

GWYNEDD COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC EQUALITY SCHEME

1) Introduction

We are pleased to introduce and recommend Gwynedd Council's First Strategic Equality Scheme, at unfortunately an uncertain and bleak time. Indeed, this context places more pressure than ever on the Scheme and on us to act in accordance with the requirements of the Equality Act.

In a climate when local authorities must make increasingly complex decisions, we must be clear on the implications of our actions and our decisions, especially on the most vulnerable in our society and ensure that we do not put an unfair and disproportionate burden upon them.

The way forward is to address those issues in detail and to include and engage appropriately with the residents of the County, in particular those who have been traditionally powerless and without a voice. In this respect, we welcome the timely requirements resulting from the new Equality Act.

The first step towards undertaking the challenge of this legislation is this Scheme: The duties are familiar from the previous legislation but the scope and implications are far wider than before.

This Scheme establishes a foundation. By working together regionally on discussing and prescribing objectives, by starting to identify and respond to evidence and by starting to strengthen our arrangements and procedures, we are attempting to address, not only the requirements of the law, but also the requirements of the people of Gwynedd.

Harry Thomas
Chief Executive

Dyfed Edwards
Leader

2) Equality Act 2010

The Specific Duties of the Equality Act requires us to decide on Equality Objectives which outline what we will be doing to ensure and promote equality through all the Council's work. This Scheme brings our Equality Objectives together, outlining who is responsible, by when it will be achieved and providing the reasons why action is needed on each objective.

A) Protected Characteristics

In the past, the Council has published Racial and Disability Equality Schemes but the Equality Act 2010 means that we must ensure equality between many more different groups than before. "Protected Characteristics" is the term used for these groups, namely:

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

As seen above, the list includes several characteristics that are relevant to each one of us; indeed we are all a unique combination of some or a number of the above characteristics.

B) General Duty

The Act also defines what we **MUST** do to ensure and promote equality between the protected characteristics. The following are the "General Duties" of the Act, namely the foundation of this Scheme:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and illegal victimisation and other behaviour that is abolished under the Act.
- Promote equal opportunities between people that share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relationships between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

C) Specific Duties in Wales

In order to assist us to conform to the General Duty, the Welsh Government has also prescribed a series of “Specific Duties”, which provide more detailed guidance on what to do and how to share this information. These General Duties include:

- Setting objectives, namely, identifying what needs to be done and how and by when it should be accomplished.
- Produce a Strategic Equality Scheme; a public document that brings the objectives together so that everyone can see and scrutinise our proposals and our progress towards equality.
- Engagement; listening constantly to people with the various protected characteristics to ascertain their priorities, find what works and what causes problems and to act on what we are hearing.
- Equality Impact Assessment; before making any changes or coming to a decision on any policy, we must show that we have considered what impact this can have in relation to the protected characteristics.
- Equality information; when planning our work in the equality field, we must gather and analyse the relevant information. This can be in the form of statistics, results of monitoring systems or evidence from the public or from staff. Acting on the basis of information means that our equality objectives are appropriate and necessary. If there is evidence to support the objective, it is also easier for us to measure progress.
- Employment information; the Act recognises that we have a key role to play as employers and we are required to gather, publish and analyse information about the workforce with the aim of ensuring fairness.
- Pay Discrimination; the Act requires us to analyse staff salaries and to take steps to ensure that there is no gap between the salaries of men and women in the Council.
- Staff training; in order to comply with the Equality Act, we must inform staff of the requirements of the law and to support them to work sensitively and inclusively.
- Procurement; the Council must ensure that everyone who works on our behalf or who receives money from us also conforms to the requirements of the Equality Act.
- Annual report; we will be required to report annually on the progress made on each one of our Equality Objectives.

- Publication; in order to be open and honest, we will be required to publish our Strategic Equality Scheme and our Annual Reports.
- Review; we will be required to review our equality objectives and our Strategic Equality Scheme every four years to ensure that it is timely and appropriate for the needs of the area.
- Accessibility; we are required to ensure that our equality publications are easy to access and easy for people to understand.

3) Preparing the Strategic Equality Scheme

A) Equality Information

The Equality Act places an emphasis on planning our work based on evidence and, therefore, when preparing the Scheme, attention was given to information that was available at several levels; nationally, regionally and locally. By undertaking a survey of the different levels, it was possible to see what requirements were the most important for Gwynedd and also which priorities arise at regional level or are shared by different organisations. We anticipate that this is a starting point for developing fields where we can collaborate (e.g. engagement at regional level) and on others where we will be acting on needs that are specific to us in Gwynedd (e.g. the specific requirements of the Llandygai Gypsy Site).

Just as important as identifying and analysing what information we have in our possession is to acknowledge where we will need to gather more information in order to have a more complete picture of equality and fairness in Gwynedd. It can be seen that some of the equality objectives deal with gathering more information or analysing what we have already gathered in more detail and in a systematic manner.

In the Equality Action Scheme, reference is made to the evidence that supports each Equality Objective and every individual Action and project.

The main sources of information used when preparing this document are listed below:

- i) **National Evidence: *How Fair is Wales? Equality and Human Rights Commission, March 2011***

This document was used as a starting point. It introduces independent and standard evidence on equality in the Welsh context. As it is also a document that is reviewed every three years, it also sets a strong baseline to measure progress on a national level.

ii) [**APPENDIX 1: Joint Equality Objectives**](#)
[**APPENDIX 2: Background and Research Document**](#)

(Work undertaken collaboratively by the North Wales Local Authorities, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, North Wales Police Authority, Snowdonia National Park Authority, Fire and Rescue Service and the Ambulance Service with the assistance of the Welsh Local Government Association.)

Since the publication of the Specific Duties for Wales, there has been close collaboration between the above public bodies to find evidence on a regional level for north Wales and to attempt to prescribe priorities and agree on the Equality Objectives that are general to us all.

For the purpose of preparing our First Strategic Equality Scheme, it was decided to concentrate on a series of main Objectives based on the findings of *How Fair is Wales?* and on regional and local data. The document is a starting point for the structure and contents of our Schemes and establishes some fields where there will be close collaboration but also allowing each body the freedom to identify and act in accordance with more local requirements.

This report recognises 6 equality areas which are common to and relevant across North Wales:

- Health
- Education
- Employment and Pay
- Personal Safety
- Representation and Voice
- Access to information, services, buildings and the environment

The above named bodies are committed to developing Equality Objectives based upon these areas, and where appropriate to working together to achieve them.

iii) [**APPENDIX 3: Local Evidence: Gwynedd Equality Review**](#)
[**January 2012**](#)

The Research and Information Unit was commissioned to undertake a review of all the available data on equality at county level. This report contains statistics that are available to the public from other authorities and from what has been gathered by the Council. This data provides us with a picture of the specific needs of Gwynedd.

The main message from this report is that the County's population are ageing, with this set to stay for the future: By 2033, it is foreseen that the 65+ population will have increased 41%. At the same time, it is calculated that the number of young people (0-25 years) will decrease by 4.2%.

This will mean more pressure on and call for health care, care and residential services, pensions and other services for older people. The Council's main strategies and planning processes have already acknowledged this and it is also reflected in the Strategic Equality Scheme's Action Plan.

B) Engagement

When establishing the objectives of equality and preparing this Scheme, it is just as important that we listen to the experiences and aspirations of people and protected groups as it is to gather and analyse data. To this end, we questioned some groups where a close link had already been established, however, with more characteristics being protected under the law; we had to engage more widely. As part of regional collaboration, a regional event was arranged which provided an opportunity to ascertain the opinions of groups where no links had been established thus far. This was also an opportunity for authorities in the north to engage jointly and, therefore, avoid duplication of resources. Also advantage was taken of the opportunity to link with national organisations that represent the protected characteristics by attending meetings arranged by them to share information. For the regional engagement experts representing all the protected characteristics were consulted; either they possessed a particular characteristic or were members of a body or organisation representing or protecting the rights of a characteristic,

i) Regional Engagement

- a) [APPENDIX 2: Regional Evidence: Shared Results and Joint Objectives \(including the observations of the Regional Consultative Panel, Conwy 2009/11\)](#)

A joint meeting with our regional partners from the public sector in north Wales was arranged. It was an opportunity to make the most of the partners' links and to invite a wide range of bodies and individuals to represent the interests of all the protected characteristics.

The event was extremely successful and because of this and because it was a cost-effective way of bringing people together and avoiding duplication, we as partners will be considering holding such events again when developing and implementing our Schemes.

ii) Local Engagement

- a) [APPENDIX 4: Gwynedd Council Disability Equality Core Group, Porthmadog 03/10/11](#)

This Group was established in 2006 and since then it has been meeting on a quarterly basis to express its opinion on issues that are important for disabled people in Gwynedd. This is the main medium for the Council to ascertain the opinion of disabled people on strategic plans and strategies.

b) [APPENDIX 5: ISL \(Intercultural Skills Link\) Group, Bangor \(29/10/11\)](#)

This group is an informal network for black and ethnic minority people living in Bangor and the vicinity. They meet regularly to share information and arrange trips and cultural events. The Council supported this Group by contributing to an independent information and advice service and currently we are supporting the group to access grant funding.

c) **Strategic Plans**

The main strategic plans in the county are the Community Strategy (Gwynedd Together) and the Council's Three Year Plan.

This year "Improving Gwynedd Together" was published which aims to achieve the longer-term vision of the main partnerships of the county, namely:-

"By 2021, our vision is that Gwynedd will have undertaken the challenges and the opportunities in a changing world, to be a more vibrant, prosperous, open and cohesive community, that takes pride in and promotes its unique natural and cultural assets and contributes positively towards a more sustainable world."

Promoting equal opportunity is one of the basic principles of Gwynedd Together and it therefore influences all the work of the partners.

In terms of the strategic planning work, a real effort was made to plan jointly. To start the work, a very thorough assessment was undertaken of the main drivers that influence the county now and are likely to do so in the next few years. This work was achieved jointly with partners under the banner of the Community Strategy and other key partnerships within the county. The result of this was a collection of key data and information which provided a statistical picture of the challenge facing the county to which the Council and its partners must respond. All of this meant that we, as a council and the principal partnerships, have to plan jointly on the basis of the same data.

The next step was to consult in 11 locations across the county to ascertain the opinion of public groups on the issues that require to be addressed in the years to come. Again, this work was completed jointly with partners. This meant that the Council and its partners had to discuss jointly with

residents, rather than, as in the past, go out in a fragmented way and ask the same type of questions several times to the same people.

This joint-planning led to an agreement to work on a partnership level towards achieving the main results, namely:-

- An area where the economy is thriving
- An area with a sustainable environment
- An area where Children and Young People succeed
- An exiting area to live in with safe communities
- An area with good health and the best care in the community

Within the Council, there are Six Programme Boards and three strategic projects that are collaborating to achieve results in the fields of Care, Regeneration and the Economy, Children and Young People, Environment and Infrastructure, Transformation, Savings, Health Improvement, Language and the Local Development Plan.

It should also be noted that the Council has a Welsh Language Scheme and a programme to promote the Welsh language: Our language agenda is not noted within this Scheme, but attention is given to language matters (along with all the protected characteristics) within our equality impact assessment template.

4) NEXT STEPS

- Following the recommendations of the Council Board, we will be publishing the Schemes, the Appendices and the Action Plan on the Council's website. We will be pleased to provide copies on request in languages other than Welsh and English or in an alternative format.
- In order to promote transparency, we will also provide and publish a brief easy-to-read version.
- In accordance with statutory requirements, we will review the Scheme in four years and we will report on progress on an annual basis.
- Legislation allows us to adapt the Scheme between reviews. In order to respond to changes and needs and in order to keep the Scheme live, we intend to take advantage of this flexibility.