Section 1. Context

1. How does your proposal demonstrate delivery of the 2050 Ambition?

The Southend Business Blanket project proposes to produce a single cohesive offer to businesses looking to locate or invest in the borough. It will constitute a ‘welcome package’ for any business investing in the borough, with ongoing support to enable those businesses to thrive. This offer could include (but is not necessarily limited to):

- Discretionary rate relief
- Dedicated client relationship management (via Economic Growth Team)
- Direct access to business support services (via the BEST Growth Hub)
- Planning permission advice/liaison (via Planning Team)
- Property Advice/Location Services (via Assets Team)
- Business Network Access (via Southend Business Partnership/Economic Growth Team/BEST Growth Hub)
- Information and guidance on key-worker housing (via Housing Team)
- Information and guidance on transport and travel planning (via Forward Motion)

Indirectly, the project will support the wider working of the Council via maximising the income of new non-domestic rates payments.

2. What evidence have you got that this approach will deliver of the outcome?

The Business Blanket project takes a range of offers typically available within UK Enterprise Zones and proposes implementing similar initiatives at a Southend level. Evidence presented by The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Department for International Trade indicates that Enterprise Zones are successful in attracting investment into specific locations, creating jobs and unlocking/enabling infrastructure development (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukti-inward-investment-report-201213).

Further, The Great British High Street campaign has also produced a specific guide on the use of discretionary rates relief to invigorate high streets with a number of successful case studies that have been delivered by other local authorities in the UK (https://thegreatbritishhighstreet.co.uk/pdf/ACS-Rate-Relief-Guide---Future-High-Streets-Forum.pdf).

Further, the LGA has conducted a specific project on the successful development and delivery of inward investment offers to attract new businesses – which concludes that producing a cohesive inward investment offer ‘will in turn generate new jobs and will have a multiplier effect in the local economy that will increase the area’s GVA by increased spending, increased demand on current services and supply chain links that will also
increase the activity of local businesses, generating more new jobs and constant economic growth: https://www.local.gov.uk/using-inward-investment-attract-new-and-retain-existing-businesses

Research from the SBC Economic Growth service design workshops so far have revealed that Southend businesses wish to see:
- A better platform for 1:2:1 relationships to be developed and maintained with businesses
- More business rates reliefs and a simplified process
- Potential to ring-fence business rates income to support local growth
- Find effective ways to sell the benefits of Southend

Economic research (https://tradingeconomics.com/united-kingdom/private-investment) also indicates that Business Investment in the UK is currently at its lowest point for two years due to the uncertainty caused by BREXIT negotiations. In order for Southend to compete effectively within the UK business investment marketplace, and put itself in a strong position to benefit from any post-BREXIT upturn in business investment, it is important that it has a compelling and comprehensive offer for potential investors in the borough.

3. What are the measures of impact, success and how will you embed learning?

Measures of impact will include:
- Number of new businesses registering in the borough
- Number of new investment leads generated
- Number of new non-domestic rates payees registered
- Number of hits on website

Measures of success will include:
- Increased volume of financial investment in the borough
- Increased number of local jobs created in the borough
- Decreased levels of business departure/redundancy from the borough
- Business satisfaction rating

As part of the project a new baseline will be created identifying Southend's position on a range of key metrics associated with attracting and retaining business investment in the borough. The project will initially be prototyped on a two-year basis with detailed key learning and performance information extracted from the project. The project will be evaluated at mid-point and in its final quarter where key learning and lessons for legacy/future will be identified.

Critical to the successful implementation of the discretionary rates relief element of the business blanket will the development of a specific criteria to assess and award the relief. Assessment metrics are likely to include: jobs created, business turnover, sqm space occupied, length of lease/location. Whilst it is not possible to accurately limit the total amount of funding distributed via the relief, we would utilise the eligibility criteria to balance the level/number of applications to target the allotted level of funding.

This project has the potential to be extended across the South Essex (ASELA) area dependent on the success of the prototype. Similarly, new business rates pooling measures can be explored across the ASEL A and other geographies.

Ultimately the project needs to be delivered at a zero-cost basis – i.e. a viable model will need to be developed and tested during the prototype period.
Section 2. Aims, Objectives & Collaboration

4. What are the key aims and objectives of the proposal?

The key aims of the project are:

- To increase the number of businesses choosing to locate in the borough
- To reduce the number of businesses choosing to leave the borough
- To increase the number of local jobs available to residents
- To maximise the level of non-domestic rates revenue to the borough
- To maximise the level of investment in the borough
- To reduce the current trend for reduction in NNDR payees in the borough

The key objectives of the project are:

- Attract 20 new business to the borough
- Attract £20,000,000 new investment in the borough
- Generate £600,000 additional NNDR income for the Council

5. Who else have you involved in discussions and how have the helped to shape the proposal?

See collaboration journey.

To date the general principle of developing a cohesive inward investment offer for businesses has been discussed and agreed by a wide range of stakeholders across the borough, including: Councillors, Southend Business Partnership, Opportunity South Essex, Southend Place Marketing Working Group and SBC Officers.

Since the original submission of the outline business case, a group of officers has met to discuss the proposal. This group included representatives from: Revenues & Benefits, Economic Growth, Finance and Planning.

6. What are the links and dependencies with the other outcome proposals?

**OP1** - *The Local Plan is setting an exciting planning framework for the Borough.* The Business Blanket project will need input, support and time from the planning department teams. The potential loss of revenue from planning advice fees will need to be discounted against the potential increase in Council income from future NNDR payments.

**OP2** - *We have a fast-evolving, re-imagined and thriving town centre, with an inviting mix of shops, homes, culture and leisure opportunities.* The Business Blanket project has the capacity to directly influence the attractiveness of Southend High Street as a location for new businesses to be based.

**OP3** - *Our children are school and life ready and our workforce is skilled and job ready.* The Business Blanket project has the capacity to have a significant impact on the number of jobs available to residents.

**OP4** - *Key regeneration schemes, such as Queensway, seafront developments and the Airport Business Park are underway and bringing prosperity and job opportunities to the Borough.* The Business Blanket project will have a direct impact on the attractiveness of the borough as a location for new businesses – and subsequently has the ability to ensure the success of new mixed and commercial development in the borough (Airport Business Park, Better Queensway, Etc.).

**CS4** - *Southend is a leading digital city with world class infrastructure.* The Business Blanket project will utilise and promote the Cityfibre Gigabit Broadband Network as a key attractor for businesses. As such, we expect that it will particularly support the creation and development of creative, culture and technology based
businesses in the borough.

7. Who are the partners (or potential partners) and how to you envisage their role(s) in collaborating to delivering the proposal to achieve the outcome?

Potential partners include:

- Southend Business Partnership – facilitating access to Southend’s business networks for new investors/businesses.
- Southend Place Marketing Working Group – supporting the development of marketing/promotional material to communicate the Business Blanket offer.
- Local Estate Agents and Landlords – promoting the Business Blanket to prospective investors.

8. What potential challenges do you anticipate in respect of a) implementing this proposal, b) caused by this proposal once implemented?

Key challenges and risks associated with this project include:

- The development, implementation and monitoring of the Business Blanket project will need senior support in order to affect change in a number of teams across the organisation.
- The development, implementation and monitoring of the Business Blanket project will need a range of staff resource in order to reach a successful conclusion.
- The use of Council funds to support private sector businesses has potential to be a political controversial position.
- The causal link between inward investment activity and business investment is notoriously difficult to monitor and measure – accordingly, evidencing the benefit of the project is likely to be challenging.
Section 3. Social Value

9. How could the proposal deliver social value - in terms of the local community, businesses, economy and environment and what will the specific impact and benefits be?

The project in itself will bring new businesses to the area, increasing the employment opportunities available to local residents, improving local business networks and raising the profile of the borough as a place to do business.

Outside of that:
- The project will utilise local suppliers of goods and services to ensure that additional local economic uplift is realised across the borough.
- The project will be physically delivered on site at SBC, minimising any additional environmental impact on the borough.
- The project will encourage use of sustainable modes of transport for local businesses, thus improving the health and wellbeing of Southend’s workers and residents.
- The project will support local people to access local jobs, minimising the requirement for travel and thus negative environmental impact from road travel.
- The project will build the reputation of Southend as a location that is supportive of local businesses, increasing the buy-in of local businesses and number of businesses choosing to locate in the borough (and subsequent business rates income).

10. What is the perceived impact the proposal will have on groups with ‘protected characteristics’?

The Business Blanket will be run on an equal access basis, and any physical or digital literature produced will be made available in a range of formats to ensure this engagement. Literature will be representative of the diverse community present in Southend, though not targeting any one particular group.

The blanket has the ability to signpost new business to appropriate schemes that support those with protected characteristics, for example apprenticeships with adults with learning difficulties currently being offered here. In recommending Southend, it will communicate to new audience that we are an open and inclusive town, with prioritised equality and diversity policies, ensuring business owners with protected characteristics feel welcome in our town.

11. What is the proposal’s potential direct or indirect impact on the wider community?

As stated above, utilising public funds to support businesses may be a difficult political position for some to accept. However, key to the acceptability of this project is the principle of running it a zero net loss to the Council (i.e. as long as the overall cash flow makes money that can be spent on delivering Council services, it should be well-received and accepted by the wider community).

A successful programme should see the community respond positively to the decrease in empty units in Southend, restoring pride in the town, and promoting safety in the High St.