

Welcome to our Spring edition of In Touch. It does seem that January and February have been particularly cold and wet, so we do hope that warmer days will arrive soon! In the meantime, we have some very positive figures from 2025 to share with you.

At our Centre we held a total of 1,187 sessions for sight loss advice, 182 tech sessions and 105 form filling sessions, supporting a total of 510 individuals.

Since our move to central Southend in May, we have opened the door every morning for our drop-in sessions. 129 individuals have visited us multiple times – that’s a lot of tea and biscuits! And we organised 88 social activities, which were enjoyed by 125 individuals on a regular basis, ranging in age from 4 to 95.

Our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer supported a staggering 1,161 individuals at Southend Hospital with 1,856 sessions.

CEO Lucy Martin says: “I am very proud of the services we offer and the staff and volunteers helping to deliver them. However, our work continues in 2026 with our mission to support as many local people living with sight loss as we can”.

The photo below shows staff in our Centre sat at a long table, from left to right: Anne, Georgie, Lucy, Catherine, Coralie, Lucy B and Dean.



Team Talk

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager

2026 has been busy so far, with the Centre team catching up on calls and appointments after the Christmas break. Please bear with us and expect a call back within a couple of weeks of an initial enquiry: we will try to fit an appointment in as soon as we can.

Our tech team of Paul and Steve also have full diaries, but we do offer weekly appointments for advice on getting the most from your mobiles, tablets and laptops. Similarly, we can offer support with form filling to ensure you are receiving the benefits you are entitled to. Please call our office on **01702 34 21 31** to book in for any of these services.



Our drop-in sessions are a good way to meet others in a similar situation to your own, especially if you are newly diagnosed with an eye condition. We are open every morning between 10:30am and 12:30pm for a cup of tea and a chat with staff and/or volunteers.

We have also been running some themed sessions every month, some fun, some informative. The photo above left shows one of our recent board game sessions with visually impaired volunteer Qandagha and Linda playing large scrabble. We have an Easter cake making session in March, as well as a tech session. One of the yellow flyers enclosed with this newsletter has all the upcoming dates for our drop-in sessions.

Dean is still making wellbeing calls and giving out information about our Cadent Centres for Warmth project. He can assist you in signing up for the Priority Services Register and offers advice on energy efficiency as well as giving out Carbon Monoxide Alarms.

Our activity schedule is still packed, with our very popular coffee mornings and Fun Fridays, as well as weekly bowling. There are a few spaces for our Tuesday and Wednesday talking book clubs if anyone is interested in joining.

Local visually impaired children and their families enjoyed a visit to the Panto at Christmas, soft play at Kids Kingdom in January and an “Animal Encounter” session during February half term. Our working age group are still enjoying meeting up for their evening pizza nights.



Two of our choir members, Jackie left (green jumper) and Jan right (New York sweatshirt) are pictured left. They would like to recruit a few new members to our fortnightly choir – the In Sight Singers – for some fun on a Wednesday from 2 to 3:30pm at Avenue Baptist Church,

Milton Avenue. The group were established 3 years ago and focus as much on friendship as they do on singing in tune. Learning the words by listening through their Alexa or using large printed sheets, the singers now have a repertoire of over 30 songs, from “Love is all Around” to “My Boy Lollipop”. Please call our office for more details on joining this activity.

Did you know that Southend Hospital Eye Clinic is the busiest in Essex? Our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer Tracey meets patients every day to help them come to terms with their diagnosis. Please call us if you do need support with your eye condition at the hospital.

Lastly, we would like to hear from anyone who is interested in learning to play or has played golf and would like to take it up again. Garon Park Golf Club has been in touch with us about setting up some sessions for local visually impaired people.

Details are being worked out, but please call our offices on **01702 34 21 31** to register your interest.

Sighted Guiding – The Basics

**Written by Penny Hefferan,
Guide Dogs Community Engagement Officer.**

If you've ever had a bad experience when being guided by someone, you will appreciate why it's so valuable for your friends and family to have some knowledge of basic sighted guiding techniques. The main aim behind the use of standardised sighted guiding techniques, as used by Guide Dogs and many sight loss organisations, is to promote independence and dignity for everyone with sight loss. Here are a few tips to help you get the most from being guided:

When you first meet your guide.

Someone offering assistance may take your arm and try to lead you. Before this happens, ask if you can have their elbow, letting them know if you would prefer the left or right side, as you may hear or see better from one side in particular.

The Grip.

You can either use the "C" grip just above the elbow or alternatively place a hand on the shoulder. To create the "C" grip, place your thumb on one side of the elbow and the index finger on the other side. This naturally puts you in a position to the side of your guide and a small step behind. You can also subtly control the speed you are walking at by pushing your guide's elbow to slow down or pulling back to speed up. Avoid letting anyone push or pull you along, this is not dignified!

The Guiding Arm.

The arm you are holding (whether by the elbow or the shoulder) is referred to as the guiding arm. Your sighted guide can use the arm you are holding to direct you to objects such as the back of a chair or handrail. When your guide puts their hand on one of these objects and informs you, you can find it with your free hand. Please keep the other hand in place on the elbow or shoulder. By using this technique, you should avoid a guide potentially reaching across your body and grabbing your free hand and placing it on the object for you.

Steps and Kerbs.

Your guide should make you aware of steps and kerbs just as you get to them. They will reach the step first and then let you get your foot in a safe place on

the step before moving again. They will need to let you know if the steps are up or down.

Narrow Spaces.

Your guide should advise you if the space you are walking into is too narrow for you to walk side by side. You will need to slot in behind your guide, still keeping a hand on the shoulder or moving your hand from the elbow to their wrist so they can extend their guiding arm behind them. Revert back to side to side afterwards.

Going through doorways.

Your guide should tell you which way the door opens and if this is towards you or away from you. Ideally, you should be on the hinge side of the doorway – you may want to swap positions to achieve this. Your guide will find the door or handle with their guiding arm (the one you are holding) and you can then take over your guide's hand placement with your free hand. This puts you in control of the door, which you can then push or pull, allowing your guide through first and you following behind. If you aren't on the hinge side of the door, you can use the narrow space technique, staying in single file.

Getting into a car.

Care is needed as car door edges, door frames and a kerb may also need to be navigated. Your Sighted Guide should guide one of your hands to the open car door or the door handle. Your other hand should be guided to the top of the door frame. Your guide should check that you aren't coming into contact with the door or frame at any point and that you can step down the kerb safely.

It's all down to communication.

A successful guiding experience for both parties comes down to communication. Please ask questions if you feel that your Sighted Guide isn't giving you all the information you would like.

Further information on sighted guiding is available on the Guide Dogs website: www.guidedogs.org.uk. They have a choice of online courses available for friends and family. You can also call our offices for further information on **01702 34 21 31**.

Fire Safety at Home

Extracts from the Essex County Fire & Rescue Service Booklet.

Staff recently attended training on fire safety in the home and thought we should pass on a few tips as a reminder.

Smoke Alarms.

Smoke alarms save lives and will alert you to the first sign of fire, giving everyone time to get out safely. Fit a smoke alarm on every level of your home, and test them regularly. They should be replaced every 10 years and if they are making a “chirping” noise, this means the battery has expired.

Everyone with a gas boiler should have a carbon monoxide alarm – please contact our office and we can supply you with one.

If someone is deaf or hard of hearing, sensory smoke alarms which use strobe lighting and a vibrating pad to alert you, are available from the sensory team at the council or directly from the fire service.

Plugs and Chargers.

Overloading three way plugs can pull them out of the wall slightly - this can cause sparking which is a fire risk, especially near flammable items.

Do not daisy chain extension leads – those with their own switches are better. Do not overload extension leads with high amp items like heaters (they can only take 13 amps).

Do not leave items such as phones/tablets/laptops on continuous charge, plugged in overnight or while you are out of the house. Similarly, only charge batteries while you are awake and alert so if a fire happens, you can respond quickly.

Only leave essential appliances switched on such as the fridge or freezer. Turn all other electrical items off when they are not in use.

If you think an electrical item is old or faulty in any way, do not use it.

Kitchen.

Never leave pans unattended when cooking. People can become distracted

and forget what they are doing.

Ensure flammable items like tea towels and kitchen roll are not near the hob/oven/air fryer.

Check your cooker or gas hob is turned off before you go to bed.

Around the home.

Do not run washing machines, tumble dryers or dishwashers overnight, or when you go out.

Candles should be well maintained and not left unattended. Please keep them away from flammable items such as curtains, furniture, paper and clothes. People with memory issues may also forget they have lit them.

Fragrant plug-ins and electric melts should be turned off at night and when people go out.

Always unplug heaters or fans when you go out or go to bed.

Do not use your electric heater for drying your washing or cover it with any materials.

Unplug electric blankets if you are not using them and store them flat. The fire service do not recommend using them.

Hoarding is a fire hazard. Fires can spread quickly and escape routes could be blocked. Please try to leave a clear pathway.

If you are a smoker, try to smoke outside, never smoke in bed or where you could fall asleep, and use proper ashtrays.

If after reading this information, you have any questions about fire safety or would like to refer yourself or someone else for a Home Safety Visit, please call the Home Safety Team on: **0300 303 0088**. The lines are open Monday to Friday between 9:30am and 4pm.

The Home Safety Team will offer advice and guidance specific to your home and can fit smoke and sensory alarms for free.

Bus Route Changes

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

Some of you have contacted us about changes to the local bus timetables and routes. The following information has been taken from the Arriva Bus website, with changes being implemented from 4 January 2026.

Service 1 – a new timetable will be introduced. Monday to Friday, the No.1 bus will run every 12 minutes, on a Saturday every 15 minutes and on a Sunday every 30 minutes.

Service 6 has been withdrawn and replaced with **Service 29**.

Services 7 and 8 – the link from Landwick and Great Wakering to Southend Hospital has been reinstated. The No. 7 and 8 buses will be diverted at Shoeburyness Asda to Landwick and Great Wakering and will run every 20 minutes Monday to Friday and every 30 minutes at the weekend.

Service 9 – Service 9A between Shoeburyness Asda and Great Wakering and Landwick will be withdrawn and replaced by Services 7 and 8. Service 9 will continue to run to Shoeburyness East Beach every 20 minutes Monday to Saturday and every 30 minutes on a Sunday. A new timetable is forthcoming.

Service 29 – will be extended to Garon Park, replacing Service 6. This change will provide direct connections to Garon Park and Southend Hospital via Fairfax Drive. A new timetable will be available, but Service 29 will run every 30 minutes Monday to Saturday and hourly on a Sunday.

Southend City Council has a bus service improvement plan, with pledges to improve links across the city, frequency of service and reliability.

In addition, all new buses will have audio-visual announcements on board. Some of you have already reported hearing your stop being announced, greatly improving your experience while on your bus journey.

Please call our office if you have any further information on any particular bus route, so that we can pass it on to those who may need it. You can call Arriva Buses on **0344 800 4411** Monday to Friday between 8am and 5pm.

Pavement Parking Win

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

In January of this year, the government announced new plans to tackle dangerous pavement parking – a huge milestone for charities such as the RNIB and Guide Dogs, who have been campaigning on this issue for years.

Pavement parking is currently banned outright in London and Scotland. The new legislation, to be introduced in England later this year, will give councils new powers to issue fines to those who cause “unnecessary obstruction” when parking on the pavement. Local government will be responsible for shaping and enforcing policy in their own area.

This change is welcomed by Southend in Sight. According to recent RNIB research (In My Way report, 2025), pavement parking is the biggest barrier to pedestrian journeys. Shockingly, 92 per cent of blind and partially sighted people have been forced to move into the road to get around obstacles, the most frequent of which is vehicles parked on pavements. This puts them at higher risk of accidents from traffic they may not see.

The survey also revealed that only 9 per cent of blind and partially sighted people feel safe making independent walking journeys in their neighbourhood. The frequency and unpredictability of vehicles parked on pavements makes this a common and exhausting problem, resulting in people with sight loss going out less or needing to rely on sighted companions just to get around their local area. There are more cars on the road than ever before and more delivery drivers, irregularly pulling over onto pavements.

Pavement parking also contributes to uneven surfaces, potholes and other damage, leading to the second-biggest barrier to blind and partially sighted pedestrians: poor quality of the pavement. Pavement parking also affects wheelchair users and parents with pushchairs.

For people with sight loss, clear, accessible streets are key for safe and independent travel. The proposed change in law is an important and positive step forward, with the potential to make a huge difference to everyday journeys.

Light Therapy for AMD

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

We have had a few enquiries about Light Therapy. The Macular Society has a more detailed report on their website on the research undertaken to trial this relatively new treatment for Dry age-related macular degeneration (AMD) – Photobiomodulation Light Therapy.

PBM Light Therapy is suitable for those with Dry AMD, particularly those in the early to intermediate stages. The treatment is designed to slow down vision loss and help retain vision for patients. It is a non-invasive, painless therapy that uses precise, low-intensity wavelengths of light with the aim of:

- Stimulating cellular repair and regeneration in the retina, slowing down the death of the cells.
- Stimulating mitochondria in the retina improving cell functionality.
- Reducing inflammation and oxidative stress which are key factors in ADM progression.

The Macular Society reports that studies have been carried out with relatively small numbers of patients. However, after 13 months of treatment, those given PBM Light Therapy showed significant improvement in vision compared to those who received a sham treatment. Around 55% of treated eyes experienced a notable increase in vision by at least 5 letters on the eye chart.

Additionally, the eyes that received treatment didn't show any increase in a common sign of AMD called drusen, unlike those in the group that didn't receive real treatment.

While we do not endorse any treatment and recommend that you seek professional advice, we have been informed that the Southend Private Hospital in Westcliff is now offering PBM Light Therapy.

To find out more about the treatment and the cost, please call Southend Private Hospital directly on **01702 60 89 08**. Please note that this treatment is not available on the NHS and is not suitable for everyone with Dry AMD.

Thank You Volunteers

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

We held our Christmas celebration in December to thank our 70 strong team of volunteers for all their hard work and dedication throughout the year. The volunteers enjoyed a lunch, followed by a Christmas quiz, including a sensory “what’s in the sock” round, and a prize for the best Christmas jumper.

In his speech, the Mayor said: “Volunteers are an essential part of a caring and connected community. By working together and supporting local charities through volunteering, we can all achieve more and help to change lives”.

The Mayor of Southend, Nigel Folkard, joined us to give out long service awards to some very deserving volunteers. The photo below shows left to right Val George (15 years), Maggie Linton (10 years), The Mayor, Chris Ayling (15 years), Russell Cable (10 years) and Liz Payne (5 years).



A huge thank you to all our volunteers who continue to support us - you are all fantastic!

Southend in Sight – your local sight loss charity.

Registered Charity Number: 1069765

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Green Light
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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

