

Final Report and Recommendations

In depth scrutiny project

2012/13

Developing strong partnership links to encourage investment in the town and the supply of employment opportunity



July 2013

1 | Page

Foreword

The former Economic & Environmental Scrutiny Committee agreed that its in-depth scrutiny project for 2012/13 would be to examine the strengths, opportunities and impacts of partnership working across the town in promoting and enabling economic growth.

The global recession had serious consequences for our whole economy, and the communities, businesses and individuals in Southend-on-Sea were not exempt from these and have seen significant impacts at every level. However, the town has also seen significant successes during this time. Opportunities brought about by the expansion of London Southend Airport, the investment of the University of Essex and the planned MedTech campus give reason for optimism in our economic prospects.

Despite the national economy being statistically out of recession and the town having experienced successes such as those above, there are still challenges facing Southend-on-Sea's economy; private, public and third sectors alike.

The announcement of the planned closure of the Lloyds bank operation at Essex House shows the how economic progress in the Borough is still fraught with risk.

With fewer resources and greater demands it is essential that now, more than ever, we work in partnership to maximise the impact of every opportunity and to ensure a healthy recovery for all our residents, businesses and communities.

Consequently this project is vital in understanding how effective, efficient and genuine partnerships can be maintained, developed and used for the benefit of Southend-on-Sea.

I was delighted to be appointed Chair of this project and my thanks go to all those who have been involved with the project, those who took the time to attend meetings – particularly the witnesses called to share their experience, expertise and insight into partnership working for economic growth in Southend-on-Sea.

Councillor Ian Gilbert
Chair, Project Team

Contents

1. Objectives and Recommendations	p4
2. Background of the Report	p6
3. Process	p7
4. Findings	p8
5. Appendices	p12
6. Contact details	p16

1. Objectives and Recommendations

Our Objectives

The former Economic & Environmental Scrutiny Committee undertook an in-depth study into the role and development of partnership working to result in economic growth in Southend-on-Sea. To maintain partnership working throughout the project the team heard from a number of key partners and stakeholders who reflected on the impact of investment, the strength of partnership working, the natural resources and future potential of the town including; the coastline, London Southend Airport, education provision, proximity to London, connectivity and the emerging Anglia Ruskin MedTech Campus. The study was particularly interested in understanding the role of partnership working in securing investment in the town and in stimulating job creation.

“Developing strong partnership links to encourage investment in the town and the supply of employment opportunity.”

Our Recommendations

The following recommendations relate to the agreed project plan and the proposed outcomes of the project. They are made to enhance and further develop partnership working in Southend-on-Sea in order to stimulate job creation and inward investment.

Cabinet is recommended to agree the following conclusions. It should be noted that approval of any recommendations with budget implications will require consideration as part of future years' budget processes prior to implementation.

1. A Southend-on-Sea showcase event is developed in partnership to promote the town's offer to businesses in the area and to companies from further afield.
2. A Southend-on-Sea Skills Strategy is developed with partners considering apprenticeships, enterprise awareness and employability skills at all ages and increasing awareness and engagement between businesses and education providers. In particular, schools and colleges are to be encouraged and facilitated to form closer links with local business to enhance employability and understanding of the world of work.
3. Appropriate external funding is applied for, incorporating partner views and support, to address key transport and infrastructure problems such as relieving congestion and town centre enhancements. The current economic impact and future growth resulting from the investment at London Southend Airport should be recognised as a key driver for inward investment, securing funding and promoting the town. It must be recognised that most sources of external

funding require match funding from the Local Authority and/or partners. There is no revenue or capital current budgetary provision for such activities and therefore this must be taken into account before bids are submitted.

4. A multimedia PR campaign is undertaken to ensure everyone across the town 'sings from the same hymn sheet' with correct facts and figures and external perceptions of the town are changed. Work with partners to ensure a joined up approach, as far as possible, is taken with publicity and promotion, with particular regard to online/social media.
5. That the City Deal opportunity is actively pursued to find creative ways of managing and using derelict sites in the borough to maximise employment land in line with business demand.
6. Appropriate external funding opportunities are pursued from local, national and European sources in partnership with relevant stakeholders to maximise the impact of funding secured. This could include commercial sponsorship, in-kind support and utilising the developing talents of students from across the borough. It must be recognised that most sources of external funding require match funding from the Local Authority and/or partners. There is no revenue or capital current budgetary provision for such activities and therefore this must be taken into account before bids are submitted.
7. Southend-on-Sea Borough Council continues to host and support a range of forums which enable partnership working while reviewing and ensuring they are fit for purpose.

2. Background of the Report

Prior to the global economic downturn in January 2008 there were 2,547 people in Southend-on-Sea claiming Job Seekers Allowance. This peaked at 5,647 claimants in February 2012 having more than doubled during the recession. April 2013's figure now sits at 4,804 claimants. Figures have also shown there to be unfilled vacancies across the town and a mismatch between the vacancies available and the skills/aspirations of those seeking work. Both statistics and feedback from witnesses show there to be vacancies which struggle to be filled locally due to the nature of the contracts available, in domiciliary care roles for example, but also roles for which the local workforce does not have the right qualifications to undertake so staff are recruited from elsewhere. The need for business investment and job creation is therefore of utmost importance in order to increase rates of economic inclusion, and all the benefits this brings to the individual and society, and to see more money circulating in the local economy and therefore the business environment flourish.

The responsibilities for securing investment and job creation do not sit with a single organisation or entity but are instead something that everyone in Southend-on-Sea has a role to play in: businesses, education providers, third sector organisations and Local Authority alike. The prosperity of Southend-on-Sea corporately and individually requires a coordinated and united approach.

Austerity measures have resulted in reduced financial and human resources in all organisations. At the same time Government policy increasingly emphasises the role of the private sector in recovery from the recession and into the future, as seen the creation of Local Enterprise Partnerships and the match funding required for funding bids. Consequently the need for effective, efficient, appropriate and mature partnership working is required to maximise the resources which are available in order to overcome the challenges we face.

Understanding the opportunities, threats and challenges to achieving great partnership working and economic growth has been a primary consideration of this project. It has sought to identify where effective partnerships are already in place, why they are effective, how they can be further developed and where there are gaps which need to be addressed. The ultimate outcome is a prosperous Southend-on-Sea.

3. Process

The Project Team met on five occasions and considered a wealth of evidence, including current statistics about economic activity, benefit claimants and skill levels and undertook three witness sessions in addition to receiving written evidence. The project team decided that the most effective way to gather current, qualitative evidence was by of witness evidence from key people:

- Essex Chambers of Commerce – Mr J Dallaway
- Federation of Small Businesses – Mrs J Poet
- Town Centre Partnership/BID – Mrs D Jeakings
- Stockvale Group – Mr P Miller
- Southend-on-Sea United Football Club – Mr G King
- Converso – Mr P Hocking, Mr S Welland and Ms S Friend
- Dedman Grey – Mr M Grey
- London Southend-on-Sea Airport – Mr A Welch
- University of Essex – Ms Z Manning & Mr S Manson
- Southend-on-Sea Adult Community College – Mr S Lay
- Portfolio Holders for Regeneration and Enterprise, and Children and Learning – Cllrs J Lamb and J Courtenay
- Job Centre Plus – written response from Ms. S. Newham
- South Essex College – written response from Ms. C Anson-Higgs

The Committee was supported in this work by a dedicated, cross party, project team, comprising:

- Councillor Ian Gilbert (Chairman)
- Councillors David Garston (Vice Chairman), Louise Burdett, Trevor Byford, Ted Lewin, Ian Robertson, Duncan Russell, Martin Terry and Ron Woodley
- Officer / partner support was provided by Emma Cooney and Fiona Abbott

Project team members considered a range of economic and employment data available from the National Office of Statistics and local indicators in order to better understand the statistical representation of the current situation. This information provided the context to the witness sessions but also stimulated questions to be asked of the witnesses.

Appropriate witnesses were identified to give evidence to the project by giving consideration to the major economic drivers in the town, key sectors, education provision and support agencies.

The agreed project plan and a full list of the questions asked of the witnesses can be found in the appendices.

Three witness sessions were held in total. Adverse weather conditions hampered the efforts of some to get to the last of these sessions so written evidence was requested of those witnesses using the same questions which would have been posed during a session.

4. Findings

The responses from witnesses were wide ranging and reflected different perspectives depending on their sector, background and experience of partnership working in the town¹. However there were a number of recurring themes explored by witnesses and felt to be of particular importance in relation to the project:

(a) **Forums for partnership working which adapt to needs**

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council facilitates and supports a number of forums which enable partners to engage with each other and the local authority. Examples of these include Southend Business Partnership, Business Improvement District (BID) committee and project specific task and finish groups as well as one-to-one meetings and communication between partners and Council Officers/Members. These, and other, opportunities for engagement with new partners and ongoing partnership development are considered to be vital.

However, there is also the recognition that such groups, formal or informal, need to be ready to adapt to reflect changing needs and avoid duplication as resources are scarce. The Town Centre Partnership's transition to a BID is just one example of this. Partners appreciate the role that existing forums have played in developing and delivering change – drawing on the knowledge and expertise of partners for funding bids was used as an illustration. Nevertheless they were also keen to highlight that it cannot be taken for granted that these partnerships will just continue to work as they are. Changing conditions and demands mean that partnerships and forums have to have time invested in them and be regularly reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose.

(b) **Skills**

The role of skills and training was raised by all partners. While there is a general understanding of some of the challenges faced by businesses in recruiting appropriately skilled staff and those faced by education providers in putting on courses which meet business needs, there is still a disconnect.

It was identified that young people would benefit from additional work experience, mentoring and employability skills to equip and position them to get employment. The responsibility for ensuring that they are aware of the need for these skills and able to apply them in real life situations seems to fall through the net between organisations. However, while these skills are considered to be basic requirements of businesses there is limited engagement between businesses and education providers offering young people insight into business expectations and practices together with work experience and/or mentoring locally.

Better communication and partnership working between businesses and education providers was identified as an opportunity to improve skills

¹ The notes taken at the sessions are available separately.

development and delivery. Businesses making education providers and students of all ages aware of the types of skills, training and qualifications needed now and in the future and being willing to work with other employers to secure course provision within the existing education funding frameworks while at the same time providers operating as flexibly as possible to accommodate needs to ensure that the education provision locally is fit for purpose for the workforce of today and of the future.

Apprenticeships were felt to be of particular importance in bridging the disconnect between young people, education providers, businesses and creating employment opportunities. Southend-on-Sea has an excellent track record in apprenticeships across the town but there are opportunities for more. Historically they have been considered as a route into work for less able, or less academic students however apprenticeships now offer training to a high level across a range of subjects and all young people should be made aware of the opportunities available to them and encouraged to reach their potential via the most appropriate route, apprenticeship or otherwise.

(c) Transport, infrastructure and parking

Transport, infrastructure and parking were found to be key issues during the project. Although not primarily derived from partnership working (with responsibility for roads and many car parks lying with the Borough Council and rail/bus with the corresponding operators) working with partners to identify challenges and solutions was identified. The ability for people to access the town and move freely around the area once in Southend-on-Sea were highlighted as key for employees reaching a place of work, day to day business operations and for visitors coming to the town for shopping/leisure purposes.

The connectivity of Southend-on-Sea with London and Europe via the train lines and London Southend Airport was identified as a significant and exciting strength for the town; enabling businesses, employees and visitors to enjoy Southend as a base with good access to other locations. Promoting this easy access and the efficiency of the services provided, with, for example, the rail operator c2c operating the most punctual service in Britain, could be further used to raise the profile of the town and to bring people in for work, pleasure and to live here.

(d) Promotion and perceptions of Southend-on-Sea

The internal and external perceptions of the town were a common theme throughout the project. An exercise was undertaken a few years ago to agree shared branding and messaging about Southend-on-Sea which has seen successes locally and nationally. Use of the town as a filming and photography location as well as positive articles in national press have all contributed to changing perceptions as has investment in the town. The changing face of Southend-on-Sea through infrastructure and public realm improvements, private investment such as the Stobart Group at London Southend Airport, and joint ventures between multiple bodies to lever finance as seen in the Forum were all recognised as having a positive impact among residents and visitors.

However it was felt that Southend-on-Sea is still perceived as a traditional seaside town with limited recognition of some of the changes that have taken place by those who haven't been here recently. There is a need for everyone to 'sing from the same hymn sheet' with a common message about the town and shared aspirations for it so that when it's being "spoken" about, regardless of the medium used, by business, community or individual some of the stereotypes and misconceptions are challenged and replaced with the reality of today's Southend-on-Sea. Ongoing developments with online content and social media provide opportunities to be exploited to ensure a greater local, national and international awareness and excitement about what the town has to offer.

The perception of security in the town centre was highlighted as a particular area for further consideration. Crime rates in Southend-on-Sea are low but despite having a Purple Flag award for the night time economy perceptions that the High Street and seafront aren't safe of an evening pervade. This has the potential to detrimentally impact staying visitor numbers as well as business decisions about where to locate and grow. Growing the evening economy to bridge the gap between day and night activity could not only give people more reasons to use the town centre but also add greater vibrancy and therefore less opportunity for crimes to take place.

(e) **Business Premises**

In order to see business growth which results in job creation appropriate business premises are required to accommodate existing businesses and possible investment. The existing stock of office accommodation is blighted by Victoria Avenue and the vacant, derelict office blocks there. It negatively impacts on perceptions of locating a business to Southend-on-Sea as well as impacting on the market. It also affects people's perceptions of the town and investor confidence.

The development of appropriate business premises requires robust partnership working. Planning authority, developer and business community must work together in order that the demand is fully understood and consequently the right accommodation developed in the right place while remaining economically viable. It must be done hand in glove with (d) to attract inward investment and business growth to Southend-on-Sea as, regardless of location, little commercial space is developed speculatively in the current climate.

The Southend City Deal will seek to address some of this and should be the context in which any actions are taken regarding business accommodation.

(f) **Funding**

There is limited funding available from Government to apply for, but what is there, more often than not, requires a partnership approach. Not just in developing and supporting a bid but match funding requirements are increasingly common and Government is looking to 'leverage' investment alongside its own to result in economic growth and job creation. European Structural Funds, for example, usually require 60% match funding from Local Authorities and/or partners while other sources can vary in the percentage match required. There is no revenue or capital current budgetary provision in the Council's budget for such activities and therefore this must be taken into account before bids are submitted.

The Borough Council has been successful in securing a range of funding through partnership working in recent years e.g. Technology Strategy Board Future Cities, Better Bus Area and co-sponsorship of The Forum. Consequently strong partnerships are key to future applications and co-funding to ensure maximum opportunity for successful applications.

Partnership working in attracting inward investors is also vital. As the timing, frequency and nature of enquiries regarding investing in Southend-on-Sea is unpredictable it's vital that partnerships are healthy, strong and continuously invested in so that they can be called on at short notice to try to secure future investment. This could be giving a business perspective on operating in Southend-on-Sea or discussions about training provision. A consistent, positive message from all partners in a coordinated manner must be presented to possible investors.

5. Appendices

5.1 Project Plan

TOPIC

DEVELOPING STRONG PARTNERSHIP LINKS TO ENCOURAGE INVESTMENT IN THE TOWN AND THE SUPPLY OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY.

FRAMEWORK FOR SCRUTINY:

Objectives:

- ✚ To gain an understanding of the current job market in the borough with particular regard to unemployment, job opportunities and the gap between job supply and demand.
- ✚ To gain an understanding of the role of SBC in supporting the Town Centre Partnership, Southend Business Partnership, inward investment and promotion of employment and skills and how this is achieved through the Enterprise and Tourism function.
- ✚ To identify how partnership working can be best used to stimulate the jobs market and to address any mismatch between supply and demand.
- ✚ To understand the role of other Partnership Boards and teams in supporting inward investment and job creation and for consistent & coordinated approach.
- ✚ To look at the challenges and best practice in maintaining and developing strong partnership (within the council, with external parties from the public, private and third sectors) to encourage investment to Southend-on-Sea and the supply of employment opportunity and how this can be strengthened and broadened.

Outcomes:

Which support the aim to develop strong partnership links to encourage investment in the town and the supply of employment.

Issues which aren't the primary focus of the review (not barred if others raise them):-

- Infrastructure issues e.g. assets, property, transport;
- Markets, which is being investigated through the 'Town Centre Market Member Task & Finish Working Group'.

Method: project team meetings and evidence gathering sessions / witness sessions.

Target date: May 2013

MEMBERSHIP:

Councillors Burdett, Byford, D Garston, Gilbert, Robertson, Lewin, Russell, Terry and Woodley

Officer / partner support – Emma Cooney, Partnerships Team, Fiona Abbott and Lysanne Eddy

SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

- National guidance
- Job centre data
- SBC policy and guidance
- Local Economic Assessment
- Economic Development and Tourism Strategy (2010)
- Business Survey and refresh
- Third sector information
- Partners from business community

WITNESSES – to be reviewed:

- Local businesses – e.g. Phillip Miller, SUFC
- SBP
- Seedbed centre
- Large employers represented on other partnership boards
- Executive Cllrs
- Charitable sector
- Relevant officers (e.g. Town Centre manager)
- South Essex job club
- University of Essex
- Southend-on-Sea Adult Community College
- Job Centre
- Airport
- FSB
- Chamber

Scrutiny process to add value and is supportive of challenges already set to be delivered have limited resources which need to be focused on providing the front line service and the priority outcomes for the Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To make appropriate recommendations to Cabinet.

Which support the aim to develop strong partnership links to encourage investment in the town and the supply of employment opportunity.

5.2 Questions Asked of Witnesses

General Questions:

1. Please briefly introduce yourself / your organisation
2. What do you believe is the role of your organisation in encouraging investment in Southend-on-Sea and stimulating employment?
3. How would you evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of partnership working in Southend-on-Sea, including interactions with SBC, in terms of assisting economic growth?
4. How do you think the public, private and voluntary sectors in Southend-on-Sea could work together better to achieve economic growth in short (1 – 5 years), medium (5 – 10 years) and long term (10 – 15 years) – i.e. what are the opportunities and what barriers need to be over come?

Specific Questions:

Essex Chambers of Commerce / Federation of Small Businesses –

1. In your experience how does the level of partnership working in Southend-on-Sea with regards to employment compare with other towns in Essex/the East? Is there best practice from elsewhere you feel could be applied in Southend-on-Sea?
2. What could be put in place to attract more businesses to the town?

Town Centre Partnership -

1. How does SBC work with the Town Centre Partnership?
2. What opportunities do you think there may be for greater partnership working to stimulate the local economy?
3. Given the well-publicised challenges faced by High Streets up and down the country, what strategies are being pursued to safeguard / enhance the retail sector in the town centre?

Businesses –

1. Government is putting greater emphasis on and mechanisms in place to facilitate public and private sector organisations working together more – particularly with regards to funding. What opportunities do you see/have you seen for this to be put into practice in Southend-on-Sea?
2. What, if any, challenges have you faced regarding recruitment in Southend-on-Sea?
3. What could be put in place to attract more businesses to the town?
4. How do you see the outlook for your sector in Southend-on-Sea?

Job Centre Plus / SEEJobGroup –

1. Please could you describe the current job market in Southend-on-Sea with particular regard to unemployment, vacancies and supply/demand of labour
2. What is the greatest challenge in improving unemployment in Southend-on-Sea? How could partnership working across the town help to address this?

Southend-on-Sea Adult Community College / University of Essex / South Essex College -

1. Please could you briefly describe your current skills and training provision and its uptake locally?
2. Have employer requirements changed in recent years? If so how and how has this impacted on your relationship with businesses?
3. What further partnership working is required around the skills agenda to ensure Southend-on-Sea is best placed for economic growth?
4. How would you assess your work with small businesses and start-ups in the area, and what more can be done by local partners to strengthen this work?

Councillor John Lamb, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Enterprise -

1. How does SBC work with local businesses to encourage economic growth?
2. How does SBC work with potential investors to encourage investment in the town?
3. What partnership arrangements need to be made or changed to achieve greater employment opportunity in the town?

Councillor James Courtenay, Portfolio Holder for Children and Learning -

1. What role does SBC have with regards to education and linking provision with economic growth?
2. How does SBC work with local education providers to ensure provision meets the needs of the local economy?
3. What partnership arrangements need to be made or changed to achieve greater employment opportunity in the town?

6. Contact Details

For further information about this report please contact:

Fiona Abbott
Project Coordinator
Legal & Democratic Services
Corporate Services
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
PO Box 6
Civic Centre
Victoria Avenue
Southend-on-Sea
Essex
SS2 6ER

01702 215104

www.southend.gov.uk

fionaabbott@southend.gov.uk