

# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda  
Item No.

Report of Chief Executive  
To  
Cabinet

On  
15 June 2021

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## 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)

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### 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.

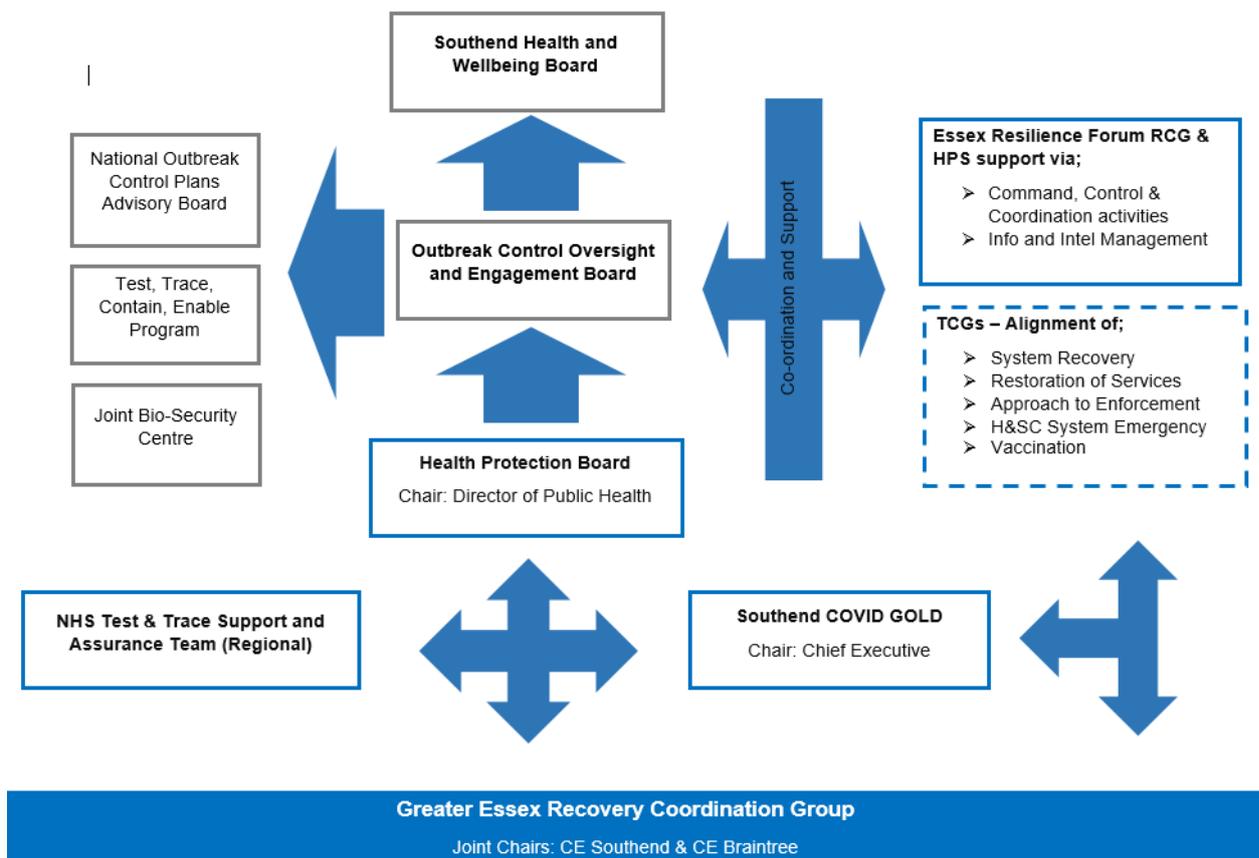
#### **4. Pandemic management**

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

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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.

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## **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.

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## 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>