

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (Regeneration and Skills)		
Councillor Paulette Lappin	Cabinet Member Regeneration, Economy and Skills	21 January 2025

INVESTSEFTON

O& S Update -January 2025-InvestSefton

- The team sadly announced the sudden passing of Julie Swarbrick (Business Growth Adviser) who was a much respected and beloved member of the team Tributes being paid to InvestSefton's Julie Swarbrick - Invest Sefton Invest Sefton
- Approaching businesses 150 attended InvestSefton's Winter Economic Forum event; the event was filmed for free by Mandy Lalley of film and tv production company Space Hound who Julie had assisted and includes a piece from Julie which will provide a lasting legacy to her work in Sefton- https://youtu.be/wJ36uNK_D4A
- InvestSefton continues to support businesses impacted by the incident in Southport on 29th July. Some £158k has been awarded. The team has also organised a recovery event for hospitality businesses on 13th January. Discussions being held with LCR Growth Platform and Southport BID about further events.
- UKSPF extended for 12 months by Government; This includes a 40% reduction and InvestSefton is preparing costings for the final year to continue its business support delivery.
- Current UKSPF contract ends 31 March 2025. Some 14 start ups created by MEH & Safe Regeneration as part of commissioned work from the team. Anonymised Case study below:

Community interest company (CIC) is dedicated to enhancing holistic educational outcomes for young people, helping to address critical issues such as teacher shortages, mental health, and wider skill development. xxxxxx attended a business-start- up event organised by the InvestSefton team in Maghull, and after a conversation with business advisor Brian Dawe, it became clear that a CIC was the best company structure to take her idea forward. After returning from working abroad, Kathryn became aware of the spiralling teacher recruitment and retention crisis which had become a long-standing concern in the UK contributing significantly to many subjects being

covered by unqualified teachers, supply staff and non-specialist teachers. She decided to do something about it. "I am really excited about making a difference in young people's education, and I'm very grateful for the support that I've had from InvestSefton and Safe Regeneration, giving me confidence in my vision and the determination that I will make my business a success."

- Since March 2020 InvestSefton has handled **8,630** enquiries from a wide range of businesses up to 29th November 2024

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Employment & Learning includes the three service areas of Sefton@work, Sefton Adult Community Learning Service and the NEET Reduction and Early Intervention Service (NREIS) together with other associated projects including Building Better Customer Experience and Multiply adult numeracy projects.

All activities within Employment & Learning are externally funded, apart from NREIS.

Summary Position

All programmes are currently operating to programme, within forecast and budget including UKSPF, Restart, Multiply, AEB, Town Deal, NREIS, LCR Mayoral Young Peoples Guarantee and LCR Test & Learn. Any risks to project delivery are understood and mitigated through robust contract management. At present there is low risk of non-compliance or financial clawback from unfavourable audit or inspection. Quality assurance systems are in place including Matrix assessments, Customer Service Excellence standards, individual awarding body standards and the most recent Ofsted inspection rating for SACL was "GOOD" in 2024.

The end of substantive funding for UKSPF which supports numerous staff in Sefton@work has been mitigated with a government announcement of a further year of UKSPF funding for 2025/6. However, there will likely be a reduction in the level of funding and this month the service has been working with the LCr-CA to better understand the implications of this reduction, promoting the continuity of service delivery and retention of trained staff as our priority.

The government's white paper "Get Britain Working" has provided a framework for significant change over the coming years across employment and skills. This includes the announcement of a new devolved scheme for economically inactive people called Connect to Work and a Youth Guarantee trailblazer scheme for 18-21year olds.

Recent Headlines

- Sefton@work continue to work with employers and contractors to identify opportunity for recruitment and training for local residents arising from regeneration projects & inward investment. Projects worked on in this period include The Strand transformation and various planning consents. This work includes promotion of the Caring Business Charter.
- Sefton@work has returned templates to the CA outlining the impact of reduced funding under UKSPF for 25/26. Greater involvement and

engagement in the funding allocation process, to recognise the strategic role of LAs has been requested by the LA Growth Directors group.

- UKSPF solely targets economically inactive people, but in Sefton we have chosen to continue with our “Open Door policy” for any workless Sefton resident seeking support regardless of benefit status.
- LA officers are still expecting to participate in negotiations with LCR-CA about the future shape and requirements of employment support which will impact on future funding available to Sefton@work. However, these arrangements have not yet been outlined.
- Sefton@work is in talks with LCR-CA about Connect2work about how this might operate across Sefton. It's focus is on improving access to work for people who are inactive and in poor health, using experience from previous programmes commissioned by health services such as Individual Placement Support. The guidance from government has made specific reference to the integral role they expect to be played by LAs, with CAs acting as Accountable bodies.
- The new Sefton@work unit in Cambridge Walk, adjacent to the Southport Town Hall has now opened to receive its first clients. A formal opening is being prepared for February 2025.
- Sefton@Work are pleased that we have again passed our annual Matrix assessment including the new assessment criteria that features health & wellbeing being a core focus.
- The Freeport Extension Fund allocation for Phase 2 of the refurbishment works for Cambridge Road Community learning hub has been secured and work is underway to commence this project. Workstreams for this project include the specification of work, procurement of a suitable contractor, oversight of works, Cambridge Kitchen concept, ICT upgrade and identification of appropriate new tenants.
- Adult Community Learning is supporting a range of community events and engagement sessions across the Borough to promote starts on the new courses commencing in January 2025.
- Sefton@work held a training showcase in the Strand unit to encourage any Sefton residents of any age to be more aware of the range of local offers across the range of providers. This was well attended by both providers and residents, many of whom had previously not used Sefton@work.
- Recent effort to secure waged placements for care experienced young people engaging with Sefton@work has been successful. This has made a positive impact on the NEET rate of this group but is funded by UKSPF and will therefore conclude in March 25. A financial and benefit analysis will be conducted in the New year and shared with colleagues in Children's services for their consideration.

- Work on the September Guarantee has now completed and Career Connect staff are in the process of analysing the cohort to identify those children most in need of targeted, additional support.
- A member of staff from Career Connect, Katie Enstone, has won a prestigious national award for Frontline Adviser of the Year for the exceptional work she has done for the SEND group in Sefton.
- The proportion of our young people with complex needs and deemed At Risk of Becoming NEET has increased significantly, putting extreme pressure on the capacity of this service to meet demands for intensive support needed to re-engage in learning and work. For example, the Elective Home Educated group is now more than twice the baseline figure when we first commenced the contract with Career Connect. We will present an analysis of this to Cabinet Member when all the data is available in the new year of 2025.
- The latest reported data available on 16/17 NEET rates from October 24 indicates that Sefton has the lowest rate of NEET across the LCR, is performing considerably better than regional and national averages and was ranked as 4th best compared to all other LAs in the country. In October 2024 we were also ranked lowest NEET amongst our 10 statistical neighbours.

REGENERATION SERVICE

The Regeneration Service continue to lead and support the Growth and Strategic Investment Programme for Sefton Council by helping to deliver several key Council priority projects across Sefton and also assisting where relevant on external partner led projects. In addition, the team manage the monitoring and reporting for a range of externally funded capital and revenue grant funding programmes.

Southport Town Deal

A range of projects are being supported through Southport Town Deal and form part of the Southport Town Deal programme for generating economic growth.

Marine Lake Events Centre

The Marine Lake Events Centre demolition work is progressing. Significant Utility diversions have been completed ahead of schedule - this has included Dowhigh, the Council's term contractor completing major water/sewerage diversions to allow future sheet piling works. DSM have been appointed to carry out the demolition and enabling works.

The demolition of the Southport Theatre Convention Centre is now over 80% complete with the theatre element demolished, and just the offices and meeting rooms near to the hotel party wall remaining. Works to salvage the historic items has also been completed. Trial pits 13m deep have commenced, and the removal of recyclable materials is underway.

The demolition and enabling works will continue until early 2025. The main contractor procurement has been completed, this will be announced shortly with the contractor entering into a PCSA with the main contract then starting on site in 2025 once demolition and enabling works have been completed by DSM.

Enterprise Arcade

The Enterprise Arcade made considerable progress this year following the start in site in January 2024 by the appointed contractor Skyline. Refurbishment of Crown Buildings in Southport's town centre for a new business hub is a key Town Deal project and will be the first ever purpose-built workspaces for start-up creative and digital businesses in Southport.

External works are now complete, and scaffolding has been removed. Works are progressing well with the main contract and are expected to complete early in the new year. The fitting of the lift has commenced, with major structural alterations to the ground floor retail and food and beverage design well underway. Work is progressing on developing the operational management for the facility once works are complete. Discussions are progressing with potential tenants for the facility.

Les Transformation de Southport

The first phase of transportation improvements, focusing on the area around Southport Market – Kings Street, Market Street, Eastbank Street. Market Street and Eastbank Street is progressing. This exciting project should help transform this area of the town centre by updating and improving the quality of the public realm and improving directional signage. Balfour Beatty have been appointed as the contractor for this project and construction works programme is due to start in 2025 and are expected to last through to the Autumn of 2025. Letters explaining the works have been sent to all local businesses and Ward Members.

Stakeholder engagement and liaison is ongoing to ensure disruption is minimised and phasing does not affect business operation. The Contractor has held a meet the contractor event for businesses. Stakeholder engagement and liaison is ongoing to ensure disruption is minimised and phasing does not affect business operation. The Contractor has held a meet the contractor event for businesses. A programme of consultation has been determined for a second scheme centred around the Promenade and MLEC site.

Building a Better Customer Experience

This key training programme has been operation for a year now and is progressing well.

The pilot of the Building Better Customer Experience Training with Southport College has now been completed, in total 212 learners have now participated in the programme including 22 different businesses participating with Southport College. The feedback has been very positive with Southport College. Training for volunteers and workless people through Sefton's Adult & Community Learning service is also proposed as part of this pilot programme. The course information has been featured in the Community Learning Service Summer prospectus, reaching approximately 70,000 households, expanding the courses visibility.

Southport Cove – The Esplanade

An Exclusivity Agreement is in place with GSL the team behind the Cove Resort proposals for the Esplanade site in Southport. The agreement gives GSL 18 months to work on the details of the scheme and prior to agreement from the Council on any future lease arrangement for development of the site. GSL are progressing planning discussions and all matters relating to delivery of the project on this site.

BOOTLE

Bootle Strand Repurposing

Progressing design development and programme for implementation of Phase 1 of Bootle Strand transformation project following approval of £20M by MHCLG.

The first phase of delivery work, which is building on the Salt and Tar events space will involve selective demolition of part of the centre, provide a new town square and landscaping down to the canal side and involve the repurposing of the former M&S unit for retail, community, health and leisure uses.

Following appointment of Vinci Build UK as demolition contractor, enabling works and utility diversions are progressing now on site to enable demolition early in 2025.

The main works planning application for Phase 1 was submitted in October following detailed consultation with over 570 people about the Strand Transformation Project. Demolition works are expected in March/April 2025. The planning application includes details on the creation of a new town square and landscaping work to better connect the shopping centre with the existing Salt and Tar site, as well as the canalside. This has been shaped by the Council's consultation and engagement exercise from people who reside, work or visit the area. Changes will include more green spaces and community areas, and changes to the former M&S building, with plans to repurpose the shop into six individual units and a community space. Sefton Council has released a CGI video showcasing its ambitious redevelopment plans for Bootle Strand, which can be accessed using the following link: [New CGI video is chance to fly through visionary Bootle Strand plans](#)

Further information on MySefton news link: [Next step for Bootle's transformation unveiled as planning application is submitted](#)

The full planning application for the next steps for the Strand is [available to view online](#).

Bootle Regeneration

Work is ongoing on the Bootle Area Action Plan (AAP) which is expect this to be submitted for examination in 2025. The AAP sets the land-use planning context to inform, direct and permit investment and development the wider Bootle area. People can find out more about the Bootle Strand scheme on the Council's website [Bootle Strand](#) .

AINSDALE ON SEA

Ainsdale Coastal Gateway - Ainsdale Beach Improvement Works

Following conversations with residents, community groups and previous wider consultation on this area, the Council undertook to update the vision for this key coastal gateway in response to the feedback received. The Council appointed specialist planning and development consultancy Turley's, to undertake a feasibility study for the coastal gateway. Officers are working on a review of the key assets in the area including The Sands, Toad Hall, Council operational bases, and options for their development/delivery.

Ainsdale Neighbourhood Centre, Sandbrook Way – In February 2023 Cabinet considered the next stage of work to bring this centre into full Council ownership, including continuing negotiations with outstanding owners. Further completions of additional properties have taken place recently. This leaves a few remaining properties to be acquired. Efforts are ongoing to bring the remaining ownerships into Council control. Parallel to this process, agents have been appointed to continue to market the site to support the Council's ambitions for change and redevelopment of this site. Expressions of interest are continuing to come forward and lines of enquiry explored further with the market, and members are being updated on progress.

Former Sands Public House, Shore Road, Ainsdale.

Sefton Council went out to the market for the former Sands Public House in Ainsdale (Opposite Pontins) following soft market testing that indicated a sufficient level of interest to encourage a formal marketing of the site. Sefton is considering and assessing responses received and carrying out further discussion with parties who have expressed an interest, as part of ongoing due diligence. Marketing of the site continues (Marketing Website link: [Shore Road, Ainsdale, PR8 | Fitton Estates](#))

MAGHULL

Maghull Health Park

MerseyCare are continuing to work with Sefton Council to develop plans for a Mental Health Digital Research and Innovation Centre at Maghull Health Park. Building on the significant investment in the site to date by MerseyCare to this site - Europe's largest concentration of complex secure mental health services and sector leading clinical excellence for serious mental illness. Phase 1 of this health park development will look to bring forward a world class Mental Health Digital Research Centre, a landmark centre of excellence for digital mental health research in Sefton.

The proposals under development include plans for a business park of 320,000sqft for medical research, technology and data occupier space which will anchor the development of a new regionally significant 10 ha Health Park.

The site forms part of the successful LCRCA bid for Life Sciences Investment Zone funding approved in March 2024 to develop and life sciences cluster in the region and will safeguard 1800 jobs currently on site and develop 1270 new jobs, training, research and product development opportunities as well as attracting private sector investment. It will also help to address health deprivation and economic inactivity in Sefton and wider region.

The Investment Zone status offers a number of tax reliefs to business looking to locate within the Health Park, making it a more attractive investment location. Tax incentives to locating within investment zone including Business Rates, Stamp Duty

Land Tax (SDLT), Employer National Insurance Contributions (NICs), Enhanced Structures and Building Allowance, and Enhanced Capital Allowances. There will be a 5-10 year programme of support. (Until 30th September 2034).

Discussions are underway with LCRCA regarding predevelopment funding for this project.

TOURISM

Destination Marketing

Destination Campaign – Due to the current impacts in Southport it was decided to run an extended Christmas Campaign, match funding was secured from UKSPF. Working with Marketing Southport and Southport BID the campaign focused on the key Christmas activity taking place in Southport along with a focus on the BID events and Christmas illuminations.

An evaluation of the campaign will take place looking at footfall and spend data to see if Christmas created a pick up in business for Southport.

PR – our agency continues to produce releases and listicles to support other elements of the marketing campaign. Pick-up on the latest (Christmas) release has been very good with it featuring on Yahoo and MSN as well as with regional media.

E-newsletter - Database stands at circa 58,000 with the addition of 2024 data and regular newsletters are sent to this audience (the latest being as part of the autumn campaign).

Golf – We continue to work with EGC and receive reports from them for Marketing Southport board meetings. We are currently finalising the 'England's Golf Coast' trademark agreement.

Marketing Southport – membership currently stands at 106

Events

Southport Food & Drink Festival – 30th & 31st May, 1st June

- Application forms for street food, bars, producers and exhibitors have been sent, the closing date is February 2025.
- The event will be in the same format as previous years
- New elements of the festival are being researched to look at growing the event for 2025.

Southport Air Show – 30th & 31st August

- The Flying Display Management Company have submitted the forms for Military aircraft requests which will be announced early this year.

- Other civilian aircraft are being approached for availability and quotes
- Due to high tides only a June or the August date was available.

British Musical Fireworks Championship – 27th & 28th September

- The event will take place on Saturday & Sunday this year and not Friday & Saturday as in the previous years. This is due to historic figures showing that the Sunday has predominantly been busier than the Friday.
- 2025 is the Champion of Champions year where the last 6 winners are invited back to compete against each other.

MLEC

- The demolition contractor DSM have been on site since July 2024. They commenced with soft strip out and asbestos removal and are now nearly complete with the demolition of the STCC.
- DSM are also responsible for the works on the party wall to disconnect from the hotel. Works are underway and due to be completed in 2025.
- Over the last few months, the procurement process to appoint a main contractor has been progressing and the preferred contractor, legals are now completed and the contractor will be announced shortly.
- As part of the MLEC Project and leading on Social Value alongside Project Management Consultants Gardiner & Theobald we continue to engage with several sectors of the community with various initiatives and events.

Salt & Tar

- Work continued to refine and shape the 2025 event programme for Salt and Tar, being mindful of the demolition work on The Strand.
- Already announced The K's, the first headline act for the next music festival in 2025 to take place over 8th – 10th August 2025, only a few hundred tickets remain.
- Billy Ocean has also been secured as the second headline act, tickets sold out within two days. A third headliner will be announced this month.
- Other events will include a new Fringe Festival that will incorporate the Bootle Comedy Festival, tickets are on sale and selling well.

PROPERTY SERVICES

The Property Services Department are a multi-Disciplinary team delivering various services, professional advice and initiatives across the Borough of Sefton. Below are some examples of ongoing pieces of work throughout the department.

Asset Management

- Ongoing work to deliver the approved Asset Disposal phases.
- Developing an overarching disposal/utilisation proposal.
- Assisting with the SEND programme.
- Ongoing work supporting Growth Board projects.
- Ongoing work in connection to lease agreements.
- Delivered work in connection with the Southport Recovery (this spans across all areas of property).

Maintenance Management, Building Services & FM

- Delivering a range of schemes in support of Corporate Buildings.
- Delivering a range of schemes in support of Education Capital & SEND programme.
- Delivery of reactive maintenance and statutory compliance services to Corporate and Educational buildings.
- Professional advice and support on a broad range of regeneration programmes.
- Phase 1 essential maintenance delivery plan for corporate buildings progressing with works nearing completion.
- Phase 2 essential maintenance – Funding secured with programme underway.
- Asset survey delivery plan in train.
- Delivering services in support of major adaptation to vulnerable and disabled residents.
- Phase 2 Corporate Landlord approval received with programme now in development.

Project Management

- Provide professional support to Growth Board on several projects.
- Project delivery for various Education capital & SEND schemes.
- Provide support to other teams on Asset Disposal, Building Maintenance, Asset Management, Energy and Statutory Compliance colleagues.

Energy Management

- Management of the Council's gas, electricity and water portfolio, procurement, contract management and billing management
- Energy and water efficiency works across the portfolio – council buildings, schools and care homes.
- Retrofit of Council buildings – insulation and low carbon heating (via external funding)
- Sefton Council Retrofit programme – Delivering large scale government funded programmes ; Providing insulation to privately owned properties for the worst insulated homes/ low income residents.
- Delivering services in support of affordable warmth to residents. Team now called Healthy Greener Homes
- Managing the Council's Climate Emergency programme to drive action across all departments.

- Southport Eco Centre educating children and delivering 'eco focused' programmes of work.
- Making funding applications to support Retrofit of domestic homes, Retrofit of Council buildings, affordable warmth, Eco Centre delivery.