

Draft Somerset West and Taunton Corporate Equality Action Plan (CEAP)

The Equality Act 2010 imposes the following General Duties on Local Authorities to:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;*
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*

It covers people who share the 'protected characteristics' of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Locally we also recognise the following characteristics: Carers, Military Status, Rurality and Low Income.

This Action Plan sets out the actions the council will take in order to deliver its agreed equality objectives, which in turn support one or more aims of the General Equality Duty. **Part A** are Somerset West and Taunton (SWT) specific actions. **Part B** relates to actions in relation to joint objectives across the members of the Somerset Equality Officers Group (SEOG) - this is a joint officer working group made up of County and District Councils, Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group, Taunton Musgrove and Yeovil Hospitals, Somerset Partnership and Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue

PART A

SWT Objective 1	Councillors and officers will fully consider the equality implications of all decisions they make.
<p>Some of the things we are already doing that support this objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All committee reports contain a section in which equality impacts, relating to proposed policy or service changes, are highlighted to the decision makers. • Equality Impact Assessment templates and guidance notes are available to all staff. • E-learning on equalities and diversity is a mandatory part of the staff induction process. • Equality and Diversity training is a key component of the Member induction programme. • 'Lunch & Learn' equalities and diversity awareness event held for staff July 2019. 	

	Action	Action Lead	Output	Outcome	Timescale
1.1	All SWT members to be aware of their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010	SWT Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer	Attendance at corporate training events.	Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010	2019/20 and ongoing
1.2	The Performance and Governance team to screen all reports submitted to committee or the Full Council to ensure they are accompanied by an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) or include clear reasoning why such an assessment is not required, to ensure that protected groups are not further disadvantaged by the policies, strategies, projects or schemes we adopt.	SWT Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer	All Council reports are screened to ensure that they include equality and diversity impact assessments or an explanation provided as to why they do not require one.	Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010	Ongoing
1.3	Agreed sources of the socio economic profile of SWT area to be identified/created, promoted and available for all EIAs to ensure consistency.	SWT Business Intelligence and Performance Manager	There is good quality and consistent equality information available for managers to use for service and policy development.	Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010	2020/21

1.4	Good practice regarding EIAs to be shared within the council.	SWT Strategy Specialist	Managers can confidently and robustly assess the equalities impacts of service/policy change, are able to identify mitigating actions where needed and are able to implement mitigating actions effectively	Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010	2019/20
1.5	Review Learning Pool e-learning equalities and diversity module	SWT Strategy Specialist	Updated and intuitive and learning tool.	Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010	2019/20

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

Some of the things we are already doing that support this objective:

- All council meetings take place in fully accessible buildings.
- Our constitution ensures individual members of the community, or community group, are able to submit a question as part of public question time at any public meeting of the council (and are not compelled to attend personally).
- Agenda and minutes of council meetings are published on our website in a format which is accessible to screen reader technology.
- Council public meetings are voice recorded and a recording on a CD or via an MP3 can be made available to those who would have difficulty accessing the written minutes.

	Action	Action Lead	Output	Outcome	Timescale
2.1	Create a publicly available list of equality community and VCS groups in Somerset.	SEOG	Suggestions and concerns can be captured from a broad range of groups which represent people in our communities who share protected characteristics.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	tbc
2.2	Introduce capability to allow for greater participation in council meetings (e.g. live stream meetings).	SWT Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer	More convenient ways for residents who may find attending council meetings (through e.g. through disability, low income, rurality) to participate in council business.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	2019/20

2.3	Draft and approve a Statement of Community Involvement for SWT, Stating how SWT will involve all of the community and stakeholders in the preparation, alteration and review of local planning policy and the consideration of planning applications within the Local Planning Authority area., to ensure the specific needs and concerns of particular groups and individuals are captured and considered. This is an important part of the Councils place making and place shaping role.	SWT Strategy Specialist	The views of groups that represent people in our communities who share protected characteristics are captured.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	2019/20
-----	--	-------------------------	--	---	---------

SWT Objective 3	People with protected characteristics are able to access services in a reasonable and appropriate way.
<p>Some of the things we are already doing that support this objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hearing induction loops are in place at the council's two main offices to assist those customers who have difficulties with hearing. • Computer kiosks in the reception areas of our main offices enabling access to our website and that of partner services such as Homefinder Somerset. (for those without Internet access - possibly through low income or rurality). • Free public wi-fi available at our main offices to enable customers to access services without cost. • Some of our customer services staff are trained in British Sign Language. • We offer alternative formats for our corporate publications (inc Braille, large print and different languages). • Our main offices are fully accessible and meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. • We have introduced a new website (with additional self-services) which contains a number of features to aid accessibility including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The ability for users to change colours, contrast levels and fonts 	

- zoom in up to 300 per cent without the text spilling off the screen
 - navigate most of the website using just a keyboard
 - navigate most of the website using speech recognition software
 - listen to most of the website using a screen reader (including the most recent versions of JAWS, NVDA and VoiceOver)
 - We have also made the website text as simple as possible to understand,
- We have Undertaken a review of the Council's website in response to the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. On 16 July 2019 the following were tested on our behalf by Sitemorse:
 - Accessibility - checking content against the W3C WCAG 2.1 and Digital ADA accessibility standards
 - Brand - reviewing content and alerting against our own brand rules
 - Code quality - checking the code of the page meets W3C and IETF technical standards
 - Email - testing that email addresses and infrastructure work and can receive mail
 - Function/links - review page content and links to check they are functioning correctly
 - SEO and Metadata - reporting improvements relating to Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)
 - Performance - reporting of the web server response time and download speed
 - Spelling - check the spelling of site content against standard and custom dictionaries
 - We visit low income customers in their home, to help them with Council Tax Support and /or Housing Benefit claims where they are unable to access these services in other ways.
 - We are able to respond to text relay calls from people who are deaf, hearing impaired or have a speech impediment.
 - We provide an interpretation service through Language Line for customers who do not speak English.
 - We have produced a range of factsheets available for staff guidance e.g.
 - Armed Forces
 - Dual Sensory Loss
 - Assisting a customer who is Deaf
 - Assisting a customer who is Blind
 - Assisting a customer who is Disabled
 - Assisting a customer who is non-English speaking
 - Gender awareness
 - We financially support the SCC contract for P2I Pathways to independence – a partnership providing housing advice to young people aged 16 to 24.
 - Our operating model, and the One Team partnership working, ensures there are officers based within our most vulnerable communities via whom residents can access services.

- Our housing service provides £300k per year to help fund disabled facility grants to enable our tenants who have a disability to continue to live independently in their council home.
- Changes have been made to our sheltered housing schemes to better meet the needs of our residents and future residents who have a disability - examples include incorporating secure storage and charging points for mobility scooters.

	Action	Action Lead	Output	Outcome	Timescale
3.1	Raise awareness amongst staff and members of our corporate translation service and how to access it.	SWT – Head of Customer	Frontline staff are aware how to access the translation and interpretation service.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	2019/20
3.2	Make training available for additional SWT frontline staff (customer services, locality champions etc.) to learn British Sign Language.	SWT – HR Business Partner	An increased pool of frontline SWT staff able to effectively communicate face to face with customers who are deaf.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	2020/21
3.3	Increase the number of our services which are available to access online 24/7	SWT – Head of Performance and Governance	More online services available on the SWT website.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	Ongoing

3,4	Publish an Accessibility Statement in accord with Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.	SWT Head of Communications and Engagement.	A published accessibility statement.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	September 2019
-----	---	--	--------------------------------------	---	----------------

SWT Objective 4	Actions are taken to identify and reduce any inequalities faced by our staff or our potential employees.
<p>Some of the things we are already doing that support this objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We use an anonymised shortlisting process for job applicants, where the personal details of the applicant (e.g. name, gender, ethnicity, age etc.) are not shown to the shortlisting officer until after shortlisting has taken place. • We provide Council employees with access to in-house Mental Health First Aiders. • Wellbeing Champions are in place to support staff in a confidential way relating for both work and non-work related matters. • A learning and wellbeing staff group has been established which has employee mental health as a key area of focus. • An anti-bullying and harassment policy is in place. • Adjustments are made on a case by case basis for staff who require changes to their working environment in order to meet the physical or mental health needs of the employees concerned. • Care First has been contracted to provide a confidential counselling and advice service for Council employees. • We monitor and publish our gender pay gap every 12 months. • We have flexible working policies in place which in particular support those with caring responsibilities. • We have appointed a Chaplain to provide confidential listening, pastoral and supportive services to our staff of all faiths or none, in order to help reduce worries, stresses and anxieties and improve general wellbeing. • We promote and mark special days such as Mental Health Awareness Week, Pride week, Holocaust Memorial Day as a visible sign of our commitment to reduce discrimination and inequality and to support and value all of our staff. 	

	Action	Action Lead	Output	Outcome	Timescale
4.1	Achieve at least Level 1: 'Disability Confident Committed'.	SWT – HR Specialist	Recognition of our commitment to having leading role in changing attitudes toward disability for the better.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	Following review of Recruitment Policy. Q4 2019
4.2	Capture staff equalities information on ITrent to enable workforce profiling by ethnic group, gender, disability, age, religion and sexual orientation, analyse implications of such profiling against community profiling, and publish the results.	SWT – HR Specialist	Allows the Council to understand and recognise our workforce. Align our workforce with the community profile.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	Q4 2019
4.3	Provide recruitment training that includes avoiding unconscious bias for all staff who may shortlist or interview applicants for jobs at SWT.	SWT – HR Specialist	Fair and transparent recruitment and selection exercises. Understanding the importance of reaching a diverse audience when advertising and adjustments when selecting applicants.	Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;	Q4 2019
4.4	Review and sign up to the Somerset Equality Commitment	SWT – HR Specialist	Review and ensure complying with the commitment with relevant areas.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	Q4 2019

4.5	Monitor dignity and behaviour in the workplace cases (bullying and harassment) against each of the protected characteristics to establish and trends.	SWT – HR Specialist	Equalities data collected on all casework.	Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;	Q3 2019 onwards
4.6	Encourage managers to consider apprentices and graduates for all vacancies. Work with other Local Authorities to provide a Graduate Scheme which gives experience in each Authority. Work experience placements	SWT – HR Specialist & People Manager (EW)	Increase in younger staff within the workforce. Aim to meet targets set by Government to spend our Apprentice Levy.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	Report due Q3 2019
4.7	Mental health support	SWT – HR Specialist	HR representative at Learning and Wellbeing Steering Group. Provide employees with access to Mental Health First Aiders, an Employee Assistance Programme (CareFirst). Mental Health Awareness training.	Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.	Ongoing
4.8	Equalities and diversity training for all staff / monitoring e-learning	SWT – HR Specialist & People Manager (EW)	Provision of e-learning to all employees, including mandatory courses such as Dignity at Work	Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;	Ongoing

4.9	Support SWT staff from the EU through Brexit (e.g. settled status awareness and registrations)	SWT – HR Specialist	Understand the numbers affected by Brexit and provide support.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	Q4 2019
4.10	Staff 'task and finish groups' – menopause, men's mental health etc	SWT – HR Specialist	Working groups considered for all HR policies. Policy development plan compiled	Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.	Ongoing.

SWT Objective 5	Work with communities and voluntary sector groups to address inequalities experienced by low incomes families and individuals
<p>Some of the things we are already doing that support this objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financially support for the work of ENGAGE (http://www.engagews.org.uk/) in the West Somerset and Taunton Deane areas, whose work includes the provision of low cost furniture for people on a low income. • We financially support Citizens Advice Taunton and the West Somerset Advice Bureau to deliver advice (including debt, housing, benefits and employment advice) to our residents. • 'One Team' multi-agency working in Halcon, Wellington and North Taunton regarding supporting accessing training and employment as well as signposting to wider help and support (e.g. benefits, food banks etc). • Financial support for Village Agents Scheme (support for older people, disabilities, isolation, low income, carers etc) • Financial support for CLOWNS West Somerset for provision of toys, craft & resources for low income families • Financial support for Homestart West Somerset to support of low income and families in crisis via home visits & in-house sessions • Financial support for North Taunton & Wiveliscombe Area partnerships, & Taunton East Development Trust to offer community support & advice sessions-low income, debt, unemployment, literacy etc. 	

- We support Priorswood Resource Centre and the Halcon link centre who provide job clubs, literacy/reading clubs etc. to residents within two of our most deprived communities.
- The Council employs dedicated Tenancy Sustainment Case Officers, Debt Management Case Managers and a Vulnerable Persons Specialist which focus on the debt and benefit needs of our HRA tenants.
- We have undertaken a number of initiatives within our housing stock to help tackle fuel poverty, including fitting solar PV panels.

	Action	Action Lead	Output	Outcome	Timescale
5.1	Draft, approve and implement a Social Value policy to secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits as part of the council's procurement activity.	SWT Strategy Specialist (ML)	Consistent consideration of the social good that could come from the procurement of services in order to obtain meaningful Social Value generated from our suppliers	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	2019/20

PART B

Joint SEOG Objective 1	Work with Communities to improve the opportunities for integration and cohesion.
-------------------------------	---

Some of the things we are already doing that support this objective:

- The Council is a signatory to the Somerset Armed Forces Covenant, which is a pledge of support between local residents and the armed forces community in Somerset.
- The Council promotes and marks special days such as Mental health awareness week, Pride week, Holocaust Memorial Day, Armed Forces Day that support groups and individuals who share protected characteristics.
- Established multi-agency 'One Team' working in Halcon, Wellington and North Taunton – getting to know the community, developing local knowledge - reducing anti-social behaviour and increasing the uptake and completion of back to work schemes.
- Financially support ENGAGE which is a resource for community groups to obtain advice and support on setting up and running charities and advising on potential funding sources and preparing funding applications.
- The Council funds and supports the Taunton Deane Disability Discussion Group.
- The Council hosts a number of free and inclusive community events such as 'Somerfest'.
- We support local groups hosting community events that are free and inclusive, such as 'Wacky Wednesday' in Wellington and 'Pride in Priorswood' in Taunton.

	Action	Action Lead	Output	Public Sector Equality Duty outcome	Timescale
6.1	Continue to support local groups hosting community events that are free and inclusive, such as 'Wacky Wednesday' in Wellington and 'Pride in Priorswood' in Taunton.	SWT – Community Engagement Leads	Free to attend inclusive events open to all groups within the community.	Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.	Ongoing

6.2	Continue to promote and mark special days such as Mental health awareness week, Pride week, Holocaust Memorial Day, Armed Forces Day that support groups and individuals who share protected characteristics	SWT – Communication and Engagement Specialist	Visible signs or support such as the raising of flags at our main offices, social media posts and /or public ceremonies.	Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.	Ongoing
6.3	Hold at least 2 meetings per year of the Taunton Deane Disability Discussion Group	SWT – Community Engagement Leads	Meetings held including items presented by SWT officers in particular relating to emerging policies: raising awareness of opportunities for the group to influence the development of SWT policies and plans.	Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.	Ongoing from Oct 2019
6.4	Work with the Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender community about support that is needed and opportunities that are available for better integration opportunities.	SEOG	Partnership to be in existence and way forward agreed	Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.	tbc
6.5	Work with the Faith and Belief community about support that is needed and opportunities that are available for better integration opportunities	SEOG	A way forward will be agreed with the community	Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.	tbc

6.6	Undertake county wide Faith Audit	SEOG	Identification of the various faith groups across Somerset.	Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.	tbc
6.7	Review how Somerset Authorities mark Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD). Work with partners to create a larger joint response.	SEOG	A consistent approach across Somerset to honour the experiences of people affected by the Holocaust and genocide.	Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.	tbc
6.8	Support the BME Community around creating a Multicultural Forum in Somerset.	SEOG	Greater insight of, and engagement with, the BME community.	Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.	tbc
6.9	Work with ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) providers in Somerset to create a single website to identify all ESOL provision in Somerset	SEOG	The provision of information for residents, or for our staff on their behalf, identifying all ESOL resources locally.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	tbc

Joint SEOG Objective 2		Improve understanding of mental health and access to support			
<p>Some of the things we are already doing that support this objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have an arrangement in place with MIND to provide confidential emotional support, advocacy and signposting for the Council's housing tenants including help around self-harm, suicidal thoughts and mental health issues. Established multi-agency 'One Team' working in Halcon, Wellington and North Taunton enabling early referral and intervention to support individuals with complex needs (including mental health issues). We promote and refer clients to the SCC commissioned 'Step Together' service for adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and also have a mix of mental health needs, drug and alcohol problems and behavioural issues 					
	Action	Action Lead	Output	Public Sector Equality Duty outcome	Timescale
7.1	Signpost sources of mental health support on our website and within our Tenant's Newsletters.	SWT – Communication and Engagement Specialist	The provision of Information to help people who are living with a mental health issue.	Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.	Ongoing from 2019/20
7.2	Use Social Media and SWT staff/Member newsletters to promote <i>Mental Health Awareness Week</i> in May and <i>Time To Talk</i> in February	SWT – Communication and Engagement Specialist	Signposting of support for those affected by poor mental health.	Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.	Ongoing from Feb 2020
7.3	Deliver mental health awareness training to our front line staff	SWT – Strategy specialist	Greater awareness to enable staff to identify where a customer may be struggling with mental health issues and knowledge of support that is available.	Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;	2020/21

7.4	SWT to undertake Council domestic-violence self-assessment and implement an action plan.	SWT – Strategy specialist	An action plan to strengthen our awareness and responsiveness to domestic abuse within our communities.	Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.	2020/21
-----	--	---------------------------	---	---	---------

Joint SEOG Objective 3		Work with the Gypsy and Traveller community to improve relationships and the provision of pitches			
	Action	Action Lead	Output	Public Sector Equality Duty outcome	Timescale
8.1	Include a positive policy within the emerging SWT Local Plan to support pitches in appropriate locations (criteria based) informed by the GTAA	SWT – Strategy Specialist	Local Plan Policy	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	tbc
8.2	Work across Somerset to identify pitch/plot provision for Gypsies and Travellers (including temporary and transit pitch provision)	SEOG	Pitch/plot provision for Gypsies and Travellers in SWT and the wider Somerset area.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	tbc
8.3	Work with support services to create a companion document for the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) focusing on services	SEOG	Companion document	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	tbc

8.4	Work with the Community to create an informed Illegal encampments process for Somerset	SEOG	A consistent agreed process in place across Somerset.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	tbc
8.5	Work with the Community to create briefing sheets for staff around understanding of the community in relation to service delivery	SEOG	Greater staff understanding of the community when delivering or planning service delivery.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	tbc
8.6	Work to find suitable funding to create a Gypsy Liaison role for Somerset	SEOG	Identification of community champions and setting up of Somerset Gypsy and Traveller Forum.	Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	2019/20
8.7	Work with the community to create a functioning Gypsy and Traveller Forum	SEOG	A way for public agencies, charities, interested individuals/groups and Traveller communities, to talk to each other.	Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	tbc
8.8	Explore options at Otterford B site	SWT - Strategy Specialist	Additional pitches	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	2019/20

8.9	Review the Gypsy, Traveller Accommodation Assessment for Somerset	Lead by SDC on behalf of the Somerset Strategic Planning Conference	A robust assessment of current and future need for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in Somerset.	Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;	2020/21
-----	---	---	---	---	---------

Joint SEOG Objective 4		Create an Equality Working Group for Staff in the Public Sector in Somerset			
Action		Action Lead	Output	Public Sector Equality Duty outcome	Timescale
9.1	SWT to promote to staff, the pilot staff equality working group made up of multiple public bodies that SCC aim to create.	HR Specialist	Networking with public sector across Somerset, build contacts, share experiences and good practice.	Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	Once group created.