

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Audit, Governance & Standards Committee – 25 September 2019

Draft Corporate Equality Action Plan

This matter is the responsibility of the Executive member for Community; Cllr Chris Booth

Report Author: Paul Harding, Strategy Specialist

1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 All public bodies, including the Council, are subject to a specific duty within the Equality Act 2010 (the Act) to prepare and publish equality objectives at least every four years.
- 1.2 The aim of the objectives is to help us better meet the needs of our service users and our staff who are, or could be, disadvantaged or suffer inequality because of their particular characteristics.
- 1.3 For Somerset West and Taunton (SWT), equality objectives were approved in March 2019 by the Shadow Executive for Somerset West and Taunton Council.
- 1.4 This report contains our draft Corporate Equality Action Plan which identifies actions we will take to deliver those objectives.
- 1.5 It is proposed that progress against delivering the plan will be reported to the Audit, Governance & Standards Committee and published on our website annually.
- 1.6 The Action Plan will be a 'living document' which will enable additional actions to be added. Any additions will be brought to the attention of the Audit, Governance & Standards Committee as part of the Plan's review cycle.

2 Recommendations

The Committee are asked to:-

- 2.1 Review, and recommend approval of this Plan to the Executive, with or without amendment.
- 2.2 Note the agreed Equality Objectives and recommend the inclusion of the additional objective referred to within para 4.10 of this report.

3 Risk Assessment

- 3.1 This plan helps the Council comply with the public sector equality duty contained within the Equality Act 2010 and thereby mitigate the financial, social and reputational risks associated with non-compliance. It does not however negate the continual requirement for the council to consider the needs of all individuals who share protected characteristics in our day to day work - in shaping policy, in delivering services, and in how we operate as an employer.

4 Background and Full details of the Report

- 4.1 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) contains general and specific duties with which all public authorities (such as the Council) must comply.

- 4.2 The general duty requires us not to discriminate against people or groups who share the Protected Characteristics identified within the Act.

- 4.3 The Act identifies Protected Characteristics of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion and Belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Locally we have also recognised the following characteristics:

- Carers
- Military status
- Rurality
- Low income

- 4.4 When public authorities carry out their functions, the Act says they must consciously consider, or think about, the need to do the three things set out below. This is known as the public sector equality duty:

- **eliminate discrimination**, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
- **advance equality of opportunity** between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

(Some groups of people who share a protected characteristic, like race or sexual orientation, may suffer a particular disadvantage or have particular needs. The public sector equality duty means public authorities must think about whether they should take action to remove or reduce disadvantages suffered by people because of a protected characteristic, meet the needs of people with protected characteristics and/or encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life and other activities).

- **foster good relations** between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

- 4.5 Public authorities also have specific duties under the Act to help them comply with the public sector equality duty. These specific duties include the requirement to prepare and publish equality objectives at least every 4 years.
- 4.6 In March 2019, in response to the specific equality duty, the Shadow Executive for Somerset West and Taunton Council approved a revised set of eight corporate equality objectives for SWT.
- 4.7 These are a mixture of objectives that SWT will pursue alone and those which SWT will pursue in partnership with the Somerset Equality Officer's Group (SEOG). This is a group which is made up of County and the Somerset District Councils, Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group, Taunton Musgrove and Yeovil Hospitals, Somerset Partnership and Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue. This approach will make the most effective use of Public Sector resources. The hope is that it will also increase the impact of any changes on the community as a whole.
- 4.8 The SEOG objectives were produced following a consultation and engagement exercise that took place between September and November 2018. This included an online consultation form, promotion to 150+ equality organisations and consultation at equality events.
- 4.9 The agreed equality objectives are:

Objective 1: Councillors and officers will fully consider the equality implications of all decisions they make. (SWT)

Objective 2: Those with protected characteristics feel empowered to contribute to the democratic process and any Council activity that affects them; their input is used to inform the planning and delivery of services.(SWT)

Objective 3: Communities with protected characteristics are able to access services In a reasonable and appropriate way. (SWT)

Objective 4: Actions are taken to identify and reduce any inequalities faced by our staff or our potential employees. (SWT)

Objective 5: Work with communities and voluntary sector groups to address inequalities experienced by low incomes families and individuals. (SWT)

Objective 6: Improve the opportunities for integration and cohesion. (SEOG)

Objective 7: Improve understanding of mental health and access to support. (SEOG)

Objective 8: Work with the Gypsy and Traveller community to improve the provision of pitches. (SEOG)

- 4.10 One of the SEOG objectives was omitted in error from the report considered in March 2019 by the Shadow Authority. This was '*Create an Equality Working Group for Staff in the Public Sector in Somerset*'. We seek to include this now.
- 4.11 This report focuses on the Action Plan, which details the actions the Council intend to take in order to deliver its equality objectives and thereby help us comply with the public sector equality duty.
- 4.12 The Action Plan is at **Appendix A**.

5 Links to Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 Embedding a culture of inclusivity and equality supports Priority Outcome 3 of our emerging Corporate Strategy – '*A Council which informs and engages openly with our stakeholders and which consistently delivers excellent customer service*'.
- 5.2 One of the guiding principles within our emerging Corporate Strategy is to '*Be fair to people who use or would like to use our services and who work for us or who would like to work for us; respecting and celebrating the diversity of our district and our workforce*'.

6 Finance / Resource Implications

- 6.1 The functional areas of the Council will be responsible for identifying and addressing inequalities and promoting inclusion. The resource implications of the Equality Action Plan should be considered by service areas as part of their budget setting process. However, by making the process part of everyday work it should not result in the requirement for any additional resources.

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 Working toward the achievement of the Council's corporate equality objectives will help ensure that SWT is meeting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 7.2 The Equality and Human Rights Commission is the regulator of compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

8 Climate and Sustainability Implications

- 8.1 No direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from this report.

9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications

- 9.1 No direct safeguarding and / or community safety implications arising from this report.

10 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 10.1 The Action Plan within this report is entirely focused on reducing inequality and promoting inclusion among the communities that make up SWT, our service users and our staff.

11 Social Value Implications

11.1 There is an action relating to Social Value within the Action Plan.

12 Partnership Implications

12.1 The Actions within the Action Plan will not be achieved by the council alone. We will work with a range of partners including, but not limited to the voluntary sector and the Somerset Equalities Officer's Group (SEOG) - this is a joint officer working group made up of County and District Councils, Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group, Taunton Musgrove and Yeovil Hospitals, Somerset Partnership and Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue which shares and develops best practice as well as undertakes collaborative research.

13 Health and Wellbeing Implications

13.1 Removing any discriminatory barriers to services or employment with the Council, for those with protected characteristics, will impact positively on the health and wellbeing of those concerned.

14 Asset Management Implications

14.1 No direct Asset Management implications arising from this report.

15 Data Protection Implications

15.1 There is an action within the Plan to capture the equalities characteristics of our workforce in order that we can better identify any imbalance between our workforce and the wider community in terms of diversity as well as any particular needs which need to be considered. This exercise will be voluntary and entirely in accordance with the relevant data protection requirements.

16 Consultation Implications

16.1 The council's equality objectives were considered in public meetings of the Shadow Scrutiny committee meeting of 14 March 2019 and the Shadow Executive committee meeting of 26 March 2019.

16.2 A consultation exercise was carried out by SEOG, the County wide group, during September to November 2018 in the production of the joint Corporate Equality Objectives.

16.3 The SWT portfolio holder for Community has been consulted on this Action Plan.

17 Scrutiny Comments / Recommendation(s)

17.1 Not applicable.

Democratic Path:

- **Audit, Governance & Standards Committee – Yes**
- **Executive – Yes**
- **Full Council – No**

Reporting Frequency: Progress against delivering the plan to be reported to the Audit, Governance & Standards Committee annually.

List of Appendices (delete if not applicable)

Appendix A	Draft Corporate Equality Action Plan
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Contact Officers

Name	Paul Harding
Direct Dial	01823 218751
Email	P.harding@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk