

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday, 13th June 2024
Report Subject	Audit Wales Report “Equality Impact Assessments: More Than a Tick Box Exercise?”
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Corporate Services
Report Author	Corporate Manager – Capital Programme and Assets
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2022, Audit Wales published a report on its findings of the use of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) in Wales. The aim of the audit was to provide insight about the approach to EIAs undertaken across the public sector in Wales.

The report “Equality Impact Assessments: more than a tick box exercise?” sets out four recommendations and seven key improvement areas for Welsh Government and public bodies.

This report provides an update on actions being taken to meet the recommendation that applies to public bodies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.	To update Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on progress to meet the recommendations of Audit Wales “Equality Impact Assessments: more than a tick box exercise?”
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE AUDIT WALES REPORT “EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS: MORE THAN A TICK BOX EXERCISE?”
1.01	<p>In September 2022, Audit Wales published a report on its audit of the use of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) in Wales; “Equality Impact Assessments: more than a tick box exercise?”</p> <p>The aim of the audit was to provide insight about the approach to EIAs undertaken across the public sector in Wales.</p>
1.02	<p>EIAs are an important part of the approach to reducing inequality in Wales, supporting public services to meet their legal duties to avoid discrimination in decision making.</p>
1.03	<p>Audit Wales state in the summary of their findings:</p> <p>“...what we have seen and heard tells us that public bodies in Wales tend to use their EIAs defensively. Too often, they seem like a tick box exercise to show that the body has thought about equality issues in case of challenge. While legal challenge is of course an important risk to manage, this approach means public bodies are not using EIAs to their full potential, especially in terms of promoting equality and cohesion”.</p>
1.04	<p>The Audit Wales report sets out four recommendations and seven key improvement areas for Welsh Government and public bodies. These are set out in Appendix 1, along with the Council's response having considered them.</p> <p>Three of the four recommendations are for Welsh Government to implement. The fourth recommendation applies to public bodies:</p> <p><i>Public bodies should review their overall approach to EIAs considering the findings of this report and the detailed guidance available from the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the NHS Practice Hub.</i></p>
1.05	<p>Audit Wales also made a similar recommendation in their report “‘Time for Change’ – Poverty in Wales”, which was published in November 2022.</p> <p>To ensure effective compliance with the Socio-economic Duty, the report includes a recommendation (Recommendation 8) that applies to local authorities:</p> <p><i>We recommend that councils review their integrated impact assessments or equivalent to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>ensure that they draw on relevant, comprehensive and current data (nothing over 12 months old) to support analysis;</i> • <i>ensure integrated impact assessments capture information on:</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>involvement activity setting out those the service has engaged with in determining its strategic policy such as partners, service users and those it is coproducing with;</i> ○ <i>the cumulative impact/mitigation to ensure the assessment considers issues in the round and how it links across services provided across the council;</i> ○ <i>how the council will monitor and evaluate impact and will take corrective action; and</i> ○ <i>an action plan setting out the activities the Council will take as a result of the Integrated Impact Assessment.</i>
1.06	<p>The recommendation made by Audit Wales in their report “Equality Impact Assessments: more than a tick box exercise?”, and which applies to the Council, has been considered.</p> <p>The Council agrees with the recommendation and work had already commenced to review the mechanism and approach taken locally to completing Assessments.</p> <p>Further information on a pilot project which is due to complete in 2024, and that will demonstrate the Council’s approach to implementing Audit Wales recommendation in relation to EIAs, is provided below.</p>
1.07	<p>Update on actions being taken within Flintshire County Council</p> <p>The University of Manchester, working in collaboration with Greater Manchester Combined Authority, had developed a Carbon and Co-Benefits Decision Support Tool.</p> <p>The Tool aims to support a holistic approach to decision-making through a process that embeds review and assessment of all policies, initiatives, or services against statutory impact assessments.</p>
1.08	<p>The Tool was being piloted in the Greater Manchester and Greater London authority areas and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) was supportive of this tool being piloted in Wales.</p> <p>Flintshire County Council is the only Council in Wales and outside London or Greater Manchester taking part in this project.</p>
1.09	<p>The Council pilot has been overseen by the Corporate Equalities Board since June 2023, with an initial workshop with users facilitated by the University of Manchester in September 2023.</p> <p>The workshop sought to identify any issues or concerns so that final amendments to the Tool could be made before it was available to pilot.</p>
1.10	<p>For the Tool to be piloted in Wales amendments were made by the University of Manchester and Flintshire County Council to ensure compliance with the statutory impact assessments including equality, the Socio-economic Duty and Welsh language, as these assessments do not apply in England.</p>

	Amendments were also made to encompass the recommendations from the two Audit Wales reports, which were published after discussions had started with the University about the potential use of this Tool within the Council.
1.11	<p>As part of the evaluation of the Tool, the University of Manchester are interviewing users and decision makers during April and May 2024.</p> <p>The evaluation will look at not just the usability of the Tool but also how it helps inform decision making.</p> <p>The outcomes of the evaluation will be reported to Cabinet so that consideration can be given as to if the Council should adopt the Tool and approach for conducting impact assessments.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>Completing impact assessments effectively requires additional time from officers, which means there are resource implications for employees responsible for impact assessments.</p> <p>Further costs associated with implementing impact assessments will be identified in the evaluation report being completed by the University of Manchester.</p>

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT																												
3.01	<p>An Impact assessment is not required as this a report on an Audit Wales report and action being taken to implement recommendations.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Ways of Working</th> <th>Impact</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Long-term</td> <td>Positive - creating long term change to ensure decisions made reduce inequalities.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Prevention</td> <td>Positive - through reducing inequalities.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Integration</td> <td>No change.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Collaboration</td> <td>No change.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Involvement</td> <td>No change.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Well-being Goals Impact</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Well-being Goal</th> <th>Impact</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Prosperous Wales</td> <td>No change.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Resilient Wales</td> <td>No change.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Healthier Wales</td> <td>No change.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>More equal Wales</td> <td>Positive – through reducing inequalities.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cohesive Wales</td> <td>Positive - through tackling hate crime and discrimination.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Vibrant Wales</td> <td>No change.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Globally responsible Wales</td> <td>No change.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Ways of Working	Impact	Long-term	Positive - creating long term change to ensure decisions made reduce inequalities.	Prevention	Positive - through reducing inequalities.	Integration	No change.	Collaboration	No change.	Involvement	No change.	Well-being Goal	Impact	Prosperous Wales	No change.	Resilient Wales	No change.	Healthier Wales	No change.	More equal Wales	Positive – through reducing inequalities.	Cohesive Wales	Positive - through tackling hate crime and discrimination.	Vibrant Wales	No change.	Globally responsible Wales	No change.
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4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	A small number of officers involved in writing impact assessments have been, and will continue to be, consulted on the revised approach to EIAs.
5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1: Recommendations and response to Audit Wales report “Equality Impact Assessments: more than a tick box exercise?”
6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Equality Impact Assessments: More than a tick box exercise?. Audit Wales
7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Fiona Mocko - Strategic Policy Advisor Telephone: English: 01352 702122 Welsh: 01267 224923 E-mail: fiona.mocko@flintshire.gov.uk
8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	<p>Equality Impact Assessment: An equality impact assessment (EIA) is an evidence-based approach designed to help organisations ensure that their policies, practices, and decision-making processes are fair, promote equality and do not present barriers to participation or disadvantage people with protected characteristics.</p> <p>Socio-economic Duty: The socio-economic duty is part of the Equality Act 2010. It aims to reduce inequality for people who experience socio-economic disadvantage. Public bodies must pay due regard to the socio-economic duty when making strategic decisions.</p>