

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Southend-on-Sea City Council

Position Statement

September 2022

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Executive Summary

Like all local authorities, Southend-on-Sea City Council (the council) has been focusing on recovery from the pandemic and responding to developing challenges of the ongoing cost of living crisis, while maintaining and adapting day to day services to meet the requirements and the needs of residents. But unlike many other places, the eyes of the world were on Southend during October 2021 and the months that followed the tragic and shocking death of Southend's longstanding local MP. Staff, councillors, partners, and communities came together in solidarity, demonstrating the strong sense of community that is felt here. The announcement that Southend would receive city status then led to new focus; a swell of activity ensued involving many partners to ensure that Sir David's legacy was fulfilled, and all had the opportunity to take part in the celebrations. A royal visit framed the civic and community celebrations and marked the transition to city status.

The impact of the pandemic has transformed the way the council works, with completely new ways of working, enhanced use of technology and new governance arrangements coming to the fore. Work is ongoing to ensure the right balance is found in supporting staff to work in the way that maximises their productivity whilst considering future estate plans.

And like many other areas, the council will be required to plan in anticipation of a financially and climate prudent post-pandemic society. This alongside the overlay of cost-of-living pressures, and increasing inflation, means the council is already seeing a stark increase in demand for support services, such as providing residents with additional stability of income, accommodation, and employment, alongside the need for ongoing health and well-being challenges across all age groups. This will require close management within confined budgets and the need to meet core environmental and place priorities.

How the council best responds in the short-term, and plans for the long-term, requires the right framework and conditions for staff - as well as the capacity for ongoing agility and flexibility to support its community to adapt and thrive, even under challenging conditions. The council's current constitution and the political environment in which it operates does not always allow for efficient decision making. The council welcomes peers' experience and feedback on how this can be improved and how the council can modernise.

The Southend community has an amazing tenacity to come together in times of crisis but also in celebration. The council wants to ensure that it continues to harness that energy and enable opportunities in a way that empowers others to respond to short and long-term health and economic priorities for the city and its residents.

Leader, Cllr Stephen George

Chief Executive, Andy Lewis

1. Introduction

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and 'on-site' exercise not being possible, the council's Corporate Peer Challenge was delayed. A remote LGA Health Check was carried out in April 2021 to provide assurance and begin gathering evidence ahead of a wider Challenge. Due to the sudden and tragic death of Sir David Amess in October 2021, the Corporate Peer Challenge, then scheduled for November 2021, was delayed for a second time.

The October 2022 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge follows the LGA Health Check in April 2021. It is an opportunity to review and assess progress in response to the feedback and recommendations from the Health Check, as well as gain insight on the remaining LGA Corporate Peer Challenge core elements not covered in April 2021.

Like many other local authorities, the council is planning in anticipation of a post-pandemic society - one in which increased demand for support services such as providing residents with additional stability of income, accommodation, and employment, alongside the need to address ongoing health and wellbeing challenges across all age groups, will require close management within confined budgets and the need to meet core adults', children's, environmental and place priorities.

More recent developments such as the cost-of-living crisis, energy price cap rises, the record inflation rate and the conflict in Ukraine has meant that cost and budget pressures are further outstripping expectation. Planning for a financially stable future faced with increasing demand for services requires additional solutions to optimise efficacy in decision making and operations, and duplication and delays must be minimised at all costs.

At times, the political environment at the council, augmented by the annual build up to elections in thirds, and the resulting behaviours in Full Council and beyond, damages both the council's reputation with partners and potential investors and hinders its ability to function in the most cost-effective way. Despite efforts such as the refresh of the Councillor and Officer relations protocol with a supporting action plan, this situation has not improved.

Supporting the community to adapt and thrive under challenging conditions requires the council to have the right governance framework, and conditions, as well as the capacity for ongoing agility and flexibility. The council welcomes the peers' experience and feedback on how it can take steps to overcome these challenges.

This Position Statement provides a summary of the council's achievements and challenges, with a focus since April 2021, including plans for the future. A response to each of the recommendations from the 2021 Health Check and how they are being progressed is set out at Appendix A.

A case study outlining the council's approach to communicating with younger audiences is also provided.

Further detail on specific issues is contained in hyperlinks within this Position Statement and supplementary evidence held in the accompanying Evidence Index.

Core documents referenced repeatedly throughout this Position Statement are:

Document title	Evidence Index Ref
Annual Report 2021/22	001
Corporate Plan	002
Annual Governance Statement 2021/22	003

2. The City of Southend-on-Sea

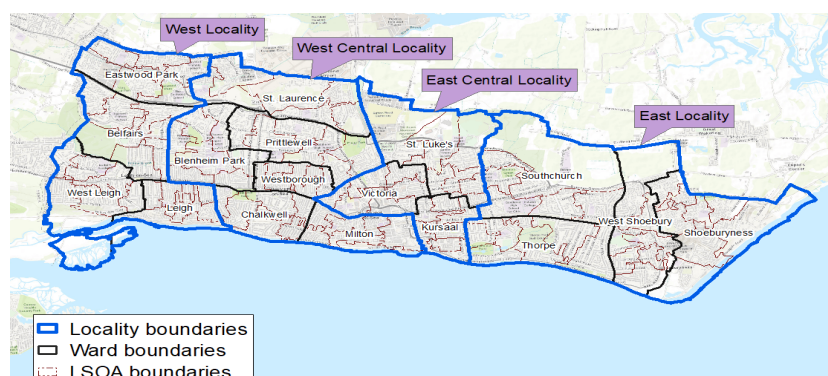
Southend-on-Sea celebrated becoming a city in March 2022, with a royal visit from the then Their Royal Highnesses, The Prince of Wales, and the Duchess of Cornwall. A community-led bid for city status was going to be submitted as part of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations; however, on 18 October 2021, The Prime Minister announced that Her Majesty the Queen would grant Southend-on-Sea City Status as a tribute to Sir David Amess, who tragically died in October 2021.

Becoming a city provides an opportunity to build on Southend's strengths – its businesses, transport links, services and the rich diversity of its people and communities – and create a more inclusive city for current and future generations, where everyone who lives here has an equal chance to flourish.

A remarkable community spirit exists within Southend. The kindness and compassion of its residents and communities was powerfully displayed during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the aftermath of the tragic murder of Sir David Amess. It is the council's intention to harness that community spirit as it continues to support each other.

Located 40 miles east of London, the city is the 36th most densely populated district in England and Wales¹, and the most populous area in Essex with 182,773 residents². A busy seaside resort with a world-famous pier, it is also home to many London commuters, with 20% of adults commuting out of the city for work. It has two rail lines into London and an international airport developed on a military airfield site. It has almost 600 hectares of parks and green space, and five designated sites for nature conservation. Seven parks hold Green Flag status in 2022, reflecting the quality and variety of their offer. The city has seven miles of almost continuous coastline, with five Blue Flag beaches designated for 2022.

Southend is represented by Conservative MP Anna Firth in the Southend West constituency (elected in the by-election following Sir David Amess's death) and by Conservative MP James Duddridge in the Rochford & Southend East Constituency.



¹ Out of a total of 348.

² ONS mid-year population estimates 2020

2.1. Population

According to the 2011 Census, 87% of residents classify themselves as white-British, with 4.6% white other, 3.6% Asian/Asian British and 2.1% Black/African/Caribbean/Black British. 87 different ethnicity categories are self-reported.

24% of the population is aged 0-19; 12% aged 20-29; 40% aged 30-59; 15% aged 60-74; and 9% aged 75+. Further analysis can be found in the [Joint Strategic Needs Assessments](#) and the [Smart Southend data explorer](#).

In Southend-on-Sea, 2021 Census data shows that population size has increased by 4.1%, from around 173,700 in 2011 to 180,700 in 2021³. This is lower than the overall increase for England (6.6%). By 2031, the projected population for Southend-on-Sea will be 195,875, an increase of 5.27% - higher than the 4.21% projected growth rate for England⁴.

There has been an increase of 12.0% in people aged 65 years and over, 1.6% in people aged 15 to 64 years, and 4.2% in children aged under 15 years⁵. The proportion of the population who are of working age is projected to increase by 8% by 2031, while the over 65 population is projected to increase by 23%.⁶

Female Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) is 0.75 years lower than UK average and has decreased by 2.01 years since 2011-2013. Male HLE is 1.41 years higher than UK average.⁷

Spatial inequalities in HLE mean that a woman living in Victoria ward, one of the most deprived wards in the city, can expect to spend around 20 years of her life in poor health. This is in stark comparison to a woman in West Leigh ward, one of the city's least deprived areas, who could expect to spend 11 years in poor health.

Further information about Southend's population is available in the Annual Report 2021/22 and the [Smart Southend data explorer](#).

2.2. Place-based insights

For summary information, data, and insights on Southend's:

- spatial inequalities
- deprivation and health inequalities
- business demographics
- transport connectivity and LTP4
- tourism, culture and leisure
- skills, unemployment and welfare
- productivity and the local economy
- community safety
- children and young people
- waste, climate and environment

³ [ONS 2022](#)

⁴ JSNA

⁵ ONS 2022

⁶ [Smart Southend data explorer](#)

⁷ OHID

...please see the Levelling Up Taskforce Briefing Pack (item 004 in Evidence Index), the Annual Report and the [Annual Public Health Report 2020/21](#).

2.3. Satisfaction, values, and priorities

In 2020 the Corporate Management Team (CMT) committed to undertaking a full Residents' Perception Survey every 18 months, aligned to the LGA's "Are You Being Served" framework. It also committed to undertaking "Pulse" surveys on an ad hoc basis as and when needed, using [Your Say Southend](#) (the council's digital engagement and consultation platform, also see page 26). Both are designed to allow the council to listen to the views of residents, help understand their priorities, find out what they think of services and check whether they feel they can influence decisions that affect them and their local area.

The insights gained allow the outcomes of Southend 2050 (the council's shared ambitions for Southend with local people and businesses – more information is provided in the Southend 2050 section below) to be reviewed in this new context and, where necessary, refreshed, considering the many changes the population of the city will have experienced since March 2020. The insights also feed into various policies, strategies, and frameworks, such as the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan, SAVS' Communication and Engagement plans, Financial Sustainability Strategy, evidencing Value for Money, Benchmarking digital accessibility, Multi-use Space Strategy, National Bus Strategy, Local Transport Plan #4, the Southend Local Plan, and the Community Safety Partnership's Southend Strategic Intelligence Assessment.

In August 2021, the council launched a new Residents' Perception Survey (item 005 in Evidence Index) and placed it specifically in the context of the council's Southend 2050 programme and the ongoing pressures of the pandemic. The 2021 survey built on the ongoing work of Southend 2050, providing insights on residents' perceptions of their local area, community interactions and crime, and the council's performance. It also sought to capture residents' experience of using council services during the Coronavirus pandemic and the impact the pandemic has had on their priorities and plans. By the survey's close on 1 October 2021, 1,206 surveys had been completed, equating to a 14% response rate. They revealed the following key messages (item 006 in Evidence Index):

Residents are particularly proud of:

- The Pier and the seafront and coastline.
- The city's parks and open spaces.

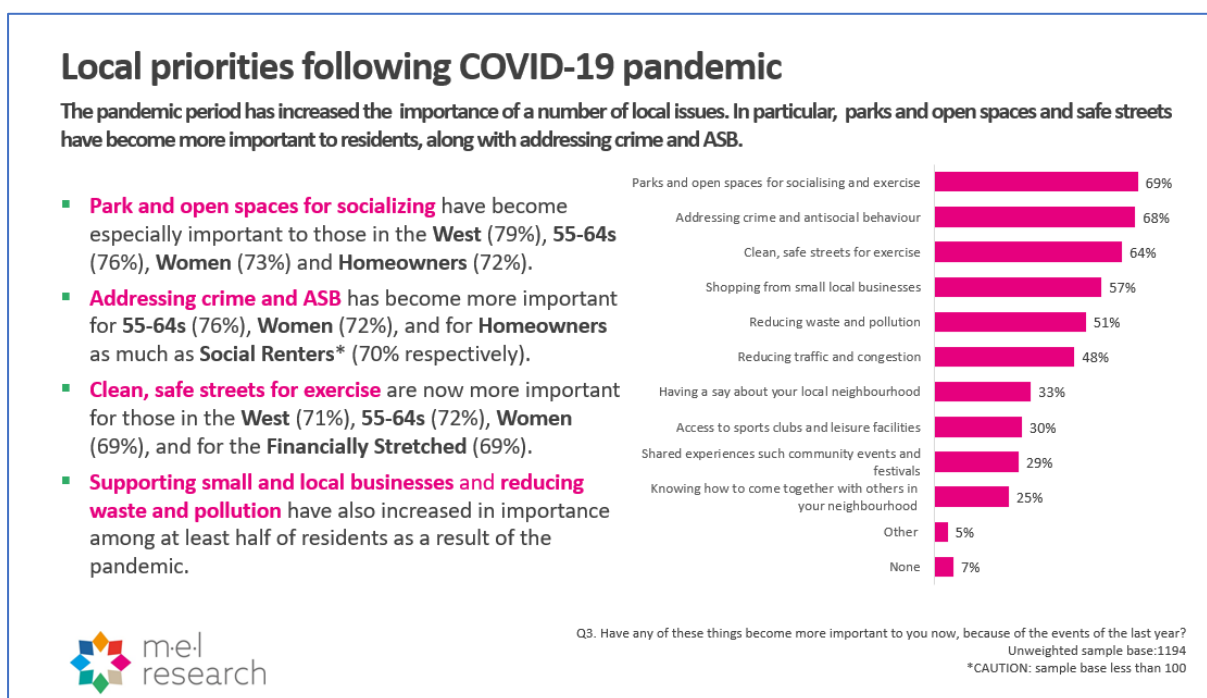
Southend residents worry about:

- Recycling, waste collection (primarily in East Central locality) and beach and marine litter.
- Homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Road and pavement maintenance.

The council is undertaking several multi-year regeneration projects, to bring prosperity and job opportunities and support growth and opportunity in the city. Most residents agree that the council’s regeneration projects will provide job opportunities (64%) and makes them feel positive about the future of Southend (63%). 52% of residents agree that regeneration will make people think differently about Southend.

By area there is substantial variation in satisfaction with the local area, with eight in ten residents satisfied with their local area in West locality (83%) compared to just over half in East Central (58%). This divide is also apparent in the ACORN classifications, where 84% of Affluent Achievers are satisfied, +31ppts more than Urban Adversity (55%). Moreover, those significantly more likely to be satisfied with the local area include women (75%) and homeowners (79%).

Residents also told us about their priorities following the pandemic:



The results were shared with officers and councillors in various formats.

3. Local Priorities and Outcomes

3.1. Southend 2050

In 2018 the council, partners and residents developed a vision for Southend's future, rooted in a programme of iterative and flexible community engagement. Southend 2050 was published and continues to be the city's ambition for the future.

People that live, work, visit, do business and study in the city were asked what they thought Southend-on-Sea should be like in 2050 and what steps are needed now, and in the coming years, to help achieve this. The ambition is therefore grounded in the values of Southenders. It is bold and challenging and will need all elements of Southend's communities to work together to make it a reality.

Southend 2050 is the city's co-designed shared ambition for the future. Its themes, outcomes and milestones set the long-term ambition but also articulate shorter term priorities through a roadmap. In developing the ambition, the council recognised that to achieve the desired outcomes, it needed to change - to be more agile and efficient. This saw the development of the Future Ways of Working (FWoW) programme to modernise its workforce. FWOV has now been replaced by a refocused transformation programme and a People Vision developed to harness the core people elements of FWOV. The Corporate Plan has more information about Southend 2050 and FWOV.

Whilst Southend 2050 successfully acted to provide a long-term vision with shorter term milestones, it didn't clearly enough articulate the council's priorities. This, coupled with regular refreshes to incorporate new administration priorities, has resulted in difficulties providing focus. Peers who undertook the Health Check in 2021 recognised the issue and recommended a review to reduce the number of priorities.

The council welcomes the Peers' reassessment of this on-going challenge.

3.2. Southend City Partnership Agreement 2022-23

The current Joint Administration has developed 20 commitments across nine priority focus areas (item 007 in Evidence Index).

This agreement will be reviewed on an annual basis and forms the basis of the Southend City Partnership, enabling the Signatories to work together as a strong and stable local government administration for the city.

3.3. The Corporate Plan

In 2022 the council developed a Corporate Plan, focusing on delivery of services to residents, driven by how the council transforms the organisation, but still meeting its statutory obligations, including inspections, as well as articulating political and financial priorities.

The Corporate Plan has cross-party support from all councillors to have a four-year timescale. It will be refreshed annually.

It will bring clear lines of accountability and understanding for every individual in the organisation and provide the framework to link personal objectives to service objectives through to corporate objectives right up to the Southend 2050 ambition.

It will enable council employees and councillors to better understand their part in the delivery of ambitions and priorities.

However, officers are concerned that despite the cross-party support for a 4-year timescale, the more regular election cycle could result in significant annual work and similar resulting issues experienced with Southend 2050, where additional priorities provide less focus.

The council welcomes the Peers' experience and feedback on what other preventative steps could be taken to ensure previous lessons are learnt and fully realised.

3.4. The Performance Management Framework

Prior to the introduction of the council's new Corporate Plan, the performance management framework consisted of the following functions:

Corporate Performance Dashboard:

Frequency: monthly A visualisation tool that enables senior leaders and Cabinet members to monitor and assess progress on Southend 2050 outcomes. The dashboard brings together the latest information on outcome success measures in one central location. Circulated monthly to CMT and regularly reviewed by senior leaders and Cabinet members.

Healthcheck:

Frequency: quarterly The Healthcheck (latest report is item 008 in Evidence Index) is a quarterly graphical snapshot of the health of the organisation through the lenses of the council, community, and partners. It is produced for CMT and senior leaders and provides key insight to enable the 'health of the council' to be tested.

Outcomes Success Measures report:

Frequency: bi-monthly The Southend 2050 Outcomes Success Measures report (OSMR) (see [here](#) for latest report to Cabinet) is a high-level summary of the council's corporate performance and progression on high-level strategic priorities. Southend 2050 Outcome Delivery Teams provide a strategic narrative on progress made on the delivery of the Southend 2050 outcomes and activity on the Roadmap. The report also contains a snapshot of key place data, which is updated as available throughout the year.

Community Insights report:

Frequency: annual The Community Insights report (item 036 in Evidence Index) brings together insights from recent formal and informal engagement and consultation undertaken by the council and its partners over the last 12 months, as well as major open engagement and engagement and those under review. Third-party reports are referenced where their remit specifically includes Southend. The report looks to provide a central reference point for insight gained from engagement and consultation with residents, organisations, businesses and visitors to support the development, delivery and evaluation of policies and services. Please note that the 2022 report is still in draft and is due to be signed off in September 2022.

Annual Report:

Frequency: The council produces an annual report to let stakeholders know about the overall performance and key achievements made over the last year. The report also sets out the council's priorities for the coming year.
annual

A revised and relaunched Performance Management Framework 2022-26, aligned to the new Corporate Plan, is being finalised and is due to be ratified in September 2022 (document to follow).

This Framework aims to achieve a corporate standard on how the council will manage corporate performance; demonstrate how corporate performance, risk and finance are to be better reported together to provide a systemic view of the council; and provide an updated set of reports and schedule of reporting aligned to the council's committee cycle.

See the [Capacity for Improvement](#) section of this document for further information on the Data Strategy that is being developed.

3.5. Equality and Diversity

Equality and diversity considerations are embedded across the Southend 2050 themes and outcomes. All the Southend 2050 themes target specific outcomes to enhance improvements towards greater equality and more diversity.

Since the pandemic and cost of living crisis the prominence of inequalities issues in health, socio-economic, and other protected characteristics has been amplified. In response, the council has renewed efforts to ensure that the decisions taken for both residents and its workforce appropriately consider such impacts. To raise the profile and signify the importance of this agenda, the Chief Executive of the council has led on all staff communications, including a new quarterly Equalities Newsletter.

The council's [Equalities Objectives](#) were reviewed and refreshed in 2022, and a new [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion \(EDI\) Statement](#) was endorsed by Cabinet. Engagement and consultation activities were undertaken with staff, residents and partners on how the objectives could be refreshed to best support this agenda over the next four years – see item 009 in Evidence Index for further information about the refresh of the Equality Objectives and EDI statement.

The Executive Director for Strategy, Change and Governance has the lead responsibility for Equalities and is now the Chair of the Corporate Equality Steering Group (CESG). The CESG is co-ordinated by the Policy Team; it brings staff forum leads together with key officer representatives to develop the council's approach to equality, diversity, and inclusion. The CESG provides a regular review of the departmental Equality Impact Assessment programme, highlighting good practice, and reviews the Corporate Equality Objectives on an annual basis (item 037 in Evidence Index)

The CESG will be looking for additional opportunities to connect the individuals and groups represented to the Southend 2050 outcomes, encouraging collaboration between staff forums to advance the work around Corporate Equality Objectives.

The council is currently working with specialist consultants to undertake an audit of its equality, diversity and inclusion offer with regards to workforce policy and support. The council further plans to engage the LGA in a specific equality review of all its activity. To avoid unnecessary duplication, the council recommends that this element is not a focus of this Corporate Peer Challenge.

4. Organisational and Place Leadership

4.1. The council

The council became a unitary authority in 1998. It employs 1,857 staff (about 1,595 full time equivalent, excluding schools), with a range of staff delivering commissioned services. It has a gross budget of £324m (£136m net) and a capital investment programme of £179m (2021-26). Over 60% of the net budget is spent on providing support for people-based services, notably social care for adults and children.

The council has developed long term strategies and action plans that will maximise opportunities for investing in its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, creating a greener future, supporting communities to thrive, and improving neighbourhoods and living standards. However, the regular occurrence of change and the annual preparation for election periods continues to present challenges and risks to the sustainability of longer-term service and financial planning.

4.2. Political make-up and leadership

The council has 51 councillors representing 17 wards. Councillors each serve for four years. One third of the council is elected each year over three years, followed by one year without election.

Following the May 2021 election, the council returned no overall political control and continued to operate a Joint Administration led by a Labour Leader. The Conservative Group held 23 seats, and two non-aligned independent members were in place.

The 2021/22 municipal year saw two unsuccessful votes of no confidence in the Leader of the Council during the months leading up to the May 2022 election. A greater number of Special Cabinet meetings took place in 2021/22 increasing the flow of business and support mechanisms around these meetings. As mentioned, the regular occurrence of change and the annual preparation for election periods present challenges and risks to the sustainability of longer-term service and financial planning. This results in council business being compacted to part of the municipal year; behaviours become increasingly, and unhelpfully, fractious; and complex key decisions can become over-simplified political campaigning matters.

The local election in May 2022 returned results with a working majority for the Joint Administration. A vote at the subsequent Southend Labour Group meeting resulted in a new Leader of the Council for the coming municipal year and saw new Cabinet members. As a result of the local elections in May 2022, the political make-up of the council is:

Conservative	21 (-2)
Labour	16 (+3)
Liberal Democrats	6 (+1)
Independent	6 (-1)
Unaligned Independent	2 (-1)

The council has made a considerable investment building a development and training programme for councillors to help support them in their strategic roles. This bespoke offer has been designed with councillors to support robust and effective decision making within a strong governance framework and is designed to equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to be an effective 21st century councillor.

The action plan, developed following the council's refresh of the Protocol on Councillor / Officer relations, continues to support enhanced working relations, and has seen additional activity with improvements to the dedicated members support hub (to improve handling of members' enquiries); an improved induction programme; improvements to councillors' ICT facilities; more political awareness training for officers; and a buddy system, where senior officers support all newly elected members and provide opportunities for better understanding of respective roles and how these can be mutually supportive.

These measures show a commitment to support effective working relationships between councillors and officers and this work continues to be reviewed and enhanced for ongoing effectiveness. However, despite this, challenges with relationships and behaviours continue to exist and improvements are not happening quickly enough.

Peers' feedback is welcomed on how the council can effect long-lasting change as regards improving officer and councillor relations.

4.3. Officer Leadership and Management

The senior management structure (item 010 in Evidence Index) consists of a Chief Executive / Director model along with a number of Service Managers and Heads of Service.

In 2021, the pandemic, coupled with retirements within CMT gave the opportunity to review the CMT structure and streamline some of the corporate services overseen by the Executive Directors. This created efficiencies and savings within the Senior Management structure whilst continuing to ensure the delivery of the Southend 2050 ambition and continued recovery.

Alison Griffin stepped down as Chief Executive in 2021, with Deputy Chief Executive Andrew Lewis stepping into the Chief Executive role.

From October 2022, Rob Polkinghorne, current Chief Operating Officer at Aberdeen City Council, will take up the post.

4.4. Learning and Development

There has been considerable focus on learning and development to ensure it aligns employee goals and performance with organisational outcomes. The council's approach has been to embed a learning culture and promote self-managed learning. To support this outcome the following interventions have been delivered:

- Development of learning plans for each service area to identify and close skill gaps, prioritising areas where there has been little investment in learning in previous years.
- Make full use of the apprenticeship levy to support learning and development and career progression of current and future leaders.
- Increased investment in learning to support transformation programmes, wellbeing, and digital enablement.
- Continue to move from designing and delivering courses to analysing and helping to solve business and performance problems.
- The review of the council's Learning & Development policy and professional development approach, ensuring any requests are considered in the wider context of priorities within the team/service.
- Completion of the Towards Maturity industry standard learning performance Benchmark exercise to reflect on the current learning strategy, highlight areas of improvement and compare the council against other organisations.
- Investment in Leadership Development and Transformational Leadership Programme (TLDP).

A core part of the council's People Vision is investment in effective leadership in shaping the direction and supporting staff to perform at their individual and collective best. Post-Covid, a need to prepare the workforce for different kinds of leadership that enable leading in uncertainty and complexity, has been identified.

As a result, a leadership programme has been developed and delivered by the council's partners The Public Office and BTS Spark to respond to the needs of pandemic recovery and the wellbeing of staff, whilst also helping to embed new approaches, reprioritise, and ensure productivity. The TLDP (item 011 in Evidence Index) launched in Autumn 2021 for the Senior Leadership Group and has continued to roll out to the Senior Leadership Network since early 2022.

The stated aims and objectives of the programme emphasised collaboration, inquiry, and empowerment, as part of a cultural shift with a greater emphasis on outcomes, constructive challenge, a coaching style, and agility. The appetite for development began to strengthen, albeit with mixed levels of engagement (due to increasing pressures faced by officers, part due to new and urgent financial demands).

However, there is now a need to pause and consider the future of the TLDP due to the council's current financial context and the mixed level of engagement. But these

existential challenges make the need for this leadership learning more, not less, urgent – without the desired shifts in how officers lead at the council, it will not be best placed to successfully navigate the challenging times that lie ahead.

4.5. Business Support Redesign – Future ways of working

The redesign of the council’s Business Support function is fundamental to how the organisation works and has been a major redesign for the whole organisation. It will impact the core of the business – it is a key part of the council’s overall modernisation and change agenda and will be a major contributor to financial efficiencies.

The consultation on the redesign ran until October 2021; consequently, a formal grievance was raised and an independent investigation from the Local Government Association (LGA) took place, with the final outcome in March 2022. An appeal and subsequent hearing took place in July 2022 and concluded that the service redesign should proceed.

Recommendations were made following this grievance process and the council is now moving through the transition into implementation.

The redesigned Business Support Service is a centralised model that brings together disparate, localised Business Support teams into three Hubs. A centralised Management team consisting of a head of service and Hub Managers maintaining business relationships with each directorate and external partners, and a programme of development will now commence with the staff affected.

Following on from the pandemic and the impact it has had on the city, the council has acknowledged that a change to its ways of working was necessary to both improve services and recover financially. Technological advancements, home-working arrangements, financial pressures and shifts in service delivery have all contributed to different working practices and helped shape what business support will look like at the council in the future.

The new service exploits available technology to deliver a consistent and customer-focused service. It clusters resources to ensure cost effectiveness and efficiencies in service delivery. It has implemented generic job descriptions that focus on those job accountabilities that provide opportunity to achieve increased flexibility within the service and cater for increased demand during peak periods, whilst also aiming to improve career progression and development opportunities.

The Annual Governance Statement has further information on the review and the impact of the council’s HR policies.

4.6. Digital

The digital shift that took place as a result of the pandemic has led to an increased need for quality connectivity and access to online services.

In response, the council’s Digital Smart Strategy (see item 012 in Evidence Index) supports many of the initiatives in the Corporate Plan and details digital priorities and

plans for achieving outcomes across four themes: Smart Technology, Smart Working, Smart Council and Smart City.

The council's vision is to create a truly smart city, which considers that society lives through the digital lens of technology and has residents at the centre. Digitally vulnerable residents and visitors are included through outreach programs, and via robotic and smart devices building a collective mastery of digital tools and opportunities.

The strategy supports flexible working for the council's workforce as well as residents and local businesses experiencing a change in their own working patterns and environments.

The council is currently remediating its legacy systems in preparation for a move to the cloud, an activity started during the pandemic to support remote working. The extension of this will support Smart Council and Smart City themes. The council also collaborates with the Association for South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA) on connectivity-related projects that will benefit the city and region. A connectivity strategy for the city is being developed, outlining how fibre, Wi-Fi, IOT networks and more will benefit the city in future years.

4.7. Partnership working and community leadership

The council, working with partners and the community, oversaw an unprecedented mobilisation of the council, partners, and community resources during the early period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The council has good relationships with its communities, civil society, and partners. These relationships have been strengthened during the pandemic and again demonstrated in subsequent activity to support Afghan and Ukrainian migrants, as well as in the aftermath of Sir David Amess's tragic death and the city celebrations.

Partner and communities display a great deal of appetite to work with the council, and the council continues to seek out opportunities to capitalise on this vital capacity and expertise. Many examples of this partnership working are included within this statement.

The council recognises its responsibility as an influential anchor institution within the city and looks for opportunities to raise public awareness on key health, environment and equality, diversity, and inclusion issues, as well as bringing others together to collaborate in order to achieve better outcomes.

The Annual Report contains further information on this topic.

4.8. Economic Crisis and Recovery Group

This group was set up as part of the council's pandemic response structure and has evolved into 'business as usual' mode by shifting its focus to one of proactive horizon scanning and targeted intervention, rather than reactive crisis management.

The group is made up of council officers, local partners, and stakeholders, who collaborate to economically support residents and businesses impacted by policy

changes (for instance the end of the Universal Credit uplift and the Coronavirus Job Retention schemes) and to specifically target certain groups, such as young people aged 16 to 25, residents in fuel poverty and residents that have been made redundant, to support their economic recovery. The Group participated in the development of the council's United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Investment Plan and will serve as the Local Partnership Group that will oversee the investment of Southend's UKSPF allocation in the city. The group will also take a leading role in the response to the [cost of living crisis](#).

4.9. Climate and environment – The Climate Hub

Following the 2019 Climate Emergency declaration, the council set an ambitious target to reach Net Zero by 2030. However, the council recognises that this ambition can only be achieved with the right coordination and partnership between the council and local communities.

Southend Climate Hub opened in June 2022 and is located at the Victoria Shopping Centre. The Hub provides a physical space for education and engagement, with a mission to share resources and engage with community stakeholders on the council's corporate Climate Change programme. The Climate Hub has been designed around the five pillars of the Green City Action Plan. It will help to raise awareness of environmental and sustainability aspirations around climate resilience, circular principles, and a pathway to Net Zero Carbon emissions.

One objective of the hub is to empower local citizens to respond to climate risks, shocks, and stresses of a rapid changing environment. To achieve this the council has partnered with organisations such as Trust Links, RHS, local businesses, SCC parks team, author John Alexander, Forward Motion, Southend-on-Sea City Council Nursery, Cambridge Council, and various schools in the city. Following an initial three-month trial, the hub team is preparing a lessons-learned report which will be published in the autumn of 2022.

4.10. The Afghan Resettlement Scheme

The council has worked with communities and partners to organise and generate support and supplies for Afghan families since September 2021. Influential groups shared the council Leader's plea for private landlords to come forward to support rehoming, with the ask still very much ongoing, backed by the Home Office, for Local Authorities to be able to secure as many properties as possible.

To date four families have been housed in settled accommodation within Southend and the Housing Policy & Strategy team is currently preparing a report that will go to Cabinet regarding future pledges for settled families. Despite best efforts nationally, large numbers of families remain in bridging hotels as affordable, or close to affordable, accommodation is sought.

The council has supported individuals and families residing in 'bridging accommodation' in the Park Inn hotel in Southend (a key local partner for the council), while permanent housing offers are 'matched' by the Home Office across the UK. Collaborative support includes:

- health screening sessions
- GP registrations and responsive advice and support
- children attending initial English as a Second Language (ESOL) and sport / activity sessions, followed by move into full time school placements within two local schools by December 2021
- adult and children's services assessing families and offering support
- further education and employment advice
- ESOL for adults, including linked activities provided by Southend Adult Community College
- faith groups have come together to deliver lunch events for families, offer befriending and wider community support through a network of volunteers
- drop-ins from local Citizens Advice and DWP services.

4.11. Response to the conflict in Ukraine

Since the announcement of the Homes for Ukraine and Family Visa schemes for Ukrainian nationals, the council has stepped up a wraparound support programme in order to support new arrivals into the city.

Duties placed upon the council with regards to the Homes for Ukraine scheme include:

- conducting property and DBS checks on sponsor families
- offering safeguarding support to families upon arrival
- arranging a £200 support payment to new arrivals whilst waiting for other income / benefits to be set up
- arranging an optional £350 thank you payment to sponsors for taking in Ukrainian families.

In addition, a cross-departmental working group has come together to build the processes and steps required to have these checks carried out as swiftly as possible.

All new arrivals into Southend are welcomed into the council's wider support package which includes a weekly drop in run by a collaboration of local organisations including Welcome to the UK, support from the local Citizens Advice and faith groups, Leigh Community Centre events and Southend Adult Community College programme of ESOL, courses and coffee mornings.

4.12. Covid-19 response and vaccination campaigns

The council continues to provide effective local leadership in response to the pandemic.

The council worked closely with Southend's communities, civil society, and partners to deal with the impacts of the pandemic, who showed amazing resilience and

coordination on an unprecedented scale and have adapted to living with Covid. The Southend Heath Protection Board and the Health Protection Oversight & Engagement Board (a cross-party group of councillors) continue to meet regularly to support the ongoing management of this pandemic as well as wider health protection issues (such as Monkeypox, MMR vaccine uptake, etc.). The total number of [deaths registered](#)⁸ in Southend involving COVID-19 was 784 as at the week ending 31 August 2022.

As mentioned in the council's statement from the LGA Healthcheck Review in April 2021, the council is very proud of its response and that of the community (see item 013 in Evidence Index). The council continues to look for opportunities to increase effectiveness of place leadership through lessons learnt during this time. Specific examples such as the learning from the collaborative approach to healthcare for the homeless will provide best practice for others through recognition as a finalist in the Healthcare Service Journal Awards 2021.

A 'wrap around' support service was also provided at the vaccine clinic, and gave support with needle phobia therapy, general health needs from blood pressure to weight management, and partnered with the Citizens Advice Service (CAS) to deliver a variety of general needs support, from benefits to debt, as part of the wrap around service. Whilst the wrap around service has now ceased, the partnership with CAS is ongoing and continues to support residents out of the Civic Centre; needle phobia therapy remains available upon request.

A mobile Vax Van allowed clinical teams to reach more vulnerable residents and tackle issues of vaccine hesitancy, and was key to supporting those experiencing homelessness, sex workers and street communities operating in soup kitchens of an evenings. The council has also been supporting the school vaccine programme for 12- to 15-year-olds, offering guidance and support to headteachers as well as offering dedicated clinics at the Civic Centre.

A number of innovative approaches to improve local Covid-19 vaccine uptake were led jointly with the NHS (Southend Vaccine Hesitancy Plan) and many of these were presented to the Regional Covid Vaccination Sector-Led Improvement (SLI) workshop in April 2022. Because of the council's impactful interventions, its Director of Public Health was appointed as the Senior Responsible Officer for the Regional SLI Covid Vaccine network and contributed to the LGA's review of this topic in July 2022.

The council is currently working closely with NHSE and the Mid and South Essex Integrated Care System to help shape the new vaccine plan for the next Covid booster, as well as the flu vaccine and ongoing work on improving the MMR vaccine uptake.

4.13. ASELA and devolution

The council seeks opportunities to enhance greater economic, environmental and health outcomes for its residents and businesses through greater collaboration with

⁸ within 28 days of a positive test

neighbouring authorities and has continued to play a central role in the growth and recovery agenda developed with the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA). Set out in the publication of its Growth & Recovery Prospectus (item 014 in Evidence Index), investment programmes and projects outline how greater delivery of productive jobs, physical and digital connectivity, 'blue and green' infrastructure and new, affordable homes for residents and business, can be achieved. In October 2021, the governance arrangements to oversee the work of ASELA and its associated programmes was formalised with the establishment of a Joint Committee with other councils under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972. Southend-on-Sea City Council acts as the Accountable Body for the Joint Committee.

ASELA has also entered into a pilot Strategic Place Partnership with Homes England, to drive the delivery of affordable housing and town centre regeneration.

The council and other South Essex authorities are at the forefront of this discussion with Homes England. The place-based partnership between ASELA and Homes England has been developed through collaborative work and formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (Item 015 in Evidence Index). This represents one of only two such partnerships in England and will enable ASELA to work alongside Homes England at a more strategic level. The Partnership aims to transform housing and regeneration across South Essex and embed outstanding place making principles in every project so local communities can thrive and see a step change in employment and skills, life chances and health and wellbeing.

Southend is well positioned to drive this agenda and take a leading role in south Essex partnership working to maximise opportunities from regional partnerships.

This collaborative approach has set a good foundation in which to build upon potential ambitions for devolution opportunities presented in the [Levelling Up White Paper](#) and subsequent [Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill](#). Southend is taking a leading role alongside Essex and Thurrock local authorities to understand what opportunities may exist.

4.14. Levelling Up Task Force

In May 2022, following short notice, the council hosted members of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' Levelling Up Taskforce (item 016 in Evidence Index). The Taskforce visited the city to learn more about its levelling up challenges and seek views on the Government's levelling up agenda.

Council officers from several departments were able to work quickly together, using their existing relationships to bring together a group of both internal and external stakeholders to form an insightful roundtable discussion of the levelling up needs and challenges in the city.

This was attended by officers and partners such as Southend Foodbank, the NHS, Southend Business Partnership, University of Essex, Southend Association of Voluntary Services, and the Southend Citizen's Advice Bureau.

Council officers also took the Taskforce on a comprehensive tour of the city, which focused on highlighting visible spatial inequalities and challenges posed by

deprivation, as well as its many well-loved areas, thriving communities and successful businesses.

The Taskforce's feedback included comments that the outcomes-based nature of the Southend 2050 programme and the council's Performance Management Framework was impressive, noting that the council's thinking and application of this approach was ahead of many other local authorities. In addition, they felt that seeing the city through the lens of inequality and levelling up challenges was extremely beneficial.

Southend 2050 continues to be the council's primary medium of articulating its vision for the future and will align with plans for local authority performance reporting to central government, as detailed in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.

4.15. Community Renewal Fund

Following the Government's announcement of the Community Renewal Fund (CRF), the council instinctively saw the opportunity to work with partners to evaluate and agree upon a shortlist of community projects for this fund.

Demonstrating its maturity and openness to collective decision making, the council invited external partners to take part in the assessment panel to decide which projects would be shortlisted in the CRF submission to central government.

Two of the six projects submitted to the CRF for consideration were approved, resulting in a total fund allocation of £1.06m:

Anchoring the Southend 2050 ambition	£430,882
Southend Opportunities	£628,283

These two projects sit within the employment investment priority. Partners from these programmes have enhanced the council's understanding of the local employment and skills market. As testament to the strong relationship built, partners have supported other pieces of work such as taking part in hosting the Levelling Up Task Force delegation in May 2022.

4.16. Community Participation

As mentioned in examples above, the council uses its ability to facilitate the coming together of groups in collective decision- and plan-making and has continued to make vital local connections between residents, groups, businesses, and public sector bodies possible.

Likewise, the pandemic and the Afghan and Ukraine resettlement responses saw community groups reach out to the council to help organise donations on a large scale, fundraise and with the latter, help guests settle and integrate locally.

Historically, the council has seen capacity issues in many groups or have found that communities did not have a focal point, such as a group, venue, or online space, making engagement difficult.

The council has sought to build capacity by connecting groups and communities with existing assets, potential sources of funding and training. One example is how SAVS has facilitated the Vaccine Inequalities Fund, allowing groups to bid for small pots of money via a simple process. In addition, community builders have been embedded with local organisations. While walking the streets through daily conversations they discover local resources and community connectors who take action on local priorities.

The council encourages residents' and partners' active participation in decision making and local action, as well as understanding the importance of communicating findings and feedback to the decision makers and public. A Community Insight report, compiling formal and informal consultation and engagement from the council and other third parties, has been produced for 2021/2022 and will support decision makers in understanding local wishes and aspirations.

The [Your Say Southend](#) online engagement platform, launched in June 2020, has enhanced levels of consultation and engagement by enabling a more flexible approach to engagement exercises as residents interact more online, with the chance to share ideas, chat in forums and check progress on outcomes.

Going from strength-to-strength, it has so far hosted over 128 projects. In Q2 2022/23 alone, the platform saw over 1,100 new registrations, 9,800 visits and almost 1,500 active engagements with consultations. The most-viewed topics were the "Public Spaces Protection Order – Proposed Beach Area for Dogs", "City Centre Strategy and Vision 2022", "Tackling Poverty Strategy" and "Help Shape What Transport in Southend Looks Like".

The platform is supplemented with other channels for those who are digitally excluded or vulnerable. However, at times councillors have discounted or devalued this evidence due to unrepresentative – or what is perceived to be inadequate – sample sizes. Similar comments have been made by councillors about the Residents' Perception Survey, despite the data in this study being statistically sound and representative.

The council has written a test and learn framework for co-production and appointed a Co-production Lead role.

Workshops have been undertaken to coproduce the Street Prostitution Strategy; and most recently the Tackling Poverty Strategy saw 15 residents engaged over two days in a community setting, supported by a free creche. Further projects are being planned in the realm of Adult Social Care to set up Partnership Boards around older people, people with learning disabilities and autism, as well as a Board for people with mental health needs. These boards will continue to feed into the co-production of the three Adult Social Care Strategies, "Living Well", "Caring Well" and "Ageing Well".

A wider review to develop a more effective realisation of the social value of the council's approach to commissioning and procurement is being undertaken, clarifying expectations for potential suppliers, and creating a system that is live to the current needs of the city. The [Social Value Portal](#) has begun to engage council officers on developing a Social Value strategy, but this work is experiencing delays due to other

priorities. However, this has not hindered progress on eliciting social value contributions.

A good example of partnership working on the Better Queensway project has seen officers from the council, DWP, Southend College, Swan, and others coming together to shape social value outcomes on this significant project.

As part of the council's journey of recovery from the pandemic it has built on the appetite for change and innovation, as demonstrated by staff and residents during the lockdowns. This was achieved by working with local people to set up an innovative Community Investment Board consisting of nine local experts by experience (people who use services and their families), supported by an additional advisory group made up of local voluntary and community organisations, local health and care providers, and clinical and social work professionals. The Community Investment Fund has been kickstarted with a £1.5m contribution from the council to allocate over three years.

The [Community Investment Board](#) is supported by [Shaping Our Lives](#), a nationally recognised user involvement organisation, and the Southend Association of Voluntary Services (SAVS). Technical advice and support is provided by the council's Commissioning team. The Board represents an innovative move to concede control of substantial funding to the local community, whilst retaining the skills of the council in procurement and monitoring to ensure value for money. The Community Investment Fund is controlled by local people, creating a culture of community ownership and resilience, and building co-production capacity in local organisations. It is shifting control from the council to the community and will create a culture of collaborating to achieve outcomes.

In February 2022, over £181,000 was distributed to smaller voluntary organisations in the city. Activities that were funded include the provision of uniform packs for school children, covering the core costs of running bereavement support groups and the employment of a mental health worker to engage with young people.

The first meeting of the Community Reference Group was in September 2021. The purpose of this Group is to enable the voluntary sector and other health and social care professionals to give their thoughts on the Community Investment Fund.

27 local organisations attended the first meeting, where they discussed the Group's draft principles, values, vision, and mission. It was a positive session with everyone engaging in groups, sharing their thoughts about what they like and do not like about various funding mechanisms they currently use, and how they thought the Community Investment Fund could make a difference to Southend. The council is excited by the learning and community development that is coming from this innovative development in co-production. This initiative has also been awarded an iESE Certificate of Excellence in the Public Sector Transformation Awards 2022.

4.17. Engagement on the Local Plan

Consultation on the [Southend Local Plan](#) took place between 31 August and 26 October 2021. The council took a hybrid approach, with virtual and outdoor events

combined to adhere to pandemic public health protocols. The virtual exhibition, platformed on social media, reached over 178,000 people via Southend Echo Facebook page and over 68,000 people through a You Tube advertisement showing Local Plan video content.

It reached over 23,000 people on Facebook, with 185 event responses and 7,127 opens of resident e-newsletters featuring local plan content. There were 5,598 views of Local Plan pages and media releases online and the virtual exhibition gained over 500 users and 2,700 page views. The council also posted three videos on You Tube explaining what the Local Plan was for and how to get involved.

In terms of in-person events, the council held 11 public “drop-in” events at venues across the city, with at least one in each neighbourhood. There were 12 stakeholder events (both virtual and in-person) and a webinar hosted with Southend Association of Voluntary Services (SAVS); three ‘drop-in events’ for councillors and two virtual drop-in events with council staff prior to consultation launch.

The comments and feedback have been collated and analysed and are due to be shared with councillors in the coming weeks. The engagement output will influence the Plan and help to refine the approach for the next stage of consultation, due to take place in spring 2023.

4.18. Cost of Living crisis

The council recognises the severe pressure its residents, and often most vulnerable residents, have been placed under due to recent inflation cost pressures and the energy crisis. Council teams have acted quickly to ensure central government funding streams are actioned quickly and in the most effective way.

In August 2022, five Southend councillors raised a motion to consider the Cost-of-Living crisis for council action, with the motion requesting that a Cost-of-Living emergency be declared (item 017 in Evidence Index).

Prior to this, the Senior Leadership Network mapped all activities across the council that are acting to support residents and businesses through the crisis, helping officers to collaborate and provide more comprehensive support to residents.

A Tackling Poverty Strategy is being co-produced with residents and voluntary and community sector partners who will support the outcomes. It is expected to be published in early 2023 and focuses on five key themes:

- financial resilience
- food insecurity
- fuel insecurity
- skills and employment
- housing insecurity.

Digital poverty and health inequality will be woven throughout the strategy as interlinking themes.

Cost of living concerns are taken into consideration in all council decisions, including budgeting decisions. The Economic Crisis and Recovery Group, established in 2020 as part of the council's pandemic response, is made up of council and external public and third sector partners and will take a leading role in informing this work.

A (currently draft) response to the August Motion outlines the activity to support residents (item 018 in Evidence Index).

4.19. Digital

A recent success is the delivery progress of the city's full fibre upgrade, as [CityFibre](#) completes its roll out into the West Shoebury, Thorpe Bay, Clifftown and High Street areas of the town and has reached 64% completion. CityFibre's investment programme will bring gigabit capable connectivity for homes that will future proof city residents' digital capabilities.

City residents already have access to more Internet Service Providers providing a wider choice of tariffs and services, and positive working relationships between CityFibre and Southend councillors have ensured that building works have been scheduled sensitively to ensure that businesses and residents are not impacted, particularly over the busy summer season.

4.20. Youth voice

The Southend Youth Voice Team works to give children, young people, and families a voice. The council wants to make sure young people can share their views, be heard, and make a difference in Southend. Several projects are offered and enable children and young people's voices to be heard on both a local and national level. This is achieved through focused projects and forums, consultations as well as a programme of fun events. The council wants to know what is important to children, young people and their families and make sure these views are heard and acted on by decision makers.

Southend Youth Council

The Youth Council is for young people aged 11-18 (up to 25 with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) to have a say over how their city is run in the form of the Southend City Youth Council. The Youth Council meets monthly to discuss the issues that affect young people in Southend, with meetings planned and chaired by the Youth Mayor and Deputy Youth Mayor. The Member of Youth Parliament represents the Youth Council on a National level. Some of their recent successes can be found on their website [Contact Us | Southend Youth Council](#).

Make Your Mark ballot 2022

The Youth Voice Team co-ordinated the 2022 Make Your Mark ballot, young people were invited to vote on the issue that was most important to them in the local area. The voting this year was open from 1 – 28 February 2022. Seven issues were presented to young people on a ballot paper, they were able to vote in schools, colleges and youth groups. This year 7,935 young people participated. Making this the biggest turnout we've ever had. This also put Southend City in second place for

percentage turnout across the UK with a turnout of 46.90%. 11 Secondary Schools, the college, two Special Educational Needs and Disabilities schools and various youth groups took part.

Children in Care Councils

The Youth Voice team relaunched the Children in Care Council in August 2021. The Children in Care Council aims to improve the lives of children and young people in the care of Southend-on-Sea City Council. Young people can share their views, experiences and ideas and help make things better for children and young people in care. The Children in Care Council meets monthly, offers lots of fun activities and is for young people aged 8+. There is currently 20+ active members and the group has now split into two separate groups:

- Small Kids, Big Ideas for those aged 8+
- Children in Care Council for those aged 13+

Some of the achievements of the group include:

- changing the word “contact” to “family time”
- a racism project with the Virtual Schools Team to educate young people on the topic of racism; all Looked After Children received a book which was researched by the young people
- LGBTQIA+ discussions and involvement in staff training development
- a top tips social worker video, starring young people, and an event attended by 40+ colleagues; this has also been shared across the Children’s Services Directorate and in addition, the directorate has created a top tips list with staff support pledged for it
- participating in lots of fun activities including cookery, laser tag and a joint activity with the Youth Council
- teams regularly attending meetings to consult with the young people about how they can improve the service they offer.

Youth Interview Panels

For appointments of Director Level and above, a youth panel will form part of the recruitment process. Working with Hays recruitment, the council recruited 10 young people and trained them in interview skills. The young people were involved in the recent recruitment of the Director of Social Work, Early Help and Youth Support and were involved in the Chief Executive interviews in July 2022. There are plans to repeat the training in autumn 2022.

4.21. City celebrations

The strength of the council’s ability to effectively collaborate with partners and adapt to new challenges outside of traditional council activity was apparent during the planning of the city celebrations. In partnership with local voluntary and community representatives, local businesses, MPs and residents, the council facilitated a

number of community events across the whole city during the year Southend became a city.

The city celebrations gave the council the perfect opportunity to shine a light on all of those people who make Southend great.

During a three-part event on 2nd March 2022 over 300 partners, individuals, faith, and community representatives took part in the official celebrations which saw Southend become a city.

This event was attended by the then Their Royal Highnesses, The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall and live broadcast to residents, nursing homes and schools. It was viewed by over 13,000 people: [City Day: All the excitement in 2m13 - YouTube](#)

Several community-led projects include:

- A concert, “He built this City”, which brought together local celebrities and artists.
- Unite in Light interfaith event with over 23 congregations and 150 people in attendance.
- 1000 Conversations, a campaign which brought together people to discuss and record their experiences and hopes for Southend and the grassroots Hands Together banner campaign travelled between events gathering signatures of partners and residents expressing solidarity and a strong stance against hatred.

5. Governance and culture

5.1. The governance framework

The council has adopted the seven core principles from the 2016 CIPFA/Solace Framework as the basis on which it wants to operate. The ('full') council is responsible for ensuring the organisation has good governance arrangements, in line with the "three lines of defence" model, and the council has delegated this function to the Audit Committee.

The council has an officer Good Governance Group that meets regularly to oversee the delivery of the governance framework, reports to the Chief Executive and provides reports to CMT and the Audit Committee (item 019 in Evidence Index for the Group's Terms of Reference). An annual Governance Statement (AGS) (item 003 in Evidence Index) is produced and identifies capacity for improvement.

Other key council bodies also have a significant role to play within the council's governance framework, as set out in the council's governance framework, "A Simple and Effective Governance Framework" (item 020 in Evidence Index). The framework was reviewed and revised in 2019, with the council's Constitution updated to reflect this revised framework. The review considered the adoption of Southend 2050 Roadmap, and the council's new values and behaviours. A reviewed and updated Local Code of Governance is being reported to the Audit Committee in October 2022 for recommendation for approval by Cabinet.

The AGS outlines the council's governance arrangements in place, reflects on how they have operated during the year and identifies where there is scope for improvement. The AGS also incorporates the [Head of Internal Audit Opinion for the year](#) which provides an opinion on the risk management, internal control and governance arrangements of the council.

The council recognises the importance of effective governance to enable effective planning and delivery in anticipation of a post-pandemic society. The council further recognises that robust but timely decisions require appropriate oversight from councillors; where the council collectively spends decision making and scrutiny time to reflect its strategic aims and be mindful of the balance between people and place services.

However, a greater number of Special Cabinet meetings took place in 2021/22, increasing the flow of business and support mechanisms around these meetings. In addition, a recent benchmarking exercise regarding the call-in of decisions has shown that the council called in more decisions in one month (July 2022), than 21 authorities did in a whole municipal year. This is discussed more in the Scrutiny section below.

At times there is a conflict of short-term political pressures resulting in decisions which do not always align to longer term strategies.

This hinders the council's ability to successfully optimise on longer term commitments such as climate ambitions (and practicality, on issues such as the reletting of the waste contract) and realise the benefits of regeneration projects. This short-termism poses challenges to the council's development of long-term place-making strategies; with setting a strategic vision for place and enabling delivery requiring long-term investment and resourcing over decades.

The council would appreciate the Peer Team's observations and recommendations as to how the council's current political cycle and practices are impacting its capacity to deliver effective, long-term place-making strategies.

As part of the approach to simple and effective governance, two governance boards are in operation.

The Investment Board (see item 021 in Evidence Index), with a particular focus on capital expenditure, reviews and challenges business cases and proposals that are put before it for investment to ensure that these have been properly developed with the right considerations and options analysis to ensure that they are the right things to be doing to assist with the delivery of the Southend 2050 Ambition, Outcomes and Roadmap.

The Commissioning Board (see item 022 in Evidence Index), with a particular focus on issues that are classified as revenue by their nature, reviews and challenges proposed strategies, approaches to issues and business cases to ensure that they are the right things to be doing to assist with the delivery of the Southend 2050 Ambition, Outcomes and Roadmap. However, it is not always clear what the remit, scope, and objective of the Commissioning Board is. This lack of clarity means it is challenging to confidently assess if the Board is achieving its outcomes.

Overall, the stock of general skills and knowledge about good governance and the council's own governance processes is varied amongst council officers, and therefore officers can find the Boards difficult to navigate and use effectively.

In addition, there are forums and collaboration spaces in respect of Growth & Infrastructure and Innovation & Design (although this board has not convened since before the pandemic), where officers can take concepts and ideas about potential proposals or projects to discuss and develop to get the support and input of colleagues with appropriate knowledge and experience, before developing these further to take into the formal decision-making processes of the council.

An internal project, led by the Head of Internal Audit, has recently been paused in light of the ongoing project to review the Constitution. This project mapped governance processes in the council and looked to make recommendations about how processes and controls could be more effective, as well as how governance knowledge and culture amongst officers could be improved and increased.

5.2. Councillor / officer relations

A buddy system is offered to all newly elected councillors upon their swearing in. This is a way for senior officers to share their knowledge to assist with orientation, acting as a point of navigation and support, and a friendly face, to their councillor buddy. As a result, newly elected councillors should be more aware of where to go for information and support; newly elected councillors will feel more confident in their representative and decision-making roles; and should be able to make an early contribution to the work of the council and representing their community.

In November 2020, the council refreshed the Protocol on councillor / officer relations - Part 5d of the Constitution, a process that was supported by the East of England LGA. The refresh highlighted many areas of good practice, but also examples of poor behaviour, frustrations, and areas to be addressed by both councillors and officers. Behaviours can, sometimes, be challenging - impacting on staff resourcing and morale and posing a risk for potential investors as well as effective decision making (webcasts of recent committee meetings can be viewed on the [council's webcasting page](#)).

An action programme overseen by the Standards Committee is being progressed. This encompasses, for example: improvements to councillor's ICT facilities; more political awareness training for officers and opportunities for better understanding respective roles and how these can be mutually supportive (see item 023 in Evidence Index). This has been helped, to an extent, by the introduction of Cabinet working parties in 2019, based on the cabinet portfolios. These have allowed for more informal policy discussions between councillors and officers outside of senior management, however, this has been impacted at times by the non-attendance of the opposition group.

A new dedicated Members Support Hub has been introduced. The Hub has been designed to be a first point of contact for councillors and is responsible for receiving, dealing with, and resolving councillor enquiries. Opportunities are being sought to engage with councillors to seek their feedback and ideas on how it can continue to improve. This process also forms part of an in-depth scrutiny committee project.

The councillor development programme – co-designed with councillors and looking to equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to be an effective 21st century councillor – has continued to develop. The action plan developed following the council's refresh of the Protocol on Councillor / Officer relations (item 024 in Evidence Index), continues to support enhanced working relations, and has seen additional activity with improvements to the dedicated members support hub (to improve handling of members enquiries); an improved induction programme; improvements to councillor's ICT facilities; more political awareness training for officers; a buddy system where senior officers support all newly elected members, and opportunities for better understanding respective roles and how these can be mutually supportive. These measures will support effective working relationships between councillors and officers and this work continues to be reviewed and enhanced for ongoing effectiveness.

Ward Walks have been taking place over the summer of 2022 and provide an opportunity for all councillors to showcase their ward and raise any concerns with two members of CMT.

The walks provide an opportunity for enhanced relationship building and a deeper understanding of issues on both the strategic and operational sides of the council. During this process all councillors are provided with profile information about their wards include the services provided (such as children's centres) and relevant works planned (such as highways maintenance).

5.3. Review of the Constitution

A review of the council's Constitution commenced in March 2021. Bevan Brittan solicitors were commissioned to carry out an [initial review](#) and reflect upon where the Constitution may be improved to better reflect how the council wishes to operate.

Working practices have developed over the years that leave little opportunity for councillors to carry out activities such as debating motions and working on the proposal of policies through scrutiny. Officers spend a significant amount of time trying to steer their way through the decision-making process, meaning resources are stretched and reports frequently dispatched late. One consequence is that matters are often debated, sometimes on multiple occasions, after a decision has been taken. If councillors were able to debate matters at full Council, they would have the opportunity to choose a meaningful matter to debate rather than using the time to review minutes.

Following this review, the General Purposes Committee agreed to provide all members with the opportunity to engage in conversations supported by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) about which aspects of the Constitution may be changed. The CfGS met with each party group to discuss the working practices of the Constitution, providing learning and best practice from elsewhere, prior to facilitating cross party workshops to establish consensus on changes. The work is ongoing and the CfGS recommendations will be presented to General Purposes Committee in October 2022.

5.4. Scrutiny

In June 2022 councillors took part in their annual scrutiny training (see file 025 in Evidence Index for assorted documentation on this topic).

Unlike many other councils, a significant number of call-ins occur. Most key decisions are called-in or, depending on the Committee timetable, "referred" to Scrutiny. Most call-ins are supported by a whole party rather than a small number of members.

The benefit of this approach is that all significant decisions get scrutinised with robust challenge, allowing for issues to be resolved and enhanced through more collective decision making. The approach also means that Cabinet members who answer questions at Committees are well prepared and have ownership of their decisions.

However, call-ins often do not articulate a reason and in many cases, those members who call-in a decision do not attend Scrutiny, or attend, but do not speak. Scrutiny frequently utilises the option to refer the decision to Full Council for consideration where the same discussions then occur at Full Council.

The disadvantage of this approach is that decisions are much slower (with at times commercial and reputational consequences), arguments are repeated, and more work is generated and duplicated. Scrutiny Committees are scheduled to meet after Cabinet, and when an additional cabinet meeting is required scrutiny committees must be moved (or extra committees scheduled) as inevitably there will be decisions called in. This is compounded by Cabinet members not taking individual decisions, as Cabinet collectively take the decisions.

Councillors have accepted that some areas of governance could benefit from being streamlined and the council has engaged the LGA and the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to review its constitution. One element which the council will be reviewing is the Standing Order 39 and whether it can learn from other councils with individual executive decision making powers.

5.5. Strategic risk management

The council's Risk Management Policy Statement and Strategy (item 026 in Evidence Folder) provides the framework for embedding robust risk management activity into business processes, contributing to the effectiveness of the governance framework (see above) and with the aim of ensuring joined up strategic, operational, programme and project risk management. The Strategy provides defined criteria for the analysis of risk, promoting consistency of risk evaluation across the council. Consistency of decision-making regarding risk across the council is supported by guidance and processes in the Strategy on risk appetite, tolerance, and prioritisation.

The roles and responsibilities of the various groups and individuals involved in the risk management process are outlined in the Strategy. Work is under way by the council to align corporate performance and corporate risk. This will enable a holistic approach to understanding and presenting the impact performance may have on the council's highest risks, and to allow for risk mitigation and planning to be informed by data. This will be facilitated by combined reporting, highlighting performance indicators that match to the highest corporate risks by way of exception and highlight reporting, so that decision makers (i.e., CMT and Cabinet) are aware of the wider repercussions of performance for the council. This moves the council away from performance and risk being viewed in isolation and deemed as disparate systems.

The Corporate Risk Register sets out the key risks to the successful delivery of the Southend 2050 ambition and outcomes. It outlines the management arrangements in place to mitigate and reduce risks or maximise opportunities. The council's performance management software, Pentana Risk, is used to record and monitor corporate and departmental performance.

This is through performance indicators, actions, risks, comments compliments and complaints, Freedom of Information requests and Subject Access Requests. Pentana Risk produces a range of reports, as well as interactive portals and dashboards, which are used to monitor performance and risk at a team, group, service, departmental and corporate level.

Updates on the Corporate Risk Register are reported to CMT, and the summary position biannually reported to Cabinet ([latest report - 26 Jul 2022](#)). The presentation of risks is aligned to the Southend 2050 themes, and details actions being taken to mitigate risks or maximise opportunities.

5.6. Staff engagement and internal communications

In May 2022, the council launched its new employee engagement portal (intranet) for staff and councillors. This replaced an outdated intranet that was unattractive and not fit for purpose. Further work is being done to promote the new intranet, discussion tools like Yammer and particularly its mobile functionality for workers who are not 'desk-based.'

The launch of the intranet has enabled the council to reduce the reliance on email and focus on using this medium for key corporate messages.

The council continues to grow and review its internal channels to ensure it has the right balance of written, visual and face to face / virtual engagement tools, that combine corporate and important news, to wellbeing and employee benefit information.

Regular and comprehensive staff surveys are also undertaken, with in-depth results provided area by area and actions taken based on feedback. As an example, senior management visibility was highlighted via the most recent staff survey and that is being addressed through a variety of new communications including 'Coffee and Chat' with the Chief Executive and CMT members, a "Meet Me" e-communications series, Meet the Leader and Chief Executive briefings, and regular staff briefings.

6. Financial planning and management

The current financial and operating landscape for the council remains extremely challenging (item 027 and 028 in Evidence Index). Placed in the context of reduced central Government funding over the last decade, uncertainty over future funding and more vulnerable residents than ever relying on the council for essential support, the council is now facing the perfect storm of huge increases in service demand combined with unavoidable rapid increases in operating costs across almost every aspect of its organisation. In addition, these pressures directly affect the council's staff. The challenges the council faces are not unique and along with other councils, the council is asking the government to recognise the pressure of inflation on council services and provide long-term sustainable funding, as opposed to short term and insufficient funding settlements. However, any short-term emergency funding for 2022/23 is still being pursued through various Treasurer networks and DLUHC.

Prudent financial management over the last decade or so through austerity times and the Covid pandemic means that the council is in a sound financially based position to deal with this challenge, but it cannot do it on its own and needs Central Government support like all other LA's in the Country. The council's reserves position is strong, but the organisation acknowledges that they can only be used once. To ensure that the forecast revenue budget overspend this year is reduced and brought back into line as much as possible by the year end and the council to remain on a sound financial footing to deal with the budget gap in this and future years, the council is implementing the following measures:

- consider the impact and risks of making reductions in budgets and consider what non-essential spending can be stopped, delayed, or deferred
- all recruitment and resourcing requests (including agency, interim and consultants) will be referred to the Workforce Transformation Panel for review and decision
- a review of all third-party supplies and services contracts
- a review of the council's overall structure to ensure it meets organisation design principles, and a review of the number of agency, leadership, managerial and supervisory positions within it.
- A review of the Capital Investment Programme to consider what schemes should stop/pause/defer to assist with issues of capacity but more importantly to reduce any potential need to borrow and to save on the associated financing costs and the consequential impact on the revenue budget.

In past years, budget savings, recovery plans, income generation initiatives and value for money exercises have been successful in reducing the council's funding gap. However, considering the large and unprecedented pressures this year the

forecast budget gap has risen significantly. Council officers and members will need to work collaboratively with the council's partners to deliver innovative solutions to meet this challenge.

In early 2022 two key financial strategies were ratified and published and were a roll over from previous years – a Financial Sustainability Strategy for 2022 to 2032 (item 029 in Evidence Index) and a [Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2022/23 - 2026/27](#) (item 030 in Evidence Index). These strategies underpin the priorities set out in the corporate plan.

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) included a medium-term financial forecast with an expected budget gap of £24.0M by 2026/27. The latest financial forecast for 2022/23 indicates a projected £14.6M overspend for the council. The potential budget gap is now going to be significantly larger over the medium term. Some initial work has been done on re-casting the medium-term financial forecast and the intention is to provide a revised illustration of the potential impact on the council's budget over the medium term until 2027/28 in the Period 6 financial performance update, which is scheduled to be reported to the Cabinet meeting in November 2022.

The original General Fund revenue budget requirement for 2022/23 totalled £140.741M and was to be met from government grants, available business rates, council tax and adult social care precept and £2.500m planned use of reserves.

Cabinet receives regular and detailed budget monitoring information throughout each financial year, so the key variances and trends are well documented and reported. The latest forecast outturn and supporting narrative for 2022/23 is summarised in the Resourcing Better Outcomes – Finance and Corporate Performance Report – 2022/23 - Period 4 (item 031 in Evidence Index), which is due to be reported to the Cabinet meeting on 29 September 2022.

The Financial Sustainability Strategy (FSS) frames the longer-term financial intentions and principles for the council and outlines the approach, desire, and commitment to achieving financial sustainability. This is key to being able to deliver the Southend 2050 ambition and better outcomes for residents. The MTFS supports the FSS and effectively targets resources to deliver the Southend 2050 outcomes and roadmap milestones, support the achievement of desired outcomes in the corporate plan and to help to ensure the council remains financially sustainable over the medium term.

As part of the development and approval of the 2022/23 Budget and MTFS, a high-level future Budget Transformation Programme for 2023/24 – 2026/27 (item 032 in Evidence Index) was also agreed as part of the council's overall budget package. This identified specific areas and themes to be analysed and reviewed further during 2022/23. The intentions will support the council's future financial sustainability commitment and help to target resources and re-design plans to avoid a financial 'cliff edge' which would require more drastic action over a shorter time frame.

The council's 'Getting to Know Your Business' programme for service managers continues in 2022/23 and will be essential in assessing the new operating environment, financial challenges and value for money of services. The ambition is

that all service managers in the council will have a comprehensive understanding of their business areas in terms of their benchmarked operational and financial performance, key demand and cost drivers, income levels, commercial opportunities, value for money and customer insight. This programme is designed to support managers to improve productivity and efficiency in all business areas ensuring that the council secures best value but also to support a more targeted outcomes-based approach to investment.

Alongside the “Getting to Know Your Business” programme, the Executive Director of Finance & Resources also put into place at the start of this financial year a set of 12 budget planning principles for the organisation to follow.

The council has assessed itself against CIPFA’s Financial Management Code and concluded that it was complying with the expectations of the FM Code. The council meets the minimum expectations for all 17 standards, with good compliance for 14 standards and demonstrable compliance, but with recognised scope for further improvement for the remaining three standards. This was reported to the Audit Committee in April 2021, with the action plan to deliver further improvement that was followed up by the Audit Committee in both [October 2021](#) and [April 2022](#) to confirm the progress that was being made.

The Audit Committee meets on a quarterly basis to obtain and provide independent and high-level focus on audit, assurance, and reporting arrangements to underpin good governance and financial standards. The [Audit Committee Annual Report for 2021/22](#) demonstrated how the Committee had fulfilled its terms of reference and concluded that the Committee had added value through its activity and that it had continued to increase the importance placed upon governance issues, particularly in respect of oversight of the council’s joint ventures and companies, risk management, anti-fraud and corruption and the assurances sought that key risks are being managed and appropriately mitigated, and that it had continued to raise the profile of internal control issues across the council and to seek to ensure that audit recommendations are implemented.

6.1. Capital Investment Programme and Regeneration

The council’s Capital Investment Programme supports the achievement of the Southend 2050 ambitions and is funded by a mix of external funding, borrowing and the use of previously set-aside council funds such as capital receipts and reserves. Officers have oversight of the Capital Investment Programme through a regular capital programme delivery board meeting and the meetings of the Investment Board. Councillors are sighted via portfolio discussions, regular capital challenge meetings with the Cabinet Member for Asset Management and Inward Investment and regular finance reports to Cabinet. The programme includes:

- investment to meet the council’s statutory duties, for instance highways, property, health and safety
- investment to support improved business outcomes, for instance Digital and ICT

- investment in the construction, acquisition, and maintenance to Decent Homes Standard of the council's housing stock
- investment in regeneration-led schemes, some of which may also deliver a commercial return.

The Local Plan sets the development agenda across the city, and additionally there are specific plans for [investment in homes](#) and for the [City centre](#).

Other high streets in the city will also be developing plans – for example, Hamlet Court Road in West Central locality will benefit from support from the Government's High Streets Taskforce.

Where appropriate the council actively pursues government funding, with the bidding process led by the Regeneration service area and supported by project leads from across the council. The council's project development and approval process includes gateway review stages to help identify projects "off the shelf" that are suitable for funding, with further projects developed "on spec" if required.

Ideally the council would have a pipeline of projects ready for funding opportunities, however the resource required to achieve a well-developed pipeline weighed against the uncertainty of funding means that this is usually not feasible. The current levels of resource capacity and skill needed to produce meaningful bids and business plans means that the council intends to deliver training on its approach to business plans, linked to a review of the capital gateway approach.

In practice, these processes do not always support commercial decision making. Discussions with Portfolio Holders are the main way of engaging councillors in commercial discussions in a political context, coupled with occasional specific working groups (however at times over the past couple of years not all parties have attended). Significant commercial decisions are managed through the Cabinet cycle; when slow governance processes lead to a risk that the council may be unable at times to take a timely commercial approach.

The use of the project development and approval process needs to be proportionate to the scale and risks of the project being proposed. New schemes can be added throughout the year as appropriate, for urgent or service critical schemes or when gateway stages are successfully completed. Project proposals are submitted to the Investment Board, one of the three Governance Boards established as part of the organisations condition of simple and effective governance.

Since the introduction of the process and the implementation of the Investment Board there have been improvements in the decision-making process for projects entering the Capital Investment Programme. However, given the prevailing financial challenges the deliverability and affordability of the programme is being reviewed to ensure that the council prioritises its limited resources on the key desired outcomes whilst keeping borrowing costs to a minimum; the council welcomes the Peer Challenge Team's observations and recommendations on the challenges posed by these processes.

7. Capacity for improvement

The council constantly seeks opportunities to adapt, learn and improve as detailed in previous chapters. Detail about specific programmes designed to deliver improvements are in the table below.

Area	Description
<p>7.1. Transformation</p>	<p>Engagement and investment in the council’s transformation programme has been significant for senior leaders, but there is a recognition that the approach has had less focus and impact below team manager level and will need addressing going forward. Therefore, the two-year Transformational Leadership Development Programme (TLDP) approach is being revisited and the Leader as Coach programme is also being targeted as a prototype to a wider cohort of managers.</p> <p>The TLDP approach supports officer and councillor leadership capability in delivering the Southend 2050 ambition. The programme has components such as Leading for 2050, Corporate Capability Building, Leader as Coach and Individual Leadership Development, all with an emphasis on supporting leaders to apply their learning in their day-to-day business. It is key to realising the Southend 2050 ambition by supporting the council’s approach to recovery and future ways of working.</p> <p>The Corporate Plan contains more information about the council’s People Vision. The council’s People Vision sets out the strategy and ambition to create “a great employee experience” ensure the council is match fit, i.e., the council have the right people, with the right skills, in the right place, with the right conditions in place for employees to successfully deliver the Corporate Plan. It has been structured to reflect the employee life cycle model.</p>

A core condition for success of the People Vision is creating "Ways of Working" that build on experience gained during the pandemic to support hybrid / flexible working, allowing employees to work in a variety of ways, with a shared sense of purpose, within a culture of collaboration. A staff survey took place in May 2021 and a subsequent Team Challenge was undertaken, which asked teams to think about how they would plan their activity and workloads.

Over 1,000 staff members from services across the council completed the staff survey, providing their thoughts on working environments, personal wellbeing, interactions with colleagues and ideas for how to work in a post-pandemic world (item 033 in Evidence Index). Results showed that a significant majority of office-based staff now consider a blended approach to work, with the option to choose a balance between office-based and home / remote working arrangements, as most appropriate.

The council's approach to hybrid ways of working will be "Work Smart", which sets out to achieve dynamic work environments and create more responsive, efficient, and effective ways of working. The council believes this will improve performance, knowledge sharing and autonomy leading to enhanced employee and service user satisfaction. "Work Smart" is a working model that comprises two types of working practices, incorporating a flexible mix of remote and office working and supporting a 'working from anywhere' environment. The council will commence implementation of its "Work Smart" framework from late September 2022.

Consideration is also being given to how this work relates to an assets review, and the acquisition of Victoria Plaza.

There are further opportunities for progression towards a paperless environment; councillors adapted to a remote way of working during the lockdowns, however, there is work to do to promote electronic paperwork universally.

Other systems that have impacted on effectiveness relate to having 'one version of the truth' for staff establishment and reporting lines. This has hindered the ability to communicate to the right staff audiences, apply effective financial management, allocate resources and track training and appraisals, among other things. An Establishment

project is in place and changes are already making a difference. These include the creation of an Active Directory of staff information available to all staff through Teams, the intranet and through email (items 034 and 035 in Evidence Index)

7.2. Grants and funding

The council's capacity to effectively administer grants and funds came to the fore during the pandemic, when it quickly organised resources to administer and monitor grants to the value of almost £136 million, such as the Local Restrictions Support Grant, Restart Grant, Additional Restrictions Grant (which is ongoing), Small Business Grant Fund and the Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Grant Fund ([report to Cabinet – item 4, appendix 3 – Jun 2021](#)). The council will continue to focus on the opportunities that provide the best outcomes for the council, community priorities (such as Community Investment Fund, Household Support Fund, Vaccine Inequalities Fund) and support economic recovery (such as the Levelling Up fund). The council has learnt from the need to resource funds and grants effectively from the start, knowing that arrangements need to be made quickly for the collation, storage, monitoring and reporting of high quality, accessible data that can be used for decision making and evaluation.

7.3. Service redesign and effective programme management

The council recognises that the needs of residents have changed significantly over the course of the pandemic and will continue to change as the cost-of-living crisis and inflationary pressures deepen. A redesign of services is a fundamental part of the council's recovery journey and so a programme of major service redesign is in place to help us meet those needs. It aims to improve the customer experience, enabling people to be more self-sufficient, sustainable and to generate significant efficiencies. The Annual Governance Statement (item 003 in Evidence Index) contains detailed information about the Service Design team and its activities.

To ensure that the council's project and programme management is cohesive, achieves value for money and provides robust outcomes for residents, the Service Design team is undertaking in-depth discovery work to understand current project management activity, and identify strengths, weaknesses, risks, and opportunities. It is recognised that the wider Change Programme should provide assurance of quality and objectives, track overall investment and realisation of benefits, and make strategic decisions in relation to scope and risk management.

To achieve this, it is crucial that options for future programme management models have robust oversight, provide an innovative culture to investment in delivering the right services, and operate using strong evidence-based design methodologies. This will have significant alignment to performance management and the wider Corporate Plan strategies.

7.4. Strategic Communications

The council developed a Strategic Communications Plan in the summer of 2021, creating a simpler narrative covering future ambitions and priorities under the four key areas identified within the Joint Administration's priorities of creating a greener future, supporting our community, improving our neighbourhoods, and investing in economic recovery.

This work has included a more proactive response to media relations, more regular media briefings with the local media, and more briefing of cabinet councillors regarding reputational issues. It has also included overt links to the four key areas to try and build understanding in the local community.

A wider Corporate Communications Strategy is being finalised and will revise the Strategic Communications Plan to align with messaging and narrative from the Corporate Plan.

7.5. Data Strategy

A review of the ways of working between the council's various data functions will be conducted over the next 12-18 months, with a view to strengthening and bringing together knowledge and skill sharing as well as streamlining processes. A formalised collaboration through a service level agreement between the data functions in the organisation has been introduced. A Data Strategy will be developed over the coming months, with desired outcomes to unify the data offer across the council, enhance data standards and accessibility, and improve opportunities for self-serve datasets.

In the longer term, a wider review and potential restructure of data functions across the council will be undertaken, aligned to other reorganisations which are likely to follow from the transformation of the organisation and a new Chief Executive.

7.6. Supporting and investing in councillors

This is a key area of focus. The council recognises that the previous offer was relatively under-developed compared to some local authorities and that this, along with a heightened national political temperature, election by thirds and some personal dynamics has meant there have been more examples of poor behaviour from some councillors over recent years. These are resource intensive to resolve and negatively impact the quality of decision making. The number of formal complaints relating to councillors has increased from an average of four a year for 2012-18, to 49 since 2019.

Specific actions taken to improve in this area are detailed in the Annual Governance Statement (item 033 in Evidence Index), with information about the council's Values and Behaviours and Equalities statement in the Corporate Plan (item 002 in Evidence Index). Further information is also provided in the sections above.

7.7. Public realm services

Improving the city's street scene is a key priority for the Administration. The council knows that this is important to residents, but unfortunately, open spaces have suffered the impacts of irresponsible behaviour, with a significant increase in littering and dog fouling during the pandemic. The council has tackled this with robust community engagement and communications programmes, including rolling out new Keep Britain Tidy resources, and working with contractor Veolia and with volunteers to keep spaces clean and inviting.

A city-wide anti-littering campaign was rolled out by the council in Q1 of 2020/21, in response to the significant increases in littering behaviour during lockdown. Additional anti-littering communications were installed on the sea front and new recycling and litter bins installed on the High Street. New "Keep Britain Tidy" dog fouling resources were rolled out in September 2020, with anti-littering communications continuing throughout autumn of 2020, including the 'Don't be Mug – Bin it or Take it Home' campaign. Community volunteer activities resumed in September 2020 (after being paused throughout the 2020 lockdown) with Keep Britain Tidy's 'Great British Spring Clean'. Litter picking equipment continues to be available for volunteers who sign up to carry out litter-picking activities, and Beach Care volunteers have been given equipment and support, including meeting to agree a Chalkwell Beach action plan.

The Victorian design of some of the city's streets and accommodation creates challenges for residents storing refuse for collection. This has resulted in concern and anxiety for some residents, and there are ongoing discussions about how best to resolve it.

Despite successes such as Operation Binbag, which engaged with businesses and residents to tackle waste hotspots, additional pressure on waste and cleaning services are being experienced because of increasing fly tipping and residual waste. However, the increased funding for road and pavements upgrades across the city have created an opportunity to help to improve not only safety but the aesthetics of the immediate street scene.

7.8. Contract Management

A Contract Management and Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) diagnostic was conducted by the EELGA in 2019, and recommendations are being actioned. Contract managers benefit from a Corporate Contract Register Teams Channel which covers c.90% of corporate supplier spend (ongoing Revenue and archive for capital projects) and a Contract Management channel which houses tools such as contract meeting agenda templates, variation templates, change logs, and risk matrices. The Teams channels are also used to highlight Contract Management webinars, legal training sessions and other training opportunities for Contract Managers.

An Electronic Contract Management and SRM system is being rolled out in late 2022, which will automate requirements / reporting from suppliers and provide a shared, accessible space for contract management resources. A Contract Management Manual has been corporately rolled out, with peer workshops and working group now in place and officers starting to use the manual to aid them in managing their contracts.

The council has moved to a five-year Procurement Plan for 2022-27, which was ratified by Cabinet in 2022. Additionally, the Commissioning Board has used the corporate contract register as a basis for calling in commissioners to present to the board since 2020, on how their contracts are performing and being managed. A review of the council's Procurement Strategy commenced in early 2022, with Member development sessions scheduled for September 2022. Survey results from the EELGA diagnostic showed that council staff perceived effective contract management, commercial behaviour and realising social value to be the key priority areas for the strategy. Therefore, the emerging draft priorities for the strategy are:

- **Smarter contract design**, with desired outcomes to improve project planning, sustainability considerations, use of local businesses, resilience and creating local value and overall creating a design framework which will help commissioners and budget holders build these requirements into new contracts where they are most appropriate and likely to generate the best results. This is also where appropriate governance arrangements for contracts needs to be set up.
- **Effective contract management**, to allow the council to focus on priorities such as ensuring social value outcomes are realised, getting the right outcomes,

creating demonstrable value for the people of Southend, responding to inflation and building effective relationships. The infrastructure to allow this has been created through the new contract management system and contract management tools and by creating a strong network of contract managers.

- **Embracing commercial behaviours**, to promote cultural changes that will enable smarter contract design and effective contract management.

This priority will include issues such as communication, team working, training and skills, attitudes to risk and knowledge and information sharing.

7.9. Digital as an enabler

Connectivity and the use of digital to improve services to Southend residents, businesses and visitors is part of the council's digital vision.

In this vision, residents can easily access "self-serve" digital services and are engaged in delivery of services. Connectivity is provided to residents, businesses, and tourists via fibre, 4G and 5G, and public Wi-Fi, enabling smooth interactions and transactions. Services and tools such as automation, smart applications, and smart buildings empower residents and operators, providing information which is used for proactive maintenance and proactive responses to problems. Sensors and cameras attached to street hardware and embedded in roads, bins, council vehicles and buildings all feed data back to central databases, allowing intelligent and proactive use of data on issues such as footfall, pothole locations, and air quality. Data collected externally to the council's systems effectively informs transport and planning systems.

The council continues to support Southend's journey to becoming a Smart City. Activity includes:

- carrying out research and development on the Smart City technology foundation and the Internet of Things (IoT)
- creating the [Smart Southend data explorer](#) to provide a single point of access for data, intelligence and analysis about the city and support Southend to become a more data driven and data intelligent town
- working with partners to provide learning materials to increase digital literacy
- participating in broader Essex broadband and mobile projects to improve connectivity across the region.

Better use of data to help drive policy (for example, to anticipate demand and proactively target those most in need) is recognised as an important area of work.

To this end, senior management now receives a corporate Healthcheck report, which is coherent package of information on performance, insights, demand pressure, policy, and softer intelligence, to enable informed decision making.

Whilst the CityFibre rollout is taking place at pace, it has caused some disruption and damage, which remains to be remediated.

Overall, digital inclusion for those who are disadvantaged or digitally vulnerable needs to be considered further as part of the council's data and connectivity strategic aims.

7.10. Community capacity

The council recognises that effective community action relies on many factors, including the community's level of confidence and its capacity to act. Research into mutual aid during the pandemic and other challenges showed that where the community mobilised, the pace, scale and effectiveness of its impact was linked to existing community infrastructure and social capital.

The council's definition of community capacity is "Identifying, harnessing and building the skills, talents, knowledge and contributions of community members; so they can take more control over their lives and contribute more effectively in tackling community issues"

The council facilitates a number of approaches to build community capacity in the community to enhance potential for social action. Such investment makes good sense financially, as the public pound managed by the council goes further with investment multiplied by leveraging local talent and hidden assets (e.g., the Southend Emergency Fund being able to attract four times more capital than the council's initial outlay).

Building community capacity locally has also evidenced that targeted social action can reach communities which are seldom heard effectively. Examples of this are the Vaccine Inequalities Fund and the City Celebrations Fund, which both mobilised small groups and charities which normally don't have access to funds.

These, in turn, found creative ways to support and celebrate their communities. The council also commissions a significant amount of services, many of which are delivered by the non-profit sector. Local impact is further enhanced by expectations in regards of social value impact.

Other examples of supporting community capacity are the Community Builders and Small Sparks Fund, the Community Investment Board and finding use for council assets, such as the North Road Chapel hosting South Essex Community Hub or other hubs opened at the Victoria Shopping Centre.

As the council refreshes the Southend 2050 programme to position it as a community and partnership strategy, considerations of community engagement and community capacity will be incorporated in a holistic manner after engaging with residents and partners.

Appendix 1 – Response to the recommendations made in the April 2021 LGA Healthcheck Review

The council acknowledges the recommendations from the April 2021 Review and a response to how the LGA’s findings have been considered is set out below.

No.	Recommendation	Response
1.	Cabinet and CMT should come together quickly post-election; be open, honest and focused to agree fewer priorities together to provide clearer focus for the council.	<p>Two elections have taken place since this recommendation. Cabinet and CMT came together quickly post-elections in 2021 and 2022 to agree refreshed Southend 2050 outcomes and high-level roadmap milestones. In addition, the Southend 2050 outcomes and roadmap were reviewed and refreshed over the summer of 2021 as part of an annual process and in context of the outcome of the May 2021 local election, bearing in mind the findings from the LGA. Milestones were refocused to highlight deliverables for 2021-2023.</p> <p>This approach has meant the council can more clearly express its priorities and focus over different time frames. To ensure that milestones which would best achieve desired outcomes were prioritised, a decision framework was used to identify areas of focus needed in response to the pandemic, economic recovery, and sustainability – including financial, environmental and transformation as an organisation.</p> <p>After the refresh of 2021, it was recognised that this process was resource intensive, and that there were opportunities to improve it further. Feedback was listened to and in 2022 the council will develop a Southend 2050 Community Plan and Partnership alongside the Corporate Plan.</p>

No.	Recommendation	Response
2.	<p>The council narrative needs to be simpler and widely communicated so that staff and councillors can understand better their part in the delivery of ambitions and priorities.</p>	<p>The council developed a strategic communications plan to communicate the council's key programmes of work over the latter part of 2021 and early 2022.</p> <p>A set of key messages and narrative was developed beneath each theme, along with a mapping exercise to ensure alignment with the priorities of the Joint Administration and Southend 2050.</p> <p>A series of 'Meet the Leader and Chief Executive' staff briefings were completed to engage and update staff following Alison Griffin's departure as Chief Executive, and to give the Leader and new chief executive a chance to talk to staff about the four priority areas. These were well received by staff where saw a good level of engagement. The chief executive has also been publishing regular videos to talk about key themes and priorities.</p> <p>Prior to this work being undertaken, work was also completed to promote the key benefits and successes from the 2021/22 Annual Report. Social media and web campaigns focused on some of the key achievements delivered through the Southend 2050 ambition.</p> <p>A new communications plan for 2022/23 is currently in development.</p>

No.	Recommendation	Response
3.	Define and clarify what you mean by; outcomes-based approach, agile, community capacity, co-design etc.	<p>What the council means by an outcomes-based approach was initially defined in the 2019 outcomes-based performance management framework and is reiterated in the Corporate Plan and the Performance Management Framework 2022-26 (document to follow). The Corporate Plan and Performance Management Framework describe an outcomes-based approach as being about achieving changes for the better for people and communities. Five Southend 2050 Outcome Delivery Teams, each supported by a Strategy Lead supported the delivery of Southend 2050 outcomes and promoted an outcomes-based approach.</p> <p>The council is reviewing its approach with a new corporate planning framework. This provides an opportunity for the council to define and clarify with staff and partners what is meant by an outcomes-based approach. And importantly, will help to simplify communications to staff and councillors about what work contributes towards the Southend 2050 ambition.</p> <p>One of the main tools used within the council to make change happen and achieve Southend 2050 outcomes is Agile. The Service Design team and Service Design Academy use Agile to re-design services together with the staff affected, using sharing an agreed definition of Agile that is about working iteratively to determine the best solutions for change.</p> <p>Co-production has featured strongly in parts of the council's work for some time, notably in the area of SEND and through the A Better Start Southend Parent Champion programme, which supports children and families. The learning from the work of the Co-production Champion has been further embedded by the development of the Co-production Framework in Adults commissioning, recruiting a Co-production Lead and commissioning the creation of a Citizen Panel to support the development of the Local Strategic Transport Plan 4. The learning from the Test & Learn event informed the development of the Southend 2050 Community Plan and engagement activity.</p>

<p>4.</p>	<p>Take time to build the trust and relationships with communities and develop and codesign your model for community engagement and empowerment.</p>	<p>Following the pandemic, the council identified key priorities for communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proactive relationship and trust building by the council and reciprocity on the side of the council and public sector to enable timely collaboration on emerging issues • access to reliable information and a consistent contact who can help problem solve and navigate system • support to build capacity and skills to address inequalities in a particular section of the community while being recognised for the contribution to the wider Southend community • representation and being heard at decision-making forums and when designing services, community cohesion, mental health, economic wellbeing, cultural expression, and diversity. <p>The model for community engagement and empowerment continues to develop via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a conversational approach • active outreach and engagement of those seldom heard • online engagement for convenience, scale and reach • building community capacity • co-production • youth voice • community voice to inform political priorities <p>The council is building on the trust and relationships with communities as developed during the Southend Coronavirus Response. The community and the council came together again in solidarity following the tragic death of Sir David to celebrate his legacy, and the award of the City Status, as well as in responding to the Afghan and Ukraine resettlement needs.</p> <p>The Faith and Belief Network has continued to grow in numbers and diversity of contributors. Community cohesion and aspiration of the congregations as to what type of city they would like to live in were manifested during jointly organised events such as “Unite in Light”, which brought together over 20 congregations, and “Eid in the Park”, with saw over 4,000 attendees. The Town2City partnership and the wider community were instrumental in celebrating Southend’s new City status in February 2022, and throughout the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee - especially pertinent for the city, in light of its newly bestowed city status.</p>
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No.	Recommendation	Response
		<p>Rather than put more events on by itself, the council resourced a City policy manager to work with partners to enhance and scale up their events via a dedicated budget, networking support and advice.</p> <p>The council's approach to community empowerment as a facilitator, host and enabler was visible in the work related to Ukrainian humanitarian response and Afghan nationals. The council was taking leadership where appropriate but mostly enhancing community action, not replacing it.</p> <p>The council is delivering on its commitment to devolve more authority and funding to the community through the Community Investment Board and the Southend Emergency Fund. Community builders have been embedded with local organisations, who discover local resources while walking the streets and having daily conversations, and Community Connectors who take action on local priorities.</p> <p>Co-design and co-production have become defined through practical work with residents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SEND co-production charter has been finalised and signed off. • The adult commissioning team supported by public health and corporate strategy are implementing a co-production framework and taking a test & learn approach to its development. • The commitment to co-production can be seen in the resources allocated to employ a co-production lead to support this work. • Workshops have been undertaken to co-produce the city's Tackling Poverty Strategy, with follow up meetings planned once a draft is in place. • Investment in the Youth Voice team has expanded its reach and diversified the Youth Council's work. <p>As referenced in the Position Statement, the Corporate Plan has been ratified by Cabinet. It is the right moment to commence the strategic partnership work in relation to co-designing a model for community engagement and empowerment as part of Southend 2050 Reset and the development of a partnership approach and community plan over the coming months.</p>

No.	Recommendation	Response
5.	Councillors, staff, systems and structures require more discipline rigour and accountability to ensure successful delivery of transformation.	This work has significantly moved on since the recommendation. Detail about transformation activity, learning and development, can be found throughout the main Position Statement.

No.	Recommendation	Response
6.	Create an operational framework for the Community engagement approach, learning from elsewhere and where this is already done well in the organisation.	<p>The Engagement and Participation Team have undertaken a discovery process in relation to its offer, learning gained during the pandemic and subsequent events and building networks with regional colleagues.</p> <p>Internal staffing changes required the team to focus on its core offer for a number of months. With successful recruitment having taken place the team will continue to combine consultation, engagement and community capacity building functions while strengthening its partnership element.</p> <p>This will support the new iteration of the Southend 2050 Ambition moving it towards a formal community partnership and the development of an underpinning engagement and participation framework.</p> <p>The wider learning from the discovery included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the importance of a consistent and accessible online platform • direct outreach to those from diverse or vulnerable communities • mobilising partners and community leaders to support with wider engagement around joint priorities • the importance of close feedback loop between senior leaders and public. <p>The online digital platform has been adopted across the organisation and provides a consistent and accessible user experience ensuring wide digital reach. At the same time an expectation that inclusivity and accessibility are at the heart of consultation and engagement projects is highlighted to internal project owners and the existing relationships with diverse communities and those seldom heard are mobilised to ensure their voices are being heard. The Faith and Belief Network, Southend EU Nationals Network and links built up with diverse communities during the 20/21 BAME listening events continue to be mobilised to support engagement. Focus has been given to closing the feedback loop from consultations and engagement and ensuring residents and partners know how their voice has impacted decision making and subsequent actions.</p>

No.	Recommendation	Response
7.	Implement councillor training and induction that is congruent with the FWoW programme and an outcomes-based approach.	See the section Officer Leadership and Management in the Position Statement.