

<b>Policy &amp; Resources Committee Meeting</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	15 July 2024
<b>Report Title</b>	Corporate Equality Scheme
<b>EMT Lead</b>	Larissa Reed – Chief Executive
<b>Head of Service</b>	Philip Sutcliffe – Communications & Policy Manager
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Janet Dart – Policy & Engagement Officer
<b>Classification</b>	<b>Open</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	1. To adopt the Corporate Equality Scheme 2024-2028 at Appendix I.

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The draft Corporate Equality Scheme 2024 – 2028 came to the Policy & Resources Committee on 7 February 2024 to seek approval to go out to public consultation. The consultation has now taken place and responses reviewed, recommendations for changes are set out in Appendix II. The Policy & Resources Committee are invited this evening to consider this scheme for adoption.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 Public authorities in England and Wales, which were subject to the specific duties of the Equality Act 2010, had until 6 April 2012 to publish equality objectives. Swale BC went beyond these requirements by publishing a Corporate Equality Scheme, containing equality objectives, in 2011 – a year ahead of schedule.
- 2.2 It is expected that authorities which are subject to the duties of the Equality Act 2010 review and/or replace their equality objectives every four years. Due to departmental restructures and the temporary lack of a policy team resource, there was a delay in carrying out the four-yearly review. This has now taken place alongside the development of the Corporate Plan priorities for 2023-2027.
- 2.3 The General Equality Duty is set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. In summary, those subject to the Act (including local authorities) must in the exercise of their functions, have regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
  - advance opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- 2.4 The duty covers nine protected characteristics – age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership\*, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. These are also known as protected characteristics. \*The duty covers marriage and civil partnership but not for all aspects of the duty.
- 2.5 The specific duties require a public authority to publish specific items of information:
- evidence of analysis that they have undertaken to establish whether their policies or practices have (or would) further the aims of the general equality duty;
  - details of the information that they considered in carrying out this analysis;
  - details of engagement that they undertook with people who they considered to have an interest in furthering the aims of the general duty; and
  - prepare and publish equality objectives.
- 2.6 The Council has sought to meet these requirements by publishing a Corporate Equality Scheme which incorporates all of the elements of paragraph 2.5, and the draft Corporate Equality Scheme 2024 – 2028 continues this approach.
- 2.7 The draft Corporate Equality Scheme 2024 - 2028 objectives and key actions focus on Swale’s communities rather than the Council’s internal processes.

## **Proposals**

- 3.1 The Policy & Resources Committee are recommended to adopt the final version of the Corporate Equality Scheme 2024 – 2028 at Appendix I.

## **4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

- 4.1 Not to publish a new Corporate Equality Scheme, although this would run the risk of censure by the Equality and Human Rights Commission who have powers to serve public authorities with compliance notices in the event of breaches of the general duty.

## **5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed**

- 5.1 Workshops were held in August 2023 with representatives from a range of external organisations where they were asked to provide input into what sort of things people with any of the protected characteristics find difficult when dealing with organisations such as Swale Borough Council when accessing their services.
- 5.2 An 8-week public consultation was conducted on the draft scheme ending on 10 April 2024. This was predominantly by means of an online survey, but key stakeholders were written to individually, including all of Swale’s parish and town

councils, voluntary and community sector organisations and representatives of groups who shared protected characteristics. The consultation was advertised on social media and through channels such as the business bulletin, as well as internally through member and staff communications. An internal engagement session was held with Swale Managers on 20 March 2024 where officers were consulted to seek their views.

- 5.3 The online survey generated 6 responses. The first part of the consultation survey asked if responders agreed with each of the 4 objectives. The majority of responses were supportive, except for objective 4 – promoting equality as a local employer. Two responses were in support, 3 did not support the objective and one responder chose not to answer this question.
- 5.2 The second part of the consultation was a free-text box for responders to provide any comments. A summary of the comments are set out in the Representations, Response and Recommendations table, Appendix II, comments 1 to 4. The Councillor representations are included in the same table, comments 5 to 7 and the officer representations are 8 to 22.
- 5.4 Following discussions with the administration, the Chair of the Policy & Resources Committee considered the consultation responses and recommended some amendments to the objectives and requested some additional data be included in Appendix I and II of the Corporate Equality Scheme. A full list of all amendments can be found in Appendix II of this report.

## 6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The Corporate Equality Scheme will support all five objectives in the Corporate Plan, and numerous cross-references to the Corporate Plan have been included within the text.
Financial, Resource and Property	There will be minimal financial implications for publishing a new Corporate Equality Scheme.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	As a public authority, we are required by statute to publish equality objectives and associated information by the Equality Act 2010.
Crime and Disorder	None envisaged at this stage. Some of the key actions in the Scheme refer to existing activity being undertaken by the Swale Community Safety Partnership.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	No specific implications have been identified at this stage.
Health and Wellbeing	No specific implications have been identified at this stage.

Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	No specific implications have been identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	No specific implications have been identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	The entire draft Corporate Equality Scheme is concerned with the Council's obligations under the Equality Act 2010.
Privacy and Data Protection	No specific implications have been identified at this stage.

## 7 Appendices

- 7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

*Appendix I – Draft corporate equalities scheme 2024-2028*

*Appendix II – Table of consultation responses*

## 8 Background Papers

SBC Corporate Equality Scheme 2016-2020 available at <https://services.swale.gov.uk/assets/Consultations/Corporate-Equality-Scheme-2016.pdf>