

Annual Report 2023-24

Southend-on-Sea City Council

July 2024



Southend-on-Sea
City Council

Contents

Welcome to our annual report	3
Our priorities	5
Achievements in the past year	6
A growing city with a strong and prosperous community	8
A safe city with a good quality of life for all	11
A clean city with a resilient environment	15
A transforming council delivering efficient, cost-effective services	17
Resources	19
Looking to the future	21

Welcome to our annual report

Our annual report for 2023/24 highlights what we have delivered for our residents, businesses and millions of visitors, as well as updating on our organisational transformation. It details the actions and outcomes achieved under our three main priorities for the city and our fourth priority for the organisation.

We have done this while facing significant challenges to remain financially stable and resilient for the future. These challenges are not unique to Southend-on-Sea, the local government sector has experienced rising demand for social care services for adults, children and the most vulnerable, increased cost pressures and high UK inflation. The Council has had to take difficult financial decisions, transform services and lead the organisation through these challenging times. Councillors and officers have worked together to find a better, more cost-effective way forward, balanced against the need for people to pay more towards the cost of some services. We have listened to residents and businesses and worked alongside stakeholders, including central Government, MPs, neighbouring councils and local partnerships.

Key achievements in 2023/24 include helping to:

- boost the local economy, promote business opportunities and give residents skills and confidence through the delivery of our economic growth strategy, running networking events for young entrepreneurs and using funds from the government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund for projects increasing volunteering, training and skills
- support residents facing cost-of-living issues by piloting financial advice sessions at One Love Soup Kitchen Southend, providing mobile dental units and hosting cost-of-living and energy usage drop-in sessions
- enhance the city's tourism, culture and leisure offer by investing in upgrading the pier, installing a new boardwalk across Chalkwell beach to improve accessibility, successfully organising and delivering events with partners and ensuring the Jazz Centre UK's long-term presence at Beecroft Art Gallery
- maintain a clean and safe city by launching a new CCTV van and running Operation Dial to combat anti-social behaviour
- deliver integrated care and support and improved health and social care outcomes for residents, for example, inviting older and frail residents to exchange their slippers for a brand-new free pair and signing the Armed Forces Covenant
- improve support for children and young people, for example, a report into the findings of a recent Ofsted inspection of the Council's children's services found significant improvements across all areas
- deliver housing and infrastructure and promote good housing design, management and maintenance in social housing and the private sector, opening a pioneering sustainable home for residents to view
- support those at risk of homelessness to live independently in their own homes and avoid homelessness and where there have been instances of homelessness, make this brief and non-recurrent

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- protect and enhance the street scene by maintaining our parks, open spaces, planting trees, keeping public land clear of litter, maintaining street furniture and installing solar-powered lamp posts along the Prittlebrook Greenway
 - keep traffic flowing in the city by maintaining our roads, pavements and footpaths to an acceptable standard
 - deliver a high-quality waste collection service for all residents and implement a One Black Bag a Week campaign with Veolia for residents to reduce waste
 - reviewing all Council joint ventures with service providers during 2023/24 to make sure they offer value for money and are operating effectively.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this work, including councillors, employees, partners and stakeholders. We look forward to continuing to work together to achieve our strategic priorities.

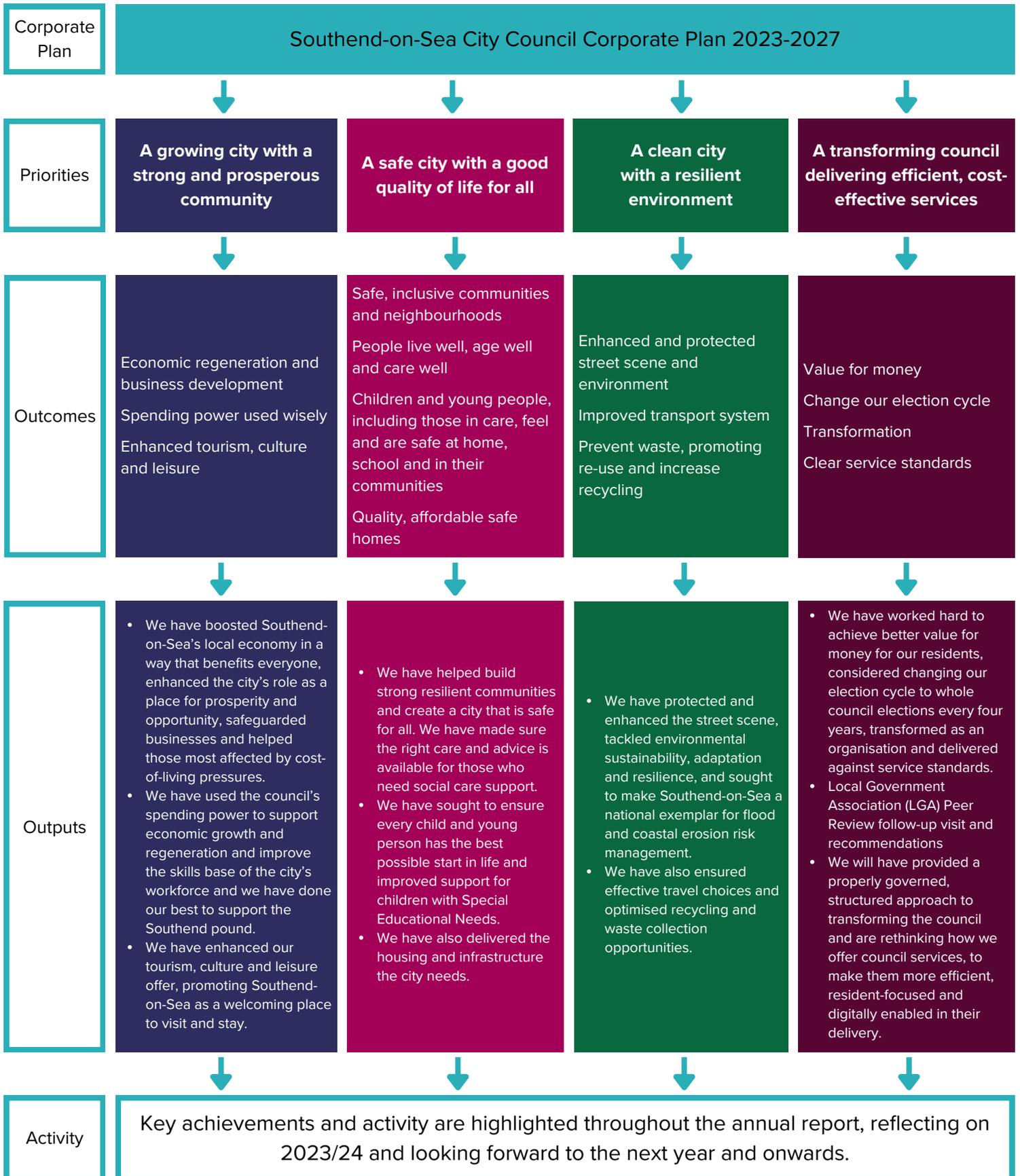


Colin Ansell, Chief Executive



Councillor Daniel Cowan, Leader of the Council

Our priorities



Achievements in the past year

Looking at key milestones and achievements from the previous year.

Southend Pier awarded Pier of the Year award 2023 by the National Piers Society



New communal area and playground opens in Southend-on-Sea city centre

April 2023

July 2023

The Council signs up again to the **Race at Work charter**



Southend-on-Sea awarded nine **Green Flag awards**

August 2023

July 2023

The Council signed up to the **Age Friendly charter**



Successful **Southchurch Business Expo launch event** to promote the benefits of living and working in Southchurch

September 2023



The city hosted the successful event, **Southend City Jam 2023**



Beecroft Art Gallery marks its 70th year and celebrates the 59th Essex Open Art Exhibition

October 2023

Safe Steps, a domestic abuse service, won the BBC Essex Make a Difference award

The Council, in partnership with Metal Arts Charities NetPark Wellbeing project, won the **Most Innovative Mental Health Intervention award** at the Mental Health Awards

November 2023

Two **Essex Housing Awards** were scooped by the Council for positive contributions to the housing sector and a further two were shortlisted

Southend-on-Sea City Council Corporate Plan 2023 to 2027 refreshed

December 2023

The Council, in partnership with Veolia, launch **One Black Bag a Week** campaign to help reduce waste and improve recycling



3,127 toys were generously donated in the tenth annual **Toy Drive** in Southend-on-Sea

January 2024



Introduction of **Transport Safety Officers** for safer train services, a pilot scheme in collaboration between Southend-on-Sea City Council, Thurrock Council and Essex County Council

February 2024



Southend-on-Sea retained its **Purple Flag Award**, for safety in the night-time economy, for the eleventh consecutive year



The Council and Ministry of Defence signed the **Armed Forces Covenant**

March 2024



Council social worker is nominated for a prestigious **World Social Work Day award**



The Councils **retrofit eco home** was shortlisted for two Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors awards

A growing city with a strong and prosperous community

Economic regeneration and business development

The Council is enabling economic growth in Southend-on-Sea by:

- developing an economic growth strategy
- consulting with local forums like the Essex Chambers of Commerce
- being an active member of South Essex Councils, a partnership of seven neighbouring councils.

This year we have launched a series of networking events for young local entrepreneurs aged 18 to 30. These networking events are part of a new initiative called YES (Young Entrepreneurs Southend), set up to empower, inspire and support young people looking to start or grow their business or broaden their connections.

We continue to implement our Tackling Poverty Strategy and Action Plan. Activity includes:

- piloting Council officers going to One Love Soup Kitchen Southend to provide people with face-to-face advice about finances, benefits and ways to improve their household finances in Summer 2023
- providing our most vulnerable residents with a mobile dentist unit
- hosting cost-of-living and energy usage drop-in sessions.

The Council used funds from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to support economic growth and business development. A record number of local organisations applied for the final year of UKSPF funding, the last of a three-year allocation managed by the Council on behalf of government. The Council and partners selected projects that increase volunteering, offer training and skills opportunities and support new and existing organisations. UKSPF funding has already supported eight local organisations, resulting in positive outcomes for residents and businesses.



We have helped turn empty buildings in the city back into occupation. The Southend-on-Sea City Council-led [No Use Empty South Essex scheme](#), which offers zero interest loans to business owners in south Essex, received £1 million of government funding to reopen for new applicants.

No Use Empty South Essex is a joint scheme between Southend-on-Sea, Basildon, Thurrock, Castle Point, Rochford and Brentwood Councils. It aims to turn empty buildings back into occupation. The scheme has already supported projects such as the development of bank premises, an old supermarket building, and mixed-use conversions from commercial to residential.

Spending power used wisely

We are utilising our spending power to ensure those who work with us contribute to our city. We have incorporated social value asks in relevant procurements, delivering added benefits for our residents and visitors through social value. For example, waste disposal contractor Suez successfully produced electricity to power 3,000 homes within the first 10 months of the waste disposal contract. While the leisure contract increased employee hours for school and college visits and the number of site visits for school children and residents, as well as 45 more people in local employment.

We have also reviewed all Council joint ventures with service providers during 2023/24 to make sure they are operating effectively and offer value for money.

Enhanced tourism, culture and leisure

The city experienced a successful year in tourism, culture, and leisure. We invested in our world-famous pier, upgrading and improving it to enhance visitor experience and increase visitor numbers, and in March 2024, installed a new boardwalk at Chalkwell beach. The installation has improved accessibility for our residents and visitors to access the water's edge, particularly those who use a wheelchair or other walking aids.



The Council, with its partners, has successfully organised and delivered events to promote Southend-on-Sea as a welcoming destination for visitors and tourists:

- we received over 60 street party permits across the city in May 2023 for residents wanting to celebrate His Majesty King Charles III's coronation, ensuring our residents and communities were able to celebrate in the best and safest way possible
- the Feel Good Festival, a free festival to help everyone in the city boost their mood and feel good, returned to Southend-on-Sea in July 2023. The event saw community organisations come together to provide support and guidance on a variety of topics, including healthy eating, exercise, mental health and personal safety
- in September, Southend City Jam 2023 provided a showcase of urban artistry, attracting thousands of attendees with stunning street art creations. Artists from across the globe displayed their skills on permanent and temporary walls in and around the city centre and seafront



- in September, Southend-on-Sea welcomed the world's elite cyclists as they cycled through the city as part of stage six of the Tour of Britain 2023
- in October 2023, the Southend Halloween Parade returned for its third year. The parade was organised by the Council and Southend Tourism Partnership. The free event featured local and national acts in their best ghostly attire, creating a fun family evening
- Southend-on-Sea's inaugural Window Wanderland festival in March 2024 was a success, with over 100 households and businesses participating. The festival was about community spirit, connecting, celebrating, creating together and brightening our city's streets with window displays decorated with art, colours and lights.



Our six libraries across the city continue to serve as community hubs for culture and learning. Southend Libraries has helped increase digital literacy in the city, participating in the National Digital Inclusion Network. The Forum is a distribution point for free sim cards to those experiencing digital exclusion. People who may benefit from free mobile data can visit The Forum on specific days to collect a free sim card. We have also made sure the Jazz Centre UK remains in its home at the Beecroft Art Gallery for the long-term.



A safe city with a good quality of life for all

Safe, inclusive communities and neighbourhoods

We have sought to make the city, its neighbourhoods and our communities safer and more inclusive. For example, not introducing parking charges in our park car parks and making sure there is no charging to use our public toilets.

All Council officers who provide frontline services to residents have received training to become trauma informed and help prevent onward negative experiences of our residents who have been subject to vulnerability.

The Council has worked with partners to improve community safety, protect people experiencing vulnerability and reduce crime. For example:

- in April 2023, we launched our new CCTV van, funded by a government grant secured by Essex Police on behalf of the Council. The Council-owned and operated van, which is part of the Townlink radio network, has been used for targeted patrols at the nighttime economy, car cruises, and major events, reducing anti-social behaviour and crime. The mobile unit has also been used to target specific areas in the city, resulting in a reduction in crime-related issues. Following its success, other Essex and London councils have started using the van and we are continuing to explore ways to improve the service the Mobile Unit provides



- our community safety unit intensified efforts to enhance community safety through Operation Dial, a Home Office-piloted initiative aimed at combating anti-social behaviour in key areas across the city, which ran from July 2023 to March 2024
- the Community Safety Partnership, including the Council, Essex Police, Fire Service, and Southend Association of Voluntary Services, launched a campaign to coincide with Hate Crime Awareness Week in October 2023 to raise awareness and reinforce the message that there is no place for hate in Southend-on-Sea
- for Anti-Slavery Day in October 2023, we held an information stall in The Forum alongside our partners. The stall empowered individuals to recognise signs of modern slavery and learn how to contribute to its prevention. We also ran a social media campaign to help raise awareness, educate on how to see the signs and what to do if detected a potential victim.

People live well, age well and care well

We have made sure the right care and advice is available for people to live well, age well and care well. For example:

- the Livewell Southend website, which has local health and wellbeing information, changed to a new platform in June 2023. The change was inspired by the need to make the website more fit for the future. Changes include ensuring that it meets digital accessibility requirements, improved search functionality and user friendly interface
- in November 2023 and February 2024, older and frail residents were invited to exchange their worn-out slippers for a brand-new free pair, complete with secure fastenings and robust soles to help prevent falls, resulting in 290 pairs of slippers being exchanged. Residents were also connected to additional support services, including 290 Able like Mabel resource packs and fall proof checklists.

The Council and Ministry of Defence signed the Armed Forces Covenant in March 2024, committing to upholding it and supporting the armed forces community. This covenant follows the Armed Forces Act 2021, ensuring service personnel and veterans are not disadvantaged in accessing services like healthcare, education, and housing.



Over 7,200 residents have benefitted from community projects funded by Active Southend this year. The investments were administered by the Community Investment Board. Active Southend provided grants of up to £1,000 to not-for-profit organisations. Activities included:

- exercise classes for more than 700 residents
- empowering women in sports, particularly young women in football
- extra support and development for neurodiverse residents
- helping families connect, both with one another and with other families.

The Council's Global Majority Working Group Practice Unit, funded by external grants, has made significant progress in 2023/24. The initiative from Children's Social Care aims to educate and raise awareness among Council employees about equality, diversity and inclusion in social care practice. Achievements this year include:

- creating a guide for foster carers looking after children from different ethnic backgrounds on caring for different hair and skin types
- providing training emphasising the importance of inclusive, non-judgmental use of language in children's social care
- providing training highlighting the overlapping impacts of multiple factors such as race, gender or sex, socio-economic background and sexual orientation – known as Intersectionality
- creating blogs that promote inclusivity and anti-racist practice and celebrate diversity
- contributing to the delivery of anti-racist practice in the Eastern region of Southend-on-Sea, Essex and Thurrock
- delivering workshops on supporting and caring for children from ethnic minority backgrounds and promoting cultural humility.

Children and young people, including those in care, feel and are safe at home, school and in their communities

We have strived to make sure that every child and young person in Southend-on-Sea has the best possible start in life and access to the opportunities they need to thrive in life, including an excellent education. In 2023/24, 99 per cent of pre-schoolers and 97 per cent of year six children got one of their top three choice of school.



The Council helped to improve support for children and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND), creating a portfolio for Special Educational Needs and Disability to focus on the outcomes for children and young people with SEND. We have sought to improve the experience of SEND parents and carers by involving them and by delivering the SEND Strategy.

We maintained our focus on safeguarding all children and young people. A report into the findings of a recent Ofsted inspection of the Council's children's services found significant improvements across all areas. The visit in May 2023 focused on the arrangements for children in need and those subject to a protection plan. It found that leaders have spent time creating a working environment where social workers can develop and build strong and trusting relationships with children, and the views of partner agencies are regularly included in assessments. The report identified some areas for improvement, which we are committed to working on.

In collaboration with 80 local authorities across England, the Council helped create a short film in 2023 called 'Any of Us' to highlight the urgent need for foster carers. The jointly funded film focuses on three different individuals who demonstrate the qualities needed to provide nurturing homes for children and young people.



Quality, affordable safe homes

The Council continues to provide the housing and infrastructure the city needs.

We have encouraged good housing design, management and maintenance in social housing and the private rented sector. In January 2024, the Council opened a pioneering sustainable home in Leigh-on-Sea for residents to view. The three-bedroom semi-detached eco home features a range of energy and water-saving features. In March 2024, it was shortlisted for two prestigious regional awards by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors for refurbishment revitalisation and public sector categories and by the MJ Awards for the Innovation in Delivering Sustainability and Social Value category. The initiative is part of our commitment to achieve net-zero emissions by 2030. With around 40% of the Council's carbon emissions originating from housing, retrofitting homes is key to reducing this impact.



This year, there has been a rise in the number of people presenting as homeless in Southend-on-Sea. In 2023/24, 695 households were accepted as owed a homelessness prevention duty, a 44 per cent increase from 2022/23, due to their risk of becoming homeless within 56 days.

Additionally, 854 households were accepted as owed a homeless relief duty, a 79 per cent increase compared to 2022/23, because we had either been unsuccessful in preventing their homelessness or they were already homeless.

The Council has been supporting significant numbers of these households into settled accommodation, but the severe under supply of settled, affordable housing and high rents in the private rented sector, coupled with a lack of mental health support and floating support, is causing many to remain homeless and if eligible placed in expensive temporary accommodation. The government-funded Rough Sleeping Initiative is the Council's main tool for providing support to those who are offered lesser protections by the law, such as no right to temporary accommodation. This has resulted in an approximate doubling of our spend on guesthouse/B&B temporary accommodation in comparison to 2022/23.

The Council participated in a government-funded pilot in spring 2024 to assess the effectiveness of the government's funding and interventions in addressing homelessness. The Council, partners, and those with lived experience fed in. The analysis is due to be published by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in Summer 2024.

A clean city with a resilient environment

Enhanced and protected street scene and environment

The Council has protected and enhanced the street scene and made sure it is attractive and welcoming for our visitors and residents. This has included maintaining our parks and open spaces, planting trees, clearing weeds from street pavements, keeping public land clear of litter, maintaining street furniture and cleaning and maintaining gullies.



Solar-powered lamp posts have been installed along the Prittlebrook Greenway, funded through the Department for Transport's Active Travel Fund 2. The lighting columns were installed after residents asked for safety to be improved in the area. A survey in July 2021 revealing that 50% of residents avoided walking along the brook due to safety concerns and 44% believed better lighting would help.

We continue to monitor air pollution in air quality management areas, implementing our Local Air Quality Action Plan and monitoring our outcomes via annual status reports.

The Council has also undertaken flood and coastal erosion risk management and invested in protecting and nurturing our coastline and its marine biodiversity.

Improved transport system

The Council has helped keep traffic flowing in the city by:

- only installing traffic calming measures in residential areas following full consultation and with the support of residents
- working with bus companies to improve bus services
- maintaining our roads, pavements and footpaths to an acceptable standard.

We continue to be highly responsive to potholes, investigating 100 per cent of reports to MySouthend within 24 hours (working days). In 2023/24, we received 5,201 reports, with 20 inspections on average per day. Our proactive and permanent approach to pothole repairs has resulted in fixing over 10,000 individual potholes in the past five years.



In June 2023, our unique and historic Cliff Lift was commemorated by the National Transport Trust's Red Wheel scheme. The scheme recognises and commemorates the most significant sites of historical importance to transport heritage in the United Kingdom and the Cliff Lift has been recognised for having a unique single car counter-balanced by a weight running directly beneath the main track.



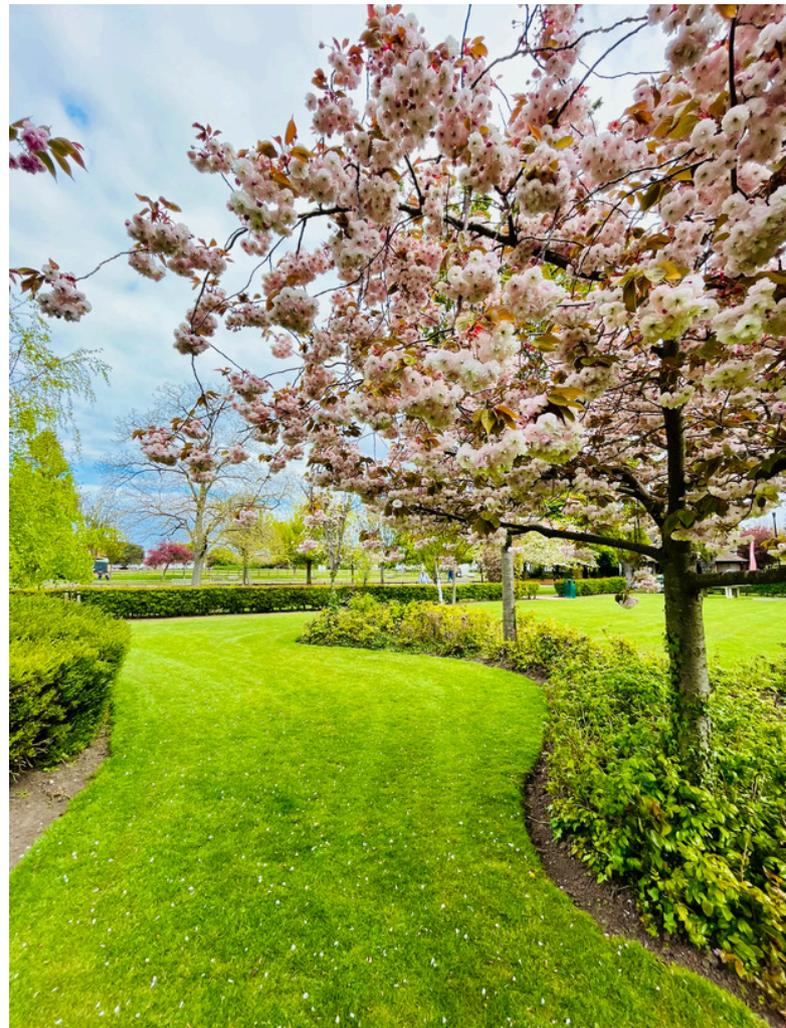
We also successfully demonstrated a proof-of-concept to increase plastic recycling rates among businesses and organisations across the city as part of PlastiCity, with over 1,000kg of plastic waste diverted from landfill in 2023/24. The initiative was funded by the EU's European Regional Development Fund. The Council was supported by MYgroup, a Yorkshire-based waste management and recycling company who delivered 500 recycling boxes for the Council to distribute to businesses and organisations across the city, including schools, charities and libraries. The focus of the project is on increasing recycling rates of 'lost plastics' – material eligible for recycling, but not yet collected or processed by mainstream waste management operations and subsequently sent to landfill.

Prevent waste, promoting re-use and increase recycling

Throughout 2023/24 we have provided a high-quality waste collection service for all residents.

Following a study in 2023, Veolia, the Council's environmental partner, discovered that 58% of the rubbish residents put in their bins should have been recycled. To help residents understand what they can recycle and reduce waste, Veolia launched a campaign focusing on commonly missed items like food waste, empty aerosol cans, plastic pots and trays. Through the campaign, Veolia and the Council have aimed to clear up some of the confusion for residents and empower them with the knowledge and tools to recycle more.

In January 2024, the Council, in partnership with Veolia, launched the [One Black Bag a Week challenge](#), encouraging residents to sign up to the pledge. A leaflet was distributed to residents with practical tips on reducing, reusing and recycling, including ideas to switch to reusable items and reduce food waste.



A transforming council delivering efficient, cost-effective services

Value for money

We have taken steps to make sure all projects we undertake are financially viable and do not put the Council and the city's taxpayers at financial risk. The Council's 2024/25 Budget, agreed in February 2024, was developed through a robust financial process, with engagement across the organisation and a focus on outcomes, savings and investments.

We continue to seek to better understand key cost and income drivers across all our services and have taken a commercial mindset when thinking about our assets.

Change our election cycle

Between October 2023 and December 2024, the Council engaged residents and stakeholders to ask them how often they would like to vote in local elections. A social media campaign and local press coverage was run over a nine-week period and nearly 2,000 people participated in online and paper surveys, focus groups and webinars on the election cycle. The results were reported to the Council in June 2024, allowing councillors to make an informed decision to continue with the current system of voting for a third of councillors every year.



Transformation

Following the Council's appointment of a Director for Transformation, work has got underway to improve areas across the Council, including governance and how we offer Council services. Throughout 2023/24 we have and continue to work on:

- refreshing the focus and direction of the Council's Transformation Board to support the delivery of circa £17m of savings and income generation initiatives
- re-energising the Service Design function to enhance service delivery and resident engagement
- scoping and designing the Council's corporate Project Management Office function to enhance delivery, efficiency and quality assurance
- building a Council change champion community to act as a point of contact and conduit for the delivery of transformation across the organisation.

The Local Government Association returned in December 2023 to provide a [progress report](#), following conducting a corporate peer challenge in October 2022. The report highlights the efforts to improve stability and implement recommendations, including stronger communication and cross-party collaboration. It also outlines the challenging financial environment and the importance of transformation for the Council's future financial sustainability. The report emphasised the need to maintain focus on delivering required savings and medium-term financial resilience and the importance of transformation in achieving this. Councillors, employees and partners agreed that progress is being made, ways of working are improving and the direction of travel is positive.

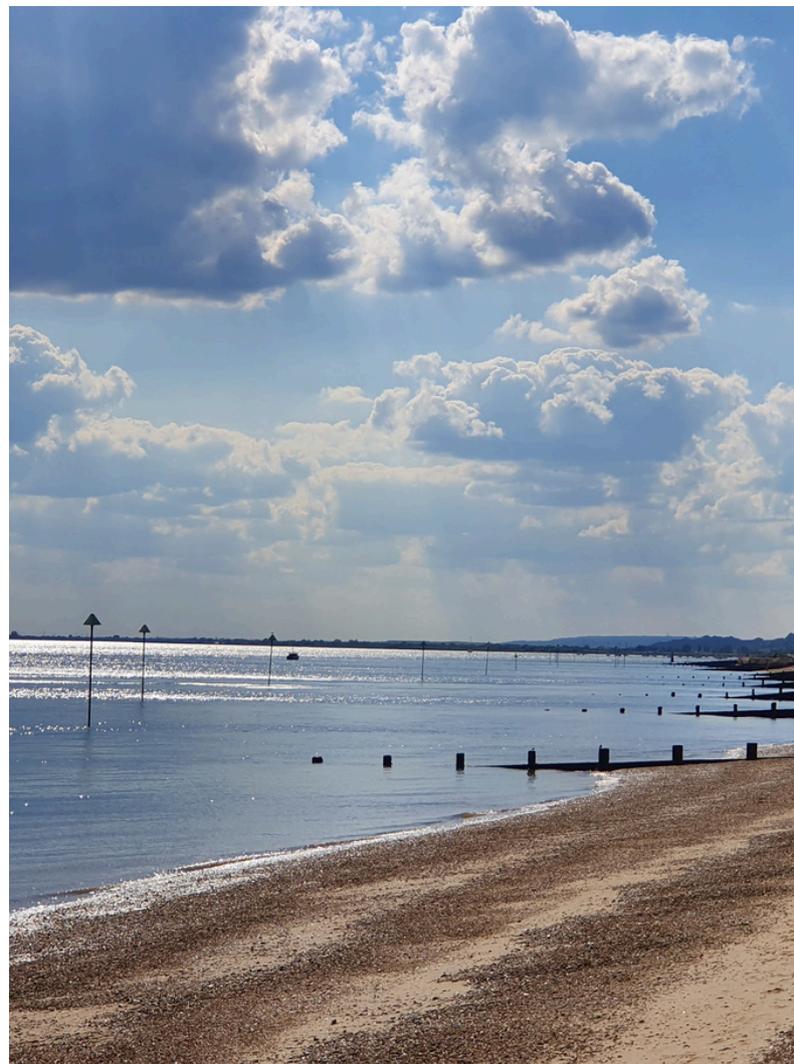
The online portal MySouthend continues to be improved to enable easier access and navigation for residents, businesses, and visitors in Southend-on-Sea, including for reporting missed bin collections, council tax information and reporting potholes.

We have been working on modernising our Information and Communications Technology (ICT) landscape, including migrating data to a secure cloud location, improving ICT systems and contracts and considering closing one of our data centres housing ICT equipment. These projects will help reduce the Council's carbon footprint and achieve cost savings.

Clear service standards

We continue to make sure residents receive the best possible service from the Council, within the budget envelope available.

The Council has monitored service provision through the development and implementation of service plans for each service area and adhered to customer and operational service standards in areas such as customer services, housing, registration services, benefits, revenues, flood and water management, environmental health, licencing, highways, transport, parking, street works, building control and planning.



Resources

The Council, along with most local authorities across the country, continues to face challenges in providing essential services to residents within the level of resources we have at our disposal. This is exacerbated by an unprecedented operating environment, increasing and more complex local service demand and uncertainty over future finance reform and national policy changes. It is within this context that we have updated our [Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2024/25 - 2028/29](#).

The Council began the financial year 2023/24 in a relatively strong financial position in comparison to several other upper tier authorities. The speed of widespread inflationary pressures, energy prices and local service demand has had a huge financial impact for Southend-on-Sea over 2023/24.

We are responsible for over 500 services and with a population of over 180,000 residents in around 80,000 households. The Council's turnover is around £440m and our resources are well-managed through our budgetary and financial monitoring framework.

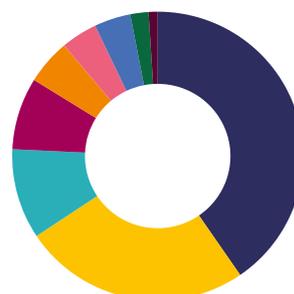
It is vital for us to assess, understand and take responsibility for our financial future. We must be proactive in the delivery of our corporate plan priorities and work with partners to refresh the vision for the city, evaluate local economic recovery progress and provide the best possible value for money services to residents, businesses and visitors. Financial sustainability can only be enhanced by embracing the city's economic potential, growing local tax bases and increasing our income generating and commercial capabilities.

Where the Councils budget comes from 2023-24



■ Council tax and collection fund surplus	70%
■ Business rates	25%
■ Government revenue support grant	5%

Where the Councils budget goes 2023-24



■ Adult social care	40%
■ Children's social care, family support and youth services	25%
■ Waste, environmental care and street cleansing	10%
■ Culture and tourism (including libraries, museums and galleries)	8%
■ Benefits, bereavement and regulatory services	5%
■ Parks and open spaces	4%
■ Economic growth, planning and housing	4%
■ Traffic, highways and transport	2%
■ Community safety	1%

In 2024/25, we anticipate a £13 million increase in income, with approximately £5 million expected to be generated by a 4.99% increase in local Council Tax. This is to help deal with the ongoing pressures and demand in social care.

As the chart below shows, the Band D Council Tax level in Southend-on-Sea in 2024/25 is still lower than many of our nearest neighbours. We are determined still to minimise the financial burden on council taxpayers. It is also worth noting that over 70% of properties in the city are in Council Tax bands A to C, which will pay lower levels of Council Tax.



The Council is predicting a cumulative budget gap of £32.9 million up to the end of 2028/29. To close the budget gap over this period we must continue our drive towards financial sustainability. As we work with partners, we may need to focus more on the delivery or joint commissioning of services in a targeted way to make sure that those in most need and who will receive the greatest benefit are the recipients of our services.

Our Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2024/25 - 2028/29 provides a robust framework for setting the budget for 2024/25 and will help make sure we remain financially sustainable over the medium term. The future forecast position is challenging but achievable due to political and management desire to put in place the necessary service transformation. We are in a strong position to influence, shape and redesign services locally and regionally to make a real positive difference to the lives of our residents and communities.



Looking to the future

We are working with partners to refresh the city's vision, which will provide the opportunity to continue strengthening partnership working across the city and wider region. Dedicated work and engagement will continue with a focus on driving our ambitions as a new city.

For our organisation we are developing a clear vision which will set out what type of organisation we aspire to be, with a framework underpinning this. Our priorities and outcomes are clearly set out in our corporate plan, which details how and what the Council will deliver in the medium-term. The strategic framework, illustrated below, is our golden thread, and includes the corporate plan; service plans, setting out the activity of each service area within the Council; and individual performance goals and objectives, supporting the performance of employees.



* currently in development

Following the Local Government Association (LGA) corporate peer challenge in October 2022 and follow-up visit in December 2023, the Council, along with its employees, councillors and partners, will continue to work towards the recommendations made in the [original report](#) with the support of the LGA.

The Council's Transformation Board will drive effectiveness and innovation by aligning Council activities with strategic objectives, ensuring efficient and effective delivery of investments, and resulting in better outcomes for residents. Possible actions include:

- evolving the Transformation Board focus from efficiencies to sustainable impact to ensure that decision making continues to drive strategic aims that contributes to improving the life chances and outcomes
- embracing and embedding the beneficiary approach to services to ensure our relationship with residents remains focused on service and delivery in a sustainable and targeted manner.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

The Council is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion, with strategic initiatives in year two of our improvement plan. We are finalising and implementing our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, which aims to cultivate an inclusive workplace culture where every individual feels valued and empowered. This strategy will align with the Council's values and serve as a roadmap for embedding diversity and inclusion across the organisation.

Proactive steps we have taken include making sure recruitment processes are more inclusive, including Equality Champions on interview panels for senior leadership interviews and expanding the reporting framework to include ethnicity pay gaps and [gender pay gaps](#).

Under the 2010 Equality Act, we are required to identify equality objectives. Our equality objectives focus on:

- employees
- access to services
- community cohesion
- partnership working.

The Council has made a number of annual commitments to support these objectives. Commitments for 2023/24 are set out below.

Key activity that has taken place includes:

- the Council has signed up to Mindful Employer
- a new EDI dashboard has been produced and continues to be monitored
- a Co-Production Framework has been created and is being implemented
- the Household Support Fund has been fully disbursed for 2023/24.

The Council will continue working on the annual commitments and will monitor and report on these internally.

