



# **ENGAGING SOUTHEND - TOGETHER**

**SOUTHEND TOGETHER'S STRATEGY FOR  
ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITIES**

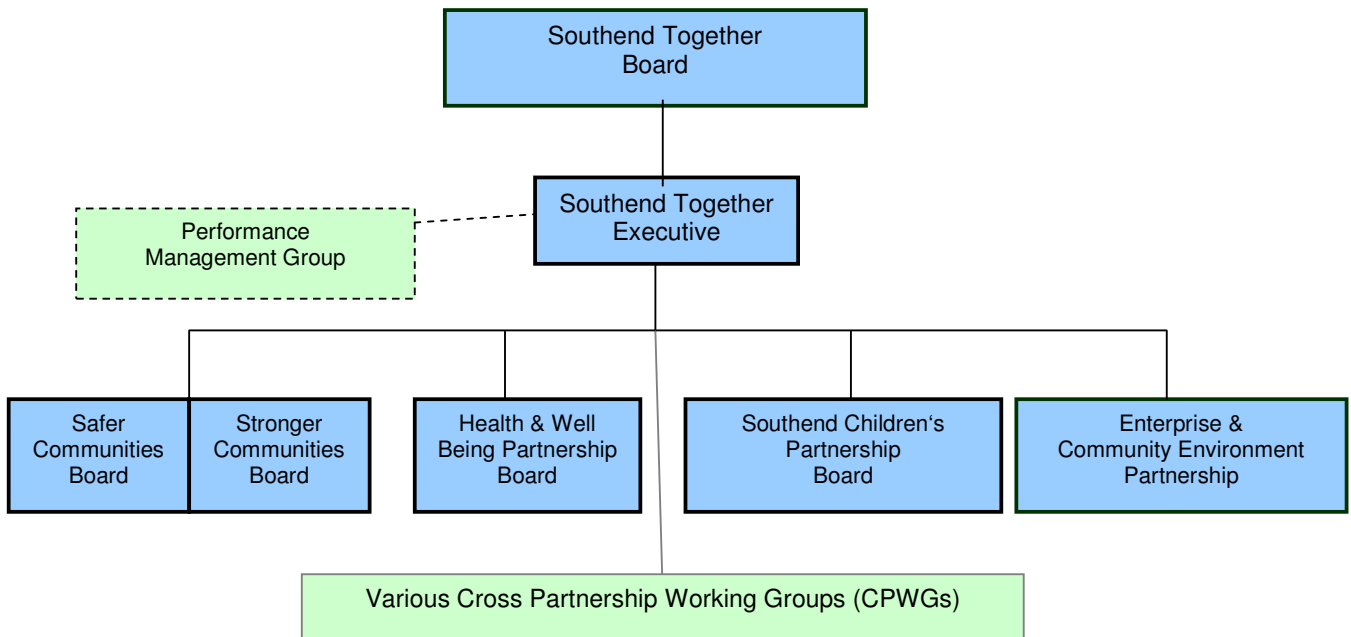
Draft for Consultation

## About Southend Together

More gets done if people in an area work together. They could be community and faith groups, the council, police and fire & rescue services, charity groups, businesses, schools, public health bodies and more. Pooling experience and expertise, they can understand local people, places and problems. And make sure the right actions are taken and right services delivered. This linking up happens in Southend through our **Local Strategic Partnership** (LSP) called **Southend Together**, a single body that:

- brings together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, business, community and voluntary sectors so that different initiatives and services support each other and work together
- is a non-statutory partnership
- provides a single overarching local co-ordination framework within which other partnerships can operate
- is responsible for developing and driving the implementation of Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements.

### Southend Together's family of partnerships



If you would like to find out more about Southend Together visit [www.southendtogether.co.uk](http://www.southendtogether.co.uk) or contact the Partnership's Team on 01702 215111.

## Foreword

I take great pleasure in presenting our first Partnership Engagement Strategy. This strategy builds upon partners own engagement plans and brings together all of the knowledge and expertise we have borough wide in engaging with our communities.

This strategy provides commitment to the key principles of engaging with our local communities that is, continuing to use their views to further improve our service provision and performance, and improve the prosperity and well-being of all communities in Southend and the overall cohesion of the community. We all realise that the more involved and informed people are, the more responsive and better a service can be, and in turn improve local outcomes and quality of life. There is a real long-standing commitment to engaging with our communities in Southend and this strategy strengthens that. Lastly a supporting toolkit helps share and promote best practice in engagement across the partnership.

I would like to thank all of those involved for their contribution and hard work to date in engaging our communities and listening to our local people, helping communities set and meet their own priorities. I am confident that this strategy will further strengthen our partnerships work in engaging with our communities in Southend.

**Councillor Nigel Holdcroft**  
**Chair of Southend Together**

## Contents Page

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>What our Partnership Engagement Strategy will do</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Our Aims and Objectives for the Strategy</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Our Principles</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The Local and National Context</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Perception of Engagement in Southend</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Engagement Frameworks Already in Place</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Definitions of Engagement</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>21</b>

## Introduction

*Southend is a great place to live and we want to make it even better. We want to cultivate a dynamic, successful, modern economy that supports, respects and develops our communities and the unique environment of Southend. As Southend Together, we see our role as one of 'place shaping' – shaping a future where people can fulfill their potential and enjoy outstanding quality of life.*

**Southend Together's Vision, taken from Sustainable Community Strategy 2007-2017**

This Engagement Strategy sets out the way Southend Together will involve communities in shaping the borough and the delivery of high quality services. It aims to help ensure that a coordinated and strategic approach to consultation and engagement is undertaken on a partnership wide basis.

We recognise that our communities have a wealth of knowledge and experience as residents living in our neighbourhoods, users of our services, businesses and voluntary and community groups. Southend Together has a long established commitment to engaging with its communities and recognises its responsibility to involve local people in issues that affect them. We understand that engaging with our residents, community groups and businesses must lie at the foundation of everything we do.

We are committed to engaging and empowering our communities: guided by local priorities and a shared sense of what matters locally, communities, councillors and partners work together to improve wellbeing. Southend Together members work together to share skills, information and engagement activities to maximise partnership resources and results. The new 'Duty to inform, consult and involve' has highlighted that working in isolation is neither effective nor efficient. The Comprehensive Area Assessment framework also encourages partners to review arrangements and plan for new engagement and empowerment requirements.

There is an increasing recognition that our communities should be given opportunities to have real involvement in our decision-making. The wide range of partnership engagement and consultation activity in Southend means there is also a growing need to streamline and co-ordinate community engagement activities across the partnership.

Southend Together has a very clear vision of what it wants the borough to be like, both now and in the future.

We know that engaging with our communities is key to achieving this aim. This Engagement Strategy sets out how we will continue to effectively involve our communities in making Southend an even better place to live with outstanding service provision. This will be achieved through using common principles to guide the way that partners work together, using a common approach to engagement that builds on best practice and looking at the skills and abilities of organisations to make sure these are being used to fulfill the partnership's potential.

## What our Partnership Engagement Strategy will do

This Partnership Engagement Strategy is a coordinated and strategic approach to community engagement and involvement. It aims to connect decision making between all partners and our communities via engagement. It contains common principles that will enable partners to bring together their community engagement work and plans. This strategy also commits all partners to work with each other and with communities to empower local communities and improve local outcomes.

### The Outcomes

- Increase in people who feel they can influence decision making.
- Communities are given the opportunity to have greater choice in the design, and delivery of our services.
- Our communities and stakeholders are better informed and have a clear understanding of all of our policies and priorities.
- Communities feel more involved via streamlined engagement activity by being kept informed about results of what they said and how this has impacted upon service delivery.
- Continuing to support a thriving third sector.
- There is a coherent approach to consultation and engagement across the partnership.
- Consultation fatigue has been reduced through a coordinated approach to consultation and engagement.
- Relationships and trust in organisations is improved through effective communication between partners.
- Learning and the exchange of skills and ideas through this strategy is crucial to the future development of Southend.
- Effective communication and engagement gives participants opportunities to learn new skills, share expertise and ways of working.

## **Our aims and objectives for the strategy:**

### **Create stronger links between communities and decision-makers**

- Engagement will be tailored to suit the needs of individual communities.
- Results of engagement activities will be fed back to all in appropriate styles and formats with explanations of what it means, as well as any action to be undertaken as a result.

### **Improve the service delivery and outcomes for local communities through a community driven approach**

- Involving our communities can help us work together across the partnership to provide improved services.
- Where appropriate, we will involve local communities in decision-making related to their service priorities and delivery.
- Encourage local people to develop innovative approaches to engagement.

### **Increase satisfaction levels**

- More joined up engagement will mean local communities will feel more satisfied by being involved in the things that matter most to them.
- More opportunities will be created for people to engage in decisions about their own area.
- Opinions of local communities are used to inform changes to service delivery and those changes will be realised by the improving public satisfaction.
- Local communities will not suffer consultation fatigue as consultation activities will be better coordinated.

### **Reduce inefficiency and duplication in engagement practice**

- Sharing of knowledge and working together to carry out community engagement will reduce duplication and reduce consultation fatigue amongst our communities.
- Making best use of limited resources.

### **Create better knowledge of engagement practice and resources**

- The commitment to engagement across the partnership raises the engagement profile to enable adequate training and skills development.
- The toolkit provides best practice approaches to engaging the community.
- Commitment to this strategy means consultation and engagement exercises will be robust, follow best practice and be of the highest possible quality within available resources

### **Strengthen partnership working**

- This strategy will help build on existing networks and relationships within Southend Together.
- There will be opportunities for partners to engage with members of the community whom they may not ordinarily have the opportunity to engage with – through joint consultation and engagement activity.
- There will be more opportunities for dialogue across different communities in Southend
  
- There will be a means to engage with the community and address issues that all partners are concerned about but none are solely responsible for, for instance issues such as migration and community cohesion.

### **Improve accountability of Southend Together**

- The strategy will develop clear recording and reporting systems to inform local communities and other stakeholders of the impact on service delivery of engagement activities.
- Southend Together and its members will be open, responsive and accountable to the communities they serve

## Our principles

Our communities have local knowledge, are crucial for judging satisfaction with services and much more. The following principles guide partners in their engagement with our communities. The more involved and informed communities are, the more responsive and better a service can be. Whenever engagement is being planned, the specific steps which need to be considered can be found in the supporting Toolkit.

### **Southend Together are committed to engaging communities**

The act of engagement must be based on a real and stated commitment from partner organisations involved to improve communication, generate community involvement, engagement and active citizenship and reduce duplication of engagement activity.

### **Engagement:**

#### **will only be carried out when necessary**

There is little point wasting resources, time or goodwill by consulting local people too much, on something that has already been covered elsewhere, or in an area where the decision has already been taken.

#### **will be robust and carried out to the highest standards**

Consultation and engagement should be carried out to the highest possible standards, and according to best practice guidelines.

#### **activities will be fit for purpose**

Engagement should use the right tools, at the right stage of the process, with the right people. It should be timely and recognise the different levels of understanding of people being engaged. Accessibility is essential for effective engagement. This includes providing accessible venues at the right time, providing translators, signers, and crèche facilities wherever possible. It is also important to provide relevant information in a clear and concise manner avoiding jargon.

#### **activities will be inclusive**

We will aim to be inclusive by enabling all groups within our community to participate and / or their views to be represented when engaging on issues relevant to them. Attempts must be made to ensure that groups of people whose interests are affected by the issues that the engagement will address, are well represented – particularly sections of the

communities that seldom participate. This will mean using a methodology that is flexible enough to be inclusive and understanding how people wish to participate. Being inclusive also means enabling people to be involved if they wish to be involved and removing any barriers to that involvement. This may be referred to as 'equality of access'. With reference to 'equality of access', the necessary support should be provided to the participant(s).

**findings will be influential**

It is not enough simply to do the consultation and engagement – the findings must also be put to use. Therefore every consultation or engagement exercise needs an action plan and those actions should be incorporated into partners' service delivery plans or feed into partners' Business Plans. What participants can influence should also be clearly identified.

**findings will be shared across the partnership**

We need to share our understanding of local residents with our stakeholders – that includes service users, possibly non-users, other services and partners. Every engagement exercise needs to publicise the activity, as well as to feedback the results and changes made.

**will be coordinated**

Many partners want to get local people involved in decision-making and this can mean that there is a danger of 'consultation fatigue' developing. It makes sense for partners committed to this strategy to pool resources and work on consultation and engagement jointly where possible.

**will build better relationships with local people**

Southend Together recognises that any contact with partner organisations should be a positive experience for our community. Building trust with local people is vital. We want our services to be easy to access and of the highest quality. Residents involved in consultation and engagement should feel it is a positive experience and that they are contributing towards improvements to services in Southend-on-Sea. Engagement should be an enjoyable experience for Southend-on-Sea's local people.

**will empower local people to have a say about their lives**

Local people are better able to have a say about their lives if they have the skills and knowledge about how decisions are made and how to influence service delivery and outcomes for local people. The partnership works hard to increase civic participation and connect people to local services. More generally, involvement in consultation and engagement gives local people a better understanding of how decisions are made and to get involved in making a difference to their local community.

## The Local and National Context

There are many local and national drivers that have added to our need to develop an Engagement Strategy. Knowing our communities and understanding the environment they live in helps us develop the right approaches to engaging them.

**Southend-on-Sea** is a densely populated town on the east coast of England, home to around 162,000 people (source – midyear census estimate 2008). Although mainly urban, there are a number of green spaces and high quality beaches within the borough. The population of Southend is getting older. A higher proportion of older people live in the west, whilst younger people tend to live towards the centre and east of Southend. The development of the University of Essex campus and South East Essex College is attracting more students to Southend, including overseas students. The majority of the population is of white British ethnicity but the area is becoming more diverse with communities from various ethnic backgrounds including Polish, Slovakian and Zimbabwean.

Pockets of affluence and deprivation exist within Southend and it has become relatively more deprived since 2004. The health of the people in Southend is similar to the England average but there are some particular health challenges facing the area, such as life expectancy and teenage pregnancies.

Unemployment levels are comparatively high. Although the earnings of residents are above the national average, the wages of people who actually work in Southend are below average. Over 90 per cent of the workforce is employed in the services industry. Tourism is a key element of the local economy, Southend being the closest seaside resort to London. Southend is part of the Thames Gateway project, the UK's largest regeneration programme. For Southend this means opportunities to strengthen its position as a favourite tourism destination, create a wide range of new jobs, new housing and improved quality of life.

### Southend Together

Southend's Local Strategic Partnership, is a single body that:

- brings together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, business, community and voluntary sectors so that different initiatives and services support each other and work together
- is a non-statutory partnership
- provides a single overarching local co-ordination framework within which other partnerships can operate
- is responsible for developing and driving the implementation of the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement.

### **Sustainable Community Strategy & Local Area Agreement**

Our Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and Local Area Agreement (LAA) include a number of targets relating to community engagement and empowerment.

### **Comprehensive Area Assessment**

- The Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) assesses community engagement activities but also takes note of levels of satisfaction and customer feedback in their final judgment.
- The CAA will publish an annual report on their findings specifically to spur on community engagement and improve public service performance.
- It is widely documented and recognised that user and citizen engagement is an important mechanism to drive service improvement and replace top down regulation.
- Evidence to support the CAA will include the views of residents, service users and outcomes generated from the National Indicator set (explained below).
- Critically CAA will look to assess engagement and knowledge of communities and sustainable improvements in citizen satisfaction, priority outcomes and value for money.

### **National Indicators**

The National Indicator Set contains indicators that measure our degree of citizen engagement and/or progress on issues for which community involvement is critical to success. 18 indicators relating to residents' perception and satisfaction are measured through the Place Survey.

### **World Class Commissioning**

World Class Commissioning is an ambitious programme which is transforming the way PCTs plan for, and deliver, local health services. The programme focuses on prioritising and improving the health of local people by developing commissioning capability and ensuring the organisation is managed in the most effective way possible.

The programme is made up of 11 competencies; three of which (competencies 1, 2 and 3) encompass engagement, namely:

1. PCTs are recognised as the local leader of the NHS.
2. PCTs work collaboratively with community partners to commission services that optimise health gains and reduce health inequalities.
3. PCTs proactively build continuous and meaningful engagement with the public and patients to shape services and improve health.

All PCTs in the country go through a yearly assessment process aiming to demonstrate improvement in each competency.

## Duties

### **Duty to inform, consult and involve**

There is a new duty to involve citizens in our place-based strategies such as our Sustainable Community Strategy, Local Area Agreement (LAA), Joint Strategic Needs Analysis, and the Local Development Framework.

### **Duty to co-operate**

Partners must work together to deliver LAA targets including those that improve community empowerment.

## Acts

**The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007** has extended Scrutiny to Southend Together and LAA targets. These new powers support councillors to engage communities and contribute to empowerment by strengthening the powers and duties of local authority councillors to hold local public services and partners to account, and take the lead on local issues.

**The Sustainable Communities Act 2007** provides the opportunity for communities to demand that issues are debated and that changes are made nationally.

**Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill** is a duty proposed to promote democracy (published December 2008).

**The Equalities Bill 2008** proposes to merge the current duties on gender, race and disability into a single Equality Duty. The purpose of the Bill is to make Britain fairer place. Through a single equality duty, public bodies will need to consider the diverse needs and requirements of their workforce, and the communities they serve, when developing employment policies and when planning services.

### **The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DDA 2005)**

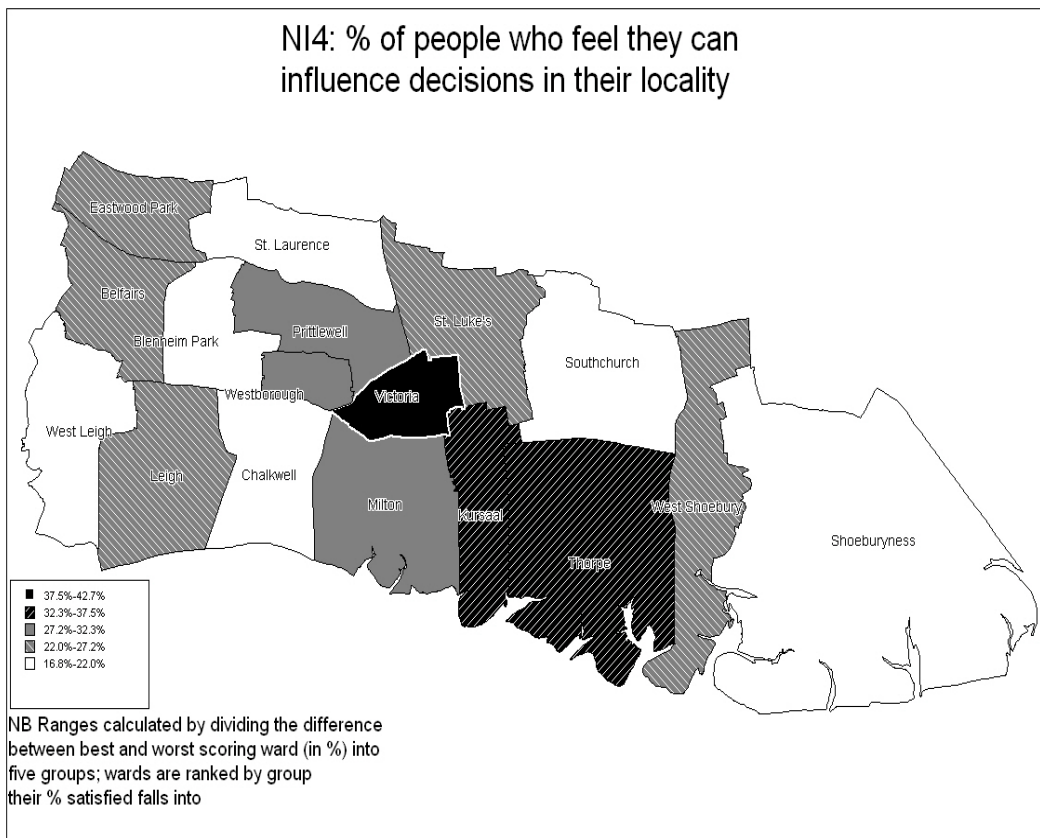
The DDA 2005 defines state public authorities have legal duties to which must be adhered to. These are divided into general and specific duties. The general duty includes the need to encourage participation by disabled persons in public life.

## Perception of Engagement in Southend

There is a new focus on improving outcomes for local people and places, rather than on processes, institutes and inputs. There is recognition that many of the complex issues dealt with by public sector partners – public health, poverty reduction, crime or sustainable economic development – cannot be dealt with by any one partner, and solutions are too complex to be imposed by the centre. Solutions therefore need to emerge from effective cooperation between partners.

Central to this is the importance of capturing local people's views, experiences and perceptions, so that solutions for an area can likewise reflect local views and preferences, and equally knowing who our communities are and understanding the environment they live in.

Community empowerment is regularly monitored in Southend through the local Place Survey sent to residents annually. Recent figures suggest a decline with regards to those who agree they can influence decisions, 26% now agree that they can influence decisions that affect their local area compared to 29% in 2006. In addition to those empowerment figures, over one fifth (22%) have volunteered (given unpaid help) at least once a month over the past 12 months. This needs to be improved.



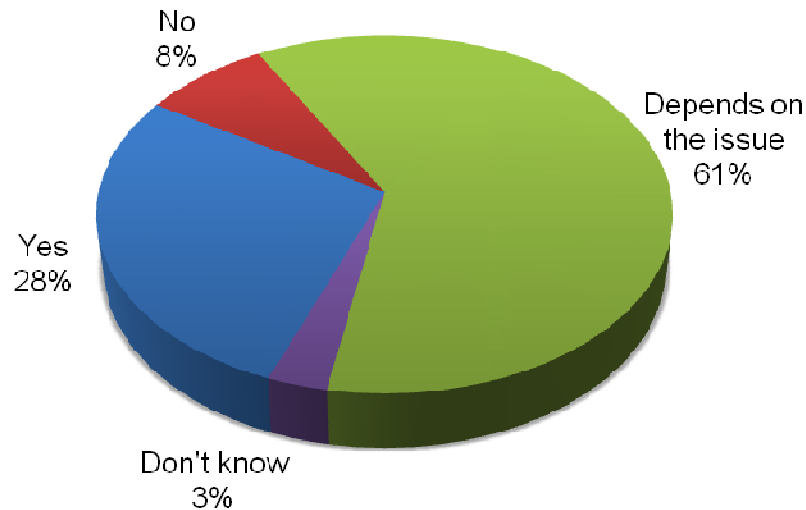
Although the majority of residents feel well informed about how and where to register to vote and about how their council tax is spent, many feel that they are not well informed of other aspects; in particular, how to complain about local public services and how to get involved in local decision making.

Younger age groups are more likely to report that they would like to be involved in local decision making (30% of those aged 25-44 and 31% of those aged 45-54), while older respondents are more likely to report that they would not (21%).

Respondents living in the West of the Borough are more likely to report that they would like to be involved (30%) with local decisions than those from other areas; those living in North Central are most likely to report that they would not (12%).

**Whether respondents would like to be involved in local decision making (valid respondents only)**

---



Unweighted sample base = 1280

---

## Engagement Frameworks Already in Place:

Southend Together organisations have worked together in a coordinated way for many years. Southend Together Engagement Group (STEG) is a regular meeting of Southend Together partners to discuss recent and forthcoming consultation, engagement and methodologies. This ensures good practice is shared throughout the Partnership.

- **Community Voices**

Community Voices are free community focused engagement events hosted by the Southend Together Partnership that happen twice a year across the Southend-on-Sea Borough.

They are designed to give residents and businesses direct access to key agencies that can offer real support and guidance on issues relevant to all.



- **Community Forums**

Southend Community Forums are for voluntary groups and organisations that provide services for people in the Southend area. The forums are an opportunity for voluntary organisations to keep informed on important issues affecting their group. They will also provide a forum to promote the interests of the voluntary sector in Southend and to influence service delivery and planning and to promote networking with other groups.



- **Place Survey**

This is a statutory bi-annual postal survey of Southend residents. It collects data for 18 National Indicators and presents a real opportunity to make engagement an integral part of assessment and focus on what really matters to local people.

- **Older Peoples Assembly**

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council's Older People's Strategy 2007 pledged to help the older residents of Southend set up an independent organisation of their choice with the purpose of giving residents the opportunity to voice their local concerns and issues. Any resident of Southend aged 55 and over is entitled to attend and contribute to the full assembly. The OPA meet every two months.



- **Youth Council**

The aim of the Southend Youth Council is to provide a voice for young people at a local level and to forge links and facilitate dialogue between young people and decision makers. The Youth Council is fully supported and endorsed by the Southend-on-Sea Borough Council and is open to all 13-19 year olds who go to school or live in Southend. They meet monthly to discuss and act upon the topics that affect the lives of young people, particularly those living in Southend.



- **Compact**

The Compact is a framework for partnership working between the voluntary and statutory sector. It is supported by Codes of Good Practice in the areas of Funding, Consultation and policy appraisal, Volunteering, Community Groups, including those, which are Faith Based and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) organisations. This Code of Good Practice aims to make a positive impact on the way in which the statutory agencies in Southend-on-Sea consults and appraises its policies in respect of the voluntary and community sector. In so doing, it should enable voluntary and community organisations to make an effective contribution to the development and implementation of policy.



- **Neighbourhood Management**

Turning Tides is a government funded initiative to improve the quality of life for residents of the central parts of Kursaal, Milton & Victoria wards, run by SAVS on behalf of the residents. A team of highly trained neighbourhood wardens and staff are active in these areas and will help by: providing a good neighbour service, offering information and advice on peoples concerns, supporting others to develop activities for young people, helping with Recycling and Environmental problems, giving people a chance to be involved in key decisions about these areas, working with others to reduce crime, assisting people to overcome problems reporting things, keeping people informed through newsletters and surgeries, and providing courses and information about healthy living.



- **Patients**

NHS South East Essex encourages patients and public to become involved in their work by:

- Joining the patient participation group at their GP surgery
- Taking part in public consultations, by attending public meetings, sending back feedback forms or using an online form
- Discussing any concerns with their Patient Advice and Liaison Service, so that issues can be raised with commissioners

- Becoming a member of their Patient and Public Voice group, an independent group of local people who are committed to working with the PCT to influence the way it works and the decisions it makes
- Joining the Maternity Services Liaison Committee, who look at ante-natal, maternity and post-natal care
- Completing patient surveys, so that they can learn from people's experiences of local healthcare
- Joining the readers' panel or web readers' panel to give feedback on patient information and their website
- Taking part in focus and discussion groups

They also involve patients, service users and carers when developing or improving services, and welcome this input. This helps to ensure that they provide the best healthcare for our local population.

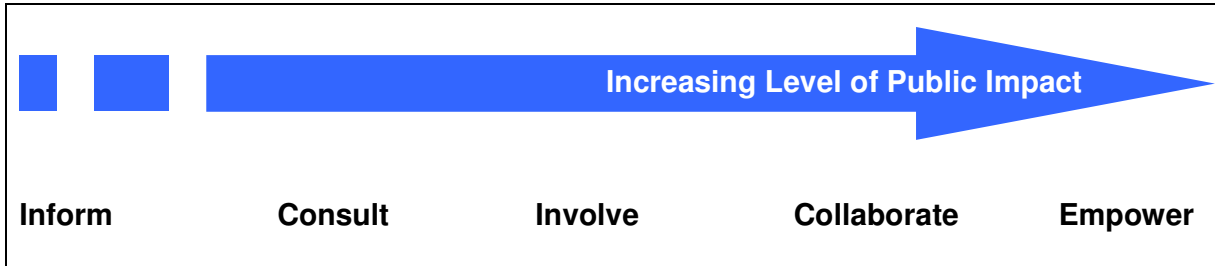
- **Local Involvement Network (LINK)**

LINks have been set up to give communities a stronger voice in how their health and social care services are delivered. They are made up of individuals and local community groups who work together to improve local services. Their role is to find out what the public like and dislike about local health and social care services. They then work with the people who plan and run these services to improve them.

**The Southend Together Engagement Strategy endorses these arrangements and provides a clear framework for all partners to sign up to. Many more examples of partnership work in action exist within the borough.**

## Definitions of Engagement

There are many different definitions of consultation and engagement. It is important that the partnership has a joint understanding of these terms for clarification and to avoid confusion. They follow the spectrum of engagement from 'informing' through to 'empowering'. Southend Together have agreed on the following definitions of these terms:



**Informing** provides the community with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and / or solutions. This could be in the form of fact sheets, information on websites or public information events.

**Consultation** is the process to obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and / or decisions. Information will be provided and concerns and aspirations will be listened to and acknowledged, and feedback will be provided on how public input influenced the decision. Consultation could take the form of public comments, focus groups, surveys and public meetings.

**Involvement** is to work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. Concerns and aspirations will be directly reflected in the alternatives development and feedback will be provided on how public input influenced the decision. This could include workshops and deliberative polling.

**Collaborate** is to partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. Communities will be looked to for advice and innovation in formulating solutions, recommendations will be incorporated into the decisions to the maximum extent possible. Collaborative engagement could include citizen advisory committees, consensus-building, and participatory decision-making.

**Community Empowerment** places the final decision-making in the hands of the public. The communities decision will be implemented. Examples include citizen juries, ballots, and delegated decision.

## Glossary

There are a number of other terms that may be referred to in the context of consultation and engagement. Definitions of some of these expressions are outlined below:

**Community Cohesion** as defined by 'Our Shared Future', Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007, is one where;

- There is a clearly defined and widely shared sense of contribution of different individuals and different communities to a future vision for a local area.
- There is a strong sense of an individual's rights and responsibilities when living in a particular place – people know what everyone expects of them and what they can expect in return.
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities, access to services and treatment.
- There is a strong sense of trust in institutions locally to act fairly on their behalf and for their role and justifications to be subject to public scrutiny.
- Encouragement is given for the contribution of both those who have newly arrived and those who already have deep attachments to a particular place, with focus on what they have in common.
- There are strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and other institutions within neighbourhoods.

Southend's local vision for community cohesion:

**'A community, with pride and belonging, where people work together in partnership and understanding to improve quality of life, for life, for all'.**

**Engagement** is about working with local people to come to joint decisions. This involves creating opportunities for people to be involved (e.g. user forums, residents committees and conferences). Local people are also supported to develop the skills, confidence and power to become involved and influence decisions. It is a step up the ladder of citizen engagement from consultation.

**Participation** is when citizens and communities are actively involved in issues that affect them, where organisations invite local people to become involved in the actual decision making process.

**Seldom heard groups** (also known as 'hard to reach and 'excluded groups') Seldom heard is used to describe groups of people who do not have a collective voice and are often under-represented in consultation and engagement activities.

**Stakeholders** refers to any individual or organisation who has an interest in the future of Southend.