



Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Rt Hon Matthew Pennycook MP
Minister of State for Housing and Planning
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Cllr Daniel Cowan
Leader of Southend-on-Sea City Council
Civic Centre, Victoria Avenue
Southend-on-Sea
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4 September 2026

Dear Cllr Cowan,

I am writing to you regarding the emerging Southend-on-Sea Local Plan ('the Plan') following your decision to pause the publication of the Plan for Regulation 19 consultation and request an extension to the submission deadline.

The plan-led approach is, and must remain, the cornerstone of our planning system. This government remains determined to drive local plans to adoption as quickly as possible in order to achieve our ambition of universal plan coverage and to ensure that plans contribute positively to increasing rates of housebuilding and infrastructure delivery.

As you know, the benefits of an up-to-date local plan are significant. Local Plans are the best way for communities to shape decisions about how to deliver the housing and wider development their areas need. They enable local areas to set their strategy for future growth and their approach to protecting and enhancing the environment, and they provide the certainty and confidence required to bring development forward across the country. In the absence of an up-to-date plan, there is a high likelihood that development will come forward on a piecemeal and speculative basis, with reduced public engagement and fewer guarantees that it will make the most of an area's potential.

I was therefore disappointed to learn that the Council has determined not to proceed with the publication of the Plan for Regulation 19 consultation at this stage, with the result that it will struggle to meet the 31 December submission deadline. The statements made by the Council, including in correspondence received by the Department, suggest that, despite the significant work undertaken to reach a stage where a Regulation 19 plan is ready for publication, there is insufficient support to proceed without significant changes to the draft Plan. Given that work on the Plan has been ongoing since at least 2019 and has already been subject to multiple consultations and changes, it is difficult to conceive of how substantial amendments might be made at this advanced stage of the process without jeopardising the Council's ability submit the Plan before the deadline for the legacy plan-making system.

In light of these circumstances, I have felt it necessary to consider the options available to me under the 2004 Act, including exercising the Secretary of State's powers of intervention. Section 27 of the 2004 Act provides the Secretary of State with broad default intervention powers where they believe a local planning authority is failing or omitting to do anything it is necessary for them to do in connection with the preparation, revision or adoption of its Local Plan.

I consider the Council's delay to publish the Regulation 19 Local Plan for consultation to be clear evidence of a failure to do something necessary in connection with the preparation of the plan, particularly taking into account the very limited time left to prepare a plan in the legacy system. The resulting delays place the Council's prospects of submitting a plan for examination by December 2026 under considerable threat. Taken together, I consider that this meets the statutory test for intervention.

I have also considered the criteria laid out in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), which states that intervention under section 27 of the 2004 Act *"should have regard to plan progress and local development needs"*:

- **Plan Progress:** Southend's current Local Plan was adopted in 2007. The existing Plan is almost 19 years old, meaning the policies it contains are likely to be out of date. There is therefore a pressing need for the Council to adopt an up-to-date local plan. A pause to plan progress at this stage risks failure to submit the Plan under the legacy system leading to further delay leaving the Council vulnerable to piecemeal and speculative development, with reduced public engagement and fewer guarantees that it will make the most of the area's potential.
- **Development needs:** The Council has consistently delivered below the target set by the standard method. The latest Housing Delivery Test (HDT) score of 20% in 2025 places the Council among the poorest performers nationally and engages the presumption in favour of sustainable development. In 2025, the affordability ratio in the area was 10.7. This is higher than the regional average for East of England of 9.02 and significantly higher than the national average for England of 7.8. This highlights that Southend is less affordable than its surrounding areas and the country as a whole. All of this is unlikely to improve without the adoption of an up-to-date local plan.

Taking all of the above into account, I consider that the intervention criteria are met, and that intervention is justified.

I am therefore directing the Council under section 27(2)(b) of the 2004 Act to provide to me the latest draft Regulation 19 which the Council has determined not to publish, and all available evidence base documents associated with the draft Plan.

Pursuant to s.27(8) of the 2004 Act, the Secretary of State has issued a direction under s.27 in order to ensure that the Plan is afforded the best possible opportunity to be adopted under the legacy plan-making system.

This information should be provided within two weeks of the date of this letter. Following consideration of the evidence, I will determine whether to make use of further directions under section 21 or 27 of the 2004 Act should this be necessary to drive forward the delivery of a satisfactory plan.

Notwithstanding this direction, I would like to give you an opportunity to set out by 18 September 2026 any exceptional circumstances which in your view suggest that intervention is not appropriate in this case. To be clear, this neither alters nor removes the direction set out in this letter.

Whilst I hope that the Council will continue to engage constructively with my Department, I'm afraid I must be clear at this stage that I will not hesitate to take further action if this request is not complied with.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Pennycook', with a large, sweeping loop at the end.

RT HON MATTHEW PENNYCOOK MP
Minister of State for Housing and Planning