

Introduction and Policy Context

This annual monitoring report covers progress during the year ending March 2023. It reports progress on the Council's Strategic Equality Plan which was approved by Council on the 5th of March 2020. You can access the latest Strategic Equality Plan on the Council's website at: <https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/equality-and-diversity/>

Links to strategies

This is not a standalone plan and has close links to a number of other key council, partnership and national strategies, plans and policies. Some of these are specifically focussed on equality and others have included equality as one of the key themes. Examples being:

- Community and Corporate Plan 2022-28
- Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011
- Cymraeg 2050 (1 million Welsh speakers by 2050)
- Strategaeth Mwy na geiriau/More than words strategy
- Monmouthshire Local Development Plan 2011-21
- Strategy for Older People Wales
- Well Being of Future Generations Act 1st April 2016
- Social Care and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

The Equality Act 2010 not only requires the Council to comply with its general and specific duties highlighted below, but also provides an opportunity for it to demonstrate its commitment to the principles of equality which have been a feature of its functions prior to the implementation of the Act.

Monmouthshire's strategic equality objectives 2020-2024

The strategic objectives that have been agreed in the new Strategic Equality Plan are:

- Give children the best possible start in life overcoming barriers to attainment and opportunity
- Overcome inequalities in access to economic prosperity
- Create cohesive communities
- Provide services that are accessible to our public and support our workforce.
- Create a diverse and inclusive workforce
- Reduce the gender pay gap

This report provides an update on progress against these objectives. It also contains links to other documents like the gender pay report.

Legislative Context

The General Duty of the Equality Act 2010

In exercising its functions the Council must have due regard to:

1. eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act;
2. advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not;
3. foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;

The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

The Specific Duties in Wales

The broad purpose of the specific duties is to help public bodies, such as this Council, in their performance of the general duty, and to aid transparency. In Wales the specific duties are set by the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011.

The following are the specific duties:

- Setting equality objectives and publishing strategic equality plans
- Engagement
- Assessment of impact
- Equality information
- Employment information, pay differences and staff training
- Procurement
- Reporting and publishing

Objective 1: Give children the best possible start in life overcoming barriers to attainment and opportunity.

Protected Characteristics

Age	x	Religion or belief	
Disability	x	Sex	
Gender reassignment		Sexual orientation	
Marriage or civil partnership		Welsh Language	
Pregnancy or maternity		Poverty	x
Race			

Actions

Outcome	Action	Responsibility	Progress
Children, young people and families are supported to improve their well-being	Develop an integrated early intervention and prevention pathway to support children and families at the earliest opportunity and reduce the need for statutory intervention to keep people safe in particular those with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).	Head of Children's Services	<p>We have set up a multi-agency panel to receive and discuss children where concerns have arisen about their wellbeing or potential family vulnerabilities. The panel members include services provided by the council (such as social care, education and youth services); health services (including CAMHS) and a range of third sector and voluntary organisations (such as Action for Children). The panel approach has resulted in a coordinated response to referrals which helps to ensure that the family receive the right help, first time from the service that is best placed to provide it.</p> <p>We have developed the Building Stronger Families Team to work with families in a voluntary capacity around family goals and</p>

			<p>outcomes. This has resulted in children and families receiving preventative support in situations where initial concerns have been identified, helping to divert the need for statutory intervention.</p> <p>We have also commenced a Welsh Government funded pilot - Early Years Integrated Transformation Programme. The pilot is a county wide programme for children aged 0 to 7 including prenatal support. This partnership pilot aims to devise a new early years system that removes the geographical and age barriers currently in place for Flying Start. It also embraces the Marmot approach of proportionate universalism for families with young children ensuring that support is provided by the right person, at the right time by using a “what matters” approach.</p>
Children attain their full potential	Map the current provision to support pupils eligible for Free School Meal (eFSM) through the Education Achievement Service (EAS) and Monmouthshire; identify any gaps and work with the EAS and wider partners to develop a cohesive strategy to raise the attainment of FSM pupils and close the gap between FSM and non FSM pupils.	Head of Achievement and Attainment.	<p>Since before the Estyn inspection in 2020 there has been a relentless focus on the standard of provision for these learners who experience disadvantage. Unfortunately, the pandemic constrained the authority’s ability to report the outcomes of learners compared to the past.</p> <p>However, this remains a key focus in individual evaluative conversations with schools and featured in our thematic work with the EAS during the autumn term 2022. Many recent Estyn reports indicate that learners eligible for free school meals are making good progress in their learning.</p>
Children, young people and families are supported to improve their well-being	Develop an effective 0 - 25 Partnership for Children and Young People;	Strategic Partnership Manager	<p>Work is underway to review the current Children & Young Peoples Strategic Partnership, in light of the new Gwent Well-Being plan and priorities and ensure the board has solid representation from key partners.</p> <p>The partnership is in the process of developing a framework, aligned to the Welsh Government Children & Young Peoples Plan (Mar 2022), with the aim of overseeing and quality assuring delivery of services for children, young people and families across the county.</p>

			The framework will seek to support the partnership to identify gaps, maximise the use of funding & resources, and adjust practice where required
Children, young people and families are supported to improve their well-being (narrowing the gap outcome)	Develop the Community Focussed School Scheme	Tackling Poverty and Inequality Lead	<p>A Community Focussed Schools Coordinator is in post. Current projects in development include:</p> <p>Working with schools and the 'Grub Club' to develop cookery skills to help during the cost-of-living crisis and as a lifelong skill;</p> <p>Fun Family Fitness program to support families learning about moving and how to be more active together;</p> <p>Intergenerational enjoyment of food and eating program, to encourage older people and younger people to spend time together while enjoying food;</p> <p>Supporting schools with writing funding applications to improve their community focus as a school;</p> <p>Continuing to build relationships/links with local churches, community groups, businesses, third sector groups and individuals to work together in making schools more community focused;</p> <p>Supporting schools with achieving a Heart in the Community Award by discussing together a plan of action to achieve steps along the way;</p> <p>Signposting schools to what organisations or sessions are available outside of the school to support families during the cost-of-living crisis and with mental health support.</p>
Children & young people have sufficient opportunity to participate in play and physical activity	Carry out an annual Play sufficiency assessment.	Community Infrastructure Officer	The latest annual Play sufficiency assessment was carried out in June 2022 and is available at on the Council's website .
Children & young people have sufficient opportunity to	Deliver the playmaker leadership programme to year 5 and 6 pupils to	Youth Support and Active Travel Manager	We have delivered a continual roll out of the Sports Leaders UK playmaker programme to all year 5 pupils on an annual basis for the last 6 year period. This has resulted in circa 6,000 young

participate in play and physical activity	support confidence, motivation, well-being and promote active citizenship		people being given the opportunity to attend the workshop and support health and wellbeing provision across primary education before transitioning to secondary education and our associated leadership academy pathway to post 16 employment.
Children & young people have sufficient opportunity to participate in play and physical activity	Reduce the inequalities in physical activity rates between males and females with the Girls Can and Ladies Stronger Together programmes	Youth Support and Active Travel Manager	We have delivered a targeted series of programmes focused on participation for underrepresented groups. This has seen an increase in participation, membership update and direct pathways to support physical activity.
Children and young people are supported to improve their well-being Children with disabilities are able to access sporting activities	Put an action plan in place to achieve the Disability Sports Gold Award	Disability Sports Officer.	Disability Sport Wales has moved to a regional delivery model from 23/24 – based on this we are currently seeing clarity as to whether the insport accreditation process will now continue as a specific accreditation with DSW. Our commitment to fully inclusive provision remains and we have seen significant progress in fully inclusive schemes, such as the Action For Children Playschemes, to support this ongoing priority.
Young people who are threatened with homelessness have improved access to accommodation and support	Establish a positive pathway to identify potential homelessness at an early stage. Review services through Housing Support Grant	Housing and Communities Manager Flexible Funding Manager	A new homeless strategy for the authority was approved in 2022. It has established a number of actions to identify those at risk of homelessness earlier and provide timely interventions to prevent homelessness occurring. 50% of applicants are prevented from becoming homeless. An improvement to 68% has been targeted within the Community and Corporate plan

Objective 2: Overcome inequalities in access to economic prosperity

Protected Characteristics

Age	x	Religion or belief	
Disability	x	Sex	x
Gender reassignment		Sexual orientation	
Marriage or civil partnership		Welsh Language	
Pregnancy or maternity	x	Poverty	x
Race			

Actions

Outcome	Action	Responsibility	Progress
More people have access to high speed broadband	Increase the availability and take up of broadband across the county to address digital exclusion.	Head of Enterprise and Community Animation	<p>The ability to access broadband is an imperative for many citizens, particularly in terms reducing travel costs and carbon impact or to access online services to address the cost-of-living crisis.</p> <p>This latest Open Market Review data reveals a much-improved situation in Monmouthshire, with further improvements to be made over the next three years.</p> <p>From 2010, UK Government policy focused on the roll-out of ‘superfast’ broadband – usually defined as broadband with download speeds of 30 Megabits per second</p> <p>In 2019 2,494 or 5.1% of all premises in Monmouthshire (our ‘digital deprivation rate’) did not have access to broadband at over 30 Mbps. By 2021 this has improved to 1,238 or 2.5% of households. This is around half of the Wales average which stood at 5.1% in 2021.</p> <p>Several broadband providers, including BT, Sky and Virgin Media, offer cheaper longterm tariffs²⁰ for those receiving benefits such as Universal Credit and Pension Credit.</p>

			A full update on this was provided to Place Scrutiny Committee on 12 th January 2023.
People have the opportunity to raise their household income	Work as part of the Cardiff Capital Region to attract high skill, high wage jobs	Chief Officer, Communities and Place	The Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership has reviewed regional skills provision, worked with employers to understand their needs and advised Welsh Government on future prioritisation – with the goal of stimulating innovative approaches to maximising the impact of future skills activity and funding. Gross weekly pay for Monmouthshire residents was £714.80 in 2022 compared to £645.20 in 2020, an increase of 10.7%. However, the rise was more pronounced for male workers indicating more progress is needed to redress this balance. The increase for Wales as a whole was 10.2%.
People have the opportunity to raise their household income	Deliver the communities for work programme to reduce the number of people in, or at risk of, poverty	Youth Enterprise Manager	The scheme continues to operate and enables participants to gain a number of qualifications, develop new skills and provide meaningful work placements, whilst offering mentoring that suits individual need to develop confidence, further learning and employability skills. Local authority staff support an average of 100 people into work each year.
Household are able to maximise their incomes and minimise their outgoings	Continue to develop a tackling poverty plan for the county aligned to the aspirations of the Social Justice Strategy	Head of Enterprise and Community Animation	On-going programme of work
A reduction in the number of people not in education, training or employment	Provide learning, training and employability opportunities for 11 to 24 year olds	Youth Enterprise Manager	2% of school leavers are not in education, training or employment. National Data shows that people with a disability are around four times more likely to be in this group than those without a disability.
More people with disabilities and care leavers in employment	Provide access to the labour market for people with disabilities and care leavers	Apprentice Graduate and Intern Co-ordinator.	We have introduced a guaranteed interview scheme for Monmouthshire care leavers, as long as they meet the basic criteria of the person specification.

<p>Overcoming the barriers to accessing transport in rural areas</p>	<p>Work with technology companies to develop digital solutions for rural transport in Monmouthshire using funding from the Cabinet Office GovTech Catalyst Programme.</p>	<p>Head of Policy Performance and Scrutiny</p>	<p>Following investment from the Cabinet Office a private sector technology company was awarded a contract to conduct research and development to develop a digital solution. This included an integrated transport planner, a booking system for demand responsive community transport and a ride-share scheme.</p> <p>The work was disrupted by the pandemic and, in a separate decision the UK Government discontinued the programme. However the research identified useful lessons which can be applied to future projects.</p>
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Objective 3: Create cohesive communities

Protected Characteristics

Age	x	Religion or belief	x
Disability	x	Sex	x
Gender reassignment	x	Sexual orientation	x
Marriage or civil partnership	x	Welsh Language	x
Pregnancy or maternity	x	Poverty	x
Race	x		

Actions

Outcome	Action	Responsibility	Progress
Better data is available about hate-based bullying	Improve recording of incidents of hate-based bullying and piloting appropriate interventions.	Healthy Schools and Bullying Inclusion Group	We have reconvened the 'Challenging Bullying Group' which has a range of school based and local authority professionals. This cross-agency working group has resulted in the development of an updated action plan and the instigation of new methods of recording bullying incidents using SIMS and PowerBI software. We are now rolling out training and support to all schools.
Increased awareness of the effect of hate-based bullying amongst young children in school	Hold awareness sessions in the Chepstow cluster initially. Then arrange for the sessions across the county.	As above with Connected Communities Manager / Community Cohesion Officer	
Increased awareness of the consequences of hate and	Hold an annual Holocaust Memorial Commemorative event in Community Hubs	Community Hub Officers	Holocaust Memorial Day has continued to be commemorated annually in Monmouthshire with presentations and guest speakers. It was held online during the pandemic. The most recent event, hosted by Friends of Caldicot Library, was held on Thursday

discrimination in society			26th of January, ahead of the annual commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day on Friday 27th of January.
Increased awareness amongst children of the dangers of bullying in all of its forms	Promote Anti-Bullying Week on an annual basis	Communication and Engagement Team. Children and Young People Directorate	We have delivered/ offered a greater focus on positive, relationship based inclusive practices and challenge of any non-inclusive or discriminatory practices. As a result, many schools are developing values-based school policies and approaches.
A reduction in the effects of loneliness and isolation	To deliver the outcomes under the Connected Monmouthshire Plan.	Communities and Partnership Development Leads	An on-going programme of work is being delivered through Community Well Being Links Officers.

Objective 4: To provide services that are accessible to our public and support our workforce.

Protected Characteristics

Age	x	Religion or belief	x
Disability	x	Sex	x
Gender reassignment	x	Sexual orientation	x
Marriage or civil partnership	x	Welsh Language	x
Pregnancy or maternity	x	Poverty	x
Race	x		

Actions

Outcome	Action	Responsibility	Progress
Ensure that we consider our diverse audience when we communicate as a council.	Continually adhere to the National Principles of Public Engagement	Communications and Engagement Team.	The Council has developed a draft public participation strategy in line with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. This includes adhering to and embedding the national principles.
A fully accessible website providing information about council services	Refresh the council's website to ensure it meets the latest web content accessibility guidelines	Digital Marketing Officer	Significant progress has been made improving the accessibility of the council's website. This means that it can be navigated using speech recognition software and the content can be accessed using a screen reader. There are still some problems with the site and these are published at https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/accessibility/

More services are available digitally thereby improving accessibility	Continue to make more services available digitally through the council's app and the Chatbot	Digital Programme Office Manager,	<p>More services have been made available via the My Monmouthshire app and usage has remained high, albeit users have expressed some frustrations with the design of forms. A review of customer service is taking place to identify steps that can be taken to improve experience. The Council's chatbot has around 1600 unique users each month but the range of questions that can be answered by the Artificial Intelligence so there remains a reliance on agent 'takeovers'.</p> <p>The authority continues to promote and resource access to services through community hubs and its telephone contact centre</p>
New and improved face-to-face access to council services	Open a new Community Hub in Abergavenny with significantly improved access	Head of Commercial and Landlord Services	The new Community Hub opened in the refurbished Abergavenny Town Hall in the autumn of 2022 offering improved access to an integrated service offer in the heart of Abergavenny.
Residents of Monmouthshire have access to independent advice	<p>Continue to fund Monmouthshire Citizens Advice Bureau</p> <p>Work closely with the Disability Advice Project to access advice from the Big Lottery funded project</p>	Head of Policy Performance and Scrutiny. Equality and Welsh Language Officer.	The authority continues to provide grant funding to Citizens Advice Monmouthshire. Their latest impact report shows that the service increased incomes by £473,924 in the third quarter of 2022-23. The project assisted 759 people, 60% were female and 40% male. 6% of those assisted had a disability
Improved services for dealing with mental health in Monmouthshire	<p>Continue to work with MIND on delivering the rural mental health project.</p> <p>Improve the support for workforce mental health</p>	<p>Strategic Partnerships Manager</p> <p>Human Resources Manager</p>	<p>Mind Monmouthshire was successful in receiving winning a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund for an innovative Rural Workers Project. The project supports those in the farming community and allied industries in a wide range of issues.</p> <p>An increased range of support is available for staff including counselling, the 'Go-To' group of staff who offer peer-to-peer support and a self-directed resources such as https://www.melo.cymru/</p>
Support for women suffering from post-natal depression	Deliver the Flying Start – 1000 days project.	Flying Start Manager	We continue to fund 0.2 whole time equivalent Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy staff through our Children and Communities Grant with peri-natal infant and maternal mental health being a priority. This funding is being increased via the Early Years Integration and Transformation Programme (EYITP) budget

			<p>on a regional basis ensuring equity of support across the whole local authority, not just within Flying Start areas. Flying Start and the EYITP are also supporting established community groups across the county to ensure sustainability and evidence-based advice when required. This includes breastfeeding/bottle feeding and baby massage support. We are also utilising funding provided by MCC's Direct Food Grant to maintain a supply of infant formula in line with UNICEF's Baby Friendly Guidance for Local Authorities. This crisis supply will ensure that babies receive nutrition during times of financial crisis for families unable to benefit from Healthy Start.</p> <p>Through the EYITP, we are now co-delivering a new Early Years Core Programme which includes support for mothers in the prenatal and perinatal period. Midwives and Health Visitors can refer in for support, but mothers are also able to request support themselves. There is no geographical restriction on this support as it is within the EYITP.</p>
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Objective 5: Create a diverse and inclusive workforce

Protected Characteristics

Age	x	Religion or belief	x
Disability	x	Sex	x
Gender reassignment	x	Sexual orientation	x
Marriage or civil partnership	x	Welsh Language	x
Pregnancy or maternity	x	Poverty	x
Race	x		

Actions

Outcome	Action	Responsibility	Progress
Those working in key sectors such as home care are less likely to experience in-work poverty	Continue to pay the living wage to all council employees	Chief Officer, Resources / Chief Officer Social Care, Health and Safeguarding	Monmouthshire County Council introduced the real Living Wage in April 2014 and continues to ensure that its lowest paid employees still earn at least this amount
More people with disabilities are applying to work for the county council	Deliver the action plan to attain Disability Confident Employer status	Equality and Welsh Language Officer	Disability Confident Employer status was attained in 2022 and runs through to 2025. Officers are presently developing an action plan to achieve level 2 status
People are able to access more services fully using	Proactively target new job opportunities at Welsh speakers	Equality and Welsh Language Officer.	99.8% of posts advertised were at least Welsh language desirable in 2022-23. Key front line posts, and those which are Welsh language essential are advertised in Welsh language publications

the Welsh language			and we have seen an increased number of applications from Welsh speakers where vacancies are targeted in this way.
A more diverse workforce	Introduce more graduate and intern and cadetship opportunities to increase workforce diversity	Apprentice Graduate and Intern Co-ordinator.	We introduced the Apprentice Graduate and Intern Strategy (AGI) to support and increase the number of opportunities across the council. Work continues on this as an integral part of strategic workforce planning. At present there are 14 AGI's across the council with several more opportunities currently being worked up.

Objective 6: Reduce the gender pay gap in Monmouthshire County Council

Why This Matters/Evidence

- Gender stereo-typing in employment is still prevalent and leads to a gender pay gap.
- There is inequality between female and male wage levelsⁱ
- Scarcity of public transport and the high cost of running a car can be a barrier to females maximising their earning potential.

Protected Characteristics

Age		Religion or belief	
Disability		Sex	x
Gender reassignment		Sexual orientation	
Marriage or civil partnership		Welsh Language	
Pregnancy or maternity	x	Poverty	x
Race			

Actions

Outcome	Action	Responsibility	Progress
Contribution towards breaking the cycle of Gender Stereo-typing that exists in society and has a negative impact on gender pay equality.	<p>Publish an annual Gender Pay Report</p> <p>Look at alternative ways of recruiting staff to break down the barriers of gender stereotyping.</p>	<p>Human Resources Manager</p> <p>Equality and Welsh Language Officer.</p> <p>Communication, Marketing and Engagement Manager / Human Resources Manager.</p>	<p>The gender pay report is published annually and reported to Council, based on a snapshot on 31st March each year. Mean earnings for males were £14.60 compared to £13.65 for females, a gap of 95 pence.</p> <p>The pay gap is strongly affected by the make-up of the Council's workforce and its distribution. The majority of the Council's employees are in the lower grades. This is particularly evident across social care, cleaning and catering service areas which have a large female workforce who in general terms work more part time hours, as opposed to roles dominated by males in areas such as Highways, Waste and Grounds as an example, who tend to work full time hours. Therefore, the Gender Pay Gap is as much a societal gap as a pure pay gap.</p> <p>There is now a gender balances amongst elected councillors which acts as a positive signal to potential recruits.</p>
Understand Gender pay differences in our organisation	Gather and analyse gender data	Human Resources Manager / Organisational Development Manager	The publication of the annual gender pay report provides a better understanding of pay differences. The full report is available at https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/pay-policy-and-pay-multipliers/
Equal pay for work of equal value	Revise the People Strategy ensuring gender pay gap data is used to inform the strategy.	Organisational Development Manager	The People Strategy is currently being revised following the adoption of the new Community and Corporate Plan by Council in April 2023. The gender pay report will be a key part of the evidence base.
Reduced gender pay difference in the County	Measures added to the Corporate Plan	Human Resources Manager / Organisational	A new Community and Corporate Plan was approved by Council in April 2023. It contains measures covering the gender pay gap and a commitment to disaggregate more data to identify differences in the experiences of, and services provided to groups of people who possesses different protected characteristics.

		Development Manager	
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ⁱ Earnings by place of work – Male 563.6, Female 562. ONS annual survey of hours and earnings – October 2019

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/placeofworkbylocalauthorityasetable7>