

# LGA Peer Challenge Self Assessment 2023





# Contents

<b>Welcome from the Leader of the Council</b> .....	<b>2</b>	<b>Governance and culture</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>Welcome from the Chief Executive</b> .....	<b>3</b>	<b>Governance Arrangements</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>Our People</b> .....	<b>4</b>	Co-production & Listening.....	38
<b>Our Place</b> .....	<b>6</b>	Wholly Owned Companies .....	40
<b>Our Heritage</b> .....	<b>8</b>	<b>Organisational Culture</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>Our Council</b> .....	<b>12</b>	Ambitious & Proud Corporate Parents .....	41
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>14</b>	One Council.....	42
Peer Team Recommendations from the 2022 Revisit.....	14	Equality, diversity and inclusion.....	42
<b>Local priorities and outcomes</b> .....	<b>16</b>	<b>Financial planning and management</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>We understand and listen to our communities</b> .....	<b>16</b>	<b>Budget Management &amp; Sustainability</b> .....	<b>45</b>
Children and Young People .....	18	Financial Management Context.....	46
Health & Wellbeing .....	18	3 year Medium Term Financial Plan - funding gap .....	46
Adult Social Care .....	19	Financial Resilience .....	46
Everyday Services .....	20	High Needs Deficit .....	47
Inclusive Growth .....	20	Our Capital Strategy and Programme.....	48
<b>Reducing Inequalities - Tackling Childhood Poverty</b> .....	<b>22</b>	Our Accounts.....	49
<b>Organisational and place leadership</b> .....	<b>24</b>	<b>Capacity for improvement &amp; fit for the future</b> .....	<b>50</b>
<b>Local Leadership &amp; Partnership Working</b> .....	<b>26</b>	Workforce .....	50
Liverpool City Region .....	27	Performance & Impact .....	52
Health 12 months on.....	27	Delivering Our Children’s Services Improvement Plan .....	53
Voluntary, Community & Faith .....	28	Our Localities Model .....	53
Businesses that Care .....	28	Climate Change .....	55
Caring for our Coast & Greenspace .....	29	Active Travel.....	55
<b>Working together to Support Our Communities</b> .....	<b>30</b>	Our Assets.....	55
Place leadership and inclusive growth.....	32	Digital.....	56
Culture Strategy.....	35	Community Capacity .....	57
		<b>Key and background documents</b> .....	<b>58</b>

# Welcome from the Leader of the Council

We are delighted to welcome you to our clean, green and beautiful corner of the world, we are lucky to live and work in an amazing borough which holds great natural beauty and a heritage to be proud of. But, to steal a quote from a Cabinet colleague, it is the people of Sefton who truly make it sparkle.

We have so much to be proud and confident of in Sefton and being an ambitious Council we are always striving for further improvements, both for our communities and for Sefton the place. The last five years have brought challenges that few anticipated. We believe that we are well placed to continue to work with our partners to make a difference locally in the context of the challenges of funding levels, the cost-of-living crisis, climate change and health inequalities. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our workforce, Trade Unions, partners and the thousands of volunteers; we could not do it without them. They are happy and proud to share their gifts and talents of the head, heart and hand to make it such a great place to live, work and visit.



We also recognise the areas where we need to improve and develop our services and so we welcome the opportunity that the Local Government Association's Peer Challenge provides us with to learn from colleagues, helping us to go further with our ambitious agenda and delivery of our improvement plans.

You will see from our new Corporate Plan that we have a real desire and drive to improve services for children and their families, make life better for local people and create an environment where businesses can thrive and invest.

Learning from previous peer challenges has helped us to improve in so many ways including the way we consider and act on performance reports but we know that there is more to do including truly embedding a performance culture across the organisation.

We look forward to the peer team's insight and advice on our improvement journey, growth and transformation plans and we intend to fully embrace the learning from this challenge.

**Cllr. Ian Maher**  
Labour Leader, Sefton Council

# Welcome from the Chief Executive



Welcome to the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge team. I know that you will benefit from the same warmth that I have since joining the Council in July as well as the breadth of knowledge, expertise and experience that our Councillors, staff, and partners bring. As the Leader says it is the people that make this a very special place to live, work and visit.

The Peer Challenge comes at an exciting time for us. We are making progress improving Children's Services, while also clearly acknowledging the significant amount of work that remains. We have an exciting Regeneration and Growth Programme; the team are focused on project delivery, but we are also keen to develop new projects and ensure the programme not only delivers buildings but also shapes place, ensures the sustainability of our beautiful coast and green spaces and makes a difference for local people and businesses.

And we are currently working on the Medium Term Financial Strategy as the vehicle to plan for the future, recognising that local government is chronically underfunded, but we still have to do more with what we have for the benefit of local people.

Central to this challenge is ensuring we have the capacity and the right culture in the council and the right relationships with our partners and communities. We are keen to ensure that we are open and transparent, we tell our story well, have a strong grip on performance and are always accountable, never defensive. We believe that building a strong culture of collaboration inside the council and across the borough is central to this: strong relationships, built on honesty and constructive challenge. This is the only way we can continue to improve our everyday services, deliver on our Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care plans, and deliver real change through our growth programme.

Our members, workforce and partners are all looking forward to sharing our story so far, our challenges and our ambitions for the future with you.

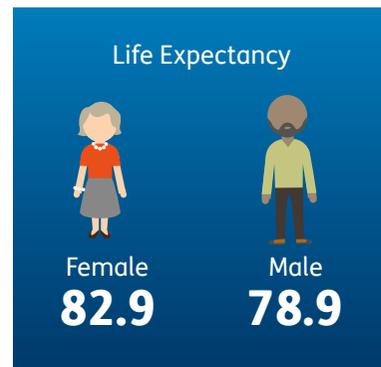
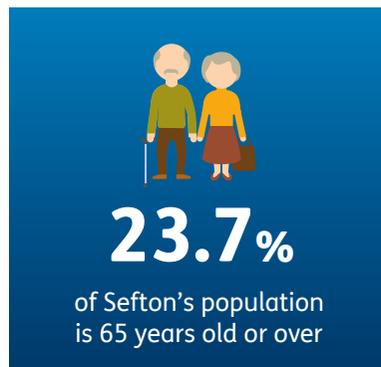
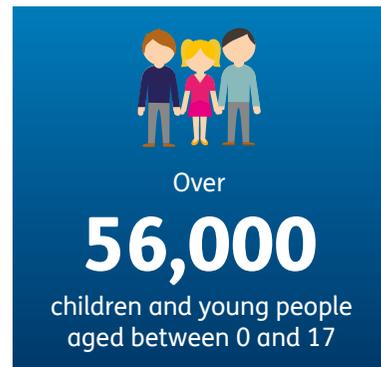
**Philip Porter**  
Chief Executive, Sefton Council

# Our Sefton

## Our People

Sefton is a confident, connected borough because of its people. Local people have a great sense of community and so many benefit from the skills and talents of the thousands of volunteers across Sefton.

Sefton has a unique socio-economic geography. In its entirety it is in the most deprived fifth of English Local Authorities, with 27 of the 189 Sefton Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) being in the top 5% nationally (17 of these being in South Sefton). Yet other parts of the Borough, particularly in the middle and north, are some of the least deprived areas, with seven LSOAs (six of which are in North Sefton) in the least deprived 5% of areas nationally.



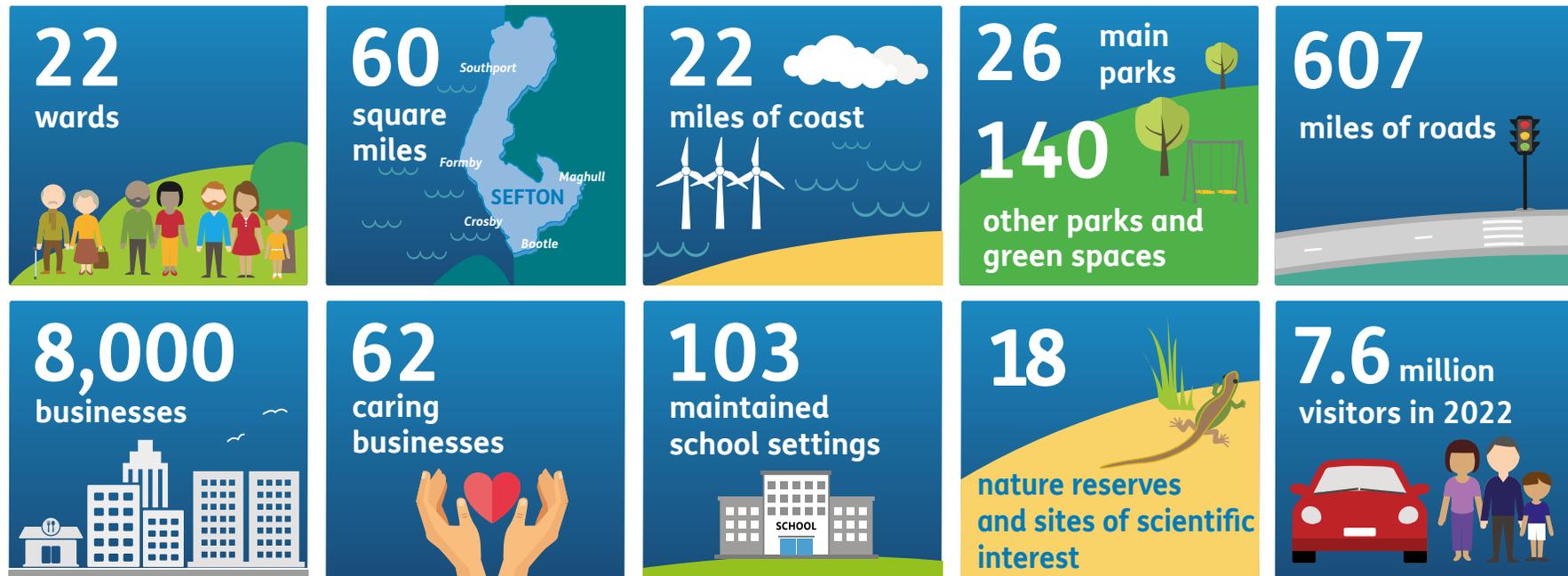


# Our Sefton

## Our Place

Sefton is named after the village and parish of Sefton, near Maghull, which had formerly served as the seat of the Molyneux family; and the watermill located there was the inspiration for Sefton Council's distinctive crest. Made up of five townships, Southport, Maghull, Formby, Crosby and Bootle, we have everything from beautiful coast and countryside to pretty villages, industrial areas and the docks. The distinctiveness of Sefton's towns and villages is integral to our uniqueness; however, it is the people that create the distinct and diverse communities that make it a vibrant place to live, work, visit and invest in.

You may not be aware that Sefton hosts many national and international events including the Open, in Birkdale, and the Grand National, in Aintree.



# Where is Sefton?



## A community of communities

**Southport** – a seaside resort renowned for its pier, sandy beaches and Lord Street - the Victorian canopied boulevard - which is a favourite shopping destination. Southport plays host to major events including the Open Golf, Air Show, Fireworks Championships and Flower Show.

**Formby** – home to glorious beaches with dramatic sand dunes, surrounded by pinewoods and known for its wildlife, particularly the endangered red squirrel and natterjack toad. The area is conserved and designated a Site of Specific Scientific Interest.

**Maghull** - lies on the picturesque Leeds and Liverpool canal and boasts the bustling Central Square Shopping Centre. The nearby village of Aintree is home to the world famous Grand National horserace.

**Crosby** – is a popular coastal town boasting the Antony Gormley 'Another Place' art installation, where 100 iron men stand proudly looking out to sea. Crosby and Waterloo are vibrant areas and the village is home to the art nouveau-inspired Crown Buildings.

**Bootle** – has a growing economy and its geography is centred on the historic port, docks, and associated industries. The area boasts the busy community-focused Strand Shopping Centre and is home to green spaces including the stunning Victorian Derby Park.



# Our Sefton

## Our Heritage

Sefton's heritage and culture are woven into the fabric of its identity. We have a rich maritime history of which we are very proud. Local history is much valued and our libraries team are a great source of information and a local memory bank.

The impact of both world wars is still visible today. Sefton lost around 4,000 men and women from 1914–1918 during The Great War, their names are inscribed on the 11 memorials throughout the borough. With support from a Heritage Lottery Grant, our libraries team created a website - [Sefton War Memorials](#), not only to commemorate the war ending 100 years before, but also to tell the stories behind the names of the brave men and women who gave their lives in both world wars. In May 1941, over 8 nights, Bootle became one of the most bombed places in England. Over 1,000 people were killed or injured and over 80% of houses were damaged or destroyed. Very few families escaped the Blitz unscathed; over 20,000 residents were left homeless following the bombing.

Our older people enjoy sharing their early memories, which we captured through our [Lost Voices project](#). Through this project the team recorded the memories of people who have a compelling story to share or who may be in the early stages of memory loss. This set of recordings are an invaluable tool for school children and students studying social history, or anyone who would be interested in listening to the oral history of a local person.

We have conservation areas, beautiful listed buildings, registered historic parks and gardens and scheduled monuments. [Southport Townscape Heritage](#) is a regeneration and community project to bring new life to historic buildings on Southport's streets. Southport Townscape - Restoring a Victorian seaside resort's heritage for the future.



## ANOTHER PLACE BY ANTONY GORMLEY

These spectacular sculptures by Antony Gormley are on Crosby beach. Another Place consists of 100 cast-iron, life-size figures spread out along three kilometres of the foreshore, stretching almost one kilometre out to sea. The Another Place figures - each one weighing 650 kilos - are made from casts of the artist's own body standing on the beach, all of them looking out to sea, staring at the horizon in silent expectation.



## SOUTHPORT TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE

Is a regeneration and community project to bring new life to historic buildings on Southport's streets.



## LOCAL AWARD-WINNING ARTIST PAUL CURTIS

Beatles mural, which is featured in the teaser videos for the new single.





## Freedom of the Borough

The Freedom of the Borough is the highest honour the Council can give to an individual and is only ever considered in exceptional circumstances.

Bootle, in particular, has longstanding links with the heroism and dedication of our Royal Navy. Naval officers from HMS Mersey paraded through the streets of Bootle in April to celebrate the ship being awarded with the Freedom of the Borough of Sefton.

The Council conferred Honorary Freedom of the Borough status on Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust, Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust, Liverpool University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Southport & Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alex Greenwood, the Bootle-born Lioness, who captured the nation's hearts in the summer of 2022 by helping to secure the UEFA Women's European Championship before narrowly losing out on the 2023 Women's World Cup, became the first woman to be given the illustrious Freedom of the Borough civic honour. Alex joined fellow Bootle footballer Jamie Carragher and famous horse trainer Donald 'Ginger' McCain as the only three individuals on Sefton's Honorary Freedom Scroll, which officially confirms her status as Freewoman of the Borough.





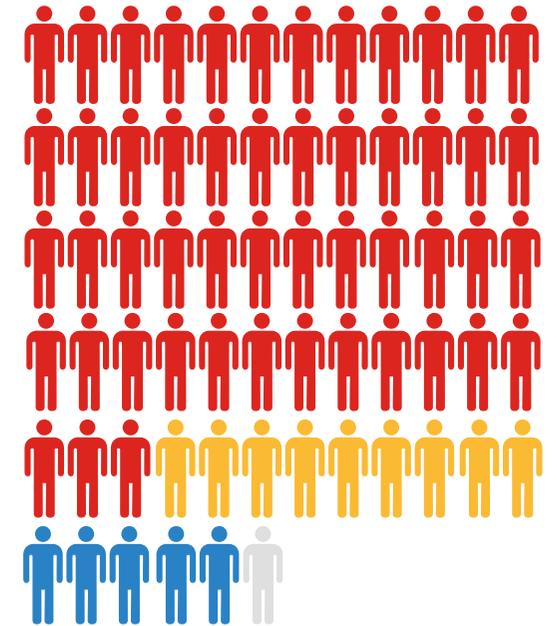
# Our Sefton

## Our Council

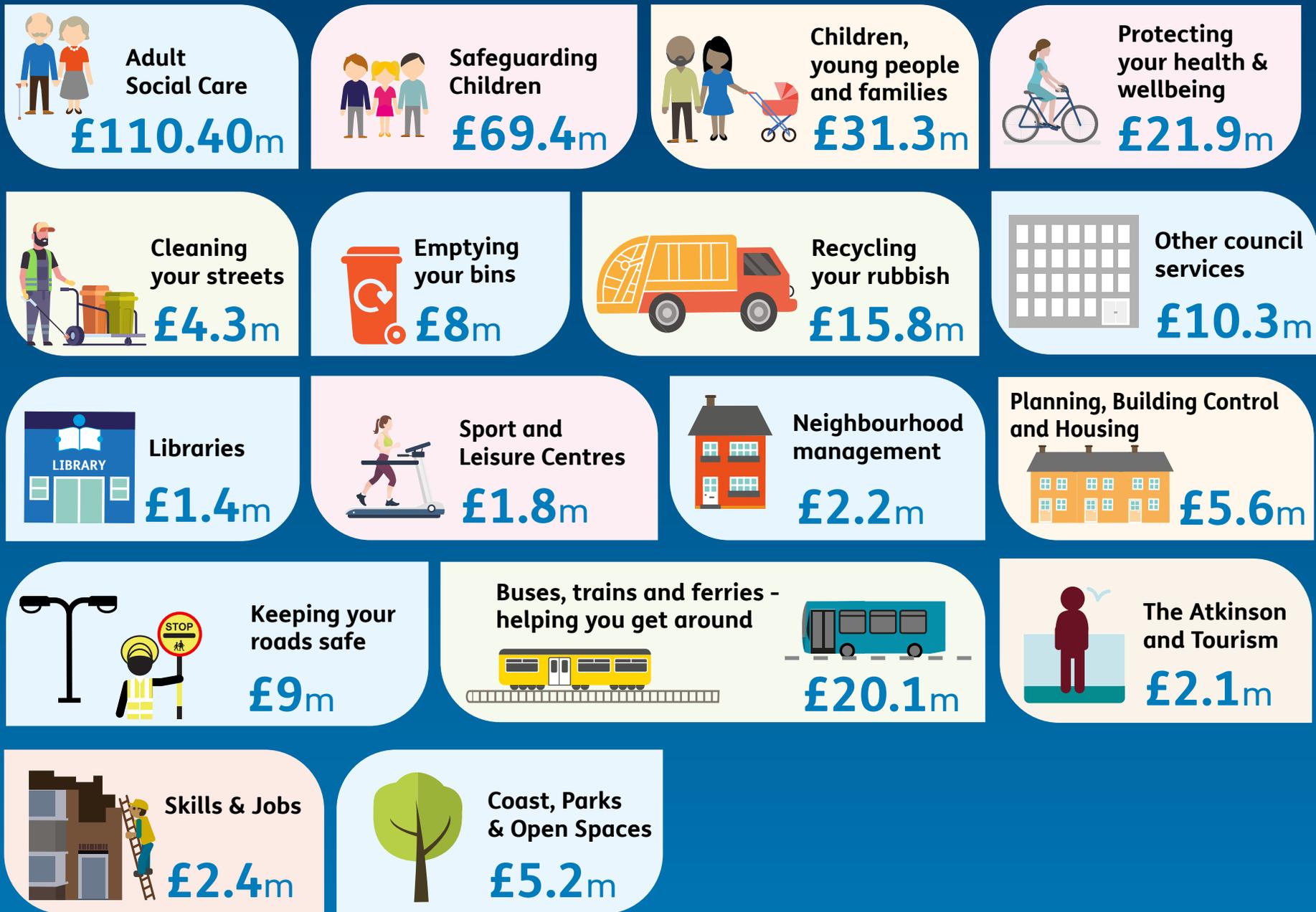
Sefton Council was formed on 1 April 1974, it is a metropolitan borough and is one of six councils that make up the Liverpool City Region. The Council comprises 66 Councillors with one-third elected annually three years in every four.

### A Leader and Cabinet model

The Cabinet comprises of the Leader of the Council and nine Cabinet Members of the Council.



# Here's what we expect to spend in 2023/24



# Introduction

In 2018 we commissioned the Local Government Association (LGA) to conduct a Peer Challenge as an independent check on how the Council is performing in terms of planning for and delivering against our ambitious plans for the future. The peer review revisit took place in 2022.

We have commissioned this Peer Challenge as we believe that we have benefitted greatly from this approach to sector led improvement and are open to learning more and look forward to sharing our plans.

## Peer Team Recommendations from the 2022 Revisit

The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the Council from the revisit that took place in 2022.

- A. Ensure the planned refresh of the vision for Sefton is used as an opportunity to then ensure the underpinning strategies and plans reflect the key priorities of the Council over the next period such as improving Children's Services.
- B. Inform the above work by taking stock, internally and with partners of the new opportunities, strengths and challenges that the Council will wish to build on, capitalise from and address in the next three year period.
- C. Embed the service level improvements in performance management made recently and establish regular, collective and cross-cutting performance discussions at Cabinet.
- D. Given how much change the world has seen in the last two years and how the localities model has been required to react, work with partners to review the localities model.
- E. Continue to build on the significant progress seen in regards to economic growth
- F. The purpose of this position statement is to provide an update on the progress made and share the further changes that we plan to make over the next few years.



# Local priorities and outcomes

- We understand and listen to our communities
- Our Corporate Plan is new
- Improving safeguarding for children is the Council's number one priority

## Understanding our communities and our Corporate Priorities

One of our greatest strengths is our deep understanding of our communities. Our **ward profiles** provide an economic, social, demographic and health insight for the 22 wards that make up Sefton and our **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment** chapters look at the current and future health and care needs of the local population to inform and guide the planning and commissioning (development of services) of health, wellbeing and social care services. We are intending to use the Census data in a new way and are currently developing a Power BI (Business Intelligence) dashboard that will show all of the domains of the 2021 Census to Lower Super Output area. Once this work is complete, we intend to produce the ward profiles as Power BI dashboards.

When developing our strategies and plans we understand how important it is to listen and work with our partners, communities and local businesses. Our partnership **Vision 2030** was developed in 2016 following **extensive consultation** with local people and businesses in 2016. Alongside the development of Vision 2030 the Council also developed its **Core Purpose** which was refreshed in July 2022. At the same time **Cabinet agreed** the approach to building upon, assessing the impact of Vision 2030 and developing Vision 2035 is described in the diagram below.



The Strategic Leadership team and their departmental management teams have started internal planning conversations regarding the development of Vision 2035 and over the next six months will build on this in readiness for the work planned for 2024/25. The work so far has started to take stock internally and next year we will take stock with partners and explore new opportunities, strengths and challenges.

## Corporate Priorities – Some of our recent achievements and plans for further development

Following feedback from the Local Government Peer Challenge revisit we have developed our **Sefton Council Corporate Plan 2023 to 2026**, which builds on our achievements of recent years and brings together our priorities for the next three years. Our ambition is for Sefton to be a confident and connected borough that offers the things we all need to start, live and age well, where everyone has a fair chance of a positive and healthier future.



The five priorities are underpinned by the Council achieving financial sustainability and developing a Medium Term Financial Plan that enables us to be fitter for the future. Recently the Leadership team has been working together with Cabinet members to ensure that there are clear focused priority actions for the next 12 months.

## Our Priorities for the next 12 months

### Children and Young People

#### Deliver Our Improvement Plan

- Safeguarding children, with our partners, is our highest priority and improving services for children and their families will be at the heart of everything we do. Our Children's Services team continues to face high demand and increases in complexity of need. The actions in our Improvement Plan identify the steps we are taking to make the required changes.
- We are working closely with the Children's Commissioner, partners and the newly appointed Department of Education Advisor to deliver the required changes.
- We share more about our improvement journey later on.

#### Deliver on SEND plan

- Our SEND Continuous Improvement Board (SENDICB) is a partnership board, led by the Council, committed to delivering the actions that will improve the lives and life chances of Sefton's children and young people with SEND. We are working closely with our partners to prepare for the new SEND inspection regime.
- We recognise that there is still much work to do in respect of improving services for children and their families but we are determined to make the changes needed.
- Based on our current work programme we anticipate that our inspection outcome will be: "lead to inconsistent experiences and outcome."



## Health & Wellbeing

### Delivering the child poverty strategy

- Almost one in six under 16s in Sefton live in relative poverty and the effects of a start living on or close to the breadline are likely to follow those 8,000-plus young people through the rest their lives. As well as the impact on their physical and mental health, childhood poverty results in some of those young people achieving lower results through education, which in turn reduces their prospects in terms of accessing higher education and well-paid work. Research shows that in addition to lower educational attainment, young people who have grown up in poverty miss out on the life chances and influences that from which others benefit.
- The Council declared a Poverty Emergency in March 2021.
- We share more about our intent later on.

### Continued to do everything we can to mitigate the worst of the cost of living crisis

- The impact of the cost of living crisis on local people and businesses cannot be underestimated.

- The combination of changes to the welfare system, domestic energy and fuel prices and rising prices in the shops due to inflation has hit households hard, leaving many in Sefton struggling to make ends meet.
- We share more about our partnership working in this area later on.

## Adult Social Care

### Prepared and ready for CQC Assurance

- We are currently working hard to prepare for the implementation of the new National Assurance Framework and regulatory visits by the Care Quality Commission, which will commence later this year. This new framework focuses on 4 key areas, Working with People, Providing Support, Ensuring Safe Systems and Leadership.
- We have invested significantly in engaging with our workforce, providers and local people to undertake our self-assessment and develop our assurance plan to ensure we are ready for future visits.
- As part of this approach work is ongoing to ensure that the Corporate Co-production Toolkit is fully embedded into practice. We are also strengthening our approach to Co-production, Engagement and Consultation to support with development of ASC Early Help and Prevention approach and supporting the delivery of Health and Social Care integration through the Sefton Place Plan.

Ensuring the right care and support at the right time is a key priority for adult social care and the service continues to work with key system partners to ensure an integrated approach across Sefton. Key areas of focus at the present time include:

- Development of Transfer of Care Hubs (to improve discharge

arrangements from hospital) and further development of a Home First Offer

- Use of population health data and risk stratification to enable a greater focus on proactive care across health and social care allowing an early intervention approach
- Further development of the current Integrated Care Teams which are aligned to Primary Care Networks which includes a focus on the workforce challenges
- A focus on strengthening access to community support

These key workstreams also align to the wider programmes of transformation within Adult Social Care which includes the use of technology enabled care, a review of the front door services, a reduction in the numbers of people access long term placements and ensuring a strength-based approach across all areas of practice. Managing increased acuity and demand within existing resources is also a key area the transformation programme.

### Risk assessed delivery plan in place and delivering for supported living and extra care.

- A key focus for our Strategic Commissioning function is how we support people to manage their health and wellbeing, so they maximise their independence, choice and control, live healthier lives and where possible reduce future needs for care and support. We do this through key priorities of achieving Market Sustainability, our support to Carers, remodelling of our Supported Living offer, development of Extra Care, expansion of reablement, how we work with our voluntary sector partners, delivery of our technology enabled care strategy and our day opportunities offer.

## Everyday Services

Core standards for everyday services confirmed and budget aligned

- We want to ensure that our work contributes to people feeling happy and safe in their neighbourhood.
- The everyday services our community expect are the things that make a difference - for example collecting the bins, dealing with fly tipping, answering calls from members of our communities with residents.
- Over the coming twelve months we will develop core standards for everyday services and align them to our available resources. Delivering an ambitious housing strategy and key projects and actions.

Delivering an ambitious housing strategy and key projects and actions

- In the last year we have developed a number of key strategies to support this including a new Housing Strategy Action Plan.
- We will focus on delivering our Housing Strategy Action Plan which underpins how we and our partners will implement our five-year Housing Strategy which focuses on providing a secure foundation for individuals to live the lives they want to live.

## Inclusive Growth

Key place-making schemes in regeneration, housing and transport agreed and in delivery

- Inclusive Growth is underpinned by a programme of work that directly supports economic growth and development within the Borough, creating new jobs and businesses and enhanced productivity. It will





also directly benefit the Council by reducing / removing subsidies, creating new net revenue streams and Council Tax and Business Rates receipts. The Programme is wholly focused on social and environmental outcomes, in tandem with economic and financial outcomes.

- Since the last Peer Challenge we have made significant progress in developing both formal and informal relationships with the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Combined Authority (CA), there is a CA officer engagement as part of the team on every strategic project in Sefton.
- We share a bit more about our Inclusive Growth Programme later on.

### Delivering the Economic Strategy

- We are committed to developing an economy that connects Sefton to the Liverpool City Region and beyond, in which businesses, employees, jobseekers and working age adults receive the help they need, and the benefits of growth are maximised for the people and places of Sefton.

## Reducing Inequalities - Tackling Childhood Poverty

We, along with our partners, are ambitious for every child in Sefton and having considered the challenging findings of a review of child poverty in Sefton it was agreed to develop a Childhood Poverty Strategy. In December 2022 we launched our **Child Poverty Strategy** which was developed following extensive engagement, appraisal of local and national data and endorsed in feedback from partners and more importantly by qualitative insight work carried out with those families who were facing financial hardship. This informed three key priorities, reducing the level of poverty and time spent in poverty now, minimising the harmful effects of poverty on educational achievement, health, and wellbeing now and later in life and preventing future poverty for today's children and young people. Delivering on this strategy is a priority action for us, we will also continue to do everything we can to mitigate the impact of the

cost of living crisis on our **communities**.

Our strategy has been developed to add value to work already being undertaken across the council and with its partners in the local Integrated Care System, the Voluntary, Community and Faith sector, as well as business and further and higher education bodies. Our regular reviews will ensure continued alignment with other policies and strategies and reflect the voices and involvement of people with a lived experience of poverty. Our focus is set firmly on what we can do to reduce the cost of living and to remove financial and other barriers so that low-income families can get early support. It outlines how we can improve physical and mental health of low-income families and considers how narrowing the educational attainment gap between children from low-income families and their better off peers is an essential driver of change. The strategy also considers how we can work together to ensure the places where we live are strong on the fundamental, universal things everyone needs to live well by creating more connected, accessible, and inclusive spaces, which support social cohesion, diversity, and participation.

The strategy is aligned to 'Build Back Fairer' and the more recent landmark report on how public, private and third sector organisations in Cheshire and Merseyside can work together to tackle health inequalities – **All Together Fairer**. Dr Tammy Boyce, from University College London Institute of Health Equity, along with Council Public Health and Place Executives, as well as NHS representatives including Dr Ian Sinha, Consultant Respiratory Paediatrician, Alder Hey Children's Hospital have all been involved in shaping our strategy events and have each given different perspectives on child poverty in Sefton. All of our keynotes have endorsed our approach which focuses on pockets, prospects, and places and explores the real and lasting changes local organisations can make for children and families here in Sefton.

The strategy sets out a blueprint for a local approach to tackling child poverty in Sefton, with actions linked to people's finances, prospects, and places. This

means increasing opportunity in employment and education and supporting the most vulnerable members of its communities.

Since launching the strategy in December 2022, we have already put into place a variety of short and long-term actions which collectively, we feel will have lasting impact in our journey to make real impactful change. We have worked together with our partners in the acute sector, housing, and the voluntary sector to create a parent champion pilot programme based in our most disadvantaged communities to support local families and children who are challenged by poor respiratory health.

There will be a focus on Place at our forthcoming conference. Our collective action will target and aim to reverse high street decline, meet the challenges of a changing retail market, accelerated by the impacts of COVID-19, and to maximise social value gains.

We are moving forward at pace, maintaining profile and momentum as we prepare our next conference in January 2024. We are delighted to be welcoming our keynotes, The High Sheriff of Merseyside (former regional

director of public health and CMO for Wales) along with the programme manager for planning and health, housing, and environment from the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID).

We still have a great deal to do in Sefton to eradicate childhood poverty and the Council and its partners are still facing significant financial challenge. However, this has not limited our ambition, belief, and commitment to focus on people and the strong assets in our communities. By working together and adopting a whole system approach we have committed to sharing aims, outcomes, and resources with all of our partners as we tackle this sobering issue together. Our strategy continues to lead and inform our bold and long-term commitment to improve social, environmental, and economic sustainability, which will help poverty proof future generations.

We are proud of our partnership work on this so far and we ask the peers to share their learning on how we embed something so broad, so transformational in all areas of the council, and with all partners, when you are trying to move at pace?

# Organisational and place leadership

- We are confident and connected
- Our inclusive growth programme is ambitious
- We believe that by working in partnership we will achieve more

## Organisational Leadership

The Council is composed of 66 Councillors with one-third elected annually (three years in every four) for a term of four years. The political composition now is Labour 51, The Liberal Democrat and Progressive Alliance Group 9, Conservative Party 5 and 1 Independent Member.

The Cabinet comprises of the Leader of the Council and nine Cabinet Members of the Council. Each has responsibility for a defined service area (portfolio). In May 2021 two new Cabinet Member roles were introduced - Cabinet Member, Education, and a Cabinet Member, Children's Social Care.

The Leaders of the opposition groups have regular bi-monthly one-to-one meetings with the Chief Executive and regular opposition group meetings take place providing an opportunity for the opposition to engage with senior officers on important issues and the Forward Plan, with no call ins in over twelve months. Members of the opposition groups sit on key committees such as Overview & Scrutiny, Audit & Governance and Planning.

Cllr Maher has been Leader since 2015 and has been on the Cabinet since 2003. He is passionate about the Council's focus on local people, including his, and our role, as Corporate Parent. He has always lived in Sefton and has a rich knowledge of the heritage of the borough and believes in the importance of that in shaping the place and the future. His leadership is visible and

empowering. He has also played a key role in the City Region.

Our Councillors are passionate, committed and engaged in the work of the Council in a variety of diverse ways. They are visible in their local communities and neighbourhood leadership continues to be good from both a member and officer perspective.

The Office of the Mayor continues to be extremely valued by local people, always a true ambassador for the Council, instilling civic pride and leading as a community connector. This is highlighted in initiatives such as the continued success of the Mayor's Toy Appeal, which demonstrates the kindness and generosity of spirit of local people and the business community.

In July 2023 Phil Porter joined us as Chief Executive. Phil has immediately demonstrated commitment to driving a culture of positivity, equality and diversity, a One Council way of working and continuous improvement to ensure the best possible outcomes for local people. His thoughts on work life balance and enjoying everything that Sefton has to offer have been well received. His leadership is visible, as well as getting out and about, meeting some members of One Council and joining team meetings he has shared a number of VLOGs.

We have a new Director of Children's Services while the wider organisational structure has largely remained stable with some changes being made in order to aid the delivery of the Children's Improvement Plan.



The Executive and Strategic Leadership teams have a great mix of skills, and the makeup of the team is well balanced in terms of corporate memory and new ideas. We are excited to be welcoming new Assistant Directors of Communities and Early Help and Protection and are confident that they will add to this skill mix. We have also recently reviewed how we work together to ensure that we build on our flexible strategic capacity to take forward our key priorities and achieve the required changes and outcomes needed through clear, strategic leadership. We have already implemented a number of simple but effective changes with a clear focus on priorities, collaboration and partnerships.

We have a positive relationship with our trade unions and there is a commitment to ensure that trade union colleagues are engaged in consultation at the earliest opportunity in relation to workforce issues.

## Local Leadership & Partnership Working

The Council continues to work hard to ensure what we and others do is in the best interests of Sefton and our residents through true collaboration, mutual trust and rigorous prioritisation. We also recognise that there is always more to do to maximise the opportunities and improve outcomes through strong place leadership and great partnership working.

The last few years have brought challenges that few anticipated. We believe that we are well placed to continue to support our communities with our partners as together we face the challenges of funding, recovery, the cost-of-living crisis, climate change and health inequalities.

Leadership of Place has been critical throughout the pandemic, when responding to the war in Ukraine and the cost of living crisis. The Council delivered the responses to these at great pace, worked closely with national, regional and local colleagues, partners, providers and volunteers to protect the most vulnerable and support our communities and businesses. Together we unlocked the borough's collective resources for the benefit of all and to ensure

that people were well informed.

The Council coordinates partners to ensure robust community responses and support plans are in place and being delivered to respond to the changing levels of need within our communities. Examples of this include:

- Working with our partners we offered support to over 24,000 people identified as clinically extremely vulnerable people in our communities during the pandemic. Over 50,000 contacts were made with those that needed continued welfare support during the lock down periods.
- 327 Ukrainian refugees were welcomed to Sefton with many people opening their hearts and homes.
- Working alongside voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations a network of Warm Spaces were established across Sefton. These included community centres, community hubs and other places offering a warm welcome and free to use for anyone feeling lonely or struggling with the cost of living. All 'Warm Spaces' were heated, safe and friendly places where people could comfortably spend time reading, studying or chatting with others.

We believe our partners will say that we have great relationships with them but there are too many meetings and that there need to be more focused on actions and priorities. Through this work all partners will be doing their share and improving the lives of local people. We are taking steps to reinvigorate strategic partnerships and we have already had good feedback from our Children & Young People Partnership Board as we work together to refresh our Children & Young People's Plan and implement Team Around the school plus SEND CIB making great strides.

Our Executive Director, People, chairs Sefton Leadership Collaborative (SLC) where strategic partners come together on a regular basis. This group works

together on a range of topics, for example, they will be a key group in the development of Vision 2035.

Feeling safe, supported and free from discrimination and harm is important to our communities. The Safer Sefton Together Partnership, facilitated by us, brings together the key agencies involved in crime prevention and community safety work. Together we continue to take a whole system approach to tackling community safety challenges. Our new **Safer Sefton Together Strategy** was agreed earlier this year with a supporting action plan as well as a new **Sefton Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy** based on need. This partnership is well established and action focused on delivering the strategy. The Domestic Partnership Board is well established and with consistent memberships these two boards are synchronized in activity to avoid duplication.

We continue to work with our partners to raise aspiration, work towards common goals and build a sense of pride and belonging in the borough. We are proud of and passionate about what we do. We remain ambitious for the borough, determined to deliver and commission services that will improve outcomes for local people and committed to partnership working.

We have great relationships and understanding of our partners and we know that we know that together we can achieve more. Over the next twelve months we are looking to drive a cultural shift in our partnerships moving from meetings to purpose and action. We will start this work with our Children & Young People's Partnership Board as we work together to refresh our Children & Young People Plan.

## Liverpool City Region

We work closely with the leaders from the other five local authorities and Metro Mayor. We worked together closely throughout the pandemic, are continuing to develop recovery approaches together and are collaboratively driving forward

strategic plans to grow our economy and attract more people and businesses to live, work, visit or invest in the wider Liverpool City Region (LCR), which ultimately benefits Sefton.

Some of our members and most senior officers hold key roles within the LCR, including the Leader as the Portfolio Lead for Employment, Education and Skills and Cllr Hardy the deputy Portfolio Lead for Housing and Spatial Planning. The Council also has influential voices on several committees. Having these leadership roles firmly rooted within the LCR enables us to speak with a powerful voice and deliver improved outcomes for our communities.

We are also a key member of the LCR Strategic Waste Partnership and together we are planning for national changes in legislation.

## Health 12 months on

There is a joint appointment between the Council and the Cheshire and Merseyside ICB of NHS Place Director and DASS leading the health and care planning arrangements for Sefton. There is governance arrangement in place to support the collaboration and decision making across Sefton's integrated arrangements.

A Sefton Partnership Board was formally established in July 2022 and built upon the already existing informal governance structures between health and care partners in Sefton. The arrangements are underpinned by a collaboration agreement shared across Cheshire and Merseyside as good practice were designed to broaden the partnership to include Primary Care Networks and further develop the established place-based integrated working arrangements between the partners for the benefit of the Sefton population.

The partnership board will over time comprise of three distinct functions to support decision making; consultative forum, S75 committee and a joint committee with the ICB.

The Collaboration Agreement has been signed by all partners including NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board that formally signed up at its public meeting in September 2022.

The Place NHS team is now co-located with Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care.

## Achievements

- Place Plan which has been co-produced by partners across Sefton and adopted through the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- A LGA peer review into Continuing Health Care in Sefton supported by the BCF improvement support team
- Shortlist for the MJ awards on integration in 2023
- Addressing health response to children's improvement programme
- Launched integrated reablement offer which has improved NCTR
- Alignment of fee structures across NHS and Council
- Strategic review of primary care estates to inform Evolution of General Practice
- Joint development of a Health Hub in The Strand – involving health partners across Sefton and the focus on women's health
- Adoption of population health management approach to health inequality – establishing a respiratory hub funded in baseline – no other C&M places have done this
- Using winter funding to invest in CVS – Crisis Café

## Voluntary, Community & Faith

We have signed a **New Realities** agreement with the Sefton CVS which demonstrates a commitment to working closely with the sector. New Realities is a 'can do' collaboration agreement that is supported by us, Sefton CVS, and other local voluntary, community and faith sectors. It is about wanting to have positive, productive environment. This commitment aims to help make Sefton a great place to be and to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone in our communities. An operational framework has been created that strengthens the working relationships between all interested parties in the borough.

We think that the sector will say that the New Realities ethos is stronger in some areas than others so we know that the visibility of the New Realities across the Council needs to be constantly refreshed and a new training programme will be launched soon for all staff to ensure that we truly embed this ethos everywhere.

## Businesses that Care

Our Invest Sefton team has far reaching and meaningful engagement with the business community. Regularly bringing together new and existing business so that we can work with local companies and potential investors to make Sefton an attractive and easy place for businesses to start, operate, grow and thrive. The Council is committed to working with businesses to help create new jobs for local people.

Last year we launched the Caring Business Charter through which businesses commit to support care experienced and other vulnerable young people access the world of work and we have over 60 businesses signed up. We regularly publish Sefton Beacon summarising opportunities for employment, work experience, mentoring, training, mock interviews, site visits and presentations aimed at those young people.

## Caring for our Coast & Greenspace

Our coast and countryside offer the perfect setting for those who want to get away from it all and explore the area. Stretching for 22 miles, our unique and tranquil coastline offers something for everyone. Southport beach has one of the most unique **natural environments** in the country. The Ribble Estuary National Nature Reserve is a bird watcher's paradise, where you can witness thousands of migratory birds each year. The Ainsdale and Birkdale Sandhills Local Nature Reserve is one of the largest areas of wild dune land left in Britain. The reserve was established in 1980 and now covers 988 hectares of open dunes and beach and offers the ideal breeding pools for Natterjacks. The Hightown Dunes and Meadows nature reserve stretches from Blundellsands to the mouth of the River Alt forms part of the Crosby Coastal Park. Here there are sand dunes, a small saltmarsh, freshwater ponds, willow and poplar scrub and wildflower meadows. These are complemented by the Alt estuary which is of international importance for shore birds. The area around Crosby beach, and Crosby Marine Park stretches from Waterloo to the estuary of the River Alt at Hightown. The Coastal Park is home to Antony Gormley's **Another Place**. Our partners, the National Trust, maintain the land and coast, in Formby, home to the beautiful red squirrels.

Volunteers make a hugely valuable contribution to the management of our beautiful coast and countryside. Regular volunteers get involved in every aspect of our work and that of our partners. such as practical tasks, helping collect litter, talking to visitors, leading guided walks, monitoring wildlife or just being our extra 'eyes and ears'.

With our partners in the Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership we have developed, consulted on and adopted the Sefton Coast Plan. This enables the strategic management of this much loved, important asset so that together we conserve and enhance important natural and cultural sites, habitats and species; local communities benefit from sustainable economic growth and we adapt to coastal and climate change; and it provides long term benefits for the health and wellbeing of local communities, businesses and visitors to the coast.



## Working together to Support Our Communities

We have a long established Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty (WRAP) Cabinet Member Reference Group that is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing and its membership includes Cabinet Members for Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing and Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services, and senior officers for Communities, Health and Wellbeing, Strategic Support and Customer Centric Services. The group provides the main forum for strategic discussions about WRAP including receiving and responding to policy developments, consultations, approaches to work jointly with other organisations, and ideas for local action. The reference group contributes to and works collaboratively with the WRAP Partnership Steering Group in the development and delivery of the local Partnership Action Plan.

The impact of the cost of living crisis on local people cannot be underestimated. During 2022 Cabinet considered reports that summarised the impact of the escalating cost of living crisis on local people and businesses outlines the support available and planned. The combination of changes to the welfare system, domestic energy and fuel prices, rising prices in the shops due to inflation has hit households hard, leaving many in Sefton struggling to make ends meet.

We acted with speed when delivering the Government's £150 Council Tax energy rebates to all eligible residents. Our approach to such national initiatives is responsive as it is underpinned by a good intelligence and accessible and clear communications.

Our Affordable Warmth Programme has been in operation for over 15 years. Last year the team brought in over £600,000 of external funding assisting over 1,000 vulnerable households to achieve affordable warmth and reduce fuel poverty. The benefits from the projects delivered include;

- Reduced heating demand
- Reducing fuel bills
- Reducing carbon emissions
- Better living conditions, in particular for those living in damp homes – helping to improve health
- Improved resilience to climate change amongst the most vulnerable
- Local job creation

The government's green home grant local authority delivery (LAD) and home upgrade grant (HUG) schemes aim to increase the energy efficiency of low income and poorly insulated homes. We adopted a fabric first approach which involves a focus on insulation to reduce heat loss and this was supplemented by renewable energy via solar PV. Along with a neighbouring council we were successful in obtaining funding to deliver work to 29 Sefton properties as part of a pilot. We were also successful in obtaining funding to deliver work to 190 properties later increasing this to 222 (£2.2m). We then successfully obtained £4m in funding to deliver work to circa 380 properties. The scheme is currently ongoing and completed over 350 properties to date. The LAD 2 project has been shortlisted in the Sefton Design Awards Scheme under the category of best sustainable/climate change resistant scheme. Winners will be announced later this year.

This year our Sefton Families Service won the Best Initiative for Tackling Homelessness category at the Northern Housing Awards. The team provides families the option to transfer the home from temporary to general needs tenancy after the support. This approach helps families settle immediately into a home-for-life, near schools, family and friends, and as part of the community.

Along with our partners we continue to put communities, local people and businesses at the heart of what we do. The Council provides and commissions support through a number of schemes including food during the holidays, emergency assistance and others with our [website](#) connecting people to support available but more importantly our ways of working make it simpler for people to access support.



## Place Leadership & Our Inclusive Growth Programme

Our ambition and confidence remain strong in our Growth Programme.

In March 2023 we were notified that the programme had been successful in securing £20 million of Capital Levelling Up Funding. This will start the first phase of changing the Strand shopping centre and wider transformation of Bootle Town Centre. The Council approved a business plan earlier this year for the Bootle Strand, including proposals for repurposing this key town centre asset as part of the wider programme of regeneration for the town centre and delivery of a Health on the High Street model.

Our vision for Bootle aims to create a thriving town centre that works for all people, brings investment and interest to an area filled with opportunities and builds a happier, healthier, more resilient population. In August we invited the community to continue shaping our ambitious plans that will ensure Bootle

is a great place to work, live, shop and socialise. Following the first round of public consultation last year, we have incorporated public feedback into our **Bootle Area Action Plan**, which sets out a clear vision for the town for the next 20 years and beyond. The Plan identifies the locations in the town where regeneration and investment is needed and also aims to help to secure the homes that people need and want, good quality open spaces and facilities, job opportunities and approaches to tackle climate change and environmental issues.

The Bootle Area Action Plan is rooted in the people, businesses and organisations of the town. It will be a plan for the future of Bootle created by its residents and other stakeholders. It will also help support our ambitious plans for Bootle town centre.



Good progress is being made in Bootle's exciting new Salt and Tar events space and following a successful Comedy Weekender in May, July saw music fans from across the world descend on Bootle for Salt and Tar's first music event at Bootle canal side. The weekend proved a great success, with over 6,000 tickets sold in total. The new venue has been nominated for several awards following its highly successful music event this summer. The event is up for the 'Best New Festival' and 'Best Small Festival' categories at this year's UK Festival Awards which will be announced in December. The Salt and Tar project and our Economic Growth & Housing team have also been shortlisted for the Most Innovative Project of the Year and Best Team in the 2023 Institute of Economic Development awards.

The Marine Lake Events Centre is one of the schemes being developed as a result of the successful bid for £37.5m of Town Deal funding for Southport. A significant proportion of this funding is for the Centre, as well as for the Light Fantastic, a water, light and sound show in the adjacent Marine Lake.

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (CA) recently approved £17.7 million of funding for the new Marine Lake Events Centre. This was on top of £2.3 million the Combined Authority had already committed to the pre-development work. We will also provide funding of up to £19.7 million for the project.

The Towns Fund was launched in 2019. Southport was one of 101 Towns allocated funds from the Town Deals Fund, a total of £37.5m. Through extensive consultation, developed Southport's Town Investment plan. This set out the long-term strategy and ambitions for Southport.

Detailed feedback from community engagement has helped guide each stage of the Marine Lake Events Centre project. Work is now underway on the future site of the Marine Lake Events Centre, in line with the programme for the Southport Town Deal. The works saw historic assets from Southport Theatre





and Convention Centre safely removed and preserved prior to the demolition of the existing building. The demolition works will take a number of months.

Located on the site of the former Southport Theatre, the state-of-the-art, £73 million Marine Lake Events Centre will be a flexible events space. It is expected to bring more than half a million new visitors to Southport each year and generate an annual £18 million boost for the local economy. This will, in turn, lead to a significant number of job opportunities.

Part of the Southport Town Deal, £1.5 million has been identified for the regeneration and transformation of Crown Buildings and retail units in the Bank Building. This will create a purpose built 15,000sq ft hub for individuals, freelancers, enterprises, and independent professionals who are taking their first steps into setting up and growing their own business. Work is under way to find a contractor for the project. The refurbishment works are due to start late 2023 and aims to be complete by Autumn 2024.

In May 2023 **Southport Market** celebrated its second birthday after a record breaking year of success. Nearly half a million meals and drinks have been served to thousands of people who have visited the popular food market in Southport Town Centre in the last twelve months. An astounding 422,300 dishes, including 30,000 burgers and 45,000 pizzas, have been sold at the King Street venue as staff and traders worked tirelessly to keep up with demand.

## Culture Strategy

In 2020 Sefton hosted the LCR Year of Culture and we got off to a great start with many people from across Sefton and beyond enjoying a range of events. This celebration was cut short by the pandemic and the resources that were allocated to the development of a Cultural Strategy aligned to supporting our communities.

In preparation for our forthcoming Year of Culture we are currently developing a cultural strategy designed to boost the Borough's incredible array of talent within its communities. In July we launched a public consultation to seek the views of residents, community groups and creative professionals on how Sefton can develop its cultural offer. The feedback will help us to understand more about the current cultural interests, areas of activity and identify opportunities for further creative participation.

We are proud to share our Inclusive Growth Programme achievement and plans. We ask the peers to share their learning on how big projects can make an impact on place and people and what is the role of culture in that?

# Governance and culture

- Our governance is robust
- We are committed to creating a more diverse and inclusive organisation
- We want to be great Corporate Parents

## Governance Arrangements

We have robust, established and effective governance arrangements which ensure that resources are directed in accordance with agreed policies and strategic priorities. We believe that good governance ensures that we are doing the right things, in the right way, for the communities we serve, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. There is sound and transparent decision-making and clear accountability as to how resources are used to improve outcomes for our communities.

In line with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) recommendations our **Code of Corporate Governance** is in place to increase credibility, accountability and public confidence. Our **Constitution**, which is reviewed annually in line with best practice, sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. Our Annual Governance Statement (AGS) is a public document that reports on the extent to which the Council complies with its own Code of Corporate Governance, demonstrating the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of governance arrangements. The AGS is a valuable means of communication and reflects the Council's features, challenges and any planned changes in the coming period.

Our decision making processes are transparent and our Forward Plan is updated on a regular basis and published, as are our decisions. Within the budgetary and policy frameworks set by the full Council, the Cabinet is responsible for carrying out almost all of the Council's functions in delivering services to the community. Regular Cabinet Member briefings take place with service leads.

We have four Overview and Scrutiny Committees which support the work of the Cabinet, Cabinet Members and the Council as a whole. These lead to reports and recommendations which advise the Cabinet and the Council as a whole on its policies, budget and how it delivers its services. Overview and Scrutiny Committees also monitor the decisions of the Cabinet and Cabinet Members.

Our Audit and Governance Committee is a key component of our corporate governance. It provides an independent and high-level focus on the audit, assurance and reporting arrangements that underpin good governance, financial standards and the Risk Management Framework.

During times of significant change and in everyday activity good risk management is essential. We have robust approach to risk management with a systematic approach to identifying and analysing risks being an integral part of all management processes and day-to-day working. Our **Business Continuity** is a key component of the organisation by ensuring priority activities continue

to be delivered in a crisis. Our policy sets out the Council’s continued approach to implement an effective business continuity framework across all service areas which will ensure the timely recovery of priority services in the event of an incident.

Our Member Development Programme is valued and in January 2023 we signed a commitment to work towards achievement of the North West Elected Member Development Charter – Level 1. Our members also have access to the Northwest Employer Induction Programme.

We have sought support from the LGA to strengthen our scrutiny. Following the training and development needs assessment undertaken in March 2023 by the Local Government Association (LGA) elected members have received Corporate Parenting training plus members of Overview and Scrutiny Children’s Services and Safeguarding Committee have received two training sessions delivered by the LGA and a further session is scheduled for October. Feedback from both the DFE Commissioner and Officers has been positive in regard to the quality and tone of scrutiny in recent meetings. We will ensure that scrutiny has a key role as we strengthen our Performance Framework.

The quality of member-officer relationships remains good with a clear understanding of each other’s roles and responsibilities. There are strong relationships with all ward members and the area co-ordinators and many frontline teams. We recently invested more in our Neighbourhoods team and this has strengthened the team’s ability to respond to requests.

Prior to each Council meeting all members are invited to take part in topic specific discussions. The subject matter is varied, ranging from for example Corporate Parenting to the budget process. Members actively take part in these sessions and engage well in thematic areas, a first this year is that a group of young people will lead one of these sessions to discuss the cost of living crisis.

### LGA Peer Challenge Self Assessment 2023



## Co-production & Listening

We have a proven track record in actively listening through our consultation and engagement activity and co-produced solutions. Our Public Engagement and Consultation Panel which includes key public sector partners and Sefton CVS is well established. The Panel meets every two months to review consultation and engagement proposals from public sector partners to ensure that they meet the standards set out in our [Public Engagement And Consultation Framework](#) that we strengthened in January 2023. We are very proud of the [Youth Voice Toolkit](#) which was developed by local young people has been shared with councillors and the workforce to help us ensure that we are truly listening to the voices of children and young people.

Sefton Young Advisors have developed an engaging and interactive face-to-face training session for staff who are planning to engage children and young people. The aim of this session is to inform participants how to use the Youth Voice and Participation Toolkit to improve their practice. We ran a pilot session with some staff from the Regeneration Team a couple of months ago, which was really well received. Feedback included:

*“I attended a great session with the Young Advisors Lead Georgia and Young Advisors Archie, Nathan and Nel this week, where they took me through their engagement toolkit for children and young people. Loved the enthusiasm and energy to have a say and be heard and worthwhile taking the time to reflect on what we do and how this can be improved. Engagement with children and young people is crucial to making sure we are working inclusively, making sure their voice is heard and that they are an active participant in plans for their future”.*

Our Cabinet work with our young people in a regular forum known as SYMBOL (Sefton Youth Making Better Opportunities with Leaders), with the young people prioritising the agenda and leading the discussion on what really matters to them. SYMBOL meetings are hosted and co-ordinated by Young Advisors, managed by Sefton Council for Voluntary Service (CVS), they help organisations to understand



the interests of young people, and how to get their message across to them in a more youth-friendly way. This group of young people continue to support many of our consultation and collaboration activity, and we are proud to say that one of their team was honoured as national Young Advisor of the Year 2022, and they also collected the Community Project of the Year award for their consultation work as part of our Sefton Your Streets initiative.

In April this year Council received the first annual **Listening to the Voices of Children and Young People** report which summarised how the Council and partners have involved children and young people in the decision making to improve services, shape their communities plus for cared for children and care experienced young people involved them in all the decisions that affect their lives. As a follow up to this report a group of young people have been invited to speak to Council in November on a subject of their choosing and they have chosen to discuss the cost of living.

Our Invest Sefton Team has produced a briefing note on consulting and engaging businesses in Sefton. The briefing note includes the connections Invest Sefton have with businesses, things to consider when staff are engaging the business sector and the support available to them.

Listening to our communities helps us to co-produce solutions, informs our commissioning intentions and understand what matters to local people.

We will continue to work hard to listen to our communities.





## Wholly Owned Companies

As recognised in the Peer Challenge revisit we have a clear position on our direction around commercialisation, We have created and maintained 3 wholly owned companies where they can deliver outcomes for Sefton residents in:

- Sefton Hospitality Operations Ltd (SHOL) operates The Lake House in Waterloo. Located alongside the Crosby Lakeside Adventure Centre, The Lake House has a café bar and restaurant, conference and events spaces, and 14 refurbished rooms for guests to stay over. SHOL has also opened the White House Cafe for the community and golfers, while the Council continues to explore longer-term options for Southport Golf Links. SHOL delivers better job opportunities in hospitality for local residents. These are quality employment and career opportunities, more than 90% of whom are Sefton residents, no zero hour contracts and all paying a real living wage or better.
- Sandway Homes Limited is a housing development company was established in 2018 to deliver a range of outcomes including using the land we own to make money; contributing directly to the need for 11,000 new homes and providing good quality homes that people want to live in. Sandway is currently building on two sites, with a third on the way.
- Sefton New Directions established in 2007 is a provider of adult social care services with a range of care needs. It is almost exclusively focused on Sefton residents, and is a part of ASC's wider Market Sustainability and Improvement planning. They promote independent living, encouraging and supporting individuals to fulfil their aspirations.

From a governance perspective the Council continues to reflect best practice in how it manages these companies - our Monitoring Officer has used the Max Caller local partnerships document to conduct a self-assessment on the

governance arrangements in each of the companies with any issues identified being highlighted to inform change and development.

Business Plans for each of the companies are taken to Cabinet each autumn/ winter for approval to provide clarity on what will be delivered over the next period and to ensure governance and assurance continues to be robust. The financial assumptions are included in the forthcoming budget process. The next set of reports will be presented at December 2023 Cabinet. Outturn reports again in accordance with the local partnerships guidance are presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## Organisational Culture

It is true that culture really does eat strategy for breakfast. We will undertake culture-based sessions to begin to drive forward changes that we need to deliver. We want to find out what our culture looks, feels, and tastes like and to produce a baseline of where we are now and where we would like to be in the future. We know that we want to be great corporate parents, work together as One Council and be inclusive.

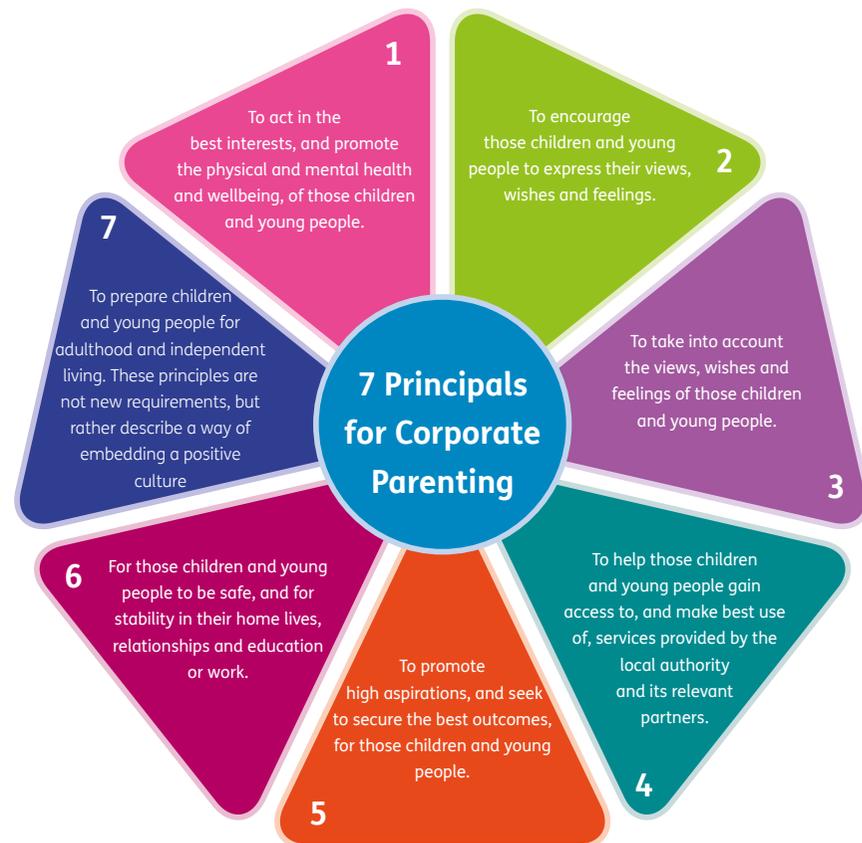
## Ambitious & Proud Corporate Parents

We are proud Corporate Parents and the improvements that we have made to our Corporate Parenting Board have been recognised by Ofsted. The priorities and action have been co-produced with children and young people.

We want to be great Corporate Parents and we will work hard to embed the seven principles across the Council and in our partner organisations. All members of the leadership team have been trained in Corporate Parenting and their duties as we want to be an organisation that not only recognises but acts on these duties. Working alongside nationally recognised voice organisations we want to become “the family business” offering opportunities, aspirations and support throughout the lives of our young people.

Just one example of partnership working in this area is that colleges across Merseyside have signed a pledge to strive to ensure that cared for and care experienced students have a fulfilling and successful experience in education.

The Sefton FE Partnership Agreement represents an understanding that this cohort of students and young people will have had challenging life experiences and obstacles that may impact on their confidence and ability to perform to their best in education. All the signatories have high aspirations for their students and are committed to offering a higher level of support and guidance to help them to achieve their goals in education, and in life. Our Virtual School has worked closely with our young people, their advocates and the colleges themselves to develop this agreement and ensure that the voices of all stakeholders are heard.



## One Council

We continue to take a One Council approach to change our culture and truly embed values. It is fair to say that the pandemic had an impact on our One Council approach firstly by demonstrating its strength as we worked seamlessly across the organisation and with partners to deliver the support that was needed to our communities. However, the pandemic did have an impact on this ethos as services started to build back and focused on their service delivery.

Our new Chief Executive took quick action to meet with the One Council Champions to gain an understanding of the history of the group, associated activity and listen to their thoughts about the future. Taking immediate action plans are now in place to work with groups of staff across the Council to develop a new corporate induction, co-produce the approach to the staff survey.

A collaborative approach is being taken to this and the Chief Executive is keen that agendas and materials are co-produced and respond to staff needs.

The planning and delivery of this work is in progress and by listening to and working with our workforce we will strengthen our collective identity and sense of purpose, create an environment where we all feel supported and are open to challenge and truly live and breathe our values. Our new face-to-face induction sessions will build on our comprehensive online resource and local team onboarding. Our staff survey will remind people of what we have done in response to previous feedback and ensure that staff feedback informs and shapes our future plans. We will also be undertaking a series of staff workshops over the next few months to help build awareness of our plans, share good practice but most importantly to listen.

## Real focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

We want Sefton to be a borough for everyone. Alongside the Corporate Plan **Council** also agreed the **Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy** and **Workforce Plan 2022-2026** (more about this later).

In January 2023 Council voted to recognise cared for and care experienced children and young people as a protected characteristic. Children and young people who have had prolonged contact with our Social Care team are now on an equal footing with people in other protected groups. This is part of our commitment to actively listen to the voices of people with care experience and consider their needs when creating new policies. In recognising 'care experienced' as a protected characteristic, the Council will actively seek out and listen to the voices of care experienced people in the same way they would ensure voices across the spectrum of age, gender, race and disability are heard. It will ensure that all decisions the Council make, the policies they set and the services they commission always consider the specific needs of care experienced young people and the impact on them.

Our Corporate Equalities Group, which is chaired by the Executive Director Place, led on the development of the **Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy** and is overseeing the delivery of the Action Plan. There is real strength in our diverse local communities where people are proud to say they live, work and take part in community life together. By placing fairness at the centre of what we do, by promoting equality of opportunity and by celebrating diversity and community cohesion, we can help to build a fairer future for all. We recognise that we have much to do in this area and our actions will focus on our role as an employer but also our action plan includes deliverables relating to our roles in delivering services, commissioning services and as a place leader. The intent is to ensure that the Council is demonstrating continuous improvement in all areas. It has recently been agreed that a

member of the Executive Leadership Team will sponsor each of the workforce groups above and all groups will be able to present reports on a regular basis at ELT meetings to ensure ELT hears from them directly.

We are proud to hold the Navajo Charter Mark in recognition of our commitment and knowledge of the specific needs, issues and barriers facing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTIQA+) people. We have received some very positive feedback in our most recent assessment by Navajo.

As part of commitment we offer two Equality & Diversity programmes 'Equality & Diversity Awareness' and 'Equality & Diversity for Managers' which are designed to help our staff understand more about their responsibilities for promoting equality and diversity in the workplace. We are also widely rolling out the LCR CA's Race Equality Hub training, comprising immersive and impactful engagement in real lived experiences – more than 200 people have completed this in-depth session so far.

We are also proud to **share** that our Sefton@Work team, who help people in Sefton improve their lives by giving them the tools to find new jobs or education, was announced as one of the Inclusive Awards finalists for their Social Mobility Project Award, our fingers and toes are crossed for 5th December when the award will be announced.

Our Digital Inclusion Strategy outlines the work needed to ensure that all residents are enabled to take advantage of the potential digital brings both at home and in work, given that digital access and skills are now becoming a universal requirement to access many services, including key services such as Health and Benefits.

In September Cabinet agreed the adoption of the **Socioeconomic Duty**. We will continue to strengthen our commitment to being an inclusive organisation by engaging with the issues people face and providing lasting solutions.

### LGA Peer Challenge Self Assessment 2023

Our ambition is to become a leading modern council where our values are to serve our communities with integrity and objectivity. Whilst seeking to be innovative and ambitious, we prioritise protecting the most vulnerable and welcoming those from all backgrounds, facilitating confident and resilient communities and driving reform to ensure that Sefton is equipped for the future.

We are committed to creating a more diverse and inclusive organisation where all of our staff and members of our communities feel welcome and heard. To assist in helping achieve this a number of specific staff networks have been developed that contribute to addressing and solving problems right across the Council. Our staff networks offer a place for staff to come together, share experiences and facilitate learning and development. The current staff networks are:

- Sefton Council Christian Workplace Group
- Sefton's Diverse and Ethnic Background Staff (DEBS)
- Sefton LGBT+ Staff Network
- Sefton Disability Staff Network
- Sefton Women's Network





One of our priorities is to promote an inclusive culture, which will reinforce our strong community spirit as part of this work we recently celebrated National Inclusion Week and **Black History Month**, we held a range of events across the organisation focused on a number of subject areas, such as one of our libraries hosting a mini summit held by the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Race Equality Hub.

We are always proud to celebrate Pride. A Council group once again flew the flag for Sefton at this year's Pride event in Liverpool. This year's march was held jointly by the Liverpool City Region Pride Foundation and KyivPride. Merseyrail helped the group travel to Liverpool in style by laying on a specially decorated train carriage. The 'Pride Train' started in Southport before stopping off at stations throughout the Borough on its way to Liverpool.

Among those attending from Sefton were members of New Beginnings, an LGBTQIA+ Youth Group for young people. New Beginnings provides a safe space and a non-judgemental environment for its members. Staff from Sefton at Work and Sefton Fostering service were also in attendance, alongside our Executive Director of People. We were also joined by partners and voluntary organisations Merseyside Youth Association SPACE, and Sefton Sea Cadets.

In July this year people were invited to and enjoyed the first Sefton Pride event, which took place in Southport. Following this hugely successful Pride march and celebration Sefton Pride CIC is hosted a networking event with organisations and traders from across the borough showing their support for the LGBTQIA+ community setting up stalls in the Southport Market Events Space. We are confident that the Pride event will go from strength to strength. We also want everyone who lives, works, studies locally to feel a sense of local pride, enjoy celebrating local culture and for those who visit Sefton to feel welcome and look forward to returning.

# Financial planning and management

- We place financial management and financial sustainability at the centre of what we do
- We have a proven track record in financial management
- Our MTFP demonstrates our commitment to improving the safeguarding of children and outcomes for them and their families

## Budget Management & Sustainability

We place financial management and financial sustainability at the centre of what we do. Cabinet provide clear direction and leadership to officers in respect of financial management, prioritisation and budget setting, with the detailed budget development being undertaken by the Executive Leadership and Strategic Leadership teams.

During the year, the Medium Term Financial Plan is provided to Cabinet and comprehensive financial reports are shared with Cabinet on a monthly basis and Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive a finance report in each cycle. We recognise the diverse range of financial factors the council is facing and financial reporting has been tailored accordingly with quarterly reports on the High Needs block being reported to Cabinet and Council and there being a clear governance pathway for approving the annual business plans for the Council's three wholly owned companies with outturn reports being presented to overview and scrutiny committee in accordance with the local partnerships best practice guidance.

We take a proactive approach to financial management and have a clear understanding of the risks facing the sector and our council. For example, our Corporate Risk Register includes specific risks around financial sustainability and the High Needs Deficit.

Following the last Peer Challenge quarterly reports that bring together finance, performance and risk are presented to Cabinet, and this is also reflected in service based reports that are provided to Cabinet Members on the same timeline. We know that we have more to do in this area as mentioned earlier.

The governance around financial and risk management is strong and reflects the complex and diverse nature of local government and Sefton.

In September 2023, the updated **3 year Medium Term Financial Plan** was presented to Cabinet and Council that provides for an informed position on both the financial position and the risks that need to be faced and addressed over this period by the Council.

In the current year the Council as stated continues to provide monthly reports to Cabinet on the in-year position. As at end of September 2023, the forecast outturn is estimated to be an overspend of £7m. This is driven by the potential value of the local government pay award equating to 6.5% which is 1.5% higher than the budget provision and budget pressure in Children's Services. This remains the most volatile budget we have but there are clear signs that the service is stabilising which is supporting financial performance. The current forecast is within the 5% tolerance that the Commissioner advised could be expected.

A remedial plan has been developed for this pressure and this was reported to November Cabinet which would see a balanced position for the year be reached. That said the Council is fully aware of the risks it will face and will need to manage for the remainder of this year especially with regard to Adult Social Care and Home to School Transport.

## Financial Management Context

We have effective financial management arrangements which has enabled the delivery of significant savings over the last 13 years that has enabled the Council to set robust, deliverable and sustainable budgets while delivering priority services. Financial sustainability has been at the heart of this approach and this needs to continue over the next three-year medium term budget cycle.

In 2023/24 the Council continues to face significant challenges driven by the conditions in the national economy, especially high levels of inflation and the continued pressure within the demand led budgets of Adult Social Care and Children's Services including Social Care and Home to School Transport. These are being managed at the same time as an agreed savings programme is being delivered in the wider Council.

The challenges facing the Council over the coming three years are likely to be equally as significant. There is no indication that the Council will be in receipt of substantially more funding over this period and the demand for services is likely to increase. At present over 70% of the Council's revenue budget is allocated to Adults and Children's Services plus Home to School Transport. This means there is less than 30% of the budget for all remaining services. At a time of increased demand led growth, the council recognises that the development of a three-year budget is required in order to support not only financial sustainability but also these services who for a number of years have had no growth in budget size, have contributed significant savings and at times

worked within a vacancy freeze in order to support short term savings. This context is critical for both budget planning but also service delivery and the delivery of the Corporate Plan.

The next three-year budget planning cycle will also take place at the same time as the Council's Children's Service Improvement Plan is delivered - this is the priority for the Council. A recommendation in the Commissioner's report was that the MTFP should be aligned with that Improvement Plan for a period of five years. That process was conducted and reflected in the budget report of March 2023, and this will again be a key feature of this MTFP. Substantial ongoing work is continuing on this budget, with the Chief Executive, s151 officer and Director of Children's Services working collaboratively on the management of the in-year position and longer-term budget plan. This will inform budget allocation, budget realignment in the service as required and how this will influence other budgets across the Council and longer-term investment opportunities.

## 3 year Medium Term Financial Plan - funding gap

Taking into account the latest available information and core financial scenario assumptions, the estimated overall gross funding gap facing the Council over the next three years is in the region of £44m (excluding any potential increases in Council Tax). This was reported to Members in September 2023.

## Financial Resilience

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) publish a Financial Resilience Index that measures the financial resilience of councils. The latest results were announced in May 2023 based on data from financial year 2021/22.

From this work there are two key issues for the Council. Firstly, when updated for the 2023/24 budget the Council will move from a period of medium risk to

one of high risk due to the high amount (in percentage terms) of its budget it spends on demand led services, e.g., Adults Social Care and Children's Services. This is considered high risk as if spending pressures increase either in this area or other areas there is little flexibility to meet this pressure. There is approximately 70% of the Council's budget spent in these areas and the council's medium term financial plan will have this as a primary consideration, not only due to this risk but also as the Council has a large number of other services it needs to provide.

The second key issue is around the level of reserves the Council holds. The Council's Reserves Strategy aids longer-term financial stability and mitigates the potential impact of future events or developments which may cause financial difficulty.

Following the risk assessment undertaken to inform the 2023/24 budget it was considered an appropriate level of General Balances for the Council would be in the region of 6.5% of the net revenue budget.

The budget for 2023/24 included a contribution to General Balances of £4.423m so General Fund balances are £16.414m. This amount of General Balances is within the risk assessed range at this time, however the risks facing the Council continue to increase, therefore it is likely that this sum will also need to increase. It was detailed in the Council's medium term financial plan that a sum of £23m should be the level of General Fund Balances that should be reached during this next 3 year period (and importantly if any are used then they should be replenished in the same period). This higher level also reflects that unlike some other councils, Sefton does not have a historically high level of Earmarked Reserves that it could call on should there be an immediate or unforeseen financial shock, which is the key element when comparing the Council to others.

In May 2023 DLUHC provided an update on levels of reserves and balances held

by councils and while the Council's General Fund Balances were slightly higher than the median level across the country which is positive (at 6.13% vs 5.93%), as stated the Council has Earmarked Reserves that are substantially lower than the same comparator local authorities. The Council has always taken the view that Earmarked Reserves should only be held for a specific purpose, hence the continual review, however this level does mean that the flexibility reduces if an adverse situation develops that could require the redirection of resources.

As part of the in-year monthly monitoring that is undertaken and reported to Cabinet, it has been identified that there is a surplus forecast in respect of Business Rates. This position does not impact on the 2023/24 budget position but a one-off surplus of £4.8m will be available in 2024/25. When added to the current General Fund Balances of the Council, this would increase the level of Balances held to £21.214m on 1 April 2024.

## High Needs Deficit

As has been reported continually by the council over recent years, the council has a key risk in respect of the deficit balance it holds against its High Needs Budget. This has grown gradually since system reform in 2013. Up until 2019/20 the growth in the deficit was £1m- £2m per year so that the total was £5.4m at the end of 2019/20. This rate of increase however has grown significantly since that point with the deficit increasing by £6.2m in 2022/23 and forecast to increase by a further £6m in 2023/24. The deficit will therefore be in the region of £25m by the end of 2023/24. This has been driven by the number of Education Health and Care Plans increasing from 1,765 at the start of 2020 to 2,857 at the end of June 2023. This increase aligns with the forecast derived from the Department for Education's Delivering Better Value Programme.

This programme estimates that without intervention the deficit on the High Needs Block will continue to increase until 2028 regardless of the interventions

put in place by the Council. At the end of 2021/22 the deficits across England amounted to £2.5bn and are increasing by at least £0.5bn per year.

There is currently a statutory override in place until March 2026, that ringfences this deficit and the advice is that this should not impact on the General Fund of councils, however there is no firm guidance on what will happen after this period which makes this a key financial risk for this and all councils.

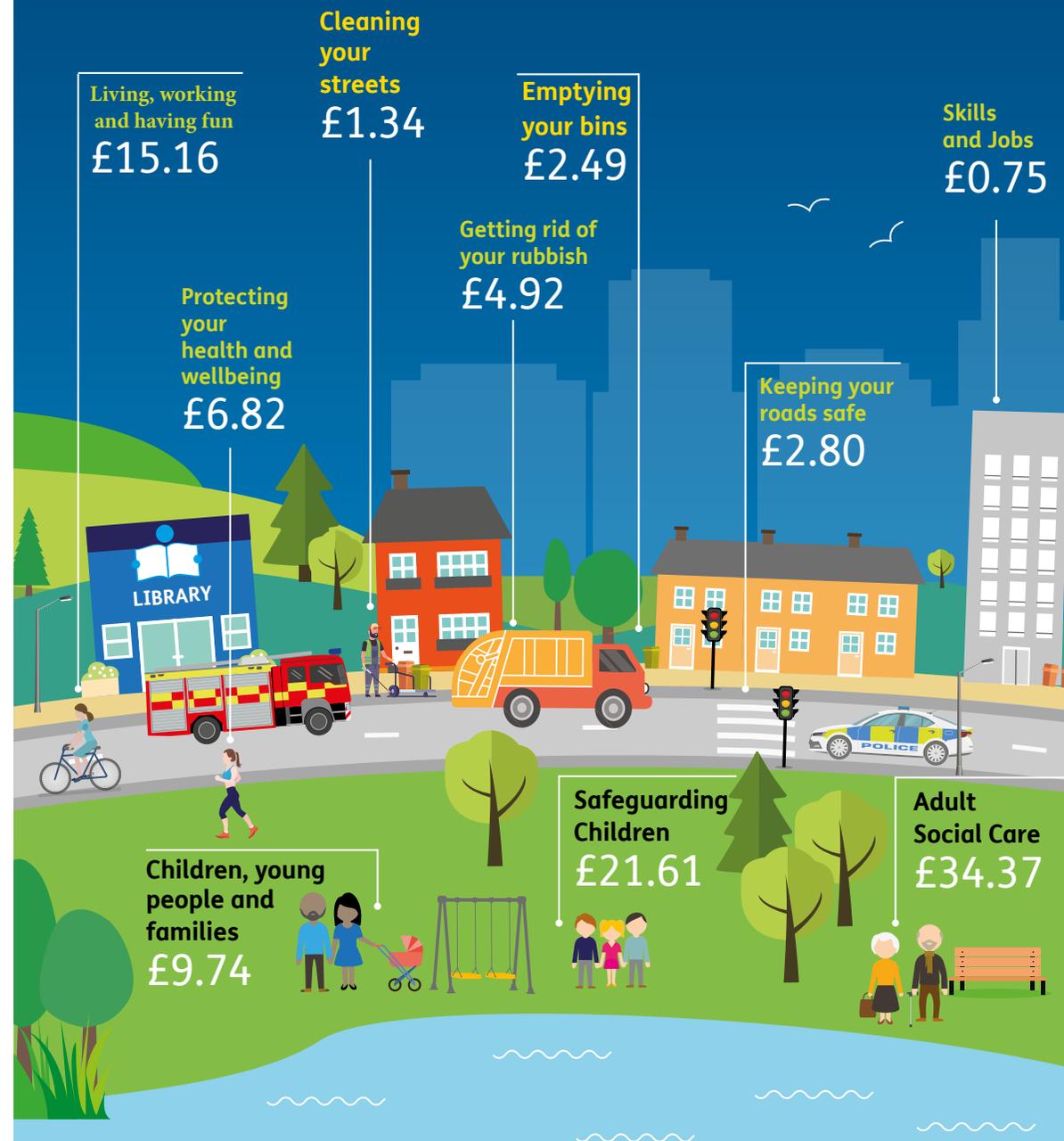
### Our Capital Strategy & Programme

Our Capital Strategy sets out the long-term context in which capital expenditure, borrowing and investment decisions are made and considers the impact of these decisions on the priorities within the Council’s Core Purpose and the promises made in the 2030 Vision for Sefton.

At the heart of the Capital Strategy is the Council’s core objective to continue deliver financial sustainability. As such a flexible capital investment programme is more important than ever as a method to stimulate and enable economic growth and strategic investment, ensuring best use of existing assets and of generating future income streams to pay for and deliver day to day services.

Our Capital Strategy is the framework from which capital expenditure and investment decisions in Sefton are made to enable the delivery of our Inclusive Growth Programme and a capital programme that supports the maintenance and development of our highways and schools.

# Where does every £100 of your Council Tax go?



## Our Accounts

Ernst and Young (EY) are our external auditor, an arrangement that has been in place since 2015/16. During that time accounts have been produced in accordance with the required regulations and presented to Audit and Governance Committee as have the external auditors reports. Each year an unqualified audit opinion has been provided on the accounting statements. The auditor each year has also provided a view that that they are assured that Council has the ability to continue to operate as a going concern based on the financial analysis undertaken.

We take a pro-active approach to this relationship and aims to have a continual all year round relationship with the external auditor, which is evidenced by sharing Medium Term Financial Plans in advance of publication and budget development progress throughout the year. This relationship has worked well over the years.

Over the last 18 months, we have worked with EY through the regulatory changes that have impacted the sector. This created a significant delay in the audit of the accounts for 20/21 and 21/22 being completed. This has been reported to Audit and Governance Committee regularly during the period. At the September meeting of the committee, members received the final audit report for 20/21 which presented an unqualified position subject to some final work being undertaken, a clear value for money assessment and identified no control weaknesses or recommendations. This is consistent with previous years.

Also, at that meeting in September the first interim report for 21/22 from EY was presented to members, with the final report due in December. This latter audit has taken nearly 12 months and whilst not untypical in the sector as has been publicised, reflects a change in the leadership of the EY team, resource constraints with that team that have interrupted the audit and a new approach including a significant increase in the number of queries being raised and the requirement for a larger volume of testing. This has proven challenging and has led to the delay. Within that report EY have made some control recommendations and officers provided a management response to these at the September meeting. A follow up meeting with EY is to be held to work through these and to agree the approach to the 22/23 audit in order that it is completed more efficiently, effectively and in a more timely manner with the Council being clear that it will also need to evolve and change its approach.

# Capacity for improvement & fit for the future

- Our staff are our greatest asset
- We understand the capacity challenges that we face
- We will be fit for the future

Overall, our ability to deliver on our ambitions remain strong, with a good mix of influential leadership, a committed workforce, collaborative partnerships and closer working with communities to build capacity further.

There is no doubt that many years of budget reductions, the pandemic, inflation and the level of change and investment required in Children's Services has had an impact on our capacity and reduced the opportunity for other areas in the Council to review how they do things or commission services. Combined these challenges have had an impact on our mind set, that is, focused financial management. However, the recent work to review our priorities is already shifting this mindset to think how we can do things differently to realise and deliver on our ambitions. Plus there is a clear message that as the changes required in Children's Services are delivered, we will look at how we create the capacity to ensure that we are fitter for the future.

There are so many factors that have an impact on our capacity and our readiness to be fit for the future, below we share some of the work we are doing to maximise our opportunities.

## Workforce

Our workforce is our greatest asset and we understand that we need to engage with employees and support them to promote and maintain stability in the

workplace, which in turn benefits the work we do. Our [Workforce Plan 2022-2026](#) has a [Delivery-Plan](#) provides a high level overview of our ongoing work which has a particular focus on establishing key strategies to support our new ways of working. This will be explored further in our planned Staff Survey with staff from across the workforce being engaged in the process.

Capacity to deliver remains a challenge with recruitment difficulties reflecting the local and regional situation in areas such as Social Care and a variety of roles for example to deliver the Growth Programme. We have taken a number of steps to address the difficulty in recruiting Social Workers, Occupational Therapists and in retaining existing staff. We have introduced a Children's Social Work Academy, with fifteen of the first entrants recently graduating and being integrated into team plus we have recruited over 20 Social Workers from overseas. A number of retention related payments have been reviewed and agreed by Council and it planned to review the impact of these in January.

Succession planning and skills development will be critical in the next few years, and this will be addressed through our Workforce Plan. A good induction is a key component of staff retention and our new Chief Executive, working with staff, is progressing a new approach to induction. Our apprenticeship programme continues to be valued. Consideration will be given to how to make the most of such opportunities these present across the organisation and

how this may help to address some recruitment challenges. A positive impact regarding the use of apprenticeships has already been seen with Adult Social Care in respect of social work and occupational therapy opportunities.

We are very proud of all of our staff and pleased to say some of them have been recognised. Jack, one of our Building Control Officers was Highly Commended in the Local Authority Building Control (LABC) Newcomer of the Year awards for the North West of England. Also, Lizzie in our libraries team won the Rising Award at the MJ awards. We also won the Planning Authority of the Year awards for the North West hosted by the Royal Town Planning Institute. We have also been nominated for an innovative project and team of the year at the Institute of Economic Development Awards.

To support the My Sefton, My Space PDR process and the identification of training and apprenticeship needs, we've launched this year's Training Needs Analysis. This will enable us to plan the delivery of training and development opportunities for the future. More importantly it will help us plan how we get ready for the future and ensure that we make the most of the talents and skills that our workforce has.

Sickness absence can at times be a risk to our capacity to deliver. We ensure employees are well supported and balance this with robust procedures to deal effectively with the monitoring and management of sickness absence. Our Personnel Team, including the Health Unit, work closely with managers, providing advice and appropriate levels of support, advising on informal processes and assisting with the more formal levels of sickness absence management.

A happy and healthy workforce is really important to us, we offer the workforce a range of opportunities to support their health and wellbeing including a discounted membership of Active Sefton, access to mental health support and a range of family friendly policies. Our new Chief Executive has a particular

### LGA Peer Challenge Self Assessment 2023



focus on health and wellbeing in his VLOGs, reminding staff that it is not all about work and that Sefton offers so many opportunities to improve their wellbeing!

We have not undertaken a whole staff survey for a number of years and as mentioned earlier we are co-producing our next survey at the moment. Once we have collated and considered the feedback, we will develop an action plan and just as importantly we will celebrate and share any good practice identified.

## Performance & Impact

Our learning from the previous Peer Challenge has led to a much tighter approach to performance reporting with quarterly reports that bring together finance, performance and risk are presented to Cabinet and this is also reflected in service based reports that are provided to Cabinet Members on the same timeline. Service Planning is also now in place across the Council. We know that we still have more to do in this area including making the most of what we have in place now, strengthening our learning and development opportunities in this area, identification of targets and embedding a performance culture. Together these changes will make it much simpler for the Council to demonstrate impact.

The Council has adopted the Power BI application and implemented a new Enterprise Data Warehouse, establishing channels to key IT systems. The first tranche of Power BI reports was produced in consultation with Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care and Public Health. These provide valuable performance information, and we are now focusing on embedding this with services - making full use of them which requires a shared model across operations and performance.

We will continue to develop our data warehouse and reporting environment, to improve the efficiency and quality of performance reporting so we are

more focused on targeting what will make the most difference particularly in addressing inequality.

We will report our progress on the actions in the Corporate Plan to Cabinet in April 2024. We are currently working to confirm our priorities for 2024/25 and this will lead to a refresh of the Corporate Plan next year.

My Sefton, My Space is our Performance Development Review (PDR) process and has been developed around our One Council values. It is a key part of the opportunities staff have to develop, grow and thrive in their role. The My Sefton, My Space PDR process provides staff and their managers with the time and space for a more in-depth and enhanced conversation about the previous 12 months, future aspirations, performance and development requirements for the following year. My Sefton, My Space is reviewed on a regular basis in 1-2-1/ supervision sessions.



We will be testing the impact of this process in our planned staff survey this year and you will learn a little more about this later on.

Supporting members to be able to effectively scrutinise and challenge performance information is a key element of good performance Management

so our Member Development Programme includes a general introduction to local government Data and Performance Management in Sefton.

We are currently developing a Performance Framework and over the next twelve months we will develop and deliver a project that develops the performance model for the Council. We believe that getting the right model in place and ensuring that skills have the right skills and capabilities to make the most of the data, information and feedback available to us will make a real difference to the council and more importantly to the people who live, study and work in Sefton.

## Delivering Our Children's Services Improvement Plan

We continue to work closely with partners and families to ensure we make improvements to deliver the changes needed in family support, children with complex needs, cared for children and children's safeguarding. At times the pace of progress has not matched our own aspirations for improvement and we have taken several steps to address this.

Our Corporate Plan, MTFP and use of council wide resources demonstrate our commitment to improving the safeguarding of children and outcomes for them and their families. We will always continue to review the MTFP in line with our Improvement Plan.

We know that any improvement journey is reliant on the stability of a permanent workforce as it is the relationships that are built with children and their families that is critical in achieving better outcomes drawn on evidence as to why social workers leave the profession we have significantly reduced caseloads, aligned business support to social work teams and ensured visible leadership, taken an innovative approach to the tricky problem of Social Worker recruitment through the introduction of the Academy and the

recruitment of experienced Social Workers from South Africa. This has been supplemented by work to improve recruitment processes and policies that may impact on the retention of staff and we will measure the impact of some of the changes that we have made early in 2024. Stability of the workforce is a key building block on any improvement journey and we are now in a strong position comparatively with other local authorities from the DCS to Team Managers.

We are proud of our Academy and delighted to welcome our new social workers, many of whom are from overseas and are looking forward to the impact that the first graduates will make on the lives of children and their families in the future.

We recognise that there was a need to focus on the basics of social work practice and have been working alongside Leeds Council to ensure that these basics are continually improving. However, we have also recognised that the profession of social work is ever changing with seismic changes on the horizon following the publication of Josh MacAllister's recommendations, therefore as well as focusing on improving the basics of practice we have also kept one eye to the future and developed new and integrated care approaches to tackle some of the significant problems faced by families in Sefton.

We have made many changes that are having an impact on the lives of children and their families including the introduction of family group conferencing, the MYSPACE team and changes to how we pay council foster carers that has resulted in us now having more internal fostering places for children.

## Our Localities Model

In line with the Peer Team recommendations from the 2022 revisit we have revisited our localities model. A number of teams have transferred to Children's Services in order to improve the line of sight by the DCS, however we



have ensured that these services have remained accessible to those residents that need them.

Our approach will continue to be about how we knit our teams and services together, how we live and breathe New Realities and not about reporting lines, structures and boundaries. This is about relationships, knowing each other and our partners well and having the skills and capabilities of the 21st Century Public Servant.

To ensure this happens SOLACE have supported us in developing a new leadership and management programme which presents a fantastic opportunity for middle and senior managers to develop and enhance their public sector leadership skills while gaining two recognised qualifications.

We are working towards accessible communications for all councillors so that there is a shared understanding of the model and how their constituents can access information, advice and support.

Our Family Wellbeing Centres, libraries and leisure centres are the footprint of the Council in our communities and will be the physical home of our localities model focused on the needs of the local community. We continue to work hard to increase our outreach for example we have had a 105% increase in children taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge at Netherton library.

This is an emerging picture given the exciting new developments in Children's Services, Adult Social Care and Sefton Place. These include Team Around the School, Family Hubs and further enhance of integrated Care Teams. The localities model will ensure that these are confident and connected systems producing the best outcomes for our communities.

## Climate Change

In July 2019 we declared a Climate Emergency. Our [Climate Emergency Annual Report](#) confirmed a 7% reduction in emissions in the last year as continued progress is made towards the Council's ambitious net zero 2030 target. Since 2019, there has been a 2,036 tonne-reduction in total emissions, which represents an 18% decrease. The reduction can be contributed to a number of factors and successful Council-led projects including the ongoing street lighting LED replacement programme.

Electricity use is the biggest part of our carbon footprint. Earlier this year a decision was made to switch to a green electricity energy supplier. This means all electricity used is now generated from 100% renewable sources which will underpin further carbon reductions moving forward. The Council continues to engage with young people and schools through its work at the Eco Centre in Southport. This year the teaching staff delivered climate related education to over 3,000 school children.

The 2023 Bootle Climate Action Festival returned for its second year taking place at Salt and Tar at Bootle Canalside. The one-day community event was a success with over 400 people attending joined by two of the Wombles! all with the aim of coming together to highlight the 'green' measures that can help to protect the local community and live more sustainably.

## Active Travel

Planning for the future is a vital part of our work. The demand for transport and hence the pressure on the existing transport network is expected to continue increasing. We need to be able to make best use of the network we have already and try to improve it to meet the demands and challenges of the future. We also need to make transport opportunities more widely accessible for all and as safe as possible.

Our School Streets Project Schemes are aimed at improving safety near schools at the start and end of the school day. Encouraging pupils to walk and cycle should help reduce the number of car journeys. In July, two School Streets Pilot schemes were launched at high schools in Southport; Birkdale High School and Greenbank High School. Following consultations with pupils, staff and parents we have agreed to introduce new rules. These rules will close off roads outside schools to most vehicles at the start and end of the school day. Each scheme will be evaluated and monitored and may be changed or extended if necessary. The school communities have been excited by the development and start of the schemes, take a couple of minutes to listen to their thoughts. We are also work withing Stanley High School, in Southport. Working with pupils, we are designing ways to control traffic around the school. We are also starting to work with schools in the South of Sefton. We are working with primary schools and hope these ideas can be used across Sefton.

## Our Assets

Our Asset Management Strategy sets out the vision and aspirations for the effective management of the Council's corporate asset portfolio.

Over the last twelve months more staff have begun to return to the office. One of the goals of the Asset Management Strategy is to enable a fit for purpose and maximised estate. This will in part be achieved by reducing the building footprint through the future ways of working agile project which in turn links back to the climate change and ICT strategies.

We are working towards the implementation of a corporate landlord approach and believe that this will help us to maintain and manage our assets more effectively.

We have reiterated our full support towards the full refurbishment of Southport Pier. It is estimated that the full refurbishment works required to ensure The pier can open safely again could exceed £13m, more than £10m in excess

of the £3m that the Council have already agreed to borrow to fund decking replacement. In order to address this significant funding gap Cabinet has agreed to progress engagement as quickly as possible with potential funders and stakeholders, given the importance of this heritage asset to the town and to local businesses.

## Digital

Our Digital Strategy outlines our vision to become a place connected by people, supported by technology, with connected communities that thrive; with support for local people and businesses that are empowered to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by digital technology.

We are all living in a time of unprecedented change; the growth of consumer technology is changing the way we all live, work and play and we will work hard to ensure that local people and business are empowered to take advantage of innovative technology to support both personal and economic growth.

Over the last three years we have delivered a range of programmes to support our digital maturity, including the establishment of dedicated governance to support digital infrastructure works, bringing together Growth, Infrastructure, and technical teams to ensure alignment of digital to key projects across the Council. We have also established a training and skills board to ensure that all staff have access to the right training and support to use digital tools in the workplace. The role of this board expands into support for local businesses and across Sefton we now have an incredibly well attended network for Digital and Creative businesses as well as digital training being developed for all businesses and targeted sessions on hot topics such as Cyber.

In 2022 Sefton launched its Digital Inclusion Strategy for Sefton place, this multi-agency strategy has delivered on a range of initiatives including the refresh of all publicly available devices across libraries, as well as the delivery



# Sefton Residents Digital Inclusion Strategy 2022-2025

of a tablet loan scheme for residents who are digitally excluded. Sefton was one of the first authorities in the Liverpool City Region to join the National Databank scheme delivered by Good Things Foundation and continues to develop its offer around training, support and guidance for residents who need support to get online.

We have refreshed our corporate website, launched our new Customer Experience Platform to allow residents to self-serve and launched Ask SARA, an online self-assessment tool and guidance tool, to allow people to browse a range of products and services to suit their needs and help them to live independently for longer.

We have modernised the way we deliver ICT services with the majority of the Council's data centre now hosted in the Cloud alongside a move to cloud-based telephony services. The Authority is now working at pace to deploy a Business Intelligence platform, hosted in Azure, alongside Power BI.

We will continue to maximise the changes that have enabled our workforce to work from home over the last couple of years. The changes we are continuing to make provide us with an excellent foundation for future adaptability and meeting the changing expectations of residents.

## Community Capacity

Community capacity is a real strength in Sefton and this capacity swelled during the pandemic and the cost of living crisis, time and time again they have pulled together to support each other and the most vulnerable in our communities.

Our incredible community led scheme which funds ideas that create more vibrant, resilient and connected communities has had a **massive impact**. The community project funding opportunity is part of Sefton Crowd, a Council initiative that aims to give anyone who lives locally with ideas about how to

### LGA Peer Challenge Self Assessment 2023

improve their area the opportunity to gain funding via the UK's leading civic crowdfunding platform Spacehive. The aim is simple – to fund and deliver exciting and innovative ideas to improve Sefton put forward by the local community, for the local community. The Council has an allocated a dedicated fund of £50,000 for projects taking part in the programme, where there is an opportunity for local projects to get a pledge from the Council of up to £5,000.

This year two long-term neighbours and supporters of Hesketh Park in Southport bequeathed £850k to ensure its best possible future. Thanks to the generosity of Louis and Anita Marks' bequest, we are now going to be able to undertake wholesale improvements at Hesketh Park and do the kinds of things people have told us they want to see, like completing the refurbishment of the Conservatory and employing dedicated staff to work on-site. We will be able to re-plant the sensory garden to help ensure that everybody can enjoy Hesketh Park as well as restoring some of the features that reflect its Victorian heritage. Among the planned work is a proposal to create a memorial and acknowledgement of Louis and Anita Marks' generous bequest.

Our Green Sefton team works closely with over forty community groups to maintain our beautiful coast and green spaces. This year Green Flag Community Awards were awarded to Friends of Rotten Row and South Park Community Garden.



# Key and background documents

## No. Document

1. Heath & Wellbeing Strategy
2. Corporate Plan
3. Example Service Plan
4. Medium Term Financial Plan
5. Capital and Investment Funding Strategy
6. Budget and Budget Monitoring Report
  - a. Budget Monitoring Report to Cabinet
  - b. Q2 Performance Information
  - c. Corporate Risk Register
7. Annual Governance Statement.
8. Organisation structure chart (senior management structure).
9. Constitution (includes decision making and Member/Officer Protocol
10. Member and Officer Development Programme / offer.
11. Statement of Accounts
  - a. Statement of Accounts 2021/22 report
  - b. Statement of Accounts 2021/22
  - c. Preliminary Audit results report Year ended 31 March 2022
  - d. Audit response to external audit 21-22
  - e. Statement of Accounts 2022/2023 report
  - f. Statement of Accounts 2022/2023
12. Public Engagement & Consultation Framework
13. Sample SYMBOL report
14. Child Poverty Strategy
15. New Realities
16. Economic Strategy
17. Growth and Strategic Investment Programme Update
18. Corporate Parenting Strategy
19. Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2027
20. Performance appraisal template
21. Staff Briefing Corporate Plan
22. Workforce Plan
23. Example of Staff Communications
24. Your Guide to Communities
25. Climate Emergency Plan



Together  
a stronger  
community



A borough for  
everyone



A clean, green  
and beautiful  
borough



Living, working  
and having fun



On the move



Visit, explore  
and enjoy



Ready for the  
future



Open for  
business



