

Merthyr Tydfil County  
Borough Council

**Annual  
Equality  
Report  
2021-2022**



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol  
**MERTHYR TUDFUL**  
**MERTHYR TYDFIL**  
County Borough Council

## Contents

<b>Introduction and Background .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Performance Assessment.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Theme: Community Cohesion.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Objective: Promote and facilitate inclusive, safe and cohesive communities .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Theme: Inclusive and Diverse Workforce .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Objective: Create an inclusive and diverse workforce, which reflects the communities in Merthyr Tydfil .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Theme: Inclusive Engagement and Participation.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Objective: Engage with our citizens to participate and have their voices heard to understand and respond to the needs of our communities .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Theme: Accessible Services .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Objective: Understand and remove the barriers people face when accessing our services .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Theme: Inclusive and Diverse Workforce .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Objective: Create an inclusive and diverse workforce, which reflects the communities in Merthyr Tydfil .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Procurement.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Workforce Data .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Theme: Gender/Equal pay.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Objective: Ensure equity of pay across Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Next Steps.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Contact Details.....</b>	<b>41</b>

## Foreword

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC) is pleased to introduce our Annual Report 21/22 for its Strategic Equality Plan for 2020-2024. This Strategic Equality Plan was prepared in line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 and was approved by Council on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

Through the Strategic Equality Plan, this Annual Equality Report for 2021-2022 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 well-being of the County Borough.

### **A message from our Equalities Champion, Councillor Gareth Richards**

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the Council's Annual Equality Report 2021-2022. 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. Through the Strategic Equality Plan, this Annual Equality Report for 2021-2022 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 well-being 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. The majority of the Act came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

The new 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.

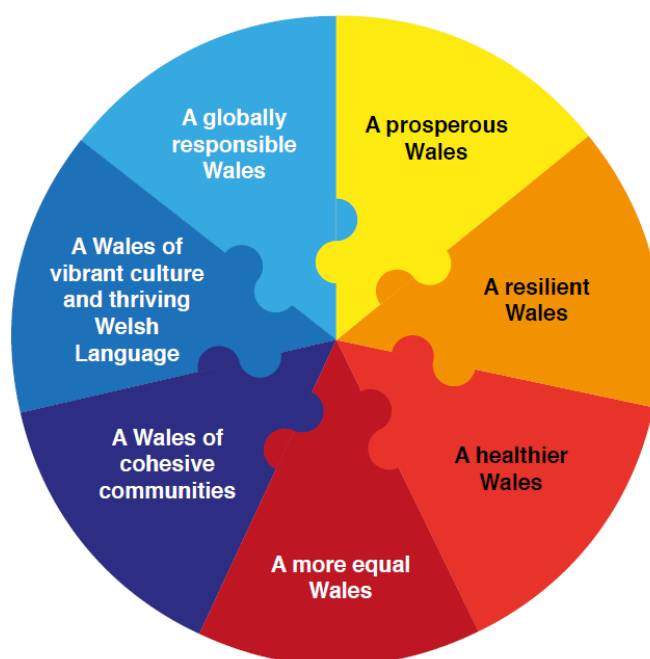
The specific duties in Wales are set out in the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011. The specific duties in Wales came into force on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

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 2016-2020 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.



### Long term



The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.

### Prevention



How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.

### Integration



Considering how the public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.

### Collaboration



Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives.

### Involvement



The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.

## 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.
- Give appropriate consideration to 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 in order 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 2021-2022.

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

A number of 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

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. The 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 came into force on 31 March 2021 and a number of activities were undertaken prior to this to ensure we met this duty. 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 have been 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 have also included the following sections to ensure that consideration is taken into 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 in order to inform the proposal and how it has assisted in the proposal development and if any gaps have been identified.

The guidance has been updated to reflect this duty and also the new sections added within the IIA. Easy read versions have been developed for staff and prompt sheets to use when completing the IIA at the start of any proposal or project. This information has been 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.

The updated IIA was implemented for use from 31 March 2021, and has also been regularly reviewed to ensure any new legislation, duties and further considerations are considered. We will be working on making the IIA assessment more accessible and also taking into consideration any other key aspects that require impact assessing.

### **Road to recovery from COVID-19**

There has been a significant amount of work undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic across the authority, with some staff redeployed into other roles to ensure the delivery of key functions to support our residents and communities.

During the early stages of the pandemic, you will see from previous reports there has been significant support for our residents, those shielding, support for digitally excluded learners, support for children who receive free schools meals, Housing support, grants administered, mass testing exercises, raising awareness of and tackling hate crime, reviews of statues, monuments and street names following the Black Lives Matter movement, support for staff, and many other key pieces of work.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on society and there was still uncertainty during this time, with additional lockdowns, mass vaccination centres set up, then the lifting of some restrictions. However, many vulnerable groups still felt isolated during this time and it will be some time before people feel they are able to go back to pre-lockdown routine.

Our equality work reflects our commitment to ensuring our residents feel safe in their community and not disproportionately impacted by any negative outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 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 is Community Cohesion. Community Cohesion is essential within the County Borough to enable different groups of people to get on together and enables a sense of belonging. This enables people to feel safer and more secure in their communities. A community where people have increased contact and are able to forge greater relationships with others increases understanding of different cultures.

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 measures.

During this period the after effects of COVID-19 were still being felt. Many restrictions were still in place and when certain restrictions were lifted, there was still some hesitancy to meet face-to-face. Therefore engagement was mainly virtual, and towards the later part of the year some small events did take place to re-engage with individuals and communities.

This period also saw concerns around the Delta Variant of COVID-19. Tensions were high around those who choose not to get vaccinated, the unease of the lifting of restrictions and the anti-vax statements/movements. Work took place to encourage minority groups to take up on the vaccination scheme. The Cohesion Team worked with the newly appointed Interlink & VAMT black, Asian, and ethnic minority COVID Engagement Officers to visit business owners/staff in Merthyr Tydfil town centre. The purpose of these visits was to engage with black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities and develop an understanding of how people felt about COVID-19, the vaccine and how they have been supported during the pandemic.

Wider community tensions were monitored during this time and this work included:

- Cohesion Officers continued to liaise with the South Wales Police (SWP) Hate Crime officer on a weekly basis where information was shared by SWP and Victim Support to identify trends and/or tension indicators. This allowed officers to monitor hotspots and put action plans in place.
- Cohesion Officers continued to touch base with voluntary and faith sectors during this time. Contact continued with internal partners and external agencies who support members of the black, Asian, and ethnic minority Community.
- Problem Solving Group (PSG) meetings were attended on a monthly basis across Cwm Taf. These meetings are led by the police, where information is shared regarding hate crime and community tensions from a number of different partners. It allows for a multi-agency approach to combat issues.
- The Cwm Taf Community Cohesion Grant Fund was opened and rolled out by the Cohesion Team. The grant fund offers groups the opportunity to apply for grants from £500 to £3000. A number of local groups submitted applications to the grant

fund and were successful in their bids. The grant helped to fund various groups in holding events that celebrated diversity and promoted equality.

- The Health and Well-being forum was attended virtually on a bi-monthly basis. This is hosted by Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil. From these meetings, links are established with local community groups that are part of the protected characteristics.
- The Cohesion Team supported the newly formed Merthyr Malayali Cultural Association (MMCA) and their inauguration ceremony took place on Sunday 20th March, where the group had foods from their culture to sample.

### **Windrush Day**

Windrush Day is 22 June, and is a day to remember and celebrate the Windrush generation who came from the Caribbean to help rebuild Britain after World War Two.

MTCBC promoted the day on social media, ensuring we continue to honour and recognise the outstanding resilience, innovation and creativity of the Windrush Generation and their descendants. Caribbean migrants have become a vital part of British society and, in the process, transformed important aspects of British life.

### **EUSS**

EU employees make a valuable contribution to the workforce and society in the UK. The EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) allows foreign nationals and their families to get the immigration status to continue to live, work and study in the UK beyond 30 June 2021. This is following the UK's departure from the European Union. Even those citizens who have lived in the UK for many years or have a UK permanent residence document still needed to apply to the EUSS.

The Cohesion Team continued to promote the EUSS during this period. MTCBC promoted the 'Time is Running Out' Campaign on their social media platforms. The Cohesion Team also spoke to locally employed EU citizens and highlighted the closing date of the EUSS, the necessity to apply for the EUSS and provided any support where required.

### **Hate Crime Awareness Week (HCAW)**

National Hate Crime Awareness Week runs between 9 – 16 October, the campaign aims to bring people together to stand in solidarity with those affected by hate crime, and help those who need ongoing support. It is a week that encourages organisations, key partners, and communities to work together to tackle local hate crime and minimise its effects.

MTCBC Cohesion Team along with the rest of the Community Safety Team and SWP held information stands in various town centres all across the Cwm Taf area, where members of the public were engaged with and encouraged to complete surveys. Although these were scaled down events from what we usually run, we were still able to promote HCAW. During this week, we also advertised for minority groups to join our CCG (Community Cohesion Group) so that we would have more community representation on the Board. We were successful in recruiting a member of a local minority group to Chair the CCG. This helped to increase representation of minority groups to Public Bodies.

### **Anti-Slavery Day**

Anti-Slavery Day, 18 October, provides an opportunity to raise awareness of human trafficking and modern slavery, and encourage government, local authorities, companies, charities and individuals to do what they can to address the problem.

MTCBC promoted the day on their social media sites and by sending emails to all staff and Councillors, with the aim of raising awareness of Modern Slavery, signs to look out for and how to report.

### **International Women's Day**

Cohesion officers organised a Self-defence event in Merthyr Tydfil College for International Women's Day. International Women's Day is annually held on 8 March to celebrate women's achievements throughout history and across nations. IWD theme 2022 was 'Break the Bias'.

A large class of public students participated in a self-defence class which was delivered by SWP. All students engaged well with the police officer who delivered the class. Once the classes were finished the students were asked again if they knew what self-defence meant. All students put their hands up and stated that they now understood the concept of self-defence and would feel confident using the principles they had learned during the class. All students stated that they had thoroughly enjoyed the class and would feel safer in the community.

The event complimented the work SWP are doing in relation to safer streets and the emphasis they have put on improving the safety of women and girls. Cohesion Officers also organised a fitness and dance class which was very well attended and encouraged participants to attend further classes.

### **Holocaust Memorial Day**

Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) was marked on 27 January 2022. This is the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp. Each year across the UK, thousands of people come together to learn more about the past and take action to create a safer future.

The theme for HMD 2022 was 'One Day'. MTCBC Cohesion Officer attended the Holocaust Memorial Garden at Merthyr Library to pay respect and alongside a SWP Officer and Inspector, visited the Jewish Memorial Cemetery in Cefn Coed to lay a wreath. The Memorial Day was also highlighted to staff and a remembrance post was published on our social media platforms, both signposted to an online service held nationally.

### **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's also an opportunity for people to learn more about the effects of racism and how to challenge negative stereotypes. To highlight Black History Month MTCBC staff received communications highlighting key moments in Black British history whilst the theme 'Proud to be' was shared on our social media platforms.

### **International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is held on the 21 March. The event is held on this day because on the 21st of March, 1960, police opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration in Sharpeville, South Africa against the apartheid "pass laws". Pass laws were an internal passport system that was designed by the South

African government to prevent the freedom of movement of Black people. This controlled where people could work, live and travel inside the country.

The theme during this reporting period was 'Voices for Action against Racism'. Which highlights the importance of strengthening meaningful and safe public participation and representation in all areas of decision-making to prevent and combat racial discrimination.

MTCBC staff and members of the public were encouraged to show their support by sharing their pictures using the 'stand up to racism frame' from the United Nations Human Rights Website.

Whilst MTCBC continues to commit 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.

### **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.

Welsh Government also developed a Race Equality Action Plan and undertook community engagement analysis in March 2021 to feed into the action plan. A consultation on the Race Equality Action Plan was then undertaken in 2021 which the Council fed responses into. The outcome of the consultation and implementation is still in development.

### **Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) Community**

#### **Gypsy Roma Traveller Month**

The Cohesion Team worked closely with the Gypsy Roma Traveller Coordinator to promote GRT History Month which takes place throughout June, on social media with a larger campaign than previous years. The month aims to educate and raise awareness of GRT heritage and helps to tackle prejudice, challenge myths and to amplify the voices of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in wider society.

Continuing with GRT community support within the County Borough, work overseen by the MTCBC Glynmil Site Manager includes:

The Glynmil site being awarded Welsh Government site funding to refurbish the site as part of a masterplan to refurbish and redevelop the whole site. Phase one was accepted in February 2021 and the works were completed by June 2021. The changes supported site families' well-being and sense of belonging. The plan and refurbishment included consultation with the community. As a result families were able to have new electric hook ups on their plots and new accessible SMART meters for utilities, to enable families to pay for usage via PayPal at shops making it more convenient. Whilst the SMART system supported families in prevention from eviction and debt, the funding also supported making the community centre safe with a new boiler and shutters. The funding also supported MTCBC investment in greenspace equipment to ensure families could use the outdoor spaces for play and well-being.

The Glynmil site community centre acted as a hub for residents and extended families to meet with service providers when COVID-19 restrictions allowed. The MTCBC Officer for the site has continued to support residents with housing, health and education related issues. MTCBC reopened the onsite centre from March 2021. Contact has been maintained with residents and extended families via the telephone and face to face where possible.

Work carried out and supported by the MTCBC Glynmil Site Manager included:

- Glynmil Site Manager involved in the GRT Education Guide research for Welsh Government as well as sitting on the board of the GRT stakeholders meeting. Site manager also wrote a Guide for Welsh Government on GRT funerals during a Pandemic.
- Meithrin Play started to deliver outdoor sessions of Welsh Play, for GRT families since June 2021. The scheme is currently term time only, one day a week. This provision has since moved into the community centre to offer indoor play.
- Arts packs from Head4Arts were distributed to families on site in January 2021. Head4Arts works across all art forms with people of all ages to provide high quality, inspirational arts experiences that introduce people to new art forms and unlock their creative potential.
- In February 2021 youth well-being packs were distributed to 11 plus young people on site, whilst play packs were distributed to young children. These packs were offered from both Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association (MTHA) and Merthyr Valley Homes (MVH).
- In March 2021 MTHA also offered families sports equipment containing multi sports for families to keep fit whilst on site. We were also able to use money from the Fit and Fed fund to offer families' food parcels from MTHA food COOP.
- Also in March, mental health packs were offered to families and extended families via Forsythia Youth Team. Whilst Swim vouchers were given out to all families via Active Merthyr March 2022.
- In May 2021 Head4arts were funded by Cohesion MTCBC to produce a community piece to celebrate GRT History month of June. The artists visited families around the site to produce a song about what community means to families of GRT heritage. This is part of a bigger project that we will put to a video to be shared at future Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month events across the UK.
- Families continued to be offered food bank support and support to apply for the Nest scheme which offers a range of free, impartial advice and if eligible, a package of free home energy efficiency improvements such as a new boiler, central heating, insulation,

or solar panels. Whilst support for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) via referral to prevention teams in the housing department, in order to provide financial support to help with rent or housing costs.

### **Theme: Inclusive and Diverse Workforce**

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

Alongside the theme of Community Cohesion some objectives feed into our Inclusive and Diverse Workforce theme. Where 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 Equalities training and learning opportunities so that Equalities is recognised and incorporated into roles.

#### **LGBTQ+ Community**

On 30 September Umbrella Cymru provided a Gender and Sexual Diversity training course that was accessible for all MTCBC staff virtually. The overall aims of the session was to:

- Enhance awareness of gender and sexual diversity.
- Explore the impact that experiences of LGBTQ+ people might have on mental health and wellbeing.
- Raise awareness of support and services available to LGBTQ+ people.

#### **LGBT+ History Month**

On 23 February the Cohesion Team organised a small event in the red house for LGBT+ History Month which runs throughout February. It is an annual celebration of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and non-binary history, including the history of LGBT+ rights and related civil rights movements. It also encourages the development of understanding the matters affecting the LGBT+ community.

It aims to promote a safer and more inclusive society where the varied spectrum of sexuality and gender is universally accepted and spoken about openly. Two guest speakers were commissioned to deliver a talk at the event. One spoke on the issue of homophobia, the other on transphobia and both about the importance of nurturing a tolerant and accepting society. The event was attended by The Mayor, LA Leader as well as the Youth Mayor and Youth Forum. The Red House building was also lit up in the colours of the Progress Flag, and the Progress flag was flown outside the Civic Centre to mark the month.



All staff and Councillors received weekly emails throughout the month which highlighted the theme: 'Politics in Art: The Arc Is Long'. Notable figures factsheets and resources were also shared whilst encouragement of the use of pronouns was circulated. This coincided with our social media platforms where the month was highlighted to members of the public.

## **Proud Councils**

Proud Councils' is a partnership of Councils in South Wales working together to support LGBTQ+ issues and actively champion LGBTQ+ inclusion. Proud Councils include the following Councils – Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Newport, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Torfaen. Since then other Councils have joined the group.

The purpose of the Proud Councils network is to improve support offered to LGBTQ+ staff within local authorities in Wales, and ensure that local government across Wales is a visible leader in the field of LGBTQ+ rights and actively championing LGBTQ+ inclusion in our communities. Being part of Proud Councils highlights MTCBC's commitment to promoting respect and diversity in our communities, and ensuring our public services work to deliver to everyone regardless of their sexuality, gender identity, age, race, disability or religion.

During this period Proud Councils held a competition for young people aged 11-18 living in Wales, encouraging them to create a piece of art to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community. The themes were 'becoming me' or 'how adults can be an ally of young LGBTQ+ people'. The high quality of the entries received made it difficult to choose a winner. Two winners were chosen, Agent 7 who created a wonderful piece of artwork and Eva who composed a piece of music. Both winners had their entries showcased on the Proud Councils Twitter page.



Are you 11 - 18? Live in Wales?

**Proud Councils want to hear from YOU!**

Take part in our LGBTQ+ competition for a chance to win **£100 of vouchers!**

Create a piece of art that we can share on social media to celebrate our LGBTQ+ community, themed on:

**'Becoming me'**

**OR**

**'How adults can be an ally of young LGBTQ+ people'**

**To enter:** send your entry to [equality@rctcbc.gov.uk](mailto:equality@rctcbc.gov.uk) with your name (or avatar if you wish to stay anonymous) and the county you live in. **Competition closes 10th August 2021.** Winner will be announced 24th August 2021 on Proud Council's Twitter.



Ydych chi rhwng 11 ac 18 oed? Yn byw yng Nghymru?

**Mae Cyngorau Balch**

**eisiau clywed gennych CHI!**

Cymerwch ran yn ein cystadleuaeth LHDT+ a gallwch chi ennill gwerth **£100 o dalebau!**

Evch ati i greu darn o gelf y gallwn ni ei rannu ar y cyfryngau cymdeithasol i ddathlu ein cymuned LHDT+ ar y themâu:

**'Dod yn fi fy hun'**

**NEU**

**'Sut y gall oedolion fod yn gynghreiriaid i bobl LHDT+ ifainc'**

**I gystadlu:** e-bostiwch eich cais i [cydraddoldeb@rctcbc.gov.uk](mailto:cydraddoldeb@rctcbc.gov.uk) gyda'ch enw (neu lun eich cymeriad rhithwir os ydych chi'n dymuno bod yn anhysbys) a'r sir rydych chi'n byw ynddi. **Dyddiad cau'r gystadleuaeth yw 10 Awst 2021.** Bydd yr enillydd yn cael ei gyhoeddi ar 24 Awst 2021 ar gyfrif Twitter Cyngorau Balch.



## **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 is 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.

With some COVID-19 restrictions lifting during this period, access to face to face work within schools and provisions increased. A focus on well-being, activities, re-engagement, school attendance, and attainment was highlighted for young people who felt the isolation and after effects of the pandemic. Examples of this work included:

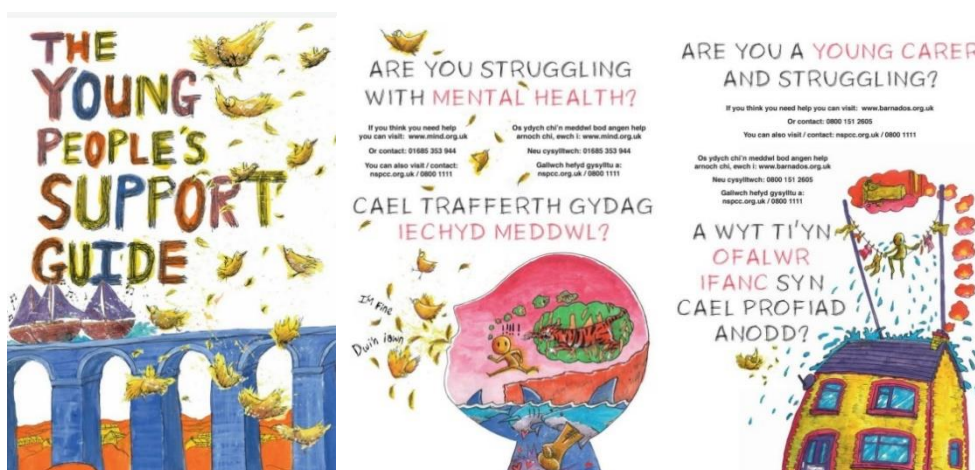
- Working in partnership with Leadership Teams and teachers to contribute towards the improved engagement and progression of young people attending the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and Special Tuition provisions.
- Delivery of bespoke sessions tailored to meet the needs of small groups of learners in order to achieve qualifications. Topics included emotional intelligence, confidence building, improving communication skills, discrimination and prejudices. As a result young people achieved either an Agored Cymru L1 in Personal Social Education or Work Related Education qualifications.
- Activities and sessions were run which aimed to improve health and well-being, utilising procured services specialising in sports, outdoor education and creative workshops aimed to support mindfulness and face to face re-engagement.
- Sessions took place during Pride month which raised awareness and history of the month and why it is important. Sessions focused on equalities, rights and tackling prejudice.
- Sessions to educate and increase awareness of mental health and homelessness were also run to support young people to understand the facts of homelessness and hidden homelessness. It ensured they knew where to get help from if they or someone they know becomes homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless. They also learned about mental health and mental illness, and the differences between them.
- Tailored one-to-one support and bespoke qualifications for young people aged 16 plus with complex needs in order to support them into voluntary work experience or paid employment.

#### **The Young People's Support Guide**

A Young Persons Support Guide was developed during this period, where young people identified health and well-being areas that they felt needed recognising in order to support other young people. The topics were centred on issues that pupils felt were exacerbated during periods of lockdown and school closures due to COVID-19. 'The Young People's

Support Guide' takes a visual approach to mental health, bullying, social media and young carers and is illustrated with the ideas that young people created. It is aimed to be user friendly, Welsh bilingual and signposts other young people towards national and local services for further support, advice and guidance.

The Young People's Support Guide was printed in two formats; a booklet and posters where the pupils who developed them in Tŷ Dysgy Homphrey (comprehensive) presented them to their peers in Tŷ Dysgy Newedd (Junior). The Head of the PRU was impressed with the engagement and contribution of pupils and the posters are on display in the main reception of the school. The Young People's Support Guide has been issued to well-being leads in mainstream schools and was circulated to the wider Youth Service throughout the County Borough.



## **Schools**

Within the County Borough, all schools adopt an inclusive approach that is embedded and founded upon the principles of respect, tolerance and rights. The aim of this is to enable learners to be resilient, imaginative, compassionate and ambitious individuals. This is at the heart of the new Curriculum for Wales which will be introduced in primary schools in September 2022.

All schools promote ethos of rights, respect and tolerance where diversity is celebrated, and healthy debate is encouraged and use a variety of resources to support these the Welsh Government Hwb hosts the most up-to-date resources for schools.

Schools are required to develop and publish Equality Objectives and a Strategic Equality Plan. There is significant scope for common objectives, occurring in a range of individual plans especially across clusters and similar schools. These are due to be revisited during the next academic year.

Equality objectives are linked to existing strategies and the approaches in the school taken to inclusion, bullying, behaviour management, improving attainment, pupil voice, well-being and pupil support. Schools build on their existing work and to ensure equality and fairness are considered in the mainstream of activities. As a local authority each school has members of staff trained in Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) to support this agenda.

The strategic plans that schools have developed consider the needs of staff and learners with protected characteristics plus the Welsh language.

Schools understand their responsibilities with regards to the Counter Terrorism Act 2015 and their duty to prevent, i.e. to try to stop children and young people from becoming drawn into terrorism. Schools have a key role in identifying and supporting pupils that are identified at being at risk of exploitation and play a major part in safeguarding pupils from potentially radicalising influences. Developing levels of resilience is essential for this and the teaching of this needs to be embedded in the curriculum.

All staff in schools have been tasked to complete the Awareness module of the new WRAP (Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent) by the end of the Autumn Term 2022. Senior staff are also expected to complete the Referral and Channel modules.

During the year, senior staff in schools and the youth forum discussed in detail responses to the Peer-on-Peer sexual harassment report published by Estyn and support and training was provided to schools on how to meet this agenda.

Since 2010 the annual student conference has supported pupils and teachers in a variety of equality issues. In 2022, this conference focused on child exploitation.

### **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 skills areas (e.g. Essential Skills). Many learners have few or no qualifications when they first engage, are likely to be the hardest to reach or may have had poor experience of mainstream education, and as such may have limited social and economic opportunities. The global pandemic imposed further disadvantage on learners, with the closure of classes in community venues and courses being moved online. However, as we moved through and into COVID-19 recovery, and as community venues opened, the services have been able to develop a hybrid approach to delivery. Learners have a choice where they can attend courses face to face or online, giving learner's greater flexibility and choice.

As a result of developing a laptop loan scheme, learners have continued not to be disadvantaged and are able to take up or continue learning. Throughout the period there has been a continued focus on learner's health and well-being, with courses offered and tutors attending additional training in mental health awareness and mental health first aid. This has enabled tutors to be better equipped to identify signs and provide support to learners.

A continued focus on digital literacy has seen an increase in learners of all ages taking courses on how to use online services such as safe use of social media, online shopping and how to use online services. The Silver Surfers Club (for learners aged 50+) continues to be very popular, with learners benefitting from learning new skills and socially by making friends.

Through Welsh Government investment, work has begun to develop digital resources and infrastructure for community learning. Working with community partners and schools to develop a community learning hub approach. This work is ongoing but once operational it will provide fully equipped community classrooms in various locations across the County Borough, offering learners greater access to resources and more choice of courses.

The Welsh Language continues as a constant thread throughout provision, supporting the Welsh Language Standards and Corporate Objectives. A survey has been conducted with tutors on their Welsh language skills, and tutors have benefited from Welsh Cultural

Awareness training so bilingualism can be embedded into all courses, and also the promotion of 'being Welsh' and how we operate as a Nation.

### **Bridges into Work 2**

The Bridges into Work 2 programme supports people 25 and over who are unemployed or economically inactive. During 2021-2022, the project enrolled 62 participants who were identified as having work limiting health conditions. Support also continued for pre-enrolled participants including those who had declared themselves to be disabled or have health conditions affecting their ability to work.

There was a return to face to face engagement and training during this time due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic easing. Not all participants were comfortable meeting in person, therefore project staff continued to keep in touch with some participants remotely either by telephone calls, text or Microsoft teams. Training was more centred on employability skills in this period, as well as staff continuing to support the emotional health and well-being of participants. Arrangements were also in place for food bank deliveries, in partnership with the Merthyr & Cynon Foodbank. Staff also provided support for people in applying for the Discretionary Assistance Fund through Welsh Government.

The project worked in partnership with the Supported Housing Team for remote delivery which was maintained for the Tenant Ready intervention in order to equip participants with the tools to live independently and maintain a tenancy, throughout the pandemic period. This has gained momentum during the latter part of this period as a result of the return to face to face meetings, which saw more uptake of the intervention.

### **Armed Forces Covenant**

Merthyr Tydfil has a proud record of valuing its armed services, both serving and retired. Being part of The Armed Forces Covenant is our commitment to supporting our armed forces personnel and their families in a number of areas such as education, well-being, healthcare, employment, housing and financial assistance.

#### **Supporting Service Children in Education**

MTCBC continues to support the local Armed Forces community. An area of this commitment is the work undertaken by the Regional School Liaison Officer (RSLO) for service children such as the Supporting Service Children in Education Wales (SSCE). In March 2022 all staff received an email highlighting a free Summer Residential for Service children whom attend a school within the County Borough is in Year 7, 8 or 9.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council also supported Armed Forces 'Month of the Military Child' by hosting Armed Forces Family Fun Fitness Sessions at Cyfarthfa Park Merthyr Tydfil.

Aimed at families and children of Armed Forces personnel who live within the County Borough and neighbouring localities, the Council, along with SSCE Cymru (Supporting Service Children in Education Wales) worked closely with Forces Fitness to provide fun and engaging sessions.

### Reserve Forces Training Mobilisation Policy

Full Cabinet approved the Reserve Forces Mobilisation policy on 2 March 2022 – the purpose of this policy intends to define our obligations towards all employees who are members of the Reserve Forces. Whilst recognising and supporting staff who are members of the Reserve Forces and the valuable contribution that Reservists and Adult Cadet Instructors make to the UK Armed Forces, their communities, and the civilian workforce.

### Armed Forces Day

On Monday 21 June 2021, the Armed Forces flags were raised outside the Civic Centre. They were flown for the rest of the week until Armed Forces Day itself, which was Saturday 26 June 2021, to show appreciation for the contribution made by all those who serve or have served in Her Majesty's Armed Forces.

### **Disability Sport**

A new community track was opened in the summer of 2021 following a successful funding application by Active Merthyr. The John Sellwood Community Track is open to the public every weekend and every evening, with users able to make voluntary donations to a maintenance fund via pay pal. Users include local groups such as Active Wheels inclusive social club, walk to run groups and sports clubs such as Merthyr Triathlon club. As well as being an affordable open space, portable lighting was used to light the track one day a week over the winter months to provide a safe space for runners and walkers. It is well utilised and phase two of the development is underway with funding now secured for permanent floodlighting.

A new family free swim voucher scheme was piloted in 2021/2022 under the National Free Swim programme. Whilst Free Swim provides free opportunities for those under 16 or over 60, some residents still had barriers to engagement due to the cost for parents. Free family swim vouchers have been provided to partners in education, social services and the third sector, who in turn identify families in need and provide them with the vouchers allowing them to attend Aberfan swimming pool for free. The project continues to run into 2022.

A new employability programme is underway with Merthyr College. The Sport, Employability, Training and Upskilling Programme (SETUP) sees students provided with industry and career awareness, additional sector qualifications and high quality vocational placements. It supports students who want to work in the sector get the best start possible. The programme was piloted in 2021/2022 with the first cohort about to begin their second year.

The MGirls project in Treharris Boys and Girls Club continues its redevelopment post COVID-19. The programme, which supports school age girls to engage in physical activity, saw big success in 2021/2022. Young people from the group pitched to a Dragons Den style project in Cardiff and secured over £10k of funding to convert a room in the centre into a gym. The room can be utilised by the girls and others, ensuring that the girls are at the heart of the project development and taking ownership over their own health and well-being.

Working with Rhondda Cynon Taf and Bridgend, Active Merthyr have launched 'Made for Mums', a programme aimed at women both pre and post pregnancy. Opportunities piloted so far include yoga and fitness and these are shared with health professionals to promote. A Made for Mums Merthyr participant forum has been created and the group will drive forward new ideas and projects.

Again, working with Rhondda Cynon Taf and Bridgend, Merthyr run the over 50's 'Super Agers' programme, which provides physical activity opportunities in the community aimed at those aged over 50. Current sessions include walking football, fitness and bowls as well as support for local care homes to engage their residents.

A new disability football provision is now in place with Cardiff City Community Foundation. The weekly session, aimed at children, is open to all disabilities and is free of charge, with Cardiff City running the sessions under their Premier League kicks programme.

Active Wheels is a new social cycling group being supported by Active Merthyr. The group, which is open to all abilities and has members with disabilities and mobility issues, provides short, easy rides with a focus on the social aspect of the activity.

The Disability Sport Merthyr forum was relaunched, following the pandemic. The forum, made up predominantly of disabled people, works alongside Active Merthyr to support the development of inclusive opportunities and to provide a voice for disabled people in the development of sport in the County Borough.

Active Merthyr also have a formal referral in place with health professionals, third sector and community partners, where disabled people can be referred into the department. They are then supported to identify and access inclusive opportunities in the County Borough.

### **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 made in 2021-2022 can be found in the Council's Welsh Language Annual Monitoring Report for 2021-2022.

#### **Urdd Eisteddfod T**

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, it was not possible to hold the annual Urdd National Eisteddfod face to face as planned in May 2021. Instead, for the second year, an online 'Eisteddfod T' was held where all entries for all competitions were submitted by video. Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Santes Tudful, Pen y Dre High School and the College Merthyr Tydfil took part. A student from the College at Merthyr Tydfil came second in the main Welsh learner's competition with students from Pen y Dre High School coming first and second in the individual recitation competitions for year 12 and under.

#### **Being Bilingual Booklet Animation**

In February 2022, the Being Bilingual Booklet was turned into an animation, as a method of marketing Welsh medium education. It is a two-minute video, which summarises the main themes from the booklet. The council's Strategic Lead for Welsh and Partners collaborated to create the animation. The video was placed on the Shwmaeronment Facebook page. Positive feedback was given by all partners with another Council now looking to undertake a similar project.

#### **Diwrnod Shwmae Su'mae**

To build on the success on the Diwrnod Shwmae Su'mae event organised in 2020 two events were arranged in conjunction with partners of the Welsh Education Forum (WEF) and the Welsh Language Strategy Steering Group. These events took place at Cyfarthfa Park on the 16th of October and Aberfan Community Leisure Centre on the 17th of October. Children from Cyfarthfa Park Primary School, Troedyrhiw Primary School, Coed y Dderwen Primary School and Abercanaid Primary school participated in the event

by performing Welsh language items. A pupil from Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun also took part as did a local professional harpist and Ynysowen Male Voice Choir. Activities were provided by a range of bilingual and Welsh language partners for children, young people and the community to participate in. Welsh language businesses also attended the event to promote and sell their products. The events provided positive publicity for the use of the Welsh language across Merthyr Tydfil.

Between 300 and 400 people attended the events. Marketing of Welsh Education and Language took place with all partners having stalls to provide information to the public. The partners who participated in the event were: Mudiad Meithrin; Rhieni Dros Addysg Gymraeg; Dysgu Cymraeg Morgannwg; Well-Being Merthyr; Early Years Department Family Information Service of MTCBC and the College at Merthyr Tydfil.

### #SHWMAERONMENT Social Media Page

In January 2022, a #SHWMAERONMENT social media page was launched. This is part of the marketing and promotion plan for the Welsh Language Strategy and Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. Information regarding Welsh language events taking place in Merthyr Tydfil and Welsh activities for children and young people are placed on the page. Any events organised by MTCBC and partners will be published on the page. There has been a positive response to the page and it currently has 186 followers with the most popular post being 26,000 views for the 'Being Bilingual' video. This supports how we encourage the use of Welsh language in Merthyr Tydfil and the Council and helps us to increase the number of Welsh speakers in the County Borough.

### 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 intranet, by email, and taster sessions. All courses and learning this year have been held online. The Council currently has members of staff learning Welsh in the workplace ranging from Entry level to intermediate level 1 and 2. Level 1 Welsh e-learning courses are being promoted to staff as part of our coronavirus pandemic recovery and wider improvement planning (Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan (RTI Plan) in developing a learning culture across the Council. Working in partnership with Dysgu Cymraeg Morgannwg we also continue to provide social opportunities for learners to listen and practise 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. As part of implementing the five year Welsh Language Strategy and the Welsh Education Strategic Plan, four Welsh learners of the Council contributed to the delivery of projects by undertaking activities stating the reasons they decided to learn Welsh and the benefits they have seen from it.

## Housing

### Non-statutory - Housing Support Grant

During the period, Housing Support Grant funded provisions delivered to both existing service users and newly referred service users. As we moved into a Post-COVID phase of housing support delivery, the relaxing of social distancing and PPE use meant that face to face support could re-commence for those who wished to be supported as they had pre-

pandemic. Those who were nervous / unable to receive support face to face continued to receive support remotely through the use of telephone and skype appointments.

The high numbers of homelessness presentations continued through this period as family and relationship breakdown meant that individuals with no alternative accommodation continued to be placed in emergency temporary accommodation by the Council. This mainly meant the use of B&B provisions within town-centre establishments. This often incredibly complex cohort of service users received floating support from skilled and experienced Housing Support Workers to promote compliance with the requirements of temporary accommodation and prevent rough sleeping.

A new supported accommodation unit is currently being progressed. This accommodation will provide 22 self-contained units of accommodation with 24 hour support as well as communal spaces and spaces for external support agencies to help address barriers to independent living. This provision is desperately needed if we are to reduce our reliance on B&B accommodation, and reduce the negative impact long-term B&B use has on those who reside within it. The provision has been delayed by several factors, but we anticipate that it will be ready for occupation in 2023 - 2024. A new 5 unit supported accommodation for young people is almost ready for occupation. This will provide 24 hour supported accommodation for young people with low-level support needs who are engaging in education or training.

Housing Support Grant funded floating support for specific service user's needs as well as general support to maintain and sustain tenancies continued to be delivered across the 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.

During this period all other pre-existing supported accommodations delivered support to service users as planned. Support slowly reverted to Pre-COVID levels (in line with current regulations) and most activities including those involving group work and close physical proximity were re-established. All service users in hostel / refuge and supported accommodation received support to work towards moving on from supported accommodation when appropriate.

Providers of housing related support in the County Borough have adapted quickly to the ever changing challenges posed during the last 12 months. As a Local Authority, we have appreciated the ways in which our support providers have ensured that vulnerable service users continued to receive support. Providers have worked closely with us to share information, and help us to adapt our plans to ensure that we are best meeting the current needs of those who require housing related support.

During this period two regional (Cwm Taff Morgannwg) research studies were undertaken, which were externally commissioned to look at the housing needs of LGBTQ+ individuals and those within the black, Asian and ethnic minority community, specifically those who are adversely effected by harmful cultural practices. The results of these studies will support our commissioning decisions going forward and ensure that we have adequate provision to support all those who require housing related support.

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.



## Statutory Housing

Due to the end of the pandemic and the 'all in approach' ending, the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, has been amended to include an additional priority need category of 'rough sleepers'. The pandemic guidance has had implications on housing and waiting lists for accommodation and we envision that this will be a work in progress to see results.

The number of clients awaiting move on from temporary accommodation, remains vast, with little or no move on options, due to lack of stock availability.

The introduction of the Rented Homes Act 2016 on 1 December 2022, has seen a lot of private landlords leaving the sector and selling their accommodation, leaving families under notice to vacate their current properties. This has also increased the demand on housing and the homelessness services, with more families having to be placed in temporary accommodation.

Welsh Government have also extended help to families and individuals leaving Ukraine as the crisis escalates, with every local authority expected to take a percentage of applicants. The sponsorship continues to operate; however we are seeing more and more of these sponsorships breaking down and applicants presenting as homeless or at threat of homelessness.

Below are the figures as of March 2022.

<b>Accommodation type</b>	<b>Number of households</b>
Supported Housing Hostels – Garth Villas & Chaplins	20 (at full capacity)
Bed and Breakfast placements	104
Shared accommodation - HMO (x2)	9
Hillfort Court	62 – in emergency placements
Other supported accommodation: Garth Newydd Court and Flooks	12 – Full
Temporary accommodation St Tydfil's, modules	4

## **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. We need to consider mechanisms for reaching all members of the community. Ensuring that there is clear readable formats for service users and ensuring that digital access is appropriate and encompasses all needs whenever possible.

## Accessibility

Digital accessibility is the process of making digital products, such as websites, mobile apps, documents, and other online tools, accessible to everyone. It is about ensuring all service users can access the same information online regardless of the impairments they may have.

As a Local Authority, we need to ensure we are making our web content and design clear and simple enough so that most people can use it without the need to adapt it. But if they do need to adapt it, the website needs to support this.

This is necessary as some people who access our information may have impaired vision, motor difficulties, cognitive impairments, learning disabilities, deafness, or impaired hearing. It is, therefore, important that our website, content, and documents work for everyone.

Accessibility not only supports social inclusion for people with disabilities, but also other groups such as older people.

Accessibility regulations came into force for public sector bodies on 23 September 2018. They say we must make our website more accessible, and we have been working continuously towards improving accessibility over the past year.

This work sees the set-up of a newly established Accessibility Working Group. The group is made up of key members of staff, working towards raising awareness internally about digital accessibility, and the accessibility of our documents. The group also puts measures in place for consistency across all our services, in order for members of the public to access the services they need without barriers.

In November 2021, a signposting page was created for staff on the intranet. This provides staff with information, links to training and 'how to' guides to make documents accessible in one easy to access location.

During January 2022 a software package, Silktide, was implemented to support with making necessary improvements to information and documents published on the corporate website. Silktide helps by testing our web pages for things which could hinder overall user experience such as; spelling and grammar mistakes, accessibility compliance and unstructured documents. It also holds a ranking system with a low score meaning improvements are needed and a high score suggests a high likelihood for good accessibility.

In January 2022 the MTCBC corporate website rank stood at 40 meaning that user experience was not satisfactory. As a result of commitment and significant work being carried out, in March 2022 our rank score was 96% which indicates a very good accessibility score for positive overall user experience.

In February 2022, Training was provided to the Accessibility working group by Learning Disability Wales on Making Information Easy to Read and Understand. Producing easy read documents and reports is a way of making written information easier to understand and accessible for all. Work will continue on how we produce documents, with scope to run more training for staff.

We are also in the process of introducing an accessibility toolbar on our corporate and sub websites. The aim of the toolbar is to further remove barriers regarding accessing our online services for those who are, for example, neurodivergent or visually impaired. We would also see the toolbar support translation into different languages to better support communities within the County Borough whose first language is not English.

MTCBC's accessibility statement can be found on the Council's website.

## **Theme: Inclusive and Diverse Workforce**

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

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 which holds information, resources and links. Other work completed to meet this objective includes:

#### **Equalities Calendar**

An equalities calendar has been produced by the MTCBC Equalities Officer 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 some important 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.

#### **Training and continued professional development**

Training and continued professional development is a key element 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.

Following staff feedback, progress is being made to implement two new E-learning platforms, one for staff called Skills Hub and one for Managers called Kallidus. Skills Hub offers opportunity for staff to access a library of over 650 online courses to help improve and develop skills whilst increasing knowledge of areas of interest. This will include modules and elements focused on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Health and Wellbeing, British Values and Personal Development. Kallidus focuses on modules to support and inform MTCBC managers in areas such as unconscious bias, emotional intelligence, managing conflict, leadership styles and equalities.

A mandatory e-learning module for all staff, on bullying and harassment is in the process of being developed. Whilst a re-launch of our staff forum is also anticipated for 2022-2023.

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.

Work has also taken place to revamp our Corporate Induction for new staff, which now has a greater focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the Council's Vision/Values. It will link to our zero tolerance for Bullying and Harassment, and our Dignity and Respect at Work Policy.

#### **Physical and Mental Health of staff**

MTCBC considers the health and well-being of its employees important, and is committed to providing healthy working environments for all employees. The Council aims to promote a positive approach to maximising attendance through work life balance and providing support

to employees who have health issues. Employees who are absent from work due to sickness will be supported and will be treated with respect and understanding.

The Council has an Employee Assistance Programme with Care First to ensure that employees have access to counselling and support 24 hours a day. Care First contact details have been circulated to all employees and they are also on the staff intranet. Regular emails are also sent out from Care First to promote their services.

The occupational health section of the intranet is continually updated and has expanded to include extra topics to help to support employees.

During this period the following was promoted and implemented:

- Occupational Health concentrated on promoting No Smoking. All staff Emails were sent out promoting the Help me Quit Service.
- In conjunction with Mental Health Week, Occupational Health promoted information to help employees manage their mental well-being. These included mindfulness sessions, workplace resilience sessions, sessions to manage stress, let's talk sessions and mental health webinars. The Occupational Health Adviser was also available for staff to contact to talk about any health related concerns.
- The health benefits of physical activity and exercise was promoted, with links to gym memberships that offered discounts to staff.
- Menopause issues were promoted in conjunction with World Menopause Day. Support sessions were set up for employees and attendees included those who are going through the menopause themselves, or who knows someone who is, or they just wanted more information. The sessions were facilitated by our Occupational Health Adviser. Each session focused on a particular symptom of the menopause and most sessions were attend by approximately 20 staff. These continued up until December 2021.
- An updated Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure was approved and management training on the promotion and implementation of this policy commenced in March 2022.
- The council has officially signed up to the Dying to Work Charter. This means that any employee who has a terminal illness will not be dismissed for this. They will be supported if they wish to remain working and will receive full pay for the duration of their illness if they are on sickness absence.
- Time to talk day was acknowledged and promoted. Online wellbeing workshops and mindfulness sessions were set up and continued for a number of months.
- An interactive well-being programme was arranged and presented to all managers which was well attended and had positive feedback.

## Procurement

The Council considers it essential that all organisations wishing to provide goods or services on its behalf are able to 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) templates 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.

## Workforce Data

Data is vital in ensuring that we are able to 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 also 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. Encouraging staff to complete this data and promoting 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.

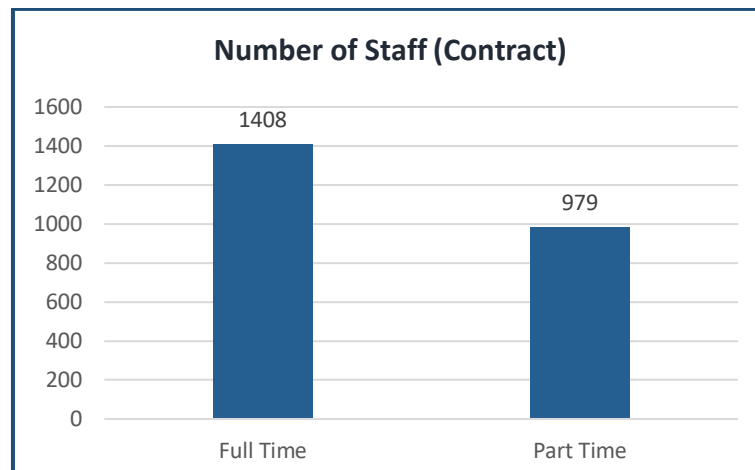
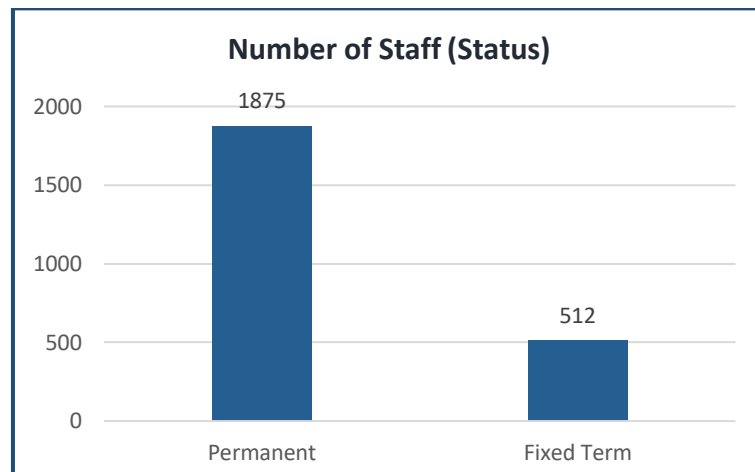
The information below shows the workforce data as at 31 March 2022.

### **Overall Staff Data**

Employed staff at the Council as of 31 March 2022

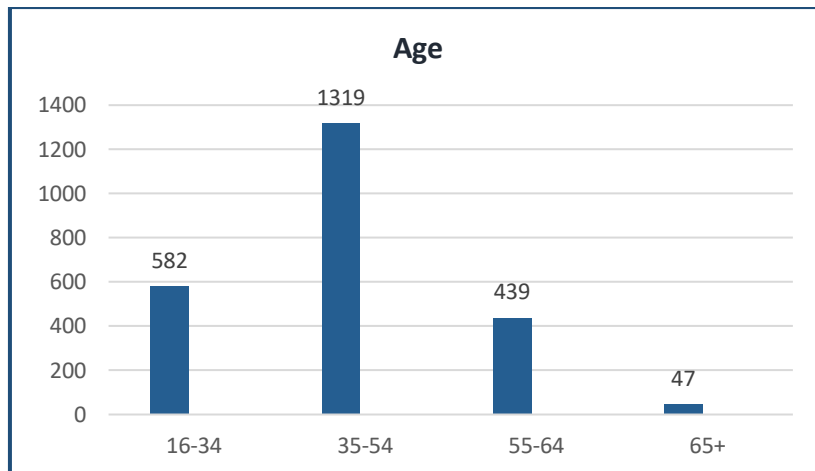
Number of staff in post = 2387, of which:

<b>Permanent</b>	<b>Fixed Term</b>	<b>Full Time</b>	<b>Part Time</b>
1875	512	1408	979



### **Age**

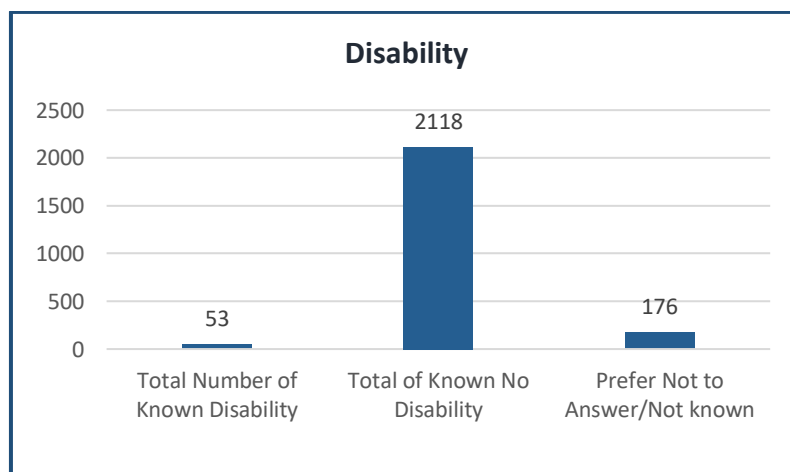
<b>16-34</b>	<b>35-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
582	1319	439	47	<b>2387</b>

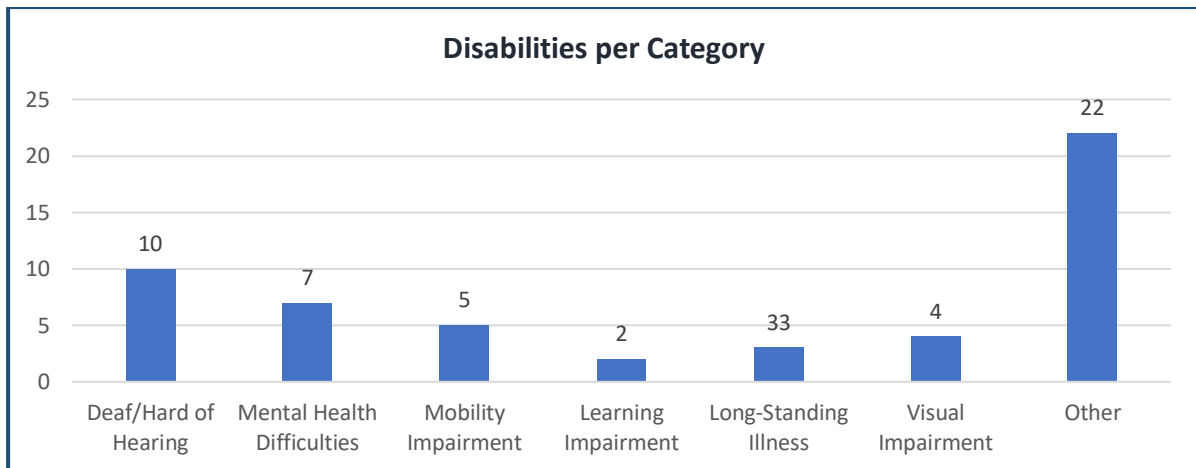


### Disability

Deaf/Hard of Hearing	Mental Health Difficulties	Mobility Impairment	Learning Impairment	Long-Standing Illness	Visual Impairment
10	7	5	2	33	4

Other	No Disability	Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	TOTAL
22	2118	176	2387



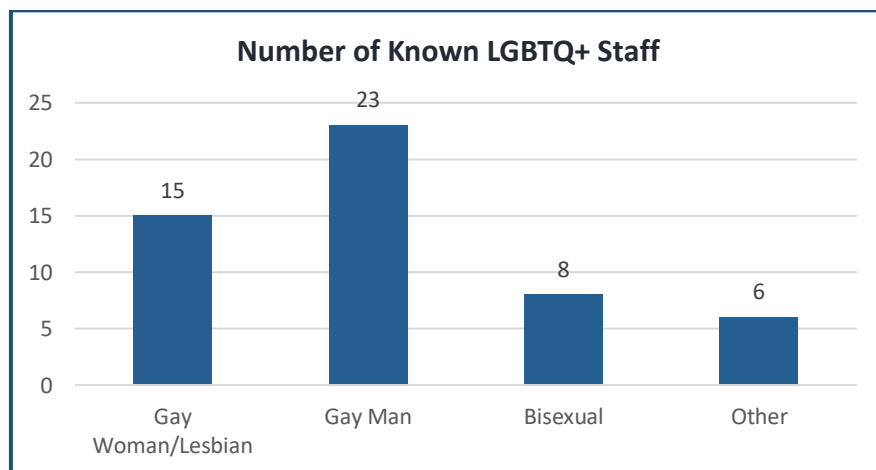


### Gender

Male	Female	TOTAL
629	1758	2387

### Sexual Orientation

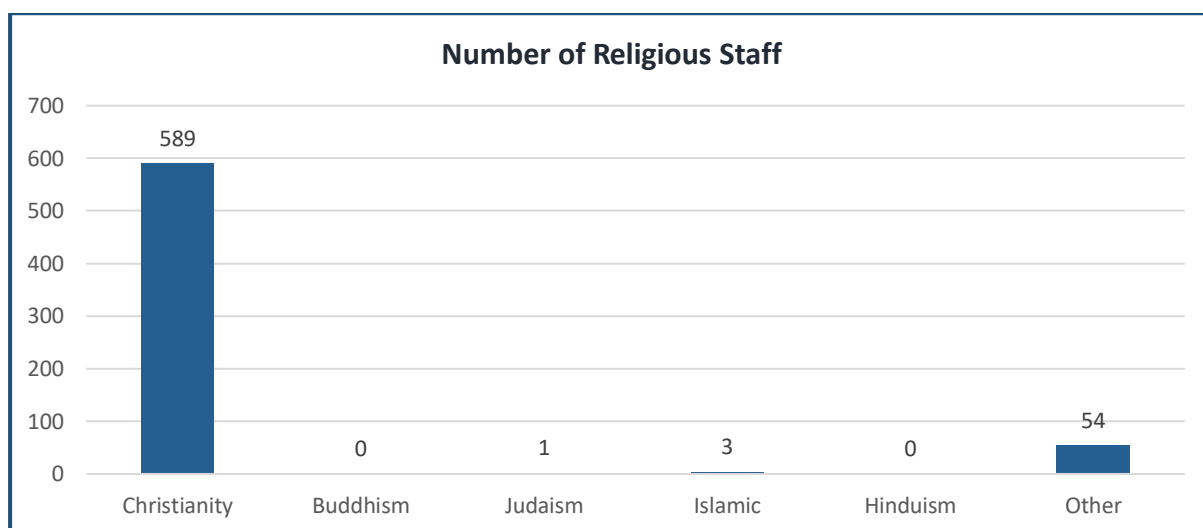
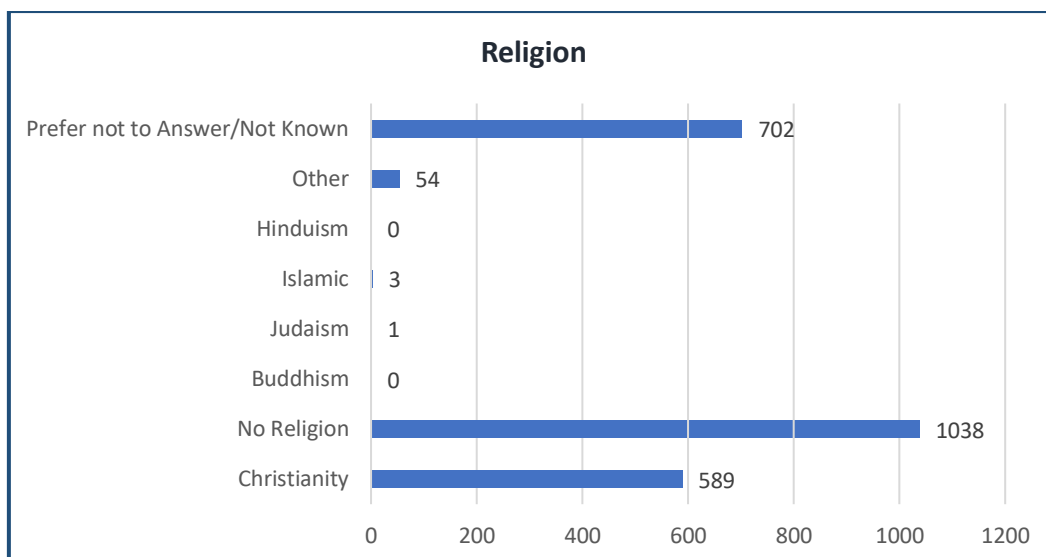
Gay Woman/Lesbian	Gay Man	Bisexual	Heterosexual/Straight	Other	Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	TOTAL
15	23	8	2063	6	272	2387



### Religion

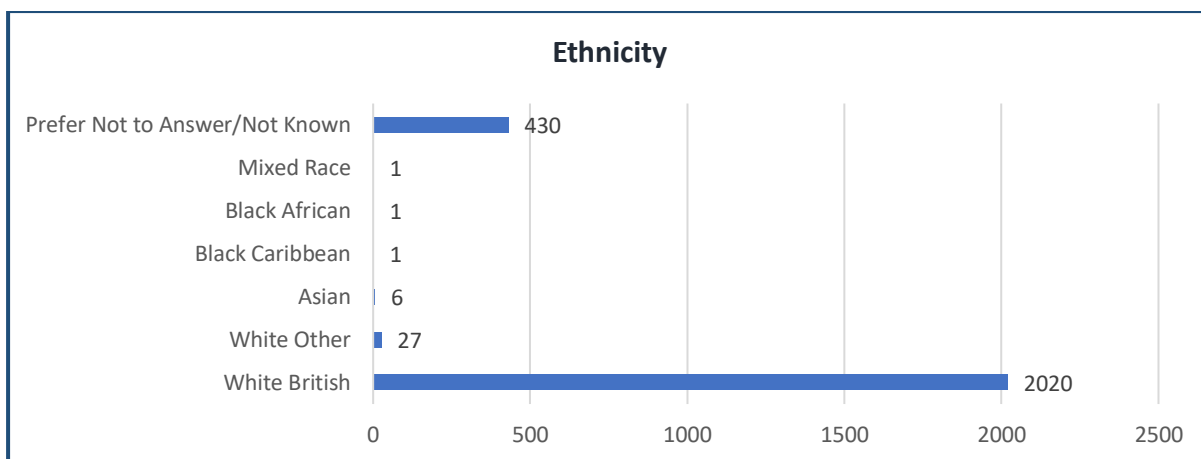
Christianity	No Religion	Buddhism	Judaism	Islamic	Hinduism	Other	Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	TOTAL
589	1038	0	1	3	0	54	702	2387





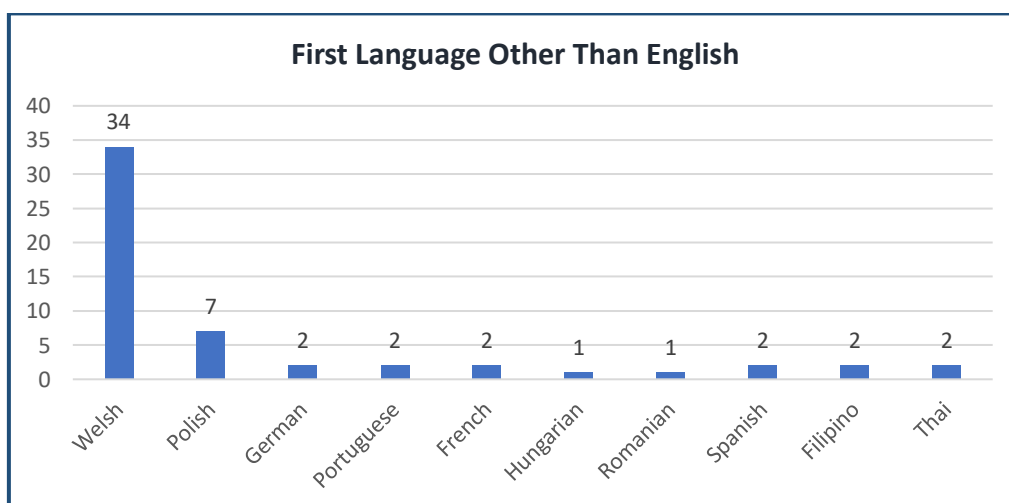
### **Ethnicity**

White British	White/ Other	Asian	Black Caribbean	Black OTHER	Mixed Race	Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	TOTAL
2020	27	6	1	1	1	430	2387



### First Language

English	Welsh	Polish	German	Portuguese	French	Hungarian	Romanian
1723	34	7	2	2	2	1	1
Spanish	Filipino	Thai	Prefer not to Answer/Not Known			TOTAL	
2	2	2	708			2387	



### **People Profile – Salary**

Salary	All Staff			
	Male		Female	
	Full Time	Part Time	Full Time	Part Time
<b>£0 - £4,999</b>	0	21	0	411
<b>£5,000 - £9,999</b>	1	15	0	177
<b>£10,000 - £14,999</b>	15	34	1	239
<b>£15,000 - £19,999</b>	49	21	192	169
<b>£20,000 - £24,999</b>	155	5	143	62
<b>£25,000 - £29,999</b>	94	1	132	15
<b>£30,000 - £39,999</b>	83	2	162	40
<b>£40,000 - £49,999</b>	87	0	209	5
<b>£50,000 - £59,999</b>	9	0	28	0
<b>£60,000 - £69,999</b>	12	0	17	0
<b>£70,000+</b>	8	0	11	0
<b>Calculated: Total number of salaries</b>				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>513</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>895</b>	<b>1118</b>

*\*The total figure is higher than the number of staff employed as it includes staff with multiple posts.*

### **Job Applications at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 Total number of applications = 1,879**

In terms of the number of staff who applied for a job internally at the Council, we received **320** internal applications of which **86** were Male and **234** were Female.

In terms of external applicants the Council received **1515** external applications of which **438** were Male and **1077** were Female.

In terms of Agency Applications the council received **44** applications, of which **36** were male and **8** were female.

	Number of employees involved in grievance procedure	
Protected Characteristics	As the complainant	A person against whom a complaint was made
<b>Age</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
16-34	0	0
35-54	0	0
55-64	0	0
65+	0	0
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	0	0
Female	0	0
<b>Disability</b>		
Disabled	0	0
Non-Disabled	0	0
Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	0	0
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>		
Heterosexual	0	0
Lesbian/Gay	0	0
Bi-Sexual	0	0
Other	0	0
Prefer not to Answer/ Not Known	0	0
<b>Ethnic Group</b>		
English/Welsh	0	0
White Other	0	0
Asian	0	0
Black African	0	0

	Number of employees involved in grievance procedure	
Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	0	0
<b>Religion or Belief</b>		
No Religion	0	0
Christianity (all Denominations)	0	0
Islamic	0	0
Buddhism	0	0
Other	0	0
Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	0	0

Protected Characteristics	Number of employees subject to disciplinary procedures	Number of employees who have left the Authority	Number of Staff taking Maternity Leave
<b>Age</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>105</b>
16-34	0	70	50
35-54	3	89	55
55-64	1	30	0
65+	0	6	0
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	3	43	0
Female	1	152	105
<b>Disability</b>			
Disabled	0	8	0
Non-Disabled	4	177	70

<b>Protected Characteristics</b>	<b>Number of employees subject to disciplinary procedures</b>	<b>Number of employees who have left the Authority</b>	<b>Number of Staff taking Maternity Leave</b>
Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	0	10	35
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>			
Heterosexual	4	149	90
Lesbian/Gay	0	4	0
Bi-Sexual	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0
Prefer not to Answer/ Not Known	0	42	15
<b>Ethnic Group</b>			
English/Welsh	4	152	92
White Other	0	1	1
Asian	0	2	0
Black African	0	1	0
Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	0	40	12
<b>Religion or Belief</b>			
No Religion	2	89	47
Christianity (all Denominations)	0	33	23
Islamic	0	1	1
Buddhism	0	0	0
Other	0	15	0
Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	2	57	34

## **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 a number of 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 (with the exception of Heads of Service who are processed via the HAY Scheme). No personal information regarding the post holder is taken into account 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. 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 2022, 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.

However, on average men at MTCBC are paid 2.34% more than women, which means for every £1 a man earns, a woman will earn 98p.

For more information on the gender pay gap, please see MTCBC's Gender Pay Gap Report 2021 – 2022.

## 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 continuing to be proactive.

We are going to continue how we collect and monitor our data; raising awareness to staff on the importance of collecting this data and how it can assist us in making better informed decisions, and providing the best possible services we can to our staff. We will continue to update and amend our equality monitoring form, including a drive to raise the importance of including this in engagement and consultation exercises.

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 on for example, neurodiversity to ensure fair interviews.

We will be launching an accessibility toolbar on our corporate website to enable residents to have better access to our information and knowledge about services we provide.

We want to keep improving our Silktide Accessibility Index score 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 authority and with partners. Introducing more training on topics to all staff in the authority.

We will be starting to engage and consult 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. Alongside this, we will be ensuring that we raise the importance of including equality aspects within our Corporate Plan 2022-2027, which will be developed and published in 2022-2023.

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 e.g. Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan. Any action plans developed will be reviewed and relevant actions included within our SEP.



## Contact Details

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

Equalities

Civic Centre

Castle Street

Merthyr Tydfil

CF47 8AN

Tel: 01685 725000

[equalities@merthyr.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@merthyr.gov.uk)