

**Draft Strategic Equality
Plan 2012**

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Introduction and background to Bridgend County Borough Strategic Equality Plan

At Bridgend County Borough Council we believe that 'equality' does not simply mean treating everyone the same. It means understanding and tackling the different barriers to equal opportunities that different people face so that everyone has a fair chance to fulfil their potential.

In April 2011 a new single public sector equality duty ([the PSED](#)) was implemented and in the same month the Welsh Government introduced regulations putting in place a series of specific duties to underpin the general duty.

The overall aim of the new equality legislation is to ensure that equality is mainstreamed into the work of public authorities when delivering their services. This in turn should result in more appropriate service delivery and outcomes taking into account individuals backgrounds including their race, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, transgender status, pregnancy and maternity, marriage or civil partnership.

The new duty builds on the previous duties in respect of gender, race and disability. It represents a significant shift in approach from a legal framework which relied on individual people making complaints of discrimination to a context where the public sector becomes a proactive agent of change. The government and the [Equality and Human Rights Commission \(EHRC\)](#) have made it clear that public bodies must mainstream equality in both their internal and externally facing functions, and the duty should provide a mechanism for tackling institutional discrimination in policies, practices and procedures.

Bridgend County Borough Council is committed to these principles of mainstreaming equality and welcomes these legislative changes. We are committed to providing high quality services to all individuals to whom we provide services and to our employees. We also understand that mainstreaming equality issues will ensure that we deliver our aims in a more meaningful way, which will reach all groups in our community more effectively.

1. Description of Bridgend County and our core functions

Bridgend is a diverse and vibrant area with 134,600 residents and 3.5 million annual visitors. Within these figures, all of the protected groups are represented. (For further information on statistics on residents and visitors to the Bridgend area, please see our [Community Cohesion Strategy](#).)

Our overall aim is to be the authority providing the best local services in Wales. Our vision is to work towards developing our County Borough into all inclusive communities where everyone feels safe and able to live happy, healthy lives and safe, vibrant and successful communities where everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential. We want to celebrate the diversity of our communities. No one knows Bridgend County Borough's communities better than the people that live and work there. When we next review the [Community Strategy for Bridgend](#), we'll be asking our local people to share their views and concerns with us.

What We Do

We Council provides a wide range of services in a variety of ways. Some are provided centrally from our main civic offices whilst others are provided from the front-line in our communities, e.g. refuse collection, street cleaning, libraries and residential homes. Others are provided by outside agencies or by contractors. As one of Bridgend's largest employers and service providers we recognise our unique role and influential position within the county borough and the contribution we can make to the development of inclusive and confident communities.

The Council is committed to:

- Providing equality of access to all of its services for the communities of Bridgend on the basis of need
- Providing services in a manner that is sensitive to the individual's needs whatever their background as far as is possible
- Taking positive action to eliminate discrimination and to redress past imbalances in order to provide genuine equality of opportunity
- Delivering services by a workforce that reflects the diversity of our communities
- The principle of equal pay for all its employees.

More information on what we do is included in our [Corporate Plan 2010 – 2013](#).

In conducting the review of our functions to identify key areas for equality objectives we have used our equality information base, our engagement and consultation evidence and our other key business planning and delivery strategies.

In the first instance, our [improvement objectives](#) have provided us with a structure to approach our objective setting as they provide an overview of all the areas of priority identified.

In relation to equality, in consultation and engagement with our key stakeholders and partners, we have reviewed our functions to identify those areas which will have the greatest impact on equality of outcome for citizens.

The priority areas identified in creating equality outcomes for protected groups are:

- **Transport**
Throughout our engagement work transport, and the access it offers to facilities and opportunities, has repeatedly been identified as a key theme.
- **Fostering good relations**
The third 'arm' of the public sector equality duty in respect of good relations has been identified as a key area where Bridgend County Borough Council has opportunities to improve the lives, experiences and opportunities for its citizens.
- **Our functions as an employer**
Clearly, Bridgend County Borough Council has a leadership role to play in the local community as a significant employer and in how it leads the way on equality and employment. We have a responsibility under the duty to address equal pay issues across all the protected characteristics, but there are a number of other key areas we will be seeking to address through our employment functions and in our objectives against them.
- **Leisure Services and Social Care**
Leisure and Social Care services are provided by our Childrens' and Wellbeing Directorates.

Our citizens tell us that Leisure services are vital to their health and wellbeing and have been highlighted by them as contributing to their overall experience of living in the Bridgend area. We provide leisure services for adults and children within every protected characteristic group in services such as libraries, arts, leisure centres, gymnasias and swimming pools and a discounted leisure scheme.

Our Adult Social Care Services help those who are elderly or who have a disability, mental health condition or sensory impairment live independently and safely and include residential and day care services, home care services, we provide meals at home, and aids and adaptations such as stair lifts and conversion of showers/bathrooms.

Our Childrens Directorate aims to help children thrive and make the best use of their talents, live healthy and safe lives and be confident and caring individuals. The services we provide include Welsh and English medium primary and secondary schools, fostering and adoption services, family support and safeguarding, youth services and child protection.

2. Equality Objectives

This section outlines our key equality objectives, the steps we are taking or intend to take to meet them and the timescales in which we expect to achieve them.

In drawing up these objectives we have reflected on our work to date on our single equality scheme. We have extended consideration to each of the [8 protected characteristics](#) covered by all three of the main aims of the general duty and the requirement to eliminate discrimination, harassment and other actions prohibited in the equality act 2010 in respect of civil partnerships and [marriage](#).

We have taken a proportionate approach to setting our objectives seeking to deliver meaningful change in respect of the biggest issues identified through our partners and key stakeholders including staff, partners, service users and key stakeholders.

We do however, recognise that our objectives and our SEP as a whole are work in progress and will be subject to constant review, input and improvement.

Each of the protected characteristics has been considered and objectives will clearly indicate where specific groups are being targeted through strategies, actions or positive action opportunities.

In arriving at our objectives, we have kept in mind the overriding purpose of the general duty. This is the requirement to have due regard to the need to:

1. eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act
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.

Objectives

In consultation with our partners and key stakeholders we have identified the following functions as the most significant issues in respect of equality and the general duty. In broad terms they are:

Objective 1: Transport

Throughout our engagement work in respect of equality and our objectives, transport has recurred as a [theme](#).

We will seek to improve the way in which it impacts upon the provision of public transport in the region by::

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Objective 2: Fostering Good Relations

Our consultation and engagement events and our equality information analysis evidenced a number of key issues which cause disadvantage for different groups which we have grouped together under the heading of [Good Relations](#).

Areas where we are considering objectives are:

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Objective 3: Our Role as an employer

Bridgend County Borough Council seeks to be an exemplar employer in respect of all aspects of equality and diversity.

We will seek to ensure that all our employment policies and practices promote equality and diversity in respect of all protected characteristics.

We will particularly seek opportunities to tackle stereotyping in all its forms by:

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Objective 4: Equal pay and all protected characteristics

We will collect disaggregated information from our pay system in respect of all protected characteristics where this is available.

Where we identify gaps in this information we will put appropriate actions in our systems to address them.

We will use this information to identify pay gaps between the protected characteristics and to identify actions to address them.

The steps we will take to meet this objective and when we will do this by:

We will review this information in 2012-2016 with a view to creating meaningful and proportionate objectives where the need is identified.

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Objective 5: Gender Equal Pay and action plan

We will review our own pay system to ensure it does not discriminate on the grounds of gender and we will expect our partners and contractors to have due regard to equal pay systems.

During 2011/2012 the council is consulting on its proposals for its new Pay and Grading Scheme following the completion of the Job Evaluation Project.

The council has reviewed the way staff are remunerated in line with the 1997 Single Status Agreement and is committed to treating all of its employees in a fair and equitable manner. The Job Evaluation Project focuses on the relative value of jobs rather than the individual employee and breaks the requirements of the job down into 3 main areas i.e.

Job Requirements (58.5%)

Work Environment (12.5%)

Knowledge and skills (28.9%).

Following consultation with employees and Trade Unions, it is proposed that the new pay and grading structure incorporating 16 grades across all job types will be introduced.

It is acknowledged that, following the introduction of the new Pay and Grading structure both male and female employees will receive remuneration in line with the value of their role/job. The council is mindful that, of its 6682 employees (as at 31st March 2011), 5116 (76.6%) were female. It is widely accepted that career progression routes for female employees are more difficult than for their male equivalents. This can easily be illustrated given that between 1st April 2010 and 31st March 2011, 82 school based employees and 148 employees from other services took maternity leave. In addition, primary carers for children of school age are mothers. Therefore, the scope for working full time hours is limited. It follows therefore, that for the “take home pay” of a female employee to equate to that of a male colleague in the same role, she would need to work hours over and above her employment contract. There remain issues around equal pay.

The conclusion of the Assessment of Impact undertaken by the council’s Reward Consultants is that:

- “The proposed pay structure improves the gender pay gap on a grade by grade basis. As employees progress through the structure with annual increments the gap will narrow even further”.
- “The proposed structure demonstrates a visible narrowing of the gender pay gap in both basic pay and total pay.”

- “The application of the JE process and design of the grading structure is acceptable and demonstrates a robust approach to the development and implementation of the new structure”.
- “The grading structure and pay model were developed with understanding of the organisational hierarchies, line of best fit and placement of gradelines”.
- “As part of its future arrangements Bridgend County Borough Council should undertake regular equal pay audits in conjunction with the Trade Unions to ensure that the new pay and grading and job evaluation arrangements are maintained. This process should also identify further changes in the gender pay gap and recommend further action if required”.

Action Plan

The steps we will take to meet this objective and when we will do this by:

Objective 6: Consultation, Engagement and Communication

We believe that engaging and consulting with our citizens is integral to our achieving real improvements that people can recognise and understand by engaging them in shaping and scrutinising our services. Good public engagement ensures that people are involved in shaping services that they rely upon and care about giving them a voice in decisions that may impact on their lives.

Public engagement is an integral part of what we do and how we do it. The way we develop policies and services is influenced by information and data we have gathered about our citizens and our services users through a range of different processes.

Our over arching vision is to be the local authority delivering the best local services in Wales and, as part of that vision, We want to be an open and transparent Council which encourages people to feedback to us about our services and how we might improve them. It is also important to us to engage and consult with people who do not use our services to establish the reasons and barriers that may prevent them from doing so.

Our Council recently took part in an all Wales study on Public Engagement conducted by the Wales Audit Office. Our commitment to public engagement was acknowledged via the development of our customer care strategy and our promotion of effective consultation and engagement.

Equality is diverse. We therefore need to involve people and representative groups in planning and shaping our services and our decision making. We have already had feedback from the Bridgend Visually Impaired Society, representatives of our Hindu community, Bridgend Deaf Club and the British Deaf Association. We have also reflected on the findings of the EHRC Report ***Not just another statistic***” and our Corporate Equality Scheme

Within this objective we will:

Objective 7: Domestic Violence

Along with most other councils in Wales, domestic violence in Bridgend has been highlighted as a high priority.

We have reflected on information, recommendations and data that we've accessed from:

National and Local statistical data

Our Supporting People Operational Plan 2011/12

Our Communities Directorate Business Plan.

Within this objective we will:

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Objective 8: Mental Health / Adult Social Care

The Welsh Health Survey 2010 highlights Bridgend as having a higher than Welsh average number of adults experiencing mental illness and the Equality and Human Rights Commission's report entitled "[Not just another statistic](#)" also highlights Mental Health as a major issue.

Within Bridgend County Borough Council, Mental Health has been raised as an issue in our [Supporting People Operational Plan Needs Assessment](#), our [Health, Social Care and Wellbeing](#) and by some of our Adult Social Care Services Users.

Additionally, the Valleys Regional Equality Council (VALREC) has undertaken extensive casework in the area of Mental Health.

Within this objective, we will:

Objective 9: Leisure

Leisure Services, such as swimming pools, gymnasias, libraries, parks and playing fields have repeatedly been highlighted by citizens as being important to their well being and experience of living in the Bridgend area.

The Council will transfer management of and responsibility for its leisure facilities to an external provider on 1st April 2012. Of paramount importance to the Council is that the new provider maintains the high level of service provision previously experienced by citizens whilst these services were under council ownership and control and that equalities issues are considered in the provision of services to people sharing a protected characteristic.

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Objective 10: Benefits

The current ongoing national welfare reform review includes a consideration of council tax benefits and housing benefits. The possible actions in respect of this review are likely to have a significant impact on the protected characteristic groups. The data from this review is not yet available however, whilst until the conclusion of the national review the council cannot mitigate for the revised benefits structure, it can put in place measures to ensure that any negative impact is reduced.

Within this objective we will:

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Objective 11: Data

Within this objective we will be developing overarching systems for collecting, collating, monitoring and publishing data on our service users, employees and citizens.

We think this is important because, following our consultation and engagement exercises, data on our service users and citizens will be vital to us when we plan, monitor and review our services. Data availability has also been highlighted as an issue in various equality impact assessments from our Wellbeing and Communities Directorates and our Human Resources Service.

We will:

4. How we are meeting the duties in respect of each protected characteristic.

We believe that the objectives above contain specific outcomes for each of the protected characteristics. We are aware through our on-going equality work and engagement activity of particular priority issues in respect of gender, sex, disability, and race.

We are also aware that we have less experience, knowledge and expertise in respect of particularly age, transgender, sexual orientation, religion and belief and pregnancy and maternity.

In the first instance our objectives in respect of collecting, using and publishing equality data in respect of all protected characteristics will help us build an evidence base on which to build effective, meaningful and proportionate objectives in respect of these groups. Our Strategic Equality Plan will be updated with these as they emerge.

In respect of pregnancy and maternity we already have a raft of policies and positive action support programmes and policies for staff and service users. We will, in 2012/13 identify these policies and engage with staff and expert groups to ensure that they are as effective and appropriate as possible.

Race, Religion and Belief

In our objectives we have identified opportunity to implement positive action in respect of recruitment of Black and Ethnic minority staff and service users.

We will review our service provision to identify opportunities to increase awareness of racial, cultural and religious issues, including consideration of various beliefs.

Disability

In our objectives we have particularly addressed disability issues in respect of

Gender and Sex including Maternity and Pregnancy

Our objectives in respect of each of the areas above include consideration of different outcomes for women and men. We have also considered and produced an objective in relation to pregnancy and maternity.

We have identified appropriate Equal Pay objectives for women and men.

Transgender

We are aware that transgender people often experience the most difficult barriers and discrimination in both employment and access and success in education despite their relatively low numbers. We have had a number of individuals identifying as transgender access our services. We will build on this experience to identify positive action to address and overcome transgender people's issues.

Age

We will in the first instance collect age related information in relation to both staff and service users and prospective service users. We will work towards identifying and differentiating between age appropriate provision and aspects of our functions which may be creating disproportionate outcomes for people of different ages.

Sexual orientation

We have particular difficulties in collecting robust and meaningful disaggregated information in relation to sexual orientation. We will therefore in the first instance though the objectives above collect this information in relation to staff, service users and prospective service users.

However, the lack of this information does not stop us understanding and implementing appropriate actions to address the experience of gay men and women and bi-sexual people. We will work with expert groups and LGBT staff and service users to identify appropriate proportionate actions in the academic years 2012-2016. We will be working towards building trust and confidence within these communities with a view to improving reporting so that we can in turn use our information in a more meaningful way.

5. Arrangements for monitoring progress

Successful delivery of our objectives will require strong leadership. Leadership will be driven primarily by our Assistant Chief Executive and the Deputy Leader of the Council.

Responsibility for operational delivery rests with all teams within the Authority. Each Director and their Heads of Service will ensure their staff have the appropriate skills and knowledge of equality that are required.

We will review our information, engagement evidence, impact assessments and objectives on an annual basis. Our Equality Steering Group will monitor delivery against the objectives and scrutinise the information available to ensure we identify and implement new strategies and objectives appropriately.

We will refine and/or develop new objectives which will be mainstreamed into each of our Directorate's Business Plans and we will monitor our progress in achieving our objectives via our Quarterly Business Plan process.

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6. Arrangements for collecting relevant equality information

Internal employment data (profile)

Human Resources will put in place appropriate systems for collecting all staff data in respect of all protected characteristics.

This will be published on our internet web site annually in April.

Service Users, census and employee data

We have collected and collated the [service user data](#) available from each of our directorates so that we understand the characteristics of the people who use our services.

We will put in place appropriate systems for collecting data in respect of all protected characteristics. We recognise however that there are limitations to both the data that we currently have in respect of protected characteristics and in the robustness and completeness of data collected particularly in respect of certain characteristics such as sexual orientation, religion and belief and transgender status.

We are committed to only collecting data where it is useful and that the data we do collect will be used in an effective manner. We will therefore work with groups in respect of these characteristics, to identify the key issues and barriers experienced by them and on the best ways to collect and use meaningful data.

This will be published on our internet web site annually in April.

External applicant data (access to opportunities)

Human Resources will put in place appropriate systems for collecting all data in respect applicants for employment in respect of all protected characteristics.

This will be published on our internet web site annually in April.

xxx For further data collection and monitoring commitments please see our equality strategy at (insert [hyperlink](#))

7. Arrangements for publishing equality information

All equality information in respect of the protected characteristics will be published annually on our internet web site. This will be published in accordance with the categories identified above and will be first published on the 2nd April 2012.

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8. Arrangements for assessing likely, actual and on-going impact on protected groups

We are committed to measuring the impact of new and existing policies, practices and procedures on all equality groups by conducting appropriate impact assessments. When conducting assessments we will:

- Establish clear criteria for measuring the relevance of a policy, practice or procedure to equality of opportunity for all groups.
- Prioritise and set a timetable to assess all existing and future policies, practices and procedures which are considered to have an impact on all groups.
- Collect and analyse relevant data to assist with impact assessments.
- Engage appropriately through involvement and consultation people who are likely to be affected by policies and programmes from the start of the development and planning processes.
- Review and revise proposals in light of data collection, consultation and involvement of people to ensure any negative impact is mitigated.
- Provide our staff with training and support to ensure they carry out equality impact assessments with confidence and knowledge.
- Aspire to provide a positive outcome for all equality groups in our work.

In order to assess the impact of our policies and programmes on all protected characteristics we will need to utilise the following information:

demographic data and other statistics, including census findings

existing research findings

comparisons with other Authorities

survey data

equality monitoring data

one off data gathering exercises

specially commissioned research

A practical guide for managers to assess the impact their functions, policies and procedures have on different groups of people.

This guide is available on our internet website at xxxx

9. Arrangements for publishing reports on assessment of impact on protected characteristic groups

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10. Promoting knowledge and understanding of the general and specific duties amongst employees

Our objectives above include the commitment to developing and implementing a comprehensive training and awareness programme for all staff in respect of the general and specific duties.

We will deliver this through a variety of methods:

1. Ensuring that our induction programme and process includes knowledge and awareness of the duties and what they mean for staff
2. A general training and awareness programme in respect of the duties for all staff
3. Training for all senior managers and elected members in respect of the duties and their responsibilities
4. Training for managers and the production of appropriate material for them to use with staff. This will assist in mainstreaming equality for all protected groups into culture and behaviour
5. Tailored appropriate training on assessing the impact of policies and functions on all protected characteristics for appropriate staff
6. Appropriate tailored training for key support staff including catering, cleaning, caretaking and estates staff
7. Tailored targeted disability training for identified priority staff particularly in respect of those delivering care services
8. Mainstreaming of equality and the duties into all professional development [training programmes](#)

11. Engagement

We recognise that equality is diverse and we cannot know what people need or how we can help them unlock their potential without involving them, and their representative groups, in our planning and decision making processes. We have committed ourselves to involving underrepresented people in areas where our work will have most impact on their access to our services and in employment with us.

Engagement is always an important part of our work, but we recognise that we now need to put specific processes in place to ensure that the needs of people are taken into account, and that the dimensions of diversity, such as ethnicity, age, gender, transgender, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation and religion or belief, are all addressed. Disabled staff and stakeholders will be fully involved with the delivery, implementation and, monitoring and evaluation of our objectives.

We will publish reports on the outcome of our engagement activity including consultation and involvement to show clearly how people and their representative groups have influenced planning and decision making within Bridgend County Borough Council.

Further information on how people were engaged in the development of our objectives and how they influenced the process can be seen at [xxxx](#)

Contact Us

Our Strategic Equality Plan is not just a council plan; it is a partnership plan to ensure that Bridgend County Borough is a fair and welcoming place to be. The plan has been written based on what we know about our services and on the views and needs of Bridgend citizens and the people who use our services.

If you would like a copy of the Strategic Equality Plan in hard copy or in an alternative format please let us know:

By e. mail at: talktous@bridgend.gov.uk

By telephone: 01656 643643

By Fax: 01656 668126

In writing: Bridgend County Borough Council

Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB

Our Customer Contact Centre is open from 8.00am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday

and we have a [Complaints Procedure](#).

Or, to contact a department directly, please refer to the [A-Z of Services](#)