

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Executive Director (Transformation)

To
Cabinet

On
14th March 2022

**Agenda
Item No.**

Report prepared by Stephen Meah-Sims, Executive
Director (Transformation) and Adam Keating,
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City Council Corporate Branding Refresh (Pre-engagement) Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Cabinet Members: Councillor Ian Gilbert

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Following the tragic death of Sir David Amess MP in October 2021, Southend-on-Sea, the place, was granted the privilege of being granted City Status; a long-standing ambition which Sir David Amess fought for on behalf of Southend.
- 1.2 Southend, the place, officially became a city at a Civic Commemoration Event on the 1st of March 2022, where His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales and Her Royal Highness, The Duchess of Cornwall bestowed city status, through the handing of the Letters Patent to our serving Mayor at a Full Council meeting, as part of the Commemoration Event.
- 1.3 Southend-on-Sea Borough Council became the local authority serving the new city and at the same Full Council, it was agreed that council's name would change with immediate effect to Southend-on-Sea City Council.
- 1.4 The new city designation for Southend provides an opportunity for the council to consider options connected to the council's existing corporate branding and updating it to reflect the new name of the council.
- 1.5 In preparation for the council's change in name, this report builds on cross-party engagement, led through the Leader of the council's Cross-Party Working Group, which was mobilised in January 2022 to work with all political groups to build a shared view of councillors in developing a new corporate brand for the council. This engagement has informed the options set out in appendix 1 of this report.

- 1.6 This report sets out the opportunities connected to updating the corporate branding for the council and presents options for Cabinet to agree on, as branding options to go out to engage more widely.
- 1.7 It is important to clarify that the corporate branding for the council is not a wide Southend place branding. The place branding for Southend, which is used across many sectors in the city, as a way of attracting visitors and investment was developed in 2021 and has been successfully implemented across the city to date.
- 1.8 Thus far, engagement with the Cross-Party Working Group and Group Leaders on concepts for a new corporate brand for the council has generated four different branding concepts. This Cabinet Report presents the four options to date, for Cabinet to endorse the next stage in further engagement with a wider group of stakeholders, which will contribute to the final decision on the council's new corporate branding.

2 Recommendations

That Cabinet consider the corporate branding options set out within this report.

- 2.1 **To agree on the four branding concepts to go out to wider engagement, as set out in section 4.1.**
- 2.2 **To agree to the timeframe of engagement of 2 weeks.**
- 2.3 **To use the feedback as an evidence-base to inform the final decision on the council's new corporate branding.**

3 Background

- 3.1 The current branding, known as the council's corporate brand, should enable users of council services to instantly recognise the council. Corporate branding aims to identify the council and the range of services that the council is connected to across the city. Branding also raises awareness of council services and makes the council publicly accountable. For example, if a resident sees a service that they are dissatisfied with and the corporate branding is visible, this transparency makes the council more accountable to that resident. If an excellent service is experienced, the same applies.
- 3.2 Corporate branding exists in variety of settings. Some can feel obvious, whereas others can feel subtle. The vast range of settings where branding exists stretches from virtual channels and social media, to livery on our uniforms, buildings, and vehicles.
- 3.3 Our branding also conveys our authenticity as a local authority, whether that is in council communication, policies and strategies, to official correspondence from the council.

- 3.4 Using corporate branding also aims to promote direct and subtle messages about the values and principles of the organisation that it represents or aspires to.
- 3.5 The change of Southend to a city includes the council changing its name to reflect its new status within a new city. Looking forward as a strong, ambitious and cohesive city; the council has the opportunity to embrace the change of status by updating the corporate branding, which reflects where the council sees itself in the city and how it wants to be perceived going forward.
- 3.6 Developing a new corporate brand for any organisation comes with challenges as brands can mean different things to different audiences. It is important to emphasise that the corporate branding for the council is not the same as the place branding that was developed for Southend as a whole, in 2021. The corporate branding for the council is focused on the council. Drawing in ideas and preferences from across the political spectrum was essential in working up the design brief. A Cross-Party Working Group, chaired by the Leader of the Council came together in January 2022 to start the conversation about working up a design brief for a new corporate brand for Southend-on-Sea City Council.
- 3.7 The design team working under the design brief are the council's contracted bespoke design and print company. They are a local company that have worked with the council since a procurement exercise in 2017, with a track record of high-quality design work across council services.
- 3.8 Through the Cross-Party Working Group, and conversations with political group leaders outside of the working group, a number of points around design preferences were established. These included:
- a) Keeping the new branding simple and identifiable
 - b) Drawing on our location as a city by the sea
 - c) Using colour, shapes and form in our branding to signal our city as a diverse one, where many council services operate for a diverse range of residents and businesses
 - d) Must work well across different settings, e.g., for social media and digital channels, to large vehicle livery
 - e) Looks forward, not backwards
 - f) Draws on good recent examples from other local authorities and sectors
- 3.9 The design preferences under 3.8 were used as the framework to work up design options, which were presented back to the Cross-Party Working Group and political group leaders. In a process of further discussion, the design options were further refined based on a range of feedback, with some new additions, such as the Southend 'S' Monogram with the pier option.
- 3.10 The corporate branding options set out in detail within appendix A illustrates four branding options.

3.10.1 Option 1: The Seaside Windmill

The Seaside Windmill sticks to the design preferences around simplicity, seaside connection and colour and form. The windmill represents an iconic symbol of the seaside, evoking memories of handheld windmills that continue to be a feature among visitors to the seafront. It also represents the different components of Southend, for example being urban, rural, coastal, diverse and our values of inclusivity and working together. The fans also represent the range of services and the five 2050 ambitions. It also shares similarities with the St Mary's lily from our traditional crest, representing the origins of the new City. This design works as a standalone device without supporting text, for social media.

3.10.2 Option 2: The Shell

The shell design is also simple and identifiable and represents several different features connected to Southend, including the seaside and beach, shells, waves, water and the 'S' motif representing Southend. This design works as a standalone device without supporting text, for social media.

3.10.3 Option 3: The Modern Coat of Arms

This is modern take on the Borough's traditional coat of arms/crest and focuses on the main shield element and its four arms that represent the heritage of the city. These symbols have been simplified into basic icons and arranged in a clear and uncomplicated quadrant design. This does not replace the formal Coat of Arms, but links the corporate brand identity. This design works as a standalone device without supporting text, for social media.

3.10.4 Option 4: Southend 'S' Monogram

An upper case 'S' motif for 'Southend' monogram with waves and pier in the lower portion. This option was developed following feedback from the Group Leader discussions.

Including a simple representation of the pier with the Royal Pavillion makes this icon unmistakably 'Southend' and is unique in that it cannot be applied to any other Seaside town or city, even those that have a name that starts with S.

As a bold, simple design this will be easy to implement across all platforms as a standalone devices or with accompanying text.

3.11 The four options set out very different design concepts which work across the visual platforms that the council use. The options apply the design preferences across three very different styles, yet remain consistent with contemporary branding concepts used by local authorities and other sectors.

3.12 The design summary for each of the four options set out are attached as **Appendix 1** where the examples are illustrated against different visual situations, for example, electronic, print and livery.

4 Seeking views on the four options

4.1 As part of engaging, a market testing exercise on public perceptions around the four proposed options, an on-line poll to different testing groups will be conducted to obtain feedback. The groups approached for feedback, in addition to the Cross-Party Working Group and Political Group Leaders will be:

- All 51 Councillors
- Council staff
- Business community leaders
- Voluntary and Community leaders
- Young people
- Anyone wishing to share views through the council's website

4.2 The opportunity to participate will be promoted through social media and direct contact that signposts to where the four options are, with the ability to feedback.

4.3 It is essential to ensure that a new corporate brand is accessible and contains no reference that could cause offence. The initial testing will also assess Equality Impact.

5 Transitioning to a new Corporate Brand

5.1 It is important to balance the requirement to update corporate branding with public perception and council reputation with respect to implementing a corporate branding change.

5.2 Branding for the council will be required across a broad range of situations, which include:

- Electronic – Websites, Social Media, Service Portals
- Print – Letterheads, documents, publications
- Uniforms
- Building signage
- Vehicles

5.3 Given the scale and range of services provided by the council, it is not advised to change branding across all areas at the same time. The costs associated with this approach will not represent best value.

5.4 Once the decision is made on the new corporate brand, it is advised that the council prioritises areas to be updated with new corporate branding. This is a common approach across local government and other sectors. This will enable the council to focus updated branding where it has the most impact and value for money. Following this approach, it is advised that the council update its Corporate Style Guide, which sets out the guidelines for use of corporate branding where all newly commissioned items requiring branding contain the new format and new branding replaces the old as part of a programme of 'as and when' renewal. This pragmatic approach to updating the council's branding over time, is sensitive to budget challenges.

6 Costs connected to corporate rebranding

- 6.1 The work on new brand concepts for the council was developed through a long-standing local Southend business, that the council has a history and contractual relationship with, having developed a range of products across council services. The costs associated with development work leading up to the latest iteration of corporate brand concepts for the council is £4338.75 and is based on 111.25 hours, including all the design work and meetings.

7 Reasons for Recommendations

- 7.1 Part of updating the council's branding and visual identity, connected to the council's change in name. Enabling the council to take an active lead in responding to the new city status for Southend, with a fresh step into a new identity for the council.

8 Corporate Implications

8.1 Contribution to the Southend 2050 Road Map

The council is a major delivery partner of Southend 2050 and though the updated corporate branding will not affect the agreed outcomes in Southend 2050, the council being perceived as a pro-active, engaging, and a forward-looking organisation is essential in successful leadership of Southend 2050.

8.2 Financial Implications

Financial implications up to this point total £4338.75 and is based on 111.25 hours of work. This is likely to increase with final development and design work, following the engagement connected to this report. This is within the budget identified for council rebranding, which was established to support the council with its City Status programme of work.

8.3 Legal Implications

None identified at this stage.

8.4 People Implications

People implications will be assessed as part of the equality impact, which is set out under section 8.7 below and underpins section 4 (4.3) of this report.

8.5 Property Implications

Updated signage to electronic property, buildings, signs and vehicles in due course.

8.6 Consultation

Market testing connected to perception of brand options is set out in section 4 of this report.

8.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

Equality impact, ensuring that new Corporate Branding for the council is accessible and does not contain any reference to cause offence on religious or cultural grounds.

8.8 Risk Assessment

None identified at this stage.

8.9 Value for Money

The proposals within this report are consistent with the council's plans to continue to improve value for money within financial strategy and the services it offers.

8.10 Community Safety Implications

None identified at this stage.

8.11 Environmental Impact

None at this stage.

9 Background Papers

Please refer to appendix 1.

10 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Corporate Branding Options