

Public Document Pack  
SOUTHEND-ON-SEA BOROUGH COUNCIL

**People Scrutiny Committee**

Date: Tuesday, 6th July, 2021

Time: 6.30 pm

Place: Council Chamber - Civic Suite

Contact: S. Tautz (Principal Democratic Services Officer)

Email: [committeesection@southend.gov.uk](mailto:committeesection@southend.gov.uk)

**AGENDA**

1 Apologies for Absence

2 Declarations of Interest

3 Questions from Members of the Public

4 Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 March 2021 (Pages 1 - 4)

\*\*\*\* **ITEMS CALLED IN/REFERRED DIRECT BY CABINET - 15 JUNE 2021**

5 **Disabled Grants Policy** (Pages 5 - 30)

Minute 58 (Cabinet Agenda Item No. 9 refers)  
Called-in by Councillors Cox and Davidson

6 **COVID Update** (Pages 31 - 52)

Minute 53 (Cabinet Agenda Item No. 4 refers)  
Called-in to all three Scrutiny Committees by Councillors Cox and Davidson

7 **Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Updated Policy** (Pages 53 - 74)

Minute 59 (Cabinet Agenda Item No. 10 refers)  
Called-in by Councillors Cox and Davidson

\*\*\*\* **ITEMS CALLED-IN FROM THE FORWARD PLAN**

None

\*\*\*\* **ITEMS FOR PRE-CABINET SCRUTINY**

None

\*\*\*\* **OTHER SCRUTINY MATTERS**

8 **Outcome Letter Following SEND Area Revisit - May 2021** (Pages 75 - 86)

Report of Executive Director (Children and Public Health) attached.

**9 Summary of Work 2020/21 & In-Depth Scrutiny Project 2021/22 (Pages 87 - 100)**

Report of Executive Director (Legal and Democratic Services) attached.

**TO: The Chair & Members of the People Scrutiny Committee:**

Councillor L Salter (Chair), Councillor H Boyd (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors B Beggs, M Berry, J Courtenay, T Cowdrey, A Dear, K Evans,  
D Garne, B Hooper, J Lamb, A Line, K Mitchell, I Shead, M Stafford, A Thompson,  
N Ward

Co-opted members

Church of England Diocese

Fr Jonathan Collis (Voting on Education matters only)

Roman Catholic Diocese

VACANT (Voting on Education matters only)

Parent Governors

(i) VACANT (Voting on Education matters only)

(ii) VACANT (Voting on Education matters only)

Southend Association of Voluntary Services

K Jackson (Non-Voting)

Healthwatch Southend

O Richards (Non-Voting)

Southend Carers Forum

T Watts (Non-Voting)

# Public Document Pack

## SOUTHEND-ON-SEA BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Meeting of People Scrutiny Committee

Date: Tuesday, 16th March, 2021

Place: Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

# 4

Present: Councillor L Salter (Chair)  
Councillors N Folkard (Vice-Chair), M Borton, H Boyd, A Chalk, D Cowan, M Dent, F Evans, D Garne, B Hooper, M Kelly, K Mitchell, C Nevin, I Shead, M Stafford and A Thompson

In Attendance: Councillors T Harp and A Jones (Cabinet Members), Councillor K Evans, S Baker, E Cook, T Forster, K Ramkhelawon, D Simon and S Tautz  
O Richards (Healthwatch Southend), T Watts (Southend Carers Forum) (Co-Opted Members)  
M Faulkner-Hatt, N Biju (Southend Youth Council) (Observers)  
T Abell, S Salthouse (Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust)

Start/End Time: 6.30 pm - 7.20 pm

#### **909 Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence from the meeting.

#### **910 Declarations of Interest**

The following interests were declared at the meeting:

- (a) Councillors M Borton, D Cowan, M Dent, A Jones, K Mitchell and C Nevin - Minute 911 (Questions from Members of the Public) - Both questioners known to each councillor - Non-pecuniary interest.
- (b) Councillor T Harp - Minute 911 (Questions from Members of the Public) – One of the questioners known to the councillor - Non-pecuniary interest.
- (c) Councillor A Jones - Minute 911 (Questions from Members of the Public) - Governor of Southend Community College - Non-pecuniary interest.
- (d) Councillor L Salter - Minute 913 (COVID-19 Response - Changes to Phlebotomy Provision) - Husband is a consultant surgeon at Southend University Hospital; daughter is a consultant at Basildon Hospital; son-in-law is a general practitioner in the Borough - Non-pecuniary interests.
- (e) Councillor N Folkard - Minute 913 (COVID-19 Response - Changes to Phlebotomy Provision) - Ambassador for Fund Raising Team at Southend University Hospital; member of the Readers' Panel for Southend University Hospital; relative employed at Broomfield Hospital - Non-pecuniary interests.
- (f) Councillor C Nevin - Minute 913 (COVID-19 Response - Changes to Phlebotomy Provision) - Employed at external NHS Trust; previous employment at Broomfield and Southend Hospitals; family members employed at Mid and South-Essex Trust hospitals and in the Trust's Estates Department; Group Director for Pathology at Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust known to the councillor through previous employment - Non-pecuniary interests.

- (g) Councillor M Borton - Minute 913 (COVID-19 Response - Changes to Phlebotomy Provision) - Daughter is a ward manager at the Mental Health Unit at Basildon Hospital - Non-pecuniary interest.
- (h) Councillor T Harp - Minute 913 (COVID-19 Response - Changes to Phlebotomy Provision) - Council's appointed Governor to Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust - Non-pecuniary interest.
- (i) Councillor M Kelly - Minute 913 (COVID-19 Response - Changes to Phlebotomy Provision) - Employed by Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust - Non-pecuniary interest.

**911 Questions from Members of the Public**

The Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care and the Cabinet Member for Children and Learning responded to questions presented by Ms T Cowdrey and Ms L Hyde.

**912 Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 February 2021**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2 February 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed.

**913 COVID-19 Response - Changes to Phlebotomy Provision**

The Committee received a report of Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust, with regard to the proposed relocation of phlebotomy services currently based around the main outpatients services at Basildon, Southend and Broomfield Hospitals to local town centre settings, as part of the response of the Trust to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Deputy Chief Executive of Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust reported that prior to the pandemic, phlebotomy services at each of the hospital sites had offered walk-in services and pre-booked appointments. The Committee was advised that following the outbreak of COVID-19, the Trust had taken a proactive approach to reduce footfall in the hospital sites by around 80% of all non-acute activity and that phlebotomy services at Southend Hospital had been relocated to a temporary location at Havens Hospice to safeguard patients.

The Committee was advised that the ongoing impact of the pandemic had necessitated a review of the way in which diagnostic services were delivered by the Trust in support of social distancing requirements. The Deputy Chief Executive of the Trust reported that the relocation of phlebotomy services would also free-up space to keep patients and staff safe and give the Trust flexibility in the event of it needing to respond to any future increases in infection within hospital settings, whilst continuing to safeguard patient health and wellbeing. The Committee noted that limited phlebotomy services would remain in each of the hospitals to support urgent clinical consultations and specialist blood tests, but that all other referrals would be subject to the proposed change of service location and that the new phlebotomy units would have fully COVID-compliant arrangements in place to minimise risk.

The Deputy Chief Executive of the Trust reported that the future provision of phlebotomy services previously provided at Southend Hospital, was intended to be located in a ground floor unit at Victoria Plaza from early Summer 2021 for all urgent and routine adult blood

tests, which would bring additional footfall to the area. The Committee was advised that the new phlebotomy service would be available over an increased number of days and longer opening hours, to improve access and reduce waiting times, and that appointments would be able to be booked on-line and over the telephone. The Deputy Chief Executive of the Trust reported that the new facility would have four phlebotomy chairs, although capacity would be able to be increased if required and that the new unit would also offer appropriate cubical facilities with a specialist bariatric chair and an appointment-only paediatric service. The Committee was advised that the operation of the new facility would be supported by feedback champions and surveys to inform future service planning.

Resolved:

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the proposed transfer of phlebotomy services from Southend Hospital to Victoria Plaza by Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust, be supported.

**Chair:** \_\_\_\_\_

This page is intentionally left blank

# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Executive Director (Adults and Communities)

to  
Cabinet

on  
15<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Agenda  
Item No.

5

Report prepared by: Carol Smith – Adaptation Team Manager

---

## Disabled Facilities Grant Policy

Relevant Scrutiny Committee: People  
Cabinet Member: Councillor Gilbert  
Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

---

### 1. Purpose of Report

This report seeks Cabinet approval of the Disabled Facilities Grants Policy for Southend on Sea Borough Council.

### 2. Recommendations

That Cabinet:-

- a. Approve removal of means test for grants under £6,000 (£6,500 for a curved stairlift) to speed up prevention process for applicants.
- b. Approve the circumstances where a discretionary disabled facilities grant can be considered, including relocation grants, special assistance grants and top-up grants.
- c. Approve and agree to adopt the Disabled Facilities Grants Policy document with immediate effect.

### 3. Background

3.1 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) were introduced in 1990, but the principle legal provisions are now contained in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (HGCRA) and associated regulations.

3.2 In 2002 the government brought in the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance)(England and Wales) Order 2002 which provide freedom and opportunities for the Local Authority to address housing issues. This Order had important implications for local housing authorities because it repeals much of the existing prescriptive legislation governing the provision of renewal grants to applicants and replaces it with a new wide-ranging power to provide assistance for housing renewal.

In 2008-9 the government extended the scope of the RRO to include use of the DFG money. This enables the authorities to use specific DFG funding for wider purposes.

- 3.3 DFG's are mandatory grants available to disabled people when works to adapt their home are judged necessary and appropriate to meet their needs and when it is reasonable and practicable to carry them out having regard to the age and condition of the dwelling or building. Occupational Therapists working with Southend on Sea Borough Council assess whether any works are necessary and appropriate and decide the best available adaptation options for the disabled person, in conjunction with the Adaptations Team at Southend on Sea Borough Council.
- 3.4 DFG's are generally subject to a 'means test' which means that the applicant's income and savings have to be assessed to determine whether any contributions are required to be made by them towards the cost of the required work.
- 3.5 The maximum amount of a mandatory DFG is currently set by statute at £30,000. In addition the Council is able to provide discretionary assistance using the DFG funding which is outlined in our DFG policy.

#### **4. Other Options**

- a. Not introduce a discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant policy, continuing to only provide the mandatory elements of the DFG.
- b. Continue to means test for all grants as per the mandatory requirements.

#### **5. Reasons for Recommendations**

##### **5.1 Means Test**

- 5.1.1 In addition to the general changes, policy suggestions are described in the following section for Cabinet to consider for approval. These relate specifically to the Means Test Process and Discretionary Assistance.
- 5.1.2 The existing means test is based on the eligibility test for Housing Benefit and was designed to target funding on 'needy' households. It has long been criticised for being complicated, unfair and, in recent years, out of date. The delivery process is often slow and cumbersome, with numerous handovers.
- 5.1.3 Too many people drop out of the process, often because they must contribute to the cost. Nearly 9 out of every 10 applications relate to physical disabilities and 90% of adaptations provided are either level access showers, stair lifts or ramps. The average nationwide cost is around £9,000 but most work in Southend is under £5,000.
- 5.1.4 Subject to all other eligibility criteria being met, we recommend that the means test is removed for adaptations under £6,000 and stair lifts (average cost of which is £6,500).



## 5.2 Discretionary Assistance

5.2.1 It is advised to Cabinet that a DFG policy is recommended for discretionary assistance to be provided in the form of a 'top-up' grant, for when works may exceed £30,000 and all other reasonable options for external financing (charities, etc.) have been exhausted. The revised policy expands the circumstances that discretionary assistance can be provided, to include a 'relocation grant' and a 'special assistance' grant.

5.2.2 It is suggested to Cabinet that a **Top-up grant** to enable discretionary assistance to be provided to disabled persons, where the cost of works exceeds that allowed by the mandatory DFG. This has proved necessary in recent times, due mainly to the rise in general building costs since the £30,000 financial limit was originally set in the mid 1990's

5.2.3 The purpose of the **Relocation grant** is where a mandatory DFG is determined not to be a feasible or reasonable option and the applicant is considering relocating to another more suitable property, which they intend to purchase. Subject to an application to the Council and support from an Occupational Therapist, a discretionary grant may be made available towards specific relocation expenses including estate agent fees, legal costs and removal costs.

5.2.4 The **Special Assistance grant** is intended to help applicants to pay for the cost of adapting their home to meet the needs of the disabled person where this may not be covered by a mandatory DFG. Each case would still need to be supported by a recommendation of an Occupational Therapist. Examples of adaptations that would not generally be covered by a mandatory DFG, but could be considered under a special assistance grant would include, but would not be restricted to:

- The provision of a safe play space for a disabled child
- To provide an area for specialist care or treatment (i.e. a dialysis room.)
- The provision of facilities for a child in foster care (where the length of stay is likely to be years rather than months)
- Adaptations to a second property, where a disabled child is living under a dual residency arrangement, where residency has been split between two parents (or other designated guardian)
- Provision of a storage facility for a mobility scooter, with a fixed charging point

## 6. Corporate Implications

### 6.1 Contribution to the Southend 2050 Road Map

Theme		Outcome
Safe & Well	2	Southend residents are remaining well enough to enjoy fulfilling lives, throughout their lives.
Safe & Well	3	We are well on our way to ensuring that everyone has a home that meets their needs.
Safe & Well	4	We are all effective at protecting and improving the quality of life for the most vulnerable in our community.

Safe & Well	5	Residents feel safe and secure in their homes.
-------------	---	--

6.2 Financial Implications

6.2.1 Central Government provides annual capital grant funding towards the adaptations to clients homes and it is administered via the Better Care Fund. The grant is awarded annually. This has been confirmed as £1.721m for 2021/22, which will be added to the sum of £1.556m, which is already included in the Capital Investment Programme over a range of years.

6.2.2 All Councils are required to submit to Central Government an annual declaration that grant conditions have been complied with as well as a return detailing amounts spent on DFGs and other supporting information, such as age of the grant applicant. In practice it has been Council policy for many years that the total grant received from central Government is fully allocated to mandatory DFG spend.

6.2.3 Reallocation of the available capital budget to discretionary grants will reduce the amount available for other mandatory grants by the same amount, as it is taken from the same overall funded budget. As such, it will be important to ensure that any discretionary award is only considered having regard to the value of resources the Council has available at that time and that both the mandatory grants and discretionary grants awarded are contained within the overall allocation for the DFG capital budget.

6.3 Legal Implications

6.3.1 The policy requires formal adoption in order to satisfy the requirements of individual Acts of Parliament/ Statutory Instruments and this includes revision or review of such policies.

6.4 People Implications

6.4.1 Removing the means test for adaptations under £6,000 and stair lifts (average cost of which is £6,500) will mean we are able to complete our adaptations quicker and positively change peoples lives for the better.

6.4.2 Increasing the number of potential circumstances that discretionary assistance could be provided by the Council through the DFG funding will directly help to improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable residents in the Southend Borough and provide additional support for those persons who care for, or provide them with assistance, on a day to day basis - thus changing their lives for the better.

6.5 Property Implications

N/A

6.6 Consultation

N/A

## 6.7 Equalities and Diversities Implications

6.7.1 There is a potential for a positive impact on both Adults and Children with Disabilities.

## 6.8 Risk Assessment

N/A

## 6.9 Value for Money

6.9.1 Investment in Aids and Adaptations supports the principle of Home First and often results in a significant reduction in long term care costs.

## 6.10 Community Safety Implications

N/A

## 6.11 Environmental Impact

N/A

## 7 **Background Papers**

## 8 **Appendices**

Disabled Facilities Grants Policy May 2021

This page is intentionally left blank

# Disabled Facilities Grant Policy

April 2021

Department Name ADAPTATIONS TEAM

- **Strategy or policy:** Disabled Facilities Grants Policy
- **Date adopted:** TBA.
- **Date of next review:** TBD

**Southend 2050 Outcomes: -**

- Southend residents are remaining well enough to enjoy fulfilling lives, throughout their lives.
- We are well on our way to ensuring that everyone has a home that meets their needs.
- We are effective at protecting and improving the quality of life for the most vulnerable in our community.
- Residents feel safe and secure in their homes.

## Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	5
<b>2. Regulatory Framework</b> .....	5
<b>3. Definition of a Disabled Person</b> .....	5
<b>4. Responsibility</b> .....	6
<b>5. Eligibility for DFG Grant Assistance and Grant Limit</b> .....	6
<b>6. The Mandatory DFG Eligibility Criteria</b> .....	7
<b>7. Discretionary DFG assistance – General</b> .....	8
Discretionary DFG Assistance – “Top Up Assistance” .....	8
Discretionary DFG Assistance – Special assistance .....	9
Discretionary DFG Assistance – Relocation Grant .....	10
<b>8. Suitability and Feasibility of an Adaptation for a Customer</b> .....	11
<b>9. The Disabled Facilities Grant Process</b> .....	12
Prioritisation .....	12
Grant Application .....	12
<b>10. Financial Assessment (The Means Test)</b> .....	12
<b>11. DFG Application Conditions</b> .....	14
<b>12. Decision Making Criteria</b> .....	15
<b>13. Alternative Scheme of Works</b> .....	15
<b>14. Two Disabled Occupiers in the same Household</b> .....	16
<b>15. Approval of a DFG</b> .....	16
<b>16. Works on Site</b> .....	16
<b>17. Unforeseen Works</b> .....	17
<b>18. Abortive Works</b> .....	17
<b>19. Completion of Works</b> .....	17
<b>20. Disputes with Workmanship</b> .....	17
<b>21. Maintenance and Warranties (General)</b> .....	17
<b>22. Payment of Grant</b> .....	18
<b>23. Changes in Circumstances</b> .....	18

<b>24. Cases in which a DFG may be Re-calculated, Withheld or Repaid.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>25. Removal of Adaptations and Reinstatement Works .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>26. Replacement of Facilities &amp; Specialist Equipment .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>27. Registered Social Housing Providers.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>28. Grant Repayment Conditions (Mandatory Only).....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>29. Appeals, Complaints and Compliments .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>30. Amendments to Policy.....</b>	<b>20</b>



## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Adaptations are needed by many disabled people so that they can remain safe and independent in their own home. They can be needed by people of all ages, but as our population ages and life expectancy increases, the number of people needing assistance to adapt their homes is expected to grow.
- 1.2 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) are mandatory grants available to disabled people when works to adapt their home are judged necessary and appropriate to meet their needs and when it is reasonable and practicable to carry them out having regard to the age and condition of the dwelling or building.
- 1.3 Southend on Sea Borough Council is committed to helping vulnerable and disabled residents and will administer Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) (and other forms of assistance such as discretionary grants, where available) to help them achieve a home which meets their needs.
- 1.4 This policy document sets out how the Council will use its resources to help those who need disabled adaptations and how decisions will be made about the help that it gives.

## 2. Regulatory Framework

There are a number of legal provisions governing DFGs and the application process including:

- Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (“The Act”) (as amended)
- Housing Renewal Grants (Services and Charges) order 1996
- The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996: Disabled Facilities Grant (Conditions relating to Approval or payment of Grant) General Consent 2008
- The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (“The Order”)
- The Housing Renewals Grants (Amendment)(England) Regulations 2008
- The Disabled Facilities Grants (Maximum Amounts and Additional Purposes)(England) Order 2008
- Delivering Housing Adaptations for Disabled People – A good practice guide (June 2006)
- The Equalities Act 2010

## 3. Definition of a Disabled Person

- 3.1 For the purposes of the legislation relating to DFG’s a person is defined as being disabled if:
  - Their sight, hearing or speech is substantially impaired;
  - They have a mental disorder to impairment of any kind; or
  - They are physically disabled by illness or impairment present since birth or otherwise

- 3.2 A person aged 18 or over is considered disabled if:
- They are registered as a result of arrangements made under section 29(1) of the National Assistance Act 1948; or
  - They are a person for whom welfare arrangements have been made under that section or might be made under it.
- 3.3 A person aged under 18 is considered disabled if:
- They are registered as a disabled child maintained under the Children Act 1989; or
  - In the opinion of the Social Services Authority (Essex County Council) they are a disabled child as defined for the purposes of Part III of the Children Act 1989.

## 4. Responsibility

- 4.1 The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 gives to Southend on Sea Borough Council as a local housing authority, the statutory duty for providing DFGs. The Council cannot, by law, refuse to process a properly made DFG application that it receives from an owner-occupier or tenant. If the eligibility criteria and proper process are satisfied, the Council must approve the appropriate grant providing funds are available.

## 5. Eligibility for DFG Grant Assistance and Grant Limit

- 5.1 DFGs are available to homeowners, owners of qualifying houseboats, owners of qualifying park homes, tenants of private landlords and tenants of Housing Associations. Grants are also available for adaptations to the common parts of buildings containing one or more flats.
- 5.2 Each case must be supported by a recommendation from an Occupational Therapist working with Southend on Sea Borough Council Social Services. Should an applicant provide an independent Occupational Therapist's recommendation, the Council will consult with the Occupational Therapy Service at Southend on Sea Borough Council, before processing the application.
- 5.3 The Council reserves the right to refuse grant assistance where the works are not necessary, appropriate, reasonable, practicable, are excessively expensive and/or where the property is not suitable for adaptation. If appropriate the Council may offer a discretionary DFG, in the form of a relocation grant to help the applicant move to a more suitable dwelling.
- 5.4 There is no restriction on multiple DFG's for the same property and depending on the time lapse between applications, there is provision for any means tested contribution made on the first grant not to be taken into account on subsequent application. This is five years for a tenant's application and 10 years for an owner occupier's application.
- 5.5 The maximum amount of grant is set by statutory instrument. The current statutory limit on the maximum amount of mandatory DFG is £30,000. The Council may consider payment of an additional discretionary grant in exceptional circumstances.

## 6. The Mandatory DFG Eligibility Criteria

6.1 DFGs are available to fund adaptations to the homes of elderly, vulnerable or disabled residents to enable them to live independently at home or be cared for at home. Grants are dependent on:

- The works being necessary and appropriate.
- The works being reasonable and practicable; and
- A financial assessment where appropriate, to establish the applicant's eligibility for a grant.

6.2 Eligibility criteria for DFGs are laid out in Section 23 of The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration (As Amended) Act 1996 and primarily relate to accessing principal rooms within the home and accessing and using essential facilities including access to gardens and outside areas of a property.

### 6.3 Works that are eligible for a mandatory disabled facility grant

A mandatory DFG may be given for the following types of work:

**Facilitating Access** - For works to remove or help overcome any obstacles that prevent the applicant from moving freely into and around the dwelling. This may include access to the garden or yard (front, side, or rear) which means immediate access from the dwelling, it does not include landscaping.

**Making a Dwelling or Building Safe** - Adaptations to the dwelling or building to make it safe for the applicant and other persons living with them.

**Access to a Family Room** – Works to ensure the applicant has access to a room used for or usable as the principal family room.

**Access to a Room usable for Sleeping** - The provision of a room usable for sleeping where the adaptation of an existing room in the dwelling (upstairs or downstairs) or the access to that room is unsuitable in the particular circumstances.

**Access to a Bathroom** - The provision of, or access to, a WC, washing, bathing and/or showering facilities.

**Facilitating Preparation of and Cooking of Food** - The rearrangement or enlargement of a kitchen to improve the access for a wheelchair and to provide specially modified or designed storage units, work top area etc. Where most of the cooking and preparation of meals is done by another household member, it would not normally be appropriate to carry out full adaptations to the kitchen.

**Heating, Light and Power** - To provide or improve the existing heating system in the dwelling to meet the applicant's needs. A grant will not be given to adapt or install heating in rooms which are not normally used by the applicant.

Provision is also made under this category for the adaptation of heating, lighting, and power to make them suitable for use by the applicant.

**Dependent Residents** - Works to enable the applicant better access around the dwelling in order to care for another person who normally resides there whether or not they are related to the applicant.

**Common Parts** – Works to facilitate access to a dwelling through the commonparts of a building, but consent must be obtained from the freeholder / leaseholder prior to any works taking place.

## 7. Discretionary DFG assistance – General

7.1 In certain circumstances the council may consider offering a discretionary grant. Three types of discretionary assistance are available from Southend on Sea Borough Council

- Top up assistance (see 7.5)
- Special assistance (see 7.6)
- Relocation assistance (see 7.7)

7.2 Whilst the Council do not have to provide discretionary assistance it will consider applications on a case-by-case basis with a view to maximising independence, health and wellbeing.

7.3 Any discretionary award will only be considered having regard to the amount of available resources the Council has available at the time. If the Council does not have sufficient resources to deal with outstanding mandatory referrals, the Council reserves the right not to approve any discretionary assistance.

7.4 All discretionary grants to owner-occupiers will be recorded as a charge on the land registry and will remain indefinitely. The grant will be repayable in full where a dwelling is disposed of whether by sale, assignment, and transfer of the title or otherwise for any reason and funds reimbursed to the DFG funding. This is over and above the mandatory repayment requirements outlined in section 29.

7.5 For discretionary grants to privately rented properties, tenants must provide proof of intention to remain at the property for at least five further years. The most appropriate evidence of this is an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) for a minimum of at least 5 years signed by both landlord and tenant, unless the Council considers it unreasonable in the circumstances to seek such arrangement. The Landlord will also be required to sign confirmation that the tenant is to remain living in the property for 5 years from the date of the grant application, thus enabling the long-term use of the adaptations.

### Discretionary DFG Assistance – “Top Up Assistance”

7.5.1 A discretionary top up grant may be considered where the cost of the proposed adaptation works exceed the maximum mandatory DFG limit of £30,000. However, the grant applicant must also meet the criteria for a mandatory DFG.

- 7.5.2 The discretionary DFG top-up grant will be subject to the same financial means test as a mandatory DFG unless the relocation is for a disabled child, in which case no such test will be applied.
- 7.5.3 The Adaptations Team Manager is authorised to agree a discretionary grant of up to £10,000 in exceptional circumstances subject to budget availability. Discretionary top-up grants in excess of £10,000 up to a maximum of £30,000 will be determined in consultation with the relevant Director of Services (Adult or Children). In exceptional circumstances where works exceed the grant limit for both mandatory and discretionary this will be taken to the Executive Director (Adults or Children's) for decision. (i.e., over £60k)
- 7.5.4 Before approving a top-up grant, the Council will have expected the applicant to have exhausted all other reasonable options with which to raise the required funds for any works over and above the £30,000 mandatory limit. This is to ensure a fair allocation of funding between the many applications received by the Council every year. Examples of these include, but are not restricted to:
- Equity release for owner occupied property
  - Bank loans
  - Charity Grants / Contributions
- 7.5.5 The Council reserves the right to decline any request for top up assistance if sufficient written evidence of the above is not provided.

### **Discretionary DFG Assistance – Special assistance**

- 7.6.1 A Discretionary Disabled Facilities “Special assistance” grant may be considered to help applicants pay for the cost of adapting their home where this is not covered by the mandatory DFG.
- 7.6.2 Each case must be supported by a recommendation from an Occupational Therapist working with Southend on Sea Borough Council. The Council reserves the right to refuse grant assistance where the works are not necessary, reasonable, practicable, or are excessively expensive or where the property is not suitable for adaptation.
- 7.6.3 Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants Assistance will be considered to fund the following types of adaptations to enable an applicant to remain living in their own homes:
- a) To make the dwelling suitable for the applicant. Examples include:
    - The provision of a safe play space for a disabled child
    - The provision of more suitable internal arrangements which would directly benefit the applicant.
  - b) To make the dwelling suitable for the employment of the applicant within the existing footprint of the dwelling (examples include the provision or adaptation of a room for the applicant to use as a work area). Any such

assistance would be subject to the applicant obtaining any relevant planning permission that may be required for working/running a business from the dwelling.

- c) To provide an area for specialist care or treatment (e.g., provision of a dialysis room).
- d) The provision and installation of ceiling track hoists.
- e) The provision and installation of a dropped kerb to facilitate access to a hardstanding located within the curtilage of the applicants dwelling.
- f) The provision and installation of an appropriate storage facility for a mobility scooter with a fixed charging point.
- g) Provision of facilities for a child in foster care, where the likely length of care at a dwelling is likely to be years, rather than months.
- h) Provision of additional facilities in a second property in circumstances where a disabled child is living under a dual residency arrangement, where residency is split between the parents (or other designated guardian.)

This list is not exhaustive and other works may be considered subject to an Occupational Therapists recommendation being received by the Council.

- 7.6.4 Depending on the value of the works, the Discretionary Disabled Facilities “Special Assistance” grant, may be authorised by the Adaptations Team Manager in consultation with the Head of Service for Adults and the Head of Children Services for children where appropriate.

### **Discretionary DFG Assistance – Relocation Grant**

- 7.7.1 A discretionary relocation grant may be available to an applicant who owns or privately rents their dwelling if adaptation of their current home through a mandatory DFG is determined not to be a feasible or reasonable option and they are considering relocating to a suitable property they intend to purchase.
- 7.7.2 Applicants must be aged 18 or over on the date that the application is made and in the case of a disabled child, the parents would make the application.
- 7.7.3 Any such application must be supported by a recommendation from the Occupational Therapy Service at Southend on Sea Borough Council.
- 7.7.4 The Council and the Occupational Therapist must both be satisfied that the proposed dwelling already meets the needs of the applicant without further adaptation or are satisfied that it can be adapted at a reasonable cost.
- 7.7.5 Applicants must be relocating within the Southend on Sea Borough. Consideration may be given to a move in Essex, but this would require:
- The approval of the relevant district/borough council

- The council would not be expected to fund adaptations at the new dwelling.
- 7.7.6 The cost of the discretionary relocation grant together with the cost of any adaptations required to the new dwelling must demonstrate value for money, whether the move is within the Southend on Sea Borough or another district / borough within Essex.
- 7.7.7 Applications must be submitted prior to relocation; grants cannot be paid retrospectively.
- 7.7.8 Assistance will not be made available towards the purchase price of a new dwelling.
- 7.7.9 The Council will normally require two quotations from independent contractors that realistically reflect the cost of the works / service being provided. In some circumstances, one estimate may be accepted if the Council is satisfied that the cost is reasonable.
- 7.7.10 All applicants will be required to complete the move within 12 months from the date of approval of their application.
- 7.7.11 If on sale of the applicants existing dwelling, a net equity of more than £10,000 is released, the discretionary relocation grant will only fund the physical removal costs.
- 7.7.12 Net equity refers to any equity released when the purchase price of the new dwelling is less than the existing dwellings selling price.
- 7.7.13 If the move is aborted through the fault of the applicant, then the grant will not be paid, and any monies already paid will be reclaimed from the applicant. If the reason for the move falling through is, in the opinion of the Council, not the fault of the applicant, then the Council will cover the full costs.
- 7.7.14 The new dwelling must be the applicant's main residence and no applicant will be awarded a discretionary relocation grant on more than one occasion.
- 7.7.15 If the applicant moves from the new dwelling within 5 years or if the dwelling is disposed of whether by sale, assignment, transfer of the title or otherwise, for any reason within a period of 5 years, the grant must be paid back in full to the Council unless there are exceptional circumstances. SBC would expect the applicant to sign a certificate advising occupancy for the next five years.
- 7.7.16 The discretionary relocation grant will be subject to the same financial means test as a mandatory DFG unless the relocation is for a disabled child in which case no means test will be applied.
- 7.7.17 A discretionary disabled facilities "relocation assistance" grant may be authorised by the Adaptations Team Manager, in consultation with the Head of Service.

## **8. Suitability and Feasibility of an Adaptation for a Customer**

### **8.1 Necessary and Appropriate**

Necessary and Appropriate works are determined through an assessment of the applicant and their home environment by an Occupational Therapist from Southend on Sea Borough Council. This concentrates on the applicant's ability to remain living independently in their own home and must distinguish between works which are desirable, and those, which are necessary and appropriate.

## 8.2 Reasonable and Practicable

There are times when it is simply not reasonable and practicable to adapt a property, for instance where there are excessive changes in level; where there are space constraints; or where moving existing services is prohibitively expensive. Rather than investing funding to poorly adapt a property, grants may be declined because the works are not reasonable and practicable. This would normally be determined by the Adaptations Surveyor and Occupational Therapist via a joint visit to see if the adaptations are feasible before proceeding.

## 9. The Disabled Facilities Grant Process

### Prioritisation

- 9.1 Prioritisation of cases is most often based on date of receipt of referral of a report from the Occupational Therapist. However, where an Occupational Therapist makes additional requests for critical or emergency assistance, this additional information will usually be taken into account, when deciding on a prioritisation for an individual case.
- 9.2 The Council however reserves the right to start processing some cases out of strict priority order in exceptional circumstances (as determined by the Adaptations Team Manager) for instance, where it is determined that it is necessary to ensure efficient allocation of staff resources, or budget allocation and spend.

### Grant Application

- 9.3 Should the proposed recommendations require a pre application feasibility study, an Occupational Therapist at Southend on Sea Borough Council and Adaptation Surveyor from the Council will meet to discuss this matter. The Council, as a Statutory Regulator of the Housing Act 2004 is unable to allow works to take place which will result in the creation of Housing Health and Safety Rating System Hazards.
- 9.4 If the applicant is the tenant of a private landlord or Housing Association, the landlord/owner must give permission for the work to be carried out. Fixed items such as level access showers will usually become the property of the owner and the Council will not reinstate the original bathroom if the tenant moves out of the rented property.

## 10. Financial Assessment (The Means Test)

- 10.1 Applications for Disabled Facilities Grants are generally subject to a Means Test. Recommendations for adaptations that cost under £6,000 (or a curved stairlift up to £6,500) will be exempt from the means test enabling a faster process for the



resident – see 11.1.08 below.

- 10.2 As part of an application for a mandatory DFG and for works in excess of £6,000, a test of resources (financial means test) must be carried out in order to assess the amount, if any, that the applicant must contribute towards the cost of the proposed adaptation works.
- 10.3 The means test applies to the applicant (if aged over 18) and any spouse or partner. The applicant is required to provide information about all sources of income, including rent from another property, and all savings to provide evidence to support information given in the application form.
- 10.4 Applicants who are in receipt of one of the following types of income and can provide evidence at the time of assessment, will be “passported” through the means testing process and will not be required to make a contribution towards the cost of the proposed adaptation works:
- Income Support
  - Income Based Job Seekers Allowance
  - Guarantee Pension Credit
  - Housing Benefit
  - Working/Child Tax Credit (if income for tax credit is below a specified amount)

Note: This list is prescribed by central government and may be amended from time to time.

- 10.5 Where the result of the means test is a ‘nil’ contribution, it is accepted that the applicant will automatically wish to proceed with the application. Where the result of the means test is such that the applicant’s contribution is likely to be less than the total cost of the works the applicant will be required to confirm in writing their intention to proceed with their application on this basis.
- 10.6 Where the result of the means test is such that the applicant’s contribution is equal to or likely to exceed the cost of the works the applicant can request the Council to approve a ‘nil’ grant, however the applicant will be responsible for the costs of the works if they decide to proceed. This will also enable the cost of these works to be deducted from any future application for a DFG so long as any subsequent OT recommendation is received within 10 years from the approval of the ‘nil’ grant (5 years for a tenant’s application).
- 10.7 Where an applicant is unable to meet their assessed financial contribution under the means-test for a mandatory DFG and in the absence of any suitable affordable alternative, the Council may in exceptional circumstances provide the applicant with Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant Assistance to enable the works to proceed, subject to the exhaustion of alternative funding options. Alternatively, if the applicant is an owner-occupier, we can offer a deferred loan against the property to be repaid when the property is sold.
- 10.8 Where the cost of the proposed adaptations is under £6,000 or require a curved stair

lift to £6,500 and the applicant is subject to all other eligibility criteria being met, the means test is removed. This will mean we are able to complete our adaptations quicker and positively change people's lives for the better. This will also reduce the amount of residents who do not proceed with urgent adaptations because they are unable to pay a contribution towards the costs.

## 11. DFG Application Conditions

- 11.1 All applications for assistance must be made on the appropriate Council application forms and shall be accompanied by all relevant supporting documents. The minimum age for applicants is 18 years of age at the date of application and in the case of joint applications, at least one person must be over 18 years of age at the date of the application. Grant applications for children under 18 years of age are completed by an authorised parent or guardian.
- 11.2 In making an application the applicant shall give the Council permission to share such given information with other Council services and departments or other statutory agencies by signing the Data Protection statement.
- 11.3 Private sector tenants may make applications where they are eligible for assistance, but the Council will require written consent from the owner of the property before approving the DFG.
- 11.4 Tenants of a Registered Social Housing Provider (RSHP) may make applications where they are eligible for assistance, but the Council will require written consent from the relevant RSHP.
- 11.5 South Essex Homes tenants in all cases should approach South Essex Homes in the first instance as the Council has funds set aside for disabled adaptation works in their own properties.
- 11.6 The adaptation works must be carried out in accordance with any plans, specifications and schedules provided by the Council.
- 11.7 Quotations for adaptation works must be provided on the specifications and schedules provided by the Council for this purpose and must be itemised and totalled on each page. Provisional sums are not acceptable except in cases where for example scaffolding *may* be required or where exploratory works *maybe* required. Works covered by insurance claims or work that should have been covered by such, will not be eligible for DFG assistance of any kind.
- 11.8 The Council will not normally approve any DFG application if the relevant works have started before the application is approved. One exception to this rule is where an authorised officer has already carried out an inspection of the dwelling and has agreed in writing that the works may commence, due to particular risks to the health and safety of the disabled applicant.
- 11.9 DFG assistance will only be approved for the benefit of the disabled applicant where they are able to provide evidence of a valid National Insurance Number.

---

## 12. Decision Making Criteria

12.1 The Council will use the following criteria as part of its decision-making process:

- The DFG works should fully and properly meet the applicants assessed needs.
- The works funded by the DFG will be the simplest and most cost-effective adaptations
- The change of use of existing rooms or the re-ordering of rooms will be the preferred solution and will take precedence over both the construction of extensions and the installation of specialist equipment.
- Generally, the DFG will only fund one facility to a dwelling e.g., only one external door will be provided with a ramped access to the outdoors.

## 13. Alternative Scheme of Works

13.1 In certain circumstances a grant up to the value of the estimated cost of providing an adaptation can be used to contribute towards an alternative scheme. In any such case the following criteria must be met:

13.2 The proposed alternative scheme shall meet the applicant's needs as assessed by the Occupational Therapist and put forward in the original recommendation.

13.3 The Council must be satisfied that the applicant has sufficient financial resources to complete the alternative scheme, including a contingency sum of 10% of the total cost of works to account for any unforeseen works.

13.4 The applicant must refer to the SBC list of approved contractors for the proposed works. The Council reserves the right to seek an alternative estimate where those provided by the applicant seem either excessive or inadequate.

13.5 The Adaptation Surveyor shall design/control the works and shall certify their satisfactory completion. The applicant is responsible for any additional costs of designing the alternative scheme and for obtaining building regulation approval and/or planning permission where necessary.

13.6 The Council will only pay an amount equal to the cost of the works originally recommended by the Occupational Therapist. The Council will not pay for the DFG approved works until all works have been completed and certified as satisfactory by the Council or its agent.

13.7 The Council's payment shall be the final part payment made towards completion of the alternative scheme and will not be paid until the Council receives confirmation from the contractor that all other monies owing have been paid in full by the applicant. Payment will be subject to the Council or its agent inspecting the works and certifying the scheme as fully completed to its satisfaction (inside and out).

13.8 The alternative scheme must be completed within 12 months of the DFG being approved, unless a written request for an extension to the time limit is received within

6 weeks of the 12-month period expiring. Extension to the mandatory time limit for completion of the works will be at the discretion of the Council and the applicant should not assume that such a request will be agreed.

- 13.9 Where the alternative works are not completed within the 12-month time period allowed and where the Council has not received a written request to extend this period, the DFG will be void.
- 13.10 No variation of the approved DFG will be made for any additional unforeseen works; all such costs are to be borne by the applicant.
- 13.11 If, for whatever reason, during the course of the works, the need for them ceases, the DFG will not be paid in full.

## **14. Two Disabled Occupiers in the same Household**

- 14.1 Where two disabled people occupy the same dwelling as their main residence and both have individually assessed needs by an Occupational Therapist, depending on the adaptations, there may be a case for considering two separate DFG applications (for example, this is more likely to affect families with more than one disabled child.)

## **15. Approval of a DFG**

- 15.1 Although the Council is statutorily obliged to approve valid mandatory DFG applications within six months, where possible, the Council will aim to approve applications within 30 days of them being determined as complete and valid.
- 15.2 In the case of discretionary DFG's, the Council will aim for the same timeframe as above but mandatory DFG's may take preference if the Council needs to consider how to make best use of its available resources.
- 15.3 The Council will not normally approve a Disabled Facilities Grant application where the relevant work has already begun.
- 15.4 The Council will not approve an application for a Disabled Facilities Grant if the relevant works have already been completed.

## **16. Works on Site**

- 16.1 Though the DFG is an agreement made between the grant applicant and the Council, all works relating to the Disabled Facilities Grant are a contractual agreement made between the grant applicant and the contractor. The contractor is working for the grant applicant and not the Council.
- 16.2 The Council will be responsible for supervising the work of the contractor. The contractor must notify the Council of the date that they agree the works shall commence.
- 16.3 The Council will not be responsible for any damage caused by the applicant or household members once the installation has been completed.

## 17. Unforeseen Works

- 17.1 Additional DFG funding will only be provided for unforeseen works where it is proven that this is required to allow the completion of the eligible or associated works, it is needed to protect the health and safety of the applicant, and it could not have reasonably been foreseen at the time of the contractor pricing for the contract.
- 17.2 No unforeseen works can commence until written confirmation from the Council has been received as to whether these works are reasonable in terms of cost, are truly unforeseen and whether the works are necessary.

## 18. Abortive Works

- 18.1 This term relates to situations where a DFG application has been aborted before all works have been completed, for example, where the applicant has died.
- 18.2 In such circumstances, consideration will be given to payment of a proportion of the grant assistance in line with current legislation and guidance and at the discretion of the Adaptations Team Manager.

## 19. Completion of Works

- 19.1 The contractor shall notify the Council on the day that the adaptation works are completed. This will enable the Adaptations Surveyor to schedule an appointment to inspect the works at the earliest opportunity, thus expediting payment to the contractor.

## 20. Disputes with Workmanship

- 20.1 Where a dispute arises regarding the standard of a contractor's workmanship, the Council will withhold payment to the contractor until the works have been completed satisfactorily in the professional opinion of the Council.
- 20.2 Where works are deemed to meet the Council's approval, but the grant applicant is not satisfied the Council will not unreasonably withhold payment to the contractor.

## 21. Maintenance and Warranties (General)

- 21.1 When equipment is installed under a Disabled Facilities Grant, the grant applicant becomes the owner of the equipment and is therefore responsible for maintenance and repairs or for removing equipment once it is no longer required beyond any warranty and maintenance periods already paid for, and included in the grant, by the Council.
- 21.2 Once the DFG works are completed the Council will not finance or organise servicing, repairs, or maintenance after the expiry of any applicable warranty period, which is usually 12 months, with the exception of stairlifts provided through the SBC framework agreement.

## 22. Payment of Grant

- 22.1 The Council will pay the contractor following the final inspection visit as long as the works have been carried out to its satisfaction and in accordance with the Occupational Therapist's recommendation, the schedule of works, the surveyor's plan and the completion of relevant certificates e.g., Gas Safe Certificates, Electrical Installation Certificates, etc.
- 22.2 Payment will only be made on production of a final invoice.
- 22.3 Where there is an assessed applicant contribution, the Council will make the grant element of the payment to the contractor and the applicant will pay the contractor directly any assessed sums as calculated under the means test.
- 22.4 The Council will not consider requests for interim payment to the Contractor prior to the commencement of works. It will also not approve interim payments of more than the value of any completed works and, in aggregate no more than 90% of the total approved cost of the work will be paid before final completion.

## 23. Changes in Circumstances

- 23.1 Applicants must inform the Council of all changes in their circumstances from the date of making their enquiry through to approval and commencement of the works. Such examples may include
- Where the works cease to be necessary or appropriate to meet the needs of the applicant.
  - The applicant ceases to occupy the dwelling; or
  - The applicant dies.
- 23.2 In the circumstances outlined above, the Council has the right to demand the repayment of the grant that has already been paid, together with any interest. However, such cases will be considered on their own merit.

## 24. Cases in which a DFG may be Re-calculated, Withheld or Repaid

- 24.1 The Council is entitled to refuse to pay a grant; to refuse to pay further instalments on a grant or may recalculate the grant in circumstances such as:
- The grant was approved on the basis of inaccurate, incomplete or false information
  - The cost of the works is different to the original estimates so requires a recalculation
  - Additional works have been undertaken without prior authority of the Council

---

## 25. Removal of Adaptations and Reinstatement Works

- 25.1 The Council will not be responsible for removing adaptations if they are no longer required.
- 25.2 The Council will not carry out any reinstatement works to previously adapted properties.
- 25.3 If an applicant changes their mind about an adaptation once the works have been completed, the Council will not remove or carry out further adaptation works unless there has been a significant change in the applicant's medical condition.

## 26. Replacement of Facilities & Specialist Equipment

- 26.1 The Council will only consider replacing damaged, broken, or worn-out facilities and/or equipment under a further DFG providing it:
- Cannot be repaired.
  - Has not been wilfully damaged.
  - Still meets the needs of the applicant.
  - Has been annually serviced and/or maintained, where applicable, and the warranty period has expired.
- 26.2 A further DFG will not be considered where a facility or equipment that was present in the dwelling previously has been removed by, or under the instruction of, the applicant unless there is a proven good reason for the removal.

## 27. Registered Social Housing Providers

- 27.1 RSHP's have a prescriptive duty of care to their tenants and must meet certain standards and targets relating to the condition of their dwellings such as The Decent Homes Standard, and they are able to access other sources of funding due to their status.
- 27.2 The Council therefore expects RSHP's to conform to these duties on behalf of their tenants, which would include the provision of disabled facilities adaptations for their own tenants.
- 27.3 In all cases where the Council receives a DFG recommendation for a tenant of a RSHP, they will be issued with a formal written request for a financial contribution towards the cost of the adaptation works.

## 28. Grant Repayment Conditions (Mandatory Only)

- 28.1 The Disabled Facilities legislation allows the Council to place a charge on a property to reclaim a proportion of the grant monies in the event that it is sold or disposed of.
- 28.2 In accordance with this repayment requirements will apply where the applicant disposes of the premises (whether by sale, assignment, transfer, or otherwise), in respect of which a Disabled Facilities Grant was paid, within 10 years of the certified

date of completion of works. This will apply to grants over £5,000 with a maximum repayment condition of £10,000. Grants below £5,000 will be exempt from repayment.

- 28.3 Repayment will also be required if a property is transferred from one person to another, whether or not this involves members of the same family, including situations where no monies are involved in the transaction.
- 28.4 The amount that is required to be repaid (if any,) will be recorded as a charge against the relevant property. Applicants who do not wish a charge to be placed against their property and have the resources to do so, may pay this amount to the Council prior to the charge being placed, or may repay the charge at any stage afterwards, by contacting the Council and asking for a settlement figure. A calculation of the reimbursed cost on a will be made once a completion date is received from the Solicitor on behalf of the applicant.
- 28.5 Where a premises for which Southend on Sea Borough Council has approved a Disabled Facilities Grant is disposed of, the Council will normally seek to recover the value of the grant that it is legally entitled to recover, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

## **29. Appeals, Complaints and Compliments**

- 29.1 In the first instance any issues should be brought to the attention of the authorised officer dealing with the application.
- 29.2 If you remain dissatisfied, to escalate any matter of concern, please access the Corporate Complaints Process on the Southend on Sea Borough Council web site.

## **30. Amendments to Policy**

- 30.1 Minor amendments to the DFG policy and guidance may be made by the Adaptations Team Manager in consultation with the Head of Service. Significant changes must be formally approved by the Council's Cabinet.



# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Chief Executive  
To  
Cabinet

On  
15 June 2021

Report prepared by: Tim MacGregor, Policy Manager

Agenda  
Item No.

6

---

## The Council's response to Covid-19 - update

Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s): Policy and Resources; People; Place  
Cabinet Member: Councillor Gilbert  
Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

---

### 1. Purpose of Report and desired outcomes

To update Cabinet of the action taken by the Council in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and its approach to protect and support residents, local businesses, staff and the borough in general.

### 2. Recommendation

2.1 That Cabinet note the action taken to date in response to the Covid-19 crisis.

### 3. Background

3.1 Cabinet received an outline of the Council's response to the Covid pandemic in June and September 2020, and this report provides a further update on action taken to manage, and live with, Covid going forward.

3.2 Tragically, over 127,500 people have died in the UK as a result of Covid, with over 609 deaths in Southend-on-Sea, including, very sadly, two members of council staff (figures based on death within 28 days of testing positive. It has had an all-consuming impact on the day to day life of everyone and on the services, policies, finances and governance of all local authorities.

3.3 The Council is very proud of its response, and that of the community and partners, which has saved lives, alleviated a breakdown of health services and supported the most vulnerable in the community. Excellent relationships and work with partners from areas, including health, community safety, education, voluntary sector, business, local authority, civil service and others has been key to a successful response, and these strengthened relationships bodes well for future partnership working. This has enabled: the ongoing provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); getting essentials to those in need via the helpline service; securing accommodation for rough sleepers; getting

financial support to businesses; ensuring residents and visitors are safe on the seafront and elsewhere; ensuring the safety of those in care homes; keeping education going and supporting and rolling out test and trace and the vaccination programme. All this, while keeping day to day services going, was achieved with remarkable speed, dedication and with many staff going way beyond the call of duty. In recognition of this work, and in line with the example of other councils, it has been agreed to grant staff, a one off, extra day of leave and to continue to develop other appropriate forms of recognition.

3.4 A series of reports and research have highlighted that the virus and its impact has disproportionately affected the elderly, those with underlying health conditions, those who are less well-off and those from some ethnic minority communities. The equality impact assessment of the impact of Covid-19 on equality groups for the borough has, therefore, been updated and a summary is attached at **Appendix 1**.

3.5 The key areas of the Council's response are outlined below.

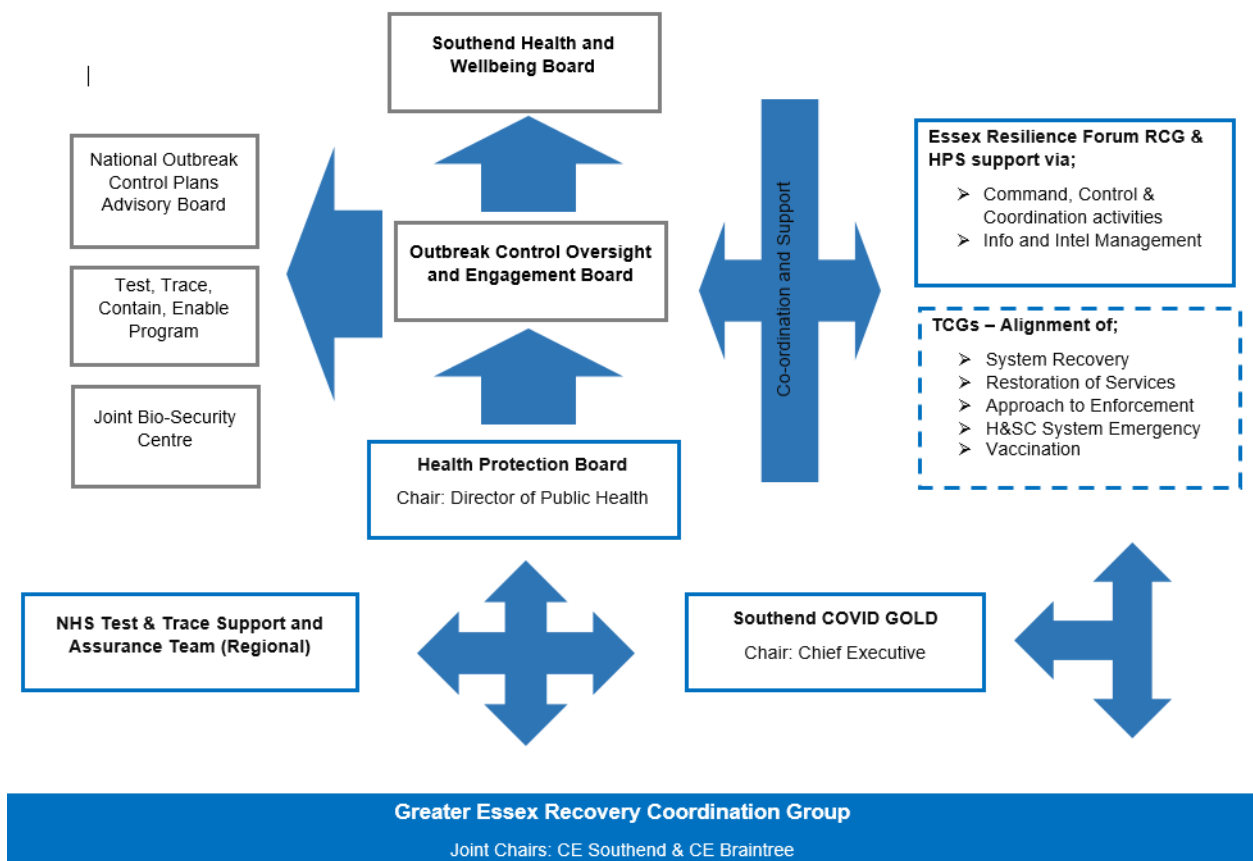
#### **4. Pandemic management**

4.1 The Council's **civil contingency** arrangements have aligned closely to Government requirements and have been shaped by the collective response of the Essex Resilience Forum (ERF). These arrangements adapted over time, with strategic (gold) and tactical command (silver) staff working with partner agencies in leading the response. Further support in managing the response and recovery has been driven by three 'recovery cells' of senior officers and partners focussed on:

- Pandemic Management & Recovery;
- Economic Crises & Recovery and
- Budget, Sustainability & Transformation

4.2 The **Covid-19 Local Outbreak Control Plan (LOCP)**, produced in June 2020 provided the framework for local implementation of the national Test, Trace, Contain and Enable (TTCE) programme and has been central to controlling the rate of reproduction ('R') and reducing the spread of infection. This has been overseen by the **Outbreak Control Oversight & Engagement Board (OCOEB)** of key councillors and the **Health Protection Board**, of key officers and health partners, with the latter meeting weekly (fortnightly from April 2021) to review progress on vaccination, testing, contact tracing, advice on compliance and enforcement of rules and restrictions, infection and mortality rates and to review any local outbreaks and impact of new variants. Engagement with the two MPs is also facilitated by the Director of Public Health. The LOCP was updated in November, and in March 2021 was replaced with a Local Outbreak Management Plan in line with changing circumstances.

**Pandemic governance arrangements – Southend and Essex (fig 1):**



- 4.3 The local response has, therefore, meant adapting to the latest Government requirements of the borough, including entering tier one (medium) from 12 October, tier two (high) from 2 December, tier three (very high) from 16 December and the new tier four from 20 December, followed by the third national lockdown from 4 January (see **Appendix 2** for the timetable of Government announcements on tiers and lockdowns).
- 4.4 Regular data reviews and analysis have been, and will continue to be, undertaken under the direction of the Pandemic Management’s Consultant in Communicable Disease and the Director of Public Health. Deep-dive analysis is also undertaken by the Data and Intelligence Cell, with independent additional public health intelligence capacity brought in as and when required, with a number of key areas being monitored:
- Change in trends and variation in any defined population groups;
  - Identifying outbreaks and risk to ensure a swift response;
  - Burden of Covid in relation to hospitalisation, mortality, daily infection rate and R rate;
  - Specific areas such as excess mortality in care homes, infection level across wards and more disadvantaged communities, exploring the outputs of Incident Management Teams.
  - Review of Variants of Concern and Mutants (VAM) and need to respond.
- 4.5 Southend has been operating three Lateral Flow Devise asymptomatic and four PCR symptomatic testing sites, with additional testing being provided in

collaboration with schools and community home testing and the use of the Twenty One venue on the seafront. The LOMP outlines the detailed arrangements for local testing, the Essex and Southend Contact Tracing Service (ESCTS) and the processes for dealing with outbreaks. The ESCTS provision for the borough is currently under review, with a view to being directly managed by the Council, rather than Essex County, from September 2021.

- 4.6 The NHS, via Primary Care Networks and Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (EPUT), were able to quickly put in place a successful **vaccination programme** from December, with five sites operating across the borough by mid-January, and a further two, including the Cliffs Pavillion, added. The programme has included identifying and setting up local sites, training staff, recruiting volunteers and developing new processes and procedures. The success of the programme, overcoming operational difficulties such as intermittent supplies early on, is a testimony to excellent collaboration between GP practices, Southend Clinical Commissioning Group, the Council, the voluntary sector and EPUT. This collaboration has also enabled targeted vaccination of the most vulnerable, including care home residents and staff, front line NHS and social care workers, former rough sleepers and to engage with those population groups where there is vaccination hesitancy. As at the end of May 70% of over 15 year olds in the borough had received their first dose and over 44% their second.
- 4.7 The OCOEB has overseen the refreshing of the messaging to the public and stakeholders, which has included regular webinars with schools and businesses, multi-media campaigns to promote key messages on, for example, maintaining social distancing, hand hygiene and using face covering in the appropriate settings. Regular community engagement webinars continue to provide reassurance, responding to local concerns and to gain more insight to support the local response.
- 4.8 The **Covid helpline** has continued to operate during the pandemic, providing advice and support on a range of issues. Calls grew steadily during the Autumn and jumped dramatically to over 1300 in January, with calls mainly relating to schools testing policy and then peaking in March, with testing related queries, including chasing test results. Numbers of calls have since fallen significantly and the need to use re-deployed staff and the operation of the helpline is being reviewed accordingly and to align with the contact tracing service.

## 5. Social care

- 5.1 Throughout the pandemic there has been severe pressure on health and social care services, and the hospitals in particular, with peaks in April and November 2020 and early January 2021. The Essex Resilience Forum declared a major incident in December 2020, based on the critical demand on the NHS and the resulting heightened demand on social care. This led to enhanced and swift collaboration and escalation in bed management, to allow the hospital to free beds safely. The Council also reviewed other social care provision, such as domiciliary care, supported living and day centres to ensure the right level of support was in place.

- 5.2 A major focus was placed on infection control in all care homes, which included the management and restriction of care home visits, the management of outbreaks among residents and staff and the knock on impact in service provision. This required putting a number of contingencies in place, including using pool staff and volunteers and a re-launch of the Priory House unit in January for the recently discharged from hospital with a covid test. The unit provides capacity for 12 beds to support people before they return to their care home or go to another Covid-19 free care home. In addition, the key worker parking permits scheme for NHS and care workers, enabling them to park when carrying out essential work, was extended to the end of June.
- 5.3 An in depth joint health/social care business continuity plan to manage future outbreaks, and a potential further 'wave' on easing of lockdown and for the coming winter, has been developed. This was been complemented by the development of an Essex wide Adult Social Care Escalation Framework (LAPEL – the Local Authority Pressures Escalation Levels), by the ERF, in January, with specific triggers and thresholds identified to escalate action further and which was seen as good practice beyond Essex.
- 5.4 There has been a particular focus on learning how to enhance services by doing things differently, including using digital methods for social care assessments and Project 49's 'on-line 49' innovative day opportunity for adults with learning disabilities, offering classes and social contact, which has gone from strength to strength. However, there is a real awareness of some of the challenges ahead in relation to social care, including an anticipated increased demand for mental health services.

## **6. Compliance, enforcement and community safety**

- 6.1 Compliance with Government Covid regulations and advice has generally been extremely good, with only a few incidents of serious non-compliance requiring more formal action that led to closure or a fine. Covid 'compliance ambassadors' have been in place since October 2020, and remain in place, providing advice and guidance to business and others (supported by £95,000 government funding). Regulatory Services and Community Safety Officers have also been provided advice and guidance as well as more formal interactions with businesses as necessary. Officers have undertaken regular joint visits with Police to hospitality premises, including those in the night time economy, to ensure compliance and respond to reports of breaches of Covid legislation.
- 6.2 With hospitality premises being closed, there has been a growing number of groups gathering outdoors in open spaces and beaches with their own alcohol - often in large numbers and from outside Southend. This has resulted in more incidents, some serious, of anti-social behaviour. This has all put additional pressures on a number of front line Council services, and on occasions, the Police have put Dispersal Orders in place (such as in Old Leigh) to prevent issues from escalating, where large groups have been involved. Concerns also remain with the impact on levels of domestic abuse, including potential under-reporting of cases. This gives heightened focus to the on-going work to prepare for the new requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act.

## **7. Re-opening Southend**

- 7.1 The Council led and developed its multi-faceted plan, 'Operation Heatwave' to ensure the borough was fully prepared to welcome back visitors and keep residents safe as national restrictions eased. The plan was developed with a local stakeholder group of traders that includes Southend Business Improvement District, Southend Tourism Partnership and Leigh Town Council. The measures and resources will focus on town centre, open spaces, seafront and beaches. Action has included:
- Further use of the 'compliance ambassadors' to work in the community and visit premises to check compliance and signpost to guidance.
  - Extra resources being deployed from end March, including toilet attendants, additional temporary toilets and medical support.
  - Additional litter picking and bin emptying in parks at weekends and during the school holidays.
  - More of the larger 'EuroBins' along the seafront and additional cleaning of parks.
  - Extra seasonal foreshore staff to provide information, advice and first aid.
  - Providing guidance to businesses on reopening safely.
  - Enhancing community safety via a new security base at Jubilee Beach and more resource on monitoring the seafront.
  - The re-opening of car parks and parking enforcement from 29 March 2021.
- 7.2 The group has been working hard to help the local economy bounce back and help businesses to reopen safely while keep residents safe. Promotion of 'Visit Southend Safely' has seen local businesses being provided with signage, poster templates and guidance, with extensive signs being put in shopping areas across the borough.

## **8. Local economy**

- 8.1 While the UK economy is now predicted to have its strongest economic growth (7.25% for 2021) since the Second World War, this follows a drop of 10% in 2020 and the Bank of England says that the economic outlook remains 'uncertain' following the phased ending of furlough support by September. This coupled with the tapered end of a range of other government support measures, the lifting of the business evictions ban and ending of the £20 a week Universal Credit uplift (taking £340,000 a week from local residents), highlight the need for ongoing focussed support for the local economy.
- 8.2 Local businesses, therefore, continued to be supported with a range of government grants and local exemptions provided to cover increased costs or disruptions to cash flow from the various restrictions. Millions have been via Business Grants; Restart Grants; Additional Restriction Grants; discretionary grants; Small Business; Christmas Support Package and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure grant, (see Appendix 3 for detail).
- 8.3 Phase 2 of the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) opened at the end of April for Southend businesses that are not covered by other grant schemes, of

particular benefit to micro-businesses of which Southend has a high proportion. Applicants need to demonstrate business related costs and a reduction in their income of at least 25% since November 2020.

- 8.4 The Economic Recovery Cell has developed strong partnership working with Southend Business Partnership, Jobcentre Plus, Citizens Advice and Southend Adult Community College among others to provide support. Work has focussed on six work streams of: economic hardship; business support; employment; communications; major projects and procurement, social value & procurement. Work to support the unemployed, including the opening of a temporary Jobcentre Plus advice centre in the high street to meet increased demand. Zero percent loans have been offered to bring empty town centre units back into use, along with grants to encourage businesses in central Southend to revitalise their shop fronts (both funded by South East Local Enterprise Partnership). The Council also bought the Victoria Shopping Centre to demonstrate its commitment to the future of the town centre.
- 8.5 Work has also been linked to the Council's kickstart programme of work placements for young people, taking advantage of the Community Renewal, Levelling up and Community Ownership funds, the ASELA (Association of South Essex Local Authority (ASELA) Recovery Taskforce, promoting economic regeneration and growth across south Essex and support for business in relation to Brexit. There will be further work on matching data to benefit needs, planning for effective allocation of food vouchers over holiday periods and links to food and fuel poverty, with a focus on 18-25 year olds and ethnic minorities who have been particularly hit by the loss of entry level and less secure jobs.

## **9. Developing community resilience & engagement**

- 9.1 Test and trace and the vaccine roll out have helped to drive better connectivity with different sections of the community. More regular and more informal 'community listening sessions' are now being held with stakeholders and public, including in relation to young people, those with a disability, those from ethnic minority and faith communities and in relation to homelessness.
- 9.2 The Southend Emergency Fund, set up last year, has continued to support grass roots organisations assist those who need immediate help. Led by Southend Association of Voluntary Services (SAVS), resources have been pooled from the Council, residents and businesses. The fund has enabled the provision of food, IT, mental health support and help with utility bills among many other things, with grants of up to £3000 via an easy access platform.
- 9.3 The Council also facilitated the Southend food alliance to bring new and more established grass roots food bank and schemes together, to share resources and knowledge - supplementing community support for provision of free school meals to those in need with a £15 pre-paid card food scheme and agreeing to appoint officer and member food champions.
- 9.4 The [Livewell Southend Directory](#) with over 1000 entries has become an essential tool for the local social prescribing programme which brings together the NHS, the Council and the voluntary sector, linking residents with resources

in their communities to help them stay well and connected. The site also hosts the SEND Local Offer information.

- 9.5 The Council, SAVS and partner organisations have built on the willingness of the local community to be involved and developed a cohort of ‘community connectors’, to help pass on or signpost people to support/information on the pandemic. Those who sign up are provided with training to develop skills on using local networks and social media, and receive twice weekly briefings, helping to provide key messages and counter misinformation. The scheme has real potential to grow significantly and develop into a network of influencers that share community, council and partner related information and intelligence – reaching those that more traditional methods currently fail to do.
- 9.6 The Council and partners also recognise the essential role played by neighbour to neighbour interaction highlighted in the mutual aid work which began in March 2020, celebrating hyperlocal street networks and acts of kindness via a crowdsourcing of stories and ideas on Good Neighbours. In addition, a ‘pulse’ survey of local residents was undertaken to discover what the impact of Covid and the lockdown has been, to help shape the borough’s recovery priorities.

## **10. Housing & Homelessness**

- 10.1 The successful programme to get rough sleepers into accommodation has continued and developed, with successful funding bids to MHCLG providing a strong position for the Council and partners to continue to provide ongoing support and accommodation. The Council, with help from partners, housed 138 rough sleepers in temporary accommodation with the vast majority being moved into more permanent tenancies, with ongoing support in place. The Council also launched the ‘Rapid Assessment Hub’ project, which includes:
- Providing single COVID-safe rooms available via Southend’s homeless charity, HARP;
  - Carrying out rapid assessments for accommodation pathways for rough sleepers;
  - Finding private tenancies for former rough sleepers to move onto, and
  - Providing former rough sleepers with lessons in life-enhancing skills, such as cooking.
- 10.2 Multi-disciplinary teams of support have been introduced, including mental health outreach workers, in addition to multi-agency outreach worker teams, continuous GP support, a volunteer befriending service and a vaccination programme, covering over 200 former rough sleepers so far. The Council has also used the Next Steps Accommodation Programme and Housing Revenue Account funding to buy additional homes to support the Housing First scheme.
- 10.3 Work has continued in anticipation of the ending of the evictions ban at end of May, by working with social and private landlords to mitigate the impact on tenants and housing supply.

## **11. Education and Early Years**

- 11.1 Working in partnership, the Directors of Education and Early Years and of Public Health, continued to offer support to all setting, school and college



leaders over the past 6-9 months. Significant disruption due to transmission rates towards the end of last year saw services and school provision stretched to meet the needs of those pupils attending and the school's remote provision for those at home. The work of the Education Cell, involving all phases of setting leaders worked throughout to support the production of localised guidance. In addition very regular webinars continued between head teachers and the two directors in order to offer support, guidance and challenge.

- 11.2 Through these meetings, the Council took various positions in relation to the return to schooling at the start of the Spring Term 2021 and the policy on the introduction of secondary school testing. These were sometimes at odds with the position recommended by the Department for Education, but our stance was always guided by what would be in the best interests of our residents. It is fair to say that the relationship between the Council and all settings and schools throughout the pandemic has strengthened.
- 11.3 In addition, the Council has also ensured that direct delivery of services and resources to schools has continued in some form, including the distribution of digital devices to support home learning, and more recently running successful holiday activities for pupils in partnership with schools and providers. Throughout, the Council has also worked very closely with all school leaders to support them in ensuring as far as possible the safety and wellbeing of those pupils not attending school, in particular those classified as vulnerable.
- 11.4 More recently, conversations with school leaders and governors have started of what the 'recovery' curriculum may look like to ensure that any gaps in lost learning as a result of the pandemic are made up over time.
- 11.5 Southend Adult Community College (SACC) was one of the first adult education providers in the country to return to face to face learning and is now delivering 80% of its provision safely across three sites. Remote learning remains in place for 20% of adult learners who are predominantly studying at higher levels. Vulnerable adults and older learners report that being back in college is rebuilding their confidence, improving their mental health and reducing their sense of loneliness. Apprenticeship numbers are slowly growing and demand for skills for employability are increasing with new provision planned to meet local demand. Retention rates are high at 97% and learners say they now feel safe and understand how to keep themselves safe in college, at work and in the community. Welfare checks on adults and young people not attending classes continue to ensure the reasons for non-attendance are monitored. Provision for young people has continued throughout the pandemic with 70% of construction learners securing an apprenticeship, progression course or employment to date.
- 11.6 SACC worked alongside the Council to establish an on-site testing centre for its young people and vulnerable groups who were not attending community testing sites. The college prepared people for home testing and used this time to show adults and young people how to test properly. This would not have been possible without the support of the Council as adult education settings were excluded from the government roll out to schools and colleges. The testing site contributed to the creation of a safe environment for people to work and learn.

- 11.7 The college also fulfilled its role in the community through the preparation and delivery of 4,500 meals for the homeless to provide capacity for the voluntary sector. SACC continues to prepare hot meals for the homeless and those in need within its community.
- 11.8 SACC followed a phased reduction in face to face teaching following the same guidelines as schools, finally closing before Easter. Teaching has continued online with high levels of engagement from 14-16 and 16-19 cohorts, in particular, and community learning. Community learning provision, for example, has 60 courses running with participation rates on average of 86% and rates for Maths, English and ESOL running at around 60%. Welfare checks were undertaken with learners and plans made for a phased return from 15 June, in line with Government guidance, with all learners being risk assessed and only vulnerable young people encouraged to attend in the first instance.

## **12. Leisure & Culture**

- 12.1 Leisure and tourism venues, including museums and galleries, closed from 5 November as part of the second national lockdown, opening briefly in December. They were closed again as Southend entered the highest tier for restrictions and the third national lockdown. Libraries re-opened from 12 April, as did Garons and the Pier, with the other leisure centres, museums and galleries opening on 17 May. The temporary closures saw services adapt, where possible, to on-line provision and also enabled the Beecroft gallery to undergo improvement works, including putting in place a better reception experience for visitors. The Cliffs Pavillion, having been successfully used as a vaccination centre, will re-open in August, with the Palace Theatre due to re-open in September.
- 12.2 Dialogue with Fusion Lifestyle has continued throughout the pandemic to ensure leisure facilities were viable and able to open as soon as possible. The company received £1.2m from the Council and had management fees waived (to be recouped through the Government's income compensation scheme) and were also supported by a successful bid for £400,000 from Sport England's National Leisure Recovery Fund. Discussions have continued on future operating models, accounting, for example, for the greater use of outdoor classes.
- 12.3 The seafront has often been busy with residents, and visitors on warmer days, and seasonal staff were recruited a month earlier than usual this year, helping to cover hot spots. The volunteer beach welfare officer cohort has been expanded for 2021 to cover an increased area and is also extended beyond weekends.

## **13. Communications**

- 13.1 The Council's communications continued to focus on being a trusted source of information, ensuring local people are clear on the frequently changing national restrictions and their impact locally. This particularly related to the consequences of the various lockdowns and placement of the borough in specific tiers. Key areas of communication and campaigns have included:

- Urging the public, businesses and other local organisations to comply with government guidelines, such as maintaining social distancing, wearing masks, sticking to the rule of six and hand washing, to stop the spread of the virus and protect the NHS, particularly as case numbers were rising.
- ‘Stay safe, stay apart, stay local’ campaign to urge residents to adhere to national guidelines.
- Stay at home and ‘Don’t Visit Southend’ campaigns to urge visitors to stay away during lockdown, reminding them, for example, that all seafront parking and visitor attractions were closed.
- Publicising the test and trace programme, in its various forms as it evolved during the crises.
- ‘Get Tested’ campaign to promote the variety of testing offer in the borough, including PCR and LFD testing sites, community collect, and also encourage uptake of testing.
- Publicising the vaccination programme in terms of availability, location, eligibility and with targeted messages at groups with low take up.
- ‘Thank you’ messages, including marking the national day of reflection, for council, NHS staff and other key workers and to communities and groups for their response to the pandemic. This included those who went out of their way to be good neighbours - ‘shining a light’ on Southend’s neighbourly spirit.
- ‘Shop Local, Shop Southend on Sea’ campaign to help local businesses.
- Facilitating and encouraging a number of print and broadcast interviews to promote and explain key public health measures.
- Publicising the availability and process for obtaining the various grants and loans made available to businesses.
- ‘Visit Southend Safely’ - welcoming back visitors and keeping people safe as national restrictions eased.
- Notifying residents of council service availability, including closures and re-openings, as restrictions changed.

#### **14. Staffing, future ways of working and Southend 2050**

- 14.1 The vast majority of council staff have continued to work remotely, with staff only using council buildings where absolutely necessary or where personal circumstances mean there is no alternative. Covid has transformed the way the Council works and accelerated the way digital is part of the fabric of the organisation, benefiting from a re-designed ICT operating model. This has enabled the rapid deployment of new laptops and softphones, better use of collaboration channels and enhanced network security.
- 14.2 There is a widespread recognition that the Council will not be going back to the way it operated before Covid, and, therefore, conversations are continuing with staff on their experiences of remote working and how this can be best blended with using council and other workplaces and reviewing the Council’s overall building requirements going forward. While remote working does not suit everyone, there are also notable air quality, carbon reduction and reduced congestion benefits to the town in reducing staff travel and these benefits are shared with staff in reduced commuting times and costs and the ability to

benefit from improved work-life balance.

- 14.3 Clearly the impact of Covid on the borough, its people and the Council has been huge. In this light a review of the Southend 2050 ambition and desired outcomes is required, along with a fundamental shift in the Council's approach to its change programme. This includes: learning lessons from Covid; integrating the pandemic work streams and the transformation programme (Future Ways of Working) into 2050; working with partners to re-frame desired outcomes, work streams and leads and putting more structure and resource behind the drive for change.

## **15. Governance and 2021 Election**

- 15.1 New governance arrangements put in place to ensure councillors could continue to make key decisions and ensure access by the public by holding on-line or hybrid meetings continued up until the permission to do so expired on 6 May 2021. Despite representations from the Local Government Association and others, formal Council meetings have since been held in person. The pandemic highlighted the need for agile, timely and effective decision making (a theme of the recent LGA 'Health Check' of the Council). A new administration and the easing of lockdown restrictions provides an opportunity to review and revise many aspects of this, including the Council's constitution, supporting councillors to undertake their role and strengthening councillor-officer relations.
- 15.2 The **May 2021 borough and Police & Crime Commissioner elections** posed huge logistical challenges to ensure the democratic process could continue, while the safety of all concerned remained paramount. This included: risk assessments and careful planning for all premises being used; revised layouts to polling stations and count centre to enable social distancing; additional equipment (pencils, masks, screens, sanitisers etc..) being purchased; restrictions on numbers allowed at the count and special arrangements for briefings to candidates and election staff. These measures, among many others, enabled the elections to proceed successfully, including having a turnout that was in line with previous elections.

## **16. Financial Assessment and Overview**

- 16.1 The current financial landscape and operating environment for the Council remains extremely challenging and uncertain. While the Council remains financially resilient from both the impact of Covid and the range of local demand and spending pressures, the Council is currently predicting a cumulative budget gap of £20.7m to the end of 2025/26. The Council's 10 year Financial Sustainability Strategy, agreed in 2020, will, therefore, be reviewed again in the autumn. At the time of writing Government has not yet announced their intentions regarding the next Comprehensive Spending Review or the planned implementation date of previously announced local government finance reform. The future funding challenge is, therefore, clearly very difficult to assess.
- 16.2 The scale and impact of the pandemic has also resulted in an unprecedented national policy and funding response from Central Government. The range, volume and value of different targeted financial support packages have been

issued on a scale never seen before. New announcements have been made on a regular basis containing a varied range of funding/grant support to be either passported on to local eligible businesses and residents or to be used directly by the Council to support our local response to the pandemic.

- 16.3 The total level of Covid-19 related grants allocated to Southend-on-Sea for 2020/21 is outlined at **Appendix 3** and totals nearly **£136 million**. The terms and conditions attached to some of these grant support mechanisms were sometimes issued late or retrospectively, which is perhaps understandable given the scale and urgency to provide funding. A number of funding streams have either been extended into 2021/22 or new funding allocations have been issued for this financial year as the country continues to put in place measures to control further outbreaks of the virus and to try to support local economic recovery.
- 16.4 The Government has also introduced other financial support arrangements such as the Income Guarantee Scheme to help with the impact on the local collection of council tax and business rates. A compensation scheme for sales, fees and charges to try to help to partly offset significant reductions in other local income streams. Finally, additional financial support has been issued to help local authorities cope with a range of additional administration and new burdens associated with assessing and issuing passported funding to eligible businesses and residents where appropriate. To put this into context around 12,000 eligible applications from local businesses have been processed. The scale of this overall level of additional financial support to the Council and associated claims to Central Government are still being finalised as part of the year-end closure of the 2020/21 accounts.
- 16.5 A Budget Transformation Programme for 2022/23 – 2025/26, was agreed as part of the Council's overall budget package, with areas identified to be scoped and developed further during 2021/22. This will support the Council's future financial sustainability, help target resources and avoid a financial 'cliff edge' that would need drastic action over a short time frame.
- 16.6 Other measures to support the Councils drive towards financial sustainability and shape our priority focus include: on-going budget reviews; implementation of outcome-based budgeting; better linking of business planning and budgeting to service outcomes; effective and creative management of service demand; review of major contracts; further implementation of the Commissioning Framework; exploring new commercial opportunities; a range of income generation initiatives and a future business transformation programme.
- 16.7 Outcomes Based Planning and budgeting, started in 2019/20, looks to repurpose and align our resources towards agreed priorities and outcomes. In line with that is a 'Getting to Know Your Business' programme for service managers, introduced in 2020/21, with the first phase helping to establish a baseline for all services on costs, income generation, value for money and relative performance.
- 16.8 This combined assessment, together with a comprehensive 'strategic-fit' review against our Ambition, economic recovery aspirations and delivering better outcomes and value for money, therefore, influenced the development of the

investments, savings, income generation proposals and level of council tax agreed for 2021/22.

## **17. Other Options**

- 17.1 The Council could choose not to outline its response to Covid-19. However, that would mean failing to recognise the huge impact the crisis has had on the borough, its people and the Council along with the Council's approach to recovery.

## **18. Reasons for Recommendations**

To ensure the Council has an opportunity to review action taken to date to tackle the Covid crisis and to consider the appropriate approach to be taken to enable the borough and council to recover.

## **19. Corporate Implications**

- 19.1 Contribution to the Southend 2050 ambition, outcomes and road map**  
The report outlines the range of measures taken by the Council to address the Covid 19 crisis. A separate report for a future Cabinet meeting will outline the Council's approach, and outcome, to reviewing the 2050 ambition and outcomes in the light of the huge impact the crisis has had on the borough, its people, the Council and other stakeholders.

**19.2 Finance and value for money implications**

The significant financial implications are addressed in paragraph 16.

**19.3 Legal Implications – none specific**

**19.4 Equalities and Diversity Implications**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken to assess the impact Covid-19 has had on equality groups throughout the pandemic. A summary of this is attached at **Appendix 1** and will continue to be updated as more information, becomes available.

**19.5 Other corporate implications:**

**19.6 People Implications**

A number of the aspects of the impact of the pandemic on council staff are outlined in paragraph , including the need to adapt to new ways of working, dealing with the need for new forms of communication, contact and networking and maintaining good staff morale. Future working arrangements are likely to look very different for many staff and the implications for this and how that is managed will be a key element of the recovery work undertaken.

**19.7 Property Implications**

The Council will need to review the current use of buildings and facilities in the light of the re-mobilisation programme, in the context of recovery, and the on-

going need to meet the health requirements of staff and visitors.

### **19.8 Empowerment, co-design/production and consultation**

The report highlights that the response to the pandemic has been one of community, partners, staff, councillors and other stakeholders continuously working closely to ensure the best possible outcomes in very difficult circumstances. The approach to recovery will look to continue this approach, develop new tools for engaging communities and partners to adapt to circumstances and continue to use co-design and co-production approaches in particular service areas.

### **19.9 Green City/Environment/Climate Change**

Indications are that the environmental benefits that were derived from the first period of lockdown, with falls in emissions of carbon dioxide and nitrogen dioxide, have largely been reversed, with, for example, levels of traffic returning to 'normal' levels. However, the Council's Green City Action Plan was agreed by Cabinet in January 2021, outlining the initial steps that the Council will undertake to become a Green City and fulfil its obligations after declaring a Climate Emergency in Autumn 2019.

### **19.9 Risk Assessment**

The Council has reviewed the Corporate Risk Register in the light of the impact and implications of the pandemic.

### **20. Background Papers**

- The Council's response to Covid-19 – report to Cabinet, 9 June 2020
- Southend 2050 milestones & measures – refresh in response to Covid-19 – report to Cabinet, 15 September 2020.
- Full Covid-19 Equality Impact Assessment

### **21. Appendices**

**Appendix 1 - Summary Equality Impact Assessment, Covid-19**

**Appendix 2 - Tier and Lockdown measures affecting Southend on Sea**

**Appendix 3 – Government Grant Support for Covid-19, 2020/21**

## Appendix 1

### COVID-19: Southend Equality Impact Assessment – Summary

---

The Equality Act 2010, requires public authorities to have ‘due regard’ to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and to advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups. There is also a requirement that public authorities foster good relations between people from different groups with protected characteristics. This includes, for example, ensuring such groups have the ability to access information and eligible services on an equal basis and to have reasonable adjustments made to enable that to happen. The duty to ‘advance equality’ requires the Council to be pro-active in reducing inequalities.

The impact of, and response to, coronavirus affects people differently, with evidence showing the impact will be disproportionately higher on those who are already disadvantaged in other ways.

This EIA assesses the impact of COVID-19 upon protected groups in Southend, by reviewing national and local evidence, where available. Much of the evidence is formed of rapid data reviews – with new research being regularly published, so that the EIA has been reviewed and revised to reflect this. Potential equality risks and impacts are, therefore, assessed for the nine protected characteristics (Disability; Age; Gender reassignment; Marriage and civil partnership; Pregnancy and maternity; Race; Religion or belief; Sex; Sexual orientation) and additional areas such as socio-economic and carers. In addition, the cumulative impact on those in multiple groups is explored, where possible.

#### **Key findings**

**Race** – The Public Health England ‘[Beyond the Data](#)’ report (June 2020) looked at impacts on BAME groups during the first wave, pointing to a range of longstanding inequalities and socioeconomic factors which may be leading to poorer outcomes from COVID-19 among these populations. A Government review into the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on BAME groups (August [2020](#)) was published, which, along with, the [ONS](#) (October 2020) release, and [Public Health Matters, \(February 2021\)](#) reports, also concluded that a large proportion of the difference in the risk of COVID-19 mortality between ethnic groups can be explained by demographic, geographical and socioeconomic factors, such as where you live or occupation. Ethnicity continues to be a major factor in the health outcomes of communities during the 2021 pandemic waves with deprivation also a key factor.

Non-white individuals form 8.1% of Southend’s population (2011 Census):

- Black African groups (2.1% of Southend residents).
- Pakistani groups (0.61% of Southend residents).
- Bangladeshi groups (0.54% of Southend residents).
- Black Caribbean groups (2.1% of Southend residents)
- Indian groups (1.04% of Southend residents).

Vaccine hesitancy among ethnic minorities has been a focus of the vaccine programme, with take-up of a Covid-19 vaccine lower among all ethnic minority groups compared with the White British population ([ONS](#)). [Figures](#) on vaccination



rates for first doses in the over 50s in England show that the lowest uptake was among people identifying as Black Caribbean and Black African followed by people from Pakistani backgrounds. Data showed that vaccination rates differs by religious affiliation with the lowest rates among those identifying as Muslim and Buddhist. Factors found to play a part in vaccine uptake, including language and deprivation.

**Age** – The majority of deaths involving COVID-19 have been among people aged 65 years and over. Nationally, in the week ending 7 May 2021, 53% of deaths involving COVID-19 were in people aged 75 years and over. For the South East NHS region, Cumulative total number of patients admitted to hospital with COVID-19 from the start of the pandemic up to 16 May 2021 is 53,021, of these:

- Around 34% of all COVID-19 patients admitted to hospital are aged 18-64.
- Around 40% of all COVID-19 patients admitted to hospital are aged 65-84.
- Around 23% of all COVID-19 patients admitted to hospital are aged 85+.

Southend's care homes have seen 93 deaths involving COVID-19 occurring in care homes this year ([ONS, 1 Jan to 14 May 2021](#)). Compared to 148 local authority areas with social care responsibility, Southend is 31<sup>st</sup> highest in England.

Residents aged 70+ make up 15% (26,867 people) of Southend's 184,882 residents (ONS Population projections, 2020). For all age groups, including children, there are equal risks of contracting COVID-19 (ONS, 14 May). Vaccine rollout is by age group, with priority access for some of those working on the frontline or with conditions making them more vulnerable to COVID-19. For children, while complication risks are lower, multiple factors exist which will result in long-term impact:

- Exposure to stress is most difficult for youngest children to manage and leads to an increased stress response, with long term negative impacts in multiple areas.
- Risk of physical development delay due to overcrowding and reduced access to outdoor play. In Southend, 33.2% of households are in flats/maisonettes/apartments, or temporary accommodation.
- During lockdown, there was no in-school provision for those with draft EHCP plans or needs assessments. Guidance has since been updated with [recommended approaches](#) that local authorities, educational settings and parents should follow.

A survey in April 2021 showed those between 16 to 29 years [reported](#) the highest rates of vaccine hesitancy, among age groups.

**Disability** – This group is most likely to have underlying health conditions, raising risk. 45.1% of disabled adults felt worried about COVID-19 vs a third of non-disabled adults, and two thirds (64.8%) felt these concerns affected wellbeing (ONS, 2020). There are messaging concerns for effective communication. PHE is analysing COVID-19 deaths of people with learning disabilities and autism as this impact is currently unpublished. 820 working-age individuals in Southend receive Disability DWP payments, and 7490 receive ESA and incapacity benefits – however the true number of those with disabilities is higher as non-working age individuals are un-counted (DWP, 2016). Vaccine rollout is by age group, with priority access for some of those with disabilities, although ONS has reported some disparity in vaccination rates among disabled people who reported being 'limited a lot' in their day-to-day activities compared with those who were not-disabled. Since April 2020 women have reported

worse mental health and wellbeing than men, however this was also true before the pandemic ([Gov.UK – Gender Spotlight, Apr 21](#)).

**Sex** – There are higher mortality rates for men than women as a result of Covid, although in Southend that difference is marginal (51% against 49%). Southend has 55,500 men of working age (16-64), and 50,100 who are economically active (IMD, 2019). Women form the majority of the frontline health, social care and educational workforce and are more likely to be informal carers for children and elderly, so these groups may face increased risk to contracting COVID-19. Concerns of an increase in the incidents of domestic abuse during lockdown remain, with women being in the highest risk category. Since April 2020 women have reported worse mental health and wellbeing than men, however this was also true before the pandemic ([Gov.UK – Gender Spotlight, Apr 21](#)).

**Sexual orientation** - Due to a number of health inequalities that LGBT people experience, some sections of LGBT communities may be at higher risk from being severely affected by the virus.

- LGBT people aged 50+ are more likely to be living with long-term health conditions (International Longevity Centre UK, 2019), increasing risk of serious illness.
- 51% of those diagnosed with HIV are gay and bisexual men (THT, 2018). Severe COVID-19 could be greater for those not receiving HIV treatment (Avert, 2020).
- 24% of homeless people aged 16-24 are LGBT, affecting ability to self-isolate and access care.
- 52% of LGBT people experienced depression in 2017-18 (Stonewall, 2019). COVID-19 related factors can cause detrimental effects for those living with long-term mental health conditions which disproportionately affect LGBT people.
- Older LGBT people are more likely to be socially isolated, and LGBT people of all ages are more likely to have 'chosen families'. Lockdown may lead to separation from those closest, or exposure to LGBTphobic families.
- LGBT Foundation's helpline saw 70% more calls about transphobia and 36% more calls about homophobia this 16th March to 5th April than last year.

**Socio-Economic** – People living in deprived areas have higher diagnosis rates – Greater than the inequality in mortality rates in previous years, indicating greater inequality in death rates from COVID-19 (PHE, June 2020). 6.15% of Southend's 4963 households are 'Families with limited resources who budget to make ends meet', a group likely to face financial hardship during the pandemic. Characteristics include; age 31-35, household income less than £15k, with children, and routinely facing limited resources and tighter budgets. [A map visualises coronavirus cases](#) in Southend since the start of the pandemic (to February 2021) - With Victoria ward worst affected, followed by – Milton, Chalkwell, Westborough and Prittlewell. Of Southend's 17 wards, the three most deprived are: Kursaal (6.71% of Southend), Victoria (6.78% of Southend), Milton (6.43% of Southend) (IMD LSOAs, 2020), 19.92% of Southend residents live within these three most deprived wards.

## Equality Impact Assessment on groups with protected characteristics

	Impact				
	Yes			No	Unclear
	Positive	Negative	Neutral		
<b>Race</b>		X			
<b>Age</b>		X			
<b>Disability</b>		X			
<b>Gender reassignment</b>		X			
<b>Marriage and civil partnership</b>				X	
<b>Pregnancy and maternity</b>		X			
<b>Religion or belief</b>		X			
<b>Sex</b>		X			
<b>Sexual orientation</b>		X			
<b>Carers</b>		X			
<b>Socio-economic</b>		X			

Descriptions of the protected characteristics are available in the guidance or from: [EHRC - protected characteristics](#)

Overarching mitigating responses across all groups have tailored to different audiences and centre around four key pillars:

**1. Prevention - to prevent spread and encourage the public to use track and trace and take up vaccinations.** PHE assets used as much as possible and localise if required. Widespread “push” messages disseminated out across all owned channels, both from SBC and partners.

**2. Management of Outbreaks.** A local contact tracing service delivered by the Essex and Southend Contract Tracing Service. There is a generic communications approach tailored to relevant audiences. Template guidance for communication issued by PHE is followed and adapted where appropriate.

**3. Local action in response to outbreaks/R number/additional insight –** Implementing local action to further prevent the spread of infection, communicating the process around local action decisions, and impacts.

**4. Support – Our strategy for people who need to isolate.** Activity focuses on providing those who need to isolate with effective support and guidance of how best to support themselves during a period of isolation (including financial support/guidance around sick pay). Contact tracers are able to pass on the details of the Essex Welfare Service (EWS) to individuals who are asked to self-isolate.

## **Tier changes and lockdowns affecting Southend-On-Sea**

**Monday 23 March 2020** - First national lockdown, with restrictions lasting into July.

**Monday 12 October 2020** - [Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus](#)

- Three tier system of local Covid Alert Levels - medium, high & very high introduced.

**Tuesday 13 October 2020** - Southend-on-Sea enter the Tier System at Tier one (Medium).

- Essex CC request to move to tier two (high alert).

**Thursday 5 November 2020** - [Tier system paused, as the Government's four-week national lockdown begins.](#) (in place until 2 December).

**Wednesday 2 December 2020** - [Southend-on-Sea enters Tier Two \(High\) local Covid restrictions.](#) The same tier as Essex and Thurrock and the whole of East of England.

**Wednesday 16 December 2020** -

- [Southend-on-Sea enters Tier Three \(Very High\) local Covid restrictions.](#)
- [Southend joins nine other districts in Tier Three, from the Essex County Council area, Thurrock, the whole of London and four areas of Hertfordshire.](#)

**Sunday 20 December 2020** - [Southend-on-Sea enters Tier Four restrictions.](#)

**Wednesday 30 December 2020** – [Southend-On-Sea to remain in Tier Four.](#)

**Monday 4 January 2021** - [A third national lockdown](#) was confirmed.

**March 8 2021** - Roadmap for England – Part One

- Schools, colleges and some university students return
- Distanced outdoor 1:1 socialisation

**March 29 2021** - [Roadmap for England](#) – Part One

- Up to 6 people may meet outdoors
- Outdoor sports possible
- Parent and child groups possible, maximum of 15
- Stay at home order lifted, remain local
- Work from home where possible
- Holiday travel aboard remains illegal

**April 12 2021** - [Roadmap for England](#) – Part Two

- Non-essential shops, libraries, zoos, theme parks, gyms, self-catering accommodation and salons reopen.
- Outdoor hospitality possible, maximum of 6
- Funerals up to 30, Weddings up to 15 attendees.

**May 17 2021** – [Proposed Roadmap for England](#) – Part Three

- Indoor dining possible
- Remaining outdoor entertainment possible
- Cinemas, soft play, museums, hotels, exercise classes return
- Weddings and funerals, up to 30
- Capacity limits for large public events
- Results to be announced on international travel review

**June 21 2021** – [Proposed Roadmap for England](#) – Part Four

- No legal limits on social contact
- Nightclubs reopen
- Large events possible
- No limits on weddings, funerals or other life events.

DRAFT

## Appendix 3

### Central Government Grant Support for Covid-19 in 2020/21 Central Government Passported Funding/Allocations

Government Department	Grant Funding Stream	Amount £
BEIS	Business Rates Grants*	45,512,250
BEIS	Top-Up Grants to Businesses* (5% of £38,835,000)	1,941,750
BEIS	Local Authority Additional Restrictions Discretionary Grant Fund	5,289,209
BEIS	Local Restrictions Support Grant Open	408,838
BEIS	Local Restrictions Support Grant Closed	8,117,025
BEIS	Local Restrictions Support Grant Sector	11,034,000
MHCLG	Expanded rate relief discounts for retail and nursery providers	27,134,932
BEIS	Christmas Support Package	44,800
MHCLG	Council Tax Hardship Fund	1,661,945
MHCLG	Business Improvement District Support Grant	18,450
DHSC	Adult Social Care Infection Control Fund	2,734,683
DHSC	Adult Social Care Infection Control Fund (Round 2)	2,321,361
	<b>Total</b>	<b>106,219,243</b>

\* 5% of intended spend of Business Rates allocation used to fund Top-Up Grants to Businesses

#### Central Government Additional Direct Grants

MHCLG	Local Authority Support Grant (Tranche 1)	5,393,935
MHCLG	Local Authority Support Grant (Tranche 2)	5,062,493
MHCLG	Local Authority Support Grant (Tranche 3)	1,571,465
MHCLG	Local Authority Support Grant (Tranche 4)	2,443,745
DHSC	Contain Outbreak Management Fund	4,421,161
DHSC	Test and Trace Service Support Grant	887,492
MHCLG	Local Authority Compliance and Enforcement Grant	95,357
DHSC	Support Clinically Extremely Vulnerable	267,164
DHSC	Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme	183,458
MHCLG	Next Steps Accommodation Programme (Short and long term)	2,304,546
MHCLG/ERDF	Reopening the High Street Safely	163,096
MHCLG/ERDF	Welcome Back fund	163,096
DFT	Emergency Active Travel Fund	1,236,000
DWP	Kick Start Scheme	881,000
DFT	Travel Demand Management	150,000
DFE	Additional Home to School Transport	515,300
DWP	COVID Winter Grant Scheme	573,690
DEFRA	Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies	212,603
DHSC	Community Testing Programme	270,190
DHSC	Adult Social Care Rapid Testing Fund	634,790
MHCLG	Workforce Capacity Fund	412,000
DCMS	National Leisure Recovery Fund	406,090
DHSC	Practical Support for those Self Isolating	41,036
DHSC	Infection Prevention and Control	826,509
DHSC	Rapid Testing Allocation	551,579
	<b>Total</b>	<b>29,667,795</b>
	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>135,887,038</b>

# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Executive Director, Children & Public Health  
to  
Cabinet

on  
15<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Report prepared by: Chris Sandercombe, Head of Service,  
A&I, CWD, Placements & Resources

Agenda  
Item No.

7

---

## Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Updated Policy

People Scrutiny Committee  
Cabinet Member: Councillor Burton  
Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

---

### 1. Purpose of Report

This report sets out changes and updates to the Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Policy including changes to the financial support provided by the Council when a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) is made by the Family Court. The updated policy also sets out how the Council will respond to requests for financial support throughout the term of an SGO.

### 2. Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to:

- 2.1 Endorse the revised SGO policy attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Note the need to revise the Policy following the recommendation from the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 2.3 Cabinet note the financial implications of the new policy for previous years and also for new cases going forwards

### 3. Background

- 3.1 A SGO, is an order made by the Family Court that is one of the options for permanency for children and means that children will not remain looked after by the Council (LAC).
- 3.2 A SGO can be recommended by the Council when a family member is assessed to be an appropriate carer, or when a family member makes it known to the Court that they wish to be a special guardian. It is intended to be irrevocable like adoption although the effect does not continue into adulthood. Nevertheless, the making of such an order attracts an enhanced

level of scrutiny by the court which is why a robust policy is necessary to underpin the support services plan.

- 3.3 It is usually an option considered as part of care proceedings rather than a free-standing private law application. Any potential special guardian is assessed by the Council which reports their assessment to the court.
- 3.4 Regulations and the Government statutory guidance provide that the Council should as part of any SGO support services plan consider and provide when necessary financial support. So as part of the assessment to the Court the Council is required to include a SGO support services plan including details of the financial support to be provided to support the SGO.
- 3.5 The changes within the revised SGO Policy relate to how financial support is calculated on a transitional basis. If financial support is included within the SGO support services plan then this Council is required to respond to a request from a special guardian at any time during the term of the SGO even if they move to another area.
- 3.6 The other change is the way in which the Council responds to requests for financial support. The updated Policy now requires the Council to include a financial means test when a special guardian requests financial support at any time during the SGO term.

#### **4. Other Options.**

4.1 The change in Policy coincides with how the LGO has interpreted the Government Statutory Guidance.

#### **5. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 5.1 The recommendations enable the Council to comply with a recommendation made by the Local Government Ombudsman's (LGO) following a finding from the LGO that the Council's Special Guardianship allowance practice was not fully in line with legislation, statutory practice, and case law. The updated SGO policy, attached as appendix 1, has been accepted by the LGO.
- 5.2 The recommendations will ensure that special guardians receive the correct financial payment and following a review of all special guardians who did not receive the correct payments, for the 2-year transitional period, under the previous SGO policy, backdated payments are currently being arranged.

#### **6. Corporate Implications**

N/A

##### **6.1 Contribution to the Southend 2050 Road Map**

N/A



**6.2 Financial Implications**

6.2.1. A review of all cases where the two-year transitional arrangements were in place, dating from 2013 until the date of the LGO findings has been completed. The reviewed calculations, as directed by the LGO have been applied to all new cases, calculated and restitution will be made to the 46 children where the two-year transitional payments were applied.

6.2.2 The amount calculated as a liability is approximately £200,000. Given, this £200,000 is a back dated liability, the cost has already been accounted for within the 2020/21 Children Social Care overall financial position and therefore total balances of the Councils General Fund. This then also means as the payments will be made post 1st April 2021, it will have no impact on the 2021/22 Children Social Care financial position as they have already been previously accounted for in 2020/21.

6.2.3 Moving forward, as part of the budget setting process for 2021/22, Council in February 2021 agreed a new investment of £50,000 per year for SGO kinship allowances. The Funding and allowance rates due are based on eligibility and will be administered in accordance with this updated policy, but this new approved investment will enable up to 25 child cases to be supported each year from the new annual budget of £50,000.

**6.3 Legal Implications**

The LGO has already indicated his agreement with the proposed revisions to the SGO policy to bring this into line with regulations statutory guidance and case law. If the changes to this policy are not implemented this will leave the Council with the continuing prospect of future challenges.

**6.4 People Implications**

N/A

**6.5 Property Implications**

N/A

**6.6 Consultation**

N/A

**6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications**

N/A

**6.8 Risk Assessment**

Noncompliance would leave the LA open to Judicial Challenge or further referrals to the Ombudsman.

**6.9 Value for Money**

N/A

**6.10 Community Safety Implications**

N/A

**6.11 Environmental Impact**

N/A

**7. Background Papers**

N/A

**8. Appendices**

Appendix 1: Revised SGO Policy

---

Appendix 1

# Special Guardianship Policy

March 2021 – Chris Sandercombe

---

CIVIC CENTRE, VICTORIA AVENUE, SS26AU –  
Department of Children and Public Health

## Contents

1. Introduction
2. Principles
3. Assessment of prospective Special Guardians
4. Parental responsibility
5. The circumstances in which a Special Guardianship Order may be made
6. Local Authority responsibility to carry out assessment of need for support services.
7. Assessment of need for support services
8. Financial Support
9. Financial Support for former Foster Carers
10. Adoption Support Fund (ASF) and Pupil Premium
11. Assistance with legal costs
12. Cessation of financial support
13. Review of Support Plans (including financial support)
14. Urgent Cases
15. Relevant Legislation and Guidance

## 1. Introduction.

Southend Borough Council will ensure that all children that are looked after have a plan drawn up for their permanence. Special Guardianship is one of several options for permanency that can be considered. The guiding principle that Southend apply is what is the best option needed for each of these children. Southend embraces the value of special guardianship in providing permanence for children and young people on the edge of care, and those receiving safeguarding interventions, who would otherwise enter care. It is important that children who are not (or were not) looked after are not unfairly disadvantaged.

Special Guardianship is a legal order made by the court that secures or allows a child or young person to live with someone permanently. This order gives parental responsibility to the Special Guardian and can exclude the parents' exercise of their parental responsibility.

A court may make a Special Guardianship Order in respect of the child on the application of:

- any guardian of the child
- a local authority foster carer with whom the child has lived for one year immediately preceding the application
- anyone who holds a [Child Arrangement Order](#) with respect to the child, or who has the consent of all those in whose favour the order is in force
- a relative with whom the child has lived for one year immediately preceding the application
- anyone with whom the child has lived with for at least three years

- where the child is in the care of the local authority, any person who has the consent of the local authority
- anyone who has the consent of all those with parental responsibility for the child
- any person, including the child, who has the leave of the court to apply.

## 2. Principles

This policy is based on the following principles.

- That looked after children are entitled to plans for their long-term care, which aims for permanence and offers stability and consistency into young adulthood and keeps placement moves to a minimum.
- Children and Young People should not remain in the public care system if there are viable alternatives.
- Statutory intervention should be kept at the lowest possible level.

Within the Policy we will set out our criteria and how we will assess prospective applicants for Special Guardianship. We will also include how we undertake the assessment of SGO support needs, and the support to Special Guardians and children subject to Special Guardianship Orders. This will detail how we calculate the provision of financial support for the purpose of the support plan to accompany the assessment.

Special Guardians will have Parental Responsibility for the child. A Special Guardianship Order made in relation to a Looked after Child will replace the Care Order and the Local Authority will no longer share Parental Responsibility.

A Care Order does not automatically revoke a Special Guardianship Order although the Special Guardian's exercise of parental responsibility will be restricted as the local authority will have primary responsibility for decision-making under the Care Order.

### **3. Assessment of prospective Special Guardians**

The SGO assessment will be completed in line with Regulation 21 of the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 (amended 2016) and the Schedule (Matters to be dealt with in report for the court). All applicants being considered or assessed for a SGO will be given advice by the SGO advisor for Southend Borough Council. They will be provided with information about the implications of a Special Guardianship Order, the assessment process and any support including financial that the applicants may be able to receive. The assessment should be a working partnership between Southend Borough Council and the SGO applicant. Information collected during the assessment should be in line with the legal requirements set out in the Schedule of the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005. The assessment will involve at least 6 visits from the assessing social worker to the applicant's household and will include individual and couple (if applicable) discussions.

There may also be interviews with significant others i.e., family or friends, particularly those that live or spend significant time within the applicant's household.

Throughout this process the applicant is entitled to seek legal advice if required.

As a requirement of the assessment, the local authority will carry out thorough safeguarding checks which include Disclosure and Barring Check (DBS), Probation, GP Medical reports, Local Authority records, Ofsted and 3 personal references. In addition, Southend Borough Council will take up references from current and previous employers and school references if the applicant has school-aged children. The local authority may take up additional safeguarding checks if deemed necessary.

#### 4. Parental Responsibility

The Special Guardian by virtue of the Court made SGO will have Parental Responsibility for the child. The Special Guardian will have a clear and expected responsibility for the day-to-day decisions concerning the care of the child.

*'The child's parents will continue to hold Parental Responsibility, but the Special Guardian is entitled to exercise parental responsibility to the exclusion of any other person with parental responsibility for the child (apart from another special guardian).'* The parents will continue to retain their right to consent or not to the child's adoption or placement for adoption.

In addition, there are events or actions in a child's life which require the consent of everyone who holds Parental Responsibility, for example.

- Any change of name of the child
- When a child leaves the United Kingdom and remains abroad for longer than three months.
- The sterilisation of a child

A Special Guardian can appoint a Guardian in their Will (Testamentary) in the event of their death.



## 5. The circumstances in which a Special Guardianship Order may be made

The Court may make a Special Guardianship Order in any family proceedings concerning the welfare of the child. This applies even where no application has been made and includes adoption proceedings.

Any person making an application for a Special Guardianship Order must give 3 months' written notice to their local authority of their intention to apply in relation to a Looked after Child, the notice will go to the local authority looking after the child. In all other cases, the notice will be sent to the local authority for the area where the applicant resides. The local authority then has a duty to provide a report to the Court.

The only exception to the requirement for 3 months' notice is where the Court has granted leave to make an application and waived the notice period.

Where the local authority has received notice from an applicant or a request for a report from the Court, it should send written information about the steps it proposes to take in preparing the report to the prospective Special Guardian and the parents of the child in question. This should include information about Special Guardianship support services and how to request an assessment of needs for support.

The provision of financial support will be considered:

## 6. Local Authority responsibility to carry out assessment of need for support services.

At the request of the following persons an assessment of need for support services must be carried out:

- a child who is looked after or was looked after immediately before the making of the SGO,
- a special guardian or proposed special guardian of such a child,
- a parent of such a child.

[\[Regulation 11\(1\) SGO Regulations 2005 as amended\]](#)

When the local authority receives a written request for or on behalf of a child, a special guardian or prospective special guardian or a parent (where the child was not looked after immediately before the making of the SGO), a child of a special guardian whether or not the special guardianship child is looked after or not, any person whom the local authority considers to have a significant and ongoing relationship with a child (whether the child is looked after or not), the local authority may carry out an assessment.

[\[Regulation 11\(2\) SGO Regulations 2005 \(as amended\)\]](#)

If the local authority decides that it is not going to carry out an assessment where it has discretion then it must give the person requesting the assessment notice, in writing, of the proposed decision including the reasons for the decision and must allow at least 28 days for them to make representations in relation to that decision. If representations are received, then the Permanence Panel must reconsider the LA's decision. The outcome and reasons for the decision must be sent to the person requesting the assessment.

[\[Regulation 11\(3\) Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 \(as amended\)\]](#)

Where a child was not previously looked after, it is the local authority where the special guardian lives that is responsible for undertaking an assessment of need and provision of any special guardianship support services in response to that assessment. If the special guardian and the family move, then the responsibility passes to the new local authority.

Where the child was previously looked after by Southend Borough Council, the authority is responsible for the assessment and provision of support services, if assessed as being required, for three years from the date of the SGO, regardless of where the special guardian lives during those three years. Southend Borough Council can arrange for special guardianship support services to be provided by another body on its behalf if considered appropriate. After the three-year period, if the special guardian no longer resides in Southend, the responsibility to assess and provide support services is the duty of the local authority where the special guardian resides.

Children who were looked after immediately before the making of a SGO may qualify for advice and assistance under the [Children Act 1989](#), as amended by the [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#) and the [Adoption and Children Act 2002](#). The child/young person would qualify if they:

- have reached the age of 16 but not the age of 21,
- are under 18 and there is a SGO in force,
- are 18 and above and had a SGO in force when they reached 18 years

and immediately before the making of the SGO they were a looked after child.

## 7. Assessment of need for support services

The [Special Guardianship Regulations](#) provide the framework in which support services (including financial support) can be provided to special guardians. Southend Borough Council can provide advice and support to Special Guardians:

- parenting support for special guardians
- advice on issues about special guardianship
- consultation and mediation with other agencies and/or local support groups
- financial support for the child, to consider their specific needs and the special guardian's financial position

Should the local authority consider providing support, it must complete a support plan setting out:

- what services are needed to meet the needs of the child(ren)
- what the timescale is for providing those services
- how these services will be reviewed
- a named person or service area that will review the services in accordance with the support plan

Special guardians should be given up to 28 days to make representations in respect of the SGO Support Plan [[Regulation 15 SGO Regulations 2005 \(as amended\)](#)].

The support plan should include details as to the person's need for support services, the basis upon which the financial assessment was determined, whether the local authority propose to offer support services, the services (if any) that are proposed to be provided to the special guardian, if financial support is to be paid, the proposed amount that would be payable and any conditions attached to the payments.

If the child has not been looked after by Southend Borough Council, then the special guardian is not as a matter of course entitled to any support services. This will include financial support; however, the authority can consider support services when assessed and determined to be appropriate and needed. The special guardian can represent their support needs with the assessing social worker, and any decision to provide support services will be confirmed by the Permanency Panel on each case.

## **8. Financial Support**

The general principle is that *'where a person is seeking to make a permanent and substantial commitment in caring for a child by means of a Special Guardianship Order, this commitment should include a willingness and ability to meet the costs associated with caring for a child in the long-term'*. The financial ability and means of any prospective special guardians to care for the child, as it is with prospective adopters, is an important part of the assessment of their suitability. When the Authority is made aware of any SGO application the financial support aspect should be discussed as early as is possible. This will set out to any prospective Guardian what they can and cannot expect and will avoid any confusion and will assist with an informed decision for the applicant Guardian. It should also consider:

- when it is necessary to enable a special guardian to care for a child

- when a child needs special care due to disability, emotional or behaviour difficulties or previous neglect or abuse
- to help towards the legal costs for applying for an SGO
- when it is necessary to contribute towards the cost of accommodating and maintaining a child

Southend Borough Council must also consider:

- any other grant, benefit, allowance, or resource which is available to the person in respect of their needs due to becoming a special guardian of the child
- any investment income, tax credit or benefit, which would be available should the child live with them
- the amount required by the special guardian or prospective special guardian in respect of the reasonable outgoings and commitments (eg, housing, transport, and daily living expenses) but not including outgoings in respect of the child, the financial needs that relate to the child (eg, diet or replacement bedding) or the resource of the child (eg, trust fund).

Where an assessment of need identifies a need for financial support a request is submitted to the Permanency Panel. Decisions concerning financial support will be made on a case-by-case basis. A financial means test will be undertaken, and the panel will set out the timeframe for any transitional financial support to be paid. There should be no assumption that financial support will continue after the transitional period. The special guardians can request an assessment of support needs, including financial support at any time through the duration of the SGO. Any further support or financial support will be based on the outcome of an assessment of need and an updated financial means tested assessment.

Southend Borough Council uses a standardised means test as devised by the Department for Education.

If, when completing a financial means assessment (including a review), it is identified that the special guardian has not declared additional income or savings the assessment will be revised, and the revised financial support plan will be used.

Failure to provide information that is required to undertake the financial assessment or review may result in the termination of financial support.

In exceptional circumstances the local authority can disregard the outcome of a means test when considering whether to provide financial support for legal costs including fees payable to the court.

The local authority has a responsibility to provide notice of the outcome of the assessment, if financial support is to be paid to the special guardian, the proposed amount that would be payable and any conditions attached to the payment. A SGO allowance is only paid once the case has been approved at the Court & Permanency Panel. A one-off contribution to the cost of specific settling-in equipment can also be considered by the Panel if a clear need is identified.

If, at the point when a SGO is granted, the special guardian was receiving either a connected persons/family and friends' allowance or a fostering allowance for the child, Southend Borough Council may match the rate of allowance not including birthday, holiday, and Christmas allowances (minus child benefit where the special guardian's income is not solely derived from state benefits), for two years from the date of the SGO. **See Appendix 1 for current rates**

Fostering allowance to be attached.

Consideration will be given to continuing to pay the fee (remuneration) element, for a limited period, up to 24 months, to support the transition from fostering to SGO, at the discretion of the Court & Permanency Panel.

During these two years if either the fostering allowance is matched and or the fostering fee is paid, no other financial means assessment will be completed. After two years, there is no assumption that financial support will continue. Special guardians can request an assessment of support needs including financial support, at any stage, but any further support will be based on the outcome of the assessment which must be considered by the Court & Permanency Panel. Any further financial support would be means tested.

## **9. Financial support for Foster carers**

If a child has been in a stable fostering placement and that carer progresses with an SGO application then Southend Borough Council will match the fostering allowance only (minus child benefit, Christmas, and birthday allowances) until the child reaches adulthood. For Independent Fostering Agency carers Southend Borough Council would not pay more than the Southend Borough Council maximum rate for a child of that age. [Regulation 7, SGO Regulations 2005 \(as amended\)](#) provides that the financial support may include an element of remuneration but ONLY when the decision is made before the SGO is granted, and the Local Authority consider it necessary to facilitate the person to become a special guardian, in a case where:

- (a) The special guardian or prospective special guardian has been a local authority foster carer (including family, friends, and connected person) in respect to the child; AND



- (b) An element of the remuneration was included in the payments made by the local authority to that person in relation to the fostering of the child or young person.

Regulation 7(2) SGO Regulations 2005 (as amended) states that the element of remuneration (fee) ceases to be payable after the expiry of the period of 2 years from the making of the SGO unless the Local Authority considers its continuation to be necessary having regard to the exceptional needs of the child or any other exceptional circumstances. This only relates to the fee (remuneration) element not to the entire SGO allowance.

#### **10. Adoption Support Fund (ASF) and Pupil Premium**

Children who were looked after immediately prior to the making of the SGO are eligible for Pupil Premium and Adoption Support Fund funding.

The Pupil Premium is accessed in the education setting, through self-declaration of the SGO by the Special Guardian.

The Adoption Support Fund will fund therapeutic support for the child, up to the Fair Access Limit. Where the assessment of need for support services identifies that therapeutic services would be beneficial, an application will be made to the ASF on the behalf of the Special Guardian. In the case of a successful application, funding will be released to the Local Authority to commission the approved services.

#### **11. Assistance with legal costs**

Regulation 6 (2)(c) SGO Regulations 2005 (as amended) provides that the Local Authority, where it considers that it is appropriate, may contribute to any legal costs including court fees, of a special guardian or prospective special guardian, as may be, associated with:

- (i) The making of SGO, variation or discharge of the same,
- (ii) Application under S8 (Child Arrangements Order)
- (iii) An order for financial provision to be made for the child.

The local authority is not expected to meet the legal costs of a SGO where it does not support the application, whether they were previously looked after or not.

## **12. Cessation of financial support**

Financial support ceases to be payable to a special guardian if:

- a) The child ceases to have a home with the Special Guardian.
- b) The child ends full time education or training and enters employment.
- c) The child qualifies for Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance in their own right.
- d) The child reaches the age of 18 unless they continue in full-time education or training, when the allowance may continue until the end of the course or training, they are undertaking (subject to a further assessment of need and a financial means test)

[\[Regulation 9 SGO Regulations 2005 \(as amended\)\]](#)

## **13. Review of Support Plans (including financial support)**

The SGO support plan including the financial support, will be reviewed annually, unless a change of circumstances requires an earlier review. Financial support will be reviewed by undertaking a financial means test unless the allowance has been agreed for a longer period. The special guardians are expected to provide evidence of the following:

- financial circumstances
- financial needs and resources of the child
- the special guardian's address and whether the child/young person still has a home and resides with them,

The local authority having regard to the review and after considering any representations received within the period specified on the notice, decide whether to vary or terminate payment of the financial support or whether to recover any part of the financial support that has been paid; and where appropriate, revise the plan. The local authority must then give the person notice of the decision including the reasons for it and, if applicable the revised plan ([Special Guardianship Guidance 2017 para 87 - 91](#)). Where the court makes a [Child Arrangement Order](#) within proceedings prior to the making of an SGO, and by doing so the carers would be financially disadvantaged (the fostering allowance would cease), Southend will wherever possible, start any agreed SGO support at that stage rather than waiting for the final SGO to be granted. If Southend Borough Council intends to vary or terminate the special guardianship support services to any person, it will provide the person with the outcome of the review and reasons for the proposed decision in writing. The special guardian will have an opportunity to make representations on the decision. In respect of an amendment to or termination of any financial support, Southend Borough Council can decide to suspend the financial support until the outcome of the representations if it considers appropriate and there is sufficient justification as set out above. The affected special guardian **MUST** make their Representations within 28 days to the Court & Permanency Panel. The outcome of the representations to the Panel will be notified in writing. If the SGO is not satisfied with the outcome of the Court & Permanency Panel they may complain through the statutory complaints procedure.

## **14. Urgent Cases**

Where a person has an urgent need of a service, the assessment process should not delay provision and arrangements can be made for support to be provided as a matter of urgency in appropriate cases. The situation will then need to be reviewed as soon as possible after the support has been provided in accordance with the procedures set out above.

## **15. Relevant Legislation and Guidance**

Adoption and Children Act 2002

Special Guardianship Regulations 2005

Special Guardianship (Amended) regulations 2016.

National Minimum Adoption Standards 2011

Special Guardianship Guidance updated April 2012.

Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families  
2000

# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Executive Director (Children and Public Health)

to

People Scrutiny Committee

on

6th July 2021

Report prepared by: Brin Martin, Director of Education and  
Early Years

Agenda  
Item No.

8

---

Outcome letter following the SEND Area Revisit 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> May 2021

**People Scrutiny Committee**  
**Cabinet Member: Councillor L Burton**  
**Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)**

---

## 1. Purpose of Report

To share the outcomes of the Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) Written Statement of Action (WSOA) revisit undertaken by OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) and the CQC (Care Quality Commission).

Following the publication of the SEND OFSTED/CQC revisit letter dated 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2021, it is an opportunity for members of the People Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the progress made by SEND area partners since the original SEND Local Area inspection in October 2018.

## 2. Recommendations

- a. For members of the People Scrutiny Committee to consider and note the findings within the SEND revisit letter. (Attached as Appendix 1)

## 3. Background

- a. All Local Authority Areas are subject to a local Area SEND Inspection. The inspection is a joint inspection undertaken by Ofsted and the CQC.
- b. As part of the national framework of independent regulator inspection, the Southend Local Area was subject to an inspection of the area's provision for SEND in October 2018.
- c. The SEND Area inspection considers the SEND offer provided by Education Health and Care teams within the Council; Health teams within the Southend Clinical Commissioning Group; and other local SEND providers including schools and settings.
- d. The outcome of the SEND Area inspection in October 2018, undertaken by Ofsted and the CQC, was that the Local Area was required to produce

a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) to address four areas of significant weakness. Specifically, to address:

- Joint Commissioning
- The Local Offer
- The quality of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP's)
- The monitoring of the quality of provision in settings

- e. OFSTED approved the WSOA for Southend in May 2019.
- f. If an area is required to produce a WSOA, OFSTED and CQC will at some point undertake a revisit to review progress against the WSOA. The revisit of the Southend SEND WSOA took place in May 2021, with inspectors on site 5 - 7 May 2021.
- g. Following off site desktop scrutiny and a survey undertaken by inspectors of parents, the onsite inspection was a blend of face to face and virtual meetings with pupils, parents, the Parent Carers Forum (PCF), school and setting leaders and stakeholders involved in the delivery of the SEND provision in Southend.
- h. Inspectors reviewed all the information they collected from the meetings they held, their review of the documents they requested, and the 366 parent / carers responses to the Ofsted / CQC survey that they undertake for all SEND inspection and revisits.
- i. The full findings from the Ofsted / CQC SEND WSOA revisit is captured in Appendix 1. In summary, inspectors across OFSTED and the CQC found that the area had made sufficient progress in three out of the four areas in the WSOA, and that in the fourth (joint commissioning), whilst they noted some more recent progress, they felt that this had yet to impact fully on children and families and so concluded that sufficient progress had not yet been made.
- j. The WSOA revisit and the subsequent report from Ofsted is a fully independent report. The report has looked at the key issues, including areas of concerns raised by parents and carers since the original Local Area SEND inspection in October 2018. Parents and carers were involved in some of the meetings with the inspection team between 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> May, and 366 parents/carers shared their views on the current SEND offer directly with the inspection team through Ofsted's survey, which the Inspection team no doubt considered when reaching their conclusions captured in their report published in June 2021.
- k. As a result of their revisit, OFSTED/CQC concluded that they will play no further part in monitoring the SEND provision in Southend, unless directed by the Secretary of State, and have asked the Department for Education (DfE) to meet with the Local Area regarding the one WSOA area where sufficient progress has not yet been made (joint commissioning).

- I. The Ofsted report demonstrates good progress since the WSOA was issued, with sufficient progress in three out of the four areas identified in the WSOA, and one area where sufficient progress has not yet been made (joint commissioning). The multi-agency SEND Strategic Partnership Board will ensure that the remaining progress in that area is rapidly addressed.

#### **4. Other Options**

- a. It is a requirement that OFSTED/CQC revisit each area that has a WSOA as part of its regulatory independent function and therefore there were no other options in relation to the WSOA other than the revisit that was undertaken.

#### **5. Reasons for Recommendations**

- a. For scrutiny to consider the contents of the independent report (Appendix 1) and the impact of actions taken since the last SEND Area inspection in October 2018.

#### **6. Corporate Implications**

- 6.1 Contribution to the Southend 2050 Road Map  
SEND provision in all settings forms part of the Safe and Well and Opportunity and Prosperity themes.
- 6.2 Financial Implications  
Not applicable
- 6.3 Legal Implications  
It is a regulatory requirement that each area with a WSOA has a revisit to determine the progress against the discharge of statutory functions.
- 6.4 People Implications  
Not applicable
- 6.5 Property Implications  
Not applicable
- 6.6 Consultation  
Not applicable
- 6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications  
Not applicable
- 6.8 Risk Assessment  
Not applicable
- 6.9 Value for Money  
Not applicable

6.10 Community Safety Implications  
Not applicable

6.11 Environmental Impact  
Not applicable

7. **Background Papers**  
None

8. **Appendices**  
Appendix 1 - OFSTED/CQC SEND revisit letter dated 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2021.



**14 June 2021**

Michael Marks  
Executive Director (Children and Public Health)  
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council  
Civic Centre  
Victoria Avenue  
Southend-on-Sea  
Essex  
SS2 6ER

Anthony McKeever, Accountable Officer, Southend Clinical Commissioning Group  
Patricia D’Orsi, NHS Alliance Director  
Gary Bloom, Head of SEND, Local Area Nominated Officer

Dear Mr Marks and Mr McKeever

**Joint area SEND revisit in Southend-on-Sea.**

Between 5 and 7 May 2021, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) revisited the area of Southend-on-Sea to decide whether sufficient progress has been made in addressing each of the significant weaknesses detailed in the written statement of action (WSOA) issued on 5 December 2018.

As a result of the findings of the initial inspection and in accordance with the Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2015, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector (HMCI) determined that a written statement of action was required because of significant areas of weakness in the area’s practice. HMCI determined that the local authority and the area’s clinical commissioning group(s) (CCG) were jointly responsible for submitting the written statement to Ofsted. This was declared fit for purpose on 14 May 2019.

**The area has made sufficient progress in addressing three of the four significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection. The area has not made sufficient progress in addressing one significant weakness. This letter outlines our findings from the revisit.**

The inspection was led by one of Her Majesty’s Inspectors from Ofsted and a Children’s Services Inspector from CQC.

Inspectors spoke with children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), as well as local authority and National Health Service (NHS) officers. Inspectors considered the 366 responses to the online survey for

parents and carers. Representatives of groups representing parents and carers participated in meetings with area leaders and inspectors. Inspectors also reviewed correspondence received about the area. Inspectors looked at a range of information about the performance of the area, including the area's self-evaluation. Inspectors met with leaders and professionals from the area for health, social care and education. They reviewed performance data, a selection of education, health and care (EHC) plans and evidence about the local offer and joint commissioning.

## Main findings

- Since early 2020, when they were appointed to their roles, the Executive Director (Children and Public Health) and the NHS Alliance Director have brought about a palpable change in the culture of the area's partnerships. There is greater commitment to joint working to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The rate of change has increased since this time despite the challenges of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Leaders are determined to maintain this momentum.
- In their own evaluation, area leaders acknowledge that they have not progressed as far as they wanted in some areas of the written statement of action (WSOA). They know what remains to be done. Most notably, they know that many children and young people with SEND and their families are not feeling the benefits of the improvements made. Area leaders are fully aware of the legitimate concerns of parents and carers and continue to work and engage with them. Leaders understand the scale of change required to reach all families and regain the trust and confidence of significant numbers of parents and carers.
- The recently established parent carer forum, Southend SEND Independent Forum (SSIF), brings an additional element of constructive challenge to the area. SSIF has injected strength and energy to the areas of work in which it is involved.
- The initial inspection found that:

**The emerging leadership of the Southend CCG, public health, the local authority and education providers has not developed quickly enough to ensure precisely coordinated priorities, accountabilities and joint commissioning to improve the outcomes for children and young people.**

There is a genuine commitment to joint working across the area at senior level. Area leaders have established relationships that have led to a more cohesive approach to identifying priorities and joint strategic planning.

In March 2020, area leaders recognised that their actions were not securing improvement at the necessary pace. A number of planned actions were late in starting or not moving forward quickly enough to meet leaders' own expected time frames within the WSOA. To accelerate the rate of change, governance structures were reviewed, coinciding with structural changes in the local

authority and CCG and recruitment and review of staff roles in both organisations. Systems were established to give clearer oversight of joint working and better accountability. However, as a result of these necessary changes, some important elements of the WSOA are only recently established or not yet fully implemented. For example, the area's SEND strategy has only recently been developed and has not yet been agreed. A formalised approach to the quality assurance of education, health and care (EHC) plans to inform joint commissioning decisions is a recent development. A new quality and outcomes framework is being developed and a co-production charter is due for adoption in June 2021.

Individual examples of recent joint commissioning, such as the neurodevelopment pathway, have the potential to have significant impact on outcomes for children and young people and their families. However, they are far too recent for any difference to be felt by children and young people with SEND and their families. Although now increasing in pace, the area's progress in tackling this significant weakness has been too slow since the requirement to submit a WSOA in December 2018.

**The area has not made sufficient progress to improve this area of weakness.**

- The initial inspection found that:

**The local offer does not provide a service that is fit for purpose to meet the obligations in the code of practice. Local partners in health, social care and education, including schools, are not proactive in promoting co-production of the local offer. They are not ensuring that the local offer is adapted according to the views, needs and achievements of the children, young people and their families.**

Area leaders fully acknowledge the many weaknesses in the previous local offer. They have shown commitment and determination, including through the appointment of a local offer and co-production officer, to improve the local offer and make it a more relevant and up-to date resource. There is still work to do, but the local offer has improved significantly since December 2018.

The revised local offer has been co-produced with children and young people with SEND and parents and carers. Children and young people from local schools, colleges and the multi-schools council have contributed their views about the services they want. Leaders have a clear plan for the ongoing development of the local offer through capturing the views of a wider group of children and young people with SEND.

Professionals across education, health and social care are increasingly using the local offer to direct families to services and guidance. Services are using the local offer in a way that is more responsive to the needs of children and young people and their families. For example, the educational psychology service has provided useful resources, accessible through the local offer, to

support the families of children and young people with SEND during the pandemic.

SSIF is leading on further development of the local offer. The group is determined to ensure that the local offer continues to evolve to meet the changing needs of children and young people with SEND and their families. Area leaders know that there are still many parents who do not know about the local offer. They have gathered parents' views through attending events organised by local groups, holding an event for parents to promote the local offer, engagement with the families who home educate their children and seeking views through surveys, such as the POET survey and a survey about experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic carried out by the educational psychology service. Leaders know that some parents feel they cannot access the services they need or that there are delays in doing so. Leaders' plans include clear actions to address these concerns and further increase parental engagement with the local offer.

**The area has made sufficient progress to improve this area of weakness.**

- The initial inspection found that:

**Leaders have not worked together to ensure that EHC plans provide a meaningful multi-agency approach to meeting children and young people's academic, social, health and care needs. There are no clear accountabilities between agencies to make sure that children and young people's outcomes are well assessed, planned for, met and reviewed.**

Area leaders have established a multi-agency process for the assessment, decision-making and quality assurance of EHC plans. This has taken longer than leaders anticipated. However, the momentum and direction of change in addressing this weakness are clearly evident. The timeliness of issuing EHC plans remains a strength. The number of annual reviews completed within the expected timescale has improved, but there is room for further improvement.

Leaders have established effective systems to ensure the timeliness and quality of contributions to EHC plans from health and social care professionals. These contributions are having a positive impact on the quality of EHC plans. More recent EHC plans are of a significantly better quality than those seen at the time of the previous inspection. The outcomes agreed in more recent EHC plans are more holistic rather than solely education focused. There is evidence of greater consideration of how these outcomes can appropriately contribute to preparing children and young people for adulthood and support their successful participation in wider society.

There is a greater focus on co-production with children and young people and their parents and carers in producing their EHC plan. The establishment of the EHC hub is seen as a positive step in working openly and in partnership with

parents and children and young people. However, the voice of the child or young person in some plans could still be strengthened further.

Recently established systems are now enabling partners in education, care and health to hold one another to account and consider how well children and young people's outcomes are planned for and met. However, this information is only now being used to inform joint commissioning at a strategic level. Area leaders know that making better use of this information is an important next step in informing jointly commissioned services.

**The area has made sufficient progress to improve this area of weakness.**

- The initial inspection found that:

**Leaders have not developed a strategic partnership that makes sure that children and young people are in provisions that give them good-quality, full-time education. This particularly includes those educated at home, in post-16 provisions, and in out of borough provisions. Additionally, within the local area, too many pupils access part-time education for too long. Leaders of the local area do not know the extent of the impact of part-time programmes on the outcomes for children and young people. This lack of information is detrimental to the work of joint commissioning.**

Area leaders have established a strategic partnership approach to evaluating the quality of provision for vulnerable learners, including children and young people with SEND. Systems are in place so that area leaders know which children and young people are in different types of education setting and can make checks on their attendance and safety.

Area leaders have increased their challenge to education providers regarding the use of part-time timetables. Leaders monitor the extent to which such programmes are used, whether they give access to appropriate education of an acceptable standard and that they lead to a return to full-time education whenever possible. The numbers of children and young people on programmes that do not provide full-time education are much reduced.

Senior leaders from education providers see a concerted drive by area leaders to set clear expectations and secure improvement in education provision for children and young people with SEND. Area leaders are providing greater challenge regarding the quality of provision and the requirement for schools to demonstrate an inclusive approach for children and young people with SEND. They have provided training and guidance for teachers, special educational needs coordinators, school leaders and support staff in different aspects of effective provision for children and young people with SEND. However, area leaders' own evaluation acknowledges that experiences of parents and children and young people in both mainstream and special schools remain varied.

Area leaders have built up a picture of the extent of elective home education (EHE) for children and young people with SEND. They know the numbers of children and young people involved and the reasons given for EHE. Leaders have established processes to assure themselves that these children and young people have a suitable standard of education. They have also ensured through joint work that families choosing to educate their children at home can access school nursing and educational psychology services.

Area leaders have further developed and strengthened relationships with post-16 education providers. The support provided has ensured that the number of children and young people with SEND who are not in education, employment or training is low. The young people who spoke to inspectors during the revisit said they feel well-supported and prepared for their next steps in learning or employment.

Other than for children looked after (CLA), the checks on the quality of education provided by settings out of the borough are limited. For children and young people with SEND who are not CLA, checks on out of borough provision are limited to the monitoring of attendance and discussion about how well the setting meets the child or young person's needs at annual reviews. Area leaders have not yet ratified a data-sharing protocol with the local authority that hosts the largest number of children and young people educated out of borough. This limits leaders' ability to monitor the quality of this provision.

**The area has made sufficient progress to improve this area of weakness.**

The area has made sufficient progress in addressing three of the four significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection. The area has not made sufficient progress in addressing one significant weakness.

As not all the significant weaknesses have improved, it is for DfE and NHS England to determine the next steps. Ofsted and CQC will not carry out any further revisit unless directed to do so by the Secretary of State.

Yours sincerely

Paul Wilson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

<b>Ofsted</b>	<b>Care Quality Commission</b>
Lorna Fitzjohn Regional Director	Victoria Watkins Deputy Chief Inspector, Primary Medical Services, Children Health and Justice
Paul Wilson HMI Lead Inspector	Elizabeth Fox CQC Inspector

cc: Department for Education  
Clinical commissioning group(s)  
Director Public Health for the area  
Department of Health  
NHS England

This page is intentionally left blank



# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda  
Item No.

9

Report of Executive Director  
(Legal & Democratic Services)

to

Place, People and Policy & Resources Scrutiny  
Committees

On 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> July 2021

Report prepared by: S. Tautz (Principal Democratic Services  
Officer)

---

## In-Depth Scrutiny Projects and Summary of Work 2020/21 A Part 1 Agenda Item

---

### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 For the Committee to consider progress with regard to the in-depth scrutiny projects undertaken during the 2020/21 municipal year and to consider a possible joint approach to in-depth scrutiny activity for 2021/22.
- 1.2 The report also provides information about the work carried out by each of the scrutiny committees during the previous year.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That progress with regard to the in-depth scrutiny projects undertaken during the 2020/21 municipal year, be noted.
- 2.2 That, subject to the concurrence of the other scrutiny committees, a single in-depth scrutiny project around the 'Councillor Queries' process be undertaken on behalf of the three scrutiny committees during the 2021/22 municipal year.
- 2.3 That no other topic(s) be selected by the Committee for additional in-depth review during 2021/22.
- 2.4 That the Committee note the summary of the scrutiny work undertaken during 2020/21.

### 3. In-Depth Scrutiny Projects – Background

- 3.1 As councillors will be aware, each of the scrutiny committees has traditionally undertaken an in-depth scrutiny project each year. The in-depth projects are selected at the beginning of each municipal year and generally focus on the Council's corporate priorities or matters of local concern. Recent in-depth scrutiny projects have also been aligned with the ambition and outcomes arising from the Southend 2050 programme. A list of the in-depth scrutiny projects previously undertaken by the scrutiny committees is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.
- 3.2 The in-depth scrutiny projects lead to the development of reports and recommendations which advise the Executive and the Council on its policies, budget provision and service delivery. The delivery of each project is driven through a member Programme Working Party (Project Team), supported by

relevant officers. Participation in the in-depth projects enable councillors to be actively involved in a particular topic and to influence and shape proposals around service improvement that will result in benefits/outcomes.

- 3.3 The undertaking of the annual in-depth scrutiny projects is not a statutory requirement and is derived from the power set out in Section 9(c) (Policy Review and Development) of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules at Part 4(e) of the Council's Constitution, which provides that the scrutiny committees may hold enquiries and investigate options for future direction in policy development.

#### **4. In-Depth Scrutiny Projects 2020/21 – Progress**

- 4.1 The following in-depth scrutiny projects have been completed during the last year:

##### **People Scrutiny Committee**

'The appropriate use of reablement for older people (65 and over) when discharged from hospital, to maximise the number of people at home after period of ninety-one days.'

##### **Place Scrutiny Committee**

'To review the level of domestic waste recycling in the Borough, in order to examine what influences residents in terms of their recycling habits and what the barriers are to achieving a higher rate of recycling and to consider ways of working with residents to improve domestic waste recycling.'

##### **Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee**

'How the Council and councillors communicate with local people and stakeholders and facilitate engagement and participation'.

- 4.2 The report of the in-depth scrutiny project for the People Scrutiny Committee was considered by the Committee at its meeting on 24 November 2020 and the recommendations arising from the project were agreed by the Cabinet on 14 January 2021. The report and recommendations arising from the completion of the in-depth scrutiny project for the Place Scrutiny Committee will be reported to the meeting of that Committee to be held on 5 July 2021. The report and recommendations arising from the completion of the in-depth scrutiny project for the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee for 202/21, will be reported to the meeting of that Committee on 8 July 2021.
- 4.3 The Committee is requested to note progress with regard to its in-depth scrutiny project undertaken during the 2020/21 municipal year.

#### **5. In-Depth Scrutiny Project 2021/22**

- 5.1 At this meeting, the Committee would normally agree the nature of the in-depth scrutiny project that it wishes to undertake during the municipal year. As already indicated, the undertaking of the annual in-depth scrutiny projects is not a statutory requirement and is based on local practice over a number of years.

- 5.2 Since March 2020, the impact of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic has required the Council to focus its effort and resources on the delivery of priority activities and services, which has included the ongoing dedication and/or redeployment of resources and capacity that would normally support in-depth scrutiny projects, towards the delivery of key services for local residents. Partly as a result of the response to the pandemic, the in-depth scrutiny projects for 2020/21 took longer than usual to complete.
- 5.3 The undertaking of the in-depth scrutiny projects in the traditional way can be resource intensive. Each Programme Working Party (Project Team) must be fully supported throughout the scoping, delivery and progress reporting of the project and appropriate specialist capacity is often required to facilitate aspects of projects. In addition, it has regularly been necessary to arrange and undertake appropriate site visits, conduct public surveys, hold public meetings, and commission research etc. to inform the delivery of projects.
- 5.4 As a consequence of the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to also focus on local recovery priorities going forward, the traditional approach to the undertaking of broad in-depth scrutiny projects might not be the best use of resources and capacity in the short-term. It is important that this type of scrutiny activity recognises the level of resources and capacity available, and it may not necessarily be appropriate during the continuing response to the pandemic for scrutiny projects to consider service changes or improvements in isolation.
- 5.5 The Committee might therefore wish to consider whether the use of in-depth scrutiny projects should be paused in favour of a dedicated focus on the review of relevant business issues that help councillors to carry out their role and support the Council through recovery from the challenges presented by the pandemic, whilst also allowing local economic recovery to continue to be driven by the delivery of key schemes. A single in-depth joint scrutiny project could be undertaken for 2021/22, involving each of the scrutiny committees, focussed on matters of importance to councillors.
- 5.6 Joint in-depth scrutiny projects have previously been conducted by the scrutiny committees on a number of occasions. In 2016/17, a joint project was undertaken by the Policy and Resources and Place Scrutiny Committees, to investigate whether there was a need for additional enforcement resources for Southend. A joint project was also undertaken during 2018/19, also by the Policy and Resources and Place Scrutiny Committees, looking at the re-imagining the town centre in the context of the vision for Southend 2050.
- 5.7 An issue that has been identified as an important priority by a number of members and which could constitute a possible focus for joint scrutiny activity this year, is the 'Councillor Queries' arrangement for the handling of enquiries and questions that councillors raise with officers of the Council. The Councillor Queries process has generated a mixed experience for councillors since its introduction, and some members have raised concerns about the way it works and enables them to deliver their democratic mandate to their electorate. This could therefore form the basis for a focussed form of scrutiny project that could be led by the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on behalf of each of the scrutiny committees. This approach could also build on the work undertaken as

part of the in-depth scrutiny project for the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee over the last year.

- 5.8 It is anticipated that such scrutiny activity, possibly with a shorter reporting timeframe than has normally been adopted for the formal in-depth scrutiny projects, would be relevant to all members of the Council, particularly as this could also inform the work that is already ongoing to improve the Councillor Queries process through the action plan for the new Protocol on Councillor/Officer Relations adopted in 2020. All councillors would have an opportunity to contribute to the scrutiny project.
- 5.9 The undertaking of a joint scrutiny project as described above would enable scrutiny activity to be coordinated and directed towards an area of key importance to members, without the need to dedicate resources and capacity to separate projects. This would therefore have advantages in terms of a reduced and beneficial impact on other work to support local COVID-19 recovery and the delivery of key schemes, than would be case if separate projects were to be undertaken.
- 5.10 This possible joint in-depth scrutiny activity for 2021/22 has been informally discussed with the chairs of each of the scrutiny committees. If the nature of such joint project is agreed by the scrutiny committees, further consideration will be given to the scope of the project and the development of an appropriate action plan for agreement at the next cycle of meetings. The scoping of the proposed joint scrutiny project will also need to consider how this activity could be undertaken and delivered by the Programme Working Parties, for which member appointments were made by the Council at its meeting on 20 May 2021 (Appendix 2).
- 5.11 It is therefore recommended that a single in-depth scrutiny project around the Councillor Queries process be undertaken on behalf of all three scrutiny committees during 2021/22 and that, in light of the proposed scrutiny project and the Council's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, no additional topic(s) be selected by the Committee for in-depth review during the year.

## **6. Work Undertaken by the Scrutiny Committees 2020/21**

- 6.1 A summary of the work undertaken by each of the scrutiny committees during the 2020/21 municipal year is attached at Appendix 3.
- 6.2 The Committee is requested to note the summary of the work it has undertaken during 2020/21.

## **7. Corporate Implications**

### Contribution to the Southend 2050 Road Map

Becoming an excellent and high performing organisation.

### Financial Implications

There are costs associated with organising in-depth projects relating to officer time, but this will all be contained within existing resources.

Legal Implications

None

People Implications

None.

Property Implications

None

Consultation

As described in report.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

None

Risk Assessment

None

**8. Background Papers**

None

**9. Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Previous In-Depth Scrutiny Projects

Appendix 2 - Membership of Programme Working Parties for 2021/22

Appendix 3 - Summary of work of the Scrutiny Committees for 2020/21

This page is intentionally left blank

### **In-Depth Scrutiny Projects**

Since 2000, the Council has undertaken a range of annual in-depth scrutiny projects. The following projects have been carried out since 2013/14.

#### **People Scrutiny Committee**

- The appropriate use of reablement for older people (65 and over) when discharged from hospital, to maximize the number of people at home after period of 91 days (2019/20-2020/21).
- In context of vision for Southend 2050, what is the vision for young people which improves their lives and what are the pathways to achieve this ambition (2018/19).
- Connecting communities to avoid isolation (2017/18).
- Alternative provision – off site education provision for children and young people (2016/17).
- Transition arrangements from children to adult life (2015/16).
- How the Council assists and excites individuals and community groups to achieve healthier lifestyles (2014/15).
- Southend primary schools' falling grammar school entry figures (2013/14).

#### **Place Scrutiny Committee**

- To review the level of domestic waste recycling in the Borough, in order to examine what influences residents in terms of their recycling habits and the barriers to achieving a higher rate of recycling and to consider ways of working with residents to improve domestic waste recycling (2019/20-2020/21).
- Maximizing the use of technology (2017/18).
- 20mph speed limits in residential streets (2015/16).
- Understanding erosion taking place on the foreshore (2014/15).
- Promoting a positive image for the town (2013/14).

#### **Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee**

- How the Council and councillors communicate with local people and stakeholders (2019/20-2020/21).

- Additional enforcement resources for Southend (2017/18).
- Control of personal debt and the advantages of employment (2015/16).
- The Council's community leadership role in promoting safer communities (2014/15).
- Impact of welfare changes (2013/14).

### **Joint Scrutiny Projects**

- Re-imagining the town centre in the context of the vision for Southend 2050 (Place Scrutiny Committee/Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee) (2018/19).
- To investigate the case for additional enforcement resources for Southend (Place Scrutiny Committee/Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee) (2016/17).



**POLICY & RESOURCES SCRUTINY PROGRAMME WORKING PARTY  
(PROJECT TEAM)**

(NB: Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee members only)

<b>Party</b>	<b>Members</b>	<b>Total 8</b>	<b>Substitutes</b>
CON	Jack Warren Steve Habermel Steve Buckley David McGlone	4	All
LAB	Matt Dent Stephen George	2	All (Except Cabinet Members)
IND	Ian Shead	1	All (Except Cabinet Members)
LD	Ashley Thompson	1	All (Except Cabinet Members)

**PLACE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME WORKING PARTY**  
 (PROJECT TEAM)  
 (NB: Place Scrutiny Committee members only)

<b>Party</b>	<b>Members</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Substitutes</b>
CON	Fay Evans Nigel Folkard Chris Walker Steve Buckley	4	All
LAB	Kay Mitchell Kevin Robinson	2	All (Except Cabinet Members)
IND	Steve Wakefield	1	All (Except Cabinet Members)
LD	Peter Wexham	1	All (Except Cabinet Members)

**PEOPLE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME WORKING PARTY  
(PROJECT TEAM)**

(NB: People Scrutiny Committee members only)

<b>Party</b>	<b>Members</b>	<b>Total 8</b>	<b>Substitutes</b>
CON	Alan Dear Denis Garne Brian Beggs John Lamb	4	All (Except Cabinet Members)
LAB	Aston Line Tricia Cowdrey	2	All (Except Cabinet Members)
IND	TBA	1	All (Except Cabinet Members)
LD	Beth Hooper	1	All (Except Cabinet Members)

This page is intentionally left blank

## **PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Work Programme 2020/21 - Evaluation**

During the 2020/21 municipal year, the People Scrutiny Committee held **8** meetings and met on the following dates: 16 June 2021 (Special Meeting), 7 July 2020, 2 September 2020, 13 October 2020, 24 November 2020, 7 December 2020 (Special Meeting), 2 February 2021 and 16 March 2021. All meetings of the Committee were held remotely via the Microsoft Teams platform, in accordance with Part 2 of the Coronavirus Regulations 2020 and the Supplementary Procedure Rules adopted by the Council.

During the year, the Committee undertook the following scrutiny work:

#### **Call-In/References from Cabinet**

The Committee considered **5** reports that were called-in from the Cabinet or referred directly by the Cabinet for scrutiny. No items were called-in from the Forward Plan. During the year the draft General Fund Revenue and Capital Budget for 2021/22 to 2025/26 was referred directly to each of the scrutiny committees for review, as was the annual Comments, Complaints and Compliments report for 2019/20. The Council's COVID-19 response, associated recovery plans and the impact of the pandemic on its Medium-Term Financial Strategy for the period to 2024/25, were also referred directly to each of the scrutiny committees.

The outcomes of the informal consultation stage one of a potential amalgamation of Chalkwell Hall Infants School and Chalkwell Hall Junior School, were referred directly to the Committee by the Cabinet (Minute 607 refers).

The Committee **referred no items** up to the Council for consideration.

The Committee **referred no items** back to the Cabinet for reconsideration.

#### **Pre-Cabinet Items**

The Committee considered **no** pre-Cabinet items during the year.

#### **Scheduled Items (each meeting as appropriate)**

A total of **34** questions from members of the public were responded to by the relevant Cabinet Member, a large number of which related to the outcomes of the informal consultation on the potential amalgamation of Chalkwell Hall Infants School and Chalkwell Hall Junior School.

#### **In-Depth Scrutiny Project**

'The appropriate use of reablement for older people (65 and over) when discharged from hospital to maximise the number of people at home after period of 91 days ('Home First' approach).'

The project was agreed at the meeting of the Committee on 9 July 2019 (Minute 172 refers) and a project plan was agreed at the meeting on 8 October 2019 (Minute 398 refers). The completion of the in-depth scrutiny project was carried forward into the 2020/21 municipal year as a result of reduced officer capacity and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. No further topics were selected by the Scrutiny Committee for additional in-depth review during 2020/21.

The reports and recommendations arising from the completion of the in-depth scrutiny project were considered by the Committee at its meeting on 24 November 2020 and the recommendations arising from the project were agreed by the Cabinet on 14 January 2021.

#### **Presentations/Other Matters Considered**

- 13 October 2020 - Report on proposed changes to acute mental health beds in South Essex (Minute 439 refers).
- 16 March 2021 - Changes to Phlebotomy Provision - Moving Services into the Community (Minute 913 refers).

## **Chair's Update Report**

As a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020/21, it was not possible for the Chair of the Committee and member representatives on the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to continue to hold regular informal meetings with the Chief Executive of Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust, to discuss the proposals of Mid and South Essex Hospitals Group with regard to the implementation of planned hospital reconfigurations. It is hoped that such meetings will be able to be resumed during 2021/22.