

THE "CALL IN" PERIOD FOR THIS SET OF MINUTES ENDS AT 12 NOON ON WEDNESDAY, 22ND JANUARY 2025. MINUTES NOD. 91 (2) AND (3), AND 92 (2) AND (3) ARE NOT SUBJECT TO "CALL-IN".

CABINET

MEETING HELD AT THE BIRKDALE ROOM, TOWN HALL, SOUTHPORT ON THURSDAY 9TH JANUARY, 2025

PRESENT: Councillor Atkinson (in the Chair)
Councillors Dowd, Doyle, Harvey, Howard, Lappin,
Moncur and Roscoe

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Sir Ron Watson CBE

83. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence due to other Council business was received from Councillor Veidman.

84. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of any disclosable pecuniary interests or personal interests were received.

85. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Decision Made:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

86. GROSS PAYMENTS

The Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director - Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing (Place Director) seeking approval to implement gross payments for Adult Social Care residential and nursing care homes.

Decisions Made:

That

- (1) the implementation of gross payments for Sefton and out-of-borough care homes be approved;
- (2) decisions on the implementation programme plan for gross payments and any future changes to how gross payments are made to care homes, be delegated to the Executive Director - Adult Social

Care, Health and Wellbeing (Place Director), in consultation with the Cabinet Member - Adult Social Care and Health;

- (3) decisions on any amendments on how gross payments are made, for example the inclusion of any third-party top-up payments, be delegated to the Executive Director - Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing (Place Director), in consultation with the Cabinet Member - Adult Social Care and Health and the Executive Director - Corporate Services and Commercial; and
- (4) the fact that reports on the implementation of gross payments and associated debt impacts and debt recovery work will be submitted to the Cabinet and other Council governance groups as part of wider debt management reporting, be noted.

Reasons for the Decisions:

The rationale for the recommendations within the report had been formulated based on the positive outcomes of the pilot project, and to ensure that Sefton continued to support the Sefton care home market.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

To continue with current payment arrangements – this option had been considered and rejected due to:

- The positive outcomes of the pilot.
- The need to ensure that payment arrangements were compliant with best practice Care Act guidance and reduced the chances of legal challenge/complaint.
- The recommendations enabled the Council to intervene at an earlier stage if client contributions were unpaid, thus reducing the risk of financial abuse.
- The recommendations removed financial matters from the relationship between residents and care homes.
- Improved market oversight of Provider fee levels.
- Reduced the administration burden on care home providers.
- The benefits of paying gross for self-funders who owned property and were taking up a deferred payment agreement with the Council, whereby their placement was commissioned by the Council under contracted rates, ensuring property equity lasted longer.

87. SOUTHPORT RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

The Cabinet considered the report of the Chief Executive that provided a detailed overview of the response to the tragic events of 29 July and the public disorder of 30 July. The report provided:

- The breadth of the response, including the significant contribution of a range of partners,
 - The key principles of how the response was delivered, was continuing, and would continue to be delivered,
 - The medium, and long-term ambition for recovery including how additional government funding would be used to support this.

The current estimated costs, including how government funding would support the response.

The following Appendix was attached to the report:

- Appendix A - Recovery Structure

The Leader reported that since the tragic events in Southport in July 2024, the Council's focus had been, and would continue to be, the families of Alice da Silver Aguiar, Bebe King and Elise Dot Stancombe. The Council had been engaging with the families to ensure they were at the centre of the recovery plan, as it was vital that the Council represented the voices of those impacted on events. Following the immediate response, the Council was now focusing on plans for longer term support. The £5.6m in combined aid from Central and Local Government would enable continued work with partner agencies to deliver for families and communities. The funding would allow the prioritisation of psychological support for families and those affected; support for schools and education provisions; community cohesion initiatives; and economic support for Southport, including businesses affected. A small, fixed-term Recovery Team had been established to provide a point of contact and co-ordinate the recovery plan and excellent partnership working had taken place over the previous 6 months. The InvestSefton Team had focused on Southport businesses and Alder Hey and MerseyCare NHS Trusts had established a dedicated psychological team, along with support from the Primary Care Network and Southport GPs, whilst volunteers had contributed support for the community. The funding supporting the recovery plan was a huge step in planning for a stronger future, and the future for the town and the wider Borough remained an exciting one with growth and investment that included the Marine Lake Events Centre and the adjacent water and light show. The Southport Town Deal would also help to make the town centre more attractive to residents and visitors. Looking forward, 2025 would see the opening of the Enterprise Arcade and the events programme for 2025 and 2026 would be strengthened, to include the Open Golf Championship in 2026. The Leader concluded that the horrific events of July 2024 would never be forgotten, but the way in which the community had pulled together along with the response from the Council and partners was inspiring.

The Leader also commended officers for the work undertaken on the response and recovery, as reflected within the report now submitted, particularly due to the sensitive nature of the matter.

Decisions Made:

That

- (1) the contents of the report be noted and the breadth of the community, partnership and Council response be acknowledged;
- (2) the financial plan that underpins both response and recovery, including the use of central government funding, be approved; and
- (3) the longer-term ambition for recovery be approved.

Reasons for the Decisions:

The report examined how Sefton Council, partners, and the community were leading on and would continue to lead on a specialist ongoing recovery operation which focused on helping children and families heal, creating safer and more united communities and assisting businesses to recover economically.

The report, and the funding that supported it, represented a significant step in addressing the emotional, social, and economic impacts of the tragedies, while also planning for a stronger future for Southport.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

There were no alternative options.

88. APPROVAL OF DRAFT LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY

The Cabinet considered the report of the Assistant Director - Economic Growth and Housing indicating that the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Local Nature Recovery Strategy was being prepared by the LCR Combined Authority as the 'responsible body' in line with government deadlines, with public consultation on the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) due to take place from February 2025 and the final Local Nature Recovery Strategy to be approved in mid-2025. Sefton Council as a 'supporting authority' was required to approve both the draft and final Local Nature Recovery Strategy prior to their approval by the Combined Authority. The report sought Council approval of the draft LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy prior to its consideration by the LCR Combined Authority. The LNRS was a cross-cutting theme across several Cabinet Member portfolios and Services.

The following appendices were attached to the report:

- Draft Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Strategy and representational PDF map of Sefton only

Decisions Made:

That

- (1) the draft Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy be approved for consultation by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, as the responsible body;
- (2) authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member - Housing and Highways, in consultation with the Assistant Director - Economic Growth and Housing or the Chief Planning Officer, to agree any subsequent changes to the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy arising through the supporting authority and Combined Authority approval process; and
- (3) authority be delegated to the Chief Planning Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member - Housing and Highways, to make minor editorial and presentational changes to the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy arising through the supporting authority and Combined Authority approval process.

Reasons for the Decisions:

It was concluded that the Council should approve the draft LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy prior to its consideration by the LCR Combined Authority, in line with the recommendations set out within the report.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None. The LCR Combined Authority had advised that Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) supporting authorities, such as Sefton Council, must agree the draft LNRS prior to its approval by the Combined Authority.

89. GAS SUPPLY CONTRACT RENEWAL

The Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director – Regeneration, Economy and Assets seeking approval for the award of the gas supply contract through the North-East Purchasing Organisation (NEPO) Gas Framework for a three year plus one year contract, in order to secure value for money and excellent customer service.

The following appendix was attached to the report:

Appendix 1 – Evaluation questions and weightings.

Decisions Made:

That

- (1) the Council remain on the North-East Purchasing Organisation (NEPO) framework contract for the supply of gas to cover the

period 1 April 2026 – 31 March 2029, with a possible 1-year extension to 31 March 2030;

- (2) the Executive Director - Regeneration, Economy and Assets be granted delegated authority to award any extension in consultation with the Cabinet Member - Regeneration, Economy and Skills; and
- (3) authority be delegated to Executive Director - Regeneration, Economy and Assets to approve purchasing decisions and approve any contractual requirements within the contract term, including the signing of all contract documents.

Reasons for the Decisions:

It was recommended that the Cabinet approve the award of the gas supply contract through the NEPO Gas Framework for a three year plus one year contract, in order to secure value for money and excellent customer service. Also, that the recommended delegations of authority be authorised to enable timely contract management.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Option 1

Do nothing – In order to comply with UK Procurement Legislation, and due to the 12- 18-month lead in times, it was necessary to either re-procure the above contract directly to market by Sefton Council via the Public Contract Regulations route, or to receive a supply contract available from a Public Contract Regulations compliant Energy Procurement Framework with a Central Purchasing Body (CPB). Therefore, this option was rejected.

Option 2

Delay the decision - The lead time for making a change to the current gas supply arrangements was significant, so any delay in decision making would shorten the window for purchasing gas in advance. This would reduce the Council's options and increase the risk associated with market conditions during that time. Therefore, this option was rejected.

Option 3

Adopt a different procurement strategy – for example purchasing all gas supplies at a fixed price. Whilst the Council had used this strategy in the past and made savings from it, it did internalise the risk associated with achieving the best prices, increased staff workload and given current volatility in the wholesale gas market increases the risks associated with achieving a competitive price. Therefore, this option was rejected.

90. SEFTON HOSPITALITY OPERATIONS LIMITED - BUSINESS PLAN

The Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director – Regeneration, Economy and Assets providing an update on the

performance of Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited, with an updated strategy and business plan. The update included an overview on economic and market conditions, as these continued sectoral challenges provided the context for the status and future of the business and its venues. Also included were updates on operational activities, alongside recent and forecast financial performance.

Cabinet Members commended officers for the work undertaken.

Decisions Made:

That

- (1) the outturn for the Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited company for the financial year 2023-24, the forecast for the financial year 2024-25, and the factors influencing those outturns, be noted;
- (2) the continued challenges affecting the economy and the hospitality sector, and future outlook for both, and how they have affected and will continue to affect the company, be noted; and
- (3) the updated strategy and business plan for the company be approved.

Reasons for the Decisions:

The role of Sefton Hospitality Operations Limited (SHOL) remained focused on the delivery of an experience for customers that aligned with the vision and objectives of the Borough and the Council. In addition to the revitalisation of, and the maximisation of opportunity from, underused assets in Sefton, SHOL and its strategy continued to enable support for local people with access to higher-quality career opportunities in the hospitality sector. As previously, this model also delivered best value to the Council (via the removal of the subsidy formerly required to the previous hospitality offer at CLAC). The Council as shareholder remained committed to the long-term future of the company and its operations. With regards to governance and board composition, the Cabinet had delegated powers set out in Chapter 5, Paragraph 40 of the Constitution to appoint the Council's representatives to serve on Outside Bodies.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

No other options were considered by the Council. The company, as part of its strategy and business planning process, had considered options for the business and its current and potential future venues, although some aspects of that review process would be commercially sensitive and confidential.

91. PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS – 2025/26 MUNICIPAL YEAR

The Cabinet considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer seeking approval of a Programme of Meetings for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

The following Appendices were attached to the report:

- Annex A - Programme of Meetings for the Cabinet in 2025/26
- Annex B - Programme of Meetings for the Council, Members' Briefing Sessions and Regulatory Committees in 2025/26
- Annex C - Programme of Meetings for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in 2025/26
- Annex D - Programme of Meetings for the Public Engagement and Consultation Panel, Sefton Safer Communities Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board in 2025/26
- Calendar of meetings 2025/26

Decisions Made:

That

- (1) the Programme of Meetings for the Cabinet, Public Engagement and Consultation Panel, Safer Sefton Together and the Health and Wellbeing Board for 2025/26, as set out in Annexes A and D of the report, be approved;
- (2) **the Council be recommended to approve** the Programme of Meetings for the Council, Member Briefing Sessions; Regulatory Committees; and Overview and Scrutiny Committees for 2025/26, as set out in Annexes B and C of the report; and
- (3) **the Council be recommended to note** the Programme of Meetings for the Cabinet, Public Engagement and Consultation Panel, Safer Sefton Together and the Health and Wellbeing Board for 2025/26 as set out in Annexes A and D of the report.

Reasons for the Decisions:

To enable the business of the Council and its various Committees/bodies to be conducted during the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None. The Council was required to produce a programme of meetings.

92. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME AND COUNCIL TAX BASE 2025/26

The Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial that provided details of the review of the local

Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the current year 2024/25 and proposing that there be no change made to the scheme for 2025/26. The report also provided an updated Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish area for 2025/26.

The following Annexes were attached to the report:

- Annex A: Council Tax Base Report 2025/26
- Annex B: Equality Impact Assessment: Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Decisions Made:

That

- (1) the outcome of the review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the current year 2024/25, be noted;

Council

- (2) the Council be recommended to approve the current scheme for 2025/26; and
- (3) the Council be recommended to approve the relevant Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish Area for 2025/26, as set out in Annex A of the report.

Reasons for the Decisions:

As a result of the review undertaken, it was proposed that the Council's local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2025/26 should remain unchanged to help maintain consistency and stability for those using it. The Scheme continued to address the Council's focus to minimise the impact on the most vulnerable households by striking a balance between collecting Council Tax whilst supporting those experiencing financial challenges.

The council tax base set out in Annex A of the report had increased compared to 2024/25 which would assist in closing the budget gap faced by the Council in 2025/26.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None, as following the review, the scheme continued to address the Council's priorities to minimise the impact on the most vulnerable, by seeking to strike a balance between dealing with Council priorities whilst supporting those experiencing financial challenges.

93. Q1 & Q2 (2024) CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

Further to Minute No. 26 of 25 July 2024, the Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial indicating that, on 25 July 2024 the Cabinet agreed the Sefton Corporate Plan (2024 to 2027), with revised corporate objectives to deliver the Council's agreed strategic priorities. The Cabinet had also agreed an updated Service Planning and Performance Management framework, aligned to the refresh of the Sefton Corporate Plan (2024 to 2027), for embedding the service level improvements in performance management, and to inform regular, collective, and cross-cutting performance discussions by the Cabinet. The report presented the first Corporate Performance Report at Annex A for Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 of 2024/25 that would be presented to the Cabinet quarterly and which demonstrated performance against the commitments agreed in the Sefton Corporate Plan (2024 to 2027).

The following annex was attached to the report:

- Annex A - the refreshed Corporate Performance Report, including data for operating/fiscal quarters Q1 and Q2 2024.

Reference was made to page 231 of Annex A of the report and the fact that the NEET figure required amendment to read as 6.7% for the Q2 average including July, August, and September performance.

Decision Made:

That the corporate performance report for Quarter 1 and Q 2 of 2024/25, against the Sefton Corporate Plan (2024 to 2027), be received.

Reasons for the Decision:

The refreshed Sefton Corporate Plan 2024 to 2027 stated the specific corporate objectives to deliver the Council's key strategic priorities over the next period and would be used as an opportunity to ensure that underpinning strategies and plans across the organisation also reflected the key priorities of the Council over the next period. It would help to keep the Council priorities front and centre, corporately, with partners, and collectively owned.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None

94. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT 2024/25 TO 2027/28 - REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET UPDATE 2024/25 – JANUARY UPDATE

The Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial informing the Cabinet of:

- 1) The current position relating to the 2024/25 revenue budget.

- 2) The current forecast on Council Tax and Business Rates collection for 2024/25.
- 3) The monitoring position of the Council's capital programme to the end of November 2024:
 - The forecast expenditure to year end.
 - Variations against the approved budgets and an explanation of those variations for consideration by Members.
 - Updates to spending profiles and proposed amendments to capital budgets necessary to ensure the efficient delivery of capital projects.

The following appendix was attached to the report:

- Appendix A – Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2026/27

Decisions Made:

That

Revenue Outturn

- (1) the current position relating to the 2024/25 revenue budget be noted;
- (2) the actions being taken to refine forecasts and identify mitigating efficiencies to ensure each service achieves a balanced position be noted;
- (3) the remedial action plan measures previously approved by the Cabinet on 7 November 2024, as outlined in section 3 of the report, be noted;
- (4) the intention to review and release Earmarked Reserves to support the additional in-year budget pressure and reduce the call on the Council's General Balances be noted;
- (5) the financial risks associated with the delivery of the 2024/25 revenue budget be recognised and it be acknowledged that the forecast outturn position will continue to be reviewed, and remedial actions put in place, to ensure a balanced forecast outturn position and financial sustainability can be achieved;

Capital Programme

- (6) the spending profiles across financial years for the approved capital programme, as set out at paragraph 8.1 of the report, be noted;
- (7) the latest capital expenditure position as at 30 November 2024 of £31.470m, as set out at paragraph 7.3 of the report, and the latest

full year forecast is £77.937m, as set out at paragraph 7.4 of the report, be noted;

- (8) a supplementary capital estimate of £0.651m and a supplementary revenue estimate of £0.005m for the Local Authority Housing Fund Round 3 funded by grant from MHCLG, as set out at paragraph 7.09 of the report, be approved;
- (9) a supplementary capital estimate of £0.449m for the Network North Roads Resurfacing Fund funded by a grant from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, as set out at paragraph 7.10 of the report, be approved; and
- (10) it be noted that capital resources will be managed by the Executive Director - Corporate Service and Commercial to ensure the capital programme remains fully funded and that capital funding arrangements secure the maximum financial benefit to the Council, as set out at paragraphs 7.11-7.13 of the report.

Reasons for the Decisions:

To ensure the Cabinet was informed of the current position in relation to the 2024/25 revenue budget.

To provide an updated forecast of the outturn position with regard to the collection of Council Tax and Business Rates.

To keep Members informed of the progress of the Capital Programme against the profiled budget for 2024/25 and agreed allocations for future years.

To progress any changes that were required in order to maintain a relevant and accurate budget profile necessary for effective monitoring of the Capital Programme.

To approve any updates to funding resources so that they could be applied to capital schemes in the delivery of the Council's overall capital strategy.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

None.