

Merthyr Tydfil County  
Borough Council

**Annual  
Equality  
Report  
2022-2023**



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

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## Foreword

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC) is pleased to introduce our Annual Equality Report 2022-2023 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.

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

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the Council's Annual Equality Report 2022-2023. 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. Our aim is not just to meet our legal duties, but also to make Merthyr Tydfil a place where everyone matters. We want Merthyr Tydfil to be a place where no one experiences discrimination or disadvantage because of their identity or background. The Council sees everyone in Merthyr Tydfil as an equal citizen whilst recognising that people will have different needs.

Through the Strategic Equality Plan, this Annual Equality Report for 2022-2023 is testament to the Council's ongoing drive to progress its equality agenda and deliver our Equalities Vision for Merthyr Tydfil, which is:

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

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

## Introduction and Background

### **Equality Act 2010**

The Equality Act 2010 brings together and replaces the previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act. It simplifies and strengthens the law, removes inconsistencies and makes it easier for people to understand and comply with it. Most of the Act came into force on 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 2020-2024 support the Council's Well-being Objectives and the seven Well-being Goals (shown in the diagram below) and link to the five ways of working (the Sustainable Development Principle) that are set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.



### 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.

## **Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011**

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

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

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

## Strategic Equality Plan 2020 2024

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

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

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies to:

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

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

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

### **Our Equalities Vision for Merthyr Tydfil is.**

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

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

| Theme   | Objective  |
|---|--|
| <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.

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

### **Strategic Equality Plan Working Group**

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

### **Scrutiny guidance**

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

### **Socio-economic Duty**

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



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

In broad terms, 'socio-economic disadvantage' means living on a low income compared to others in Wales, with little or no accumulated wealth, leading to greater material deprivation, restricting the ability to access basic goods and services. 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 several 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 account regarding engagement and the use of data:

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

The guidance has been updated to reflect this duty and 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 taking into consideration any other key aspects that require impact assessing.

## Performance Assessment

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

### **Theme: Community Cohesion**

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

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

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

#### **Refugee Week**

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

A family event took place on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2022 at Theatr Soar to highlight Refugee Week. This year's theme was 'healing' through creativity and conversations. In line with the theme, different activities were carried out with participants including cake decorating, bird box painting and a range of other arts and crafts projects. In addition to this, a welsh band attended and played music for the families. It was an opportunity for different members of the community to engage and participate in fun activities as well as engaging with other agencies such as the South Wales Police (SWP) who were also in attendance.

#### **Ukraine Independence Day**

This day, celebrated on 24<sup>th</sup> August, is a state holiday in modern Ukraine and celebrates the Declaration of Independence of 1991.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council was proud to stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian community on this special day – which was the first Independence Day since Russia invaded the country on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022.

The Ukrainian flag was raised outside the Civic Centre whilst the Red House in the town centre was lit up in the colours of the Ukrainian flag.

A small event was organised on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2022 for some Ukrainian families. The event was held in Theatre Soar where Ukrainian food and a range of engaging activities were organised for the families. The Mayor attended along with colleagues from SWP and other local agencies.

Weekly support has been offered to the Ukrainian families that have settled in the County Borough. Cohesion Officers have organised and assisted with weekly meetings for the Ukrainian families and their host families, allowing them a safe place to meet and source the relevant support. Support available came from a range of external agencies such as the police, tutors from the local college, employment agencies and social services.

### **ONAM Celebration**

ONAM is a festival of harvest and happiness that is celebrated to showcase the culture and heritage of Kerala, India. A celebration event was organised by the Merthyr Malayali Cultural Association and was held at the Engine House on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2022. The event included sampling a selection of traditional Indian food, some fun activities, programs explaining the history of the ONAM celebration, a theatrical performance, dances and candle lighting.

### **Hate Crime Awareness Week**

Hate Crime Awareness Week (HCAW) this year took place between 8<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> October 2022. HCAW is a dedicated campaign aimed at raising awareness about hate crimes and promoting tolerance and understanding among communities. It is a week that encourages organisations, key partners, and communities to work together to tackle local hate crime and minimise its effects.

The theme for Wales this year was 'Wales Together'. During this week various events and initiatives were organised to educate people about the impact of hate crimes and how to report them, as well as to encourage communities to come together to combat hatred and prejudice.

Initiatives carried out during this period included holding an engagement stall at the 'Kepak Merthyr' site, distributing merchandise and working with South Wales Police to engage with people from minority backgrounds. Officers also attended a local nursery class where children completed activities on hate crime, whilst talking about different races incorporating arts and crafts.

The goal is to create a more inclusive and accepting society by addressing issues related to hate crimes such as racism, homophobia, religious discrimination and other forms of bias-motivated offences.

### **Holocaust Memorial Day**

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

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

Observances for this day included a wreath laying service held with members of South Wales Police and the Local Authority at the Jewish Cemetery located in Cefn-Coed.

Young people from Merthyr Tydfil's Glynmil Caravan Park also remembered the lives of Gypsy/Roma Holocaust victims who died in World War Two by creating an educational art installation that would later be displayed at events and buildings across the UK.

The artwork, which recently featured in a Holocaust commemoration service held at St Tydfil's Parish Church, was on display at Merthyr Tydfil Central Library and was displayed at the Senedd in August 2022 for Roma Holocaust Memorial Day.



A Welsh Government Equality and Inclusion Programme grant funded the project which was led by Head4Arts Kate Strudwick, sculptor Cindy Ward and digital artist Natasha James. Named 'Many Stars in the Sight of God', the heart-shaped design of the sculpture was created from recycled copper pipe and wire, with a cast iron cartwheel base.

Each of its crafted stars represents 10,000 Gypsy/Roma people killed by the Nazis in World War Two, with the young people having drawn upon Gypsy/Traveller iconography to decorate the stars.

### **LGBT+ History Month**

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

The theme for 2023 was 'Behind the Lens'. The theme was chosen to shine a light on all people who are instrumental in creating TV and film, highlighting the work of LGBTQ+ people in this field, both in the past and present. The theme is also linked to how LGBTQ+ lives are portrayed in the media versus the lived experiences.

MTCBC was proud to support LGBT+ History Month 2023. A flag raising ceremony was held on 1<sup>st</sup> February where the Pride flags were raised outside the Civic Centre. In attendance were the Major, the Consort, the Equalities and Diversity Champion and other members and staff of the Council.

MTCBC's Community Cohesion Team organised engagement sessions with South Wales Police colleagues at The College Merthyr Tydfil and schools within the County Borough. They spent time chatting with pupils about LGBT+ History month and why it is important to understand how the historical fight for equality helped us to create a fair and equal society today.

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

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

The theme for 2023 was 'Embrace Equity'. To celebrate the day various activities were organised by the team and external contacts, including an empowerment through fitness session which was held for students at The College Merthyr Tydfil and a self-defence session which was delivered by South Wales Police at a local High School for Year 11 girls. A stall was also set up at a local leisure centre promoting the importance of the day.

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

Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month (GRTHM) is an annual observance that takes place in June. The purpose of this month-long celebration is to raise awareness about the history, culture, and contributions of the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) communities, as well as to challenge the stereotypes and discrimination they often face.

The Cohesion Team worked closely with MTCBC's Glynmil Site Manager who promoted and organised an event for GRTHM. The event was held at Glynmil Caravan Park on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022 and was attended by primary school pupils and staff, residents and community groups, and members to educate and celebrate traveller culture.

Members of 20 partner organisations provided craft and other activities. The event coincided with Youth Work Week, so Georgetown Boys and Girls Club and Twyn Community Hub attended and offered a range of sports on the greens. Cardiff City Foundation also organised football, while South Wales Police came along with their working police dogs to share some interesting facts and for people to interact with them.

The event featured traditional folk music played on the lawns, cinema, arts and crafts, and games. There was also an exhibition of boxing - which has been developing at the site for a while with support from the Pride Boxing initiative – along with circus skills and tightrope activities, face painting and many other activities.

The day was funded by Welsh Government's Cohesion Fund, Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association's 'Fit and Fed' project and Tesco. Partnership for the event included Tywn Community Hub, pre-school playgroup Meithrin, community arts organisation 'Head4Arts', 'Masquerade Arts' and 14 other partners, which all supported education and wellbeing via information stalls at the event. A team from Cyfarthfa Museum also took along a 19<sup>th</sup> century oil painting for viewing.



Continuing with Gypsy Roma Traveller community support within the County Borough, work carried out and overseen by MTCBC's Glynmil Site Manager during 2022-2023 included:

- The Glynmil site continued into phase two of the site capital funding to improve the site. 24 utility blocks were being refurbished to ensure a high standard of plots for families living in cultural homes.
- In May 2022, funding was utilised from the 'Fit and Fed' initiative to offer 8 weekly Indian drum sessions on site to engage families. Other instruments were introduced to participants to develop their understanding of music and song.
- Welsh play sessions are held on Glynmil by Mudiad Meithrin. They aim to introduce the Welsh language through play. The team have donated play equipment and have decorated the walls in one area of the main hall designated to play.
- The organisation Head4Arts continues to offer arts and crafts once a week in the Glynmil community centre.
- In May 2022, 8 weekly wellbeing and boxing sessions were provided to residents by Pride Boxing initiative.
- In May 2022, the site had a Ministerial visit from Jane Hutt MS who met with residents and partner organisations working on the site. The site manager talked the Minister through the masterplan for the site refurbishment.
- In August 2022, a project called 'fruit ball' was run on site. This project was designed by the site manager to introduce families to fresh fruit and organised ball games on the greenspaces. It was funded by 'Fit and Fed'.
- In the Summer of 2022, an arts and crafts club continued through the school summer holidays funded by the Cohesion fund.

### **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 'time for change – actions not words' was shared on our social media platforms.

Race Council Cymru also launched Black History Wales 2022-2023 and the theme throughout the year was 'Young People, the Time Is Now!'.

### **Zero Racism Wales**

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

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

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

Welsh Government also developed a draft Race Equality Action Plan and undertook community engagement analysis to feed into the 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 was analysed and a final version of the Race Equality Action plan was published in June 2022. It was renamed the 'Anti-racism Wales Action Plan'. The plan sets a long-term vision for 2030, but each published plan will set out what we need to do for the next two-year period.



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

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

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

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

Work completed to meet this objective includes:

#### **Equalities Calendar**

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

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

#### **Proud Councils**

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

The main objectives and purpose of Proud Councils include:

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

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

During 2022-2023, MTCBC chaired the Proud Councils Network and with Covid restrictions being lifted, national and local pride events were able to resume after a two-year gap.

The network marched and represented in the following Pride 2022 events:

- Swansea Pride on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2022
- RCT Pride on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2022
- Powys Pride on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2022
- YEPS Family Pride on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2022
- Pride Cymru on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2022
- Newport Pride on 3rd September 2022



### **LGBT+ History Month**

An online Q&A event was held 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023 for all staff during LGBT+ History Month. It highlighted the year's theme 'Behind the Lens' which celebrated LGBTQ+ peoples' contribution to media from behind the scenes. Directors, cinematographers, writers, producers, animators, musicians, choreographers and beyond.

The event featured three guest speakers who shared their lived experiences and stories related to writing and filmmaking. These speakers were Rachel Dax (Writer and Filmmaker), Rebs Fisher-Jackson (Writer/Director and Script Supervisor), and Christopher Anstee (Author, Writer & LGBTQ+ Public Speaker). They provided valuable insights into their journeys and the challenges and successes they've encountered in their careers.

Throughout the month staff received information on events taking place within the South Wales area and some useful links to videos and resources to enable them to learn more about the month via the Proud Councils events and resource guide.

## **Training and continued professional development**

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

At the beginning of 2022, a new Corporate Induction process was introduced for all new staff. This includes modules on the Council's visions & values, equality & diversity and directs staff to our Dignity & Respect at Work policy which enforces our zero tolerance on bullying & harassment.

This was also supported with the introduction of a new Managers Induction process in November 2022. This programme looks at MTCBC's visions & values, policies and procedures from a manager's perspective. There were also several soft skills sessions to ensure new managers can support staff through the Performance Management process which underpins our corporate values and behaviours. Additional sessions will be developed during 2023 following consultation through employee engagement activities.

At the beginning of the year, two e-learning platforms were introduced to help support staff to develop additional skills in the workplace. 'Skills Hub' gives staff access to a library of over 750 online courses to help improve and develop skills whilst increasing knowledge of areas of interest. Modules include Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Health and Wellbeing, British Values and Personal Development. A managers portal called Kallidus provides managers additional learning in areas such as unconscious bias, emotional intelligence, managing conflict, leadership styles and equalities.

### **Learning at Work Week**

Learning at Work Week in May provided bite sized sessions for all staff, aimed at the importance and benefits of learning and development. The sessions were wide ranging and included autism awareness, keeping you safe from frauds and scams, emergency first aid, digital literacy and a Welsh conversation workshop.

Eight members of staff underwent an intensive mental health first aider course, hosted by Mental Health First Aid Wales, to become qualified Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA). The role of a Mental Health First Aider is to provide support to staff who are developing a mental health problem, experiencing the worsening of an existing problem, or are in a mental health crisis. The MHFA would act as a starting point for staff to access and be signposted to relevant agencies that can provide further experienced support, advice and guidance. They are also a presence to promote workplace culture where staff feel able to discuss mental health openly and feel supported to do so. All the MHFA's work closely with the Occupational Health department to support the delivery of the health and wellbeing provision within MTCBC.

### **Physical and Mental health for staff**

Throughout 2022-2023, the focus of wellbeing remained a key priority and the Occupational Development team explored a variety of blended approaches to wellbeing training.

For our aspiring managers, Coleg Y Cymoedd supported 21 staff members to obtain their ILM Level 3 in Leadership and Management.

Bully and harassment became the focus of mandatory training in November 2022 with separate sessions for staff and managers. This is now being developed into an e-learning module which will be rolled out across the Council in the next year.

Care First, the Council's employee assistance programme, has continued to support staff with access to specialist counselling services. They also provide staff with online webinars for additional wellbeing assistance. Recent topics covered have included understanding domestic violence, digital health and wellbeing, understanding long Covid, managing grief and financial wellbeing.

In March 2023 the Council celebrated Neurodiversity Week with several online sessions. The sessions were well attended and provided staff a greater understanding of neurodiverse conditions, the impact and benefits.

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.

## **Theme: Inclusive Engagement and Participation**

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

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

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

#### **Youth Service**

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

Inspire2 Achieve (I2A) deliver a key stage 4 (KS4) programme known as 'School Ready' throughout all mainstream schools and alternative education settings in Merthyr. The programme was developed with the overall aim of improving the behaviour and attendance of young people whilst adopting a positive and sensitive approach to wellbeing when engaging the groups. The level one qualification allows scope for tutors and lead workers to implement coaching and mentoring sessions so to address wellbeing issues within a comfortable and relaxed environment.

A 'School Ready' programme was created for Year 10 and 11 pupils who had been referred to the I2A project for emotional issues, poor school or classroom attendance, inappropriate behaviour and low levels of attainment, and who needed support with their post-16 destination. In the year 2022-2023 twelve groups took place with 39 young people achieving a qualification. They all demonstrated an improvement in their wellbeing. Participation in the qualification supported young people to identify what they wanted to do after they left school, inspired healthy learning habits and coping strategies for the learners' GCSEs and encouraged them to take ownership of their behaviour and school attendance through positive wellbeing activities.

#### **I2A Project Developments, Behaviour Change Programme – Wellbeing**

Following consultation with High Schools throughout Merthyr Tydfil, it was identified that there was a need to address the emotional wellbeing, behaviour and appropriate social responses of young people in Key Stage 3 (KS3) since schools had reported a decline post the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, the I2A Project created the 'Behaviour Change' programme. It included six weeks of two-hour thought-provoking workshops which aim to address emotional intelligence, self-regulation, resilience, empathy for others, wellbeing, leadership, team building and community cohesion.

The Year 8 pupils will take part in the Level 1 Assistant Sports Coaching in Sport and Physical Activity. This Programme will look to be piloted in Pen Y Dre High School in the year 2023-2024 and a full report will follow its inception.

## **Schools**

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

Pen Y Dre High School took part in a short film called 'Look at Us' which shines a light on the issue of bullying, based on sexual orientation. Ffilm Cymru in collaboration with Cymoedd Creadigol decided that Pen Y Dre should be the school to bring the script to life which was written by pupils from Porth County Community School in Rhondda Cynon Taf, who have faced this type of bullying themselves.

Pupils from the school produced and directed the film, with the support of their drama department. The film was then premiered in July 2022 to pupils, staff and parents. They were joined with representatives from Stonewall, Cymoedd Creadigol, Ffilm Cymru and Careers Wales who spoke at the event.

In September 2022, Cyfarthfa High School was presented with bronze, silver and gold awards by the SSCE Cymru Armed Forces Friendly Schools initiative. They became the first school in Merthyr Tydfil to attain this level of recognition. It was received due to the level of support and the activities offered to eligible students.

## **Period Poverty**

Merthyr Tydfil CBC were allocated funding from the Welsh Governments Period Dignity Grant (PDG) to end period poverty by providing period products free of charge to schools and in the community. Period poverty refers to a lack of access to period products and inadequate awareness about menstruation, typically because of financial difficulties. A survey by Action Aid UK in 2022 found that nearly one in eight of those surveyed struggled to buy menstrual products in the last six months. Period poverty can impact attendance at school and work.

As a result, Attendance Inclusion Officers oversaw the distribution of period products throughout schools and community-based settings. Twenty primary schools and four high schools within the County Borough benefited from the grant whilst community-based settings including museums, libraries, leisure centres, community centres and youth provisions held reusable and disposable products in toilets, making them available when required.

Furthermore, MTCBC's Waste Services team teamed up with 'Hey Girls', an award-winning social enterprise, to offer our residents the chance to try reusable products for free. Most period products are made from single use plastics. Every year 200,000 tonnes of period product waste is landfilled in the UK and around 4kg of period product waste is generated per household per year. That equates to around 114 tonnes of this waste in Merthyr Tydfil alone.

## **Adult Community Learning**

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

The Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020 imposed further disadvantages on learners with the closure of classes in community venues and the courses being moved online.

Post pandemic we have returned to deliver more face-to-face sessions with services operating using a hybrid approach. This gives learners the opportunity of greater choice and flexibility to learn around their daily lifestyles.

We have also been able to purchase IT equipment for community learners. We continue to be committed to ensuring learners are not disadvantaged and are able to take up or continue learning.

We continue to see the impact of Covid with issues presenting around mental health and wellbeing. The engagement of new learners has been quite slow due to confidence and anxiety issues around going back out into the community. The focus going forward is on providing short activities and engagement sessions. Working alongside the new ACL Multiply Project, basic/numeracy skills will be embedded to develop learners' confidence and provide a pathway to learning.

For example, working together to provide learning activities around everyday life. Focusing on supporting community learners around the cost-of-living crisis. This pathway can encourage the uptake of further adult Learning courses.

Tutors have undertaken CPD around First Aid and Motivational Interviewing to allow them to be able to identify concerning behaviours and adapt their delivery.

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 the safe use of social media and online shopping. 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 continues 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 almost complete with some venues fully equipped and operational as community classrooms in various locations across the County Borough. They offer 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. Tutors continue to embrace the Welsh Language and culture embedded within their delivery and the promotion of 'being Welsh' and how we operate as a Nation. Staff new to the Local Authority all must undertake Level 1 Welsh course as a condition of employment and existing staff also are required to upskill and undertake the course.

### **Armed Forces Covenant**

MTCBC are proud to be one of the Local Authorities in Wales to have signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant. The Council has a proud record of valuing its armed services, past and present, and the commitment to the Covenant significantly progresses the Council's objectives to support our Armed Forces Community.

The Council leads in encouraging other organisations to support the Armed Forces community through a Partnership Armed Forces Covenant Panel. The Panel brings together

34 statutory, non-statutory and third sector organisations, all with a role in supporting civilian and military communities.

In 2022, the Authority received two coveted Ministry of Defence (MoD) awards. The first awarded to the Authority was the MoD Silver Award for its Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. This was in acknowledgement of its support to our Serving, Reservists, Veterans and their families within the Armed Forces Community. The second award went to Cyfarthfa High School for achieving the Armed Forces Friendly Schools (AFFS) Cymru Bronze status. This was in recognition of the level of support and the range of activities offered to students whose parents are either serving or have served within the British Armed Forces.

In 2023 the Council launched internally a socialising and support group for employees who are Veterans and Reservists. The group provides advice and support to employees if required.

We support the Armed Forces Employment Pathway, offering work experience opportunities to those interested in joining the Council and the Reserve or Regular forces. We also have a generous Reserves Policy, which allows employees to take additional leave to participate in Reservist related training.

In 2023, Merthyr Tydfil Council completed a data collection activity and through this we identified that there are 68 Service children (under the Welsh Government definition) in Merthyr Tydfil, in a total of 14 schools. As a result of this data, the Local Authority has been awarded a total of £4,000 from SSCE Cymru (Supporting Service Children in Education). There are also an additional three children in non-statutory year groups attending schools in Merthyr Tydfil.

### **Disability Sport**

A range of new opportunities have been developed this year targeting residents that, according to insight and data, are less active.

Targeted programmes to engage females are in place including recreational sessions such as Back to Netball, which sees females aged 40+ participating on a weekly basis. More recently activities such as Yoga have also been launched specifically for women going through the Menopause.

Several new disability specific opportunities have been supported to launch locally. A new Rock-Climbing provision is underway, as well as a new primary age Rugby programme. Bridging the Gap youth group are also being supported to launch a new after school multi sports club that will run out of Greenfield School.

A range of opportunities for older adults was launched as part of a funded 60+ Active Leisure Scheme. Community opportunities in Fitness, Table Tennis, Cycling and Walking are all underway. A new programme to bring together care homes for regular physical activity is also in the planning stage.

The 'Free Swim' programme remains in place. Whilst Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Centre remains closed, all over 60's and under 16's can swim for free at any public swim time in Aberfan pool. Alongside this, a scheme is in place with internal departments and external partners identifying families in need and providing them with vouchers that allows the whole family to swim for free.



A new Balance Bike Track has been developed in Cyfarthfa Park, utilising an unused Tennis court. The Track offers a fun, vibrant, safe and free space for children to learn to ride their bikes. As part of this a local provider, who runs balance bike sessions in the south of the borough already, will be supported to develop a new provision from the park.

Also, the remaining two Tennis courts in Cyfarthfa Park will be redeveloped, providing an opportunity for recreational Tennis for residents who want to participate but may not want to join a club.

Local groups such as Active Wheels Social Cycling group have been supported to access grant funding to purchase bikes. These bikes will then be used to support residents to participate who may not have access to their own bike, ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to cycle. The club also have access to trikes and adapted bikes to support those with impairments.

The next stage of development of the John Sellwood Community Track is underway with funding secured for permanent floodlighting. Over the winter portable lighting has been used to ensure the track can be used at night. This has been done on a one night a week basis so far. The permanent lighting will mean the track is available for more evenings during the winter months.

A new Young Ambassadors programme has been launched, engaging over 170 primary school pupils as playground leaders. A recent launch event was attended by every primary school in the County Borough, who will now utilise these pupils as a lunchtime workforce to support physical activity sessions, easing the pressure on lunchtime staff. These Ambassadors will be mentored and supported with resources to fulfil their roles.

The SETUP employability programme with Merthyr College continued. The programme provides students seeking to work in the sport sector with the knowledge, skills and experience to do so. Already the programme has seen several students move into placements and even casual paid employment in the sport sector alongside their studies.

A new volunteer recruitment programme was put in place, match-making potential volunteers with local providers that need support, as providers have reported losing workforce since the COVID-19 pandemic. Potential volunteers will be supported with free training to provide them with the skills and knowledge in return for committing to local volunteering placements.

Local clubs that use Local Authority pitches have been supported with a freeze on pitch fees, to aid them with COVID-19 pandemic recovery, after consultation showed that clubs were struggling with funding of pitch fees. This freeze remains in place until 2024/2025.

Clubs were supported with a range of free training opportunities, allowing them to upskill their workforce. Recent training opportunities have included First Aid, Safeguarding, Disability Inclusion Training and Social Media development.

### **Welsh Language**

Below is some of the key work that took place to promote and support the Welsh Language. The full details of all achievements for this period can be found in the Council's Welsh Language Annual Monitoring Report for 2022-2023.

#### **Urdd Eisteddfod 2022**

The National Urdd Eisteddfod took place in Denbighshire with Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Santes Tudful and Pen Y Dre High School representing Merthyr Tydfil in numerous competitions. Pen Y Dre High School was successful in coming first, second and third in several recitation competitions for learners.

#### Diwrnod Shwmae Su'mae

To build on the success of the previous annual Diwrnod Shwmae Su'mae event, this year's event was arranged in conjunction with partners of the Welsh Education Forum (WEF) and the Welsh Language Strategy Steering Group. It was opened by the Director of Education & Welsh Language from Welsh Government. The event was held at Cyfarthfa Park on October 15 2022. Children from Pantyscallog Primary School, Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Santes Tudful, Rhyd Y Grug and Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun provided entertainment as did a local harpist and Dowlais Male Voice Choir. Entertainment for the younger children was provided by the bilingual company Do Rei Mi Canu and pupils from Ysgol Coed Y Dderwen also offered a variety of activities through the medium of Welsh.

Both the Chief Executive and Head of Communications of the Football Association of Wales were present to undertake a question-and-answer session on how the Welsh language has been used and embedded into the organisation.

Between 300 and 400 people attended the event allowing children, young people and the wider community to engage with the Welsh Language. There were more businesses present than in 2021 and the event provided positive publicity for the use of the Welsh language across Merthyr Tydfil. The partners who participated in the event were Mudiad Meithrin, Menter Iaith Merthyr Tudful, Canolfan Soar, Rhieni Dros Addysg Gymraeg, Dysgu Cymraeg Morgannwg, Wellbeing Merthyr, Early Years Department Family Information Service of MTCBC and The College Merthyr Tydfil. During the event a competition was launched jointly between The College and MTCBC to name the Shwmaeronment mascot. The winner (a pupil from Cyfarthfa Park Primary School) received a signed Welsh football shirt and ball.

#### 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. Courses and learning this year have been held mostly online through Microsoft Teams with some sessions returning to face-to-face learning.

The Council currently has members of staff learning Welsh in the workplace ranging from Entry level to intermediate level 1 and 2 and some on Higher. Level 1 Welsh e-learning courses are being promoted to staff as part of our Covid-19 recovery and wider improvement planning (Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan (RT&I Plan) in developing a learning culture across the Council.

Working in partnership with Dysgu Cymraeg Morgannwg we also continue to provide ongoing social opportunities for learners to listen and practice using Welsh. Previously, learners of the Council have assisted Dysgu Cymraeg Morgannwg with the marketing of courses and offer any support to promote the Welsh language throughout the County Borough. As part of the five-year Welsh Language Strategy and the Welsh Education Strategic Plan, four Welsh learners of the Council contributed to the implementation projects

by undertaking activities stating the reasons they decided to learn Welsh and the benefits they have seen from 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 envisage 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. With the opening of Marsh House in 2024, we will be looking at an exit plan from Bed & Breakfast provisions and supporting the utilisation of the support self-contained flats which meet the legal requirements in The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 regarding suitability of accommodation.

The introduction of the Rented Homes Act 2016 on 1 December 2022 saw a lot of private landlords leaving the sector and selling their accommodation, leaving families under notice to vacate their properties. This has increased the demand on housing and the homelessness services, with more families having to be placed in temporary accommodation. However, we are developing internally a private leasing scheme with funding from Welsh Government to utilise properties within this sector to maximise our housing stock and discharge our statutory duty.

Welsh Government also extended help to families and individuals leaving Ukraine as the crisis escalated, 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. We have started engaging with resettlement centres across Wales in resettling families into our area, through a Welsh Government funded program and have successfully rehoused two families into the area.

### **Non-statutory - Housing Support Grant**

Housing support services continue to deliver vital support and assistance to those who require it, to prevent and alleviate homelessness. Post-pandemic, there has been an increased demand for reactive homelessness services such as our 24 staffed supported accommodations for those who would have no alternative than to sleep rough. There continues to be far greater demand than we can accommodate within our hostels and supported accommodations, meaning that many vulnerable people are residing in temporary B&B accommodation. Housing support grant funds skilled staff to support these individuals within their temporary accommodation, addressing causes of homelessness, building resilience and preparing them for independent living.

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 February 2024.

A new 5 unit supported accommodation for young people opened in January 2023. This fully renovated and re-purposed building provides 24 hour supported accommodation for young people with low-level support needs who are engaging in education or training either at the Compass or elsewhere.

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 County Borough. This included specialist provision for those with criminal offending histories, young people, older people, those with mental health needs, substance dependencies and people with disabilities.

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 2021-2022, regional (Cwm Taff Morgannwg) research studies were undertaken, which were externally commissioned to look at the housing needs of LGBTQ+ individuals. 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 report produced recommendations which as a region we are now addressing. During 2022-2023 changes have been made to the way in which we commission, ensuring that training in relation to the needs of LGBTQ+ people is undertaken by all our support staff who work across our housing support services. This requirement now forms part of our basic contracts and will be rolled out as contracts are renewed. We are also looking at the way in which we collect data regarding gender and sexual orientation which will assist us with future commissioning decisions.

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

## **Theme: Accessible Services**

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

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

#### **Accessibility**

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

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

Accessibility regulations were enacted for public sector bodies on September 23, 2018, mandating the improvement of website accessibility. Over the past years we've been dedicated to enhancing accessibility. An Accessibility Working Group was established in 2021, which comprises key staff members whose aim is to raise awareness internally about digital accessibility and ensure consistency across all our services, reducing barriers for the public.

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

Furthermore, in January 2022 we implemented Silktide which is a software package used to help identify and rectify issues on our corporate website, including spelling and grammar mistakes, accessibility compliance, and unstructured documents.

Silktide has a ranking system that evaluates user experience. It assesses all Council websites in the UK and gives them accessibility scores. In January 2022, MTCBC was one of the worst performing with a score of 40%. But with hard work we have significantly improved our accessibility ranking and in July 2022 we scored 100% which we have maintained. MTCBC is now ranked joint 1<sup>st</sup> out of all the 403 UK websites tested for accessibility and we are the only Welsh Council to be in the top 20.

To enhance our staff's capabilities, training from Learning Disability Wales on "Making Information Easy to Read and Understand" was circulated to staff. This training aimed to improve how we create documents for people with learning disabilities ensuring they have a right to information they can understand so they can make informed choices, speak up, and take part in their communities.

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

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

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

## Procurement

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Welsh Language tenders

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

### Modern Slavery Statement

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Workforce Data

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

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

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

The information below shows the workforce data as of 31 March 2023.

### Overall Staff Data

Employed staff at the Council as of 31 March 2023

Number of staff in post = 2443, of which:

| Permanent | Fixed Term | Full Time | Part Time |
|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| 1925      | 518        | 1496      | 947       |

### Age

| 16-34 | 35-54 | 55-64 | 65+ | TOTAL |
|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------|
| 581   | 1309  | 488   | 65  | 2443  |

**Disability**

| Deaf/Hard of Hearing | Mental Health Difficulties | Mobility Impairment | Learning Impairment | Long-Standing Illness | Visual Impairment |
|----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 11                   | 8                          | 6                   | 4                   | 11                    | 1                 |

| Other | No Disability | Prefer not to Answer/Not Known | TOTAL |
|-------|---------------|--------------------------------|-------|
| 6     | 1280          | 1116                           | 2443  |

**Gender**

| Male | Female | TOTAL |
|------|--------|-------|
| 610  | 1833   | 2443  |

**Sexual Orientation**

| Gay Woman/Lesbian | Gay Man | Bisexual | Heterosexual/Straight | Other | Prefer not to Answer/Not Known | TOTAL |
|-------------------|---------|----------|-----------------------|-------|--------------------------------|-------|
| 20                | 18      | 9        | 2130                  | 6     | 260                            | 2443  |

**Religion**

| Christianity | No Religion | Buddhism | Judaism | Islamic | Hinduism | OTHER | Prefer not to Answer/Not Known | TOTAL |
|--------------|-------------|----------|---------|---------|----------|-------|--------------------------------|-------|
| 603          | 1166        | 6        | 1       | 7       | 0        | 147   | 513                            | 2443  |

### Ethnicity

| White British | White/ Other | Asian | Black Caribbean | Black OTHER | Mixed Race | Prefer not to Answer/Not Known | TOTAL |
|---------------|--------------|-------|-----------------|-------------|------------|--------------------------------|-------|
| 2112          | 35           | 8     | 1               | 1           | 2          | 284                            | 2443  |

### First Language

| English | Welsh    | Arabic | Polish                         | German | Portuguese | French | Hungarian | Romanian |
|---------|----------|--------|--------------------------------|--------|------------|--------|-----------|----------|
| 1848    | 36       | 1      | 12                             | 1      | 2          | 1      | 1         | 1        |
| Spanish | Filipino | Thai   | Prefer not to Answer/Not Known |        |            | Urdu   | TOTAL     |          |
| 2       | 1        | 2      | 534                            |        |            | 1      | 2443      |          |

### People Profile - Salary

| Salary                               | All Staff |           |           |           |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                                      | Male      |           | Female    |           |
|                                      | Full Time | Part Time | Full Time | Part Time |
| £0 - £4,999                          | 0         | 16        | 0         | 314       |
| £5,000 - £9,999                      | 1         | 25        | 0         | 195       |
| £10,000 - £14,999                    | 13        | 16        | 2         | 215       |
| £15,000 - £19,999                    | 20        | 15        | 156       | 174       |
| £20,000 - £24,999                    | 108       | 1         | 154       | 104       |
| £25,000 - £29,999                    | 134       | 22        | 136       | 47        |
| £30,000 - £39,999                    | 90        | 3         | 158       | 39        |
| £40,000 - £49,999                    | 119       | 2         | 292       | 8         |
| £50,000 - £59,999                    | 16        | 0         | 33        | 1         |
| £60,000 - £69,999                    | 12        | 0         | 16        | 1         |
| £70,000+                             | 18        | 0         | 18        | 0         |
| Calculated: Total number of salaries | 531       | 100       | 965       | 1098      |

NB - The figures include staff with multiple posts = 2694 OCCUPIED POSTS

Total Jobs advertised 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 = 378

Total No of Job Applications 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 = 2195

Total No of Online Applications = 2039

In terms of the number of staff who applied for a job internally at the Council, we received 354 internal applications of which 71 were Male and 283 were Female.

In terms of external applicants, the Council received 1805 external applications of which 534 were Male and 1271 were Female.

In terms of Agency Applications, the council received 36 applications, of which 15 were male and 21 were female.

|                                | Number of employees involved in grievance procedure |  |  |   |  |
|--------------------------------|---|--|--|---|--|
| Protected Characteristics      | As the complainant                                  | A person against whom a complaint was made | Number of employees subject to disciplinary procedures | Number of employees who have left the Local Authority | Number of Staff taking Maternity Leave |
| <b>Age</b>                     | <b>4</b>  | <b>4</b>                                   | <b>7</b>   | <b>275</b>  | <b>115</b>                             |
| 16-34                          | 1   | 0  | 1  | 55  | 60                                     |
| 35-54                          | 2   | 1  | 4  | 180   | 55                                     |
| 55-64                          | 1   | 3  | 2  | 25  | 0                                      |
| 65+                            | 0   | 0  | 0  | 15  | 0                                      |
|                                |   |  |  |   |  |
| <b>Sex</b>                     |   |  |  |   |  |
| Male                           | 3   | 4  | 4  | 80  | 0                                      |
| Female                         | 1   | 0  | 3  | 95  | 115                                    |
|                                |   |  |  |   |  |
| <b>Disability</b>              |   |  |  |   |  |
| Disabled                       | 1   | 0  | 0  | 0   | 0                                      |
| Non-Disabled                   | 3   | 4  | 5  | 200   | 70                                     |
| Prefer not to Answer/Not Known | 0   | 0  | 2  | 75  | 45                                     |
|                                |   |  |  |   |  |
| <b>Sexual Orientation</b>      |   |  |  |   |  |
| Heterosexual                   | 4   | 4  | 7  | 150   | 105                                    |
| Lesbian/Gay                    | 0   | 0  | 0  | 0   | 0                                      |
| Bi-Sexual                      | 0   | 0  | 0  | 0   | 0                                      |
| Other                          | 0   | 0  | 0  | 125   | 10                                     |
| Prefer not to Answer/Not Known | 0   | 0  | 0  | 0   | 0                                      |
|                                |   |  |  |   |  |
| <b>Ethnic Group</b>            |   |  |  |   |  |
| English/Welsh                  | 4   | 4  | 7  | 0   | 103                                    |
| White Other                    | 0   | 0  | 0  | 0   | 0                                      |
| Asian                          | 0   | 0  | 0  | 0   | 0                                      |

|                                  |   |   |   |    |    |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|----|----|
| Black African                    | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  | 0  |
| Prefer not to Answer/Not Known   | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  | 12 |
|                                  |   |   |   |    |    |
| <b>Religion or Belief</b>        |   |   |   |    |    |
| No Religion                      | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 20 |
| Christianity (all Denominations) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 40 | 35 |
| Islamic                          | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  | 0  |
| Buddhism                         | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  | 0  |
| Other                            | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  | 0  |
| Prefer not to Answer/Not Known   | 3 | 2 | 4 | 70 | 60 |

## **Theme: Gender/Equal pay**

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

#### **Gender/Equal Pay**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Next Steps

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

We are going to continue with 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, so we can provide 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 relating to, for example, neurodiversity to ensure fair interviews.

The launch of the accessibility toolbar on our corporate website has enabled residents to have better access to our information and it gives them the knowledge about services we provide. We want to continue to raise awareness of this function to the wider community.

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 Local Authority and with partners, plus Introduce more training on topics to all staff.

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

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



## Contact Details

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

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