




# Somerset Equality Impact Assessment

Before completing this EIA please ensure you have read the EIA guidance notes – available from your Equality Officer or [www.somerset.gov.uk/impactassessment](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/impactassessment)

<b>Organisation prepared for (mark as appropriate)</b>						
<b>Version</b>	<b>0.1</b> <b>0.2</b>	<b>Date Completed</b>	<b>05/03/2024 1<sup>st</sup> Draft</b> <b>30/05/2024 2nd Draft</b>			
<b>Description of what is being impact assessed</b>						
<p>Currently the Council’s legacy Taunton accommodation consists of 1) former District Council office at Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton and 2) former County Council offices at County Hall, The Crescent, Taunton. The distance between the 2 office bases is 1.1 miles by road (not as the crow flies).</p> <p>Deane House is in close proximity to Taunton train station, has adequate on site Member and staff parking and is served by 4 bus route (1/1E town centre bus routes, 28 (Minehead) and 25 (Dulverton)) and is currently the Council’s main customer facing reception which was implemented in December 2023 as part of the winter office arrangements pilot in Taunton. Deane House opening hours for customers is 8.30-5pm Monday to Friday. Its opening hours for staff is 7 am to 7 pm Monday to Friday. There are keyholder arrangements in place for out of hours access. On occasion there are evening infrequent meetings which last until 10 pm which is managed by on site facilities teams. All staff whose workbase is Deane House have access to discounted parking on site at £1 a day.</p> <p>County Hall is in close proximity to town centre main bus route stops, has Member, visitor and business use parking for staff and is served by 13 (7, 22, 22A, 30, 99, 96C, 95, 1E, 21A, X22, 21, 28, 3) bus routes in addition to Taunton’s 2 Park and Ride services stopping right outside the campus. Parking for non-business users is in local pay and display short term or longer-term car parks. County Hall is a back-office site and does not currently receive customers who walk in, visitors to County Hall are by appointment only. County Hall opening hours for visitors by appointment is 8.30am - 5pm Its opening hours for staff is 7 am to 7 pm Monday to Friday – some staff have 24/7 access to specific areas of the campus. There are</p>						

accessible parking arrangements for staff and customers available at County Hall. There is no free accessible parking for staff at Deane House, but this is currently being looked at.

The Council's current financial emergency status has catapulted its Asset Management Strategy and asset rationalisation programme into the spotlight. The Council's longer-term strategy for Taunton accommodation is a live topic.

Deane House has significant number of tenants (public sector multi agency hub plus commercial tenants) already occupying the site. County Hall has fewer tenants although it does have a long-term licence agreement in place with a key partner that cannot be changed for the next 7 years. External estates advice received is that a fully tenanted site is a better longer-term strategy for the Council to consider its options to dispose or sell.

Alongside the Council's winter office arrangements pilot period (December 2023 to end March 2024) for Shape Mendip and County Hall, (which saw A Block closed to staff, and staff contained within floors B1 and B2 of B Block), the Council continues its partnership work through the One Public Estate programme with its key partners, the NHS and Police to align office accommodation strategies.

An external partner organisation has made a request to relocate some of their staff to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor at Deane House. Another organisation has made a request to take accommodation on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of Deane House. The commercial heads of terms are agreed with both organisations, and these will be converted into licences following the approval of the related Key Decision by Executive on 8 July 2024. These deals would contribute significant income (£575k per year) over a period of 5 years but would necessitate the relocation of Somerset Council staff who currently occupy the first floor. The customer service reception on the ground floor would not be impacted by these proposals. The impacts of this opportunity have been subject to formal union and staff consultation. If approved, the opportunity to optimise the Council's Taunton accommodation would result in the following:

**1) Deane House, Belvedere Road, specifically:**

- a) retaining face to face customer service reception facilities on the ground floor, supplemented by back-office accommodation facilities for members of staff who are required to work from the building for service requirements or to meet with members of the public. – no significant change for customers
- b) retaining sufficient control and use of first floor committee rooms for ongoing Council Member meetings for 2.5 days a week – no significant change for Member and their ongoing meeting commitments
- c) relocating the Council's staff who have Deane House as their contractual workbase to County Hall – significant change
- d) identifying a solution for the Deane House fleet of pool cars including EV vehicles – potential facilities change
- e) identifying a 'no detriment' solution for Taunton based staff parking

## **2) County Hall, Taunton, specifically:**

- a) interim re-use of parts of A Block for decant and storage as required during project implementation stage – this will include some interim use of meeting rooms.
- b) opportunity to refresh layout plans for all floors of B Block (including reopening floor B3) to re-plan for a modernised look and feel, planning for teams to be located by Directorate, taking into account known PEEP, equalities and accessibility needs, confidentiality requirements, sharing and engaging on proposed plans with Business Change Managers - please note this project will be subject to a separate EIA
- c) determining the requirement for new furniture to replan B Block, taking into account existing furniture available within the Taunton offices
- d) identifying pool car and parking solution for incoming staff

Strategic data from the Council's HR SAP system tells us that a total of 2,243 staff have contractual bases at either Deane House or County Hall office bases in Taunton – see below for further breakdown of equalities data

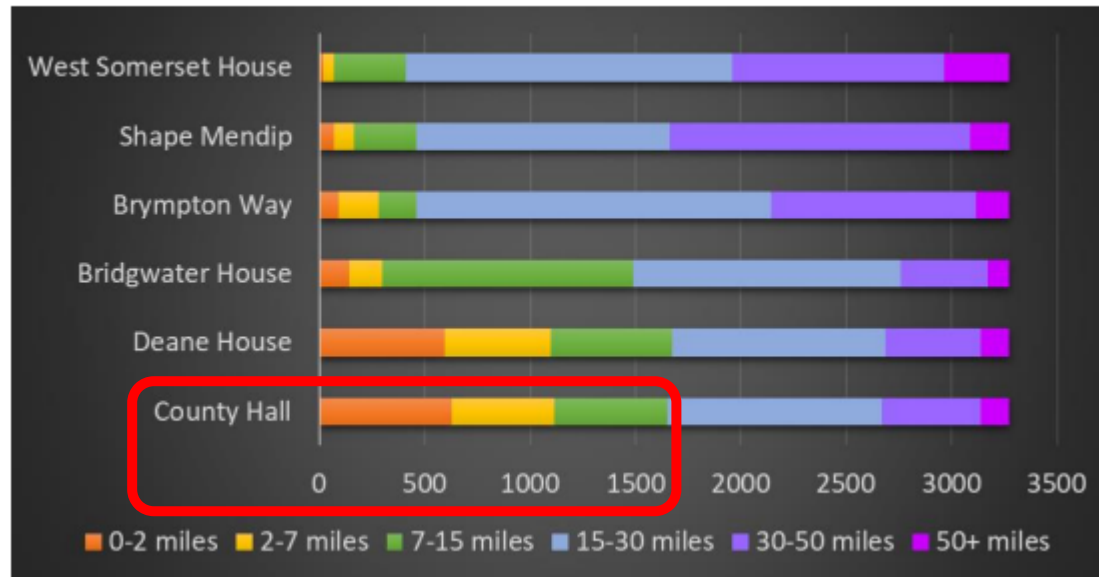
### **Evidence**

**What data/information have you used to assess how this policy/service might impact on protected groups?** Sources such as the [Office of National Statistics](#), [Somerset Intelligence Partnership](#), [Somerset's Joint Strategic Needs Analysis \(JSNA\)](#), Staff and/ or [area profiles](#), should be detailed here

Property rationalisation office data for main office sites run during December 2023/January 2024, confirming strategy and use of Taunton offices – see business case.

- Occupancy studies used to understand number of staff regularly accessing each site undertaken monthly since December 2023 – Deane House max occupancy is 54 %; County Hall max occupancy is 57 %; full analysis data available on request
- Business intelligence analysis of staff postcode data to identify home to work travel information to various sites – this is still work in progress but will look at travel by foot, bike, car, train. This shows that c50% of staff can commute to Taunton offices within a 7 mile radius. See extract of Chart 1 from the Redesigning Taunton Office Accommodation Business Case released to all staff 11 April 2024 below

Chart 1: Office-based workforce – distance of home address from selected office sites



- Analysis of impact on home to work travel if Deane House staff are relocated to County Hall

Discussions with line managers and facilities teams to discuss individual PEEPS will be needed at project implementation stage. An Accessibility Questionnaire has been issued to Taunton based staff via nominated Change Agent/s appointed on behalf of each Taunton based team. The Change Agents have been promoting the co-production of these between managers and staff who have a workplace adjustment requirement. These will be collated for the project team to consider and manage prior to team relocations taking place.

The lessons learned from recent office change projects:

- 1) have been shared with the project team from the Ways of Working team from the winter office arrangements pilot;
- 2) from previous NHS teams relocation to B Block, County Hall in Summer 2020

SAP data shows the following information;

#### Deane House

282 members of staff have Deane House listed as their contractual place of work

66% are female and 34% are male

26% are aged 55+, broadly in line with overall workforce data

0.35% declared a disability however 98% answered 'prefer not to say' – we therefore recognise there is a significant gap in this data with the actual declared % of disability is likely to be higher; local facilities knowledge about known staff disability will influence space planning proposals

Ethnicity 84.4% identified as White British; 9.9% BME including White Other; 2.8% BME excluding White Other

### County Hall

1961 members of staff have County Hall listed as their contractual place of work

66% are female and 34% are male

20% are aged 55+

9% declared a disability 8% answered 'prefer not to say'

Ethnicity 84.6% identified as White British; 7% BME including White Other; 1.8% BME excluding White Other

We know a key impact of this proposal will be a greater concentration of Taunton based staff in a single location, with the project team needing to facilitate the ability to provide suitable size rooms, spaces, and layouts for a variety of office needs to meet different protected group's needs. Other data we will look to collate and consider is team requirements for meeting rooms on a regular basis.

**Who have you consulted with to assess possible impact on protected groups and what have they told you?** If you have not consulted other people, please explain why?

The facilities leads at County Hall and Deane House were able to offer working knowledge of teams at sites they are based at to understand potential impacts.

Discussions with HR managers, IT network managers, Facilities leads, service directors and leadership team have commenced and will continue be undertaken prior to planning space allocations and commencing staff moves during summer 2024. This will ensure information shared will be used to inform the B Block re-planning process. Union representatives have been consulted as part of the business case development phase – please see updated timescales table below. Affected staff based at Deane House have been formally consulted with following discussion with JNF on 13 March and have had the opportunity to feed their concerns to the project team through the Trade Union representatives during the Collective Consultation phase. All Taunton office-based staff are having the

opportunity to feed into the space planning options for County Hall as part of the project through their nominated Change Agents appointed by managers on behalf of their teams. This will be the subject of a separate but related Equalities Impact Assessment. Line managers and staff will be encouraged to share information regarding specific requirements needed.

During the Trade Union consultation period the project team attended and sought feedback from several Employee Network groups to discuss how we can improve office layouts for specific network needs. Feedback received from the networks will help to inform the space planning should the project proceed and will also be fed into the Equalities Impact Assessment. The following network meetings were attended with related feedback from each group summarised below;

- Neurodiversity - Create quiet space away from rest of team to enable concentration; Simple to use desk booking system so teams can work side by side; Create more breakout / quiet spaces to take calls and to relax away from the level of noise in the main desk area; Circulate reminders about office etiquette to assist shy staff
- Rainbow - Consider gender neutral facilities and sanitary bins in men's toilets
- Disability – remind staff with specialist chairs they can get assistance with moving them around County Hall from facilities teams if required; discuss with manager and facilities team options for parking if member of staff has limited ability to walk distances but doesn't have a Blue Badge; Hearing loss – consider quieter spaces for this including allocating some glass rooms on B3E for calls rather than bookable meeting rooms; collaboration spaces are better to have hexagonal or horseshoe layouts than long tables; Allocate quieter space in the office may help staff with dyspraxia who find it hard to concentrate; Staff with dwarfism would appreciate a full length mirror in each bathroom please as they can't see in the regular height mirrors;
- Parents - More communal coffee / chill / debrief areas; Office base relocation opportunities for staff currently based in Taunton who no longer wish to be – signpost to line management discussion in first instance; Desk booking system being managed by Transformation Programme to gauge interest in pilot for Directorates who want it
- Carers - Consider bookable parking spaces for carers; desk booking etiquette; create ability to make / take private phone calls
- Menopause Café - Mix of spaces to help manage noise. Access to fresh air, fans etc. Office etiquette. Site plans/tours to help people navigate around buildings
- Women's network - Ability to make lighting adjustments overhead for women who experience migraines/headaches

County Hall staff drop in feedback: Recommend use of floor walkers from facilities and IT teams post moves to be on hand to assist with post move 'snags'; quieter thinking space; consider distribution of staff taking conference calls etc; Reconsider floorplate colour schemes.

Updated indicative project consultation timescales in basic terms:

Activity	Date	Audience
Initial basic information about potential changes to Taunton accommodation	6 March 24	All Staff Q&A session hosted by CEO
Full business case and draft Equalities Impact Assessment	11 March 24	Executive Leadership Team / Informal Executive
Full business case and draft Equalities Impact Assessment briefing	13 March 24	Joint Negotiating Forum (unions)
Formal Trade Union Collective Consultation period	16 April – 31 May 24	30 days + 2 weeks as requested by Trade Unions
Space planning sessions with Change Agents, attendance at Equalities Diversity and Inclusion Networks, County Hall site tours	16 April onwards	This activity will be ongoing during the summer 2024
Review of the Equalities Impact Assessment following consultation	End May 24	Project team
Discuss and secure Trade Union agreement – Go/No Go decision	31 May 24	Project Sponsor and project team
Executive Members Key Decision	15 July 24	Members
Implement phased moves inc potential procurement of furniture	July 24 onwards	Project team

**Analysis of impact on protected groups – CONSIDER GROUPS GENERICALLY, NOT INDIVIDUALS**

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations with protected groups. Consider how this policy/service will achieve these aims. In the table below, using the evidence outlined above and your own understanding, detail what considerations and potential impacts against each of the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty. Based on this information, make an assessment of the likely outcome, before you have implemented any mitigation.

Protected group	Summary of impact	Negative outcome	Neutral outcome	Positive outcome
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<p><b>Age</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some sensory loss &amp; musculoskeletal conditions are linked to age &amp; these conditions can mean that reasonable adjustments are required. This could include access to building needs, specialist DSE equipment. This applies to staff customers and Members</li> <li>• Younger or older carers could be impacted by relocation</li> <li>• Younger people may be more reliant on public transport</li> <li>• Older people may be more likely to be living in single car households so an office move could make it more challenging or improve the commute</li> </ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Disability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees with neurodivergence such as autism or dyspraxia for example are likely to find moving to a new office building challenging and may suffer increased anxiety as a result of the change.</li> <li>• Some neurodivergent employees may be adversely impacted by sensory environmental factors such as noise, visual disruption, smell, light etc.</li> <li>• Employees with some disabilities may need time to adapt and adjust to new surroundings that are unfamiliar.</li> <li>• Staff may be relocating from a less densely populated office environment to a more densely populated environment which may have an adverse impact on some staff with disabilities such as neurodivergence/autism/ADHD.</li> <li>• Staff with some disabilities often require different reasonable adjustments when their working environment is changed.</li> <li>• Some staff may rely on PEEP buddies from different teams which may no longer be possible if teams are not seated alongside one another.</li> </ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



<b>Gender reassignment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential for increased anxiety due to working in a new location with different colleagues</li> <li>• Consider gender neutral facilities and sanitary bins in men's toilets</li> </ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Marriage and civil partnership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protected characteristics of marriage and civil partnership have been considered and no negative impacts have been identified</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Pregnancy and maternity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees who are pregnant are likely to need reasonable adjustments which may change over time and with office moves</li> <li>• Staff who are breastfeeding may require a place to do so – this is already in place at all office hubs</li> <li>• Breastfeeding spaces will remain available for staff and customers at Deane House</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Race and ethnicity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protected characteristics of race and ethnicity have been considered and no negative impacts have been identified</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Religion or belief</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protected characteristics of religion or belief have been considered and no negative impacts have been identified</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sex</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More women are impacted by this change than men.</li> <li>• Women are more likely to be the primary carer of dependents and may have the need for flexibility to assist them with these responsibilities. A change in office location may impact their ability to meet these responsibilities. This may also impact their</li> </ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	<p>start times and therefore they may find it more challenging to secure desk space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff with menopausal symptoms may require workplace reasonable adjustments which may need reviewing in a new office location</li> </ul>			
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protected characteristics of sexual orientation have been considered and no impact identified</li> </ul>	☐	☒	☐
<b>Armed Forces (including serving personnel, families and veterans)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The armed forces protected group has been considered and no negative impacts have been identified</li> </ul>	☐	☒	☐
<b>Other, e.g. carers, low income, rurality/isolation, etc.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential impact for carers who change office base which may impact their ability to fulfil caring responsibilities</li> <li>Potential impact for some staff on lower incomes potentially having to adjust their travel slightly further to County Hall than Deane House – equally this could be a benefit to some staff as County Hall may be closer to their home than Deane House</li> <li>Potential impact on staff who need to drive for their role who don't have a car of their own and who currently use Deane House pool cars – these will remain available at Deane House. Disabled staff relying on pool car use may find this even more challenging</li> </ul>	☒	☐	☐

**Negative outcomes action plan**

Where you have ascertained that there will potentially be negative outcomes, you are required to mitigate the impact of these. Please detail below the actions that you intend to take.

<b>Action taken/to be taken</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Person responsible</b>	<b>How will it be monitored?</b>	<b>Action complete</b>
<p>Discussions with line managers and facilities teams to review known PEEPs and other requirements prior to space planning taking place.</p> <p>Staff with specific PEEPs and mobility requirements will be considered when planning the location of team zone allocations, including consideration of evacuation routes, and supporting equipment. These will be identified through sending a staff survey / accessibility questionnaire to all team managers for further discussion. It is anticipated that areas of B Block County Hall will be designed as a quieter, calmer, darker space for staff who prefer to work in this environment on occasions that suit their working requirements.</p>	05/03/2024	Lisa Wassell/ Louise Smith/ Angela Hill	Ongoing discussions with managers and staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Communication with employees and Managers to identify additional requirements and consideration given to the desk allocation/location for impacted members of staff.</p>	05/03/2024	Sara Kelly/Richard Birch		<input type="checkbox"/>

Break out spaces and quiet rooms will be provided at each location, taking into account accessibility of break out space options.		Lisa Wassell/ Louise Smith/ Angela Hill		
Project team to design and develop overarching process that will ensure that needs of all individuals requiring reasonable adjustments are known about and captured at the earliest opportunity which will allow adequate time for them to be put in place prior to relocation happening. This will include ensuring equipment to support reasonable adjustments is moved at the same time as staff moves take place	05/03/24	Lisa Wassell/ Louise Smith/ Angela Hill	Ongoing – Summer 2024	
Clear activity of communications planning for all affected staff to be developed, to be issued in timely manner to mitigate levels of stress and anxiety	05/03/24	Project team	Ongoing – Spring / Summer 2024	
As part of project planning the project team will be doing detailed design and liaison to meet all relevant known requirements. Part of this will be to consider providing some desk space only available from 0930 or ask teams to consider this requirement	05/03/24	Lisa Wassell/ Louise Smith/ Angela Hill	Ongoing – Summer 2024	
Project team to work with line managers and individuals ensuring all PEEPS are reviewed in a timely manner that allows refresher training and/or new buddies to be recruited	05/03/24	Lisa Wassell/ Louise Smith/ Angela Hill	Ongoing – Summer 2024	

Amendments to desk allocations will be made if we become aware of previously unidentified requirements.	Ongoing	Lisa Wassell/ Louise Smith/ Angela Hill	Discussions with Managers and Staff. Floorwalking.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff parking mitigation action: The proposed solution provides continued parking at £1 a day for staff who have a contractual base at Deane House who would be required to relocate to County Hall; The Park and Ride service already receives Council subsidy to help support the cost of commuting to work. We have agreed a no detriment solution so that there is no negative impact on low-income families.	05/03/2024	Cat Tyson / Louise Smith / Lisa Wassell / Angela Hill	Ongoing – Summer 2024	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pool cars will remain at Deane House on a bookable basis. Staff can leave and park their own vehicles at Deane House when using a pool car		Sari Brice / Cat Tyson / Louise Smith / Lisa Wassell / Angela Hill	Ongoing – no change	
Staff familiarisation visits have been offered to groups who do not regularly use County Hall during the implementation stage before phased relocations take place – based on a standard pilot area of the B Block site for viewing		Lisa Wassell/ Louise Smith/ Angela Hill	Spring 2024 and ongoing as needed	
Revised DSE assessments will be encouraged via staff comms once staff have relocated to their new locations.	05/03/2024	Sara Kelly/Richard Birch	Summer 2024	<input type="checkbox"/>

Where staff have specific chairs or equipment to meet individual requirements/to support DSE assessments, facilities teams will implement the requirements for individuals in advance of team moves including assisting with evacuation routes and Stairmate training as identified	05/03/2024	Lisa Wassell/ Louise Smith/Angela Hill	Summer 2024	<input type="checkbox"/>
During and following team moves, facilities teams will allocate resource to floor walk to assist with adjustments as required		Lisa Wassell/ Louise Smith/Angela Hill	Summer 2024	
Regular review of suggested floor plans with amendments where required to react to previously unknown requirements being identified once phases of moves are completed	Ongoing	Lisa Wassell/Louise Smith/Angela Hill	Summer 2024 and beyond	<input type="checkbox"/>

**If negative impacts remain, please provide an explanation below.**

Staff parking: The proposal that has been put forward which offers a no detriment solution to all staff is one that has considered a number of competing challenges: continued access to parking for business users and those with workplace adjustments, our financial emergency, our Green agenda including the Council's own policies and strategies which we cannot undermine. We accept that a broader cross county review of staff parking will need to be undertaken but there is not the capacity to deliver this at present and neither do we feel the workforce can cope with any non-essential changes

It will not be possible to mitigate all stress/anxiety encountered by staff with disabilities. Close monitoring by Change Agents and managers will be required to ensure appropriate levels of support are offered, supplemented by offers from the Project Team to meet, discuss and show staff groups the revised layout areas of B Block as they are delivered before the teams formally relocate and settle

**Completed by:**

**Sian Powell/Sara Kelly**

<b>Date</b>	<b>First draft 5 March 24 - checked with Michelle Anderson Second draft 30 May 2024 – checked by Michelle Anderson</b>
<b>Equality Lead sign off name:</b>	<b>Michelle Anderson</b>
<b>Equality Lead sign off date:</b>	<b>19/06/2024</b>
<b>To be reviewed by:</b> (officer name)	<b>Sian Powell</b>
<b>Review date:</b>	<b>1 August 2024</b>