

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Audit and Governance Committee – 13 September 2021

Corporate Equalities Action Plan Update

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member Chris Booth

Report Author: Paul Harding

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on progress against the Corporate Equalities Action Plan.
- 1.2 The Action Plan sets out the various actions which the Council alone, or in partnership with others, intend to take to deliver against our agreed Equality Objectives.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to review the Action Plan and note the progress made to date.

3. Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

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

4. Background and Full details of the Report

- 4.1 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) contains general and specific duties with which all public authorities (such as the Council) must comply.
- 4.2 The general duty requires us not to discriminate against people or groups who share the Protected Characteristics identified within the Act.
- 4.3 The Act identifies Protected Characteristics of:

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

Locally we have also recognised the following characteristics:

- Carers
- Military status
- Rurality
- Low income

4.4 When public authorities carry out their functions, the Act says they must consciously consider, or think about, the need to do the three things set out below. This is known as the Public Sector Equality Duty.

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

4.5 Public authorities also have specific duties under the Act to help them comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty. These specific duties include the requirement to prepare and publish equality objectives at least every 4 years. All public bodies, including the Council, are subject to a specific duty within the Equality Act 2010 (the Act) to prepare and publish equality objectives at least every four years.

4.6 For Somerset West and Taunton (SWT), equality objectives were approved in March 2019 by the Shadow Executive for Somerset West and Taunton Council.

4.7 The agreed equality objectives are:

For SWT:

- Councillors and officers will fully consider the equality implications of all decisions they make.
- Those with protected characteristics feel empowered to contribute to the democratic process and any Council activity that affects them; their input is used to inform the planning and delivery of services.
- People with protected characteristics are able to access services in a reasonable and appropriate way.

- Actions are taken to identify and reduce any inequalities faced by our staff or our potential employees.
- Work with communities and voluntary sector groups to address inequalities experienced by low income families and individuals

Plus, jointly as part of the Somerset Equality Officers Group (SEOG):

- Work with Communities to improve the opportunities for integration and cohesion.
- Improve understanding and reduce the stigma of mental health and Disability within and across communities
- Work with the Gypsy and Traveller community to improve relationships and the provision of pitches
- Create an Equality Working group for staff in the Public Sector in Somerset (to be revised to 'Review and where necessary improve recruitment practices to make them more inclusive').
- Improve the consistency of accessibility standards across the Public Sector for service users including the Accessibility Information Standard

4.8 Following the setting of the objectives a Corporate Equality Action Plan was created which set out the actions which SWT alone, or in partnership with others, intend to focus on to deliver against the equality objectives.

4.9 This last year has been productive in terms of equality delivery, either alone or in partnership with others, despite the disruption caused by the pandemic. Some particular highlights are shown below:

- Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) has been shortlisted as a finalist for this year's Municipal Journal Achievement Awards in recognition for its work to support neurodiversity in the workplace.
- The SWT website has been independently assessed as the 4th best in terms of accessibility out of 413 public sector websites ([Q2 2021 Sitemorse Index](#))
- SWT Achieved Level 2 (Disability Confident) of the [Disability Confident Scheme](#)
- A joint officer and member equality group is now in place and meeting regularly.
- We have commenced the rollout of Equality Impact Assessment refresher workshops for officers within SWT,
- A Consultation Toolkit has been created and launched within SWT (which highlights the importance of engaging with people with Protected Characteristics).
- SEOG commissioned a service to gain the voice of the Faith and Belief community about support that is needed and opportunities that are available for better integration opportunities
- SEOG commissioned a service to work with the Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender community about support that is needed and opportunities that are available for better integration opportunities.

- SEOG obtained funding and recruited two Gypsy Liaison officers for Somerset
- SEOG delivered Gypsy and Traveller awareness training to officers across each of the Somerset authorities
- We have agreed arrangements for Black Lives Matter Taunton to deliver an awareness session with members at each Somerset authority (Dec 2021 for SWT).
- SWT supported the creation of the 62-metre-long Rainbow Inclusivity Pathway in Goodlands Gardens Taunton as well as the very successful Taunton Pride event, held on 17 July. The aim is to make Taunton feel more inclusive and welcoming to people who may have felt marginalised in the past.

4.10 The Equality Action Plan has been updated to reflect progress made and is attached at Appendix A, where details of additional progress can be found.

5. Links to Corporate Strategy

5.1 The report links to a statutory duty of the Council.

6. Finance / Resource Implications

6.1 There are no direct unfunded financial/resource implications.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 The Equality Act 2010 places duties and obligations upon the Council. This Action Plan is part of meeting those obligations.

8. Equality and Diversity Implications

8.1 The Corporate Equalities Action Plan is designed to advance the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

9. Social Value Implications

9.1 There is reference to Social Value within the Action Plan.

10. Partnership Implications

10.1 The Action Plan is made up of actions which SWT will work on and deliver alone and

others which will be delivered via the Somerset Equality Officers Group (SEOG)

11. Consultation Implications

- 11.1 The Council's equality objectives were considered in public meetings of the Shadow Scrutiny Committee meeting of 14 March 2019 and the Shadow Executive Committee meeting of 26 March 2019.
- 11.2 A consultation exercise was carried out by SEOG, the County wide group, during September to November 2018 in the production of the joint Corporate Equality Objectives.
- 11.3 At the meeting held on 28 July 2021, the Council's joint member and officer equality group reviewed progress against the Action Plan.

Democratic Path:

- **Audit and Governance Committees – Yes**
- **Cabinet/Executive – No**
- **Full Council – No**

Reporting Frequency: **Annually**

List of Appendices (background papers to the report) (delete if not applicable)

Appendix A	Updated Corporate Equality Action Plan
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