

Joining up our legislative requirements

Provisions outlined within both the Well-Being of Future Generation Act (2015) and Local Government Elections Act (2021) also aligns with other duties placed on councils, such as the Equality Act (2010), Welsh Language (Wales) Measure (2011) and Environment (Wales) Act (2016).

This next section of this report will therefore provide details of how we have been working towards these other legislative requirements.

The Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023

The Social Partnership Duty in Wales, introduced under the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023, places a statutory obligation on certain public bodies—including local authorities—to engage meaningfully with recognised trade unions or other staff representatives when setting well-being objectives and making strategic decisions. This duty came into force on 1 April 2024 and complements existing obligations under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Its core aim is to embed collaborative working practices into public sector decision-making, ensuring that those delivering public services have a voice in shaping the policies and actions that affect them.

Local authorities must now, “in so far as is reasonable,” seek consensus or compromise with staff representatives at formative stages of policy development. This includes providing sufficient information and time for proper consideration and response. The duty also requires annual reporting: each authority must publish a report detailing how it has complied with the duty, agreed with trade unions where possible, or explaining why agreement was not reached.

The Council intends to report annually as to how it has fulfilled its responsibilities under the Social Partnership Duty through this annual report.

The Council has well-established consultative forums with the recognised Trade Unions that meet regularly throughout the year. The forums act as a formal opportunity for engagement between Members, Officer and Trade Union representatives on important strategic and policy matters affecting the Council and its employees.

This year, the consultation and engagement has focused upon the development of the federated model between Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Councils, the development of joint roles across both councils and the development of the transformation plans to develop a collaborative approach to service delivery. It has also provided the opportunity for early engagement on service transformation plans, and this year, that engagement has included a major transformation programme on early intervention and prevention within social care services.

Trade Union Representatives have also, through the forum, been consulted upon changes to the County Plan that have been brought about by changes to the definitions of work-related wellbeing goals within the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

In addition to the formal consultative forums that take place on a quarterly basis, the Chief Executive meets with Trade Union Representatives on a bimonthly basis to discuss strategic and policy developments affecting the council and its employees as well as any operational matters that may be pertinent at the time. The Head of HR also meets with Trade Union Representatives monthly to discuss any operational matters affecting employees and the workplace.

Equality and diversity



The Equality Act 2010 places a specific duty on councils to develop and publish a Strategic Equalities Plan (SEP) every four years, along with an Annual Equality Report which sets out progress against the Equality Objectives set within the Plan.

Our Council's Strategic Equality Plan for 2024 to 2028 was developed to guide the Council's efforts to advance equality and diversity and to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to meeting the Public Sector Equality

Duty, the additional Wales specific duties and The Equality Act 2010.

As a Marmot Council, we are committed to the principles of inclusion, fairness, equity of outcomes and social justice and we strive to ensure that this is demonstrated in our employment practices, the attitude and behaviours of our staff and in our service delivery.

Despite financial challenges that have reduced staff capacity in equalities in recent years, which has substantially increased pressure on staff, we continue to strive to not only maintain but improve our services, so they work for, and protect the rights of, the people and groups covered by the Equality Act.

It should be noted that the very small investment in preventative equality, diversity and inclusion work is a cost saver. Whether ensuring compliance and avoiding discrimination and costly legal challenges, developing policy in a way that avoids future problems, or harnessing the lived experience of protected groups such as our Torfaen Access Forum – essentially providing free consultancy – our EDI work is not about ideology but rather effectively meeting our various legal responsibilities and often about getting things right, first time.

Our Annual Equality Report is not due to be published until 31st March 2026. However, content has been collated and will be presented to Council by the end of 2025. Actions within our Strategic Equality Plan for 2024-2028 were inserted into Service Plans and progress therefore subjected to regular performance monitoring.

Key points regarding our organisation wide performance and a few of the impacts of this work:

- We met the statutory deadline of 31st March 2025 for publishing our Annual Equality Report 2023-2024
- We made good progress against numerous actions which were published in the action plan that sits under our new Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) for 2024-2028.
- Feedback from the Equality and Human Rights Commission on the Council's compliance and wider local government compliance with the PSED was received in July 2025. Our feedback was generally positive but highlighted some minor oversights to be addressed and the need for the Council to identify an Equality Objective specifically around the Socio-economic Duty.
- We developed the internal Participatory Group to ensure expectations of engagement with protected groups, as listed in the Council's Public Participation Strategy. 45 officers from a range of directorates have attended the meetings, receiving guidance on inclusive consultation and support to ensure diverse community voices are heard.
- The Diverse Minds staff and Member network was born, which is developing our understanding of neurodiversity. A toolkit is being developed to support staff and managers, which will increase both efficiency and wellbeing of both neurodivergent and neurotypical staff. Meetings have also sparked discussion on how technology can be distributed to maximise its potential benefits, potentially funded by Access To Work funding.
- A review of recruitment data in relation to ethnicity highlighted positive findings, indicating a lack of discrimination.
- After reviewing and changing our processes so that the Equalities Officer is more promptly informed of equalities related corporate complaints, staff are being better supported to understand the implications of any complaints and respond accordingly, including adjusting practices where necessary.

- We responded punctually to an increased number of complaints and Freedom of Information requests (the former will be detailed in the Annual Equality Report).
- Torfaen Veterans Hub has been developed, becoming constituted and securing funding. It currently supports up to 50 veterans each week
- Informed by local domestic homicide reviews involving people aged 60+, our Age Friendly Communities officer worked in collaboration with Newport City Council and Gwent Regional VAWDASV Team to contribute to the production of an Older Persons Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Awareness video.

Collaboration across Gwent and beyond - Our work on equality, diversity and inclusion is informed by the Ways of Working outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the principles of collaboration and co-production. Staff continued to attend equality officer meeting coordinated by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to support good practice across Wales, worked closely with the West Gwent Cohesion Team and equality officers across Gwent and participated in Proud Councils network activities to outwardly show that Torfaen is a place for all, where discrimination is not tolerated.

Welsh Language

As part of our obligations under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, we must publish a five-year strategy which shows how we will promote the Welsh language and facilitate the use of the Welsh language more widely in the Borough.

The Welsh Language Strategy, was approved by Council on 27 February 2024, outlining our strategic direction during 2024 – 2029, that will assist the growth of the Welsh language within the Borough, support the Welsh Government's vision of a million Welsh speakers by 2050 and the Councils Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP). Our progress against this strategy is reported to Council each year, within our [Welsh Language Standards Annual Report](#).



During 2024/25 we have:

- **5 Year Promotion Strategy** – We continues to work with Menter Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen a Mynwy, and other partner organisations to deliver the outcomes of our 5-year strategy (2024 – 2029). There are 5 key areas covered by the Strategy : 1) Legislation and Policy 2) Education 3) The Community 4) Services Delivery 5) The Workplace. The Strategy is closely aligned to our Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP) and the Welsh Government Strategy – Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers. The Welsh Language Commissioner will be conducting a review of Promotion Strategies across Wales during 2025/2026.
- **Staff Skill Audit** - We have many staff who have gone through Welsh medium education in the borough, but we know that often skills are forgotten, and confidence lost. We would like to support our staff to continue to use those extremely valuable life skills. This will also allow us to understand where we have skills gaps so we can look to fill these by recruiting and/or training in the future. At the beginning of 2024, a new campaign was launched to encourage our staff to record their language skills on iFOR (our HR system) using the CEFR levels. The 7 skill levels ranging from pure beginner (A1) to 'fluent' (C2) are linked to a recognised qualification and other assessment frameworks, in order to align us with other public sector organisations.
- **Removing Barriers** - In April 2024, our internal charging of directorates for translations was removed, easing the barriers faced by managers in balancing budget pressures and compliance with the Welsh language standards. Additionally, we transitioned to an electronic system for requesting and tracking translations, streamlining the process for both staff and translators. These changes have enabled us to place greater emphasis on promoting the Welsh language and enhancing our Welsh language services for residents. During the past 2 years the Council has been involved in a Welsh Government pilot scheme. A campaign which aims to encourage people from all walks of life to choose Welsh-medium education for their children. The 'Cymraeg i Bawb' (Welsh for All) partnership has been so successful that it is now being pushed across Wales with the help of Mentrau Iaith Cymru.

- **Cultural Events** - To celebrate Welsh culture in partnership with Menter Iaith Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen a Mynwy, the Council continues to support the 'Torf-hwyl' festival. A music, storytelling and activities event aimed at promoting Welsh culture among children and young people, regardless of their background. The event was held at Ysgol Panteg in 2024/2025. The Council also promoted awareness of St David's Day, Santes Dwynwen, and the Eisteddfod throughout the year. This was achieved primarily through internal staff communications, themed menus at the Inspire Café, and the display of various flags outside the Civic Centre.
- **Policy Development** – The Council has strengthened its Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) following advice from the Welsh Language Commissioner. The assessment now references the “conscientious effort” needed for all policy decisions. A new on-line training module has been developed to sit alongside the IIA and assist managers and senior officers on making a “conscientious effort” when assessing the positive and adverse effects of the policy, both directly and in-directly on the Welsh language. The need to assess impacts earlier in the policy development process remains key to the process. We have worked with colleagues from Corporate Development to ensure this is made clear to all officers involved in completing the IIA.

Biodiversity



Biodiversity is a cross-cutting theme for local government with strong links to all other sustainable development issues. There is a range of legislation including the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 Environment (Wales) Act 2016, which places a duty on all local authority departments to have regard for biodiversity. We are committed to ensuring we meet our obligations to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity within Torfaen through actions set out in our Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Plan, and our Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan.

Torfaen is characterised by high quality natural habitats and contains areas of national and local conservation importance. There are four Sites of Special Scientific Interest, approximately 200 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation and seven eight Local Nature Reserves. The Afon Llwyd is an important ecological corridor in Torfaen alongside the Monmouthshire and Brecon canal.

Key habitats include ancient deciduous woodland, ancient woodland, wetlands, species rich grassland and heather dominated upland heath. Woodlands in general comprise approximately 5% of the total area in Torfaen with many examples of ancient woodlands in Cwmbran that are over 400 years old.

The Torfaen Local Biodiversity Action Plan Torfaen's Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Plan sets out how we will retain and enhance the borough's rich and varied biodiversity in accordance with our statutory duty set out in Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The plan, facilitated by the Torfaen Biodiversity Partnership, includes an action plan to ensure we meet our specific statutory obligations.

We have a key statutory role in development management to provide ecological expertise and advice through the planning process to ensure our obligations as a Local Authority as set out in Planning policy Wales 12, are fully met.

During 2024/25 we have:

- Designated a new Nature Reserve – Blaenserchan Local Nature Reserve – official opening to take place on 5th July with a bioblitz event.
- Managed 8 local nature reserves for the benefit of biodiversity and ecological resilience, as well people and communities.
- Through the Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Local Nature Partnership, began preparations for cross-boundary projects in accordance with the objectives in our NRAP.
- Delivered bespoke training to the Property Team – 'Bats and the Built Environment' to reduce any potential breaches in protected species legislation in project work.
- Began the process of undertaking a review of our Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Plan – currently going through consultation.

- Supported the delivery of the Torfaen Climate and Nature Emergency Strategy and Action Plan.
- Through the WG funded Resilient Greater Gwent and Local Places for Nature projects, worked in partnership to deliver community-based biodiversity enhancement and well-being projects – including new ponds, tree planting, grassland restoration and community orchards and gardens.
- Planted 9700 trees
- Continued a conservation grazing programme across several sites including Llwyn Celyn LNR, Garn Lakes LNR, Llantarnam Abbey Meadow site, The Boating Lake Orchard, Pentwyn Field, Llantarnam Grasslands SINC, Ty Coch Grasslands and Llanyrafon Manor.
- Continued grassland restoration and management work for biodiversity.
- Organised public events to celebrate Wales Nature Week, including Go Wild Event held in Pontypool Park
- Worked closely with our Communication Team to release information to our residents about biodiversity related stories/news
- Provided on-going advice to the land use planning process in terms of its statutory requirement to protect and enhance biodiversity through planning decisions.
- A review of the criteria used to designate SINC sites.
- The Purchase of Coed Meyric Moel, an area of woodland and grassland near Henllys Local Nature Reserve
- Mapping of INNS
- Nature Festival held in a Primary school with support from our Litter and Fly-tipping prevention officer
- Partnership work with community councils, e.g. installing swift boxes in Pontypool Town Centre
- Film produced for Valleys Regional Park project promoting the work we do for biodiversity across our borough. Other short films/videos
- Film produced on the value of wetlands
- The Council's Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee has reviewed our approach to greenspace management, taking into account the Council's biodiversity duty.