

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES

5 DECEMBER 2011

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE - PERFORMANCE

UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN

1. Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the work being done to develop the strategic equality plan and outline the key stages in the process.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

2.1 The Equality Act 2010 sets out general and specific duties for local authorities in Wales. The specific duties include the preparation of a strategic equality plan and the publication of the Council's equality objectives.

3.0 Background

3.1 The Act introduced a new general duty for public bodies to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations with individuals within the equality groups with protected characteristics; these are:-

- Age (Act applies to over 18yrs)
- Gender reassignment
- Sex
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Disability
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Sexual Orientation
- Marriage and Civil Partnership (only in relation to eliminating discrimination)

3.2 In addition to the above, the Welsh Government introduced specific duties for public authorities in meeting the general duties under the Act. These are set out in the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 which came into effect on 6th April 2011. One of these is a duty to publish equality objectives and a strategic equality plan by 2nd April 2012; the equality objectives must set out how the council will address the most pressing issues for each of the equality groups.

4. Current situation / proposal

- 4.1 'The essential guide to the public sector equality duty: An overview for listed public authorities in Wales' was published in June. This provides an overview of all of the specific duties that apply to listed public authorities in Wales. The remaining seven parts were published in July and give further information on specific elements of the duties.
- 4.2 To ensure compliance with requirements, an outline plan which sets out the key stages has been prepared. This sets out responsibilities and timetable for completion of the following elements:
- Collate relevant information held by service areas across all protected characteristics (including workforce information)
 - Consult with groups and individuals on the priorities for each protected group
 - Develop equality objectives
 - Consult and confirm those equality objectives
 - Develop an action plan
 - Agree and publish the strategic equality plan
- 4.3 In June 2011 officers that participate in the Corporate Equality Management Group met with a specialist external advisor who was involved with the development of the guidance. This enabled the group to develop a better understanding of the duties and identify the actions to be taken to develop the Council's initial strategic equality plan and ensure compliance with requirements.
- 4.4 Work on collating information and planning consultation to inform the development of the objectives has been undertaken. Information has been gathered from Directorates to develop our understanding of service users and identify known issues for groups with the protected characteristics. It is clear that there is a need to improve the way in which we capture local data to form part of the evidence base. In areas where direct work is regularly undertaken with service users such as in social care and education, we collect more data in relation to individuals with protected characteristics than in services such as leisure, arts and culture, where very little such data is collected.
- 4.5 Some examples of the internal, local data collated to date:
- Age and disability of local residents involved in the Exercise Referral Scheme
 - Age, disability, ethnicity and religion of local residents whose needs have been addressed by Social Services

Details have also been received of projects which focus specifically on protected characteristics such as the increase in provision of

accessible public conveniences and access improvements within the rights of way network

- 4.6 An important consultation mechanism supporting the development of the equality objectives is the Valley Voices project. Members will recall that this project is being run by VALREC. It will be able to identify issues for discussion within the Bridgend Equality Forum and it is hoped that the council will be able to work with Valley Voices to consult with people sharing the protected characteristics.
- 4.7 Work on collating information and views of a cross section of individuals is progressing, the result of this work will support the development of the draft equality objectives and gaps in the data are also being identified. This will enable the Council to engage with other authorities, WLGA and other bodies and give consideration to how the problems associated with this issue can be addressed in the future.
- 4.8 It is proposed that the Equality Objectives forming the basis of the draft Strategic Equality Plan comprise are developed on the following themes:
 - 4.8.1 Transportation:

Issues associated with the provision of public transport have been a recurring theme throughout our engagement work. Consideration will be given to public transport routes, costs and access, community transport, provision of wheelchair accessible taxis, pedestrian crossings and disabled parking spaces.
 - 4.8.2 Fostering Good Relations:

Along with other local authority areas, instances of hate crime involving abuse of people because of disability, race and sexuality are a cause for concern. Our consultation and engagement events and our equality information analysis evidenced a number of key issues which cause a disadvantage for different groups which we have brought together under this one heading. Themes for consideration will be public awareness of diversity and equality, school bullying and hate/identity based crime. The Community Safety Partnership is developing a community cohesion strategy for this area.
 - 4.8.3 The council's role as an employer:

The council has been striving to become an employer of choice openly demonstrating its commitment to promoting an inclusive diverse work place. The action plan will establish ways in which employees sharing a protected characteristic may be supported.
 - 4.8.4 Equal Pay:

The council will extract relevant information from its payroll system in respect of all protected characteristics where this is available. Where gaps are identified, appropriate action will be taken to address this.

- 4.8.5 Consultation, engagement and communication:
Equality is diverse and we need to involve people and representative groups in planning and decision making. Engagement has highlighted where improvements could be made and specifications will be proposed under this objective.
- 4.8.6 Domestic Violence:
Domestic Violence continues to be a priority in the Bridgend County Borough area. The council will work with the Community Safety Partnership to address the incidence of reported domestic violence.
- 4.8.7 Adult Social Care / Mental Health:
The Welsh Health Survey 2010 highlights that Bridgend has a higher than average number of adults experiencing mental illness. Mental Health issues have also been highlighted in the Council's Supporting People Operational Plan, through VALREC Casework and via the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Strategy. This puts into context some of the health issues for the corporate plan and community plan. The council will work in partnership with health and the third sector to increase and improve mental health service provision.
- 4.8.8 Leisure:
Leisure is repeatedly highlighted by citizens as important to their well being and experience of living in the Bridgend County Borough area. The associated objective outlines a requirement for the quality of leisure provision in Bridgend to be maintained following the transfer of leisure facilities and pools to a new provider in April 2012.
- 4.8.9 Benefits:
There is a need to consider the potential impact on local citizens following the national review of the Benefits System. The council will promote take up of available benefits.
- 4.8.10 Data:
The council will develop an overarching objective for collecting, collating, monitoring and publishing data relating to its service users, citizens and council employees.

The draft objectives outlined above are suggested as a basis for consultation.

A draft Strategic Equality Plan detailing the approach to be taken together with links to supporting information is attached at appendix 1 and an action plan outlining the reasons for themes/priorities being chosen, protected characteristics affected and lead officers is attached as appendix 2.

The final Strategic Equality Plan will require Cabinet approval on 7th March 2012. Our completion date for the SEP, including a period of consultation, will be mid January 2012. Preparatory work on the SEP must therefore be concluded by the end of November 2011.

Following the approval and publication of the Strategic Equality Plan in April 2012, the equality objectives will be mainstreamed into Directorate Business Plans and progress will be monitored via the Quarterly Business Review process.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework& Procedure Rules.

5.1 As this is an information report, there are no proposed changes to the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 Whilst no equality impact assessment has been carried out, this report provides the Committee with information which will positively assist in the delivery of the Authority's equality duties.

7. Financial Implications.

7.1 The implementation of the revised equality duties will have financial implications for the Authority; at the current time, however, these cannot be quantified. The development of the Plan will be managed within existing resources. The new Strategic Equality Plan will set out the equality objectives and the financial implications of all actions will be considered within the medium term financial plan process.

8. Recommendation.

8.1 The Cabinet Committee – Equalities

- a) considers the progress being made
- b) agrees the outline equality objectives proposed as a basis for local consultation
- c) receives a further report at its next meeting on the draft equality objectives

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Background documents:
None