

Decision Report - Executive Decision

Forward Plan Reference: FP/23/08/13

Decision Date – 15th January 2024

Key Decision – Yes

Confidential Information – No



Sign off of Equality Objectives and Action Plan from EFLG Peer Challenge

Executive Member(s): Cllr Adam Dance - Lead Member for Public Health, Equalities and Diversity

Local Member(s) and Division: All

Lead Officer: Tom Rutland – Public Health Promotion Manager – Equalities

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Summary / Background

1. A paper was presented to the Executive in May 2023, seeking agreement to proceed with 3 specific areas of work. This report provides an update on these three pieces of work:
 - Disability Confident Leader Assessment
 - Internal Race Audit
 - Equality Framework for Local Government Peer Challenge
2. This report also seeks agreement from Members on Somerset Council's new Equality Objectives that will take effect from April 2024.

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Recommendations

3. The Executive agrees:
 1. The action plan in response to the LGA Peer Challenge report
 2. The 4 Equality Objectives that will take effect from April 2024, noting that further work will need to be undertaken to develop the actions to deliver the objectives from April 2024 and that a further report will be made to Executive when the actions have been developed and agreed by relevant services.
 3. To note the progress that has been made on the Race Audit.

4. To note that the Disability Confident Leader assessment will be completed by the end of January 2024 with external validation being completed by April 2024.

Reasons for recommendations

4. The Council has taken the opportunity in its first year of operation to put Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion at the heart of the work of the Council by agreeing to undertake both an Equality Framework for Local Government Peer Challenge and an Internal Race Audit. Both pieces of work will support the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion delivery for our residents and staff by developing and improving areas identified as requiring further development.
5. The Council has also taken the opportunity to develop a new set of Equality Objectives to meet our requirements under the Equality Act 2010. The objectives will aim to make a difference to the communities that we will work with as they are now more focused, with specific goals to achieve.

Other options considered:

6. The option not to take forward the recommendations from the LGA Peer Challenge.

Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

7. This work will support the Council's commitment set out in the Council Plan priority to create a Fairer Ambitious Somerset.

Financial and Risk Implications

8. There are no current financial implications in this report. Work done to date has been funded through the Equality Budget, using the Equality Team resources as required.

9.

Please enter risk description					
Failure to meet our requirements under the Equality Act 2010					
Likelihood	3	Impact	4	Risk Score	12
Please enter mitigation here					
1. Equality Objectives are agreed.					

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">2. Action plan is developed to deliver the agreed objectives.3. The compliance elements of the Peer Assessment report are delivered ahead of any developmental elements.4. Regular reporting to Members and Senior Leaders. |
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Legal Implications

10. The Public Sector Equality Duty, under the Equality Act 2010, sets the requirements on public authorities through the general duty and the specific duty. The specific duty requires a public authority to publish information demonstrating compliance with the general duty and to set equality objectives at least every 4 years.

The Equality and Human Right Commission has oversight of the Act and in particular the Public Sector Equality Duty and will undertake audits to ensure that these requirements are being met.

HR Implications

11. There are no HR implications of this decision. However, there may be some outcomes and feedback from the audits and assessments. This will be considered independently when completed.

Other Implications:

Equalities Implications

12. No Equality Impact Assessment is required for this decision as it will improve the outcomes for communities and staff.

Community Safety Implications

13. There are no implications from a community safety perspective

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

14. There are no implications in this report for Climate Change and Sustainability.

Health and Safety Implications

15. There are no implications in this report for Health and Safety.

Health and Wellbeing Implications

16. There are no implications in this report for Health and Wellbeing.

Social Value

17. There are no implications in this report Social Value.

Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

18. Both the LGA Peer Challenge draft report and the draft Equality Objectives have been presented to the Members Steering Group on which Chairs and representatives of the Scrutiny Committees sit.

Background

19. The Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG)

The framework has been in place for over 8 years and provides an audit process to establish progress on equality in 4 areas:

- understanding and working with your communities
- leadership, partnership, and organisational commitment
- responsive services and customer care
- diverse and engaged workforce

The Council were fortunate to secure a Peer Challenge with core cost covered by the Local Government Association, for the period 3rd to 5th October 2023. The Council completed a self-assessment to inform the Peers on how the Council was currently performing around equality and diversity. During the Challenge the Peers interviewed a significant number of people from across the organisation and external partners. The Peer Report confirmed the findings of the Councils self-Assessment and provided a clear indication that the organisation knew how it was functioning around equality.

The LGA report has now been received and from this, 9 recommendations have been made. Working with these recommendations and the actions work already identified, the Team have brought together an initial action plan that will ensure that the team deliver actions that improve our legal compliance. The balance of the actions which are seen as development will be developed in due course when the team is clearer on the direction of the council and thus where the development work will sit. The action plan can be found at Appendix Two.

20. The Equality Objectives for Somerset Council

The Public Sector Equality Duty sets the requirements on public authorities through the general duty and the specific duty. The specific duty requires a public authority to publish information demonstrating compliance with the general duty and to set equality objectives at least every 4 years.

The current set of objectives were set in 2019, jointly agreed between the 5 predecessor councils, Somerset Foundation Trust, Avon and Somerset Police and Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service. In view of the transition to a single Unitary Council the objectives have been extended to account for the first year of the new council.

The Equality Team developed the following 6 initial objectives for consultation, based on data, research, and past objectives:

1. Work across council services and with external partners to deliver a minimum of 2 initiatives that will improve people's access to information and services who are otherwise digitally excluded by December 2025
2. By 2025, and by working with partners from across the County, improve access to, and information about, public amenities and services for those residents who are otherwise excluded by disability.
3. To create a viable solution to the delivery of accommodation (transit and permanent) for Gypsy and Traveller community by September 2025
4. A reduction of 15% in the number of cases of school-based peer-on-peer discrimination by April 2026
5. To improve reporting by the LGBTQ+ community of all incidents of hate against them, with improvement seen every 6 months from 1st October 2024
6. To work with council colleagues and the Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise sector to improve knowledge and understanding about the county's diverse communities and any tensions and integration issues that exist, delivering innovative solutions by June 2025

In determining the new set of objectives, the Equality Team considered and sought agreement from the Executive Director of Strategy, Workforce and Localities to create them for 2 years instead of 4, to reflect the transition and transformation that will occur over the next two years for the Council.

The consultation ran from 1st September to 17th November 2023. Despite best efforts, the response was low, with some clear gaps from specific communities. However, the consultation has been undertaken at a challenging time when focus was

elsewhere. The team will take the learning from this consultation to develop more creative approaches when the next set of objectives need to be created in 2025.

The top three objectives from the consultation are:

1. Work across council services and with external partners to deliver a minimum of 2 initiatives that will improve people's access to information and services who are otherwise digitally excluded by December 2025.
2. By 2025, and by working with partners from across the County, improve access to, and information about, public amenities and services for those residents who are otherwise excluded by disability.
3. A reduction of 15% in the number of cases of school-based peer-on-peer discrimination by April 2026.

A fourth objective 'To work towards being an Anti-Racist organisation, with a review of progress by December 2025', will also be included in the Council's Equality Objectives for 2024 to 2026 in recognition of the work done through the Race Audit. This will also support delivery of the Race Audit action plan.

The next step will be to develop an action plan to ensure delivery which will be completed in April/May 2024.

21. Internal Race Audit

The Internal Race Audit is now complete, and the draft report is expected mid-January 2024. The audit framework included an organisational-wide survey which received over 400 responses, two focus groups with staff from the RISE Staff Network, 16 individual interviews across the organisation and two self-assessments.

22. Disability Confident Leader assessment

The Disability Confident Leader self-assessment is currently being finalised with the aim of completion by the end of January 2024, and external validation by 1st April 2024.

Background Papers

23. The following additional papers provide additional information:

- LGA EFLG Webpage – <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/equality-frameworks/equality-framework-local-government>

- LGA Peer Challenge - <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/equality-frameworks/equality-peer-challenge>
- Internal Race Audit scope
- EHRC website - <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/>

Appendices

- Appendix One - LGA Peer Challenge report (draft)
- Appendix Two - EFLG action plan

Assurance checklist

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	David Clark	19/12/23
Communications	Peter Elliott	15/12/23
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	3/1/24
Workforce	Dawn Bettridge	3/1/24
Asset Management	Oliver Woodhams	N/A
Executive Director / Senior Manager	Sara Cretney	19/12/23
Strategy & Performance	Alyn Jones	3/1/24
Executive Lead Member	Adam Dance	3/1/24
Consulted:	Councillor Name - Val Keitch	3/1/24
Local Division Members		
Opposition Spokesperson	Lucy Trimnell	4/1/24
Scrutiny Chair	Bob Filmer	3/1/24