

Welcome to our Summer edition of In Touch. Exciting news – we have moved and our new Centre at SAVS is now officially open! Staff worked hard throughout April to ensure we remained available to the people we support for as long as possible, while packing and unpacking all our equipment.



Our new Centre is proving popular. In the few weeks we have been open, we have received more visitors than usual.

Maybe it was the promise of free tea and cake in May that has brought people to us! The photo left shows staff members Coralie, Lucy B, Lucy

and Georgie in front of our glare glasses and magnifiers in the new Centre.

If you haven't already done so, please do pop in for a visit. You will find an open, light space with room to chat and a private space for consultations. We are more accessible, being situated in central Southend, and close to good transport links. Please call ahead if you would like to be met at the train or bus station and guided to our offices.

This does feel like a new chapter for our charity, as we trial some new activities, while still offering our high-quality service for anyone living locally with sight loss.

Our building at Hamlet Court Road served us well for 15 years, but we have outgrown the space and now need to plan for a sustainable future for Southend in Sight. Our thanks to everyone locally who continues to support us on our journey – long may it continue!

Team Talk

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager



As well as moving premises, we have also welcomed a new member of staff – Lucy Bergsman, pictured left. She joined us just before we reopened in May as our Central Administrator. Lucy has lived experience of sight loss and has worked in a busy administrative role previously. She will be supporting us all in the Centre and even after a few weeks of settling in, we know she will be an asset to our team. Welcome to the Southend in Sight family Lucy B!

As our Centre was shut during the second half of April, it has taken us some time to catch up with all the enquiries we have received. Our phone and IT system were out of action for a few days, but we are back on track and working through our list of calls and emails. Rest assured we will get back to everyone who has contacted us for advice and appointments. And please continue to call us on our usual number – **01702 34 21 31** - with new queries about low vision equipment and other support you might need.

Our “tech” service is as popular as ever, with appointments for help with phones, tablets and laptops available on a Monday for Android queries and a Tuesday for Apple. Please call our office to talk to us and we can book you in with our volunteers Paul and Steve.

Dean continues to run our Talk and Support service with the help of his trusty volunteers. We know that these regular calls make all the difference to local blind and partially sighted people.

Dean is also continuing his work with our Cadent project, ensuring visually impaired people are listed on the Priority Services Register and are aware of the type of benefits they could be receiving.

While we paused some of our social activities in April, we know that people were itching to meet up with friends again. Opening our doors to everyone throughout May was very much appreciated. Our very first visitors on the 1st of May were Sylvia and Malcolm. They are pictured below with staff members Liz and Lucy B, enjoying their tea and cake!



We are pleased to say that our coffee mornings, Fun Fridays, choir and talking book club have all resumed. Details of the dates and times for our activities can be found on the separate yellow flyer in this newsletter.

Our bowling group seems to be expanding, with an average of 20 bowlers playing every week. They meet every Thursday during term time at CJs in Hockley and are a very friendly, welcoming group with an age range of 21 to 93. If you fancy giving it a try, please call Anne on **01702 34 21 31**.

Our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer Tracey continues to support patients and their carers and families at Southend Hospital. We never underestimate the difference we make to people's lives, but Tracey was pleased to receive the following feedback from a patient's son: "Thank you wholeheartedly for taking an interest in my mum and giving her the comfort and reassurance to know there are still options and support available". Our final update for the Eye Clinic - Tracey has a new direct line to her answerphone: **0300 4437774**.

Focus on Retinitis Pigmentosa

Extracts from the Retina UK website.

We have a number of people known to us with Retinitis Pigmentosa, so we thought it would be useful to offer some information about this eye condition. Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) is an inherited eye condition that affects the photoreceptor cells responsible for capturing images from the visual field. These cells line the retina at the back of the eye and are called rods and cones.

People with RP experience a gradual decline in their vision as the rod and cone cells stop working over time. Rod cells help with peripheral vision and seeing in low light and the dark. RP can lead to difficulty seeing in dim light (dusk), and transitioning from light to dark and vice versa, e.g from being inside and walking out onto a bright sunny street.

The cones are mainly concentrated in the central region of the retina (the macula), and help us see detail and colour. As the condition progresses, RP may start to affect central vision, making it difficult to read or recognise faces. Peripheral vision can also be affected, leaving a narrow field of vision, often referred to as “tunnel vision”.

Conditions in which the rod photoreceptors deteriorate ahead of the cones are sometimes grouped under the umbrella term “rod-cone dystrophies”. RP is the most common of these.

Symptoms.

Rod cells are usually initially involved, and difficulty seeing in dim light, including transitioning from light to dark and vice versa, is one of the earliest symptoms.

Peripheral vision will also decline, meaning that a person may trip or bump into things and not see either side. Central vision is often maintained until much later.

RP is typically diagnosed in young adulthood, but the age of onset may range from childhood to late adulthood.

The condition is slowly degenerative, but the rate of progression and degree of visual loss varies from person to person and even among affected members of the same family. It is therefore very difficult to predict what an individual's vision will be like at a specific time in the future. Both eyes are usually affected in a similar way.

Cause.

RP is one of the most complicated genetic conditions, and over 80 causative genes have been currently identified; faults in any one of these can cause the disease. RP follows various inheritance patterns, including autosomal dominant, autosomal recessive and X-linked. It is not unusual for cases to occur where there is no family history of the disease.

Treatment.

For the vast majority of those affected, there are currently no treatments that can effectively slow or stop the progression of RP, although research in this area has accelerated and potential therapies are at the clinical trial stage.

For a very small proportion of those with RP, a gene therapy called Luxturna, which is available on the NHS, may be appropriate. This therapy is only suitable for those whose RP is caused by mutations in the RPE65 gene, and it is most effective when given early.

Many of the novel treatments being tested are gene therapies or other molecular approaches that are specific to a particular genetic fault. It is extremely important that those affected by RP are offered genetic testing to allow them to access future treatments and clinical trials.

Despite the lack of current treatments for RP, it is still very important to continue to have regular eye check-ups. In particular, people with RP tend to develop cataracts at an earlier age than the non-RP population and can benefit from cataract surgery, although the visual outcome obviously depends on the severity of the retinal degeneration.

For support.

The Retina UK Helpline provides information, support and signposting for people affected by inherited sight loss.

Telephone: **0300 111 4000** (9.00am – 5.00pm Monday to Friday and Tuesday and Thursday evenings 5.00pm – 8.00pm)
or email Helpline@RetinaUK.org.uk.

Benefits Changes

Extracts from the RNIB website.

You may have heard about the government's proposed changes to benefits and might be worried about how this may affect you. Before we get into the detail, it's worth knowing it will be at least a year before any changes are brought in. Importantly, over the next three months, organisations like the RNIB will be consulting with the government.

Below we have summarised the main proposals and what the implications might be.

Tightened PIP criteria.

From November 2026, the Government wants to tighten the criteria for qualifying for Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

- PIP payments have two components, a daily living part and a mobility part.
- The Government wants to change the daily living criteria.
- The Government wants PIP recipients to score at least four points in at least one activity to get the daily living element.
- Any new rules will impact new claimants from November 2026 and existing claimants will only be impacted once reassessed.
- This change will not impact entitlement to the mobility element of PIP.

PIP provides vital support for the extra costs that come with being blind or partially sighted. It helps people to access mobility aids, home adaptations, assistive tech and taxis when public transport isn't accessible.

Although it is not dependent on whether you are working or not, PIP often enables people to stay in employment by covering costs such as transport and assistive tech.

The current PIP system, whereby claimants can either accumulate low points across activities or score highly in one or more activity, does seem to be a fair way of assessing PIP entitlement, as everyone's needs and lives are different. Sight loss is a spectrum and every eye condition affects everyone's sight differently.

Universal Credit, including the health element.

There are plans to change incapacity benefits under Universal Credit, which currently give some claimants an additional £416 a month.

- There will be a boost to the basic rate of Universal Credit in 2026. This would mean a single person over the age of 25 would receive £7 more a week in 2026 (from £91 a week to £98).
- However, the rate of the additional health element will face real terms cut and be frozen at £420 a month until 2029.
- The £420 rate will be maintained for those already in receipt of the health element.
- But, from 2026 the rate of the health element for new claimants will be halved, from £97 to £50 a week.
- The government will also consult on stopping people getting the health top up for Universal Credit until they are 22.

Work Capability Assessment to be scrapped.

- In 2028, the Government plans to scrap the Work Capability Assessment (WCA).
- The WCA currently determines whether a person is fit for work for the purpose of their Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit. Those in the “limited capability for work-related activity” group receive a top up to their basic Universal Credit award (also known as the health element) at £416 a month.
- The Government plans to move to a single assessment, the PIP assessment, for financial support related to health and disability benefits.

Right to try.

There are plans to introduce the “right to try”, so claimants can try work without fear of losing their current benefits if it doesn’t work out. This is a positive step, as we know the fear of reapplying for benefits, which is often an extremely stressful and difficult process, and not being granted the same financial entitlement as before, currently prevents some people with sight loss from feeling able to try work or seek employment support.

The RNIB are consulting with the government and would like your input on these proposed changes. You can call them on **0303 123 9999**. They can also help with queries about benefits. You can of course still call the team here at Southend in Sight for support with form filling.

City Day Celebrations

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

Thanks to a grant from the Rosca Trust, we were able to organise a free activity for local blind and partially sighted people to enjoy City Day on Saturday 1st March.

Southend in Sight took a group of 15 visually impaired adults to “Caddies”, the indoor mini golf venue in Southend. Once everyone had got to grips with the feel of the putt, the artificial grass and the obstacles on the course, the competition was on. Some of the holes were trickier than others and required some faith to just hit and hope for the best. Prizes were given for the best (and worst!) golfers of the day.

After all the hard work on the golf course, the group then enjoyed a meal at a local restaurant, enabling everyone to come together and chat about their experience.



Fundraising Manager Catherine Hodgson said: “It was brilliant to witness so much laughter and camaraderie between sighted and non-sighted players in a fun social situation. It really did show off Southend at its best and helped local visually impaired people be more independent around our City.”

The photo left shows golfers Wendy, Claire and Mike on the course at Caddies, putts in hand.

New Activities

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

With our move to a bigger space, we made a promise to try out some new services and activities. We are starting slowly and will be chatting with everyone that does drop in to us over the coming months to discover the most popular ideas.

For May we have been welcoming people every morning to drop in for tea and cake. For June, we are open every morning from 10:30am to 12:30pm, but in addition we are offering the following:

- **Every Monday** from **10:30am** to **12:30pm** we will have staff available to read post – please call in advance to book our confidential space.
- **Every Wednesday** from **10:30am** to **12:30pm** we are continuing with our drop-in sessions with volunteers Maria and Jackie for general sight loss advice.
- **Thursday 5 June** from **10:30am** to **12:30pm** we have a second hand equipment sale.
- **Tuesday 17 June** from **10:30am** to **12:30pm** we have a “meet the bowlers” session.
- **Thursday 3 July** from **10:30am** to **12:30pm** please join us for an anti-glare glasses demonstration.
- **Tuesday 22 July** from **10:30am** to **12:30pm** come and meet Penny and her Guide Dog Questa.

New Talking Book Club.

As our Wednesday talking book club is now full and we have a few people interested, we are setting up a new group to meet on the first Tuesday of the month.

Dates: Tuesday 3rd June, Tuesday 1st July, Tuesday 5th August.

Time: 2pm to 3:30pm.

Venue: Ground Floor, SAVS, 29-31 Alexandra Street, Southend.

Please call Georgie on **01702 34 21 31** to book your place.

Our New Mayor

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

We are excited to announce that Southend in Sight has been chosen as one of the new Mayor's charities for the year. Councillor Nigel Folkard was sworn in as Mayor on 7th May at the Southend Civic Chambers in front of his fellow councillors, local MPs, The High Sheriff of Essex, past Mayors and Mayoresses, along with other local dignitaries.



The Mayor, with the help of his committee, will be raising funds throughout the year for ourselves and the Southend Hospital Charity. He is pictured left in his Mayoral chains and fur trimmed red robes, with Southend in Sight's CEO Lucy Martin (left), alongside Lucy Thomas-Clayton, from Southend Hospital's Fundraising Team (right).

We have known Nigel for many years, both as a local Councillor and an ambassador for Southend Lions. He is often seen on Hamlet Court Road in one of his many hats, collecting used spectacles from our shop. He has been very supportive of our charity, funding equipment through his Lions connections and organising the annual Mayoral walk on World Sight Day.

We are very much looking forward to supporting Nigel during his Mayoral year and helping to raise funds for both charities. The new Mayor is keen on swimming and cycling, so we are expecting some energetic activities to be on offer.

We will be keeping you all updated on his and our progress!

Thank You Volunteers

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

At the end of March, we held a volunteer “thank you” celebration in our Hamlet Court Road building. Our move to central Southend means that we will not all be working together at the same location, so these events are even more important and will become more frequent.

It was lovely for our volunteers to meet up, especially as many of them cross over on shifts in our charity shop or work different days in our Centre, or at specific activities.

We are so grateful to all of our volunteers who give their time to help the local visually impaired community. We could not provide the services and activities that we do without their support.

In early June we will be meeting our volunteers once again for another celebration, this time during Volunteers’ Week. This will not only provide another opportunity for a get-together, but also allow those that support us “off-site” to visit our new premises.



The photo left shows a group of volunteers sitting in our old Centre at Hamlet Court Road, with staff and volunteers chatting and laughing in the background.

Southend in Sight – your local sight loss charity.

Registered Charity Number: 1069765

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Green Light
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Our Contact Details:

Telephone: 01702 342131

Email: info@southendinsight.org.uk

Website: www.southendinsight.org.uk

Our Charity values:

- Excellence
- Community
- Empowerment
- Support
- Integrity

Your vision is our vision

