



POLICY & RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 25TH FEBRUARY 2020

SUBJECT: STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS 2020-2024

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR – EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Report is seeking the views of Members and provides information on the Council's draft Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 (Appendix A).

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty in Wales came in to force on 6th April 2011 and included a requirement for public authorities to develop and publish a Strategic Equality Plan every four years. The Council has had a Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) in place since 2016, and must now update this for the next 4-year cycle.
- 2.2 This has also ensured that the Council has a good foundation in place to meet three of the Well-being goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 2.3 The views of Policy and Resource Scrutiny Committee are sought on the draft Strategic Equality Plan, to inform a version to be presented to Cabinet and Council for its approval for adoption as Council policy.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The views of Policy and Resource Scrutiny Committee are sought on the draft Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024, to inform a version to be presented to Cabinet and Council for its approval for adoption as Council policy.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To allow the adoption of the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 for the next 4 years.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 Since April 2016, the Council has had in place a four-year operational document known as the Strategic Equality Plan - Equalities and Welsh Language Strategic Objectives; this has been accompanied by a separate Action Plan.
- 5.2 The Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 has undergone a full revision compared with the previous version, in order to reflect changes in best practice, changes in the objectives or to provide additional information. The combined Objectives and Action Plan have been developed to take achievements and progress into account and merged them into one

operational document.

5.3 The Strategic Equality Plan has been developed so that the Council can set out how it aims to meet its commitment to equality and how it will meet its legal obligations contained within the Equality Act 2010.

5.4 A comprehensive engagement process took place during November and December 2019 to involve as many people as possible in developing the draft Equality Objectives and to give an opportunity for suggestions for additional or alternative objectives and any relevant actions. An engagement report has been produced (Appendix B).

5.5 Feedback on the consultation process was very supportive of the draft objectives on the whole. Areas for improvement and barriers identified have been included as actions under each relevant Equality Objective.

5.6 The Equality Objectives included in the Strategic Equality Plan are:

- **Service Planning and Delivery** – Understand and remove the barriers people face when accessing services
- **Education, Skills and Employment** – Improve education opportunities for all
- **Community Cohesion** – Promote and facilitate inclusive and cohesive communities
- **Inclusive Engagement and Participation** – Engage with citizens to encourage participation, to have their voices heard when planning service delivery
- **Welsh Language** – To ensure the Welsh speaking public can access services that comply with the statutory requirements
- **Inclusive, Diverse and Equal Workforce** – Create a workforce which reflects and respects the diversity of the communities within the county borough
- **Reducing the Gender Pay Gap**

5.7 The Gender Pay objective is a requirement of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

5.8 **Conclusion**

The updated Strategic Equality Plan and associated actions will ensure that the Council has a fit-for-purpose document in place to demonstrate compliance with the latest statutory Equalities and Welsh Language duties. It has been developed in line with legislative requirements and guidance produced by the Equality & Human Rights Commission.

6. **ASSUMPTIONS**

6.1 No assumptions have been made in preparing this report.

7. **LINKS TO RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES**

7.1 The following Council policies are relevant to the decision being requested:

7.2 **Corporate Plan 2018-2023**

Objective 1 - Improve education opportunities for all – this objective is reflected in the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 as Equality Objective 2. We need to identify and remove the barriers to accessing education, training and employment which will positively contribute to creating cohesive and resilient communities. The skills agenda is fundamental to economic development and economic prosperity.

Objective 2 - Enabling employment - this objective is also reflected in the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 as part of Equality Objective 2.

Objective 3 - Address the availability, condition and sustainability of homes throughout the county borough and provide advice, assistance or support to help improve people's well-being – Housing can be seen as a barrier to accessing other goods and services and can impact on people's mental health and well-being. Living in conditions where you feel safe and belong is vitally important and these are considered within Equality Objectives 2 and 3 of the Strategic Equality Plan.

Objective 4 - Promote a modern, integrated and sustainable transport system that increases opportunity promotes prosperity and minimises the adverse impacts on the environment – Transport can be seen as a barrier to accessing services and employment within the county borough. This was a theme which was discussed within the focus groups we held as part of the consultation process. Transport is considered within Equality Objective 2, increased and improved transport links will enable and encourage people to access education, training, employment and services easily.

Objective 6 - Support citizens to remain independent and improve their well-being – This is a key thread within the Strategic Equality Plan. If citizens live in the right living conditions and have easy access to transport, these enable them to reach education, training and employment opportunities. They also support citizens to access goods and services independently and to participate in consultations around service planning and delivery. By having their voices heard, services can be tailored to suit the needs of citizens thus empowering them to feel included. It includes supporting people to help themselves by providing comprehensive advice and guidance including signposting to other services. It's about having meaningful conversations with people to help them identify what matters to them, which will inform services to suit their needs.

Welsh Language Standards

Equality Objective 5 in the Strategic Equality Plan supports the Welsh Language. Language is not considered a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, however communicating with citizens in line with their language preference is a statutory duty under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Council's Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice. A number of the actions are underpinned by the county borough's Five Year Welsh Language Strategy 2017-2022.

Shared Ambitions Strategy

This strategy outlines the Council's commitment to work with schools and the Education Achievement Services (EAS) to improve educational attainment and achievement and links with Equality Objective 2.

Communication and Engagement Strategy

The availability of information in various formats is essential in ensuring that all citizens are able to participate in any or all engagement exercises. Whilst advances in technology enable us to provide information in digital formats, there continue to be barriers that prevent citizens from engaging.

8. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

8.1 The Strategic Equality Plan contributes to all 7 of the Well-being Goals which are:-

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language
- A globally responsible Wales

The Strategic Equality Plan is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act and are as follows

- Long Term – Any actions identified in the Plan will be used to plan service delivery over the next 4 years and will be reviewed and updated should any actions be met within the 4 year timeframe of the Plan.
- Prevention – By having a Plan in place ensures that services understand what is expected of them to deliver inclusive services and without discrimination.
- Integration – There is a crossover between the Strategic Equality Objectives and the Objectives of the Corporate Plan 2018-2023. This ensures consistency in meeting objectives and reporting. It also places a stronger and joined-up link between services and the Plans the Council already has in place.
- Collaboration – Working with key stakeholders is important to learn and understand how we can improve on how we currently deliver services based on the actions in the Plan.
- Involvement – The Strategic Equality Plan is about making citizens feel equally valued whilst recognising that people have different needs and delivering services in a non-discriminatory way. To understand what people's needs are its very important to involve them in any service planning, design and delivery. The public consultation responses on the Strategic Equality Objectives assisted us in identifying key actions to include in the final version of the Plan.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Equality Act 2010 introduced a general equality duty and a specific public sector equality duty that is applicable to Councils. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (Public Sector Single Equality Duty) requires public authorities to demonstrate that they have paid 'due regard' in their decision-making process to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

9.2 The Council must have due regard to the impact of any proposals on those with a protected characteristic. The Council has a specific duty to publish information to demonstrate how it has paid due regard to the aims above as part of its decision-making. Undertaking an Equality Impact Assessment screening exercise (and if necessary a full Equality Impact Assessment) would be evidence that the Council has considered its legal obligations in making the decision on the recommendations in this report.

9.3 The equality objectives provide a positive impact on all groups with protected characteristics. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken. Whilst an effort was made to engage

with all sectors of the community, it is evident that no responses were received from individuals representing local religious groups or the black and minority ethnic community. This is particularly concerning as we are not aware if there are any support / advocacy groups in the borough representing the needs of BAME and Religious citizens. As a result, actions within the equality objectives will ensure efforts are made to develop communication and engagement routes with BAME and religious groups and citizens to ensure their voices are heard in the future.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

11. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Equality Objective 6 - Inclusive, Diverse and Equal Workforce and Equality Objective 7 – Reducing the Gender Pay Gap both relate to Human Resources activities. The Gender Pay objective is a requirement of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

11.2 In light of the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards and the wider requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty, any personnel implications will be dealt with as they arise by Human Resources and the Equalities, Welsh Language and Consultation Team, and reported on in the annual reports.

12. CONSULTATIONS

12.1 All responses from consultations have been incorporated in the report.

13. STATUTORY POWER

13.1 Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011
Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011
Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015
Human Rights Act 1998
Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

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Mark Williams – Interim Head of Property Services
Kathryn Peters – Service Improvement and Partnerships Manager
Ros Roberts – Business Improvement Manager
Christopher Hunt – Community Cohesion Coordinator (West Gwent)

Background Papers:

Appendices:

Appendix A [Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024](#)

Appendix B [Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 - Consultation Report](#)

Appendix C [Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 - Equality Impact Assessment](#)