

Committee: **Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **5<sup>th</sup> July 2023**

Report Subject: **Meeting Specific Requirements of the Equality Act 2010: Strategic Equality Policy Development**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Stephen Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member Corporate Overview and Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Sarah King – Head of Governance and Partnerships**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	04/05/23	22.06.23			05/07/23	19/07/23		

1. **Purpose of the Report**
  - 1.1 To present an approach for undertaking strategic equality policy developments during 2023/24 to ensure the Council meets its statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010 (the Act hereafter) and achieves its commitments set out in the Corporate Plan 2022/27.
  
2. **Scope and Background**
  - 2.1 The current Strategic Equality Plan 2020/24 is in its final year of implementation. The Council has a legal requirement to develop and publish a new Strategic Equalities Plan & Equalities Objectives 2024/28 by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. Failure to fulfil these requirements would result in reputational and financial consequences.
  
  - 2.2 **National strategic equality policy development areas**
    - 2.2.1 The table below outlines *additional* strategic equality policy development areas set out by Welsh Government; a description of what they aim to achieve; and the expectations placed on local authorities / public bodies.

**Table 1: Strategic equality development areas**

<b>Strategic equality development areas</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Expectations on local authorities</b>
<p><a href="#">Anti-racist Wales Action Plan</a></p> <p>The Plan sets a vision for 2030.</p> <p>Initial implementation period covers June 2022 – June 2024.</p>	<p>To take action to make Wales an Anti-racist nation.</p> <p>To create a culture with zero tolerance of racism and change our systems and institutions to ‘design-out’ racism.</p>	<p>To develop a local action plan and performance monitor delivery.</p>
<p><a href="#">Public commemoration in Wales</a></p> <p>Non-statutory guidance for public bodies currently under development.</p>	<p>To support local authorities to reach well informed decisions about current and future public commemorations in-line with the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan.</p>	<p>To review and appropriately address the way in which people and events with known historical associations to slavery and colonialism are commemorated in our public spaces and collections.</p>
<p><a href="#">LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales</a></p>	<p>Together in Pride – making Wales the most LGBTQ+ friendly nation in Europe.</p>	<p>To develop a local action plan and performance monitor delivery.</p>

## 2.3 Proposed approach for strategic equality policy development

### 2.3.1 What?

To develop the new Strategic Equality Plan & Equality Objectives 2024/28 and concurrently use this work to underpin the development of the *additional* strategic equality development areas outlined in the table above.

### 2.3.2 How? (Key actions)

- Undertake research to understand strategic equality position.
- Mapping of existing service delivery contributions.
- Briefings on strategic equality policy development provided for service areas, senior management teams and elected members.
- Organisation-wide quarterly corporate Policy & Performance workshops to be established to raise awareness and support the implementation of key statutory policy areas (e.g., Equality, Welsh, Climate Change etc.)

- Set up Equality Stakeholder Reference Group as a mechanism for capturing the lived experiences of people protected by the Act to support policy development and performance monitor implementation, with opportunity to include elected member and specialist agencies / organisation representation.
- On-going involvement / consultation via established engagement networks, key groups and staff with protected characteristics covered by the Act.
- Consider training requirements for staff, senior management, and Members on key statutory areas such as Equality, Welsh, and Participation & Engagement\* etc.

*\* Development of the Council's Participation and Engagement Strategy 2023/26 (as per Local Government (Wales) Act 2010) is aligned to this work to maximise use of resources.*

### 2.3.3 **When?**

- Key actions undertaken during Summer and early Autumn 2023
- Formal consultation period held Autumn/Winter 2023 (4 weeks)
- Political / professional route for adoption by Council completed early 2024 prior to statutory deadline as noted above.

## 3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The report was considered and endorsed by CLT on the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

### 3.2 **Option 1 (preferred)**

- I. Consider and support the proposed approach for developing the Strategic Equality Plan 2024/28 and Equality Objectives to be approved by Cabinet.

### **Option 2**

- I. Provide comment and suggest an alternative approach for developing the Strategic Equality Plan 2024/28 and Equality Objectives.

Option 1 is the preferred option.

4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**  
The Corporate Plan recognises that our Strategic Equality Plan is one of the key policies and strategies that help to deliver our ambition.

The plan will strengthen the Council to actively participate in the newly forming Gwent Well-being Plan which is due for adoption in July 2023 by the Gwent Public Services Board. This plan will have a strong focus on tackling and preventing inequity within the communities of Gwent.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

The development, publication, and translation of the Strategic Equality Plan 2024/28, on behalf of the Council, is met within existing budget of the Governance and Partnerships.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

The main risks are reputational and relate to meeting the legal requirements within the statutory timescales, and in doing so developing a plan which plays a significant part in the council being able to meet both its general and specific duties from the Act. The outlined development plan should mitigate these risks, based on previous policy development models implemented since the Act inception in 2010.

5.3 ***Legal***

Failure to effectively project manage and set out appropriate arrangements for developing a new Strategic Equality Plan 2024/28 and Equality Objectives; local Anti-racism Wales Action Plan; local LGBTQ+ Action Plan or further work in relation to the National Commemoration Audit may lead to an increased risk of the Council failing to comply with its statutory requirements and specific duties of the Act.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

There is a duty across the organisation to comply with the Act and meet the specific Public Sector Equality Duties. The Policy and Partnerships Team oversee responsibility via the Professional Lead for Engagement, Equalities & Welsh Language to develop the Strategic Equality Plan 2024/28 and Equality Objectives within the defined timeframes.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

Relevant equality performance information and data (e.g., primary and secondary research) will be used to inform strategic equality policy developments (e.g., the setting of equality objectives and actions).

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

Strategic equality policy development is centred on delivering positive outcomes for the public and is aligned to the national well-being goals for a more equal Wales; a Wales of cohesive communities; and a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

Input from staff, elected members, and key representatives will be sought from across the Council as well as key stakeholders such as residents, local businesses, public & third sector organisations.

Involvement will also be supported via the Corporate Policy & Performance Workshops and Equality Stakeholder Reference Group.

***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The plan covers a four-year period, and should be seen as a building block towards continually improving outcomes in-line with the Act and those defined within the protected characteristics.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The plan looks to ensure that the Council is well-placed to meet its duties and strive to prevent discrimination now or in the future.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The plan will be developed collaboratively with residents, the public and third sector and community organisations as well as any professional stakeholders interested in achieving equality outcomes for Blaenau Gwent.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

The plan provides a corporate approach across the organisation to deliver general and specific equality duties, and will look to integrate with the overarching well-being plan for the area, and the Council's Corporate Plan.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

This report has no direct implications towards decarbonisation or reducing carbon emissions.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)***

The report considers Equalities throughout and seeks to strengthen and embed Equalities across the Council. An Integrated Impact Assessment will be undertaken to support the policy development process, as expected by guidance and legislation.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 As part of our statutory monitoring responsibilities, we have a duty to publish a Strategic Equality Annual Report on the Council web site where it is made available to the public and other organisations (e.g., EHRC). Furthermore, the Annual Report is considered each year (whether as a specific report or information item) as part of the Council's Cabinet and Scrutiny forward work programmes.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- [Blaenau Gwent Strategic Equality Plan](#)