

CABINET MEMBER REPORT

Overview & Scrutiny

Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Christine Howard	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services	22 October 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. The latest budget monitoring report, showing the August position was reported to Cabinet on 3rd October 2024. The next report to Cabinet in November will show the September position. This will be the Mid-Year Review position and will include action being taken to mitigate the forecast overspend on the Council's Revenue Budget.

Work continues to be undertaken on updating and expanding the Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2025/26 – 2027/28. This includes an assessment of any potential ongoing issues from the 2024/25 budget as well as new pressures. A report presenting the updated MTFP will be presented to Cabinet on 7th November 2024. Officers will also be assessing any announcements made in the Chancellor's Autumn Budget Statement on 30th October 2024 that impact on the financial position of the Council and these will also be incorporated into the report.

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

The Government has now implemented legislation for "backstop" date to be introduced for early December 2024 by which time audit certificates will need to be issued for all outstanding audits up to 2022/23. Officers are currently working with its previous external auditors, EY, to ensure they can finalise their audit opinions for the two open audits for 2021/22 and 2022/23. As the work on these audits won't be fully complete the audit opinions will be qualified on that basis. This will be in line with many other outstanding audits across local government. A special meeting of Audit and Governance will take place on the 20th November 2024 to consider the Statement of Accounts for 2021/22 and 2022/23, as well as the external auditor's report.

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 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, especially in the Council Tax team.

Customer Services

Typically, the Council's Customer Services Contact Centre answers approximately 16,000 calls each month. In August 2024, a total of 15,360 telephone calls were handled; this is approximately 12% less than the 17,468 telephone calls that were handled in August 2023.

The salutation message that is relayed at the start of each incoming call encourages customers to use 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).

The excellent workload progress that is being made by the Council Tax team continues to have a positive impact in relation to the number of telephone calls being received. In August 2024, there were a total of 2,588 telephone calls handled for Council Tax compared to 4,141 handled in August 2023 (37% reduction). The salutation message for this service continues to encourage customers to go online if they are able to do so and to register for 'My Account' where they are able to view and manage their account online.

Enquiries relating to Cleansing due to operational issues across the borough, the availability of brown bins, missed collections and 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 prefer to stay on the line to speak to a Customer Service Advisor.

Demand continues to be high at the One Stop Shops, with approximately 2,500 customers attending Bootle One Stop Shop each month. Typically, the team continues to 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.

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 18,600 households and businesses now successfully signed-up for My Account, and around 21,800 households and businesses signed up for paperless billing.

Since go-live to the end of September 2024, approximately 25,680 work items have been submitted via the Council Tax portal, e.g. new requests /amendments for discounts, Direct Debits, contact details etc. with approximately 56% 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.

Council Tax Sole Occupier Discount Review

The Council recently commenced a Council Tax Sole Occupier Discount review to help ensure that households are being charged correctly for Council Tax. At the end of August 2024, a review letter was issued to just under 50,000 households asking them to report any household changes by 30th September if they were no longer the only occupier. Any changes reported by 30th September will be effective from the date the change was reported.

As at 27th September 2024, 1,063 households have cancelled their Sole Occupier Discount online of which 87% have been automated via the My Account Council Tax portal to generate a revised Council Tax bill.

The Council Tax team is now working with software provider, NEC, to plan the next phase of the Sole Occupier Discount review.

Advice and guidance has been provided to householders contacting the Council to enquire about entitlement to available discounts, e.g. student discounts.

Taxi-Licensing

The updated Taxi Licensing system consisting of an online portal went live at the beginning of April 2024. The system allows taxi drivers, vehicle owners and operators to upload various evidence documents as well as pay all licensing fees via an online portal.

Some drivers continue to experience issues accessing the portal and creating an e-mail account. Technical support remains available at Bootle One Stop Shop and assistance is also being provided by trade representatives at selected garages. Contact has also been made with Sefton's Adult Education team to see if they can offer any digital support.

Following a request from the trade, the taxi licensing area of the Council website is being revamped to make it more user-friendly. Work is now taking place with the colleagues from the Communications team to have the update completed in the near future.

A review of fees for a vehicle licence and driver licence is also currently underway. Work is being undertaken to assess the time and effort it takes to produce each licence. When this has been done, the new fees will then be calculated, and a proposal will be put to the trade by Licensing colleagues. In addition to the new licence fees, a £50.00 non-refundable application fee will be imposed.

Regular meetings between Customer Services and Taxi Licensing continue and the trade are given regular updates on progress.

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
- Sefton New Directions
- Risk Management Health Check
- Code of Conduct
- Credit and Debit Cards
- ASC recruitment and retention
- CSC Procurement
- Marine Lakeside Event Centre procurement
- Supplier Management
- Bulky Waste
- Planning Financials
- Sundry Debtors
- Council Tax
- Children with disabilities
- Out of Area Placements- ASC

- Alleyway Waste
- Childrens Placements
- CSC Market Sustainability
- ASC Market Sustainability

Following a re-structure a Trainee ICT Auditor has been appointed and started 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.

- The Team are currently finalising 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. The renewal figures increased in line with expectations although there was reductions in costs to reflect a number of schools that transferred to Academies.
- The Team have proposed the use 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.
- The Team 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. A consultation exercise on a re-valuation of the affected schools to ensure that the properties have accurate re-building costs is currently being undertaken. This will help to prevent under insurance and potential restrictions of cover in the event of a claim.
- The 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.

The Team 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 are currently

- 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
- Working on the Southport Recovery Cell

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.
- Completed a planned review of the Council's Health and Safety Policy.
- Completed 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. Further guidance will be provided to colleagues across the Council.
- 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.

The **Counter Fraud** function has been focused on improving the governance and counter fraud during the quarter developing a Fraud Strategy as well as improving communication to staff. In addition, the team are working on the National Fraud Initiative ensuring that data is uploaded on time for the 2025/26 exercise.

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), and Data Centre relocation. 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. The client team is pleased to be able to report that the Website upgrade project is now completed,
- Work has also been completed to scope out the technical requirements associated with implementing Power Apps across the Council, this work is well underway and we hope to start piloting the use of these additional services within HR over the next few months.
- Data centre rationalisation and right sizing complete 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 now nearing completion, this includes the reconfiguration of all dark fibre connections in Bootle and the installation of new air conditioning and UPS systems. The Agilisys team have now

successfully relocated into their new office location within Magdalen House. Plans are well underway 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 timelines for the connectivity piece with Virgin now firmed up, this means that all relocation works should be completed by the end of the calendar year.

- 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 now built with final work in progress to develop the reporting element. A new ELAS process is in development. Work continues to make 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 now in progress with the service lead. Phase 3 of the eforms migration has been slightly delayed due to the impact of the Southport incident. New processes have been requested for Registrars (due to commence December 2024), Trees & Sefton Arc amongst others. Regular changes and improvements to existing processes are ongoing.
- 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 now completed. A forward plan has been developed in partnership with central procurement colleagues and work has now started on procurement for Payroll and HR, Inform CPI for Revenues and Benefits, a Digital Social Care Pricing System, Fleet Management and Egress (secure email).
- The ICT client is working in partnership with Agilisys colleagues to deliver a refresh programme for end user devices 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. New devices will start to be deployed to the relevant staff prior to Christmas 2024.
- 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 and a schedule of ongoing training is in place for all members.
- Consultation on the new Digital Strategy for Sefton is now complete, all responses have been reviewed and the 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 took 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:

- The Principal Lawyer Team has led on a project to ensure HMRC compliance in terms of off-payroll working arrangements. This has been a significant audit and HMRC have confirmed the case is closed (with one exception). New controls to manage HMRC compliance have been developed and are in the process of being rolled out, including a new off-payroll policy, an off-payroll panel and training.
- 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. This has been a significant amount of work all to tight deadlines set by the Department for Education. There are 18 schools that have indicated they will transfer to Multi Academy Trusts this financial year. The Team are also leading on developing a process to improve efficiency of the process and to better protect the Council.
- 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 supporting on academies as above. In Planning we are now starting to have to actively deal with applications subject to the new Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) regime as required by the Environment Act 2021, as well as getting to grips with the myriad of changes being proposed by the new government in regards to grey-belt (reforming green belt policy), new NPPF revisions and reversion back to mandatory housing targets
- The Contracts and Commercial team continue to support the procurement department in preparing for the implementation of the new Procurement Act which has been pushed back to February 2025 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 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 successes. This includes a successful prosecution of a landlord who had let his property out to tenants in dangerous conditions and a significant fine for the landlord of £20,000 see [Negligent landlord who ignored safety risks penalised in court \(smbc.loc\)](#). The team also secured a prosecution of a parent for failing to send her son to school, resulting in a significant fine and costs.
- The Debt recovery team recovered a further £112,000 in unpaid debts.

Democratic Services Team – Overview

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 3 September 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside – Sefton Place Update
- Health Provider Performance Dashboard
- Adult Social Care Assurance
- Shaping Care Together Programme
- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Work Programme Update

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 15 October 2024.

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 24 September 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Children’s Services Improvement Programme
- Social Work Practice and Improvement
- Education Scorecard
- Ofsted Inspections
- Work Programme Key Decision Forward Plan

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 12 November 2024.

- **Children’s Services and Safeguarding Parents/Carers Sub-Committee**

The last meeting of the Sub-Committee was held on 17 September 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Attendance of Parents/Carers - Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

The next meeting of the Sub-Committee will be held on 10 December 2024.

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 17 September 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority – Service Delivery Plan 2024/25 - Presentation
- Winter Maintenance Policy & Operational Plan
- LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy - Update and Next Steps Towards Approval of Draft LNRS
- Work Programme 2024/25, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan
- Cabinet Member Report – June 2024 to September 2024

The Committee has agreed that following the submission of cleansing related reports over the next two meetings, consideration be given at the March 2025 meeting to arranging an informal meeting to look into cleansing services.

On 28 August 2024 the Committee held an informal meeting to consider the provision of housing for former looked after children who were now care leavers. Recommendations agreed by the informal meeting were endorsed by the Committee on 17 September 2024 and the Work Programme has been updated to include subsequent actions.

Due to the unavailability of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee the next meeting, scheduled to be held on 5 November has been rearranged and will now take place on 25 November 2024.

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

The last ordinary meeting of the Committee was held on 10 September 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Customer services activity
- Financial Management 2024/25 to 2027/28 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2024/25 - September Update
- Levels of Disciplinary, Grievance, Dignity at Work and Sickness Absence
- Work Programme 2024/25, Scrutiny Review Topics and Key Decision Forward Plan
- Cabinet Member Report – June 2024 to September 2024

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 22 October 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 10 September 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Scrutiny Link - Councillor Hart
- Update on Informal Meetings and Working Groups
- Centre for Governance and Scrutiny - Newsletters
- Training session for Overview and Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs

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

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

Since the last Cabinet Member update of the LCRO&S has met once on 11 September 2024. Details of matters considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Financial Performance April - July 2024
- LCR Freeport and Innovation Zone Progress Report
- Liverpool City Region Long Term Skills Plan
- Work Programme Update 2024-25

- Appointments of Scrutiny Members to the Audit & Governance Committee 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. The Chair of the LCRCOA&S cannot be a member of the majority group. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee for 2024/25 are Councillors Steve Radford and Pat Moloney respectively.

Sefton's appointed Members are Councillors Desmond, Hart and Hinde. Councillor Hart is Sefton's Scrutiny Link. Councillor Hart and Councillor Desmond have been appointed to the Audit and Governance Committee. Councillors Desmond and Hart have been appointed as Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee respectively.

The next meeting of the LCRO&S will be held on 23 October 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 18 July 2024. In this period over 200 appeals were listed and heard. The number of appeals was lower than in recent years, with more applicants being offered schools from their initial preferences. However, a number of late appeals and a backlog of in-year transfers has meant that 7 days of appeals have been listed in September which has continued to be busy. Additionally, another two days have already been booked for early October.

Two of the new Panel members have completed their training and sat on Panels during September.

Civic and Mayoral Services

Tickets are now on sale for the Mayors Charity Cabaret Night on 19 October 2024 and the Burns Night on 25 January 2025.

On 20 August we welcomed HM King to Southport, this visit was a timely boost for the Town, and for the King to meet the families affected by the events of 29 July.

From 22 August to 25 August a delegation from Sefton visited Mons, which included the Mayor of Sefton, Deputy Leader of the Council and the MP for Bootle. The purpose of the visit was to discuss and start planning for upcoming projects for 2026 & 2027. The visit was a great success and we look forward to welcoming a delegation from Mons from 25 to 28 October to plan these projects further.

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 4 September 2024 and the Committee considered the following items:

- Corporate Risk Management
- Risk and Audit Service Performance
- Treasury Management Outturn 2023/24 and Position to July 2024
- Current Position relating to the Audits for 21/22 and 22/23
- Audit and Governance Committee Annual Report 2023-2024
- Review of Members Code of Conduct Complaints 2023-24
- Review of the Council's Constitution
- 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:

- Emotional Health and Wellbeing Board
- Psychological Support offer following Southport Incident on 29th July 2024
- Child Poverty Strategy
- Public Health Annual Report 2023/24
- 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

The next meeting of the Committee has been moved from 2 September 2024 to 7 November 2024.

Electoral Services

The annual canvass for the 2025 register of electors has now started. The programme was delayed due to the UK Parliamentary General Election in July and as such the 2025 register will be published on the 1 February 2025 rather than the annual publication date on the 1 December.

Interest in the General Election added over 7,000 new electors to the register, so we go into the canvass period with 217,596 registered elector details to update at 133,329 residential properties. The canvass will focus on encouraging young people to register to vote, as this is the area we have seen the most significant drop off in recent years. We will also concentrate on the number of new builds across the Borough to capture those who recently moved in these areas.

Alongside the annual canvass, we are carrying out a piece of work required because of the Elections Act 2022 to review the registration status of all European Union Citizens registered to vote in the Borough. For these people, eligibility to register to vote now depends on whether they are a citizen of Denmark, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal or Spain, who the UK has reciprocal voting rights with, or are an EU citizen of any other EU country who, on or before the 31 December 2020, had permission to enter or stay in the UK.

The Elections Act 2022 also makes changes to how we manage information on electors who are registered to vote by post. Previously, those electors with a permanent postal must refresh their signature (used for verification) every 5 years. New rules now require permanent postal to make a new application every 3 years. Given that we now have in the region of 45,000 postal voters across Sefton, this is a significant piece of work, which, like EU electors is an ongoing task.

The Boundary Commission published the final recommendations for Sefton in July, and we are now waiting for a report to be laid before Parliament for approval and necessary order to be made. Once the order has been made, we will then need to carry out a review of polling districts and polling stations to put a new polling scheme in place ahead of the all-out elections in May 2026.

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.

1 Casual Senior HRBP casual arrangements has ended, this post was predominantly supporting the schools, although they did cross over into the wider Children's Services and had a section of the service within their portfolio. An offer of placement for an agency worker has been made for the interim Senior HRBP and clearances are now being sought. This post will provide day to day operational support to Children's Services freeing up the two Senior Business Partners to focus more on the delivery of the restructure and the work surrounding the strategy agreed for improved collaborative working between Corporate Resources and Children's Services.

In addition to business-as-usual there are clear focus on the following priorities.

- Children's Social Care Whole Service review and restructure. The restructure is well underway. In addition to the update in the last report, the following has now also been implemented:

All Support and Protection Posts including Court Advisory and Team Around a Baby posts have been populated where assimilation was possible. Posts that remain vacant (some covered by Agency workers) have been advertised. All Family Support Worker posts have been recruited to and onboarding is in process. Advertisements for Social Workers and Assistant Team Managers remain open.

All Immediate Support has been populated where assimilation is possible. Posts that remain vacant (some covered by Agency workers) have been advertised.

Planning is underway to move the three Academy Graduate Teams into vacant teams in both Support and Protect and within Immediate Response's Assessment teams. Further planning is underway to transfer the Academy into teams that sit within the structure rather than have them as a standalone entity. This is to support with the challenges previously recognised when transferring from the Academy, into teams across the Service. This will also support with the ongoing recruitment campaign of 'growing our own'.

Adoption and Fostering and the Safeguarding Service implementation plans were presented to the JTU on 2nd October 2024 and staffing meeting are set to follow this week and early next week. This will be an assimilation process in the main and then recruitment activity will follow to fill the remaining vacant posts.

The next Services set to be implemented are CWCN, Cared for and Care Experienced and Practice improvement. This will leave 2 full-Service areas in phase 1 implementation and Early Help and Youth Justice remaining areas to complete. Phase 2 will see the implementation of Business Support and Work is already underway to develop what that restructure will look like.

- A further mop up onboarding event was held. Agency workers were sent an appointment from the AD Early Help, Support and Protect. It was attended by a handful of workers and to date, we have not received any paperwork to onboard.
- The posts of Safeguarding Service Manager and Service Manager CWCN are currently out for advert with interviews taking place set to take place on 24th and 25th October.
- The posts of Service Manager – Cared for and Cared Experience is set to be released early next week.
- A presentation was made to Children's Services SLT in September and agreements were made surrounding Collaborative Working between Children's Services (excluding Schools) and Corporate Resources. The team working with Corporate Learning and Development colleagues continues working towards this plan.
- 2 Schools are set to academies in November and 1 further School set to go in December 2024. 2 other schools remain on the watch list for academisation, although at this time they are not progressing.

Pay & Grading, Job evaluation, projects and Occupational Health Unit.

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 Childrens 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.

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. The Council and UNISON reached an agreement in March 24 to take forward an overarching settlement process. Individual settlement offers have been formulated in accordance with this agreement. 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 Senior HR business partner and the newly recruited HR business partner that make up the policy team responsible for undertaking reviews of policy, procedures and guidance and introduce new policies as required in line with current legislation have been transferred under the remit of the HR Operational Support Team.

Officers are involved in supporting employing departments with elections pay and payments for onboarded Exercise instructors. Officers are also looking at the implications of the Holiday pay and entitlement reforms and will be producing a paper for discussion and implementation in due course.

The Occupational Health Unit manages the Councils OH provision for Council employees and schools. The unit has 3 providers Premier Physical for Physio services, Optima for OH Dr appointments, and pension assessments and Listening Ear who are the providers of Counselling, and CBT services.

Following concerns regarding the performance of the Optima provision a procurement waiver is in place to enter into arrangements with alternative service provider. The legalities of the contract provision are under discussion with the contract holders with assistance from the legal team.

Service Development, Reporting, Establishment Control, Recruitment, and Transactional HR Services.

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 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

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.

Employee Support – Payroll and Pensions

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 sending pension leaver forms to Local Government Pension funds and these are being worked on and are reducing, each week.

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

The 1st September 2024 pay award for Teachers is currently laid before Parliament and is expected to be ratified in November and will be processed in December pay.

The 1st September 2024 pay award for Soulbury and Youth workers is still to be agreed.

HMRC came to Sefton 17th September to discuss National Minimum Wage (NMW) and National Living Wage (NLW) compliance. HMRC are going to contact Sefton again, in the near future and they are going to request a 6-year compliance check.

HMRC wrote to Sefton querying the apprentice levy payments from April 2020 to March 2024 and Sefton responded, saying we believe we have overpaid. We are awaiting further contact from HMRC but have raised a call with MHR (the payroll software supplier) as the functionality is not working as it should.

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 includes the **Level 6 Improvement Leader** qualification.

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 agreed a second cohort with LCR colleagues and 2 managers commenced the programme this month.

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 went live with the upgraded version of Me Learning on Monday 16th September 2024. The implementation went well, and the new upgrade has been well received by the workforce. However, like any new system, we are working on some minor technical issues following feedback from users, this feedback is invaluable and will help us to make further improvements to the Me Learning system.
- **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.

- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** training delivery is going well. To date, we have trained 278 Sefton Council and schools' staff. An increase of 9 since the last report.
- **LCRCA Race Equality Training** – we delivered a further six Race Equality Training sessions for staff and managers in May, June, July and September 2024. To date, 186 managers have completed the managers course and 314 staff have completed the non-managers course.

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 362 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 for review and signoff by Adult Social Care and Children's Services Senior Leadership Teams. We are hoping to commence Tier 1 and Tier 2 training from late January 2025.
- Staff in the team continue to support **Adult Social Care** to prepare for CQC inspection. We provided all relevant evidence to support the self-assessment process and are fully engaged in the Strategic Workforce and Adult Social Care Improvement Board meetings to ensure workforce activity regarding learning and development needs, recruitment, retention, data is captured.
- We attended a meeting on Thursday 22nd August with **Children's Services** to review their CPD offer and training priorities going forward. We agreed to reinvigorate the Training Governance Group, refresh the terms of reference and present the approach to Children's Services Senior Leadership Team early October 2024 to seek buy in and agreement for this particular approach.

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. This new technology is being adopted to support the development of the new council wide Corporate Performance framework (aligned to the new Corporate Plan) and the first performance report will be presented to Cabinet in November 2024. The team is continuing 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. They are also producing and distributing the school data booklets which help the LA, school improvement groups and schools understand the statistics comparative performance in education attainment across the borough, regionally and nationally.

The team have been supporting the Southport Recovery Programme, gathering, analysing and presenting data in the 'Southport Profile' which shows baseline data that typically explains the demography and economic context for Southport, and is now gathering quantitative & qualitative data/insight that demonstrates the impact that recent events. A key part of this work will be

qualitative social research and analysis to gather insights collected through interviews, focus groups, surveys, and observations. It is intended that the profile will inform the Council's community impact assessment and recovery planning.

Work continues with the Chief Executive and senior managers across the Council as part of the transformation programme to review our capacity and capability to deliver better quality information and analysis. The project group are exploring the gaps across specific services and the opportunities to align existing data analysis and performance resources with the corporate team to improve performance management, to develop skills, create opportunities for growth, and to retain staff.

Consultation & Engagement.

The Service continues to support consultation and engagement activities across the Council and is providing support to teams on accessible information and co-production. The findings of the extensive consultation and engagement on the refresh of the Children & Young People's Plan were presented to the Children & Young People Partnership Board in August 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. In October, the team are also holding another Accessible Information awareness training for elected members.

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.

The challenge of increasing demand and complexity of ASC, CSC and SEND complaints continues to pose a risk to complaints not being responded to within agreed and published standards, which in turn poses a reputational risk to the Council. The Chief Executive and Executive Directors for ASC and Children's Services have considered 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. 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. These six key pillars are now being reduced to four; 1) Children's Services, 2) Council Housing, 3) ASC Better at Home and 4) In House Operational Services, with CSC, SEND and H2S transport collapsed into the Children's Services pillar. 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. The Team has developed the Council's Transformation Plan, which is aligned to the Corporate plan and the Council's priorities, and provides detail on the four pillars of change (Everyday Excellence, Better Outcomes, Sustainable Services, Setting us up to Success and Growth – Redefining Place).

The team has supported the development of new Service Planning Guidance and Templates to be used across the Council, and will be providing support to managers across the Council on how to complete their service plans.

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.

Communications

The team continues to provide comprehensive support across the Council following the tragic incident in Southport. A dedicated officer has been appointed to support the communications activity linked to the council's recovery plan, supporting the recovery working groups.

The team is supporting the communication of the new corporate plan, the transformation plan, and the new service planning guidance and templates. The team is also supporting the preparation of key documents for the Care Quality Commission assessment of ASC, and will continue that support throughout the next quarter.

The team continues diligently to support communication of major events such as the recent Musical Fireworks Championship in Southport, and broadcast of key news including progress on Sefton's first new council housing and the demolition of Southport in preparation for the MLEC development through 'This is MySefton' and its social media presence.

Procurement

The team are now working updating the Councils' Procurement Strategy, incorporating the new Procurement Act 2023 legislation changes, the Transforming Public Procurement (TPP) programme, and changes to the threshold and applicability of procurement waivers. The Act is now expected to come into force in 24 February 2025, and all procurements started after that date will have to comply with the new rules. The team is continuing to work with law firm DLA Piper (who are supporting the roll-out of the Act) so that the key officers across Council understand these new rules and the various steps required to run a successful and fully compliant procurement. With the rules governing public procurement changing, this is likely to place increased demand on the procurement team to ensure readiness for implementing the new regime, to familiarise themselves and advice others with the new regime, understand potential impact on procurements scheduled to commence under the new Act, and address these eventualities. Officers in the corporate team will be expected to assist, escalate issues and promote best procurement practice within the Council. Consequently, the structure of the team is being reviewed to ensure it has the necessary capacity and capability. In the interim, the team continues to support procurement activity across the Council.

