

## **Consultation Response Form**

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### **Privacy note:**

Please be aware that responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. We will store your responses to help us develop the Strategic Equality Plan. Please let us know if you would prefer your response to remain anonymous.

### **Explanatory note:**

There is no minimum or maximum to your responses, although in most questions we anticipate that responses would be under 500 words.

### **The National Equality Objectives**

We have set out our draft National Equality Objectives. The Objectives are intended to be both aspirational and deliverable.

The proposed National Equality Objectives may evolve in response to changing circumstances, we will build this into the Strategic Equality Plan which will emerge from this consultation.

### **Question 1: Do you agree with the Long-term Aim? Please explain your answer, suggesting any amendments.**

We welcome the formulation of a long-term aim to “create a Wales based on equity, non-discrimination, and inclusion” and the accompanying paragraph that substantiates this aim. It sets out an ambitious vision that covers relevant elements, including equal access to rights, resources and opportunities, freedom from discrimination, as well as inclusion and respect. However, while all these elements are integral, we believe that the overarching aim could place greater emphasis on structural change aimed institutions, systems, and processes.

Historically embedded structural inequalities will continue to reproduce inequitable outcomes unless they are being actively challenged, which is why such a focus is indispensable when seeking long-term change. The Welsh Government's commitment to doing this critical, long-term work is evident across several of the action plans and policies that are being brought together by this Plan. For instance, the Gender Equality Action Plan acknowledges the need to challenge “power structures that disadvantage women” and the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan states that “anti-racism involves actively identifying and getting rid of policies, systems, structures and processes that

produce radically different outcomes.” The commitment to addressing structural drivers of inequality is also implicit in the Welsh Government’s commitment to mainstreaming equality, which is one of the three principles of approach of the Strategic Equality Plan 2024-28 and involves integrating an equalities perspective into the design, implementation, and monitoring of policies, legislation, and spending decisions.

As the commitment to addressing structural inequality is both critical to achieve long-term change and is already a central part of the Welsh Government’s approach to advancing equality and human rights, we believe the long-term aim should be amended to reflect this.

Suggested wording: **“Long-term aim: to create a Wales based on equity, nondiscrimination, and inclusion.** *Social Justice is at the heart of all Welsh Government work. We want a Wales where all people have equal access to human and civil rights, resources, and opportunities in all areas of life. We want a fair Wales that is free from discrimination, an inclusive Wales where all individuals feel valued, respected, and included. We want a Wales free from institutions, structures and systems that reproduce inequalities.*

**Question 2: Do you agree with the proposed National Equality Objectives above? Please explain your answer, suggesting any amendments.**

Our answer to this question has two parts. The first part provides detailed comments on the National Equality Objectives as proposed in the consultation document, suggesting how each could be strengthened.

The second part discusses whether the approach to setting National Equality Objectives is the most suitable to support the aim of the Strategic Equality Plan. Given the new role of Plan in a changed policy landscape, we argue that consideration should be given as to reshaping the Objectives more substantively. We lay out an approach as to how this could be done and outline the potential advantages of doing so.

**Comments on specific National Equality Objectives**

As noted in the previous consultation on the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24, the consultation document sets out the Welsh Government’s objectives and aims without detailing the specific actions that are intended to deliver these aims. The below section presents our views on these objectives and aims as presented. However, we would caution that it is difficult to fully scrutinise the likely impact of the aims and objectives without knowing what actions will be taken to deliver them. While we welcome the opportunity to shape the Strategic Equality Plan at this stage, we believe that the Plan could benefit from an opportunity for stakeholders to feed back on a version that includes the full set of actions.

*National Equality Objective 1 - We will create a Wales where everyone has opportunities to prosper in line with our organisational goal to reduce poverty.*

We welcome the overall objective and aims. Possible actions to strengthen this Objective could be to acknowledge child poverty and align it with the aims and actions

of the Child Poverty Strategy. For further details regarding poverty and socio-economic disadvantage, see our answer to Questions 6.

*National Equality Objective 2 - We will create a Wales where everyone can be aware of their human rights, where they are protected, promoted, and underpin all public policy.*

We welcome the overall objective and aims. However, in line with the commitment in the Programme for Government, we would expect this Objective to include specific aims and actions relating to the incorporation of CEDAW and UNCRDP into Welsh law, as well as actions relating to exploring the incorporation of a wider range of international human rights conventions. The actions should build on the work of the Legislative Options Working Group and ensure delivery is appropriately resourced.

The expression “intersectional advice” is a somewhat unconventional use of the term intersectionality. We would suggest that the intended action can be better conveyed if reframed as “work to ensure that people are aware of their rights and know where to find appropriate advice and support, including advice and support tailored to those who experience intersecting forms of discrimination.”

*National Equality Objective 3 - We will create a Wales where everyone can be aware of and has equitable access to high quality public services.*

We fully agree that ensuring equitable access to high quality public services should be a central part of the Strategic Equality Plan. Public services play a key role in the delivery of the different policies and actions plans that this document brings together. While public services affect people with all protected characteristics, they are especially important from a gender equality perspective, because women are more likely to work in public services, to rely on public services and to become providers of last resort when services are cut.<sup>1</sup>

Public services will be under unprecedented pressures in the coming years. Despite the Welsh Government’s commitment to protect frontline services in its in-year spending changes and in the 2024-25 Draft Budget, we are concerned that the allocated funding is not sufficient to keep pace with the cost pressures. As noted by Wales Fiscal Analysis, Wales’ local authorities are facing a £354million shortfall in 2024-2025, which will require difficult decisions regarding service provision cuts.<sup>2</sup> We are particularly concerned that the public services most critical to women, such as social care, childcare, and housing, will face real-term and actual funding cuts as a result.

Given the central role that public services play in achieving a broad range of equality objectives, and the magnitude of the financial challenges and cuts expected in the coming years, we are concerned that a single National Equality Objective will be insufficient to ensure meaningful progress (or at least prevent regress) across a number of public services such as health, social care, housing, childcare and transport

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<sup>1</sup> UK Women’s Budget Group (2022), The gendered impact of the cost-of-living crisis on public services

<https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Gendered-impact-of-cost-of-living-crisis-on-public-services1.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Wales Fiscal Analysis (2023), The medium-term fiscal outlook for local government in Wales, [https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/2779342/The-medium-term-fiscal-outlook-for-local.pdf](https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/2779342/The-medium-term-fiscal-outlook-for-local.pdf)

unless the Objective includes great number of aims and actions that specifically relate to each of these services.

In addition to targeted aims and actions for each public service, there may be a useful role for some cross-cutting actions. For instance, we would recommend an action to ensure funding cuts to public services are informed by robust equalities evaluation and impact assessment using data disaggregated by gender and other protected characteristics. We would also recommend an action relating to monitoring the cumulative equality impacts of cuts to different services, with a requirement for the Welsh Government to take action to mitigate any inequitable consequences.

*National Equality Objective 4 - We will take action to prevent discrimination, victimisation, harassment, abuse, hate crime and/or bullying against all people, including violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.*

We welcome the overall objective, which is centred on prevention, as well the aims, which are focussed on advice and support for those who experience discrimination, harassments or abuse, and awareness of those who support people who are experiencing it. However, while both aims are important, a successful approach to prevention needs to include aims and actions tailored towards perpetrators as well as the wider public. This would also ensure that the Objective is aligned with the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy 2022-26, which acknowledges the need to tackle perpetrators and change the wider culture, alongside the need to support survivors.

For our view on the term “intersectional advice”, see discussion under National Equality Objective 2.

*National Equality Objective 5 - We will create a Wales where everybody is able to participate in the workplace, have access to public transport and see themselves as reflected in the leadership of our public services.*

Workplace participation, access to public transport and leadership in public services are all important areas for advancing equality. But it is unclear what motivates these three areas being grouped together under a single Objective. The grouping of these three areas is also not reflected in the aims under this Objective, which are focused almost exclusively on participation and leadership in public and political life.

Due to the lack of a common theme and the lack of relevant aims relating to work and transport, we would suggest that National Equality Objective 5 should be reframed around “a Wales where everybody is able to participate in political and public life, including elected office and leadership of public services.” We would expect the aims under this Objective to reflect the fact that meaningful action to improve diversity among elected representatives needs to take effect well in advance of the 2026 Senedd elections to impact the planned expansion of the Senedd. We would also recommend an action around piloting a financial assistance scheme for candidates with caring responsibilities, such as parents and unpaid carers, ideally in advance of the 2026 Senedd elections and the 2027 Local Government elections. For further details on both points, please see WEN’s submission to the Local Government and Housing Committee’s inquiry on the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> WEN Wales (2023), Consultation on the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill by the Local Government and Housing Committee. <https://wenwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/WEN-consultation-response-on-the-Elections-and-Elected-Bodies-Wales-Bill.pdf>

Workplace participation, and the accompanying aim to “seek to highlight the success of entrepreneurs from all communities,” could be included under National Objective 6, which focusses on fair work and employment. Within the current structure, it seems that access to public transport could naturally sit under either National Equality Objective 3 (public services) or National Equality Objective 7 (environment). However, for the reasons outlined above, we would strongly caution against subsuming all public services under a single Objective and would instead recommend that consideration is given to an alternative structure of Objectives set out below.

*National Equality Objective 6 – We will create a Wales with fair and equal opportunities to gain employment and for fair and equal treatment in the workplace.*

We welcome this Objective as fair work and access to employment are central to advancing equality across a range of protected characteristics, including gender equality. Women in Wales continue to be overrepresented in part-time, low-paid employment. This compounds the existing gender pay gap and drives long-term disparities in women’s lifetime earnings, savings and risk of poverty, in particular for single mothers, disabled women, and ethnic minority or racialised women.<sup>4</sup>

The aims under this Objective are set around the Welsh Government’s role as an employer. We welcome the Welsh Government’s commitment to lead the way on fair work and employment and believe the proposed aims on workplace diversity, pay parity and removing barriers are appropriate to progress this commitment. But we believe the Objective should be much more ambitious in setting aims and actions to progress fair work and access to employment more widely. This is all the more important because work and employment features centrally in most of the action plans and policies brought together under this Plan. Without a National Equality Objective that addresses work and employment more broadly, the Strategic Equality Plan will not be able to bring the plans together, make connections and ensure due consideration is given to intersecting forms of discrimination in the context of work and employment.

*National Equality Objective 7 We will create an environmentally sustainable Wales with the capacity to both ensure our journey to net zero is fair and to respond to the inequitable impacts of climate change.*

We welcome the inclusion of a National Equality Objective on the environment, together with a set of aims that acknowledges the potentially disastrous impact of climate change on equality and human rights, as well as the risks and opportunities associated with the transition to net zero.

We believe that the Objective would benefit from a more explicit recognition that climate change has the potential to exacerbate inequalities not just along the dimension of socio-economic disadvantage but along other dimensions. For instance, research suggests that women and children are [14 times more likely to die or be injured](#) in a natural disaster than men, and disabled and trans women are disproportionately impacted by [climate displacement](#), particularly in relation to healthcare.

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<sup>4</sup> WWBG & WEN Wales (2023), Joint submission to the Finance Committee: Welsh Government Draft Budget proposals for 2024-25. <https://wenwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/WWBG-and-WEN-Wales-response-to-Finance-Committee-re-WG-Draft-Budget-24-25.pdf>.

We would expect the aims and actions to consider the findings and recommendations of the Mainstreaming Equality and Just Transition Evidence Panel.<sup>5</sup> The Panel served as a pilot on how the Welsh Government could address the changes to education, skills, training, and working practices that the transition to net zero will bring through an equality lens. The evidence reviewed shows that past transitions have widened labour market inequalities and that such inequalities will be likely be reproduced in the transitions to net zero unless we make sustained efforts to mitigate them. The report presents a range of recommendations on how to achieve this, including a recommendation to fully include sectors such as social care, health and education in the transition to net zero, and the need to build opportunities for flexible and hybrid working into the transition.

### **Comments on the general approach**

We welcome the Welsh Government's progress on developing action plans and policies that are tailored to specific needs and experiences of people with different protected characteristics. As noted in the consultation document, this change in policy landscape suggest a new and critical role for the Strategic Equality Plan in bringing the different plans and policies together, makes connections and ensuring appropriate attention is paid to intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage. We believe that this new role is effectively reflected in the three principles of approach, each of which addresses a cross-cutting theme that is imperative to the successful delivery of the different plans and policies.

While we believe the principles of approach are the right ones to underpin this work, we are not convinced that the design and choice of National Equality Objectives fully reflects the new role of the Strategic Equality Plan and are concerned that progress could even be hampered due to overcomplexity, insufficient alignment between the Objectives and the areas identified in the documents that the Plan seeks to bring together, and a lack of integration of the principles of approach into the Objectives.

#### *Problems with the current approach*

The consultation documents recognised the need to avoid duplication and unnecessary complexity, and therefore proposes a new approach. Instead of adding further objectives and actions relating to specific protected characteristics and areas already covered in the existing plan, it proposes that the Objectives should be framed around the six domains of the EHRC "Is Wales Fairer?" report with an added objective on the environment. While we agree that a new approach to framing objectives is needed, we are not convinced that the approach taken is either entirely new or particularly suited to avoid overcomplexity and duplication.

First, it is unclear from the consultation document how exactly the National Equality Objectives relate to these domains. The domains in the EHRC report are education, work, living standards, health, justice and personal security, and participation (plus an added objective for the environment). The areas covered by the National Equality Objectives are, in the order of Objectives: living standards, human rights, access to public services, protection from discrimination, harassment and abuse, participation, work and environment. The areas addressed in the seven Objectives do not directly

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<sup>5</sup> Parken, A., MacBride-Stewart, S., Ashworth, R, and Minto, R. (2023). *An Equal and Just Transition to Net Zero: Findings from the Mainstreaming Equality Evidence Panel*. <http://tinyurl.com/ke3bwsnf>.



correspond to the proposed EHRC domains. For instance, there are Objectives that are not represented as distinct domains in the EHRC report, such as human rights, but which are clearly relevant in the context of the Strategic Equality Plan. More worryingly, there are no Objectives in the consultation document that specifically focus on justice, education or health, which are not only domains in the EHRC report, but key areas in most of the actions plans and policies that the Strategic Equality Plan seeks to bring together.

The consultation document also states that “One or more of the proposed National Equality Objectives should be linked to each of these thematic areas (ideally all).” This suggests a different approach whereby, rather than each Objective corresponding to one EHRC domain (plus environment), each Objective should ideally set out aims and actions linked to each of six the EHRC domains (plus environment). The latter appears to be the approach taken in the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24. But it is not clear whether it is the most practical or effective format to support the new role of the Strategic Equality Plan in the changed policy landscape, and it could potentially engender rather than avoid unnecessary complexity.

For instance, some Objectives already broadly correspond to specific EHRC domains, such as Objective 5 and the EHRC domain participation. All aims under Objective 5 relate to participation. It is unclear how they could be linked to the other EHRC domains in a meaningful way, or indeed if they need to be linked to them at all to facilitate progress in advancing the Objective 5 or the long-term aim of the Strategic Equality Plan.

In other words, the link between National Equality Objectives and EHRC domains appears somewhat confused. The result is a system where some areas (such as participation) risk being overcomplicated while others (such as justice, education, or health) are being left out entirely. More generally, it is not clear that framing National Equality Objectives around EHRC domains (in either of the above interpretations) is the most effective approach to supporting the new role of the Strategic Equality Plan in bringing together distinct plans and policies under the three cross-cutting principles of approach.

### *An alternative approach to setting National Equality Objectives*

In light of the discussion above, we propose an alternative model of setting National Equality Objectives that ensures the Objectives cover a wide range of policy areas addressed in the distinct actions plans and policies that the Strategic Equality Plan seeks to bring together. The list below is an illustration of what this could look like.

- New National Equality Objective 1: Education, including childcare and early learning
- New National Equality Objective 2: Living standards, including housing, energy and food
- New National Equality Objective 3: Work, including employment, apprenticeships, lifelong learning and entrepreneurship
- New National Equality Objective 4: Human rights, including access to justice, crime and policing
- New National Equality Objective 5: Protection from and prevention of discrimination, harassment and abuse
- New National Equality Objective 6: Health, including social care and mental health

- New National Equality Objective 7: Participation, including equality and diversity in elected office and public appointments
- New National Equality Objective 8: Environment, including transport
- New National Equality Objective 9: Culture and sport
- New National Equality Objective 10: Finance and budget

This list is not meant to be definitive. There are different ways of grouping policy areas together under National Equality Objectives in a way that supports the role of the Strategic Equality Plan. The key features that we believe any model going forward should incorporate are the following:

- Broadly retain the existing Objectives 1-2 and 4-7 as each of them is critical to advancing equality and human rights.
- Remove Objective 3, which addresses public services in a too broad and general fashion. Instead, ensure individual public services such as education, health, housing, childcare and transport are specifically addressed under distinct National Equality Objectives. This could be achieved either through introducing new Objectives (Such as an Objective on health, social care and mental health) or through explicitly including specific public services under existing Objectives that address related areas, such as Livings Standards and Housing, or Environment and Transport.
- Add an additional Objective on Culture and Sport, which is an area that features in the different equality plans and policies but is entirely missing from the current list of Objectives.
- Add an additional Objective on Finance and Budget, which is a critical cross-cutting area that requires distinct aims and actions in accordance with the three principles of approach.

In addition, we would propose that each of the Objectives should include aims and actions that specifically relating to the three principles of approach to ensure these are incorporated across all policy areas covered by the Strategic Equality Plan.

This model has several advantages. It would ensure that all main policy areas covered in the distinct plans and policies are reflected in the Strategic Equality Plan, which would facilitate bringing the different plans together and making connections. As the model explicitly covers more policy areas, it reflects a greater number of relevant ministerial portfolios and could therefore encourage cross-government working and cross-government responsibility for achieving the aims of the Strategic Equality Plan. By including specific aims and actions relating to the three principles of approach under each Objective, it could help facilitate a rolling out of equality mainstreaming, closing of the implementation gap and the effective tackling of intersecting discrimination and disadvantage across the Welsh Government. This could ensure a more effective implementation and reduce the risk that these principles become siloed within the Social Justice portfolio.

**Question 3: Please tell us about any other issues relating to equality and community cohesion in Wales that you feel should be addressed?**

NA



## **The Principles of Approach**

The Strategic Equality Plan will support and draw together other equality plans and policy interventions (the things we do) in specific areas of interest. The Principles of Approach above connect distinct Action Plans and policies, which provide their own Objectives and Actions.

**Question 4: Do you believe having the proposed Principles of Approach strengthens the Strategic Equality Plan? / Question 5: If so, do you agree these are the right Principles of Approach? Please explain your answer, suggesting any amendments.**

We believe that the three principles of approach have the potential to strengthen the Strategic Equality Plan because they address cross-cutting themes that are imperative to the successful delivery of the different plans and policies.

While we believe the principles of approach are the right ones to underpin this work, we are not convinced that they will live up to their full potential unless they are integrated into a set of National Equality Objectives that fully reflects the new role of the Strategic Equality Plan. Our answer under Question 2 sets out how this could be achieved.

## **The Socio-economic Duty in relation to the Strategic Equality Plan**

For people who face the additional barriers of inequality, socio-economic factors can have an even more negative effect and impact on their day-to-day lives. The [Socio-economic Duty](#) is an important part of how we deliver the Strategic Equality Plan.

**Question 6: Do you believe the National Equality Objectives will help us fulfil the Socio-economic Duty? Please explain your answer.**

It is not clear from the current set of National Equality Objectives that this will be the case. Although there is now a duty to address socioeconomic disadvantage, there currently is no specific plan setting out measurable actions to tackle it and only two of the proposed Objectives directly mention socio-economic disadvantage.

In the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24, actions relating to socio-economic disadvantage were largely subsumed under Long Term Aim 1 (Elimination of inequality caused by poverty). This suggests that the same could happen with National Equality Objective 1, which focusses on poverty alleviation. But it is not clear if this is the best way forward. In the 2020-24 Plan, Long Term Aim 1 has the biggest number of actions (13 actions) alongside Long Term Aim 3 which deals with public services – twice as many actions as most of the other Aims. We agree that a specific actions on socio-economic disadvantage are needed but believe consideration should be given as to whether both areas (poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage) could be served better if each National Equality Objective includes aims and actions that specifically relate to socio-economic disadvantage.

Although socio-economic disadvantage is related to poverty it is different, in that socio-economic disadvantage is a major dimension of inequality that produces poverty and also amplifies and compounds inequalities across other domains such as race and gender. Inequality makes certain groups of people systematically more likely to be socioeconomically disadvantaged, and socio-economic disadvantage makes people

more vulnerable, and less able to protect themselves, against other aspects of inequality, such as discrimination, harassment and abuse related to their protected characteristic.

Ensuring that each National Equality Objective includes aims and actions that specifically relate to socioeconomic disadvantage may help to fill the gap left by the absence of a specific action plan, place greater recognition on socioeconomic disadvantage as a cause of wider inequality and could help maximise the impact of socio-economic duty.

## **Human Rights**

The Welsh Government is committed to strengthening and advancing human rights in Wales. We want to understand the extent to which people are aware of their rights under the Human Rights Charter.

### **Question 7: Do you believe the National Equality Objectives will help to promote and embed human rights in Wales. Please explain your answer.**

We agree with this, subject to the comments made in response to Question 2 (National Equality Objective 2).

## **Other areas**

### **Question 8: Do you have any further specific points you'd like to raise in relation to the Strategic Equality Plan?**

No.