



**Southend Borough Council & SEAL:**

**Working together for a better Southend**

David Colwill  
Team Leader – Private Sector Housing, SBC

Martin Ransom  
SEAL Spokesman

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**Selective Licensing Proposal**

- January 2010 SBC successful in bid for support from LGR (LACORS). Following survey SBC advised a **selective licensing** scheme would be the more appropriate option for Southend, over additional licensing.
- Jan – June 2011: Research, ASB & % privately rented evidence & consultation preparation
- July – Oct 2011: Full public consultation, mail drops, questionnaire, drop in sessions & presentations
- Oct 11 – Feb 2012: Consideration of all responses & evidence & first formal discussions with newly formed 'SEAL'



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**Why SEAL?**

- Consultation – Adoption of SL was not pre-determined
- Decision making influenced not just by tenant and resident responses but by landlords & managing agents
- Council willingness to work with the better LLs & agents whom had come forward to address the wider problems
- Benefit of Whole Borough scheme vs. discreet areas proposed under SL
- SL = parts of 3 Wards (in Borough of 17) and some 1,000 PRS properties (refer map)
- 2011 data: Southend Borough over 77,000 dwellings, estimated 14% was in PRS, proposed SL area average was 45%



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### Area Overview




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### Borough Map




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### Developing SEAL

- Why SEAL – Borough Wide vs. specific and resourcing; AND
- Partnership working: Working together with LLs & agents whom clearly wanted to improve standards
- Report to Cabinet June 2012, partnership agreed
- July 2012 – Jan 2013 Standard documentation, procedures & Code of Conduct formally agreed between SBC & SEAL.
- CoC requirements including regular inspection, Tenant ASB declarations, identification, issue of tenant info packs, specific procedure for S21 & notifying Council
- Working groups & behind the scenes work on procedures and standard documentation
- Agreed SEAL 'Member' and 'Tenant' information packs
- Full Council support for SEAL including 12 months funding for Monitoring & Compliance Officer – CoC compliance




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### Future of the Partnership

- SEAL as a pilot – being given time to progress & succeed. Major launch was in Feb 2013
- Regular reporting to Scrutiny Committee
- Monitoring progress & success in improving management, property condition & reduction of ASB
- Council retains the mandate to impose selective licensing
- In the interim: Further use of existing powers, extension of delegated powers, charging for Notices, ongoing HMO licensing & routine inspections of all non-licensable HMOs
- Communication b/w PSH & SEAL – identifying where SEAL members need to improve




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### Overview of SEAL

- SEAL has been formed to provide a facility in which Landlords, Agents and Residents can work together with relevant local authorities to address issues relating to rented accommodation throughout the Borough.
- SEAL will strive to improve mutual cooperation with relevant local authorities, maintain high standards and address problems with residential rented accommodation throughout the Borough of Southend.
- SEAL will work together with local authorities and relevant organisations to identify, and where legally possible, combat ASB in the Borough. Members will receive a SEAL Members Pack containing guidance and standard forms, to support members in attaining the standards listed in the Code of Conduct.
- Members are demonstrating they are responsible landlords / agents by signing up and agreeing to the Code of Conduct. They will strive to achieve the highest standards in the private rented sector.




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### Overview continued

- SEAL Identification: SEAL members place an identification sticker in the window of each of their properties which contains a mobile number and email contact for a complaint/service request to be made. These complaints are dealt with by our Compliance and Monitoring Officer, who works with the member to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. It is made clear to members that if service requests are not dealt with swiftly then they face action from the Council and ultimately they will lose their SEAL membership.
- Tenants sign a declaration as an attachment to the tenancy agreeing to act in a proper manner and for them to understand what is meant by the term Anti Social Behavior.

• Full code of contact can be found on the web site [www.southeastalliance.org](http://www.southeastalliance.org)




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### How SEAL recruits new members

- We contacted all the local agents informing them of the advantages of the scheme and reminding them that selective licensing could still be introduced.
- Member agents are encouraged to promote SEAL to all of the let only landlords they deal with.
- Awareness of SEAL has grown greatly through the local press and promotion by Southend Council and organisations such as the NLA.
- Members are carefully vetted, private landlords must be NLA or ELA members and agents must have been trading for a minimum of 2 years and ideally be members of ARLA or NALS and have client money protection in place. We ensure they clearly understand the Code of Conduct and what being a member means in terms of raising management and property condition standards.




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### Challenges overcome to date

- Getting the identification stickers physically in place.
- Getting members to adopt processes they may not be used to, such as regular property condition visits and taking references.
- Getting a good structure in place to deal with service requests.
- Working with many different departments and agencies and communicating to them how the processes should work.
- Building a trust with agents and landlords and departments within the Council.




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### SEAL's initial goals

- Educate and alert tenants as to what is reasonably expected of them by the landlords, agents and residents of the town.
- Provide support to landlords and agents through standard documentation, resulting in confident management of tenancies and higher standards of property management.
- Indicate to the public who are the responsible landlords and agents
- More effective reduction in all kinds of ASB emanating from rental property.
- Sharing of information between members about troublesome tenants.




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**Progress**

- Majority of SEAL ID stickers now in place.
- Membership gradually growing through careful vetting.
- Firm procedures in place.
- Greatly increased corporation with the Council and other agencies ensuring the quick resolution of most complaints.
- Many service requests and complaints successfully dealt with.
- Reduction in time and effort from the Council in dealing with properties managed by SEAL members.
- Reduction in evictions due to improved communication with the Council's Homeless Team at the start of the Section 21 process.
- Greater ability to deal with ASB issues.




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**Progress continued**

- Positive feedback from members, tenants residents and other organisations such as Essex Police.
- Working with non SEAL members to get them up to a standard so that they can become a member and improving the condition of their properties.
- Starting the production of the database of tenants, names can only be added to this once tenants have signed the appropriate data protection clause.
- SEAL members working with Council departments to give a better understanding of the private rented sector, which we hope will assist in decisions with Council strategies. The SEAL board represents many years of experience in the sector including private landlords, agents and surveyors.
- Regular Forum set up for SEAL members.
- Regular Steering Group meetings to help direct the partnership.
- Starting to build a picture of those agents and landlords who are unable to meet the SEAL standard.




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**Next Steps**

- Present & report to the Council's Scrutiny Committee mid October
- Continue to refine & improve procedures
- Continue to educate members and embed necessity of regular property condition inspections
- Log numbers of service requests direct to SEAL vs. referrals from Council.
- Auditing of members & ensure compliance with CoC.
- Ongoing Steering Group meetings to ensure communication and discussion of any problems




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### Questions?

- Examples of SEAL Member and Tenant Information Packs at front
- David Colwill  
Team Leader - Private Sector Housing  
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council  
[davidcolwill@southend.gov.uk](mailto:davidcolwill@southend.gov.uk)

- Martin Ransom  
SEAL Spokesperson  
[info@southeastalliance.org](mailto:info@southeastalliance.org)  
[www.southeastalliance.org](http://www.southeastalliance.org)  
07722 600 639



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