

Southend-on-Sea City Council Modern Slavery Statement 2023/24

This statement is made in accordance with section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. It sets out the steps that Southend-on-Sea City Council takes to ensure that no modern slavery or human trafficking takes place within our organisation, our partners, our sub-contractors or supply chain.

Modern slavery includes slavery, servitude, human trafficking and forced labour. We have a zero-tolerance approach to any form of modern slavery. We are committed to acting ethically and with integrity and transparency in all business dealings. We will ensure effective systems and controls are in place to safeguard against any form of modern slavery taking place within the council or our supply chain.

Our business

Southend-on-Sea is located on the Thames Estuary with a long coastline. As such it is close to Tilbury docks, DP World London Gateway and Harwich docks. Southend has an airport and is close to London, meaning there are many transport and access routes for consideration in relation to modern slavery and human trafficking.

Southend-on-Sea City Council is a unitary local authority, serving a population of 180,700 residents (2021 Census). We spend around £190m per year on purchasing services, supplies and works contracts to meet the delivery of services to the public. We employ around 1,800 staff to provide a vast range of services to fulfil statutory and discretionary needs for residents, businesses, visitors and partners.

In addition to our duties as an employer, we are committed under [section 52 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015](#) to notify the Secretary of State of suspected victims of slavery or human trafficking.

Our areas of focus

We deem areas of focus to include children and adult services, housing (including social and private sector housing), environmental health, education and licencing. In particular, those experiencing homelessness or those at risk of becoming homeless are at higher risk of exploitation and falling prey to modern slavery.

We recognise that other areas of focus in the city include restaurants, car valeting services, the sex trade and affiliated establishments, the construction industry (including sub-contractors) and forced or arranged marriages. We also realise that areas of focus are not just limited to these areas.

Our policies

We review our policies and procedures on a regular basis and operate internal policies. These ensure that business is conducted in an ethical and transparent manner and in compliance with the Modern Slavery Act. These include:

1. The [Modern Slavery Guidance, which](#) sets out our stance on modern slavery and explains how employees can identify any instances of this and where they can go for help. The guidance should be read alongside Southend, Essex and Thurrock [\(SET\) Safeguarding Adults Guidelines](#) and [\(SET\) Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures](#).
2. We operate a robust 'Safer Recruitment and Selection Policy. This includes conducting eligibility to work in the UK checks for all employees, to safeguard against human trafficking or individuals being forced to work against their will.
3. The Procurement Team is responsible for ensuring all procurement activity complies with the Council's 'Contract Procedure Rules' and wider 'Public Contract Regulations 2015'. We operate a Whistleblowing Policy so that all employees know that they can raise concerns about how colleagues are being treated or raise concerns about practices within our business or supply chain, without fear of reprisals.
4. The 'Code of Conduct' explains the manner in which we behave as an organisation and how we expect our employees and suppliers to act.

Our suppliers

We operate the following systems and controls to safeguard against any form of modern slavery taking place within our dealings with suppliers.

- We maintain a database of registered suppliers as well as a corporate contract register.
- Financial due diligence is carried out on all suppliers before allowing them to become a contractual supplier.
- An insolvency and social media alert system also tracks increased risks against our key suppliers.
- The new SQ template, as issued by central government in April 2023, is in operation.
- The anti-slavery policy forms part of our contract with suppliers. Suppliers are required to confirm that no part of their business operations contradict this policy.

As part of our contract with suppliers, we also require they confirm to us that:

- They comply with the Modern Slavery Act 2015: Requirements under Modern Slavery Act 2015.
- They are a relevant commercial organisation as defined by section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

- If they answer yes to the previous question, they are compliant with the annual reporting requirements contained within section 54 of the Act 2015.

Training

The Corporate Procurement team provides training across the business, to raise awareness about the Corporate Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs). Within the CPRs are ethical procurement requirements that link to the procurement process and tests suppliers on their compliance with the Modern Slavery Act.

In 2023 we revised our Council Procurement and Contract Management Strategy so that Modern Slavery is one of the key areas of focus in relation to better contract management.

In addition, the Corporate Procurement team has a Contract Management Framework and a contract management manual in place. The team has also finalised the building of a corporate contract management system. This will be key to ensuring suppliers are monitored by contract managers in terms of compliance. Suppliers receive regular requests to evidence how they are operating their contracts. Advisors within the Corporate Procurement Team have completed specific, in-depth training in Modern Slavery, as this is an element of formal CIPS qualifications. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Cabinet Office have funded Foundation Contract Management Training, which has been completed by forty to fifty officers. Twelve officers will also be accessing the Contract Management Pioneer Programme, also funded by DLUHC and the Cabinet Office, as well as Crown Commercial Services and the Local Government Association (LGA). This is with a view to pass knowledge on to relevant officers.

Council employees across all service areas continue to attend training, events and conferences hosted by partner or external organisations as well as national and regional anti-slavery groups. These include the National Network Coordinators' Forum (NNCF) and Eastern Region Anti-Slavery Partnership (ERASP).

Next steps

We will further embed the importance of the Modern Slavery Act into our business and supply chain procedures, ensuring that our activities and that of our suppliers are committed to complying with the requirements of the Act. We will continue to monitor and audit our policies and procedures to make amendments and update staff where necessary.

We continue to work with and support the activities of the [SAMS Partnership](#). This organisation identifies and partners with key community stakeholders, mobilises communities and raises awareness about modern slavery and human trafficking in the community.

To ensure the city is protected from violence and criminal behaviour, we will continue to be involved with the Essex-wide Violence and Vulnerability Unit and continue to combine the efforts of strategic partnership boards. These boards include the Southend Safeguarding Partnership, the Health and Well-Being Board and the Community Safety Partnership. We will draw on the Boards' expertise, knowledge and spheres of influence, reflecting our determination to keep Southend-on-Sea safe and thriving.

The Council also commits to:

1. Deliver training for the workforce, partner agencies and third sector organisations. We will also continue to raise awareness.
2. Promote national campaigns to help raise awareness of modern slavery and human trafficking.
3. Review the adult safeguarding referral pathway to better identify and support potential victims of modern slavery and human trafficking. We will refresh this pathway if needed.

This statement is made under section 54(1) of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 for the financial year ending 31 March 2024.

Approval for this statement

Leader & Acting Chief Executive