

Annex 1 – NRW B O 8.14

Foreword

We are delighted to present our first Annual Report on Natural Resources Wales' achievements and our future plans in respect of equality and diversity.

As a major organisation in the Welsh Public Sector, providing a range of important services to Welsh communities and businesses, we recognise the importance of providing equality of opportunity to everyone. As an employer, we are committed to building an organisation that is representative of Welsh society and that makes full use of the talents, skills and experience of all our staff. As a service provider, we are committed to providing services that are accessible, eliminate discrimination, and that promote equality and embrace diversity in everything we do.

Natural Resources Wales is still a new organisation, formed on 1 April 2013 from its three predecessor organisations. Undoubtedly, we have been fortunate to inherit from the legacy organisations a solid and positive track record in the equalities field, both in terms of how we manage and support our employees and the way in which we deliver our services to customers. Certainly, this gives us a strong platform for success. Our aim is to build on this, drawing upon best practice to strengthen and improve, working and learning from other organisations as much as we can. Equality and diversity is a central element in delivering business success and we want to embed our equality work into the centre of how Natural Resources Wales plans and delivers its business. This will take time to fully take root but we believe this report reflects excellent early progress.

This report also sets out our Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2014/15 and beyond. We believe this plan is ambitious, helping us not only to deliver our legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010, but also enabling us to build on our strengths, challenging us to do better and work differently. In adopting this approach to our equalities work, our aim is to become an exemplar organisation, achieving positive outcomes that make a real difference to staff and customers alike.

Professor Peter Matthews
Chairman

Dr Emyr Roberts
Chief Executive

Introduction

This document has the dual purpose of reporting the early achievements of Natural Resources Wales in the field of equality and diversity before setting out our plans for next year and beyond.

As a new Welsh Government public sector organisation, formed on 1 April 2013, we took early advice from the Equality Commissioner for Wales. The advice was that we should rely upon the legacy equality plans (from the Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and the Countryside Council for Wales) for our first year of operations and then put in place the new equality arrangements for Natural Resources Wales, including the development of our own Strategic Equality and Diversity Plan.

Our Organisation

Our purpose is to ensure that the environment and natural resources of Wales are sustainably maintained, sustainably enhanced and sustainably used, now and in the future. To achieve this we have some 1966 staff located throughout Wales – scientists, engineers, foresters, environmental managers, recreation and education experts, and we work with local authorities and communities, together with a wide range of partners in the Third Sector, to achieve better outcomes for the people of Wales.

We are a young organisation. We know what sort of organisation we would like to be, but it will take us time to get there. Our commitment is to work with our staff and partners to improve the way we work and deliver our business while ensuring we keep providing services to our customers. To achieve this, we recognise that we will need to get the very best out of our own staff whilst also maintaining a strong and positive relationship with our customers and communities across Wales.

As part of this, we understand the vital contribution that our work on equalities and diversity can make to business success. It is important to ensure that we make full use of the talent, skills and experience of our staff and partners and that the services that we provide to the people and communities of Wales are both inclusive and fair. This report will explain how we are trying to achieve these important goals.

Our Legal Duties in Relation to Equality

As a Welsh Government Sponsored Body, Natural Resources Wales has a legal and moral responsibility to comply with the General and Specific duties outlined in the Equality Act 2010. The General Duty has three aims:

- To eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited under the Act;

- To advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- To foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Under the Equality Act 2010, we will also fulfil the two Specific Duties to help us achieve our General Duty as set out above:

- To publish Equality Objectives by 1 April 2014. In order to ensure that these are managed, reported and delivered, an associated Action Plan will be prepared and published.
- To publish an annual report demonstrating Natural Resources Wales' compliance with the General Duty. The report will also include a statistical analysis of staff.

The Act explains that having a due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages experienced by people due to their protected characteristics
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other areas where their participation is disproportionately low.

We are required to have due regard to the General Duty when we deliver our core business. The Equality Act 2010 outlines discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities or services on the basis of a protected characteristic.

Our Equality and Diversity Work and Achievements During 2013/14

Overall Approach

Each of our three legacy organisations had a strong record in the equality field, with supporting Strategic Equality and Diversity Action Plans which ran until 2016, underpinned by sound policy, practice and performance reporting. Our approach has been to draw upon this foundation whilst we developed the longer term strategies and plans for Natural Resources Wales. We believe this parallel running approach has enabled us to move ahead quickly with our equalities work.

Top Level Commitment

An early focus for Natural Resources Wales has been to declare its vision and ambitions for equality and diversity. We have approached this in a variety of ways, each with the aim of ensuring that equality and diversity had a high profile and stressing that this is seen as a keen ingredient in our overall future business success.

The Natural Resources Wales Board has been an important supporter in the establishment of the equalities and diversity agenda. It has appointed a Champion for equalities and diversity, whose role is to ensure that all equality issues remain central to Board discussions and decisions. The Board Champion has also been important in projecting a visible and high profile presence for our equalities work, not just with staff members and staff networks, but also with our customers and external organisations.

A further step has been to develop and then publicise to all staff Natural Resources Wales' commitment and objectives in respect of equality and diversity.

Our Commitment

To be an exemplar organisation in promoting equality and valuing diversity.

Our Objectives

- To promote, respect and value equality of opportunity and diversity
- To promote equality and diversity in all our policies, practices and procedures
- To promote equality of opportunity between people from different groups.
- To behave as an exemplary employer and accessible service provider
- To aim for our workforce to be representative of our diverse society
- To foster positive attitudes and good relations between people from different groups, widening participation and engagement across Wales

Establishing Good Governance and Networks

An important element in raising the profile of equalities work and maximising staff engagement has been the establishment of robust governance arrangements. This has included establishing an Equalities and Diversity Forum, chaired at Executive Director level and attended by our Board Champion, together with other business leaders, plus

representation from networks. The aim of the Forum is to plan and then manage delivery of the equality work, ensuring that we not only meet our legal obligations but that we are sufficiently ambitious in our plans to deliver on our commitment to equality and diversity.

We also work closely with our Trades Union colleagues within the framework of a Partnership Agreement looking at all elements of our work, with equality and diversity recognised as an important topic of mutual interest. An objective in our Partnership Agreement is ensuring diversity is valued and everyone is treated with dignity and respect, free from prejudice, discrimination, bullying and intimidation.

We have worked with staff to encourage the establishment of networks for those with protected characteristics. Three networks have formed to date and their input has been invaluable to the development of our early plans. We will continue to support the creation of additional networks, but the real catalyst for this must come from staff themselves, reflecting their own needs.

Establishing the Policy and Planning Framework

Whilst Natural Resources Wales has been fortunate to inherit a robust set of equality policies and plans from its predecessor organisations, we recognise the importance of moving ahead quickly to underpin our own distinct approach to equality activity. We have published our own equality and diversity policy, and other important supporting policies, such as the Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment (EDIA) are currently undergoing consultation with our Trades Union colleagues. We plan to complete our policy revision work early in the next financial year.

With the implementation of change currently being a particularly important aspect of Natural Resources Wales' work, we have taken additional steps to ensure that equality issues are seen as core considerations as part of our Change Programme. In addition to the EDIA issue highlighted above, we have developed Change Management Principles which highlights the importance of equality considerations as a central part of the process. We have also arranged a series of senior/middle management training courses on change where again the importance of equality issues is highlighted.

We have also ensured that equality issues form a key part of our corporate and business planning approach, together with our governance assurance systems. At all levels of our governance and planning, there are clear links to our equality commitment and plans, with the connection to our equality work highlighted in our current Business Plan and incorporated into our Corporate Plan 2014-17 (currently in draft). Specific equality measures have also been incorporated into our People Strategy. Equality impact assessments are also included as a key part of our governance and assurance processes with all Board papers taking proper account of equality as part of the decision-making process. The aim is to ensure that equality considerations are included in our business

planning process and that it also becomes embedded into how Natural Resources Wales does its business day to day.

Understanding and Valuing our Workforce – Core People Processes

We recognise that our staff are the key catalyst for the successful delivery of our business goals. How staff are led and managed matters. Natural Resources Wales have sustained a full range of work life balance arrangements and continue to actively support reasonable adjustments for staff with disabilities. We have put in a number of additional arrangements to support change, including leadership support, staff briefings and regular communications on all the topics of interest. Feedback suggests these have been well received, but plans are in hand to strengthen these further as key change projects move towards implementation.

We continue to monitor carefully the delivery of our core HR services, such as recruiting and training provision and other interventions such as timely responses to disability adjustments, to ensure that service provision continues to meet all equality considerations – encouragingly, feedback and data shows strong performance in all these areas. Looking forward, our work on developing a Total Reward Package for Natural Resources Wales will reaffirm our commitment to flexible working.

A key priority for Natural Resources Wales has been to develop a fuller understanding of our workforce, both in terms of its composition and characteristics. Some of this data was held by predecessor organisations, but much of it was not available or was out of date. We developed a staff questionnaire, which we asked staff to complete anonymously. Our aim was to use this data to help shape policies and procedures that best fit the needs of our workforce. We also wanted to use the results to inform the development of our Strategic Equality and Diversity Plan.

The full results from this questionnaire, complemented by other data held on the legacy based HR systems, is shown at Annex 1. The annex also includes additional narrative comment on areas where we need to do more investigation to understand any potential issues, or areas which need to be taken forward and addressed in our Strategic Equality and Diversity Plan for 2014/15.

Working with Welsh Communities and People from Protected Groups

This report has focused on important issues around governance, strategy and plans. Whilst this has been essential work, it should not in any way mask the work that our staff continue to deliver working with Welsh communities and people from protected groups. This has included:

- Working with our partner Myned, we have delivered a broad range of activities. This has ranged from working with disability groups to give information on outdoor wheelchair access along various countryside and coastal routes to arranging outdoor walks for BME groups to promote physical and mental wellbeing. The feedback from our Myned programme has been extremely positive.
- Natural Resources Wales attended Gay Pride events in North and South Wales and sponsored or participated in events seeking to promote equality awareness and knowledge of particular cultures etc.
- A number of Natural Resources Wales' core activities focus upon encouraging people to enjoy, value and benefit from our natural environment. We run and maintain a range of facilities, from nature reserves to forest sites, and our aim is to increase participation levels across the board. As part of this, we will continue to undertake Equality Assessments and access improvement programmes at our key sites to ensure compliance with our statutory duties. Improving participation levels has been identified as a priority area in our Business Plan.
- Natural Resources Wales put forward a submission to the 2014 "Stonewall Employers Index". Whilst our submission was based on our first six months of existence, we were determined to make a clear statement of our intent and get a baseline from which to improve. We were delighted to have recently been advised that our submission was successful and that we had been placed at 296 in the UK Employer Index – we will use the feedback from this process to drive future improvement within our organisation.

Our Plans for 2014/15 and beyond

This section focuses on Natural Resources Wales' equality plans going forward, particularly in respect of the development of a Strategic Equality and Diversity Plan.

From discussions with the Equality Commissioner for Wales, we have been advised that the best way to proceed is for us to develop a one year Strategic Equality and Diversity Plan for 2014/15, followed by a more comprehensive plan for the three year period 2015 to 2018. This timetable will align Natural Resources Wales with the wider Welsh Public Sector, which is due to produce their updated three year plans in 2015. It will also give us the next year to develop and embed our own equality work, also identifying our key areas for improvement, before then going out to wider public consultation on our proposed Strategic Equality and Diversity Plan for 2015-18.

Strategic Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2014/15

We have identified four priority objectives with a number of corresponding actions that have shaped our one year Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2014-15.

- We will demonstrate clear leadership with senior management commitment and accountability for embedding equality and diversity into all aspects of our business
- We will act with dignity, show respect for others and develop a workplace that is inclusive and confident, free from bullying, harassment and discrimination, where staff are passionate about our goals, engaged and able to contribute fully.
- We will make Natural Resources Wales a good place to work that attracts, develops and retains the most talented people from the widest range of backgrounds
- We will ensure our people have the skills and tools they need to make Natural Resources Wales a high performing organisation that understands and responds to the needs of our customers

A full copy of our Strategic Equality and Diversity Plan for 2014/15, which includes details of tasks to be achieved to deliver the objectives, is at Annex 2. We will monitor progress through our Equality and Diversity Forum, together with performance reports to the Natural Resources Wales Board. Our 2014/15 Equality and Diversity Annual Report will also provide details and supporting narrative on our performance against the plan.

Strategic Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2015 - 2018

Over the coming months a further important activity will be the development of the equality objectives for our three year Strategic Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2015-2018. This will include comprehensive engagement workshops internally with staff, our Board networks and trade unions. We will also consult externally with our stakeholders and customers. These sessions will provide everyone with the opportunity to directly contribute to the setting of our objectives and how we should achieve them.

Annex 3 sets out in more detail the process and timetable for the development of the Strategic Equality and Diversity Plan 2015-2018.