

Carmarthenshire County Council

Strategic Equality Plan

2016-2020

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Introduction

Carmarthenshire County Council has developed a Strategic Equality Plan which covers all our legal duties and which reaffirms our commitment to equality and diversity. This is the second Strategic Equality Plan that the Council has prepared and published.

This strategic plan sets out the principles of our commitment to equality and diversity and outlines how we intend to fulfil our responsibilities and ensure that we follow our principles through into practice.

These commitments are outlined in terms of:

- The role of the county council as an employer;

- The role of the county council as a provider of services;

- The role of the county council in promoting tolerance, understanding and respect within the wider community.

This Plan outlines how we will promote equality and diversity for the next four years, some of the practical steps we will be taking to put our commitments into practice and how we will monitor our performance and the effectiveness of this Strategic Plan.

Comments and suggestions as to how the council can improve and best perform as an equal opportunities organisation can be submitted at any time to the:

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Carmarthenshire County Council
County Hall
Carmarthen
SA31 1JP

equalities@carmarthenshire.gov.uk

Our Commitment to Equality and Diversity

The authority has 8 Core Values:

1. Openness, Trust, Honesty, Integrity
2. Putting Customers First
3. Listening and Delivering on Promises
4. Working in Partnerships
5. Valuing our staff
6. Ensuring Equality of Opportunity
7. Treating people and the environment with respect
8. Improving our services

The importance of Equality of opportunity to the authority is clear within core value number six on this list, but it is also intrinsic throughout the other 7.

We are committed to treating our staff, and the people of Carmarthenshire, fairly. We will make sure that we do not discriminate against people because of their age, disability, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, belief or non belief, social class, gender, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, responsibility for dependents or for any other unfair reason.

We are committed to ensuring the delivery of excellent public services to everyone living, working, studying and visiting Carmarthenshire.

This Strategic Equality Plan outlines the continued commitment of Carmarthenshire County Council to creating an environment of true equality and diversity across the county.

Legal Background

The new Equality Act came into force on 1 October 2010. The Equality Act brings together over 116 separate pieces of legislation into one single Act. Combined, they make up a new Act that provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all.

The Act simplifies, strengthens and harmonises the current legislation to provide Britain with a new discrimination law which protects individuals from unfair treatment.

A major feature of the new Act is that it introduces a Public Sector Equality Duty covering 9 protected characteristics. The protected characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion and belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

In Carmarthenshire, there is also a particular need to have regard to the Welsh Language. Although this falls under a separate legislative framework, (Welsh Language Measure 2011), there is a considerable tie-in between the council's wider approach to equalities and diversity and the commitment the council has towards the Welsh Language – and especially the need to ensure that people can use the language of their choice (Welsh or English) when dealing with the council.

The requirements to Assess for Impact in relation to the nine characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010, applies equally to the Welsh Language.

Further information on the Welsh language Standards can be found on the council's website or through the Welsh language Commissioner.

Public Sector Equality Duties

As referred to on page 6, the Equality Act 2010 places Public Sector Duties on listed bodies in the Act.

The General Duty

The aim of the General Duty is to ensure that public authorities and those who carry out a public function consider how they can positively contribute to a fairer society through advancing equality and good relations in their day-to-day activities.

Public bodies are required to have due regard to the need to:

1. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act
2. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not
3. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Specific duties in Wales

The Equality Act 2010 made provision for Welsh Ministers to be able to make regulations that place specific public sector equality duties on relevant Welsh public authorities listed in Part 2 of Schedule 19 of the Act.

The duties have been developed to be proportionate in design, relevant to need, transparent in approach and tailored to guide relevant Welsh public authorities towards better performance of the general duty. The ambition is to better meet the needs of the citizens of Wales relying on the services provided to them by the public sector.

The Specific Duties in Wales are set out in the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 and came into force on 6 April 2011.

In Wales, the specific duties state that the listed bodies will undertake and develop the following requirements:

- Objectives
- Strategic Equality Plans
- Engagement
- Assessing Impact
- Equality information
- Employment information
- Pay differences
- Staff training
- Procurement
- Annual reporting (by Public Authorities and Welsh Ministers)
- Publishing
- Review
- Accessibility

We will ensure that during the lifetime of this Plan, we will fulfil and comply with each of the Specific Duties noted above.

About Carmarthenshire

According to the 2011 Census, the population of Carmarthenshire is 183,777 persons. This represents a numerical increase of 10,935 persons and a percentage increase of 6.3% since the last Census was undertaken in 2001. In comparison, the population of Wales increased by 5.5% over the 10 year period, while the total increase for England and Wales as a whole was slightly higher at 7.8%, confirming that Carmarthenshire's growth pattern is fairly consistent with the England and Wales average.

Carmarthenshire has a population density of 0.8 persons per hectare, which is lower than 17 of the 22 Unitary Authorities in Wales. The most densely populated settlements in Carmarthenshire are, in descending order, Tyshia, Lliedi, Bigyn and Pontamman. Carmarthenshire's International Labour Organisation (ILO) unemployment rate – which comprises individuals who are unemployed and actively seeking work – was 5.2% in the year ending September 2012, the lowest rate since 2006 and considerably lower than the Wales average of 8.4%. However, over the same trend period (2006 – 2012), the number of persons in Carmarthenshire who may be classified as 'long term unemployed' (those in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance for a duration exceeding 6 months) has risen by 66.2%, peaking in 2010 at 3,835 persons but flattening out in 2012 to 3,590 claimants, of which 34.7% (1,245 persons) are aged between 16-24.

Population change in Carmarthenshire mirrors patterns of growth observed throughout Wales as a whole for all but one age group. This anomaly is present in the 0-15 age group, where an almost two percent decrease in children aged 0 to 15 years between 2001 and 2011 in Carmarthenshire contrasts with a 1.3% increase on a national scale over the same period. Excluding a minimal increase of 9.4% in the 0-4 age group in Carmarthenshire since the last Census, the county's young population, specifically those aged between 5 and 14 years, has experienced a 7.1% reduction. In contrast, Carmarthenshire's young adult population (18-24) has risen significantly. The 2011 Census records a 20.3% increase in this age category which, for the most part, may be accredited to the developments in the higher education sector (Coleg Sir Gâr & Trinity Saint David).

The most dramatic increase was observed amongst the older age groups, in particular those aged between 60 – 74 years and 85 years and over, where increases of 24.1% and 32.4% respectively were reported. Both increases were above the Wales average of 21.2% (60 – 74 years) and 27.7% (85 years and over) and reinforce the model of an ageing population, whereby a greater number of Carmarthenshire residents are concentrated in older age groups above pensionable age.

If we could shrink Carmarthenshire's population to a village of approximately 100 people, with all of the existing human ratios remaining the same, there would be:

- 49 Males and 51 Females (2011 Census)
- 18 children aged under 16 (2011 Census)
- 61 people of working age (2011 Census)
- 21 people of pensionable age (2011 Census)
- 44 people able to speak Welsh (2011 Census)
- 98 people from a white background and 2 from a non-white background (2011 Census)
- 6 – 9 people would be Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (Stonewall Cymru)
- 14 people with a limiting long term illness (2011 Census)
- 13 people would be providing unpaid care (2011 Census)
- 24 of the working age population with a disability (DWP Stats May 2013)
- 62 people who were Christian, 1 person would be of other religion and 29 would have no religion (8 would prefer not to state their religion) (2011 Census)
- 17 households would be earning less than £10,000 per year and 5 households would be earning over £80,000 per year (CACI Paycheck 2013)
- 31 people from the total population claiming key Department of Work and Pension benefits (DWP Stats May 2013)
- 18 lone parent households (2011 Census)

When we consider our County from such a compressed perspective, the need for acceptance, respect, understanding and knowledge of equality and diversity issues becomes apparent.

The Carmarthenshire Strategic Equality Plan

The Carmarthenshire Strategic Equality Plan considers three dimensions to our responsibilities, and these are set out in more detail in the following three chapters:

Our role as an employer: We are the county's largest employer and have a workforce exceeding 8,000 (including school based staff). We are committed to ensuring equality within our workforce and we want to be an exemplar of good practice to other employers.

Our role as a service provider: We provide around 300 different services to local people, which are as diverse as providing the local education service, refuse collection, caring for vulnerable older people or children, providing leisure facilities, maintaining highways and as landlord for 9000 council homes. We wish to ensure that all of our services are provided in accordance with the commitments contained in this Strategic Equality Plan.

Our role as a community leader: We wish to promote tolerance and understanding and to help build a cohesive and united community within Carmarthenshire. We will promote the principles of equality and diversity as set out in this Strategic Equality Plan through our working with partners and community organizations throughout the county.

This Strategic Equality Plan outlines the continued commitment of Carmarthenshire County Council to creating an environment of true equality and diversity across the county.

The Council recognises the importance of leadership on a number of levels. A member of the Executive Board is an Equalities Champion and plays a key role in overseeing the application of the Strategic Equality Plan. Alongside this, the Councillor champions issues of Equality within the Executive Board itself.

Equalities and Diversity and our Improvement Plan

The Wales Programme for Improvement guidance explicitly mentions 'reducing inequality in accessing or benefiting from services, or improving the wellbeing of disadvantaged groups'.

In order to successfully deliver our Equality Objectives, they will be an integral part of our service business plans and our Improvement Plan.

Engagement

Engagement is one of the Specific Duties for Wales. The development of this Strategic Equality Plan has involved representatives from all of our stakeholders, customers, staff, elected members, community groups and partners.

From the Council's Improvement Plan, through to the Carmarthenshire Disability Coalition and to Community Cohesion projects and events, our objectives have been developed through engagement with our communities. We have used surveys, focus groups, forums and engagement meetings to set the priorities. However, we do need to know more and this will form one of the priorities of the Plan.

The Strategic Equality Plan reflects the needs of our communities and will develop as our communities change in the future. Over the next four years, the Council will develop its understanding of the needs and aspirations of its communities and the ways in which it involves communities in monitoring its performance against our objectives.

Setting our Equality Objectives

Our Equality Objectives have been set following collection of evidence and feedback from our engagement work. All Equality Objectives are relevant to every Protected Characteristic.

Carmarthenshire County Council as an employer – promoting equality and diversity within our workforce

Our Equality Objectives:

- Attract and retain the very best workforce.
- Work to improve employment monitoring data held by the Local Authority and ensure pay differentials are identified and acted upon.

To promote the achievement of these objectives we will:

- Ensure the Council attracts talent from the widest pool of potential employees.
- Continue to develop staff, in line with the Council's People Strategy.
- Undertake exercises to refresh the Council's employment monitoring data and address gaps.
- Analyse data and undertake corrective action where necessary.

Our detailed action plan will include the actions which sit under each of our strategic objectives and the timescales that we are working to.

Staff awareness and training

Staff training is one of the Specific Duties for Wales and indeed, learning and development opportunities are key to the success of our Strategic Equality Plan. Linking staff knowledge and skills to our equality objectives will help to ensure that all learning and development resources are being targeted towards enabling individuals to fulfill their roles, support their local service Business Plans and meet personal responsibilities.

Equality and Diversity provision forms a core part of our Learning and Development Strategy and we will continue to develop and tailor courses in line with our Strategic objectives. Learning and Development opportunities will be available to all Elected Members and Staff.

Pay differences

Addressing pay differences is one of the specific duties in Wales. In 2011 the Authority implemented job evaluation and single status.

The main features of this are:

- A single pay and grading structure
- Harmonisation of terms and conditions
- A standard working week of 37 hours
- It has been subject to an independent equality impact assessment focusing particularly on gender

The key aims are to:

- Ensure equal pay for jobs of equal value
- Modernise the Council's pay structure
- Ensure that the Council's pay and reward strategy supports flexible working and modern service delivery
- Harmonise other conditions of service, for example, overtime payments and travel allowances.

In December 2013 the Authority achieved a collective agreement with the recognised trade unions to assimilate employees on 'Red Book' terms and conditions into the new single status pay and grading structure. During 2015 the majority of employees on Youth and Community grades were also assimilated to the single status pay and grading structure.

The Authority is committed to undertake an annual pay audit and any changes to the pay structure or terms and conditions are subject to an equality impact assessment.

Carmarthenshire County Council as a provider of services

Our Equality objectives:

- Continue work to remove the barriers to accessing Council services and give due regard to all groups when making decisions.
- Help maximise the potential of people, through the education system and by supporting the growth of the local economy.

To promote the achievement of these objectives we will:

- Respond to access concerns raised by the public.
- Recognise community concerns quickly through continued regular contact with the Carmarthenshire Disability Coalition and Equality Carmarthenshire groups.
- Continue to refine the process of undertaking equality impact assessments (EIAs).
- Mainstream actions addressing education, employment, poverty and business growth through the County's Well-being Plan.

Our detailed action plan will include the actions which sit under each of our strategic objectives and the timescales that we are working to.

Assessing for Impact

The law requires that a duty to pay 'due regard' be demonstrated in the decision making process. Assessing the potential equality impact of proposed changes to policies, procedures and practices is one of the key ways in which public authorities can show 'due regard'. Assessing for Impact is one of the Specific Duties for Wales.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission recommends that public bodies assess the impact their policy and financial decisions might have on the new protected groups where relevant and proportionate, and that this is best done through the use of an Assessing for Impact tool.

Carmarthenshire County Council has embraced this approach and has developed its own template for assessing policies and service changes. In

some cases this will be augmented by a more detailed assessment and statement showing what steps have been taken to mitigate against any potentially adverse impacts to persons falling into any of the 8 protected characteristics and the Welsh language.

Assessments are required of 'policies' to embrace the full range of functions, activities (including service delivery) and decisions for which the council is responsible. This includes both current policies and new policies under development.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission suggest that an Assessment has four possible outcomes and that more than one may apply to a single policy:

Outcome 1: No major change

The Assessment demonstrates the policy is robust; there is no potential for discrimination or adverse impact. All opportunities to promote equality have been taken.

Outcome 2: Adjust the policy

The Assessment identifies potential problems or missed opportunities. Adjust the policy to remove barriers or better promote equality.

Outcome 3: Continue the policy

The Assessment identifies the potential for adverse impact or missed opportunities to promote equality. Clearly set out the justifications for continuing with it. The justification should be included in the EIA and must be in line with the duty to have due regard.

Outcome 4: Stop and remove the policy

The policy shows actual or potential unlawful discrimination. It must be stopped and removed or changed.

(Codes of practice and guidance on each of the public sector duties are available on the Equality and Human Rights Commission's website which

provides information about what constitutes unlawful discrimination (www.equalityhumanrights.com)

Procurement

Procurement is a Specific Duty for Wales. Carmarthenshire County Council contracts with external organisations in the private and third sectors for provision of works, goods or services. Equality considerations will be more relevant to some services, goods or works but we must always have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

We will give due regard at all stages of the procurement process to the need to advance equality. For example in planning the contract and advertising; in setting the evaluation criteria and preparing specifications and also in monitoring our contracts with third parties.

Carmarthenshire County Council as a community leader – promoting tolerance and respect within the wider community

Our Equality objectives:

- Support cohesive communities by promoting community and civic engagement.
- We will encourage healthy lifestyles and promote the importance of well-being.

To promote the achievement of these principles we will:

- Mainstream actions addressing sense of community, citizenship, satisfaction with services, community safety, and engagement with leisure and culture through the County's Well-being Plan.
- Mainstream actions addressing well-being (including housing, loneliness, mental health and physical activity) through the County's Well-being Plan.

Our detailed action plan will include the actions which sit under each of our strategic objectives and the timescales that we are working to.

Monitoring and Reporting on the progress of this Strategic Plan

Monitoring and reporting are Specific Duties for Wales. We will monitor how well we perform on the priorities and objectives we have developed on equality and diversity through the council's performance management framework.

We will produce an annual report outlining what we have done in the preceding year, and what actions we have planned for the coming year. Annual Reports from our first Strategic Equality Plan and our Workforce Information Reports can be found on our website.

Community groups and representatives will have an opportunity to comment on this plan and to make suggestions as to how we could do better.

The Annual Report will be presented to the Executive Board and Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

The Strategic Equality Plan will be revised every 4 years.

Thank you for taking your time to read our Strategic Equality Plan

If you want to know more, please contact the

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County Hall
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www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales