

Report



Cabinet Member for Education & Skills

Part 1

Date: 23 July 2019

Subject Newport City Council Accessibility Strategy for Schools

Purpose To seek adoption, following public consultation, of Newport City Council's accessibility strategy for schools.

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Summary Schedule 10 of the Equality Act, 2010, directs that "*A local authority in England and Wales must, in relation to schools for which it is the responsible body, prepare... an accessibility strategy*".

In March 2018, the Children's Commissioner wrote to Chief Executives of Local Authorities in Wales announcing the publication of a follow-up report to Full Lives: Equal Access, first published in 2014. The 2018 report made recommendations for the development and publication of Local Authority Accessibility Strategies and school accessibility plans, and directed that accessibility strategies should be developed through consultation and published online.

To date, Newport City Council's strategy has been reactive; addressing individual needs as they are identified, through reasonable adjustments. The draft Accessibility Strategy 2018-2023 was developed with stakeholders and public consultation on the draft strategy was undertaken between 11th February and 8th April 2019, and a consultation report is attached.

The strategy sets out the vision, values and roles and responsibilities of the Local Authority and schools in respect of planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils. The document also identifies some objectives and priorities for action to ensure improvement is achieved during the timespan of the strategy.

Following consultation some minor amendments have been made to the strategy which are summarised below:

- The physical inclusion theme and objectives have been changed to include the aim to improve provision for pupils with sensory impairments
- Reference to the Strategic Equality Plan, 2020 is included
- Reference added to an annual progress report being created and progress being subject monitoring and governance of the Strategic Equality Group.

Proposal To approve the adoption of the Newport City Council Accessibility Strategy for Schools

Action by Chief Education Officer

Timetable Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Strategic Director - People
- Chief Education Officer
- Head of Finance
- Head of Law & Regulation
- Head of People & Business Change

Signed

Background

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act, 2010, directs that “*A local authority in England and Wales must, in relation to schools for which it is the responsible body, prepare... an accessibility strategy*”. It goes on to describe an accessibility strategy as a strategy which:

- Increases the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in a school’s curriculum (inclusion)
- Improves the physical environment/facilities (physical access)
- Improves equality of access to information

In March 2018, the Children’s Commissioner wrote to Chief Executives of Local Authorities in Wales announcing the publication of a follow-up report to *Full Lives: Equal Access*, first published in 2014. The 2018 report made recommendations for the development and publication of Local Authority Accessibility Strategies and School Accessibility Plans including that:

- Accessibility Strategies should be published on council websites and School Accessibility Plans should be available online.
- Staff should know about the strategy/plans (therefore they should be publicised)
- Children and young people should be consulted in the preparation of accessibility strategies and plans

To date, Newport City Council’s strategy has been reactive; addressing individual needs as they are identified through reasonable adjustments. An Accessibility Strategy for Schools has not been developed or published. .

The Council committed to the development of an accessibility strategy for schools in the Strategic Equality Plan 2016-2020 under Equality Objective 3, Improving Access to Services (action 2). It will contribute to the delivery of Newport’s well-being objectives:

1. To improve skills, educational outcomes and employment opportunities.
2. To promote economic growth and regeneration while protecting the environment.
3. To enable people to be healthy, independent and resilient.
4. To build cohesive and sustainable communities.

Current Position

Newport City Council’s draft Accessibility Strategy for Schools, 2018-2023, was developed following a stakeholder workshop held at GAVO HQ on 25th June 2018. It was then subject to public consultation between 11th February and 8th April 2019. The draft strategy was revised to take account of the comments and feedback received during this consultation.

The strategy sets a definition of accessibility as being ‘the removal of barriers to learning, so that all children and young people are able to achieve their potential in a socially, physically and emotionally inclusive environment’.

The strategy sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Local Authority and schools in improving accessibility to the curriculum, our school buildings, and to information. The strategy sets objectives for improvement under three themes and provides an action plan to show how the council will deliver improvement over the next five years.

Consultation process and responses

The draft Accessibility Strategy for Schools was made available on the council’s website, together with a children’s version and a consultation response form.

An e-mail explaining how to access the relevant documents and take part in the consultation exercise was sent to all concerned stakeholders including:

- All Newport maintained schools and nursery schools
- Trustees of schools

- Newport Access Group
- Public Services Board
- Early Years and Childcare
- Aneurin Bevan Health Board
- Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations
- Serennu Children's Centre
- Teaching Unions

The consultation remained live for eight weeks during which time members of the public were able to comment on the proposed strategy. 9 responses were received during the consultation period, 8 of which responded to the questions asked on the response form. Of these 8 responses, 7 supported the adoption of the strategy. 1 respondent stated that they did not support the adoption of the strategy, but agreed that the adoption of the strategy would improve the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the schools' curriculums. Once the Accessibility Strategy for Schools is approved it will be formally published on the council's web pages and a link will be sent to all relevant stakeholders and staff.

Financial Implications

The Accessibility Strategy for Schools contains an action plan to deliver improvements to the accessibility of our school buildings. A number of the activities within the action plan will have a funding requirement, the actual cost of which is not currently known. The action plan is informed by a self-assessment survey completed by head teachers, which has allowed us to identify priority areas for improvement. In the first instance this information needs to be verified and potential solutions identified and costed.

Newport Norse has provided a cost proposal to cover site investigations and provision of a report detailing recommendations and associated costs for each of the school sites identified in the action plan. The total cost for this feasibility study is £38,440, covering 15 primary school sites and 4 secondary school sites.

This work would be funded through the Newport City Council feasibility fund and could be split over 3 phases as set out below:

Phase 1: 2019-2020	Phase 2: 2020-2021	Phase 3: 2021-2023
Feasibility study at 5 primary and 1 secondary school sites where Hall access is identified as an issue.	Feasibility study at 6 primary and 1 secondary sites where classroom access is identified as an issue.	Feasibility study at 4 primary and 2 secondary sites where classroom access is identified as an issue.
£11,570	£12,689	£14,181

Recommendations for each site will be addressed by way of a capital bid submitted on behalf of People Services Capital Programme Board on a case-by-case basis, through the established council channels.

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
 Council Improvement Plan
 Strategic Equality Plan (Equality Objective 3.2)
 Education Service Plan

Options Available and Considered

Option 1. To approve adoption of the accessibility strategy for schools. This will enable the council to publish the strategy and progress the work outlined in the action plan within the strategy document.

Option 2. To undertake further consultation with stakeholders prior to adoption and publication of the strategy.

Preferred Option and Why

Option 1. The draft strategy has been subject to consultation through the engagement of key stakeholders and meets the requirement under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act, 2010.

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

The accessibility strategy includes a number of objectives which are likely to require capital expenditure to implement. The cost of these are currently unknown and feasibility studies are required to assess the requirements for each school, which will be carried out over 3 phases. There is an existing budget for feasibility studies, which these will be funded from.

Future capital expenditure will require capital bids which will be assessed on a priority basis alongside affordability of the overall capital programme.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

There are no specific legal issues arising from the Report at the present time. The draft Accessibility Strategy for Schools has been prepared in accordance with the Council's statutory duty under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act, 2010. The proposed strategy has been the subject of extensive consultation, in accordance with Welsh Government statutory guidance, to ensure that the views of key stakeholders are properly taken into account before the final strategy is adopted. Minor amendments have been made to the original draft strategy, where appropriate, to reflect the consultation responses received. The Cabinet Member is now required to consider and approve the final strategy, in the light of the consultation responses and the proposed minor amendments. The strategy will provide a framework for meeting the Council duties under the Equality and Education Acts to ensure that the accessibility and inclusion needs of disabled pupils are being properly met.

Comments of Head of People and Business Change

The proposed strategy sets out a programme for progressively increasing the accessibility of Newport schools to pupils with disabilities. In achieving this the key themes will be, physical inclusion, access to Information and Communication and Transparency. As well as being required under Equality legislation, the accessibility strategy demonstrates Newport City Council's commitment to removing barriers for all children in education, maximising their potential and embedding a culture where difference is both included, and valued. Consultation with a range of stakeholders has ensured that the views of children, parents and professionals who will be impacted by the strategy have helped to shape its priorities, and the new Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 will be well placed to ensure these are delivered.

There are no staffing implications arising from the report.

Scrutiny Committees

None

Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Report writers need to indicate how they have considered the five things public bodies need to think about to show they have applied the sustainable development principle put into place by the Act. You will need to demonstrate you have considered the following:

- **Long term: the importance of balancing short- term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long – term needs** *The strategy promotes the implementation of policies, training and awareness that will positively change the outlook and culture of our schools. Physical changes made will be designed to deliver permanent improvements for pupils with various needs, to improve access to the school concerned.*
- **Prevention: How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help us meet our objectives** *The strategy promotes an inclusive education experience for all. The implementation and delivery of the strategy is expected to ensure an appropriate level of support is provided and have a positive effect on emotional wellbeing. The strategy promotes a pro-active and long term approach to improving access to services.*

- **Collaboration:** have you considered how acting in collaboration with any other person or any other part of our organisation could help meet our wellbeing objectives *The strategy sets out a commitment to working with children, young people, their families and carers when making decisions which are likely to affect the quality and equity of their education provision. The implementation of the strategy will be undertaken in partnership with our schools and occupational therapists, taking into account the needs and desires of the pupil and their family/carers.*
- **Involvement:** The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the wellbeing goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the City we serve *The stakeholders are the children and young people of Newport, their families and carers. Parents, professionals and support workers have been engaged through the workshop held at GAVO on June 25th. Engagement with young who have recently been through the education system in Newport was facilitated by Serennu Children's Centre and the views of these people informed the development of the draft accessibility strategy. The strategy was subject to a full public consultation which sought the views of all stakeholders between February and April 2019. The consultation was hosted on the council's website with a notification e-mail containing a link sent to all identified stakeholders. The consultation was also featured in the One Newport bulletin and publicised through the council's twitter feed.*

Crime and Disorder Act 1998

Section 17(1) of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 imposes a duty on the Local Authority to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area.

Consultation

The draft strategy was subject to full public consultation as outlined in this report.

Background Papers

NCC Accessibility Strategy for School 2019-2024
 Consultation Report
 FEIA – NCC Accessibility Strategy

Dated: 23 2019