

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES

6 FEBRUARY 2012

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 authority's Strategic Equality Plan and equality objectives.

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. Background

- 3.1 The Act introduced a new general duty for public bodies to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The protected characteristics are:-

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

- 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 6 April 2011. One of these is a duty to publish equality objectives and a strategic equality plan by 2 April 2012. The equality objectives must set out how the council will

address the most pressing issues for each of the protected characteristic 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 2011. 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 2011 and give further information on specific elements of the duties.
- 4.2 To ensure compliance with requirements, an outline plan setting out the key stages was prepared. This set 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 The collation of internally held data, local, regional and national information, as well as consultation with a number of groups and individuals, helped officers to develop an understanding of the needs of service users, and to identify issues and priorities for those who share a protected characteristic. This in turn helped to identify a number of possible themes on which to base the authority's equality objectives.
- 4.4 Progress with this work has been reported at previous meetings of the Cabinet Committee. At the meeting in December 2011, a draft Strategic Equality Plan which proposed a number of themes on which to base the equality objectives, along with a draft supporting action plan, was considered.
- 4.5 The following equality objectives were subsequently drafted:

Transportation

We will help to provide an accessible, cost effective, all inclusive transport network within Bridgend County Borough.

Fostering Good Relations

We will positively promote a fairer society in Bridgend County Borough by increasing public awareness of the issues faced by people with protected characteristics and increasing our efforts to tackle school bullying, hate crime and domestic abuse.

The council's role as an employer

We will build on our efforts to be an inclusive, supportive employer promoting diversity and equality within our workforce, enabling all employees who have a protected characteristic to fulfil their potential.

Equal Pay

To ensure that employees are paid the same for doing the same jobs, regardless of their protected characteristics, an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) will be conducted on our final proposed Pay & Grading structure, and we will conduct EIAs at specific intervals to ensure that the council's pay structure remains robust in terms of equality issues.

Consultation, engagement and communication

We will improve the ways in which we communicate, consult and engage with those who share a protected characteristic.

Mental Health

Our Adult Social Care Service will build on its partnership work with the third sector to provide mental health support and services.

Leisure

We will promote fair and equal access to participation in sport and recreation services to all members of the community.

Benefits

We will introduce measures to mitigate for the effects of the National Benefits Review on Bridgend County Borough residents.

Data

We will develop a system to collect, collate and monitor equalities data about people who use our services in respect of all protected characteristics. We will use this data to help ensure we are providing our services fairly and making them accessible.

- 4.6 The draft equality objectives outlined above formed the basis for the council's consultation exercise which began on Monday 9 January.
- 4.7 In order to collect and collate the views of a cross section of individuals on the draft equality objectives, a survey (see appendix 1) was made available on the council's website – a link appeared on the homepage – and was also made available in hard copy format at all local libraries and leisure centres. A notice also appeared in the Gazette on 12 January, alerting the public to the availability of the survey and encouraging residents to share their views by completing it. A link to the on-line survey was also emailed to Citizens' Panel members, as well as to a number of local and national interest groups, representing people who share one or more of the protected characteristics. Details of the survey also appeared on the homepage of the staff intranet, and

a 'Message of the Day' was issued to all staff encouraging them to have their say by completing the survey.

- 4.8 A verbal update will be given at the meeting on the responses to the survey.
- 4.9 Officers have also attended a number of meetings to raise awareness of the Strategic Equality Plan, and to encourage people to offer their views on the draft equality objectives. Meetings attended/ due to be attended include the Bridgend Equality Forum, where attendees were also asked to share the survey within their own individual networks, the Bridgend Deaf Club and the Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People.
- 4.10 The survey responses received and the feedback gained at the meetings attended are currently being used to support the further development of the equality objectives and accompanying action plan.
- 4.11 The consultation period will end on 7 February 2012. This will allow sufficient time for the equality objectives and Strategic Equality Plan to be finalised for consideration by Cabinet on Tuesday 6 March 2012.
- 4.12 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 The 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 That the Cabinet Committee notes the progress being made.

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30 January 2012

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Background documents:
None