attached at Appendix 1, be noted;
- (2) the proposed action plan and recommendations be noted;
- (3) the recommendations set out in the action plan be agreed; and
- (4) the Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial be requested to provide further information on how many residents have access to the internet in Sefton and how many do not have access.

**13. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT 2024/25 TO 2027/28 - REVENUE
AND CAPITAL BUDGET UPDATE 2024/25 - SEPTEMBER UPDATE**

Further to Minute No. 44 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 5 September 2024 the Committee considered the report of the Executive Director - Corporate Services and Commercial that advised of:

- (1) the current position relating to the 2024/25 revenue budget;
- (2) the current forecast on Council Tax and Business Rates collection for 2024/25;
- (3) the monitoring position of the Council's capital programme to the end of July 2024 in respect of:
 - the forecast expenditure to year end;
 - variations against the approved budgets and an explanation of those variations for consideration by Members; and
 - updates to spending profiles and proposed amendments to capital budgets necessary to ensure the efficient delivery of capital projects; and
- (4) the measures being taken by the Council to respond to the tragic incident in Southport on 29th July 2024.

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- Uncertainties and assumptions facing the revenue budget 2024/25 and difficulties associated with Adult and Children's Social Care.
- Costs associated with looking after children and the likelihood of another one-year settlement which created difficulties in longer term planning.

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- More demand for services with less resources.
- When the next Ofsted visit was due. Enquiries would be made.

RESOLVED:

- (A) That in respect of the Revenue Budget:
- (1) the current position relating to the 2024/25 revenue budget be noted;
 - (2) the actions being taken to refine forecasts and identify mitigating efficiencies to ensure each service achieves a balanced position be noted; and
 - (3) the financial risks associated with the delivery of the 2024/25 revenue budget be recognised and it be acknowledged that the forecast outturn position will continue to be reviewed, and remedial actions put in place, to ensure a balanced forecast outturn position and financial sustainability can be achieved; and
- (B) That in respect of the Capital Programme:
- (1) the spending profiles across financial years for the approved capital programme (paragraph 8.1) be noted;
 - (2) the latest capital expenditure position as at 31 July 2024 of £15.781m (paragraph 8.08); and the latest full year forecast of £87.038m (paragraph 8.09) be noted;
 - (3) it be noted that capital resources will be managed by the Executive Director - Corporate Service and Commercial to ensure the capital programme remains fully funded and that capital funding arrangements secure the maximum financial benefit to the Council (paragraphs 8.12-8.14); and
- (C) that in respect of Children's Social Care, the Executive Director – Children's Social Care be requested to provide information as to the next anticipated Ofsted visit.

**14. LEVELS OF DISCIPLINARY, GRIEVANCE, DIGNITY AT WORK
AND SICKNESS ABSENCE**

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Services and Commercial that provided information on the levels of discipline, grievance, dignity at work and sickness absence within the Council (excluding schools).

The report indicated that the management of the workforce was an important activity to ensure outcomes for Sefton's communities were

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achieved and to ensure that the workforce was appropriately managed and motivated. Specific information was provided on:

- Disciplinary, Grievance and Dignity at Work – The organisation enjoyed a comparatively good level of cases and this reflected on the whole, both the good overall industrial relations environment, the partnership approach that was undertaken and also the work undertaken within departments. HR had a business partner model that was industry best practice and HR worked across departmental management teams to facilitate this partnership working. The Council had clear and agreed processes in place for consistency across the Council
- Suspensions - In the period January – July 2024, 10 employees were suspended from duty within central Service Areas (excluding schools)
- Disciplinary - During the period January – July 2024, there had been 24 disciplinary investigations
- Grievances - During the period January – July 2024, there had been 3 Grievances
- Dignity at work - During the period January – July 2024, there had been 5 dignity at work complaints
- Statistical data for Q3 and Q4 2023/2024 (01.10.23 – 31.12.23 and 01.01.24 - 31.03.24). The information detailed 'Short Term', 'Long Term' and 'All Absence' data along with previous year's figures for comparison purposes
- Occupational Health referrals - Excluding schools, the reasons for referral to occupational health during Quarter 3 and 4 of 2023/24 were detailed
- Initiatives undertaken by the Council which included the Strategic Leadership Board continuing to monitor and encourage the reduction of levels of both short and long-term absence; the Occupational Health Unit providing Counselling and CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) on a face-to-face basis. In addition, a specific type of CBT known as Eye Movement Desensitisation, was also available if declared appropriate by the OH physicians. Telephone and video call appointments could be arranged if that was the preferred method for individual; and physiotherapy appointments being arranged through the OH Unit as were pension assessments for ill health, ill health pension appeals and deferred pension cases
- Managing Absence the Council's Sickness Absence Policy which operated in a partnership with trade unions; and both the trade unions and management recognised the need for correct management of sickness absence to provide appropriate support to lessen the demands on employees who remained at work.

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

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- Sickness absence within Operational In-House Services and whether rates of sickness varied across the year; Further information would be obtained.
- Absences due to mental health issues and the promotion of good practice in this area. Further information would be sought.
- The possibility of undertaking an in-depth review of the health of the workforce in the future.
- Year-on-year trends in terms of disciplinary action taken. Further information would be obtained.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report providing information in terms of discipline, grievance, dignity at work and sickness levels be noted;
- (2) the ongoing work and initiatives to monitor and encourage the reduction of levels of both short and long-term absence be noted; and
- (3) the Executive Director of Corporate Services and Commercial be requested to provide further information on:
 - Variations in sickness rates in Operational In-House Services across the year;
 - Additional information relating to mental health issues; and
 - Year-on-year trends in terms of disciplinary action taken.

15. CABINET MEMBER REPORT - JUNE 2024 TO SEPTEMBER 2024

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that included the most recent report from the Cabinet Member – Corporate Services.

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- The need to support businesses and mitigate reputational damage, particularly following recent events in Southport.
- The possibility of undertaking an in-depth review of community resilience in the future.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the update report from the Cabinet Member – Corporate Services be noted; and
- (2) Councillor Howard be thanked for her attendance at the meeting.

16. WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25, SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPICS AND KEY DECISION FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that sought the views of the Committee on the draft Work Programme for 2024/25; the identification of potential topics for scrutiny reviews to be undertaken by informal meetings of the Committee; the identification of items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan; and that updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- Good working relationships between officers and Members and the fact that feedback was welcomed.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Work Programme for 2024/25, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved;
- (2) the presentation on the Corporate Communications Strategy be made to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 22 October 2024;
- (3) the topic for review, at an informal meeting of the Committee, relating to “Customer Journey/Channel Shift” be no longer pursued;
- (4) possible suggestions for an in-depth review by the Committee be noted; and
- (5) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.