

# **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **Council**

**4 September 2024**

### **Report of Head of People and Organisational Development – S Rees**

#### **Matter for Decision**

**Wards Affected:** All Wards

**Report Title:** Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028

#### **Purpose of Report**

1. To present a revised Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) for 2024-2028. The draft, revised SEP was presented to Cabinet on 24th July where it was approved and referred to Council for formal adoption.

#### **Executive Summary**

2. Under the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 we, along with other public bodies, have a duty to develop Equality Objectives and produce a Strategic Equality Plan containing equality objectives and other information as required in the Regulations.
3. The equality objectives, developed in 2020, have been reviewed in light of recent local, regional and national research publications, feedback from internal engagement activities, and engagement with interested local groups, as well as relevant strategies and plans that are already in place or being developed.
4. The equality objectives themselves remain as relevant for our communities today as they did in 2020, although the actions to meet them have required considerable amendment.
5. It was initially anticipated to have published the revised Strategic Equality Plan, including the equality objectives and associated actions, in April 2024,

followed by a revised date of July 2024 but both have been delayed due to resourcing issues and changes in our democratic arrangements/cycle of meetings then closely followed by pre-election period.

6. The Equality and Human Rights Commission have been kept informed of the position while our Strategic Equality Plan webpages carry an explanation as to the delay in the date of publication.

## **Background**

7. Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations amongst and between people of different protected groups; the Public Sector Equality Duty.
8. In Wales specific duties have been introduced under the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 to help public bodies carry out the public sector equality duty. Under these regulations, we along with other public bodies have a duty to develop equality objectives and produce a Strategic Equality Plan containing the equality objectives and other information.
9. We have produced three Strategic Equality Plans since the introduction of the duty; in April 2012, November 2015 and September 2020. The latter delayed due to the pandemic.

## **The Revised Strategic Equality Plan**

10. A significant period of time has passed since our last Plan yet the challenges, inequalities and injustices apparent then are no less so now. Our communities continue to face increasing pressures due to the consequences of global conflicts; inequities caused by the impact of the pandemic, inflation and energy prices; more people are seeking help from social services; more people presenting as homeless and more children needing extra help in school and in travelling to school.
11. It was against this backdrop that we reviewed our objectives and found they remained relevant to our communities in Neath Port Talbot. Changes that

were required were in relation to actions to meet these objectives; changes primarily due to the completion of actions; outdated actions/actions of their time; a shift in focus to more relevant actions.

12. Significant work has been undertaken to identify relevant actions with measurable outcomes to meet our equality objectives; some existing actions have been amended while new actions have been identified to reflect current circumstances.

### **Feedback from Members**

13. It is to be noted that the revised Strategic Equality Plan presented to Council, is an updated version to that which was part of the Cabinet pack for 24th July 2024.
14. Following observations from the Community Finance and Strategic Leadership Scrutiny Committee on 18th July, Cabinet on 24th July agreed to commend the revised Strategic Equality Plan to Council for adoption, with an amended action plan. The amendments indicate which service and Cabinet Member owns each of the actions and make it clear where actions are linked to or taken from another strategy or plan.
15. This does not materially change the Strategic Equality Plan that was considered by Cabinet but will make it easier to track progress going forward.

### **Financial Appraisal**

16. It is proposed that the equality objectives in the new Strategic Equality Plan will be met through actions already identified in existing strategies/plans or those due to be developed. The delivery of this work will be against an ongoing challenging financial backdrop.

### **Integrated Impact Assessment**

17. The Integrated impact assessment undertaken in the development of the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 was revisited and updated as appropriate. The following text remains relevant and the summary, below, updated to reflect the current position.

18. A first stage Impact assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The first stage impact assessment has indicated that a more in-depth assessment was required.

An overview of the Integrated Impact Assessment has been included below in summary form only and it is essential that Members read the Integrated Impact Assessment, which is attached to the report at Appendix 2, for the purposes of the meeting.

‘As a result of widespread changes in circumstances since March 2020 due to the global pandemic, the killing of George Floyd and the intensification of the Black Lives Matter movement it has been apparent that a refocus of our work was necessary. This being the case the equality objectives and actions were reviewed taking into account evidence of the impact the pandemic has had/continues to have on Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and others who share protected characteristics. Although the equality objectives were deemed relevant the proposed actions did not adequately address the current situation.

Consequently the latter stages of the impact assessment has concentrated on the equality objectives including the subsequent conclusion.

The whole ethos of the Strategic Equality Plan and the equality objectives is to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation as well to advance equality of opportunity between different groups. The equality objectives were developed with this in mind and as such will help address inequalities experienced by members of our various communities.

The equality objectives and associated actions will in themselves and by complementing other areas of work help reduce the socio-economic disadvantage faced by many in our communities.

As a result of our continued work on improving the availability and quality of our services through Welsh there is potentially a positive impact in relation to opportunities to use the Welsh language.

There will be no adverse effect on biodiversity or Eco-system resilience.

There will be a positive impact in relation to the Wellbeing of Future Generations as the equality objectives have been developed in line with the five ways of working.'

### **Valleys Communities Impact:**

19. The equality objectives and associated actions will contribute to projects supporting the valley communities.

### **Workforce Impact**

20. Employees across the council have a duty to comply with the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 and in doing so will contribute to the Strategic Equality Objectives in the Plan.

### **Legal Impact**

21. The equality objectives along with the Strategic Equality Plan have been reviewed in line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011.

### **Risk Management**

22. We have a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 to review equality objectives and publish these, alongside other information, in a Strategic Equality Plan. Failure to do so could lead to a compliance notice from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, an independent statutory agency which was established under the Equality Act 2006.

### **Crime and Disorder Impact**

23. The Council has a legal duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to carry out all its various functions with “due regard to the need to prevent Crime and Disorder in its area”.
24. The action plan contains specific actions to prevent and address hate crime and domestic abuse thereby assisting us in discharging the crime and disorder duty.

### **Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Impacts**

25. The Council has a legal duty under Section 2(1) of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 when exercising relevant functions to ‘have regard (along with all other relevant matters) to the need to remove or minimise any factors which:
  - (a) increase the risk of violence against women and girls, or
  - (b) exacerbate the impact of such violence on victims.’
26. The action plan contains specific actions to prevent and address domestic abuse thereby assisting us in discharging this duty.

### **Consultation**

27. Due to the equality objectives remaining consistent with the 2020-2024 Plan, this item has not been subject to public consultation. However, representative groups who have an interest in how we as an authority carry out our functions were engaged in the review.

### **Recommendations**

28. That Council adopt the Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028 as attached at Appendix 1.
29. The Head of People and Organisational Development be given delegated authority to make such changes as may be needed to the Strategic Equality Plan prior to publication, provided that such changes do not materially alter the content of the document considered by Council.

### **Reason for Proposed Decision**

30. To meet the statutory requirements set out in the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011.

### **Implementation of Decision**

31. The decision is proposed for immediate Implementation.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028

Appendix 2 – Integrated Impact Assessment - updated

### **List of Background Papers**

Equality Act 2010

Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011

'Is Wales Fairer? – Equality and Human Rights Commission

Healthy Relationships for Stronger Communities Strategy

Chwarae Teg Fair Play Employer Scheme - Action Plan

Time to Change Wales Campaign Employer Pledge

Access Denied: Older people's experiences of digital exclusion in Wales

Digital Data and Technology (DDaT) Strategy

Review Workshop - feedback

NPT Ethnic Minority Network - feedback

### **Officer Contact**

Sheenagh Rees, Head of People and Organisational Development

E-mail: [s.rees5@npt.gov.uk](mailto:s.rees5@npt.gov.uk)

Anita James, Corporate Policy, Performance and Engagement Manager

E-mail: [a.james6@npt.gov.uk](mailto:a.james6@npt.gov.uk)