

FULL COUNCIL REPORT

Date Written	6 th March 2024
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Service Area	Transformation and Equalities
Exempt/Non-Exempt	Non-Exempt
Committee Date	20 th March 2024

STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN 2024-2028

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty includes a requirement for public authorities to develop and publish a Strategic Equality Plan every four years.
- 1.2 The Council's Strategic Equality Plan and Equality Objectives for 2016-2020 were approved by Council on 23rd March 2016 and for 2020-2024 were approved by Council on the 25th March 2020.
- 1.3 A Strategic Equality Plan for 2024-2028 has been developed for the Council in partnership with Members, the public, Council officers and partners. Feedback from the consultation has been taken into consideration when developing the objectives.
- 1.4 The Strategic Equality Plan includes the Equalities Vision for Merthyr Tydfil supported by six equality objectives for 2024-2028. These objectives will be monitored and delivered through a detailed action plan as part of the Strategic Equality Plan. The Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028 can be found in Appendix 1.
- 1.5 The Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028 was scrutinised at the Corporate Support and Resources Scrutiny in February 2024 and at a follow up workshop. These outcomes have contributed to the development of this Plan that has now progressed to Council for approval.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION that

- 2.1 The Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028 be approved.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council has had in place a four-year Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) which was approved in March 2020. This plan has undergone revision in order to reflect changes in best practice and legislation. The SEP sets out how the Council aims to meet the commitment to equality and how to meet the legal obligations as found within the following legislation and strategic documentation:
- Is Wales Fairer? 2023 – Equality and Human Rights Commission
 - Equality Act 2010
 - Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011
 - Public Sector Equality Duty
 - Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
 - Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011
 - Socio-economic Duty
 - Anti-racist Wales Action Plan
 - LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales
- 3.2 The Equality Act 2010 brings together and replaces the previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act. It simplifies and strengthens the law, removes inconsistencies and makes it easier for people to understand and comply with it.
- 3.3 The Act includes a new Public Sector Equality Duty (the ‘general duty’), replacing the separate duties on race, disability and gender equality.
- 3.4 The general duty covers the following protected characteristics:
- Age
 - Disability
 - Gender Reassignment
 - Marriage and Civil Partnership
 - Pregnancy and Maternity
 - Race – including ethnic or national origin, colour or nationality
 - Religion or belief – including lack of belief
 - Sex (Gender)
 - Sexual orientation
- 3.5 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. This will achieve better outcomes for all.
- 3.6 When making decisions and delivering services public authorities must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

3.7 In advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't the Council must also ensure that we:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and are connected to that characteristic.
- Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation is disproportionately low.
- Meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.

3.8 There are specific statutory duties placed upon the Council which set out what actions the Council must take to comply. The broad purpose of the specific duties in Wales is to help listed bodies in their performance of the general duty and to aid transparency.

3.9 A listed body in Wales must:

- Publish objectives to meet the general duty.
- Publish a statement setting out the steps it has taken or intends to take to meet the objectives and how long it expects to take to meet each objective.
- Make appropriate arrangements to monitor progress towards meeting its objectives and to monitor the effectiveness of its approach.
- Give appropriate consideration to relevant equality information it holds when considering what its equality objectives should be.

3.10 As part of this requirement listed bodies must also:

- Have due regard to the need to have objectives to address the causes of any pay differences that seem reasonably likely to be related to any of the protected characteristics.
- Publish an equality objective to address any gender pay gap identified or else publish reasons why it has not done so.

3.11 Further information regarding the associated legislation can be found in the SEP document (appendix 1).

3.12 Progress on delivering our equality objectives is reported as part of the Council's Annual Equality Report that is considered and approved by Cabinet.

4.0 STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN 2024-2028

- 4.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to review its Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives at least every four years.
- 4.2 Following consultation on the objectives with staff and the public, meetings and workshops were held with the Corporate Management Team and Scrutiny to gather views on the objectives. Feedback is also included in the SEP document (appendix 1).
- 4.3 The themes and objectives are shown below:

Objectives 2024-2028	
Inclusive Engagement and Participation	Engage with our communities and workforce to support effective participation and encourage people to be involved.
Accessible Services	Understand and remove the barriers people face when accessing our services.
Inclusive and Diverse Workforce	Support an inclusive and diverse workforce, which reflects the communities in Merthyr Tydfil.
Equity of pay	Ensure equity of pay across Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.
Safe, Inclusive and Cohesive Communities	Promote and facilitate safe, inclusive and cohesive communities.
Education, Skills and Employment	Improve education, skills and employment opportunities.

- 4.4 The theme 'Education, Skills and Employment' was included following the consultation as training and improving skills was raised in the consultation responses. We have listened to our workforce and the community and included this additional objective. We have also ensured that we integrate and include actions relating to the Welsh Language.
- 4.5 The Council carried out a detailed consultation exercise in setting its SEP objectives. Appendix 2 shows the consultation pack and appendix 3 provides the detailed analysis.
- 4.6 Feedback from the consultation was supportive of the draft objectives. Areas for improvement and barriers were identified. We have taken into account the comments that were raised in the consultation.
- 4.7 We have been analysing the feedback from the consultation and engagement, and the 2021 Census. In total, 93% of respondents agreed with the five objectives within the plan. This is shown below.

Objective	Consultation done by:	Agree %
Inclusive Engagement and Participation	Online/Paper	193 (87%)
	Counters	280 (97%)
Community Cohesion	Online/Paper	201 (90%)
	Counters	281 (98%)
Inclusive and Diverse Workforce	Online/Paper	181 (81%)
	Counters	277 (96%)
Gender/Equal Pay	Online/Paper	197 (88%)
	Counters	282 (98%)
Accessible Services	Online/Paper	203 (91%)
	Counters	282 (98%)
TOTAL		93%

4.8 We will ensure that the objectives link with our Corporate Well-Being Plan 2023-2028 and other internal strategies and plans, and any Welsh Government plans (e.g. Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales).

4.9 In addition to public consultation, we also engaged with our Corporate Management Team (CMT) and the Corporate Services and Resources Scrutiny (both in a formal meeting and workshop). Our findings and how we used the feedback can be seen in the table below.

CMT Feedback	How have we used this?
Question has data been used to inform the SEP?	Yes, analysis has been done and used to inform the objectives (e.g. a new objective being include).
High level actions are to be considered at this point and a more detailed action plan worked on with the working group.	This has been reflected in the workshop with Scrutiny and in the details set out below in this SEP.
Available resources to be considered.	The SEP will be reviewed and potentially reprofiled following the Council setting its budget. It is important to note that the action plan will consider the short, medium and long term actions.
Ensure integration and not duplication.	The SEP working group will use the SEP to ensure all objectives are considered in other plans/strategies and not worked on in isolation. The SEP will report to the Council's Corporate Wellbeing Borad for this and to ensue sound governance exists to deliver this SEP.
Scrutiny Feedback	How have we used this?
How can this SEP and other plans/strategies be used to ensure more engagement and engagement from seldom heard voices?	This has reflected in the objectives of this SEP. Scrutiny are also considering writing a report to Cabinet relating to this matter and he SEP.
How is the SEP going to monitored? And it is likely to be part of future Scrutiny forward plans.	The SEP will be monitored in a similar way to the Corporate Wellbeing Plan, i.e. reporting to the Corporate Wellbeing Board (Officer and Member lead, with external regulators monitoring progress). This SEP can be considered by Scrutiny as part of future forward plans.
How does this fit with wider customer services and other plans/strategies?	The SEP working group will use the SEP to ensure all objectives are considered in other plans/strategies and not worked on in isolation. The five ways of working (especially collaboration and integration) will

	be key to this point.
How will timescales and resources be factored into the SEP?	The SEP will be reviewed and potentially reprofiled following the Council setting its budget. It is important to note that the action plan will consider the short, medium and long term actions. Available resources will dictate how long it will take to deliver the SEP, but we believe these are the correct objectives, based on legislation requirements, feedback from the public and integration with the Council's wellbeing objectives.
Can the following themes be used when developing the SEP action plan? – Engagement and consultation; MTCBC Working Practices; Policy, Legislation and strategy; Governance; Digital and Data.	Yes, these themes can be used by the working group when adding the detailed action plan that sits below this SEP.

4.10 The plan has been developed to reflect our commitment to equality in the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil and to ensure we are meeting our statutory obligations. It is a fit for purpose document and has been developed in line with legislative requirements and guidance produced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

5.0 DELIVERING, PUBLISHING AND MONITORING

5.1 The Council's Equality Objectives for 2024-2028 will be monitored and delivered through the Action Plan, as part of the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024. It will be delivered through a working group and monitored by the Council's Corporate Wellbeing Board.

5.2 The Council will publish an Annual Equality Report that will provide information on:

- Delivery of the Strategic Equality Plan
- Progress on the objectives and actions
- Employment monitoring information

5.3 The plan will be reviewed annually to ensure that actions are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-Bound), and fit for purpose and that new legislation/guidance is factored into the plan. This will enable us to continuously improve the plan.

5.4 We will continue to use the sustainable development principle (five was of working) and to work in an efficient, effective, and economic way when delivering the SEP.

6.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELL-BEING OBJECTIVES

6.1 This report considers our SEP and, as such, considers our performance against our SEP objectives. These have direct implications on the delivery of our Well-being Objectives and in achieving our outcomes.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no specific financial implications identified in this report. Any financial implications arising from the delivery of the Strategic Equality Plan for 2024-2028 will be reported to Cabinet/Council as appropriate, including potential options for funding.

8.0 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts	Neutral
1. Merthyr Tydfil Well-being Objectives	4 of 4	0 of 4	0 of 4
2. Sustainable Development Principles	5 of 5	0 of 5	0 of 5
3. Protected Characteristics (including Welsh Language)	10 of 10	0 of 10	0 of 10
4. Socio-economic Disadvantage	6 of 6	0 of 6	0 of 6
5. Decarbonisation	0 of 6	0 of 6	6 of 6
6. Biodiversity and the resilience of Ecosystems	Maintained	Enhanced	Reduced
	1 of 1	0 of 1	0 of 1
7. Consultation and Engagement	Undertaken	Due to be Undertaken	Not Required
	1 of 1	0 of 1	0 of 1
8. Data and Evidence	Yes		No
	1 of 1		0 of 1
Summary			
The main positive impacts are:	<p>The Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028 will help us to ensure we focus on positive outcomes for people in Merthyr Tydfil.</p> <p>The main positive impacts are that the plan reflects our commitment to equality in the County Borough and also in meeting the duties and obligations placed upon us. The plan also ensures that we are thinking long term and preventing problems from arising. Ensuring that involvement and collaboration is undertaken and that it links to other strategies which assist is our work to ensure that we have inclusive communities free from discrimination.</p> <p>The plan positively impacts on the Council's Wellbeing Objectives, the five ways of working and the protected characteristics (including</p>		

	Welsh language).
The main negative impacts are:	No negative impacts have been identified.

Appendix 1 – Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028

Appendix 2 – Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028 – Consultation Pack

Appendix 3 – Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028 – Consultation Analysis

**ELLIS COOPER
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**COUNCILLOR ANDREW BARRY
CABINET MEMBER FOR GOVERNANCE
& RESOURCES**

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No

Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team in respect of each proposal(s) and recommendation(s) set out in this report.