

Gwynedd Council Strategic Equality Plan 2016-20



Further information

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Introduction

Gwynedd Council is pleased to present a draft of the Strategic Equality Plan 2016-20 for consultation. Should you wish to offer comments on the plan a short questionnaire is available on www.gwynedd.gov.uk/equality and copies are also available from council offices, libraries and leisure centres. You are also welcome to comment by using the contact details on the front page. Please use the same contact details if you require the plan in a different language or format.

The consultation will be open until 1 March 2016.

Purpose of the Equality Plan

The purpose of Gwynedd Council's Strategic Equality Plan 2016-20 is to reduce inequality between people with equality characteristics and the rest of society. Those characteristics are:

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

(Equality Act 2010)

What Gwynedd Council wants to do is to place the people of Gwynedd at the centre of everything we do. Appropriate arrangements to ensure equality is of vital importance in order to do that. It will not be possible to provide a consistent service to all otherwise.

Although the previous Equality Plan has now been in place for four years, we are aware that there is room to improve on our internal arrangements in order to ensure that equality is at the heart of everything the Council does.

It is also important to note that this new plan is being written during a difficult time when Gwynedd Council has to make significant cuts to services. At a time like this, it must be acknowledged that some groups of people are affected more than others. It is very important that we are aware of this and do everything possible to reduce those effects.

How are we going to act?

We believe that the best way of promoting equality and reduce the effects of cuts on people with various equality characteristics is to listen to their opinion and experience before we act. Our intention therefore during the coming four years is to prioritise that, strengthening the way in which we receive and use the contributions of people who have specific equality characteristics. It will be possible for this information to lead us generally in the work but also we will ask for input to policies, projects and specific ways of working. We believe therefore that we will be able to identify ways of making a real difference to people with these characteristics.

We have set objectives to help us to do that, in accordance with our duty in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. We are also identifying what we can do to work towards those objectives. It is important that the plan is flexible to respond to the changes which will happen during the next four years. More importantly, we must be ready to respond to the feedback we will be receiving from people with specific equality characteristics. It is only by being flexible that it will be possible for us to be innovative and provide effective and efficient services which will meet the needs of the people of Gwynedd.

We already have services which protect the most vulnerable people in society. These include arrangements to ensure the safeguarding, fairness and independence of vulnerable individuals such as children in care, older people, disabled children and people. We are working to improve outcomes for the children and people of Gwynedd by improving education standards, promoting the economy and work to prevent poverty. Preventative work, e.g. services for young offenders, promoting healthy living, Ageing Well Strategy, Domestic Violence Strategy is also part of the Council's day to day work.

Since procedures, projects and strategies are already available in these field we will not be addressing them in detail in this plan. Information is already available on these, e.g. in the Council's Strategic Plan. Our intention, rather, is to strengthen our way of working in order to ensure that the input and aspirations of the people of Gwynedd are given fair consideration in our work and that the effect on people who share the equality characteristics is considered. This will be a way in which to identify any barriers or gaps and allow us to work more effectively and efficiently.

Also it is important that the fields of equality are not confined to any specific project or service. It should rather permeate through the Council's work, e.g. mental health considerations is not only a matter for the Mental Health Team, but also a matter for the whole whole Council.

In order to ensure that equality is embedded throughout the Council, each Head of Service will identify any equality matters and include them in the service's Business Plan. These matters are expected to be set on the basis of evidence, in particular input by people who share equality characteristics. Progress will be monitored and managed throughout the year.

Assessing Impact on Equality

An important method of ensuring that the voice of people with equality characteristics receives fair consideration is Equality Impact Assessments. Assessing impact in this way is a way to ensure that we identify any inequality and work to reduce its impact. It is already necessary for any such assessment to be made on any policy which is submitted to the Cabinet and Council on any change to practice which affects people. One of the essentials of impact assessments is to ensure input by people who share equality characteristics.

When looking at the impact assessments which are being completed we have identified that the standard is inconsistent and that the work of developing them is not always completed appropriately. We are therefore prioritising improving the standard of our Equality Impact Assessments as one of our objectives over the next four years.

Regional Objectives

The Council is a member of the North Wales Public Sector Equality Network (NWPSSEN). The network has identified six objective to work towards:

- i. Address health inequalities
- ii. Address unequal outcomes in education to maximise individual potential
- iii. Address inequalities in employment and pay
- iv. Address inequalities in personal safety
- v. Address inequalities in representation and voice
- vi. Address inequalities in access to informaiton, services, buildings and the environment.

As noted in point 3, the Council has strategies, procedures and projects which respond to the above. We feel that the best way to work towards these objectives locally is to strengthen the working arrangements. This will embed the awareness of equality needs deeper within the Council's day to day work, improving our response to the above objectives. We will look at how our work weaves into these objectives more specifically in the annual reports on the plan.

Gwynedd Council Objectives 2016-20

We note below the four objectives that Gwynedd Council will work towards over the next four years. We have decided on these objectives on the basis of a range of evidence including:

a) Internal information

Unfortunately, our contact with some specific groups has lapsed. This is particularly apparent with the Disability Core Group which has shrunk substantially in membership. Our intention therefore is to look anew at our arrangements, creating contact with specific groups and establishing an Equality Core Group to represent each characteristic.

When looking at the impact assessments which have been completed, we identify that there is room to improve on their consistency and their development. There is also a need to improve the way in which we use the input received in order to ensure that the opinion and aspirations of the people of Gwynedd is given fair consideration when we plan our work.

We have also identified that the information we have on our workforce's equality characteristics needs to be improved. Whilst accepting that people do not need to share information with us it is important that this information is as complete as possible so that we are able to reduce any inequality or barrier that comes to light.

We have also identified the need to create a situation which reduces any barriers which prevent people with some equality characteristics from attempting to become a member of the Council.

b) Voice and participation

We have received input from a number of sources. A regional engagement day was held with various stakeholders to discuss our regional objectives.

The Council has collected information on people's priorities through the Her Gwynedd opinion seeking exercise, which included meeting with older people's groups, young people and disabled people. This information has been used when creating the objectives below but it will also be used when planning our work in the future.

Ensuring the input of different groups is one of the objectives of this plan and therefore will play an important part not only when establishing the objectives but in all of the Council's work over the next four years. We hope that the people of Gwynedd will help us to discover innovative and appropriate ways of working.

We have decided on this objective because the people of Gwynedd have told us time after time that this is a priority for them. They have said that they feel that decisions have been made before they can provide an opinion on them. It is extremely important that the Council continues with the work of including people in order to ensure the trust of the people in its work. It should be noted that we do not necessarily mean formal consultations here, although that those have a role to play,

but also to have information on the aspirations and opinion of different groups which are affected by our work on a daily basis.

Officers and managers within the Council have also noted that they have discovered ways of improving services as a result of public input, e.g. weekly collection of baby nappies as a result of changes to refuse collections every three weeks, alternative ways of providing care.

We are also eager to receive opinion on these plan and objectives. Should you wish to provide comments, the contact details are on the front page.

c) Data on equality characteristics

The Council collects local, regional and national data on equality data in order to receive an improved picture of needs. This information is published on the Council's website.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has also published "Is Wales Fairer?" in December which looks at the condition of equality and human rights in 2015. This information will also inform our work, e.g. it notes "There is[sic] been little evidence of improvement in political representation in the last five years, with women, disabled people, young people, ethnic minorities, religious minorities and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people remaining under-represented at all levels of politics in Wales."

In addition to providing information to use in order to decide on our objectives, the above data will help us when deciding on more specific work during the next four years.

Objective I	To improve our arrangements to discover and use the opinion of people who share equality characteristics
Why have we decided on this field?	Listening to people is important in order to ensure that the services we provide are appropriate for them. There is enough anecdotal evidence to demonstrate that the people of Gwynedd feel that this is a priority. We are aware that our contact with some groups has lapsed, e.g. the decline of the Disability Core Group
Which equality groups does it affect specifically?	Every one
How are we going to do this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To strengthen the Council's contact with specific groups and to establish an equality core group and share the information from the group throughout the Council. • To share information from opinion seeking exercises on the Council's intranet so that it is available to all. • To strengthen the equality element in the Engagement Handbook on the basis of good practice in order to ensure that services are reminded of the benefit that comes from receiving the opinion of people with equality characteristics, as well as the duty to do so.
What is the timetable?	Continuous, with the work on establishing the core group and the Consultation Booklet taking place in 2016-17
What results do we want to see?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That there are new strong contact arrangements between the Council and characteristic groups and individuals. That those groups feel that the Council is listening to their views. • That each service has the necessary information to collect and use the contribution of individuals and groups in accordance with their duty under the Equality Act 2010 by ensuring that there is a range of information available on the intranet. • To identify innovative and appropriate ways of work by receiving the specialist opinion and input of groups and individuals with equality characteristics.

Objective 2	To improve our equality impact assessment arrangements
Why have we decided on this field?	Although impact assessment arrangements have been developed as part of the previous Strategic Equality Plan, we have identified, from the assessments that we have seen, that there is room to improve their consistency and development. The Equality and Human Rights Commission together with the Older People's Commissioner emphasise the importance of such assessments.
Which equality groups does it affect specifically?	Every one
How are we going to do this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide support and training to officers to ensure that they have information about their duty towards people with equality characteristics. This should include ensuring that impact assessments are part of the development of any policy, project or procedure before any decisions are made. • To ensure that the messages that come from seeking the input of groups and individuals with protected characteristics are shared throughout the Council for inclusion in impact assessments.
What is the timetable?	Continuous
What results do we want to see?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A workforce which is aware of our duty to engage and assess impact under the Equality Act 2010 and the benefit that emanates from that, so that assessing impact becomes a natural part of working. • Continuous improvement to create more effective and efficient services by identifying the impact on various groups and to reduce any unfair outcomes.

Objective 3	To create the circumstances for people from different backgrounds to represent the people of Gwynedd by standing in an election to become an elected member
Why have we decided on this field?	The Equality Commission has identified that further work is required in the field since there has not been much improvement in political representation by individuals with equality characteristics over the past five years. The Local Government Act (2012) also places a duty on us to increase diversity.
Which equality groups does it affect specifically?	Every one
How are we going to do this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To undertake a local review to identify the elements which are a barrier to individuals to stand in an election to become a local councillor • To act (where possible) on the results of the above) to move barriers • Various methods to raise awareness of the people of Gwynedd of democracy and the opportunities to represent as a local councillor
What is the timetable?	2016/17 – 2017/18
What results to we want to see?	To increase diversity amongst the individuals standing in the May 2017 elections

Objective 4	To identify any employment and pay inequalities and to take action to reduce them
Why have we decided on this field?	<p>The most recent pay audit has demonstrated that the Council has acted to ensure that basic pay is equal. What requires attention is to identify if there are barriers preventing any group from receiving opportunities to develop within the work.</p> <p>At the moment only 46% of staff have disclosed information about equality characteristics. Whilst accepting the rights of the individuals not to disclose, more complete information would make it easier for us to identify inequalities.</p>
Which equality groups does it affect specifically?	More complete information would improve the understanding of each characteristic, but it is expected to affect the fields of sex and disability more specifically
How are we going to do this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A campaign to close gaps in the equality characteristics data • To complete a pay audit • To act on the basis of evidence from the pay audit and any other relevant information
What is the timetable?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To start the campaign to close gaps in June 2016 • The remainder of the work will be completed during the lifetime of the plan
What results do we want to see?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To obtain more information on the equality characteristics of members of staff in order to identify barriers • To reduce any inequality on the basis of evidence collected

Further information

a) Profile of Gwynedd

75 Elected Members sit on Gwynedd Council. The Council is responsible for providing a wide range of public services for 122,273 residents, including: education and schools, social services, leisure centres, libraries, planning services, highways, waste management, public protection, youth services and economic development.

Since 2011, Gwynedd's population has increased by 0.6% (750 people). This compares with an increase of 0.9% in Wales.

Gwynedd is a large rural area that is 2,535 square kilometres in size in geographical terms. Gwynedd is the second largest county in Wales and represents 12% of the total area of the country.

65% of Gwynedd's residents speak Welsh and it is also the Council's internal administrative language.

In 2015-16, the Gross Revenue Expenditure of the Council was £367 million. Among a wide range of other services, this money was used to educate over 16,000 pupils, maintain 2,888 kilometres of highways and 301 kilometres of coastline.

There are 95 Primary Schools, 14 Secondary Schools and 2 Special Schools in Gwynedd.

The Council is responsible for running 12 Leisure Centres and 17 Libraries within the county.

Gwynedd's natural environment is a valuable attraction to tourists. In 2014, approximately 6.9 million visitors came to Gwynedd, creating £975 million in revenue.

67.5% of the land within Gwynedd is located in the Snowdonia National Park, the largest national park in Wales.

A large part of the Llŷn Peninsula was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1956, one of five in Wales.



In 2015, the median household income in Gwynedd (£22,458) was 8% below the figure for Wales (£24,271) and 28% lower than the figure for Britain (£28,696).

In 2015, the median price for a house sold in Gwynedd was £145,000 which is an increase of 9.8% compared with 2011.

It is estimated that the number of households in Gwynedd will increase by 12.5% by 2036. This is less than the estimated increase for all of Wales, which is 14.6%.

More information about the Council and its services can be found on the website - www.gwynedd.gov.uk

b) Training and Development

Training has been provided for staff on impact assessments and very good responses were received in terms of feedback and numbers. The Council also has an equality e-learning module for staff and members.

Since we are identifying the importance of embedding equality in everything that we do, particularly during the challenging period that we are facing, we will shortly be reviewing training and development needs.

c) Legislation

When preparing this plan, the Council has followed the unstatutory guidance of the Equality and Human Rights Commission which provides guidance on how we should respond to the duties of the Equality Act 2010.

Another field of work over the next four years will be to ensure that we look to the future and improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being in order to create a Gwynedd in which we all want to live (the Well-being of Future Generations Act will have effect in April 2016). We intend to weave this work with the work on equality.

d) Publication

The Strategic Equality Plan will be published and circulated using various methods. It will be available to members of the public in a number of formats and languages on request. Please contact the address at the beginning of the document.

e) Monitoring

When facing the challenges of the next four years it is of vital importance that we monitor progress against the four objectives and decide on different ways of working. We will publish an Annual Report which will demonstrate the steps that we as a Council will have taken over the twelve months to work towards achieving our four objectives.

Summary

Gwynedd Council is pleased to present a draft of the Strategic Equality Plan 2016-20 for consultation.

The aim of the plan is to reduce inequality to people with equality characteristics in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 namely age, gender reassignment, sex, race, disability, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, religion or belief (including non-belief), marriage and civil partnership.

Gwynedd Council wants to place the people of Gwynedd at the centre of everything we do. Ensuring appropriate arrangements to ensure equality is of vital importance in doing so. It will not be possible to provide a consistent service for all otherwise.

We are aware that there is room to improve our internal arrangements in order to ensure that equality is at the heart of everything that the Council does. We believe that the best way, at a difficult time such as this, to ensure fairness is to listen to the relevant people before action is taken. Our intention therefore during the next four months is to strengthen the way in which we receive and use the opinion and comments of people who have various equality characteristics.

We have Rydym wedi set four objectives, based on internal evidence, opinion and data in order to do so:

- Objective 1 To improve our arrangements to discover and use the opinion of people who share equality characteristics
- Objective 2 To improve our equality impact assessment arrangements
- Objective 3 To create the circumstances for people from different backgrounds to represent the people of Gwynedd by standing in an election to become an elected member
- Objective 4 To identify any employment and pay inequalities and to take action to reduce them

The Strategic Equality Plan will be published and circulated using a variety of methods. It will be available for members of the public in a variety of formats and languages on request. Please contact the address at the beginning of the document.

When facing the challenges of the next four years it is of vital importance that we monitor progress against the four objectives. We will publish an Annual Report which will demonstrate the steps which we as a Council will have taken over the twelve months to work towards achieving our four objectives.