

Report

Council



Part 1

Date: 29 September 2020

Subject **Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024**

Purpose To present the council's draft Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 and seek approval from Council. The Strategic Equality Plan is required to be published on the council's website in accordance with statutory deadlines.

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Ward All

Summary Under the Equality Act (2010) the Council is required to publish a Strategic Equality Plan every 4 years, including a number of strategic equality objectives. Objectives should be based on local and national evidence of inequality, the authority's own equality data, and consultation undertaken with key stakeholders, including people that share protected characteristics. This is the third Strategic Equality Plan, and builds on progress already made, whilst taking a more outcome-focussed approach to delivery of clearly defined objectives. The statutory deadline for publishing of the Strategic Equality Plan is March 31st. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (regulatory body) have notified public sector bodies who are subject to regulations under the Equality Act 2010 that the publishing of a draft document is sufficient in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the council published a draft Strategic Equality Plan online on March 31st.

The council recognise that since March, the equality landscape has been impacted significantly by the Covid19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter movement. The Strategic Equality Plan is a long term, high level document which provides overarching objectives with sufficient flexibility to adapt to changing priorities. The delivery plan which underpins this Strategic document will reflect ongoing work relating to equality in these areas.

Proposal **To approve the attached Strategic Equality Plan.**

Action by Head of People and Business Change

Timetable Draft Strategic Equality Plan currently published to be updated and finalised immediately following Council approval.

This report was prepared after consultation with:
Cabinet Member for Community and Resources
Heads of Service
Senior Leadership Team
Overview and Management Scrutiny Committee
The Council's Strategic Equalities Group
Cabinet

Background

Legislation

The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) brought together and replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act. The Act includes a public sector equality duty (the general duty), replacing the separate duties on race, disability and gender equality which came into force on the 5th April 2011.

The aim of the general duty is to ensure that public authorities and those carrying out a public function consider how they can positively contribute to a fairer society through advancing equality and good relations in their day-to-day activities. The duty ensures that equality considerations are built into the design of policies and the delivery of services and that they are kept under review. The general duty requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

1. eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited under the Act
2. advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not
3. foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

The general duty covers the following protected characteristics:

- Age
- Gender reassignment
- Sex
- Disability
- Marriage and civil partnership (in relation to employment only)
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Sexual orientation
- Race – including ethnic or national origin, colour or nationality
- Religion or belief – including lack of belief

Listed bodies in Wales are also subject to the Act's specific duties, which are designed to support them meeting the general duty. The specific duties include the requirement for bodies to prepare and publish its equality objectives at least every four years, and the requirement to have a Strategic Equality Plan which sets out how these objectives will be met. Objectives must relate to all protected characteristics, and effective arrangements must be in place to monitor progress made against them.

Objectives should be developed through consideration of a listed body's work and activities, including employment, service delivery and policy development. This analysis should be informed by engagement with people that share protected characteristics, gathering and analysing information, and assessing equality impact. Engagement is a key opportunity to gather information about which areas of work may be of interest to people with particular protected characteristics.

Development of objectives

The Council's draft Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 sets out six equality objectives, each with a number of related outcomes and key actions that will contribute to those outcomes. The objectives relate to Leadership and Governance, Access and Engagement, Representative Workforce, Community Cohesion, Learning Well and Independent Living.

These objectives were drafted considering broad themes that have already been identified across the council's existing strategic documents, such as the Well-Being and Corporate Plans, and key external documents like the Equality and Human Rights Commission's 'Is Wales Fairer?: The State of Human Rights and Equality' (2018) report, which provides a broad assessment of inequality in Wales.

The objectives were also aligned with Welsh Government’s strategic equality work, considering documents including their Nation of Sanctuary Plan, Hate Crime Framework for Action, and Action on Disability framework.

Extensive stakeholder consultation has also informed the objectives, including surveys relating to:

- Public perception of equality in Newport
- Support for LGBTQ+ people in Newport
- Attitudes towards migration in Newport
- Making a complaint to the council

The council’s equality objectives were also subject to a 6 week consultation period, providing opportunity for the public to consider our areas of proposed focus.

Specific engagement was undertaken with people that share protected characteristics through focus groups with:

- Newport Access Group
- Newport People First
- Newport BAME Forum
- Newport Youth Council
- LGBTQ+ young people

A Consultation Report will be published alongside the Strategic Equality Plan. This is attached at Appendix 1 and provides further detail on the methods and outcomes of engagement, links to wider council priorities, and how local and national evidence has informed the development of the objectives. An operational delivery plan will underpin the Strategic Equality Plan, setting out in detail the steps that will be taken to achieve the objectives. The delivery plan will be routinely reported on through the council’s Strategic Equality Group (SEG), chaired by the Cabinet Member for Community and Resources and will also form the basis of the Strategic Equality Annual Report, received by Cabinet and Council.

The draft Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 is attached to this report as Appendix 2.

Financial Summary

The cost of implementing the Strategic Equality Plan and the equality objectives is met out of existing budgets by each relevant service area. A cost of approximately £3000 has been met by the Equality and Welsh language budget 19/20 for work to improve accessibility of the public facing Strategic Equality Plan.

	Year 1 (Current) £	Year 2 £	Year 3 £	Ongoing £	Notes including budgets heads affected
Costs (Income)					Not applicable
Net Costs (Savings)					
Net Impact on Budget					

Risks

Risk	Impact of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect	Who is responsible for dealing with the risk?
That the Plan and its equality objectives are not implemented	M	M	Governance arrangements relating to delivery of the Strategic Equality Plan are being reviewed to ensure that actions are effectively progressed and monitored throughout the duration of the plan, particularly at an operational level	Heads of Service

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

The Council's commitments under the Equality Act and the Strategic Equality Plan are aligned to the Wellbeing Goals, in particular, working towards a more equal Wales, and a Wales of cohesive communities.

Previously, the council has included Welsh language as a specific equality objective within its Strategic Equality Plans. As separate, statutory, reporting processes are in place under the council's Welsh Language Standards, Welsh language will no longer feature in our Strategic Equality Plan.

Options Available

- a) To approve the attached Strategic Equality Plan
- b) To not approve the attached and redraft

Preferred Option and Why

Option a) is the preferred option, in order to ensure that the Council remains compliant with its statutory obligations.

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

There are no adverse financial implications associated with the proposal to approve and publish the Strategic Equality Plan. The cost of implementing the SEP is met from existing budgets in service areas.

The Strategic Equality Plan and the general obligations and requirements under the Act are key issues in the planning and delivering of services and therefore a key consideration in the Council's financial planning and budgets. Established processes allows for this consideration and is reviewed regularly.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

There are no specific legal issues arising from the Report.

In accordance with the Equality Act 2010 the Council is required to publish a revised Strategic Equality Plan every 4 years. The general Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to have due regard in the exercise of its functions, to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other prohibited conduct, to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations. Regulations made by the Welsh Ministers impose specific duties on local authorities in Wales for the purpose of enabling better performance of these general duties. These include the duty to publish objectives designed to enable the authority to perform the statutory duty, to publish a statement setting out steps taken or

intended steps in order to fulfil each objective and how long the authority will take in order to fulfil each objective. This Strategic Equality Plan supports Newport City Council in meeting these duties.

Comments of Head of People and Business Change

There are no direct HR implications arising from this report.

This Strategic Equality Plan represents another important step towards creating a fairer, more equal Newport. It builds on positive work already achieved under previous plans, and sets out clear objectives and outcomes for the next 4 years. The Plan also contributes to the delivery of the Council's wellbeing objectives and the national wellbeing goals.

Comments of Cabinet Member

The Equality Objectives in this Strategic Equality Plan are outcome focused. They reflect both the strategic priorities of the wider organisation and those of key partners, like the Equality and Human Rights Commission and Welsh Government. It is important to note however that they also reflect the concerns of the public, thanks to our wide and robust consultation process. The strategies have evolved significantly since our 2016-2020 plan. We worked in close partnership with service areas across the authority to develop well balanced priorities that are both inward-facing and externally focussed.

Local issues

NA

Scrutiny Committees

The draft Plan was reported to Overview and Management Scrutiny Committee in March 2019 and their comments informed amendments to the draft Strategic Equality Plan. Comments and responses are summarised below:

The current National Emergency relating to the Corona Virus has caused the Shut down of our major industries/services and other aspects of our economy and normal life. As a result of this, Local Government has been severely affected from a strategic planning and service delivery aspect.

a) What if any changes to the Councils published plan have been made or need to be made to take account of this unpredicted and monumental change? Or need to be made so that we can transition back to normality.

There are no changes to the Strategic Equality Plan proposed as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, however, operational plans which underpin its delivery may need to take into account delays, or address any pressing areas of inequality, for example, mitigating any resulting community tensions. Welsh Government have already agreed to some extended deadlines. It is recognised that Covid-19 is impacting disproportionately on many of our minority communities, and any learning from this will be reflected in our delivery plan which will evolve as necessary over the lifespan of the Strategic Plan.

b) Do our city goals need to be urgently realigned to take account of the current national situation and the wider aspects of recovery.

The Strategic Equality Plan details the strategic and policy framework within which the Council operates, and is designed to align with the Council's wider corporate priorities. The operational plan which will support its delivery will be reviewed following this period of emergency management and incorporate any immediate actions necessary to mitigate the impact of Covid19, but the overarching principles, and long term strategic objectives remain the same.

c) Devise and implement a method or means of measuring success of actions/ activities against the various stated areas of focus/goals. If it can be measured it can be managed to completion. Each activity/area of focus needs to have a recognised owner, this is for accountability and reporting purposes.

As outlined in the Strategic Equality Plan, an operational delivery plan will set out in detail steps that will be taken to achieve the Strategic Equality Objectives. This will include clear timescales, action owners and performance indicators. The Plan also sets out the aim to work towards mainstreaming equality delivery through service area plans, resulting in better performance management as part of the corporate process. A published annual report on progress against Strategic Equality Objectives is a statutory requirement under the Equality Act 2010.

7) Project milestones and reporting of activity milestones need to be agreed and published for each team or area of activity.

As above.

8) There needs to be one overall project manager/owner identified and tasked with performance management of the various programmes of work encompassed by the scope of work.

As above.

Equalities Impact Assessment and the Equalities Act 2010

Strategic Equality Plans are required by law in order to contribute towards the reduction of inequalities and set out priorities which impact positively on people that share protected characteristics. An Equality Impact Assessment which has been carried out on our draft Strategic Equality Plan is attached at Appendix 3.

Children and Families (Wales) Measure

This Strategic Equality Plan sets out a specific objective focussed on improving equality for vulnerable learners. This objective will be achieved through delivery of the council's Learn Well education strategy. Pupil voice is at the heart of this work, and ongoing consultation and engagement with children ensures their participation in decisions that affect them.

Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015, which came into force in April 2016, places an obligation on Local Authorities to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Strategic Equality Plan represents much of the work that the authority undertakes to fulfil our Wellbeing objectives to work towards 'a more Equal Wales' and a 'Wales of Cohesive Communities', drawing on much of the research undertaken by the Equality and Human Rights Commission into fairness and inequalities in Wales.

The Strategic Equality Plan and its objectives aim to influence the way that the Council makes decisions that have a long term impact on communities, and engages and consults with diverse and seldom heard groups to ensure they are able to influence the design of service delivery. Early intervention to address issues such as hate crime and the risk of radicalisation prevent escalation of issues which may threaten community cohesion, and collaboration with key partners in the delivery of our Equality Plan ensures an effective, holistic approach. The Strategic Equality Plan is influenced by national research, local data, and engagement with people in Newport that share protected characteristics.

Crime and Disorder Act 1998

Not applicable

Background Papers

Strategic Equality Plan 2016-20

<http://www.newport.gov.uk/documents/Council-and-Democracy/Equalities-and-Welsh-language-/NCC-Strategic-Equality-Plan-and-Equality-Objectives-2016-1.1-Eng.pdf>

Strategic Equality Plan Annual Reports

<http://www.newport.gov.uk/en/Council-Democracy/Equalities-the-Welsh-language/Equalities.aspx>

Equality Act 2010 and guidance for Local Authorities in Wales
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>

Draft published Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24

<https://www.newport.gov.uk/documents/Council-and-Democracy/Equalities-and-Welsh-language-/SEP-2020-1.0-English.pdf>