

Blaenau Gwent

Strategic Equality Plan

Annual Report 2022 – 2023



Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Annual Strategic Equality Monitoring Report

April 2022 – March 2023

“Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open, and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities”

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Email: pps@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

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Foreword

We are pleased to provide our progress towards Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's Strategic Equality Plan 2020/24. The annual report covers the period of April 2022 to March 2023 (including workforce data 2021-22) and sets out how we are meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010. It highlights progress we have made against our six strategic equality objectives.

Putting fairness and equalities at the heart of everything we do is central to the delivery of our equalities plan and our services. We recognise our key role, as a public body, in advancing and strengthening equalities across Blaenau Gwent and are committed to being a 'place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities' as outlined in our [Corporate Plan 2022/27](#)

To achieve this, we continue to deliver a range of programmes and activities, in partnership with other public bodies, to realise better equality outcomes for Blaenau Gwent. Including making progress towards contributing to the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act](#) and the seven National Well-being Goals.

We acknowledge the growing importance of the equality agenda and the need for the Council's continued commitment and support to address ongoing and new equality matters. We continue to focus on key priorities which seeks to support local recovery following the impact of the global COVID 19 pandemic as well as looking to address new impacts such as the cost-of-living crisis, and, have proactively supported families fleeing the Ukraine conflict by setting up a Welcome Centre.

Over the next year, in-line with Welsh Government, we will continue to develop local plans in support of the Anti-Racist Wales and LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer +) Action Plans and the National Commemoration Audit as we begin work to develop our new Strategic Equality Plan for 2024/28.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank our staff, local communities, and stakeholders for their on-going support in helping us to deliver our commitments.



Councillor Stephen Thomas

Leader, Portfolio for Equality & Diversity



Damien McCann

Interim Chief Executive

Introduction

Our annual report highlights how we are meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty (the “general duty”) or PSED by ensuring we are supporting a fairer society through advancing equality and fostering good relationships.

We do this this by valuing diversity through activities on a day-to day basis as well as how we deliver our services and our policies to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Our annual report is divided into six main sections—one for each of our strategic equality objectives. Each main section has been divided into the following sub-sections:

- Overview
- Key Examples of Actions from 2022/23
- Next Steps for Equality Objective in 2023/24

Our annual report concludes with the presentation of the Council’s Workforce data for 2021/22.

Progress against Equality Objectives

Equality Objective One *“We will be an organisation who ensures fairness and equalities in everything that we do”*

Overview

We want to be an organisation that embeds fairness and equality throughout everything that we do. The Council is committed to being a ‘place that is fair, open, and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities’.

We recognise the value of this work in enabling us to achieve meaningful outcomes for our staff, citizens, local communities, and stakeholders. We want to ensure and continue to develop a workforce that is supportive and want to ensure the services we deliver are accessible for all.

Our aim is to advance equality across Blaenau Gwent by developing a strong framework, which is supported by the whole organisation lead through strong political and effective leadership.

We continue to strengthen our equality programme through our Corporate Leadership Team and School Management Team. We work collectively, using a “One Council” approach, to meet our six equality objectives set out within our plan. Our Corporate Leadership Team regularly considers its PSED duties and provides effective leadership to ensure its equality outcomes are delivered through organisation-wide collaborative delivery.

We feel it is very important that we continue to ensure that equality is championed throughout the organisation and have done this both politically and professionally. For example, we recognise international campaigns such as White Ribbon Day, World Aids Day, Holocaust Memorial Day, LGBTQ+ history month as well as many more.

Key Examples of Actions from 2022/23



New Corporate Plan for 2022/27 – Our new Corporate Plan was agreed by Council in October 2022 and reflects our new vision and core values of being respectful, inclusive, collaborative, accountable and supportive. Furthermore, we have set four priorities that we feel will allow us to achieve the best outcomes for our communities which are:

- Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent
- Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities
- An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place
- Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent, and resilient

Furthermore, the Council, along with our partners across Gwent through our Public Services Board, are working towards becoming a region that aims to tackle and reduce inequalities, via the Marmot principles to:

- Give every child the best start in life
- Enable all children, young people, and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
- Create fair employment and good work for all
- Ensure a healthy standard of living for all
- Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
- Strengthen the role and impact of ill-health prevention
- Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together
- Tackle racism, discrimination, and their outcomes

The Corporate Plan recognises that our Strategic Equality Plan is one of the key policies and strategies that help to deliver our ambition.

Partnership Work and Collaboration - Our Equality Champion represents the organisation on the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Members Equality Network, and the Council is also represented at various National and Regional Equality Network meetings to collaborate and share good practice and learning. As an organisation we continue to pledge our support towards national equality campaigns and emerging policies, such as Zero Racism Wales; Welsh Government's vision of an [Anti-Racist Wales](#) by 2030 and [LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales](#).

We continue to be part of the Proud Council's network which has currently expanded over the last year to include a further two local authorities in Wales. Being part of the network allows us to work collaboratively to attend Pride events and work together on LGBTQ+ history month. By uniting and working together we can achieve a greater impact.

New Integrated Impact Assessment process from 2022/23 - In our previous report we highlighted our intention to develop a new Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process to coincide with the implementation of the Socio-Economic Duty. Over the past year, we have considered the effectiveness of our previous process; feedback from those completing impact assessments; and the findings of the Audit Wales Report [Equality Impact Assessments: more than a tick box exercise?](#).

This has resulted in the removal of the screening element to ensure that all our decisions, and service and policy reviews require are assessed. We further strengthened the process by including impact assessments against the Well-Being of Future Generation Act goals, our new Corporate Plan objectives, the new Armed Forces duty and also Community Safety Considerations.

The new IIA process was agreed in November 2022 following a briefing session with Senior Managers and Corporate Leaderships Teams.

Further sessions have also been held with specific teams as part of an ongoing process.

As part of the IIA review work we are developing a research library to provide accessible data and intelligence to support anyone carrying out an IIA and the delivery of actions associated to our Strategic Equality Plan. The research library includes case studies, census data, other local data, regional & national evidence and reports relating to equality and diversity, as well as examples of lived experiences from peoples covered by protected characteristics.

Key Strategy Development - Our Annual Workforce Equality data for 2021/22 is available via Open Source on Blaenau Gwent Council's website under the "[Equality in Blaenau Gwent](#)" page. This data is used to gain an effective picture of the diversity of our organisation and informed the development of our Workforce Development Strategy, review of existing policies, and the development policies and guidance documentation for managers, with a key example this year being Accessibility Guidance for supporting those with neurodiversity conditions.

Simple SEPs for Schools – The Council has supported our schools over the last year to develop a two-page template to be used as their School Equality Plan. This approach clearly aligns to the organisation's Strategic Objectives for 2020 to 2024, as well as allowing them to deliver on outcomes specific to their school. It also will allow case studies and good practice to be identified as we go forward.

Policy Development – A good example of equality-focused policy development is the writing of a Toileting Policy to ensure that the Equalities Act 2010 is followed in all our schools. The policy supports toileting plans for our pupils who need further support due to key issues associated to protected characteristics such as disability and gender. Parental support groups across the area are in operation to address any parental concerns and develop pathways to support parents who raise

concerns regarding their children's disabilities. We have brought together agencies to support and provide up-to-date guidance and advice every month across different venues across the area.

Elected Member Training – This reporting year coincides with a new Council following local election held in May 2022. To support all elected members, both new and returning, an organisational member development programme was put in place. One of the core courses identified to happen within the first quarter for our elected members was Equality and Diversity, being delivered in August 2022. The training was co-delivered by an equality and diversity specialist company, [Red Shiny Apple](#), and a representative from Victim Support.

The training focused on giving elected members an understanding of the legal responsibilities in relation to Equality and Welsh Language. It provided an overview of the Council's equality and diversity policies which promote our PSED commitments (for example, the Integrated Impact Assessment). The session also focused specifically on hate crime and equality issues for people with protected characteristics.

We also encourage our elected members to consider e-modules available online developed by the WLGA which further support them to understand their duties.

Championing Key Equality Campaigns – As in previous years, the organisation continues to champion national and international equality campaigns from both professional and political leadership. As an example, in 2022/23 we have delivered organisational campaigns and events for International Women's Day 2023, International Holocaust Memorial Day 2023 and LGBTQ+ History Month. Each of the above examples have had active participation of the Council's newly appointed elected member for Equality and our Cabinet Members and senior management.

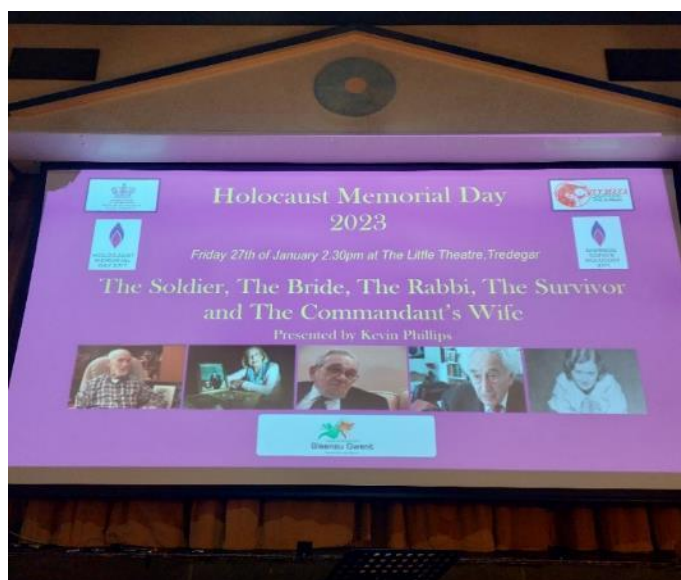


A particularly good example of this was the recent recognition given to International Holocaust Memorial Day via an event held on Friday 27th January 2023. It was a chance to honour the survivors of regimes of hatred and take the opportunity to reflect on the ways in which we live our lives today and bring our communities together to create a safer, better future.

With the theme being “Ordinary People” for 2023, our Equality Champion hosted the event to commemorate the day, with local councillors, council staff and partner representatives invited to attend “The Little Theatre” in Tredegar. The event was hosted by Tredegar-based not for profit company Cymru Creations and involved a documentary film that brought together five different stories to highlight the atrocities that occurred. Also, later in the evening, the organisation lit up Tredegar Town Clock and the General Offices in Ebbw Vale purple to commemorate the day.

Furthermore, at the Council meeting held on 26th January 2023, the Council’s Leader, supported by the Cabinet members, made a proposal - which was unanimously agreed - to award [Eva Clarke](#) the Freedom of the Borough, the highest accolade the can the Council can bestow.

Eva Clarke was born in a concentration camp and was one of only three babies that survived. Eva has worked so hard over the years to ensure the stories of those survivors have been told, ensuring their memories live on and what they endured is never forgotten. Eva has strong links with South Wales, and Blaenau Gwent particularly. The award ceremony took place in March 2023.



Next Steps for Equality Objective One in 2023/24

- Continue to raise the profile of the equality agenda across the organisation and embed it as “business as usual”, supported through regular meetings and monitoring work carried out by the organisation.
- The development of the new Strategic Equality Plan for 2024-28.
- Ensure that the organisation is appropriately considering all the related duties from the Welsh Government’s Anti-racist Wales Action Plan and LGBTQ+ Action Plans.
- Ensure the organisation receives up-to-date guidance and support, including the sharing of good practice, to achieve its Public Sector Equality Duty.
- Continued engagement of political and professional leadership teams and ongoing support of National and Regional equality campaigns.
- Review the effectiveness of the new Integrated Impact Assessment process, provide guidance and support
- Provided management teams with guidance on the new Integrated Impact Assessment process to ensure staff are familiar with the process
- Build on our research library to include guidance on the Integrated Impact Assessment Process and examples, data sets, national and local reports, and case studies and lived experience stories.
- Continue to lead on key agendas affecting our communities such as Cost of Living and supporting national issues such as resettlement.
- Develop an organisational Equality and Welsh Network

Equality Objective Two - “We will be an equal opportunity employer with a workforce that values equalities and diversity”

Overview

We as an employer value our workforce, we recognise that being an equality opportunity employer and being identified as an employer of choice is of upmost importance to encourage take up of roles and encourage more diversity within the workforce.

We continue to take steps to maintain and create a diverse workforce as we recognise this brings about benefits both internally and within the community of Blaenau Gwent as it allows for different perspectives and alignment with the communities that we serve.

In 2021 we developed an organisational Workforce Strategy which is in place until 2026. The strategy sets out the key priorities to create an effective workforce:

- Health, culture, and effective leadership
- Excellence in management across the council
- Highly motivate engaged workforce
- Evidence based decision making, planning and delivery; and
- Modern employer of choice

To support us becoming a ‘modern employer of choice’ we have continued to monitor the diversity of the workforce using workforce data and information.

Key Examples of Actions from 2022/23



Key Workforce Data - This year work has taken place to improve the quality of our workforce data via a review by of our Organisation Development Division on our equality monitoring processes. This has been done to reflect current guidelines across all the protected characteristics.

Following the review, the equality questions asked in our staff information management system, iTrent, has been updated and all staff are regularly reminded via our internal communication channels to consider their personal information. It is anticipated this will further allow for greater understanding of the workforce.

Gender Pay Gap – We annually consider the issue of gender pay and publish relevant statistics each year as part of our statutory equality measure which helps us to understand the difference in average earnings between women and men.

Our assessment, published as part of our [Pay Policy Statement for 2022/23](#), shows women and men are paid equally for doing equivalent jobs across the Council, with a predominantly female workforce (77.3% female, 22.7% male), occupying a high percentage of jobs across all four pay quartiles. Furthermore, our gender pay gap is significantly lower than the national UK average.

Agile Working - In 2021 the new Agile Working Policy was implemented which ensured staff were able to work at home, or from the community safely and effectively, following risk assessments. This process ensured that staff were provided with the necessary adjustments or equipment to carry out their duties effectively as well as demonstrating the ongoing commitment towards equality.

An online survey and face to face workshops were undertaken at the end of 2022 to consider the impact of the Agile Working Policy to understand the positives or negatives of the policy in regard to staff working practices. The policy will be reviewed further in 2023 and updated where necessary.

Our Organisational Development Policies – In 2022/23 our Organisational Development Division reviewed and updated a series of workforce policies which supports equality and diversity within the workplace. A few examples are highlighted below:

Pay Policy	Mar-22
Adverse Weather Guidance	Jun-22
Adoption/Surrogacy Leave	Oct-22
Maternity Leave	Oct-22
Paternity/Maternity Support Leave	Oct-22
Parental Leave	Oct-22

We believe regularly monitoring, reviewing, and implementing these policies allows us to maintain policy effectiveness and strengthens equality of opportunity.

A good example of where policy development for our staff has made a difference is when the Council agreed to sign up to the Trade Union Congress (TUC) policy “Dying to Work Charter” in December 2022. Therefore, our Critical Illness and Working Guidelines and the Attendance Management Policy have been updated. Interim Chief Executive, Blaenau Gwent County Borough, Damien McCann, commented:

“We support the TUC’s Dying to Work Campaign and in signing the Dying to Work Charter we show our commitment to support colleagues should they receive a terminal ill health diagnosis. A terminal diagnosis is devastating and is a time of huge emotional stress, fear, and uncertainty. The health and well-being of our staff is a priority and when employees are faced with a serious or terminal illness, it is important that they can choose the path that is right for them and their families, without having the additional worry of financial uncertainty.”

Training for council staff and school-based staff – As part of our equality and diversity training offer for teachers and pupils we delivered a Race Awareness Training Programme facilitated by [No Boundaries](#) in one of our learning community schools over three separate sessions.

Furthermore, two of our Primary Schools in the area have taken part in training on anti-discrimination offered by our regional West Gwent Community Cohesion Team. This saw over 60 pupils (Year Five and Year Six) exploring themes of: Similarities and Differences; Identity; Exploring diversity; Communities Culture and Cohesion; Belonging and Inclusion; and Prejudice.

We also have a corporate partnership training programme agreement with neighbouring Caerphilly County Borough Council to deliver bespoke training specifically for those working within Health & Social Care. Although the courses are not solely equality focused, equality is embedded throughout the delivery.

During 2022/23 around 3,000 training opportunities (online and face to face), were taken up by approximately 2,000 Council and school staff.

Further support around Training and Development - Children in Wales have also provided free training, including webinar sessions, on LGBTQ+ support for Children & Young People; Child Poverty; Violence Against Women and Girls and NSPCC report. These training opportunities, alongside additional resources have been shared with services across the Council, including educational settings.

In 2022/23 we worked with the West Gwent Community Cohesion Team to develop an e-module on equality for all staff, which we anticipate will be rolled out early 2023/24.



Communicating on Equality and Diversity

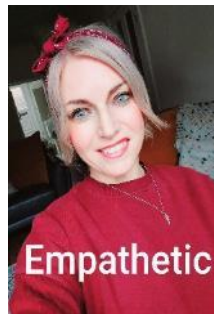
Issues – We have continued to deliver a weekly ‘Well-being Wednesday’ staff bulletin which provides up-to-date access to well-being services such as our Care First service, as well as information on training and development opportunities.

In 2022/23 the bulletin has been used to promote training opportunities for staff on topics such as armed forces, hate crime and Welsh, as well as promote relevant equality and diversity information (for example, online animated video about mental health support).

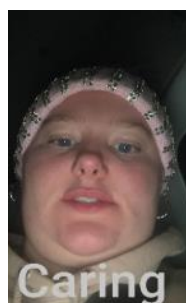
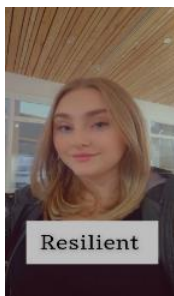
Two other good examples include encouraging all staff to learn sign language through [Sign4life](#), and also providing updates on the release of key statistics from the Census 2021, providing new up-to-date insight into the people living in Blaenau Gwent and their protected characteristics.

Communicating with Schools on Equality and Diversity – Regular educational bulletins are prepared to provide schools with key equality and diversity information, resources, policy information, training and support relevant to educational settings.

Supporting White Ribbon Day – In November 2022 staff across the council were encouraged to participate in [White Ribbon Day](#) . This day looks to engage people to prevent violence against women and girls by addressing its root causes. In 2022, the day fell during the FIFA World Cup, and people participating were asked to highlight one of 11 traits that men and boys can nurture to help create a world of equality and safety for women. Examples of staff participation are shown below:



Also, the Blaenau Gwent Youth Forum were keen to participate, with examples shown below:



UK Youth Parliament Member for Blaenau Gwent (left); Blaenau Gwent Youth Mayor (Centre); and Welsh Youth Parliament Member for Blaenau Gwent.

Social Care Recruitment Drive - A positive career campaign was developed to raise the profile of working in social care. The campaign aimed to encourage people to take up staffing roles which help individuals with protected characteristics. Please click the links below to watch the films:

[Grace - Adult Social Care](#)

[Interested in a career in Social Care?](#)

Next Steps for Equality Objective Two in 2023/24

- We will test if our workforce values equalities and diversity through continued staff engagement and involvement and identify any key areas for improvement.
- We will review the diversity of our workforce using our workforce data and where appropriate implement the delivery of positive recruitment drives
- We will continue to use our workforce data to understand health conditions of our employees and where appropriate hold specific awareness days to raise awareness
- Implement and review the Equality Training & Resources Toolkit for wider services.
- To continue to build on the Welsh & Equality staff network to support with plan development and deliver on the objectives within the plan.
- We are currently developing Neurodiversity Guidance for managers in consultation with key partners and trade unions.
- Other policies under development for Council approval include the Recruitment Policy, IVF Policy, and Attendance Management Policy.

Equality Objective Three - “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 2022/27- *“Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent”*. We as a local authority continue our commitment to ‘improving pupil outcomes, progress, and well-being, particularly for our most able and vulnerable pupils’. Providing access to support for children and young people to reach their learning outcomes is essential both for themselves now and the future.

We believe all children and young people should have access to learning opportunities and we aim to work with pupils who are covered by one or more of the protected characteristics to ensure that their learning outcomes are maximised, giving them every opportunity to reach their goals.

Key Examples of Actions from 2022/23

School Support & Guidance - We continue to build strong relationships with our schools and provide support to ensure the latest equality advice and guidance is provided and understood. This includes raising awareness of our strategic equality objectives to ensure schools understand how they contribute and can support equality outcomes.

Working together with schools a simplified, two-page, school equality plan template has been implemented which provides a mechanism for capturing how school are delivering on their equality objectives. The template is fully aligned to the Council’s Strategic Equality Plan and enables schools and the Education Directorate to set out how strategic equality goals are to be achieved.

To complement the new template, we have also developed a new monitoring process for schools to be able to showcase the positive work they are delivering to support the equality agenda. We will review these new arrangements for schools in 2023/24.

“Equality, Diversity & Inclusion” guidance, which includes training, information and toolkit resources are regularly provided from supporting organisations via the Schools Bulletin. For example, National Equality Campaigns and specific reports focusing on equality matters relevant to children and young people are provided.

We continue to develop a framework for reporting incidents via the “My Concerns” system. The system, when fully adopted, looks to provide intelligence on school-based issues and will allow for bespoke training and interventions to be provided, if required, to support outcomes for schools, staff, and pupils.

Gypsy Traveller Play Scheme Project – A positive play scheme project continues to deliver positive outcomes for Gypsy Traveller families and children since the appointment of a dedicated Housing Support Officer for Cwmcrachen. The project delivered onsite and in partnership with Head4Arts has provided children of all ages the opportunity to gain skills in wreath making, t-shirt design, jewellery making and much more.

The Arts Award project for children aged 11-21 years provides opportunities to gain new skills as well as an academic qualification. The projects benefit all children who attend school or are home educated.

A Flying Start project and a ‘Ti a Fi’ group has also been established which will promote the **Welsh Language** to mother and babies. The purpose of the project is to provide younger generations an opportunity to play and learn a new language before attending school whilst raising the importance of early years’ education and the **Welsh Language**.

In February 2023, Gwent Police delivered “The Young Police Cadets” project to target anti-social behaviour and raise awareness about the consequences of poor decisions and actions.



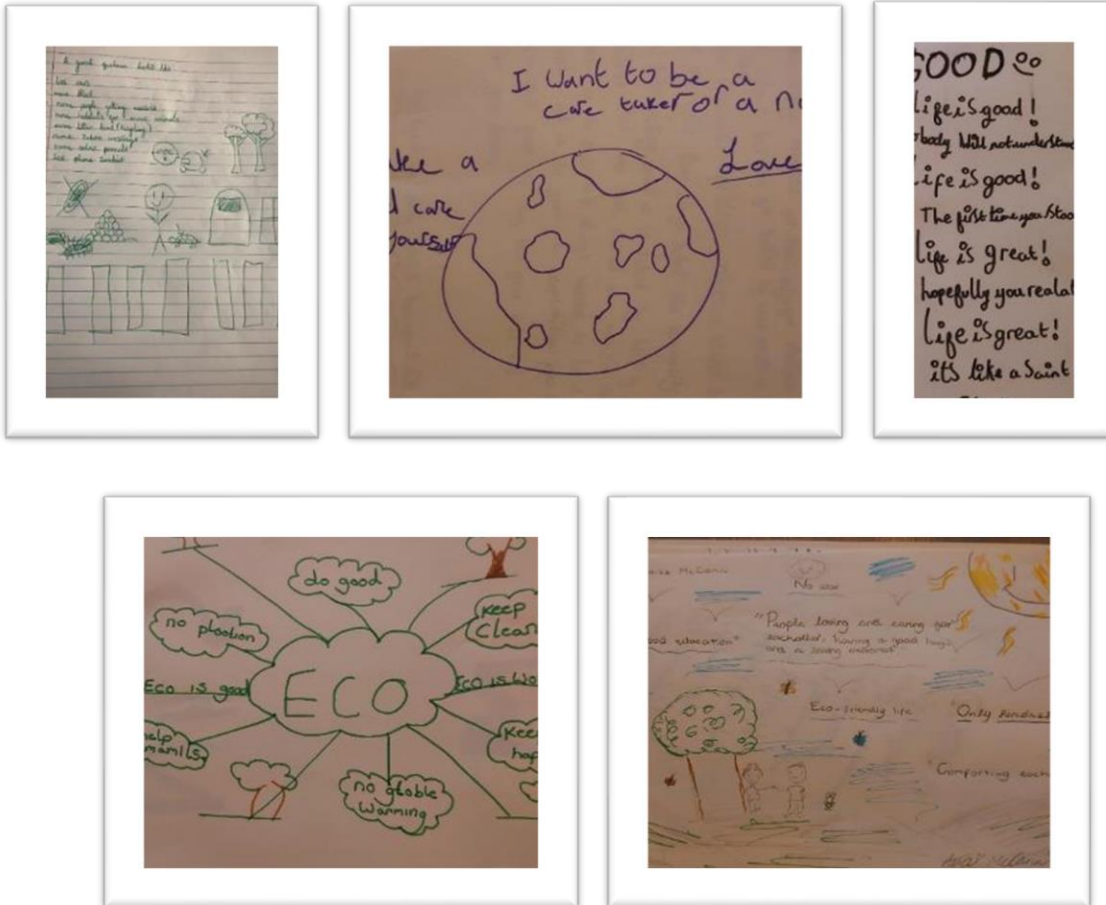
The Gypsy Traveller service along with the Housing Officer worked together to feed into the WG review of local authority Gypsy Traveller sites which can be found here [Gypsy and Traveller caravan count: quality report | GOV.WALES](#).

Children's Grand Council - The Policy and Partnerships team worked together with Education, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, and other Council service areas to successfully deliver three Children's Grand Council sessions to a cohort of 59+ pupils within Blaenau Gwent.

In 2022, two online sessions were delivered due to Covid-19. The first in-person session was held in October 2022 and focussed on the following topics:

- Children's Rights
- Why we have a Children's Grand Council
- How children and young people can get involved
- Healthy food relationships
- Gwent Well-being Plan consultation

What does a good future look like?



Further online sessions are arranged for children who could not attend the in-person session to ensure all children and young people had an opportunity to take part.

LGBTQ+ Support Groups - LGBTQ+ support groups for children and young people are still in operation across Blaenau Gwent. The support groups provide appropriate information and with the opportunity to speak about feelings and empower them to ensure their voice is heard within a safe space.

Young Carers - Families First continue to support young carers to ensure that they are supported, and their voices are heard. Currently, there are 124 Young Carers. A weekly Young Carers group is held and on average 22 members regularly attend. On average, 32 Young Carers attend residential events or planned activities.

The Young Carers steering group brings representatives from a range of partner organisations together to ensure the best support available is offered at the right time to those who need it.

As a Council we support Young Carers to ensure their voices are heard by encouraging them to participate and get involved in Blaenau Gwent's Youth Forum by sharing their priorities or issues. We will continue to work with Young Carers to understand how they would like to participate and ask them to help shape any future sessions with services they want to talk with.



Children & Young People Staff and Partnership Network -

The Children & Young People Staff and Partnership Network has been established to support better communication and joined-up working; to help develop and facilitate projects (for example, excursions). The network helps maximise outcomes for all the children and young people we work with.

Key Educational Work and Development - Schools have developed strategic pathways to ensure the correct agencies are supporting learners and their families. A robust referral process has been established via the Early Years and Additional Learning Needs Support Panel. The panel provides early intervention to support learners and their families to achieve specific targets and achieve better learning outcomes.

Enhanced transition, Person Centred practice (PCP), is embedded to ensure transition of early years' learners are managed with the full support of schools. In partnership with the Inclusive Practice Service work has been underway to design support packages to help school nurseries to develop autism spectrum disorder friendly classrooms.

Our early year's settings supported World Down Syndrome Day – Odd Socks; World Autism Awareness Day; World health day – Healthy Eating; and National Inclusion Week – Celebrating diversity and inclusion.

The Traveller Education Service – We continue to provide one to one, and small group academic support for children and young people within schools and alternative settings. Through the literacy intervention, nearly all Gypsy Roma Traveller pupils made improvements in both reading and spelling in both primary and secondary education. Despite Covid-19 having an initial impact on learning most pupils' have reached pre-pandemic attainment levels due to the additional support provided.

All pupils at secondary schools now have literacy levels within the normal range for age i.e., Standard Scores of 90 or above. The onsite Literacy Project provides support to those with low literacy levels. Also, literacy booklets have been created and distributed to parents to encourage reading at home.

During Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller History Month in June 2022 we encouraged all schools to participate to raise awareness and to celebrate the culture.

Transition work continues to support pupils moving from primary school into secondary schools' settings (Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3). Gypsy, Roma, Traveller pupils and their families are fully supported throughout this phase to ensure any barriers and fears are overcome which typically stem from parents' own negative personal experiences from school. Leaflets for professionals, pupils and parents were distributed to help guide and encourage transition.

Next Steps for Equality Objective Three in 2023/24

- Continue to embed and develop the current equality performance monitoring arrangements for schools
- Development of corporate schools' equality network as a channel for providing up to date guidance and support, as appropriate
- Continue to develop the framework for reporting issues within schools via the "My Concerns" system
- Consideration of [Children in Wales' Child Poverty Report's](#) findings and what work required to support Blaenau Gwent.
- Expanding the Children's and Young People Network to ensure maximised opportunities for children and young people to get involved
- To support Families First to establish a working group for Young Carers to improve their voices being heard

Equality Objective Four- “We will promote and support safe, friendly and cohesive communities”

Overview

Our commitment towards the Well-being of Future Generation (Wales) Act National Goals of supporting ‘a more Equal Wales’ and a ‘Wales of Cohesive Communities’ continues. Working in partnership with the West Gwent Community Cohesion Team alongside our Community Safety Team we deliver programmes and initiatives that increase awareness & understanding, celebrate diversity, and bring communities together.

Key Examples of Actions from 2022/23

National & International Campaigns - We continue to work in partnership with a wide range of organisations to support key national equality and cohesion campaigns through public and organisational events and via social media.

Examples, includes:

- Holocaust Memorial Day
- Show Racism the Red Card
- LGBTQ+ History Month, Pride
- White Ribbon Day (campaign to end domestic violence)
- Black History Month
- International Children’s Day

Asylum Dispersal and Ukrainian Support - Since 2016, Blaenau Gwent Council has supported the UK's Resettlement Scheme Programme, working in partnership with a wide range of public, third sector and private organisations, to deliver a holistic package of support.

In June 2021, the Council agreed to support Afghan nationals via Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and later Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) building on existing commitment to support the UK Resettlement Scheme. The Council pledged to resettle up to 4 families from Afghanistan. 2 families have successfully resettled in Blaenau Gwent (9 individuals), alongside a spontaneous Afghan family arrival (3 individuals).

In early 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine saw those living in Ukraine fleeing their country due to the conflict. This led to the UK Government launching "**The Homes for Ukraine Scheme**" in March 2022. The scheme allows individuals, charities, community groups and businesses to bring Ukrainians to safety, including those with no family ties to the UK.

The Homes for Ukraine Scheme allows (individual) sponsors in the UK to nominate a named Ukrainian or a named Ukrainian family to stay with them in their home or in a separate property.

In Blaenau Gwent, several expressions of interest were received in support of The Homes for Ukraine Scheme – including residents offering accommodation (spare rooms or second homes). We now have 33 Ukrainian refugees hosted within the borough.

Furthermore, in 2022 the Council worked with Welsh Government to set up a Welcome Centre in the area to support Ukrainian people seeking refuge and sanctuary via the Wales Super Sponsor Scheme. Arrivals at the centre began from July 2022, and to date, almost 100 Ukrainians have been supported with initial accommodation.

Several residents have secured employment locally. All school aged children are now enrolled into local schools. A number of residents are exploring private rental options, particularly the larger families where there are no hosting options available. Positive communications campaigns have resulted in two expressions of interest to host Ukrainian families.

Partnership & Community Work - In November 22, we supported the Gwent Public Services Board in delivering its second participatory budgeting programme, Community Voice, Community Choice. 16 community groups were successfully voted by the public to receive monies to deliver local well-being projects (a total of £127,527) at a community event held at The Beaufort Theatre, Ebbw Vale.

Since October 2022, 11 community groups received monies from the Household Support Fund / Cost of Living Food Distribution Support Grant to provide direct help to local communities in need, and 21 community groups received monies from the Loneliness and Isolation Grant.

Next Steps for Equality Objective Four in 2023/24

- Continue to support National equality campaign (e.g., Black History Month, Holocaust Memorial etc.), including positive social media campaigns.
- Continue to provide representation and National, Regional and Local Equality and Community Cohesion Networks supporting the sharing of intelligence, learning and good practice.
- Deliver Community Cohesion training (e.g., Hate Crime Awareness) for Corporate Leadership Team, Members, and staff and schools
- Support the delivery of the Afghan Resettlement Programme and Wider Asylum Seeker Dispersal Scheme pilot.
- Continue to work as a partner with Welsh Government, local communities, and education to support those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the Community Voice & Community Choice programme to understand the impact of the programme and to continue to work with partners should additional funding arise for 23/24.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the Warm Grant Scheme within BG and how it has supported the community. If further funding arises for 23/24, continue to use this funding to support the community
- Continue to work with our partners, post-Covid-19, and within the current cost of living crisis, to maintain community provisions which support community cohesion.

Equality Objective Five- “We will ensure there is meaningful involvement with people who have protected characteristics and key stakeholders that represent their interests”

Overview

As a local authority we take the voices of our community very seriously. We understand the importance of meaningful involvement and providing opportunities for everyone to be able to share their views and influence decision-making processes within the Council and our wider partners.

We demonstrate this through our commitment to the National Principles for Public engagement and the National Principles for Children and Young People’s Participation.

Key Examples of Actions from 2022/23

Engagement Highlights – Post Covid-19 we continue to engage our community groups via online platforms. However, during the past year - when it has been safe to do so - we have run in-person engagement activities. Engaging people in a variety of ways has allowed us to reach as many people as possible so they are able to get involved and share their views.

We continue to support the Citizen Panel which gives local people as well as stakeholders the opportunity to get involved and have their say on local matters, through surveys, user research interviews, and focus groups etc. Examples of consultations promoted includes:

- Council Budget 2023/24
- Active Travel Consultation
- Development of Participatory Budgeting Process.

Gwent Public Services Board, Gwent Well-being Plan - As a member of the Gwent Public Services Board we are committed to supporting the Well-being of Future Generation’s Act’s five ways of working, which includes “involvement”, both locally and regionally.

In 2021, we consulted on the findings of the Gwent Well-being Assessment's findings. 402 (23%) participated in Blaenau Gwent out of a total of 1,713 responses across Gwent.

In 2022, we consulted on the draft Gwent Well-being Plan. 97 (37.2%) participated in Blaenau Gwent out of a total of 261 responses across Gwent.

Our reach and participation rates reflect the strong partnership working and community links we have in Blaenau Gwent which is supported by the local partnership engagement group.

Special sessions were delivered for children and young people via the Children's Grand Council and Youth Forum (65 participants). The sessions were made accessible and enabled views and ideas to be shared through drawings, stories, and poems.

Our Blaenau Gwent Youth Forum -The Youth Forum gives young people the chance to have their say and get involved in the development and improvement of services. The group continue to represent the voices of young people across Blaenau Gwent and have delivered on several local and regional priorities and actively participated in a range of public activities:

- National / Local Campaign Work (for example, encouraging young people to register to vote)
- Film development around tackling bullying
- Attendance at House of Commons Debate
- Consultations to support policy development
- Knife Angel launch
- Police Crime Commissioner Question Time Event
- Young person Adopted-Member role on scrutiny committees

The Youth Forum received recognition for the valuable contributions made to the local community at the GAVO Volunteering Awards in 2022.

Next year, a positive campaign to recruit more young people will be launched with the aim to redress the gender equality balance of the group as currently all forum members are female.



Gwent Association for Voluntary Action (GAVO)- Awards



Video: [Knife Angel Launch - Newport](#)



House of Commons Debate



Video: [Let's Go Zero](#)

Youth Mayor Priority on Tacking bullying - Outgoing Youth Mayor, Chloe Lines and Youth Forum members worked with Cymru Creations to create a film as part of their Anti-Bullying Campaign. To view the film, click on the image below:



Next steps

- Continue to support the Gwent PSB and Local Delivery Partnership in meeting its involvement and engagement requirements under the WBFG Act as well as supporting delivery of the Gwent Well-being Plan.
- Continue to support the development of our forums, understanding the levels of engagement that each person accessing those forums wants, i.e., information only, consultations, meetings etc.
- Development of a participation & engagement strategy along with the development of a communication strategy which will consider the requirements of the Equality Act.
- Undertake a review of Blaenau Gwent citizens' panel.
- Continue to strengthen children & young people's participation and engagement by launching a campaign to recruit new Youth Forum members and to explore opportunities to expand the Children & Young People's Network.

Equality Objective Six *“We will strive to tackle inequality caused by poverty for people who have protected characteristics”*

Overview

We are committed to meeting our requirements under the Public Sector Equality Duty 2011 which includes tackle inequality caused by poverty. We look to ensure those who experience poverty, or those who live in less favourable living standards, are considered during all decision-making processes relating to the services we deliver.

We continue to work with Welsh Government, the Equality & Human Rights Commission as well as our partners to undertake work, research, and analysis to understand the socio-economic situation of our communities within Blaenau Gwent. This work informs our decision-making processes.

The cost of living crisis that has swept across the United Kingdom in 2022 has meant that many people are struggling with escalating costs such as bills for energy and food as inflation soars, and wages have not increased at the same or similar levels.

As a Council in 2022/23, we have been determined to do what we could to help those within our community that needed support, help, advice or guidance, particularly for those that need it the most.

Key Examples of Actions from 2022/23

Revised Integrated Impact Assessment – The Council undertook a review of the way it carries out its impact assessment process. This fell in-line with new legal expectations from the Act, the Socio-Economic Duty.

As part of the review a decision was taken to streamline and simplify the process by removing the initial screening process. The process was also strengthened to ensure all equality and socio-economic factors were fully considered as well as wider policy considerations when making decisions, reviewing existing or developing new policies:

- Well-being of Future Generation Act Goals
- New Corporate Objectives
- Armed forces (new national duties)
- Community Safety considerations

The requirement to carry out and report on impact assessing continues to be expected as part of the corporate reporting and decision-making process. The Policy Team continues to provide on-going support, advice, and guidance to the organisation on the Integrated Impact Assessment Process.

Cost of Living Crisis – We continue to work collaboratively with partners to help tackle the cost of living crisis. Recognising joined-up working and holistic interventions are required to ensure those who are socio-economically disadvantaged are provided the right support at the right time now, and in the future.

As a Council during 2022/23 we have set up internal networks to ensure available schemes are put in place to support people with a strong focus on our Community Hubs, which operate across seven accessible locations across the borough through our network of libraries. Furthermore, we are working with Citizen Advice to offer weekly support through our community hubs.



The community hubs offer people the opportunity to benefit from a range of advice and support including discretionary payments for cost of living and housing payments with specific support available for pensioners and those with disability. Also, council tax discounts and reduction may be appropriate which particularly help those with mental or physical disabilities, carers or those on low income. Support for families with children is also offered with a specific focus on free school meals and uniform grants.

Furthermore, advice and support for utility bills continues to be offered as people suffer as a consequence of the energy crisis, with opportunities for support and schemes provided for fuel support, winter fuel payments for older people and warm home discounts.



Blaenau Gwent Food Partnership – The Council plays a crucial role with its partners in supporting this important [new partnership](#) which is aiming to build a local food system that is healthy, affordable, resilient and fair.

The partnership is focusing on supporting communities around the borough with community growing projects, food organisations and a shop local network.

In supporting people through the cost of living crisis there is currently a focus on providing opportunities for people who are struggling to get access to food through a number of food bank or food support providers across the borough. In 2022/23 the Council provided support through overseeing the Food Distribution Support Grant with over £70,000 being available to groups.

Next Steps

- Continue working with Welsh Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission to ensure we are maximising equality outcomes for those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, using up to date data and reports as well as local intelligence to inform local decisions.
- Monitor and review of the new Integrated Impact Assessment process, including guidance and supporting materials for staff.
- Continue to work in partnership with public and third sector organisations to reduce inequality of outcomes for those who are socio-economically disadvantaged.

Next steps and action planning 2023-2024

Our annual report has highlighted the continued progression towards meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty as well as highlighting key examples to demonstrate our progress towards our Strategic Equality Plan Objectives 2020-2024, which continues to raise the profile of equality throughout the organisation.

We do however recognise that there is more work to do in order to improve inequality of outcomes for our local communities, staff, and stakeholders, which has become increasingly important over recent years in light of the global COVID 19 pandemic, which has been followed by the unjust war on Ukraine as well as the current cost of living crisis which has exacerbated existing inequalities.

We are committed to continually building on the progress made, share good practice across the organisation, strive towards continued contribution to the WBFG Act goals 2015 and the national goals of ‘**a More Equal Wales**’ and ‘**a Wales of Cohesive Communities**’.

Over 2023-2024 we intend to build on our highlighted work using it to form a plan for the up-and-coming year, as well as using this to form the development of new Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028. Part of this work will also involve further work around Welsh Government’s Race Equality and LGBTQ+ Action Plans, and the National Commemoration Audit for Wales.

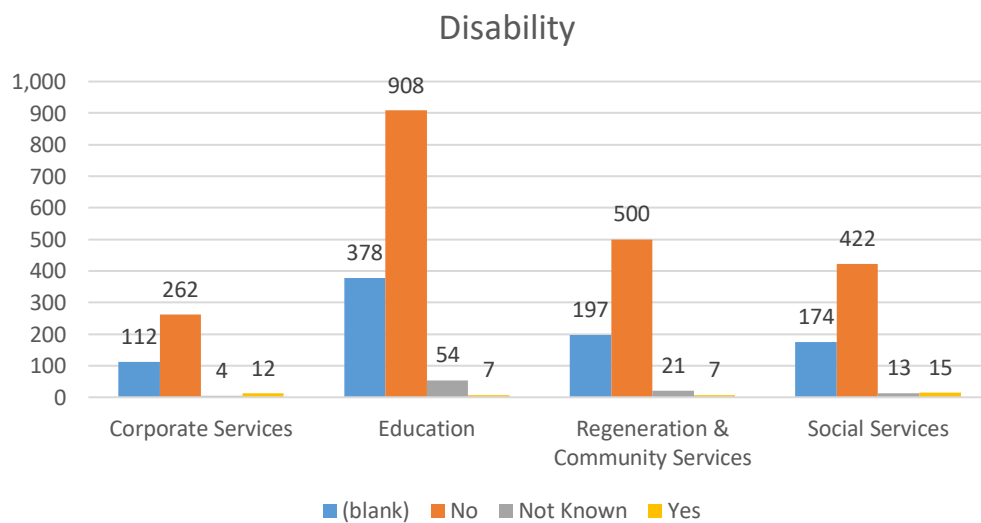
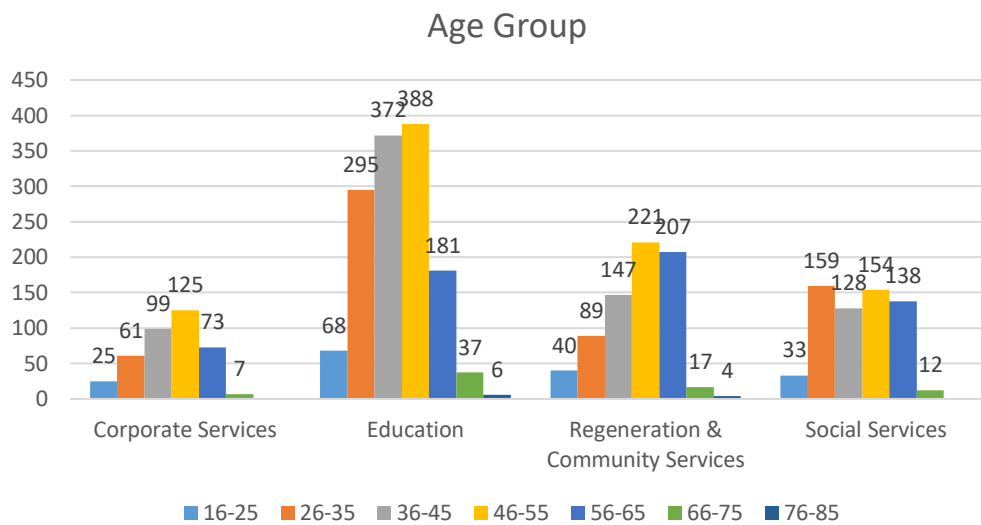
As you will have seen within the report each section has next steps that will form the work plan for 2023-2024. Some of the key actions for 2023-2024 are highlighted below:

- Continue to embed the new Integrated Impact Assessment Process, ensuring that this is part of core business, allowing for effective decision-making processes to maximise equality outcomes across the organisation.
- Continue to work with education to understand the equality landscape within our schools, to gain a baseline of equality work, implement a

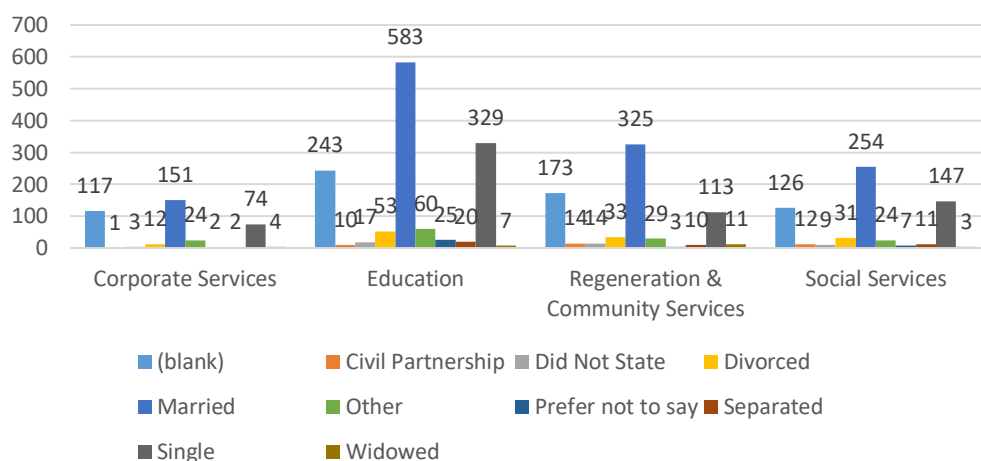
robust reporting mechanism for schools and understand training/support needs to continue to build on the equality work.

- Develop and implement an Equality Training Programme & Resources package accessible to the whole organisation (including basic awareness training and bespoke)
- Continue to support the Gwent Public Services Board to develop the New Gwent Well-being Plan
- Re-establish and strengthen existing engagement networks as well as establish new opportunities for people to get involved (e.g., Voices of our Valleys, Corporate Equality Network, Young People Network etc.)
- Raise awareness of the ARWAP, LGBTQ+ Action Plan and the commemoration audit, what this means and key actions to take forward to develop an action plan in order to progress this work
- Engage effectively across the organisation, with partners and key groups to develop the new Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028

Workforce Summary Data April 2021-March 2022



Marital Status



Ethnicity

