

Merthyr Tydfil County
Borough Council

**Annual
Equality
Report
2023-2024**



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

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Foreword

We are pleased to introduce our Annual Equality Report 2023-2024 for the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024. This Strategic Equality Plan was prepared in line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011, and Public Sector Equality Duty, and was approved by Council on 25th March 2020. This is the final report for the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024.

A message from our Equalities Champion, Councillor Gareth Richards

It gives me great pleasure to once again introduce the Council's Annual Equality Report. The Council is required under the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 to produce an annual monitoring report on the steps it has taken to meet the public sector equality duty and its own Equality Objectives. Welsh Government was the first government to impose specific duties on public services over and above those required by the Act. The Act places a duty on public bodies to consider how to positively contribute to a fairer society through the delivery of services having due regard to eliminating discrimination.

The Council remains committed to ensuring that everyone within the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil is treated with equal respect and that their individual circumstances are not a barrier to them receiving the services they need from the Council or its partners. The Council will seek to ensure that no one receives less favourable treatment because of possessing a specific protected characteristic. Where it is evident that there is inequality of treatment or outcome, the Council will actively take steps to address such inequality. Our aim is not just to meet our legal duties, but also to make Merthyr Tydfil a place where everyone matters. We want Merthyr Tydfil to be a place where no one experiences discrimination or disadvantage because of their identity or background. The Council sees everyone in Merthyr Tydfil as an equal citizen whilst recognising that people will have different needs.

Through the Strategic Equality Plan, this Annual Equality Report for 2023-2024 is testament to the Council's ongoing drive to progress its equality agenda and deliver our Equalities Vision for Merthyr Tydfil, which is:

A place where diversity is valued and respected and everyone can participate, flourish, and have the opportunity to fulfil their potential free from discrimination and prejudice.

The Council is working towards delivering this vision through our role as a community leader, service provider, commissioner, employer and working in partnership to reduce inequalities and to improve the wellbeing of the County Borough. It is recognised that there are and will continue to be areas for improvement.

Introduction and Background

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 brings together and replaces the previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act. It simplifies and strengthens the law, removes inconsistencies, and makes it easier for people to understand and comply with it. Most of the Act came into force on 1st October 2010.

The Act includes a new public sector equality duty (the 'general duty'), replacing the separate duties on race, disability, and gender equality. This came into force on 5th April 2011.

The general duty covers the following protected characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnerships
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race – including ethnic or national origin, colour or nationality
- Religion or belief – including lack of belief
- Sex (Gender)
- Sexual orientation

It applies to marriage and civil partnership, but only in respect of the requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination.

What is the general duty?

The aim of the general duty is to ensure that public authorities and those carrying out a public function consider how they can positively contribute to a fairer society through advancing equality and good relations in their day-to-day activities. The duty ensures that equality considerations are built into the design of policies and the delivery of services, and that they are kept under review. This will achieve better outcomes for all.

When making decisions and delivering services we must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
- 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 Specific Duties in Wales

The broad purpose of the specific duties in Wales is to help listed bodies in their performance of the general duty and to aid transparency.

The specific duties in Wales are set out in the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011. The specific duties in Wales came into force on 6th April 2011.

The specific duties in Wales cover:

- Objectives
- Strategic Equality Plans
- Engagement
- Assessing impact
- Equality information
- Employment information
- Pay differences
- Staff training
- Procurement
- Annual reporting
- Publishing
- Welsh Ministers' reporting
- Review
- Accessibility

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Council's Vision and Equality Objectives for 2020-2024 support the Council's Well-being Objectives and the seven Well-being Goals (shown in the diagram below) and link to the five ways of working (the Sustainable Development Principle) that are set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.





Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 replaced the Welsh Language Act 1993 and as part of the legislation, in Wales the Welsh language has equal legal status with English and must not be treated less favourably.

Public bodies must comply with a set of national Welsh Language Standards which the Welsh Language Commissioner issued via a Compliance Notice to the Council. The Compliance Notice sets out which of the 176 standards in the legislation apply to the Council, along with any exemptions and their implementation dates.

Welsh language issues are not covered by the Equality Act but rather have a set of Standards under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, it has long been recognised that the equality and Welsh language policy agendas complement and inform each other. This is further reinforced by the goal within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language.

Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024

MTCBC's Strategic Equality Plan for 2020-2024 reflects our commitment to equality in the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil, and ensures we are meeting our statutory obligations as found within the Equality Act 2010. The plan replaces the Strategic Equality Plan 2016-2020.

It highlights links to legislation and regulations covering Welsh Language Standards and Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty. This continues the work the Council is doing and promotes our commitment to ensuring that we have inclusive communities free from discrimination.

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies to:

- Publish objectives to meet the general duty every 4 years.
- Publish a statement setting out the steps it has taken or intends to take to meet the objectives and how long it expects to take to meet each objective.
- Make appropriate arrangements to monitor progress towards meeting its objectives and to monitor the effectiveness of its approach.
- Consider relevant equality information it holds when considering what its equality objectives should be.

As part of the review of the Council's Strategic Equality Plan it was identified that an Equalities Vision for Merthyr Tydfil was essential to set out the Council's ambition to eliminate discrimination / harassment, advance equality and foster good relations.

As identified above, the following Equalities Vision for Merthyr Tydfil has been developed.

Our Equalities Vision for Merthyr Tydfil is.

“A place where diversity is valued and respected and everyone can participate, flourish and have the opportunity to fulfil their potential free from discrimination and prejudice.”

This vision is supported by the following five Equality Objectives (listed in the table below) that are set out in the Council's Strategic Equality Plan for 2020-2024.

Theme	Objective
Inclusive Engagement and Participation	Engage with our Citizens to participate and have their voices heard to understand and respond to the needs of our communities.
Community Cohesion	Promote and facilitate inclusive, safe, and cohesive communities.
Inclusive and Diverse Workforce	Create an inclusive and diverse workforce, which reflects the communities in Merthyr Tydfil.
Gender/Equal Pay	Ensure equity of pay across Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.
Accessible Services	Understand and remove the barriers people face when accessing our services.

These Equality Objectives will be delivered through an Action Plan that is set out in the Strategic Equality Plan for 2020-2024.

Several actions were identified under each objective and work has been progressing to deliver these actions. The Strategic Equality Plan will be reviewed to reflect any updates and changes to legislation or requirements as we progress.

Strategic Equality Plan Working Group

A Strategic Equality Plan Working Group was set up to work together on delivering the actions within the plan and identify any other actions which could be included, discuss issues, risks, and update on progress. This group is made up of officers from across the Local Authority who have actions within the plan and meets on a quarterly basis. In the lead up to the development of the new Strategic Equality Plan for 2024-2028 the group will meet regularly to ensure that there is co-production in the development of any new objectives and themes. This group will also extend wider to other teams who may have actions within any new plans developed.

Scrutiny guidance

Information on the socio-economic duty has been included within the '*Practical Support Resource Pack for Scrutiny Committee Members*' which was in development in 2021. It explains what the duty means for us, how we can define terminology, how it links to the Public Sector Equality Duty and what it asks us to do. The five stages to delivering this duty were included as a visual step by step guide of how we can ensure 'due regard' has been given to the socio-economic duty in decision making.

Socio-economic Duty

The Socio-Economic Duty places a responsibility on the Council to actively consider ('pay due regard' to) how we can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage when making strategic decisions. The duty gives us an opportunity to do things differently and put tackling inequality genuinely at the heart of key decision making.

The overall aim of the duty is to deliver better outcomes for those who experience socio-economic disadvantage.

In broad terms, 'socio-economic disadvantage' means living on a low income compared to others in Wales, with little or no accumulated wealth, leading to greater material deprivation, restricting the ability to access basic goods and services. Duty is a key mechanism in supporting the most vulnerable in our communities and is extremely important in our recovery from the pandemic.

The duty will be a key mechanism in supporting the most vulnerable in our communities and will be extremely important when we recover from the coronavirus pandemic.

Integrated Impact Assessment

As a part of ensuring we are complying with the socio-economic duty, we have reviewed the Council's Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) to ensure it includes consideration for socio-economic disadvantage when making strategic decisions. The following sections were included within the IIA under socio-economic disadvantage:

- **Low Income/Income Poverty** - Unable to afford to maintain regular payments such as bills, food, clothing, transport, other essential items etc.
- **Low and/or No Wealth** - Enough money to meet basic living costs and pay bills but have no savings to deal with any unexpected spends and no provision for the future.
- **Material Deprivation** - Unable to access basic goods and services i.e. financial products like life insurance, repair/replace broken electrical goods, warm home, leisure, and hobbies etc.
- **Area Deprivation** - Where you live e.g. rural areas, and where you work e.g. accessibility of public transport.
- **Socio-economic Background** - Social class i.e. parents' education, employment, and income.
- **Socio-economic Disadvantage** - What cumulative impact will the proposal have on people or groups because of their protected characteristic(s) or vulnerability or because they are already disadvantaged?

Alongside these additions, we also included the following sections to ensure that consideration is taken into account regarding engagement and the use of data:

- **Consultation and Engagement** – Requirement for consultation and/or engagement to be undertaken, or a legitimate expectation that it will take place. Using the Gunning principles and identifying what type of consultation was undertaken, who was consulted with and if any further engagement or consultation is required.
- **Data and Evidence** - Data and evidence used to inform the proposal and how it has assisted in the proposal development and if any gaps have been identified.

The guidance was updated to reflect this duty and the new sections added within the IIA. Easy read versions were developed for staff and prompt sheets to use when completing the IIA at the start of any proposal or project. This information was updated on our Council Intranet and any changes communicated to staff.

Engagement exercises were undertaken with Corporate Management Team, Senior Leadership Team, and other departments to review the IIA and gather feedback on any new sections to include within the IIA. Information updates were provided and sessions exploring the new sections to give more detail about what each area entailed.

We have reviewed our IIA to ensure that we are meeting the needs of the duty and ensuring that we have due regard to the need to reduce inequalities of outcome as a result of socio-economic disadvantage. We have also reviewed it to ensure any new legislation, duties and further considerations are considered. We will be working on making the IIA assessment more accessible and taking into consideration any other key aspects that require impact assessing.

Performance Assessment

Below is the summary of progress against delivering our Equality Objectives within our Strategic Equality Plan for 2020-2024.

Theme: Community Cohesion

Objective: Promote and facilitate inclusive, safe, and cohesive communities

One of the objectives in the Strategic Equality Plan is Community Cohesion. Community Cohesion is essential within the County Borough as it provides an environment where strong and positive relationships can be developed between people with different backgrounds. Cohesive communities are communities which are better able to tackle common problems, to provide mutual support and to work together for a positive future. Residents in good cohesive communities feel safer, more secure, and have a sense of belonging.

Here is a summary of how this has been actioned by the team and how other external organisations and internal work has contributed towards meeting the objective.

Community Events

Below are some of the community events that took place:

- A local community group, Twyn Community Hub, facilitated an event for the older members of the community to tackle social isolation post-covid and bring together those who are most vulnerable due to their age and isolated status. They called it a 'Communi-TEA' event. The Cohesion team helped to organise and fund the event which was a huge success and was a welcoming and safe space for those who attended.
- Squirrel Friends is a monthly support meeting for the trans community, and it continues to be part funded by the Community Cohesion team. The team met with the group to discuss any concerns surrounding hate crime and support aimed at trans people in the community.
- The Cwm Taf Cohesion team were represented and present at the SIGCE Roundtable meetings along with the WSMP Asylum Dispersal meetings and remain up to date with current issues and intelligence. SIGCE stands for Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism and is a local authority network bringing Councils and partners together – to share practice and tools for responding to extremism and cohesion challenges, disrupting activity, and engaging communities.
- The Cohesion team were present at the Cwm Taf Youth and Safety Partnership which was put in place following the raised tensions and publicity surrounding a local gang at the time.
- Two cohesion officers attended three local PACT (Partnership and Communities Together) meetings throughout the Merthyr Tydfil Borough in the evenings to engage with community members, PCSOs and local councillors.

- Cohesion Officers and South Wales Police Hate Crime Officers attended a range of events to conduct general engagement with the public. These included Merthyr College Careers Day, Merthyr Military Prep College, and Merthyr College – Primary Cluster Business Day

Billy Chip Scheme

In October 2023, the Billy Chip scheme was introduced in Merthyr Tydfil. The scheme breaks down barriers and provides a safe and secure way to donate to those sleeping rough or experiencing homelessness, without the fear or worry of giving money which could be used on alcohol or drugs.

It works by a member of the public purchasing a Billy Chip token from a participating outlet, such as a coffee shop, at the cost of £2. They keep the token safe until they see a person in need. The recipient of the token can redeem their token in one of the local participating outlets, using it to choose a drink or snack.

ONAM Celebration

ONAM is a festival of harvest and happiness that is celebrated to showcase the culture and heritage of Kerala, India. A celebration event was organised by the Merthyr Malayali Cultural Association and was held at the Engine House. It was open to the local community and included sampling a selection of traditional Indian food, some fun activities, programs explaining the history of the ONAM celebration, a theatrical performance, dances, and candle lighting.

Hate Crime Awareness Week

Hate Crime Awareness Week (HCAW) this year took place between 14th and 21st October 2023. HCAW is a dedicated campaign aimed at raising awareness about hate crimes and promoting tolerance and understanding among communities. It is a week that encourages organisations, key partners, and communities to work together to tackle local hate crime and minimise its effects.

During HCAW various events and initiatives were organised by the Community Cohesion team to educate people about the impact of hate crimes and how to report them, as well as to encourage communities to come together to combat hatred and prejudice.

Initiatives carried out during this period included holding an engagement stall at the following locations:

- Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Centre – general community engagement and merchandise/QR code distribution;
- Trago Mills Shopping Centre - general community engagement and merchandise/QR code distribution;
- Prince Charles Hospital – Staff and general public discussion and engagement;
- Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre – promoting HCAW materials and the Billy Chip Homelessness project materials, as well as general meet and greet engagement

Hate Crime Awareness Training

The Community Cohesion team designed new Hate Crime posters and distributed them across the Cwm Taf area including GP surgeries, local shops, dentists, and hospitals. The posters contain a QR code allowing users to directly report any hate incidents to the South Wales Police 101 team.

The Community Cohesion team also delivered two separate training sessions during HCAW to Merthyr Tydfil Council staff including front line staff who work with the public. In addition to these activities, a social media post and an all staff email was sent out.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) is a day for reflection, remembrance, and education. Its primary purpose is to ensure that the memory of the Holocaust is preserved and that the lessons from this dark period in history are passed on to future generations.

It is marked annually on 27th January as this is the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau; one of the most notorious concentration and extermination camps operated by the Nazis.

This year's theme for HMD 2024 was 'Fragility of Freedom'. The theme of Fragility of Freedom provides us all with an opportunity to stop and consider what we value in our own lives and in the wider world.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council joined people across the globe in remembering the victims of the Holocaust.

The Cohesion team, senior Council officers, and South Wales Police attended the Jewish Memorial Cemetery and laid a wreath on the morning of 26th January to mark Holocaust Memorial Day.

Merthyr Leisure informed us that they took the decision this year not to organise the usual church service for HMD due to a shortage of staff and a lack of funding, as well as staff concerns about adverse reactions to the conflict in Gaza.

Another event took place in Pontypridd at the memorial in Ynysangharad Park. Local councillors along with officers from South Wales Police and the Community Safety and Cohesion teams were in attendance and a wreath was laid in remembrance.

LGBT+ History Month

LGBT+ History Month runs throughout February. It is an exciting, informative, and celebratory month to educate out prejudice and make LGBTQ+ communities, in all their rich diversity, visible. It also aims to promote a safer and more inclusive society where the varied spectrum of sexuality and gender is universally accepted and spoken about openly.

The theme for 2024 was 'Medicine' which celebrated LGBT+ people's contribution to the field of Medicine and Healthcare.

MTCBC was proud to support LGBT+ History Month and a flag raising ceremony was held on 1st February where the Pride flags were raised outside the Civic Centre.

Pride Month

Pride Month is about acceptance, equality, celebrating the work of LGBTQIA+ people, education in history and raising awareness of issues affecting the community.

Pride Day is celebrated on 28th June. This day marks the date in history when the Stonewall uprisings took place in New York City in 1969. Pride Month aims to commemorate the uprising, which had ripple effects around the globe and shaped reforms in law and acceptance of LGBTQIA+ identity.

To celebrate Pride Day on 28th June, the Redhouse Cymru was lit up in rainbow colours. The Progress Flag was raised outside the Civic Centre on 1st June and flown for the month to celebrate diversity within our communities.

Merthyr Tydfil Pride Event

In 2023, Merthyr Tydfil held its first ever Pride Event on Saturday 19th August. It was a historical day which began with a colourful and vibrant Pride March through the town centre. The event was held at The College, with food and drink stalls, local businesses, and live entertainment.

It was a fantastic day, with lots of local supporters, sponsors, organisations, and charities helping to make it a success.

MTCBC were a sponsor of the day, and officers ran a stall. At the time, the Council was running a consultation exercise for a new Strategic Equality Plan, and so officers engaged with attendees to capture their views on our proposed SEP objectives and how they feel the services we provide could be improved from an Equalities perspective. We had tablets and paper questionnaires for people to fill out in person, and QR codes if they wished to fill it in when they got home. The response was very good, and it was great to hear people's opinions and to get feedback from residents.

International Women's Day

International Women's Day (IWD) is a global observance held annually on 8th March. It is a day dedicated to celebrating the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women worldwide. Additionally, it serves as a call to action for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

The theme for 2024 was 'Embrace Equity'.

A 'Call It Out' Campaign was delivered in conjunction with the Community Cohesion Team and Signpost Cymru at various points in 2023-24. The project focused on violence against women and girls. On IWD 2024, a session was delivered at Merthyr College to recognise IWD, classes/sessions on Personal Safety, Self-Defence and recognising and reporting various crimes against women.

Gypsy Roma Traveller Community

Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month (GRTHM) is an annual observance that takes place in June. The purpose of this month-long celebration is to raise awareness about the history,

culture, and contributions of the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) communities, as well as to challenge the stereotypes and discrimination they often face.

The Cohesion Team worked closely with MTCBC's Glynmil Site Manager who promoted and organised an event for GRTHM. The event was held at Glynmil Caravan Park on 30th June 2023 and was attended by primary school pupils and staff, residents and community groups, and members to educate and celebrate traveller culture.

Members of various partner organisations provided craft and other activities. Twyn Community Hub attended and offered a range of sports on the greens, while South Wales Police came along with their working police dogs to share some interesting facts and for people to interact with them.

The event featured traditional folk music played on the lawns, cinema, arts and crafts, and games, face painting and many other activities.

The day was funded by Welsh Government's Cohesion Fund and Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association's 'Fit and Fed' project. Partners for the event included Twyn Community Hub, pre-school playgroup Meithrin and a variety of other organisations which all supported educational and wellbeing with information stalls at the event.

The Glynmil site continued into phase two of improvements to the site. The Council received funding from Welsh Government and match funding from Core capital to refurbish all 24 utility blocks at the Glynmil site for residents to have access to quality facilities. We designed this in consultation with residents to ensure their needs were met and they were also involved in choosing some of the materials and colour schemes. This enabled the outdated and existing units in a state of disrepair to be upgraded. Having sufficient kitchen and bathroom facilities, storage and ventilation will improve their quality of life on the traveller site.

In May 2023, funding was utilised from the 'Fit and Fed' initiative. Together with Twyn Community Hub, residents at the Glynmil site were gifted a choice of an air-fryer or slow cooker to promote healthy living and to support energy efficiency with lower energy costs. Cooking classes were also offered by the voluntary group at the community centre on site.

Black History Month

Black History Month is observed every October. It is an opportunity to celebrate the outstanding contributions that black people have made to British society, whether that be today or historically. It is also an opportunity for people to learn more about the effects of racism and how to challenge negative stereotypes.

The theme for 2023 was 'Saluting our Sisters'. The theme highlights the crucial role that black women have played in shaping history, inspiring change, and building communities. This year's celebration showcased pioneering black women who have made remarkable contributions to literature, music, fashion, sport, business, politics, academia, social and health care, and more.

Black History Month is also a time for people to learn more about the effects of racism and how to challenge negative stereotypes.

In addition, Race Council Wales launched Black History Wales 360 which is an all-year showcase of artistic, cultural, and educational events across Wales. Their theme for 2023-2024 was 'Celebrate and Elevate'.

Zero Racism Wales

Zero Racism Wales is a campaign led by Race Council Cymru, supported by Welsh Government and Community Cohesion Coordinators. It calls on businesses, organisations and individuals committed to promoting racial harmony and equity to sign a pledge and agree a zero-tolerance policy to racism in Wales.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council commits to promoting a zero tolerance to racism throughout the Council and has signed the Race Council Cymru's Zero Racism Wales policy. By signing the policy, it reaffirms our commitment to ensuring that MTCBC treats every person fairly and equally irrespective of race, that there are equal opportunities in employment and service delivery and that the Council will adhere to the Equality Act 2010 and provide fair and equitable services to all. As a Council, we agree to take a stand against racism and promote a more inclusive and equal workplace and society that makes every individual feel safe, valued, and included.

The Council's full pledge can be found on the Zero Racism Wales website - <https://zeroracismwales.co.uk>

Refugee Week

MTCBC was proud to support Refugee Week this year. Refugee week is a UK-wide festival celebrating the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees and people seeking sanctuary.

2023 marked the 25th anniversary and the theme was 'Compassion'.

Theme: Inclusive and Diverse Workforce

Objective: Create an inclusive and diverse workforce, which reflects the communities in Merthyr Tydfil

We want employees to feel safe in the environment they work and to be themselves. To achieve this, we work collaboratively and support and facilitate training and learning opportunities so that Equalities is recognised and incorporated into roles.

Information on the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty is available on the Council's Intranet and Internet for staff to view. We also have an Equalities and Welsh Language section for staff online which holds information, resources, and links.

Work completed to meet this objective includes:

Equalities Calendar

An equalities calendar has been produced for staff and is available on the staff Intranet. The purpose of the calendar is to bring together a list of national awareness days and events that recognise and celebrate diversity, equality, and inclusion. It is not an exhaustive list but at a glance staff can see key dates that are listed each month.

The calendar is a useful tool and a practical resource to help promote awareness of diversity, equality, and inclusion throughout the Council. This calendar is regularly reviewed and updated, and a new calendar is produced and circulated to staff every January.

Proud Councils

The Proud Councils network in South Wales is a partnership of Local Authorities working together to support LGBTQ+ issues and actively promote LGBTQ+ inclusion within their respective communities. The member Councils, which include Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Newport, Powys, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Swansea and Torfaen, collaborate on various initiatives and activities aimed at advancing LGBTQ+ rights and fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment.

The main objectives and purpose of Proud Councils include:

- **Supporting LGBTQ+ Staff:** The network seeks to improve the support and resources available to LGBTQ+ employees within local authorities in South Wales. This includes promoting workplace equality, providing resources, and offering training on LGBTQ+ issues.
- **Leadership in LGBTQ+ Rights:** Proud Councils aims to position local government across South Wales as a visible leader in the field of LGBTQ+ rights. This involves advocating for policy changes and practices that protect and promote LGBTQ+ rights.
- **Community Inclusion:** The network is dedicated to championing LGBTQ+ inclusion within the communities served by member Councils. This includes outreach efforts, awareness campaigns, and initiatives that promote respect and diversity.
- **Public Services Accessibility:** Proud Councils members are committed to ensuring that public services are accessible and welcoming to everyone, regardless of their sexuality, gender identity, age, race, disability, or religion. This commitment emphasizes the importance of inclusive policies and practices.

By joining Proud Councils, Local Authorities like Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council demonstrate their commitment to creating inclusive and diverse communities. They actively work to eliminate discrimination and promote acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals and their rights. These efforts not only benefit LGBTQ+ residents and employees but also contribute to a more equitable and inclusive society.

The network marched and represented in the following Pride 2023 events:

- Swansea
- Torfaen
- Caerphilly
- Newport
- Cardiff Pride
- Merthyr Pride

The network has continued to work closely together, gathering ideas for future awareness and events.

LGBT+ History Month

In February, we celebrated LGBT+ History Month. Throughout the month staff received information on events taking place within the South Wales area and some useful links to videos and resources to enable them to learn more about the month via the Proud Councils events and resource guide.

Training and continued professional development

In November, a new and improved Manager's hub was brought in for managers and team leaders. It is an online purpose-built solution that helps leaders to manage and support their employees and teams effectively. They now have access to resources and information, with some focusing on the protected characteristics.

Staff new to the Local Authority must undertake the Level 1 Welsh course as a condition of employment and existing staff are required to upskill and undertake the course.

Training and continued professional development are key elements of the Council's Performance Management Framework for staff member's performance appraisals and one-to-ones. This enables employee training needs for equalities to be identified and addressed.

Our Corporate Induction process for all new staff includes modules on the Council's visions & values, equality & diversity and directs staff to our Dignity & Respect at Work policy which enforces our zero tolerance on bullying & harassment.

For those who manage staff, a Managers Induction process looks at MTCBC's visions & values, policies, and procedures from a manager's perspective. There are also several soft skills sessions to ensure new managers can support staff through the Performance Management process which underpins our corporate values and behaviours. Additional sessions continue to be developed following consultation through employee engagement activities.

Learning at Work Week

Learning at Work Week in May provided bite sized sessions for all staff, aimed at the importance and benefits of learning and development. The sessions were wide ranging and included disability awareness, health sessions, social media safety, digital literacy, and a Learn Welsh workshop.

Some of the sessions were held online, and some in person at the Civic Centre and the Compass Community Hub. All staff were encouraged to take part, as it aimed to put a spotlight on the importance and benefits of continual learning and development.

Disability awareness week was in June, and to help our staff and managers gain a better understanding of disability, discrimination, and reasonable adjustments in the workplace, an E-learning training package was put together and made available for all staff.

In July, Sight Cymru came into the Civic Centre and ran a workshop with some staff on a Sight Loss Friendly Organisations scheme. The session looked at the barriers that people with sight loss face and how those barriers can be broken down.

Physical and Mental health for staff

Throughout 2023-2024, the focus of wellbeing remained a key priority, and the Occupational Development team explored a variety of blended approaches to wellbeing training.

A new Employee Assistance Programme has been made available for all employees called 'Vivup.' Launched in January 2024, Vivup are a UK leading employee benefits provider specialising in Health and Wellbeing.

Vivup employ professionally qualified Counsellors and Support Specialists who are experienced in helping people to deal with all kinds of practical and emotional issues.

Vivup is available for all staff 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year and is accessible by phone or online. It is free of charge and staff do not need to ask their manager to use the service. It is fully confidential. They can provide:

- 24/7 Telephone Support
- Face to Face and Virtual Counselling
- Self Help Workbooks
- Domestic Abuse Resources and App
- Podcasts and Blogs
- Health and Wellbeing Platform

The Vivup Health and Wellbeing Platform offers extensive resources including:

- Access to 24/7 support and counselling, 365 days a year.
- A range of personal, emotional, and financial wellbeing tools.
- Health and Wellbeing assessments to identify the risk of developing any of the five-leading lifestyle-related diseases (Cancer, Diabetes, Dementia, Lung and Cardiovascular), plus podcasts on a variety of health and wellbeing topics.
- The option to set health-boosting goals with sustainable lifestyle changes through completing goals.
- Connectivity with health apps to automatically track goal progress.
- Blogs, videos, recipes, and more resources to inspire positive change.

Welsh language training continues to be offered to staff. The Council works in partnership with Dysgu Cymraeg Morgannwg (Learn Welsh Glamorgan) to provide workplace training opportunities for staff and Councillors.

A training event was shared with all Councillors that was arranged by the WLGA (Welsh Local Government Association). There were two sessions available on 11th May and 18th May 2023 called Introduction to the Equality Act.

Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)

The Integrated impact Assessment was reviewed and amended in 2023. The Integrated Impact Assessment is used to determine the potential positive and negative impacts on various topics, such as,

- The impact of a proposal against our Corporate Well-being Objectives, Protected Characteristics, Welsh Language, Socio-economic disadvantage, and biodiversity.
- How the proposal works towards our sustainable development principle.
- Whether consultation and engagement took place including any data or evidence was used, and how this has been used to inform the proposal.

A further section was included to incorporate our decarbonisation and climate change objectives. The Council has developed a Net Zero Roadmap with a themed approach to deliver the Decarbonisation Plan in response to Welsh Government's aim of achieving a carbon neutral public sector by 2030. This will be delivered through the 6 key themes:

Theme 1 – Buildings and Planning

Reducing or removing GHG emissions from existing property portfolio and new developments e.g. heat pump systems, solar panels.

Theme 2 – Travel and Transport

Reducing or removing GHG emissions in the Council's fleet and equipment, and supporting sustainable travel e.g. electric vehicles, bike schemes, EV charging.

Theme 3 – Procurement of Goods & Services

Consideration of carbon reduction options in procurement process, consider ways to reduce supply chain impacts.

Theme 4 – Outsourced services (Leisure Trust)

Reduce and remove GHG emissions from leisure facilities e.g. low carbon options in new building or refurbishments **(N.B. only complete this section if direct impact on Leisure Trust)**.

Theme 5 – Land Management

Maximising the Council's land to increase biodiversity in open spaces, parks, and woodlands.

Theme 6 – Governance

The Council is required to measure and report carbon emissions and carbon absorption. Are there outputs that can be captured and recorded from this project/decision?

We will continue to add and amend sections within the IIA to ensure we include all potential impacts to proposals to ensure the Council makes better informed decisions. Amendments to Welsh Language will be discussed in 2024/2025.

Healthy Organisation Strategy

The Healthy Organisation Strategy was developed and approved on 6th December 2023.

In order to drive the Council forward, it is vital to have a Human Resource strategy which details the organisations overall plan for managing its workforce to align with its organisational goals.

The strategy sets the direction for the next four years in key areas of HR, including attraction and recruitment, performance management, workforce development, leadership and management and wellbeing. It is a corporate strategy which all Directorates have shared responsibility for the delivery, that links with the Corporate Wellbeing Objectives. The strategy also links with our work around equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Participation strategy

This year a Participation Strategy has been developed and was approved on 12th July 2023.

The Council has a firm commitment to delivering high quality, sustainable services. Fundamental to the success of this is a strong relationship between the Council, its residents, and the communities across the County Borough.

The Participation Strategy sets out our approach to encouraging two-way communications and making the process of influencing decision making more accessible. It provides our commitment to take on board the views of our audiences, and our statutory duty to engage with them, which will enable them to shape the decision we make.

Communication and Consultation strategy

A Communication and Consultation strategy has been created and was approved on 12th July 2023.

The Communications Strategy explains the way in which MTCBC communicates with residents, partners, businesses and all our other key audiences.

The Council is committed to delivering value for money and quality public services to the residents of our County Borough, keeping our audiences informed and engaged throughout our journey. Our approach is to ensure communications and engagement activity is fit for purpose and helps to achieve our vision and objectives. It also defines how we will listen and respond to what our audience is telling us through two-way communication.

Our aim is to provide high quality, relevant communications in a variety of ways to increase people's understanding of the Council and its services.

One of the key objectives is making the Council easy to understand with content that is clear, concise and with easy-to-read language that is accessible to all.

All of the above strategies can be found on the Council's corporate website:

www.merthyr.gov.uk

Theme: Inclusive Engagement and Participation

Objective: Engage with our citizens to participate and have their voices heard to understand and respond to the needs of our communities

Community engagement, inclusion and participation is vital to the Council in achieving positive change for the community. Without knowing more about the people that make up the communities in Merthyr Tydfil, we are unable to identify specific issues or barriers that may prevent them accessing our services or engaging with the Council when they need to.

Some examples of work carried out to action this theme during this period are as follows.

Youth Service

MTCBC's Youth Service and commissioned partners support young people aged 11-25 within the County Borough, within settings including schools/education provisions, youth centres and through outreach work.

Through additional funding from the Youth Support Grant, a series of projects were undertaken by local youth provisions that examine and address the needs of young people with protected characteristics and additional learning needs, whilst extending the knowledge of wider groups of young people.

A good example is the Georgetown Boys and Girls Club 'Our Wonderful World' project, the aim of which was to educate young people on respecting differences and being more inclusive and covered LGBTQ+ issues, sign language and use of the Welsh language.

'Youth Inc.' at Treharris B&G Club involves weekly sessions for young people with additional learning needs that focuses on interactive play activities, along with the development of a sensory area within the club setting. This was co-developed with young people and their parent/carers.

The club also has also embarked on a wide-ranging project to promote inclusion and equality through the use of photography to explore identity and stigma and the creation of a support space for young people.

The Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum (MTBWYF) undertook some art and craft-based workshop sessions to develop a banner, t-shirts and badges in preparation for attendance at the annual Merthyr Pride event. They put together an action plan to ensure that everything was ready in time for the event.

There have been some notable developments in Welsh medium/bilingual youth work provision. For example, Georgetown Boys and Girls Club has been hosting bilingual projects to promote the use of the Welsh language, along with the development of a Welsh Zone at the club.

Merthyr Tydfil's Academy of Success held its awards ceremony at Merthyr Tydfil Football Club. The awards recognise the successes of young people, aged 11-25, and organisations across Merthyr Tydfil County Borough. The Youth Service is committed to developing independent and active citizens and these awards are an excellent way to showcase young people's achievements through participation in extra-curriculum activities.

These awards celebrate the success and achievements of our hard-working young people, and it is an occasion of pride being able to celebrate the Academy of Success.

Anti-poverty Action Plan

We are in the process of developing an Anti-Poverty Action Plan.

As part of this, the Council took to improve their understanding of their residents' 'lived experience,' to review and improve accessibility to and use of council services.

A robust engagement and consultation took place across the County Borough and wider Cwm Taf Morgannwg region when setting the Council's wellbeing objectives and new Corporate Wellbeing Plan. This was also used in setting regional plans. The exercises included listening to residents lived experiences. Further engagement is taking place regarding reviewing the Council's Strategy Equality Plan (SEP) and tackling poverty plan.

Also, to compliment the consultation, a short staff and councillor survey was distributed. The aim was to gather insights, especially from those who work with people in poverty or financial hardship. The survey also aimed to identify whether staff would like more support or training so they can better identify and support service users who may be in financial hardship.

Cost of Living Crisis

The cost-of-living crisis is a term people use to describe the effects of the rising cost of food and energy in the UK currently.

The impact of the cost-of-living crisis can be unequal, and those in Protected Characteristic groups can be disproportionately impacted.

To ensure people are able to get the information and advice they need, we optimised our digital services.

A landing page was created on the homepage of the Council's website with information that included:

- Cost of Living Support Scheme (Council Tax)
- Getting help with benefits, rent, and other bills.
- Help for families with children.
- Food Banks
- Warm Hubs
- A special edition of the Council's community magazine dedicated purely to the Cost-of-Living Crisis, which was available electronically, but also delivered to every house in the County Borough.

The Council also engaged with its residents and businesses via on-line surveys on social media to understand what type of support was needed. Various campaigns were also run via social media to promote and signpost support being provided by partners.

A cost-of-living crisis group was set-up with partners. This group met on a regular basis to share information on what support was available. All this information was channelled through the Council's website and social media sites.

Ageing Well in Wales

An age-friendly community is one which supports people of all ages to live and age well. It maximises the potential of our ageing society and creates an environment where everybody looks forward to growing older.

39.6% (23,284) of residents were aged 50+ in Merthyr Tydfil in 2021, up 3.6% since 2011 (ONS 2021)

We have an ageing population and with just under 2/5 of the population in Merthyr Tydfil aged 50+, it is more important than ever for local communities, decision-makers, and organisations to work together to make an age friendly Merthyr Tydfil.

We are working to improve the quality of life of Older People in Merthyr Tydfil. We want to ensure that Merthyr Tydfil is an Age Friendly place, where people can age healthily, happily, and safely.

As a Local Authority we are currently working towards membership with the World Health Organisation (WHO) to be recognised as an Age Friendly Community and become part of their Global Network for Age Friendly Cities and Communities. The Global Network was established in 2010, with a view of making communities a great place to age in. The mission being to connect places wanting to make their communities great to grow old in, and to inspire change. In response to our ageing population and accelerated urbanisation, the network targets action at a local level that champions the full participation of older residents within the community to enhance healthy and active ageing.

The WHO focuses on 8 interconnected domains or features within the community to highlight and overcome barriers effecting the wellbeing of older people. If the needs of people as they age are considered throughout these domains, then we can help ensure that Merthyr Tydfil is a place where everybody can age happily, healthily, and safely.

Membership to the Network is not an accreditation for age-friendliness. Rather, it echoes our commitment to listen to the needs of our residents aged 50+, alongside working in collaboration with other sectors and organisation across our County Borough to build age friendly physical and social environments. Additionally, membership is a commitment to share our experiences, successes and difficulties with other cities and communities who are members of the network.

In order to sign up to the WHO's network of Age Friendly communities and cities, we need to establish our baseline and submit an application form. Alongside this, we must also ensure that we sign up to this by signing a commitment letter.

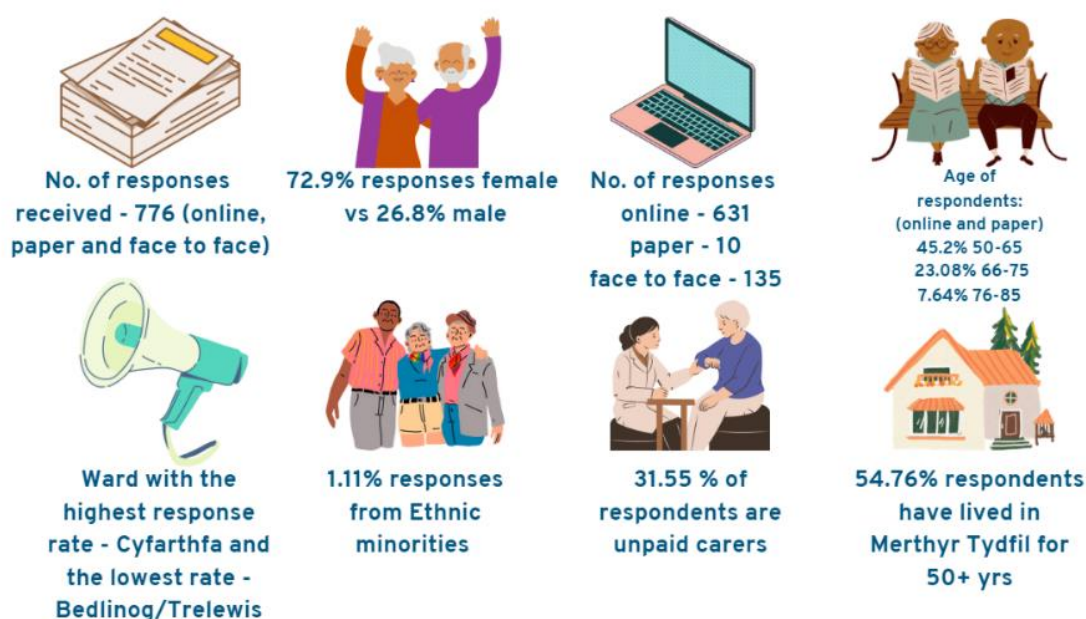
In order to determine our baseline, an engagement exercise has been undertaken with staff, senior managers, and the public to gather feedback on the 8 domains, as shown below.

The 8 domains are;

- Transportation
- Housing
- Social Participation
- Respect & social inclusion
- Civic participation & employment
- Communication & Information
- Community support and health services
- Outdoor spaces & buildings

In the autumn of 2023 Age Friendly Merthyr Tydfil launched a Merthyr-wide Age Friendly survey based on the WHO's 8 domains. The aim of the survey was to gather the views of older people, as well as their carers, friends, and family, to help build a picture of what is important to residents in our local communities compared to what services are available to them. The findings of this survey have informed the development of our baseline assessment 'Age Friendly Merthyr Tydfil.' The report identifies where we are currently and our key recommendations for the future of an Age Friendly Merthyr Tydfil.

Highlights of survey analysis.



The survey identified the top 10 needs of residents in Merthyr Tydfil being;

- Reliable emergency ambulance services - Community health & Support services
- Clean public toilets – Community spaces and public buildings
- Affordable home maintenance services – Housing
- Public services using clear, jargon free language – Communication and Information
- Easy to find information about public services' activities and plans - Communication and Information
- Information in a variety of formats to cater for different needs e.g. vision or hearing loss - Communication and Information
- Frequent and reliable public transport - Transportation
- Well maintained roads – Transportation
- Activities easily accessible by public transport – Social participation
- Easy to find information, advertising activities – Social participation

Analysis of the engagement and consultation is taking place to inform our baseline assessment. We have also looked at specific elements within the feedback such as digital exclusion to assist in informing the digital strategy to ensure our services are accessible for

all. This also assists in our work around ensuring our services are accessible which links with the Strategic Equality Plan.

Schools

Lots of events and activities took place during the year in all our schools, to raise awareness and to educate the young people of Merthyr Tydfil on equalities, diversity, and inclusion.

The Educational Psychology Service developed 'E-Learning' training modules - 'Inclusion for All in the Early Years.' This online training has been made available to all schools via login to the Merthyr Tydfil Extranet.

The Education department provided bespoke training for schools on monitoring and assessing the progress of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL). Training was also provided for new EAL Co-ordinators.

A Student Safeguarding conference was held in November and was an open invite to all schools. The purpose was to discuss topics such as hate crime, equality, and diversion.

Adult Community Learning

The Adult Education department supports adults in the community to attend and complete a wide range of courses and qualifications designed to promote personal development and progression within or into employment. They also upskill individuals in priority areas with essential/basic skills. Many learners who have few or no qualifications when they first engage are likely to be the hardest to reach or may have had poor experiences of mainstream education, therefore may have limited social and economic opportunities.

ASPIRE

At Aspire, our commitment to inclusion and diversity is a vital part of the success of all our Programmes. Through tailored mentoring and utilisation of a wide network of support we create opportunities for individuals from all walks of life, including those facing personal and societal challenges. This enables them to excel.

Programmes include:

- The Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme
- The Aspire QuickStart Programme
- The Pathway to Work – Children Looked After Programme
- Ewch Amdani (CLA)
- Welsh Language Inclusivity
- Commitment to Accessibility and Wellbeing

Compass Community Hub

The Compass Community Hub opened its doors on the 1st April 2023 to community members to enable them to access training, learning and employment support within the community, with the view to helping them to improve their employment circumstances.

The project has seen a vast need for the type of support provided by Compass since opening, where the staff team has been increased to respond to the popularity of the program.

What we do at the Hub:

- Provide differentiation in learning and learning aids to anyone who identifies an additional learning need such as dyslexia
- If needed tutors can work 1-1 with participants who need extra support to complete courses
- Some procured courses such as CSCS tests can be administered in other languages such as Polish
- All tutors embed Welsh in the workshops and courses that are delivered at Compass
- The offer of work related licenses enables people with low skill levels to have an opportunity to gain a qualification and improve their circumstances
- Community open days are held to encourage all nationalities to attend the centre with their families, such as the construction open day and learning fiesta
- Through our ex-offender mentor, support is provided for ex-offenders to help them to improve their circumstances and decrease their risk of reoffending
- Compass has a disability employment mentor who supports people with disabilities to sustain their employment or change career path. This works holistically with other specialist services such as DWP to ensure the person has multi agency support
- Data shows that a wide age range has accessed Compass, with the youngest being 16 and the oldest 78. This is due to a diverse marketing plan which ensures people can access program information whether this is printed or via social media
- Learning through the Outdoors provides support to anyone with a mental health condition to encourage them to improve their wellbeing through engaging in outdoor activities
- Learner participation in a focus group being held at Compass for the BBC on the impact of digital exclusion to monitor the impact on older people if TV / radio services are solely online
- Free sims cards which include data, calls and texts being issued to people who are socially excluded working in partnership with the Good Things Foundation
- Menopause cafes have been held at Compass
- "Conversation clubs" being set up where non-English speakers can practise their English language skills
- Demographic data shows an even split of male / females engaging at Compass

The Welsh Language continues as a constant thread throughout provision, supporting the Welsh Language Standards and Corporate Objectives. Tutors continue to embrace the Welsh Language and culture embedded within their delivery and the promotion of 'being Welsh' and how we operate as a Nation.

Armed Forces Covenant

MTCBC are proud to be one of the Local Authorities in Wales to have signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant. The Armed Forces Covenant is a commitment from the nation that those who serve or have served in the armed forces, along with their families, will be treated fairly. It ensures they are not disadvantaged because of their service. The Council has a proud record of valuing its armed services, past and present, and the commitment to the

Covenant significantly progresses the Council's objectives to support our Armed Forces Community.

The Council leads in encouraging other organisations to support the Armed Forces community through a Partnership Armed Forces Covenant Panel. The Panel brings together multiple statutory, non-statutory and third sector organisations, all with a role in supporting civilian and military communities.

The past year has been quite busy for the Armed Forces Team. We are proud to maintain our Silver Award in the Employer Recognition Scheme, reflecting our commitment to supporting our veteran and reservist employees.

This year we hosted our first coffee afternoon for veterans employed by the Council, providing a welcoming space for open discussions about the challenges they face. Held on 12th December, the event allowed them to share their experiences and offer feedback on how we can enhance their journey as veteran employees.

Our annual Remembrance Service remains a significant event, allowing community members to come together and pay their respects. This occasion not only honours the sacrifices made by 'the fallen' but also strengthens the bonds within our community.

This year, we also launched our new Armed Forces web pages, providing valuable information and resources for the Armed Forces community.

Our council continues to work closely with local veteran groups to enhance support. Our newly appointed Armed Forces Champion plays a vital role in these collaborations, ensuring that the needs and voices of the Armed Forces community are effectively represented.

Also in this year, we welcomed a new Armed Forces Champion, Councillor David Jones, and a new lead for the Armed Forces team, Michelle Edmunds.

Disability Sport

A new walking group called 'Merthyr Women's Walks' started up in September 2023 with our support. This is a ladies only group which walk three times a week. They meet in Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Centre and walk the surrounding trail. Each session is delivered to the needs of the participants. Due to the season changes and darker nights, we provided funding to purchase walking safety gear which included headlamps and outdoor clothing.

Treharris and Dowlais started new table tennis clubs for age 60+ in March 2023. We funded the hall hire and the equipment for both venues. They have over 60 members to date. An over 60's Pickle Ball group also started up without support and funding. Sessions take place once a week in Dowlais Community Centre. We also funded another session through Merthyr Tennis club.

A new recreational netball session called 'Back to Netball' started in October 2023. We supported the start-up of the group by funding the initial equipment and hall hire for 8 weeks. Over 30 ladies have joined.

Yoga

We funded a new yoga instructor's qualification in March 2023, on the back of this she has set up 4 yoga sessions throughout Merthyr Tydfil. These have proven very successful with multiple participants attending.

BE-Fit running club

A new running group started in May 2023, we funded a run leaders' course and equipment. Over 40 people have joined a monthly membership in the Taff Bargoed area of Merthyr.

Midwives – Aqua

Midwives in Merthyr have completed a swim aqua course in October 2023, the course fee was funded by us. Sessions are due to take place with pregnant and new mums in Merthyr leisure centre. They are liaising with Halo leisure currently.

Bridging The Gap

We have supported Bridging the Gap (a disability specific after school and holiday club) to kick start a new weekly sports club. They were supported to access funding and Active Merthyr support the coordination of weekly activities.

Disability Sport come and try day

In February 24 Active Merthyr ran a disability sport come and try day in partnership with Disability Sport Wales. The event was supported by 10 local Merthyr providers who all run local inclusive provision. Local residents were able to come and try opportunities and 3 clubs saw new members as a result.

Welsh Language

Below is some of the key work that took place to promote and support the Welsh Language. The full details of all achievements for this period can be found in the Council's Welsh Language Annual Monitoring Report for 2023-2024.

Welsh Medium Education Community Event

On April 18, 2023, a promotional community event was held in Play Zone at Trago Mills. This aim was to promote and increase the number of children transferring from Cylchoedd Meithrin to Welsh Medium Education. Learn Welsh Glamorgan were present to provide and promote information to parents on Welsh for adults' courses taking place in Merthyr. This event was led by the Local Authority and arranged in conjunction with Mudiad Meithrin, Learn Welsh Glamorgan, Adult Community Learning. Teachers from Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Santes Tudful and Rhyd-y-Grug were also present and spoke to prospective parents about any queries they had about Welsh Medium Education. Activities were provided for children by the Council's Ti a Fi officer.

Urdd Eisteddfod 2023

The National Urdd Eisteddfod took place in May 2023 in Llandoverly, Carmarthenshire. In May 2023 Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Santes Tudful, Ysgol y Graig, Ysgol Gellifaelog, Ysgol Uwchradd Pen y Dre and Afon Taf reach reached the Urdd National Eisteddfod. Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Santes Tudful were successful in coming third in three competitions.

Diwrnod Shwmae Su'mae

The annual Diwrnod Shwmae Su'mae event was held on October 13, 2023, in Cyfarthfa Park. This was the 5th year of the annual event. The Merthyr Tydfil response to this national event continues to be developed each year and promotes the use of the Welsh language for children, adults and within the community of Merthyr Tydfil. It encourages people to use

incidental Welsh and learn the language. Seven schools from Merthyr Tydfil participated by performing a variety of items. A question-and-answer session was held with the Welsh Language Policy Officer from the Welsh Rugby Union. They provided a session on how the language is being developed and implemented within the Welsh Rugby Union. To open the event, Efa Gruffudd Jones, the Welsh Language Commissioner, provided an address on how the language is being used in Merthyr Tydfil. Welsh Language Businesses were also present selling their products.

There was an increase of 5 businesses compared to when the event took place in 2022. Welsh language partners included RHAG, Learn Welsh Glamorgan, The College Merthyr Tydfil, Menter Iaith Merthyr Tudful and Canolfan Soar. The Community Focus Schools Team were present promoting the range of services and activities which they offer to families and the community. Activities such as Welsh language face painting and balloon making were available for children and a Welsh language Children's company called 'Do Re Mi Canu' provided an entertainment session of singing for children aged between 3 and 11. The Merthyr Tydfil Youth Orchestra were present for the first time providing musical items. This event was the biggest event held to date with approximately 500 people attending.

Dysgu Cymraeg Morgannwg / Learn Welsh Glamorgan

The Council continues to work in partnership with Dysgu Cymraeg Morgannwg (Learn Welsh Glamorgan) to provide workplace training opportunities for staff and Councillors. This includes an ongoing promotional campaign to encourage staff and Councillors to undertake Welsh language training opportunities via drop-in sessions, through the Council Intranet, by email, and taster sessions. There have also been courses online and face-to-face learning.

The Council currently has members of staff learning Welsh in the workplace ranging from Entry Level to Intermediate Level 1 and 2 and some on Higher Level. Working in partnership with Dysgu Cymraeg Morgannwg, we also continue to provide ongoing social opportunities for learners to listen and practice using Welsh. Previously, learners of the Council have assisted Dysgu Cymraeg Morgannwg with the marketing of courses and offer any support to promote the Welsh language throughout the County Borough. Community learning hubs have also been set up in Pen y Dre, Ysgol Rhyd y Grug and Ysgol Santes Tudful schools, providing opportunities for both the education workforce, council workforce, and the community of Merthyr Tydfil to learn Welsh.

Siarter Iaith

In April 2023, Coed-Y-Dderwen became the first English Medium Primary School in Merthyr Tydfil to achieve the Siarter Iaith Silver Award. Siarter Iaith is a Welsh Government initiative that encourages schools to promote the use of Welsh Language, improving skills and inspiring children to use Welsh in all aspects of their lives. The Charter provides a framework for schools to follow in order to achieve the award at three possible levels; Bronze, Silver, or Gold.

Housing Support Services

In 2023-2024, Housing support services continued to deliver vital support and assistance to those who require it, to prevent and alleviate homelessness. Demand for reactive homelessness services such as our 24 staffed supported accommodations for those who would have no alternative than to sleep rough continues to rise. There continues to be a greater demand than we can accommodate within our hostels and supported

accommodations, meaning that some vulnerable people are still residing in unsuitable temporary B&B accommodation. Housing support grant funds skilled support staff to work with these individuals within their temporary accommodations, addressing causes of homelessness, building resilience, and preparing them for independent living once suitable longer-term housing options become available.

Marsh House opened providing 22 en-suite units of accommodation with 24-hour support as well as communal spaces and spaces for support sessions to address barriers to independent living. This provision was desperately needed to reduce our reliance on B&B accommodation and reduce the negative impact which long-term B&B use has on those who reside within it. Our Young Person's Hostel has been relocated to the rear of the Marsh House building. This provides 10 units of en-suite accommodation, communal areas, and training spaces to young people aged 16+ with housing needs.

Pen-y-dre apartments is now in its second year of operation, providing 5 x self-contained apartments for young people, (predominantly those leaving care) with self-contained apartments with on-site support workers to support them to study, train, volunteer and prepare for independent living.

Housing Support Grant funded floating support for specific service user needs as well as general support to maintain and sustain tenancies continued to be delivered across the County Borough. This included specialist provision for those with criminal offending histories, young people, older people, those with mental health needs, substance dependencies and people with disabilities.

A new specialist support service for those resettling in Merthyr Tydfil was piloted at the end of 23-24 and will be extended into 24-25. The scheme provides specialist housing resettlement workers to support households predominantly fleeing the war in Ukraine. 20 x families were supported in 23-24.

A new scheme to support people with physical disabilities and sensory loss is currently being developed in partnership with our Social services department to ensure that we can best support people to access the housing they require in order to stay living independently in their own homes or other specially adapted properties for longer – we hope this will be operational in 24-25.

During 2023-24 we have continued to make changes and improvements to the way in which we commission, ensuring that training in relation to the needs of LGBTQ+ people is undertaken by all our support staff who work across our housing support services. This requirement now forms part of our basic contracts and will be rolled out as contracts are renewed. We are also looking at the way in which we collect data regarding gender and sexual orientation which will assist us with future commissioning decisions.

The limited amount of suitable and affordable housing within the County Borough continues to present challenges for those moving on from supported accommodation. We anticipate that through the Housing Support Programme and with the continued support of Welsh Government we can further improve our offer of supported accommodation, suitable move-on accommodation, and rapid-rehousing to those who need it.

Theme: Accessible Services

Objective: Understand and remove the barriers people face when accessing our services

More services are being accessed digitally which allows citizens to be more engaged, empowered and allows us to reach more people. However, we need to consider mechanisms for reaching all members of the community. Ensuring that there are clear readable formats for service users and ensuring that digital access is appropriate and encompasses all needs whenever possible.

Accessibility

Digital accessibility is a critical process that ensures all digital products, including websites, mobile apps, documents, and online tools, are usable by everyone, regardless of any impairments they may have. It is essential for ensuring that all users can access the same information online, promoting inclusivity and eliminating barriers.

As a Local Authority, our responsibility is to make our web content and design user-friendly and straightforward so that most people can navigate and use it without the need for adaptations. However, it is equally important that our website supports those who do require adjustments due to various impairments, such as impaired vision, motor difficulties, cognitive impairments, learning disabilities, deafness, or hearing impairments. This commitment extends to ensuring that our digital assets are accessible not only to people with disabilities but also to other groups, including older individuals.

Over the past few years, we have been committed to ensuring that we make our services more accessible, and ensuring we have dedicated resources available to encourage others to write more accessible documents, use more accessible language and remove barriers for people accessing our services. We commit to compliance to the Accessibility Regulations.

We have continued to add to our signposting page on our intranet to provide staff with information, training links, and 'how to' guides for creating accessible documents.

Following the introduction of our Silktide software, we have been improving the accessibility of our corporate website. Silktide which is a software package used to help identify and rectify issues on our corporate website, including spelling and grammar mistakes, accessibility compliance, and unstructured documents. This enables more efficient checking of our content on the corporate website. Since its implementation in 2022, we have seen our score increase from 40% to 100%, with the MTCBC corporate website still being ranked as joint 1st out of all the UK websites tested for accessibility.

Training has been circulated and signposted to staff to enhance understanding and capability. The training aims to improve how we create documents for people with learning disabilities ensuring they have a right to information they can understand so they can make informed choices, speak up, and take part in their communities.

We reviewed the data from the Recite Me toolbar on our corporate website and other domains, which is due for renewal in June 2024. The Recite Me toolbar has been a positive and welcome addition, making the website digitally inclusive by allowing visitors to customise the content so they can access and consume it in ways that work best for them. The tool has successfully increased engagement by supporting people who have additional needs, and those who require languages other than English or Welsh.

The Recite Me Toolbar is broken down into four main areas: screen reader, translation, styling and reading. All functions support a wide range of disabilities to aid website usability and reflect the needs of our communities. Since its launch on our Website in September 2022, the most popular feature clicks are currently the screen reader and translation tools.

We are further analysing the data from the toolbar to put a case together to renew this contract in 2024.

A digital strategy is currently in development which will align with both local priorities and the Welsh Government's Digital Strategy, which emphasises digital inclusion, infrastructure, data-driven decision-making, and skills development. The digital strategy is a forward-looking blueprint designed to modernise council services, enhance operational efficiency, and deliver a seamless digital experience to residents. The vision is to build a digitally connected Merthyr Tydfil, where council services are accessible, efficient, and designed around the needs of our residents.

The key objectives within the draft digital strategy are;

- **Service Efficiency and Accessibility:** Streamline operations and reduce manual tasks, ensuring essential services are accessible to all citizens online.
- **Strategic Integration and Partnerships:** Strengthen alignment between digital initiatives and the Council's corporate objectives while collaborating with regional partners and aligning with the Welsh Government's six digital themes.
- **Resource and Impact Planning:** Prioritize sustainable funding, allocate resources effectively, and implement clear performance metrics to measure success and continuous improvement.
- **Systematic Learning and Adaptation:** Foster a culture of learning by reviewing project outcomes, adjusting initiatives based on citizen feedback, and sharing lessons across departments.

Through structured initiatives like process automation, enhanced data integration, and robust cybersecurity, MTCBC aims to become a digitally mature council that meets the evolving needs of its community while actively supporting Wales' national digital transformation goals.

For more details on our accessibility efforts and progress, please refer to MTCBC's Accessibility Statement which is available on the Council's website. We are committed to ensuring that our digital presence is accessible to all, and we will continue to work towards this goal.

Procurement

The Council considers it essential that all organisations wishing to provide goods or services on its behalf can demonstrate that all reasonable and practicable steps are taken to allow equal access and equal treatment in employment, service delivery and training for all.

The Council uses the Single Procurement Document (SPD) blended with appropriate supplier qualification questions and has added its own specific equalities related questions to it. The Council's standard Invitation to Tender (ITT) template includes a specific equalities statement with the inclusion of contract clauses relating to the Equality Act 2010 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. Equalities and Welsh Language related clauses to its standard terms and conditions for contracts are added when required.

The Council underpins the principles of the Welsh Procurement Policy Statement 2021 (WPPS) and its ten main themes through a fit for purpose procurement strategy that provides strategic direction and coordination to comply with corporate priorities and the WPPS. The WPPS includes themes such as Economic, Social and Environmental Impacts, Community Benefits and Open, Accessible Competition.

The Equalities and Welsh language elements of the Procurement Process in relation to Tendering and Request for Quote Documentation have been reviewed in line with the Equality Act 2010, (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

These documents support the Council in ensuring that all third-party suppliers demonstrate compliance with these requirements, where relevant, to the nature and type of goods and services being provided on its behalf.

The Council is a signatory of the Ethical Employment in Supply Chains Code of Practice. Modern Slavery, Blacklisting and Employment Practices have been incorporated into the pre-qualification/selection stage questionnaires for all applicable tender activity.

Welsh Language tenders

In line with our provisions for equalities and the Welsh Language, the Welsh Language will be treated no less favourably than the English language. If a request for a Welsh tender document is received during a tender process, the process will be paused to allow time for a translation. Once the translated document(s) is received, the translated document(s) will be communicated and the process will commence with the addition of the number of days it took to create the translation, ensuring that there is no additional benefit to those tenderers using the English version of the ITT (and supporting documents).

Modern Slavery Statement

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council recognises it has a responsibility as an employer and procurer/commissioner of services to ensure slavery and human trafficking does not exist within its supply chains or in any part of its own business.

In February 2023, we published our first Modern Slavery Statement to demonstrate our public commitment to play our collaborative part in reducing modern slavery and human

trafficking, including through effective partnership working (prevention, identification, awareness raising, information sharing and enforcement).

The statement highlights the steps we take to ensure our suppliers adhere to the highest standards of ethics.

The statement covers a 12-month period and is reviewed/updated every year if required.

MTCBCs Modern Slavery statement can be viewed on the Council website.

Workforce Data

Data is vital in ensuring that we can monitor trends, identify areas for improvement and assess where we were, where we are and where we would like to be.

We have been reviewing our equalities monitoring form to ensure that it reflects the information required. We have also developed an equalities monitoring form for consultations and engagement exercises to ensure we receive a representative sample of responses, and to ensure we hear the views and lived experiences of our communities.

As a part of this, we are also reviewing internal monitoring of data and how we can best identify where improvements may need to be made. We encourage staff to complete this data and promote that this data is used not only in line with our duties but to ensure we are providing the best services we can to our workforce.

The information below shows the workforce data as of 31 March 2024.

Overall Staff Data

Employed staff at the Council as of 31 March 2024

Number of staff in post = 2471, of which:

Permanent	Fixed Term	Full Time	Part Time
1961	510	1552	919

Age

16-34	35-54	55-64	65+	TOTAL
567	1358	476	70	2471

Disability

Deaf/Hard of Hearing	Mental Health Difficulties	Mobility Impairment	Learning Impairment	Long-Standing Illness	Visual Impairment
12	10	6	6	46	6

Other	No Disability	Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	TOTAL
39	2247	99	2471

Gender

Male	Female	TOTAL
630	1841	2471

Sexual Orientation

Gay Woman/Lesbian	Gay Man	Bisexual	Heterosexual/Straight	Other	Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	TOTAL
23	19	14	2296	5	114	2471

Religion

Christianity	No Religion	Buddhism	Judaism	Islamic	Hinduism	OTHER	Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	TOTAL
624	1315	7	1	5	0	162	357	2471

Ethnicity

White British	White/ Other	Asian	Black Caribbean	Black OTHER	Mixed Race	Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	TOTAL
2275	37	8	1	1	3	146	2471

First Language

English	Welsh	Arabic	Greek	Polish	Russian	Portuguese	French	Hungarian	Romanian
2261	36	1	1	14	1	2	2	1	2
Spanish	Filipino	Thai	Prefer not to Answer/Not Known			Urdu	TOTAL		
1	1	1	146			1	2471		

People Profile - Salary

Salary	All Staff			
	Male		Female	
	Full Time	Part Time	Full Time	Part Time
£0 - £4,999	0	9	0	241
£5,000 - £9,999	0	15	0	160
£10,000 - £14,999	5	14	3	153
£15,000 - £19,999	13	28	88	240
£20,000 - £24,999	55	11	142	117
£25,000 - £29,999	170	2	168	42
£30,000 - £39,999	136	4	203	43
£40,000 - £49,999	130	0	302	6
£50,000 - £59,999	18	0	40	5
£60,000 - £69,999	14	0	19	1
£70,000+	18	0	27	0
Calculated: Total number of salaries	560	82	992	1008

NB - The figures include staff with multiple posts = **2642 OCCUPIED POSTS**

Total Jobs advertised 31st March 2024 = 367

Total No of Job Applications 31st March 2024 = 2822

Total No of Online Applications = 2623

In terms of the number of staff who applied for a job internally at the Council, we received **434** internal applications of which 129 were Male and **305** were Female.

In terms of external applicants, the Council received **2346** external applications of which **762** were Male and **1584** were Female.

In terms of Agency Applications, the council received **42** applications, of which **22** were male and **20** were female.

	Number of employees involved in grievance procedure				
Protected Characteristics	As the complainant	A person against whom a complaint was made	Number of employees subject to disciplinary procedures	Number of employees who have left the Local Authority	Number of Staff taking Maternity Leave
Age	15	2	15	375	0
16-34	11	0	1	146	0
35-54	2	2	8	133	0
55-64	1	0	5	90	0
65+	1	0	1	6	0
Sex					
Male	15	1	11	107	0
Female	0	1	4	268	0
Disability					
Disabled	0	0	0	0	0
Non-Disabled	0	0	11	0	0
Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	15	2	4	0	0
Sexual Orientation					
Heterosexual	15	2	8	269	0
Lesbian/Gay	0	0	0	5	0
Bi-Sexual	0	0	0	3	0
Other	0	0	0	1	0
Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	0	0	7	97	0
Ethnic Group					
English/Welsh	15	2	15	267	0

White Other	0	0	0	8	0
Asian	0	0	0	0	0
Black African	0	0	0	0	0
Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	0	0	0	100	0
					0
Religion or Belief					
No Religion	0	0	0	169	0
Christianity (all Denominations)	0	0	0	68	0
Islamic	0	0	0	2	0
Buddhism	0	0	0	1	0
Other	0	0	0	15	0
Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	15	2	15	120	0

Theme: Gender/Equal pay

Objective: Ensure equity of pay across Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

Gender/Equal Pay

As a Council we are required to consider any pay differences that exist and to identify an objective that will address any difference identified, including reporting on the gender pay gap.

Nationally whilst pay systems are important in determining pay equity, there are several other issues that are relevant in determining what women and men are paid.

These include occupational segregation; availability of full/part-time work in different occupational groups, e.g. lower paid job roles being mainly part-time whilst higher paid more senior roles being mainly full time; availability of family friendly policies and support and organisational culture.

Reporting on this helps us to understand the size and causes of any gender pay gaps and any issues that need to be addressed. It is also a measure to show the difference in earning between women and men.

The Council undertakes regular gender pay gap reporting. All jobs are evaluated using the Greater London Provincial Council scheme of Job Evaluation (except for Heads of Service who are processed via the HAY Scheme). No personal information regarding the post holder is considered at this stage. As a result, the grading system is free of any unconscious bias. The grades and additional payment mechanisms in operation at the Council are provided on a gender-neutral basis. Therefore, there are no obvious discrepancies between genders during the reporting.

There is no inequality in pay identified in the Council. All jobs are scored fairly and consistently in accordance with the Greater London Provincial Council scheme. Our policies and procedures are continually monitored and reviewed to ensure that there are no hidden or perceived barriers. Historically, the Council together with Trade Unions undertook a lot of work with the implementation of single status and the new pay spine.

As at March 2023, the median gender pay gap is 0%, so men at MTCBC are paid 0% more than women, which means for every £1 a man earns, a woman earns £1.

Reviewing our Equality Objectives: Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028

As a part of our statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty, to review our equality objectives at least every 4 years, we have reviewed our equality objectives, which were approved on 20 March 2024.

Internal engagement began in April 2023 with consultation documentation being developed in readiness for public consultation to start in July/August 2023. The consultation spanned over the summer 2023 and ended in December 2023. An online survey was developed, including supporting information and easy read versions of both. Face to face events were held in various locations and with multiple forums, with the survey and documentation being sent to a number of organisations. Information on the detailed consultation can be found in the SEP consultation pack on the Intranet.

During the consultation we engaged with groups from all Protected Characteristics, both digitally and face-to-face.

We received 223 responses to the online consultation.

We received 288 responses in the face-to-face consultations. We engaged with 41 individuals in five forums that were held.

In total, the number of participants throughout the SEP consultation was 552.

Of those who responded to the online survey; 137 were residents, 53 were MTCBC staff members, 6 were elected members, 7 were business people and 2 represented the third sector.

Overall consultation results

OVERALL RESPONSES				
552 people completed the consultation survey				
OBJECTIVE 1	OBJECTIVE 2	OBJECTIVE 3	OBJECTIVE 4	OBJECTIVE 5
Inclusive Engagement and Participation	Community Cohesion	Inclusive and Diverse Workforce	Gender/Equal Pay	Accessible services
92% of respondents agreed with this objective	94% of respondents agreed with this objective	88.5% of respondents agreed with this objective	93% of respondents agreed with this objective	94.5% of respondents agreed with this objective

Online consultation results

RESPONSES		COUNCIL'S EQUALITY VISION		
223 people completed the online survey	61.43% of respondents were residents of the County Borough	84.3% of respondents agreed with the vision		
OBJECTIVE 1	OBJECTIVE 2	OBJECTIVE 3	OBJECTIVE 4	OBJECTIVE 5
Inclusive Engagement and Participation	Community Cohesion	Inclusive and Diverse Workforce	Gender/Equal Pay	Accessible services
86.55% of respondents agreed with this objective	90.13% of respondents agreed with this objective	81.17% of respondents agreed with this objective	88.34% of respondents agreed with this objective	91.03% of respondents agreed with this objective

The majority of respondents were aged 56-65.	60.09% of respondents were female.	74.88% of respondents have no disability.	The majority of respondents described themselves as "White – Welsh".
The majority of respondents were married or in a civil partnership.	The majority of respondents described their sexual orientation as heterosexual.	English was identified as the main language for most respondents.	The majority of respondents said they had no religion.

Feedback - Online

- Most respondents agreed with the Council's Equality Vision and believed zero tolerance for discrimination and prejudice should be adopted by all.
- Most said engagement is the key to success, but it needs to be meaningful and frequent. MTCBC needs to create the right forums to do this and most importantly needs to listen to feedback.
- Some respondents mentioned safety in the community is a concern, especially for the vulnerable.
- Most respondents agreed our workforce should be diverse and we should recruit the best person for the job regardless of characteristics. They feel a diverse workforce will help communities.
- Most respondents agreed services should be accessible to all. However, some aired concerns over most services moving online and feel it is more difficult to have their query dealt with by a person.
- Some respondents said the Council can be too reliant on social media as a communicative tool which is not accessible by all. We should be looking at trying different ways to reach all audiences.
- Some respondents said they would like to see more training in both our workforce and in our communities around equality and diversity.

Face to face consultation results

RESPONSES				
288 people responded in the face-to-face consultation events				
OBJECTIVE 1	OBJECTIVE 2	OBJECTIVE 3	OBJECTIVE 4	OBJECTIVE 5
Inclusive Engagement and Participation	Community Cohesion	Inclusive and Diverse Workforce	Gender/Equal Pay	Accessible services
97% of respondents agreed with this objective	98% of respondents agreed with this objective	96% of respondents agreed with this objective	98% of respondents agreed with this objective	98% of respondents agreed with this objective

Feedback – Face to face

- Some respondents feel staff training is important and believe this will help overall in being able to deliver the objectives. Specifically training for front line staff.

- One resident felt there is a lack of inclusion and community cohesion, partly due to less facilities in areas such as Bedlinog compared to the rest of the County Borough. They feel those who live in the lower part of the County Borough are the poor relation in Merthyr Tydfil.
- More support for the elderly was raised as an issue to be addressed. It was felt they are the most disadvantaged group in the County Borough.
- Some respondents called for more community safety. They felt everyone should feel safe, especially the elderly.

Following consultation on the objectives with staff and the public, meetings and workshops were also held with the Corporate Management Team and Scrutiny to gather views on the objectives. The previous 5 objectives contained within the 2020-2024 were carried over (with 93% of respondents agreeing to the 5 objectives).

The theme 'Education, Skills and Employment' was included following the consultation as training and improving skills was raised in the consultation responses. We have listened to our workforce and the community and included this additional objective. We have also ensured that we integrate and include actions relating to the Welsh Language.

The equality objectives for 2024-2028 are shown in the table below.

Objectives 2024-2028	
Inclusive Engagement and Participation	Engage with our communities and workforce to support effective participation and encourage people to be involved.
Accessible Services	Understand and remove the barriers people face when accessing our services.
Inclusive and Diverse Workforce	Support an inclusive and diverse workforce, which reflects the communities in Merthyr Tydfil.
Equity of pay	Ensure equity of pay across Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.
Safe, Inclusive and Cohesive Communities	Promote and facilitate safe, inclusive, and cohesive communities.
Education, Skills, and Employment	Improve education, skills, and employment opportunities.

We continue to be committed to delivering our equality objectives and equalities vision for Merthyr Tydfil. We will review our objectives and work to develop detailed actions within the plan that will sit under the high-level actions.

Work will continue in ensuring that we meet the needs of our communities and ensure that we deliver on the plan. Some actions may be short term, some longer term, and some will be ongoing. We will also review the plan to ensure that actions reflect the needs and priorities at the time. We will also take into consideration any potential future legislation changes and

amend our work to implement anything new that progresses. There will be updates in The Worker Protection (Amendment of the Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, including potential changes in the Employment Rights Bill. These will be taken into account when delivering the plan.

Next Steps

It is paramount that we continuously improve and ensure that we are delivering the most appropriate actions within our SEP. We remain committed to our equalities vision and continue to be proactive.

We will continue to collect and monitor our data, making amendments to our diversity monitoring forms, and our workforce data. We will continue to raise awareness to staff on the importance of collecting data, and how it can assist us in making better informed decisions that meet the needs of our communities.

We will work towards ensuring our equalities monitoring form is included within all consultations to ensure we are engaging with all protected characteristic groups and encourage early identification of impacts so the relevant people are engaged with and can participate.

We will continue to raise awareness where possible in our equalities calendar and also through specific awareness raising posts throughout the year.

We are working on improving our recruitment and encouraging more diverse applicants. In doing this, also reviewing our job application forms and the questions we ask, ensuring that we include questions relating to, for example, neurodiversity to ensure fair interviews.

We want to continue to raise awareness of the accessibility toolbar on our corporate website and other domains to improve the accessibility of our information and services to our communities.

We want to maintain our Silktide Accessibility Index score as being joint 1st on the index out of all UK Councils, and making our services more accessible, by producing easy read versions and promoting the importance of this.

We want to continue to ensure there is a joint approach to delivering our equality vision and objectives across the Local Authority and with partners, plus introduce more training on topics to all staff.

We engaged and consulted on our new SEP for 2024-2028 in 2023 and will continue to ensure protected characteristic groups have a voice and are included in the setting of our new objectives.

We will continue to horizon scan and ensure we are involved in any consultations on any action plans being developed by Welsh Government and wider. Any action plans developed will be reviewed and relevant actions included within our SEP.

We will continue to voice the importance of equalities in all our work, working with departments when writing new policies, plans and strategies, to ensure the needs and views of our communities are considered.

The next annual report will report against the objectives and actions within the 2024-2028 plan. We will continue to review these actions regularly.

Contact Details

We welcome comments on the report and if you would like to know more about the work the Council is doing, or require the report in another format please use the contact details below:

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