

Torfaen County Borough Council

Strategic Equality Plan

2024 – 2028



Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg, ac mewn ieithoedd a fformatau eraill ar gais.

This document is available in Welsh, and in other languages and formats on request.

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Foreword

Torfaen County Borough Council is committed to the principles of inclusion, diversity and social justice in the performance of all aspects of its business. This Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 has been produced to guide the Council's efforts to advance equality and to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to meeting the Public Sector Equality Duties and the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011.

The plan demonstrates to staff, citizens, stakeholders and elected members, how the Council intends to deliver its equality commitments, whilst continuing to be an inclusive organisation that does not tolerate discrimination of any kind.

These are challenging times and we find ourselves in a difficult financial climate for local government. At a time of further budget cuts and further decreasing staff resources, there is a need to be realistic about what we can do and achieve, yet it is vital to reflect on our commitment to tackling inequality and remember the role it plays in meeting long term goals and preventing even higher costs in years to come. We have developed this plan knowing that we must focus on achievable and impactful objectives and actions that remain aspirational and fully expressive of our determination to tackle inequality.

As one of the borough's biggest employers, tackling inequality starts at home, with consideration of the way we employ people and the way we support the development and progression of staff in a way that is fair and equitable. In the workplace, equity involves ensuring that all employees have access to resources, opportunities, and fair compensation, regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, beliefs, their relationship status, whether they are transitioning gender or are pregnant, or their age. Nobody should be held back from attaining what they are able to achieve simply because of a characteristic over which they have no say.

In inclusive workplaces, all employees feel welcome, valued, involved, supported and able to be themselves — which cultivates trust, motivation, greater job satisfaction and ultimately better outcomes for our communities. Being able to demonstrate an inclusive and diverse working environment benefits recruitment, helping the organisation not only fill roles but attract people with a wide range of lived experiences and cognitive diversity, helping us to avoid bias and group think and to look at issues from a range of perspectives.

And of course, having a conscientious workforce, with lived experience and understanding of people's varying needs is vital for us to be able to deliver services that meet those needs. We are here to work with our communities and this plan emphasises our continuing commitment to engaging with people from all backgrounds. Indeed, developing this plan has allowed us the pleasure of reflecting on the wonderful commitment we see from both staff and Elected Members on a daily basis, a commitment to tackling inequality and supporting not only the most vulnerable in our communities, but in fact, everyone in our communities.

Our Equality Objectives seek to improve Torfaen for everyone that lives here. When life improves for the most disadvantaged in our communities, it improves for all of us.

Stephen Vickers
Chief Executive
Torfaen County Borough Council

Cllr Anthony Hunt
Leader
Torfaen County Borough Council

Introduction

Our Strategic Equality Plan is published every four years and outlines what the Council will do to meet our responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duties and The Equality Act (2010). It also demonstrate the Council's commitment to meeting the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011, which came into force in 2011 and links to other legislation and regulations covering Welsh Language and Human Rights issues. It directly supports 3 of the 7 aims under the Welsh Government's Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The plan has been developed with a focus on the recommendations of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and Welsh Government plans relating to equality, which have been co-produced with stakeholders following extensive consultation with the communities impacted.

To help to improve the action plan, which we will consider annually, we welcome any ongoing, general comments from the people we serve and the people we employ. We also welcome comments or questions regarding the content, quality and accessibility of this document.

If you have any comments or would like to know more about the work the Council is doing, please contact:

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An overview of Torfaen

Torfaen County Borough is located in the south-east of Wales and borders the city of Newport to the south, the county of Monmouthshire to the east and the county boroughs of Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent to the west and north-west. Torfaen has an area of 126km² and is the 3rd smallest borough in Wales.

Between the last two censuses (held in 2011 and 2021), the population of Torfaen increased by 1.3%, from around 91,100 in 2011 to around 92,300 in 2021. Torfaen's population increased at a similar rate to the overall population of Wales; the population of Wales increased by 1.4%, from 3,063,000 to 3,107,000.

In 2021, Torfaen was home to around 5.2 people per football pitch-sized piece of land. This area was the third-most densely populated out of all 22 local authority areas across Wales (after Cardiff and Newport).

There are three main settlements running from the south to the north. Much of the southern parts of the county borough are now urbanised around the Cwmbran New Town conurbation which has a population of around 49,000.

Cwmbran Centre, owned and managed by commercial property and investment company LCP, part of M Core, is the main retail area of Torfaen. The company's website states that in 2022, Cwmbran Centre welcomed 19.75 million people. In addition to the local population, the facilities attract many visitors from the wider area of Gwent and the M4 corridor.

The former industrial town of Pontypool with its traditional indoor and outdoor market is the next largest settlement located in the heart of the borough with a population of around 37,000 people.

The World Heritage Site town of Blaenavon has a population of around 6,000 people and is situated at the furthest north point within the borough. Blaenavon is famous for the Big Pit coal mining museum and Europe's best preserved 18th century ironworks.

In 2022, Gwent Public Services Board published Local Well-being Assessments for each of the three towns, available on their website:

Blaenavon: <https://www.gwentpsb.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Final-Version-Blaenavon-Well-being-Assessment.pdf>

Pontypool: <https://www.gwentpsb.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Final-Version-Pontypool-Well-being-Assessment.pdf>

Cwmbran: <https://www.gwentpsb.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Final-Version-Cwmbran-Well-being-Assessment.pdf>

In addition, a wealth of information about Torfaen can be found in the Regional Partnership Board's Population Needs Assessment, which can be found at:

<https://www.gwentrpb.wales/population-needs-assessment#:~:text=The%20PNA%20consists%20of%20two,to%20which%20they%20need%20support>

The information in the following sections includes some of the key findings highlighted by the Population Needs Assessment that relate to specific protected characteristics and the actions in this plan.

Age

The 2021 Census indicated an increase of 16.7% in people aged 65 years and over in Torfaen since the 2011 Census. This compares with a 17.7% rise across Wales. Over the same period, Torfaen saw a decrease of 2.5% in people aged 15 to 64 years, and a decrease of 0.2% in children aged under 15 years.

Between the last two censuses, the average (median) age of Torfaen increased by one year, from 41 to 42 years of age. This area had a lower average (median) age than nearby Monmouthshire (49 years) and had a similar average (median) age to Wales as a whole (42 years). The median age is the age of the person in the middle of the group, meaning that one half of the group is younger than that person and the other half is older.

The number of people aged 65 to 74 years rose by around 1,800 (an increase of 20.9%), while the number of residents between 35 and 49 years fell by around 2,200 (12.0% decrease).

The 'Is Wales Fairer? 2023' report states that people aged between 64-74 years of age and those over 75 are significantly less likely to have internet access at home. The Older People's Commissioner has also raised this issue and called on local authorities and other public bodies to ensure that people's rights to access information via non-digital means are respected.

In the pursuit of meeting the needs of older people, the Council commits resource to engaging with older people, coordinating and financially supporting three independently constituted 50+ Forums, in Blaenavon, Pontypool and Cwmbran. The groups are regularly engaged in consultation exercises and invited to ask questions about or highlight concerns with any public services. To combat digital exclusion, they are also verbally provided with information that the Council shares online, which is also printed in the minutes of their meetings.

Meeting the needs of digitally excluded people, including older people, is an important consideration and is recognised in our Digital First Strategy. The proportion of people in post-retirement age groups who have internet access increased between 2018-2019 and 2021-2022, but a lot remain non-users. We therefore continue to provide a range of ways to access services.

Gypsy, Roma and Travellers

The draft Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan (2022) outlines a strategy for an actively anti-racist Wales. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are affected by this due to their status as a protected characteristic group under the 2010 Equality Act. It is outlined in the plan that by 2030 the voices of these communities will have been heard and acted on. The action plan recognises "that safe, culturally appropriate accommodation is necessary in order for individuals to flourish in other parts of their lives and to address the lack of site provision and poor quality of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in Wales" and commits to a number of actions including reviewing current funding for Gypsy and Traveller sites, redrafting guidance and commission a pilot programme to provide independent advice to those seeking to develop private sites.

Torfaen has the largest Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community of the five Gwent boroughs. In October 2023, the Office of National Statistics published the Gypsy or Irish Traveller Population Count, which identified 265 people in Torfaen identifying as Gypsy or Irish Traveller. This is a noticeably higher number than identified by the 2011 census (155).

More widely, it is thought that many households would not have completed the census – both because they were living on unauthorised sites or encampments, and as such did not appear on official records or because of a mistrust of the purpose of the census. Where people did receive forms, potential lower than average literacy levels may have meant that some households would not have completed them, and where they were completed some households would have chosen not to identify as Gypsies/Travellers or Irish Travellers.

It should be noted that when the Council last conducted its Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment, 38 of the 49 respondents (representing 154 community members) identified as Romani.

The Gypsy and Traveller caravan count, All Wales caravan count (Welsh Government) detailed that on 31 January 2021 there were 1,065 Gypsy and Traveller caravans and 139 sites reported in

Wales, 4 of which are in Torfaen. The neighbouring county borough of Newport is very often the unofficial unauthorised site for travellers in transit heading east/west from Ireland to England.

The Council recognises the importance of both authorised permanent and transit sites and is committed to working with partners and stakeholders including the Roma, Gypsy and Traveller community to ensure appropriate and sufficient accommodation in Torfaen and the wider region.

The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have the worst outcomes of any ethnic group across a huge range of areas including education, health, employment, criminal justice and hate crime (House of Commons 2019). It has been found that:

- Infant mortality rates are up to five times higher among this minority group when compared to the national rate.
- The immunisation rates among Traveller's children are low compared with the rest of the population. Some suggest that GPs are reluctant to register Travellers as they are of no fixed abode, meaning they cannot be counted towards targets and therefore remuneration.
- There is a high accident rate among the Traveller and Gypsy population, which is directly related to the hazardous conditions on many Traveller sites – particularly as sites are often close to motorways or major roads, refuse tips, sewage works, railways, or industrialized areas. Health and safety standards are often poor.
- Travellers have lower levels of breastfeeding.
- There is also a higher prevalence of many medical conditions when compared to the general population, including miscarriage rate, respiratory problems, arthritis, cardiovascular disease, depression, and maternal death rates.
- Alcohol consumption is often used as a coping strategy, and drug use among Traveller young people is widely reported and feared by Traveller elders.
- Cultural beliefs include considering that health problems (particularly those perceived as shameful, such as poor mental health or substance misuse) should be dealt with by household members or kept within the extended family unit.
- Travellers also face challenges in accessing services either due to the location of the sites (or due to transient nature of being in an area). Not having access to transport (particularly related to women who often cannot drive) to reach services is another reason for low use of services, as well as lower levels of health literacy of what services they are entitled to use or how to access them.

Generally, the communities have low expectations in regard to their health and life expectancy. Studies have repeatedly shown that Travellers often live in unhealthy conditions, while at the same time using health services much less often than the rest of the population.

Torfaen Traveller Education Service provide school-based support to assist Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) pupils and their schools. The team work on an outreach basis supporting pupils on a needs lead basis in line with the Torfaen graduated response and matrix of support. Many GRT young people and their families will require outreach support during their children's education. Outreach provision is essential in building trusting relationships with the community,

signposting and working with other services and providers. Further information on the support available is provided on the Council's website.

The Council also employs a Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officer and there is a well-established rapport between officers and the local Gypsy and Traveller community.

Black and Minority Ethnic groups

The 2021 Census shows that across Wales, the proportions of usual residents identifying with all high-level ethnic group categories other than "White" increased between 2011 and 2021. Torfaen saw an increase from 2.0% in 2011 to 2.9% in 2021.

Between 2011 and 2021:

The percentage of people in Torfaen identifying as Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh increased from 1.1% to 1.3%

The percentage of people in Torfaen identifying as Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African remained at 0.2% (no change)

The percentage of people in Torfaen identifying as Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups increased from 0.7% to 1.1%

The percentage of people in Torfaen identifying as White decreased from 98.0% to 97.1%

The percentage of people in Torfaen identifying as Other Ethnic Groups increased from 0.1% to 0.3%

Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021

The National Survey for Wales (NSW) in 2019-20 found that ethnic minorities (excluding White minorities) are most likely to experience discrimination at work (28%), compared with White minority groups (21%) and White British workers (9%).

Language barriers can cause difficulties for engagement and supporting people. Raising awareness of services and support within communities is crucial to improve uptake of support. It has also been highlighted that although costly, the information needs to be accessible within areas of the community and also accessible in different formats and languages.

Coronavirus had an adverse and disproportionate impact on people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities. A Government enquiry took place to identify why people from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds appeared to be disproportionately affected and further work is needed to ensure we improve outcomes, particularly relating to health and well-being.

Asylum Seekers, Refugees & Migrants

Until 2001, relatively low numbers of asylum seekers and refugees decided to settle in Wales compared to some parts of the UK. The numbers of asylum seekers and refugees increased when Wales became a dispersal area. The number of asylum applications in 2016 saw an increase of 8% compared to the year before. Service provision to refugees and people seeking asylum by non-government organisations (NGOs) has decreased significantly in recent years.

This has an adverse impact on people's health and wellbeing. No recourse to public funds and safeguarding issues such as honour-based violence and trafficking are key emerging themes for service providers. For service users the lack of, or limited access to information and tenancy support appear to be the key emerging themes. Various reports acknowledge that data collection systems for the number of migrants have weaknesses, which puts limitations on their reliability. There is no agreed definition for 'migrants' which further exacerbates reliable data collection.

The 2011 census found that the top ten countries of origin of people born outside the UK, in order of highest numbers first were: Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Poland, Philippines, Germany, South Africa, Nigeria, Italy and Zimbabwe. Feedback from Education and Social Services indicate that people from Roma background have very specific needs in addition to those of the general new-migrant population.

Good communication with migrants is essential. Determining the language and suitability of format (e.g., written, audio, face to face, telephone) and support available, such as advocacy and interpretation are critical elements to ensure effective communication. This will in turn benefit budgets and customer care as it contributes to determining the appropriate service. In addition, other issues highlighted for both migrants and asylum seekers include the need for more advocacy and floating support for migrants, lack of a strategic approach to information and service provision for new migrants and lack of coordination between services for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQ+) community

The public health white paper 'Healthy Lives, Healthy People' identified poor mental health, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), problematic drug and alcohol use and smoking as the top public health issues facing the UK. All of these disproportionately affect LGBT populations:

- Illicit drug use amongst LGB people is at least 8 times higher than the general population
- Around 25% of LGB people indicate a level of alcohol dependency
- Nearly half of LGBT individuals smoke, compared with a quarter of their heterosexual peers
- LGB people are at higher risk of mental disorder, suicidal ideation, substance misuse and deliberate self-harm
- 41% of trans people reported attempting suicide compared to 1.6% of the general population

2021 Census data states that 2.65% of people aged 16 years and over in Torfaen Local Authority Districts are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other (LGB+) and 90.39% are straight or heterosexual. 6.97% did not answer the question.

In recent years there has been very limited visibility of the LGBTQ+ community in Torfaen. 2024 will see the inaugural Torfaen Pride event hosted by charity Club F.O.D. which seeks to address social isolation experienced by LGBTQ people. During the full Council meeting of June 2023, Torfaen Councillors pledged political support for the idea of Pride events in Torfaen.

Disability in Torfaen

Almost 1 in 4 people in Torfaen live with a disability. In 2021, just over one in nine people (11.2%) were identified as being disabled and limited a lot, whilst 11.9% of Torfaen residents were identified as being disabled and limited a little. This figure increased from 11.4% in 2011. The proportion of Torfaen residents who were not disabled was 76.9%.

These are age-standardised proportions, enabling comparisons between populations over time and across geographies, as they account for differences in the population size and age structure.

Since 2020 the Council has worked closely with Torfaen Access Forum, a disabled people's organisation. Regular meetings are held every two months and attended by Elected Members and Council Officers to discuss issues affecting disabled people in Torfaen. A number of third sector organisations that represent and support disabled people also attend. The group have supported the Council with polling station reviews, active travel routes, drop kerb placements, regeneration designs and also worked with our Sports Development Team and Torfaen Leisure Trust to improve access to fitness activities for disabled people. Disability Wales have commented on this relationship and told the Chair that they see it as exemplary practice.

Religion in Torfaen

In 2021, 50.8% of Torfaen residents reported having "No religion", making it the most common response in this local authority area (up from 35.8% in 2011). Because the census question about religious affiliation is voluntary and has varying response rates, caution is needed when comparing figures between different areas or between censuses.

Across Wales, the percentage of residents who described themselves as having "No religion" increased from 32.1% to 46.5%.

In 2021, 41.5% of people in Torfaen described themselves as Christian (down from 55.4%), while 6.1% did not state their religion (down from 7.6% the decade before).

There are many factors that can cause changes to the religious profile of an area, such as a changing age structure or residents relocating for work or education. Changes may also be caused by differences in the way individuals chose to self-identify between censuses. Religious affiliation is the religion with which someone connects or identifies, rather than their beliefs or religious practice.

The percentage of people in Torfaen identifying as other religions, increased from 2011 to 2021:

- Buddhist: Increase from 0.2% in 2011 to 0.3% in 2021
- Hindu: 0.3% (no change)
- Jewish: 0.0% (no change)
- Muslim: Increase from 0.3% in 2011 to 0.4% in 2021
- Sikh: 0.1% (no change)
- Other: Increase from 0.3% in 2011 to 0.5% in 2021

The Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty

The Equality Act - Welsh Specific Duties

The general duty of the Equality Act 2010 (also known as the Public Sector Equality Duty or PSED) sets out that those subject to the duty must have due regard to the need to:

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

To support the general duty, the Equality Act 2010 allows for the enactment of specific duties. The specific duties are devolved powers, and this has resulted in different specific duties being set in Wales, England and Scotland.

In England, the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 require public authorities to publish equality objectives and information to demonstrate compliance with the general equality duty.

In Wales, the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) goes further and contains express provisions about engagement (Regulation 5) and equality impact assessments (Regulation 8) which are not present in the English PSED.

Regulation 5 (2) of *Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011*, states that:

Where any provision of these Regulations requires an authority to comply with the engagement provisions in carrying out any activity (see for example regulation 4(1)(a), compliance with those provisions means that in carrying out that activity the authority:

- a. must involve such persons as the authority considers -
 1. represent the interests of persons who share one or more of the protected characteristics; and
 2. have an interest in the way that the authority carries out its functions;*
- b. may involve such other persons as the authority considers appropriate;*
- c. may consult such persons as the authority considers appropriate.*

(3) In reaching a decision under paragraph (2)(b) or (c) the authority must have regard to the need to involve or consult (as the case may be), so far as is reasonably practicable to do so, persons who—

- a. share one or more of the protected characteristics; and*
- b. have an interest in the way that the authority carries out its functions.*

Regulation 8 (1) of *Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011*, states that:

- a. assessing the likely impact of its proposed policies and practices on its ability to comply with the general duty;*
- b. assessing the impact of any:*
 - 1. policy or practice that the authority has decided to review,*
 - 2. revision that the authority proposes to make to a policy or practice, on its ability to comply with that duty;*
- c. monitoring the impact of its policies and practices on its ability to comply with that duty; and*
- d. publishing reports in respect of any assessment that:*
- e. is referred to in sub-paragraph (a) or (b); and*
- f. shows that the impact or likely impact (as the case may be) on the authority's ability to comply.*

When thinking about how to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who don't, we need to:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and are connected to that characteristic.
- Meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.
- Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
- We also have to particularly think about how it will tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

The Welsh Government published regulations that introduced the Specific Duties for Wales in March 2011, these set out the actions the Council must take in order to comply and include the following areas:

- Setting Equality Objectives and publishing a Strategic Equality Plan
- Ensuring it engages with people who have an interest in how the Council's decisions affect them
- Collecting and publishing information relevant to compliance with the General Duty
- Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments and publishing the results if there is a substantial impact identified
- Publish employment monitoring information annually
- Promote knowledge and understanding of the General Duty amongst its employees and use its performance assessment procedures to identify and address the training needs of its employees in relation to the General Duties
- Set a gender pay equality objective where a gender pay difference is identified
- Think about including conditions relevant to the General Duty in its procurement processes.

The Protected Characteristics

Who is protected under the Equality Act 2010?

It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of a protected characteristic. The nine protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

Definitions of these terms sourced from the website of the Equality and Human Rights Commission:

Age

A person belonging to a particular age (for example 32 year olds) or range of ages (for example 18 to 30 year olds).

Disability

A person has a disability if she or he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Gender reassignment

Where a person undergoes, or proposes to undergo, a process for the purpose of reassigning their sex.

Marriage and civil partnership

Marriage is a union between a man and a woman or between a same-sex couple.

Same-sex couples can also have their relationships legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'. Civil partners must not be treated less favourably than married couples (except where permitted by the Equality Act).

Pregnancy and maternity

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

Race

A race is a group of people defined by their colour, nationality (including citizenship) ethnicity or national origins. A racial group can be made up of more than one distinct racial group, such as Black British.

Religion or belief

Religion refers to any religion, including a lack of religion. Belief refers to any religious or philosophical belief and includes a lack of belief. Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition.

Sex

A man or a woman.

Sexual orientation

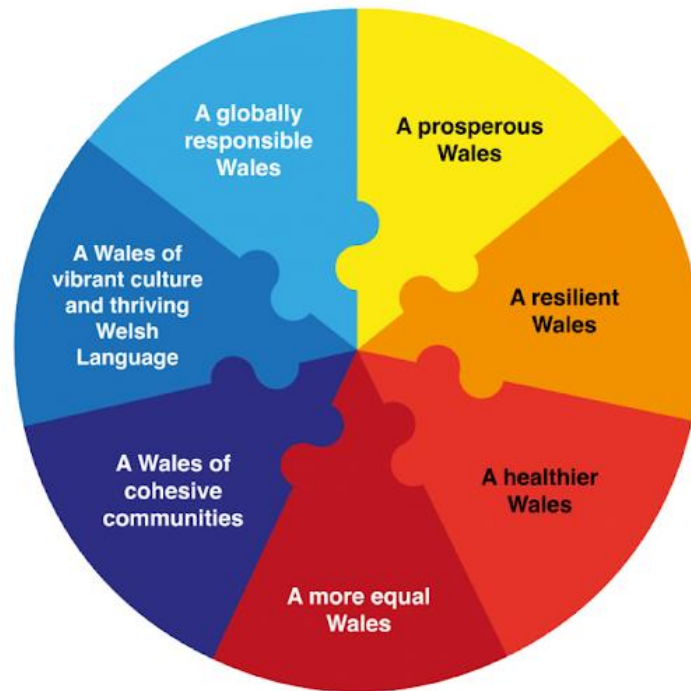
Whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission provides advice and guidance on discrimination relating to these protected characteristics on its [website](#).

The Well Being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015

The Council is committed to embedding the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 into all its service delivery and activities.

The Act places a duty on the Council to focus on the challenges that we, and our partners within Public Services Boards will face in meeting the long-term needs of communities and ensure that all strategic policy fully recognises the connections that exist between social justice, economic prosperity and the management of natural resources, both now and over the long term. The Act is designed to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales and provides us with an opportunity to advance equality and inclusion in a more integrated and strategic way. This plan reflects and is designed to contribute to those goals.



The Well-being of Future Generations Act also asks individual public services to apply five ways of working:

1. Long Term - The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long term needs.
2. Prevention - How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.
3. Integration - Considering how the public body's wellbeing objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.
4. Collaboration - Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives.
5. Involvement - The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.

The 5 ways of working have been used to shape the Council's Strategic Equality Objectives.

Gwent – A Marmot Region

In 2022, the Gwent Public Services Board (PSB) committed to Gwent becoming a Marmot Region. This involved adopting the Marmot Principles, developed by Professor Sir Michael Marmot, as a way to provide a consistent, Gwent-wide approach to improving equity.

As one of five local authorities represented on the PSB, Torfaen have since reviewed our County Plan 2022-2027 through the lens of the Marmot Principles and similarly considered them in development of this plan's objectives and actions.

Our Strategic Equality Plan supports a number of the Marmot Principles, most clearly:

- 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
- Tackle racism, discrimination and their outcomes

More information about the Marmot Principles and Building a Fairer Gwent programme can be found on the Gwent Public Services Board's website: <https://www.gwentpsb.org/en/gwent-marmot-region/background/>

Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011

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

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

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

Welsh Language developments will be made corporately in line with the aims of the Measure, which:

- confirmed the official status of the Welsh language;
- created a new system of placing duties on bodies to provide services through the medium of Welsh;
- created a Welsh Language Commissioner with strong enforcement powers to protect the rights of Welsh speakers to access services through the medium of Welsh;
- established a Welsh Language Tribunal;
- gives individuals and bodies the right to appeal decisions made in relation to the provision of services through the medium of Welsh;
- created a Welsh Language Partnership Council to advise Government on its strategy in relation to the Welsh language;
- allowed for an official investigation by the Welsh Language Commissioner of instances where there is an attempt to interfere with the freedom of Welsh speakers to use the language with one another.

Each of the seven well-being goals forms a key part of how Wales should look, and although the seven goals are important in their own right. they should not be looked at individually because they are all interlinked with each other. If we look at the seven goals from a Welsh language

perspective we can see how the Welsh language forms a part of, and plays a part in all aspects of education, health and social care, community cohesion, the economy and more.

Guidance issued by the Welsh Language Commissioner in 2018 called Standards relating to promoting the Welsh Language, included an illustration showing how the seven well-being goals relates to the Welsh language. We have included an objective to continue to monitor our compliance with our statutory Welsh Language duties.

Socio-economic Duty

On 31 March 2021 the Socio-Economic Duty came into effect in Wales. The Socio-economic Duty requires that we, as an organisation, when making strategic decisions such as deciding priorities and setting objectives, consider how our decisions might help reduce the inequalities associated with socio-economic disadvantage.

The overall aim of the duty is to deliver better outcomes for those who experience socio-economic disadvantage. The Socio-economic Duty will support this through ensuring that those taking strategic decisions:

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

The Council updated our Integrated Impact Assessment process to include the Socio-economic Duty when it came into force.

Recommendations

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

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

- Education
- Work
- Living Standards
- Health
- Justice and Personal Security
- Participation

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

The report was published in November 2023, during our 12-week period of consultation on our Draft Equality Objectives. It has been considered thoroughly and significantly influenced the actions within this plan.

Anti-racist Wales Action Plan

In the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, Welsh Government states:

“In early 2020, the Welsh Government started work on an action plan for race equality, following calls by the Wales Race Forum, and other grassroots organisations. Almost immediately however, the work was halted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, in May 2020, the killing of George Floyd sent shock waves throughout the world. Both events shone a light on the systemic racism faced by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, both in Wales and elsewhere. Both events reinforced the urgent need for action.

Through the development of the Plan we heard a clear message about the lack of trust felt by many people from ethnic minority backgrounds, over whether public bodies will enforce their rights – rights enshrined in law – but which often have little real impact on their lives. In this new Plan we outline how we have developed more focused actions, to help us make the necessary changes, and to fix broken systems.”

Torfaen Council fully support the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan and its purpose and have embedded relevant actions within our equality objectives to ensure we play our part in achieving the aspirations of the plan.

LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales

In the LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales, Welsh Government states:

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

As a government, we stand with our LGBTQ+ communities. That is why LGBTQ+ rights are embedded in our Programme for Government commitments (Welsh Government 2021a), are a key component of the Co-operation Agreement (Welsh Government 2021b) with Plaid Cymru, and why we have developed this ambitious Action Plan. Our aim, through this plan, is to show our clear commitment to respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the human rights of all LGBTQ+ people in Wales (OHCHR 2022a).

This plan will act as the framework for LGBTQ+ policy development across government and with our partners. It sets out the concrete steps we will take to strengthen equality for LGBTQ+ people, to challenge discrimination, and to create a society where LGBTQ+ people are safe to live and love authentically, openly and freely as themselves.”

The Council fully supports the LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales and its purpose and we have embedded relevant actions within our equality objectives to ensure we play our part in achieving the aspirations of the plan.

Our Strategic Equality Objectives for 2024 – 2028

Below are our 6 Equality Objectives for this four year period:

- 1. Torfaen County Borough Council provides and promotes equitable employment opportunities and has a workforce that respects people’s rights and understands the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion**
- 2. Understand the accessibility of our services, buildings, built environments and green space and take action to remove any disadvantages or barriers that make it difficult for some people to access the same opportunities as everyone else**
- 3. Promote and facilitate safe, inclusive and cohesive communities**
- 4. Play our part to deliver on the aspirations of Welsh Government strategies and plans relating to equality and diversity, including the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan and LGBTQ+ Action Plan**
- 5. Involve people and communities in matters that are important to them and the decisions that we make**
- 6. Effectively monitor our compliance with our statutory equality and Welsh Language duties**

Consultation on the Strategic Equality Objectives 2024 – 2028

A 12-week public consultation commenced in October 2023 and ran until 15th January 2024.

Consultation documents were produced in both Welsh and English, available as an online survey on the Council’s Get Involved webpages and as hard copies in both regular and Easy Read versions. These were handed out to a variety of groups and in community locations.

A range of local groups and organisations provided responses, including members of the three 50+ Forums in Torfaen and disabled people’s organisation Torfaen Access Forum. The Torfaen branch of LGBTQ+ charity Club F.O.D. were also contacted for a response.

The consultation received 111 responses.

60.4% of respondents were female, 27.7% were male and 11.9% preferred not to say.

59.6% of respondents were aged 50 or over.

9.5% of respondents identified as LGBTQ+ identities. 1 respondent identified as non-binary. 2 respondents stated that the gender they identify with is not the same as their sex registered at birth.

Precisely 50% of those who indicated whether they were currently married or in a civil partnership said yes.

43.6% of respondents said they have physical or mental health conditions or illnesses that have lasted or are expected to last for 12 months or more. 41.8% said they do not.

20.4% of respondents said their condition(s) or illness(es) reduce their ability to carry out day-to-day activities a little. 19.4% of respondents said their condition(s) or illness(es) reduce their ability to carry out day-to-day activities a lot.

Of disability types, physical disability or mobility impaired was the most selected response. 6 respondents said they had a hearing impairment and 2 said they had a vision impairment.

4.5% of respondents identified in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groupings.

42.2% of respondents identified as Christian. 39.2% said they had no religion. 1 respondent identified as Buddhist and 1 respondent identified as Jewish. 5.9% identified as 'other'. Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and Humanist were provided as options, but no respondents identified with these religions.

Respondents were asked if they 'agreed', 'disagreed' or were 'not sure' about each objective in turn. A number of questions encouraging 'write-in' responses were also included to capture reasoning and suggestions. The consultation showed broad support for the proposed equality objectives, with agreement rates for the proposed objectives ranging from 54.1% to 78.2% of respondents.

The wording of Objective 1 and Objective 6 has been amended to reflect comments received during the consultation period, providing constructive improvements.

As a result of the response to draft Objective 1, we have added the words 'and promote' into the wording of the final objective, as we agree in the importance of communicating this.

As a result of the response to draft Objective 6, we have reconsidered this objective and changed the wording to put the focus on effective monitoring of our compliance with our legal obligations. We believe that retaining an objective along these lines is useful so that readers of the Annual Equality Report, including Elected Members and the public, have sight of the number of complaints and can maintain confidence in both our performance and transparency.

How will we deliver and monitor the Strategic Equality Plan?

The actions within the Strategic Equality Plan will be delivered through Service Plans.

Comprehensive Service Plans set out the key priorities for each service area within the Council, outlining what they will deliver. Each Head of Service reports progress to their Strategic Director on a quarterly basis.

In addition to assisting the service with monitoring progress against its priorities, Service Plans also:

- support delivery of the Council's County Plan priorities
- demonstrate how the service is aligning with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act
- provide a framework to ensure the priorities arising from the Council's Corporate Assessment are addressed
- facilitate coordination of cross cutting strategies etc.

It is advantageous to include the actions that will deliver our Strategic Equality Objectives within Service Plans and it ensures equality priorities are embedded and mainstreamed throughout service delivery.

All Service Plans are monitored by the Head of Service and Strategic Directors as part of the Council's performance management arrangements.

Publication of the Annual Equality Monitoring Report

The main purpose of an Annual Equality Monitoring Report is to fulfil the Council's legal duties and obligations to report on its progress in delivering the General and Specific Equality Duties, which includes its progress in delivering the Equality Objectives. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires that all public authorities covered under the specific duties in Wales should produce an Annual Equality Report by 31st March each year.

The Annual Equality Monitoring Report is considered at a full Council meeting prior to publication, providing Elected Members with an opportunity to be sighted on progress against the action plan.

Equality & Procurement

Under the Equality Act when public sector organisations are procuring works, goods or services from other organisations, a listed body in Wales must:

- have due regard to whether it would be appropriate for the award criteria for that contract to include considerations to help meet the general duty
- have due regard to whether it would be appropriate to stipulate conditions relating to the performance of the contract to help meet the aims of the general duty.

In developing a supportive local commercial environment in which the Council can act as a provocateur for promoting greater equality within the activities and functioning of other organisations with who it works. As part of the procurement process an additional line of consideration for tenders will be developed that will seek to highlight areas in which specific organisations can make incremental improvements that can enhance its performance on issues of equality.

APPENDIX

Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028

DRAFT ACTION PLAN

PLEASE NOTE: A final action plan detailing confirmed measures and timelines will be published by September 2024

Objective 1 - Torfaen County Borough Council provides and promotes equitable employment opportunities and has a workforce that respects people's rights and understands the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion		
Protected Characteristics: All		
Equality and Human Rights Commission domains: work, living standards, health, justice and participation.		
	Actions	Service Plan
1.1	Ensure staff have access to, and receive training in, equality, diversity and inclusion.	HR
1.2	Ensure all staff involved in recruitment decision making have completed training on fair recruitment practices.	HR
1.3	Establish a baseline of recruitment data and assess the diversity of job applicants and recipients to understand what further interventions are required.	HR
1.4	Ensure processes in place to tackle workplace bullying, harassment, and discrimination relating to protected groups are communicated.	HR
1.5	Introduce transitioning at work guidance.	HR
1.6	Undertake a gender pay audit, ensuring that the pay and grading structure supports fair, equitable and transparent pay arrangements.	HR
1.7	Scope and implement measures to encourage diverse representation amongst Elected Members.	Democratic Services

Objective 2 - Understand the accessibility of our services, buildings, built environments and green space and take action to remove any disadvantages or barriers that make it difficult for some people to access the same opportunities as everyone else.		
Protected Characteristics: All		
Equality and Human Rights Commission domains:		
	Actions:	Service Plan
	An action plan for this objective will be produced in 2024/25 to identify opportunities or mitigate challenges in the following key areas:	PSSU (Equalities)
2.1	Customer experience surveys	
2.2	Accessibility of public buildings	

2.3	Digital technologies	
2.4	Service design	
2.5	Interpretation services	
2.6	Parking enforcement	
2.7	Gates and barriers	
2.8	Dementia Action Plan	

Objective 3 - Promote and facilitate safe, inclusive and cohesive communities		
Protected Characteristics:		
Equality and Human Rights Commission domains: education, living standards, health, justice and personal security, and participation.		
	Actions	Service Plan
3.1	Advocate community diversity, promoting inclusion and fostering good relationships.	PSSU (Cohesion)
3.2	Reduce the incidence of hate crime in Torfaen communities.	PSSU (Cohesion)
3.3	Engage with minority communities, involving them in developing initiatives to promote community cohesion based on the needs of that community and the wider community.	PSSU (Cohesion)
3.4	Manage the Local Authority's engagement with Refugee Resettlement Schemes and asylum dispersal.	PSSU (Cohesion)
3.5	Deliver a programme of activities from our libraries to provide resources and learning opportunities that foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.	Customer & Digital (Libraries)
3.6	Run two social media campaigns per annum to raise awareness of methods of reporting online hate and abuse and support available to victims.	PSSU (Comms)

Objective 4 - Play our part to deliver on the aspirations of Welsh Government strategies and plans relating to equality and diversity, including the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan and LGBTQ+ Action Plan		
Protected Characteristics: Race, Sexual Orientation, Gender Reassignment		

Equality and Human Rights Commission domains: education, work, living standards, health, justice and personal security, and participation.		
	Actions	Service Plan
4.1	Finalise and implement an Anti-Racism Plan for Torfaen Schools	Education
4.2	Work with partners and stakeholders to ensure the provision of sufficient and suitable sites for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities through the development of a robust evidence base to inform the Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) 2023 – 2038. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) to assess need over the period 2020-2025 • Based on the GTAA, allocate sites as necessary in the Deposit RLDP 	Planning
4.3	Promote awareness campaigns linked to Protected Characteristics, raising awareness of key dates and events throughout the year, including Windrush Day, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month, Black History Month, LGBT+ History Month and Pride Month.	PSSU (Comms)
4.4	Deliver a training programme within the Council's homelessness services to raise awareness of the specific needs of LGBTQ+ people, people's rights and barriers, including a specific focus on LGBTQ+ asylum and refugee support.	PSSU (Housing)
4.5	Continue to participate in the Proud Councils network and support and attend Pride events.	PSSU (Equalities)

Objective 5 - Involve people and communities in matters that are important to them and the decisions that we make.		
Protected Characteristics: All		
Equality and Human Rights Commission domains: education, work, living standards, health, justice and personal security, and participation.		
	Actions	Service Plan
5.1	Convene a Participatory Advisory Group to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop our understanding of survey respondents using the Get Involved platform and develop strategies to better target underrepresented demographics • Develop and communicate a forward plan for consultations and engagement activity, considering the timings of policy & strategy reviews and new initiatives, ensuring conversations with interested groups and those most likely to be affected can be facilitated. • Provide advice and support to representatives of various service areas on appropriate opportunities for engagement to inform Equality Impact Assessments 	PSSU (Comms)

5.2	Continue to engage with and support Torfaen Access Forum to ensure challenges experienced by disabled people in our communities are highlighted and addressed.	PSSU (Equalities)
5.3	Continue to engage with and support Torfaen's three 50+ Forums to ensure challenges experienced by older people in our communities are highlighted and addressed, and use those meetings to provide information to older people who are not online.	PSSU (Equalities)
5.4	Engage extensively with older people and stakeholders to co-produce an Age-Friendly Plan for Torfaen.	PSSU (Equalities)
5.5	Develop and support the Torfaen Youth Alliance to ensure young people, including those from minority groups, have opportunities to have a say on issues that affect them.	PSSU (Comms)

Objective 6 - Effectively monitor the Council's compliance with our statutory equality and Welsh Language duties

Protected Characteristics: All

	Actions	Service Plan
6.1	Monitor the number of complaints that involve an Equalities Act, Public Sector Equalities Duty or Human Rights compliance element	PSSU (Equalities)
6.2	Monitor the number of complaints that involve a Welsh Language Standards compliance element.	PSSU (Welsh)