Summary

The Welsh Government is under a statutory obligation to review its Equality Objectives every four years and publish a new Strategic Equality Plan. Revised Equality Objectives were published in March and the Strategic Equality Plan is planned for publication by 31 December 2016.

Cabinet is asked to agree the Strategic Equality Plan for 2016-2020 and its publication.

Background

1. The Welsh Government has a duty under the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 (also referred to as ‘the Welsh specific equality duties’) to review our Equality Objectives every four years and publish a Strategic Equality Plan. The Welsh Government is also under a duty to engage with appropriate persons when revising or remaking our Equality Objectives and the strategic equality plan. As part of the process, officials undertook a 12 week formal consultation exercise between 20 April 2015 and 10 July 2015. This was widely circulated to all stakeholders including third sector organisations representing protected groups. The consultation was available in Welsh, Easyread and child friendly versions to ensure accessibility.

2. In tandem with the formal consultation, officials also engaged widely to capture the views of protected groups. Third Sector and public sector by facilitating workshops in Cardiff, Swansea and Llandudno Junction.

3. Over the last four years, the Welsh Government has made significant progress across all the equality objectives. This includes introducing legislation such as the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, which will transform the way social services are delivered in Wales; promoting independence and stronger voice and control. It also includes the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 which will help prevent violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence as well as protecting and supporting victims and survivors. We have established a National Advice Network to bring key partners and stakeholders together to ensure services are geared to making a positive difference to people’s lives.

4. The Welsh Government has also continued to address the link between poverty and low attainment through additional funding for children eligible for free school meals through our Pupil Deprivation Grant. Furthermore, the introduction of the National School Categorisation System directs support and resources to schools most in need, in order to secure the improvements necessary in our school system. Our Frameworks such as the Tackling Hate Crimes and Incidents Framework, the Framework for Action on Independent Living and the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework have helped drive forward our commitment to make Wales a safer and fairer country. The Welsh Government will continue to build on these achievements through our new Equality Objectives over the next four years.

and evidence gathering, provided details of the extent of progress on equality and human rights in Wales, covering the period 2010-2015, and the key challenges to achieving a fairer Wales over the next five years.

6. The report found good progress had been made in key areas including a fall in homelessness, reduction in hostility towards lesbian, gay and bisexual people and an increase in the proportion of pupils achieving 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C. However, it also found areas where there had been less progress. For example, in education, significant inequalities remain for some protected groups. The report also found young people are significantly worse off in many ways including in income, employment, poverty and housing.

7. In 'Is Wales Fairer?’ the EHRC identified seven key challenges for the public sector to address over the next five years. These are:

- Close attainment gaps in education;
- Encourage fair recruitment, development and reward in employment;
- Improve living conditions in cohesive communities;
- Increase access to justice and encourage democratic participation;
- Improve access to mental health services and support to people experiencing poor mental health;
- Prevent abuse, neglect and ill-treatment in care and detention; and
- Eliminate violence, abuse and harassment in the community.

8. There is a clear alignment between the evidence from ‘Is Wales Fairer?’ and the feedback from our consultation and engagement events on the Equality Objectives. The overwhelming majority of respondents to the consultation agreed the subject matter of the existing Equality Objectives should be retained as they address long-term inter-generational inequalities which could not have been resolved over four years (2012-16).

Strategic Equality Plan 2016-20

9. In addition to containing the equality objectives, the Strategic Equality Plan must include other information, for example the actions to be taken to meet the objectives, timescales and details of how progress and effectiveness will be monitored. The Welsh Government is required to publish an equality report annually and, in addition, the Welsh Ministers are required to report on how devolved public authorities are meeting the general equality duty and co-ordinate action amongst them. The Strategic Equality Plan Board were consulted on, and discussed the draft plan at its October 7 meeting and were content with the format and level of detail.

10. While the Strategic Equality Objectives were finalised prior to the 2016 National Assembly Elections and the new Programme for Government, their principles are in line with Taking Wales Forward, which identifies four areas where we can have the greatest impact and which form the basis of our Well-being objectives: prosperous and secure, healthy and active, ambitious and learning, united and connected.

11. Over the summer, and since publication of Taking Wales Forward, departments have developed actions that will support delivery of the Equality Objectives. The actions are intentionally at a high level, with signposting to the original plans, projects and programmes. All high level actions have been agreed by Directors and cleared by Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers. The actions that will be undertaken to meet our
Equality Objectives will need to be aligned to the four cross-cutting strategies as work on these progresses.

12. Similarly, while the actions have been finalised prior to the publication of the new Government’s Well-being Objectives (due to be published on 4 November), they dovetail well with the National Indicators. To fulfil statutory obligations, Welsh Government has to publish the Well-being objectives this autumn. Both the well-being objectives and the equality objectives support the delivery of *Taking Wales Forward* and a joint Communications Plan will be developed to address any queries which arise about this.

**Publication**

13. Following Cabinet agreement, the Strategic Equality Plan (at Doc 1) will be published by 31 December 2016. It is my intention to make the plan as attractive as possible to a wide audience, with a simpler format, online resources, and potentially as an eBook. This would be consistent with the approach being taken for the Child Poverty Strategy report, reinforcing the close relationship, and interlinking of these two areas of work.

**Impact**

**Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

14. The Strategic Equality Plan captures a range of Welsh Government actions which contributes towards the achievement of the well-being goals as provided within the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*, including a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

**Welsh Language**

15. The Strategic Equality Plan will be published bilingually. A Welsh Language Impact Assessment was drafted at the start of the consultation process and continues to be updated at key stages of the development of the Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives 2016-2020.

**Tackling Poverty**

16. Evidence shows people with particular protected characteristics are more likely to be living in poverty, for example disabled people, and families with disabled children, lone parents (predominantly women) and some ethnic minority groups.

17. Respondents to the consultation emphasised the importance of the link between poverty and inequality and the need to ensure socio-economic considerations were reflected in either the objectives or the actions sitting underneath them.

18. The Equality Objectives, set within the Strategic Equality Plan, specifically Objective 7, support the tackling poverty agenda, and officials are working to ensure the tackling poverty, equality and children’s rights agenda are clearly aligned.

**Equality and Human Rights**
An Equality Impact Assessment was drafted at the start of the consultation process and continues to be updated at key stages of the development of the Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives 2016-2020. The Equality Impact Assessment has been published online.

**Finance Requirements and Governance Implications**

In agreeing and publishing the Strategic Equality Plan this commits the Welsh Government to delivery of the actions and timescales set out within it.

Departmental Equality leads have cleared their actions with Cabinet Secretaries under cover of the following ministerial advice folders:

**Education and Public Services:** MA-P/KW/7180/16; MA-(P)/CS/7182/16; MA-(P)/MD/71792/16

**ESNR:** P/KS/7169/16 – Ken Skates; MA - P/JJ/7171/16 – Julie James; MA P LG/7175/16 – Lesley Griffiths

**HSS Finance:** MA(P)/VG/7198/16 and MA(P)/RE/7199/16

Ministers and have confirmed the proposals are affordable within existing and future Departmental budgets.

Any actions added to the Strategic Equality Plan over the life of the Plan will need to take into account any financial implications. Any associated financial implications will need to be agreed by respective portfolio Ministers.

The Strategic Equality Plan 2016-2020 will require publication in various formats, including an e-Book and in easy read format. The cost implication of the Easy-read format is estimated at £3,000 which can be met from the Equality and Inclusion (BEL 7060) budget within the Communities and Children MEG in 2016-17. The Easy read estimate is in line with previous documents we have had translated and is inclusive of VAT.

The EPS Operations Team is content this MA complies with interim Finance Notice 01/2015 (EPS/CS/179/16).

This advice has also been cleared by Strategic Budgeting (SB0067/5) and Local Government Finance (LGF/053/16).

As there are no issues of regularity or propriety, this paper does not need prior approval by the Corporate Governance Unit (CGU). In accordance with FN 01/2015, the submission has been copied to the CGU Mailbox for monitoring purposes.

**Legal Advice**

Legal Services have reviewed this Cabinet Paper and the Strategic Equality Plan and their comments are incorporated.

**Research and/or Statistics**
Knowledge and Analytical Services have been consulted on the Cabinet paper and are content that clearance is not required.

**Communications and publication**

The Strategic Equality Plan will be published by 31 December 2016. Officials will liaise with Press Office to publicise the Strategic Equality Plan.

**Recommendation:**

*Cabinet is asked to agree the Strategic Equality Plan for 2016-20 to be published by 31 December 2016.*

**Joined up Working**

45. The following Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers have noted the Strategic Equality Plan and agreed their respective Actions:

- Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure
- Cabinet Secretary Education
- Cabinet Secretary Environment and Rural Affairs
- Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government
- Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language
- Minister for Skills and Science
- Minister for Social Services and Science

Carl Sargeant AM
Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children
November 2016