



Committee and Date

Cabinet
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Item

Public



SAND Covenant Proposal

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Cabinet Member:	Lezley Picton, Leader		

1. Synopsis

Cabinet is requested to agree a protocol for determining whether to approve proposals to sign up to specific covenants and campaigns. If approved Cabinet is asked to sign up to the Safe Ageing No Discrimination (SAND) Covenant. The first to then be considered using this protocol.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 The perceived needs for a protocol are as follows:

- To ensure alignment is visible between any particular covenant and campaign, the Shropshire Plan, and our obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty set out in the Equality Act 2010.
- To ensure that the approval process and approach thus demonstrates transparency and facilitates objective consideration of intersectionality across the Protected Characteristic groupings defined in the Equality Act 2010.
- To facilitate consideration of time commitments anticipated, by officers and by councillors, and any financial commitments, known or unknown.

2.2 The adoption of such a protocol will also enable the Council to continue with a consistent approach whereby we should not be signing up to be part of a campaigning organisation. This has been the case whether we have sympathy for

and empathy with the views of said organisation, and whether we find ourselves to be in accord with perhaps only elements of such a campaign.

2.3 Safe Ageing No Discrimination CIC (SAND) is a group working to improve the experience of older and old lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people as they access health and social care services. Groups and organisations in Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin local authority areas are invited to sign up through a Covenant to five broad commitments, agree an annual action plan for change, and then report progress and share their next year plan at an annual event.

2.4 The intention of the Council as a proposed signatory would be to work with SAND, as with others in the voluntary and community sector, with regard to not only health and social care needs but also overall social inclusion endeavours that will value diversity and promote cultural and social efforts in so doing. Assurance would be given to SAND that we will not expect them to speak as the sole advocates on behalf of the diverse LGBTQ+ community or of older people within the community.

2.5 In terms of alignment with the Shropshire Plan, it could be a positive move for the Council to sign up to the SAND Covenant so that the following key aspirations could be progressed, alongside potential embedding of the Covenant aspirations within Council policy and practice:

- *Healthy economy: We'll develop Shropshire as a vibrant destination that attracts people to live in, work in, learn in and visit.*
- *Healthy environment: We'll enable safer, sustainable, diverse and inclusive communities that pull together by reducing anti-social behaviour and risk of harm;*
- *Healthy organisation: We'll enable a skilled, happy, healthy, diverse, inclusive, empowered, and proud workforce that influences and leads change, addressing any inequalities.*
- *Healthy people: We'll work with partners to develop, commission and deliver the right services and support that meet the needs of children, young people, adults and families in the right place, at the right time.*

2.6 This is because the signing of the SAND Covenant could be considered to have potential positive economic and societal impacts for the wider community, as well as equality and health and wellbeing impacts for people who may identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other (LGBTQ+) at any life stage. Signing it would emphasise the policy intentions of the Council to foster and create an inclusive and welcoming county.

3. Recommendations

That Cabinet -

3.1 adopt the proposed protocol attached at Appendix 1 t

3.2 sign up to the Safe Ageing No Discrimination (SAND) Covenant, as the first to be considered under this protocol, with the following provisos:

- that assurances be given by SAND to seek to support work across the Protected Characteristic groupings of Age and Sexual Orientation, recognising depth and diversity within these groupings as well as their particular field of working with older people;
- that officers engage with SAND itself and share and develop joint good practice with other advocacy organisations, to complement engagement efforts with and for all Protected Characteristic groupings.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1 It is important that before the Council signs up to any covenant or campaign it must first check that its aims and aspirations are compatible with our own. This needs to be the approach irrespective of whether we have sympathy for and empathy with the views of said organisation, and whether we find ourselves to be in accord with perhaps only elements of such a campaign. A further risk is that the Council may find other organisations making contact to argue for their own campaign or covenant to be supported in similar fashion, which could present a drain upon scant officer time and resources.
- 4.2 The mitigation is for the Council to adopt an agreed protocol for covenants and campaigns for officers to draw upon and utilise in liaison with councillors. Under this protocol, where a proposal to sign up to a new covenant or campaign is being put forward, whether by officers or by councillors, relevant officers will work with councillors to advise on content for an Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) and supporting document on how and why the covenant or campaign could support the Council and partners in meeting strategic and community objectives. This will help to ensure that we do not misalign ourselves or agree to contradictory principles
- 4.3 Additionally, officers may support the work or aims of an organisation, as in this case, where officer support was given to the SAND Covenant in June 2022. Since this time, colleagues have been meeting on a regular basis to work through ways in which the aspirations set out in the Covenant may be realised through potential embedding of these within Council policy and practice. The risk in this approach is that it presents an external view that the Council has formally signed up to the Covenant, without a formal proposal to do so being prepared for elected Members to consider.
- 4.4 The protocol, as an internal working process for officers, has been utilised to aid consideration of whether the Council should sign up to the SAND Covenant. An ESHIA has been completed and is attached as Appendix 2.a. Utilising the protocol is anticipated to minimise the reputational risk of the Council being considered to have signed up to the Covenant without having followed due democratic decision making processes.
- 4.5 The ESHIA screening that has been carried out includes recognition of a potential negative equality impact in terms of perceptions that a narrow number of Protected

Characteristic groupings are receiving additional recognition or achieving undue prominence, and that this may then become a precursor to creating a budget and/or drawing upon finite resources to meet the needs of people in these groupings to the exclusion of others.

- 4.6 The mitigation would be that, rather than creating a call upon budgets, the SAND Covenant would help to create greater awareness and understanding, across the workforce, partner organisations, and the wider community, with regard to diversity and intersectionality across all groupings and within all groupings. In so doing, the Council will be explicitly meeting the three national equality aims, around fostering good relations, advancing equality of opportunity, and seeking to eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.
- 4.7 The screening has helped to assess at this stage that the equality impacts are likely to be medium positive for the groupings of Age, Sex and Sexual Orientation, and for the grouping of Disability, given mental wellbeing aspects. The equality impacts may be assessed as low to medium positive for other groupings, in the absence of further detail at this stage, given that support for the Covenant would be seen as a way in which to make local progress towards achieving the overarching three national equality aims.
- 4.8 In regard to health and well being, there is an anticipated medium positive impact for the groupings of Age, Sex, and Sexual Orientation. Additionally, the further commitments, when taken together and if acted upon, are likely to enhance mental and physical wellbeing across these groupings and therefore lead to positive impacts for the grouping of Disability as well.
- 4.9 This anticipated medium positive impact, in regard in particular to access to health and social care services for old and older people who are LGBTQ+, will potentially lead to service users in these intersecting groupings being able to make decisions about their current and emerging care needs from an informed and engaged perspective. This will mitigate risk around use of resources, as it will facilitate a more efficient and effective use of officer time and better quality health and social care outcomes.
- 4.10 The commitments within the Covenant could be considered to have potential positive economic and societal impacts for the wider community as well as for people who may identify as LGBTQ+ at any life stage, as the signing of the Covenant may be taken to signal the policy intentions of the Council to foster and create an inclusive and welcoming county. In so doing, this may lead more people from a diverse range of backgrounds to not only come here to live and work or as visitors, but also remain here into older life stages. This will then potentially assist the Council to realise a range of aspirations within the Shropshire Plan.

Risk table

<i>Risk</i>	<i>Mitigation</i>
Covenant not wholly compatible with our aims as an organisation	Use of an agreed covenants and campaigns protocol
Other organisations may come forward, presenting a drain upon officer time and resources	Use of an agreed covenants and campaigns protocol
Reputational risk that Covenant may be considered to have been signed up to without due process being followed	SAND Covenant to be considered by Cabinet through use of democratic decision-making processes
Potential negative equality impact in terms of perceptions that a narrow number of Protected Characteristic groupings are receiving additional recognition or achieving undue prominence	SAND Covenant could help to create greater awareness and understanding, across the workforce, partner organisations, and the wider community, with regard to diversity and intersectionality across all groupings and within all groupings

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The financial implications are anticipated to be neutral, as the costs involved are in relation to officer time.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1 Climate change represents a significant challenge to all Shropshire residents, regardless of age, gender identity or sexual orientation. Adopting a protocol and signing the covenant is not expected to have any direct implications for climate change or the management of carbon emissions.

7. Background

- 7.1 Safe Ageing No Discrimination CIC (SAND) is a group working to improve the experience of older and old lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people in Shropshire as they access health and social care - and related - services. As part of SAND's Campaign to "EMBRACE A Culture of Inclusion", they encourage pledges from health and social care providers and other organisations, groups and services which people may need or want to access as they age. These 'pledges' set out to be practical actions to ensure that services are welcoming and inclusive. These pledges take the form of a Covenant.
- 7.2 Accepting that each organisation works within its own limitations and financial constraints groups and organisations in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin local authority areas sign up to a set of broad commitments and agree an annual action plan for change. Participating groups and organisations are then invited to feedback progress and share their next year plan at an annual event.

The SAND Commitments are:

- Commit to providing the best possible quality services for older and old LGBT+ people
- Commit to learning what life can be – and has been – like for different LGBT+ people
- Commit to vocally and visually supporting groups working with and for older and old LGBT+ people
- Commit to creating meaningful opportunities for LGBT+ people and groups to “influence” what you do
- Commit to assess and evidence change, including work carried out to engage LGBT+ people (within the group/organisations and outside it)

7.3 Officer support was given to the SAND Covenant in June 2022. Since this time, colleagues have been meeting on a regular basis to work through ways in which the aspirations set out in the Covenant may be realised through potential embedding of these within Council policy and practice. This input has been in terms of officer time as the key resource. Were the decision to be taken to sign up formally to the Covenant, input would be focussed upon development of the action plan that forms a necessary part of the Covenant, The action plan would need to be based on what is realistic in terms of size, capacity and available resources. It would also need to outline specific actions, identify the changes that would result from these actions, and identify the evidence to be collected to illustrate the changes. In so doing, it would facilitate collection of evidence about the needs of people in these groupings, to add to the overall evidence base about the needs of diverse communities in Shropshire.

7.4 A tangible early positive outcome has been the support that the group has given toward raising the profile of LGBTQ+ communities, within the workforce and within the wider community, by sharing ideas and supporting ongoing efforts to raise awareness of and celebrate a range of initiatives and events. These have included Pride History Month 2023 and Pride Month in June 2023, where members of the group worked with the Performance and Research Specialist: Rurality and Equalities. The signing of the SAND Covenant will be anticipated to complement ongoing partnership work to achieve not only positive equality and social inclusion impacts but also positive economic and societal impacts.

7.5 SAND as an organisation has described itself as taking a targeted approach to increasing LGBT+ inclusion, challenging discrimination, and promoting accessibility and equality of opportunity for LGBTQ+ people ageing in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin.

7.6 The stated policy intention of SAND is to value diversity and to highlight the relevance of different life experiences and associated needs, together with the policy intention to increase awareness of equality and diversity issues at all levels.

7.7 The intention of the Council as a proposed signatory would be to work with SAND, as with others in the voluntary and community sector, not only in regard to health and social care needs but also in regard to overall social inclusion endeavours that will value diversity and promote cultural and social efforts in so doing.

- 7.8 This will include opportunities such as Pride Month and LGBTQ+ History Month, events such as Ludlow Pride and Shrewsbury Pride, and ongoing activities and resources such as monthly family activities at the Museum in Shrewsbury. Shropshire Libraries are already Safe Spaces for all, with LGBTQ+ interest books available at all Shropshire Libraries, a dedicated LGBTQ+ interest section on the Library Service's free E-book system, and LGBTQ+ emagazines also available. Uptake of such resources and participation in such events and activities, would be evaluated and feedback sought via organisers and service areas.
- 7.9 The Culture Leisure and Tourism service area will also draw upon the Cultural Compact for Shropshire, set up in December 2022. This is a cross-sector partnership, made up of a broad membership, is independent of the Council and brings together culture, business, education, health, social care and other sectors. It sets out to deliver Vibrant Shropshire, the county's cultural strategy, to ensure that culture thrives in Shropshire and enhances the county's health, wellbeing, resilience, economic prosperity and environmental sustainability

8. Additional Information

- 8.1 Further information is available on the SAND website.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 Use of a protocol would aid thorough consideration of requests to sign up to covenants and campaigns, ensuring that any such covenants and campaigns are only supported where they will assist the Council and partners in meeting strategic and community objectives.
- 9.2 The Safe Ageing No Discrimination (SAND) organisation has described itself as working with the LGBTQ+ community and service providers to develop inclusive practice in general, while focussing on the particular experiences and needs of LGBTQ+ people. To sign the Covenant would complement continuing officer efforts to share ideas and support ongoing actions to raise awareness of and celebrate a range of initiatives and events within our overall strategic equality policy framework. It will thence help to meet identified aspirations within the Shropshire Plan.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Local Member:

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Covenants and Campaigns Protocol

Appendix 2 - Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA)
