

Strategic Equality Plan

2024-2028



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg /
This document is available in Welsh.

Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
ABOUT MERTHYR TYDFIL	4
OUR COUNCIL	5
INTEGRATION	6
PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN	8
LEGISLATION - EQUALITY ACT 2010, PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY (PSED) AND PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS	9
DEVELOPING OUR OBJECTIVES	14
OUR EQUALITY OBJECTIVES FOR 2024-2028	16
Objective: Inclusive engagement and participation	16
Objective: Accessible Services	18
Objective: Inclusive and Diverse Workforce	19
Objective: Equity of pay	20
Objective: Safe, Inclusive and Cohesive Communities	22
Objective: Education, Skills and Employment.....	23
DELIVERING, MONITORING AND REVIEWING THE PLAN	25
FURTHER INFORMATION	25
APPENDICIES.....	26
Appendix 1 – Further information and opportunities	26
Appendix 2 – Is Wales Fairer – Previous Reports.....	32
Appendix 3 – Consultation Analysis	32

INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to introduce our Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028. The purpose of this Plan is to improve equal opportunities within our communities through service delivery, employment, commissioning, leadership and working in partnership.

We want a County Borough where everyone is treated equally and fairly in all aspects of their lives; where no one is discriminated against or placed at a disadvantage due to their background or identity.

“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.”

Our Equalities Vision for Merthyr Tydfil

As a Council, we have a duty to tackle and challenge discrimination and disadvantage so that people feel safe from harassment and everyone has access to high quality services. This Strategic Equality Plan will help us to ensure that we focus on positive outcomes for people in Merthyr Tydfil.

Building on the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024, we will continue to promote equality and diversity and share ideas and good practice with partners and other service providers. We will continue to refine and develop our services, including respective monitoring systems, to help us gain a better understanding of our staff and the wider local communities and the diverse needs of our communities.

We will continue to work towards achieving our vision through our role as community leader, service provider, commissioner and employer, and we will work in partnership in any way we can to improve the well-being of the County Borough.

The activities in this Plan clearly show our strong commitment to eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote equal opportunities and good relations between people visiting, living and working in Merthyr Tydfil. However, due to our limited resources including our budget, we will need to prioritise areas of the Plan and look to longer term delivery.

We are strongly committed to ensuring that the principles of equality and diversity are demonstrated in all aspects of how we deliver services and within our working practices.



Councillor Gareth Richards
Equalities Champion



Ellis Cooper
Chief Executive

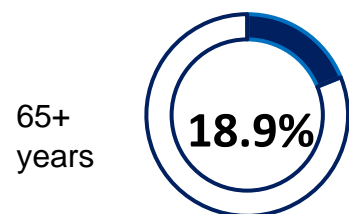
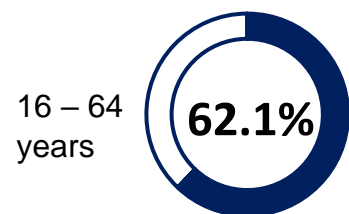
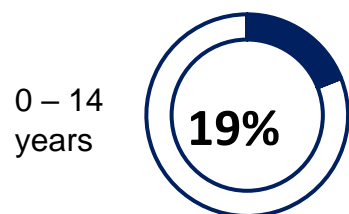
ABOUT MERTHYR TYDFIL

Located in the Heads of the Valleys area approximately 20 miles from the Welsh capital, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough is the smallest Welsh local authority and sits within the Cardiff Capital Region. The UK Census 2021 shows us the following facts and figures about Merthyr Tydfil:

Total Population:

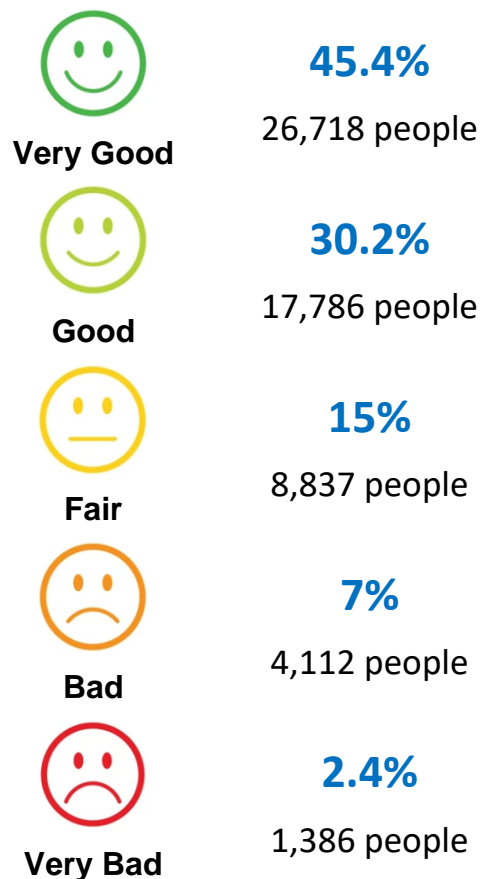
58,839

Population by Age Group:



Source: [Census 2021](#)

Health:



Source: [Census 2021](#)

Ethnicity:

Source: [Census 2021](#)

91.7% 57,140 people	Identify as White
0.9% 510 people	Identify as mixed / multiple ethnic group
1.5% 871 people	Identify as Asian / Asian British
0.2% 91 people	Identify as Black African / Caribbean / British
0.4% 227 people	Identify as other ethnic groups

Merthyr Tydfil CBC's [Local Development Plan](#) (LDP) shows us that the main town of Merthyr Tydfil has a highest concentration of population (approximately 43,000). It is the main retail and service centre in the Heads of the Valleys; fulfilling a key strategic role in the region. Merthyr Tydfil has some of the most deprived areas in Wales.

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation identified Merthyr Tydfil as having high levels of deprivation; with 28 of its 36 LSOAs recorded as being in the top 50% most deprived areas in Wales. To address this, the Council is developing a 'Tackling Poverty' strategy to enable and deliver targeted and co-ordinated actions in conjunction with our key partners.

OUR COUNCIL

Number of Council staff:	2,922
Number of electoral wards	11
Number of local Councillors	30
Number of Households	25,800
Number of Primary Schools	19
Number of Secondary Schools	3
Number of 3-16 Schools	1
Number of Special Schools	1
Number of Pupil Referral Units	1

Our shared vision for Merthyr Tydfil is:

“To strengthen Merthyr Tydfil’s position as the regional centre for the Heads of the Valleys, and be a place to be proud of where:

- People learn and develop skills to fulfil their ambitions.
- People live, work, have a safe, healthy and fulfilled life.
- People visit, enjoy and return.”

Core Values

More information can be seen in appendix 1.

The Council has **seven core values**. These were developed with our staff as part of a programme of staff involvement and engagement regarding how we want to work. These values are a link from personal objectives of staff members; to team/ service goals; to our well-being objectives and vision.

Honesty and Openness	Trust and Respect	Accountability
Learning	Aspiration	Team Working
Communication		

Operating Model

Our Operating Model Our Council approved operating model has been designed to set out how we will deliver our services. It supports us in transforming and improving how we work. Our operating model (built on the 5 ways of working) includes how we should work **economically**, **efficiently** and **effectively**.

We have set out the **8 operating principles** and expectations.

Listening and engaging with our stakeholders	Clear communication	Embracing digital technology
Focusing on key priorities and outcomes	Consistently and timely implementation of strategy	Aligning the budget to key priorities
Everyone is accountable	Promoting independence	

How will we work together to deliver our shared vision and achieve our goals?

The Council has developed four objectives that form the focus of the Council’s Corporate Well-being Plan. These are outlined in the table below:

Our Corporate Wellbeing Plan 2023-2028

An aspirational Merthyr Tydfil focused on learning	We will strengthen how we enable people to grow and reach their potential
A healthier Merthyr Tydfil	We will empower people to live independent and dignified lives
A Safe & Prosperous Merthyr Tydfil	We will support how our economy recovers and grows; ensuring people feel safe in their local area
A Clean & Green Merthyr Tydfil	We will support the creation of a clean and green environment now and in the future

INTEGRATION

How does the Strategic Equality Plan link to our other Key Corporate Strategies?

The Strategic Equality Plan links to a number of other key strategies, plans, policies and frameworks of the Council. It also ensures that the Council delivers its duties in line with legislation and contributes to regional and nation objectives.

Some examples are included in the list below:

- Statement of Well-being 2023-2028
- Acting Today for a Better Tomorrow 2023-2028
- Building a Healthy Organisation Plan 2020-2023
- The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014
- The Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015.
- Welsh Language Standards (introduced under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011)
- More Than Words: Welsh Government Welsh Language Strategy
- Cymraeg 2050 (1 million Welsh speakers by 2050)

The diagram below gives a summary of the Council's Shared Vision in the context of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 together with regional objectives and local political priorities.

It should be noted that this is a live document. Future versions are likely to include evidence how the SEP integrates with other documents through the implementation of the action plan in this document.

Our Shared Vision

“Acting today for a Better Tomorrow”

The Wales We Want



A Prosperous Wales



A Resilient Wales



A Healthier Wales



A More Equal Wales



A Wales of Cohesive Communities



A Wales of Thriving Culture & Welsh Language



A Globally Responsible Wales

To strengthen Merthyr Tydfil's position as the regional centre for the Heads of the Valleys; and be a place to be proud of where:

The Shared Vision for Merthyr Tydfil:

People learn and develop skills to fulfil their ambition;
People live, work, and have healthy and fulfilled lives; and
People visit, enjoy and return

How we will work together to deliver change and achieve our goals:

Merthyr Tydfil CBC well being objectives	Cwm Taf Morgannwg PSB well-being objectives	Merthyr Tydfil CBC Lead Administration’s Vision
An Aspirational Merthyr Tydfil focused on learning <i>We will strengthen how we enable people to grow and reach their potential.</i>	Healthy Local Communities <i>A Cwm Taf Morgannwg where our communities are inclusive and feel cohesive and people feel safe, supported and valued.</i>	Our people make Merthyr Tydfil a place with a positive future filled with pride for our communities. Taken from <i>People, Place and Pride: Your Independent Vision for 21st Century Merthyr Tydfil</i>
A Healthier Merthyr Tydfil <i>We will empower people to live independent and dignified lives.</i>	Sustainable and Resilient Local Neighbourhoods <i>A Cwm Taf Morgannwg where we understand and respond to the risk of climate change to our communities. To do this we must value, manage and enjoy our green and blue spaces responsibly</i>	
A Safe & Prosperous Merthyr Tydfil <i>We will support how our economy recovers and grows.</i>		
A Clean & Green Merthyr Tydfil <i>We will support the creation of a clean and green environment now and in the future.</i>		

PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN

The Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028 has been developed to reflect our commitment to equality in the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil and to ensure we are meeting our statutory obligations as found within the Equality Act 2010. This plan replaces the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 which was approved in March 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.

LEGISLATION - EQUALITY ACT 2010, PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY (PSED) AND PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS

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 Act includes a **Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)** replacing the separate duties on race, disability, and gender equality. To find out more, please view the [Equality Act 2010](#) and the [Public Sector Equality Duty \(PSED\)](#) (opens in new pages).

Public Sector Equality Duty (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 Act.
- 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.

In advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't we must also ensure that we:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and are connected to that characteristic.
- Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation is disproportionately low.
- Meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.



It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of their protected characteristic. There are **nine protected characteristics** listed under the Equality Act 2010:

Age	Disability	Gender Reassignment
Pregnancy and Maternity	Race	Religion or Belief
Sex	Sexual orientation	Marriage and Civil Partnership

To find out more about the protected characteristics, please view the [Equality Act 2010](#) (opens in new page)

The Specific Duties

In Wales we have **specific statutory duties** placed upon us which set out what actions the Council must take to comply. 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. These were published by Welsh Government in April 2011 and cover the following:

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

For more information on the specific duties in Wales, please view the [Equality Act 2010 \(Statutory Duties\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2011](#) (opens in a new page).

Well-being of Future

Generations (Wales) Act 2015

We are committed to ensure the **Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** is embedded into working practices and service delivery.

We must maximise our contribution to the seven national Well-being goals. In all of our work, we need to incorporate these goals into all of our work ensuring that they are considered when decisions are being made. We must *'act in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'*.

Each of the **7 national well-being goals** has a descriptor to build a common understanding – click [here](#) to read an overview of these goals (opens in a new page).



For more information on the **five ways of working descriptors**, please view the

The Act places a legal duty on public bodies to adopt the **sustainable development principle**. These principles have been used to guide the development of our Equality Objectives and the actions we will take to deliver each objective. The assessment of the **five ways of working** is included within the Council's Integrated Impact Assessment, which also includes assessment of the Well-Being objectives, protected characteristics and biodiversity. All decisions made by the Council are assessed against the nine protected characteristics. External reports undertaken by the Equality and Human Rights Commission have supported and influenced the development of our equality objectives.

Our ways of working



Long Term

Prevention

Collaboration

Integration

Involvement

For more information on the Act, please view [the Well-Being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) (opens in a new page).

Socio-economic Duty

On 31 March 2021 the [Socio-Economic Duty](#) came into effect in Wales. The Duty imposes a legal obligation on the Council when making strategic decisions to consider the need to reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage. The overall aim of the duty is to deliver better outcomes for those who experience socio-economic disadvantage. The Socio-economic Duty will support this through ensuring that those taking strategic decisions:

- take account of evidence and potential impact
- through consultation and engagement
- understand the views and needs of those impacted by the decision, particularly those who suffer socio-economic disadvantage
- welcome challenge and scrutiny
- drive a change in the way that decisions are made and the way that decision makers operate.



Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011

The [Welsh Language \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#) replaced the Welsh Language Act 1993 and placed an obligation on public sector bodies to comply with Welsh Language Standards. Essentially, the Measure has the same requirement as the Welsh Language.

Public bodies must comply with a set of national Welsh Language Standards. These were issued to the Council by the Welsh Language Commissioner via a [compliance notice](#). There are 176 standards and the compliance notice sets out which standards apply to the Council, along with any exemptions and expected implementation dates.

The standards are split into four themes:

- Service Delivery
- Operational
- Record Keeping
- Policy Making



Welsh Language is not covered by the Equality Act 2010, but Equality and Welsh Language policy agendas complement and inform each other. Welsh Language is also included within the goals in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language. Welsh Language is a key element of the Council’s Equality agenda. The Council promotes and facilitate the use of the Welsh Language by observing the following guiding principles:

- Individuals have the right to deal with us in Welsh
- Welsh must be positioned to be read first (to the left or above the English)
- Language rights for staff
- The quality of service and a positive attitude are important
- We must offer Welsh Language services to give language choice.

We must treat the Welsh and English on the basis of equality in the provision of services to the public in Wales.

Equality and Human Rights

Monitor: Is Wales Fairer?

The Equality and Human Rights Monitor, ‘Is Wales Fairer?’ dated November 2023, is the [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#) provides an evidence-based overview of progress of the nation on equality and human rights in Wales. Their last report was published in 2018. It focuses on the nine characteristics that are protected in law in the Equality Act 2010. It identifies a wide range of recommendations to address the key equality and human rights challenges in Wales. It identifies that some progress has been made but there is more work to be done.

Whilst the report highlighted some areas of progress, it stated that there is significant work to be done to address some longstanding issues, and to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities.

For more information on this report, please view [The Equality and Human Rights Monitor, ‘Is Wales Fairer?’](#) (opens in a new page).



Anti-racist Wales Action Plan

The Welsh Government states in the [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan](#): *“Through the development of the Plan, we heard a clear message about the lack of trust felt by many people from ethnic minority backgrounds, over whether public bodies will enforce their rights – rights enshrined in law – but which often have little real impact on their lives. In this new Plan we outline how we have developed more focused actions, to help us make the necessary changes, and to fix broken systems.”*

The Anti-racist Wales Action Plan and its goals are fully supported by Merthyr Tydfil Council and will incorporate the necessary actions into our equality action plan.



LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales

The Welsh Government (WG) wants to make Wales the most LGBTQ+ friendly nation in Europe. It is an ambitious goal, but we believe we can support all LGBTQ+ people in Wales to live their fullest life: to be healthy, to be happy, and to feel safe.

For all LGBTQ+ people, WG will:

- strengthen equality and human rights (Welsh Government 2022a)
- make Wales a safer place make Wales a Nation of Sanctuary for
- improve healthcare outcomes
- ensure education in Wales is inclusive
- improve inclusion and participation in all areas of life
- listen to, and work with, our LGBTQ+ communities
- defend and promote the rights of trans and non-binary people.

This plan will act as the framework for LGBTQ+ policy development across government and with our partners. As a result, MTCBC fully endorses the goals of the LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales and will incorporate the appropriate actions into our equality action plan.

For more information on this report, please view [LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales Together in Pride – making Wales the most LGBTQ+ friendly nation in Europe](#) (opens in a new page).

DEVELOPING OUR OBJECTIVES

We undertook a 12-week consultation with the public and workforce. An on-line survey was available to complete, emails were sent to staff and community groups that reflect the protected characteristics contained within the Equality Act 2010, with updates being posted on social media channels. We have also met with the Senior Management Team within the Council and Managers who will be delivering the actions within the action plan. The consultation pack is included in appendix 3.

The purpose of the consultation was to ensure we meet our duties to review our equality objectives and to engage with protected characteristic groups in doing so.

We asked people to consider the following when answering the questions:

- What challenges are people facing within the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil?
- Do the themes and objectives adequately address these challenges?
- Should these themes and objectives continue into the 2024-2028 plan?
- Is there anything missing that we need to consider?
- What more could we do to improve?
- How can we better provide our services to meet the needs of our communities?
- What do you think needs to be included within our 2024-2028 Strategic Equality Plan?

WHAT FEEDBACK DID WE RECEIVE FROM THE CONSULTATION?

We have conducted an analysis of the feedback and data collected. We have used this information to inform our objectives and actions within the plan.

In addition to public consultation, we also engaged with our Corporate Management Team (CMT) and the Corporate Services and Resources Scrutiny (both in a formal meeting and workshop). Our findings and how we used the feedback can be seen in the table below.

CMT Feedback	How have we used this?
Question has data been used to inform the SEP?	Yes, analysis has been done and used to inform the objectives (e.g. a new objective being include).
High level actions are to be considered at this point and a more detailed action plan worked on with the working group.	This has been reflected in the workshop with Scrutiny and in the details set out below in this SEP.
Available resources to be considered.	The SEP will be reviewed and potentially reprofiled following the Council setting its budget. It is important to note that the action plan will consider the short, medium and long term actions.
Ensure integration and not duplication.	The SEP working group will use the SEP to ensure all objectives are considered in other plans/strategies and not worked on in isolation. The SEP will report to the Council's Corporate Wellbeing Borad for this and to

	ensure sound governance exists to deliver this SEP.
Scrutiny Feedback	How have we used this?
How can this SEP and other plans/strategies be used to ensure more engagement and engagement from seldom heard voices?	This has reflected in the objectives of this SEP. Scrutiny are also considering writing a report to Cabinet relating to this matter and the SEP.
How is the SEP going to be monitored? And it is likely to be part of future Scrutiny forward plans.	The SEP will be monitored in a similar way to the Corporate Wellbeing Plan, i.e. reporting to the Corporate Wellbeing Board (Officer and Member lead, with external regulators monitoring progress). This SEP can be considered by Scrutiny as part of future forward plans.
How does this fit with wider customer services and other plans/strategies?	The SEP working group will use the SEP to ensure all objectives are considered in other plans/strategies and not worked on in isolation. The five ways of working (especially collaboration and integration) will be key to this point.
How will timescales and resources be factored into the SEP?	The SEP will be reviewed and potentially reprofiled following the Council setting its budget. It is important to note that the action plan will consider the short, medium and long term actions. Available resources will dictate how long it will take to deliver the SEP, but we believe these are the correct objectives, based on legislation requirements, feedback from the public and integration with the Council's wellbeing objectives.
Can the following themes be used when developing the SEP action plan? – Engagement and consultation; MTCBC Working Practices; Policy, Legislation and strategy; Governance; Digital and Data.	Yes, these themes can be used by the working group when adding the detailed action plan that sits below this SEP.

OUR EQUALITY OBJECTIVES FOR 2024-2028

We have engaged with our communities and workforce in developing our equality objectives. We have also used relevant information to inform our objectives including looking forward to considering potential future changes that we need to consider in assessing impact.

We want to ensure we are making progress in advancing equality and inclusion for all protected characteristic groups and the objectives will assist us in continuing to do this.

The objectives that we have included in this plan are identified 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.

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 used the five themes from our scrutiny workshop in providing some high-level actions but this will be expanded on in the detailed action plan that will sit below this plan.

Objective: Inclusive engagement and participation
Engage with our communities and workforce to support effective participation and encourage people to be involved.
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. A clear understanding of who lives within the local area is essential in providing services to the public. Involving residents in decision-making creates strong communities. Some protected groups face significant barriers on a daily basis which can impact on their participation in community life and when accessing services. By understanding these barriers, we are able to provide better services to our residents. Engagement is not only a key means of improving services, but also a statutory responsibility in relation to Equality, as set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).
Rationale

Ensuring that information is available in a variety of different formats and providing different access channels for response is vital in ensuring that everyone is able to participate in engagement exercises and have their voices heard. Meaningful discussions are important to help us identify what matters most to people, which can enable us to be better informed when making decisions.

Even though more access is available digitally, there continues to be barriers that prevent people from engaging. We need to further understand this and remove any barriers people may face when accessing our services. Consulting with key stakeholders in a variety of different formats and methods, using digital platforms and also face to face interactions, using plain language, and ensuring that engagement starts with sufficient time to involve more people to improve communication and ensure everyone has a voice.

We want to do more to engage and support groups which are not represented and strengthen relationships, working together with our communities to design services that best meets their needs. We want to improve the collection of data and our equality monitoring form when consulting with our communities to ensure we are reaching out to our communities to give them an opportunity to be involved and to be well informed.

What will success look like?

A supported workforce, encouraged to engage, improve the access channels (especially in providing feedback) and ensure that this also happens internally to give staff more insight into other work is being undertaken across the Council. This will lead to a joined-up approach making our services easier to understand and improving customer experience for all.

Continued collaboration with our partners who are experienced in supporting specific groups that may not ordinarily participate in our engagement.

Key Focus

Involving residents in decision-making to create strong communities.

Understand the barriers that some protected groups face. This will help us increase participation and how residents access our services.

Relevant Protected Characteristics (including Welsh Language)	Domains in Is Wales Fairer? 2023	Link to Well-Being Goals
Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Welsh Language.	Education, Work, Living Standards, Health, Justice and Personal, Security, Participation.	A healthier Wales, A more equal Wales, A Wales of cohesive communities, A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
Actions		
We want to engage, support and strengthen relationships with groups that are under-represented and work in collaboration with our communities ensuring services meet their needs.		

We want to work towards attaining the Inport Gold standard status to ensure that we are placing service users at the centre of developments for disabled people within Merthyr Tydfil.

We will work towards delivering the actions set out in the Council's People Workforce 'Healthy Organisation Strategy', 'Participation Strategy' and 'Communications and 'Consultation Strategy' ensuring that communication channels are utilised.

Objective: Accessible Services

Understand and remove the barriers people face when accessing our services.

Barriers experienced by groups and individuals may include physical access to buildings, access to information in appropriate formats to suit their needs, transport, unemployment, mental health difficulties, access to technology etc. During our consultation we asked about how people access our services to ensure that the services we offer and how we offer our services reflect the diversity of our communities. We need to raise awareness and improve our understanding of the issues people face when accessing our services to remove barriers. Effective engagement and monitoring of information will assist in informing us of the accessibility of services to our customers. We want to empower groups with protected characteristics to be able to access the services offered by the Council. More services are being accessed digitally which allows people to be more engaged and allows us to reach more a wider audience. We need to consider mechanisms for reaching all members of the community. Ensuring that there is clear signage, lighting, readable formats for service users ensuring that physical access and digital access is appropriate.

Rationale

In order to encourage communities to thrive in Merthyr Tydfil, accessible and inclusive services are essential. Community members face many barriers, including physical access to buildings, information in appropriate formats, poverty, transport, unemployment, mental health, technology, transport, and more.

Effective engagement and monitoring of information will help us assess customer accessibility and ease of use. Engaging and consulting with residents improves our equalities monitoring information, helping us understand our communities and tailor our services to their needs; this helps us improve and ensure service equality.

Digital access to services engages communities and expands our reach. However, we must encourage and support those who cannot access services digitally and produce relevant information in other formats.

What will success look like?

The creation of accessible and inclusive services in Merthyr Tydfil that address the various barriers faced by community members. By effectively engaging and consulting with residents, monitoring information, and tailoring services to their needs, the community will be better served and more empowered. Additionally, by providing digital access to services while also supporting those who cannot access them digitally, the reach of services will be expanded, ensuring that all community members can benefit from the resources available.

Key Focus Our aim is to empower groups with protected characteristics to be able to access Council services.		
Relevant Protected Characteristics (including Welsh Language)	Domains in Is Wales Fairer? 2023	Link to Well-Being Goals
Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Welsh Language.	Education, Work, Living Standards, Health, Justice and Personal Security, Participation.	A healthier Wales, A more equal Wales, A Wales of cohesive communities, A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language.
Actions		
Ensuring that the services within Merthyr Tydfil are accessible and inclusive for our residents.		
We will comply with relevant legislation in relation to website accessibility (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018).		
We will ensure the Council's website is fully bilingual.		
We will ensure that training is available to our workforce who deal with customers on providing services to people with disabilities.		

Objective: Inclusive and Diverse Workforce
Support an inclusive and diverse workforce which reflects the communities in Merthyr Tydfil.
<p>Nationally there is a need to ensure understanding of requirements to collect and use employment information on all protected characteristics. Also nationally, IT systems or alternative solutions need to support the collection, recording and use of required employment information. We need to do more to raise awareness about what support is available to those with protected characteristics, not just at recruitment but also throughout the workplace journey. To get the best out of our employees and ensure they provide the best services to our residents we need a workplace culture that is safe and inclusive. To do this we need to know more about the diversity of our workforce and continue to ensure our services are inclusive.</p> <p>Rationale</p> <p>This objective directly links to our Workforce Plan which forms part of the Council's Corporate Wellbeing Plan.</p> <p>Workplaces should be safe and inclusive, where people can be free to be themselves and feel a sense of belonging. Promoting this culture will ensure that our staff are working in a positive environment and confident to be their true authentic selves. The mantra of Stonewall Cymru is that "people perform better when they can be themselves". We want to get the best out of our employees and provide the best services that we can, and in order to do this, the culture needs to reflect a safe and inclusive place.</p>

What will success look like?

We want our workforce to feel confident to disclose who they are and provide information about themselves to ensure we are aware of the diversity of our workforce to provide better services.

Using this data and learning from it will enable us to improve our services. Policies and strategies must be inclusive and fair to all, and new policies developed where required.

A Council made up of people who have different backgrounds, thoughts, experiences and identities is important to ensure we are progressing and ensuring that people are at the heart of it.

Key Focus

Support and facilitate equalities training and learning opportunities for staff to raise awareness and promote the importance of equalities.

Relevant Protected Characteristics (including Welsh Language)	Domains in Is Wales Fairer? 2023	Link to Well-Being Goals
Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Welsh Language.	Education, Work, Living Standards, Health, Justice and Personal Security, Participation.	A healthier Wales, A more equal Wales, A Wales of cohesive communities, A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language.
Actions		
We will foster and create an open, diverse and inclusive environment where all employees feel like they can be themselves.		
We will support and promote training opportunities for our staff and line managers for raising awareness on the importance of equalities.		
We will continue to support the embedment of the Welsh language throughout the Council's service areas.		
We will work in collaboration with departments across the Council to ensure that Equalities is promoted throughout the recruitment and attraction process and that staff feel represented by reviewing the data collected through the employee lifecycle.		
Deliver the specific Local Authority actions within relevant Welsh Government Strategies e.g. Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, LGBTQIA+ Action Plan and any other plans developed.		

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

As a Council we are required to consider any pay differences that exist across the organisation and to identify an objective that will address any difference identified. 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.

Rationale

As a Council, we must assess pay disparities and set objectives to address them.

Nationally, pay systems are important for pay equity, but other issues that affect what women and men earn. Occupational segregation, full/part-time work availability, family-friendly policies, and organisational culture are factors to consider. Lower-paid jobs are often part-time, while higher-paid (senior) roles are mostly full-time.

Following our duties, the Council publishes a 'Annual Pay Policy Statement' and 'Annual Gender Pay Gap Report' and collects and publishes annual employment data across protected characteristics. Job evaluation is done by the Greater London Provincial Council, except for Heads of Service, who use the HAYS Scheme. No post-holder personal information is considered at this stage. This eliminates unconscious bias from the grading system. Gender-neutral grades and payment mechanisms are offered by the Council. No gender differences are apparent in the reporting.

Reporting on this helps us understand gender pay gaps' size, causes, and issues. As a Council we are confident that our gender pay gap does not arise from men and women being paid differently for the same or equivalent work. Roles that attract men and women and their current roles explain the small gap. Even though parents are more flexible, research shows that women still do most of the childcare. Females hold more part-time jobs than males, which may lower pay. This can relate to economic, social, cultural and educational factors.

What will success look like?

Addressing pay disparities within a local council is crucial for ensuring fair compensation and equal opportunities for all employees. By implementing a comprehensive and transparent pay equity review process, the Council can identify and rectify any discrepancies that may exist. This not only promotes a more inclusive and equitable work environment, but also helps to build trust and morale among staff members.

Good data representation includes accurately reflecting the workforce and meeting statutory obligations for reporting on equality monitoring information. Analysis of this data helps identify pay gaps and develop strategies to address them. Additionally, promoting flexible working policies and other initiatives can support diverse working arrangements tailored to the needs of the workforce.

Key Focus

The Council's main aim/focus is to address pay disparities, and assess and set objectives, considering factors like occupational segregation, work availability, family-friendly policies, and organizational culture.

Relevant Protected Characteristics (including Welsh Language)	Domains in Is Wales Fairer? 2023	Link to Well-Being Goals
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Age, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Sex.	Education, Work, Living Standards, Health Participation.	A prosperous Wales, A more equal Wales, A healthier Wales.
Actions		
Ensure that we review our HR policies and raise awareness of opportunities throughout the Recruitment and Selection process and to existing employees i.e. flexible working, job sharing, parental leave entitlements, carers leave.		
Continue to publish annual workforce data, Annual Equality Report, Annual Pay Policy Statement and Gender Pay Gap Report in line with the Equality Act 2010 and where necessary identify any changes that may have a contributory factor to any inequality of pay.		
Ensure workforce data is up to date and regularly review this to develop and inform the Strategic Equality Plan.		

Objective: Safe, Inclusive and Cohesive Communities
Promote and facilitate safe, inclusive and cohesive communities.
<p>Although Merthyr Tydfil has a proud and diverse heritage, we recognise that under reporting of hate crime still needs to be addressed. We need to raise awareness of what a hate crime is and ensure the public know how and where to report hate crime. Community cohesion is essential in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on together and enables a sense of belonging. This enables people to effectively feel safer and more secure in their communities. A community where people have increased contact and are able to forge greater relationships with others and an increased understanding of different cultures is less likely to foster extremist views.</p> <p>Rationale</p> <p>A Wales of Cohesive Communities is one of the seven Well-being goals as identified in the 'Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015'. It ensures that cohesion remains central to how we deliver services now and in the future.</p> <p>Merthyr Tydfil has a proud and rich history of being a diverse and welcoming community. However, there are strong challenges that need to be overcome with the impact of political debates and the influence of social media which impact how communities respond to changes. With this, comes a possible increase of hate crime and extremism. Hate crimes and incidents have a damaging and corrosive impact upon community cohesion, which can in turn, increase community tensions and create a sense of intolerance.</p> <p>What will success look like?</p> <p>Ensuring communities are cohesive, safe and inclusive contributes to a more equal society, creating the foundation stone that enables different groups to interact on an equal footing.</p> <p>Key Focus</p> <p>To raise awareness of hate crime and how this is reported.</p>

Relevant Protected Characteristics (including Welsh Language)	Domains in Is Wales Fairer? 2023	Link to Well-Being Goals
Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation.	Education, Work, Living Standards, Health, Justice and Personal Security, Participation.	A more equal Wales, A Wales of cohesive communities, A healthier Wales
Actions		
We will continue to raise awareness of national events using social media campaigns and events that promote positive community cohesion and celebrate diversity.		
We will work in collaboration with departments across the Council to ensure that our staff and residents know how and where to report hate crime and are signposted to the relevant support available.		

Objective: Education, Skills and Employment
Improve education, skills and employment in Merthyr Tydfil.
<p>Giving people the opportunities to learn and develop their skills enhances the opportunities to gain sustainable employment. This assists in tackling poverty and unemployment within Merthyr Tydfil, and preventing further problems associated with low skills and unemployment.</p> <p>Rationale</p> <p>Our vision in the 'Raising Standards, Raising Attainment (RARS) Strategy' is for all Merthyr Tydfil children and young people to have access to high-quality education so they can become ambitious, capable learners, enterprising and creative contributors, ethically informed residents, and healthy, confident individuals ready to lead fulfilling lives. Children and youth should leave school with the attributes and life skills needed to succeed in employment, education, and training. We also want to celebrate Merthyr Tydfil's diverse cultural heritage, promote its future ambitions among our children and young people, and promote Welsh language use in school and the community, championing Wales' identity.</p> <p>Providing education and training to our residents will help to create thriving, resilient and cohesive communities. Our nation, Council, and Cardiff Capital Region's economic growth depends on improving training and upskilling access. To close economic development gaps, identify skill gaps, increase apprenticeships, and raise awareness of their benefits, we must reduce the number of residents not in employment, education, or training. Merging Welsh Government funds via Communities for Work Plus (CfW+), developing key engagement services through Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), and developing learning provision/opportunities in our communities encourages those farthest from the labour market to consider informal, formal, upskilling, and employment. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is a central pillar of the UK Government's Levelling Up agenda. We've made great strides in designing and delivering inclusive programmes since SPF was</p>

introduced from UK and Welsh Government funding avenues, but CfW+ will end in March 2025.

What will success look like?

Enhancing education and skills development opportunities in Merthyr Tydfil is crucial for addressing poverty and unemployment, promoting economic growth, and fostering cohesive communities, with a focus on preparing children and youth for successful futures and celebrating the region's cultural heritage.

Key Focus

Promoting education and training opportunities in Merthyr Tydfil to enhance skills development, tackle poverty and unemployment, and celebrate cultural heritage. Emphasizing the importance of upskilling and training access to create thriving communities and support economic growth.

Relevant Protected Characteristics (including Welsh Language)	Domains in Is Wales Fairer? 2023	Link to Well-Being Goals
Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Welsh Language.	Education, Work, Living Standards, Health, Justice and Personal Security, Participation.	A healthier Wales, A more equal Wales, A Wales of cohesive communities, A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
Actions		
We will continue to explore key funding opportunities to assist with improving education, skills and employment pathways in the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough.		
We will continue to foster and develop good working relationships with external partnerships such as The College Merthyr, our Schools and our employability teams in order to promote employment pathways, skills development and education standards within the County Borough.		
We aim to develop a robust data capture process from all in house provision and external contracted organisations.		

DELIVERING, MONITORING AND REVIEWING THE PLAN

The equality objectives will be monitored and delivered through the action plan. The Council will publish an Annual Equality Report providing information on:

- Delivery of the Strategic Equality Plan
- Progress on the objectives and actions
- Employment monitoring information

The plan will be reviewed annually to ensure that actions are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-Bound), and fit for purpose and that new legislation/guidance is factored into the plan. This will ensure that we are continuously improving.

FURTHER INFORMATION

We welcome comments on the plan and if you want to know more about the work the Council is doing, please use the contact details below:

Equalities
Civic Centre
Castle Street
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 8AN
Tel: 01685 725000
equalities@merthyr.gov.uk

The plan is available in other formats upon request. To make a request please use the contact details above.

APPENDICIES

Appendix 1 – Further information and opportunities

Objective: Inclusive engagement and participation
Engage with our communities and workforce to support effective participation and encourage people to be involved.
<p>Community engagement, inclusion and participation is vital in achieving positive change for our communities and delivering our 'Corporate Well-Being Plan for 2023-2028'. 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. A clear understanding of who lives within the County Borough is essential in providing services to the public. The 2021 Census provides us with new and up to date information on our communities.</p> <p>Involving residents in decision-making creates strong communities. Some protected groups face significant barriers on a daily basis which can affect their participation in community life and when accessing services. By understanding these barriers, we are able to provide better services to our communities. Engagement is not only a key means of improving services, but also a statutory responsibility in relation to Equality, as set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). We must involve people who we consider representative of one or more of the protected groups and who have an interest in how we carry out our functions.</p> <p>Ensuring that information is available in a variety of different formats and providing different access channels for response is vital in ensuring that everyone is able to participate in engagement exercises and have their voices heard. Meaningful discussions are important to help us identify what matters most to people, which can enable us to be better informed when making decisions.</p> <p>Even though more access is available digitally, there continues to be barriers that prevent people from engaging. We need to further understand this and remove any barriers people may face when accessing our services. Consulting with key stakeholders in a variety of different formats and methods, using digital platforms and also face to face interactions, using plain language, and ensuring that engagement starts with sufficient time to involve more people to improve communication and ensure everyone has a voice.</p> <p>We want to do more to engage and support groups which are not represented and strengthen relationships, working together with our communities to design services that best meets their needs. We want to improve the collection of data and our equality monitoring form when consulting with our communities to ensure we are reaching out to our communities to give them an opportunity to be involved and to be well informed.</p> <p>We want to continue to work towards attainment of Insport Gold standard. The successful attainment of Insport Gold standard will ensure the Council, and its key partners, place service users at the centre of the development of sport and physical activity opportunities for disabled people in Merthyr Tydfil, with actions being a direct response of engagement and consultation. The Insport Gold Standard will evidence how service users have been engaged and how the Council and its partners have taken a collaborative approach to meet this need.</p>

We want to deliver on the actions within the 'Healthy Organisation Strategy' and ensure that we analyse all feedback from our culture surveys to identify barriers, issues and areas for improvement. Ensuring all staff receive an informed induction, signposting to relevant information and raising awareness of what people can get involved in, linking to the 'Participation Strategy' and 'Communications and Consultation Strategy'.

We want to support and encourage our workforce to engage, improving the access channels of providing feedback and ensuring that this happens internally between departments to give staff more insight into other work being undertaken throughout the Council. We also want to continue to work with the support of our partners who are experienced in supporting specific groups that may not ordinarily participate in our engagement.

Objective: Accessible Services

Understand and remove the barriers people face when accessing our services.

Ensuring people within Merthyr Tydfil have accessible and inclusive services is key to encouraging and enabling our communities to thrive. We aim to empower groups with protected characteristics to be able to access the services offered by the Council.

There are many barriers faced by our communities which may include physical access to buildings, access to information in appropriate formats to suit their needs, poverty, transport, unemployment, mental health, access to technology, transport etc. We want to encourage inclusion of actions about accessibility into service implementation plans and strategies that work together and successfully address any barriers people may face to assist us in removing any identified barriers.

We want to find out more about how people access our services to ensure that the services we offer and how we offer our services reflect the diversity of our communities. We want to raise more awareness and improve our understanding of the issues people face when accessing our services.

Effective engagement and monitoring of information will assist in informing us of the accessibility and ease of use of our services to our customers. Ensuring that when we engage and consult with residents, we improve our equalities monitoring information we receive to ensure we are engaging with our communities effectively, helping us to understand who they are and tailoring our services to suit their needs. It also enables us to continuously improve and continue to ensure equality in the access to our services.

More services are being accessed digitally which allows our communities to be more engaged and allows us to reach more people. However, we still need to work on ensuring that those who are unable to access services digitally are encouraged and supported to do so and produce the relevant information in other formats. Tackling digital exclusion is key, by upskilling residents and staff, signposting to training on things such as how to write accessible documents, the use of social media, accessing job opportunities, how to access council services etc. This will enable more people to be more aware of our services and how they can access them.

We need to consider mechanisms for reaching all members of the community. Ensuring that there is clear signage, lighting, readable formats for service users ensuring that physical access and digital access is appropriate, easy read versions of documents are made available, and continue our focus on reducing inequalities and supporting the most vulnerable within Merthyr Tydfil.

We want to develop a Council action plan for poverty to ensure we are continuing with tackling poverty in Merthyr Tydfil and also developing other plans to support our communities. We want to establish what could make Merthyr an Age Friendly Community and develop appropriate plans that assist this.

A group that could face particular challenges when accessing services is the Armed forces and their families, and anyone who is affiliated with the Armed Forces. Whilst some adapt to civilian life, able to utilise their skills and experience obtained whilst serving, a significant minority can be in need of additional support for many years after. Merthyr Tydfil has a proud record of valuing its armed services and has signed the 'Armed Forces Covenant: Today and Tomorrow'. This covenant is the expression of the moral obligation the Government and the nation owe to our armed forces, and that those who have served should be treated with fairness and respect.

Objective: Inclusive and Diverse Workforce

Support an inclusive and diverse workforce which reflects the communities in Merthyr Tydfil.

Workplaces should be safe and inclusive, where people can be free to be themselves and feel a sense of belonging. Promoting this culture will ensure that our staff are working in a positive environment and confident to be their true authentic selves. The mantra of Stonewall Cymru is that *"people perform better when they can be themselves"*. We want to get the best out of our employees and provide the best services that we can, and in order to do this, the culture needs to reflect a safe and inclusive place.

We want our workforce to feel confident to disclose who they are and provide information about themselves to ensure we are aware of the diversity of our workforce to provide better services. We need to have a greater understanding of the diversity of our workforce by collecting equalities monitoring information, from the start of employment. Using this data and learning from it will enable us to improve our services. Policies and strategies must be inclusive and fair to all, and new policies developed where required. A Council made up of people who have different backgrounds, thoughts, experiences, and identities is important to ensure we are progressing and ensuring that people are at the heart of it.

Nationally there is a need to ensure understanding of the requirements to collect and use employment information on all protected characteristics. Also nationally, IT systems or alternative solutions need to support the collection, recording and use of required employment information.

Ensuring we are inclusive and diverse will ensure staff are performing to the best standard and helps to retain staff. It also enhances our reach to job searchers and those who want a career in many Local Authority services.

We are a Disability Confident employer. However, we want to do more to raise awareness about what support is available to those with protected characteristics, at recruitment but also

throughout the workplace journey. Longer term we want to further explore progressing into Level 2 and raise more awareness about disability, mental health and the well-being of our staff.

We want to raise more awareness of the Welsh language and Welsh Language Standards, and upskill our workforce to ensure there is awareness of the protected characteristics and responsibilities we all have to ensure fairness and equality for all. Ensuring staff are culturally aware is vital in providing our services. More training for front line staff who have more interactions with the public, and providing more opportunities for staff to engage and ask questions through our staff forum and other channels.

As a part of our 'Healthy Organisation Strategy'; we want to ensure any issues raised relating to protected characteristics are identified and appropriate actions are developed.

Support to managers is also key in ensuring our managers are equipped with the skills they need to support staff. We want to develop a Merthyr Curriculum, continue our work in promoting the managers hub, and providing useful resources and training opportunities to everyone.

Objective: Equity of pay

Ensure equity of pay across Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.

As a Council we are required to consider any pay differences that exist across the Council and to identify an objective that will address any difference identified. 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.

In line with our duties, the Council collects and publishes annual employment data across a number of protected characteristics and publishes an 'Annual Pay Policy Statement' and 'Annual Gender Pay Gap Report'. 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 HAYS 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 gender during the reporting.

Reporting on this helps us to understand the size and causes of any gender pay gaps and any issues that need to be addressed. As a Council we are confident that our gender pay gap does not arise from men and women being paid differently for the same or equivalent work. The small gap is due to the types of roles in which attract males and females, and the roles they currently work. Research has shown that the responsibility of childcare still falls disproportionately upon women, even though parents are increasingly more flexible. More part time roles are held by females than males and these salaries may attract lower salaries. This can relate to economic, social, cultural and educational factors.

We want to ensure our data accurately reflects our workforce and continue to meet our statutory duties of reporting on our equality monitoring information and within our 'Annual

Equality Report'. By analysing this data, we can have a more informed understanding of pay gaps, and it assists us in developing strategies and policies which can tackle any such issues.

We also want to raise more awareness of the flexible working policy and any other policies which can assist in promoting different working arrangements to suit the different needs of our workforce.

Objective: Safe, Inclusive and Cohesive Communities

Promote and facilitate safe, inclusive and cohesive communities.

A Wales of Cohesive Communities is one of the seven Well-being goals as identified in the 'Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015'. It ensures that cohesion remains central to how we deliver services now and in the future.

Merthyr Tydfil has a proud and rich history of being a diverse and welcoming community. However, there are strong challenges that need to be overcome with the impact of political debates and the influence of social media which impact how communities respond to changes. With this, comes a possible increase of hate crime and extremism. Hate crimes and incidents have a damaging and corrosive impact upon community cohesion, which can in turn, increase community tensions and create a sense of intolerance.

Ensuring communities are cohesive, safe, and inclusive contributes to a more equal society, creating the foundation stone that enables different groups to interact on an equal footing.

We need to ensure communities can flourish, advancing opportunities and fostering good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not. We all have different experiences, values, and beliefs and this needs to be respected and valued, encouraging communities to build positive relationships. This increases understanding of different cultures and enables our communities to feel safer and more secure. Working together rather than against one another enables a sense of belonging and appreciation for other cultures.

We recognise that under reporting of hate crime still needs to be addressed. We need to raise awareness of what a hate crime is and ensure the public know how and where to report a hate crime. We want to ensure the public and the workforce know how and where to report hate crime and that victims of hate crime understand and are supported to access the support available to them.

We want to continue to work with our communities, celebrate diversity and bring people together to promote positive community cohesion. We also want to continue to network with other stakeholders, collaborate and strengthen links.

We play an important role in ensuring our communities feel safe and included, and implementing any other Welsh Government action plans, such as, the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan and LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales.

Objective: Education, Skills and Employment

Improve education, skills and employment in Merthyr Tydfil.

Giving people the opportunities to learn and develop their skills enhances the opportunities to gain sustainable employment. This assists in tackling poverty and unemployment within Merthyr Tydfil, and preventing further problems associated with low skills and unemployment.

The opportunity for all children and young people in Merthyr Tydfil to access high quality education so that they develop as ambitious capable learners, enterprising and creative contributors, ethically informed residents, and healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives is our vision within the 'Raising Standards, Raising Attainment (RARS) Strategy'. We want children and young people to leave school with the necessary attributed and life skills to enable them to make a successful transition to employment, education, and training. We also want to ensure we celebrate the diverse cultural heritage of Merthyr Tydfil and promoting its future ambitions amongst our children and young people and facilitate the wider use of the Welsh language both within school and the wider community, championing the identity of Wales.

Supporting our residents to access education and training will positively contribute to creating thriving, resilient and cohesive communities. Improving access to training and upskilling is key to our economic development and prosperity of the nation, the Council and Cardiff Capital Region. It is key to focus on reducing the number of residents not in employment, education, or training to reduce any gaps in our economic development, identifying any gaps in skills, increasing apprenticeships, and raising more awareness of the benefits of this.

Through the delivery of 'Communities for Work Plus (CfW+)' and the and 'Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF)', we have developed a single employment support model for Merthyr Tydfil. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is a central pillar of the UK Government's Levelling Up agenda.

Merging Welsh Government funds via CfW+ and developing key engagement services through SPF and developing learning provision/opportunities right at the heart of our communities allows us to encourage those furthest away from the labour market to consider informal learning, formal learning, upskilling and employment. Through the engagement models of SPF Compass Community Hub and also SPF Town Centre Hub, this should allow us to access residents with the most complex barriers and allow the Cowl+ employability support function to support residents.

Natural identification of the residents will also allow them to access more robust level of service intervention, allowing residents to build relationships with multiple departments to break down barriers, whilst accessing full support from the Council. This promotes a very inclusive approach to all who want to access services.

Whilst we have seen very positive strides made on designing and delivering an inclusive set of programmes since the introduction of SPF from UK Government funding avenues along with Welsh Government - CfW+ are all due to cease at the end of March 2025. We will ensure this is reviewed annually and keep a focus on the desire to provide more inclusive services for all whilst maximising opportunities for departments to work together to maximise resources being secured in the future.

IS WALES FAIRER? 2015 – EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

This report identified a number of key equality and human rights challenges for Wales. It looked at 7 key challenges:

- Close attainment gaps in education.
- Encourage fair recruitment, development, and reward in employment.
- Improve living conditions in cohesive communities.
- Increase access to justice and encourage democratic participation.
- Improve access to mental health services and support people experiencing poor mental health.
- Prevent abuse, neglect and ill-treatment in care and detention.
- Eliminate violence, abuse, and harassment in the community.

According to the report, the challenges will require substantial efforts of public, private and third sector organisations and of individuals to reduce them.

IS WALES FAIRER? 2018 – EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

This report provides a complete picture of people's life chances in Wales. It looks across all areas of life, including,

- Education
- Work
- Living standards
- Health
- Justice and security
- Participation in society

It identifies a wide range of recommendations to address the key equality and human rights challenges in Wales. It identifies that some progress has been made but there is more work to be done.

The key focus of the Equality and Human Rights Commission will be socio-economic disadvantage, disability, gender, and race.

The objectives have been developed to align with the findings from both *Is Wales Fairer? 2015* and *Is Wales Fairer? 2018*.

IS WALES FAIRER? 2023 – EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

The 'Is Wales Fairer? 2023' report, the Equality and Human Rights Monitor, is the latest review and the first since Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic and the start of the cost-of-living crisis.

The report provides an evidence-based overview of progress on equality and human rights in Wales. It is arranged by the nine protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act 2010 and each one looks at the following themes in more detail:

- Education
- Work
- Living standards
- Health
- Justice and security
- Participation in society

The report also contains a chapter focused on key priority areas including human rights, socio-economic status and the Welsh language.