



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol

Blaenau Gwent

County Borough Council

Blaenau Gwent

Strategic Equality Plan

2024-2028

Blaenau Gwent Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028

This document is available electronically at [[insert link](#)].

A version of this document is also available in Easy Read [[insert link](#)] and in hard copies at each of Blaenau Gwent's local libraries.

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

Policy and Partnerships

Email: pps@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk



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

Welcome and Introductions

We are pleased to present Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's fourth **Strategic Equality Plan 2024-28**; a plan which sets out how we will meet our duties under the Equality (Wales) Act 2010.

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

We recognise as public service providers that we have a key role to play in making a real difference to people's lives. Therefore, we will continue to strive to meet our priority 'Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities' as outlined in [Corporate Plan 2022-27](#)

Our plan sets the approach we will take over the next four years to strengthen and advance equality across Blaenau Gwent. We will continue to build on the steps we have made over the past four years and continue to embed equality throughout our organisation to bring about meaningful change.

We would like to thank everyone who has been involved in the engagement processes to develop the plan and we look forward in continuing this journey with you throughout the plan's delivery.

Introduction

Under the Equalities Act 2010, the Council has a statutory duty to prepare and publish a Strategic Equality Plan with equality objectives every four years. The plan must show due regard to how the Council can contribute to a fairer society by advancing equality and good relations in our day-to-day activities.

The Equality Act (Wales) 2010 legally protects people from discrimination, victimisation, and harassment if they share one or more of the following protected characteristics.

The Act protects people because of:

- **Age** - A person belonging to a particular age (e.g. 32 year olds) or range of ages (e.g. 18 - 30 year olds).
- **Disability** - For example, a physical, or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
- **Gender reassignment** - For example, transgender. People who were born into their body and feel it is not right for them. This might mean that they want to change from being a woman to a man, or a man to a woman.
- **Marriage and civil partnerships** - Marriage is 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.
- **Pregnancy and maternity** – The condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth, and is linked to

maternity, or paternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks' after giving birth and includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.

- **Race** - This refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origins.
- **Religion or belief** (including non-belief) - Religion has the meaning usually given to it but belief includes religious and philosophical beliefs including lack of belief (e.g. Atheism). Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition.
- **Sex** - A man or a woman.
- **Sexual orientation** - Being heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Strategic Equality Plan 2024-28

This is the Council's fourth Strategic Equality Plan and will set out our commitments for meeting its statutory aims to:

- (1) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation
- (2) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not
- (3) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Strategic Equality Plan will also support the Council in meeting other statutory duties set out within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales for the people of today and future generations. The Act sets out seven National Well-being Goals, including '*A more equal Wales*', '*A Wales of cohesive communities*' and '*A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language*' which is something that the Strategic Equality Plan will help contribute towards.

Within the Act the sustainable development principles of the five ways of working will also be central to the delivery of the Strategic Equality Plan:

1. Prevention
2. Integration
3. Collaboration
4. Involvement
5. Long-term

Welsh Government Equality Commitment

Equality and Human Rights are central to the work of the Welsh Government and their vision to support a fair and equitable Wales.

Since our last Strategic Equality Plan was published in 2020, the Welsh Government have set out comprehensive and specific commitments in light of the inequalities that were highlighted and intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, national strategic plans and key action plans have been developed and published by the Welsh Government to tackle the existing inequalities experienced 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)

It is our intention that specific actions where relevant from the national plans will relate directly to action plans for each of the strategic objectives within our new plan. This will demonstrate our accountability and commitment to helping to achieve the national commitments and goals set out by the Welsh Government.

How did we decide what our equality objectives should be?

To create a Strategic Equality Plan that is relevant to those living and working within Blaenau Gwent, public engagement was crucial. The initial step taken was reviewing our 2020-24 plan to influence the creation of a public survey, we wanted to know what you thought of our previous objectives and what we should be prioritising. The results were collated and used to shape our proposed objectives outlined in the [Consultation Document](#).

To successfully deliver a plan requires us to have an effective framework in place that has:

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

Our new Strategic Equality Plan for 2024 to 2028 will focus on the outcomes that matter to the community and people who use Council services. We want it to be about services that are accessible, delivered effectively and on an equitable basis. The Plan takes into consideration the findings from our engagement and consultation activity undertaken, which has involved 160 people with lived experiences from across the identified protected characteristics. Some examples of those involved so far include:

- Parent Networks
- School Council's
- Representatives from Faith and Religious Groups
- LGBTQ+ Support Groups

- Older People
- Young Carers Support Groups
- Representatives from minority ethnic groups
- Individuals with a Disability

Furthermore, we have had forty-eight individuals participate via an online questionnaire, to encourage people to share their views and experiences, and talk to us broadly about equality, diversity, and inclusion.

We gathered and analysed the results of the consultation and used them to create our proposed objectives in the Consultation Document. We asked the public again if we had reflected their feedback in the proposed objectives through a second survey. We also engaged with various local networks and groups face to face, as mentioned above, for more in depth feedback please see the link: [SEP Engagement Feedback](#)

Besides the public consultation, we also consulted through our internal management structures on the suggested objectives and confirmed that they agreed with the knowledge and information shared by professionals in relation to equality.

We already know that many of the barriers facing people with protected characteristics are long-standing and entrenched and it takes long-term commitment to be fully addressed. Therefore, the equality objectives which we had in place during the previous plan 2020-2024 have been reconsidered and refined rather than replaced.

Our equality objectives are 'themed' as we acknowledge that many of the key equality issues that we have identified are not isolated to one specific 'protected characteristic' – we recognise intersectionality for people living in our area.

We feel our themed approach will help us to tackle relevant issues, and therefore we are sure that the steps we want to take to deliver the objectives will also deliver positive equality outcomes for people covered by one, or more of the protected characteristics. Our themes cover:

- Organisational Culture and Leadership.
- Workforce Inclusivity and Diversity.
- Fair and Inclusive Learning.
- Inclusive Engagement and Participation.
- Community Cohesion.
- Tackling Disadvantage caused by Poverty.

Monitoring and review

We will incorporate the objectives into our corporate reporting process, which are monitored quarterly, this will support us in making equality everyone's business.

As part of the plan development, we established a stakeholder reference group which will also be used to monitor progress and accountability. This group will be further developed by establishing an Oversight Group to monitor progress and accountability of the actions related to each Strategic Objective. The group will meet quarterly and will review and monitor the progress for each action.

We have a duty to produce an annual report to highlight progress towards our objectives, this will also be a key time to consider whether our actions may need to be changed to incorporate our next steps.

Over the four years of our plan, we will deliver a series of targeted high-level actions underpinned by our objectives which will align to the national equality plans already mentioned.

Our Strategic Equality Objectives are as follows:

Equality Objective 1: We will be a fair and equitable organisation.

Equality Objective 2: We will be a workplace that champions diversity and inclusion.

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.

Equality Objective 4: We will promote and support inclusive, safe and cohesive communities.

Equality Objective 5: We will ensure effective engagement and participation for people with protected characteristics.

Equality Objective 6: We will strive to reduce inequality caused by poverty.

Blaenau Gwent 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 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.

One of the ways we demonstrate our commitment to equality is by fulfilling our role as a corporate parent for children and young people who are looked after or have left care.

As an organisation we are committed to delivering the equality duties placed on 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.

What people have told us:

People have told us that they recognise the importance of equality and diversity within the organisation, but also highlight some of the challenges and areas for improvement. They suggest that people want to see more action and commitment from the leadership and management, as well as more opportunities for collaboration and learning across different groups and teams.

Some of the key themes and messages that people have told us about Objective 1 include:

“We should be an organisation that rejects and challenges any discrimination and ensure equity and inclusion for all.”

“Consistency is required across the organisation with strong leadership, good management with partnership working and collaboration with external partners and Union support.”

Source: Blaenau Gwent Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Survey 2023

“We need to ensure that all people are aware of prejudice, I am happy to correct others but some of what is said may upset others who identify as being gay”.

Source: BGCBC staff Member, equality engagement 2023

What valuable work are we continuing from:

- Development of a new Integrated Impact Assessment and associated guidance document for staff.
- Delivery of targeted racial equality training to our Leadership Team and Elected Members.
- On-going support for national and regional equality campaigns.
- Taken a leadership approach to tackling issues affecting our communities with an organisational approach e.g. Cost of Living Crisis and Resettlement.
- Enhanced the equality data collected from our staff which provides a better understanding of the organisation’s workforce.

- Implemented the Blaenau Gwent Corporate Parenting Action Plan 2023/24.

Some of the main actions we will do to help us achieve Equality Objective 1:

- Demonstrate a strong commitment and desire to lead anti-discriminatory values and behaviours throughout the organisation.
- Commit to integrating key expectations from national strategies and plans into our approach for equality, diversity, and inclusion e.g. Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan and LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales.
- Strengthen our plans, policies, and procedures in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion considering the most up-to-date guidance e.g. in terms of declarations, definitions, and statements.
- Embed the re-designed Integrated Impact Assessment throughout the organisation decision-making processes.
- Champion equality issues by embedding the lived experiences of people with protected characteristics into our service design, delivery, and reviews.
- Strive to understand the barriers which prevent people from accessing and benefitting from our services and do all we can to mitigate them.
- Further develop and deliver a range of up-to-date and relevant equalities training, seminars, events, and learning resources for our political and professional leaders.
- Commit to the principles of the National Corporate Parenting Charter.

What difference do we want to make:

We want to make a difference by creating an organisation that respects and values the diversity of its staff and customers, and that promotes a culture of inclusion and belonging. We want to ensure that everyone has equal

opportunities to develop their skills and talents, and to contribute to our vision and mission. We want to remove any barriers that prevent people from accessing and benefitting from our services, and to address any issues of discrimination, harassment, or bullying. We want to be a role model for other organisations and sectors, and to influence positive change in our communities and beyond.

We want to demonstrate that by being a good corporate parent, we not only fulfil our statutory obligations, but also contribute to the wider equality agenda. We will strive to promote the rights and interests of a vulnerable and often marginalised group of people, and ensure they are treated with respect, dignity, and fairness.

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.

What people have told us:

Feedback from the survey showed us that the people are keen to see more diversity and representation in the organisation and that staff are eager to learn and change. Staff have stated that they are looking for more clarity on the organisational structure and how it supports diversity and inclusion.

Positive attitudes towards equality and diversity have been expressed and people are seeking more knowledge and awareness on the issues people with protected characteristics face.

Some of the key themes and messages that people have told us about Objective 2 include:

“There is enthusiasm to create change within the organisation”.

“We need better understanding as a workforce on how the organisation is built and how people with protected characteristics are represented”.

Source: Blaenau Gwent Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Survey 2023

“More training and awareness is needed, we don’t need to be scared to look within as this will bring about positive change”.

Source: Staff members as part of SEP engagement conversation 2023

What valuable work are we continuing from:

- Development and implementation of our Organisational Workforce Strategy.
- Annual consideration of the Gender Pay Gap.
- Development and review of key policies such as Agile Working Policy and Right to Request Flexible Working Policy.
- On-going training and development opportunities for staff on equality, diversity, and inclusion.
- Promotion of equality, diversity, and inclusion to our staff through national and international campaigns.
- Delivery of the ASPIRE shared apprenticeship programme and the ASPIRE mentor project for children looked after.

Some of the main actions we will do to help us achieve Equality Objective 2:

- Create an inclusive staffing culture where equality, diversity and inclusion are recognised, valued, and celebrated.
- Increase understanding on Positive Action as defined in the Equality Act 2010 and understand how to embed it in our staff's work.
- Meet our legal requirement to publish gender pay data and consider report on disability and ethnicity pay gaps.
- Ensure equality of opportunity when recruiting staff.
- Seek to identify levels of minority ethnic diversity using Organisational Development data and use this as a benchmark to explore any structures and cultural barriers.
- Monitor equality in our staff promotions, training, and discipline and grievance policies and procedures.
- Implement and review the equality, diversity and inclusion training opportunities using the new training portal 'Thinqi' with a specific focus on key issues such as Anti-Racism, LGBTQ+, Disability, Gender and Age.
- On-going provision of support services to our staff for issues associated to equality, diversity, and inclusion e.g. Counselling support, Menopause cafes and Health related issues.
- Ensure staff that work directly with people with protected characteristics are sufficiently trained and able to respond appropriately to equality issues.
- Aim to increase levels of self-identification from our staff on all protected characteristics and increase confidence in sharing data.
- Commit to collecting and using the 'lived experiences' of our workforce.

What difference do we want to make:

We want our staff to reflect the diversity of the communities we serve by providing equal opportunities for career development and progression for all staff, regardless of their protected characteristics or personal circumstances.

We want to encourage staff to share their experiences for us to inform our policies and practices and improve our workplace environment.

We want to promote awareness and understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion across the organisation and challenge any forms of discrimination, harassment, or bullying.

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.

What people have told us:

Children and young people have shown courage, openness, and honesty during our consultation work with them. They have expressed what they think needs to change and that often equality and diversity recognition is superficial rather than integrated as part of the learning culture. In particular, they mentioned tick box exercises rather than systemic change.

Children and young people with specific protected characteristics said that sometimes they feel unsafe and discriminated against compared to those who do not.

Some of the key themes and messages that people have told us about Objective 3 include:

"I get called you stinking Gypsie XXXX, but nothing is done, it's like it's not seen as a race issue".

"Where are you from, do you live in a caravan?"

Source: Session with Gypsie Traveller Community in school setting as part of
SEP engagement 2023

"I was continually bullied throughout school for being feminine".

Source: 121 session with service user as part of SEP engagement 2023

'We need to start with the children as they are our future as the African saying goes It takes a whole community to raise a child. It's not about punishment, it's about ensuring Children and Young People understand kindness, empathy'.

Source: Equality Session 2023 Members of the Blaenau Gwent Baha'i Faith

What valuable work are we continuing from:

- Targeted and specialist intervention for young carers through our Families First provision.
- The development of a LGBTQ+ Support Group within three of the four secondary schools in the borough.
- Supporting Gypsy and Traveller children and young people through a targeted service.

- Development of a regional approach to tackling racism in schools.
- Recruitment of a Minority Ethnic worker through the Families First programme.
- Children's Grand Council – equality focused workshops to understand the equality issues that children and young people face.
- Collaborative and partnership working with schools to develop School Equality Plans.
- Youth forum priorities that reflect the voices of children and young people in relation to equality, including, Show Racism the Red Card, International Women's Day etc.

Some of the main actions we will do to achieve Equality Objective 3:

- Improve equality data and performance monitoring arrangements with schools.
- Deliver the tackling racism in schools' action plan developed as part of the regional approach.
- Support a range of appropriate interventions to be made available to schools to meet the wellbeing needs of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Strengthen reporting on equality, diversity, and inclusion issues within schools.
- Work with Education establishment to increase representation from minority ethnic groups on the Youth Forum.
- Working with schools to embed and deliver school equality plans.
- Consider equality focused peer support network for school's staff.
- Support School Governors to appoint anti-racism leads.

- Seek to adopt and implement Welsh Government's trans guidance when published.
- Create better feedback channels from the LGBTQ+ Support Groups in the secondary schools to ensure the voices of young people are heard.

What difference do we want to make:

We want to enhance the quality and relevance of learning by acknowledging and addressing the diverse needs, interests, and goals of learners. Our goal is to improve the outcomes and well-being of learners by providing them with opportunities to develop their potential, express their voice, and contribute to their communities. We will strive to advance the values and principles of social justice, human rights, and democracy by challenging discrimination, prejudice, and oppression, and by empowering learners to become active and responsible citizens.

Blaenau Gwent 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.

What people have told us:

To deliver on the objective to promote and support inclusive, safe and cohesive communities, it is imperative that we consider the protected characteristics when delivering services that educate and support vulnerable individuals within the community. Ensuring that our Community Safety Team are well-informed on all plans, strategies, and initiatives such as the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales etc. is essential in addressing matters that hinder objective 4, like anti-social behaviour wherein inequality is a driving component in its cause.

We must be confident that adequate education on the importance of equality is provided as this is crucial to the prevention of attitudes that encourage prejudice within the community. Therefore, we must engage with the public to understand not only those subject to prejudice but also the perpetrators. This

engagement will support a positive embrace of equality as celebration of people of different race, gender, age etc forming cohesive communities.

Some of the key themes and messages that people have told us about Objective 4 include:

'How do we ensure that everyone knows about the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan?'

Source: Equality Session 2023 Members of the Blaenau Gwent Baha'i Faith

"We are all the same, it doesn't matter about the colour of your skin, faith, religion or sex"

Source: Children's Grand Council Session November 2023

"Why can't they leave me and my community alone, why do they have to be unkind, I am sick of seeing how my people are affected because of who they are, I am myself and I am being me!"

"I use the female toilets, I am sorry if that makes you feel uncomfortable."

Source: Individual session with service user as part of SEP engagement

"Why are we not believed, why are we treated differently to women and why is International Women's day so upbeat and International Men's Day about suicide!"

Source: Dads group as part of the SEP engagement

What valuable work we are continuing from:

- Delivering a host of National and International campaigns that raise the profile of matters relating to equality such as Holocaust Memorial Day, Show Racism the Red Card, White Ribbon Day, International Women's Day and Black History Month.
- Effectively support the implementation of the UK's resettlement scheme that Blaenau Gwent has supported since 2016.
- Provide support to community projects with initiatives that promote understanding and respect between different groups of people and create opportunities for people from all backgrounds to unite in obtaining Community Cohesion grants.

Some of the main actions we will do to achieve Equality Objective 4:

- Work with community groups, particularly those vulnerable in relation to their protected characteristics, to gain a rich and up-to-date understanding of attitudes in relation to equality.
- Work closely with our partners to monitor activity that threaten the safety of communities to understand how to put preventative measures in place.
- Develop innovative campaign that promote and inform the community while celebrating diversity and commemorate relevant historical events.
- Challenge negative stereotypes on an organisational-wide level.
- Review our monuments and street names to implement appropriate action upon those associated with slavery and colonialism.
- Identify champions for equality, diversity and inclusion across all departments to help ensure due consideration is given to the protected characteristics when delivering our services.

- Continue to work in partnership with a wide range of public, third sector and private sector organisations, to deliver a holistic package of support for those requiring resettlement.
- Learn from the experiences of people seeking sanctuary in Blaenau Gwent.
- Continue our support of the LGBTQ+ Community and give consideration to hosting Pride events.
- Raise awareness of what a hate crime is and ensure the public know how and where to report hate crime.

What difference we want to make:

We want to be able to take pride in our communities knowing that its members feel safe and included.

We aim to see an increased awareness among our communities surrounding the protected characteristics, in turn reducing incidents that jeopardize the feeling of safety for all individuals within our area. Furthermore, we aim to continuously improve our collaborative working between our equalities officer and champions and the community safety and cohesion teams to monitor public ongoings relating to matters of equality. We want it to be clear to the public that their safety and inclusion are priorities for the Council and ensure individuals are aware of the resources available to them to seek guidance surrounding the support and development of more cohesive communities.

Our vision is to be a community that sees the value in equality and exemplified by the consideration of those most vulnerable in the Council's decision making and service delivery.

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 The Equality Act (2010) and Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, with intersectionality being taken into consideration. We will utilize all available engagement tools from in person discussion to formal online survey.

What people have told us:

As a member of the Blaenau Gwent Community and Baha'i Faith group said "conversation is where change begins" and as such we must invest in effective engagement. Not only should Blaenau Gwent be engaging with the public on matters when planning how we deliver our services and set out our plans and policies; but providing the public with clear feedback on the outcomes and how we have considered their views within our work. It is vital that we continue to gather the public's opinions on our actions to measure their success and rectify any shortcomings.

Some of the key themes and messages that people have told us about Objective 5 include:

‘Invest in engagement, bring people together, in shared, safe space, encourage conversations, this could bring about real change’

Source: Equality Session 2023 Members of the Blaenau Gwent Baha’i Faith

“More Dad’s workers to support dad’s within Blaenau Gwent”

Source: Dad’s group as part of SEP engagement 2023

“Feedback to communities about outcomes so communities are clear on decisions being made”

Source: One Life Community Group as part of SEP engagement 2023

What valuable work we are continuing from:

- Development of an Engagement and Participation Strategy.
- Development of a Stakeholder Reference Group.
- Community Impact Assessment undertaken to understand the impact of the COVID pandemic on Children & Young People aged 16-24, those with a Learning Disability, Families with children under the age of 11, new vulnerables and armed forces.
- Community Engagement Officers continue to focus on listening to the voices of vulnerable children and families in the community to understand what matters to them and deliver community focussed services, including:

- Sow Pretty gardening project at Bryn Bach Park in collaboration with Aneurin Leisure Services
- Youth Clubs running weekly activities including Zumba, Yoga, Cookery, Art, Storytelling, and DJ'ing.
- Young Carers trips, events and festival
- 18-25 Disability Arts Club
- Spoken Word (maternal mental health) Project
- World Book Day Celebration – making resources available to all.

Some of the main actions we will do to achieve Equality Objective 5:

- Implementation of the Engagement and Participation Strategy.
- Carry out engagement and participation activities that capture the 'lived experiences' of people living within protected characteristics.
- Encourage improved representation and participation in council activities and decision-making from young people, disabled people, LGBTQ+ people and people from minority ethnic groups.
- Oversee engagement and participation activity to monitor how well and how often we engage with people with protected characteristics.
- Review Blaenau Gwent Citizen's Panel and how we promote the panel to gain person centred insight into equality issues.
- Review and strengthen how children and young people feel heard and considered in the delivery and design of our services.
- Further encourage and support participation of Children Looked After and Children leaving care throughout Council services.

What difference do we want to make:

We want to see an increase in public engagement, particularly in terms of engaging the views of areas within the community that we are currently seeing low levels of participation. A protected characteristic that we acknowledge needs addressing is that of young people. The National Survey for Wales noted that Blaenau Gwent was ranked below the national average in 'percent of adults aged 16+ who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local areas'. Therefore, we want to work with our education providers, youth services, and youth forum to strengthen how we engage with children and young people.

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.

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

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.

What people have told us:

The engagement captured the real-life challenges faced by many people with multiple protected characteristics. The difficulty to pay for basic needs like food, heating, and leisure activities is common. People have shared that they are using coping strategies such as limiting their gas, wearing more clothes, or using hot water bottles to stay warm.

The economic impact people experience now has made people feel stressed, frustrated, or hopeless about their financial situation and how it affects their quality of life.

Some of the key themes and messages that people have told us about Objective 6 include:

“Both me and my husband work and we still can’t afford to do anything, our food bill has gone up and leaves us with little monies for life”.

“Most months in the last week I run out of money, so I am unable to put anymore gas on the meter until I receive my money”.

“My child is older now so I can layer him in clothes, and I put a hot water bottle under his mattress, so he is always warm”.

“Receiving my benefits monthly has been a real struggle”.

“Zero-hour contracts effect your benefits so it’s so hard to budget”.

“I’d love to work but there are no childcare places for the hours I can work”.

Source: Parent groups as part of the SEP engagement 2023

Some examples of progress to date:

- Delivery of Welsh Government funded anti-poverty programmes through the Children and Communities Grant.
- Establishment of 'warm hubs' throughout Blaenau Gwent, which offer sanctuary during the daytime to those struggling with rising living costs.
- Working in partnership with community settings to enhance and support the foodbank provision across the area.
- Development of Cost-of-Living Group and Workstream
- Successful delivery of the Blaenau Gwent 'Christmas Toy Appeal' for identified vulnerable children and young people.
- Promoted Cost-of-Living support schemes e.g. Council Tax discounts and reductions, winter fuel payments, and school uniform grants.
- Revised the Integrated Impact Assessment to ensure socio-economic groups with protected characteristics are fully considered.

Some of the main actions we will do to achieve Equality Objective 6:

- Evidence how we are meeting the statutory duties placed by the Socio-economic duty.
- Consider the socio-economic aspect of the Integrated Impact Assessment
- Further promote and enhance cost of living support to our communities and Blaenau Gwent workforce.
- Seek to use the issues identified through the Community Hubs and Citizens Advice services to influence the Cost-of-Living workstream.
- Ensure socio-economic disadvantage is considered in engagement and participation.

- Undertake work, research, and analysis to understand the socio-economic situation of our LGBTQ+ and minority ethnic groups within Blaenau Gwent.
- Continue to prioritise support to Care leavers whose lives have been adversely affected because of the cost-of-living crisis.
- Consider the Children in Wales's Child Poverty Report's findings.

What difference do we want to make:

We aim to address the inequality faced by people who live in poverty and have protected characteristics, so that everyone can access opportunities and resources equally, no matter who they are, where they come from, or what they face. We aim to enable people with protected characteristics to engage fully and effectively in society, and to have a say and impact in the choices that affect them and finally, we hope to narrow the gaps and differences in outcomes and well-being among different groups and ensure that no one is excluded or treated unfairly because of their economic circumstances.