

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (Highways and Housing)

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Cabinet Member
Regeneration and Skills

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STRATEGIC TRANSPORT

The current Strategic Transport initiatives aren't specifically set out in this update but clearly there is a link to the development of Transport and Highway schemes. Current initiatives and areas of work include;

- Agreement of a Pipeline of projects for CRSTS2 with the LCRCA following their assessment.
- Work with the CA on the development of the Local Transport Plan 4– now out to consultation.
- Low Carbon Transport Position Statement
- Carbon Assessment work on training of staff.
- Consultation on the development of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan
- Development of an EV Charging policy and roll out of EV infrastructure.
- Use of the agreed process for Engagement and Consultation on Transport Schemes.
- Supporting Public Transport development and access.

Highway Schemes

The development and delivery of highway schemes is undertaken by the Council' Design team supported by the Council's Transport Technical Support Services providers, WSP and Atkins. Efforts are underway to recruit to increase in house resource.

Business Case Schemes

- **Maritime Corridor Scheme**

This scheme involves the delivery of some highway improvements between and including A5036 Dunnings Bridge Road, A59 Ormskirk Road. It was identified by Members as a priority in 2016, the CA approved a Strategic Outline Case in 2018 and an Outline Business Case in 2020. The scheme also includes active travel and safety improvements and has been considered and reviewed by Active Travel England. It is one of the larger schemes in the current CRSTS programme and has attracted funding from the Levelling Up Fund. The funds allocated to the scheme are £21.2m and these need to be expended by March 2027, with the £9.5m LUF by March 2025 (although it is accepted that this won't be expended in its entirety).. The LUF Business Case has been approved, the CA have completed a Gateway Review and approved the CRSTS allocation to deliver the first Phase of work and a Grant

Funding Agreement signed. The Business Case has been approved and a GFA is being compiled for Phase 2 funding. Phase 1 of construction is now on site.

Main actions since last time:

- Section 6 agreement signed with National Highways.
- Contract signed for Phase 1 and works commenced.
- Lease details agreed with Netherton Park
- Comms strategy enacted, letters sent out and social media information produced.
- Social Value Action Plan put into place.
- Business Case approved and discussions held with CA over GFA for Phase 2
- Cabinet report setting out Acquisition strategy agreed.

Main Actions before next update:

- Works progress on site within agreed Traffic management regime for Phase 1.
- GFA for Phase 2 works received and signed.
- Programme to be developed for Phase 2.
- Remaining design of Phase 2 to commence.
- Statement for Reasons for CPO to be developed and approved
- Letters to be sent to all Internal land transfers re the CPO position confirming the intention to acquire land by negotiation.

- **Southport Eastern Access Scheme:**

This scheme involves the delivery of some highway improvements to reduce congestion on the eastern approaches to Southport. Like the Maritime Corridor, it was identified by Members as a priority in 2016, the CA approved a Strategic Outline Case in 2018 and an Outline Business Case in 2020. The scheme also includes active travel and safety improvements as well as traffic mitigation measures to help address potential changes in traffic patterns resulting from the reopening of Foul Lane. The scheme is wholly CRSTS funded with £19.97m allocated. This needs to be expended by March 2027. The Business Case has been approved by the LCRCA. Phase 1 of construction is programmed for starting on site in January 2025.

Main Actions since last time:

- GFA signed and agreed.
- Contract signed.
- L&R Committee has considered and approved changes to the highway.
- Social Value Action Plan agreed in principle.
- Sustrans have presented the work that they have completed with the schools in Norwood.
- Comms strategy enacted, letters sent out and social media information produced.
- Information collated for Planning Approval,
- Cabinet report setting out Acquisition strategy agreed.

Main Actions before next update:

- Works commence on site.

- Social Value Action Plan signed off.
- Programme to be developed for Phase 2.
- Design work to be progressed for the Norwood mitigation measures.
- Statement for Reasons for CPO to be developed and approved
- Letters to be sent to all Internal land transfers re the CPO position confirming the intention to acquire land by negotiation

Corridor or Area Wide Improvements

- **A59/Kenyon's Lane Junctions and Corridor:**

This is part of a wider scheme is aimed at creating cycle facilities along the A59 corridor linking facilities in West Lancs with Switch Island and beyond whilst improving pedestrian and cycle accessibility across the A59 at key junctions. The CA received a Strategic Outline Case for the whole corridor but agreed that the improvements should be delivered in Phases. This phased focusses on the section from Dodds Island to Robins Island and creates a new CYCLOPs junction at Kenyon's Lane.

Main Actions since last time:

- Dowhigh Ltd have started work focussing on some additional survey work.
- A meeting has been held with Lydiate Parish Council with the aim of agreeing the details of the change of lease and the mitigation and boundary treatment measures.
- Temporary road closures of Kenyon's Lane have been approved.

Main Actions before next update:

- Continued work on site.
- Deed of variation for the lease to be agreed with Lydiate Pariah Council.
- Continued engagement of scheme progression to stakeholders and ward members.

- **A59/Dodds Lane Junction**

A further part of the wider scheme includes reviewing this junction from a safety and accessibility perspective with a view to improvements to the junction forming part of the next phase of work.

Main Actions since last time:

- Options for improvement received.

Main Actions before next update:

- Preferred option to be reviewed and discussed with Cabinet Member.
- Prelim design work and survey work commissioned

- **A565/ Woodvale junction**

This scheme aims to introduce active travel improvements through the junction to enable the previous improvement work to link with the Coastal Road and TransPennine Trail. Consultation has been completed Further preliminary and outline

design work is continuing on the section from Southport Road and through Ince Woods.

Main Actions since last time:

- WSP completing a design review using Active Travel England's Toolkit

Main Actions before next update:

- Design review to be completed.
- Prelim design fee to be agreed,
- Scheme details, to be finalised with report submitted in March to L&R.
- Further CM Update before L&R

- **A565 Wider Corridor improvements**

Works is progressing looking at the continuation of an active travel link southwards from Southport Road to Thornton including access improvement work at the various junctions. An offline route has been identified through Ince Woods and negotiations are ongoing with landowners.

Main Actions since last time:

- Assessment work reviewed and scope of further work discussed and agreed.
- Scope of work required at Southport Roundabout and link to Altcar Lane discussed.
- Initial plans for new commercial development proposed for North of Formby reviewed and proposal identified for possible link to the Formby Industrial estate.
- Outline plans agreed for North End Lane junction to address the safety issue.
- Junction with Scaffold Lane reviewed.

Main Actions before next update:

- Further discussions with landowners over Ince Woods route
- Design brief for A
- Initial land search for Formby Industrial estate.
- Design brief to be completed for the Scaffold Land junction to potentially be delivered using local safety scheme funding
- Further discussion around LCWIP to feed into development of schemes

- **Green Bus Corridor:**

The LCRCA commissioned consultants to develop and appraise options for potential bus priority measures commence works on a number of routes in the City Region, including the No 53 bus corridor which travels between Crosby and Liverpool, including Stanley Road. Officers have reviewed the works undertaken and provided comments.

Main Actions since last time:

- No further formal update – currently awaiting LCRCA's confirmation that they are seeking consultancy support to model and develop the design

Main Actions before next update:

- To be held with LCRCA to further understand their intentions for the corridor.
- **Great Georges Road:**

Much of the work (Phase 1) was delivered some time ago. The final design for the remaining work has been completed.

Main Actions since last time:

- Additional re-paving works outside the Hotel have been completed

Main Actions before next update:

- Completion of the works including reinstatement of compound area

Town Centre Schemes

- **Les Transformation Phase 1**

The Business Case Submission for the Southport Town Deal identified a series of public realm and accessibility projects in Southport Town Centre under the term 'Les Transformation de Southport'. Phase 1 is focussed around Southport Market with works proposed for Market Street, King Street and Eastbank Street. The scheme includes £2.5m from the Southport Town Fund with the remainder 5m from CRSTS. A contractor has been appointed and works are programmed for starting on site in January 25.

Main Actions since last time:

- The tender cost has been agreed.
- A CM report which adds funds to the budget has been approved.
- The works contract has been signed.
- Testing has been completed on the existing foundations.
- Businesses and other stakeholders to receive an update.
- A drop in session has been held with businesses.
- Social Value Plan agreed in principle.

Main Actions before next update:

- Th trial panel will be completed.
- Works commence on site.
- The Social Value Plan will be enacted.

- **Les Transformation Phase 2**

Further to the above, the need for public realm improvements improvement on the Promenade around the MLEC building to complement this scheme and improve accessibility to the town centre for cyclists and pedestrians has been identified.

Main Actions since last time:

- Agreement reached with the MLEC team over the details proposed outside the building to feed into the
- Informal discussions held with the LCRCA over possible funding over and above the current CRSTS 1 allocation.

- Consultation proposals discussed in principle

Main Actions before next update:

- Consultation plans developed and taken Cabinet Member and Ward Members.
- Surveys, traffic counts to be completed.
- Prelim design brief to be compiled.
- Likely phasing of works to be firmed up.

- **Chapel Street and North- South Cycle route**

The Southport BID and others are keen that Chapel Street be reviewed and some improvement works initiated. There is also a commitment, identified in the report recommending the retain of the current north-south cycle scheme in Southport that consideration be given to a more permanent improvements scheme which does incorporate walking and cycling improvements.

Main Actions since last time:

- Works orders for some minor decluttering near the station entrance.
- Further review of the possible short term measures undertaken following the review by WSP.

Main Actions before next update:

- Decluttering works commenced.
- Agreement to be reached on scope of work on Chapel Street over and above the decluttering.
- Review to be undertaken of the timing of consultation on the N-S cycle route.

- **Scarisbrick Avenue:**

This public realm improvement scheme, linked with the Southport Townscape Heritage initiative, was largely completed in 2023. There are some remedial and enhancement works to be completed following a review. These are programmed

Main Actions since last time:

- Discussions have been held with the contractor regarding a return to site however due to capacity issues within the design team and other delivery priorities the timescales for delivery have slipped.

Main Actions before next update:

- Revised timescales for delivery to be agreed
- Ward Member updates to be set out.

- **Birkdale Village Improvements**

This is a pedestrian access and safety improvement scheme in Birkdale Village funded from the CRSTS1 programme. Some additional assessment work has been completed in Birkdale and an assessment process undertaken.

Main Actions since last time:

- Tender documents completed

Main Actions before next update:

- Tender documents sent out
- Construction programme agreed and Ward Members updated

- **Crosby Town Centre Improvement Works**

Highway works aimed at improving accessibility were completed in late 2023 funded by CRSTS1. Public realm works to introduce higher quality paving are currently being implemented. Further design work has been programmed to redesign the car parks.

Main Actions since last time:

- Final Account agreed.

Main Actions before next update:

- Agreement to be reached on whether the car park modification design (and implementation) works to be delivered.

- **Thornton Improvement Works**

A number of issues have been raised by residents, schools and the Parish Council re traffic and safety concerns in Thornton. These have been reviewed and an Action Plan developed.

Main Actions since last time:

- A Programme of implementation work has been determined.
- Initial design work commenced on Drummond Road element of the scheme.

Main Actions before next update:

- The Drummond Road design work will be completed and signal changes at a couple of junctions determined.

- **Bootle Town Centre – Works supporting the Strand development**

Work had been designed and procured to ensure the Strand Service Road can operate from Vermont Way thus enabling a section to be closed and demolition to take place. The design team are reviewing a longer-term plan to create an improved access arrangement which will be completed once demolition has been undertaken. This will involve modifications to one of the car parks and some work on the service road from Washington Parade

Main Actions since last time:

- Detailed discussions held with the Strand Team over demolition programme and interface with highway works with a demolition start date of March 2025 through to Autumn 2025.
- Initial progress on the WSP commission to undertake the Preliminary Design for the revised car park exit onto Vermont Way and the subsequent changes

to the proposed signal junction and the Service Road works off Washington Parade.

- Informal discussions on highway issues including those impacting on Planning Applications.
- Action Plan developed for Bramley Moor Dock and enhancing links with Everton.
- Costs established for developing a possible residents parking scheme in Sefton on matchday.
- Discussion held with LCRC re potential transport funding for Bootle in CRSTS2.

Main Actions before next update:

- Design work to be progressed on all aspects of the enabling works.
- Delivery Programme for the enabling works to be agreed following discussions with the demolition contractor as to what works can be carried out during the demolition.
- Initial costs to be developed to check against transport allocation.
- Action Plan for Everton links to be further developed and actions re bus operation and matchday parking to be progressed.
- Masterplan exercise to be developed over possible links between bus station, train station and Strand.

- **Walkable Stanley Road**

Freshfield Foundation agreed to fund a pilot study to identify a series of measures aimed at encouraging and enabling walking in Bootle to tie in with other initiatives. The Consultants, Urban Movement initially identified 48 possible interventions for further consideration and development.

Main Actions since last time:

- Final report to be drafted by Urban Movement, with a particular focus on linking the defined actions to a 'school neighbourhoods' approach (i.e., road safety / safer routes to school focus) and reverting back to a 'Bootle-wide' scale.
- Priority list to be developed for potential early interventions.

Main Actions before next update:

- Final report to be reviewed.

- **School Neighbourhoods Work:**

Two schemes have been delivered on the three School Street Pilot schemes in Southport. The further scheme, at Stanley High School is subject to further consultation before implementation later in 2024. Engagement work has been undertaken with 5 other schools in the south of the borough and one school street scheme implemented. Work also progressed with schools in Norwood ward impacted on by the Southport eastern access scheme.

Main Actions since last time:

- Continued work progressing with 5 schools in South of the borough (at varying stages of development).

- Work completed in Norwood Ward and reviewed.
- Work commenced on the development of the School Neighbourhood area (involving up to five schools and the local community) in Bootle, using ATE Capability Fund and secured from the Freshfield Foundation..

Main Actions before next update:

- Further school engagement and programme of interventions to be developed.
- Stanley High zebra crossings and new cycle parking on the school grounds to be completed.
- Reconsider previous school prioritisation process to determine additional schools to engage, in line with appropriate funding availability/opportunities.

Local Safety Schemes

The Local Safety Schemes in the Transport Capital Programme include interventions at Northern Road (Gt Crosby), Hawthorne Road and Prescot Road. These schemes have all been subject to consultation and approved by L&R Committee and are at different stages of development. The programme for 24-25 is being developed.

Main Actions since last time:

- Prescot Road works complete, however additional road marking works are required for the roundabout.
- Northern Road puffin crossing completed.
- Hawthorn Road works completed,
- Designs completed and consultation completed for 3 the proposed zebra crossing locations.

Main Actions before next update:

- L&R to consider approval of 2 new zebra crossings.
- Further consideration to be given to Brownmoor Lane.

Highways Development Control

The Highways DC team is currently under pressure from a significant number of applications and legal agreements requiring input. To assist the team, recruitment is ongoing to boost resources. The Council's Transport Technical Support Services providers provide specialist advice, WSP and Atkins. The team is also dealing with high workloads for highway searches, street naming and numbering, Public Rights of Way and highway adoption queries.

Planning Applications

- A total of 131 applications have been responded to in the 3 month period between October and December. This number is based on per planning application and does not include the numerous responses that are provided for a particular planning application (there can be typically up to 5 responses for a major planning application and ones with significant highway issues, sometimes more). A lot of staff time has also been spent on Council regeneration proposals that have been submitted to Planning.

Section 38 Highways Act 1980 legal agreements

- Submissions for s38 agreements have continued requiring the subsequent processing of these at times, lengthy and complex applications, particularly following the approval of planning applications for Local Plan sites. This is exacerbated by developments being split into different phases/agreements which takes a lot longer to process than if everything was considered in a single agreement for a development. Staff leave in the design team is also impacting on delivery due to limited resources.
- The report is as follows:
 - No of live s38 and current developments subject to a s38 application – 46
 - No of stalled or no activity (on the part of a developer) – 2 where the developer appears to have ceased trading.
 - Number of development sites adopted within the last 3 months - 0
 - No of submissions awaiting technical approval – 33
 - Number of new and recent submissions awaiting administrative set up – 0

Section 278 Highways Act 1980 legal agreements

- The numbers of this type of application also remains high, including the approval of planning applications for Local Plan sites. The team are currently managing 74 live full s278 HA 1980 highway works schemes in various stages of development on behalf of the Council plus 27 minor s278 agreements. The successful delivery of these schemes is dependent on close liaison with the Legal, Finance and Planning Departments. Staff leave in the design team is also impacting on delivery due to limited resources.

Winter Maintenance

- To date (6th January) we have gritted the carriageways on 19 occasions and the footways 4 times.
- Regular financial reports are now being produced to monitor expenditure against budget and information will be shared with Cabinet Member in the monthly briefings.
- The new LCR Contract for Forecasting and Bureau Services is due to go out to tender in the next few weeks with a new contractor being appointed before the current contract expires in July. Having an LCR contract provides savings to each individual Authority.

Quarterly Update Highways Maintenance December 2024

- Since 1st April 2024 which coincides with the start of the new financial year, planned & routine maintenance operations are progressing well and in accordance with allocated programming timeframes.
- To date key maintenance improvements have been completed which include the following:
- Completion of carriageway Surface Dressing programme which is a recognised preventative type of treatment covering approximately **7,000m²** of carriageway, inclusive of road markings totalling **£518,000.00**.

- Resurfacing which involves the removal of one or more surfacing layers in the carriageway has been completed, totalling approximately **90,000 M2** with a spend value of **£3,267,000.00**.
- Routine safety inspections continue to operate daily which identifies isolated defects and repairs in accordance with the council's safety inspection policies and other industry guidelines, The volume and value of work does fluctuate monthly, current invoiced values associated with these reactive working operations is totalling **£1,400,000.00**.
- In support of the council's routine safety inspection responsibilities and reactive repairs, approximately **900M2** of footway has been improved through extended patching operations with a spend value of **£60,000.00**.
- Other maintenance operations including grass cutting, gully cleansing and road marking upgrades continue which has a current spend value nearing **£1,200,000.00**.

PLANNING SERVICES

The Planning Service is set up to operate the Council's regulatory functions in relation to the development and use of land. The report looks at key areas of activity and successes over the past 3 – 6 months and challenges for the few months ahead.

A Planning Services Charter was published in May 2024 [Planning Services Charter 2024 \(sefton.gov.uk\)](https://sefton.gov.uk). This sets out our values, our service standards, our priorities and how we are accountable.

1. Development Management

- Numbers of planning applications have reduced to below pre-Covid levels
- 100% of Major and Minor applications were determined 'in time' between October - December 2024 (targets 60 & 65% respectively), and 98% of 'Other' applications (mainly householder; target 60%)
- This high level of performance is dependent on staff agreeing 'Extensions of Time'. We are actively seeking ways to improve performance without the need to seek EoTs although this is more difficult for 'Majors' which are often complex and require more time to address key planning issues.

Key Challenges

- In December 2024, the Government confirmed a significantly higher housing target for Sefton. This could lead to applications for planning permission for housing on land within the current Green Belt. The anticipated rise in applications will put pressure on staff resources.
- We regularly receive proposals for children's homes which are often difficult to resist purely on planning grounds but pose challenges corporately. We are working closely with colleagues in Children's Social Services to improve how we respond to these proposals.
- Securing timely responses from statutory consultees, in particular some of our internal consultees.

2. Building Control

- The Building Control Team continues to meet its key statutory targets in relation to plan-checking, carrying out of site inspections and percentage applications given full or conditional approval.
- The Team's market share remains just above the national average for local authority building control teams.
- Towards the end of 2024, Building Control held interviews for two vacant permanent Building Control Officer positions - one officer started with the Team in early October and the other in November. One member of staff remains on long-term sickness absence.

Key Challenges

- The Team is struggling to meet its locally set plan-checking targets, due to long-term staff absence. As a temporary measure, a consultant has been engaged to assist with plan checking. As the Team comes back to full establishment, that temporary arrangement will come to an end and it is expected that plan checking performance levels are likely to improve.
- One of the biggest challenges is the implementation of the Building Safety Act, which requires all Building Control Bodies and their individual team members to undergo an assessment of competency. Approximately half of the Team has now been successfully assessed and it is hoped the rest will be successfully assessed over the first half of 2025.
- The Building Control Team is due to be assessed by the newly established Building Safety Regulator sometime in 2025 - in order to confirm they can continue to operate as a Building Control Body. Work is currently being undertaken by the Team to ensure the assessment is successful – such as ensuring the annual ISO 9001 Quality Assurance internal audits are all completed.

3. Local Planning

- The government have recently updated the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the way they calculate local authority's housing requirements. This has given Sefton a housing requirement of 1,368 per year.
- This means that Sefton has a much reduced supply of developable land and now leaves us exposed to housing proposals on sites they we may have been able to previously resist.
- The government has ordered every Council to set out a timetable for a new Local Plan. The timetable should be submitted by 6 March 2025.
- A report on the updated NPPF, housing numbers and possible Local Plan timetable is going to members in the next few weeks.
- A number of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) have recently been adopted (in December). These are:
 - Boundary Treatments
 - Short Term Holiday Lets
- Additional SPDs are being progressed to secure developer contributions towards visitor infrastructure in Southport; to manage proposals for conversions to Children's Care Homes; an update of the current Nature and Affordable Housing SPDs; and a city region approach to mitigation at the coast from new housing developments.

- Bootle Area Action Plan - The publication draft of the AAP was approved in July and was published for public comment from 13th September to 11th November 2024. This was submitted to the Secretary of State for examination on 16th December 2024. If hearings are needed, it is expected that these will be in late Winter/Spring 2025.
- The Local Plan team are also helping to support the CA in developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which is due to be published in January 2025.

Key challenges

- Responding to questions and preparing evidence for the Bootle AAP examination
- Dealing with the implications and making plans for a new Local Plan under the emerging planning system and higher housing requirement.
- Finalising and engaging on a range of Supplementary Planning Documents.

4. Heritage and Conservation

- Southport Townscape Heritage Project – Grants given and building works now on site for 6 retail units and upper floors repaired and reinstated. A further 9 units and upper floors in progress on site and extension given from Lottery Fund to end of December 2025.
- Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans – Damfield Lane, Maghull Conservation Area and Lydiate Hall and Chapel Conservation Area under initial draft
- Development Management – For last three months 61 DM consultations undertaken. Continuing to work with enforcement to resolve outstanding heritage cases.

Key Challenges

- To unlock difficult Heritage at Risk development sites and facilitate their sustainable future.
- Progress delivery of remaining large scale Townscape Heritage Projects.
- Loss of staff, adding pressure to workload and ensuring adequate levels of staffing and recruitment.

5. Technical Support

- Performance in completing searches has been consistently above target throughout the last quarter.
- Performance in validating minor applications has slightly improved in the last quarter from 74% up to 79% within 5 working days but is still slightly below the target of 80%. This shortfall is due to staff vacancies and ongoing training of new team members.
- A key success has been consistently in the HMLR gold standard of best performing Local Authorities for maintaining the Local Land Charges register.

Key Challenges

- Ensuring adequate staff levels and training over next 12 months
- Recruitment to vacant posts.

- Implementing a biodiversity net gain monitoring system and the validation of biodiversity net gain metrics.
- Setting up of reporting mechanisms for the Building Safety Regulator.

PUBLIC PROTECTION – FOOD AND SAFETY AND POLLUTION CONTROL

- The 2024/2025 Food Hygiene and Standards inspection programme is progressing well and as we approach the end of quarter 3 the Food and Safety team are currently on target to meet the Food Standards Agency (FSA) inspection requirements. Lower risk inspections which were previously removed from the programme during the Covid recovery period i.e. 'E' rated businesses are being filtered back into the inspection programme.
- During the later part of 2024 the Food and Safety Team have observed a significant increase in the number of food borne infectious diseases (eg Salmonella, Campylobacter etc) which are notifiable to the EH service. This has resulted in an increased demand for infectious disease investigation. Working in collaboration with our infection control team and other partners we have ensured all ID's have been investigated as required.
- Preparation for the implementation of the new Food Standards Delivery Model (FSDM) which is due to be implemented imminently is progressing well. Staff training and updates of the Information management system are underway. A number of officers within the Food and Safety team will, however, require an additional qualification in Food Standards inspection. The lead food officer is currently exploring what options are available in respect of this training provision.
- The Food and Safety Team are preparing a campaign to educate residents in Sefton about the possible dangers and risk associated with consuming some American Confectionary. The law in England is very different to that in the USA and products that are made for the USA market may not be compliant with food law in England. Where there are compositional issues, such as banned additives being used, these products are technically unsafe and must not be sold. Businesses will be educated about these dangers and advised of likely enforcement action if they are found selling such products. In conjunction with educational settings and Public Health, children and carers will be provided with information and advised of the risk of consuming such products.
- To help Support Southport businesses following the tragic events in summer the Food and Safety team will be offering new or existing businesses in the Southport area free support to comply with food hygiene legislation and help them achieve the highest food hygiene score. Advice prior to the unannounced statutory food hygiene inspection will be provided to assist businesses to get it right first time, saving money and enhance chances of receiving the highest food hygiene rating to attract more customers. Additionally, we are also offering free advice and support in relation to food labelling / composition and health and safety at work.
- The Pollution Control Team continue to respond to significant numbers of complex planning consultations within the specified deadlines, this however, can impact on the reactive (complaint type) work of the team.

- Work to progress and develop a number of the proposed air quality improvement actions proposed in the Council's Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) is now underway. These include progressing the traffic light optimisation project at key junctions in South Sefton to improve traffic flow and engaging with Fleet operators to better understand barriers to vehicle upgrades and replacement.
- Officers from the Pollution Control Team along with the Local Licensing team routinely attend Merseyside Police licensing partners meeting which is held every fortnight. The meetings are an effective way for officers to share intelligence about problem licensed premises, provide case updates and co-ordinate enforcement activities.

HOUSING UPDATE

Affordable Housing

Affordable Homes Programme

Officers have been meeting with developing Registered Providers over the last few months in anticipation of a new Affordable Homes Programme, being announced in the 2025 Comprehensive Spending Review.

In addition, as part of the Social Housing Transformation Project a paper on options to maximise Affordable Housing delivery in the borough is being developed.

Council Housing Programme

Phase 1

I'm pleased to report that the Council and Sandway Homes have now exchanged contracts for the purchase of 18 apartments at Buckley Hill Lane. The build of the apartments continues to progress with both apartment blocks now constructed to roof height and remain forecast for completion in March 2025.

Work continues to progress in the background to ensure that the Council is operationally ready to take handover of the apartments, moving into the letting and management of tenancies.

A key step to being operationally ready is ensuring that the Council has a suite of policies in place necessary to be able to manage its homes and future tenancies. Members will recall that earlier this year, Cabinet gave delegated authority to consider and adopt a suite of policies in readiness to become a landlord. I can now report that the following suite of policies has been approved for adoption:

- i. Access to Housing Policy
- ii. Aids and Adaptations Policy
- iii. Alterations and Improvements Policy
- iv. Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- v. Damp and Mould Policy
- vi. Decant Policy
- vii. Domestic Abuse and Violence Policy
- viii. Housing Landlord Complaints Policy
- ix. Housing Rechargeable Works Policy
- x. Neighbourhood Policy
- xi. Property Safety and Compliance Policy

- xii. Repairs and Maintenance Policy
- xiii. Rent Arrears and Credit Management Policy
- xiv. Rent Setting Policy
- xv. Resident Involvement Policy
- xvi. Right to Buy Policy
- xvii. Service Charge Policy
- xviii. Tenancy Policy
- xix. Void Policy

All policies will be kept under review allowing for changes to be made in response to new/amended legislation, regulation, best practice, learning and service changes.

Members may be aware that the Autumn Budget proposed some changes to Right to Buy as well as setting out plans for long term stability with social housing rents, both impact the Council Housing Programme. The Government has now published consultations in both areas and responses have been prepared, agreed and submitted.

Housing Standards Team

As of 10 December 2024, we have received 3414 licence applications, which is 98.5% of the expected number of applications. 1818 licences have been issued and 624 compliance inspections have been carried out.

The team has taken a very strict approach with landlords that provide properties or services that fall below the expected standards, and we have had 3 successful prosecutions against one Managing Agent for failure to licence 2 properties and failure to provide requested information. The Landlord was found guilty in their absence and sentenced to a £20,000 fine. A further prosecution of another Managing Agent for failure to licence 5 properties has been found guilty with a fine of £25,000 and a Landlord has also been found guilty of not licensing a property. He is yet to be sentenced. One landlord has been entered onto the Government's Rogue Landlord Database. There are a further 6 prosecutions pending for offences including failure to licence properties and failure to respond to Statutory Notices. We also have 4 appeals that remain pending at the First Tier Property Tribunal, where Landlords have appealed against enforcement action, including a Prohibition Order and Civil Penalty Fines for breaches of licence conditions.

There have been 79 requests for service relating to poor housing standards received between 18 Oct 2024 and 10 Dec 2024. Where landlords fail to comply with informal action, the team continue to take formal enforcement action. Since 18 Oct 2024 this has included the service of 1 Prohibition Order, 4 Improvement Notices, 4 Intention to serve Civil Penalty Notices and 1 Final Civil Penalty Notice for failure to licence properties. There have also been 5 further enforcement actions for landlords failing to maintain smoke alarms or provide the necessary Electrical Safety Certificates or other documentation for privately rented properties.

32 Landlords have attended specific training sessions in relation to dealing with Damp & Mould in their properties. Further training sessions for Landlords will continue to take place using the Government's Healthy Homes Grant. All staff within the Housing Standards Team have received specialist training in relation to damp and mould enforcement.

Work to reduce the number of long-term vacant homes has continued, with responses to 7 new Service Requests relating to problematic empty homes.