

Strategic Equality Plan

Draft Equality Objectives and Proposed Actions

Consultation Report

1. Introduction

The Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 place a duty on the Council to prepare and publish equality objectives to meet the general duty (including steps on how we will meet these objectives) and produce a Strategic Equality Plan (to include specific information).

Draft equality objectives and proposed actions were developed collaboratively with the equality and Community Cohesion Group whose members include representatives of local equality groups, elected members and senior officers.

In addition a Community of Practice on Involvement and Engagement comprising of officers who regularly engage with various groups within Neath Port Talbot, for example, carers, partnerships, children and young people, were involved in a 'light touch' workshop to gather initial thoughts prior to their, and their groups, more detailed involvement during the public consultation exercise.

A five week public consultation on the Council's draft equality objectives and potential actions was undertaken from 16 January to 20 February 2020.

Please note where quotes from respondents have been used these are original and unedited.

2. Changes due to COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter

The final draft of the Strategic Equality Plan, including the equality objectives and associated actions was to be presented to Cabinet at the end of April 2020.

However, as a result of the outbreak of COVID -19 this was not possible due to executive reporting arrangements being disrupted and many of our workforce having been redeployed to other service areas to support the Council's response.

The brutal killing of George Floyd on 25th May 2020 caused an international outcry and condemnation. This, along with other events in our recent history as well as the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 experienced by members of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

communities have clearly shown that there remains deep seated attitudes and behaviours towards people from these communities.

In light of this it was considered appropriate to further review the Strategic Equality Plan to ensure addressed concerns and experiences that perhaps were not fully aware realised.

In the current circumstances the draft equality objectives continue to be appropriate but further consideration of more relevant actions is now required.

Therefore to avoid confusion this consultation report will focus on comments received in relation to the draft equality objectives with a brief overview of the comments received in relation to the original proposed actions.

3. What we did

To help ensure that the consultation was as widely available as possible, there were a number of mechanisms by which people could submit their views. These included:

- a self-completion questionnaire published on the Council's web site
- consultation packs, including a hard copy of the questionnaire, in libraries and civic centres
- promotion via a press release
- promotion via the Council's corporate social media accounts messages
- Promotion via the Equality and Community Cohesion Group
- Promotion via Community of Practice on Innovation and Engagement

4. Consultation analysis

A total of 46 responses were received all via the online survey, with:

- 44 in English and 2 in Welsh
- The majority of responses (where indicated) came from Port and the surrounding area.
- A high majority of respondents agreed/strongly agreed with each of the equality objectives.

All views and comments expressed during the consultation were considered prior to the equality objectives being finalised.

4.1 Responses received in relation to the equality objectives

Education – to ensure children and young people are the best they can be

The majority of respondents (44, 95.65%) agreed/strongly agreed with this objective; 1 respondent neither agreed nor disagreed and 1 strongly disagreed.

One of the areas focused on by respondents who supported the objective was the opportunity this would provide for the future of our children and young people both as individuals and members of society; ‘...live a happy and productive life’, ‘to achieve their potential’ and it will ‘contribute to a better future for the area’.

Respondents considered that equality of opportunity in education, that children and young people are influenced by behaviours shown to them as well as the recognition that academic achievements are not for everyone. ‘Equal opportunity and sufficient funding to cater for all abilities and talents; ‘children find it easy to conform to beliefs in them. If they are not believed in positively, it is easy to behave negatively’, ‘this focuses on the expectation that they are the best they CAN be. Rather than just the best - well worded’ respectively.

One respondent simply commented – ‘why wouldn’t you?’

The one respondent who neither agreed nor disagreed considered ‘pressure can be counter productive’.

Health and Wellbeing – to promote wellbeing and good mental health and tackle mental health stigma and discrimination

The majority of respondents (42, 91.30%) agreed/strongly agreed with this objective; 3 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and 1 strongly disagreed.

A number of respondents commented that emotional wellbeing /mental health affects everyone and all aspects of life – relationships, work and physical health. It affects the individual and the ‘whole family’.

Providing support and tackling the stigma associated with mental health was also highlighted; for individuals, the community and in the work place.

This stigma was clearly expressed by one respondent ‘Many people who are affected by mental health issues will not talk about it for fear of stigma, but talking about it is one of the things that might help them deal with it’.

The Councils continuing commitment to the wellbeing of its workforce was reflected by the comment received from one respondent ‘the council dose (sic) always promote well being ... they were very supportive towards myself’.

Of the two respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed one commented on the length of the objective and other appeared to misinterpret the objective believing it would lead to a diagnosis of mental health issues for an individual.

Personal Safety – to ensure people and communities are safe, respected and free from violence and abuse

The majority of respondents (43, 93.47%) agreed/strongly agreed with this objective; 2 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and 1 strongly disagreed.

Respondents who agreed/strongly agreed with the objectives commented on various aspects; from the fundamental principle ‘everyone deserves to feel safe’ to acknowledging the impact of this on the individual, community and economy of the area, ‘helping to build strong communities’; from the need of an understanding of rights, responsibilities and unacceptable behaviours to the knowing who to turn to in times of need and the ‘confidence that matters would be dealt with’

Of the two respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed one wished us luck and the other queried the meaning of ‘respected’.

Employment – to ensure our workforce is more reflective of our community, our policies are fair and equitable and gender pay gaps are reduced

The majority of respondents (38, 82.60%) agreed/strongly agreed with this objective; 4 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and 3 strongly disagreed.

Comments received supported the principle of fair and equitable policies and that the workforce is reflective of our community: ‘everyone should receive the same salary for the same work’; ‘ensure opportunities exist for everyone regardless of age, gender, religion, etc.’; ‘we need to have a more diverse workforce so that we gain a fuller understanding of the issues that affect our community and can work with those areas much better’.

One respondent even commented that a ‘happy workforce will offer higher levels of productivity and loyalty’.

Another commented that ‘there are not just gender issues, there are also issues associated with disabilities.’

Of those who neither agreed nor disagreed two commented that suitability rather than any other reason is essential for a post. While one responded felt this objective was not as important as the others.

The comments from those who disagreed with the objective also focused appointment to posts based on suitability and skill rather than other considerations, such as gender etc., and ‘the composition of the local community, which would discriminate against people from outside Wales’.

Participation – to ensure services are accessible for all and people and communities are able to better influence decisions that affect them

The majority of respondents (41, 89.13%) agreed/strongly agreed with this objective; 4 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and 1 strongly disagreed.

Respondents supported this objective from participation in decision making, ‘people ...feel more ownership...’ ‘believe their actions and decisions make a difference’ to supporting people to become more involved in communities, their own lives, etc, ‘support to make the best

choices for them and their communities. Everyone should have the same opportunities to help and improve themselves and their lives' 'providing people with a voice is essential if we are to meet their (sic) needs'

One respondent commented 'there should be equality of opportunity for everyone whatever your circumstances' and this was echoed by a number of others particularly in relation to digital exclusion 'digital services are increasing... (but) ...ensuring people can access services and information is essential'.

The support already provided to those unable to access services from the usual sources was also highlighted as was the view that greater accessibility to Welsh medium education and schools transport and GP and mental health services was required.

While agreeing with the objective some respondents did not consider that 'we have good enough education opportunity for young people with additional or behavioral needs' and that a greater focus on disabilities is required.

Comments by those who neither agreed nor disagreed with the objective focused on general participatory aspects rather than those equalities related

Living standards – to work to reduce poverty and support independent living

The majority of respondents (41, 89.13%) agreed/strongly agreed with this objective; 4 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and 1 strongly disagreed.

Respondents commented that 'no child in a modern society should be born or grow up in poverty' and that sufficient funding from government was necessary to tackle it.

Independence was important for a number of respondents who commented that helping 'people help themselves...(would)...promote self esteem and self confidence.' One respondent commented that 'many young people...have stated they don't have the necessary skills to live independently'.

Some general observations were also provided: 'every one deserves a good happy life; 'this is help raise the quality of life for everyone and 'feel that a large number of people in Neath Port Talbot do not work because they don't want to, rather than being unable'.

A respondent who neither agreed nor disagreed with the objective considered that living standards would 'improve if the other areas are improved and is not the main issue', while another observed that 'supporting independent living...must be economically viable'.

4.2 Responses received in relation to the proposed actions

The majority of respondents (an average of 75%) considered that the proposed actions would meet our draft objectives. Actions to meet the Participation equality objective attracted most support (80%) while Living Standards attracted the least (72%).

Comments predominantly reinforced the actions but where other views were expressed these were either unrelated to the actions, of a more general nature or the actions appeared to have been misconstrued

During the consultation period further potential actions were suggested by the Regional Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer and from the Education Leisure and Lifelong Learning Directorate for inclusion under specific equality objectives.

Given the current circumstances it is not considered appropriate to continue with this process. However, we do recognise and appreciate the contribution of respondents and will take all comments into account when revisiting the development of actions later this year.

4.3 Impacts identified by respondents in relation to the equality objectives

The majority of respondents indicated that neither they nor their family would be impacted by the equality objectives generally.

Where respondents indicated to the contrary the majority considered impacts would be due to age: explanations focused on children and young people in relation to education; equal pay and age discrimination were also indicated.

Impacts in relation to disability, race and sex were also identified (although in lower numbers) with the following reasons being provided:

- I'm 18 and suffer from anxiety, I have not been able to get support, for day to day life and getting work
- As a non-Welsh person living and working in Wales, I already feel discriminated against by Welsh Government policy and practice
- Improvement in gender pay gap discrepancies

4.4 Additional comments provided

Of the few additional comments received the majority required no further action. However, one respondent considered the terminology Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, rather than Black Minority Ethnic, to be more appropriate and consequently this has been amended.

5. Changes made following consultation

Given the level of support for the equality objectives from respondents it was not considered necessary to make amendments.

Had circumstances remained unchanged some amendments to the proposed actions would have taken place. However, as circumstances have now overtaken the process the proposed actions are no longer considered relevant and will not be included in the Strategic Equality at this time.

6. Equalities Information

The council's standard set of equalities monitoring questions were also included with the survey. A breakdown of the equalities information relating to the consultation respondents can be found in the table below.

Please note these questions are voluntary and as such not every respondent completed this section.

Age Range	Number
16-24	2
25-29	3
30-39	8
40-49	12
50-59	9
60-74	6
Prefer not to say	4
No response	2

Welsh Language	Number
Little or no knowledge	25
Learner	9
Fluent speaker and writer	2
Fairly fluent speaker	5
Fairly fluent speaker and writer	2
No response	3

Do you consider yourself to have a Disability?	Number
Yes	8
No	32
Prefer not to say	3
No response	3

Gender	Number
Male	8
Female	32
Prefer not to say	4
No response	2

Religion / Belief	Number
Christian	17
No religion	19
Any other religion	1
Prefer not to say	6
No response	3

Sexual Orientation	Number
Heterosexual	38
Lesbian	1
Bisexual	1
Prefer not to say	3
No response	3

Nationality	Number
Welsh	36
English	2
British	5
Prefer not to say	1
No response	2

Ethnic Origin	Number
White (British)	35
White (Other) - White Welsh	4
Mixed (White and Black Caribbean)	1
Mixed (White and Black African)	1
Mixed (White and Asian)	1
Prefer not to say	2
No response	2