

DRAFT – STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN 2024 to 2028

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

1. Foreword

Welcome to Rhondda Cynon Taf Council's Strategic Equality Plan. This plan contains important information about the work the Council is doing to promote Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

EDI is an essential element of the Council's work. We recognise and value the benefits of a diverse workforce that works together to provide responsive and flexible services that take account of the different needs of people within our communities.

We believe we have a duty to tackle discrimination and disadvantage so that people feel safe from harassment, and everyone has access to high quality services.

The Council will use its leadership role to promote EDI and embed this within the delivery of our services. In developing this plan, we have engaged with our residents, our workforce, our partners and other stakeholders. Their opinions and experiences have helped us to shape the equality objectives it contains.

We have developed this plan following a period of tumultuous and challenging times. People within our communities were severely affected by Storm Dennis, the Covid-19 pandemic and aftermath of the pandemic, and we have seen an exacerbation of inequalities for many. Evidence shows that disabled people in Wales persistently face barriers to achieving a similar standard of living to non-disabled people; that discrimination and inequalities for Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority people exists in many areas of society; that female workers are more likely to be in low paid occupations and part-time jobs than male workers. These are just some of the instances of inequalities faced by many people. We all have a part to play in reducing these inequalities and preventing people from harm, and we are optimistic that the equality objectives contained in this plan will make a positive difference to the lives of people in our county.

We believe our workforce has an important role in eliminating discrimination and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion. Therefore, this Strategic Equality Plan significantly focusses on developing and equipping our 10,000 plus employees with the awareness and behaviours needed to create an inclusive working environment. Doing this will enable us to provide equitable and inclusive services to the people of the county. This is a challenge for us, we are operating in unprecedented times in

respect of our budget situation and our resources are fewer than ever. Nonetheless, we are committed to EDI being central to our service delivery and for RCT to be a county where we can be proud to be inclusive to all.

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Councillor Maureen Webber

Deputy Leader

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Paul Mee

Chief Executive

2. About our Strategy

Purpose:

Our Strategic Equality Plan has been developed so that we can set out how we aim to meet our commitment to EDI and how we will meet legal obligations contained with the Equality Act 2010.

Within the Equality Act 2010, public bodies have an additional responsibility to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty. These are outlined below:

Public Sector Equality Duty

The General Duty

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

- Eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited under the Act.
- Advancing equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (protected characteristics are explained later in this report).
- Fostering good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

When thinking about how to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who don't, we also need to:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and are connected to that characteristic.
- Meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.
- Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

We also have to particularly think about how it will tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

The Specific Duties

The Equality Act provides a power to make regulations imposing duties on public bodies to support better performance of the general duty; these are known as the Specific Public Sector Equality Duties and are different in England, Scotland and Wales.

The Specific Duties underpin the General Duty and have been developed around four main principles:

- Use of evidence
- Consultation and Involvement
- Transparency
- Leadership.

The Welsh Government published regulations that introduced the Specific Duties for Wales in March 2011, these set out the actions the Council must take in order to comply and include the following areas:

- Setting Equality Objectives and publishing a Strategic Equality Plan
- Ensuring it engages with people who have an interest in how the Council's decisions affect them

- Collecting and publishing information relevant to compliance with the General Duty
- Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments and publishing the results if there is a substantial impact on the Councils identified
- Publish employment monitoring information annually
- Promote knowledge and understanding of the General Duty amongst its employees and use its performance assessment procedures to identify and address the training needs of its employees in relation to the General Duties
- Set a gender pay equality objective where a gender pay difference is identified
- Think about including conditions relevant to the General Duty in its procurement processes.

Who is protected under the Equality Act 2010?

It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of their protected characteristic.

Here are the terms used in the Equality Act 2010 to identify the types of things that affect how people are treated and can mean people may experience discrimination.

The law is designed to protect them, they are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation.

This strategy is designed to build on the progress we've already made and ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded into everything we do.

Our progress to date:

We believe we have a positive record in delivering on EDI. Our [Annual Equality Reports](#) detail the areas where progress has been made. Some highlights are outlined below:

- We know more about the people we serve and are more responsive to their needs

We do this by collecting and analysing equality monitoring data and community insight data. We have developed an equality monitoring toolkit so our service areas have a consistent approach to equality monitoring and are more confident in collecting and using equality data.

- We have strengthened the scrutiny of the Equality Impact Assessment process

This ensures that timely and relevant evidence and data is used when making decisions that affect our service delivery to people in RCT.

- We have embedded the Socio-economic Duty into our strategic decision making processes

This allows services areas to reflect and evidence how the key decisions we make can improve outcomes for residents who may be more adversely affected by socio-economic disadvantage.

- We proactively recognise, celebrate and promote diversity

We are proud of our commitment in supporting inclusion. We've held many awareness sessions on EDI topics. We are committed to:

Armed Forces Covenant	Autism Aware
Disability Confident	Race at Work Charter
Stonewall Diversity Champions	Zero Racism Wales

- Senior Diversity Champions and Staff Networks - Several members of the Senior Leadership Team are Diversity champions: Disability and

Carers, Gender, LGBTQIA+, Neurodiversity and Race. As champions, they promote diversity and inclusion throughout the organisation.

- Staff Networks – we have 5 staff networks who provide a voice and peer support for our employees.
- Youth Engagement – have hosted a number of youth events to promote EDI.
- Anti Racism – our Education and Inclusion team have launched and shared a number of anti-racism resources for Schools.
- Gender Pay – we delivered a Women in Leadership programme.
- Carers – we launched our Working Carers Guide.
- Women - we launched our Menopause Guide and have annually held International Women’s Day events

- Supported Employment Opportunities

Pathways to employment – we offer a number of schemes such as Care 2 Work, Step in the Right Direction, Gateway to Employment and the Green Light programme (year 11 pupils). These provide supported and inclusive working environments to young people who are facing challenges in life.

Vision Products – provides meaningful support, training and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in the local community.

Learning Disability Service – we have run a number of projects with people with a learning disability to provide skills for work.

- Diversity in Democracy

We have improved accessibility for our elected members in a number of ways. We have refurbished our Council Chamber making it fully accessible. We offer translation facilities, audio equipment within the Chamber, hybrid meeting opportunities and promote reasonable adjustments to elected members. We

also promote inclusion to prevent any perceived barriers for any future candidates.

- Improved accessibility of Council services and buildings

Many of our service areas have undertaken Autism Aware and Dementia Friendly training. Changing Places facilities have been installed in 3 visitor attractions across the county.

3. About Rhondda Cynon Taf

Rhondda Cynon Taf is the 3rd largest Council area in Wales and is made up of communities with different needs and aspirations. Covering a wide geographical area it has a population of just over 237,000 people. Like much of Wales, we have a population that is growing older and an increase of people aged over 65, with 1 in 5 people in this age group. The majority of the county's population identify as White Welsh and British, though the ethnic minority population has slightly grown in recent years. Over half of the population have no religion, of the rest of the population, Christianity is the predominant religion.

1. Information relating to this section is taken from ONS Census 2021.

ADD VISUAL – MAP OF RCT

The Council is governed by 75 elected members and operates a Cabinet system. It has a Senior Leadership Team headed by the Chief Executive and attended by Senior Directors, and employs over 10,000 employees in a variety of service areas and roles based within the following groups:

- Chief Executive
- Community & Children's Services
- Education & Inclusion Services
- Finance Digital & Frontline Services.

We are a major employer in the area and over 80% of our employees live within RCT. Following the pandemic, many of our employees now work in different ways, with many traditional office workers working in a hybrid way - a mixture of working from an office and working from their homes.

Our workforce is made up of 74% female and 26% male employees. Reflecting societal trends, many of our female employees work in lower paid, part-time roles. This has an impact on our gender pay gap. The predominant ethnicity of our workforce is White Welsh, though we have ethnic minority employees working across all service areas. Unfortunately, we do not have reliable data on the disability status of our employees, but we know many of our employees have a disability as we routinely make reasonable adjustments for many colleagues. We have LGBT employees working across all areas of the Council and we have an increasing number of employees who identify as non-binary. However, we have only recently started collecting equality data on gender identity so it will take some time to collect reliable data. Just over a quarter of our staff are in the age range of 45 to 54 years. This means we need to have workforce succession plans in place to ensure our service areas are sufficiently staffed in the future.

4. Our Commitment to Equality

The Senior Leadership Team have used this plan to outline the equality objectives that reinforce the Council's values and commitment to EDI. As such the Council will provide equality of opportunity for all, where all staff feel valued and can reach their full potential.

Our commitment:

- We recognise that to meet the needs of future generations of staff and communities we need to lead change and to be brave in what we can achieve.
- We will create a safe working environment where people are able to be who they really are, feel listened to, and are able to raise concerns, knowing we have their backs to do so.

- We will communicate the rationale for decisions so that people understand why actions have been taken and decisions made.
- We will take action to support the experience and career progression of under-represented groups and support everyone to understand the benefits of equity for all.
- We recognise that people's experiences across the organisation differ, and we will build a culture where everyone has a great experience.
- We will call out behaviour that harms or devalues people and there will be clear consequences for behaviour that falls below our organisation's standards.
- We commit to listening and seeking to understand the experiences of all. We will support and listen to staff to enable them to outline the culture they want to see.

5. How we developed our Equality Objectives

The Council's Vision is for a Rhondda Cynon Taf where:

People, communities, and business can grow and live in a healthy, 'green', safe, vibrant, and inclusive County Borough where they can achieve their full potential in all aspects of their lives and work, both now and in the future.

To help us achieve this vision we have a number of ambitious strategies and objectives in place with the aim of reducing inequalities and improving the outcomes of people within our county. These strategies are delivered by our service areas. Some of the strategies are in partnership with external agencies such as Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board and South Wales Police.

We have robust performance monitoring arrangements in place to ensure we are delivering on what we say we are going to do. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken on all of our strategies, ensuring we are mindful of how our decisions and the services we offer impact on the wide diversity of people in the

county. Many of these strategies can be found here ([hyperlink to Corporate plan when available](#))

As well as reflecting upon individual strategies, in developing this Strategic Equality Plan, we have aligned our equality objectives with our Corporate Plan 2024-2029 ([hyperlink when available](#)). The Corporate Plan outlines the Council's 4 wellbeing objectives:

1. **People and Communities** - Supporting and empowering RCT residents and communities to live safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives.
2. **Work and Business** - Helping to strengthen and grow RCT's economy.
3. **Nature and the Environment** - A green and clean RCT that improves and protects RCT's environment and nature.
4. **Culture and Heritage** - Recognising and celebrating RCT's past, present and future.

The Corporate Plan outlines the framework that will guide and shape what we do. It directs how and where we spend our budgets, manage, and mitigate strategic risks and inform how we train and develop our staff and Councillors to meet the current and future challenges. Challenges like:

- A growing and aging population, many of whom may experience poor health with complex care and support needs.
- The need to attract investment, high quality jobs and support the green economy whilst addressing the skills gap.
- The impact on lives and the risk to homes and businesses from extreme weather events.
- Tackling inequalities in health, education, work and improving life chances.
- Dealing with rising energy costs and energy security, higher prices because of the supply chain disruptions.

In developing the Corporate Plan we aligned with important regional documents such as the [Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership Board Population Needs](#)

[Assessment \(2022-2027\)](#) and [Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Service Board Wellbeing Plan \(2023-2028\)](#). The findings and ambitions of both of these documents have been reflected in wellbeing objectives contained in our Corporate Plan ([hyperlink when available](#)).

Whilst it is important to align our equality objectives to our Corporate Plan, there are key external factors that have been important in developing our equality objectives. We wish to reflect the Welsh Government's ambitions outlined in their [Anti-Racist Action Plan](#) and [LGBTQ+ Action Plan](#). We have considered information from the [Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023: 'Is Wales Fairer?'](#), and from an Audit Wales report relating to [Equality Impact Assessments](#), as well as a report from the Older People's Commissioner for Wales – [Access Denied: Older people's experience of digital exclusion in Wales](#). As members of organisations such as the [Business Disability Forum](#), [Business In the Community](#), [Stonewall](#) and [Tai Pawb](#) it is important to reflect upon relevant evidence and research they publish.

We are mindful of forthcoming recommendations from the Welsh Government's [Disability Rights Taskforce](#), in particular on embedding and understanding the Social Model of Disability. When the Disability Rights Action Plan is released in 2024, we will incorporate its recommendations into this plan's accompanying action plan.

To ensure our equality objectives are evidence based we have engaged with residents and our workforce through face-to-face meetings, focus groups, surveys, manager's briefings and on-line sessions as well as analysing community and workforce data. Having objectives that are evidenced based ensures that we not only reflect significant societal issues and trends but the regional issues that affect and matter to our residents and employees.

6. Our Equality Objectives

Objective 1

We will embed equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) into every aspect of our service delivery.

Why we are doing this:

- We recognise, and are concerned about, the growing inequalities that face some people living and working in Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- Residents have told us that we need to improve the accessibility of our towns and county.
- Whilst some of our services areas have a good knowledge of their customers, others have told us they'd like support to be more responsive to the diversity of their customers.
- Feedback has told us that we need to engage in genuine and meaningful communication with residents.
- We need to foster respect and trust between different communities and generations.
- Whilst we already have good governance processes in respect of Equality Impact Assessments, we need to do more to ensure we monitor the progress on the things we said would do. In particular, tasks in respect of any mitigating actions identified.

What we will do:

1. Embed EDI into all of our strategic decision-making processes.
2. Establish a monitoring process for Equality Impact Assessments.
3. Incorporate actions contained within Welsh Government Action plans (Anti-Racism, LGBTQ+ and the forthcoming Disability Rights Action Plan) into service areas delivery plans.
4. Ensure EDI is regularly monitored and discussed at Senior Leadership team and Service Area Senior Management team meetings.
5. Ensure all Service Area Delivery plans have robust EDI actions that recognise the diverse nature of our communities.
6. Annually challenge service areas on their EDI record.
7. Ensure our engagement with residents is continuous and inclusive and further developing relationships with diverse and underrepresented groups.
8. Ensure communication to residents is in accessible versions such as BSL, Easy Read and non-digital formats.

9. Collaborate with relevant organisations to better understand the needs of communities.
10. Raise awareness of the benefits of undertaking equality monitoring.

How we measure:

- Monitor Equality Impact Assessments.
- Review Equality Monitoring data.
- Review EDI achievements in service area self-assessment process.
- Review engagement and consultation responses.
- Review equality monitoring data that is collected.

What will success look like:

That RCT residents, regardless of their background, culture or identity, feel listened to and represented in our decision-making processes.

Objective 2

We will attract applicants that represent the diversity of our communities, enriching our organisational capability to meet our ambitions.

Why we are doing this:

1. We have identified gaps in our workforce equality monitoring data. This does not provide us with an accurate picture of our workforce.
2. Analysis of workforce monitoring data shows that some groups of staff are not progressing as well as others in their careers.
3. Whilst we have narrowed our gender pay gap there is still work to do, but we also need to understand our disability and ethnicity pay gaps.
4. Analysis of our recruitment data indicates there may be barriers to some groups of people joining the organisation, particularly ethnic minority people and people with disabilities.
5. We need to continue to undertake actions that reduce our gender pay gap.

What we will do:

- Improve the uptake of completion of workforce equality monitoring data.
- Publish our pay gaps on Disability, Ethnicity and Gender.
- Improve the number of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority candidates applying for jobs.
- Review our existing Recruitment and Selection policy and practices with the intention of removing any bias.
- Actively promote the positive benefits of working for the Council. Whilst policies benefit all employees, some will have a particular benefit to women e.g. flexible working, support for carers, shared parental leave, menopause guide.
- Offer initiatives such as mentoring programmes that benefit under-represented groups of staff.

How we will measure:

- Monitor workforce equality monitoring data.
- Monitor the number of applicants for jobs by protected characteristic.
- Monitor the progression of people in the workforce, with particular focus on ethnic minorities, disability and women.
- Conduct pulse surveys to hear experiences of applicants through the recruitment process.

What will success look like:

- We attract diverse applicants for our jobs, and we have diverse teams across the Council which genuinely celebrate the value of difference.

Objective 3

We will respect, value and listen to all our employees by embedding a culture of inclusion.

Why are we doing this:

- Engagement with our employees has told us that not all staff are having a positive experience at work. We have heard about experiences of discrimination and harassment in the workplace. This is particularly apparent for some ethnic minority colleagues and colleagues with disabilities. We have also heard about examples of sexism and ageism.
- Members of our staff networks told us their networks are important in providing peer support. In addition to this they want a greater role in driving inclusive culture change across the organisation.
- Evidence from [Welsh Government Anti Racist Wales action plan](#), [BITC - Race at Work Charter report](#) and [Race Alliance Wales – Deconstructing Unsafe Spaces](#) shows there is much organisations need to do to create race equality. Our ethnic minority staff told us that many white colleagues have little understanding of factors that may impact upon them. Issues such as microaggressions, lack of cultural awareness and racism.
- Some of our neurodiverse staff, as well as our managers, have told us that we need to do more to raise awareness about neurodiversity.
- The [BDF Great Big Workplace Adjustment Survey 2023](#) highlights that most participants felt the onus is on the disabled employee, rather than their employer, to initiate the process of reasonable adjustments. This is echoed by some of our employees. We've also heard about unnecessary delays for some employees in obtaining reasonable adjustments and the anxiety this can cause.
- Our managers have told us they need more awareness to have conversations around disability and reasonable adjustments, gender identity, neurodiversity and race.

What we will do:

1. We will take a Zero tolerance approach to bullying and harassment and improve our policy and mechanisms for reporting harassment.

2. We will roll out mandatory equality training for all staff on a range of EDI topics.
3. We will hold awareness raising sessions and reflective spaces for staff on a range of EDI topics.
4. We will support safe spaces for staff to share any concerns they may have in respect of EDI issues.
5. We will improve Cultural awareness across the organisation.
6. We will review our existing HR policies with the intention of removing bias.
7. We will review and improve the reasonable adjustment process to ensure it supports the staff that need it.
8. We will ensure our workforce development plan includes actions to reduce our gender pay gap.

How we will measure:

- Monitor reports of bullying and harassment.
- Monitor attendance of training.
- Monitor disciplinary action in relation to complaints of harassment and discrimination.
- Ask questions about inclusion in pulse and annual surveys.
- Develop mechanisms to monitor reasonable adjustments.

What will success look like:

- Our employees will feel valued, respected and safe in the workplace.

7. How we will measure performance

The actions within this plan (Appendix 1) will be delivered through Service Delivery plans. Service Delivery plans set out the key priorities for each service area to be delivered over 12-18 months.

In addition to assisting the service with monitoring progress against its priorities, the Delivery Plans also:

- support delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan priorities
- demonstrate how the service is aligning with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act
- provide a framework to ensure the priorities arising from the Council's Corporate Assessment are addressed
- facilitate co-ordination of cross cutting strategies
- inform Personal Development Reviews
- enable Internal Audit to conduct its review of Risk Management arrangements as part of agreed work programme.

All Service Delivery Plans are monitored by the Group Director and Cabinet Member as part of the Council's performance management arrangements.

Self-Assessment

In addition to Service Delivery Plans we have a well-established and effective self-assessment process in place. The self-assessment process focuses on impact and outcomes of the services being delivered, it leads to improvements in the experiences and the outcomes for our customers.

At the heart of self-assessment are three questions:

- How well are we doing?
- How do we know?
- How can we improve things further?

The process of self-assessment is continuous and an embedded part of the Council's working life.

Performance Report to Cabinet

Performance Reports are prepared every quarter. These reports enable Council officers and Councillors to monitor and scrutinise the progress of all Council priorities and services.

We regularly assess and review our progress in the delivery of actions set out in the Council's key plans and also the performance measures within the Council's Corporate Plan and Service Delivery Plans.

Publication of the Annual Equality Monitoring Report

The main purpose of an Annual Equality Monitoring Report is to fulfil the Council's legal duties and obligations to report on its progress in delivering the General and Specific Equality Duties which includes its progress in delivering the Equality Objectives.

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires that all public authorities covered under the specific duties in Wales should produce an Annual Equality Report by 31 March each year.

6. Get in touch with us

We welcome comments on all aspects of this report, both in what it contains and what it may not make clear enough about the work we intend to do.

If you have any comments or want to know more about the work the Council is doing please contact:

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