

MERTHYR TYDFIL COUNTY  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# ANNUAL EQUALITY REPORT

2020-2021



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol  
**MERTHYR TUDFUL**  
**MERTHYR TYDFIL**  
County Borough Council

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## FOREWORD

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC) is pleased to introduce the first Annual Report for its Strategic Equality Plan for 2020-2024. This Strategic Equality Plan was prepared in line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 and was approved by Council on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

Through the Strategic Equality Plan, this Annual Equality Report for 2020-2021 is testament to the Council's ongoing drive to progress its equality agenda and deliver our Equalities Vision for Merthyr Tydfil, which is:

*A place where diversity is valued and respected and everyone can participate, flourish and have the opportunity to fulfil their potential free from discrimination and prejudice.*

The Council is working towards delivering this Vision through our role as a community leader, service provider, commissioner, employer and working in partnership to reduce inequalities and to improve the well-being of the County Borough.

### The COVID-19 Pandemic

We have taken the decision to produce this report in view of the unprecedented events of 2020, to provide an overview of how MTCBC responded to the equality impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, from when the outbreak began in early 2020 up to the end of March 2021.

The arrival of Covid-19 required the Council to respond quickly in order to ensure essential services continued for the residents of Merthyr Tydfil. The Council continued to provide important public services, in the face of increasing pressures, especially to those in need and the vulnerable.

Covid-19 has had a substantial impact on individuals and communities across Wales, especially within our County Borough, with very significant implications in relation to equality. The pandemic has exposed deep inequalities disproportionately affecting many people and communities.

# INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

## **Equality Act 2010**

The Equality Act 2010 brings together and replaces the previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act. It simplifies and strengthens the law, removes inconsistencies and makes it easier for people to understand and comply with it. The majority of the Act came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2010.

The Act includes a new public sector equality duty (the 'general duty'), replacing the separate duties on race, disability and gender equality. This came into force on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

The new general duty covers the following protected characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnerships
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race – including ethnic or national origin, colour or nationality
- Religion or belief – including lack of belief
- Sex (Gender)
- Sexual orientation

It applies to marriage and civil partnership, but only in respect of the requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination.

## **What is the general duty?**

The aim of the general duty is to ensure that public authorities and those carrying out a public function consider how they can positively contribute to a fairer society through advancing equality and good relations in their day-to-day activities. The duty ensures that equality considerations are built into the design of policies and the delivery of services, and that they are kept under review. This will achieve better outcomes for all.

When making decisions and delivering services we must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

## **The Specific Duties in Wales**

The broad purpose of the specific duties in Wales is to help listed bodies in their performance of the general duty and to aid transparency.

The specific duties in Wales are set out in the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011. The specific duties in Wales came into force on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

The specific duties in Wales cover:

- Objectives
- Strategic Equality Plans
- Engagement
- Assessing impact
- Equality information
- Employment information
- Pay differences
- Staff training
- Procurement
- Annual reporting
- Publishing
- Welsh Ministers' reporting
- Review
- Accessibility

### **Strategic Equality Plan**

The specific duties in Wales included a requirement for listed bodies to develop and publish a Strategic Equality Plan every four years.

As part of the review of the Council's Strategic Equality Plan it was identified that an Equalities Vision for Merthyr Tydfil was essential in order to set out the Council's ambition to eliminate discrimination / harassment, advance equality and foster good relations.

The following Equalities Vision for Merthyr Tydfil has been developed.

#### **Our Equalities Vision for Merthyr Tydfil is;**

***“A place where diversity is valued and respected and everyone can participate, flourish and have the opportunity to fulfil their potential free from discrimination and prejudice.”***

This Vision is supported by the following four Equality Objectives (listed in the table below) that are set out in the Council's Strategic Equality Plan for 2020-2021.

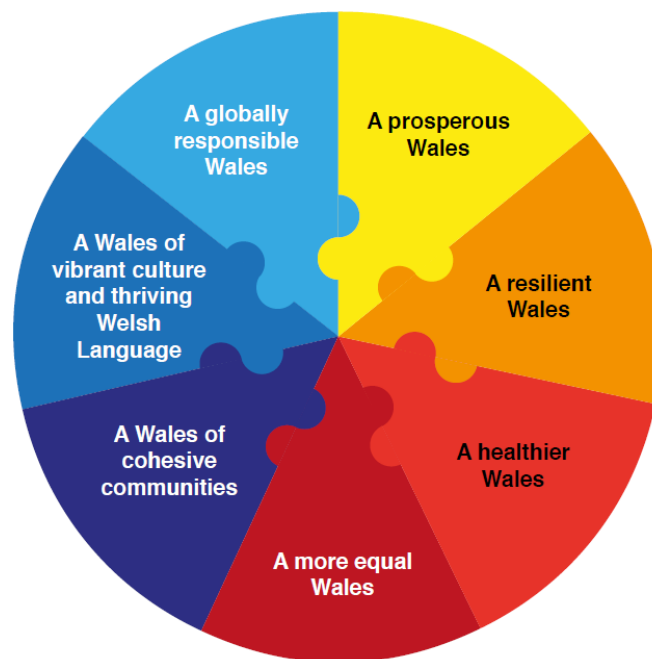
<b>THEME</b>	<b>OBJECTIVE</b>
<b>Inclusive Engagement and Participation</b>	Engage with our Citizens to participate and have their voices heard to understand and respond to the needs of our communities.
<b>Community Cohesion</b>	Promote and facilitate inclusive, safe and cohesive communities.

<b>Inclusive and Diverse Workforce</b>	Create an inclusive and diverse workforce, which reflects the communities in Merthyr Tydfil.
<b>Gender/Equal Pay</b>	Ensure equity of pay across Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.
<b>Accessible Services</b>	Understand and remove the barriers people face when accessing our services.

These Equality Objectives will be delivered through an Action Plan that is set out in the Strategic Equality Plan for 2020-2024.

**Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

The Council’s Vision and Equality Objectives for 2016-2020 support the Council’s Well-being Objectives and the seven Well-being Goals (shown in the diagram below) and link to the five ways of working (the Sustainable Development Principle) that are set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.



### Long term



The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.

### Prevention



How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.

### Integration



Considering how the public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.

### Collaboration



Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives.

### Involvement



The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.

## STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN 2020-2024

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies to;

- Publish objectives to meet the general duty.
- Publish a statement setting out the steps it has taken or intends to take to meet the objectives and how long it expects to take to meet each objective.
- Make appropriate arrangements to monitor progress towards meeting its objectives and to monitor the effectiveness of its approach.
- Give appropriate consideration to relevant equality information it holds when considering what its equality objectives should be.

MTCBC's Strategic Equality Plan for the next four years (2020-2024) reflects our commitment to equality in the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil, and ensures we are meeting our statutory obligations as found within the Equality Act 2010. The plan replaces the Strategic Equality Plan 2016-2020. The Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 was approved on 25 March 2020.

It highlights links to legislation and regulations covering Welsh Language Standards and Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty. This continues the work the Council is doing and promotes our commitment to ensuring that we have inclusive communities free from discrimination.

### **Consultation**

To help shape the new Strategic Equality Plan, we undertook a 12-week consultation with the public and workforce from December 2019 to February 2020. An on-line survey was available to complete, emails were sent to staff and community groups that reflect the protected characteristics contained within the Equality Act 2010, with updates being posted on social media channels. We have also met with the Senior Management Team within the Council and Managers who will be delivering the actions within the action plan.

The purpose of the consultation was to ensure we meet our duties to review our equality objectives and to engage with protected characteristic groups in doing so.

We asked people to consider the following when answering the questions;

- *What challenges are people with protected characteristics facing within the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil?*
- *Do the objectives adequately address these challenges?*
- *What more could we do to improve?*

Some of the feedback we received from the consultation can be found within the Annual Equality Report 2019-2020. We used the information from the consultation to inform our objectives and actions within the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024.



## **Objectives**

The themes and objectives that within the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 are identified in the table below:

<b>THEME</b>	<b>OBJECTIVE</b>
<b>Inclusive Engagement and Participation</b>	Engage with our Citizens to participate and have their voices heard to understand and respond to the needs of our communities.
<b>Community Cohesion</b>	Promote and facilitate inclusive, safe and cohesive communities.
<b>Inclusive and Diverse Workforce</b>	Create an inclusive and diverse workforce, which reflects the communities in Merthyr Tydfil.
<b>Gender/Equal Pay</b>	Ensure equity of pay across Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.
<b>Accessible Services</b>	Understand and remove the barriers people face when accessing our services.

A number of actions were identified under each objective and work has been progressing to deliver these actions. The Strategic Equality Plan will be reviewed to reflect any updates and changes to legislation or requirements as we progress.

## **Strategic Equality Plan Working Group**

A Strategic Equality Plan Working Group was set up to work together on delivering the actions within the plan and identify any other actions which could be included, discuss issues, risks and update on progress. This group meets quarterly and is made up of officers from across the Council who are delivering actions within the plan.

## **Scrutiny guidance**

Information on the socio-economic duty has been included within the 'Practical Support Resource Pack for Scrutiny Committee Members' which was in development in 2021. It explains what the duty means for us, how we can define terminology, how it links to the Public Sector Equality Duty and what it asks us to do. The five stages to delivering this duty were included as a visual step by step guide of how we can ensure 'due regard' has been given to the socio-economic duty in decision making.

## **Socio-economic Duty**

The Socio-Economic Duty places a responsibility on the Council to actively consider ('pay due regard' to) how we can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage when making strategic decisions. The duty gives us an opportunity to do things differently and put tackling inequality genuinely at the heart of key decision making. The overall aim of the duty is to deliver better outcomes for those who experience socio-economic disadvantage.

In broad terms, 'socio-economic disadvantage' means living on a low income compared to others in Wales, with little or no accumulated wealth, leading to greater material deprivation, restricting the ability to access basic goods and services. The duty is a key mechanism in supporting the most vulnerable in our communities, and is extremely important in our recovery from the pandemic.

The duty came into force on 31 March 2021 and a number of activities were undertaken prior to this to ensure we met this duty. The duty will be a key mechanism in supporting the most vulnerable in our communities, and will be extremely important when we recover from the coronavirus pandemic.

### **Integrated Impact Assessment**

We have reviewed the Council's Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) to ensure it includes consideration for socio-economic disadvantage when making strategic decisions. The following sections have been included within the IIA;

- **Low Income/Income Poverty** - Unable to afford to maintain regular payments such as bills, food, clothing, transport, other essential items etc.
- **Low and/or No Wealth** - Enough money to meet basic living costs and pay bills but have no savings to deal with any unexpected spends and no provision for the future.
- **Material Deprivation** - Unable to access basic goods and services i.e. financial products like life insurance, repair/replace broken electrical goods, warm home, leisure and hobbies etc.
- **Area Deprivation** - Where you live e.g. rural areas, and where you work e.g. accessibility of public transport.
- **Socio-economic Background** - Social class i.e. parents' education, employment and income.
- **Socio-economic Disadvantage** - What cumulative impact will the proposal have on people or groups because of their protected characteristic(s) or vulnerability or because they are already disadvantaged?

Alongside these additions, we have also included the following sections to ensure that consideration is taken into engagement and the use of data;

- **Consultation and Engagement** – Requirement for consultation and/or engagement to be undertaken, or a legitimate expectation that it will take place. Using the Gunning principles and identifying what type of consultation was undertaken, who was consulted with and if any further engagement or consultation is required.
- **Data and Evidence** - Data and evidence used in order to inform the proposal and how it has assisted in the proposal development and if any gaps have been identified.

The guidance has been updated to reflect this duty and also the new sections added within the IIA. Easy read versions have been developed for staff and prompt sheets to use when

completing the IIA at the start of any proposal or project. This information has been updated on our Council Intranet and any changes communicated to staff.

Engagement exercises were undertaken with Corporate Management Team, Senior Leadership Team and other departments to review the IIA and gather feedback on any new sections to include within the IIA. Information updates were provided and sessions exploring the new sections to give more detail about what each area entailed.

## PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

Below is the summary of progress against delivering the Council's Equality Objectives for 2020-2024.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic - Support for residents shielding**

A database of those residents who were on the Welsh Government (WG) shielding list, or who had contacted the Council to say they were shielding and/or vulnerable was kept and was in use from 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020 until 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021. It was initially introduced so the Council could co-ordinate the delivery of WG food parcels, but it was recognised even before we began contacting people on the shielding list that we would need more information. Not everyone had a telephone number therefore letters were sent to those individuals asking them to contact the Council. 398 residents didn't respond.

Any resident who we contacted, or who contacted us, were asked a series of questions regarding their current health and well-being, even if they were not contacting us specifically for a food parcel. The questions asked were:

- We are going to ask you some questions about your support - are you happy for us to share the information?
- Do you have Covid-19 symptoms?
- Are you living alone?
- Do you have support from family, friends or neighbours?
- Do you have someone to chat to if you get lonely?
- Do you need help with shopping?
- Are you missing meals because you haven't been able to go shopping?
- Would you like to receive the Welsh Government food box?
- If you want the food box, do you have any dietary requirements?
- Do you need assistance collecting your prescription?
- Is your medication due to run out in the next week?
- Is there anything else you need support for that we may be able to help with?

We also included a box for the officer to note down whether they felt the individual may need a referral to Social Services.

Depending on the response to these questions the referrals were given a priority RAG (Red, Amber Green) status. If they had no support at all, if they had skipped meals or if their prescriptions were due to run out, then they took priority.

People were continuously being added to and removed from the database, but the final figures were as follows:

- Total number of residents offered support throughout the lockdown – 3404
- Number of self-referrals – 263
- Number on the WG shielding list at the end – 2854
- Number removed from NHS shielding list either on request, deceased or were no longer eligible - 287
- Residents on the WG shielding list
  - Loneliness – 207
  - Shopping – 250
  - Prescriptions – 95

- WG food box – 778 (this decreased toward the end of the lockdown because people were calling in and cancelling the box)
- Number for self-referrals. We added them to the system and treated them the same as the shielded patients, in that we referred them to the volunteer groups. However, a number of self-referrals were calling because they believed they were entitled to the WG food box so we had to refer them back to their GP:
  - Loneliness – 117
  - Shopping – 27
  - Prescriptions – 19

### **COVID-19 Pandemic - Digitally Excluded Learners (DEL)**

At the start of the pandemic, Welsh Government committed to providing Councils with funding as a part of 'stay safe, stay learning', with the aim to support digitally excluded learners in maintained school where there was no existing provision in place from their school or local authority. The funding was managed through the wider Hwb EdTech infrastructure programme.

A digitally excluded learner is defined as 'a learner who does not have access to an appropriate internet connected device to engage in online learning activities from home'.

In May 2020, this financial support begun and the Council assisted schools to share equipment needed to support learners identified as digitally excluded. Initially this was 730 learners across 440 households in need of a device and 133 households who needed support with an Internet connection, via Mi-Fi devices.

Over the course of the pandemic and as we went in to further lockdowns, the number of learners needing a MiFi device rose to 225.

The initial circa 450 devices were sourced from existing stocks of equipment at schools. This equipment was subsequently replaced with devices provided via the Welsh Government EdTech grant at a cost of £84,000.

The 250 Mi-Fi were funded by the same grant, with the element being retained by WG. This cost was £67,000 across the 2020-21 and 2021-22 financial years, ending July 2021 (£52,000 in 2020-21 and £15,000 in 2021-22).

As time progressed, it became apparent that schools were changing the amount of synchronous engagement, at scheduled times, they were having with learners. Midway through the lockdown, the focus shifted to ensuring an 'appropriate device' was available. This revealed that more learners needed support with devices than originally identified or were no longer able to share devices. Further support was provided by schools as they were able to loan more of their own devices to learners.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic - Free School Meals (FSM)**

When the schools closed in March due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the main focus was ensuring pupils who receive free school meals continued to be provided with access to food whilst they are unable to attend school. Provision also included the Easter holidays, spring half term break and the summer holidays.

A full FSM list was provided to the Learning department from the Benefits department; although they advised that the addresses on their list were not all up to date. So an exercise

was carried out to cross reference the list with Education's ICT system Capita to update addresses where necessary. Approximately 1800 children in Merthyr Tydfil are eligible for free school meals.

FSM lists were also gathered from neighbouring authorities for pupils attending schools outside of Merthyr but living in Merthyr, to ensure they were included on our delivery list.

From March 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>, deliveries were attempted to every pupil entitled to FSM. Lots of volunteers assisted to carry out this task, and they were MTCBC staff, Merthyr Leisure Trust staff and taxi drivers to name a few. This turned out to be a bigger task than anticipated and lots of deliveries failed due to several reasons, including no answer at the home, people turning the lunch away, wrong address etc. There was also a walk up list where packed lunches could be collected from a local school.

In the first week we delivered 5630 meals, on average 1126 meals per day. It was then decided to contact all FSM families and ask if they wanted a packed lunch delivery. Schools contacted families and provided the Learning department with a list of pupils who wanted a delivery. As the weeks progressed we eliminated families from the list who wished not to receive a free lunch. The school walk up list was subsequently stopped.

From March 26<sup>th</sup> to April 3<sup>rd</sup>, packed lunches were delivered to all pupils that had requested a delivery. Extra refrigerated vans were hired to accommodate this. FSM delivery lists were updated every day using feedback from the delivery volunteers and updates received from schools and the Benefits department. Deliveries of FSM ended on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2020.

From 6<sup>th</sup> April to 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020, FSM vouchers were offered instead of a home delivery. Asda and Tesco vouchers were purchased and allocated to all eligible pupils depending on address. Pupils living in Dowlais and Penydarren areas were allocated Asda, and all other areas were allocated Tesco.

The first batch of activation codes for vouchers were issued via post on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> April and covered the period 6<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> April (Easter holidays). All vouchers were digital vouchers and needed to be activated online. Tesco vouchers also needed an activation code and these were sent separately to parents/carers via text message.

A HUNT group was set up to answer any queries and to help families to activate their vouchers. Five members of staff worked over the bank holiday weekend (10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> April) to answer calls. The number of calls/queries received were higher than anticipated, so extra staff were drafted in to help with this.

A small number of families struggled with digital vouchers, so they were added to a 'post' list whereby their vouchers were activated online for them and then printed out and sent to them via post.

A second batch of activation codes for vouchers were issued 23<sup>rd</sup> April, and these covered the period 20<sup>th</sup> April to 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020. If we had an email address then the activation codes were sent electronically. The same process occurred as before and the HUNT group was still in place to deal with any queries.

From 4<sup>th</sup> May to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020, direct payment were offered. Letters were posted on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020 to all eligible families advising them that they now needed to register online for future payments. These letters were also sent via email where we had email addresses following the voucher queries.

Online, families could register for a weekly bank payment or to continue with vouchers. A Separate HUNT group was set up to deal with online payment queries. Registration needed to be completed by Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> May to be included on the first payment run on Monday 4<sup>th</sup>

May. All families on this run had their first payment on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> May and then every Thursday going forward. Any families registering after the 3<sup>rd</sup> May deadline had their 1<sup>st</sup> payment backdated to 4<sup>th</sup> May. Families who requested to continue with vouchers had these sent via email or via post depending on what was requested.

Any pupils who became entitled to free school meals after 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 received backdated payments or vouchers. They were backdated to the start date of their entitlement or to 4<sup>th</sup> April if the start date was prior to this.

In September 2020, the schools reopened. However the kitchens were closed for the first two weeks. Pupils who were eligible for FSM were issued with payments/vouchers to register for this period. When the schools returned in September, the rules around a Covid-19 case in a class meant the whole class would have to isolate at home for 14 days. In these situations, the schools provided names to the Council of FSM pupils who had been asked to isolate and payments/vouchers were issued to registered pupils. Pupils were also reimbursed when schools had to close classes for Covid-19 related issues i.e. staff shortages etc.

## **Housing**

During 2020-2021, Housing Support Grant funded provisions delivered to both existing service users and newly referred service users. The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in changes to the way floating support was delivered and the use of smart phones, skype and telephones rather than face to face support meant that those who needed housing related support continued to receive it. Those who were unable to receive support remotely received visits from support staff in PPE, adhering to guidelines around social distancing and not meeting inside. The vast majority of service users opted for remote support rather than physical visits.

A new support provision was established to support the cohort of service users who would have previously accessed winter night shelter provisions. Those who were rough sleeping during the Covid-19 outbreak were placed in B&Bs as temporary accommodation to enable them to self-isolate and comply with Covid safety measures. The new overnight provision tackled issues arising outside of office hours when floating support was unavailable. Urgent issues such as emotional distress and anti-social behaviour were addressed by the new provision and service users remained in their temporary accommodation rather than returning to rough sleeping. This often incredibly complex cohort of service users had round the clock support to promote compliance with the 'stay at home' directive and to comply with the requirements of their temporary accommodation.

Three new schemes were commissioned to address the rising numbers of people presenting to Housing relating to debt caused by redundancy, furlough and zero hours contracts as well as a rise in mental health-related housing support needs. We were also able to bolster support for ex-offenders in response to the increase in presentations from those newly released from secure estate.

The Council had planned to fund a new temporary supported accommodation this financial year. This would have provided floor-space or direct access temporary emergency accommodation for rough sleepers with an assessment centre model of support. It would allow us to intensively assess individuals who were rough sleeping prior to placing them in a hostel / housing first / temporary accommodation etc. Due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, we were unable to progress with this model which would not have been compliant

with Covid guidelines due to the proximity of beds in the direct access 'floor space' area, and the sharing of kitchen and bathroom facilities. Those who would have met the criteria to access this provision were placed in B&Bs temporary supported accommodation with wrap-around support, as mentioned above.

During the pandemic, all other pre-existing supported accommodations delivered support to service users as planned. Support was reconfigured to comply with regulations and some activities (those involving group work and close physical proximity) were avoided. All service users in hostel / refuge and supported accommodation received support to work towards moving on from supported accommodation when appropriate. Where service users accessing floating support were unable to access support remotely via the use of technologies, staff undertook physical visits to gardens and doorsteps when necessary wearing PPE and practicing social distancing. All service users who required support were supported via a medium in which they were able to engage.

Providers of housing related support in Merthyr Tydfil have adapted quickly to the challenges posed during the last 12 months. As a local authority, we have appreciated the ways in which our support providers have ensured that vulnerable service users continued to receive support. Also the way in which providers have worked closely with us to share information, and help us to adapt our plans to ensure that we are best meeting the current needs of those who require housing related support.

The limited amount of suitable and affordable housing within the County Borough continues to present challenges for those moving on from supported accommodation. We hope that through the housing support programme as a whole and with the continued support of Welsh Government, we can further improve our offer of supported accommodation, suitable move-on accommodation and rapid-rehousing to those who need it during 2021-2022.

Before the pandemic, MTCBC used temporary accommodation to meet its statutory duty in one of the following ways:

<b><u>Name of unit</u></b>	<b><u>Unit Number of rooms</u></b>
Garth Villas Hostel	10
Chaplin's Hostel	10
Bed and Breakfast accommodation	12

At the time our legislation hadn't changed so households who were placed would have been prioritised - households with children, households who are pregnant, households with significant mental health issues, households with physical health issues, elderly, individuals fleeing domestic violence and individuals leaving armed forces.

When the pandemic hit in March 2020, our legislation was changed and priority need was removed. A duty was placed on all local authorities in Wales to place everyone that is homeless in accommodation regardless of priority need or a legal duty. Due to this change in legislation our units of temporary accommodation had to change to meet the demands but also the number of homeless individuals coming through the system and who are currently being housed in our accommodation have more than quadrupled.

Below are the figures as of March 2021.



<b><u>Accommodation type</u></b>	<b><u>Number of households</u></b>
Supported Housing Hostels – Garth Villas & Chaplins	20 (at full capacity)
Bed and Breakfast placements	88
Waiting list for placement	9 - Full
Shared accommodation - HMO (x2)	9
Hillfort Court	1 (ending June 2021)
Other supported accommodation: Garth Newydd Court and Flooks	12 – Full
Temporary accommodation Merthyr Valley Homes, including modular.	17 – Full
Total number of placements	147

### **National Day of Reflection**

On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021, MTCBC lowered its flags outside the Civic Centre to half-mast as part of 'National Day of Reflection'. This day marked the first anniversary of Britain going in to lockdown, and was in remembrance of the 125,000 people UK-wide who had died in that first year.

Buildings in Merthyr Tydfil town centre were lit up in yellow as part of the day of reflection. The Redhouse Cymru and The College Merthyr Tydfil, along with the Iron Heart sculpture on Penderyn Square were lit yellow to commemorate the Welsh lives lost during the first year of the pandemic. There was also a giant yellow heart painted on the road between the Redhouse and Central Library containing the words 'Forever we will remember'.

MTCBC also marked the occasion by sharing examples of some of the fantastic work carried out by our staff during the past year, as well as remembering some of the Merthyr Frontline Heroes that we have celebrated over the course of the lockdowns.

### **COVID-19 Mass Testing**

In the autumn of 2020, Merthyr Tydfil became the first whole area testing pilot in Wales for the Covid-19 virus. Everyone living or working in Merthyr Tydfil were offered Covid-19 testing, whether they had symptoms or not. All residents and workers were then offered repeat testing, to help find more positive cases and break the chain of transmission. It was delivered through a partnership between the Welsh Government, UK Government, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board and the Ministry of Defence, with logistical support from Armed Forces personnel.

At the time, Merthyr Tydfil had the highest case rate of coronavirus in the UK. During the mass testing, 22,021 asymptomatic people got tested in Merthyr Tydfil and the positivity rate was 2.3%. The pilot caused an immediate reduction in the level of Covid-19 in the area, and helped prevent hospitalisations and deaths.

Throughout the pandemic, people from ethnic minority backgrounds have been 'disproportionately' more likely to get severely ill or die from coronavirus. Also a large proportion of those working on the frontline fighting the virus are from BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) backgrounds. To ensure there was plenty of awareness of the mass testing centres within the BAME community, Cohesion Officers contacted agencies who work with the BAME community to promote the importance of testing on a mass scale and to encourage individuals to get tested.

### **Hate Crime/Discrimination**

We continue to regularly engage with groups vulnerable to harassment and/or experiencing community tensions. Groups such as EU citizens, BAME communities and other protected characteristic groups. With Covid-19, we were unable to engage with these groups face to face as we normally would. However where possible, we continued working with the communities virtually. We tried to keep in as much contact with groups as possible, but most were not holding online meetings as they didn't have the resources or capacity.

National Hate Crime Awareness Week was in October 2020, and unfortunately we were unable to run our usual week of events and engagement with the public, which prove very effective in raising awareness and encouraging the reporting of hate crime. Instead, sealed packs were put together containing information on Hate Crime and how to report it as well as merchandise including pens, bags and trolley coins. These were handed out to members of the public during the week.

There were many difficulties brought by the pandemic, such as interacting face to face with residents. However the Council continued to monitor community tensions and communicate virtually where possible. The work throughout the year included:

- Cohesion Officers continue to liaise with the South Wales Police (SWP) Hate Crime officer on a weekly basis and they monitor information shared by SWP and Victim Support for trends and or tension indicators. It allows us to monitor hotspots and put action plans in place.
- Cohesion Officers continued to touch base with voluntary and faith sectors during this time. Contact continued with internal partners and external agencies who support members of the BAME Community, including founder or VEMS (Valleys Ethnic Minority Support) and the Syrian Refugee resettlement coordinator. As well as Equality and Diversity staff from the local Health Board.
- PSG (Problem Solving Group) meetings are attended on a monthly basis across Cwm Taf. The meetings are led by the police, and is where information is shared regarding hate crime and community tensions from a number of different partners which allows us to put together a multi-agency approach to combat issues.
- The Health and Well-being forum is attended virtually on a bi-monthly basis. This is hosted by Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil. From this meeting, links are established with local community groups that are part of the protected characteristics.
- The Cohesion Team work with the Environmental Health Team on a regular basis, sharing information and often making referrals of any potential community tensions or hate crime incidents.
- We continue to work closely and maintain contact with third sector support agencies including VEMS (Valleys Ethic Minority Support), HOPE (Helping others Participate and Engage), People First, and Age Connect to ensure a sound and broad

knowledge of support is available locally, as well as the appropriate referral pathways.

- Support to the schools regarding hate crime decreased during this period because of the schools being closed. Support was still offered where required, however this will be picked up once the schools have returned back fully.
- Along with SWP, the Cohesion Team have visited potential Victims of Hate Crime to encourage reporting of any incidents. Visits have included going to local business owners and Gypsy Roma Traveller family's. All visits have been in line with Covid-19 guidelines.
- 'Safer Streets' project – We aided the Safer Streets project by visiting businesses in Merthyr Town Centre to discuss what anti-social behaviour/hate crimes they were witnessing within the town centre.
- Creating hate crime training resources, that were used to provide training to local schools during the Annual Student Conference in November and within The College Merthyr Tydfil during tutorials, where possible.
- Cohesion Officers aided Victim Support in promoting research aimed at young people who had been victims of hate crime. They contacted school liaison officers and this will be promoted in the Annual School Conference.
- 'Remembering Srebrenica' is a UK based charitable organisation which raises awareness and educates about the Bosnia genocide, where thousands were killed because of their ethnicity. The charity have stated to Cohesion Officers that there have been an increase in the number of children, (some as young as 10) being interviewed in relation to far right extremism. We're currently working with Community Safety Managers & Channel/Contest Chairs to tackle this.

### **Black History Month**

October is Black History Month, and it has been celebrated in Wales and across the UK for over 30 years as a way of recognising and celebrating black people's contribution to all aspects of our culture and society. It promotes a better understanding of black history and culture, challenges inequalities experienced by many black communities and promotes respect for cultural differences.

This year the programme moved to 'Black History Wales' – rather than 'Black History Month Wales' - and was a full year of activity known as 'Black History Cymru 365'. It ran until September 30<sup>th</sup> 2021.

The theme for 2020 was '2000 Nations – Celebrating Diversity'. People of African and Caribbean descent originate from around 2000 different ethnic groups with a range of over 2000 languages and multiple cultural traditions.

There were a lot of online events held this year, organised by Race Council Cymru and their partners.

### **Review of statues, monuments and street names**

In 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement brought to the world's attention the important issues relating to on-going racism that continues in our society and around the world.

One important issue raised during the Black Lives Matter movement related to ensuring that commemorations of history are appropriate to the current time. The Council is committed to

working with communities with regards to any statue, monument, plaque, street name or building within the County Borough that may be considered offensive.

Welsh Government undertook an audit of all statues and street names and asked all Council's to participate in this to provide information. The Council began work on identifying and reviewing all commemorations within Merthyr Tydfil to ensure they are representative of local people's values and those of a modern, inclusive Council. A review was undertaken of 'Visit Merthyr' locations and also street names. This has been fed back into the review being undertaken by Welsh Government.

### **International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**

The day was celebrated on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2021, and every year its aim is to engage everyone to fight racism and to foster a global culture of equality and anti-discrimination.

'Youth standing up against racism' was the 2021 theme. Young people all over the world massively showed their support for the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement. They protested against racial injustice and stood up for the equal rights of all. Their activism was all the more remarkable in the Covid-19 pandemic. As the virus began to spread in early 2020, a parallel pandemic was unleashed - of hatred, violence and fear against certain ethnicities and nationalities. It quickly became clear that stark inequities, sometimes rooted in racism, had subjected minorities to a significantly higher risk of infection and death.

Covid-19 has also heavily impacted young people, including those from minority backgrounds. Many are now having to deal with an increase in racial discrimination, in addition to severe disruption to their education and diminished employment prospects.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council commits to promoting a zero tolerance to racism throughout the Council, and has signed the Race Council Cymru's Zero Racism Wales policy.

### **Zero Racism Wales**

Zero Racism Wales is a campaign led by Race Council Cymru, supported by Welsh Government and Community Cohesion Coordinators. It calls on businesses, organisations and individuals committed to promoting racial harmony and equity to sign a pledge and agree a zero-tolerance policy to racism in Wales.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council commits to promoting a zero tolerance to racism throughout the Council, and has signed the Race Council Cymru's Zero Racism Wales policy. By signing the policy, it reaffirms our commitment to ensuring that MTCBC treats every person fairly and equally irrespective of race, that there are equal opportunities in employment and service delivery and that the council will adhere to the Equality Act 2010 and provide fair and equitable services to all. As a Council, we agree to take a stand against racism and promote a more inclusive and equal workplace and society that makes every individual feel safe, valued and included.

The Council's full pledge can be found on the Zero Racism Wales website.

Welsh Government also developed a Race Equality Action Plan and undertook community engagement analysis in March 2021 to feed into the action plan. A consultation on the Race Equality Action Plan was then undertaken in 2021 which the Council fed responses into. The outcome of the consultation and implementation is still in development.

## **The EUSS**

EU employees make a valuable contribution to the workforce and society in the UK. The EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) allows foreign nationals and their families to get the immigration status to continue to live, work and study in the UK beyond 30 June 2021. This is following the UK's departure from the European Union. Even those citizens who have lived in the UK for many years or have a UK permanent residence document still needed to apply to the EUSS.

Before the pandemic, we regularly engaged with individuals and businesses, to provide as much information and support to them as possible so they can remain working in the UK via the EUSS scheme. However, during the pandemic, this level of engagement was obviously reduced. The Community Cohesion Team still kept in contact with organisations such as Citizens Advice and the large EU Nationals employers in the area remotely during this time.

Information packs were sent out to various care homes across Merthyr, advising them to check whether any of their residents would be eligible for the EUSS or if any residents needed help in completing it.

The Community Cohesion Team also supported the Census Team in ensuring all members of the community complete the census. We are working towards sending information packs to schools, local employers and to display information in local businesses when they reopen. We will also display EUSS materials alongside census packs. In addition, a plan is being developed which ensures those in the community who may be illiterate, may not speak English or whom may struggle to complete the form without support can successfully complete the census.

Cohesion Officers aided the Equality and Diversity Manager for Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board who was seeking further information on the EUSS. The Senior Leadership Team within the board identified that a number of staff needed to apply. Support and resources were given to aid these staff.

## **Ethnic Minorities**

A Welsh organisation called BAWSO, which provides advice and support to ethnic minority women have in the past years come in to MTCBC to deliver modern day slavery training to all frontline staff. Unfortunately this couldn't happen this year due to lockdown. We are looking at delivering this once restrictions have lifted or look at the potential to deliver the training online.

Windrush Day was celebrated on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020; the same date as the arrival of 492 migrants from the Caribbean to the UK in 1948. This year marked the 72<sup>nd</sup> anniversary and continues to be an important cultural landmark in our history. Usually celebrations/education events take place in community groups and in schools to commemorate the day. However this year restrictions meant face to face gatherings could not take place. Therefore several virtual meetings and events were held online, including an online event held by the First Minister in partnership with Windrush Cymru Elders and organised by Race Council Cymru and their partners.

The Cohesion Team have maintained contact with the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Coordinator during this time offering support. However, engagement with the families have decreased during lockdown.

## **Holocaust Memorial Day**

Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) is marked on 27<sup>th</sup> January every year. It is a day when we remember the millions of people murdered in the Holocaust, under Nazi persecution, and in the genocides which followed. The 27<sup>th</sup> January is chosen as it marks the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp.

The theme in 2021 was 'Be the light in the darkness'. It encouraged everyone to reflect on the depths humanity can sink to, but also the ways individuals and communities resisted that darkness to 'be the light' before, during and after genocide. Due to the national lockdown at the time, unfortunately events and services could not take place. Therefore the HMD Trust encouraged people to join their online memorial service and to light a candle in their window at home.

## **LGBTQ+ Community**

### **Proud Councils**

'Proud Councils' is a partnership of Councils in South Wales working together to support LGBTQ+ issues and actively champion LGBTQ+ inclusion. Proud Councils include the following Councils – Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Newport, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Torfaen.

The purpose of the Proud Councils network is to improve support offered to LGBTQ+ staff within local authorities in Wales and ensure that local government across Wales is a visible leader in the field of LGBTQ+ rights and actively championing LGBTQ+ inclusion in our communities.

Being part of Proud Councils highlights MTCBC's commitment to promoting respect and diversity in our communities, and ensuring our public services work to deliver to everyone regardless of their sexuality, gender identity, age, race, disability or religion.

### **LGBTQ+ History Month**

LGBTQ+ History Month runs for the whole of February each year. The month long celebration aims to promote equality and diversity, and encourages further education in LGBTQ+ issues to stamp out prejudice. It raises awareness of matters which affect the LGBTQ+ community and celebrates the lives and history of LGBTQ+ people.

MTCBC was proud to show its support by raising the progress flag outside the Civic Centre on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021. Due to the national lockdown at the time, in person events could not take place. Therefore we held a virtual event and senior cabinet members gave recorded speeches that were posted on the Council's social media.

Proud Councils developed a calendar of events which showcased different events taking place across all the Borough's that people could access. It also included links to books, videos and information relevant to celebrating LGBTQ+ history month.

### **Pride Cymru 2020**

The Pride Cymru event, which takes place every year in August, was cancelled due to the pandemic. However Wales' biggest celebration of equality and diversity instead went online. As part of the Proud Councils network, MTCBC was extremely pleased to be sponsoring 'The Rainbow United'. This is a panel discussion hosted by the chair of Glitter Cymru with panellists from the Bi, Trans, BAME, Disabled LGBTQ+, Gypsy Romany LGBTQ+ and HIV+ communities represented.

Lots of other events took place virtually, such as:

- **Progress & Politics** – With Jane Hutt MS, Kirsty Williams MS and Julie James MS.
- **Gender Identity and intersectionality, why it matters** – with NHS Wales.
- **Hate Crime conversations** – with Victim Support.

There was also lots of entertainment including quizzes and sports sessions.

### **Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) Community**

The Cohesion Team continue to work closely with the Gypsy Roma Traveller officer in Merthyr Tydfil and regularly engage with the community. During the pandemic, contact was maintained with residents on site via phones and face to face. The onsite warden also ensured the day to day running, maintenance and other impending issues were dealt with and fed back in the appropriate manner.

Early intervention and prevention officers visited the site when restrictions allowed, in order to provide advice, assistance and support in whatever capacity was needed, including but not exclusive to applying for housing/ applying for benefits.

Work has taken place with the NHS and residents around the Covid-19 vaccine process with some success. Further developments are in place which include NHS trained staff visiting the GRT site to answer questions and dispel myths around the vaccine to hopefully get a larger intake.

### **Schools**

#### **Equality Strategy and schools' roles**

Schools adopt an inclusive approach that is embedded and founded upon the principles of respect, tolerance and rights. The aim of this is to enable learners to be resilient, imaginative, compassionate and ambitious individuals. This is at the heart of the New Curriculum for Wales.

Schools are required to develop and publish Equality Objectives and a Strategic Equality Plan. The purpose of these is to enable the delivery of measurable equality outcomes which improve the lives of individuals and communities. A Strategic Equality Plan template and guidance have been developed for schools to use and are aligned to the Council's Strategic Equality Plan and its Equalities Vision for Merthyr Tydfil. In developing their SEPs, schools need to ensure that the actions in their plans are proportionate to the equality issues within the school. Plus be relevant to the school's plans and policies, both currently and what is anticipated could become relevant at some time in the future. When considering capacity and resources, schools should consider authority-wide, regional or national research and engagement exercises as well as work they can do themselves. There is significant scope for common objectives, occurring in a range of individual plans especially across clusters and similar schools.

Equality objectives should be linked to existing strategies and the approaches taken to inclusion, bullying, behaviour management, improving attainment, pupil voice, well-being and pupil support. Schools should seek to build on their existing work and to ensure equality and fairness are considered in the mainstream of activities.

The strategic plans that schools have developed requires that they consider the needs of people with characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010 plus the Welsh language.

Schools understand their responsibilities with regards to the Counter Terrorism Act 2015 and their duty to prevent, i.e. to try to stop children and young people from becoming drawn into terrorism. Schools have a key role in identifying and supporting pupils that are identified at being at risk of exploitation and play a major part in safeguarding pupils from potentially radicalising influences. Developing levels of resilience is essential for this and the teaching of this needs to be embedded in the curriculum.

Schools recognise the need to:-

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

Having due regard for promoting and ensuring equality includes: -

- Removing or minimising disadvantages experienced by people due to their protected characteristics;
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people; and
- Encouraging people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where they participate less than other groups.

All schools promote ethos of rights, respect and tolerance where diversity is celebrated, and healthy debate is encouraged. Schools will use the following to develop these values;

- PSE curriculum
- SEAL-Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning
- P4C- Philosophy 4 Children
- RRSA- Rights Respecting Schools Award
- GOT- Getting to Together resources
- Trust Me Cymru resources
- Online safety

This is not an exhaustive list. There are lots of resources for schools on the Welsh Government Hwb.

### Training and workshops

Schools provide lessons and resources to mark occasions to ensure that pupils can learn to empathise and respect others. These are incorporated into the curriculum by lessons in English Language (making posters, letter writing, debates etc.), History, Religious Education, and Drama etc. Occasions such as Remembrance Day, Holocaust Day, Windrush Day and Children in Need.

All of the above is reinforced at the annual Student Conference. This has been held since 2010 during Anti-bullying week. The main focus has been on well-being and has covered such topics as domestic abuse, equality, respect and tolerance, racism and anti-bullying to enable pupils to make informed choices.

The Anti-bullying guidance has been updated in line with the Welsh Government guidance and shared with all schools. The School Safeguarding Policy is reviewed and updated annually. This has been adopted by all schools and covers matters such as child protection, radicalisation, online safety and domestic violence.



## Youth Service

MTCBC's Youth Service and commissioned partners support young people aged 11-25 within the County Borough. From March 2020, school & youth club provision closures were in place due to Covid-19 and as a result, support was adapted in order to meet the needs of young people in line with restrictions.

The Street Based Team continued aspects of their work during the initial and subsequent lockdowns, which included encouraging young people to stay at home, signposting to online services and support with emotional well-being & maintaining routines.

Youth workers liaised with schools to support young people during the move to blended learning, and to distribute hard copies of school work to ensure education and routine was maintained. The service also highlighted the lack of IT equipment to schools, so laptops and pre-paid data sim cards could be allocated to those who needed them. One project within the service purchased two laptops in order to support the most vulnerable young people. These laptops were used to support young people in supported accommodation to access Employability Programmes.

The service also worked in partnership with Careers Wales, training providers and The College Merthyr Tydfil to support destination pathways for Year 11 leavers. Year 11 at this time were entering a time of upheaval with GCSE's and 'next steps' in the balance. But the youth service were able to simplify the process by acting as a go between to link young people with services. This was in order for the most marginalised to aspire and maintain further education and to reduce the risk of learners becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

One youth club ran a Youth Endowment Funded project in partnership with Youth Cymru between November 2020 and March 2021. This was to encourage positive mental health and well-being with young people at risk of offending behaviour, through creative cultural mediums using online platforms. This complemented the training that youth service staff have received during this period, including mental health and well-being training and mental health first aid.

Throughout this period of the pandemic, staying in contact with young people was initiated through phone calls, texting and social media. Particularly for those that were experiencing anxiety, isolation and loneliness or the most vulnerable. When face to face work was limited, engagement and participation was captured via live streaming and pre-recorded sessions using platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Nearpod.

These sessions were tailored to the needs of young people whilst incorporating current affair issues within the wider world. Some examples of these include;

- *'Fake news' and conspiracy theories quizzes* – this was in place due to misinformation shared on social media surrounding the Covid-19 virus and the vaccination drive. The aim was to equip young people with the most factual unbiased information whilst tackling perceptions and values in order for them to make informed decisions.
- *Money management workshops* – arising from concerns brought on by furlough and job loss, sessions were run that looked at savings, how to manage money effectively, to plan for the future and not be in a poverty mind set.
- *Anti-social behaviour and adherence to Covid-19 regulations* – Nearpods (interactive lessons) were developed and a fact sheet from the Welsh Government with the 'Stay at Home' message was circulated, with clear information on how and why it was

important to keep everyone safe. Youth workers also highlighted services such as local youth club Facebook pages and live sessions (e.g. Joe Wicks) in order to keep them occupied. Information on Valley Steps, The Exchange and MIND was provided to support them with their well-being and anxiety around Covid-19 and isolation.

When the Black Lives Matter movement happened in 2020, some young people were signposted to tutors to complete a qualification in Discrimination and Prejudice. This informed young people of the protected characteristics, what constitutes as a hate crime and how they can make a difference for others. As a direct result of inequalities being highlighted in the media, the youth service also developed resources to educate in this field including, ethics, values and morality.

Additionally, discussions, information and advice sessions were held with young people who felt affected by what was happening in the world. Discussions included the work of inspirational authors and film stars, and the historical context of the challenges faced by many minority groups.

### **Adult Community Learning**

The Adult Education department supports adults in the community to attend and complete a wide range of courses and qualifications designed to promote personal development and progression within or into employment, plus the upskill of individuals in priority skills areas (e.g. Essential Skills). Many learners have few or no qualifications when they first engage, are likely to be the hardest to reach or may have had poor experience of mainstream education, and as such may have limited social and economic opportunities.

The global pandemic imposed further disadvantage on learners, with the closure of classes in community venues and courses being moved online. A digital capabilities survey was completed to identify common themes. As a result, a laptop loan scheme was implemented which included the purchase of Wi-Fi hubs for those most in need. Some learners (especially those at pre-entry level with additional learning needs) missed the social interaction of being part of a group. As such, tutors increased 'keeping in touch' activities to promote well-being and to overcome social isolation.

Remote learning was adapted to meet the needs of groups and to support the cross over to digital/online services. For example, the Silver Surfers club (learners aged 50+) continued to meet on a weekly basis online, and participated in activities that benefited them as citizens including how to book a GP appointment online and support for online grocery shopping.

Feedback also suggested learners were keen to explore more well-being and leisure orientated activities. A Well-being Friday course was run which explored aspects of mental health, but primarily focused on strategies and practical tools to promote well-being. An online notice board was also created to post regular updates on matters such as fuel poverty, TV licencing funding, local projects etc. A well-being booklet was also produced for those without IT access.

The Family Programmes course was reformatted to fit in and to complement the demands of home-schooling. Parents and carers benefited from shorter courses (Help your child with reading / Help your child with maths), and the programme was also extended to families with children in Early Years settings (Time 2 Talk course).

The Welsh Language continues as a constant thread throughout provision. This not only supports the Welsh Language Standards and Corporate Objectives, but also requirements

stipulated by ESTYN. Tutors have benefited from Welsh Cultural Awareness training so that an element of bilingualism can be embedded into all courses, and also the promotion of 'being Welsh' and how we operate as a Nation.

### **Communities for Work and Communities for Work Plus**

Communities for Work and Communities for Work Plus support individuals who are long term unemployed, economically inactive or NEET. During the period between March 2020 and March 2021, the project supported 393 residents of Merthyr Tydfil with employability related activity who declared they had a work limiting health condition.

Also during this period, 198 participants gained employment through the support of Communities for Work and Communities for Work Plus. A reduction in engagement of participants was seen during the pandemic, however engagement was maintained during periods of lockdown. This included the upskilling of participants to support with employment and during 2020-2021, 55 participants achieved a qualification.

Early in the pandemic, Communities for Work and Communities for Work Plus linked in with Digital Communities Wales to introduce a small laptop loan scheme to support participants experiencing digital exclusion. Later that year the project was able to work with Welsh Government on a national laptop loan scheme, again linked to Digital Communities Wales and 30 new laptops were received. Two digital champions were identified within the team to manage and process the initiative, with 44 participants benefiting from the scheme.

### **ASPIRE Shared Apprenticeship Programme**

The ASPIRE Shared Apprenticeship Programme continued its work in partnership with apprentices aged 16 – 24. They were employed by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, trained by The College Merthyr Tydfil and placed with a host firm within manufacturing and engineering for the duration of the two to three-year apprenticeships. It continues with its aim of tackling youth unemployment and providing aspirational opportunities for young people across the County Borough.

Work over this period included;

- Support for some apprentices with maintaining positive mental health & well-being during an unprecedented time over periods of lockdown.
- The completion of Level 3 STEM engineering apprenticeship for an apprentice who is profoundly deaf, who has secured employment with a rail engineering company.
- Furlough support for apprentices - 95% of young people with the ASPIRE programme were furloughed at one point. Throughout the pandemic the project managed to retain all our apprentices on to the programme. One young person lost their placement due to the pandemic but continued their learning remotely and they have secured full time work which has enabled them to continue on their framework.
- Supporting female participants into STEM pathways – three female engineering apprentices on the programme, all working on STEM related frameworks to suit their host employer's needs.

## **Bridges into Work 2**

Bridges into Work 2 supports people 25 and over who are unemployed or economically inactive. During 2020-2021, the project enrolled 36 participants of whom 18 identified as having work limiting health conditions. Support also continued and maintained for pre-enrolled participants including those who had declared themselves to be disabled or have health conditions affecting their ability to work.

Project staff kept in touch with all participants remotely during this time either by telephone or through Microsoft Teams. Support was not exclusively centred on employment skills; the team supported in areas such as bereavement and emotional well-being signposting for the most socially isolated. Arrangements were also in place for food bank deliveries in partnership with Merthyr & Cynon Foodbank staff, as well as providing support for people in applying for the Discretionary Assistance Fund through Welsh Government.

Project work was also upheld through remote delivery and in partnership with the Supported Housing Team, whom supplied laptops to supported housing premises. As a result sessions were maintained for the Tenant Ready intervention, in order to equip participants with the tools to live independently and maintain a tenancy. This was met with difficulties due to lack of digital skills however mentors and tutors were on hand to support in these areas.

## **Armed Forces Covenant**

Merthyr Tydfil has a proud record of valuing its armed services, both serving and retired. Being part of The Armed Forces Covenant is our commitment to supporting our armed forces personnel and their families in a number of areas such as education, well-being, healthcare, employment, housing and financial assistance.

The Veteran Advice Officer (VAO) actively attends veteran groups within the Cwm Taf area. Also good relationships continue to grow with key organisations such as SSAFA (the Armed Forces Charity), The Royal British Legion and Change Step who offer support for veterans, their families and carers in Wales to access vital support services and to tackle stress and mental health related issues.

## **Supporting Service Children in Education**

MTCBC continues to support the local Armed Forces community. An area of this commitment is the work undertaken by the Regional School Liaison Officer (RSLO) for service children, Annabel Harries, who works in collaboration with the 160th (Welsh) Brigade and SSCE Cymru (Supporting Service Children in Education in Wales).

A recent data collection activity led by the RSLO and the local authority was used to inform the total money distributed to MTCBC. This data collection activity identified that there are 36 service children (under the Welsh Government definition) in Merthyr Tydfil, in a total of 18 schools. As a result of this data, the local authority has been awarded a total of £4,750. The Council will use the funding to provide ELSA training (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) for key staff in a number of schools, to understand how to better support service children. This includes staff time and resources to implement the ELSA training with service children by offering 1:1 and group support. Funding will also be used to release members of staff in each school to engage with SSCE Cymru support and the RSLO.

In November 2020 the Council launched its Virtual Armed Forces Covenant training packages to raise awareness of the Covenant. The training is available at no cost to

organisations and businesses in Merthyr and can be tailored to meet needs and requirements.

### Veterans Connected project

In partnership with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, £18,900 has been awarded by the Armed Forces Covenant Positive Pathways Programme. The funds are being used to purchase electronic tablets, which will be available to veterans for hire via our new 'Veterans Connected' project. The new project will help veterans to stay in touch with family, and social connections through digital technology, with an aim to help improve well-being by reducing social isolation. Working in partnership with our neighbouring Council authorities, this project will be delivered across four local authorities in South East Wales.

### Armed Forces Day

On Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020, the Armed Forces flags were raised outside the Civic Centre. They were flown for the rest of the week until Armed Forces Day itself, which was Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2020, to show appreciation for the contribution made by all those who serve or have served in Her Majesty's Armed Forces.

### Disability Sport

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a lot of sports clubs and events were unable to run face to face. However some online events took place where possible.

Disability Sport Wales officers across the Central South region teamed up in the summer to run an online inclusive summer holiday programme that ran for four weeks. This consisted of pre-recorded videos and live zoom sessions. A variety of sports and physical activities were included such as football, basketball, martial arts, workouts, family fitness, garden Olympics and much more. These were run by providers from across the region. A Disability Sport Wales Central South Facebook page was set up to host the programme. Off the back of this, a Disability Sport Wales club support forum was launched for those sports clubs who have disabled members that need support to relaunch post the pandemic.

The Active Merthyr Team also ran their own mainstream 'Healthy at Home' programme during the first lockdown. This included free daily content to support Merthyr residents to remain active at home and in their local area. The programme featured providers in Merthyr Tydfil who were running online classes, or local walking trails and challenges for participants to take part in themselves.

During February 2021, Active Merthyr delivered a 30 miles in 30 days family challenge. Over 300 families signed up and were supported to be active across the month, receiving resources to support them at no cost.

We have run a series of courses both for club personnel but also young people on employability programmes between January and March 2021. These courses including Sports Leaders, First Aid and Child Protection were run to support those who assist at clubs (or will be) to get the necessary qualifications needed. These were run at no cost to support clubs hit financially by the pandemic and included clubs from some of the most deprived areas of the Borough.

We have also supported over £360k of grant funding for local organisations to survive through lockdown and plan for the future.

## Welsh Language

Even though this year has brought Covid-19 and the issues surrounding it, MTCBC has still managed to achieve a lot with regards to the Welsh Language. Below is some of the key work that took place. The full details of all achievements made in 2020-2021 can be found in the Council's Welsh Language Annual Monitoring Report for 2020-2021, which was approved by Cabinet on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

### Welsh Language Standards

All public bodies are required to comply with a set of Welsh Language Standards which ensures the Welsh language has equal legal status with English and must not be treated any less favourably. The Council has developed a Welsh Language Programme structured around compliance with the Welsh Language Standards, translation and promotion of the Welsh language. It is made up of many elements such as training, correspondence, social media, telephone & reception, translation plus others.

Unfortunately due to Covid-19, it has not been possible to implement some of the projects planned. A work placement was arranged with University of South Wales for a Welsh Language Support Officer, but due to restrictions this could not take place. The Council was also unable to undertake the mystery shopper exercise.

### Urdd Eisteddfod T

Due to the pandemic, it was not possible to hold the annual Urdd National Eisteddfod in May 2020. A new online Eisteddfod T was held instead where all entries for all competitions were submitted by video. Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Santes Tudful in Merthyr Tydfil took part and one of their pupils came first in an individual creative dance competition.

In 2021 the Urdd Eisteddfod T will once again take place online – three schools have entered – Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Santes Tudful, PenyDre High School and Coed y Dderwen Primary School.

### Diwrnod Shwmae Su'mae

To build on the success on the Diwrnod Shwmae Su'mae event organised in 2019, an event was organised again in partnership with members of the Welsh Education Forum. However due to the pandemic the event took place online. The day promoted the use of the Welsh language from children and young people, the community, the workforce and the family. Cabinet members and the Mayor also participated in the event. The actress Donna Edwards, who attended Vaynor and Penderyn High School and is herself a Welsh learner, provided information on the experiences she gained learning Welsh and what opportunities opened up for her. The viewings of performances on social media ranged from 254 to 2,100. The event also had television coverage.

### #SHWMAERONMENT Event

In March 2021 a #SHWMAERONMENT event was organised to promote the use of the Welsh Language across the County Borough within families, children and young people, the community and the workforce. It was once again held virtually online due to the ongoing pandemic.

The event started on St David's Day and ran over three weeks with a few videos being

posted each day on the Council's Facebook event page. The Council's Welsh Language Strategy Officer was also interviewed for television to promote the event. On the last day, all the performances were repeated. The number of views reached 3,400 and the event was seen by the public as far afield as America and Australia.

Activities included a question and answer session with Geinor Styles, a former pupil at Ysgol Santes Tudful, now Director of Theatre Na-Nog (a national theatre group for education). Lord Dafydd Wigley also provided an item on his time and experiences in Merthyr Tydfil and how he fought for Welsh Medium Education. Only Boys Aloud participated in the event singing Calon Lan, and included members from Only Merthyr Aloud. All secondary schools, two early years settings and 12 primary schools participated in the event by providing a video promoting the Welsh language.

As part of the event, a marketing competition was launched to all schools in the County Borough to create a banner to promote the Welsh Language Strategy. The entries were judged by the leader of the Council and the Council's Welsh Language Champion. The winning entries came from Pen y Dre High School, Abercanaid Community Primary School and St Mary's RC Primary School.

### Dysgu Cymraeg Morgannwg / Learn Welsh Glamorgan

The Council continues to work in partnership with Dysgu Cymraeg Morgannwg (Learn Welsh Glamorgan) to provide workplace training opportunities for staff and Councillors. This includes an ongoing promotional campaign to encourage staff and Councillors to undertake Welsh language training opportunities via drop-in sessions, through the intranet, by email, and taster sessions.

Nine members of staff have successfully achieved the WJEC Entry Certificate in Welsh Second Language: The Use of Welsh.

All courses and learning this year have been held online through Microsoft Teams. Informal learning has also taken place with 'Sadwrn Siarad', where learners can meet other learners on the same level and practice and expand their Welsh.

The Council currently has 10 members of staff learning Welsh in the workplace, ranging from entry level to intermediate level 1 and 2. Level 1 Welsh e-learning courses are currently being promoted to staff. This is part of our Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan (RT&I Plan) whereby we develop a learning culture across the Council.

Working in partnership with Dysgu Cymraeg Morgannwg we also continue to provide ongoing social opportunities for learners to listen and practice their Welsh. Previously, learners of the Council have assisted Dysgu Cymraeg Morgannwg with the marketing of courses and offer support to promote the Welsh language throughout the County Borough.

As part of implementing the Five Year Welsh Language Strategy and the Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP), four Welsh learners of the Council contributed to the implementation projects by undertaking activities stating the reasons they decided to learn Welsh and the benefits they have seen from it.

### Accessibility

Everyone should be able to access and enjoy the Internet. Accessibility is the practice of making a website and its content usable by everyone – however they encounter it and whatever their disability.

The accessibility regulations came into force for public sector bodies on 23 September 2018 (Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018). The regulations say websites or mobile apps must be more accessible by making it 'perceivable, operable, understandable and robust'. The accessibility regulations build on our existing obligations to people who have a disability under the Equality Act 2010.

MTCBC has published its accessibility statement on the Council website. It outlines what we are doing to improve accessibility and how people can contact us if they wish to report accessibility problems.

We are aware that some parts of the website are not fully accessible. However, we are committed to making it more accessible, in accordance with the regulations, and are currently working with departments to make improvements. In our accessibility statement, we have set ourselves the aim to resolve identified issues by 31 March 2022.

Our website, Merthyr.gov.uk, has tests carried out by a centralized web governance platform called Silktide, to analyse and score the website for accessibility. Tests are run on every page of the website using auditing tools and we are also manually testing our pages. As improvements are made, our score for compliance will increase.

There has been a significant increase in our scoring on the Silktide Index after undertaking some work on the website. Work is continuing and the accessibility statement is updated monthly with the new scoring.

An Intranet page was set up with information on this, including links to relevant videos and information about how to make documents accessible. Work is continuing on this to ensure staff are aware of these regulations and training is undertaken as required.

An accessibility working group with key staff will be set up shortly, to identify progress, issues, share resources and for next steps in terms of accessibility of our documents.



## EMPLOYEE AWARENESS

Information on the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty is available on the Council's Intranet and Internet for staff to view.

Within the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024, the Council has identified an Equality Objective which is to '*create an inclusive and diverse workforce which reflects the communities in Merthyr Tydfil*'.

Within this objective, there are many actions with the main one being '*support and facilitate Equalities training and learning opportunities so that Equalities is recognised and incorporated into roles*'.

### **Training and continued professional development**

Training and continued professional development is a key element of the Council's Performance Management Framework for staff member's performance appraisals and 1:1s. This enables employee training needs for Equalities to be identified and addressed.

Unfortunately due to the pandemic, no face to face training sessions were held in 2020-2021. However training on gender and sexual diversity is being planned for next year.

Also an e-learning module on diversity and inclusion will hopefully be developed and available next year. The modules will be compulsory for all Council staff to complete. Modules already in place include Hate Crime and Bullying Awareness.

Welsh language training continues to be offered to staff. The Council works in partnership with Dysgu Cymraeg Morgannwg (Learn Welsh Glamorgan) to provide workplace training opportunities for staff and Councillors.

### **Equalities Calendar**

An equalities calendar has been produced by the MTCBC Equalities Officer for staff and is available on the staff Intranet. The purpose of the calendar is to bring together a list of national awareness days and events that recognise and celebrate diversity, equality and inclusion. It is not an exhaustive list, but at a glance staff can see some important dates that are listed each month.

The calendar is a useful tool and a practical resource to help promote awareness of diversity, equality and inclusion throughout the Council. This calendar is regularly reviewed and updated, and a new calendar is produced and circulated to staff every January.

### **COVID-19**

Due to the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic, MTCBC staff moved from working in the office to working from home, where possible, throughout the reporting year. This move occurred unannounced and quickly. Staff were requiring to adapt swiftly to the new way of working whilst continuing to provide services to the people of Merthyr Tydfil. 1037 laptops were

issued from March 2020 onwards for those staff who were not already equipped for home working.

There was also a requirement for the Council to meet virtually to continue business politically. The challenge was to put a solution in place that enabled all 33 Councillors, as well as Officers, to participate in a virtual meeting, with audio and video, and that allowed meetings to be recorded and subsequently uploaded to the Council website.

Microsoft Teams was deemed the corporate solution for video conferencing for the organisation, as it was already being used in other areas before lockdown. The 33 Councillors were provided with laptops for the virtual Council meetings to run successfully. Once the solution had been tested, training was provided to members – guidance was produced but more effectively, Democratic Services were contacting Councillors to check that they knew how to join meetings, use the different functions, and to test their connections from home.

### Physical and Mental Health of staff

Once it was realised that home working was likely to be remaining in place for the foreseeable future, staff were able to purchase office equipment such as desks and chairs for their homes to ensure their new working conditions were fit for purpose. Each member of staff was also asked to fill in a risk assessment of their home working area and to highlight any additional requirements or support needed.

Changes were also made within the offices for employees where working from home was not feasible. Hand sanitiser units were mounted on walls in kitchen areas and corridors. Plus all staff were told to adhere to the social distancing rules and to wear masks at any time when they were away from their desk.

The council was conscious of the additional stress the pandemic was causing, along with the changes from the lockdowns and the move to homeworking.

In summer 2020, two surveys were sent out to staff; one to find out how they were finding working from home and the other on safe ways of working. This information was used when a Recovery Group was formed to support staff and to aid plans on becoming an agile workforce. An agile working policy was also written and this provided staff with guidance on how to work from home and how to manage well-being.

Throughout the year, staff were reminded of the importance of managing their mental health and well-being. Especially when the nation was in lockdown and Covid-19 rates were high, the Human Resources department set out trying to provide staff with as much information and resources as possible to support them. Support included:

- An extensive FAQ's documents providing answers to common questions. This was emailed to staff and was regularly updated in response to Welsh Government guidelines. Questions such as concerns about the risk of contracting Covid-19 at work, self- isolation and the pay received, or with regards to being on the shielding list etc.
- Information regarding bereavement with information on bereavement support agencies.
- Counselling support provided from First Care Counselling Service, who were available 24/7.
- Help with coping in lockdown, such as creating a routine, managing alcohol intake, being active and taking regular breaks from your workstation.

- Lots of support from Occupational Health, which was emailed out to staff and was also made available on the Intranet.
- Courses were offered to managers on how to manage and support a remote team. Guidance was also sent to them regarding managing staff who are shielding, isolating etc.

### Staff Shielding

Between March 2020 and July 2020, 127 staff were classed as medically at risk (identified on the Public Health Wales Shielding list). Of these, 45 continued to work from home, 79 couldn't work from home and three we have no data for.

Of the 127 identified as shielding or at risk, only 65 stayed off until 16<sup>th</sup> August 2020 when Welsh Government advised shielding could end. Some returned back to work when risk assessments were carried out and/or they didn't get a shielding letter.

Pregnant women over 28 weeks were also regarded as at increased risk and were recommended to work from home where possible, especially those with underlying health conditions. Between March 2020 and July 2020, 35 staff were pregnant, four worked from home, 29 didn't work from home and two we have no data for.

Between March 2020 and July 2020, seven staff members had family who were at risk. Two worked from home and five could not work from home.

## PROCUREMENT

The Council considers it essential that all organisations wishing to provide goods or services on its behalf are able to demonstrate that all reasonable and practicable steps are taken to allow equal access and equal treatment in employment, service delivery and training for all.

The Council uses the Single Procurement Document (SPD) blended with appropriate supplier qualification questions and has added its own specific equalities related questions to it. The Council's standard Invitation to Tender (ITT) templates includes a specific equalities statement with the inclusion of contract clauses relating to the Equality Act 2010 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. Equalities and Welsh Language related clauses to its standard terms and conditions for contracts are added when required.

The Council underpins the principles of the Welsh Procurement Policy Statement 2021 (WPPS) and its ten main themes through a fit for purpose procurement strategy that provides strategic direction and coordination to comply with corporate priorities and the WPPS. The WPPS includes themes such as Economic, Social and Environmental Impacts, Community Benefits and Open, Accessible Competition.

The Equalities and Welsh language elements of the Procurement Process in relation to Tendering and Request for Quote Documentation have been reviewed in line with the Equality Act 2010, (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

These documents support the Council in ensuring that all third party suppliers demonstrate compliance with these requirements, where relevant to the nature and type of goods and services being provided on its behalf.

The Council is a signatory of the Ethical Employment in Supply Chains Code of Practice. Modern Slavery, Blacklisting and Employment Practices have been incorporated into the pre-qualification/selection stage questionnaires for all applicable tender activity.

## WORKFORCE DATA

Employed staff at the Council as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021

Number of staff in post = 2404, of which:

Permanent	Fixed Term
1882	522

Full Term	Part Time
1380	1024

### Age

16-34	35-54	55-64	65+
588	1305	453	58

### Disability

Long-standing Illness	Deaf/Hard of Hearing	Mental Health Difficulties	Mobility Impairment	Learning Impairment	Visual Impairment
40	11	7	6	2	4

Other	No Disability	Prefer not to answer/not known
17	2103	214

### Gender

Female	Male
1801	603

*\*We are currently working on our internal HR systems to enable us to capture other genders.*

### Sexual Orientation

Heterosexual	Gay Man	Gay Woman	Bisexual	Other	Prefer not to answer/not known
2140	17	16	4	3	224

### Religion

No Religion	Christianity	Buddhism	Islamic	Judaism	Hinduism
1125	656	5	4	1	0

Other	Prefer not to answer/not known
149	464

### Ethnicity

White British	White/Other	Asian	Black Caribbean	Black African	Mixed Race	Prefer not to answer/not known
2116	45	8	1	1	1	232

### First Language

English	Welsh	Polish	German	Portuguese	French
1769	39	8	3	2	2

Thai	Hungarian	Romanian	Spanish	Filipino	Prefer not to answer/not known
2	1	1	1	1	575

### People Profile – Salary

Salary	All Staff			
	Male		Female	
	Full Time	Part Time	Full Time	Part Time
£0 - £4,999	0	87	0	240
£5,000 - £9,999	1	74	0	147
£10,000 - £14,999	15	160	3	225
£15,000 - £19,999	49	72	159	204
£20,000 - £24,999	155	22	140	72
£25,000 - £29,999	94	6	136	10
£30,000 - £39,999	84	8	122	37
£40,000 - £49,999	91	0	242	1
£50,000 - £59,999	9	0	31	0
£60,000 - £69,999	12	0	17	0
£70,000+	11	0	12	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>521</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>862</b>	<b>936</b>

*\*The total figure is higher than the number of staff employed as it includes staff with multiple posts.*

### Job Applications

Total number of applications = 1891 as of March 2021

In terms of the number of staff who applied for a job internally at the Council, we received **194** internal applications of which **112** were Female and **82** were Male.

In terms of external applicants the Council received **1,661** external applications of which **1075** were Female and **586** were Male.

In terms of Agency Applications the council received **36** applications, of which **26** were male and **10** were female.

**Number of employees involved in grievance**

Protected Characteristics	Number of employees involved in grievance procedure	
	As the complainant	A person against whom a complaint was made
<b>Age</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
16-34	0	0
35-54	1	0
55-64	0	0
65+	0	0
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	0	0
Female	1	0
<b>Disability</b>		
Disabled	0	0
Non-Disabled	1	0
Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	0	0
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>		
Heterosexual	1	0
Lesbian/Gay	0	0
Bi-Sexual	0	0
Other	0	0
Prefer not to Answer/ Not Known	0	0
<b>Ethnic Group</b>		
English/Welsh	1	0
White Other	0	0
Asian	0	0
Black African	0	0
Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	0	0
<b>Religion or Belief</b>		
No Religion	0	0
Christianity (all Denominations)	0	0
Islamic	0	0
Buddhism	0	0
Other	0	0
Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	1	0

<b>Protected Characteristics</b>	<b>Number of employees subject to disciplinary procedures</b>	<b>Number of employees who have left the Authority</b>	<b>Number of Staff taking Maternity Leave</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>107</b>
16-34	3	30	57
35-54	5	53	50
55-64	4	30	0
65+	2	7	0
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	6	36	0
Female	7	84	107
<b>Disability</b>			
Disabled	1	9	4
Non-Disabled	11	88	89
Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	2	23	14
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>			
Heterosexual	10	96	87
Lesbian/Gay	0	3	0
Bi-Sexual	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0
Prefer not to Answer/ Not Known	4	21	20
<b>Ethnic Group</b>			
English/Welsh	11	94	87
White Other	0	5	1
Asian	0	0	2
Black African	0	0	0
Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	3	21	17
<b>Religion or Belief</b>			
No Religion	5	45	48
Christianity (all Denominations)	3	40	28
Islamic	0	0	1
Buddhism	0	0	1
Other	0	7	0
Prefer not to Answer/Not Known	6	28	29

### **Gender/Equal Pay**

The Council undertakes regular gender pay gap reporting. All jobs are evaluated using the Greater London Provincial Council scheme of Job Evaluation (with the exception of Heads of



Service who are processed via the HAY Scheme). No personal information regarding the post holder is taken into account at this stage. As a result, the grading system is free of any unconscious bias. The grades and additional payment mechanisms in operation at the Council are provided on a gender neutral basis. Therefore, there are no obvious discrepancies between genders during the reporting.

There is no inequality in pay. All jobs are scored fairly and consistently in accordance with the Greater London Provincial Council scheme. Our policies and procedures are continually monitored and reviewed to ensure that there are no hidden or perceived barriers. Historically, the Council together with Trade Unions undertook a lot of work with the implementation of single status and the new pay spine.

## CONTACT DETAILS

We welcome comments on the report and if you want to know more about the work the Council is doing please use the contact details below:

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