



**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGULATORY,  
COMPLIANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES)**

**MEETING HELD AT THE COMMITTEE ROOM, TOWN HALL BOOTLE  
ON TUESDAY 14TH JANUARY, 2025**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Bradshaw (in the Chair)  
Councillor Byrom (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors Evans, Johnson, Catie Page, Parker,  
Porter, Shaw and Thomas

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Howard

**23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brodie-Browne, McNabb, Murphy and Sir Ron Watson.

**24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**25. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

**RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

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

Further to Minute No. 92 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 9 January 2025 the Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Services and Commercial that provided details of the review of the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) for the current year, 2024/25; recommending to Cabinet that following the review, it was proposed that there should be no change made to the scheme for 2025/26; and that provided an updated Council Tax Base for Sefton Council and each Parish area for 2025/26.

Annex A to the report detailed the Council Tax Base for 2025/26; and Annex B detailed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2025/26, including consultation summary and equalities impact assessment.

The Committee was advised that the Cabinet, at its meeting held on 9 January 2025 resolved (Minute No. 92) that:

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

The report required approval by Council at its meeting to be held on 16 January 2025.

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- The Council was commended for ensuring that vulnerable people, especially those with disabilities, were safeguarded during the challenging economic period due to the cost-of-living crisis and increases in energy bills
- The principle was noted that the Council would continue to recognise the additional needs of families with children; and that Child Benefit and Child Maintenance payments were not considered as income when calculating entitlement to CTRS. Information was sought on potential anomalies in the CTRS due to absent parents who did not contribute financially to their child(ren) and the impact this had on entitlement to CTRS. The Customer Centric Services Manager indicated that she would provide an update to the Committee on this matter
- The migration from legacy benefits to Universal Credit and how this would affect CTRS claims
- The work of One Stop Shop staff who provided assistance to customers seeking help with claims and entitlements for CTRS was commended

RESOLVED:

That the report updating on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax Base 2025/26 be noted.

## **27. COUNTER FRAUD STRATEGY**

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Services and Commercial that sought comments for the submission to Cabinet on the Council's Counter Fraud Strategy (the Strategy).

The report indicated that The Council had carried out a self-assessment against the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption; that one of the

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proposed actions that the Council should undertake was the development of a Counter Fraud Strategy for approval; that the proposed Strategy was based on the CIFAS, a not for profit counter fraud organisation's, five pillars and included roles and responsibilities as well as key priorities for the next three years; that an action plan had been developed based on the key priorities; and that the Council had made some progress on implementing actions to improve the Council's counter fraud approach which would be enhanced with the actions from the proposed Strategy.

A copy of the Strategy and Action Plan 2024/25 to 2025/26 were attached as appendices to the report.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) Cabinet be recommended to approve the proposed Counter Fraud Strategy and the responsibilities detailed in the document; and
- (2) the progress on implementation of proposed counter fraud actions be noted.

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

Further to Minute No. 94 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 9 January 2025 the Committee considered the report of the Executive Director - Corporate Services and Commercial that advised 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; and
- (3) the monitoring position of the Council's capital programme to the end of November 2024 in respect of:
  - the forecast expenditure to year end;
  - variations against the approved budgets and an explanation of those variations for consideration by Members; and
  - updates to spending profiles and proposed amendments to capital budgets necessary to ensure the efficient delivery of capital projects.

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- did the Government appointed commissioner to oversee services for children, young people and families in Sefton recommend ways for the Council to address budget overspends?

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- A recent report by the Local Government Association which identified that the number of looked after children across the country continued to increase; and that the high figures underlined the urgent need for the Government to implement measures to address the funding pressures in children's services
- Competition amongst local authorities to attract experienced social work staff and resultant increases in costs
- In respect of Education Excellence, the potential net overspend of £2.5m, which mainly related to Home to School Transport; and how this figure compared to the department's overall budget
- Would Government allow local authorities to roll over overspends on the Dedicated Schools Grant in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities?
- Education Excellence schemes within the capital programme

RESOLVED:

(A) That in respect of the Revenue Budget:

- (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 Cabinet on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2024, and as detailed 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; and
- (5) the financial risks associated with the delivery of the 2024/25 revenue budget be noted and that 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; and

(B) That in respect of the Capital Programme:

- (1) the spending profiles across financial years for the approved capital programme (paragraph 8.1) be noted;
- (2) the latest capital expenditure position as at 30 November 2024 of £31.470m (paragraph 7.3); the latest full year forecast of £77.937m (paragraph 7.4), be noted; and

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- (3) 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 (paragraphs 7.11-7.13).

**29. WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25, SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPICS  
AND KEY DECISION FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that sought the views of the Committee on the Work Programme for 2024/25; the identification of potential topics for scrutiny reviews to be undertaken by informal meetings of the Committee; the identification of any items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan; updated on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and provided reasons for the deferral of a number of items at the previous meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Work Programme for 2024/25, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted;
- (2) the reasons for the deferral of a number of items at the previous meeting of the Committee, as detailed in paragraph 1.1.5 of the report, be noted;
- (3) consideration of the Transformation Programme Update and Air Quality Monitoring reports be deferred to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 4 March 2025;
- (4) the Corporate Communications Strategy be removed from the Committee's Work Programme for 2024/25 and that the Corporate Communications Manager be requested to update the Strategy for 2025/26 and that a presentation be made to the Committee during that municipal year on the updated Strategy; and
- (5) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

**30. CABINET MEMBER REPORT - OCTOBER 2024 TO DECEMBER  
2024**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that included the most recent report from the Cabinet Member – Corporate Services.

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A Member of the Committee commented on the activity at the One Stop Shop facility provided at the Atkinson and the current position regarding improvements to make the facility more accessible.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the update report from the Cabinet Member – Corporate Services be noted; and
- (2) Councillor Howard be thanked for her attendance at the meeting.