Annual Report 2024-25

Cyngor Gwynedd's Strategic Equality Plan

Foreword

I'm delighted to present the 2024-25 Annual Report for Gwynedd Council's Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028, which is the first report for this Plan. This is also the first report I have presented since becoming Cabinet Member with responsibility for Equality.

I'm pleased to say that much of the long-term work has begun during this year, with a clear framework to follow throughout the remainder of the Plan's period.

I am pleased to say that an Equality Forum for Council Staff has been established, and the Council has been successful in obtaining Disability Confident Scheme's level 2 accreditation, which is a way for us to work towards being at the forefront regarding employment equality.

In addition, the Equality Training Framework has progressed with a clear action plan and additional titles for specific areas included. I'm also pleased to say that the new equality impact assessment template is in place and ready to be used by staff, with additional resources to enable them to complete it effectively.

In addition to these objectives, the plan also looks at different services, including museums. I am pleased to be able to say that there has been a lot of work done by this service during the year using alternative methods to ensure a better experience for the Gwynedd public.

I now look forward to seeing the progress continue over the remainder of the Strategic Equality Plan period, up to 2028.

Llio Elenid Owen

Elected Member for Corporate Services

Introduction

In March 2024, the Council published Cyngor Gwynedd's Strategic Equality Plan 2024-28, to continue with the work of ensuring fairness for all. This fulfils public sector duties under the Equality Act 2010 as it is implemented in Wales.

The Act has been designed to reduce inequalities between specific groups by asking public bodies to give due regard 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.

The Plan looks at fairness in terms of nine protected characteristics, i.e.:

- 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)

The Equality Act 2010 also includes the Socio-economic Duty since 2021. The expectation is for public bodies to take socio-economic deprivation into account when making strategic decisions.

This Plan describes the work that would form the Council's priority in the equality field for the four years in question, which has been divided into five objectives, namely:

- **Objective 1: Employment: Acting to improve equality in the workplace**
- **Objective 2: Information - Improving our data about people with equality characteristics**
- **Objective 3: Systems: Ensuring that the Council is an anti-discriminatory organisation, by improving our internal systems**
- **Objective 4: Services: Ensuring equality within our day-to-day work**
- **Objective 5: Schools: Improve equality within education**

One of these objectives, namely Objective 1, relates to employment and includes actions on the pay gap, as the specific duty requires us to do.

The specific duty also requires us to have objectives on each protected characteristic. Our decision has been to produce thematic objectives, and every objective works towards equality for each of the protected characteristics. This reduces duplication and makes it easier to identify factors that come from intersectionality (these are the additional barriers faced by people with more than one specific characteristic).

In this report we outline, per objective, the action points we have committed to in our Strategic Equality Plan, how the objectives respond to the requirements of the act, and the difference we intend to make by the end of the Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028.

Objective 1: Employment: Acting to improve equality in the workplace

Relevant actions for the year

- Establish a staff forum(s) to discuss equality issues, so that our employees can contribute to the area within the Council.
- Set the aim of working towards being a leading employer in this field, including addressing the following fields:
    - Not include unnecessary requirements in our job descriptions when advertising jobs to give as many people as possible the opportunity to apply.
    - How and where we advertise jobs.
    - Our image as an employer in our communities - be proactive when trying to attract people from every part of a community to work for Cyngor Gwynedd.
- Continue to take steps to fully develop the awareness of managers and staff of this field, including equality, inclusion, neurodiversity, sexual harassment, respect and dignity in the workplace.
- Hold a pay gap audit annually, considering what steps to take to try and close the gap. Reach a situation where we can also hold a pay gap audit on the grounds of disability and race.

What have we done

Objective 1 relates to improving equality in the workplace, for the sake of our staff and job applicants, ensuring that we are equal opportunity employers. One of our priorities to ensure the success of the objective was to understand staff perspective and accept their feedback in relation to equality matters by establishing a Staff Equality Forum. The forum was established by inviting volunteers to commit to becoming members of the Group. Meetings have been arranged for the next operating year, namely 2025-26, and we are looking to the members to contribute their ideas and judgement on equality matters in employment.

We have also started to work towards becoming a leading employer, giving specific attention to our image as an employer in our communities, being proactive when trying to attract people from every part of society to work for Cyngor Gwynedd. As a way of measuring the type of employer we are in relation to disability, we were committed to reach a Level 2 Accreditation of the Disability Confident standard, after being on level 1 of the accreditation in the previous Equality Plan. We have managed to reach the level 2 accreditation as a Council, which is in force until 2028, with an ambition to reach level 3 by the end of the Plan.

Continuing to take steps to develop the awareness of managers and staff of equality fields in the workplace was also a priority for this year. One of the specific fields identified was neurodiversity. To ensure that staff understand the field, a training programme is in place, which looks specifically at autism. Ten sessions have been arranged for 2025, with three of them during this operating year. Also, our Elected Members have had the opportunity to complete a 'Neurodiversity Awareness' course. The council has also responded to legislation about Sexual Harassment in the Workplace. This legislation came into force at the end of October 2024 and therefore work has commenced to create specific training in the field. This work will continue into the next operating year.

The Council also has a specific duty to look annually at the pay gap between the sexes, conducting an audit and considering which steps can be taken to try to close the gap. We have established arrangements and systems which allow us to conduct a timely audit every year, based on gender in the first instance. The Payroll Unit is working on the core data to report a pay gap figure based on gender for March 2025.

How do the objectives respond to the requirements of the act?

We look at our progress against three elements of the duty, as well as considering socio-economic deprivation, as noted at the beginning of the report, to measure the success of the objectives and how they respond to the specific requirements.

Firstly, we believe that committing to reach a Level 2 Accreditation of the Disability Confident standard helps us to prevent discrimination specifically based on disability, and allows us to consider good practice, measuring the ways in which we are leading employers. This step is also essential for us to be able to ensure equal opportunities for disabled people in the workplace, ensuring that people who are under-represented are being encouraged to take part in every element of the workplace.

The second point that reinforces the prevention of unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation is to prioritise training and staff awareness in fields such as neurodiversity and sexual harassment, to ensure that everyone is treated with respect and dignity in the workplace. Training is also an opportunity to nurture good connections between people who have a general protected characteristic and those without that characteristic, and to raise staff awareness about the protected characteristics to encourage good relations.

The third point that responds to this need is conducting an annual pay gap audit, considering which actions to take to try and close the gap. This allows us to look at any systematic indirect discrimination and reducing the gap is a continuous discussion throughout the wider strategic plan. This audit also works towards the objective of promoting equal opportunities between people who have a relevant protected characteristic, namely gender, and specifically considers reducing the socio-economic disadvantage gap. Monitoring the pay gap ensures that we can identify and respond to any socio-economic disadvantage.

Finally, creating and establishing an equality forum for staff was an important element to respond to the need to promote equal opportunities between people who have a general relevant protected characteristic and those without any type of characteristic, encouraging them to take part in the public life of the workplace. Bringing people who share various characteristics together creates and strengthens their connections and provides equal opportunities to report back to the Council on equality matters and nurture good relations.

What difference do we expect to make by the end of the Equality Plan 2024-2028 period?

We have started to establish steps where staff are able to take part and offer ideas on how Cyngor Gwynedd as an employer could improve things for people with equality characteristics. We also ensure that they understand the needs of others by providing training on specific characteristics. We take practical steps to develop our image as an employer for people with equality characteristics and aim, in the long term, to be innovative in the field. We will also ensure that our managers and staff have access to information to support them when dealing with employment matters that are associated with the field.

Objective 2: Information: Improving our data about people with equality characteristics

Relevant actions for the year

- Create an easier and more accessible system of storing our equality data. The aim is to make it easier to use when amending policies and creating plans.
- Improve and update the data we have on Gwynedd in the Equality in North Wales document, filling in any gaps if possible.

What have we done

Objective 2 specifically looks at data and how, as a Council, we could improve our data about people with equality characteristics. Data Cymru has now developed a dashboard which brings some of the core data in the field together, on a county level. After the dashboard was released, we have reviewed the content and decided to create a Dashboard specifically for Gwynedd. As a starting point, it will include information from the North Wales Data Document. Therefore, during the year 2024-25, the data officers went through the process

of determining what additional information was required, researched what is available and how to ensure that the information is shared in an easy and accessible way. It was not possible to complete the work within the one-year period as the Data Cymru Dashboard was unavailable until September.

How do the objectives respond to the requirements of the act?

We assess the progress against three elements of the duty, as well as considering socio-economic deprivation noted at the beginning of the report to measure the success of the objectives and how they respond to the specific requirements.

Receiving correct data complies with three elements of the duty as data is used to draw up future equality policies and plans, ensuring effective equality impact assessments. By reviewing and improving the quality of equality data, the Council is in a better position to note and address fields where people with protected characteristics could experience discrimination or disadvantage. The decision to create a specific dashboard for Gwynedd itself helps to ensure that policies and practices are steered by a clear understanding of the barriers that our local communities face. By noting and filling data gaps, the Council can design services which promote equal opportunities proactively for those with protected characteristics, ensuring that inclusive decisions are made and working to respond to any socio-economic disadvantage that could appear. Getting easy access to correct data allows us to identify and act on any socio-economic gaps.

What difference do we intend to make by the end of the Equality Plan 2024-2028 period?

We intend to improve the data we have in order to use it when creating or amending a policy or way of working and provide a better service to the people of Gwynedd. We will also ensure that we obtain suitable input from people with protected characteristics, without overwhelming them by questioning them often. It is important to have an overview and a clear understanding of the main problems facing people with different protected characteristics.

Objective 3: Systems: Ensuring that the Council is an anti-discriminatory organisation, by improving our internal systems

Relevant actions for the year

- Continue with the training framework ensuring that it includes a range of equality characteristics / diverse topics, in order to give our staff at all levels within the Council the resources and confidence to respect diversity and deal with a range of needs appropriately.
- Raise Council staff awareness of the new Equality Impact Assessment procedure and provide support, information and training to ensure the quality of work.

- Make our website more accessible by creating an action plan and acting on it. This will include working towards getting rid of the use of PDF documents.
- Continue to work to reduce Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

What have we done

Objective 3 looks at equality within the Council's internal systems and how we can continue to be an anti-discriminatory organisation. The first sub action point looks at internal training systems for our staff. A Power Bi dashboard has been created, and is now live, which provides an accurate picture for the Heads of Department of the number of staff members who have completed mandatory training, including the equality training. Work will continue throughout the period of the plan to ensure that staff members complete the training.

During the year, work has also been done to review the training that managers receive in the equality field. There is no specific training for managers to complete to date. However, to further support managers, information and resources are available for them on the Leading and Managing Hub, and we have started on the work of preparing Equality Impact Assessment training for managers (electronically). The rest of the plan period will look at developing a series of equality training for them.

We are also reviewing the content of the training programme regularly to include courses on a variety of equality characteristics. This work is continuous in order to work towards being a leading authority in this field. During this operating year, the Council has identified priority areas from the Welsh Government, namely anti-racism, LGBTQ+ and disability, and a plan has been prepared to arrange sessions in these core fields. By now, the LGBTQ+ training pilot has been conducted by Adferiad Cymru, and work is continuing to gather and analyse staff feedback. A Learning and Development Panel has been established to accept applications for any further training courses required in this field that could be added to the Learning and Development Framework.

The Council also continues with the developmental session on Women in Leadership with another cohort beginning in September 2024

The second action point that we are looking at this year is specifically on our equality impact assessment procedure, creating a new procedure, promoting it and ensuring support for staff to complete the assessments effectively. By now, an electronic version of the Equality Impact Assessment has been completed by the IT service, and work to prepare training on how to use it has started, with a clear plan in place. During the year, equality officers have started to promote the electronic impact assessment for managers and staff, raising awareness with a training clip explaining the importance of the assessment and encouraging its use. Based on responses and feedback from staff, the template itself has been adapted where required, and further updates will continue throughout the plan period to ensure that the template is accessible and useful for staff, to ensure effective assessments.

Continuing to look at our internal systems, the next action point looks at accessibility and how to make our website more accessible over the plan period.

A series of meetings have been established and conducted monthly with the IT department to identify any new accessibility matters arising. In response to these discussions, a live action plan has been created to record matters arising, ensuring that the tasks are divided appropriately. As part of this work, a temporary Accessibility Officer has been appointed on a 12-month contract and has started in the role since January 2025. Following this, work will start on re-designing the website's home page to get rid of many accessibility problems that have been identified and to look more specifically at the accessibility of PDF documents, in the next operating year.

Looking at our internal arrangements, the final action step looks at our White Ribbon plan which has already been part of the council's strategic plans and has been transferred from the Equality Plan 2020-24 to allow us to continue working to reduce Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence. Staff are encouraged to complete safeguarding training to ensure that they have an understanding and awareness of the safeguarding procedures, with completing this mandatory training being a requirement. The training is promoted as part of the work to promote mandatory courses by the Learning and Development Service, and this is ongoing work. The Council's procurement guidelines and policy is currently in the process of being reviewed to include safeguarding considerations, and safeguarding and domestic abuse elements will be included. The pre-qualification questions within the Council's procurement process have been published and we will review the series of questions to ensure that they meet the requirement to give attention to safeguarding and domestic abuse.

Raising awareness and taking part in the White Ribbon campaign is also a key part of this work. In November 2024, the White Ribbon Day was supported by raising awareness amongst staff through various ways, flying a white banner outside the Council's chamber and Elected Members wearing white ribbons. Also, a press statement was announced noting that the Council takes violence against women seriously and uses its position to influence and make a difference internally and externally. We are also researching to develop safeguarding and domestic abuse information sheets in other languages, to be accessible for refugees and asylum-seekers.

How do the objectives respond to the requirements of the act?

We assess the progress against three elements of the duty, as well as considering socio-economic deprivation noted at the beginning of the report to measure the success of the objectives and how they respond to the specific requirements.

Objective 3 helps the Council to fulfil its equality duties by focusing on improving internal systems to ensure that it acts as an anti-discriminatory organisation. By continuing with a comprehensive training framework which includes a variety of equality areas and characteristics, the council provides staff on every level, including managers, with the

resources and confidence to be able to respond to various equality needs. This strengthens the effort to prevent unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to promote equal opportunities, raising awareness and nurturing good connections. Updating the template and promoting the Equality Impact Assessment, especially for managers, also responds to the requirements, ensuring that staff are aware of their responsibilities and are able to make inclusive decisions, which looks at these three elements of the act specifically. The impact assessment template emphasises the importance of considering any socio-economic impact, as well as protected characteristics and therefore fulfils the need to comply with the 2021 duty, specifically when making strategic decisions. In addition, promoting campaigns such as the White Ribbon Day and continuing to work to reduce Violence against Women, fosters good relationships, creating a proactive culture.

What difference do we intend to make by the end of the Equality Plan 2024-2028 period?

Our aim is to ensure that the Council's arrangements give consideration to all equality characteristics and that our staff understand and accept their responsibilities in the field. We will ensure better understanding of the rights and needs of people with various characteristics by creating a variety of training titles. In addition, that consideration of equality characteristics is given the place it deserves when producing and amending policies and ways of working through our Equality Impact Assessment procedure. We will ensure that people receive the information that they need by making our website more user-friendly. Promoting the White Ribbon plan also provides support for staff to understand their responsibility in the field.

Objective 4: Services: Ensuring equality within our day-to-day work

Relevant actions for the year

- The Museums and Arts Service will support the communities of Gwynedd by:
  - Providing inclusive programmes for our diverse communities, whether they are an exhibition, an activity, events, promotion opportunities, projects and grants
  - Ensuring that the narrative in our museums is suitable (anti-racist etc.), and that the stories of people with particular characteristics are heard
  - Working with communities of people with equality characteristics to remove barriers to using our museums and galleries
- The Housing and Property Department will
  - Fulfil Cyngor Gwynedd's Housing Action Plan activities who has the aim of "Ensuring that the people of Gwynedd have access to a suitable home of a high standard, that is affordable and improves their quality of life".
  - Establish a One-Stop Shop which will be a new system which could respond to residents' needs by presenting applications relating to housing in one central place.
- The Transport service will

- Continue to work to ensure that public transport is more accessible.

What have we done

Under Objective 4, we look at three specific services / departments to ensure equality within day-to-day work. The first service is Museums. During the year, the Museums Service has been assessing the accessibility of the service it offers, with the aim of creating an action plan to get rid of any barriers. This has given attention to operational matters that have arisen in recent general equality questionnaires, as well as any matters that have arisen through other feedback or complaints.

The Museums Service also looks at the accessibility of the service, has identified the provision of inclusive programmes for various communities as one of its priorities, planning programmes with equality objectives part of it. Between 2024 and 2025, they looked at the programmes in order to report on the numbers of opportunities and the feedback on them, ensuring that the programmes are inclusive, and then identifying improvements. Storiel accepted a grant used to support an artist with a small exhibition in the "Wonders Cabinet" in September/October and a workshop looking at Caribbean heritage through an artistic lens. Storiel staff members have received mentoring through a Welsh Government plan for museums for the Anti-Racism Plan and the Lloyd George Museum staff through AIM (Association of Independent Museums).

Another priority for the Service was to ensure that the narrative in our museums is suitable and that the stories of people with specific characteristics are heard. There was an emphasis on ensuring that planning new exhibitions and other updates are made in an inclusive way. A successful SPF grant application was made to reinterpret the Lloyd George Museum which includes engagement, with the work continuing with match funding until March 2025. Following this, an application has been submitted for 2025/6 to continue with engagement work in the Lloyd George Museum and Storiel. There is a Welsh Government grant in place to support Storiel to look at developing an audience between September 2024 and March 2025. This information will feed into the future plans. The service will look at continuing this work, gathering feedback from the community to be able to plan for the next period. Feedback through engagement will include customer satisfaction, responding to complaints and any other identified media.

The second service / department that is part of this objective is the Housing and Property Department. They are working on Cyngor Gwynedd's Housing Action Plan which coincides with the Equality Plan period. During the year, the Department has consulted with communities to identify the housing needs of residents as part of the Ardal Ni corporate survey, where 2,220 responses were received. It provided a better understanding of the barriers that prevent the people of Gwynedd from living in a place that meets their needs. Following the consultation, the service is in the process of upgrading many affordable housing dwellings, jointly developed with our Housing Partners. 278 units have been constructed as part of the Social Housing Development Programme, with another 262 underway, with the Council aiming to ensure that Gwynedd houses are environmentally friendly and offer energy efficiency advantages to residents. During the period, the Council

has managed to distribute 4102 energy vouchers that are worth £167,820. As a result, 278 properties have seen progress in their energy performance certificate through the ECO4 plan, with another 600 having been approved.

Also as part of the work, a One-Stop Shop was established to facilitate the process of submitting applications for Social Housing and to improve access to the service in general. This enables Council officers to assess the customer needs, referring to one enquiry as required. Research work and engagement sessions have been conducted with key stakeholders and partners to identify the need and opportunities to improve the current arrangements. There is a new procedure to simplify the process relating to the Housing Support Grant, with a one contact point/SPOA arrangement established, and over 691 Gwynedd residents have already benefited by receiving information and guidance with their relevant housing support needs.

The third service that is part of this objective is the Transport Service. It continues to work to ensure that public transport is more accessible, gathering information about the needs of different groups to understand how to address individual needs. During the year, an officer from the department has visited the Council's Equality Core Group, to listen to their views and design for the future. Following this, work has commenced on implementing on the feedback by adapting bus timetables so that they are more suitable for older people. Reasonable adaptations have also been made such as printing bus timetables on an A3 paper for anyone who requires it.

How do the objectives respond to the requirements of the act?

We assess the progress against three elements of the duty, as well as considering socio-economic deprivation noted at the beginning of the report to measure the success of the objectives and how they respond to the specific requirements.

The Museums Service has worked to note, understand and get rid of barriers by assessing the accessibility of the service, considering feedback through questionnaires, complaints and any further information. By doing this, the Council contributes to removing discrimination by noting the barriers and the need to promote equal opportunities by creating an inclusive environment which is accessible for Gwynedd residents. The Service prioritises the promotion of equal opportunities and fostering good relations by providing comprehensive programmes for various communities, for example, Storiel's Caribbean exhibition, to reflect the variety of our community. To add to the three aims, the service has worked to ensure that the narrative presented reflects the variety of our community. Throughout the year, this community work specifically focuses on the socio-economic duty, by promoting the community's well-being and community projects, with access to many activities for free.

The Housing Service contributes to removing discrimination by consulting with communities to identify needs within the field, to ensure that no one is discriminated against indirectly. The work of removing discrimination and trying to promote equal opportunities continues by increasing the number of affordable housing and prioritising energy costs support. The One-Stop Shop also complies with the three aims by improving the internal system

arrangements to be more accessible. All of this work contributes to reducing the socio-economic gap.

The Transport Service also, like other Services, tries to remove discrimination and promote equal opportunities by gathering information about the needs of different groups and then works to make any adaptations required for the service based on the feedback. The action of gathering views from the Equality Core Group contributes to fostering a good relationship by bringing different groups together with council staff to be able to discuss the various matters. In addition to this, the Equality Core Group has been able to offer and discuss several points regarding socio-economic disadvantage throughout the year which also responds to the 2021 requirements.

What difference do we intend to make by the end of the Equality Plan 2024-2028 period?

We will look at how accessible our services are to everyone and work to reduce any barriers. Our Museums and Arts Service will also build on what is already in place to ensure that communities can contribute their voices to the narrative in our museums, to have more opportunities, fewer barriers and enable them to participate more in their culture and experience enjoyment, learning and health and well-being improvements. People have told us the importance of housing and transport for those with specific equality characteristics and those living under socio-economic disadvantage, and we have action points in these fields too to improve people's living standards.

Objective 5: Schools: Improve equality within education

Relevant actions for the year

- Collect, analyse and act on data relating to cases of bullying and hate crime to be able to identify training needs for school staff and work with welfare officers, the Youth Service, the Police and agencies.
- Identify the true financial and emotional cost of attending school for the children of Gwynedd and reduce costs and barriers to education, and implement a range of Mental Health and Well-being interventions to support learners, whatever their background and protected characteristics.
- Identify, monitor and act to improve the attendance, punctuality and attainment of groups of pupils such as: children who are eligible for free school meals, looked after children, continual absences, additional learning needs and other various groups as highlighted by the data.
- Establish effective arrangements to obtain children and young people's input through school councils and forums, ensuring that the pupil's voice is acted upon, irrespective of their protected characteristics and needs.

What have we done

Objective 5 looks specifically at education in Gwynedd and how to improve equality in the field. The first action point is to gather and analyse data to be able to understand the various needs of pupils. To gather the relevant data, a new procedure was established to gather data about the different categories of bullying recorded in the school. By now, 90% of Gwynedd schools are using an electronic system to record cases of bullying. The new system means it is possible to analyse the data and respond to it annually, influencing a training plan for the schools for the following year. Following the process of gathering information, there is collaboration with officers/agencies to respond to the needs that the data highlights by arranging and conducting training and support for schools, to improve staff awareness on how to respond and support in cases of bullying. Resources have been shared with schools and this will continue annually.

The second element of the objective is to identify the true financial and emotional cost of attending the school for Gwynedd children to reduce costs and barriers and getting access to education, implementing a range of Mental Health and Well-being interventions to support learners. To understand the true financial and emotional cost, questionnaires were created to gather information about the hidden costs associated with pupils attending school for the schools to consider possible amendments that could be implemented to mitigate the cost. Action steps have been established for schools to follow the analysis by drawing up a 'Cost of Attending School' Charter to highlight the steps that schools need to take to be a cost-friendly school. A draft Charter has been drawn and will be shared in the next operating year.

Following the first action step, work to implement the data that schools have has started with the objective to identify, monitor and implement to improve attendance, punctuality and attainment of groups of pupils. For example, children who are eligible for free school meals, looked after children, continual absences, additional learning needs and other various groups. A procedure to analyse the attendance data for Gwynedd schools consistently was established to be able to identify patterns of challenges from the attendance data. The Welfare Officers support schools in accordance with the findings of the attendance data, on individual and various groups level, and this work will be continuous throughout the plan period.

The final objective was to look at establishing effective arrangements to receive the input of children and young people, through school forums and councils, ensuring acting on the voice of the pupil, irrespective of their protected characteristics and needs. During 2024, work started to create a job description, advertising and appointing an Engagement and Communication Coordinator to coordinate the work of receiving the input of children and young people from schools, colleges and enterprises. Following the appointment, the Engagement and Communication Coordinator has drawn up a work programme for the educational year to establish effective arrangements to receive the input of children and young people, with the work having started in November 2024.

How do the objectives respond to the requirements of the act?

We assess the progress against three elements of the duty, as well as considering socio-economic deprivation noted at the beginning of the report to measure the success of the objectives and how they respond to the specific requirements.

Identifying the true financial and emotional cost of attending school for children and taking steps to reduce the costs and barriers, irrespective of their background is a step towards promoting equal opportunities within education and being able to prevent discrimination, ensuring that every learner gets the support that they need. This action point also specifically considers socio-economic disadvantage, looking at some of the community and financial barriers. Our aim on identifying, monitoring and implementing to improve attendance, punctuality and attainment of groups of various pupils (e.g. children eligible for free school meals, looked after children, continual absences, additional learning needs and other various groups as the data highlights) is also able to ensure that every learner gets an equal opportunity amongst their peers, and prevent any discrimination whilst fostering good relations between pupils from various backgrounds. Continuing to establish arrangements to receive the input of children and young people, through school forums and councils, goes further to ensure that the pupil's voice is acted upon, and that every learner gets an equal opportunity to be able to give their opinion on schools' arrangements and expressing their different barriers. To go further with the aim of fostering good relations, the plan looks at working with many other departments and officers, such as welfare officers, the Youth Service, and the Police, to be able to bring staff and learners together to respond to any trends within bullying and the need to provide training.

What difference do we intend to make by the end of the Equality Plan 2024-2028 period?

Our aim is to ensure equality of education and opportunity for all pupils, staff, parents and carers who receive services from our schools, irrespective of their protected characteristics and their needs. By improving equality within education, we will develop a culture of inclusion and diversity where every child who is linked with Gwynedd schools feels proud of their identity and are able to participate fully in school life. Pupils' attainment will be monitored and we will use the data to support the pupils, raise standards and ensure inclusive education. We will tackle discrimination by facilitating and supporting schools to positively promote equality, challenging bullying and stereotypes and create an environment that fosters respect towards all. In Gwynedd we believe that diversity is a strength that should be respected and celebrated by everyone within and outside the schools.

Further Information

In accordance with the guidelines of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Cyngor Gwynedd is required to report annually on the information we gather in the field of equality.

Monitoring Staff Equality Details

As filling the form is optional (in accordance with the guidelines), not enough staff members have completed it. We have recognised this and are working to encourage more workers to complete it (Objective 1, Action Point 1.8). When we have sufficient information, we will be able to identify pay gaps, on a wider level than merely gender-based (Action Point 1.6), to implement to improve variety in our workplace. 52.1% of the workforce had completed the questionnaire on 31 March 2024, a little higher than last year. The information on the equality characteristics of our workforce can be found here Employment Information 2024-25

Complaints and concerns

18 complaints came to the attention of equality officers because they contained allegations of discrimination, or because they had some other connection to equality issues. 7 of them were deemed to be valid (5 informal and 2 formal). Most (5 of them) related to disability issues – seaside access, officer behaviour on a beach, access to a building, equipment for disabled children in a playground and bins not being returned properly. Disability issues also arose among the complaints deemed invalid – yellow lines and communication modifications. We will feed this information into the work we will be doing on access in Objective 3.

The remaining topics of the valid complaints were racist graffiti and bins. The invalid ones covered 2 allegations of racism on the grounds of nationality regarding financial matters, dissatisfaction that a link about Pride was shared because it mentioned education, an allegation of discrimination on the basis of religion (Paganism), the conduct of an officer, a food safety audit causing concern, an allegation that some of the library's books were unsuitable for children, an allegation of gender discrimination as a father.

Engagement

Gathering information, especially through engagement, is a very important objective within the Equality Plan. We want to ensure that sufficient information is easily available for officers when generating impact assessments, to ensure that due regard is given to the 3 aims of the general duty and the socio-economic duty. We also want to ensure that good use is made of the information gathered, therefore the engagement work that we conducted between 2023 and 2024 has fed into and steered the current plan, with over 600 people taking part. We continue to work with the Council's Equality Core Group often throughout the year to gather their views about many different subjects. In addition, in the current operating year, we have also started to engage consistently with Council staff, by means of creating a staff forum. We will continue to develop this forum for the rest of the Plan period.

Quantitative Data

The current Strategic Equality Plan includes a specific objective on quantitative data. The intention is to create a dashboard on a local level for Gwynedd to be able to build and develop our plans when moving forward. This data will also be available for staff to use for impact assessments, to draw up policies and improve services. We have included this

Objective as we identify the importance of gathering suitable data to improve these types of services.

We have already gathered information about pay differences relating to protected characteristics and publish it annually, see the appendix. We also undertake an audit on gender-based pay gaps every three years. As part of the North Wales Public Sector Equality Network, we have commissioned the "Equality in North Wales: A Data and Evidence Document" from our Data and Information Service, which has brought wide-ranging information together to be able to form the current Plan and give us a better understanding of equality in North Wales. Our intention is to use this document as a foundation for the dashboard (see above).