

Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives 2024 – 2028

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1. Introduction and background

Welcome to Bridgend County Borough Council's fourth Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) and Objectives, which is intended to cover the next four years (2024 to 2028).

We are pleased to present this SEP which outlines our six strategic equality objectives. These will be used to form an action plan during this period to ensure that equality, equity, and fairness remain firmly at the heart of how the council plans, provides, and delivers important services to the people of Bridgend County Borough.

Our objectives are based on the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) research ["Is Wales Fairer 2018?"](#) which sets out key inequalities in Wales.

The new objectives set out how we will deliver our equalities commitments whilst continuing to be an inclusive and effective organisation that is representative of its communities and does not tolerate discrimination of any kind.

Our aim is to deliver good quality services to our residents, while considering their differing needs and ensuring that no one experiences disadvantage or discrimination due to their background or identity.

We recognise that sustained change takes time and cannot be achieved in isolation, this is why we are working in partnership with other public sector organisations in the county borough to strive towards our vision to become a fairer county borough, promoting opportunities for all and making real and tangible differences to the lives of the people in our communities.

By producing this this plan and objectives, we will meet our statutory Public Sector Equality Duties under the Equality Act 2010 to advance equality, eliminate unlawful discrimination, victimisation, and harassment, and foster good community relations in our employment, policy, procurement, and service delivery functions.

The objectives build on the progress we have made through previous plans, by nurturing an environment that recognizes and respects the diversity and uniqueness of individuals, regardless of their characteristics or backgrounds.

Our Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives will not be implemented in isolation. They have been developed and will be delivered alongside our Participation and Engagement Strategy and Welsh Language Standards which sets out our commitment to achieving a more inclusive and equal future for all. The objectives are also linked to our [Corporate Plan 2023-28](#).

We value the contributions from everyone who has participated in the development of this set of objectives.

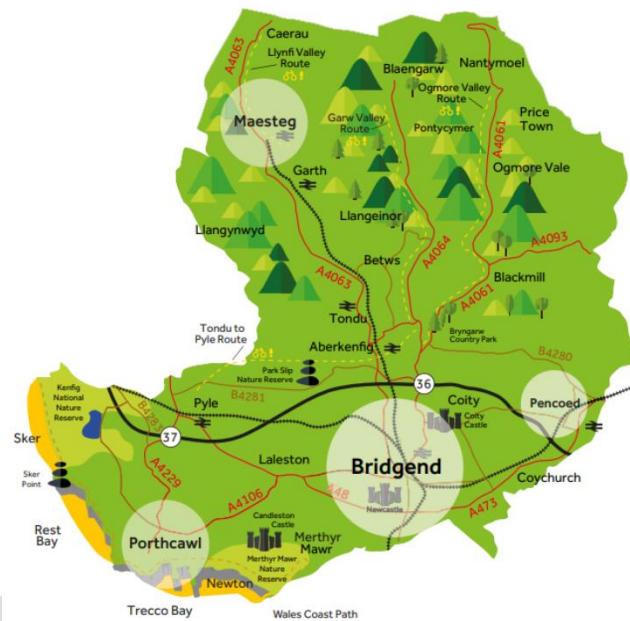
If you would like to become involved and contribute to continuing to review our priorities that will reduce inequalities in Bridgend County Borough, please contact us (see page 15 for details).

Council Leader Huw David
Chief Executive Mark Shephard

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2. About us

- 2.1 Bridgend County Borough is a diverse and vibrant area with 145,760 residents and over three million annual visitors. As one of the county borough's largest employers and service providers we recognise our unique role and influential position within the area and the contribution we can make to the development of inclusive and confident communities.



- 2.2 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 vision which is to function as "One council working together to improve lives". Achieving this will improve the quality of life of all those living and working in the county borough, as outlined in our [Corporate Plan](#).
- 2.3 Our new strategic equality objectives identify how we will strengthen and advance equality across Bridgend County over the next four years. For example, we will continue to embed equality throughout our organisation to ensure meaningful change is achieved. In order to support our staff achieve this, we provide corporate equality awareness training, which is mandatory not just for new starters but all members of the authority. In addition, Bridgend Council is committed to the 'Disability confident employer scheme', which encourages employers to think differently about disability and take action to improve recruitment and retention of disabled people, as well as developing them in the workplace.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has been involved in the engagement processes to develop our objectives and we look forward in continuing this journey with you throughout their delivery.

3. Purpose of the Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives

- 3.1 Under the Equalities Act 2010, the Council has a statutory duty to prepare and publish a Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives every four years which must show how the Council can contribute to a fairer society by advancing equality and good relations in our day-to-day activities.
- 3.2 The Equality Act provides protection against discrimination for nine protected characteristic groups as follows:

Age

A person belonging to a particular age group (so 38-year-olds would be an age group) or an age range (for example 16-24 year olds).

Disability

A person that has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantive and long-term effect on their ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

Gender Reassignment

The process in which a person transitions from one gender to another. This can be in any way they choose and does not need to involve medical intervention as it is a personal process. A reference to a transsexual person is a reference to a person who has the protected characteristic of gender reassignment.

Marriage and Civil Partnership

Marriage is a formally recognised union between two people, this can be a man or a woman or a same-sex couple. Same sex couples can also have their relationship recognised as a civil partnership.

Pregnancy and Maternity

Pregnancy is defined as the condition or period of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after birth.

Race

Race includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins. In relation to the protected characteristic or race, this refers to a person who is of a particular racial group or to persons of the same racial group.

Religion or belief

Religion refers to any religion or lack of religion. Belief refers to any religious or philosophical belief or lack of belief. In order to constitute a belief it should

affect the way that you live your life. The characteristic refers to a person of a particular religion or belief or to persons who are of the same religion or belief.

Sex

This can refer to either male or female, or groups of men and women.

Sexual Orientation

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

- 3.3 The Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives serve as a roadmap for advancing equality, eliminating discrimination, and fostering good relations. It aligns with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and demonstrates our commitment to promoting inclusion as well as serving as a tool for accountability, ensuring that we remain transparent and accountable in our efforts to promote equality and diversity. The SEP will be reviewed annually, to demonstrate progress against actions, incorporate new areas of work for the council, changes to legislation and the development of any new objectives for the duration of the plan.

4. Statutory Duties

The legal framework described in this section serves as the foundation for Bridgend Council's equality aims.

4.1 The General Equality Duty

The aim of the general equality duty is to ensure that we consider the needs of all individuals when carrying out our day-to-day work, in developing policy, in delivering services and in relation to the public and to our workforce.

The commitments of the general duty include:

4.2 Welsh Language Commitment

The promotion and use of the Welsh Language is covered by the requirements of the Welsh Language Measure 2011 rather than the Equality Act. However, in Bridgend Council we consider Welsh Language requirements alongside the protected characteristics of the Equality Act to encourage a co-operative approach to the needs of all communities in designing and delivering services.

4.3 Socio-economic Duty

The socio-economic duty came into force in Wales in 2021. It aims to improve decision making and help those who are socio-economically disadvantaged. Socio-economic disadvantage means having low savings or income compared to others in Wales, making it more difficult to access basic services and opportunities. This can lead to inequality of outcome, for instance lower levels of good health, lower paid work, poorer educational attainment and an increased risk of being a victim of crime. We need to understand how the decisions that we make may increase or reduce opportunities for people who are at socio-economic disadvantage. We do this by carrying out equality impact assessments, every time we create policies, programmes or make decisions that may impact our residents.

4.4 The Specific Public Sector Equality Duties (Wales)

In addition to meeting the general duty, public organisations including the council must meet the following specific duties:

- Setting Equality Objectives and publishing a Strategic Equality Plan.
- Engaging with people in relation to the protected characteristics.
- Collecting and publishing information relevant to compliance with the General Duty.
- Annual publishing of employment monitoring information.
- Ensuring that our workforce know and understand our duty under the Equality Act.
- Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments of relevant policies and practices
- Addressing unfair pay differences.
- Establishing relevant conditions to meet the general duty in procurement processes.
- Reviewing progress on the Strategic Equality Plan and our Equality Objectives.

- The Strategic Equality Objectives will also support the Council in meeting other statutory duties set out within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (see 4.5).

4.5 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.

The Act strengthens existing governance arrangements for improving the well-being of Wales to ensure that present needs are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The Act states that public bodies must work to improve the wellbeing of Wales. We have to agree and publish a set of wellbeing objectives to tell you how we will contribute to the national wellbeing goals. To find out more information on our wellbeing objectives see our [Corporate Plan](#).

5. Welsh Government reports and data

5.1 A number of Welsh Government strategies, reports and datasets have informed the development of this Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives to reflect what is happening on a national level, including:

- Anti-Racism Wales Action Plan
- LGBTQ+ Action Plan
- Cymraeg 2050 Strategy
- Well-being of Future Generations Act: Essentials Guide
- National Survey for Wales 2022-23
- Local Government Candidates Survey 2022
- Labour Market Overview: December 2023
- Labour Market Statistics (Annual Population Survey) 2022-23
- 'Locked out- liberating disabled people's lives and rights in Wales beyond COVID-19' Report
- Affordable housing provision 2022-23
- VAWDASV Strategy 2022-26
- Is Wales Fairer? 2018 – Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

Data acquired from these have positively influenced our priorities, such as producing an LGBTQ+ action plan as well as an Anti-racist Wales action plan. These will sit under the objective to promote a more inclusive workforce for those with protected characteristics.

6. Bridgend Council's Equality Objectives 2024-2028

The development of our objectives was shaped and agreed by our corporate equalities focus group. The purpose of the focus group is to provide strategic oversight for the Council's responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Well-being and Future Generations Act:

Equality Objective 1 – Access to services

Improve the experience and outcomes for our customers, ensuring that every resident has equity of access to the services that they need.

Equality Objective 2 – Protecting the most vulnerable

Establish comprehensive policies and procedures that effectively safeguard and support the rights and well-being of our most vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, people with disabilities, those experiencing homelessness or poverty and those that access care and support from Social Services.

Equality Objective 3 - Living Standards

Tackle poverty and support independent living by considering the impact of any policy changes or decisions under the socio-economic duty. Consideration to vital services such as Housing and homelessness, cost of living crisis and the adverse effects on individuals.

Equality Objective 4 – Participation and engagement

Encourage people and communities to take part and engage in issues that are important to them and influence the decisions that affect their lives. Building and increasing quality relationships with communities to ensure a focus on what matters to them.

Equality Objective 5 – Learning

Promote equal access to quality learning for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, abilities, age or ethnic background. Support diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Equality Objective 6 – Employment

Promote a more inclusive workforce and improve the participation, well-being, and opportunities for development for those with protected characteristics.

7. Developing our equality objectives

The council's equality objectives were informed by the legislative and planning framework set out in sections five and six above. In addition to this we:

- 7.1 Conducted a consultation and engagement exercise with the public, partners and equality and diversity groups. We asked for their views on the draft objectives for 2024-2028 and asked them to make comments to help us develop our action plan. During the consultation we engaged with 400 people who shared their views with us. Most respondents agreed with the proposed objectives, which we have now finalised based on this feedback.
- 7.2 Took into account the information that is shared in local equality and diversity groups and via the Bridgend Community Cohesion and Equality Forum. Topics include the accessibility of our services and how we can help support, promote and raise awareness of issues such as hate crime and LGBTQ History Month.
- 7.3 Aligned the equality objectives with the council's [Corporate Plan](#) 2023-28, which already identifies the council's priorities and how we will work alongside local people and partners to provide services over the next five years. The corporate plan sets out the Council's seven Wellbeing Objectives which are:
 - A County Borough where we protect our most vulnerable
 - A County Borough with fair work, skilled, high-quality jobs and thriving towns
 - A County Borough with thriving valleys communities
 - A County Borough where we help people meet their potential
 - A County Borough that is responding to the climate and nature emergency
 - A County Borough where people feel valued, heard and part of their community.

This provided us with the opportunity to focus our objectives on priority areas that had already been identified following the corporate plan consultation. This includes protecting our most vulnerable, which was a common theme identified in the feedback from both the corporate plan consultation and the Strategic Equalities Plan objectives consultation.

- 7.4 In addition, we reviewed our Strategic Equality Plan 2020 – 2024 and our action plan for this period and considered our progress to date. This gave us an opportunity to review the positive work that has been carried out to become a more inclusive organisation. This includes:
 - Running regular Hate Crime awareness sessions across the county borough in partnership with South Wales Police.

- Development of an Education and Engagement Team by Education and Family Support that provides integrated support for a range of pupils identified by Estyn as vulnerable or potentially vulnerable.
- Identifying physical wellbeing opportunities, social opportunities and working with Awen libraries to provide creative and wellbeing support.
- Maintained our Disability Confident Employer status.
- Continuously reviewing our internal processes such as staff training. We are committed to recruiting Welsh speakers, disabled people, people who identify as LGBTQ+ and people from minority ethnic backgrounds as part of our commitment to address under-representation across all levels of the organisation.

8. Next Steps

- 8.1 We will develop an outcome focussed **Strategic Equality Action Plan** which will outline:
- The actions we are seeking to progress under each of our objectives which will make a positive difference to residents and employees' lives.
 - When we expect to achieve these actions.
 - Who is responsible for taking the actions forward.
 - How we will measure our success.
- 8.2 Building on the work we have carried out in our previous Strategic Equality Plan, we will continue to work with our partners to provide a range of services for people within our communities. We will continue to work with the police to identify and tackle hate crime within our communities, strengthen collection and analysis of data for discriminatory incidents in schools and ensure our residents can participate in consultations through a variety of formats, including face to face interactions.
- 8.3 We will use the information and feedback from the Strategic Equality Objectives consultation to support the development of our action plan. The action plan will be finalised in the summer of 2024 and added to this plan as appendix C.

9. Delivery of objectives

- 9.1 Successful delivery of our objectives requires strong leadership which is driven primarily by the Future Generations and Well-being Cabinet Member, our Chief Executive and council Leader.
- 9.2 Progress on our Strategic Equality Plan is regularly reported to the Corporate Equality Network. Our group of Equality Champions was established to ensure that the organisation considers and promotes equality across the board, and it has an important role in monitoring our strategic equality plan and objectives.
- 9.3 Responsibility for operational delivery rests with all service areas and teams within the authority. Each Corporate Director and Head of Service ensures their employees have the appropriate skills and knowledge of equality that are required. Our Cabinet Committee Equalities monitors delivery against the objectives and scrutinises information available to ensure we identify and implement new strategies and objectives appropriately.
- 9.4 Our main area of focus in monitoring progress is to undertake further, regular consultation and engagement with all protected characteristic groups. We are mindful that our most reliable measure of success of our equality objectives is via our residents, service users and employees.

10. Assess the impact or potential impact on protected groups?

- 10.1 We are committed to assessing the impact of new and existing policies, practices and procedures on all equality groups by conducting appropriate equality impact assessments. Our Equality Impact Assessment page is available on the council's [Website](#)
- 10.2 We have also produced an Equality Impact Assessment toolkit which is a practical guide for service managers to use to assess the likely impact of their functions, policies and procedures on different groups of people. Additionally, staff are encouraged to undertake the corporate training module.

11. How to contact us:

Comments and suggestions to help us improve and best perform as an equal opportunities' organisation can be submitted at any time to the: Equalities and Engagement Team, Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB
E-mail: equalities@bridgend.gov.uk
Phone: 01656 643664

Accessible formats

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.



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