

## Decision Report – Key decision

Proposed decision date – 11<sup>th</sup> January 2016

### Somerset County Council Equality Objectives 2016-2019

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr J Osman – Cabinet Member for Customers and Communities

Division and Local Member(s): All

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<b>Report Sign off</b>	<b>Seen by:</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Date</b>
	County Solicitor	Honor Clarke	23/12/15
	Monitoring Officer	Julian Gale	14/12/15
	Corporate Finance	Kevin Nacey	09/12/15
	Human Resources	Chris Squire	10/12/15
	Property / Procurement / ICT	Richard Williams	23/12/15
	Senior Manager	Simon Clifford	23/12/15
	Local Member(s)	All Members	23/12/15
	Opposition Spokesperson	Cllr A Wedderkopp	23/12/15
	Relevant Scrutiny Chairman	Cllr Leigh Redman for Scrutiny Children & Families, Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey for Scrutiny Adults and Health or Cllr Tony Lock for Scrutiny Place	23/12/15
Cabinet Member	Cllr J Osman	23/12/15	
<b>Forward Plan Reference:</b>	FP/15/12/04		
<b>Summary:</b>	Somerset County Council [SCC] is required by statute to review and establish organisational equality objectives. Our existing objectives are due to end in April 2016. A refreshed set of objectives are proposed for approval and endorsement.		
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<p><b>That Cabinet are asked to agree and endorse:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The proposed eight Equality Objectives for the organisation from April 2016.</li> </ol> <p><b>That Cabinet are asked to note:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The additional work SCC has already agreed – British Sign Language Charter and Equality Pledges</li> <li>2. Key findings from an engagement event with equality communities within Somerset.</li> </ol>		

<b>Reasons for Recommendations:</b>	The objectives aim to improve the lives for the residents of Somerset. The objectives also support the Council’s legal requirements identified through the Equality Act 2010.
<b>Links to Priorities and Impact on Service Plans:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The objectives will make sure the Council remains compliant with equality legislation</li> <li>• The objectives will support all of the Priorities set in the County Plan</li> <li>• Services are asked to identify how they can support completion of the objectives.</li> </ul>
<b>Consultations undertaken:</b>	<p>The main consultation to support the objectives took place on the 17<sup>th</sup> September with a wide range of equality communities. The key findings from this are identified in the main report but included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How people access services</li> <li>• Equality work with young people</li> <li>• The support that is available for people with a mental health illness</li> <li>• How well the work of equality is supported by public bodies</li> <li>• The training for all staff.</li> </ul>
<b>Financial Implications:</b>	It is envisaged that there will be minimal cost implications connected with delivering the equality objectives. What funding is required will be provided through the current equality and service budgets and where appropriate external funding.
<b>Legal Implications:</b>	The objectives and the information gathered for them contribute to the Council’s compliance with the Equality Act 2010. Either not having Objectives or collecting data could find the Council in breach of the Equality Act 2010.
<b>HR Implications:</b>	The Equality Objectives support the Council’s ability to meet its duties under the Equality Act 2010.
<b>Risk Implications:</b>	The main risk identified to these objectives would be non completion of the objectives. This would place us in breach of our legal duties.
<b>Other Implications (including due regard)</b>	By the nature of what is being considered, the report addresses any equality implications.

<b>implications):</b>	<p>The objectives also go some way to supporting the Council’s requirements around community safety, human rights, access, health and wellbeing.</p> <p>There will be no impacts in relation to privacy, sustainability and health and safety</p>
<b>Scrutiny comments / recommendation (if any):</b>	Not applicable.

## 1. Background

### 1.1 Legislative Background

The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2010. It replaced over 100 pieces and sections of legislation that afford people protection through the delivery of service or when in employment. The Equality Act also sets out the Public Sector Equality duty that includes the General and Specific Equality Duties.

The Public Sector Equality Duty came into force across Great Britain on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2011. It means that public bodies have to consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. It also requires public bodies to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited 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.

These Duties are supported by Specific Equality Duties that came into force on the 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011. The specific duties require public bodies to publish relevant, proportionate information showing compliance with the Equality Duty, and to set equality objectives at least every four years.

### 1.2 The Equality Act identifies who is protected under the legislation and refers to them as Protected Characteristics. They are:

- 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

This report does not change the status for any of the protected characteristics.

1.3 Our current objectives are due to be refreshed in 2016. This is in line with other organisations that set their objectives for 4 years.

1.4 To assist with refreshing SCC's equality objectives a review was completed of how other authorities had gone about this. It became clear through this research that joint engagement by public bodies with communities was becoming the most effective way. This was for two main reasons. Firstly it reduced the burden on communities to engage through multiple engagement exercises. This would have placed an unrealistic burden on the communities and had the potential for duplication and engagement fatigue. Secondly it was establish that the resources available for public bodies to run their own events had reduced. Because of this it made sense to combine resources and outcomes from a joint event.

## 2.0 **Feedback from Equality Engagement Event 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

2.1 On the 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015 the Public Sector in Somerset ran a joint engagement event with equality communities (communities within Somerset related to the protected characteristics for example Age UK, Chinese community, Compass Disability) in Somerset. The communities were asked a set of questions on four areas:

- What can accessibility look like?
- How safe do you feel in your community/what makes you feel safe in your community?
- What affects my health (including mental health)?
- Education/learning and social engagement

This event identified the key concerns and issues which have been used to create a set of informed objectives to meet the legislation and support equality communities.

2.2 The event was attended by 38 delegates representing 25 equality organisations. The key themes that emerged were as follows:

- How people **access** services:
  - The language organisations use such as jargon and acronyms
  - How people access information about our services
  - Can people access services due to physical accessibility issues
  - SCC staff in particular front line staff understanding different disabilities and the affect this has on the support people need and how they access services.
  - A recognition by public organisations that not all people can use digital services delivery/access
  - Ability to access service due to reductions in public transport
- It was felt that more work needed to be done with **young people** on

equality and communities getting along together.

- It was clear from the communities that **hate crime** is still an issue for them in Somerset.
- There was confusion around what support was available for people with **Mental Health** illnesses and how people can access these.
- It was clear from people that engaged with the **CAMHS** (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services) service it was seen as vital to young people and a well-received service.
- It was universally felt that equality was not as prominent or visibly championed in Somerset as it used to be.
- The groups felt that all staff across various organisations needed on-going **training** to support their understanding of equality.

In addition to the feedback from the engagement event above further analysis undertaken to support the development of a new set of Equality Objectives for Somerset include:

- SCC Complaint and customer feedback – specifically those relating to discrimination and harassment
- National data – such as the Equality and Human Rights Commissions Triennial report
- Inspection findings – Children and Young People Ofsted report
- Health and Wellbeing Plan and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- SCC County Plan

### 3.0 **Equality Objectives 2016 – 2019**

3.1 The proposed eight equality objectives for Somerset County Council are in three distinct areas:

- Work with equality communities to make sure they feel included and safe within Somerset
- Children are engaged in SCC services and feel they are seen as a whole individual and empowered to contribute.
- People are informed about how they can maintain and improve their emotional and mental health and wellbeing, and what support and services are available should they need them.
- Work with businesses in Somerset to make sure they understand their requirements under the Equality Act 2010 and the positive impact it can have on them.

The Council's employment equalities objectives, led by Human Resources and Organisational Development are:

- Provide employees with the skill and knowledge to meet the needs of both our diverse community and workforce, in order to provide a fair and accessible service for all.
- Provide a workplace that recognises and meets employee needs, in relation to the protected characteristics.

3.2 Based on the joint analysis of data from the consultation event a set of partnership objectives were identified. These will be completed collectively through the Somerset Equality Officers Group (SEOG). SEOG is where local

authorities and health work collectively on equality and diversity within Somerset. The joint objectives which SCC are asked to sign up to in addition to the objectives above are:

- Equality communities are able to access services how they need too in a cost effective and appropriate way
- Equality communities and individuals feel able and empowered to contribute to the democratic process and decisions that affect them.

#### **4.0 Additional Information**

4.1 Once the objectives have been agreed an action plan will be finalised to support their completion. The action plan will be informed by work completed by the Corporate Equality Manager and by the wider organisation. As part of this Directors will be contacted to identify key pieces of work that can support compliance with the legislation and fulfilment the objectives. This action plan will be in place for April 2016.

4.2 It is proposed that an engagement event will take place with equality communities in Somerset on an annual basis. This event will be used to provide evidence on the actions taken to progress the objectives and provide an option to refresh the objectives where needed.

This event will then feed a progress report to Cabinet and the Senior Leadership Team on an annual basis. This will provide them with evidence on progress on the objectives and areas of concern raised with the community.

#### **5.0 Options considered and reasons for rejecting them**

5.1 The Council has a legal duty placed upon them to publish a set of equality objectives at a minimum of every four years. Because of this no alternative could be considered.

5.2 The objectives themselves are supported by data and research at creation.

#### **6.0 Background Papers**

6.1 Additionally to the Equality Objectives the council is also committed to:

- Somerset British Sign Language Charter – Appendix 1
- Equality Pledges for Somerset County Council – Appendix 2
- Two Tick Employer - <https://www.gov.uk/recruitment-disabled-people/encouraging-applications>
- Mindful Employer