

Southend-on-Sea City Council

Economic Growth Strategy

Southend-on-Sea City Council

2024 to 2028



Foreword

The council is committed to enabling economic growth in Southend-on-Sea and building strong and prosperous communities. We want to help businesses and organisations to achieve sustainable economic growth, improve communities and provide secure, high quality and well-paid jobs for our residents.

We will deliver economic growth by focusing on our strengths. Southend-on-Sea is a city with a strong entrepreneurial spirit. In 2022, over 1,100 new businesses were launched in the city[1]. The majority (99%) of businesses and organisations in Southend-on-Sea are micro or small enterprises[2]. Our city benefits from sectors including retail, aviation, engineering, tourism, fisheries, medical technologies, creative and cultural industries, specialist construction, manufacturing and health and social care. We will continue to develop our economic advantages in these sectors and support people to grow their businesses locally, working with partners.

The council will promote, with businesses, what our city can offer employees. People enjoy a good work-life balance here in Southend-on-Sea and can take in our blue and green spaces, strong leisure offer and vibrant cultural and art scene. We are a university city, with regional and local colleges and top performing schools. There are also lots of family-friendly learning and creative opportunities. We can and will do more to capitalise on these strengths and promote the city as a big opportunity for setting up a business.

We will embrace our geographical position as a coastal community in the South East, bordering a sea that has brought commerce, sustenance, opportunity and tourists to the area for centuries, and our proximity to London, to maximise benefits and opportunities for our businesses and communities. We want Southend-on-Sea to become a 'Sydney-on-Thames' with a bustling coastal economy and a leading role in leisure, culture and arts. Like the Australian city Sydney, we want to empower our local workforce, support our small businesses and unleash the power of innovation.

As a council, we are committed to making Southend-on-Sea the best place in the UK to start and grow a micro, small or medium sized enterprise. We will identify the barriers and drivers to becoming a hub for start-ups and small and medium sized enterprises. The council will work with partners, tap into the creativity of our business community and encourage use of local facilities like the LaunchPad innovation hub at Airport Business Park Southend to overcome barriers, seize opportunities and drive innovation. We recognise the crucial role small and medium sized enterprises play in the supply chain of large businesses and want to support this here in the city.

The council is also committed to setting up our young people and adults to succeed in their lives and get decent jobs, whether those jobs are in Southend-on-Sea, south Essex or London. We will help educate and train young people and adults, so they can engage productively with work, achieve their goals and offer the skills employers want.

This strategy has been developed amid the ongoing impacts of a pandemic, the UK's low economic growth, severe financial constraints faced by local authorities, a cost-of-living crisis and ongoing deprivation in some of our wards. We will address challenges by identifying anchor projects that deliver positive economic, social and environmental impacts and help to build accessible pathways to financial independence for our residents. We will embrace our role as an anchor institution to convene our communities, business and public sector leaders and work with central government and south Essex partners to create opportunities. We understand the opportunities of Southend-on-Sea and will work with others to achieve the outcomes that all our communities can benefit from.

Councillor Daniel Nelson

Cabinet Member for Economic Growth and Investment, Southend-on-Sea City Council

[1] Office for National Statistics (ONS), UK Business Demography data (ONS, 2023)

[2] ONS, UK Business Counts 2023 data (ONS, 2023)

Contents

Foreword 2

Introduction 4

Our approach 5

Ambition and objectives 7

Guiding principles 8

Delivering the strategy 10

Monitoring and evaluation 15

1 Introduction

Enabling economic growth and a strong and prosperous business community is integral to the work of Southend-on-Sea City Council. It has a key role in levelling up disparities across the city and bringing positive changes that benefit all communities in Southend-on-Sea.

The Southend-on-Sea Economic Growth Strategy 2024 to 2028 is a key document for the council and the city. It is realistic, strategic and adaptable. With this strategy, we aim to:

- Support established businesses and organisations in Southend-on-Sea to achieve sustainable economic growth, particularly those in our key growth and strategic sectors, and drive the development of local skills, employment and infrastructure.
- Promote Southend-on-Sea as the home of micro, small and medium sized enterprises to deliver a growing business base in the city.
- Improve our skills base, attract new talent and improve access to high quality jobs for employees, jobseekers and students, particularly those in wards with lower skills and employment levels.

Southend-on-Sea's key growth sectors include creative and cultural industries, health and social care, specialist construction and specialist manufacturing. Our strategic sectors include aviation and engineering, financial services, medical technologies, retail and tourism.

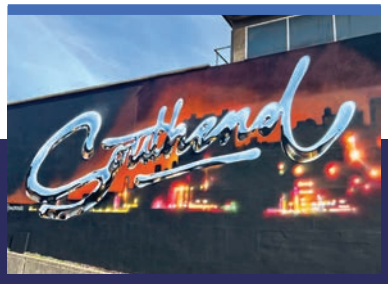
Guiding principles for the strategy that underpin the above priorities are:

People



Promoting economic growth that is resident and business focused.

Place



Promoting our unique assets and tackling the challenges we face in our communities.

Infrastructure



Accessing opportunities through infrastructure planning and investment.

Our approach

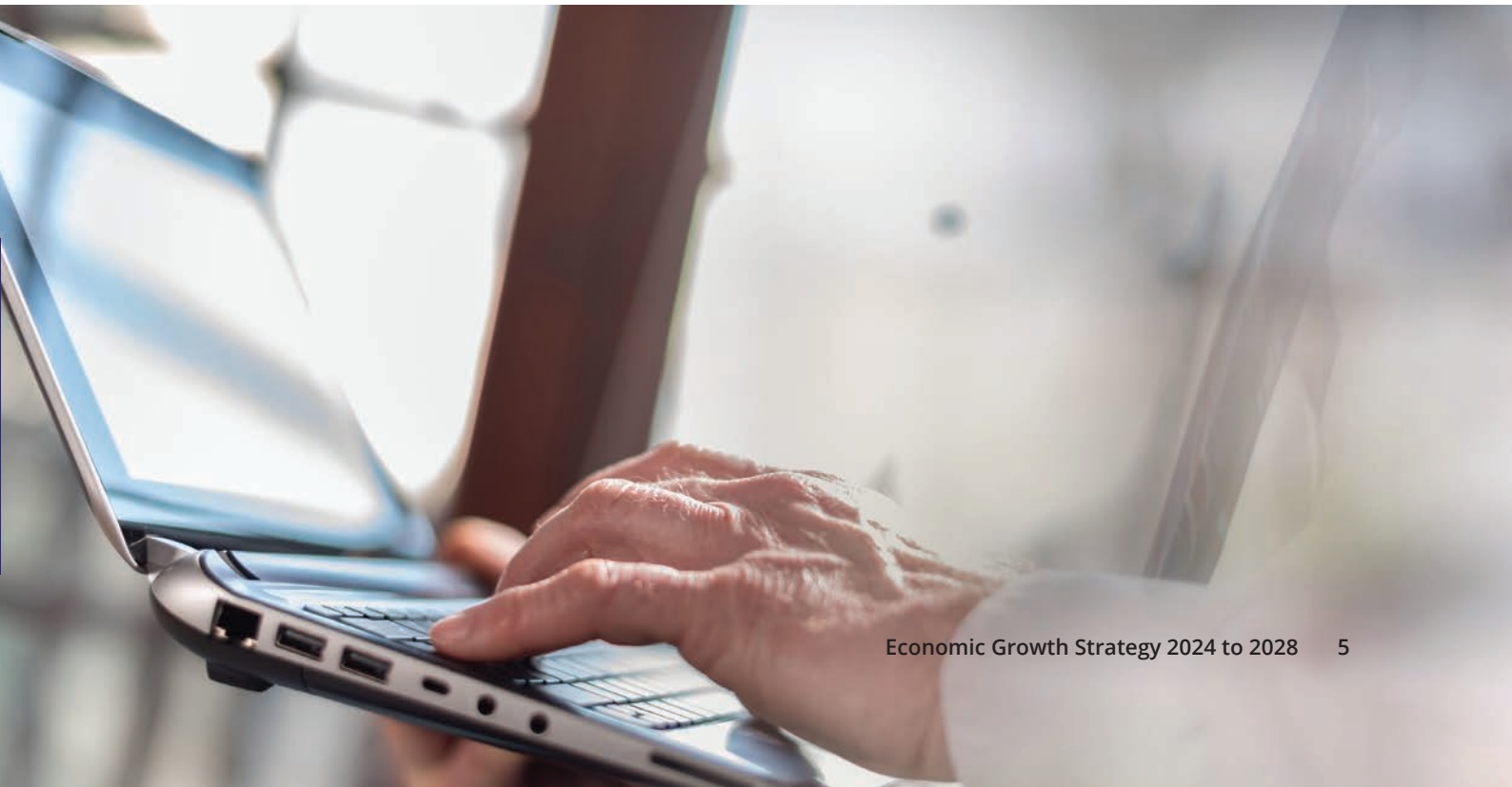
The economic growth strategy sits underneath Southend-on-Sea City Council's Corporate Plan 2023 to 2027. The corporate plan provides a medium-term vision for Southend-on-Sea and how we will grow the city with a strong and prosperous community.

The economic growth strategy sets out what we will do over the next five-years to deliver a growing city with a strong and prosperous community. It is supported by an evidence base, an action plan for implementing the strategy and a plan for monitoring and evaluating performance. Our strategy will need to be agile to adapt to the changing requirements of our residents, businesses and other organisations.

We have focused on our key strengths as a city and what we believe can deliver sustainable economic growth in Southend-on-Sea. These objectives will be progressed within the lifetime of this strategy. We recognise the importance of other determinants of economic growth and these will be addressed in other supporting plans.

The strategy will serve as an umbrella document, setting out the overall approach for delivering economic growth in Southend-on-Sea. Underneath the strategy will sit specific, detailed plans, covering different areas of focus. These will be developed subsequently in collaboration with relevant partners and stakeholders. Examples could include plans for:

- Promoting businesses engagement
- Attracting new businesses, organisations and investment
- Workforce development
- Clean growth
- Boosting tourism
- Supporting our strategic and growth sectors



There has been extensive consultation with stakeholders in the development of this strategy. We want to maximise the benefit from collaboration opportunities across the organisation and for economic growth to be a key consideration within all council activity. This strategy has a specific focus on business and enterprise. It has been prepared to sit alongside and work with a suite of existing strategies which are also relevant to economic growth. These include:

- City Centre Strategy and Investment Plan 2022
- Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 to 2028
- Southend Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021 to 2024
- Southend Skills Strategy 2023 to 2028 (in development)
- Southend-on-Sea City Council Digital Strategy (in development)
- Southend-on-Sea City Council Tackling Poverty Strategy and Action Plan
- Southend-on-Sea City Council Tourism Strategy and Destination Southend Plan
- Southend-on-Sea City Council's adult social care strategies – Ageing Well, Caring Well and Living Well – and our Market Position Statement

The strategy will feed into sub-regional strategic planning across South Essex Councils and any evolution of future devolution discussions with our partners in Essex and Thurrock. While our focus is on highlighting our unique appeal as a centre for micro, small and medium sized enterprises, we will also market our offer with larger businesses to encourage inward investment and attract employment. We will extend our support to these businesses, recognising their key role in the supply chain and their representation of the city in regional and national spaces.

We want to build upon our economic advantages in our strategic sectors of retail, aviation and engineering, tourism, fisheries and medical technologies, as well as in our growth sectors of creative and cultural industries, specialist construction and manufacturing and health and social care. Inclusive growth, which balances productivity, environmental and community outcomes, is key to delivering good growth in Southend-on-Sea. We will support the transition to a green economy and respond to emerging and changing sectors like natural habitat protection, coastal tourism and artificial intelligence (AI), identifying potential opportunities for businesses and organisations.

This strategy outlines how we will work our partners, stakeholders and networks in south Essex to achieve objectives. Business networks like the Essex Chamber of Commerce, Southend City Business Improvement District, Southend Business Partnership and Southend Tourism Partnership are key, so too are large employers like Olympus KeyMed, London Southend Airport and Ipeco. We will strengthen existing relationships and establish new ones, integrating shared objectives into our strategy and plans where possible.

We will continue to monitor the health of the economy at all scales and undertake activity to maximise benefits for our residents and businesses accordingly. Research indicates that despite the current challenging economic climate, the transport, storage, health, arts, entertainment, and recreation sectors are expected to experience growth in the coming years[3]. This represents an opportunity for the city if we can position ourselves appropriately in our key sectors.

[3] Based on PwC's Good Growth for Cities report (PwC, 2023)

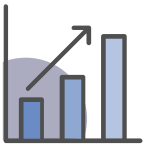
2 Ambition and objectives

Ambition

Our ambition is to make best use of Southend-on-Sea City Council's resources to grow the city's economy in a sustainable way, securing inward investment into the area, improving business conditions, making Southend-on-Sea the best place in the UK to start and grow a small business and enhancing skills and job opportunities for residents.

Objectives

Our objectives are to:



Support established businesses in Southend-on-Sea to achieve sustainable economic growth.

Measured through gross value added by industry, gross value added per hour worked, business birth, death and survival rates and the number of businesses engaged.



Promote Southend-on-Sea as the home of micro, small and medium sized enterprises

Measured through the number of businesses and their legal status, industry, employment and turnover size bands.



Support employees, business owners, jobseekers and students in Southend-on-Sea to achieve their career ambitions

Measured through the number of jobs and vacancies, employment and earnings, qualification levels, employment by industries and occupations and job quality.

3 Guiding principles

The economic growth strategy is underpinned by guiding principles covering three areas:

- **People**
- **Place**
- **Infrastructure**

People

The wellbeing and aspirations of our residents and businesses are at the heart of this strategy. We will celebrate the unique characteristics and assets of our communities and make sure our services are accessible to enable people to unlock their full potential. This will include, helping local businesses with their recruitment needs and working with partners in the further education sector and communities to address skills requirements, to assist people in achieving secure and stable jobs and enabling businesses to grow. We also want to equip our businesses to thrive in and beyond the city, boosting aspiration and leading to better financial outcomes.

Place

We will promote Southend-on-Sea as a top destination to live, learn, do business and access our leisure and cultural activities. We will work jointly with neighbouring councils to facilitate economic growth and prosperity in the south Essex region. This will include promoting the use of facilities like the Airport Business Park Southend and the LaunchPad innovation hub within the business park to businesses and organisations. With the shift to more remote and hybrid working since the pandemic, we will also embrace opportunities to market the city as a hub for remote and hybrid working, to attract businesses and professionals seeking a dynamic and supportive environment in the evolving work landscape whilst remaining close to London and Europe via our nine train stations with direct access in to Fenchurch Street or Liverpool Street and London Southend Airport..

We will actively work with businesses, communities and partners to shape the physical, economic, social and cultural aspects of Southend-on-Sea to improve the quality of life for all. Recognising that certain wards within the city face challenges related to lower skills and employment levels, we will tailor our delivery to enhance the accessibility of services in these areas. We will use the strength of existing council and partner strategies and plans and encourage effective stakeholder leadership, advocacy and communication across the city to create a more cohesive and comprehensive approach to place.

Infrastructure

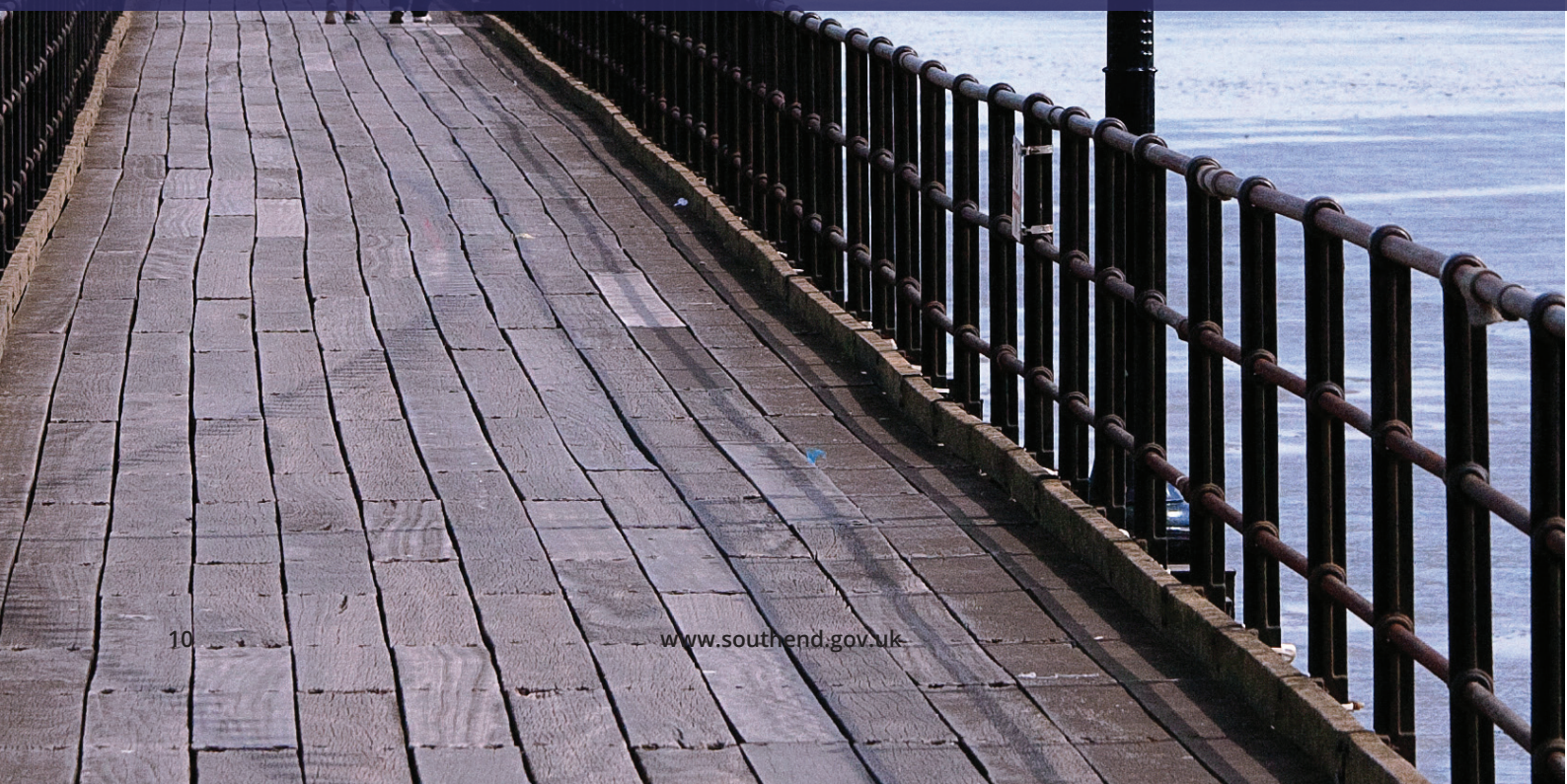
We will continue to attract investment to support economic growth, regeneration and business and community development. We will make Southend-on-Sea a competitive investment and growth destination by strategically allocating resources to provide the best value for money, working with partners and securing the necessary resources to stay at the forefront of opportunities in Greater Essex and along the Estuary corridor, as well as the associated supply chains. We will prepare funding bids and business cases that demonstrate the viability and positive impact of proposed initiatives and showcase Southend-on-Sea's unique offer and market potential, making a compelling case for investment in the city. A strong track record of delivering projects on time and within budget distinguishes Southend-on-Sea, and maintaining this track record secures the city's position as a great investment prospect for the future.

We will use our spending power wisely and identify projects and initiatives that align with our objectives and have the potential to yield significant impact. We will support improvements to local infrastructure, including transport, digital connectivity and inclusion. We will also continue to invest in our city centre and our tourism, cultural and leisure offer, to enhance the City's appeal as a destination for businesses and to create a desirable living environment. We will encourage the generation of project ideas and investments that can transform our economy and communities. These ideas and investments should align with our objectives for economic growth and move the city towards a low carbon economy.



4 Delivering the strategy

In this section we detail specific actions that we will carry out and support to deliver our objectives. We acknowledge that these actions exist in a world of evolving economic realities, including changing work patterns, the green agenda and significant developments in AI among other factors, all of which will impact our local economy. Southend-on-Sea also sits within the south Essex economy and is influenced by the rest of Essex and London. As we put these actions into practice, we will consistently evaluate these demands, making necessary adjustments and seizing opportunities, while also effectively addressing challenges.



Support established businesses in Southend-on-Sea to achieve sustainable economic growth

People

- Offer accessible business support, including financial and funding advice and networking and business opportunities, such as understanding the export potential of goods and services.
- Promote local talent retention opportunities and upskilling of the workforce.
- Engage and promote sector-led working groups to raise the profile of and engage with businesses and organisations.

Place

- Develop inward investment plans that identify the types of businesses and organisations we want to attract to Southend-on-Sea.
- Promote the city as the creative hub of Essex.
- Work with partners to signpost to and promote our local offer.
- Promote the delivery of spaces that businesses need to operate and grow.
- Assist businesses and organisations in their interactions with the council.

Infrastructure

- Bid for funding to support sustainable economic growth.
- Share funding opportunities and developments with businesses and organisations.
- Enhance infrastructure development, particularly in the areas of transport and digital infrastructure.
- Facilitate growth of London Southend Airport, in partnership with Rochford District Council and other stakeholders, to realise its potential as a regional transport hub, providing new employment opportunities and space for growing businesses. Mindful of the impact of night flights on communities, we will work with the airport to minimise the impact of night flights on residents who live under the airport's flight path.
- Provide businesses and organisations with guidance and support to improve their premises, reduce energy costs, cut carbon emissions and minimise their environmental impact.

Promote Southend-on-Sea as the home of micro, small and medium sized enterprises

People

- Offer a personalised approach when engaging with enterprises, to understand their individual needs and provide tailored business support and resources.
- Give stakeholders an active role in the coproduction of projects and services.
- Signpost businesses and organisations to recruitment resources and platforms within the community to access local talent.
- Identify and establish channels for businesses and organisations to access skills providers, promoting employee training and development opportunities.
- Promote apprenticeship programmes, encouraging businesses and organisations to invest in local talent development to provide hands-on experience and career pathways.

Place

- Develop plans to attract businesses and organisations to the city, including medium and large sized enterprises, focusing on sectors that bring the greatest value.
- Make sure council services respond to the needs of businesses, for example, community safety and environmental health.
- Promote the growth of community-led business hubs and networks, providing them with the support and resources to thrive and collaborate.
- Market the city as a hub for micro, small and medium sized enterprises with a wider audience.
- Champion local needs and community ownership of businesses, recognising employment hotspots in wards and empowering residents to take an active role in the economy.
- Engage businesses and organisations in shaping the city's identity and success, fostering a sense of pride and commitment to its growth.
- Use our assets and networks to facilitate idea sharing, joint working and growth among businesses and organisations.
- Marketing and events to promote businesses and organisations in partnership with others where possible.
- Advocate for the creation of coworking spaces, promote innovation and enhance digital skills to make Southend-on-Sea a top destination for remote working.
- Work with businesses and organisations to move the city to a green economy and seize green business opportunities.

Infrastructure

- Use the council's spending power to increase sourcing of goods and services locally.
- Support capital infrastructure projects that benefit micro, small and medium sized enterprises to create a more favourable environment for businesses and organisations to thrive.
- Enhance transport and digital infrastructure development – promoting accessibility with investors and partners.
- Promote use of Airport Business Park Southend and the LaunchPad innovation hub within the business park and the business support Oxford Innovation provide through the Launchpad.
- Support landlords to promote accessible workspaces that cater to the needs of micro, small and medium sized enterprises.

Support employees, business owners, jobseekers and students in Southend-on-Sea to achieve their career ambitions

People

- Increase adult qualification levels through accessible means, collaborating with partners such as South Essex College, Southend Adult Community College and University of Essex.
- Advocate for good work with fair pay, working with businesses and organisations to promote the living wage, emphasising its benefits for employee retention.
- Align career guidance from childhood to adulthood and promote pathways to employment alongside upskilling opportunities.
- Promote accessible foundational and essential skills training for individuals facing financial hardship.
- Assist in entering the workforce and addressing skills gaps by providing employability training, particularly for those who are furthest from the job market, partnering with employers to deliver training that bridges skills gaps.
- Promote the development of green skills and training courses needed to do green jobs.

Place

- Promote further and higher education and training providers offering employer-tailored training, facilitate interactions and signpost to encourage use of local providers.
- Champion flexible, vocational education and skills premises that are accessible to public education and skills providers, non-profit providers and private firms.
- Engage with national initiatives like Multiply, the government-funded programme to help adults improve their numeracy skills, and local programmes to support the development of career pathways and connect employers with suitable avenues for progression and qualification enhancement.
- Highlight the local offer of physical and virtual learning centres, aiming to increase awareness and encourage active engagement with local educational opportunities.
- Encourage enrolment in The Digital Academy Southend to foster digital career pathways, establishing a talent pipeline that bolsters the city's digital innovation ambitions and enhances its reputation as a hub for remote and hybrid working.

Infrastructure

- Engage differently across south Essex to streamline the business engagement offer and simplify access for businesses.
- Engage with the Greater Essex Local Skills Improvement Plan to make sure Southend-on-Sea is seamlessly integrated into the plan to maximise funding, efficiencies and collaboration opportunities.
- Make sure partners and stakeholders are aware of and can access funding opportunities.
- Provide and signpost individuals and organisations to guidance and support to streamline the process of applying to and accessing funding.

Other key steps for delivering this strategy

Outline our resources

Our delivery plan will outline our resourcing, including people, skills, time, budget and the role for business and partners to play. We will actively seek external funding opportunities and maximise partnership working to strengthen our ability to deliver services in line with our objectives. We recognise work may be required to build knowledge and capability within both the council and those responsible for delivering the strategy.

Engage stakeholders and partners

We will identify the key stakeholders and partners for each priority area, who will help with delivery of the strategy. We will need to develop our understanding of stakeholders to identify their spheres of influence, areas of interest and the key individuals within groups or organisations. We will use a behavioural approach to optimise the way we engage with audiences. This will include delivering more effective communication activities and taking a personalised approach to stakeholder management to establish and maintain effective working relationships with individuals and organisations.

We will collaborate with our partners to champion Southend-on-Sea and create the conditions for sustained economic growth. We will consult and share ideas with partners and make sure that an appropriate network of internal and external partners can effectively and efficiently review activities and initiatives across Southend-on-Sea.

Within the council, we will strengthen connections between services, including economic development and housing, planning and regeneration in the area, to create optimal conditions for attracting and driving economic growth and community development. We are doing this by bringing together all place-based services under one leadership team within the council.

Make the case for Southend-on-Sea

We will create a strong and consistent evidence base and key messages for the city's offer, embedding this across communications and engagement activity. Where resources enable us to do so, we will build a bank of diverse business case studies for use in communications and for external funding applications.



5 Monitoring and evaluation

It is important that we evaluate the impact of activity to understand what is working well. We should recognise and celebrate milestones that are achieved and help raise the profile of Southend-on-Sea.

The council will establish comprehensive monitoring practices on its economic growth activities, to make sure that desired progress is achieved and that economic benefits are maximised for our business and residents. A delivery plan will be created, with measures related to activities monitored by the council, so too an in-depth risk register. This will allow activity to be refined so that initiatives that are not working are stopped and those that prove most successful are invested in and rolled out more widely. It will also demonstrate progress against the economic growth strategy objectives. Therefore, the following metrics should be measured and assessed on a regular basis:

Objective	Measure
Support established businesses in Southend-on-Sea to achieve sustainable economic growth	• Business birth, death and survival rates • Gross value added per hour worked • Gross value added by industry • Number of businesses engaged
Promote Southend-on-Sea as the home of micro, small and medium sized enterprises	• Businesses by employment size • Businesses by industry group • Businesses by legal status • Businesses by turnover size • Number of VAT traders and PAYE employers
Support employees, business owners, jobseekers and students in Southend-on-Sea to achieve their career ambitions	• Employee jobs by industry • Employment • Employment by occupation • Gross weekly earnings for full-time employees • Job quality • Number of jobs • Number of vacancies • Proportion of the population aged 16 to 64 with level 4+ qualifications