

Committee: **Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2020**

Report Subject: **Strategic Equality Plan 2020 to 2024**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Nigel Daniels, Leader / Executive Member Corporate Services**

Report Submitted by: **Bernadette Elias (Head of Governance and Partnerships); Andrew Parker (Service Manager: Policy and Partnerships) ; Emma Scherptong (Professional Lead for Engagement, Equality & Welsh Language)**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	18.02.20	20.02.20			03.03.20	11.03.20	26.03.20	

**1. Purpose of the Report**

1.1 To present the Council's proposed Strategic Equality Plan for 2020-24.

**2. Scope and Background**

2.1 The Equality Act 2010 (the 'Act' from here on in) came into operation on the 6th April 2011. The Council, as a public body in Wales, has a requirement under the Act to meet a set of general and specific duties.

2.2 The general duties are that in exercising its functions the Council must have due regard to:

- i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other inappropriate conduct;
- ii) advance equality of opportunity; and
- iii) foster good relations.

2.3 There are nine 'protected characteristics' covered by the Act which are: Disability; Gender Reassignment; Pregnancy and Maternity; Race; Religion and Belief; Age; Sex; Sexual Orientation; and Marriage and Civil Partnership.

2.4 In Wales there are also specific duties which were set by the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011. These include:

- i) Equality objectives set within an equality plan
- ii) Engaging the community
- iii) Assessing impact
- iv) Providing accessible information
- v) Collecting employment and pay information
- vi) Public procurement

- 2.5 Additionally, the Welsh Government is looking to commence a new Public Sector Equality Duty named the 'socio-economic duty' from April 2020. This will place a statutory duty on relevant public bodies to give consideration to the need to reduce the inequality that result from socio-economic disadvantage when making strategic decisions.
- 2.6 To ensure the Council was prepared to meet these duties, a project plan was put in place as part of the Policy and Partnership Team's Business Plan for 2019/20. This contained all the key elements necessary to develop an effective equality plan such as engagement, drafting strategic objectives, formal consultation, adoption, and monitoring and review.
- 2.7 Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee set up a 'Member's Working Group' made up of five committee members (including the Chair and Council's Equality Champion) as part of their Forward Work Programme for 2019/20. This enabled effective elected member involvement in the development of the equality objectives and plan.
- 2.8 Research and engagement has been instrumental in developing this plan to ensure it is based on a good understanding of the equality issues in Blaenau Gwent. Key phases have included a public engagement programme called 'Let's Talk about Fairness and Equalities' (Aug to Sept 2019) and a formal consultation process from Dec 2019 to Jan 2020.
- 2.8 Following formal consultation, the Strategic Equality Plan 2020 to 2024 has been developed. The plan contains Our Equality Objectives which are:
- We will be an organisation who ensures fairness and equality is in everything that we do;
  - We will be an equal opportunity employer with a workforce that values equality and diversity;
  - We will support children and young people, particularly those with protected characteristics, to achieve their learning ambitions;
  - We will promote and support safe, friendly and cohesive communities;
  - We will ensure there is meaningful involvement with people who have protected characteristics and key stakeholders that represent their interests;
  - We will strive to tackle inequality caused by poverty for people who have protected characteristics;

The plan and supporting documents can be found at Appendix 1.

### 3. **Options for Recommendation**

CLT considered the proposed plan and recommended for approval on 18 February 2020.

**Option 1** - That Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee considers the proposed Strategic Equality Plan and supports prior to approval by Executive and Council.

**Option 2** - That Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee considers the proposed Strategic Equality Plan and make specific recommendations to prior to approval by Executive and Council.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

The report relates to the Council meeting the specific duties identified under the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 in relation to setting equality objectives within a plan.

This duty aligns with both the Corporate Plan and Well-being Plan, and also the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which set a National well-being objective to create “a more equal Wales”.

The proposed equality objective relating to strive to tackle inequality caused by poverty for people who have protected characteristics will also put the Council in a strong position to be able to meet the new Public Sector Equality Duty named the ‘socio-economic duty’ from April 2020.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

There are no direct financial implications as a consequence of this report. The publication and translation of the report, on behalf of the Council, is met within existing budget of the Governance and Partnerships.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

Failure to develop and publish a new Strategic Equality Plan and Equality Objectives by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 would result in the Council failing to comply with its statutory requirements and specific duties of the Equality Act 2010.

This risk has been mitigated by effective project planning to develop equality objectives and the supporting plan, and by ensuring timely professional and political approval.

5.3 ***Legal***

The Council has a legal requirement to develop and publish a Strategic Equality Plan & Equality Objectives by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

There is a duty across the organisation to comply with the Act and proactively support the implementation of the Strategic Equality Plan. The Policy and Partnerships Team will oversee this responsibility via the Professional Lead for Engagement, Equality & Welsh Language.

## 6. **Supporting Evidence**

### 6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

Underpinning the development of the Strategic Equality Plan and Equality Objectives is intelligence and research including:

- Understanding each of the protected characteristic and gathering local statistical information - where available;
- Information, data and statistics considered at a local, regional and national level;
- National Research undertaken by the Equality and Human Rights Commission: *Is Wales Fairer?* (2015) and *Is Wales Fairer?* (2018);
- Feedback received from interested parties through our formal consultation and engagement work.

The plan (Appendix 1) summarises this information via the supporting documents, which includes data and statistics aligned to the nine protected characteristics including an overview of the Blaenau Gwent area (see page 31) and a profile of the Council (see page 24)

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

A more equal Wales: A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic background and circumstances).

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

An initial phase of engagement work called 'Talk to us about Fairness and Equalities' was carried out during July to the end of September 2019 to give people the opportunity to share their views. The phase saw 120 people participate.

A second phase of engagement called 'Tell us what you think about equalities' was carried out as part of the formal consultation period delivered during December 2019 and January 2020. It gave interested parties the opportunity to comment on the draft Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives. The phase provided 96 survey responses.

During both engagement phases the Children's Grand Council, Youth Forum, 50+ Forum, and Blaenau Gwent People First Group were engaged and shoppers were surveyed across each of our town centres.

There was effective elected member involvement via the Corporate Overview Working Group, which met in September and November 2019 as part of the project plan. Additionally, a special Members Session, led by the Chair of Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee, was held in January 2020 to give all elected members the opportunity to consult on the draft equality objectives.

Corporate Leadership Team have signed off both the draft equality objectives for consultation and this proposed plan. Furthermore, the draft plan and proposed equality objectives were discussed at the Wider Corporate Leadership Team in January 2020.

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

The objectives will be in operation until 2024 and will be monitored annually to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and considers future trends and needs.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The plan works to ensure that no person is discriminated against now or in the future.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The plan has been developed with the involvement of key stakeholders and partners and this activity will continue, as part of the delivery of the plan.

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

The plan is to be linked to the implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act to ensure alignments and avoid duplication. The plan will be integrated into the Business Planning process of the Council to ensure all service areas are effectively taking into consideration the requirements of the Act and our identified equality objectives.

6.8 ***EqIA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)***

A part of the development of the proposed plan an on-going Equality Impact Assessment process has been carried out which has taken into consideration key issues. The EQIA is summarised in Appendix 1 (see page 58). It is considered that the approval of this plan will have positive impacts to those covered by the Protected Characteristics.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The Council is obliged to carry out an annual reporting process to outlined how progress has been made against the plan. The report is published on the Council's website and sent to the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Additionally, the annual report is taken through democratic processes via the Corporate Overview Scrutiny and Executive Committees.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- *Appendix 1 – Blaenau Gwent Strategic Equality Plan 2020 to 2024*