

CABINET MEMBER REPORT

Overview & Scrutiny

Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Christine Howard	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services	December 2024

Financial Management

Within the Financial Management service, there has been significant activity on a number of key issues:

The latest budget monitoring report, showing the October position, was reported to Cabinet on 5th December 2024. The next report to Cabinet in January will show the November position.

A report presenting an updated Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2025/26 – 2027/28 was presented to Cabinet on 7th November 2024 and Council on 14th November. Work continues to be undertaken on updating and expanding the MTFP. This includes an assessment of any potential ongoing issues from the 2024/25 budget as well as new pressures. Officers are currently assessing the Local Government Finance Policy paper, which was published on 28th November and provided additional information on the announcements made in the Chancellor's Autumn Budget Statement on 30th October 2024. However, the full impact on the financial position of the Council is unlikely to be known until the Local Government Finance Settlement is announced later in December (expected to be the 19th).

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. A special meeting of Audit and Governance took place on the 28th November 2024 to approve the Statement of Accounts for 2021/22 and 2022/23, as well as consider the external auditor's report (EY). Officers are currently working with the external auditors, EY, to finalise their audit opinions for the two open audits. 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.

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 to date and will recommence in January 2025 once all work on 2021/22 and 2022/23 has been completed by the Council's previous external auditors. Audit and Governance Committee will meet in February 2025 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.

For the Contact Centre, the ongoing progress to reduce Council Tax priority workloads is also having a positive impact in reducing customer contact as set out in the table below. The salutation

message continues to encourage customers to go online if they are able to do so and to register for 'My Account.'

Year	Council Tax call volumes
1.4.23 to 31.10.23	29,242
1.4.24 to 31.10.24	22,287
Reduction	6,955 (-23.78%)

Customer Services

The Contact Centre team continues to handle in the region of 17,000 calls each month. The torrential rain across the borough that resulted in various roads being closed and houses being flooded generated a high volume of telephone calls for Environmental Services and Highways.

With the garden waste collections ending in November until March 2025, Cleansing enquiries increased with customers calling to confirm the exact date of their last green bin collection. In addition, customers called to enquire about the calendar for the Leafing Program that started on 14th October and the various bulky items that had failed to be collected throughout the month.

Various customer enquiries were received for the Election service. At the start of October, the annual canvass of 84,254 e-mails and 49,075 letters were dispatched. The communication requests households to check the names registered to vote are correct and to add or delete names to their household if necessary.

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).

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.

Taxi-Licensing

Good progress continues with taxi-licensing workloads. Taxi-licensing webpages have been updated on the Council's website, providing clearer information to answer frequently asked questions. The link to the website has been shared with trade representatives and they have been complimentary of the changes that have been made. The website will be updated each week with progress on all Taxi Licensing workloads and can be found at [Taxi Licensing](#)

The team are making advanced contact with all drivers whose driver/vehicle licence is due to expire during the Council's shutdown period and through to mid-January, ensuring that they are licenced to drive over the busiest time of the year.

Some drivers continue to experience issues accessing the on-line taxi-licensing 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.

A review of fees for a vehicle licence and driver licence is 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 was introduced from 25th November 2024.

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

Council Tax Sole Occupier Discount Review

At the end of August 2024, the Council commenced a Council Tax Sole Occupier Discount review to help ensure that households are being charged correctly for Council Tax. 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. Changes reported by 30th September were applied from the date that the change was reported.

By the end of September 2024, almost 1,300 households cancelled their Sole Occupier Discount. The majority used the online My Account Council Tax portal to cancel the discount which automated a revised Council Tax bill in 87% of cases notified this way.

The Council Tax team is now working with software provider, NEC, for the next phase of the review. NEC use credit records to check how many adults might be living in properties claiming Sole Occupier Discount. NEC has recently written to approximately 10,000 households, where the information held does not appear to be correct to check whether they are still eligible for the discount. Further updates will be provided.

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

Southport Business Improvement District (BID)

The Business Rates team within the Revenues service is responsible for the billing and collection of the BID levy.

Following the ballot for the new 5-year Southport BID term from 1st November 2024 to 31st October 2029, the service has now completed the Annual Billing exercise with 714 bills being generated.

Open Access Household Support Fund

Further to the Government announcement that the Department for Work and Pensions would continue to provide Household Support Funding to local councils to support communities during the winter period from October 2024 – March 2025, colleagues in Communities, in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Communities & Partnership Engagement, have decided that £1,210,000 of the funding should be available through the application scheme which is administered by the Benefits team in Customer Centric Services.

The Open Access application element of the Household Support Fund re-opened on 14th October. There was an immediate surge of applications. By the end of November, just over 5,800 applications have been received with over 3,400 awards so far made through the Post Office Pay Out service which enables the recipient to redeem a voucher for cash at their local Post Office.

During the last two iterations of Household Support Fund, the application scheme has closed early due to funding running out. This time, the amount of award per application has reduced in order to ensure that the budget lasts for the whole six-months winter period, which is likely to be the hardest season for Sefton's most vulnerable households. The award levels are set out in the table below:-

Original		New
Amount	Description	Amount
£150	Single	£75
£200	Couple	£100
£250	Family 2 or less children	£125
£300	Family 3 or more children	£150

The Benefits team has worked with Communications and the Council's website has been updated to reflect the current version of the scheme: [Household Support Fund](#)

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.
- Risk Management Health Check
- Code of Conduct
- Credit and Debit Cards
- ASC recruitment and retention
- CSC Procurement
- Sefton New Directions
- Major Capital Schemes Procurement
- Supplier Management
- Bulky Waste
- Planning Financials
- Bootle Golf Club
- Alleyway Waste Management
- Children with disabilities
- Out of Area Placements- ASC
- 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 have finalised 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 were reductions in costs to reflect a number of schools that transferred to Academies.

- The Team have proposed the use of 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.
- The Team have developed a report for various service areas detailing claims numbers, values and outcomes, and areas where the concentration of claims is the highest. This has been completed for 2023/24 and provided to service areas.
- 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 re-valuation of the affected schools to ensure that the properties have accurate re-building costs is currently being undertaken and due to finish by 31 December 2024. 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 current contract with the Council’s Insurance Brokers expires on 31 March 2025. The Team are shortly to commence a procurement exercise, in line with current Contract Procedure Rules, to test the market and obtain value for money.
- An exercise will also shortly be undertaken to gain quotes from various Insurance Brokers to enable an Actuarial Report to be undertaken on the Council’s insurance claims. This is a requirement of the Council’s External Auditors and will provide an analysis of current claims reserves, a forecast of expected ultimate losses after allowing for volatility and will also comment on emerging risks within the sector. Ultimately it will determine if the Insurance Fund has sufficient reserves to fund current and future claims that may be presented.

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 on a number of work plan initiatives
- Development of a Shoreline Pollution Plan
- Review of Major Emergency Guidance
- 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 which is due to be presented to Cabinet in the next quarter
- 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 including:

- An action plan has been drawn up to implement the outstanding actions from the CIPFA Fraud self-assessment.
- A draft Counter Fraud Strategy has been developed and will be presented to ELT/ Cabinet Member and Cabinet over the next three months.
- Research on a sanctions policy has been undertaken with Legal Services
- Evaluation of a benchmarking exercise to determine proposals on resourcing for Counter Fraud and qualifications for the Counter Fraud Investigator has been shared with management.
- Shared training resources from a neighbouring local authority enabled us to set up two fraud awareness eLearning courses:
 - Introduction to fraud and
 - Introduction to Bribery and Corruption
- Requests for completion of Fraud Risk Assessments has been provided to all Assistant Directors and the wholly owned companies. We have had documents from the majority of the Assistant Directors or a timescale when they have been completed and are following up the outstanding areas.
- Internal Audit are including an aspect of fraud assessment within each audit that is undertaken.
- We have worked with colleagues in HR to incorporate counter fraud as a topic in the induction process and promote the fraud related eLearning training courses found in the Me Learning library.
- We have worked with Communications team to advertise the fraud awareness eLearning training as well as Fraud Awareness Week in November 2024.
- We have developed a Communication Plan to raise awareness of counter fraud in the organisation.
- National Fraud Initiative (NFI) privacy notice compliance exercise completed in August 2024.
- Data upload submissions completed for the NFI National Exercise 2024/25 for the following datasets:
 - Council Tax Reduction Scheme

- Housing Waiting List
- Payroll
- Pensions
- Resident Parking Permits
- Taxi Driver Licences
- Trade Creditors
- Reviewed the allocation of the NFI matches to individual staff members and evaluate the work completed.
- NFI Procurement Matches: Payroll to Companies House matches investigated in relation to declarations of interest under the Code of Conduct.
- Involvement with the Mersey Region Fraud Group (MRFG) sharing information and ways of working.
- A suspected fraud issue found relating to a leisure activity.
- A review of all council tax accounts with a Sole Occupier Discount (SOD) took place in September 2024. As a result of the review almost 1300 households have cancelled their SOD.

The focus on the next quarter is to:

- Work with the Communications team to develop a fraud newsletter we can circulate regularly.
- Work with Legal Services and other colleagues to develop a draft Sanctions Policy for consideration by ELT before presentation to Cabinet.
- Obtain the outstanding Fraud Risk Assessments and evaluate the information provided.
- Research and develop a Fraud Risk Register from the completed Fraud Risk Assessments.
- Progress the action plan from the CIPFA Self – assessment on fraud.
- Work with Communications team to develop a fraud awareness campaign for the upcoming National Fraud awareness week.

ICT

- The ICT Service continues to work on a number of 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 team have experienced some capacity issues over the last few months due to the sickness absence of three colleagues and the further absence of our ICT Procurement lead due a HR matter. We have recently recruited two further staff into the team to support Service Delivery and the Contracts and Procurement function.
- A platform is now ready for the implementation of Power Apps across the Council, the first development proposal has been received from HR and once the relevant staff in the service area have completed training, we should be able to pilot the use of these additional services within HR.
- Data centre rationalisation and right sizing is complete within the existing Data Centre at St Peters ready for relocation to a new site. The move of the main comms room for the council to Magdalen House is now completed and 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 configuration work has been completed as required by the Sefton team but there have been significant challenges in scheduling the Virgin works, due to civils necessitating a road closure and access required to ducting out of hours. We continue to work in partnership with Virgin and colleagues in Liverpool to schedule these works but seasonal events in the city and prior commitments of the LCR team have made this incredibly challenging, we are now looking at dates in the new year. The Property team in Sefton are fully sighted on these issues and as far as we are aware there is no current impact on the sale of St Peters House.

- 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 report is slightly delayed due to capacity issues in the team as mentioned above and will now be ready in Spring.
- The Council's CXP solution continues to be developed. A new internal data breach process is now live, and a new ELAS process is in development and ready for testing. 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 is now underway and the final phase (phase 4) in scoping. Work on Registrars is due to commence December 2024 and should complete by the end of the year. Funding for the member of staff seconded from Agilisys into the ICT client to support implementation will end on the 31st of December, with this colleague returning to their substantive post within Agilisys. Further works required will be commissioned as projects from Agilisys in line with the terms of the ICT Support Contract.
- The ICT Procurement team continue to be busy; and the team has been impacted by the loss of the ICT Procurement lead, work has been reallocated in partnership with the central procurement team and key procurements are in progress.
- 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 has now tested 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. The first batch of new devices is now ordered and will be delivered prior to Christmas, it is likely that deployment will now start in January after the Christmas break.
- 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, deployment of the new backup and recovery solution for Sefton is nearing completion and further work is ongoing in line with the Cyber Improvement plan.
- 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. This was deferred to February 2025 due to staff availability in Autumn.

- Due to the Agilisys contract ending on the 30th of September 2025 procurement activity is now completed to secure a Managed Service provider for ICT from October 2025. A report recommending preferred bidder will be presented to Cabinet on the 5th of December.
- In the new year the team will establish a project team which will start to review opportunities to pilot AI across Sefton, this will include a number of proof of concept exercises to assess the potential use cases technologies such as Microsoft Co-Pilot and Transcription tools. To inform this work the team have engaged with colleagues within Microsoft to complete an AI readiness assessment.

Legal Services

Legal Services continues to be busy, providing support across a range of areas including: Children's 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 has led and continues to advise on a project to ensure HMRC compliance in terms of off-payroll working arrangements. This has been a significant audit and is nearly complete. Further work continues on developing 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 have recently completed the documentation on a further three academy conversions. One of the academy conversions required extensive advice, with complex and bespoke drafting to protect the Council's position.
- 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 Council on a range of commercial matters. Particular highlights include:
 - North West Legal Consortium Framework. In addition to assisting with the procurement and appointment of law firms to this framework, the contracts team have also led on the agreement and signing of collaboration agreements for 44 public sector members. This consortium provides a framework under which various public bodies can appoint law firms across the North West region.
 - Procurement Act/Contract Procedure Rules. The team continues to assist the procurement department in preparing for the implementation of the new Procurement Act which has now been delayed to February 2025. This preparation work includes working with colleagues and external advisors to re-draft the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

- Project Support Work. 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.
 - Subsidy Control. The team have seen an increase in queries relating to subsidy control legislation and the navigation of it by various departments across the Council.
- The Children, Education and Adults legal team remain exceptionally busy, the team of 23 is now fully staffed following recruitment for a legal Assistant and a Senior Legal Assistant. 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. Case being presented to the court in respect of care proceedings remain consistent together with an increase in the number of children on care orders being discharged because of the work of the discharge team in Children' Social Care together with their partnership with legal services. The Children subject to pre-proceedings planning also remains consistent. Additionally, the team have a duty helpline which is available from 9-5 Monday to Friday which is open to Childrens Social Care, Education and the Sefton Schools who have a service level agreement with Legal Services for legal advice. This provides access to an experienced Lawyer who will be able to assist our client departments with their legal queries.
 - The Adults team remain exceptionally busy as does the Lawyer designated to supporting the Special educational needs department. This year has seen a steep rise in cases before the Special Educational Needs tribunal which would appear to be a trend nationally.
 - The Prosecution team have had some great successes. Highlights include:
 - advising the licensing sub-committee on three hearings required pursuant to the Licensing Act 2003;
 - securing the conviction of a managing agent convicted of two counts of managing a property without a licence, the sentencing hearing is to be held next month;
 - successfully resisted an appeal of a taxi driver who had been revoked following conviction for plying for hire;
 - representing the Council in the first-tier property tribunal – appeal of a Community Protection Notices for a landlord's breach of the HMO management regulations.
 - The employment team continue to provide day to day advice, for example, three settlement agreements on termination of employment and providing advice on several dismissals/appeals. The employment lawyers support the Council and schools on a number of sensitive employment law issues, which are confidential in nature, further details can be provided on request but are not suitable for inclusion in this report.
 - The debt recovery team have had some notable successes including: recovered debts of £13,246; obtained court orders for removal of travellers from two encampments; drafted a high hedge remedial notice; and the debt recovery team continues to recover significant sums 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 15 October 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- North West Ambulance Service Update

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

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 7 January 2025.

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

The last meeting of the Committee was held on 12 November 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Cabinet Member Update Reports
- Children’s Services Improvement Programme
- Quality Assurance Practice and Improvement
- Children, Schools and Families - SEND Data
- Work Programme Key Decision Forward Plan

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 28 January 2025.

- **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 next meeting of the Committee will be held on 25 November 2024. At the time of writing this report the agenda has been published but the meeting has not taken place. The following items will be considered at the meeting.

- Selective and Additional Licensing Schemes - Anti-Social Actions of Littering and Dumping Rubbish in Rear Entries
- Recycling & Waste Containment
- Local Plan Policy – Provision of Community Recycling Facilities in Development Proposals
- 2023/2024 Flooding and Coastal Erosion Annual Report
- Southport Market Update
- Social Value Outcomes from the Growth and Strategic Investment Programme
- Sefton Economic Strategy Action Plan Update
- 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.

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

The last ordinary meeting of the Committee was held on 22 October 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Financial Management 2024/25 to 2027/28 - Revenue and Capital Budget Update 2024/25 - October Update
- 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 14 January 2025.

- **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 12 November 2024. Details of items considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Cabinet Member - Corporate Services Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)
- Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Scrutiny Link - Councillor Hart
- Executive/Scrutiny Protocol - Clarification
- Update on Informal Meetings and Working Groups
- Centre for Governance and Scrutiny - Newsletters
- Strategic Scrutiny in Practice Network

The next meeting of the Management Board will take place on 7 January 2025.

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

Since the last Cabinet Member update of the LCRO&S has met once on 23 October 2024. Details of matters considered at the meeting are set out below:

- Draft Local Transport Plan
- Active Travel - Progress Report
- Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (Levi)
- Social Value Update
- Digital Connectivity Vision & Roadmap
- Delivery Planning and Performance Reporting
- Work Programme 2024-25

On the 23 October 2024 a LCRO&S Knowledge Briefing was also held that provided a background and overview of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's Commercial Investment Funds.

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 27 November 2024. At the time of writing this report the agenda for the meeting has not been published but details of this meeting will be provided as part of the next update report.

School Appeals

The Team 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 meant that 7 days of appeals have been listed in September. An additional 7 hearing days were listed during October – November, which included further late transfer and in-appeals. Four days of appeals have already been booked for December 2024. These appeals are mid-year transfers, or children returning to school after a period of being home educated.

An Independent Review Panel (exclusion appeal) has been listed for 19 November 2024.

Planning for the 2025 'high season' will start in December.

Civic and Mayoral Services

Tickets are now on sale for the Mayors Charity Burns Night on 25 January 2025 at Waterloo Rugby Club, and ticket prices are £25 which include a 2 course Burns supper.

On 25 – 28 October, we welcomed a delegation from our twinned city of Mons to Sefton. The purpose of the visit was to further develop the projects planned for 2026 & 2027. The group visited a rehearsal by Sefton Schools Music Service and visited Salt & Tar to look at the development there, along with the future of the Strand and the Mons Square redevelopment project.

Remembrance Sunday Events took place across the Borough on Sunday, 10 November. All services were very well attended and organised, despite the early rain before the services.

Electoral Services

The annual canvass of the register of electors is now in its final stages before publication of the update 2025 version on the 1 December 2024. Current canvass rules make evaluation difficult to assess compared to previous methods of conducting the canvass, however in the areas that can be measured, there has been a positive 3,5% increase in registrations compared to this time last year.

The review of EU Citizens registration status is also in its final stages and work is about to begin on the review of electors who are currently registered to vote by post. This along with the forthcoming review of polling districts and polling stations following the final recommendations of the Boundary Commission review of Sefton will be the main focus of the electoral services team in the first half of 2025 before preparations start for the all-out elections in May 2026.

Initial work is also starting to look at the new Government manifesto commitments to introduce Votes at 16 and Automatic Voter Registration,

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.

Unfortunately, we have been unable to secure an agency worker to give the team much needed capacity support, however we are now confident after speaking to a supplier that we will be able to do so in the new year. Once appointed to this post will provide day to day operational support to Children's Services freeing up the two permanent Senior Business Partners to focus more on concluding the remaining elements of the restructure and implementing 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.
 - Implementation to the remaining Early Help, Youth Justice, MYSPACE and VAS along with Sefton Safeguarding Partnership and CWCN will be taken to JTU on 11th December with staff consultation and assimilation/recruitment following.
- Reducing Agency
 - Movement of Academy Graduate Teams into vacant posts.
 - New ASYE Academy Teams into Vacant Teams
 - 5.5 FTE Personal Advisor posts filled with agency to permanent conversations, onboarding is ongoing.
 - Appointment to Safeguarding Service Manager and Service Manager CWCN have been made and onboarding is well underway. Both appointments are from staff currently working for Sefton in different roles on an interim basis.
- The posts of Service Manager – Cared for and Cared Experience release of advert has been delayed, considerations are being given to how this post is best filled.
- 2 Schools converted to academies further School set to go in December 2024. 2 other schools remain on the watch list for academisation, although currently 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. 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 hearing.

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 have recently been involved with supporting employing departments with amendments to pay calculations for Auto fitters within Operational in-house services and Term time only contracted Tutors within Community Learning.

A report has been taken to the Joint Trade Union Forum relative to the implications of the Holiday pay entitlement reforms which has been accepted. Work will now progress with Payroll in terms of implementation of the holiday pay reforms and employee communications explaining the revised processes.

The Occupational Health Unit manages the Councils OH provision for Council employees and schools. The unit has contracts with Premier Physical for Physio services, and Listening Ear for Counselling, and CBT services.

The former contract for the provision of OH Dr appointments, and pension assessments has been terminated and a procurement waiver is now in place with an alternative service provider – NATION Occupational Health Services. This provision has now been extended on a trial basis to provide direct Occupational Health Services at the Hawthorn Road Depot within Operational in house services division.

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

Development of iTrent to include PDR's and monthly 1:1/supervision meetings has been implemented and has gone partially live from 4th November 2024. This will be extended to include electronic form completion in 2025. Communication has been shared across the council with targeted messages to managers along with the production of written guidance, instruction videos and several lunchtime live help sessions presented to operational managers. The timing overlap of the build and test period with the PDR schedules this year has meant that the PDR forms for 2024 will be completed outside of the system but managers have been asked to upload completed forms and to report on their teams' objectives within the usual completion period.

Development work to relaunch Managers Self Service (MSS) has been completed and has introduced new desktop reports and dashboards, these allow managers to view their team structure and give them immediately visible detail on temporary arrangement end dates and key visa and right to work end dates. Workflow reminders also prompt managers to be more proactive when managing future expected changes reducing the impact on chasing outstanding actions.

Workforce information and statutory returns continue to be delivered and maintained as BAU alongside FOI data requests. The review of existing Payroll Q&A reports continues ensure final accuracy. Financial workforce data reporting is ongoing to enhance data sharing between iTrent and collaborative planning.

Proposals to commence development using the MS power platform applications (power apps/power automate and Azure functions) have been submitted. Development will follow a structured framework to maintain the integrity and security of systems and data and staff will be required to have attained the relevant qualification status before being authorised to commence any build work. This development work plan will allow us to review processes across Employee support, Recruitment and HR, particularly a replacement ECF process which is currently being scoped. The introduction of new E-forms and automation will bring efficiencies across services.

Development and restructuring of the SharePoint systems used across Employee Support and HR will enable a more efficient and logical more streamlined central data repository of data, THR and Recruitment and Pension teams have already moved with Establishment Control, Payroll and the Development team scheduled in for early 2025.

There are letter backlogs on the recruitment and THR teams due to process and system changes, additional temporary resource has been taken on within the Recruitment team and THR to address the backlog and a plan is in place to ensure this is being brought up to date by the end of March 25. This plan will sit alongside BAU work which is being prioritised.

Knowledge transfer has been rolled out to the Recruitment Team on the Matrix system as they support the administration of the reminders to managers who have agency worker placements coming to an end.

Establishment Control continue to maintain ongoing requests for change but have taken on the administration of the Absence Feeder System for the council and school establishments. EC are also supporting CSC and operational HR with the ongoing restructure of the service, which will mean major changes in the iTrent structures and the Absence Feeder 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) move 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 and Chief Executive was agreed on 22nd October 2024 and was processed for November 2024 pay

The 1st April 2024 pay increase for Councillors has been agreed and will be processed in December 2024 pay

The 1st April 2024 pay increase for Coroners has not yet been agreed.

The 1st September 2024 pay award for Teachers is now agreed and will be processed in December 2024 pay.

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

HMRC came to Sefton 17th September 2024 to discuss National Minimum Wage (NMW) and National Living Wage (NLW) compliance. HMRC have requested a follow up meeting on Friday 22nd November 2024 and HMRC is 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. HMRC have accepted the response from Sefton and Sefton is currently requesting refunds for each financial year from HMRC. Sefton has raised a call with MHR (the payroll software supplier) as the functionality is not working as it should and we continue to overpay for 2024/2025.

Sefton's date for Pension Cyclical Auto Enrolment (every 3 years) is 1st April 2025 so work has started now to implement as required.

12 schools transferred to academies on 1st September 2024 and 5 have requested Sefton continue to provide payroll and pension services. These 5 schools are part of Mersey View Learning Trust.

Health Unit

During the period 1st October to 30th November 2024, a total of 126 referrals for SMBC employees were made to the Health Unit (HU). This is an increase of 28.6% when compared to approximately the same period in the previous 12 months in which there were 98 referrals.

Referrals during this latest period included Education Excellence (42.1%), CSC (13.4%), ASC (11.9%), and Corporate Resources (9.5%). As usual the main reasons were stress and mental health related (47.6%), chronic medical illness (19.8%) and musculoskeletal (18.3%).

Delivery of all the OH services continue to be offered via a mixture of telephone and face-to-face appointments, with the arrangement working successfully, however following an increase in requests, more appointments are taking place face-to-face.

Due to difficulties with performance, the contract with Optima, the organisation providing OH Physician cover, has been mutually terminated. This was facilitated with the assistance of the council's Legal and Procurement teams. Provision of a new Occupational Health provider has been secured through assistance of the Procurement team.

The Health Unit's long-serving OH Nurse retired at the end of November. Following an unsuccessful first round the recruitment and selection process is being used again to secure a replacement. Fortunately, short-term cover has been arranged through the same organisation providing the OH Physician.

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** Youth Worker qualification.

We have 4 cohorts of staff enrolled on the **Level 6 Social Work Apprenticeship Degree** – all are progressing well with their studies, and we have recruited a further 5 apprentices (1 from Adult Social Care and 4 from Children’s Services) who will commence their studies in January 2025. 2 staff from Adult Social Care are due to qualify in January 2025.

Staff enrolled on **Level 6 Occupational Therapy Degree** are progressing well and 2 Senior Managers commenced their studies on the **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. A 2nd second LCR cohort started in September 2024 and 2 managers from Sefton joined this programme.

We have 1 member of staff from the Public Health Team enrolled on the **Level 6 Environmental Health Practitioner Degree** in September 2023 and are continuing to make good progress. A further member of staff joined the September 2024 cohort and is making good progress.

Training and development activities

The Workforce Learning and Development Team continues to deliver a number of training programmes and initiatives. These include:

- **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 249 Sefton Council and school staff.
- **LCRCA Race Equality Training (Embrace)** – The LCR Race Equality Hub will shortly commence a procurement exercise for phase 2 of the Embrace Race Equality Training Programme. This will include the following activity:
 - Further Race Equality face to face training sessions for managers and non-managers.
 - Learning Library, Refreshers, Workbooks, Bite Size e-learning opportunities.
 - Reciprocal mentoring programme for leaders.

- Race equality / Anti racist conferences across the Liverpool City Region.

The programme is expected to go live from 1st April 2025.

- **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 343 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. Delivery will commence for Tier 1 and Tier 2 training from February 2025.
- **Succession Planning** – we are developing a succession planning process to support departments to find people with the right skills to fill key positions. This will include evaluating individual skills and identifying potential successors within and outside the organisation.
- **Adult Social Care** - Staff in the team continue to support Adult Social Care to prepare for CQC inspection. We continue to be fully engaged in the Strategic Workforce and Adult Social Care Improvement Board meetings to ensure workforce activity regarding learning and development needs, recruitment and retention data is captured. We also attend the Quality, Safety and Practice Assurance group with senior managers to respond to any identified learning needs.
- **Children’s services** - We have agreed quarterly meetings with the Principal Social Worker to review and identify training opportunities linked to the transformation programme. This will allow us to refresh the CPD and training priorities going forward which includes working with staff to access Me Learning, the Council’s training booking system.
We recently supported Practice Month by collaborating with colleagues in Children’s services and ensured that session attendance and evaluations have been captured.
- **NQSW/ASYE** - We continue to support our NQSWs (Newly Qualified Social Workers) to complete their ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) and continued progression of our social workers through a panel process.
- **Social Work Teaching Partnership** - We continue to actively participate in several workstreams within the Cheshire and Merseyside Social Work Teaching Partnership as primary members. This brings us many benefits including the opportunity to train up to 20 new Practice Educators and also management training for early career managers.

Strategic Support

Performance & Business Intelligence

The Business Intelligence team continues 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 following extensive consultation and co-production with the council’s Strategic Leadership Board, the first iteration of the new performance report showing performance for Q1 & Q2 2024 is scheduled to be presented to Cabinet in January 2025. 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 continuing to support schools to interpret their 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.

Key areas of focus for December are supporting the ASC CQC inspection scheduled for December/January and supporting detailed analysis of the demand and cost of Children's residential social care, using regression analysis to inform forecasting and predictive modelling.

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 and shared with the Public Engagement and Consultation Panel in November and the Sefton Health and Wellbeing Board in December. 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 and are currently in the process of writing the Panel's Annual Report. In October, the team held another Accessible Information awareness training for elected members. The team are also supporting Adult Social Care prepare some of the CQC inspection materials into accessible formats and have set up a feedback form for service users, carers, and professionals to complete, following their contact with the service.

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. Capacity to demand with the volume and complexity of ASC, CSC and SEND complaints is a current concern, which

poses a risk to achieving statutory compliance and possible reputational damage from customer dissatisfaction with the timeliness of responses.

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 universally across the council, which demand and prioritisation being business led. Previously officers in the team have been aligned to provide project support to each of the four key transformation projects identified under the theme of 'Better outcomes, sustainable services' including 1) CSC, 2) Better at Home, 3) Housing and 4) Operational In-House Services. The OIHS project, looking specifically at waste collection and resource optimisation has been renamed to 'Cleaner Sefton.' The SEND and H2S transport projects have been collapsed into the Children's Services Transformation Programme, with H2S transport now renamed to Transport Support. Children's Services has received additional resources and is in the process of recruiting additional capacity to support the delivery of its transformation intentions.

However, the strategic support team have now been directed to specifically supporting the ASC CQC Inspection, and Children's Services inspection readiness and improvement activity for the 12-week period (3 months) from the 2nd December 2024 to 2nd March 2025, which is likely to continue to the end of the current financial year on the 31st March 2024. Focussing the full capacity in the team to support these two services should help to drive improvement and change at pace in the short-term, but it is expected that in the new financial year the focus will be re-balanced to support the council wider transformation intentions universally across the Council.

Communications

The Communications Service continues to support the leader of the Council, elected members, executive leaders, senior leaders, managers and officers across the Council on all communication matters. The service is making positive progress at pace to develop the Council's internal communication strategy and approach, making significant improvements in addressing cultural differences and barriers to internal communications, developing a culture of sharing information, choosing technology tools strategically to allow distribution of comms across multiple channels to reach all employees quickly and easily and acting on regular feedback. The Service also continues to maximise the impact of social media and new technologies in sharing key messages and engaging with our communities.

The Service continues to provide ongoing communications support relative to aiding the recovery from the unfortunate incidents in Southport in July 2024, including responding quickly to combat the spread of inaccurate or misleading information and 'fake news' intended to cause harm or to stir up racism and hatred against a person or group.

The team is also 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 inspection process.

Moving forward the Service will play an increasingly key role acting as a trusted advisor, navigator and leader in helping to transform our relationship with our residents and communities in Sefton and strengthening our relationships with citizens, stakeholders and staff. To do so we will continue to ensure that our Communications Service has regular access to the leader, chief executive and key decision making forums, whilst developing our corporate communications strategy and annual campaign plan, with an initial focus on developing/improving internal communications. On the back of the Staff Survey 2024 the Service will also play a pivotal role in introducing a new staff recognition scheme for the Council that is fair, fiscally effective and helps employees to understand the value of every role in the Council.

Procurement

The Service continue working updating the Councils' Procurement Strategy and Contract Procedure Rules (CPR) 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 continue to assist in providing guidance on the new Act and promoting best procurement practice within the Council.

The Service continues to develop Council's Contract Register and consider the most appropriate option for the Council to manage its contracts and contract pipeline effectively and transparently to the standard required for PA23 compliance and beyond. The Contracts Pipeline will inform potential suppliers of any upcoming contracts and allow members of the public to see what we plan to spend money on. This will extend to a review and update the Tenders and Contract pages of the Council website in-line with the rollout of the Council's new Contract Procedure rules and are PA23 requirements to make it easier for organizations to 'do business with the Council.' Notwithstanding the additional burdens associated with the implementation of PA23, the Service is continuing to monitor the waivers being raised and intervene where necessary to reduce the number of waivers wherever possible. Furthermore, the Service remains focused on maximising savings opportunities through its early payments programme, and promoting Social Value in procurement.

Finally, the organisational structure of the Procurement Service has been reviewed to ensure it has the necessary capability to support the changes associated with the implementation of PA23, and proposed changes to roles have been shared with the HR Service for consideration.