

Somerset Council Equality Framework for Local Government Self-Assessment

- 1. Why Somerset Council Commissioned an LGA (Local Government Association) Equality Peer Assessment**
- 2. Joint statement from Bill, Adam and Duncan**
- 3. The Organisation**
- 4. The Council Vision and Priorities**
- 5. The Place Narrative**
- 6. Somerset – The People and the Place (data and information)**
- 7. Our Approach to Equality and Diversity – Equality Objectives**
- 8. The Framework (to include what is going well what is not going well and any case studies)**
 - a. Understanding and working with our communities**
 - b. Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment**
 - c. Responsive services and customer care**
 - d. Diverse and engaged workforce**
- 9. Conclusions and Common Themes**

1. Why Somerset Council Commissioned an LGA Equality Peer Assessment

Somerset Council was formed on the 1st April 2023 from 4 District Councils (Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset, Somerset West and Taunton) and a County Council. This coincided with a change in the primary political party in the area from Conservative to Liberal Democrat.

Equality, diversity and inclusion has historically been supported by either a full-time officer or an officer for whom the responsibility has been part of a role. With the creation of a single council the total staff resource comprises 1.75 FTE (full time equivalent) working on service delivery, corporate compliance and community engagement and 1 FTE on staffing relation considerations.

As part of the new council's first year, it was agreed that an Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) Peer Challenge would be completed. The aim is for this to act as an external validation of where we are as an organisation and where we need to improve so this can be embedded into the organisation early.

An EFLG Peer Challenge can look at several different areas and identify several different outcomes. As an organisation there are several key areas we would like the Peer Challenge to focus on.

Scope of the Peer Challenge

For this Peer Challenge the focus will be on the organisational commitment to equality and diversity and how well it is embedded throughout the organisation. We are proposing the Challenge focuses on these three areas:

- The level of ownership there is throughout the organisation by officers and Members of equality, diversity and inclusion.
- An understanding of the commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion by officers and Members across the organisation.
- How effectively 'Due Regard' is embedded within all stages of the decision-making process to inform the direction we take.

2. Joint statement from Bill, Adam, Val and Duncan

Equality, diversity and inclusion are fundamental to a productive, happy and settled community. Somerset, as a county, has a lot to offer those living, working and visiting the area. Whether this be the many Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the current and coming developments of Hinkley Point and the Gravity plant coming to Bridgwater, the vibrant and diverse arts and creative culture from individuals teaching our diverse communities to those supplying national chains, the flourishing food and hospitality sector providing variety in offer and embracing the culture of the area.

All of this would not be possible without Somerset welcoming all to this glorious County.

There is so much that this assessment has made clear to us that has been happening throughout the organisation. These are often unseen things such as how we support our staff to work effectively through timely reasonable adjustments, to the nationally recognised work in the Quantock Area of Outstanding Beauty or the work of the Rough Sleeper Nursing Team.

Naturally we recognise that we are a new authority and there is still work to be done. There are areas where we lack consistency, others where we are still working out how this will work. We are however committed to the journey of improvement and being able to provide the best we can, with the resources we have, for the people of Somerset whether they be visiting, working or living here.

3. The Organisation

Organisational Structure

In April 2023 Somerset Council was formed from the 5 predecessor councils - Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset, Somerset West and Taunton and Somerset County Council. Just prior to vesting day the first 3 tiers of Management were in place. This provided an overarching structure for the organisation going forward. In some areas this has provided clarity on the way forward and how services will be structured going forward, but in others this work still needs to happen.

Below is the structure that is currently in place.



Somerset Council
Leadership Team Stru

Following vesting day on the 1st April work started on creating the structures for the remainder of the organisation, with the exception of Adults and Childrens services and Public Health who were not affected by the creation of the new council having previously gone through restructuring or have restructuring or transformation programmes planned.

Organisational Context

Transition, Transition and Change

Following Vesting Day, the Council has been working to deliver the next phase of the programme to bring the services of the five former Councils into one, taking the opportunity to transform the organisation in the process. The Council developed the Transition and Transformation blueprint, and this sets out how we will undertake service alignment, improvement, transformational and cost reduction activities across Somerset Council together. This will mean that there will be a clear corporate approach to manage our programmes. The approach is

1. Flow chart to distinguish Business As Usual, transition and transformation activities
2. Prioritisation matrix to ensure right projects/programmes are selected that can be resourced properly to deliver the right things.
3. Single architecture.
4. Programme Management Office gateway for a controlled move through each stage of a programme/project to ensure understanding of costs versus benefits opportunity, readiness for change and successful delivery.
5. Benefits maturity framework and realisation tracking.
6. Change readiness framework.

Financial position

Somerset Council is no different from many authorities in that we have significant budgetary challenges. Whilst we are working through the first year of being one Council and bringing together the budgets from the former 5 councils, the Council

has been looking at a longer-term approach that will look to achieve financial sustainability, and in July 2023 agreed the Medium-Term Financial Strategy with the overriding aim to 'To provide a financial framework within which financial stability can be achieved and sustained in the medium term to deliver the Council's key strategic priorities and sustainable services'.

Integrated Care System and Board

Somerset is a single authority area for the Integrated Care System and Board. This provides real opportunities to look at how Somerset delivers health, social care and tackles the wider determinants of health in a consistent and structured way.

Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector (VCFSE)

The formation of a single authority in Somerset provides the opportunity to have an improved and collaborative relationship with the Voluntary Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector in Somerset. This is being done through a core group of officers who were working with VCFSE prior to April and will have a good understanding of the sector and the grants paid under the former councils.

A memorandum of Understanding between the VCFSE and the ICB has been drawn up and it is anticipated that this will also be signed by the council.

4. Organisational Vision and Priorities

Somerset Council's vision and priorities are set out in the Council Plan 2023-2027

The new council's vision is that,
"Somerset Council will build a fairer, greener, resilient, more flourishing Somerset that cares for the most vulnerable and listens to you."

The council has agreed four main priorities which are -

1. A Greener, More Sustainable Somerset

We will ensure that addressing both climate and ecological emergencies are integrated into all areas of our work, including housing, flood management, land and planning policies, transport, economic development, and access.

We will support Somerset to become a leader in green technologies, the circular economy and renewable energy, by developing skills, supply chains and unlocking opportunities for clean economic growth.

The Somerset climate emergency strategy was developed in partnership and adopted by all councils in 2020. Somerset Council will build on the work carried out by district and county councils and address ecological issues alongside the climate emergency.

2. A Healthy and Caring Somerset

We are committed to improving the health and wellbeing of Somerset residents. We know that when people have the right information and support about their health, and what they can do to prevent poor health themselves, many will take the opportunities to build a healthier lifestyle. We will do what we can to make sure we have an environment that supports healthier lifestyles including access to active travel, leisure facilities, open spaces, good housing, meaningful employment, cultural experiences and social opportunities, so that our residents' mental and physical health will thrive.

Whenever Somerset residents need support, we will make sure that they can access what they need.

3. A Fairer, Ambitious Somerset

A priority for this Council is to do whatever we can to reduce the inequalities that cause these disparities, so that everyone in Somerset can live their lives as they choose. To change this, we will have to make a greater effort in the parts of Somerset and with particular groups of the population who are struggling the most.

We'll work with communities, and through the Somerset Integrated Care Partnership, to get a detailed understanding of what the issues that cause such disparities are and how we will work together to make a difference.

We need our children to get an excellent education and to aspire to achieve their goals in life.

4. A Flourishing and Resilient Somerset

For Somerset to be flourishing and resilient we need to have well balanced communities. Somerset has an older and ageing population, we know we need to work hard to attract and keep young people, young families and working age adults in the county.

The need for a thriving education sector will be paramount to making sure that Somerset flourishes economically.

Somerset Council will be a strategic leader in improving the education, skills, and vocational training offer at all levels, working closely with partners to raise aspiration and boost local opportunities.

We are acutely aware that, without a university, the higher education offer in Somerset holds us back economically.

The equalities agenda is very much addressed by priorities 3 and 4.

All of the above will be underpinned by the following principles -

- A responsible council that acts with integrity
- A listening, empowering council
- A council with evidence based and open decision making
- A collaborative council
- An enterprising council

Business Plan

The council is currently in the process of producing its Business Plan. Once complete and published the process of service planning will begin.

The Peoples' Strategy

As an Organisation we are currently engaging with our staff on the future values and culture of the organisation. This will then be used to inform a Peoples Strategy that will set out the values and key priorities for workforce planning.

5. Place narrative

Since April 2023 the Council has been working with the Local Government Association to establish a Place Narrative for Somerset. A Place Narrative is a clear compelling story that sums up key elements of places and people in an area. It should be authentic and realistic and focus on the future direction and honest challenges.

Over the last four months the Local Government Association has engaged with a large number of council staff to inform what this first draft could look like.

This Narrative is currently in its final stages and reads as follows.

“Our county of big skies, special places and unique history makes everything possible for us.

At heart there’s a common core to Somerset: a strong sense of community, resilience and a fierce determination to make a difference for all the people of Somerset; ‘Sumorsaete ealle’, as our motto says.

Ours is a place of distinctive communities, a remarkable city, market towns and villages, shaped by a proud heritage and unique geographies, loved by those who live here and visit. Every beautiful winding country lane, rolling hill, coastal and wetland area is a reminder of the importance of nature to us and our way of life.

A green future is our reality. We want to lead the South-West in building a green regional economy, using our excellent location, growing supply chains and generating sustainable employment that fits with our values.

Our growing reputation for innovation in areas like low carbon technology and energy is bringing new investment, like thousands of high skilled, quality jobs at the Gravity site – but not at the expense of our environment.

The challenge of planning for the future comes with the responsibility for protecting Somerset’s precious, but fragile, environment. The Romans first began to reclaim the extraordinary Somerset Levels from the sea. Now the urgent threats of flooding mean we are steadfast in protecting our stunning landscapes.

The carnivals that take place all over Somerset bring light into the short days and long nights. Glastonbury Festival, the most famous and joyful music festival in the world, could only happen here. Music, craft and a rich diverse cultural life are catalysts for growth and bring people together, keeping us inspired, healthy and active.

It’s right to be ambitious – we deserve the best. We see our market towns growing as vibrant places where young families can flourish. Children and young people need to get the best possible support and

start in life with training linked to work in a range of thriving local businesses.

We make and produce great things here, from cheese and cider that's enjoyed across the world to state-of-the-art helicopters, but we know we need to do more to connect people to jobs, homes and opportunities. We will always work hard for people who need more help. It's in our DNA.

All the people of Somerset make this historic, creative and beautiful county special. and the stories we tell about Somerset have people at their heart. We're facing the future with a sense of belonging and pride.”

6. Somerset – The People and the Place (data and information)

In Somerset as a village – Tony Johnson



Somerset was a
village of 100 people.

[Link to Somerset Intelligence](#)

Workforce Equality Data 07/2023

69% female 30.96% male 0.04% other

5.8% 16-25yrs 16.6% 26-35yrs 24.7% 36-45yrs 26.8% 46-55yrs 26.1%
56yrs+

45.5% unknown or pns 52.6% heterosexual 1.9% lgb

6.5% disability 30.7% pns

82.4% white British 8.3% BME including White Other & White Irish 3.3% BME
excluding White Other & White Irish

7. Our approach to Equality and Diversity – Equality Objectives

Current Objectives

The former five Councils all collaborated to produce a joint set of objectives for the period 2019 to 2023. They were:

1. Work with communities to improve the opportunities for integration and cohesion.
2. Improve public understanding of mental health,
3. Work with the Gypsy and Traveller communities to improve relationships and the provision of pitches,
4. Create Equality work groups for staff in the public sector in Somerset,
5. Implement and review the Accessibility Information Standard to create consistency around its implementation.

As the standards were due to be reviewed in September 2023 and with the creation of the new Council in April 2023, all 5 former councils agreed to extend the above objectives a further year.

Reviewing the objectives

Equality leads have started work on developing the initial long list of objectives for consultation. However, in starting this work, it has become clear that with the council still evolving, services aligning and transformation taking place, to develop a full set of objectives for 4 years, may well not allow the council sufficient time to demonstrate the difference the objectives can and will have made. Therefore, it has been agreed that there will be 3 objectives for the period April 2024 to April 2026. This will allow a further review in 2025 by which time, there will be sufficient stability and alignment to allow for consideration of a longer term set of equality objectives; probably covering a period of 4 years and with the possibility of more than 3 objectives being considered.

The current draft long list of objectives that will be used for consultation are -

1. Work across council services and external partners to deliver a minimum of 2 initiatives that will improve people's access to information and services who are otherwise digitally excluded
2. To improve access and information to services and amenities that the public use and enjoy in Somerset by 2025 by working with partners from across the County
3. To create a viable approach to the delivery of accommodation (transit and permanent) for Gypsy and Traveller community by September 2025
4. Cases of peer-on-peer discrimination in schools reduced by 15% 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 colleagues and the VCFSE to understand the diverse communities of Somerset and the tensions and integration issues that exist, working to deliver innovative solutions by September 2025

There will be a further internal Equality Objective relating to staff, but we are awaiting the outcome of the Race Audit in late August/early September to formulate the wording for an objective.

Consultation will take place from 1st September to 17th November 2023 via a variety of media including social media, our consultation portal Citizen Space, face to face attendance at events and forums and the Somerset Equality Officers Group (SEOG) newsletter to local VCFSE groups.

The objectives will be finalised in late November based on consultation results and from there we will work to agree the revised objectives along with an accompanying action plan to ensure that these are delivered. Furthermore, we will set up a reporting process to monitor progress.

Staffing the function

There are currently 2.75 FTE (4 officers) delivering the equality function for Somerset. One member of staff is dedicated to the staff side of the Council, whilst the other three support the wider Council.

As resources are tight, the Council is considering taking a business partner approach whereby each officer, dependent on the time available, will work with specific services to support them from an Equalities perspective. The existing resource is also responsible for planning, writing, and delivering internal training on all areas of equality, diversity, inclusion and wellbeing. This includes identifying where the use of an external trainer will deliver a more impactful learning/development opportunity.

Member Steering Group

We recognise that Elected Members have a fundamental role to play in supporting the Equalities agenda as they are the decision makers, and as such will need to take 'Due Regard' into consideration as part of their decision-making responsibilities. To support Members, the Council has a Member Steering Group chaired by the Executive Lead for Equalities. There is cross party representation on the group. A wider variety of issues and topics are discussed, with Members given the opportunity to challenge what is being presented to them or raise issues that have come to them.

8. Equality Framework for Local Government

A. Understanding and working with your communities

1. Collecting and sharing information

Where we are currently.

The Council has set up a Business Intelligence Unit with a corresponding website to support their work ([Home Page - Somerset Intelligence - The home of information and insight on and for Somerset - Run by a partnership of public sector organisations](#)). Through the Unit the Council captures and analyses all relevant local, regional and national data that is available. This data is spread across a wide variety of topic areas such as Health and Wellbeing, Economy and Jobs. The Unit also supports the development of the annual Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and data from each assessment supplements the data already collected.

The data that the Unit collects feeds into a variety of supportive information such as ward profiles and profiles for the Local Community Networks (LCN's) ([Burnham - Somerset Intelligence - The home of information and insight on and for Somerset - Run by a partnership of public sector organisations](#))

Data from our Voluntary Community Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) partners is collected based on the agreements that are in place and the requirements under those agreements. Some can be limited by what is required in the agreement but regular updates with the VCFSE partners can be used to expand or understand better what is being provided. (Folder ref 1 and 2)

The Council is fully General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) compliant ([Information Governance \(somerset.gov.uk\)](#))

Where the information is available then any protected characteristic information will be included and broken down to the relevant characteristic to the level available from the data, for example Census 2021 data is available across a wider range of protected characteristics – ([Census 2021: ethnic group, language, and religion - Somerset Intelligence - The home of information and insight on and for Somerset - Run by a partnership of public sector organisations](#))

The Council uses Citizen Space as its online portal for consultation activity. However, it recognises that dependant on the consultation activity that needs to be undertaken then a variety of methods can be deployed including paper questionnaires, attendance at forums, use of libraries, social media and existing meeting places such as 'Talking Cafes'.

The Council is working with health partners on the development of the Population Health database and with wider partners on the development of the Transform [supporting families] database.

Areas for development

- a) Review the data sets that are collected to identify if there are gaps in data and determine if that data is available to the Council to be used.
- b) Ensure that all data sets that the Council collects is broken down by Protected Characteristics where that information is available.
- c) Understand what VCFSE data is collected across the authority and what that data is used for.
- d) Understand how services use their data and, who and for what purpose they share that data. Through this identify areas for development.
- e) Continue to develop the Population Health database and understand how this can be used across the wider Council to make the most of the data collected.
- f) There is a need to develop an action plan for the Data Strategy.

2. Analysing and using data and information

i. Where we are currently.

The Council has a Data Strategy (Folder ref 3) that sets out the expectations in terms of data quality and the Council's aspirations in this area.

The Council has introduced a data engineering function, with a role to develop and improve systems for data flow, processing and analysis which will aid better insight and evidence-based decision making. This will be supported by the Council's Business Intelligence Strategy which sets out the aspirations in terms of data development and analysing of data.

Procurement and commissioning

There is a recognition that data has a part to play when we procure or commission services and contracts. The level of data is dependent on the work that needs to be sourced. However, it is recognised that the Council approach is sporadic, with no consistent approach being adopted.

ii. Areas for development

- a) Development of the new data engineering function.
- b) Development of the Business Intelligence Strategy with clear links to the requirements around Equality data.
- c) Expand the use of data insight.
- d) Clear guidance on the level of data that is required when the Council procure or commission a service.

3. Effective community engagement

i. Where we are currently.

The Council has a set of Consultation and Engagement Principles (Folder ref:4) that were introduced in June 2023. These principles are set against a backdrop of established routes for engagement including:

- Somerset Equality Officers Group – engagement with specific Equality groups across Somerset such as Somerset Diverse Communities
- The Council’s Customer Panel
- Our work with our VCFSE partners and using the routes that they use, for example the VCFSE forums organised by Spark across the County
- Gypsy Liaison Officer as a direct engagement link to the Travelling Community
- Members Steering Group - an internal group with a cross party of Elected Members that look at a wider variety of engagement opportunity as well as the feedback from these
- Youth Parliament and Youth Forum
- The Council’s work with Learning Disability groups

In undertaking any consultation activity, the Council is always keen to get as wide variety of views and feedback as we can and recognise that there are groups of people who may never take part. To encourage different group to participate we will use:

- Translated documents for consultation, for example recent consultation with Ukraine refugees – forms were translated into 2 different languages to support greater participation.
- Easy read options.
- Using places that a wide variety of people frequent such as libraries.
- Using VCFSE partner channels such as their newsletters, social media channels or face to face events/meetings they organise such as the ‘Talking Cafes’, ‘Together’ events.
- Specialists such as the Gypsy Liaison Officer role.

The Council will consider all consultation responses in formulating policy, service development, projects and budgets.

The Council uses several different approaches to support engagement, using some initial funding to build foundations for future engagement opportunities. These include:

- Social media, across the Council channels plus also the use ‘Next Door’, a site where people sign in using their postcode – this allows us to specifically target areas if that is needed.
- Specialist groups that deal with a specific community which further enables under presented groups to have their voices heard, including -
 - WECIL – support disabled people especially around access issues
 - Somerset Diverse Communities – supporting Ethnic communities across the County. They hold a variety of events across the County bring communities together to celebrate cultures.
 - Interfaith and Belief network – bringing together a wide range of faith and belief groups from across the County.
 - GLO – supporting the Travelling community.
 - LGBTQ+ network as well as 2BU for young people

- Youth Forum
- VAWG – the team use events to raise awareness and engage with women and girls, for example a recent event held in Bridgwater by the Council and partners on a Friday night.

LCN's are the council's new 'voice' of the community. They are about engagement and improving outcomes for residents through establishing strong connections between Somerset Council, our communities and key stakeholders. There are 18 LCN across Somerset. The first set of meetings have been held through June and August, with the next round being developed for September. LCN handbook can be seen in the [Folder ref 5](#).

ii. Areas for development

- a) Development of the Citizen Space consultation system to include 'we asked, you said, we did', so that people supporting consultations can see what the Council have done with their comments and feedback.
- b) Develop monitoring information for Citizen Space together with guidance about when to use the monitoring categories,
- c) Develop opportunities to work with the NHS on engagement.

4. Fostering good community relations

i. Where we are currently

Stand Against Racism and Inequality (SARI) works in Somerset to support victims of Hate Crime, supporting them from the start of the process through to court proceedings.

SARI, together with the Council, Avon and Somerset Police and other interested parties such as local Housing Associations, work together through the Somerset Hate Crime and Community Cohesion Group (SHCCCG) to ensure that all parties understand the data on Hate Crime across the Somerset area ([Folder ref 6](#)), including hot spots and work collectively to reduce instances of Hate Crime as well identify opportunities for positive, innovative work in both targeted areas and Somerset wide. The group has developed an overarching action plan ([Folder ref 7](#)) to support the work of the group on the wider agenda of community cohesion and integration.

The Council has a Community Safety Plan, that is being updated for the new Council.

Safer Somerset Partnership is an established partnership for Somerset and supports the Community Safety function for the Council. The membership of the Partnership includes the Leader of the Council and 3 other elected Members.

(<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/community-leisure-and-tourism/safer-somerset-partnership/>).

The Council works closely with the Police around escalating issues such as Anti-Social Behaviour through the fortnightly Priorities and Tasking meetings.

Additionally, the Council has established an ASB panel to bring colleagues together to look at what is currently going on, in what areas and what actions are being taken to reduce or eliminate ASB in these areas. The panel will also look at other specific, complex cases.

Somerset is hosting a nationally significant infrastructure project, Hinkley Point C. The Council works with other public sector colleagues, and EDF, to support community cohesion and monitor community relations through the Hinkley Community Safety Group. This group monitors what is happening through quarterly reports from Police, the Council and Fire Service, identifying areas of concern and setting up additional actions/initiatives to overcome issues raised.

(<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/business-economy-and-licences/socio-economic-advisory-group/>) The Police quarterly report identifies specific crime and non-crime statistics including harassment and any incidences of hate crime as well as welfare concerns.

SARI monitor with partners the incidents of hate crime in Somerset through quarterly 'Every Victim Matters' meetings. The SARI data will break down the number of victims of hate crime by protected characteristics as well as the area in which the incident took place, and where the referral came from. (See folder ref 6)

The former District Councils developed the ONE team model of multi-agency working. The aim is to bring together a wide variety of partner agencies, working in a specific area, for example Sydenham in Bridgwater, and through that team deals with the issues and problems that come up, with a specific focus on particular families or individuals who need support for a wide variety of reasons. For example, a family may be identified as having rent arrears but through a collective approach, other issues affecting the family can come to light, a child having problems at school, no benefits being claimed, mental health issues.

(<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/community-leisure-and-tourism/one-teams-somerset/>)

ii. Areas for development

- a) There is work to do to see if there is a way to have a more defined way Members can report issues in their particular wards.
- b) There is a recognition that as a Council we need to get better at monitoring community tensions as a collective instead of through individual services and how in response we can report the issues being raised.
- c) Complete the work in establishing a process to support critical incidences.
- d) There is a need to have a case management system for ASB which support a greater understanding of ASB and where and how that can lead to Hate Crime.

5. Participation in public life

i. Where we are currently

The Council works to ensure that it has an open and transparent approach to the work that we do. All public meetings are open to the public, with information online about how to attend. Information can be provided in several different ways including paper copies of documents and alternative languages. All Council meetings are held in accessible venues with loop systems. Where someone does use remote facilities then Teams can provide sub-titles.

Each committee meeting includes a slot for public speaking and whilst this is time limited, gives people the opportunity to have their say on the issues that matter to them e.g. planning applications.

The Council ensures that meetings are accessible by location instead of being centralised in Taunton. All meetings can be viewed online. The Council tries to vary the times of meetings to give opportunity for participation. For example, Planning and Licencing committees are held in the evening, allowing greater participation.

The Council has a majority Liberal Democrat administration, with a total number of Councillors of 110. The Council has a good understanding of the make-up of the Councillors through a demographic profile.

Many of the elected members of Somerset Council sit on outside bodies or are involved in partnerships that the Council is involved in. At Full Council on May 2023, this was reviewed and Members allocated to outside bodies and partnerships (<https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=214&MId=2385&Ver=4>)

ii. Areas for development

- a) Look at ways to encourage greater participation by a wide variety of groups, often underrepresented, in the decision making of the Council.

B. Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

1. Political and Officer Leadership

i. Where we are currently

Our current leadership are still in their forming stage. Our first three tiers of management have been in place since 1st April 2023. Our Tier 4 and associated tiers should start to be in place from December 2023 onwards.

There is a Lead Member for Public Health, Equalities and Diversity. He is supported by an Associate Lead Member for Localities (LCNS) and Public Health. The Executive have also received training to make sure they are aware that equality and diversity is a shared responsibility.

From an Officer level the Executive Director for Strategy, Workforce and Localities holds the responsibility for all elements of equality within his portfolio. However, a productive workshop was run with the Corporate Leadership Team on the responsibility they all share on equality, and where equality fits within their Directorates.

We have a cross party Member Equality Steering Group with representatives from all the main political parties. This Group aims to look at how the organisation is delivering the equality agenda and the opportunities for learning to be shared across the parties on Somerset Council.

We have clear statements on equality through our corporate plan, equality commitment and equality objectives.

As an organisation we have publicly supported and attended Pride events and flown the pride flag for Pride Month. We have flown the Gypsy and Traveller History Month flag and shared information about Gypsy Traveller History Month with the wider community through social media, schools and our staff. We have worked with schools on Black History Month and how black history can be included within the curriculum on an ongoing basis. For over 15 years we have supported the community Holocaust Memorial Day commemorations in the County.

Whilst doing the above there is more we can do to evidence our public commitments to equality and diversity. We also need to better plan the delivery of this work and where possible involve community groups in its development.

Equality considerations are included within our decision-making documentation with a specific equality considerations section within our reports, along with the inclusion of equality impact assessments as part of the report packs. All EIA's are reviewed by equality professionals for robustness before the decision is finalised. At the moment, because the EIA is attached to the decision-making paperwork, this can result in "Due Regard" considerations coming late in the process rather than at the beginning and be seen as an additional burden by the organisation. We have started working on changing this perception and are working with the Corporate leadership Team

and individual services to ensure 'Due Regard' is considered both at the beginning of the process and then throughout.

Due to a having an established group of equality professionals, we have managed to maintain good and long standing working relationships with our Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) partners.

We have worked with, and funded community organisations locally where no work has been taken place such as the creation of an LGBTQI+ network, the Interfaith and Belief Network and Accessible Somerset Project. This is to enable a stronger infrastructure and for appropriate support to be in place for communities.

We have worked with our specialist equality organisations to inform and challenge the wider communities of Somerset. For example this could be through the Gypsy Liaison post that works with both the Gypsy and Traveller community and public bodies to raise awareness, supporting the staging of 'Together' multicultural events, conversations about race run with Primary schools, the 'Unstoppables' dispelling myths about disabled young people or the Interfaith and Belief Network working with all sectors on sharing information and knowledge about different faiths and beliefs.

Our council Leader also worked with others around the negative impact of an external organisation's response to the asylum hotel in Bridgwater. Working with communities to break down barriers, supporting the local cricket club to provide a friendly match between community groups and those at the hotel.

The council is still finding its feet in terms of its wider community role. There are some areas of good practice where we have placed ourselves in situations that could otherwise have unnecessarily escalated. We have also worked effectively with community partners to have a more local and less confrontational response. However, as mentioned throughout this report practice is not always consistent

Whilst the council works on the social-economic elements of the equality legislation and includes low income as an agreed element of the EIAs, we have not adopted a formal policy.

Every year during budget setting the Council must make difficult decisions that will impact people's lives. We try to do this whilst considering the specific equality impacts of these decisions but also have to look at how these decisions will affect collectively all residents of Somerset.

In addition to having a new management team that is still in a state of flux and finding its feet, we do not have a good understanding of local equality related needs that is clearly articulated by each service area. This information is held within the Somerset Intelligence website for people to access, but we feel there is more work that could be done on providing this in a more user friendly and evolving way.

The 5 legacy Councils signed up to Anti Racism Statement. This commitment has been carried forward in to the new organisation and will be supported by an Action Plan.

ii. Areas for Development

- a) Create a plan for Equality days throughout the year that can be worked on with the VCFSE

2. Priorities and Partnership Working

i. Where we are currently

Our corporate plan talks about fairness and how we can give people the chances they need. We are currently writing our corporate plan with a commitment to include the updated equality objectives. We will also be using equality data and the “Due Regard” principles to inform what action we take.

The current objectives were created collectively for the whole Public Sector in Somerset. This was supported by broad community and partner engagement.

VCFSE infrastructure organisation Spark Somerset works with a wide range of community representatives to include their voices in how the council should work. The new LCNs will be focused on specific geographical communities to make sure local communities have their say over how their community works. There has been a lot of work done to make sure these are inclusive spaces and that the information provided includes information disaggregated where appropriate. This is with the aim for LCNs to be making informed decisions through the lens of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

A cross party Member Steering Group includes representatives from Community Groups who attend on an ad hoc basis. This provides the Steering Group with community level intelligence that the members can then take back to their parties to help inform decision making.

Whilst voluntary and community partners are cited as equal partners, effective engagement mechanisms need to be improved. We currently connect in a piecemeal way rather than in a structured and meaningful manner. Our aim is to have a more structured conversation with communities that feed the wider direction of the council. We are working towards being a joint signatory on a new Memorandum of Understanding with the VCFSE; developed principally as part of the ICB arrangements, is about to institute an internal VCFSE working group. Furthermore the council has developed a new partnership register and partnership framework and tool kit as part of the Local Government Reorganisation process.

The Council has worked closely with Partners to try and identify and meet requirements under the Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) and for the wider Gypsy and Traveller Community. This has had varying degrees of success. The Council has a Gypsy Liaison Officer that works to provide training and support for services (both Council and wider when it can be of benefit to the community) to have better understanding of the community. It also works with the community to break down barriers. The Council still has work to complete on providing adequate site provision in the County. This has been an ongoing issue for

the Council and whilst some progress is being made through a new site and community site in Glastonbury there is still a lot of progress to be made.

ii. Areas for Development

- a) Create a consistent approach to how we engage in an ongoing conversation with the equality VCFSE
- b) Continue to work with the Member Equality Steering Group on building a relationship with the VCFSE
- c) Create an organisational equality network framework.
- d) Work with Council service to understand our commitment and appetite for the Council to deliver Gypsy and Traveller sites in Somerset

3. Using Equality Impact Assessments

i. Where we are currently

Somerset Council has an organisation wide agreed Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process. This is also used by Health organisations in Somerset to aid cross organisational working.

Training on 'Due Regard' is available online through the Council's learning portal. Individual and online support is provided per case where needed.

Due to the amount of change the organisation is going through 'Due Regard' can mainly be accommodated at the decision-making process point for reasons of pragmatism. There is work ongoing to shift the perception, so Equality Impact Assessments are completed early enough in the process to effect change more easily. This is taking place with the Leadership Team and specific services.

There is some evidence of the Equality Impact Assessments taking account of community views, but this is not consistent throughout the organisation.

A cumulative equality impact assessment is completed for the budget setting process where required. This has not taken place over the last 2 years, but when completed it identifies any areas of disproportionate impact when setting a balanced budget.

Core decision making processes have equality embedded into them through inclusion of the Equality Impact Assessment within the decision documentation. Work needs to take place so that this is also embedded within the Transformation process.

The organisation cannot consistently and effectively evidence whether mitigations identified in equality impact assessments are effective.

ii. Areas for Development

- a) Work with services to improve the timeliness of 'Due Regard' considerations and Equality Impact Assessment completion.
- b) Work with performance leads to identify how Equality Impact Assessment mitigations can be effectively monitored.

4. Performance monitoring and Scrutiny

i. Where we are currently

There is a Member Equality Steering Group that includes a number of Scrutiny Chairs on the membership. Part of the role of the Steering group is to review and challenge the effective delivery of the organisation's Equality Objectives.

When the objectives were originally set they will have gone through the full decision-making process, including Scrutiny.

Due to capacity, the wider organisation is not regularly updated on progress of the Equality Objectives although Information is shared with the Member Equality Steering Group.

Somerset Council has been part of the South West Equality Network since its inception over 20 years ago. This has provided an invaluable network to benchmark how Somerset Council is performing when compared to similar organisations in the region. It also provides the opportunity to share good practice and learn from others.

ii. Areas for Development

- a) Make sure the draft equality objectives are shared early with partners and Scrutiny Committee.
- b) Identify a way to share monitoring of Equality Objectives more effectively

C. Responsive services and customer care

1. Commissioning and Procuring Services

i. Where we are currently

As mentioned in 8A above the Council's approach to the use of data in informing commissioning intentions is sporadic, with a lack of consistency across the organisation. However, to rectify this the Council will be putting in place a new Contract Management System in 2024 that will better enable it to make effective use of data, address the right questions with regard to equalities and have more robust monitoring, particularly important in relation equality. There is also a recognition of the need to have specific equality clauses in contracts which will also be addressed by the new System.

With regard to contract monitoring, making use of both quantitative and qualitative data is patchy across the organisation with only occasional exemplar practice.

The articulation of the council's equality objectives and their relationship to commissioning and contract requirements is not explicit. Whilst contract providers can understand and can articulate a commitment to their own equality policies they are largely unable to do so with the council's. This is partly down to company size, with practice likely to be better in larger companies.

Currently the council does not measure the equality performance of sub-contractors although a new Procurement Bill will place a responsibility on the council to have 'Due Regard' to sub-contractors.

There is clearly some good legacy practice that has been carried over from the predecessor authorities where robust equality considerations have been included in service specifications and monitoring metrics e.g., Citizens Advice and the Drug and Alcohol Service.

There are also good examples of equalities specific procurement e.g., Disability Access, Faith and Belief, Race, and Interpreting and Translation services all informed by equalities objectives.

There is also a good track record of implementing Social Value Policy and practice with clear outcomes tracking. For example, South Somerset District Council adopted the National TOMS methodology developed by the Social Value Portal within which were specific equalities metrics.

As with many areas of the council's services going forwards it is crucial that the best of what all the predecessor authorities were doing is adopted by the new council or that if all legacy practice is insufficient for equalities purposes then new 'fit for purpose' policy, processes and practice are approved.

ii. Areas for Development

- a. Ensure a consistent approach to the use of data when drawing up commissioning plans including that relating to equalities and enshrine this in the new contract management system. This to be supported by providing the necessary training to procurement and commissioning staff.
- b. Tighten up commissioning processes to ensure equality considerations are explicit at the time of tendering and in the monitoring requirements of contracts.
- c. Where results of contract monitoring show the need for improvements in equalities outcomes this give rise to appropriate contract variations and clear improvement targets for the providers which are subsequently monitored.
- d. Compliance with the requirement to have 'Due Regard' to the activity of sub-contractors as required under the new Procurement Bill.

2. Integration of equality objectives into planned service outcomes

i. Where we are currently

As a new council that is still in its forming stage, many continuing services will still be delivering legacy service outcomes therefore it difficult to evidence a consistency of approach to how these outcomes have been informed by equalities objectives.

We have successfully operated a single Equality Impact Assessment regime which was developed by the Somerset Equality Officer's Group across the Somerset public sector four years prior to LGR. An example of good practice in this area is where with senior management backing, a campaign was undertaken whereby a 100% stretch target was achieved for the completion of EIA's for all committee reports requiring member decisions, thus ensuring that equality considerations were a key issue where new or revised service outcomes were proposed.

As described in more detail in 3i below, the introduction of a new Somerset Council consultation and engagement platform, 'Citizen Space', will provide a tool to facilitate service user engagement in the development of Service Plans and to feedback on performance. The CS platform enables a feedback loop with consultees/service users through its 'we asked, you said, we did' facility.

Finally, a new Performance Management Framework is currently in development which can be utilised to ensure that the consideration of equality objectives is a necessary requirement when considering service outcomes and which is subsequently reported on.

ii. Areas for Development

- a. Ensure that full consideration of corporate equality objectives is a required part of the service outcome planning process.
- b. Ensure that full consideration is given to measuring how service outcomes impact on equality groups in the new Performance Management Framework and that the service user/resident experience of people from the protected characteristics of services is captured and reported in the new Performance Management Framework.

3. Service delivery and design

i. Where we are currently

Many of the council's services continue to work to their predecessor authority's service plans whilst a process of service realignment is undertaken. This is also impacted by the fact that many services continue to work with interim structures as the process of developing the final organisational structure is considered in the context of the challenging financial picture. It is likely, therefore, that the finalised structure will not be completed until the beginning of the 2024/25 financial year. To this end, current practice will not be consistent in terms of how well those service plans were drawn up in consultation with users based on the different approaches taken by predecessor authorities.

Furthermore, the creation of new service plans will follow the completion of the Council's Business Plan. As of the time of writing, work is still taking place on the Business Plan. Equalities specialist officers will be included in any conversations regarding both the development of the Business Plan and Service Plans but for now there is no timescale for when this process will be completed.

In terms of how the council will be able to engage with and take into consideration the views of service users/residents in the development of future service delivery, a key component of the LGR One Council business plan was the creation of Local Community Networks (LCN's). Following community consultation 18 LCN's have been established which will function as Area Boards of the council with participation by key agency stakeholders and open to the public. Each LCN will be serviced by a LCN link officer and democratic services staff. A key function of the LCN's will be to establish local priorities based on evidence and to inform where council service delivery may need to adapt and change. To date the LCN's have held their first meetings which were principally concerned with clarifying purpose, adopting the Terms of Reference and electing the Chair and Vice Chair. Establishing local needs and priorities will begin in earnest from the second round of meetings which are due to take place in September/October. Crucially, ensuring that the participation and views of people from the protected characteristics are included in the LCN will be key to their success.

A new consultation and engagement platform, 'Citizen Space' (CS) [Somerset Council - Citizen Space](#), has been procured by the council (used previously by two of the predecessor District Councils). This will also provide a tool to facilitate service user engagement in the development of services and to feedback on performance. The CS platform enables a feedback loop with consultees/service users through its 'we asked, you said, we did' facility.

For those for whom English is not their first language - including those for whom BSL is, the council has procured Interpreting and Translation services to ensure that they can receive fair access to services.

ii. Areas for Development

- a) The development of all new service plans to incorporate a requirement to have consulted with service users, and particularly those from Protected Characteristics.
- b) Measures to secure the engagement and participation of residents and groups/organisations from, or representing, Protected Characteristics in the new LCN are put in place.
- c) Engagement of equality groups is a required measure of the performance of LCNs.
- d) That the 'We asked, you said, we did' facility on the Citizens Space portal is fully utilised to that customer feedback on the results of consultations is provided.

D. Diverse and engaged workforce

1. Workforce Diversity & Inclusion

i. Where we are currently

The Council has a current workforce of 5288 employees of which 69% are women and 31% are men.

The new Council has restructured Tiers 1-3 and is now in the process of beginning consultations to restructure Tiers 4 and below. Equality and Diversity has and continues to be a key consideration throughout this ongoing process. Examples include, ED&I and Unconscious Bias training delivered to all decision-making recruitment panel members, and all equality and wellbeing staff network participants were invited and encouraged to participate in staff panels. Diversity of all stakeholder and decision-making panels was also considered.

EIAs are completed for all restructures.

The Council supports numerous Staff Employee Networks linked to areas of equality & wellbeing. These include RISE BME network, Menopause Café, Neurodiversity, Men's Health, Disability, Armed Forces, Young People's Network, Wellbeing and LGBTQIA+. Many of the staff networks are now linking with similar groups in partner organisations, for example with the NHS and Police.

In May '23 the Council held its first RISE Conference to celebrate racial diversity and to provide a safe space to discuss race, and challenge the Council to adopt a stronger anti-racist position. Following the conference, actions are being taken forward and a working group has been set up to look at allyship.

Following a significant increase in reports of racism being experienced/witnessed by employees the Council has commissioned an internal Race Audit that will be undertaken by an external ED&I Consultant in August/September 2023. Training, delivered by an external provider, has also been arranged for areas where this is a particular concern, notably areas of social care.

Whilst the new Council continues to form, establishing the culture of the new organisation is of critical importance. The Council ran a series of staff culture workshops prior to vesting day and is now running a further 100 workshops to ensure that as many staff as possible are involved in forming the new culture.

ii. Areas of Development

- a) As we continue to experience significant organisational change it remains critical that we support staff. We acknowledge and have witnessed that with significant change often comes increased anxiety and at times less desirable behaviours. We need to review how we best achieve this.

- b) We are hopeful that the Race Audit will help us identify ways in which we can better adopt an anti-racist position as an organisation and improve the experience of our BME colleagues.
- c) As the Council continues to restructure we need to find new ways of embedding equality and diversity considerations within these processes with the resources we have.
- d) Many of our staff networks are relatively new and require time and support to grow.
- e) One area the Council is keen to explore is the setting up of an Employment/Corporate Equalities Board. The vision is that the board will include elected members, employee network and leadership representation from all directorate areas, and will play a vital role in driving the ED&I agenda forward as well as ensuring there are clear channels of communication between employees, members and leadership.

2. Inclusive Strategies and Policies

i. Where we are currently

The Council is currently a Level 2 Disability Confident Employer, and we are in the process of applying for Level 3 Leader. This is particularly important to us as Somerset currently only has 1 employer at Level 3 and as a significant employer in the county we have a duty to be a good role model. This is one of many guaranteed interview schemes we have. Others include care leavers, and veterans and direct family members of military personnel. We are currently looking to adopt Care Experienced as a local protected characteristic and will be offering guaranteed interviews to this group of people also.

Our recruitment team use gender neutral software for all adverts to ensure our job adverts appeal to all. Whilst we do use a predominately online application process we are able to offer alternative formats. We are currently working with Discovery to look at adjusting the whole recruitment process for candidates with learning disabilities. This will remove the barrier of traditional application forms and replace interviews with working interviews allowing candidates to demonstrate their skills.

The Council has signed the Menopause in the Workplace pledge and has robust guidance for both managers and employees that was written through consultation with Trade Unions.

All new HR policies and any policies under review are fully consulted on with Trade Unions and include EIAs.

Several HR policies and guidance are directly related to ED&I matters such as employment of a person with a disability policy, neurodiversity guidance, domestic abuse, disability leave, family and carers support.

The Council has a number of inclusive strategies which include the Dynamic Working Strategy and the Team Charter. These promote flexibility around how, where and when people work.

The Council communicates and gains feedback from employees through monthly CEO Q&A sessions. This is also a forum used to promote news and information around ED&I matters.

ii. Areas of Development

- a) Moving forwards further employee consultation through the various equality and wellbeing staff networks would be useful in informing policies and strategies the Council develops and reviews. The continued support and promotion of the networks is necessary to achieve this.

3. Collecting, analysing and publishing workforce data

i. Where we are currently

The Council collates workforce equality data through the payroll system as well as from job applications.

Data is collected for race, disability, sex, gender, transgender, religion and belief, age and sexual orientation.

The Council publishes an Annual Workforce Equality Report on the Council's website [Equality and Diversity \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/equality-and-diversity).

Details of employee data, including leavers, and internal processes such as disciplinary, and recruitment data are published.

The report also includes case studies from employees as well as narrative around ED&I initiatives and partnership working to provide context and detail around wider ED&I work.

We recognise that the current data set has gaps due to differences in the predecessor councils' collation of data. The council will continue to use the employee services function on SAP to prompt all employees to update their equality data annually.

Likewise, the Council publishes the Gender Pay Gap annual report on both the Council's website and the dot Gov reporting website. The GPG is a tool that helps inform wider equality objectives in the Council. [Equality and Diversity \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/equality-and-diversity)

Monthly power BI reports are also produced around both ED&I and Wellbeing, which includes Race, Disability, Sex, leavers and sickness absence.

Each directorate creates their own service plan/workforce strategy which includes considerations around ED&I.

ii. Areas of Development

- The Council offers all leavers the opportunity to participate in an exit interview. We are currently reviewing this process due to the very low take-up and the benefits of the data leavers can provide us with. One key improvement will be the offer of an exit interview being given upon receipt of a resignation.

4. Learning, development and progression

Where we are currently

The Council provides employees with a variety of training and learning opportunities throughout their careers.

Training has been increasingly delivered online since the pandemic, but we are now seeing some training returning to face-to-face delivery. Online training is delivered through our eLearning platform which hosts a range of ED&I modules. Some of these modules have been identified as mandatory as part of a wider mandatory ED&I training package for all employees that is based on a 3hr face-to-face session. Refresher sessions will also be delivered every 2 to 3 years following the completion of the initial training.

A range of bespoke ED&I training is also widely offered. Recent examples include a variety of mental health training sessions, for example REACT, Connect5 and Mental Health First Aid, Neurodiversity Awareness sessions, Challenging Behaviour, and Autism Awareness. We have also delivered a session around ED&I and Challenging Behaviour to our Tier 1 to 3 senior managers.

The Council runs a host of schemes and programmes supporting both new and existing employees at all stages of their careers. Examples include, Internship programme, Graduate Programme and SEND supported apprenticeship programme. We also offer apprenticeships for both new recruits and as a way of upskilling the current workforce.

We offer information sessions on Multiply to help staff develop their numeracy skills.

The Council supports the Pathways to Employment Scheme, supporting vulnerable/disadvantaged groups into work. For example Care Leavers and SEND.

We are currently looking to become a 'Project Search' organisation in 2024, supporting people with learning disabilities into the workplace. Likewise, we are currently working with partner Discovery to change how we recruit/interview those with learning disabilities.

The Council is hosting and providing a number of four-week placements for Women's Work Labs, a national programme for women returning to the workplace after a prolonged period of absence.

The Council runs a coaching scheme & is currently reviewing wider coaching and mentoring to improve the scheme for 2024.

The Council is exploring the opportunity of signing up for the '10000 Black Interns' scheme.

We make use of development opportunities through partner organisations. Examples would include, LGA Apprentice of the Year challenge, PPMA Apprentice of the Year Challenge and Rising Star Challenge. Apprentices are invited to one-day events with learning and coaching opportunities & Rising Star candidates are invited to a similar two-day event.

We are currently reviewing professional fees and how they will be paid in the future.

The Council has a robust Early Careers Strategy in place.

ii. Areas of Development

- a) We currently rely heavily on eLearning as a platform and need to focus on moving more training to face-to-face and better consider the accessibility needs of employees.
- b) Continue to develop support for our SEND or Care Experienced employees.
- c) Continue to review and improve Leadership and Management Programmes for staff including developing a reverse-mentoring scheme.

5. Health & Wellbeing

i. Where we are currently

The Council has a number of inclusive strategies, for example, Dynamic Working Strategy including the Team Charter and the Wellbeing Strategy. These strategies are developed through consultation with employees and other stakeholders, for example Trade Unions through regular monthly informal meetings.

Bespoke support and training is offered to all managers and teams in understanding how they can put into practice the strategies and policies in place. Recent examples include working with teams to establish ways of working that support both flexibility for employees and the operational needs of the service.

We always look at best practice amongst wider external colleagues for example through South West Councils.

We provide a vast array of manager and employee guides across a range of wellbeing areas. Examples include healthy eating, DSE support and exercise, mental health and financial support.

An annual communications plan is in place to ensure key areas of Wellbeing are covered regularly as well as providing more reactive communications and support as required.

The Council provides all employees access to physiotherapy through a Rapid Access to Physio scheme. All sessions are face-to-face unless the employee requires them to be online.

The Council also has an Employee Assistance Programme with Care First. This enables all employees to access support 24hrs a day, access to counselling and access to information specialists.

We have a robust stress toolkit in place, with manager and employee guidance and tools.

We have trained in-house mediators and wellbeing specialists who can support individuals/groups.

We use staff surveys to collate data from our employees and to gauge how people feel about focused areas such as wellbeing at a given point in time. These are useful in informing the Wellbeing strategy and identifying priority work around wellbeing. One example where this was particularly helpful was a survey conducted during the pandemic that helped us prioritise staff support.

Access to information, initiatives and support is available for all staff via our Wellbeing intranet site. We have recently started to deliver face-to-face sessions to employees without online access.

Strong partnership working has helped with access to training. For example, 350 managers have undertaken REACT training around mental health and 300 places funded for Mental Health First Aid training via the European Social Fund.

The Council runs a number of Wellbeing initiatives throughout the year, for example Walk this May. These initiatives allow for wider team building and connect employees from across all areas of the organisation as well as promoting positive physical and mental health.

A range of informal learning and information sessions are delivered throughout the year through 'lunch & learn' type webinars. These have included Financial Wellbeing, Working with Cancer, Gypsy and Traveller awareness, Menopause Matters and Sugar Smart sessions.

ii. Areas for Development

- a) Consider consulting with external bodies regarding the development of new policies.
- b) Review how we communicate new or reviewed policies and strategies in order to be more effective in helping managers and teams understand the information and understand how it can impact/support staff. Whilst we often signpost them to information we don't instruct them and do not provide opportunities to ask questions.
- c) Improve how we reach employees without ICT access with support, training opportunities and information.
- d) Review and improve the range of social initiatives to improve inclusivity.

9. Conclusions

The process of completing the Peer Assessment has provided a good opportunity to take stock at a time of major change and understand where the council is performing in relation to Equality and Diversity and to set the direction of travel early in the new council's life.

Having reviewed ourselves against the Equality Framework there are some overarching themes that can be identified:

- **Consistency** – whilst we can identify pockets of good practice in certain areas there are also examples where things are not going well within the same area of council business. Part of the action going forward will be to establish how we can have consistent good practice across the organisation.
- **Proactivity vs Reactivity** – presently the equality service is having to react to what is taking place in the organisation rather than being able to be proactively involved in the direction it is taking.
- **Service Planning** - how equality objectives are factored into the development of service outcomes and plans is yet to be defined by the new council.
- **Change** - The current organisation is in a greater state of flux than expected at this stage in its development. However, this does provide an opportunity to effect its direction whilst also presenting a challenge to effective delivery.
- **Customer voice** – Whilst we are, in most cases, good at asking customers for opinions this is again not consistent and greater improvement needs to take place in creating a customer feedback loop back developing ongoing conversations.
- **Equality Events** – Better planning and promotion of equality events that engages the community in its development.
- **Equality data** - Making better use of the equality data that the Council has available to it in order to inform organisational direction and the key consideration of “Due Regard”.
- **Communication** – Better communication and support in understanding new strategies, policies and learning opportunities.
- **Staff Networks** – building upon the existing staff networks to enable them to be a meaningful voice and inform the Council's ED&I agenda.
- **Equality Workforce Data** – improve the gaps in data and use in a meaningful way to inform objectives.