OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGENERATION AND SKILLS)

MEETING HELD AT THE BIRKDALE ROOM, TOWN HALL, SOUTHPORT
ON TUESDAY 17TH SEPTEMBER, 2019

PRESENT: Councillor John Sayers (in the Chair)
Councillor Blackburne (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Brough, Dowd, Halsall, Lewis, Marshall, Robinson and Sathiy

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Myers.

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

11. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

12. HOMELESSNESS ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Economic Growth and Housing that presented the ‘Annual Report on Levels of Homelessness in Sefton 2018/19’; and in particular, which drew attention to the sorts of data provided and how the data in the Annual Report was presented.

The report indicated that Sefton’s published Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-23 contained an action to,

‘Publish an annual report explaining the current levels of homelessness, to aid elected councillor and chief officer decision making, and to,

Carry out an in-depth analysis of data collected by the Homelessness Case Level Information Classification monitoring system (H-CLIC).’

that in July 2019, the Cabinet Member – Communities and Housing approved the Homelessness Annual Report 2018/19; and that the Annual Report allowed Sefton to present a picture of homelessness within the borough over the last year, and provide a baseline for future annual reports in so that Sefton could track the performance and impact on services since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
The report concluded that following approval of the Annual Report the Cabinet Member also recommended that it be forwarded to this Committee for further scrutiny and that it be noted as an example of good practice as to how a service area could present and report on its data.

Attached as an appendix to the report was a copy of the Homelessness Annual Report 2018/19.

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

- The “other” category for homelessness reasons, and were informed that this was used when a client’s reasons didn’t fit with the other standard categories, although officers indicated that this was an issue being picked up with staff to ensure the correct categories were being used and to attempt to reduce the use of the ‘other’ category
- Confirmation was sought, and given, that the Council did not impose fines for rough sleepers nor did it force homeless people out of the borough with one-way train tickets
- The contributory impact of discretionary housing benefit payments on reducing the risk of rent arrears, evictions and consequently homelessness, and the potential effects on homelessness levels should the availability of such payments be reduced
- Interventions by the Council and partner agencies to help tenants manage their finances and avoid problems with Universal Credit
- Multi-agency partnership working, for example with Merseycare and Light for Life, to tackle problems experienced by rough sleepers, and through joint working being pursued by the Council’s Housing Options services with a variety of external organisations
- Differentiation between being homeless and a rough sleeper
- The “spot count” previously undertaken to determine the levels of rough sleeping in the borough in accordance with Government regulations, and how future counts may be conducted
- the number of Statutory Homeless decisions made by the Sefton Housing Options Team in 2018/19 compared to previous years, prior to the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- whether future reports could contain information on the new dispersed homeless accommodation service being introduced with Riverside housing association

RESOLVED:

That the Annual Report on Homelessness 2018/19, and in particular, as an example of good practice, of how a service area’s data is used and presented within the Annual Report, be noted.
13. DIGITAL INCLUSION WORKING GROUP – UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Further to Minute No. 25 of 6 November 2018 the Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer setting out progress made against each of the recommendations formulated by the Digital Inclusion Working Group and approved by Cabinet.

The report also indicated that the Head of Economic Growth and Housing had advised that, additional to the responses to the recommendations, Sefton was aligning itself to LCR proposed Digital Programme structure, which would allow easier and better flow of information and ideas, and allow Sefton to move the “whole” Digital agenda forward at a pace.

RESOLVED: That

(1) the report setting out progress made against each of the recommendations formulated by the Digital Inclusion Working Group and approved by Cabinet be noted; and

(2) the Head of Economic Growth and Housing be requested to submit bi-annual reports to the Committee on the progression of the Liverpool City Region Digital Inclusion Strategy.

14. SEFTON ECONOMIC STRATEGY UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Economic Growth and Housing that updated on work relating to the production of the Sefton Economic Strategy Action Plan for final approval by Cabinet Member - Regeneration and Skills.

The report indicated that the Sefton Economic Assessment, a factual statement of the borough’s strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, was approved by Cabinet Member – Regeneration and Skills on 9 March 2017 together with a draft Strategic Framework for Action, or the building blocks of the Strategy; that a business and public consultation exercise was undertaken which produced an excellent response with a total of 189 returns received through focus groups, online surveys, telephone contacts and written returns; that the strategy’s focus on inclusive growth, which encompassed wellbeing, housing and infrastructure helped generate a larger response from residents (49%) and Sefton’s business community (30%) and that there was also a good geographical split of responses; and that details of the responses were outlined in paragraph of the report.

The report also indicated that the Sefton Economic Strategy Action Plan would focus attention on Priority Actions and Key Outcomes with the actions focussing on 7 key priorities and objectives under Places, People and Productivity with an overarching aim of achieving Inclusive Growth for the benefit of Sefton’s communities; that the Action Plan would be a working document that could be reviewed, challenged and updated on a
regular basis; and that it would be underpinned by a robust Performance Framework developed through the commissioned assessment work and supplemented by more up to date and ongoing analysis from the Executive Directors and officers.


Attached as appendices to the report were the Draft Sefton Economic Strategy Framework (March 2018) and the Sefton Economic Strategy Consultation report.

Members of the Committee asked questions/raised issues on the following matters:

- The uncertainty about private sector demand for office space; the continued presence of some large, office based employers such as Santander in Netherton and the potential future vulnerability in the face of uncertain economic prospects for the financial and professional services sector post-Brexit; and whether analysis had been undertaken on the impacts of a deal or no-deal Brexit on this issue
- The expansion of the Port of Liverpool was acknowledged but it was also noted that concentration of employees in the port sector was below England's average

RESOLVED:

That the production of the Sefton Economic Strategy Action Plan for final approval by Cabinet Member - Regeneration and Skills be welcomed.

15. REFUSE COLLECTION, RECYCLING AND FOOD WASTE UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Locality Services that updated on refuse collection, recycling and the suspension of food waste collections during 2018 / 2019.

The report indicated that the waste collection operation within the Council’s Cleansing Services Section consisted of three strands:

- Waste which cannot be recycled (collected via black sack or grey wheeled bin)
- Waste which can be recycled (collected via hessian sack or brown wheeled bin)
- Green ‘Garden’ Waste (collected via green wheeled bin) a seasonal operation (March to end November)

And that in February 2019 elected Members determined to suspend food waste collections from June 2019 due to falling rates of collection / tonnages.
The report also indicated that it had now been just over three years since the dry recycling service was brought in-house, and a number of interesting outcomes had become apparent since the service was changed to fully comingled operation on 1 August 2016; one such outcome being that the anticipated extra tonnages of recycled materials had not materialised and recycling performance across the Council had somewhat slightly reversed at just over 38%. However, evidence from Merseyside recycling and Waste Authority (MRWA) showed that Sefton achieved the highest recycling rates of all other Liverpool City Region Councils. The report also indicated that the green (garden) waste service had improved dramatically over the last period and tonnages of collected waste levels were around 20,000 tonnes per year. In respect of household waste collections, in 2018/2019 the amount collected increased over the previous twelve months by approximately 900 tonnes; and that in 2018/19 the service collected just over 108,000 tonnes in total, which was approximately 1% above the total tonnage generated in 2015/2016.

The report also detailed current issues within refuse, recycling and green waste services and provided additional information relating to refuse collection/ recycling/green (garden) waste and food waste collections; and concluded that despite severe reductions in budget since 2010 across the waste collection service these reductions had overall been found via efficiencies alone as the Council was still required to collect refuse or empty bins from every property across the Borough; that Locality Services (Cleansing) would continue to seek ways to use its expenditure in a smarter and more efficient manner, however, given the proposed increase in new properties forecast between now and 2026, there would be considerable additional pressure placed upon the service for which solutions for the future operation and funding of the required services would be necessary; and that the service would continue to welcome observations, comments and suggestions from any interested party or parties relating to the provision or operation of any aspect of the refuse and recycling collection services.

Members of the Committee asked questions/raised issues on the following matters:

- Missed or delayed collections and the problems for this caused by access issues for collection vehicles
- The use of hit-squads to tackle fly-tipping and grot-spot areas
- In sack collection areas awareness campaigns could be undertaken regarding collection days
- A comment was made that the rear-entry crews did a fantastic job clearing fly-tipped rubbish but that the problem simply re-occurred over, and over again. The production of a generic leaflet to residents may help to alleviate such problems. Residents had to be educated about the problems they were causing but ultimately, enforcement action would have to be taken
- Could a visit be organised for Members to the Gillmoss Materials Recovery Facility?
The use of communal euro bins and recycling bins at accommodation comprising flats/apartments and problems with cross-contamination of waste in such bins

RESOLVED: That

(1) the report updating on refuse collection, recycling and the suspension of food waste collections during 2018 / 2019 be noted; and

(2) the Head of Locality Services be requested to organise a visit for Members of the Committee to the Gillmoss Materials Recovery Facility.

16. WINTER SERVICE POLICY AND OPERATIONAL PLAN

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Highways and Public Protection that sought consideration and approval of the revised Winter Service Policy and Operational Plan policy document for 2019/20.

The report indicated that the Council provided a Highway Winter Service to the Borough in accordance with the Winter Service Policy and Operational Plan; that officers monitored the weather conditions 24 hours a day throughout the winter season and enacted the plan when weather conditions dictated; that the Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003 (section 111) had inserted an additional section 41(1A) to the Highways Act 1980 which placed a duty on Highway Authorities in respect of winter conditions, and stated ‘In particular, a Highway Authority was under duty to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway was not endangered by snow or ice’; and that in addition, the Traffic Management Act 2004 placed a Statutory Network Management Duty on all local traffic authorities in England requiring authorities to do all that was reasonably practicable to manage the network effectively to keep traffic moving.

The report also indicated that the Winter Service Policy and Operational Plan was subject to an annual review, reassessment and consultation; that as part of this and in accordance with Cabinet Member’s wishes, a consultation letter was sent to every Elected Member; and that Merseytravel had also been contacted and asked if there had been any revisions to their bus routes since last year.

The report concluded that the Policy was based on guidance provided by the Government in a document entitled ‘Well Maintained Highways – Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management.’; that a new code of practice was published in 2016 entitled ‘Well Managed Highway Infrastructure’ which superseded all previous codes; that Guidance relating to practical issues and delivery of the service was now contained within the National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG) Practical Guidance Documents; that five practical Guidance Documents had been updated and released this year in respect of spread rates, salt storage,
spread management, treatments for snow and ice and treatment method and technologies; and that a number of enhancements were made to the Winter Service policy last year through the provision of a new contract which included a new purpose built salt storage facility, capable of holding 3500 tonnes of rocksalt and new gritting vehicles with the latest technology to allow for optimum spread rates.

A copy of the latest version of the Winter Service Policy and Operational Plan for 2019/2020 was attached to the report.

Members asked questions/raised issues on the following matters:

- Gritting of pavements in the vicinity of train stations/transport hubs, schools and care homes
- The specification of vehicles to ensure they operated well in severe weather conditions
- The forecasting technology used to determine when gritting operations will be undertaken

**RESOLVED:** That

(1) the Winter Service Policy and Operational Plan for 2018/19 be approved; and

(2) the Head of Highways and Public Protection be requested to arrange a visit for Members of the Committee to see in operation the forecasting technology to determine when gritting operations will be undertaken.

**17. WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20, SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPICS AND KEY DECISION FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer seeking the views of the Committee on the Work Programme for 2019/20, the identification of potential topics for scrutiny reviews to be undertaken by a Working Group(s) appointed by the Committee and the identification of any items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the Key Decision Forward Plan.

The report also updated on issues associated with Utilities and increases in their charges and on Housing Licensing issues.

Members asked questions/raised issues on the following matters:

- The potential for the establishment of a Working Group to investigate the factors associated with the decline of retail areas and shopping parades
- Regarding Working Groups, could consideration again be given to previous suggestions made by officers
RESOLVED: That

(1) the Work Programme for 2019/20, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved;

(2) Councillor Robinson be appointed as a Member to serve on the Effectiveness of the Council’s Enforcement Activity Working Group;

(3) the update on issues associated with United Utilities and increases in their charges as referred to in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.4 be noted;

(4) Members be requested to give consideration to attending the site visit at Southport Eco-centre on 24 October 2019, with United Utilities, to investigate how Sustainable Drainage Systems can be installed to reduce drainage charge bills at a school site in Sefton;

(5) the update on Housing Licensing Issues as referred to in paragraphs 4.5 to 4.9 be noted; and

(6) before a Working Group is potentially established to investigate the factors associated with the decline of retail areas and shopping parades the Cabinet Member – Regeneration and Skills be requested to give her views on such factors.

18. CABINET MEMBER REPORTS - JUNE TO SEPTEMBER 2019

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer that included the most recent reports from the Cabinet Members for Communities and Housing; Health and Wellbeing (Green Sefton), Locality Services; Planning and Building Control; and Regeneration and Skills.

RESOLVED:

That the update report from the Cabinet Members for Communities and Housing; Health and Wellbeing (Green Sefton), Locality Services; Planning and Building Control; and Regeneration and Skills be noted.