

Blaenau Gwent

Strategic Equality Plan

Annual Report

2024-2025

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Strategic Equality Plan Annual Monitoring Report April 2024 – March 2025

“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

Contents	Pages
Foreword	4
Introduction	6
Equality Objective 1 – We will be a fair and equitable organisation.	7
Equality Objective 2 - We will be a workplace that champions diversity and inclusion.	14
Equality Objective 3 - We will create a fair and inclusive learning culture for all children and young people with a focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion.	22
Equality Objective 4 - We will promote and support inclusive, safe and cohesive communities.	30
Equality Objective 5 - We will ensure effective engagement and participation for people with protected characteristics.	36
Equality Objective 6 - We will strive to reduce inequality caused by poverty.	44
Next Steps	49
Workforce Data Summary 2023/24	50

Foreword

I am pleased to present the first annual report on our progress towards the [Strategic Equality Plan \(SEP\) 2024-28](#) of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. This report showcases some of the achievements and challenges we have faced in the past year.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion are at the heart of our vision and values as a council. We want to ensure that everyone who lives, works, or visits Blaenau Gwent can fulfil their potential and enjoy a good quality of life. We are and remain fully 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](#).

Blaenau Gwent Council is in a process of change. In June 2024, both Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Councils agreed to share a Chief Executive. This arrangement is the first of its kind in Wales and highlights both council's ability to forward think and pioneer enhanced collaborative working. We continue to be part of the [Gwent Marmot Region](#), and are currently working towards developing a Marmot Masterplan for Blaenau Gwent to become a region with the goal of addressing and lowering inequalities, by using the Marmot principles:

- 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

We recognise that there is still more work to do to address the persistent and emerging inequalities that affect our residents and staff. We are committed to learning from our experiences and evidence, engaging with our stakeholders and partners, and taking positive action to make a difference. Our work also contributes towards the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act](#) and the seven National Well-being Goals, which are fundamental in realising change within our communities.

This report provides an overview of how we have delivered on our six strategic equality objectives in 2024-25, covering areas such as leadership and governance, workforce representation and development, community

engagement and involvement, community cohesion and inequality caused by deprivation. It also highlights some of the good practice examples and case studies that demonstrate our progress and impact.

Within this report we have also considered national strategic plans and key action plans, that the Welsh Government have developed to address the current inequalities faced by individuals and communities.

These plans include:

- [LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales \(2023\)](#)
- [Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan \(2022\)](#)
- [Age Friendly Wales Strategy \(2021\)](#)
- [Children and Young People's Plan \(2022\)](#)
- [Violence Against Women and girls, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence \(VAWDASV\) strategy \(2022\)](#)
- [Socio Economic Duty \(2021\)](#)

We would like to thank all our staff, councillors, partners, service users and communities who have contributed to our equality work in the past year. We value your feedback and suggestions on how we can improve our performance and outcomes. We look forward to working with you in the next year and beyond to achieve our vision of a fair, open and welcoming Blaenau Gwent for all.



Councillor Stephen Thomas
**Leader, Cabinet Member Corporate
and Performance**



Stephen Vickers
Chief Executive

Introduction

Our annual report highlights how we are meeting the 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 delivering policies and services on a day-to-day basis that support and value diversity, in order 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.

The Annual Report is presented into six sections. Each section corresponds with each of the current equality objectives and provides the following:

- Overview of the Objective
- Summary progress against Equality Objectives 2024-25
- Identified next steps for Equality Objectives 2025-28

The report concludes with the council’s workforce data for 2023-24.

Equality Objective 1

We will be a fair and equitable organisation.

Overview

We recognise that everyone is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. The ability to live and work without prejudice is a fundamental right, regardless of people's background, identity, and experiences.

Equality is not only a legal obligation, but it is also a moral and social responsibility. To be a fair and equitable organisation requires effective political and professional leadership that promotes a culture of respect, accountability, and collaboration across the organisation.

As an organisation we are committed to delivering the equality duties placed upon us as a public body and understand the need to ensure that our policies, practices, and services are fair, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs and aspirations of our communities and workforce.

Our [Strategic Equality Plan](#) is recognised as a key policy driver in achieving this goal alongside ambitions set within our [Corporate Plan 2022-2027](#).

Summary of progress - Objective 1

Over the past year, the Corporate Leadership Team has actively reviewed and supported the SEP Year One Action Plan, ensuring that equality outcomes were achieved across the organisation. To facilitate this process, we established a Strategic Oversight and Delivery Group, which is responsible for reviewing and monitoring our progress on each action related to our Strategic Objectives. By aligning these actions with our business planning processes, we have ensured that they are effectively tracked and continuously improved. The group, chaired by Councillor Chris Smith, our Equality Member Champion, who also represents the Council on the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Members Equality Network.

Training

The Corporate Leadership Team has approved the rollout of an Equality E-Learning Module, developed by the West Gwent Cohesion Team and integrated into the new training platform, Thingi. Managers have been briefed, and staff have been informed throughout 2024-25 about the importance of completing

this module. Additionally, the Equality Member Champion has completed the training and encouraged all Elected Members to do the same. Staff completion rates have been monitored and reported throughout 2024-25.

Elected Members have received several Member Briefing sessions on key equality matters including Gypsy Traveller and LGBT+ History Month and Diverse Cymru's Cultural Competency Scheme.

Networking

Blaenau Gwent Council continues to be represented at the Regional Equality Network as well as other National/Regional Networks to share best practice, learning opportunities and to work collaboratively, this includes being a part of the Proud Councils Network and WLGA Equality Officers Network.

Integrated Impact Assessment

The Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process remains a crucial tool for facilitating and informing our decision-making processes. The assessment, along with associated guidance documents and supporting examples, can be accessed by our staff on our in-house intranet system. Recognising the need for improvement, we have identified better monitoring of the IIA's usage as a key action for the 2024-25 period. This will be a primary focus in our Year 2 action plan to ensure the process is effectively utilised and continuously improved.

International Campaigns

Throughout this reporting period, as an organisation we have continued to recognise and mark international campaigns, including, Black History Month, Holocaust Memorial Day, LGBTQ+ History Month and International Women's Day. Given our agile working model, there has been the provision of Microsoft Teams backgrounds to our staff to ensure we are showing support for these important campaigns during meetings across the Council.

LGBT+ History Month

As an organisation, we remain fully committed to Welsh Government's vision as set out in the [LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales](#). During 2024-25 the Council agreed to support the exploration of a grass roots Pride event within the Blaenau Gwent area, working with community groups and local partners.

Blaenau Gwent Council stands in support of our LGBTQ+ residents and staff and actively celebrate LGBT+ History Month. As outlined in our Corporate Plan we are working to make Blaenau Gwent 'a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities'. As such, we are committed to

promoting equality, supporting individuals' rights, and ensuring that all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, can live their lives authentically and without fear of discrimination.

To mark LGBT+ History Month, the LGBTQ+ flag was flown outside the General Offices, in Ebbw Vale throughout February, Elected Members were invited to attend a briefing session on LGBT+ Awareness and the plans for a first Pride event in 2025 were publicly launched on social media.



The Integrated Children's Centre in Blaina was decorated in support of LGBT+ History Month as can be seen below:



International Day of Persons with Disabilities

The Council celebrated International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Internally, with our staff we shared a specific newsletter that cited the training available relating to disability as well as encouraging our staff to be part of our Lived Experiences Network where we look to draw insight from relevant personal experience. Externally, recognition was given on our social media platforms, using the opportunity to promote the services available to those living with a disability to reach their full potential via the Blaenau Gwent Pathways Working on Wellbeing Programme.



International Day of Disabled Persons 2024

International Day of Disabled Persons recognises visible and invisible disabilities to promote the importance of inclusion in life and the workplace. This year's theme is 'amplifying the leadership of persons with disabilities for an inclusive and sustainable future'.

While the council of course works in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 that recognises disability as a protected characteristic and as such embed this within our policies and procedures, participation and representation of persons living with a disability are integral to continuous development. If you are a member of staff living with a disability, be that a physical, sensory or learning disability your lived experience can help us ensure we are amplifying the leadership of persons with disabilities for an inclusive and sustainable future!

JOIN THE LIVED EXPERIENCES NETWORK TODAY - Be as involved as much as you like; just receive updates such as consultations, questionnaires and relevant information from the **Policy Team** or actively participate in forums, social media interaction, events and so on. To join the Lived Experience Network please email: pps@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

iTrent Information

In order for us to get a clear understanding of our organisation we capture an overview of our staff's equality and diversity detail follow the instructions below to ensure your information is up to date. (All information is stored in accordance with GDPR). 'Click here (<http://intranet/policies-plans-strategies/equality-and-diversity.aspx>) to find more information on equalities'

Equality Training for Staff

We encourage all Blaenau Gwent staff to complete the online equality training module to help us work in the most effective and fair way possible.

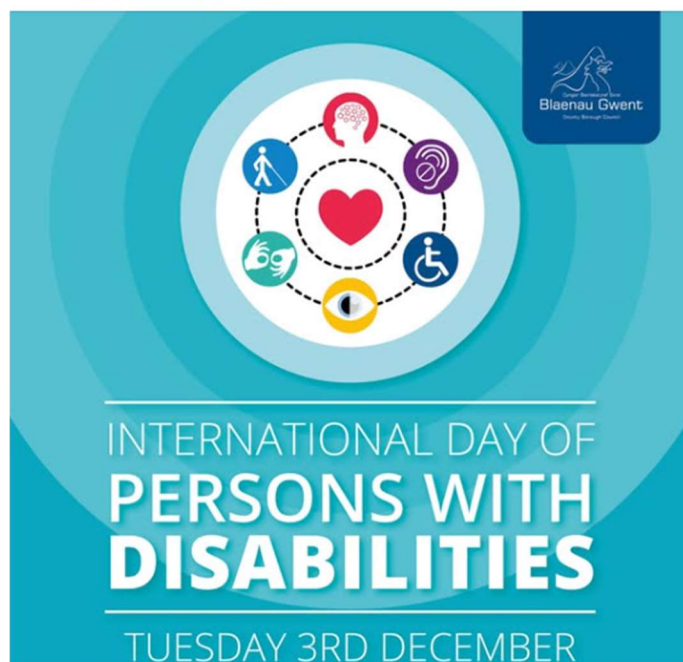
What will you gain from this training?

- An understanding of the Equality Act 2010, and what this means for Statutory Services.
- Understand what we mean by 'protected characteristics' and be able to identify the 9 protected characteristics recognised by law.
- Understand why equalities is so important to society, by providing an overview of some of the historical equality milestones.
- Provide you with reporting methods to report any issues should you experience or witness discrimination in the workplace.
- Provide you with the understanding of how you should and shouldn't treat others in the workplace and within our communities.
- Equip you with the tools to enable you to promote equalities within your team.

To get access to this training please contact: pps@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk who will provide all the relevant information.

Blaenau Gwent CBC · Follow
3 December 2024 · 🌐

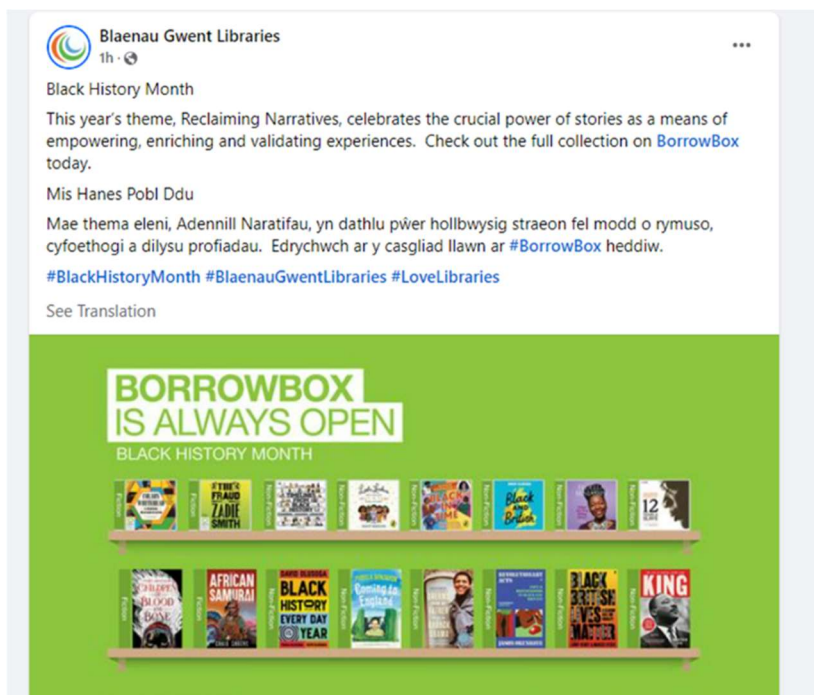
Did you know that the 3rd of December is International Day of Disabled Persons 2024? International Day of Disabled Persons recognises visible and invisible disabilities to promote the importance of inclusion in life, the community and the workplace. Equality and inclusion are at the heart of our vision and values as a council. We want to ensure that everyone who lives, works, or visits Blaenau Gwent can fulfil their potential and enjoy a good quality of life. We therefore would like to shine a light on the importance of recognising and raising awareness of International Day of Disabled Persons 2024! See here for more information on disability support within Blaenau Gwent. The theme for 2024 is 'Amplifying the leadership of persons with disabilities for an inclusive and sustainable future'. In Blaenau Gwent we are fully committed to making sure that we have the right opportunities available for young people as they progress through and beyond school. That means having the right choices and opportunities to suit everyone's needs. If you are over the age of 16, consider yourself as disabled, living in Gwent and unemployed, Blaenau Gwent Pathways can support you working with 'Disability Can Do' to build a bright and sustainable future with the Working on Wellbeing programme. <https://loom.ly/aNrhHNY>



Black History Month 2024

October is Black History Month in the UK, the 2024 theme was 'Reclaiming Narratives' and as a Council we proudly celebrated this important occasion by showcasing many inspirational Black individuals with ties to our area, highlighting their significant contributions and the lasting impact they've made.

[Black History Month](#)



Holocaust Memorial Day

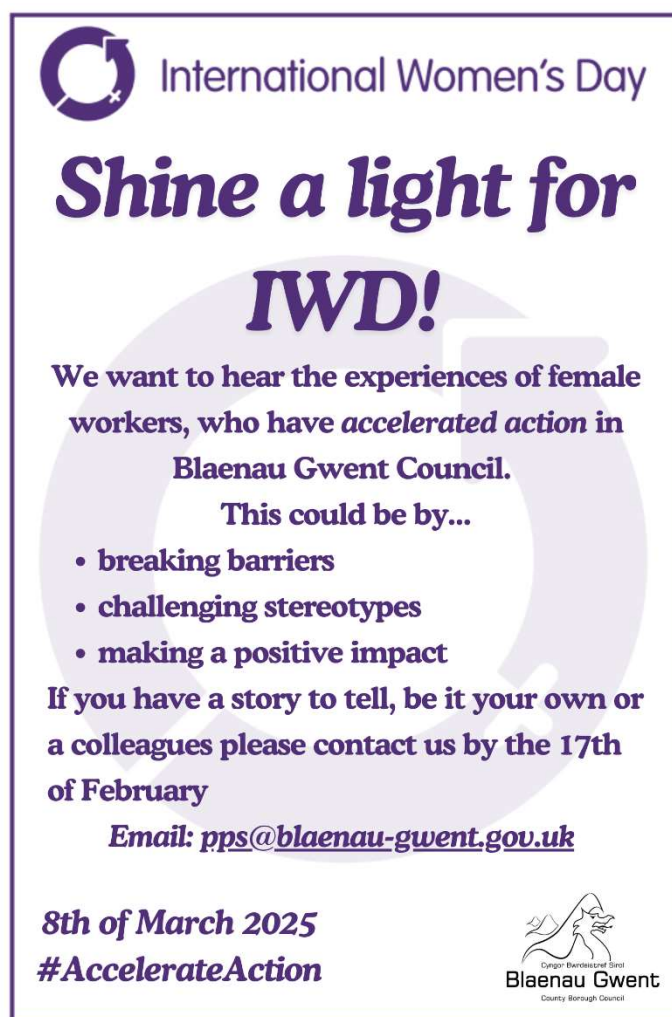
Each year Holocaust Memorial Day in the UK is underpinned by a specific UK wide theme chosen by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. The 2025 theme was 'For a Better Future'. The Deputy Leader, Councillor Helen Cunningham and the Equality Member Champion, Councillor Chris Smith led the commemoration offering a reflection space in the General Offices, Ebbw Vale for local people and our staff to come and reflect on how we can contribute to




a future free from hatred and division. The General Offices was also illuminated in purple on the 27th January 2025, and our partner, Tredegar Town Council commemorated the day by lighting up their Town Clock and holding a vigil at the Aneurin Bevan Memorial Stones.

International Women's Day

Staff across the council were encouraged to participate in International Women's Day. This day looks to celebrate women's achievements, celebrate gender equality and support action for gender parity. The International Women's Day 2025 theme was "Accelerate Action"- emphasising the importance of taking swift and decisive steps to achieve gender equality.



The poster is enclosed in a purple rectangular border. At the top left is a purple circular logo with a white arrow forming a circle. To its right, the text "International Women's Day" is written in a purple sans-serif font. Below this, the phrase "Shine a light for" is in a large, bold, italicized purple serif font, followed by "IWD!" in a very large, bold, italicized purple serif font. A large, faint purple silhouette of a woman's head and shoulders is in the background. Below the main title, the text "We want to hear the experiences of female workers, who have *accelerated action* in Blaenau Gwent Council." is in a purple sans-serif font. This is followed by "This could be by..." and a bulleted list: "• breaking barriers", "• challenging stereotypes", and "• making a positive impact". Below the list, the text "If you have a story to tell, be it your own or a colleagues please contact us by the 17th of February" is in a purple sans-serif font. Underneath is the email address "Email: pps@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk" in a purple sans-serif font. At the bottom left, "8th of March 2025" and "#AccelerateAction" are in a purple sans-serif font. At the bottom right is the Blaenau Gwent Council logo, which features a stylized figure and the text "Blaenau Gwent" and "County Borough Council".

 International Women's Day

Shine a light for

IWD!

We want to hear the experiences of female workers, who have *accelerated action* in Blaenau Gwent Council.


This could be by...

- breaking barriers
- challenging stereotypes
- making a positive impact

If you have a story to tell, be it your own or a colleagues please contact us by the 17th of February

Email: pps@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

8th of March 2025
#AccelerateAction


Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council

www.internationalwomensday.com

As part of the International Women's Day celebration, we shared content on social media and via a staff special which included:

- A montage that sought to explore how the workforce has changed over the years, for example, how the Corporate and Senior Leadership teams have evolved and now exemplify women in leadership and decision-making roles.
- Showcased of female employees throughout the organisation and celebrated how they have 'Accelerated Action'
- Presiding Member Councillor Chris Smith presented a special recognition certificate to the Parc Bryn Bach Running Club Ladies team who won the team title for the 120th Welsh Cross Country championships. In doing so, they not only became the first Blaenau Gwent team ever to win it (Men or Ladies) but are the first Gwent Club to win since Newport Harriers 27 years ago.

Identified next steps - Objective 1

For the 2024-25 period, our key actions will include:

- Better Monitoring of the Integrated Impact Assessments Usage: This will be a primary focus in our Year 2 action plan to ensure the process is effectively utilised and continuously improved.
- Strengthening the Work Programme for the Elected Member Equality Champion: We will foster stronger collaboration between the Equality Champion and various departments to integrate equality objectives across the organisation.
- Promoting Progress from Annual Reporting: We will enhance our efforts to communicate the progress identified in our Annual Reporting to both internal and external audiences

Equality Objective 2

We will be a workplace that champions diversity and inclusion

Overview

As the largest employer in the area, we recognise the importance for staff to feel valued and safe in the workplace. We understand the need to cultivate an inclusive and diverse workplace that enables individuals and teams to thrive and create optimum levels of job satisfaction.

We aim to foster a culture of inclusion that celebrates diversity and promotes belonging, collaboration, and innovation. We aspire to be an employer of choice that attracts and retains diverse talent from all backgrounds and identities.

It is essential that we provide staff at all levels with appropriate up-to-date guidance, training, and support on key issues such as Anti-Racism, LGBTQ+, Disability, Gender, and Age.

The Council's Workforce Strategy 2021-26 demonstrates the Council's commitment and investment in its workforce and wants staff to feel engaged and motivated so that the best services can be delivered to the residents of Blaenau Gwent.

Summary of progress - Objective 2

Over the last year we have provided a variety of resources to support our employees and foster an inclusive workplace. Whether staff are looking for advice on addressing a specific issue or simply want to learn more about equality and diversity. There has been a new focus on the distribution of staff news that include dedicated sections on equality. These newsletters often feature equality specials that highlight important topics, updates, and resources related to equality and diversity.

6 Ways to Champion Equality in Your Team



CREATING A WELCOMING AND RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE

Blaenau Gwent Council is all about promoting equality and inclusion in every team. Here are six practical tips for managers to help build a fair and inclusive workplace. These steps are designed to help managers support diversity, create a respectful culture, and offer a supportive environment where everyone can succeed. By following these tips, Blaenau Gwent managers can set a great example and make our workplace more welcoming for everyone.

1. FOSTER AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

Create an open environment where everyone feels valued and able to contribute. Encourage team members to share ideas and perspectives and show respect for diverse views. Make it clear that discrimination or harassment will not be tolerated. Additionally, motivate staff to join the Lived Experiences Network, where they can share their unique stories and learn from the experiences of their colleagues. This initiative fosters understanding and empathy, helping to build a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture.

2. LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Model inclusive behaviour and language in all interactions every day. As a manager, show you're committed to equality by treating everyone fairly, challenging stereotypes, and addressing any inappropriate behaviour quickly and effectively.

3. SUPPORT TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Promote and participate in equality and diversity training and e-learning, making sure everyone knows how to spot and prevent bias. Encourage personal development opportunities that allow employees from all backgrounds to grow and develop their skills.

4. ADAPT TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Be flexible to accommodate individual circumstances, whether related to disability, cultural practices, or family responsibilities. This could include offering flexible work hours, recognizing religious observances, or providing assistive tools and technology.

5. CELEBRATE AND RECOGNISE DIVERSITY

Support events that celebrate cultural, racial, and social diversity, like Black History Month or International Women's Day. Recognising diverse contributions can reinforce the value of inclusion and help team members learn about each other's backgrounds.

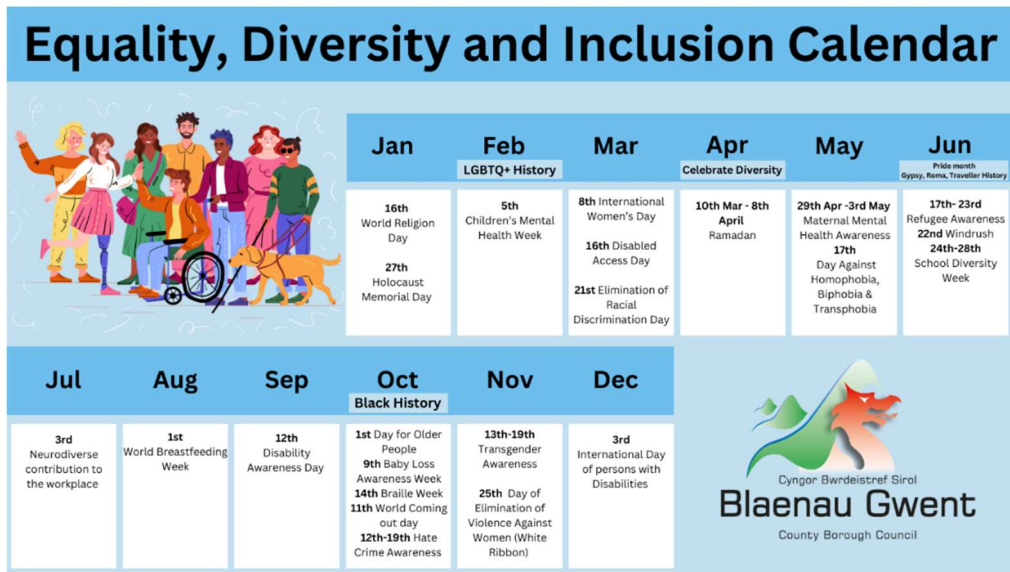
6. ACTIVELY LISTEN AND TAKE FEEDBACK

Regularly seek feedback from team members to understand their experiences and concerns. Use this feedback to improve practices and policies, making it clear that their insights are valued in shaping a fair workplace.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you would like to get involved or have any questions, please contact us by email at: PPS@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

We have created a calendar of key dates that celebrate equality and diversity throughout the year. Staff can use this calendar as a reference point to learn more about different groups and communities, raise awareness, and show their support.



We have led a campaign to encourage staff to complete their iTrent data. This initiative aims to ensure that all sensitive information is up to date and accurate. By doing so, we can gain a better understanding of our workforce's protected characteristics, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and disability status.

Having accurate data helps us to create a more inclusive and supportive work environment. It allows us to tailor our policies and initiatives to meet the diverse needs of our staff.

Is your iTrent info up to date?

Please tell us about your Equality/Diversity details.

- 1 Log in to iTrent
Click 'View Profile'.
- 2 Click 'Sensitive Information'
- 3 Fill in your Equality details such as Ethnicity, Religion and First Language.
- 4 Don't forget to click 'Save'.

WE RESPECT Each Other

 Culture, Ethnicity, Religion, Choices, Feelings, Experiences and Differences

Blaenau Gwent

Training

A number of training sessions for staff focused on equality, diversity, and inclusion, have been provided throughout 2024-25, including:

- Visual Awareness,
- Hearing Impairment,
- Neurodiversity,
- Menopause,
- In-person Equality Training (delivered through the West Gwent Cohesion Team)
- E Learning modules available to all staff on Equality and Hate Crime.

These sessions are designed to inform staff on best practices, legal requirements, and ways to foster an inclusive workplace.

The West Gwent Cohesion Team continue to offer three training packages for schools, the workshops can be delivered to a maximum of 30 pupils at any one time. The workshops aim to raise awareness around similarities and differences, train and capacity build, mitigate tensions, be inclusive, prevent hate, exploitation and extremism.

Lived Experiences Network (LEN)

We have developed a network where staff who share protected characteristic/s can share their stories, challenges, and achievements with the Council to guide the delivery of the Blaenau Gwent Strategic Equality Plan 2024-28. The Lived Experiences Network aims to create a safe and supportive space where people can learn and understand, celebrate diversity, and advocate for their rights and inclusion

To date, we have had several members of staff who have signed up and attended the Equality and Diversity Oversight and Delivery Group to share their experiences and help us to understand how we can foster a truly inclusive work environment.

Blaenau Gwent Lived Experiences Network



Matthew Harvey-Knowles (Matte) is a proud and inspiring member of the LGBTQ+ community and sits on the council's Lived Experiences Network (LEN).

Matte works as a Dad's Support Worker in Flying Start and, alongside his husband Aaron, has been fostering children for the past 8 remarkable years.

His dedication to nurturing young lives extends into his professional role, where he tirelessly works to support families.

Through the LEN, Matte offers invaluable insights, sharing his experiences as a gay man working in Blaenau Gwent. His openness and authenticity have fostered a profoundly supportive and inclusive work environment. Matte's efforts are not only educating but also inspiring his colleagues to embrace diversity and champion acceptance.

By sharing his journey, Matte is paving the way for a more understanding and compassionate community. His story is a testament to the power of acceptance and the positive impact of embracing our differences.

Read more about Matte's fostering journey [here](#).



World Arthritis Day

World Arthritis Day is celebrated on October 12th every year and is used to raise awareness about arthritis, its impact and what can be done to reduce that impact. Arthritis is one of the biggest causes of disability and long-term pain in Wales and 10 million people live with arthritis across the UK.



Adele Jones, 26 – Corporate Engagement Officer has shared her story to shine a light and raise awareness of Arthritis.

While arthritis is often associated with older adults, it can affect people of any age.

My journey with arthritis began six years ago when I was diagnosed with a rare type of inflammatory arthritis known as Still's Disease. This autoimmune disorder causes my immune system to mistakenly attack healthy cells, tissues, and organs.

Facing this significant life change at the age of 20 had profoundly influenced my self-perception, capabilities, and outlook on my future. After enduring a year of health challenges, I received a diagnosis from a great rheumatologist and began treatment. I am now in medical remission and experience minimal to no symptoms, which allows me to lead a fulfilling life that I appreciate greatly.

Living with arthritis has instilled in me a sense of resilience and a deep appreciation for aspects of life that many people may overlook, such as the ability to work, drive, and exercise. It motivates me to maintain a happy, healthy, and enjoyable life which I choose to be optimistic about. I feel lucky that to be able to live a normal, healthy life, but unfortunately there are many people that face significant daily changes with the condition.

On World Arthritis Day, it is important to raise awareness about the condition as there are many misconceptions about the disease:

"Oh, I have that too."

Most people equate 'arthritis' with Osteoarthritis – a 'wear and tear' disease causing a decline of joint cartilage leading to swelling, pain, and sometimes joint degeneration, but there are many different types of arthritis that vary greatly. Often when I tell people that I have arthritis, it is assumed that our conditions are identical, yet Still's Disease arises from an overactive immune response that affects multiple joints and some organs, and can also lead to symptoms such as fevers, rashes, sore throat, and muscle pain.

"You're young to have that."

Arthritis can affect people of any age and unfortunately, even children. Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA) is a group of disorders that cause arthritis in children.

"But you look fine."

An invisible disease. You may already know someone suffering from arthritis yet remain unaware of their condition. Despite appearing able bodied, someone can be living with invisible health issues and chronic pain. It's important to keep this in mind.

If you have read to this point, thank you for taking the time to be informed about the condition that impacts many people's daily lives.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.versusarthritis.org/in-your-area/wales/>



Still's Disease Logo

SPOTLIGHT ON JADE FORBES: CHAMPIONING ANTI-RACIST SOCIAL WORK

As part of Race Equality Week (3rd–9th February 2025), we are proud to spotlight Jade Forbes, a social worker and Approved Mental Health Professional, whose work is at the forefront of promoting anti-racist social work in Wales.

Jade's dedication to creating a more inclusive and equitable society is inspiring. She emphasises the importance of celebrating Black culture, particularly during Race Equality Week but also all year round, beyond the focus on racism and historical struggles. Jade reflects:

"I love celebrating Blackness during Race Equality week and Black History Month, but it's important to remember that racism appears in many forms. There is a richness to celebrate in culture and black culture consists of more than just the negative history of slavery. There is so much more to celebrate, and we should uplift all aspects of Black, Welsh culture."

Her approach to social work is rooted in the belief that it's not just a career—it's a platform to challenge discrimination, address oppression, and create opportunities for healing and growth. She reminds us all of the power social workers have to make a positive impact:

"We have the power to support, listen, encourage healing, and most importantly, to bring about change."

Jade will be joining Social Care Wales for an upcoming podcast in celebration of Social Work Week 2025, which takes place in March.

This special episode will also feature the National Poet of Wales, Hanan Issa, as they discuss the important contributions of social work and its impact.

Jade's commitment to anti-racist social work is paving the way for a more inclusive and compassionate Wales, and we are grateful for her contributions. Let's draw inspiration from Jade's work as we continue to build a better, more inclusive community together.



We offer a range of employee benefits from our health and wellbeing partner 'Vivup'. These benefits are designed to improve your mental, physical, and financial wellbeing. Vivup are an independent, leading provider of professional employee support services. Vivup employ professionally qualified Counsellors and Information Specialists, who are experienced in helping people to deal with all kinds of practical and emotional issues such as:

- Anxiety
- Bereavement
- Stress
- Depression
- Workplace Issues
- Trauma
- Relationships
- Finances
- Family Difficulties

The service is available 24/7, confidential and free of charge for staff to use.

In addition to the *Vivup* service, the council sends out a "Wellbeing Wednesday" newsletter to all email users. This newsletter is designed to provide valuable information and resources related to health and wellbeing. It includes various support options that staff can access to improve their physical and mental health. These include:

- Menopause Cafes: A safe and supportive space where staff can discuss and share their experiences related to menopause. It's a great way to connect with others who might be going through similar experiences.
- Creative Wellbeing Sessions: These sessions focus on using creative activities, such as art and crafts, to promote mental health and wellbeing. They provide a relaxing and enjoyable way to de-stress and express oneself.

These initiatives are designed to ensure that staff have access to the support they need to maintain their health and wellbeing.



Lunchtime Creative Wellbeing Sessions

Get creative, learn a new skill and connect with others in these Wellbeing Wednesday sessions for staff.

Singing for Wellbeing

Sing a long to your favourite feel-good songs in a friendly setting.

**5th March
12:00pm - 12:45pm
At the Abraham Darby room
General Offices**

All materials included. No experience needed.

Being creative can relieve stress, boost your mood and improve productivity.

Feel free to bring your lunch along, no need to book. Tea and coffee included.

For more information contact: bgarts@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Blaenau Gwent

2



Wellbeing Wednesday

19 FEBRUARY 2025

Lunchtime Creative Wellbeing Session

Our first Wellbeing Wednesday session was a success!

Here are some photos from our Eco Painting activity that aims to promote general wellbeing through the form of creativity.

These sessions provide a chance to socialise and opportunity to try out a new creative skill. Bookmarks and artworks were created along with lots of happy faces.

The next Wellbeing Wednesday session is "Singing for Wellbeing" and takes place on Wednesday 5 March – further details below.

1



PATHWAYS TO PROGRESS
MALES UNION LEARNING FUND

unite

LUNCH & LEARN

MENOPAUSE AWARENESS

JOIN US FOR A FREE LUNCHTIME WORKSHOP
FROM 1.15 - 2.00 PM

THE MENOPAUSE TEAM

HELPING EMPLOYERS & EMPLOYEES
WORK WITH THE MENOPAUSE...

Disability Confident Leader Scheme

In January 2025, officers from the Welsh Government and the Department of Working Pensions met to discuss the Disability Confident scheme, which helps employers utilise the talents of disabled people. It was agreed to explore the option for the Council to move from Level 1 to Level 2 of the scheme and learn from local businesses that have achieved leader status.

Gender Pay Gap

As an employer we are required by law to carry out Gender Pay Reporting under the Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017. The UK gender pay gap is just over 14.3% (2023). At the Council we are confident that men and women are paid equally for doing equivalent jobs across the business. The gender pay gap 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 continues to be significantly lower than the national average. More on this can be found in our published Pay Policy Statement.

[Pay-Policy-Statement-2024-2025.pdf](#)

Identified next steps - Objective 2

For the 2024-25 period, our key actions will include:

- Explore Moving from Level 1 to Level 2 of the Disability Confident Leader Scheme and investigate the learning from local businesses that have achieved leader status to understand best practices and strategies for successful implementation.
- Use of Organisational Development Data to monitor the diversity of the workforce and proactively target the Equality Programme.
- Publish an overarching Equality Policy for the organisation.

Equality Objective 3

We will create a fair and inclusive learning culture for all children and young people with a focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion

Overview

Understanding your identity is an important part of a child's development. It takes place in the early years of their lives and follows them into adulthood.

Tackling inequalities in our education and learning settings is not a new concept and remains an on-going challenge in Blaenau Gwent. We know that fair and inclusive learning cultures promote equity, access, participation, and achievement for all learners, regardless of their identity, ability, or circumstance. Fair and inclusive learning cultures also foster a sense of belonging, collaboration, and mutual support among learners and educators.

Creating a positive and respectful learning environment for all learners requires commitment and collaboration from all stakeholders involved in the learning process, including educators, learners, administrators, policymakers, and community members.

Summary of progress - Objective 3

School Support & Guidance

We provide equality advice and guidance to schools, fostering and maintaining strong relationships with them. This collaboration is crucial, enabling schools to recognise and understand how their efforts contribute to the overarching goals of the Strategic Equality Plan. We believe this is essential for advancing our commitment to equality.

Examples of how schools have used our resources include:

Lola Williams from Tredegar Comprehensive School who is the winner of our poetry and art competition which asked pupils to reflect on this year's HMD theme 'for a better future.'

This was an opportunity for young people to express their thoughts and feelings through creative works, honouring the memory of those who suffered and ensuring their stories are never forgotten.

During the summer term, we audited school equality plans after publishing our SEP. We found that 40% of schools had plans, compared to the 12% national average (EHRC 2021). We provided additional support through the Equality and Human Rights Commission and Headteacher Awareness Day. Another audit is scheduled for summer term 2025.

Every school now has a designated lead for Multilingual and Gypsy Roma Traveller students. These leads act as key contacts, and their details have been shared with the GEMS lead.

There has been work undertaken with Unions to develop new processes to better support students with medical needs. A working group has been meeting regularly to develop new Local Authority Guidance, this collaboration aims to create effective support systems for these pupils.

An updated school reporting document has been developed and approved which now includes a section on reporting cases of abuse towards staff with protected characteristics.

As part of the tackling racism in schools' action plan developed as part of the regional approach, Abertillery Learning Community, in partnership with other Blaenau Gwent schools, hosted an Anti-Racism Headteacher Awareness Day for all schools in the borough on the 18th of March 2025. The event was dedicated to strengthening anti-racism plans and commitments in Blaenau Gwent schools.

Speakers from across the education sector discussed strategies to embed anti-racism in schools and ensure an inclusive future for all learners. Education is a powerful tool in tackling racism, and the event was an important step in ensuring our schools lead the way in racial equality.

The Education Directorate within the Council also presented the ongoing challenges relating to reporting incidents through the 'My Concerns' system, which if used effectively will provide intelligence on school-based issues and will enable tailored training and interventions to be offered.

Children and Young People's Participation

In September 2024, the corporate function for Children and Young People's Participation was transferred to the Youth Service within the Education Directorate. The transition has provided opportunities for increased representation from Asian, Black, and other ethnically diverse people on both the Children's Grand Council and Youth Forum. There have also been

developments in young people's participation in democracy with the youth service leading new initiatives to get more young people involved in meaningful participation.

LGBTQ+ Support Groups

Groups across Blaenau Gwent offer support to Young People who identify as LGBTQ+. These are spaces where they feel accepted and have an opportunity to share and express their emotions, as well as a chance to celebrate and promote diversity.

The Council along with community members and pupils from Ebbw Fawr Community School attended the parade at the Pride Cymru 2024 event in Cardiff on Saturday 22nd June. They attended alongside other Welsh Local Authorities, under the 'Proud Councils' banner.



The LGBTQ+ support groups within the schools have also taken part in a consultation exercise for the planning of a first local Pride event in Blaenau Gwent. The young people shared their views and opinions via interactive polls and face to face feedback on what they would like to see feature as part of the event.

The Youth Service remains committed to fostering an inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ young people in secondary school settings. Through various initiatives and support mechanisms, we aim to address the unique challenges faced by

these individuals and promote their well-being within the community. While there are no exclusive LGBTQ+ Youth Service groups established within secondary schools, our commitment to promoting fairness, inclusivity, and equal opportunities for all young people remains a priority.



Young People present ideas for the Taith Fund application.

Discussions have taken place with young people to look at a Taith funding application for Blaenau Gwent. Taith provides funding to enable learners and staff in Wales to take part in educational international exchanges. It also brings learners and educators from around the world to Wales.

The multi-year programme, with Welsh Government funding of £65 million, launched in 2022 and offers life-changing opportunities to travel and learn for learners and staff in every part of Wales, and in every type of education.

Youth workers Josh and Lauren tasked the group of young people to prepare for a Dragon's Den evening, where they would

- Pitch the countries they would like to visit
- Look at the pro and cons
- Travel time
- Opportunities for learning

On the 16th of December the group came together to pitch their ideas.



Pitch One (Australia, Malta and New Zealand)



Pitch two (New Zealand, Australia, Peru and Canada)

Following the presentations the group agreed that the top three were Australia, New Zealand and Canada, when asked why they had chosen countries outside of the EU, one young person said

"We will never get the opportunity to travel this far, we may get the opportunity to go to Spain but never as far away this!"

Keep watching to find out what happens next!

The Youth Mayor and AP Cymru



Chloe Simmonds, Youth Mayor for Blaenau Gwent is passionate about raising awareness about disabilities, and particularly those that are not visible. Blaenau Gwent Youth forum recently teamed up with AP Cymru to deliver an in-person session at the General Offices, Ebbw Vale.

The awareness session was delivered by Sean Allen from AP Cymru. The session was positively received by those who were in attendance. Here are some of the quotes from the attendees.

Deputy Mayor Ellie Colwell said: 'I learnt a lot more about different conditions that can affect people's learning and understanding. I felt very seen in this session when discussing conditions that I, myself have - it was very comforting knowing my peers know more about a condition that affects my everyday life.'

Lissa Friel (Engagement Officer) said: 'It was a pleasure to be with the group in person to discuss and learn about this important subject. The young people fully engaged in the session. As an officer I felt that I learnt so much for the session, Sean from AP Cymru was so knowledgeable and I took away so much from the session, thank you!'

Youth Forum member Abi Phillips said: 'I really enjoyed the meeting, and it was very informative about hidden disabilities, I feel it should be talked about more. AP Cymru are an amazing charity.'

Youth Mayor Chloe Lines said: 'I really enjoyed the session with AP Cymru, I felt as though I learnt so much about conditions that affect so many people's lives including my own. The session made me feel understood with the struggles I face having a disability and it comforted me that others were learning about this. The session was overall really engaging and extremely interesting.'

Youth Forum member Mara Moruz said: 'The session was incredibly informative and engaging; I learnt a lot about neurodivergence and can understand the difficulties that individuals who are neurodivergent, deal with on a daily basis!'



Families First Programme

The Welsh Government funded Families First programme in Blaenau Gwent includes three qualified Social Workers who are based within all the mainstream and Welsh schools. The Social Workers provide consultations advice to staff, and support for vulnerable families. The aim of programme is to identify at the earliest opportunity, within education, where children and their families need intervention and support to prevent escalation of need and to prevent unnecessary referrals into Social Care. The programme also includes specific support for Young Carers and Disabled Children and Young People through youth clubs, parenting support programmes, family fun days, arts and craft classes, and respite day trips.

Play Activity Co-ordination and Term Time Play Provision

The Early Years, Childcare and Play team offer term-time staffed after-school Wild Camps sessions for older children with identified vulnerabilities and a dedicated after-school play club supporting Children Looked After.

Aspire Mentor Programme

The Aspire programme works collaboratively with the 14+ team delivering a bespoke intervention relating to the post 16 education, employment and training opportunities for those young people identified as children looked after (CLA) and/or care leavers. The programme utilises a mentor who directly works with CLA and care leavers to support and advise on education, training and employment opportunities.

The support offered by the Aspire Mentor includes:

- Identifying training opportunities
- Help with CVs and job applications
- Support with interviews
- DBS applications
- Facilitating work experience placements
- Linking with Traineeships (Jobs Growth Wales Plus)
- Supporting into Apprenticeships
- Financial support for training and employability

Identified next steps - Objective 3

For the 2024-25 period, our key actions will include:

- Complete a further audit of School Strategic Equality Plans
- Support schools to successfully embed and deliver their equality plans
- Further increase representation Asian, Black and other ethnically diverse people on the youth forum.

Equality Objective 4

We will promote and support inclusive, safe and cohesive communities

Overview

To ensure cohesive communities within Blaenau Gwent, all individuals living and working in the area must feel included and safe, a notion that echoed within our continued commitment to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. Working in partnership we will aim to support the National Goals set out within the Act of creating 'a more Equal Wales' and 'a Wales of Cohesive Communities'. These goals will be incorporated within the programmes and initiatives that we deliver that increase awareness and understanding of matters surrounding equalities to celebrate and bring together communities.

Summary of progress - Objective 4

Celebrating Black Culture



As part of our Black History Month celebrations, we were proud to acknowledge the remarkable [Windrush Exhibition](#) that went on display across Blaenau Gwent over the summer. The Windrush Cymru Exhibition has been an incredible journey through history, showcasing the achievements and contributions of those who settled in the UK from the Caribbean and their descendants. These pioneers played

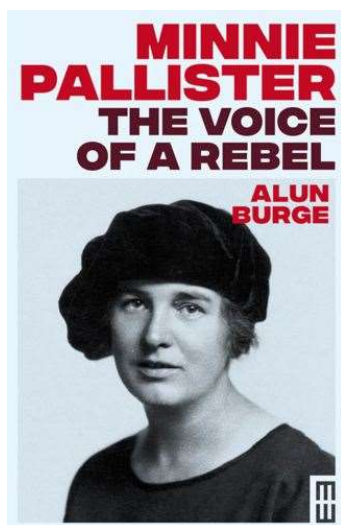
a vital role in rebuilding Britain – working in steel mills, coal mines, hospitals, and public transport – and have significantly shaped the fabric of our nation after World War II.



Championing Female Rights

The unveiling of a [Purple Plaque commemorating Minnie Pallister](#), political activist, BBC broadcaster and forerunner of the Women's Liberation Movement, took place on the 18th September 2024 at Brynmawr Market Hall. The

commemoration also included the official book launch of 'Minnie Pallister: The Voice of a Rebel' by Alun Burge – a compelling account of her courageous life story.



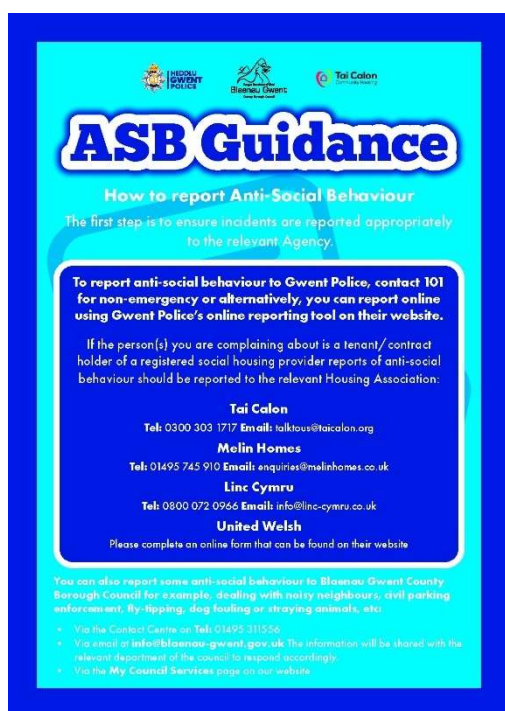
Experiences of people seeking sanctuary in Blaenau Gwent

During Refugee Awareness Week, the West Gwent Community Cohesion Team took a proactive approach to highlight the experiences and challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers. This included interviewing families from the region, one of which was an asylum seeker family (residing in Blaenau Gwent) that had recently received a successful asylum outcome. These interviews and lived experiences were shared widely to provide personal insights into the resettlement process, fostering empathy and understanding within the community. By showcasing real-life stories, the initiative helped to humanise the refugee experience, breaking down stereotypes and promoting a more inclusive community.

Additionally, the West Gwent Cohesion Team have launched a resettlement e-learning module on the e-learning platform, Thinqi. This module is designed to enhance staff awareness of key policy areas such as resettlement and asylum dispersal. The e-learning module will be instrumental in equipping staff with the knowledge and skills needed to support refugees effectively. It will also contribute to a more informed and compassionate workforce, capable of addressing the unique needs of refugees and asylum seekers. Together, these initiatives have significantly increased awareness and measures of inclusion, ensuring that the community is better prepared to support and integrate refugees.

Community Safety

Robust practices remain in place; tension monitoring reports are collated weekly and shared with Community Safety/Prevent Leads and the regional CONTEST board. Weekly meetings remain in place with the East Gwent Cohesion Team and Gwent Police's Community Cohesion Team. There is routine engagement at community Safety partnerships across all three local authority areas. The West Gwent Cohesion Team also provide a weekly update at all partnership tasking meetings held across the region.



ASB Guidance
How to report Anti-Social Behaviour

The first step is to ensure incidents are reported appropriately to the relevant Agency.

To report anti-social behaviour to Gwent Police, contact 101 for non-emergency or alternatively, you can report online using Gwent Police's online reporting tool on their website.

If the person(s) you are complaining about is a tenant/contract holder of a registered social housing provider reports of anti-social behaviour should be reported to the relevant Housing Association:

Tai Calon
Tel: 0300 303 1717 Email: talktous@taicalon.org

Melin Homes
Tel: 01495 745 910 Email: enquiries@melinhomes.co.uk

Linc Cymru
Tel: 0800 072 0966 Email: info@linc-cymru.co.uk

United Welsh
Please complete an online form that can be found on their website

You can also report some anti-social behaviour to Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council for example: dealing with noisy neighbours, civil parking enforcement, fly-tipping, dog fouling or straying animals, etc:

- Via the Contact Centre on Tel: 01495 311356
- Via email at info@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk This information will be shared with the relevant department of the council to respond accordingly.
- Via the **My Council Services** page on our website



Talk2gether

• BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL •
RESIDENTS • ELECTED MEMBERS •
GWENT POLICE • TAI CALON •

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has partnered with the Neighbourhood Policing Team, Tai Calon, and Youth Services to focus on what matters to you in our communities through 2-way conversations.

Let's Talk together about Anti-Social Behaviour

Dates and locations to be confirmed soon!

Blaenau Gwent Anti-Social Behaviour Task Force has won a Wales Safer Communities Award for its innovative partnership work in supporting communities with anti-social behaviour concerns.

The Task Force was established in February 2024 by partners Blaenau Gwent Council, Gwent Police, Tai Calon Community Housing and the BG - Youth Service. Through the Council's public engagement programme, Talk2gether, the Task Force was able to meet with residents and businesses to hear their concerns about their communities, enabling partners to work together to identify hotspot areas and offer support and advice about reporting and recording problem behaviour.



Hate Crime Awareness Week

Local schools took part in various activities to raise awareness of the importance of cohesion/inclusivity and to make a canvas that reflected the theme of cohesion/inclusivity. A social media pack was shared throughout the week - working with Victims Support to ensure a unified message.

The Hate Crime Awareness E-Learning module, created by the West Gwent Cohesion Team, has been accessible to staff via the intranet throughout 2024 and is now part of the Thingi platform launched in 2025. This module aims to:

- Define what is meant by Hate Crime and Hate Incident.
- Explain the significant impact these crimes have on individuals and communities.
- Compare the effects of Hate Crimes with other types of offences and victimization.
- Guide on how to report Hate Crimes or Hate Incidents.

This initiative helps the workforce gain essential knowledge and understanding of these critical issues.

Maternity Support

The Get Blaenau Gwent Breastfeeding campaign was established in 2024, led by Children's Services in partnership with the Health Board, Early Years stakeholders and the Blaenau Gwent Local Well-being Partnership. The project aims to improve breastfeeding rates in Blaenau Gwent (previously the lowest in the UK) by developing an equal level of advice, guidance and support on breastfeeding for all expectant and new mothers in Blaenau Gwent. A key action of the Get

Blaenau Gwent Breastfeeding campaign is to encourage businesses, premises and community venues across Blaenau Gwent to become 'Gwent Breastfeeding Welcome' venues. The Gwent Breastfeeding Welcome Scheme aims to promote, protect and support parent's right to breastfeed in public, and to increase the acceptability of breastfeeding as a normal activity.



Support for the LGBTQ+ Community

We have taken a proactive approach to planning and delivering its first Pride event in 2025 by forming a dedicated Task and Finish Group. The group has been instrumental in organising the event and ensuring its success.

The group has worked to secure the support and allyship of Elected Members through a dedicated Members Briefing Session which was held in February 2025 during LGBT+ History Month. This step is crucial as it helps to promote inclusivity and understanding within the wider community.

PRIDE
BLAENAU GWENT



The Aneurin Leisure Trust through Bedwellty House and Park have taken a lead role in the detailed planning, which includes logistics, event programming, and community outreach. The goal is to create an event that celebrates diversity and fosters a sense of belonging for all attendees.

This collaborative effort highlights Blaenau Gwent's commitment to promoting inclusivity and understanding through meaningful community events.

Identified next steps - Objective 4

For the 2024-25 period, our key actions will include:

- Identify champions for equality, diversity and inclusion across service areas.
- Development of engagement calendar to continue to get feedback from the community, particularly those with protected characteristics.

Equality Objective 5

We will ensure effective engagement and participation for people with protected characteristics.

Overview

As a Council we are committed towards everyone playing their part in delivering our vision and ambitious programme for action and change. Instrumental to this will be how we engage specifically with people who are under-represented and have protected characteristics. We also understand how aspects of a person's identities combine to create different and multiple discrimination and privilege. Our Engagement and Participation Strategy is being developed in compliance with the Equality Act (2010) and Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, with intersectionality being taken into consideration. We will utilise all available engagement tools from in person discussion to formal online survey.

Summary of progress - Objective 5

Over the last year we have delivered and planned effective engagement across Blaenau Gwent with groups that represent protected characteristics to deliver the new Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028. Those engagement activities have helped to inform our objectives and develop our key actions going forward.

Through surveys, user research, interviews, focus groups we continue to support local people with a chance to get involved and share their views on local matters. Key examples of consultations include:

- National Residents Survey 2024
- Council Budget 2025-26
- Talk2gether Public Engagement programme
- Community Lived Experiences Network

Championing Equality in Our Community via the Lived Experiences Network (LEN)

We are committed to understanding and addressing the attitudes towards equality within our community, especially for those who are most vulnerable. In December 2024, we engaged with several Nigerian families who recently settled in Blaenau Gwent. Their feedback was invaluable. The families praised the local community for its warmth and support, but also highlighted critical areas for improvement:

- **Transportation Reliability:** The need for more dependable public transport services.
- **Healthcare Wait Times:** The urgency to reduce long waiting periods for medical care.
- **Balancing Childcare and Work:** The challenge of managing childcare alongside work commitments.

My name is Georgina Palfrey, and I am the Race Policy Officer for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. I am responsible for ensuring our council listens to and supports the voices of diverse communities, including Nigerian families, as we shape our services. A key part of my role is delivering the Blaenau Gwent Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) 2024-2028, which aligns with the Anti-Racism Wales Action Plan (ARWAP).

WHAT IS ARIWAP?
The Anti-Racism Wales Action Plan (ARWAP) is a national strategy aimed at eliminating racial inequality and promoting inclusivity. It is part of the Welsh Government's wider vision to create a truly anti-racist Wales by 2030. ARWAP focuses on breaking down structural barriers, improving racial justice, and ensuring that every community has equal access to opportunities. This plan informs how we at Blaenau Gwent work with and support Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities.

WHAT IS THE LIVED EXPERIENCE NETWORK (LEN)?
The Lived Experience Network (LEN) is a platform for individuals and families who want to share their personal experiences with the council to help improve services. It provides a safe space to discuss challenges, achievements, and cultural stories that can help inform our work and support for diverse communities.

WHY JOIN THE LEN?
By joining the LEN, you can:

- **Raise awareness** about issues affecting Nigerian families and other ethnic minority communities in Blaenau Gwent.
- **Influence change** within the council to ensure more inclusive services.
- **Show your story** Good or challenging, your experiences matter and can shape future services.
- **Develop your skills** through workshops, leadership training, and peer mentoring.
- **Celebrate your culture** as part of Black History Month, ensuring Nigerian voices are heard and understood.

HOW CAN WE GET INVOLVED?

- **Share your story:** Whether it's a challenge or an achievement, sharing your lived experience can highlight the unique needs of your community.
- **Participate in events** during BHM or throughout the year to promote awareness of Nigerian culture.
- **Help shape policies** that ensure a better understanding of how different cultures interact with the local community.
- **Volunteer or lead initiatives** that advocate for your community's needs and create lasting change.

By participating in the LEN, your feedback will be directly fed into the council's **Listening Commission** to ensure that all communities, including Nigerian families, are represented in our decision-making processes. This work is aimed at **improving services**, promoting cultural understanding, and ensuring everyone's needs are met in Blaenau Gwent.

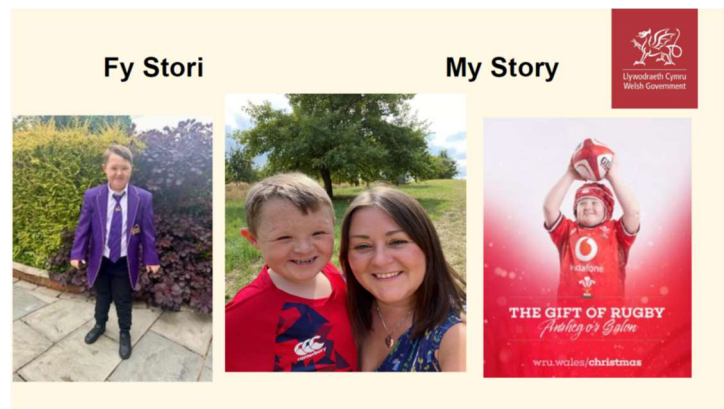
CONTACT INFORMATION
If you would like to get involved or have any questions, please contact us by email at PPS@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

An easy-read version of the **Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028** is available for better accessibility. It ensures everyone can understand the goals and actions. Access via QR code or link below:
<https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/strategy/equality>

Moreover, these families expressed a strong desire for more Council-supported cultural events, which would help them feel even more integrated and celebrated within the community.

In January, the Equality and Diversity Oversight and Delivery Group received a presentation from the Welsh Government on the Disability Leader Confident Scheme. This presentation was delivered by a Welsh Government Officer who is also a resident of Blaenau Gwent and has personal lived experience. By sharing lived experiences, such as these, it has created an understanding the real challenges and barriers faced by people with protected characteristics. These personal stories provide valuable insights that can highlight gaps in current

policies and practices, helping to shape more effective and inclusive solutions. By hearing directly from those affected, decision-makers can better appreciate the complexities and nuances of individuals and families, leading to more empathetic and informed leadership and service provision.

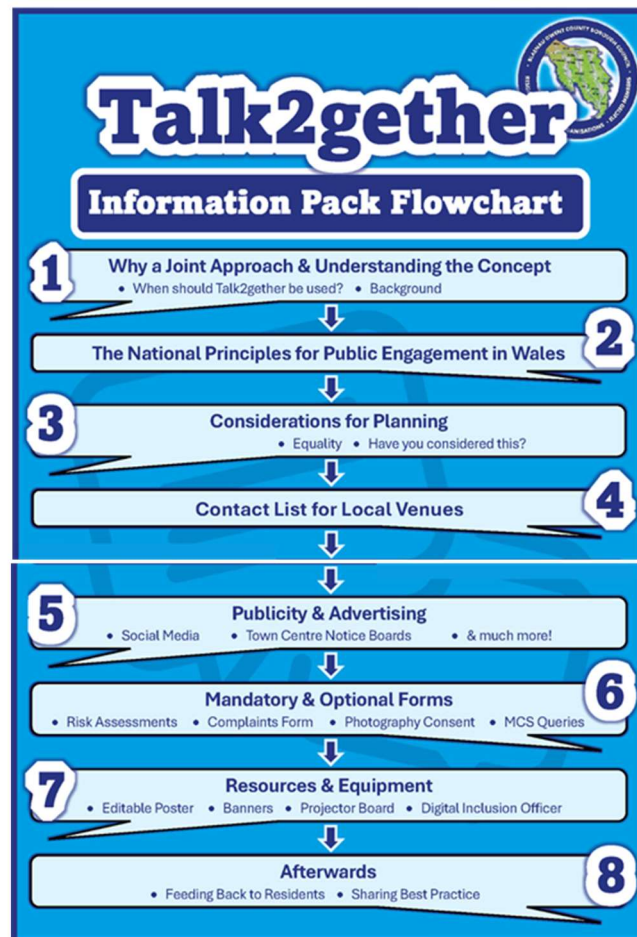


The LGBT+ Task and Finish Group, responsible for developing the first Blaenau Gwent Pride event, includes representation and participation from LGBTQ+ individuals both in the workplace LEN and the community LEN. This inclusive approach ensures that the event truly reflects the diverse experiences and needs of the LGBTQ+ community. By involving people from various backgrounds and sectors, the group can better identify and address potential challenges and barriers. This collaborative effort not only enriches the planning process but also fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment among participants, ultimately contributing to a more successful and meaningful Pride event.

The community Lived Experiences Network initiative underscores our dedication to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all residents. By listening and responding to these voices, we are taking meaningful steps towards a more equitable future.

Engagement and Participation As part of the new Engagement and Participation Strategy, we have worked to mainstream effective engagement and participation approaches across the Council. Part of this has included the dissemination of new guidance for staff on public engagement and consultation. The pack which has been made available to all staff via a designated page on the intranet which provides guidance, templates, tools and best practices for planning, conducting and evaluating public engagement and consultation processes. The pack also outlines the legal and ethical obligations that we have as a public body to involve and inform the public in our decision making. It is designed to be a user friendly, flexible resource that can be adapted to different contexts and needs. We have encouraged all staff across the council who are involved in any public engagement and consultation to use the pack and provide feedback on how it can be improved. To keep our staff informed about 'what's on' we have also

created an outlook calendar that can be viewed by anyone with a BG email address.



Citizens Panel

We have worked to re-launch the Blaenau Gwent Citizens Panel. To ensure this initiative is meaningful and worthwhile, we have reached out to all previous members to gauge their continued interest and involvement. Additionally, we collaborated with colleagues in Torfaen to learn from their successful 'Get Involved' programme, identifying areas of good practice that we can mirror. This comprehensive approach aims to create a more inclusive and effective platform for community engagement, ensuring that the voices of Blaenau Gwent residents are heard and valued.

Blaenau Gwent 50+ Network

On our journey to become a Marmot place and an age friendly community we have engaged with Blaenau Gwent residents via the 50+ Forum and wider network of partners and community groups to gather the thoughts and experiences of local older people to gain some understanding of how they feel about living in Blaenau Gwent and how age-friendly their local community is.



In November 2024 a 50+ Network Workshop was held to discuss our journey to become an Age-Friendly Community. Colleagues from the police service, fire service, health service, volunteering sector, transport and mental health care shared experiences and actions within our communities, all in aid of supporting and empowering our residents to age well.

The Cabinet Member for People & Services and Age-Friendly Champion Cllr Hayden Trollope hosted, with contributions from the Ageing Well Lead, Older Peoples Commissioner for Wales' Office, Gwent Police, the local authority, and community champions. Attendees were then given the opportunity to discuss areas of concern and consider priorities identified through the engagement with the 50+ Community.



Children and Young People's Participation

Active participation by young people is at the heart of the Blaenau Gwent Youth Service. All projects and sessions are developed through direct consultation with young people. By identifying their needs before any planning process begins, the service ensures that offerings are relevant and tailored to meet their interests and needs, rather than being dictated by a fixed curriculum.

Encouraging active participation empowers young people to take ownership of their learning and decision-making processes. By becoming partners in shaping their opportunities, they not only enhance their own development but also contribute positively to their wider communities, ensuring their voices are heard and valued.

Young people attending youth service provisions across the Youth Service are consulted throughout to ensure activities, resources, and delivery are tailored to

meet their needs. This can include sports sessions, gaming sessions, cooking sessions, workshops, and much more.

Over the past year, young people have played a significant role in shaping services in Blaenau Gwent:

- **Pride Event 2025:** consultations were held with the Youth Forum and the 16-25 Cuppa and Catch Up group. The feedback has helped to design and shape the event.
- **Debating Session:** Students from Brynmawr and Tredegar Comprehensive participated in a debating session about the NHS to improve their confidence and debating skills.
- **Invisible Disabilities Awareness:** The Blaenau Gwent Youth Forum collaborated with AP Cymru to raise awareness about invisible disabilities.
- **Council Peer Review:** Members of the Youth Forum took part in the council's peer review process through an online evening session, providing honest reviews and insights on youth involvement.
- **Prior to the submission of a Taith funding application** for a foreign exchange, young people were consulted. They presented various country options, outlining the pros and cons of each. Their input served as the foundation for the application.

Children Looked After and Children Leaving Care

In August, the Council signed the Welsh Governments Corporate Parenting Charter 'A Promise for Wales'. The Charter sets out 11 principles on equality, eradicating stigma, working together, inclusive support, fulfilling ambitions, nurturing, good health, a stable home, education, thriving in the future, and after care support. It also sets 9 promises for how care experienced children and young people will be treated, listened to, and involved in decisions that affect them. Over the last year, we have actively collaborated with care-experienced children and young people to ensure their views, feelings, and ideas are integral to the services they receive. This collaborative approach is designed to influence and inform both the nature of the services and the way they are delivered.

One key aspect of this initiative is the inclusion of care-experienced individuals in the Blaenau Gwent Youth Forum. This representation ensures that their unique perspectives are heard and considered in decision-making processes. By engaging directly with these young people, the council can better understand the challenges they face and work towards creating more effective and

supportive services. This commitment to participation and inclusion helps to empower care-experienced children and young people, giving them a voice in shaping the policies and practices that affect their lives.



Identified next steps - Objective 5

For the 2024-25 period, our key actions will include:

- Re-launch the Citizens Panel and ensure representation and participation in council activities and decision-making from young people, disabled people, LGBTQ+ people and people from minority ethnic groups
- Further encourage and support participation of Children Looked After and Children leaving care throughout Council services
- Implementing further the Equality actions associated to the Engagement and Participation Strategy

Equality Objective 6

We will strive to reduce inequality caused by poverty

Overview

We are committed to meeting our requirements under the Public Sector Equality Duty which now 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.

Inequality affects people with protected characteristics disproportionately. Poverty is one of the main causes and consequences of inequality, and it has specific and differential impacts on different groups. Tackling inequality for people with protected characteristics caused by poverty requires a holistic and targeted approach that addresses the root causes and the manifestations of poverty.

As an organisation, we have been determined to help those within our communities that require support, help, advice, or guidance, particularly for those that need it the most.

Summary of progress - Objective 6

Listening Commissions Report for Parents

The Council's Cost of Living Task Group has worked to produce a report on the Listening Commissions conducted with parents across Blaenau Gwent to understand how the costs of living crisis affects families and what actions have been taken by the local authority to address the issues raised. The report identifies six common themes that emerged from the consultations with 50 parents: housing, school, food and nutrition, benefit and debt issues, impact on mental health, and employment. For each theme, the report summarises what the parents said and what the local authority did in response, highlighting the various initiatives, grants, schemes, and support services that were implemented or improved. The report also outlines the future plans to improve service access and delivery in Blaenau Gwent, such as the Family Support Hub, the antenatal support, and the additional cost-of-living events.

LISTENING COMMISSIONS REPORT FOR PARENTS



Community

Hubs Our community hubs offer a range of support and guidance for individuals facing financial challenges or digital barriers that hinder their access to necessary services. They provide discretionary payments for living expenses, rent assistance for older adults and those with disabilities, and help with eligibility checks for council tax reductions, benefiting people with mental or physical disabilities, carers, and those on low incomes. Additionally, families with children can receive support through school uniform grants.

The hubs are places where people can get help in local libraries that

are in each valley. From the 1st January 2024 to the 31st December 2024, the hubs have supported 6,881 people. The main reasons why people visited the hubs were for benefit support, blue badges, council tax and fuel vouchers. The hubs are considered vital for residents to receive the help they need in places that are easy to reach.

Blaenau Gwent Community Hubs

Blaenau Gwent
Cwmwl-y-Ddraig

Blaenau Gwent Community Hubs offer residents easy access to services in local communities operating out of town centre libraries.

Services Available include:

- Council Tax and Non-Domestic rates information and advice.
- Benefits information and advice including Universal Credit, Council Tax reduction, free school meals, school clothing grants and benefit overpayments.
- Apply for a Blue Badge.
- Make bulky waste bookings, get waste/recycling timetables, make a booking at a HWRC site and order new recycling receptacles.
- Requests for information on many other Council services.
- Offering help and guidance on many other organisations.

Opening Times:

Location	Opening Hours	Day
Abertillery Library	9am - 5pm Tuesday, Thursday & Friday Closed: 1pm - 2pm 10am - 5pm Wednesday Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Tuesday, Wednesday Thursday & Friday
Brynnaaf Library	9am - 5pm Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Monday, Tuesday Thursday & Friday
Elbow Vale Library	9am - 5pm Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Monday, Tuesday Thursday & Friday
Treileger Library	9am - 5pm Monday, Tuesday & Friday Closed: 1pm - 2pm 10am - 5pm Wednesday Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Monday, Tuesday Wednesday & Friday
Stanes Library	9:30am - 4pm Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Monday
Cwm Library	9:30am - 5pm Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Thursday
Llanhilleth Institute	10am - 4pm Closed: 1pm - 2pm	First Wednesday of every month

For further information visit your local Community Hub or call 01495 311556. Website: www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Family Support Hubs

Family support hubs, located in our Flying Start areas allow families access to a 'one front door' service to ensure families can access any type of support where and when they need it as opposed to navigating a complicated referral and eligibility system. Through the family support hubs all expectant parents are offered antenatal support via a Family Support Worker. This support also includes an invitation to an antenatal event, which incorporates cost of living and anti-poverty partners who are available to give advice and guidance helping families to save money.

Support to Care Leavers

The Welsh Government Children and Communities Grant continues to provide essential support to care leavers who have been adversely affected by, or are facing undue pressure from, the cost-of-living crisis. In 2024 alone, there were 110 individual requests for funding to assist with income loss, food supplies, household bills, and other essential living costs, including securing tenancy arrangements. This grant has been crucial in helping young people who are or have been in local authority care to access opportunities that lead to independent and successful lives. The fund is used flexibly, and we encourage the 14+ team to work collaboratively with the children and young people regarding its use. This co-productive approach ensures that the support provided aligns with their personal outcomes, reducing barriers they have identified for their goals and aspirations. We remain committed to continuing to support care leavers in a flexible manner, helping them manage the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and achieve their personal and professional aspirations.

Socio-economic aspect of the Integrated Impact Assessment

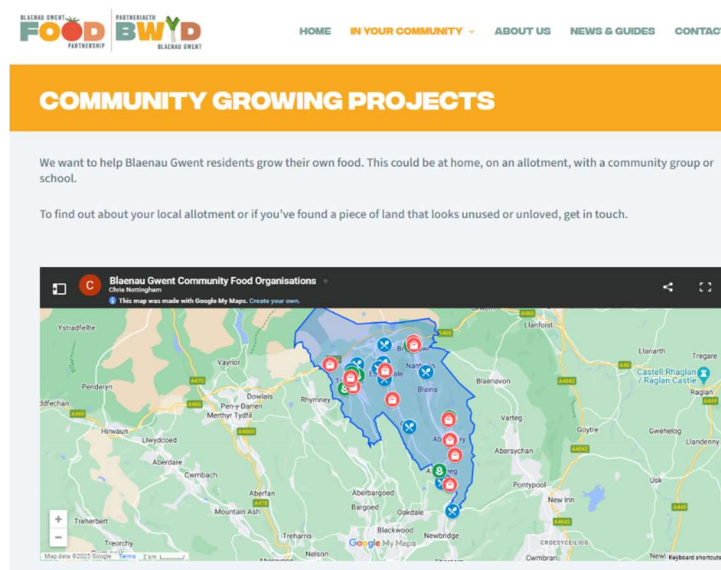
Following the council's motion to recognise care-experienced individuals as a protected characteristic, we have made amendments to the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) under Section 6, [Children's Rights Approach - The Right Way](#). These changes specifically address the potential positive and negative impacts of our decisions on Children Looked After (CLA) and Children & Young People with care experience.

The updated section now includes a detailed analysis of how our policies and decisions affect these groups. This involves assessing the potential benefits, such as improved access to services and support, as well as identifying any possible negative outcomes, such as unintended barriers or challenges. By incorporating

the perspectives and experiences of care-experienced individuals, we aim to ensure that our decisions are more inclusive and supportive.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund Community Food Development Grant Scheme

[Grant funding](#) for local community food initiatives has been made available during 2024-25 for improving access to healthy and sustainable foods in Blaenau Gwent. The grant scheme is for [projects](#) that promote a more coordinated approach to tackling the root causes of food insecurity through supporting community led initiatives to promote healthy, sustainable eating and growing. This includes growing projects, community food pantries, food education programmes such as cookery and nutrition classes.



The Get Blaenau Gwent Breastfeeding campaign aligns to the priorities of the BG Local Well-being Partnership and the BG Food Partnership to reduce health inequalities, improve access to healthy, affordable food, and promote the Marmot principles. Breastmilk gives a baby the best start in life as it has many health benefits, and plays a significant role in a child's development as well as mothers' health and well-being. In a time where the cost of living remains high, breastfeeding can contribute to reduction in the cost of the weekly food shop as well as having a positive environmental impact by reducing the use of packaging from formula products.



Identified next steps - Objective 6

For the 2024-25 period, our key actions will include:

- Further analysis the socio-economic aspect of the Integrated Impact Assessment
- Undertake research and analysis to understand Blaenau Gwent's socio-economics focusing on inequality from protected characteristics
- Consider the Children in Wales's Child Poverty Report's findings

Next Steps and Action Planning 2025-2028

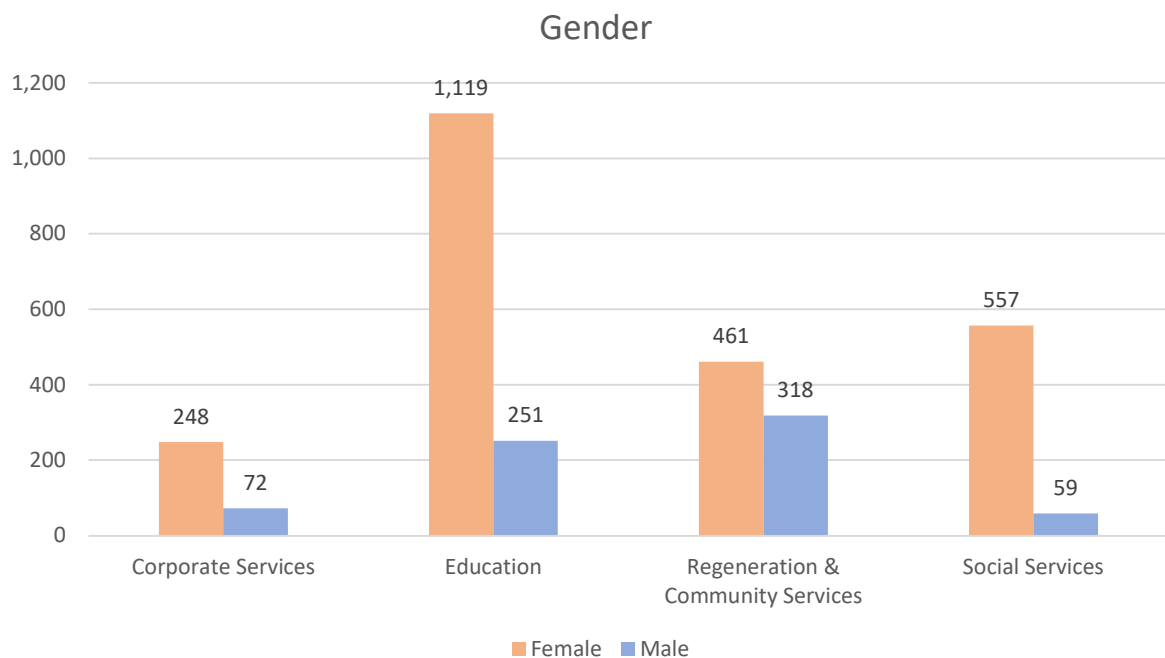
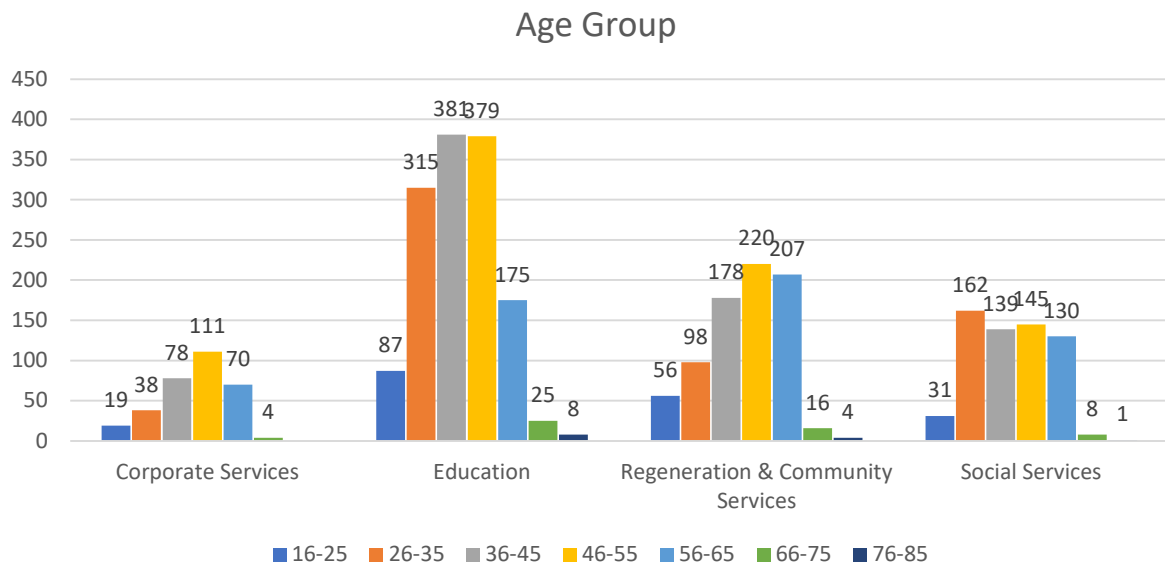
Our annual report highlights our ongoing progress in fulfilling our Public Sector Equality Duty and showcases key examples of our advancements towards the Strategic Equality Plan Objectives 2024-2028. This effort continues to raise awareness of equality throughout our organisation.

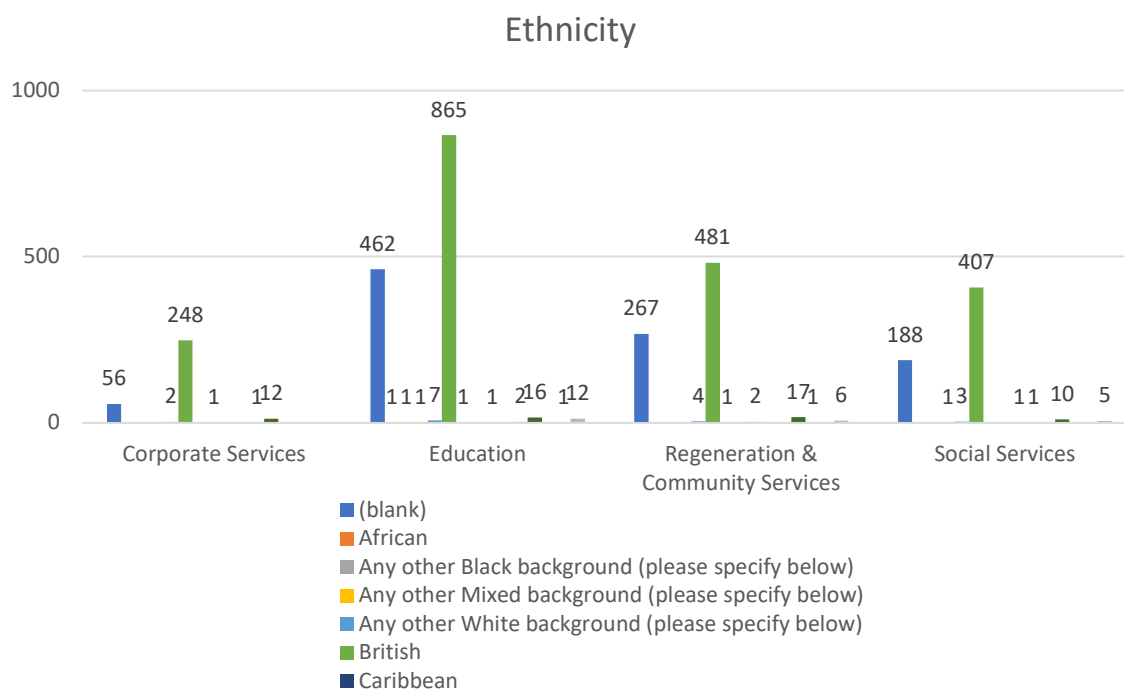
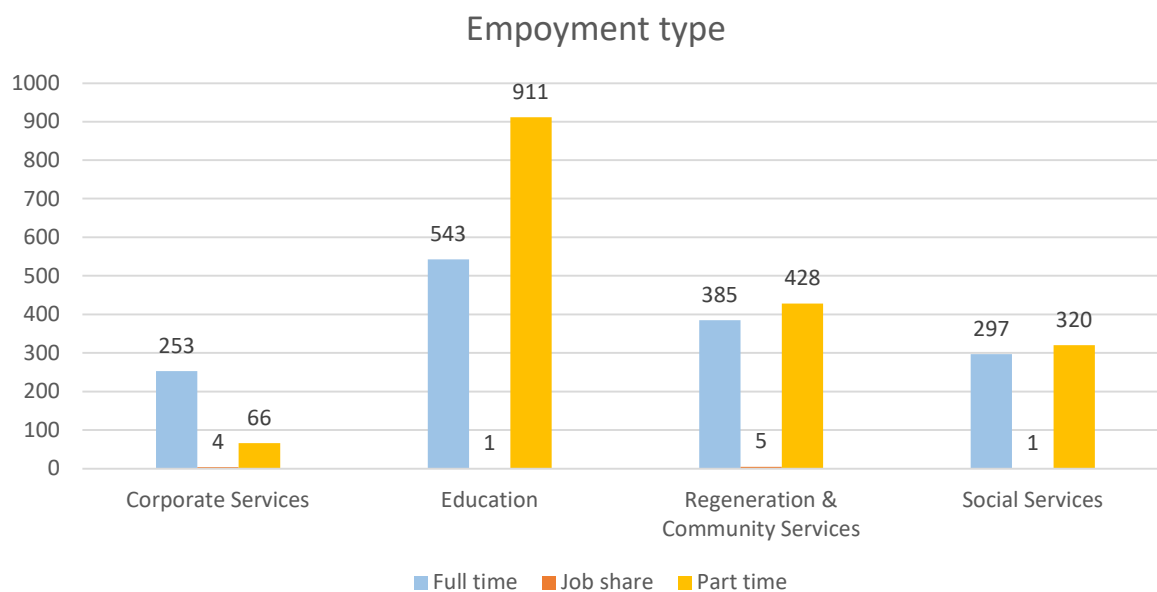
While we have made significant strides, we acknowledge that there is still work to be done. This report demonstrates our recognition of the need to carry forward many aspects of our work into the second year of the 2024-28 plan.

In the coming year, we aim to build on the work outlined in this document to inform the second-year Action Plan. This plan will include commitments to deliver on the Welsh Government's Strategic Action Plans for Equality, including the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan and the LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales.

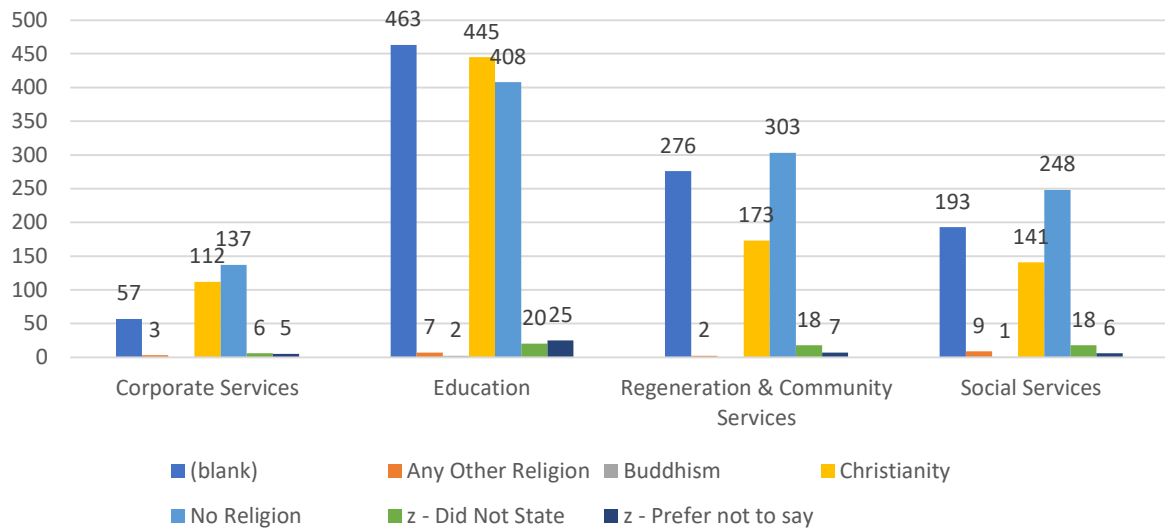
We are committed to continuing our journey towards greater equality and look forward to making further progress in the year ahead.

Workforce Data Summary April 2023 – March 2024

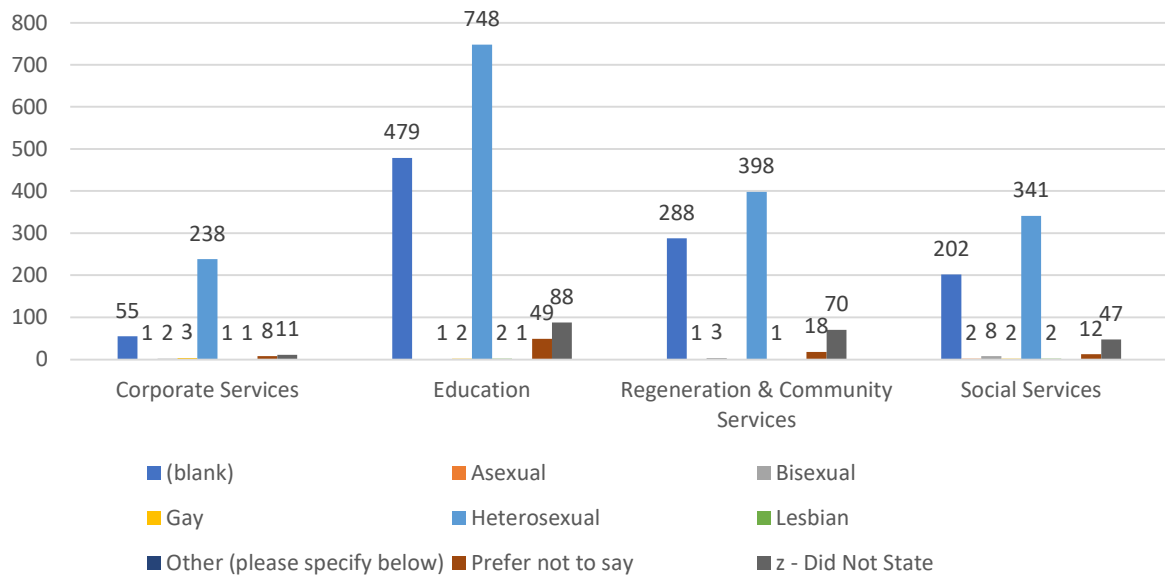




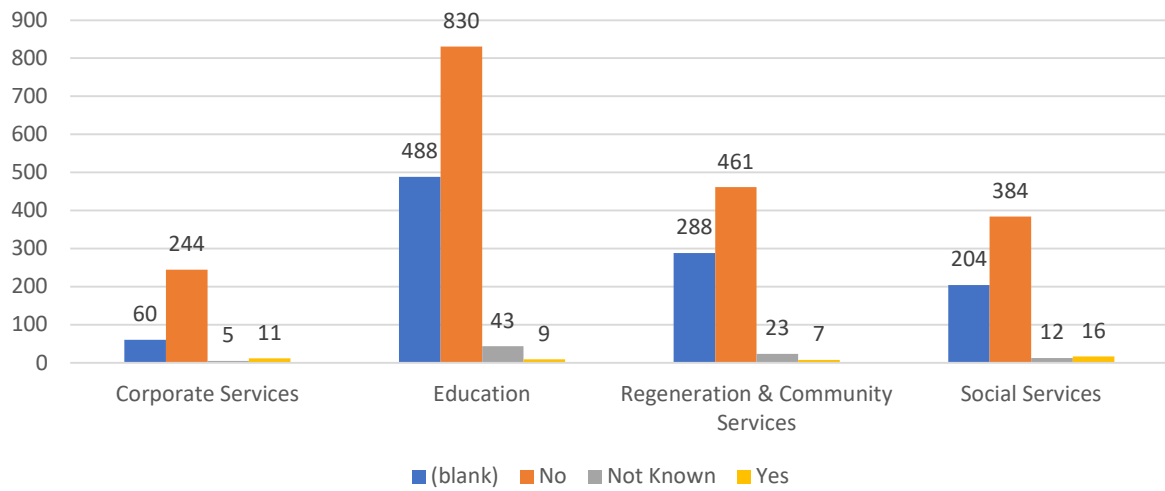
Religion



Sexual orientation



Disability



Marital status

