

Blaenau Gwent Strategic Equality Plan

2020 - 2024

“A more equal Wales”



Blaenau Gwent Strategic Equality Plan

2020-24

This document (including Easy Read version) is available electronically at the Council's website:

<https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/council/equalities-welsh-language/equality-information-advice/>

Hard copies are available at each of Blaenau Gwent's local libraries.

If you require this document in a different format, e.g. large print, Braille, audio version, etc. please contact:

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



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A Welcome

We are pleased to present Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's third **Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24**. A plan which sets out how we will meet our duties under the Equality (Wales) Act 2010.

Putting fairness and equality at the heart of everything we do is central to maximising well-being outcomes for our residents, local communities, staff and visitors, now and in the future.

We recognise as public service providers we have a key role to play in making a real difference to people's lives. Therefore, we will continue to strive to be a 'fair and equitable' organisation as outlined in our **Corporate Plan 2018-22**.

To achieve this, our plan sets out the key steps we will take over the next four years to strengthen and advance equality across Blaenau Gwent. The steps build on the progress we have already made and will continue to support in order to enable meaningful change.

We wish to thank everyone who has been actively involved in the engagement processes to develop this plan and look forward to working together with you to make it a success.



Councillor Nigel Daniels
Leader of the Council



Michelle Morris
Managing Director

Summary of Our Equality Objectives

We will be an organisation who ensures fairness and equality is in everything that we do.

We will be an equal opportunity employer with a workforce that values equality and diversity.

We will support children and young people, particularly those with protected characteristics, to achieve their learning ambitions.

We will promote and support safe, friendly and cohesive communities.

We will ensure there is meaningful involvement with people who have protected characteristics and key stakeholders that represent their interests.

We will strive to tackle inequality caused by poverty for people who have protected characteristics.

Introduction

Meeting the Equality Act 2010

Under the Equality Act 2010 (the Act) the Council has a statutory duty to prepare and publish a Strategic Equality Plan and equality objectives every four years. During the plans development we also have a duty to involve people, including those protected by the Act, who have an interest in Council functions.

The Act aims to put fairness at the heart of society and is a law which protects people because of:

Age - A person belonging to a particular age (e.g. 32 year olds) or range of ages (e.g. 18 - 30 year olds).

Disability – For example, a physical, or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Gender reassignment - For example, transgender. People who were born into their body and feel it is not right for them. This might mean that they want to change from being a woman to a man, or a man to a woman.

Marriage and civil partnerships - Marriage is defined as a 'union between a man and a woman'. Civil partnerships are legally recognising 'same-sex couples' relationships. Civil partners must be treated the same as married couples on a wide range of legal matters. The Act applies to this characteristic, but only in respect of the requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination.

Pregnancy and maternity – The condition of being pregnant, or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth, and is linked to maternity, or paternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks' after giving birth, and includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.

Race - This refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origins.

Religion or belief (including non-belief) - Religion and belief includes religious and philosophical beliefs including lack of belief (e.g. Atheism). Generally, a belief should affect your life choices, or the way you live, for it to be included in the definition.

Sex - A man or a woman.

Sexual orientation - Being heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Our third Strategic Equality Plan

This is the Council's third Strategic Equality Plan which sets out our [equality objectives](#). It aims to strengthen and advance equality across all of our service areas and achieve meaningful outcomes for local residents, communities, staff and visitors.

It also outlines our intended steps for meeting our general **Public Sector Equality Duties** which are to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- Advance equality of opportunity; and
- Foster good relations.

Further information on our specific duties can be found within our [Supporting Documents](#) on page 27.

We recognise as a Council that the successful delivery of this plan will require us to have an effective framework in place that has:

- Strong political and professional leadership;
- A 'One Council' approach for delivering equality across the organisation;
- Clear aims, objectives and actions;
- A meaningful involvement and engagement programme; and
- Effective monitoring and performance arrangements.

Further information on how we developed our plan can be found in our [Supporting Documents](#) from page 43.

Introducing our equality objectives

Outlined below are our equality objectives which are all of equal status and are to be delivered across the four years of the plan:

- We will be an organisation who ensures fairness and equality is in everything that we do.
- We will be an equal opportunity employer with a workforce that values equality and diversity.
- We will support children and young people, particularly those with protected characteristics, to achieve their learning ambitions.
- We will promote and support safe, friendly and cohesive communities.
- We will ensure there is meaningful involvement with people who have protected characteristics and key stakeholders that represent their interests.
- We will strive to tackle inequality caused by poverty for people who have protected characteristics.

Framing our equality objectives

Our equality objectives are 'themed' as we recognise that many of the key equality issues we have identified are not isolated to one specific 'protected characteristic'. The steps we take to deliver the objectives will also deliver positive equality outcomes for people covered by one, or more of the protected characteristics.

Further information on how we intend to meet the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generation (Wales) Act can be found within our [Supporting Documents](#) on page 40.

Monitoring our plan

Monitoring the plan through our corporate business planning arrangements will be an important step to ensure equality is mainstreamed and embedded across our working practices and service delivery. Through this process we will give careful consideration to how effective progress is made, and as part of our annual review arrangements will consider whether our objectives remain appropriate.

How we intend to [monitor and review our plan](#) can be found on page 22.

Section Overview

Information about each of our six equality objectives can be found from pages 8 to 21. Each objective includes the following sub-sections:

- Overview
- What people have told us?
- Why is this equality objective important?
- What good work are we building on?
- Some of the key steps we will take to meet this equality objective
- What difference do we want to make?

EQUALITY OBJECTIVE: We will be an organisation who ensures fairness and equality is in everything that we do

Overview

We recognise the important role of the Council as a public service provider to strengthen and advance equality across Blaenau Gwent.

In order to deliver meaningful outcomes for our staff, citizens, local communities, and stakeholders we must put fairness and equality at the heart of everything we do. Therefore, delivering on our equality duties must be 'business as usual'. We emphasise this in our Corporate Plan 2018-22 through our core value of being fair and equitable.

Achieving this will require good political and professional leadership, as well as an effective framework for delivery, alongside a 'One Council' approach.

What people have told us?

During our '**Tell us what you think about equalities**', our formal involvement and engagement programme, respondents generally agreed that this objective is important. For example, they recognised this objective as being vital in supporting the delivery of our plan as a whole, over the next four years. Respondents also told us that this objective needs to be more than just words and that the '**Council needs to clearly demonstrate**' its delivery through meaningful action which leads to positive equality outcomes being achieved. Furthermore, respondents felt that this objective would assist the Council in getting to know and understand its residents better and also suggested that more work needs to be done to promote examples of the good work already happening across Blaenau Gwent to support the equality agenda.

Why is this equality objective important?

Strengthening our existing internal and external practices is vital to make sure equality is embedded in everything we do and delivered as 'business as usual'.

What good work are we building on?



Some of the key steps we will take to meet this equality objective...

- Political and professional leadership teams accountable for owning and supporting the effective delivery of the plan;
- Effectively integrate equality and diversity within our corporate and strategic decision-making, through an updated Equality Impact Assessment process;
- Progress against the delivery of our equality objectives undertaken via the Council's business planning arrangements;
- Undertake research to identify appropriate data and intelligence in relation to equality and diversity to support service delivery and decision-making;
- Publish our equality information using an open source format.

What difference do we want to make?

We want to raise the profile of the equality agenda and ensure it is effectively mainstreamed across the organisation in order to maximise the equality outcomes we achieve.

EQUALITY OBJECTIVE: We will be an equal opportunity employer with a workforce that values equality and diversity

Overview

We recognise the value of being an equal opportunity employer and being identified as an employer of choice. We want to take the necessary steps to create and maintain a diverse workforce as we acknowledge the real benefits this can bring to the organisation as well as the local people and communities we serve.

We recognise that having a '*workforce that values equality and diversity*' is vital if we want to embed equality as 'business as usual', across all of our working practices. It is also central in supporting the delivery of our core organisational value of being a '*fair and equitable*' organisation.

Achieving this objective will require us to review the current diversity of our workforce and working together with our staff we will look to identify how and where improvements can be made.

In delivering this objective, we aim to ensure that new and existing staff are provided with the appropriate training, guidance and support and that the key principles of the Strategic Equality Plan is integrated with other key strategies such as the Workforce Development Strategy.

The engagement and involvement of staff will be key in supporting the delivery of this well-being objective. Therefore, we will look to use our established communication methods, such as staff engagement sessions, management briefing events and conferences. We will also look to re-establish an equality and diversity working group to sit alongside our staff well-being group.

What people have told us?

During our **‘Tell us what you think about equalities’**, our formal involvement and engagement programme, respondents generally agreed that this objective is important. Respondents told us that equality, diversity and inclusion training for staff is **‘very important’** and that staff should at least receive basic awareness training in order to support a positive workplace environment, and also to ensure equality sits at the heart of how we deliver our services. Furthermore, respondents highlighted that specialised training should be **‘appropriate to need’**, and also include access to **‘support and advice’** to ensure staff are equipped to deal with equality issues competently, efficiently and effectively.

Why is this equality objective important?

This equality objective will help us in our journey towards becoming an equality opportunity employer, who is representative of the local people and communities we serve and therefore better able to support local need and deliver meaningful outcomes.

Furthermore, having a workforce which **‘values equality and diversity’** will be key in supporting the creation of positive working environments which promote a good working culture whereby all staff feel valued and supported.

What good work are we building on?

Blaenau Gwent &
Caerphilly
Workforce
Development
Programme

Provide bespoke
training such as
mental health
awareness

Supporting
National equalities
campaigns such
as International
Women’s Day

Some of the key steps we will take to meet this equality objective...

- Assess what our current position is an 'equal opportunity employer' by reviewing the diversity of our workforce and identify key steps to support improvement;
- Test to what degree our workforce values equality and diversity through staff engagement and involvement and identify key steps to support improvement;
- Identify staff who require equality, diversity and inclusion training (including induction, general and specialised) and ensure training opportunities are accessible;
- Operate a Staff Well-being Network, with representation from across the whole organisation.

What difference do we want to make?

We want to celebrate and recognise the value of being a diverse organisation and have a workforce who recognises the importance of the equality agenda for the local people and communities it serves.

EQUALITY OBJECTIVE: We will support children and young people, particularly those with protected characteristics, to achieve their learning ambitions

Overview

Education is identified as a key priority within our [Corporate Plan 2018-22](#) and we are committed to *‘improving pupil outcomes, progress and well-being, particularly for our most able and vulnerable pupils’*.

We believe that everyone should have appropriate access to learning opportunities and the support required to enable them to achieve their learning ambitions. Recognising that learning provides the foundation for better life prospects. However, the specific focus of this objective will be to ensure we are maximising the learning outcomes of pupils who are covered by one, or more of the protected characteristics as identified within the Act, particularly where gaps in educational attainment are identified.

To help us achieve this we will consider findings from the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s *‘Is Wales Fairer?’* National Report regarding gaps in learning outcomes for learners protected by the Act and will undertake research to determine whether these findings apply to Blaenau Gwent learners and if so, what steps need to be taken to support improvements.

Another key aim of our Corporate Plan 2018-22 is to provide *‘access to skills development’*. Working together with our partners we also aim to support the learning of parents and carers. Our holistic approach seeks to maximise opportunities for prosperity for all as part of our Cardiff City Regional deal commitments.

What people have told us?

During our **'Tell us what you think about equalities'**, our formal involvement and engagement programme, respondents agreed that this objective is very important.

Respondents told us that equality, diversity and inclusion training for school-based staff is **'important'** and also having adequate educational provision to **'support learners with learning difficulties'** as being key to supporting pupils through all stages of development. Furthermore, respondents emphasised the importance of continuing to raise awareness and understanding about equality within educational provision, alongside the importance of **'integration'** in that **'children and young people shouldn't be singled out'** because they have one, or more protected characteristic.

Why is this equality objective important?

This equality objective is important because it focuses on ensuring that children and young people are fully supported to fulfil their learning ambitions. We recognise the impact learning can have on a child, or young person in terms of their life prospects and well-being, now and into the future.

Focusing on improving the educational attainment of 'vulnerable learners' and those covered by the Act is key to ensuring children and young people are not disadvantaged, and that opportunities to fulfill their learning ambitions are created.

This equality objective is important as providing quality learning opportunities for children and young people needs is key in creating the right learning environments which enables everyone to achieve well, enjoy learning and feel safe.

What good work are we building on?

Schools
Strategic
Equalities
Plans

Safer Schools
Partnership

Additional
Learning Needs –
Provision
Improvement Plan

Some of the key steps we will take to meet this equality objective...

- Provide advice and guidance to support the development and delivery of School's Strategic Equality Plans and annually review progress;
- Undertake local research to determine if children and young people covered by the Act are successfully achieving their learning ambitions and scope appropriate steps where areas for improvement have been identified;
- Advise and guide School based staff on equality issues as required.

What difference do we want to make?

We want to create safe learning environments which enable children and young people, particularly those with protected characteristics, to successfully achieve their learning ambitions.

EQUALITY OBJECTIVE: We will promote and support safe, friendly and cohesive communities

Overview

As a member of Blaenau Gwent's Public Services Board we are committed to supporting 'fair and safe communities'. Working with our partners, through the local Community Safety Hub we actively support the development of cohesive communities.

As part of Welsh Government's commitment towards Community Cohesion we are members of West Gwent's Cohesion Steering Group and will continue to support the delivery of this important programme.

Working with our partners we will deliver key activities and projects which look to strengthen community spirits, bring communities together and supports resilience across Blaenau Gwent.

What people have told us?

During our '**Tell us what you think about equalities**', our formal involvement and engagement programme, respondents agreed that this objective is very important.

Respondents told us that creating safe and friendly communities '**is important for everyone**' and more work to '**promote respect and help improve community spirit**' was viewed as positive. Furthermore, respondents told us that we should continue to build on the work already happening in schools and promote events such as the 'Voices of Valleys' which brings people from different communities from Blaenau Gwent together.

Why is this equality objective important?

Creating a safe and friendly Blaenau Gwent is vital if we want to create a place where everyone feels they belong and can play an active role in society. Undertaking work to develop strong and vibrant communities is vital if we want to create good places to live where everyone gets on together. This equality objective is important for developing mutual respect and understanding between people which supports increased community spirit and togetherness.

What good work are we building on?

Community Safety
Partnership
Hub

Hate Crime
Awareness
Campaign

EU Settlement
Scheme and
Citizen Rights
Programme

Some of the key steps we will take to meet this equality objective...

- Work with partners to support the delivery of the West Gwent Community Cohesion programme in Blaenau Gwent;
- Support projects which promotes increased awareness and understanding and encourage people to get on together;
- Delivery of effective social media campaigns to mitigates community tensions and dispels myths.

What difference do we want to make?

We want to create attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.

EQUALITY OBJECTIVE: We will ensure there is meaningful involvement with people who have protected characteristics and key stakeholders that represent their interests

Overview

Our approach for undertaking meaningful involvement is set out within the Council's Engagement Strategy 2018-23. We recognise the importance of meaningful involvement which enables people, communities and stakeholders to have a voice, and have genuine opportunities to work together with us to help improve the delivery of our services.

In-line with the National Principles for Public Engagement and the National Principles for Children and Young People's Participation we will ensure that people covered by one, or more of the protected characteristics are given meaningful opportunities to influence key decisions which affect them.

What people have told us?

During our '**Tell us what you think about equalities**', our formal involvement and engagement programme, respondents agreed that this objective is very important. Respondents told us that ensuring people's voices are heard and listened to will help the Council better understand need which will lead to better decision-making. Respondents told us that the Council should engage and involve local people and communities in ways which encourage greater participation, with examples given such as '*visit groups*' across Blaenau Gwent. Respondents also felt more could be done to understand people's '*lived experiences*'.

Why is this equality objective important?

People's viewpoints, stories and insights are powerful and can help lead to positive change. This objective is important as it seeks to ensure we proactively involve local people and communities in the work that we do and ensure people with protected characteristics get to influence the decisions we make which can have the greatest impact on them.

What good work are we building on?



Some of the key steps we will take to meet this equality objective...

- Establish a 'Voices of the Valleys' Equality Forum;
- Strengthen Blaenau Gwent Council's Citizen Panel;
- Demonstrate our commitment towards Children & Young People's Participation by working in partnership with Children in Wales;
- Actively promote engagement opportunities aimed at members of the public who share protected characteristics.

What difference do we want to make?

We want to deliver the best possible services for our customers and by creating meaningful opportunities to work together with local people and communities we will be able to better respond to need.

EQUALITY OBJECTIVE: We will strive to tackle inequality caused by poverty for people who have protected characteristics

Overview

Welsh Government is set to launch a new Public Sector Equality Duty, called the 'socio-economic duty' which will be placed on named public bodies, such as Local Authorities, in-line with the requirements of the Act.

Following its commencement, which is planned to be in April 2020, the Council will be required to demonstrate how it will look to tackle inequality caused by poverty, specifically when the Council makes big decisions about the way it plans and delivers its services, particularly in areas such as education, health and housing.

Further information about the new duty can be found in '[Meeting Welsh Government's New Public Sector Equality Duty – The Socio-economic duty](#)' on page 42.

What people have told us?

During our '**Tell us what you think about equalities**', our formal involvement and engagement programme, respondents agreed that this objective was a very important topic. However, respondents felt that our proposed draft objective, which was 'We will strive to reduce poverty', was too broad and needed to have a greater focus on tackling inequality caused by poverty. There was a concern that the objective would not be achievable and so in response to feedback we amended the wording of this objective accordingly to make it more specific. Respondents also feedback the term '**poverty**' is unclear and is difficult to measure, but suggested '**looking at the causes of poverty**' as being key to taking this work forward.

Why is this equality objective important?

As a public service provider it is vital that the big decisions we make are fair and that we provide local people and communities with life chances and opportunities regardless of their socio-economic background. This objective will enable us to take steps towards developing a greater understanding of inequality caused by poverty and to be able to better support those most at risk of disadvantage.

What good work are we building on?



Blaenau Gwent
Well-being
Assessment

Anti-poverty
programmes
such as
Families First,
Flying Start

Some of the key steps we will take to meet this equality objective...

- Work alongside Welsh Government in preparing to meet the requirements of the new 'socio-economic duty';
- Undertake research and analysis to understand Blaenau Gwent's socio-economic position;
- Work with regional partners on key programmes to reduce inequality caused by poverty;
- Work with partners on key projects to support those most vulnerable in our communities.

What difference do we want to make?

We want to ensure that decisions we take are fair and are based on quality evidence to ensure local people and communities have life chances and opportunities regardless of their socio-economic background.

Monitoring and reviewing our plan

Throughout the life cycle of the plan we will monitor and review our progress against the intended steps, or areas for delivery we have identified, which will enable us to achieve our equality objectives.

To enable us to embed and mainstream our equality work across all our service delivery, our progress will be reported in-line with our corporate performance management arrangements and effectiveness and equality outcomes will be measured through our business planning arrangements.

The Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 will also be subject to regular reporting and monitoring through the Council's democratic processes, with the annual report submitted for oversight through the Council's Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee.

Throughout this process, we will also consider how progress is being achieved for each of the protected characteristics. Furthermore, as part of our annual review arrangements, which will be supported by the Council's Political and Professional Leadership Team, we will consider whether our objectives remain appropriate.

In-line with our equality duties we will also publish an annual report on the Council's Website, but also make it available to appropriate key partners, stakeholders and citizens.

Blaenau Gwent Strategic Equality Plan

Supporting Documents

“A more equal Wales”



Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council is one of 22 unitary authorities in Wales, which were formed in 1996 following the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994. The area was formerly part of Gwent County Council.

Blaenau Gwent is made up of 16 electoral wards which are represented by 42 members (councillors) who are elected every four years by the people of Blaenau Gwent. The Council operates a Cabinet system, which is led by the Leader of the Council. The cabinet is made up of five executive portfolios and five main scrutiny committees, and three joint scrutiny committees.

A Corporate Leadership Team, consisting of the Managing Director; three Corporate Directors covering Social Services, Education, and Regeneration and Community Services; and two Chief Officers covering Finance, and Commercial services. The Team are responsible for the strategic management of the Council's business.

As of February 2020, there were 2,887 paid employees of the Council. Of these, 683 (23.6%) were male and 2,204 (76.3%) were female. This makes the Council the largest employer in Blaenau Gwent.

The latest Staff Opinion Survey carried out in 2019, which was completed by 726 staff, showed that of those completing the question, 20% were male and 72% were female; 2% were 16 to 24; 16% were 25 to 34; 51% were 35 to 54; 20% were 55 and over and 11% preferred not to say.

Out of the total number of respondents 34 (5%) told us that they have a disability according to the Equality Act 2010's definition and 625 (87%) said they did not, and 59 (8%) preferred not to say.

The Council's Corporate Plan 2018-22 sets out the organisations vision, core values and priorities and is reviewed and adapted on an annual basis. It also refers to a 'One Council' approach which emphasises the important role the whole organisation has on working towards the commitments set out within this plan.

Our Core Vision

**Proud Heritage,
Strong Communities,
Brighter Future**

Our Core Values

Proud &
Ambitious

Trust &
Integrity

Working
Together

Raising
Aspirations

Fair &
Equitable

Our Council Priorities



Our Strategic Equality Plan is not a standalone plan, it links closely to a number of key Council and Partnership strategies, plans, policies and frameworks, such as the:

- Blaenau Gwent's local well-being plan 'The Blaenau Gwent We Want, 2018-2023';
- Age Friendly Blaenau Gwent;
- Welsh Language Promotion Strategy;
- Corporate Performance Framework;
- Human Resource Policies, Procedures and Protocols.

Understanding our Equality Act 2010 specific duties

As well as our general duties, the Council has a number of specific duties which it must take account of. In Wales, the specific duties are set by the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 as follows:

- Equality Objectives and Strategic Equality Plans
- Engagement
- Assessment of impact
- Equality information
- Employment information, pay differences and staff training
- Equal Pay
- Gender Pay
- Procurement
- Reporting and Publishing

Equality Objectives and Strategic Equality Plans

The purpose of the objectives and plans is to enable the delivery of measurable equality outcomes which improve the lives of individuals and communities. The Council is required to review, develop and publish Equality Objectives and a Strategic Equality Plan every four years.

Engagement

Understanding the diversity of the Blaenau Gwent population will allow the Council to shape service provision in the best way. The Council must carry out meaningful engagement, gathering relevant information when engaging people, and involve people who represent the interests of those who share one or more of the protected characteristics and have an interest in the way that the Council carries out its functions.

Assessment of impact

An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is carried out when a policy or practice is proposed or being reviewed, and looks for evidence of adverse impact against people or groups from the nine protected characteristics. The Council must carry out Equality Impact Assessments on policies, procedures, functions, service delivery and financial savings proposals.

A copy of this plans EQIA can be found in the [Support Documents](#) from page 53.

Equality information

Strategic Equality Plans, Equality Objectives and Equality Impact Assessment, as prescribed by the Equality Act 2010, must be based on robust evidence. This would include use of research, information, data and statistics at a local, regional and national level. Alongside qualitative data through meaningful and timely engagement, particularly engagement with people covered by the protected characteristics so that decision making can be influenced.

Employment information, pay differences and staff training

The Council must collect extensive employment information which includes data on recruitment and retention, promotion, training opportunities, and grievance and disciplinary actions on an annual basis. This information must be collected for each of the protected characteristics. Data is also required with regard to male and female employees on job roles, pay and grading, contract type and working pattern. It is important to note that the Council cannot require an employee to disclose information in relation to the

protected characteristics and should provide an 'unknown' or 'prefer not to say' category.

Equal pay

Following the completion of the Equal Pay project (associated to the Strategic Equality Plan 2012 to 2016), a new pay and grading structure was developed, using a country wide consistent job evaluation and pay modelling criteria. This also aligned the salaries of male and female dominated roles in order to remove any historical discrimination that may have been. New and amended roles continue to be Job Evaluated to maintain fairness.

Gender Pay

The gender pay gap is an equality measure that shows the difference in average earnings between women and men. The UK gender pay gap is just over 18% (2018). At Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, we are confident that men and women are paid equally for doing equivalent jobs across the business. The gender pay gap at Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council shows that the workforce is predominantly female with women occupying a high percentage of jobs across all four pay quartiles. The pay gap in Blaenau Gwent is significantly lower than the national average and has further improved declining 7.06% between the mean pay of men and women. The Gender Pay Gap information required under the statutory requirements of the Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017 is presented and published through the Council's Pay Policy Statement 2019/20.

Procurement

This specific duty applies when Councils are procuring works, goods or services from other organisations on the basis of a 'relevant agreement'. Relevant agreements include the award of a 'public contract' or the

conclusion of a 'framework agreement' which are regulated by Public Sector Directive (Directive 2004/18/EC) / Public Contracts Regulations (2006).

The specific duty requires Council's to consider whether it would be appropriate to include specific stipulations relating to the general duty, in the award criteria and / or in conditions relating to the performance of a contract of this type.

Reporting and Publishing

Every year the Council must publish an Annual Report outlining how it met the three aims of the general duty. The report will outline the progress the Council has made in achieving its equality objectives and High-level Action Plan.

The report will also include a statement on the effectiveness of the authority's arrangements for identifying and collecting information relating to its workforce and the reasons why any identified information has not been collected.

An Overview of Blaenau Gwent

Blaenau Gwent is located in South-East Wales. It is approximately 20 miles from Newport, and 30 miles from Cardiff, and directly south of the Brecon Beacons National Park.

The area is relatively small geographically, being at most 15 miles long, and 8 miles wide, and is the smallest of the Welsh local authorities in terms of land area, at about 10,900 hectares. The area is physically defined by high hillsides dividing the three main valleys. These valleys are home to towns and villages which seem to merge together into one. However, each community proudly maintains its own character and traditions. The five main towns and settlements are seen as Abertillery, Brynmawr, Ebbw Vale, Nantyglo & Blaina, and Tredegar.

Providing an accurate statistical picture

It is widely recognised that there are significant challenges when it comes to collecting accurate information relating to equality and diversity, particularly for some protected characteristics e.g. Sexual Orientation and Gender Reassignment. The remainder of this section will present some relevant statistics to help establish an overall picture of equality and diversity in Blaenau Gwent. The information will be presented in such a way that it links closely to the **Protected Characteristics** defined by the Equality Act 2010.

People

Blaenau Gwent is estimated to be home to around 69,700 people in 2019, making it the second smallest Welsh local authority in terms of population numbers. Even so, due to its relatively small geographical size, it has the 6th highest population density behind Cardiff, Newport, Torfaen, Caerphilly and Swansea.

Population projections from the Office of National Statistics (mid-2014 based) suggest that compared to 2019 the population of Blaenau Gwent is projected to decrease by 1.4% over 10 years (by 1,000 residents) and 4.5%

over 20 years, although projections become less reliable over more extensive time periods. The projected population decrease in Blaenau Gwent along with three other local authorities is in contrast to a picture of projected increases in general across other regions of Wales. The population of Wales as a whole is projected to increase in population by 2.6% over the next 10 years and 4.0% over 20 years¹.

Although life expectancy is increasing in Blaenau Gwent, reduced birth rates and increased mortality rates contribute to the projected downward trend over the next 20 years.

Gender²

As is the case across Wales and the rest of the UK, the 2018 mid-year estimates show that there are slightly more females (51%) than males (49%) in Blaenau Gwent. There is also little difference from the Welsh average when considering gender split across each of the key age bands, varying by no more than 2%.

¹ Stats Wales <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Population-and-Migration/Population/Projections/Local-Authority/2014-based/populationprojectioncomponentsofchange-by-localauthority-year>

² Stats Wales: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Population-and-Migration/Population/Distributions/agedistributionofpopulation-by-gender-year>

Age³

Table 1 shows the population of Blaenau Gwent and Wales broken down into key age bands. Analysis of the population by age band shows no significant differences from that of the Welsh average.

**Table 1: Blaenau Gwent and Wales Mid-Year 2018 population
Estimates by key bands**

	Blaenau Gwent			Wales		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
0 to 15	6,245	5,944	12,189	288,218	274,491	562,709
16 to 24	3,454	3,503	6,957	181,268	165,369	346,637
25 to 44	8,585	8,764	17,349	373,211	374,359	747,570
45 to 54	9,540	9,746	19,286	404,347	425,375	829,722
55 to 64	3,889	3,921	7,810	174,528	185,007	359,535
65 to 84	2,084	2,508	4,592	95,735	114,305	210,040
85 and over	570	960	1,530	30,002	52,416	82,418
Total	34,367	35,346	69,713	1,547,309	1,591,322	3,138,631

Disability⁴

The 2011, Census showed that 27% of all people who live within Blaenau Gwent stated they had a limiting long-term health problem or illnesses, where day-to-day activities were limited. This was higher than the Wales average (23%), and was the 2nd highest level (behind Neath Port Talbot with 28%) in Wales.

³ Stats Wales: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Population-and-Migration/Population/Distributions/agedistributionofpopulation-by-gender-localauthority>

Stats Wales: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Population-and-Migration/Population/Estimates/Local-Authority/populationestimates-by-localauthority-age>

⁴ Stats Wales: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Census/2011/LimitingLongTermIllnessDisability-by-LocalAuthority>

In 2011, the Annual Population Survey showed that of Blaenau Gwent's population of working age (males aged 16-64 and females aged 16-59) an estimate of 3,100 people had a Physical Disability, 2,600 with Respiratory or Heart Problems and 1,400 with Long Standing or Progressive Illness. As well as this, 4,000 people had 'other' health problems such as Sensory Impairments and Learning Difficulties.

More recent statistics from the Annual Population Survey year ending 30 June 2016 showed that Blaenau Gwent continues to have above average levels of disability with a total of 25.8% of working age people being defined as disabled compared to 24.4% for Wales overall.

The latest available disability-related figures from Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council show the following⁵:

- Just over 100 children known to have a disability;
- Just over 100 people known to have a sensory impairment; (this includes visual impairment) (2018/19)
- Just over 350 people known to have a learning disability;
- Almost 5,000 people were registered for Blue Badges

These comparably high levels of disability in Blaenau Gwent means there are a high proportion of people claiming disability-related benefits, as shown below:

- 12.0% of working aged people in Blaenau Gwent claimed EAS or Incapacity Benefit, compared to 8.4% across Wales (Nov 2016).

⁵ Stats Wales: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Disability-Registers/physicallysensorydisabledpersons-by-localauthority-disability-agerange>
<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Disability-Registers/personswithlearningdisabilities-by-localauthority-service-agerange>

- 8.0% of all people in Blaenau Gwent claimed Disability Living Allowance, compared to 6.1% across Wales (Nov 2018).

Race⁶

The 2011 Census statistics showed Blaenau Gwent's Black and Ethnic Minority population to be just under 1,900. This equates to 2.6% of the total population and well below the Welsh average of 6.7%. In 2001 the percentage of people in Blaenau Gwent from minority ethnic groups was 1.8%, approximately 1,300 people, therefore, a notable increase from 2001 to 2011. Even so, Blaenau Gwent still has one of the lowest levels of people from minority ethnic groups in Wales, being one of the least ethnic diverse local authorities in England and Wales with only 4 other areas having a smaller percentage of ethnic minority population.

Long term international migration statistics provide estimates of the number of usual residents moving in or out of the UK. This set of statistics is probably the one most quoted when discussing international migration. They include only those intending to change their place of usual residence for 12 months or more.

Figures from ONS reveal a relatively modest level of net International migration per 1,000 resident population in Blaenau Gwent since 2010. Small increments had been experienced with a 0.8 per 1,000 residents' inflow in 2010 up to 1.8 for the same period in 2015. However, this upward trend has since reversed, down to 1.5 per 1,000 residents' inflow in 2018. This equates to an annual average international inflow of 1.4 per 1,000 residents locally compared to 5.0 per 1,000 residents across Wales. This inflow has been offset by a local average annual international outflow of 1.0 per 1,000 residents.

⁶ Stats Wales: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Population-and-Migration/Population/Components-of-Change/components-of-population-change-by-timeperiod-component>

Over a longer term period of 10 years Blaenau Gwent has experienced an international inflow of 1,013 people and outflow 702 people. This is a net international inflow of 311, or an average of 31 people each year.

Over the same 10-year period there were 1,302 National Insurance Number (NINo) Registrations in Blaenau Gwent from adult overseas nationals aged 16-64

This relates to adult overseas nationals entering the UK and allocated a National Insurance Number (NINo). A NINo is generally required by any overseas national looking to work or claim benefits / tax credits in the UK, including the self-employed or students working part time.

Figures are based on recorded registration date on the HMRC National Insurance Recording and Pay as you Earn System, i.e. after the NINo application process has been completed. This may be a number of weeks or months (or in some cases years) after arriving in the UK.

All Adult overseas nationals allocated a NINo are included regardless of their length of stay in the UK.

According to the Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Count conducted by local authorities in Wales, as of July 2019 there were three authorised gypsy traveller site in Blaenau Gwent and 16 residential occupied pitches.

However, Census 2011 figures suggest a wider spread of occupancy throughout the borough in varying accommodation types as there were 72 Gypsy or Irish Travellers living throughout the borough in 27 different output areas within 11 wards.

Religion and Belief

The 2011 Census showed that half of people in Blaenau Gwent stated their religion to be Christian (50%), below the Welsh average of 59%. This has

shown a notable decrease since the 2001 Census, with respective levels of 64.0% and 71.0%

Just over 1% of people in Blaenau Gwent stated that they were of another religion such as Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish and Sikh.

Just over 41% of the Blaenau Gwent population stated they have no religion, above the Welsh average of 37%. This is a notable increase compared to 2001, with respective levels of 25% and 19%. A further 8% of people in Blaenau Gwent did not state their religion. Table 2 provides details.

Table 2: Religion in Blaenau Gwent, Census 2011

	People	Percentage
Christian	34,805	49.9%
Buddhist	112	0.2%
Hindu	72	0.1%
Jewish	8	0.0% (<i>less than 0.049%</i>)
Muslim	179	0.3%
Sikh	39	0.1%
Any other religion	253	0.4%
No religion	28,676	41.1%
Religion not stated	5,670	8.1%
All People	69,814	

Further analysis showed that people under 24 (56%) and people aged 25 to 49 (51%), were more likely to state they had 'no religion' than people aged 50 and over (20%).

Sexual Orientation⁷

⁷ Stats Wales <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Equality-and-Diversity/Sexual-Orientation/sexualidentity-by-year-identitystatus>

Statistics on sexual orientation for Blaenau Gwent are not available with any level of accuracy. However, the Annual Population Survey includes data on sexual identity for Wales on a calendar year basis. In 2017, this survey shows that in Wales 95.0% of people identified as heterosexual, 1.3% as gay/lesbian, 0.7% as bisexual, and 0.5% as 'other' while 2.5% of people did not answer this question.

Marriage and Civil Partnership

In Wales, in 2018 there were 34 civil partnerships. The highest levels in Wales were in 2006 - the year following the law changes, when there were 560 civil partnerships.

In Blaenau Gwent in 2016 there were 173 marriages. There have been no civil partnerships in Blaenau Gwent between 2013 and 2018.

Gender Reassignment⁸

As was the case in 2012, statistics on gender reassignment for Blaenau Gwent are not available. However, the Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES) does suggest estimates for gender dysphoria, which is the medical term for the condition with which a person who has been assigned one gender (usually at birth on the basis of their sex), identifies as belonging to another gender, or does not conform with the gender role their respective society prescribes to them.

GIRES outline that a low estimate for the UK would be 8 people per 100,000, and a high estimate would be 21 people per 100,000. Taking this into account Blaenau Gwent would expect to have between **5 to 14 people** with Gender Dysphoria.

⁸ <https://www.gires.org.uk/>

Other Relevant Statistics

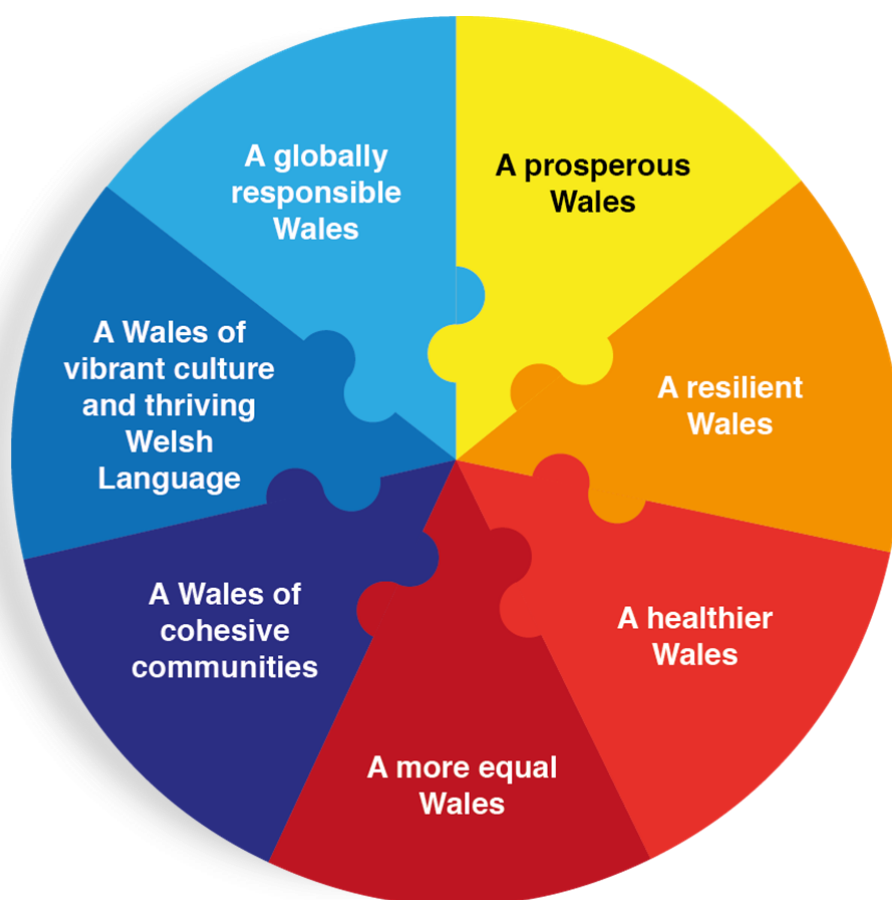
As well as the above equality specific statistics, compared to an all Wales level Blaenau Gwent also experiences:

- Higher levels of unemployment and economic inactivity;
- Higher percentage workless households
- Lower levels of new businesses starting up;
- Higher levels of people depending on benefits;
- Lower levels of qualifications;
- Lower than average life expectancy; and
- Higher levels of poor health (economically inactive long term sick).

Meeting the Well-being of Future Generations Act

We are aware of the strong links between strengthening equality and improving the well-being of our area. We recognise the delivery of our Strategic Equality Plan will be key in helping to contribute towards achieving Blaenau Gwent's local Well-being Plan, [‘The Blaenau Gwent We Want, 2018-23’](#) and meeting our duties under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

For example, our strategic equality plan will be key in contributing towards achieving the National Well-being Goals—specifically ‘*A more equal Wales*’, ‘*A Wales of cohesive communities*’, ‘*A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language*’ and ‘*A more prosperous Wales*’.



Furthermore, throughout our delivery we will ensure to apply the five ways of working, as well as give consideration to the current and future needs of the area:



1. **Long-term** – The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.
2. **Prevention** – How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.
3. **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.
4. **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.
5. **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.

Meeting the new socio-economic duty

Welsh Government is planning to commence a new Public Sector Equality Duty in April 2020 called the 'socio-economic duty'. The duty looks to make sure that public bodies, such as Local Authorities, think about how to reduce poverty and inequality when they make big decisions.

Poverty is defined as not having enough money to live well, or not being able to get services easily like health care and education. Research suggests that people with protected characteristics are likely to face greater levels of inequality because they are living in poverty and therefore the duty looks to ensure that those people are treated equally and fairly.

During November 2019 and January 2020 Welsh Government consulted on the proposed public sector equality duty – the socio-economic duty. As a Council we took the opportunity to share our views as we will be subject to the duty.

In general, we fully support the aims of the duty and have included this as part of our plan. Further information can be found in the section '[Equality Objective](#)' on page 20.

During the first two years of this plan, we will work closely with Welsh Government who are offering all public bodies, subject to the new duty, interim support, until the launch of statutory guidance.

Developing our equality objectives and plan

To ensure the Council was prepared to meet its general and specific duties relating to equality objectives and a strategic equality plan, a time-aligned project plan was created. The project plan outlined all the key elements necessary for supporting the development of our equality objectives and plan from inception, through to publication.

June 2019 – March 2020

- Gathering intelligence and undertaking research;
- Involvement and engagement of key stakeholders, including all Council Elected Members to identify key equality issues and priorities;
- Drafting our Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 approach and equality objectives for formal consultation;
- Formal Consultation of our Draft Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 approach and equality objectives;
- Review of feedback received;
- Final draft of Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 and equality objectives developed;
- Professional and Political engagement - route for adoption by Council (including Scrutiny and Executive);
- Publication & promotion;
- Implementation;
- Monitoring and review.

Gathering intelligence and undertaken research

Underpinning the development of our plan is intelligence and research such as desktop research into the Equality Act 2010 and each of the protected characteristics, and a review of advice and guidance from relevant regional and national organisations such as the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).

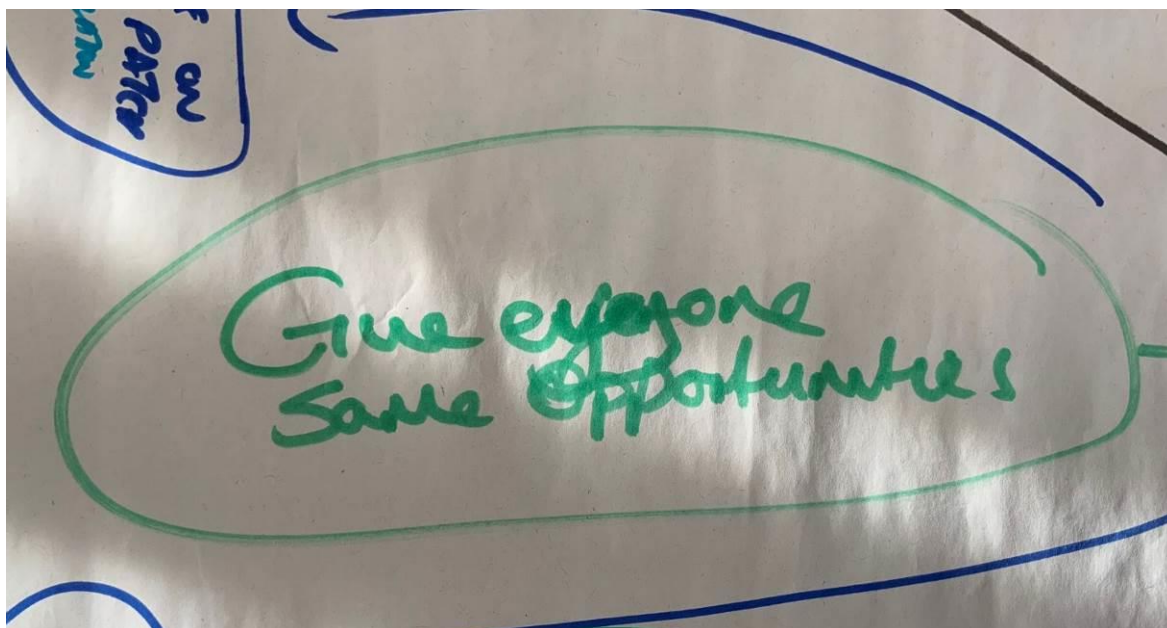
This included:

- Gathering and reviewing guidance on the Equality Act 2010;
- Understanding each of the protected characteristic and gathering local statistical information - where available;
- Information, data and statistics considered at a local, regional and national level;
- National Research undertaken by the Equality and Human Rights Commission: Is Wales Fairer? (2015) and Is Wales Fairer? (2018);
- Welsh Government's recent consultation on their proposed Equality objectives for 2020 to 2024, specifically the Equality Act 2010: Commencing the socio-economic duty (issued in November 2019);
- Consideration of local plans such as Blaenau Gwent Council's Corporate Plan 2018-22 and Blaenau Gwent's local well-being plan The Blaenau Gwent We Want, 2018-23 as well as our previous Strategic Equality Plan 2016-20;
- Attendance at the National Equality Conference;

Support from our Professional and Political Leadership Teams

- An elected member working group was set up by the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee as part of their forward work programme for 2019/20. The Council's Equality and Diversity Champion is part of the group, which met in September and November to help shape the approach and objectives;
- A special session was held in January 2020 for Members on our Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 approach and draft equality objectives, led by the Chair of Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee;
- Sessions were held with each of the Departmental Management Teams and also the Wider Corporate Leadership Team to support the development of an 'effective framework for delivery' and to inform strategic managers of the general and specific duties for public bodies as a consequence of the Equality Act 2010 and to consider the draft Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 approach and equality objectives.

Engagement and Involvement



To support the development of our plan, in-line with our duty to ‘involve’ people with an interest in Council functions we delivered an engagement programme, over two stages, which gave staff, local people, communities and staff the opportunity to talk with us about equality and to inform us what they felt were the main equality issues in Blaenau Gwent and what suggestions they had for tackling them.

Our engagement and involvement phases:

- **Stage 1 – Let’s Talk about Fairness and Equalities!**
- **Stage 2 – Tell us what you think about equalities!**

Our engagement was guided by both the National Principles for Public Participation in Wales and Children and Young People’s National Participation Standards and was also available in Welsh and English. Further to this, we also made all our engagement materials available in Easy Read to ensure our engagement was as accessible as possible.

Options for requesting the materials in alternative formats was also offered, such as braille.

We encouraged respondents to take part in a variety of different ways such as through our online survey, writing to us, visiting us, chatting to us over the phone, or even by submitting drawings, poems and stories. Recognising that people can often feel more comfortable providing views in their preferred formats.

During both stages we widely promoted the opportunities to engage with us through the Council's website and social media platforms, as well as distributing it through our partnerships networks and sending it to relevant groups, clubs and organisations in the area.

Below is a summary of each stage of the engagement programme:

Stage 1: August to September 2019

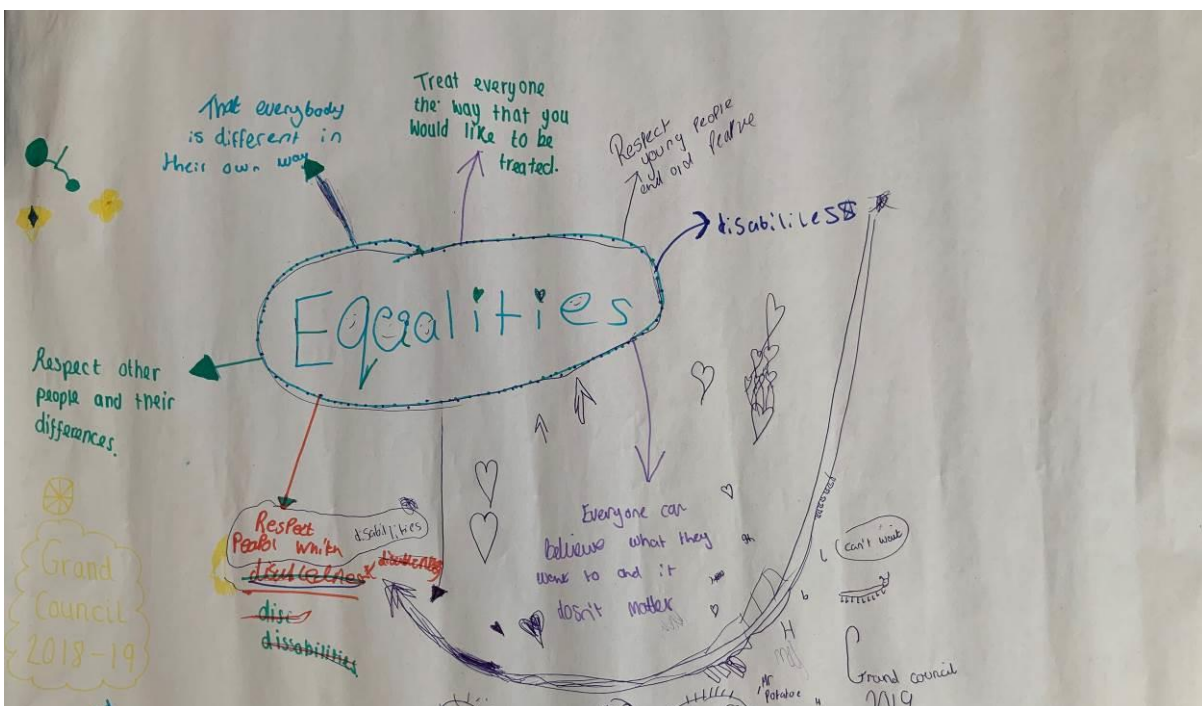
This stage took place before we began to draft the plan. We asked:

- 1. What is the most important thing to you about equalities?**
- 2. What are the key equalities priorities that the Council needs to focus on?**

At this stage, in addition to the methods outlined above, we also held dedicated engagement sessions with our Children's Grand Council, Youth Forum, and also a group of adults with physical and learning disabilities at Vision House Day Centre, Ebbw Vale.



An example of feedback from our session at Vision House



An example of picture feedback from the Children's Grand Council

Some of the key themes that emerged from our first engagement stage were;

- Respecting and celebrating difference and diversity;
- Accessibility within the community;

- Employment opportunities for those with disabilities.

A total of 120 participants took part during stage 1.

Stage 2: December 2019 to January 2020

The feedback from stage 1, combined with key statistics and demographic data, was used to help us draft our Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 approach and equality objectives.

During stage 2 of our engagement programme we presented our draft Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 approach and equality objectives and asked:

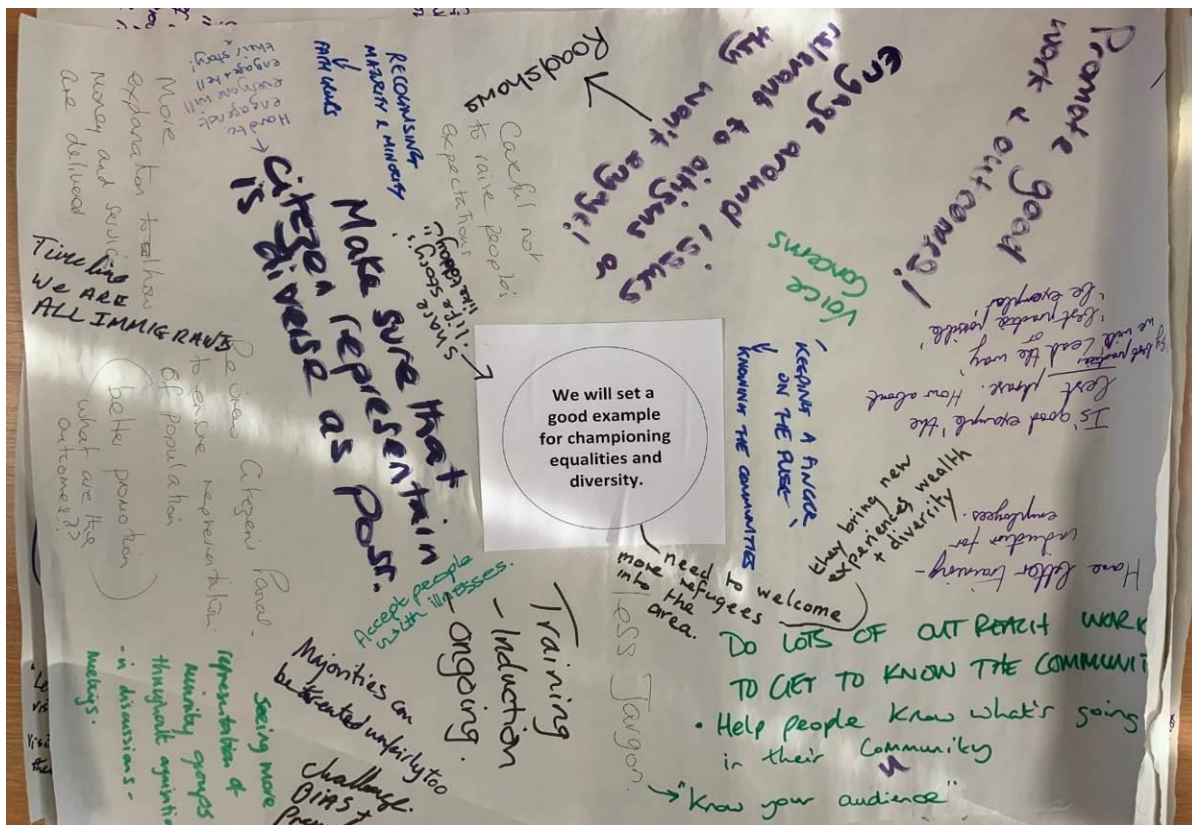
- 1. To what level do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach for equalities?*
- 2. To what level do you agree or disagree with our six equality objectives?*
- 3. Do you have any comments on our plan or equality objectives?*

Reach of our engagement during Stage 2

During stage 2 we used a range of methods and activities to support engagement. This included:

- Workshops held at Vision House Day Centre, a centre for people with disabilities, such as learning disabilities and physical disabilities;
- A special session was held in January 2020 for Members on our Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 approach and draft equality objectives, led by the Chair of Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee;

- Surveyed shoppers across our key town centre using iPads with preloaded questionnaires;
- Held a special equality event called 'Voices of our Valleys' which brought different groups of local people and communities together from across Blaenau Gwent, including key organisations with an interest in equality and diversity. With 50 in attendance, the event was successfully launched by Cllr Moore our Equality Champion and Chair of the Council and included a range of talks, such as Blaenau Gwent People's First, Deighton Primary School, Bahá'í Faith Group. The event showcased the positive work already happening within our area to support the equality agenda and allowed attendees to participate in interactive workshops where they were able to share their views and discuss equality matters. This resulted in us being provided with a rich source of information which was used to inform the development of the final draft plan;
- We also extensively shared our survey with key forums and networks such as our Youth Forum, Older People's Forum and PSB Engagement Sub-group and also promoted the opportunity with key organisations which represent people and communities who are covered by one, or more of the protected characteristics.



Example of feedback from the 'Voices of our Valleys' Event

A total of 96 responses were received to the online questionnaire:

- 90% of respondents agreed (65%) or strongly agreed (25%) with our proposed approach. Just 4% disagreed (2%) or strongly disagreed (2%), with the remaining 7% stating that they 'didn't know'.
- 86% of respondents agreed (71%) or strongly agreed (15%) with our six equality objectives. Just 2% disagreed. No respondents strongly disagreed. 12% were unsure.

Drafting the Equality Plan

Feedback from stage 2 of the engagement programme was used to inform the final draft Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 and equality objectives.

Overall people provided very positive feedback about our approach and objectives and overall there were no significant changes made to the Draft Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 or draft equality objectives. However, where we received significant feedback and suggestions to change the phrasing, or language of our equality objectives the appropriate amendments were made. For example, our draft objective 'We will strive to tackle poverty' was changed to 'We will strive to tackle inequality caused by poverty for people with protected characteristics' as a significant number of people felt this would be more tangible and realistic to achieve.

Equality Impact Assessment – Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24

Q.1. Please outline the purpose of the policy or practice: (include the aims, objectives, expected outcomes and any key emerging themes from the policy; you may want to outline any key priorities / objectives outlined in the policy or practice)

Under the Equality Act 2010 the Council has a statutory duty to prepare and publish a Strategic Equality Plan and equality objectives every four years. To meet this duty, a project plan was put in place as part of the Governance and Partnerships Business Plan for 2019/20.

Additionally, Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee agreed to set up a 'member's working group' made up of five committee members (including the Chair and Council's Equality Champion) as part of their Forward Work Programme for 2019/20 to ensure active involvement in developing of equality objectives and supporting plan.

There are six proposed equality objectives. The proposed objectives respond to: Welsh Government's proposed objectives and their current consultation on the **commencement of the socio-economic duty**; the Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) **Is Wales Fairer? 2018 report**; and local involvement work carried out in Blaenau Gwent between July and September 2019 called 'Let's talk about Fairness and Equalities'

The six proposed Equality Objectives are:

1. We will be an organisation who ensures fairness and equality is in everything that we do.
2. We will be an equal opportunity employer with a workforce that values equality and diversity.
3. We will support children and young people, particularly those with protected characteristics, to achieve their learning ambitions.
4. We will promote and support safe, friendly and cohesive communities.
5. We will ensure there is meaningful involvement with people who have protected characteristics and key stakeholders that represent their interests.
6. We will strive to tackle inequality caused by poverty for people who have protected characteristics

Formal consultation on the proposed objectives is being delivered from 16th December 2019 to 22nd January 2020, before being presented through political and democratic processes as an overall plan in February and March 2020 (the strategy must be agreed at Council). There will be support and events to help stimulate response to the consultation.

A summary document is being used to support consultation and provides information on each proposed objective (available in Welsh and English). An easy read version has also been made available.

Q.2. Is the policy or practice new, existing, or under review:	Q.2.1. Is this policy or practice subject to any of the following processes: 1. <i>A Financial Efficiency Saving</i> 2. <i>A Policy</i> 3. <i>A Report</i> 4. <i>Decision Making Process</i> 4. <i>Business or service plan</i>
<p>The public sector equality duties placed on Local Authorities have been in place for 8 years. Every 4 years we are required to review our existing Strategic Equality Plan and equality objectives.</p> <p>The Council is taking steps to renew its equality objectives in-line with Welsh Government's and Equality Human Rights Commissioners new approach of setting more specific and tangible objectives in order to maximise and advance the equality agenda.</p> <p>This assessment began from the first stages of policy development and reflects on its development through to publication. It takes account of key equality issues identified during the process.</p> <p>Furthermore, Welsh Government intends on commencing a new socio-economic duty on Local Authorities from April 2020, under the Equality (Wales) Act 2010. The new duty will require Local Authorities to reflect how it will approach and deliver its statutory requirements within the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24.</p>	<p>A Policy, the Strategic Equality Plan will be subject to professional and political reporting and decision making processes throughout its life cycle.</p> <p>This assessment includes all relevant professional and political processes undertaken prior to publishing.</p>

Q.3. Potential Positive, Adverse or Neutral effects on Protected Characteristics:

<u>Protected Characteristic</u>	<u>Positive, Negative, Neutral</u>	<u>Relevance of the Policy or Practice</u>
<i>Age</i>	Positive	<p>The Strategic Equality Plan and objectives intends to deliver a positive impact on those covering protected characteristics relating to age. For example, different age groups, such as children and young people and older people have been able to contribute towards the development of the plan and will be able to be involved in any future development relating to the delivery of this plan and its objectives.</p> <p>Furthermore, this plans sets out intended steps which has the potential to support positive effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess what our current position is an ‘equal opportunity employer’ by reviewing the diversity of our workforce and identify key steps to support improvement; • Ensure there is alignment between the Council’s Strategic Equality Plan and Workforce Development Strategy; • Actively promote engagement opportunities aimed at members of public who share protected characteristics; • Work with partners on key projects to support those most vulnerable in our communities • Provide advice and guidance to support the development and delivery of Schools Strategic Equality Plans and annually review progress • Advise and guide School based staff on equality issues as required

Disability	Positive	<p>The Strategic Equality Plan and objectives intends to deliver a positive impact on those covering protected characteristics relating to disability. For example, people with disabilities have been able to contribute towards the development of the plan and will be able to be involved in any future development relating to the delivery of this plan and its objectives.</p> <p>Furthermore, this plans sets out intended steps which has the potential to support positive effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess what our current position is an ‘equal opportunity employer’ by reviewing the diversity of our workforce and identify key steps to support improvement; • Ensure there is alignment between the Council’s Strategic Equality Plan and Workforce Development Strategy; • Actively promote engagement opportunities aimed at members of public who share protected characteristics; • Work with partners on key projects to support those most vulnerable in our communities • Provide advice and guidance to support the development and delivery of Schools Strategic Equality Plans and annually review progress • Advise and guide School based staff on equality issues as required
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<i>Gender Reassignment</i>	Positive	<p>The Strategic Equality Plan and objectives intends to deliver a positive impact on those covering protected characteristics relating to gender reassignment. The Strategic Equality Plan and objectives will be shared with key partners and organisations who represent the needs of people covered by this protected characteristic.</p> <p>Furthermore, this plans sets out intended steps which has the potential to support positive effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess what our current position is an ‘equal opportunity employer’ by reviewing the diversity of our workforce and identify key steps to support improvement; • Ensure there is alignment between the Council’s Strategic Equality Plan and Workforce Development Strategy; • Actively promote engagement opportunities aimed at members of public who share protected characteristics; • Work with partners on key projects to support those most vulnerable in our communities • Provide advice and guidance to support the development and delivery of Schools Strategic Equality Plans and annually review progress • Advise and guide School based staff on equality issues as required
<i>Marriage & Civil Partnership</i>	Positive	<p>The Strategic Equality Plan and objectives intends to deliver a positive impact on those covering protected characteristics relating to marriage and civil partnership.</p>

<i>Pregnancy & Maternity</i>	Positive	<p>The Strategic Equality Plan and objectives intends to deliver a positive impact on those covering protected characteristics relating to pregnancy and maternity.</p> <p>Furthermore, this plans sets out intended steps which has the potential to support positive effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure there is alignment between the Council’s Strategic Equality Plan and Workforce Development Strategy; • Actively promote engagement opportunities aimed at members of public who share protected characteristics.
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Race	Positive	<p>The Strategic Equality Plan and objectives intends to deliver a positive impact on those covering protected characteristics relating to race. For example, we have actively engaged people covered by this protected characteristic to contribute towards the development of the plan and we will continue to support any future involvement in any future development relating to the delivery of this plan and its objectives.</p> <p>Furthermore, this plans sets out intended steps which has the potential to support positive effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess what our current position is an ‘equal opportunity employer’ by reviewing the diversity of our workforce and identify key steps to support improvement; • Ensure there is alignment between the Council’s Strategic Equality Plan and Workforce Development Strategy; • Actively promote engagement opportunities aimed at members of public who share protected characteristics; • Work with partners on key projects to support those most vulnerable in our communities • Provide advice and guidance to support the development and delivery of Schools Strategic Equality Plans and annually review progress; • Advise and guide School based staff on equality issues as required.
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<i>Religion & Belief</i>	Positive	<p>The Strategic Equality Plan and objectives intends to deliver a positive impact on those covering protected characteristics relating to religion & belief. For example, we have actively engaged people covered by this protected characteristic to contribute towards the development of the plan and we will continue to support any future involvement in any future development relating to the delivery of this plan and its objectives.</p> <p>Furthermore, this plans sets out intended steps which has the potential to support positive effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess what our current position is an ‘equal opportunity employer’ by reviewing the diversity of our workforce and identify key steps to support improvement; • Ensure there is alignment between the Council’s Strategic Equality Plan and Workforce Development Strategy; • Actively promote engagement opportunities aimed at members of public who share protected characteristics; • Work with partners on key projects to support those most vulnerable in our communities • Provide advice and guidance to support the development and delivery of Schools Strategic Equality Plans and annually review progress; • Advise and guide School based staff on equality issues as required.
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Sex	Positive	<p>The Strategic Equality Plan and objectives intends to deliver a positive impact on those covering protected characteristics relating to sex.</p> <p>Furthermore, this plans sets out intended steps which has the potential to support positive effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess what our current position is an 'equal opportunity employer' by reviewing the diversity of our workforce and identify key steps to support improvement; • Actively promote engagement opportunities aimed at members of public who share protected characteristics.
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	Positive	<p>The Strategic Equality Plan and objectives intends to deliver a positive impact on those covering protected characteristics relating to sexual orientation.</p> <p>Furthermore, this plans sets out intended steps which has the potential to support positive effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess what our current position is an 'equal opportunity employer' by reviewing the diversity of our workforce and identify key steps to support improvement; • Ensure there is alignment between the Council's Strategic Equality Plan and Workforce Development Strategy; • Actively promote engagement opportunities aimed at members of public who share protected characteristics; • Work with partners on key projects to support those most vulnerable in our communities • Provide advice and guidance to support the development and delivery of Schools Strategic Equality Plans and annually review progress; • Participate in National Campaigns such as 'Proud Council's' which promotes and celebrates LGBTQ+

<i>Welsh Language</i>	Positive	<p>The Strategic Equality Plan and objectives intends to deliver a positive impact on those covering protected characteristics. However, whilst the Welsh Language is not a specific protected characteristic identified within the Equality (Wales) 2010 Act the Council still has a duty to meet its requirements under the Welsh Language Standards requirements as well as demonstrate its commitments towards the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act's National Goal 'A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language'. Therefore, the Council has a duty not to treat the Welsh Language less favourably.</p> <p>Welsh speakers have been able to contribute to the development of the plan and will be able to be involved in any future development relating to the delivery of this plan and its objectives.</p>
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Q.3.1. Overall evaluation on the potential impact on each protected characteristic:

Blaenau Gwent's Strategic Equality plan intends to benefit a range of stakeholders including residents, staff, community groups, people who work or visit the area.

Consideration of the potential impacts on protected groups has been embedded in the planning and consultation process, and although improvements have been identified as a result of this engagement and planning process, the overall process has allowed the policy to demonstrate the positive impacts on each protected characteristic. The development of the Strategic Equality Plan has been developed using qualitative and quantitative research methods such as good stakeholder engagement, alongside use of National, Regional and Local data.

These are initial observations which will require further regular assessment and monitoring during its implementation phase as it only provides an overview of our current understanding of potential impacts and benefits for protected groups. One significant factor to emerge from the above initial assessment process highlights potential issues around the lack of information available relating to people and groups with protected characteristics, how they access services and what are their support needs.

Q.4. Please outline the key stakeholders of this policy and identify who the policy is intended to benefit:

The key stakeholders included in the Strategic Equality Plan are: -

- Residents (children & young people; older people)
- BG Council Staff
- People who work in Blaenau Gwent
- People who visit Blaenau Gwent

In relation to the above categories it is intended to benefit all, but particularly those covered by one, or more of the protected characteristics.

Further information on any identified positive, neutral or adverse effects that the plan will have on people with protected characteristics can be found in the initial assessment (screening) section of this assessment.

Q.5. Please outline any evidence and / or research you have collected which supports this policy or practice (*please consider both primary and secondary data sources such as quantitative data [Census] and qualitative data [journals and research reports]*):

- Strategic Equality Plan, 2016-20
- Strategic Equality Plan, Annual Report 2017-18
- Blaenau Gwent Public Services Boards, Well-being Assessment;
- Equality and Human Rights Commission: Is Wales Fairer? Report 2018
- Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation;
- Census information
- BG Council Staff Survey Results

Q.6. Please outline the consultation / engagement process: (*to include method of consultation, objectives and target audience*)

Initial engagement:

- Corporate Overview Scrutiny Working Group (June 2019)
- Let's Talk about Fairness & Equality Involvement Programme (August – September 2019) (120 participants engaged)

Target: All stakeholders

Objective: To find out why equality is important, identify any issues and what is really important.

Method: A mix of events/workshops and formal survey. With materials provided in Welsh\English and Easy Read

Formal consultation:

- Tell us what you think about Equalities! – (December – January 2020)

Target: All stakeholders

Objectives: To receive views on our draft equality objectives and approach for delivery

Method: A mix of events/workshops/public engagement sessions/mail outs to key organisations and formal survey. With materials provided in Welsh\English and Easy Read. For example, Voices of our Valleys event (22 Jan 2020) which promoted the positive work being delivered to support the equality agenda and gave people to provide feedback on our six draft objectives.

Q.7. Please outline any key responses and significant outcomes as a result of the consultation and engagement process:

A summary of significant changes to be added after the consultation period closes (22 Jan, 2020).

Q.8. Please outline how this policy or practice will be communicated to the wider community and / or it's intended target group:

The policy has been communicated with stakeholders through a variety of engagement\involvement mechanisms:

- Stakeholder engagement workshops;
- Partnership meetings;
- Formal consultation (6 weeks' consultation process);
- Via Corporate Communications – social media\staff messages\BG Council web pages
- Learning Action Centres
- Libraries
- Wider partnership forums and networks (older people's forum, youth forum; children's grand council; PSB Engagement sub-group)

Q.9. What are your standard methods of communicating with service users (*information must be available in a range of formats including Easy Read, Braille, Audio / Video Tape, BSL, Different Languages*):

<u>Communication Methods</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Face-to-Face Verbal Communication	*	
Telephone	*	
Printed Information (e.g., posters, leaflets, flyers etc.)	*	
Written Correspondence	*	
Email	*	
Other (Please specify):	We have also provided the options for people to participate using any methods they choose. E.g. stories, photographs, poems.	

Q.10. Please list the possible positive impacts this policy is expected to have on people with protected characteristics (*initial descriptions of the expected impact on protected groups can be found in the initial assessment (screening) section – see guidance notes for examples of positive impacts*):

A number of positive impacts are expected:

- Promoting equal opportunities and equality through implementing each objective
- Improving relations between different targeted groups
- Increased opportunities to engage with local services to inform decision making processes
- Providing targeted services to highlighted groups

Q.11 Please detail the expected adverse impact of this policy on people with protected characteristics (*initial descriptions of the expected impact on protected groups can be found in the initial assessment ‘screening’ section*):

There are no anticipated adverse impacts, nor have there been any adverse impacts throughout the development of the strategic equality plan. However, the next phase of the Plan is ‘implementation’, which will be monitored to ensure any potential adverse impacts are managed appropriately and mitigating actions are embedded within the process. There is confidence that the consultation and engagement process has aimed to collect the views of the community as a whole and this information has been used to inform the development of the strategic equality plan.

Q.12. If any adverse impact has been identified, please outline any mitigation actions:

There are no adverse impacts at this point and the plan inherently looks to mitigate any negative impacts on people, or groups covered by one or more of the protected characteristics.

Delivery of the strategic equality plan will include the development of a new EQIA process which also considers socio-economic impact and looks to strengthen existing mechanisms to identify adverse impacts and appropriate mitigations.

Q. 13. Does the policy or practice support the Council in achieving its statutory duty to:	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Please explain:</u>
Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not	*		The process of development, particularly through the consultation and engagement process, has maintained an inclusive approach and has taken the views of a diverse range of stakeholders and has allowed groups to come together to share their experiences, thoughts and ideas in the development of the strategic equality plan.
Advance quality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not	*		This development process has encouraged all people, regardless of their background and status, to input their ideas and thoughts for the strategic equality plan.
Eliminate unlawful discrimination and other conduct prohibited by the act	*		This development process has encouraged all people, regardless of their background and status, to input their ideas and thoughts for the strategic equality plan.

Q.14. Are there any specific resource implications linked to this policy:

Yes, BG Council has a duty to effectively resource the development and implementation of the Strategic Equality Plan. Certain areas of the plan will be delivered collectively in collaboration with key partners.

Q.15. Have any changes to the policy been implemented as a result of the assessment process, please detail (*take in to consideration the results of the consultation process, trends in primary and secondary data, as well as other themes identified within the policy assessment process*):

To be included following closure of the formal consultation process.

Q.16. Having taken in to consideration all elements of the above Equality Impact Assessment, please indicate your decision in relation to the policy implementation:	
Reject the Proposed Changes (you must have an objective justification to do this)	
Accept the Proposed Changes and Make Relevant Changes	
Continue the policy with minimal Changes	
No Changes needed; the policy has no potential for discrimination	*
Stop the policy as it has potential for unlawful discrimination	
Q.16.1. Please provide any relevant details on your decision:	
<p>The policy was subject to a thorough consultation and engagement process, and has used a range of research and data to inform the development of the plan. The development of the Strategic Equality Plan takes in to account the views of relevant stakeholders and the implementation of the plan looks to advance and promote the equality agenda. Delivery of the plan looks to have a positive impact on people, or groups covered by one, or more of the protected characteristics.</p> <p>We are satisfied that no further changes are required to contribute to the reduction of discrimination as there is no possibility that its publishing and implementation will cause unlawful discrimination.</p>	

Q.17. Overall evaluation / summary of the assessment <i>(include significant findings and actions taken as part of the process)</i>
<p>The development of the strategic equality plan satisfies the requirements of the Equality (Wales) Act to prepare a strategic equality plan and objectives every four years, and for the development of the plan to be informed by consultation feedback provided by stakeholders who have an interest in the delivery of BG Council's services and functions.</p> <p>This can be seen through the comprehensive engagement and involvement programme which has supported its development.</p> <p>By default, the strategic equality plan looks to positively advance and promote the equality agenda. Furthermore, its delivery will be used good mechanisms for monitoring and review and includes plans to develop a strengthened EQIA process which looks to identifying any potential positive/negative adverse impact on people, or groups covered by one or more of the protected characteristics as well as the new socio-economic duty being placed on Local Authorities with effect from April 2020.</p>