

Gwynedd Council's Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Gwynedd Council is keen to ensure that an awareness of equality is deeply rooted within the Council's work in order to secure complete equality for everyone.
- 1.2 Although much of the Council's work involves people with protected characteristics; for example, the work of the Adults, Health and Well-being Department, the Children and Families Department and the Education Department, further work is required to ensure that every member of staff and every elected member is fully aware of how to ensure fairness for all.
- 1.3 One of the ways in which Gwynedd Council does this is by drawing up a Strategic Equality Plan which satisfies the duties of the public sector under the 2010 Equality Act (the Act).
- 1.4 The Act has been prepared in order to reduce inequalities between specific groups by asking public bodies to give due attention 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.

Here are the characteristics protected under the Act:

- Age
- Gender reassignment
- Gender
- Race – including ethnic or national origin, colour or nationality
- Disability
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Sexual Orientation
- Religion or belief - including lack of belief
- Marriage and civil partnership

As a Council, we are committed to the principles within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) in order to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of communities in Gwynedd. Gwynedd Council's Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24, the Council's day-to-day work and the improvement priorities identified in the Council Plan 2018-23 will contribute to our well-being objectives (Gwynedd Council Well-being Statement 2019-20). When carrying out our work, we will seek to ensure that we work in accordance with the five sustainable development principles which have been adopted nationally; namely the long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration and inclusion. The two additional principles adopted by the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board, namely the Welsh language and Equality, will also be central to our work.

2. How are these characteristics relevant to Gwynedd?

- 2.1 If we were to consider Gwynedd as a village of only 100 people, half would be women, 23 out of the 100 would be of pensionable age (based on 65 years old and over), 17 would be young people under 16 years old, and four would be from a black or ethnic minority background. 21 individuals would have a long-term illness or impairment which restricts them, 12 households would earn less than £10,000 a year, and 9 of the 60 in working age would claim unemployment benefits. 59 people would be Christians, 30 people would have no religion and two of them would worship another religion.
- 2.2 Language is not a specific protected characteristic within the Act; however, 65% of Gwynedd's population are Welsh speakers, and the Welsh language has been identified as a priority in terms of the well-being of the county's residents. Therefore, the Welsh language is also considered as a protected characteristic as we plan and provide services, alongside the protected characteristics of the Act. Additionally, the Welsh Language Promotion Plan for Gwynedd (2018) states our objectives for this field up to 2023.

3. Creating the Equality Plan 2020-24

- 3.1 The Equality Plan 2020-2024 builds on the Strategic Equality Plan 2016-2020 and endeavours to protect each of the above characteristics by promoting equality and diversity for the benefit of our staff and the people of Gwynedd. It states the key fields that we will be focusing on over the next four years in order to improve our services for the residents of Gwynedd, and it ensures that our own internal arrangements promote equal opportunities among our workforce.
- 3.2 It should be borne in mind that the Council remains in a difficult financial period and, although we want to be ambitious, we do not want to include any action which we are unable to progress. Of course, this Plan is drawn up during a time of great uncertainty and, therefore, it is important to ensure that the basics are done right. In order to do this, we have taken a step back in order to ensure that we focus on the right things.
- 3.3 This includes ensuring that any changes the Council could make to services will not affect people with protected characteristics in a different way to the rest of society. In doing so, it is necessary for us to include the people's voice when making decisions.
- 3.4 In order to improve the way the Council engages with people who have protected characteristics, the Equality Core Group was developed in 2018. This Group includes members from other groups who represent people with protected characteristics, and the Group has been part of the work of creating this new Plan from the outset. There are also other forums and partnerships that undertake wider work such as the Older People's Council. Forums such as these are essential to provide input and advice on equality matters and to analyse the impact of decisions on specific groups of people. We have also undertaken an engagement exercise with the North Wales Public Sector Equality Network on the fields which we are collaborating on for North Wales. A number of operational matters relevant to Gwynedd were raised, and we will give these due attention over the period of this Plan.
- 3.5 In addition to engagement, whilst drawing up the plan we gave full consideration to relevant data, for example the valuable data on equality in Wales which was presented in the Equality and Human Rights Commission's latest state of the nation report, 'Is Wales Fairer?' 2018, and the Equality and

Human Rights Commission's report on the response of Welsh Authorities to the General Duty. We have also compiled a document of regional information which contains information on Gwynedd.

4. The Period of the Previous Plan (2016-2020)

- 4.1 The [Gwynedd Council Strategic Equality Plan 2016-20](#) had identified long-term objectives in order to improve our service for the residents of Gwynedd who share protected characteristics, and to improve participation and opportunities for our staff. As a result, there is enough left to do and those objectives can therefore be seen in some of the actions below.

Having said that, many actions were completed during the four years. We believe that setting up the Equality Core Group, and the fact that the voice of people with protected characteristics are heard, will improve our services. The same is true for equality impact assessment arrangements - an example of this is seen with the refuse and recycling collection arrangements where it was identified that bins left on the streets caused problems for disabled people. Additionally, a work programme was completed to create the circumstances for people from various backgrounds to represent the people of Gwynedd by standing in an election to become an Elected Member. One of the things that was identified was that people did not have sufficient information about the support available for women as Elected Members, and therefore the information was provided. A questionnaire was also prepared in order to monitor the protected characteristics of our staff which will enable us, once enough people have completed it, to identify the make-up of our staff. Following this, we will be able to see whether anything prevents people with specific characteristics from applying for jobs.

A full analysis of the work completed during the four years will be published in the 2019-20 Annual Report.

4.2 Improving our internal systems so that all residents of Gwynedd receive appropriate services that fulfil their requirements.

It must be borne in mind that much of the Council's work is specifically for people with protected characteristics, particularly in the Adults, Health and Well-being Department, the Children and Families Department and the Education Department. It should be noted that the Council has protected these in a time of hardship, taking a public consultation into consideration. Other Departments within the Council have also done specific projects involving equality as part of their everyday work, e.g. establishing LBGT (Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transsexual) sections in Bangor and Caernarfon libraries in order to make them easier to find and to raise the publications' profile. We have also kept up to 63 public toilets open with the support of Town and Community Councils and other partners, which will be very important to enable older people and people with specific conditions to be part of their community. All the work the Council undertakes can be seen by viewing the Council Plan 2018-23.

Council policies, e.g. Pay Policy, ensure that we protect our staff from any illegal discrimination, harassment and persecution. Additionally, we promote equal opportunities and develop a good relationship between people who share a protected characteristic with those who do not, within our workforce, e.g. through our 'Women in Leadership' project, which attempts to eliminate any obstacles that could prevent women from reaching lead jobs within the Council. We also have internal projects which include raising awareness and encouraging a discussion on mental health and stress issues, to ensure that our staff identify symptoms within themselves or others and can respond appropriately.

4.3 We have a duty to prepare Equality Impact Assessments, which is a process of assessing how our services and policies affect different people, especially when changing them or creating new ones. The Cabinet considers Impact Assessments on every relevant matter in order to help them with the decision-making process, including financial decisions. This gives them better information on how their decision will impact people with protected characteristics - which will lead to better decisions.

It is also important to carry out Equality Impact Assessments on matters that are not submitted to Cabinet. It is fair to say that progress has been made with the numbers that have been completed since the beginning of the Plan in 2016. However, this process needs to be improved further, and we have an Objective below to ensure this.

5. Action Plan for the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24

- 5.1 Although the Plan for 2020-24 builds on the previous Plan, we also see an opportunity here to change our way of thinking. Our intention is to ensure that equality is fully rooted in the Council in order to ensure that it is a natural part of our work across the organisation, and that it does not sit as a separate project.
- 5.2 This Action Plan will outline **how** we are going to realise our objective of creating a more equal Gwynedd. In presenting the Objectives and the Action Plan below, our aim is to focus on ensuring that the arrangements to consider protected characteristics are rooted, with the aim of leading to an improvement in the way we do things. Therefore, the Action Plan focuses on changing the Council's internal culture in order to lead to improvement in services, rather than looking at operational matters alone, in order to then improve services for the people of Gwynedd. Every objective is expected to meet the requirements of each characteristic.

We have identified two main work fields, namely to improve our internal systems so that all residents of Gwynedd receive appropriate services that fulfil their needs (Objectives 1, 2 and 3) and to improve the economic situation of the people with equality characteristics in Gwynedd (Objectives 4 and 5).

5.3 Improving our internal systems so that all residents of Gwynedd receive appropriate services that fulfil their needs.

In the initial engagement, the Equality Core Group had drawn attention to a number of operational issues. We believe that the best way to give due attention to these, as well as the matters raised by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in a report on the response of Welsh Authorities to the General Duty of the Equality Act 2020, is to look at our core systems as a whole.

Objective 1: Strengthen the awareness of Gwynedd Council staff and Elected Members of the Equality field, and ensure that they know how to act appropriately.

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| Why? | <p>It has emerged, from day to day work in the field, that not all staff members fully understand the need to prioritise equality considerations, or are uncertain of how to do this properly. The operational matters of the consultation, the recommendations by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, and the lack of understanding of suitable Equality Impact Assessments' worth in every case, show this.</p> <p>Consequently, we are going to revisit the available training resources in order to make them more appropriate, create new training and ensure that people are more willing to complete them. Research work will be required to ensure suitable, attractive and effective training. We have identified additional challenges such as reaching some front-line staff. Equality principles also need to be incorporated into other relevant training, in order to root equality deeper within the Council's work.</p> | |
| How? | 1. We will create an equality training programme as a core field that will be varied, innovative, specific, and of the highest quality. It will be appropriately tailored for all staff members on all levels, along with | Preparation work in 2020-21 and will be |

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| | <p>Elected Members, in order to improve their understanding of their duty towards equality. In order to do this, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider the effectiveness of our current training and discover what would help staff to understand more about the field; work with Council Managers in order to discover which presentation methods would be most suitable for the needs of various staff, e.g. front-line staff, managers; commission training providers who have life experience of the field to provide specialist face-to-face training for our staff as required; continue with the work of raising staff's awareness and understanding of the equality field; monitor staff awareness of the Act through training's feedback forms. <p>2. Elected Members have access to the Members' Portal, an electronic intranet, which contains information about training and events relevant to them. Over the period of the Plan, we will update the Portal with training guidelines and information relevant to the equality field. We will also hold a promotion campaign by using the Members' e-newsletter, "Rhaeadr", to raise awareness of the information available on the Portal.</p> <p>3. "Ffordd Gwynedd" is the name given to the "way" we in Gwynedd Council will ensure that we put the people of Gwynedd at the centre of everything we do. Ultimately, the success of Ffordd Gwynedd will be a situation where individuals' experiences when they come into contact with the Council will be positive ones that will meet their needs. In moving forward, we will continue to work on strengthening the equality element as part of the "Ffordd Gwynedd" training. This will also be the case for the Welcome to the Council session for new staff members.</p> | <p>operational from April 2021</p> <p>September 2020 and then as required</p> <p>September 2020</p> |
| Outcome | That the workforce, whatever their jobs, have a better understanding of the field and are confident to act on their duty toward individuals and groups who have protected characteristics. The Elected Members will also understand and be more confident in their duty to challenge and make decisions. | |
| Additional cost | The training costs will be identified once the engagement and research work is completed. No additional costs are anticipated in the first year, however expenditure will be required to achieve high quality training. | |

Objective 2: Improve the information we have from and about people with protected characteristics.

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| Why? | <p>Putting the people of Gwynedd at the centre of everything we do is a cornerstone to the way the Council works and, of course, this includes people with various protected characteristics. It is not possible to do this without receiving and acting on the expert opinion of the people in question. We are required to do this in line with the Equality Impact Assessment guidelines of the Equality Act 2010 as it is implemented in Wales.</p> <p>Information has been gathered about the residents of Gwynedd, e.g. Well-being Assessment of the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board, responses to Gwynedd Council surveys such as the Gwynedd Challenge and "Which Services are Important to You?" and, of course, information from our Departments. Once again, we have identified that we are not doing enough as a Council to ensure that the voice of people with protected characteristics is included naturally when making everyday decisions regarding service changes (especially the decisions that are not submitted to the Cabinet).</p> | |
| How? | <p>1. In order to understand any barriers that the residents of Gwynedd who have various protected characteristics face when they are involved with the Council, we will hold a thorough public survey in order to identify these barriers and what we could do to respond. This work will include a survey which will be available on-line, on paper, and in various formats (such as easy-read and audio); focus groups, as well as directly contacting representative partners and groups.</p> <p>2. We will work to develop more contact with groups or individuals who have protected characteristics, by continuing to work with the Equality Core Group and extending it, and making contact with additional groups of people with protected characteristics in order to continue to receive various views. We will also ensure that our Residents Panel includes a variety of people with protected characteristics, by targeting as required.</p> <p>3. By working with managers and Heads of Departments, we will ensure that everyone in the Council understands the needs of people with protected characteristics. We will use the information gathered to improve our services and create an Equality Impact Assessment. Our Access/Equality Policy will need to be reviewed, whilst considering the operational recommendations of the Equality Core Group.</p> | <p>By March 2021</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing but the policy will be updated by January 2022</p> |
| Outcome: | Gwynedd Council will have a better understanding of the needs and obstacles that face people with protected characteristics who receive our services in order to improve our procedures. | |
| Additional cost | Expenditure will be required for alternative formats and any other adjustments, e.g. a British Sign Language interpreter as required (a maximum of £2,000). | |

Objective 3: Build on the work already carried out to embed Equality Impact Assessments as a tool to ensure better decision-making

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| Why? | <p>Improving our Equality Impact Assessment arrangements was an important part of the Strategic Equality Plan 2016-20. In its initial discussion about the new Plan, the Cabinet has noted that, although the number and quality of our assessments have improved, there is room for further improvement. By using the assessments to their full potential, we can ensure that we put all the people of Gwynedd at the centre of everything we do as a Council, by giving due attention to equality matters. It will enable us to satisfy the operational matters in the right way, including those that were raised by the Equality Core Group, e.g. transportation or changing rooms, during the work on the Plan. This, of course, is a statutory requirement under the Equality Act 2010 as it is implemented in Wales.</p> <p>This Objective is closely linked to Objective 2, as the engagement work will be required in order to undertake Equality Impact Assessments.</p> | |
| How? | <p>1. We will create additional specific training for relevant staff and Elected Members, focusing on the advantages of the Equality Impact Assessment, and we will provide guidance and advice on undertaking them in order to give thorough consideration to any potential impacts on the residents of Gwynedd. The content of the training will be regularly reviewed in order to ensure that it is up-to-date.</p> <p>2. Over the coming years, we will also strengthen arrangements by ensuring that Elected Members are increasingly confident to challenge the quality of Equality Impact Assessments as a natural part of their work in accepting reports/information for decision-making in the Cabinet, Scrutiny Committees and Performance Challenge meetings. The above training will be key to ensure the success of this procedure, and we will provide guidelines for the various meetings.</p> <p>3. We will continue to work with the Council Departments to ensure that due attention is given to equality requirements within any process that identifies savings or cuts. During the period of this Plan, we will ensure that timely and high quality Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken and that they contribute to the process of identifying any plans. We hope that through this, we will be aware of any negative implications that any budget cut decisions will have on specific minority groups in Gwynedd, and mitigate them where possible.</p> | <p>By April 2021</p> <p>Ongoing with guidelines in place by September 2020</p> <p>Ongoing</p> |
| Outcome: | Decisions made on a firm basis at every level of the Council as staff and Elected Members fully understand and act on their duty. | |
| Additional cost | None | |

5.4 To improve the economic situation of people with protected characteristics in Gwynedd

The Council welcomes the fact that Welsh Government has decided to include the socio-economic duty as an active part of the Equality Act 2010 as it is implemented in Wales. The evidence from "Is Wales Fairer" clearly demonstrates that some people with protected characteristics are statistically more likely to be poorer than the rest of society.

Following the Well-being Assessment, the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board has identified poverty as a priority. Unfortunately, the data on material deprivation according to protected characteristics is not available locally. Nevertheless, other evidence is available which gives us an idea of the situation.

The number of people who are unemployed in Gwynedd is high (5.5%); however, interestingly, the number of men who are unemployed is lower (4.7%) than women (6.4%), which is contrary to the rest of the region. The fact that 12.2% of disabled people in Gwynedd are unemployed, compared to 4.7% of people who are not disabled, is striking. Unfortunately, the statistics for people from ethnic minorities are not available at authority level due to low numbers.

Another factor that could show deprivation is a lack of access to a car or a van. Grade DE households (semi-skilled, unskilled and unemployed occupations) are much less likely to have access to a vehicle than AB households (advanced and intermediate occupations). Only 15% of people from a white background in Gwynedd are without access to this type of vehicle compared to approximately 35% of people from an Asian background (with other ethnic groups between both peaks). Disabled people are also more likely to be without access - 32% of people who state that they are significantly affected by a impairment or a long-term condition do not have access to a vehicle compared to the 12.6% of people who are not affected by a impairment or condition.

As one of Gwynedd's main employers, it is essential that we ensure that our internal systems are effective enough as a starting point.

Objective 4: Act to reduce the gender pay gap and identify any pay gap based on any other characteristic

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| Why? | <p>Although the previous two audits have demonstrated that the Council provides equal pay to women and men, the average pay gap continues, as in every other local authority. On the whole, this is due to the fact that women are less likely to apply, and therefore are less likely to be offered, jobs on higher pay scales within the Council. We have already identified this as a matter of priority that needs to be addressed, which is why the 'Women in Leadership' project is included in the <u>Gwynedd Council Plan 2018-2023</u>. It is also a matter that Welsh Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission is eager to see us addressing.</p> <p>Although national evidence shows that other wage gaps exist, such as the difference between disabled people and the rest of any workforce, it proves difficult to gather enough information within the Council as we depend on staff members to volunteer the information. As with every other public organisation, the numbers who do so are low. During the 2016-20 Plan, we have amended our staff questionnaire and have uploaded it on to the Council's self-service system in order to make it as easy and as accessible as possible.</p> |
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| How? | <p>1. Over the coming years, we will focus on encouraging more staff to complete the optional equality data questionnaire in order to increase how much information we have. This will allow us to set a baseline, identify gaps in our workforce and to hold investigations on other equality characteristics. We will do this through various methods during the period of the Plan, including holding an advertising campaign and raising the awareness of staff members who are new to the self-service system.</p> <p>2. We will continue to conduct an annual audit on the wage gap between men and women, and by collecting the data noted above, will work to develop our ability to undertake such an audit in relation to other protected characteristics. Additionally, we will undertake a pay audit every three years in order to ensure that we are still paying fair wages. We will also work towards putting plans in place to reduce any gaps that emerge in light of the audit.</p> <p>3. Work has also been underway as part of the Women in Leadership Project (which is one of the <u>Council Plan 2018-23</u> projects), which has identified that the number of women who are in a management role in the Council is disproportionately low, given that women form 70% of the whole workforce. The main purpose of the project is to address this by boosting the number of women who apply for and attain higher positions within the Council by reviewing the conditions and the working environment to attract more women to undertake the work in future.</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Annual audit. The next wage audit by April 2021</p> <p>In line with the Plan's timetable</p> |
| Outcome: | The gender-based wage gap is reduced, other gaps have been identified and work to mitigate this has commenced. Also, more women applying for lead jobs in the Council. | |
| Additional cost | None | |

Objective 5: Act to increase the diversity of our workforce

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| Why? | <p>The Council is one of the county's largest employers, employing nearly 7,000 people. Therefore, it is important that we work towards ensuring that our workforce reflects the Gwynedd working age population as much as possible. The Cabinet has noted this as one of its main priorities for the Plan in its initial discussions.</p> <p>We have already noted that there is a lack of available data for us in relation to the protected characteristics within our workforce and, unfortunately, this shortfall creates problems as we attempt to act appropriately in this field. Therefore, the success of the work outlined above under Objective 4 is central and all-important in order to achieve Objective 5.</p> | |
| How? | 1. We will use the information that has been gathered from the equality questionnaire (see Objective 4) and will conduct research and engagement with the public and our staff in order to discover any factors that prevent specific cohorts of people with protected characteristics from | Ongoing |

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| | <p>applying for jobs. We will also work to discover ways of encouraging them do to so, e.g. by advertising jobs on a wider level than the Council website alone, in order to attract a broader range of applications.</p> <p>2. Work with other public bodies within our region such as North Wales Police or Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board in order to address any obstacle noted. This could also provide access to a wider range of people, bearing in mind that the equality profile of all workforces are unlikely to be the same.</p> <p>3. Prioritise working towards reaching Level 2 of the 'Disability Confident' scheme in order to be a 'Confident Employer'.</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> <p>September 2022</p> |
| Outcome: | To have useful information on the protected characteristics of our workforce in order to act to target our recruitment methods if required. | |
| Additional cost | The outcome of the research would need to be viewed to see the exact costs, but there are potential costs for the advertisement. | |

6. Monitoring, Reviewing and Reporting

We will regularly review the development of elements of the Plan over the four years through our internal performance challenge arrangements, and the above projects will be addressed by the relevant Cabinet Members.

Early on in each financial year, we will publish the Annual Report which will weigh up the progress made on the Plan as a whole during the previous year, especially the Action Plan. At the beginning of this Plan, we are taking a step back as there is an action within each objective which mentions gathering evidence, especially through engagement. We will then have a better understanding of what we should do to improve the lives of the people of Gwynedd who have protected characteristics. Therefore, it is expected that we will be able to add more detail to the Action Plan during the coming years.

We will also publish a new Plan every four years. The plans and the annual reports are available on our website or by contacting the Policy and Equality Officer.