

Report

Council

Part 1

Date: 23 April 2024

Subject **Strategic Equality Plan 2024 - 2028**

Purpose To present Newport City Council's draft Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028 and seek Council's approval for formal adoption.

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Ward All

Summary Under the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011, local authorities in Wales must develop and publish a Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) that sets out the objectives it wants to achieve over a four-year period. Newport City Council's first SEP was published in 2012 and our current plan runs until the end of financial year.

To meet statutory requirements, the Council must develop and publish a new SEP, which sets out its Equality Objectives to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty for the next four-year cycle, 2024 – 2028.

Proposal **Full Council to agree the adoption of the attached Strategic Equality Plan**

Action by Head of People, Policy and Transformation

Timetable Immediate

To meet statutory requirements, the draft Strategic Equality Plan is published on the Council's website and will be updated following Council approval by the end of April.

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Corporate Management Team
- Executive Board
- Head of People, Policy and Transformation
- Strategic Director, Transformation and Corporate
- Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation
- The Council's Strategic Equalities Group
- Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee
- Newport City Council Cabinet Members

Signed

Background

Legal Context

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.

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

Local authorities in Wales are also subject to the requirements set out in the above-mentioned Regulations, namely, to prepare and publish 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 Equality Objectives

The development of our draft Equality Objectives started with examining the broad themes identified across the Council's existing strategic documents, including our [Corporate Plan](#) and the [Gwent Well-being Assessment](#). These documents identify prevalent issues and highlight some key areas of focus based on an understanding of local or national need and existing research.

As part of this process, we also considered key external documents, such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) State of the Nation 'Is Wales Fairer' reports (2018 & 2023), which provide a comprehensive overview of equality in Wales and support evidence-based decision making to address inequality. To ensure our draft objectives aligned with national priorities, we also mapped our draft

Equality Objectives against the Welsh Government's strategies and plans, which set out actions to deliver a more fair and equitable Wales, including key policy interventions such as the [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan](#) and [LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales](#).

As with the protected characteristics under the Equality Act, we have also considered the challenges encountered by people with care experience following the unanimous agreement of the motion to adopt care experience as a protected characteristic by the Council.

Through this work, the Council drafted six Equality Objectives that are focused on the following areas:

- **Equality Objective 1 (Leadership, Governance & Involvement)** - Newport City Council has strong leadership and clear governance around equality, ensuring robust monitoring processes and regular meaningful stakeholder engagement.
- **Equality Objective 2 (Customer Service and Access)** - Newport City Council's services are accessible to everyone in Newport, providing services that are both inclusive and considerate of individual need.
- **Equality Objective 3 (Representative Workforce)** - Newport City Council has a workforce that represents the city and is a workplace with an inclusive culture which recruits, develops and retains staff.
- **Equality Objective 4 (Community Cohesion)** - Newport City Council promotes positive relationships between different communities, supporting integration and effectively identifying emerging community tensions.
- **Equality Objective 5 (Equity in Education)** - Newport City Council supports schools and settings to positively address any inequality in provision, attainment, and early career pathways, of known groups of vulnerable and learners with disabilities.
- **Equality Objective 6 (Independent Living)** - Newport City Council contributes to the city being a great place to live, to grow older and live independently, and has in place a range of services that accommodates people in different situations.

Public engagement and consultation were undertaken following the endorsement of our draft Equality Objectives as a basis for consultation by the Council's Strategic Equality Group. The main aim of this consultation was to capture the views and opinions of Newport residents, particularly those from seldom heard communities with protected characteristics, and other key stakeholders on our draft Equality Objectives and Strategic Equality Plan, including their thoughts on what actions we could take to tackle inequality and promote inclusion.

The results from our different consultation exercises suggest that Newport residents felt we were focusing on the right equality objectives. The majority of people agreed with our draft objectives. However, they also highlighted the inequalities that exist within local communities and gave us a clear steer on how we can improve our services and advance equality for everyone.

A Consultation Report will be published alongside the Strategic Equality Plan to provide further detail on the methods and outcomes of engagement, engagement by protected characteristic, links to wider council priorities, and how local and national evidence has informed the development of the objectives.

Governance

The delivery of the SEP will be underpinned by a series of comprehensive operational delivery plans, and specific delivery groups will be established to ensure the operational delivery of Equality Objectives.

Respective objective leads will provide quarterly reports to the Council's Strategic Equality Group (SEG), which will monitor and support progress against Equality Objectives throughout the year. SEG is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation, who also has responsibility for Equalities, and membership includes representation from Newport Fairness Commission, Trade Unions, Elected Member Equality Champions, Staff Equality Network Chairs, service area leads and senior officers.

In addition, annual reports summarising the progress we have made as an authority against each Equality Objective will be compiled at the end of every financial year for consideration by our Scrutiny Committee then presented to Cabinet and Council before publication on the Council's website, in accordance with statutory deadlines.

Financial Summary (Capital and Revenue)

The cost of implementing the Strategic Equality Plan and Equality Objectives is met out of existing budgets by each relevant service area.

Risks

Risk Title / Description	Risk Impact score of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Risk Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	Risk Mitigation Action(s) What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect?	Risk Owner Officer(s) responsible for dealing with the risk?
SEP and Equality Objectives are not formally adopted or published	H	L	A draft SEP has been developed and taken through relevant governance processes for approval	Executive Board, Head of People, Policy and Transformation
SEP and Equality Objectives are not implemented or reviewed	H	L	Delivery of the SEP will be underpinned by a series of comprehensive operational delivery plans. Progress against Equality Objectives will be monitored and supported by the Strategic Equality Group.	Strategic Equality Group, Policy and Partnership Manager, Senior Equalities Officer
Equality commitments are not understood by members and staff, including senior leaders	M	L	Mandated Equalities training is regularly delivered to staff and members. This training will be updated to include new priorities and clarify Equality commitments of all members and staff	Head of People, Policy and Partnership, Head of Law and Standards, Policy and Partnership Manager, Senior Equalities Officer

* Taking account of proposed mitigation measures

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

[Corporate Plan 2022 - 27](#)

[People Plan 2023 - 28](#)

[Digital Strategy 2022 - 27](#)

The SEP also considers the priorities identified in the Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) [Is Wales Fairer? \(2023\)](#) report and the Welsh Government's strategies and plans, which set out actions to deliver a more fair and equitable Wales, including key policy interventions such as the [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan](#) and [LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales](#).

Options Available and considered

1. Council to agree the adoption of attached Strategic Equality Plan
2. Council to not approve the attached plan and redraft.

Preferred Option and Why

1. Council to agree the adoption of attached Strategic Equality Plan to ensure publication on the Council's website in accordance with statutory deadlines.

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

There are no direct financial implications arising from the proposal to adopt the plan, as the cost of implementing the plan will be met from existing service areas budgets.

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 budget setting processes allow for this consideration.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

The Council's legal duties are set out in the report. There are no further legal implications.

Comments of Head of People, Policy and Transformation

The Council's Strategic Equality Plan sets out clear Equality Objectives and outcomes to support the Council in meeting its statutory duties under the Equality Act over the next four years. It builds on the positive work delivered in our previous SEPs and was developed following consultation with residents, including equality stakeholder groups. The Plan also contributes towards achieving the well-being objectives in the Council's new Corporate Plan and Wales well-being goals, particularly the vision for '**A More Equal Wales**, and '**A Wales of Cohesive Communities**'.

There are no direct HR implications arising from this report.

Scrutiny Committees

The draft Strategic Equality Plan 2024 -2028 was presented to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OMSC) on 8 March 2024. The full details will be published in the minutes of the Committee meeting on the Council's democracy pages.

The Committee thanked officers for their work and made the following recommendations:

- The Committee recommended more promotion of this plan with the youth population – either as a shortened/more accessible report, or a graphic etc.
- The Committee recommended using data to reinforce successes or challenges where it is meaningful in annual reports.
- The Committee recommended that the final Strategic Equalities Plan Annual Report for 2023/24 includes a summary of work done within the plan period.
- The Committee emphasised the importance of accessibility for residents with low digital skills, elderly residents or those who don't choose to engage with the Council digitally.

In line with OMSC's recommendations, the final version of the Strategic Equality Plan will be made available in Easy Read and other formats to improve accessibility.

Cabinet

The draft Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028 was approved at the Council's Cabinet meeting on 10 April with cabinet member agreement to present at Council.

Fairness and Equality Impact Assessment:

A full Fairness and Equality Impact Assessment (FEIA) was undertaken on the Strategic Equality Plan 2024 - 2028 and published on the Council's website (available in Welsh [here](#) and English [here](#)).

This FEIA considers our legislative responsibilities under the Equality Act (2010), including the Socio-economic Duty, the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure (2011).

Wellbeing of Future Generation (Wales) Act

In terms of the Wellbeing of Future Generation (Wales) Act and consideration of the sustainable development principle, 5 ways of working:

Long Term - The delivery of the Strategic Equality Plan, Equality Objectives, and associated actions aim to influence the way that the Council makes decisions that have a long-term impact on communities.

Preventative - The Equality Objectives and associated actions within the Strategic Equality Plan have been developed to address inequality within service provision, the workforce, and the wider community. This includes early intervention to prevent the identified problems from worsening and actions to promote equality of opportunity and outcome.

Integration – While the Strategic Equality Plan cuts across all of Wales well-being goals, this plan will particularly support progress to achieve the vision for A More Equal Wales and A Wales of cohesive communities. Similarly, the delivery of this plan and work within this area align with and contribute to achieving the well-being objectives in the Council's new Corporate Plan.

Collaboration - Collaboration is key to delivering against the Equality Objectives set. We recognise to achieve our priorities we must work collaboratively with a range of key internal and external stakeholders, including the Strategic Equality Group, Equality Objective leads, service delivery groups and community partners.

Involvement – The Council engaged with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders in the development of this plan. Engagement and consultation with key stakeholders, including Newport residents, equality stakeholder groups, community partners and other interested parties will remain consistent throughout the delivery of this plan.

Consultation

Public engagement and consultation were undertaken following the endorsement of our draft Equality Objectives as a basis for consultation by the Council's Strategic Equality Group. The main aim of this consultation was to capture the views and opinions of Newport residents, particularly those from seldom heard communities and other key stakeholders on our draft Equality Objectives and Strategic Equality Plan, including their thoughts on what actions we could take to tackle inequality and promote inclusion.

The Strategic Equality Plan 2024 - 28 Consultation Report (available [here](#)), which accompanies this strategy, provides further information on the consultation process that informed its development.

Background Papers

[NCC Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24](#)

[Corporate Plan 2022-27](#)

[Public Sector Equality Duty](#)

[Socio-economic Duty Guidance](#)

[The Essentials - Wellbeing of Future Generation Act \(Wales\)](#)

[Overview and Management Scrutiny Committee papers March 2024](#)

[Cabinet papers April 2024](#)

Dated: April 2024