

COUNCIL - 16TH JANUARY 2025

QUESTIONS RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

1	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Brough to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health/Deputy Leader (Councillor Moncur)</u>
	Subject: Sefton New Directions Ltd.
	<p>“The published accounts for 2021 show a Pension Liability for the Company of £4.687.470</p> <p>The published accounts for 2022 refer to this Liability as ‘derecognised’ and credited to statement of comprehensive income.</p> <p>Following that decision, Sefton Council chose to provide a full guarantee to the company in respect of future pension liabilities.</p> <p>What will be the effect of the new Employer’s National Insurance contributions on this private Limited Company and how will it be met?”</p>
	Response:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The council following inception of Sefton New Directions and the admission agreement to the Merseyside Pension Fund was always the ultimate guarantor for any pension liability should the company no longer exist therefore there has been no change in the role or responsibilities of the council in respect of any potential future pension liability- it should also be noted that at this point in time the company’s element of the pension fund is in surplus therefore there is no liability at present that would need to be met. • The council is working with Sefton New Directions as it is with all providers to understand the impact of the Employers National Insurance Contribution changes and will engage with the company and all providers in the next 2 months on this”.
2	Question submitted by Councillor Prendergast to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economy and Skills/Deputy Leader (Councillor Lappin)
	Subject: Southport Marine Lake Events Centre
	<p>The development of the Southport Marine Lake Events Centre (MLEC) is a key part of Southport's economic strategy with the vast majority of the £38.5 million Town Deal funding from the previous Conservative Government going towards the project.</p> <p>In light of this can the Cabinet Member answer the following question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The terms of reference for the Southport Town Deal Board state that agendas, decisions and actions agreed by the board will be made publicly available via the Council's gov.uk site. There are no minutes available since 11th June 2024, why is that?

	Response:
	“The minutes from the last Board meeting, which was 11 th October 2024, will be made public once approved by the board at the next meeting.”
3	Question submitted by Councillor Prendergast to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economy and Skills/Deputy Leader (Councillor Lappin)
	Subject: Southport Pier
	<p>Southport Pier has now been closed for over 2 years and whilst surveys have been undertaken and plans put in place for how to carry out repairs, we appear to be little further along in terms of funding the repairs.</p> <p>Southport's new Labour MP has indicated that his preference is to "nationalise" Southport Pier.</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member answer the following question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How much of the additional funding needed to repair Southport Pier has been successfully obtained?
	Response:
	<p>“The pier is already nationalised; it belongs to the people of Sefton.</p> <p>As communicated on several occasions no additional funding has been secured at this stage. Conversations are continuing with funding bodies to seek the necessary funding to undertake the works. The Council has undertaken a large amount of pre-development work to ensure we are able to start works once funding becomes available.”</p>
4	Question submitted by Councillor Prendergast to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economy and Skills/Deputy Leader (Councillor Lappin)
	Subject: Southport Beach
	<p>Southport is a seaside town with tourism playing a huge part in our local economy. Over a prolonged period of time, the useable area of Southport Beach has reduced as more and more of it is taken over by vegetation leaving an ever-decreasing area of beach for visitors and local residents to enjoy.</p> <p>Are there any plans to ensure that areas of Southport Beach are kept clear of vegetation, especially near to Southport Pier, to ensure as a seaside town Southport has a beach as part of its tourism offering?</p>
	Response:
	<p>“This is addressed in the Sefton Coast Plan Visioning Position Statement published in 2021.</p> <p>Inevitable natural processes have changed the feel of this beach over time; as the beach levels rise, shallow tides deposit silt, and the golden sands of old slowly change to a wetland habitat and salt marsh develops. This process, part of the accretion of the west coast of England, has been going on for centuries. Like the sand dunes elsewhere in Sefton, the salt marsh is part of the natural coastal protection of Southport; helping to absorb wave energy including from</p>

	<p>increased storminess or other impacts of climate change.</p> <p>The town and the borough still have a range of beautiful “resort beaches”, but the areas of vegetation referred to have beauty in their own right, and play a vital role and benefit to the environment - as coastal and flood defences, and as a carbon sink contributing to climate change mitigation as well as being the home to rare and other salt-marsh species.”</p>
5	<p>Question submitted by Councillor Prendergast to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economy and Skills/Deputy Leader (Councillor Lappin)</p>
	<p>Subject: Southport Marine Lake Events Centre</p>
	<p>The development of the Southport Marine Lake Events Centre (MLEC) is a key part of Southport's economic strategy with the vast majority of the £38.5 million Town Deal funding from the previous Conservative Government going towards the project.</p> <p>In light of this can the Cabinet Member answer the following question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On 12th December it was announced, via press release, that Sefton Council had terminated its relationship with Kier Group PLC, the contractor initially selected to construct the MLEC. Has a replacement contractor been appointed yet?
	<p>Response:</p>
	<p>“The procurement of the main contractor has been completed, subject to contracts. An announcement will be made shortly on the appointed main contractor once legal discussions are complete.”</p>
6	<p>Question submitted by Councillor Prendergast to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economy and Skills/Deputy Leader (Councillor Lappin)</p>
	<p>Subject: Southport Pier</p>
	<p>Southport Pier has now been closed for over 2 years and whilst surveys have been undertaken and plans put in place for how to carry out repairs, we appear to be little further along in terms of funding the repairs.</p> <p>Southport's new Labour MP has indicated that his preference is to "nationalise" Southport Pier.</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member answer the following question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there any plans in the forthcoming Council budget to allocate additional funding for the repair of Southport Pier?
	<p>Response:</p>
	<p>“The remaining funding from the £3m previously approved by Cabinet and Council remains within the Council budget.”</p>

7	Question submitted by Councillor Prendergast to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economy and Skills/Deputy Leader (Councillor Lappin)
	Subject: Southport Marine Lake Events Centre
	<p>The development of the Southport Marine Lake Events Centre (MLEC) is a key part of Southport's economic strategy with the vast majority of the £38.5 million Town Deal funding from the previous Conservative Government going towards the project.</p> <p>In light of this can the Cabinet Member answer the following question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The terms of reference for the Southport Town Deal Board state that meetings will be held on a monthly basis. Why have meetings not been held on a monthly basis?
	Response:
	“As part of the Town Deal submission and subsequent project development work the Town Deal Board met regularly to provide oversight on the development of the projects. As projects moved into delivery there was agreement that the Board would meet less frequently, approximately quarterly.”
8	Question submitted by Councillor Prendergast to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economy and Skills/Deputy Leader (Councillor Lappin)
	Subject: Southport Marine Lake Events Centre
	<p>The development of the Southport Marine Lake Events Centre (MLEC) is a key part of Southport's economic strategy with the vast majority of the £38.5 million Town Deal funding from the previous Conservative Government going towards the project.</p> <p>In light of this can the Cabinet Member answer the following question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The original budget for MLEC has been set at £73 million. Is this still the current cost projection for the project?
	Response:
	“Any updates to the project budget will be reported to Cabinet and Council before the main works commence.”
9	Question submitted by Councillor Prendergast to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economy and Skills/Deputy Leader (Councillor Lappin)
	Subject: Southport Pier
	<p>Southport Pier has now been closed for over 2 years and whilst surveys have been undertaken and plans put in place for how to carry out repairs, we appear to be little further along in terms of funding the repairs.</p> <p>Southport's new Labour MP has indicated that his preference is to "nationalise" Southport Pier.</p>

	<p>Can the Cabinet Member answer the following question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does she believe that "nationalising" Southport Pier is the right approach to the long-term security of Southport Pier?
	Response:
	"Southport Pier is already considered a nationally significant, Grade II-listed heritage asset."
10.	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Hinde to the Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Families (Councillor Roscoe)</u>
	Subject: Labour Government's Breakfast Club Initiative
	When will the Labour government's breakfast club initiative be implemented in Sefton?
	Response:
	<p>"The Government has committed to all families being able to start accessing free breakfast clubs lasting 30 minutes for their primary school age children before school through their new free breakfast club programme.</p> <p>The Government invited schools to apply to be part of an early adopter scheme, rolling it out to families starting from April 2025. This scheme is to include 750 participating schools funded to provide access to a free, universal breakfast club lasting at least 30 minutes that includes food.</p> <p>The Government invited schools to apply to the free breakfast club programme completing an expression of interest form. Schools will be selected across different school types, sizes and geographical areas to ensure a wide range of representation. A national roll out will follow. In Sefton we sent the Expression of Interest Form out to schools in the schools' bulletin before Christmas in addition to the Government communications and we have asked that if any schools are successful to let us know. We will monitor the roll out of any breakfast club provision through being kept informed by individual schools and through the Headteacher Associations.</p> <p>If an individual school is selected as one of first to roll out the free breakfast clubs, families of primary aged children will be able to access a free breakfast from April 2025. Evaluation of the early adopter scheme will inform the roll out of the programme to all schools nationally and also in Sefton.</p> <p>The Government will continue to support the schools currently providing the existing National School Breakfast Programme to disadvantaged children."</p>
11.	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Lunn Bates to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health/Deputy Leader (Councillor Moncur)</u>
	Subject: Hospital Waiting Times
	Can the Cabinet Member comment on how he thinks the recent Government announcement on hospital waiting times will affect residents in Sefton?

	Response:
	<p>"I welcome the government's plans to cut NHS waiting times to 18 weeks. There are currently more than 7.5million people across the country waiting for care at hospital and this is far too many. Every single person on those waiting lists represents a life put on hold, stuck waiting for care often in pain or in fear.</p> <p>In particular, I welcome the creation of millions more appointments to get people including Sefton residents the treatment they need quicker. Up to half a million more appointments across the Country will be made available each year thanks to greater access to expanded surgical hubs and also the greater patient choice over follow up care will open up a million appointments alongside better use of tech and other action to save another million missed appointments.</p> <p>The new Labour government inherited a NHS which was broken, with many people waiting for treatment, people waiting too long for an ambulance even in the most serious of circumstances, and in A&E, but those delays have cost and ruined lives. The Council commits to work with government to ensure that we get our NHS back on its feet by providing the highest possible quality care addressing poor health and health inequalities in our community. Boosting opportunity for our residents to enjoy exercise and healthy lifestyles and working with government, GPs, hospitals and our local health leaders to ensure we work together to fix our health service."</p>
12.	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Pugh (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) to the Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Families (Councillor Roscoe)</u>
	Subject: Residential Care Placement Costs
	What are the figures for the annual cost of each of the ten most expensive external or residential care placements currently paid out by Children's services?
	Response:
	"This area of the service and support to children changes continually – based on the current position the average cost of the top 10 placements is approx. £12,500 per week. The council is clear that children will only be placed in residential care when there is no alternative with a home setting explored in full before any placement is made."
13.	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Pugh (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) to the Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Families (Councillor Roscoe)</u>
	Subject: Length of Care Package
	For each of the ten most expensive external or residential care packages how long has the individual in receipt of them been in the authority's care?

	Response:
	"We cannot be specific with any information that could identify a child but on average, the length of time the that the top ten most expensive external or residential care packages for children who are in the local authorities care is 1920 days or 5 years and 2 months."
14.	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Pugh (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) to the Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Families (Councillor Roscoe)</u>
	Subject: Care Package with Disabilities
	In what percentage of the ten most expensive external or residential care packages does the individual child have a serious physical disability?
	Response:
	"There are 0 children who have a serious physical disability in the top ten most expensive external or residential care packages."
15.	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Pugh (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) to the Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Families (Councillor Roscoe)</u>
	Subject: Commissioner's Report
	Assuming that the Statutory Direction of the Secretary of State still applies to Children Services, when does the Council expect the next or final report from the Commissioner?
	Response:
	"We received the most recent draft report in November and received the follow up letter from the DFE on 6 th January."
16.	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Pugh (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economy and Skills/Deputy Leader (Councillor Lappin)</u>
	Subject: Southport Pier
	Has any new funding from the Heritage Lottery fund been secured for restoration work on Southport Pier?
	Response:
	"No"

17.	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Pugh (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) to the Cabinet Member for Cleansing and Street Scene (Councillor Harvey)</u>
	Subject: Duke Street Cemetery
	Given agreement on the unsatisfactory state of the areas of Duke St cemetery allowed to go wild, is the Cabinet Member able to assure the council that the problem will be addressed in a timely fashion?
	Response:
	<p>"I have visited Duke Street Cemetery, Southport, and spent almost two hours assessing concerns over the fine balance between encouraging biodiversity and maintaining a safe, respectful burial ground.</p> <p>The rewilding project featuring wildflowers was launched several years ago in the older part of the cemetery where most graves are rarely visited. However, over time and following reductions in staff resource the area has become unmanageable, requiring remedial action to return it to an acceptable standard in a timely manner, which I am pleased to report has now begun.</p> <p>Over the winter, the Burial and Cremations Maintenance Team has begun the 'cutting back' of affected areas. Work will continue throughout the winter months and these areas will be added to the core maintenance routes for ongoing care throughout spring and summer. Staff will also work collaboratively with the community payback team to bolster the resource available. Progress will be monitored.</p> <p>Having spoken to nearby residents, it is clear many have great affection and interest in the cemetery. I hope there will be an opportunity to develop a 'Friends of Duke Street Cemetery' group, and to review signage aimed at informing the public of our rewilding aims while also sharing the history of the cemetery with visitors. Volunteers deliver a significant amount of work that enhances public open space within our communities and their contribution is highly valued."</p>
18.	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Pugh (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)</u>
	Subject: Southport Recovery Plan
	The Council is allocating £790,000 for Community Cohesion as part of the Southport Recovery Plan -who will decide how this money is spent and what mechanisms are in place to ensure transparency, accountability, and proper reporting back to the Council?
	Response:
	<p>"On 9 January 2025, Cabinet received a report on the Southport Response and Recovery. The report set out the governance structure and financial plan that underpins both response and recovery including the use of central government funding. Under these arrangements the Community Cohesion sub-group have oversight of the allocated budget of £790,00 to provide:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Multi-disciplinary team to include an increase in Equality, Diversity and

	<p>Inclusion capacity, with a fund to deliver cohesion programmes.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Enhanced Youth Services focussed on youth work in the Southport area. 3. Capital costs to increase building security across the VCFS sector. 4. Support for Sefton CVS leadership capacity in response phase and the provision of a VCF Fund.”
19.	<p><u>Question submitted by Councillor Shaw (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) to the Cabinet Member for Cleansing and Street Scene (Councillor Harvey)</u></p>
	<p>Subject: Bin Collections at Christmastime</p>
	<p>Does the Cabinet Member recognise that having a 4-week gap between brown bin collections over the Christmas 2024 period for residents in Southport, Formby and Hightown has created difficulties for many of those residents?</p> <p>Will a review be carried out to establish whether an improved system can be devised for Christmas 2025?</p>
	<p>Response:</p>
	<p>“For several years, Sefton Council has operated a four-day unpaid shutdown arrangement for staff which delivers a significant financial saving. The arrangement forms part of staff contractual terms and conditions.</p> <p>Some service areas are required to operate over the shutdown period, waste collection being one. Staff are asked to volunteer to cover those days, and their shutdown deduction is repaid to them for the days worked.</p> <p>Levels of staff willing to work has fluctuated over the years, and also between the north and south Sefton depots. The service delivered reflects the staff resource available. Wherever possible, residual waste (grey bins) takes priority over recycling (brown bins), as recycling is a cleaner waste stream. For example, it doesn't contain food waste or baby's nappies. It can be stored for longer periods without subsequent issues.</p> <p>Waste collection is continuously reviewed to achieve the best possible service for our residents within resources available.”</p>
20.	<p><u>Question submitted by Councillor Lloyd Johnson to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Highways (Councillor Veidman)</u></p>
	<p>Subject: Gritting Outside Schools</p>
	<p>Is it the policy of the Council that pavements and roads immediately outside schools and on the approach to schools are not prioritised for gritting in icy conditions?</p>
	<p>Response:</p>
	<p>“Details of the Councils Policy for winter maintenance can be found at Gritting. A report was taken to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills) at its meeting of the 19th September 2023 which considered the Winter Maintenance Policy and Operational Plan. The report included the following: “A request was received in January this year from a member of the public, via a</p>

	<p>Councillor, to grit all school locations in the Borough. A previous exercise, undertaken in 2010, estimated the additional costs for this would be £220,000 per year. Based on the revised legislation in 2013, including more stringent requirements for gritting vehicles, the updated costs would now be approximately double that figure at £440,000 per year. This is based on estimates of gritting activity which does fluctuate each year, depending on weather conditions.</p> <p>Prior to the meeting Officers had discussed the analysis and findings of gritting all schools with the then Cabinet Member – Locality Services and it was concluded that funding did not allow for gritting around schools to be included in the Policy. This situation remains the same.”</p>
21.	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Lloyd Johnson to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Highways (Councillor Veidman)</u>
	Subject: Criteria for Using Asphalt Over Paving Slabs
	We have seen recent examples of damaged paving slabs being replaced with bitumen (asphalt concrete). What are the criteria considered when choosing to use asphalt concrete, rather than replacing paving slabs like-for-like?
	Response:
	<p>“The Council would normally expect paving slabs to be replaced like for like. However, when a temporary reinstatement is made materials other than paving slabs may be used until the permanent reinstatement can be made.</p> <p>The area may also be reinstated with materials other than slabs in locations where tree roots are causing a problem or where vehicles overrunning the footway would cause damage to paving slabs.”</p>
22.	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Lloyd Johnson to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Highways (Councillor Veidman)</u>
	Subject: Council Powers to Enforce Paving Repairs
	What powers do the Council have to encourage, or compel, a business to fix paving stones on their land which present a clear safety risk to the public?
	Response:
	“The Council has no powers available to encourage or compel private landowners to undertake repairs on their land.”
23.	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Evans to the Cabinet Member for Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services (Councillor Howard)</u>
	Subject: Live Streaming
	When can we expect live streaming to be implemented for committee meetings?
	Response:
	“I can confirm that a streaming and conferencing system has been procured from the market leader, Public-I. There have been delays in installing the

	<p>hardware due to issues with asbestos in both Southport Town Hall and Bootle Town Hall. Furthermore, we had hoped to be able to use the Council's current network but have had to install dedicated data points in both Council chambers, the Birkdale Room in Southport Town Hall and the Committee Room in Bootle Town Hall. The only outstanding piece of work is the installation of the data point in the Committee Room which will be done as soon as the room and the adjoining Council Chamber are available. The Council chamber is currently being used for inquests. Thereafter, the system will be tested at both sites, staff trained in the use of the system and a plan devised to roll out the live streaming of meetings."</p>
24.	<p><u>Question submitted by Councillor Sammon to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economy and Skills/Deputy Leader (Councillor Lappin)</u></p>
	<p>Subject: Marine Lake Events Centre</p>
	<p>Can the Council provide us with an update on where we are in the procurement process on assigning a contractor to build the Marine Lake Events Centre.</p>
	<p>Response:</p>
	<p>"The procurement of the main contractor has been completed, subject to contracts. An announcement will be made shortly on the appointed main contractor once legal discussions are complete."</p>
25.	<p><u>Question submitted by Councillor Sammon to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)</u></p>
	<p>Subject: Southport Business Recovery Fund</p>
	<p>Will the newly announced increase in funding for the Southport Business Recovery Fund be available to businesses in the hospitality and entertainment sector, which were directly impacted by the temporary drop in footfall and tourism to Southport town centre?</p>
	<p>Response:</p>
	<p>"After the events of 29th and 30th July, immediate focus was on Hart St, St Lukes Road, and those immediate areas, for obvious reasons. The assistance provided has included grants to support those businesses following loss of income as a direct consequence of closure, due to being inside the cordoned area for example and forced to close.</p> <p>No wider business grants scheme is proposed – there are several hundred member organisations of Southport BID, and hundreds and hundreds more businesses in Southport, across a wide range of sectors, all of whom have been affected to some degree by the events of July. There simply is not the money available to be able to offer meaningful grants to every single one of those businesses, nor the means to prioritise or determine who should or shouldn't be eligible for such support.</p> <p>This course of action was discussed with business across the town at the business event of 26th November 2024, and this approach was validated by subject matter experts who shared good practice and lessons learned from elsewhere at that event.</p>

	Focus of the funding allocated to economic recover is on what we can practically do, together, to drive footfall in Southport in 2025 and beyond, and how we maximise return in that sense on the limited financial resources we do have.”
26.	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Sammon to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)</u>
	Subject: Sefton Hospitality Operation Limited
	The latest accounts for Sefton Hospitality Operation Limited (SHOL) on companies’ house published 20th December 2024 show a loss of £1,439,203 for 2023-2024. Can the Council clarify: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How much money has Sefton Council lent to SHOL? 2. When will the repayments on the loan commence? 3. What will happen if SHOL cannot make the repayments?”
	Response:
	I do not recognise the number within the question. The profit and loss account for the financial year 2023/2024 is as reported to Cabinet on 9 th January 2025. May I suggest the councillor resubmits his question once he understands the difference between a balance sheet and a profit and loss statement. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (Public Pack)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 07/12/2023 10:00 2. (Public Pack)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 09/01/2025 10:00 3. This would be reported to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committees, via an updated annual Business Plan.”
27.	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson to the Representative of the LCR Combined Authority Transport Committee (Councillor Carragher)</u>
	Subject: Merseytravel - Consultation
	May I ask if the Elected Member is aware of any follow-up feedback consultation that has taken place with the public since the introduction of the new rolling stock and if so, what have been the results?
	Response:
	“I have asked Merseyrail to collate results from their comments systems and any responses received through the regular local and national passenger surveys and for those to be reported back.”
28.	<u>Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson to the Representative of the LCR Combined Authority Transport Committee (Councillor Carragher)</u>
	Subject: Merseytravel – Northern Line Service
	The Northern Line Service from Southport through to Hunts Cross provides a comprehensive service and is particularly useful to those people wanting to use public transport to get to Liverpool airport.

	<p>For a considerable period of time however, all of the trains have been terminating at Liverpool Central.</p> <p>Can the Member advise the circumstances that led to this happening and whether or not it is a temporary situation and if so, what is the anticipated timeframe for the reintroduction of the previous service?</p>
	Response:
	<p>“The new 777 trains can either operate in 4-car formation or in 8-car formation (where two trains are coupled up to each other). The arrangement to terminate Southport services at Liverpool Central was agreed on a temporary basis to allow 8-car services to be introduced between Southport and Liverpool Central (in view of passenger loadings) at the same time as work is being progressed on stations between Liverpool Central and Hunts Cross which will facilitate the running of 8-car trains. This work relates to the implementation and testing of Automatic Selective Door Operation (ASDO) technology which allows passengers to safely use 8-car trains at stations where there are short platforms that don't fully accommodate all 8 cars. There are no platform issues preventing 8-car services operating between Central and Southport.</p> <p>The Merseyrail operation has, therefore, been reconfigured on a temporary basis to provide services between Southport and Liverpool Central with Hunts Cross served by services to and from Ormskirk (where 4-car trains are in operation).”</p>
29.	Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)
	Subject: Planning (1)
	<p>I am sure the Leader of the Council and all Members will welcome the fact that the Government has announced that they are to provide funding to Local Authorities to employ a further 500 Planning Officers to help speed up the process.</p> <p>Does the Leader of the Council know whether or not Sefton is included in those Authorities who will benefit from the announcement?</p>
	Response:
	Details of how this measure will work is yet to be announced. When they are Sefton will of course apply for funding/resources to manage any demand.
30.	Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)
	Subject: Planning (2)
	<p>Following on from the previous question: -</p> <p>Would the Leader support any new Planning Officer being given as their first priority dealing with any planning applications coming from the farming community within the borough?</p>
	Response:
	All of our planning officers are highly qualified and experienced and are classed as multi-disciplinary, capable of handling any type of application

	professionally. This approach allows us to deploy our limited resources more efficiently and effectively.”
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31.	Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)
	Subject: Planning (3)
	<p>Following on from the previous two questions: -</p> <p>Does the Leader recognise that the changes announced in inheritance tax will undoubtedly damage smaller farms in particular, of which there are some in Sefton, and as a consequence they are likely to have to sell land and reduce their capacity, both in terms of crops and livestock, in order to meet the inheritance tax liability and that although a period of 10 years is to be allowed to pay the tax the figures produced by the relevant Government Department clearly indicate that few, if any, farmers make sufficient profit to pay what is a significant additional financial burden at a time when added food security should be a priority?</p>
	Response:
	<p>“Previously, farms were almost entirely exempt from inheritance tax – as a consequence of both the Agricultural Property Relief (APR) and Business Property Relief (BPR). Farm owners have been able to use a combination of these reliefs to pass on their farmland and associated business assets, tax free.</p> <p>But under the recent Budget, these reliefs will together be capped at one million pounds – so farmland and farm assets over that value will be subject to inheritance tax at 20 per cent.</p> <p>The impacts of this policy will be kept under review locally, as the Council does with all major changes of this nature by any Government.”</p>
32.	Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)
	Subject: Winter Warmth (1)
	<p>The Council Leader will no doubt recall that a proposal to provide some pensioners with an item of warm clothing in view of the decision by the Government to remove the Winter Fuel Allowance from the vast majority of pensioners was rejected by the Council.</p> <p>Since then, is she prepared to recognise that all across the country Council after Council – the majority being Labour controlled – are seeking ways in which the adverse impact of the decision by the Chancellor in the budget can be mitigated and for example, one Council is to provide air fryers and many others are seeking to use specific funds available for hardship?</p>

	Response:
	<p>“The Council has delivered a range of programmes to support all residents through the winter using the Household Support Fund provided by the Government: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to Christmas, an open Application Scheme was available to support residents in hardship and this is continued throughout the rest of the year with the Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme which provides urgent help with the costs of food, winter coats, gas, electricity or emergency travel to eligible residents. • Contributions are made to foodbanks to ensure sufficient stock is available. • The Affordable Warmth Team – continue to support residents with advice on boiler replacement, draught proofing etc through this programme. • Energy Project Plus – provide meter top up vouchers to be distributed by Energy Project Plus (more detail here Sefton Council Energy Projects Plus) • CVS Winter Clothing project – to provide winters coats and clothing to those most in need. • The warm hubs network delivered on our behalf by Sefton CVS through a network of delivery points (more detail here Sefton Warm Spaces Sefton CVS).”
33.	Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)
	Subject: Winter Warmth (2)
	<p>Following on from the previous question:-</p> <p>There have also been a significant number of Labour Councillors who have resigned as Labour Party Members because of this policy and in view of the recent very severe weather conditions would the Leader consider that Sefton introduces a scheme whereby pensioners could be provided with an electric throw – a facility which is recognised as being hugely helpful and helping to keep people warm – particularly the most vulnerable – and this can be done at a very modest capital cost with very low electricity running costs?</p>
	Response:
	“The range of support provided to all vulnerable members of Sefton’s communities allows individuals to determine which elements of support they require – be that financial for energy bills, energy efficiency advice, access to food banks, clothing or somewhere warm to spend time with other people.”
34.	Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Atkinson)
	Subject: Winter Warmth (3)

	<p>Following on from the previous two questions:-</p> <p>Does the Leader agree that the provision of such a facility would clearly indicate the extent to which all Sefton Councillors recognise the problem and notwithstanding any party political considerations have decided to take action in the best interests of this section of the population?</p>
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	<p>Response:</p>
	<p>“The Council’s use of Household to Support Fund to support vulnerable residents recognises that the cost of living and energy costs are a struggle for many people in Sefton.”</p>