



Neath Port Talbot Council Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 **Annual Report 2023-2024**

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

www.npt.gov.uk/equalities



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

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Introduction

We are pleased to present Neath Port Talbot Council's Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report for 2023-24 detailing progress on our Strategic Equality Objectives.

Published in accordance with The Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011, this report provides an overview of our work in meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty. It also sets out progress for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 against the six equality objectives and associated actions set out in our Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024.

Progress against our equality objectives and associated actions is mainly reported on an annual basis, however, there are instances where academic years and other time periods are reported, all of which are indicated.

This is the fourth and final Annual Report on progress towards meeting the equality objectives in the council's Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024, the latest revised plan (for 2024-2028) having been published in September 2024.



Developments during 2023-2024

Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2023-2028

Our revised Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2023-2028 was adopted by Council on 12 July 2023. The strategy aims to ensure that by 2028 Welsh is much more audible and visible in local communities and used by more people in their daily lives. It sets out how we will work toward realising of the themes of increasing the number of Welsh speakers, increasing the use of Welsh and creating favourable conditions (infrastructure and context) in the county borough.

Public Participation strategy

The council's Public Participation Strategy was adopted in April 2023, and progress has since been made against a number of actions in the action plan during 2023-24.

General outreach activity has taken place utilising Electoral Commission democratic resources to engage with young people including better understanding of voting and voter registration for 16-17 years olds at Senedd and local elections.

A Children and Young People's Participation and Engagement Strategy is in place, with children and young people's and easy read versions available. Associated training has been developed and work has been undertaken with all teams within Education.



Integrated Impact Assessments

Integrated Impact Assessments (IIAs) continue to be carried out as part of policy/service development. As a public body we must consider ‘relevant evidence in order to understand the likely or actual effect of policies and practices on people with different protected characteristics’ (Assessing Impact and the Equality Duty: A Guide for Listed Public Authorities in Wales Equality and Human Rights Commission 2014).

Following an audit of Integrated Impact Assessments in 2021-2022, an action plan was developed to ensure best practice is embedded throughout the process. In November 2023, as part of the action plan, socio economic and biodiversity sections were added to the first stage assessment tool, a new section on evidence for the first stage tool was also developed.

During the year, the full Integrated Impact Assessment Guidance was also updated to help strengthen the initial identification and monitoring of any impact of decision-making.

Engagement

We undertook our ‘Let’s Keep Talking’ public engagement exercise during the summer of 2023 to ensure we had a good understanding of what matters to people now and to have clear insight about what has changed in people’s lives since we did the original ‘Let’s Talk’ exercise back in 2021-2022.

During the initial ‘Let’s Talk’ campaign it was clear that the main focus for our residents, community organisations and businesses was to keep friends, family and customers safe whilst continuing to ease restrictions and return to day to day living. Whilst these were still important to people, when asked ‘what matters to you for the future’ in the 2023 ‘Let’s Keep Talking’ campaign the responses included protecting our local economy, our environment and health and well-being. We have used the feedback we gathered through this latest exercise in developing the priorities set out in our Corporate Plan 2024-2027.

Council employees are an important and valued stakeholder group. Almost 70% live in the county borough, so have a valuable viewpoint from the perspective of both delivering and using council services.

Our first council-wide annual Employee Engagement Survey was launched on 13 March 2024. It provides a key mechanism for employee voice, enabling employees to communicate their views to the council and influence matters that affect them at work. The survey is a touchpoint in time and running it annually will help us pick out themes and trends over time and identify if things are changing – e.g. improving, staying the same or getting worse. The survey was made available in Welsh and English.

Equalities in Employment

The Equalities in employment data included is for the 12-month period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, or where more appropriate, a snapshot of the workforce on 31 March 2024.

Our gender pay gap report, a snapshot as at 31 March 2024, sets out the difference between the average pay of the men and women who work in the council in 2020.

The pay data has been taken as at 31 March 2024 with a council workforce of **6549** employees which represents **(29%)** males and **(71%)** females. (The pay data excludes casual employees and all school employees.)

Data relating to the gender pay gap for the 2023-2024 is not available and will be published in a future report.

As of March 2023, the mean pay gap was 3.67% and the median pay gap 3.28%. The mean gender pay gap has decreased from 4.26% in 2022.

Progress on Objectives

Education

To ensure children and young people are the best they can be

Priority 1.1 All Children and Young People will have improved levels of attainment

Action: We will work with schools to identify those children who require specific support at foundation phase and key stages

Progress 2023-2024:

The Flying Start programme continues to be delivered across deprived areas of NPT with almost 2,000 eligible children accessing at least one element of the programme each year. Children from outside Flying Start areas are able to access support via the Outreach element of the programme, including enhanced Health Visiting support, childcare or support for an additional learning need.

Children's early speech, language and communication is supported through the Flying Start programme with delivery of both direct work with children and interventions with parents to equip families with strategies they need to support their child's language development through everyday interactions. Training is also offered to childcare settings to make environmental changes and to ensure that early years staff are equipped with the strategies to support children's communication development in their pre-school environment.

Effective transition support is available for all children and their families. This includes support from Early Years teams for children, families, childcare settings and schools to ensure transition into childcare and education is effective. Transition for children with additional learning needs is managed effectively by the local authority, with a clear focus upon meeting the developmental needs of children.

Action: We will provide targeted support to families in need, including Armed Forces families, to reduce the potential for children to have an adverse childhood experience

Progress 2023-2024:

NPT Family (previously Family Information Service) supports families through engaging directly with parents, carers and local agencies to promote early help and support. Early intervention support for children, young people and families is provided through the multi-agency Early Intervention and Prevention (EIP) panel. In 2023-24, 1,746 referrals were received, requesting support for 2,213 children and young people.

The Families First Children and Families Parenting team provide a wide range of universal and targeted parenting support programmes and support families who have been through the EIP process. The team have supported almost 1200 individuals throughout 2023-24.

Two of our schools, Baglan Primary and Ysgol Cwm Brombil, were awarded gold and bronze status respectively in the Armed Forces Friendly Schools Cymru scheme in recognition of the support given to their service children by embedding good practice into the daily running of the school and creating a positive environment

Action: We will continue to work with schools and other relevant settings to support and provide access work experience, training and professional development opportunities for those who are at risk of becoming not in education employment or training (NEETs) post 16

Progress 2023-2024:

For the year 2022-2023 the percentage of year 11 leavers who were NEET was 2.41%, at the end of 2023-2024 this figure decreased to 1.3%.

Action: We will work with schools to identify those children who require enhanced non- academic support as a consequence of the impact of COVID-19 to help them to fulfil their potential

Progress 2023-2024:

Families First Early Intervention & Prevention Team provide support to vulnerable young people with the aim of preventing problems from escalating. In 2023-2024 85.8% of young people demonstrated an improvement in their emotional wellbeing, with 72.6% of young people reporting an improvement in their own resilience

Action: We will work with schools to ensure all pupils, particularly those from low-income families and those where Covid-19 has had particular impact, can access appropriate digital devices

Progress 2023-2024:

Adult learning have loaned digital devices to learners for hybrid learning, alongside 1:1 support with digital skills where required. Currently we have on loan: Laptops used in sessions – 20; Long term loan – 6; Use of exams – 5

Priority 1.2 All children of school age will have improved wellbeing and a greater sense of belonging

Action: We will continue to work with pupils, parents/carers and schools to reduce the number of instances of non-attendance and exclusions in all our schools

Progress 2023-2024:

We continue to support schools to increase levels of pupil attendance across primary and secondary age groups.

- Primary attendance rates for 2023-24 increase by 1.17% to 90.97%.
- Secondary attendance rates for 2023-24 increased by 1.63% to 87.61%.

37 pupils were permanently excluded from schools during 2023-24 compared to 47 the year previous.

Action: We will collect data from schools and support schools to address bullying and harassment in all its forms and work with them to address trends/issues

Progress 2023-2024:

We continue to support our schools with these areas of activities, efforts are ongoing to capture data to develop robust reporting mechanisms, patterns and trends going forward. Schools are provided with workshops and awareness raising sessions and events around managing and supporting bullying in schools.

Action: We will work with schools and other relevant settings to support pupils who are victims of bullying and work with perpetrators of bullying

Progress 2023-2024:

We continue to support our schools with these areas of activities, efforts are ongoing to capture data to develop robust reporting mechanisms going forward.

Young people who have been involved in bullying incidents, as perpetrators and victims, are provided with various levels of support by schools and Cynnydd Youth Engagement Workers who are embedded within secondary schools. Support may be in the form of welfare and wellbeing, advice and nurture or around restorative justice. Restorative approach training is offered to all schools, many schools who have taken up the training and use it to support potential bullying incidents. A growing number of schools have peer mentors and buddy systems in place to support other children and young people.

Action: We will continue to work with parents/carers of pre-school children to ensure that they are prepared for school.

Progress 2023-2024:

The Flying Start programme continues to be delivered across deprived areas of NPT with almost 2,000 eligible children accessing at least one element of the programme each year.

The Flying Start and Families First programmes enable the local authority to deliver a wide range of parenting support to help parents provide for their child's development and prepare them for learning.

The local authority continues to work with childcare providers to provide high quality part-time Flying Start funded childcare for two year olds. During 2023-24, delivery of Early Years expansion of funded childcare for two years olds commenced. The purpose of this initiative is to enable more two years old to access part-time, funded Flying Start childcare.

During 2023-24, 1129 children accessed Flying Start funded childcare, this includes 322 children eligible for childcare via the Flying Start expansion programme. During 2023-24, 1463 children aged three and four accessed funded, part-time childcare via the Childcare Offer

Action: We will work in partnership with schools and local organisations to ensure our children and young people 'are knowledgeable about their culture, community, society and the world now and in the past and respect the needs and rights of others, as a member of a diverse society'.

Progress 2023-2024:

All schools have received training and information around achieving the mandatory elements of the curriculum, many clusters have developed their own resources.

Action: We will work with schools and local organisations to ensure teaching of the new curriculum reflects the multi-ethnic nature of Wales

Progress 2023-2024:

Secondary schools continue to be supported in the delivery of a progressive curriculum and developing their own resources.

Health and Wellbeing

To promote wellbeing and good mental health and tackle mental health stigma and discrimination

Priority 2.1 Our Staff will be supported and appropriate services promoted

Action: As an employer we will raise awareness of mental health and support services

Progress 2023-2024:

In January 2024 we implemented an Employee Assistance Programme offering every employee in the council access to confidential counselling services as well as a range of other benefits which could include holistic health and well-being support, a rewards platform, etc. Currently 4.5% of the Council's employees are utilising the services of the Employee Assistance Programme, which is the average usage for a programme in the first year of its operation. It is anticipated that going forward this will increase as more employees become aware of it.

Action: As an employer we will update and implement policies to address mental health in the workplace

Progress 2023-2024:

In 2023-24 we reviewed and updated the following employment policies, aspects of which will support mental health in the workplace:

- The Hybrid Working Framework
- Flexible Working
- Carers' Policy
- Employers for Carers Platform
- TUC Disability Passport Financial Well-being Strategy
- Salary Finance Platform
- Employee Assistance Scheme
- The Menopause Pledge

Action: We will provide information to employees about mental health and signpost to support services

Progress 2023-2024:

Stress management E Learning modules have been made available via the eLearning platform. The first concentrates on managing an individual's stress and suggests some relaxation exercises. It also looks at a few lifestyle ideas to help reduce stress. The second video is based on Self-care, and it looks at ways in which staff can practice looking after themselves and being positive in their outlook and the way they treat themselves. A third video concentrating on making the best of Homeworking is currently in production and will be released shortly. For 2023-2024, we had 220 staff completing stress related training.

Action: We will continue to implement our Time to Change Wales Employer Pledge Action Plan

Progress 2023-2024:

In partnership with Time to Change Wales we continue to develop and implement evidence based actions that support mental health and well-being in the workplace. We have been proud to be in partnership with TTCW since 2019.

In 2023-24 we recruited and trained 33 Mental Health Champions across the workforce. Champions are people with an interest in or experience of mental health problems and they are at the heart of the TTCW campaign to challenge the stigma associated with mental health. They share their story with their colleagues, and help signpost to sources of help and advice. Two of our champions produced films of their story this year to help colleagues.

Action: We will provide training and resources for staff to help raise awareness of mental health issues and help reduce the stigma associated with mental health

Progress 2023-2024:

In addition to the actions above, we also provide Mental Health First Aid Training, as part of our core training offer.

Priority 2.2 Our Children and young people can access appropriate support

Action: We will redesign our systems relating to Emotional, Mental Health Wellbeing support to provide a simpler integrated access to services

Progress 2023-2024:

A regional Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health work stream has been established which has representation from education, health, local authority and voluntary services. The group meets monthly with the priority focus being the development of a single point of entry to be established across the region to ensure simpler access to services.

Priority 2.3 Our Communities that need support will be able to access appropriate services

Action: We will provide information to the public about mental health and signpost to support services from our website

Progress 2023-2024:

The NPT website contains a number of resources and signposting services available from various organisations, for individuals to access support around mental health. This section of the website received a total of 220 hits for April 1 2023 – March 31 2024.

Action: We will honour our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant, ensuring that no veteran, or family member of serving personnel or a veteran, is disadvantaged by their service, when accessing health and wellbeing support and services

Progress 2023-2024:

The fourth 'in-person' Mayor of NPT Armed Forces Festival took place in October and November 2023 (the 2020 and 2021 events having been virtual due to the pandemic). One of the aims of the event is to support the Armed Forces community and raise awareness of Covenant.

In addition, an information day as part of the event featured 14 information stands (increased from 6 in 2022), including organisations that provide support to the Armed Forces community.

Action: We will contribute to the Public Services Board's work to reduce suicide rates in the county borough

Progress 2023-2024:

The LA has developed, with partner agencies, a rapid response forum for responding to suspected suicide, significant attempted suicide and the sudden death of a person under 25. Males are over-represented in this

data 61 males to 18 females. Males between 28 years and 40 years account for the most at risk group, with the female at risk groups sits between 30 years and 42 years.

Whilst we want this number to reduce, there are no discernible patterns, trends or themes of note. Following a suspected suicide the rapid response forum now ensures the family, friends and communities are offered support by agencies across the region and to date there is no evidence that others connected across NPT have gone on to attempt or complete suicide.

The current rapid response process is being evaluated across the region and a report will be shared in the new year. Whilst there is no discernible patterns, trends or themes the data is limited and consideration is currently being given to what is captured, how the regional data may be enhanced by the live data tracker held by Public Health Wales and we are due to meet with an academic to look at how machine reading and AI might assist us to better understand this issue and ultimately reduce this number moving forward.

Action: We will work with Public Health Wales and Swansea Bay University Local Health Board to help address the impact of COVID-19 on health and social care staff

Progress 2023-2024:

IP&C continue to work closely with adult social care to audit care settings and minimise the risk of infection spread.

The Commissioning team are alerted whenever there is an outbreak of infection within a home and measures are put in place to minimise spread.

Action: We will work within the regional NHS Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) Service to engage all people, including those with protected characteristics in the health protection programme and we will also ensure that all people who need to access the TTP service can do so, ensuring access caters for all

Progress 2023-2024:

The NHS Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) ceases to exist since June 2022.

Personal Safety

To ensure people and communities are safe, respected and free from violence and abuse

Priority 3.1 People feel safe in their homes

Action: We will increase the reports of Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence in Neath Port Talbot, through awareness raising and challenging attitudes

Progress 2023-2024:

The VAWDASV Communications & Engagement Group continued to meet on a quarterly basis during 2023-24. The group are responsible for all communications and awareness raising regarding all forms of domestic abuse. During this reporting period; The regional Group membership was extended to include representatives from New Pathways, Department of Work & Pensions. The group supported the Annual White Ribbon campaign to end male violence against women; Promoted local and national campaigns including Clare's Law, Bright Sky, and Respect.

The monthly Community 'Safer' events held across Neath Port Talbot provided regular opportunities to promote VAWDASV awareness and signposting to local and national support services. Focus on ensuring VAWDASV is everyone's business and bringing difficult conversations into all arenas

The regional 'Heads Up' campaign was further extended across the hair and beauty industry in partnership with South Wales Police Operation Prunella and the NPT Be Safe Team. The campaign aims to upskill staff in identifying domestic abuse and providing confidence in handling sensitive conversations. Information packs distributed promoting Live Fear Free and Respect helplines as well as local service providers. The Safe Spaces campaign continues its rollout into Neath and Port Talbot Town Centres as well as all civic buildings and libraries.

Action: We will increase awareness in children and young people of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and that abusive behaviour is always wrong

Progress 2023-2024:

During this reporting period, 1501 Year 6 pupils from 52 primary schools received a Healthy Relationships workshop at the annual Crucial Crew event. Stori were able to deliver Healthy Relationships education to 790 pupils across NPT and included 50 teachers in the sessions, Camau Training has delivered Healthy Relationships education to 1425 pupils in secondary schools. Camau training has been approached by a number of schools requesting further lesson delivery in topics not currently covered including: consent within relationships, sexual harassment, family dynamics and misogyny. A survey was undertaken with Safeguarding leads to assess the requirement for expansion of content. Camau Training has delivered sessions to NPT college providing information on positive masculinity and consent

Calan DVS supported 29 children and young people through its refuge services, 92 children and young people through the Ar Trac Project, 14 children through the Drawing and Talking Project, 100% of these young people reported that they felt heard and listened to. Calan's Ar Trac Team held 5 consultations with children and young people across the Neath Port Talbot area. These consultations help informed the practices of the organisation and identify any gaps in services and develop models to address the gap.

Action: Provide all victims with equal access to appropriately resourced, high quality, needs led, strength based, gender responsive services across Neath Port Talbot

Progress 2023-2024:

During 2023-24 the Commissioning exercise continued which looks at suitability of current emergency accommodation provision for victims of domestic abuse. It is vitally important that we have provision that is fit for purpose and can meet the needs of any / all victims who may be in need. Current provision of floating support is diverse, with an array of victim programmes, child and young people support, and perpetrator programmes.

Priority 3.2 People feel safe in the community

Action: We will work with members of local equality groups, partners and our communities to encourage the reporting of hate incidents/crime and ensure people get support which is fit for purpose

Progress 2023-2024:

During 2023-24, the Community Safety Team, Regional Cohesion Team, BME Community Association and partners have continued to raise awareness of what constitutes a hate crime and how it should be reported, plus what support is available.

Events were scheduled during Hate Crime Awareness Week and positive community cohesion events were also held to commemorate Black History Month and Windrush. NPT Pride was also supported, and the development of LGBT Brunch Clubs, plus an employee support network.

Action: We will support the use of the BME Community Association Access Card (to help breakdown language barriers when accessing service)

Progress 2023-2024:

This action is no longer considered to be relevant, as a result has been removed.

Action: We will support the BME Community Association to build on the work already undertaken in the Community Profiling exercise as well as to extend its scope

Progress 2023-2024:

The Community Safety Team continues to dedicate 2 days per week of the Community Cohesion Officers time to support the BME Community Association with its everyday operations, event planning, and its AGM. This is now a well-formed partnership which really strengthens our approach to our work with the communities and support of our minority groups.

Action: We will develop an action plan in response to the feedback from the Community Cohesion Survey

Progress 2023-2024:

The BME Community Association are reviewing their ongoing work programme. All actions will be reviewed for relevance and inform the SEP 2024-2028.

Action: We will continue to work with the BME Community Association to further understand the lived experiences of members of our BAME communities, particularly in relation of their experiences of hate incidents/crimes

Progress 2023-2024:

A total of £24,500 in third sector funding was awarded to the BME Community association in 2023-2024.

During 2023-24, the Community Safety Team, Regional Cohesion Team, BME Community Association and partners have continued to raise awareness of what constitutes a hate crime and how it should be reported. With an array of community engagement events, and the continued support of sessions such as Chai and Chat we continue to explore individuals' experiences of being a victim of hate crime, to help further steer or campaigns and shape our services to better respond.

Employment

To ensure our workforce is more reflective of our community, our policies are fair and equitable and gender pay gaps are reduced

Priority 4.1 Our workforce reflects our diverse communities and is supported by our policies

Action: We will ensure a fair and transparent recruitment and selection process that encourages a wider talent pool and facilitates a more equal gender balance

Progress 2023-2024:

With the implementation of the iTrent recruitment module, the council is now able to offer recruiting managers the opportunity to adopt the use of anonymised application forms during the shortlisting stage of the appointment process. The applicant's name is removed from the application form, before it is provided to the recruiting manager for shortlisting, in order to reduce bias in decision making, and increase inclusivity in our recruitment practices.

Research carried out by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development suggests that women are more likely to progress through the recruitment process when their gender is obscured in the application process. The evidence is less clear cut in relation to ethnic minority applicants. The Council's Special Appointments Committee have committed to using anonymised application forms for Chief Officer appointments. Monitoring will determine the impact on the appointment process and inclusivity.

Action: We will promote, facilitate, analyse and monitor flexibility in the workplace at all levels, to enable women to progress and to ensure compatibility with a multi-generational workforce

Progress 2023-2024:

- We set out actions to support the progression of women in our workplaces via the Gender Equality Action Plan originally developed in partnership with Chwarae Teg via the Fair Play Employer Scheme.

Key activity in 2023-2024:

- Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council was awarded the 'Womenspire Fair Play Employer Award' recognising our achievements towards gender equality within the workplace
 - An event was held to mark International Women's Day (8th March) with guest speakers from Chwarae Teg, and attended by the Chief Executive and employees across the Council.
 - Flexible working policies and options have been re-publicised via communication channels to ensure all our employees (men and women) are aware of the opportunities available to them
- The Menopause Action Plan and Menopause Pledge are supporting and showing support to employees via communication channels and activities (see feedback above). This work won an Innovation Award at the Employee Recognition Awards 2023.
- The launch of the Ment2Be NPT mentoring scheme developed to support low paid women access advice and guidance to help them with career development and progression:
 - 10 mentors from across the council have received training from Chwarae Teg, to form our Ment2Be NPT Mentoring Network
 - 11 employees are currently being mentored by our mentoring network.
 - 5 employees are on a waiting list for mentoring; as soon as our mentors have capacity their mentoring sessions can commence

Action: We will collect and monitor data in more depth related to flexible working

Progress 2023-2024:

Presently, only successful requests for Flexible Working are returned to the HR Team. In order to ascertain whether requests are being refused, we are changing our process so that we receive all completed Flexible Working Request Forms and will monitor these to ensure compliance with our Flexible Working Policy.

Action: We will scrutinise the Shared Parental Leave uptake to monitor gender balance and encourage uptake across genders

Progress 2023-2024:

We report on the number of employees who take up Shared Parental Leave on an annual basis. For the year 2023-24, five employees took Shared Parental Leave.

Action: We will, in the spirit of the Armed Forces Covenant, include a guaranteed interview scheme for recently discharged members of the Armed Forces.

Progress 2023-2024:

The Guaranteed Interview Scheme for Veterans of the Armed Forces is in place. Data collection in relation to this will be established in 24 / 25 to enable monitoring to take place.

Action: We will consider how our policies and practices impact on our staff who are employed on casual and temporary contracts and part time contracts.

Progress 2023-2024:

We have the Charter for Casual, Temporary and Fixed Term employees which was approved by Personnel Committee in April 2019. This was developed to ensure that these employees were not treated less favourably.

Going forward, we will survey these employees and run focus groups for qualitative feedback.

Action: We will develop a BAME Equality and Diversity Action Plan, developing a set of evidenced based actions with the aim of improving equality and diversity amongst the Council's workforce

Progress 2023-2024:

As part of the Anti-Racism Action Plan, we aim to remove barriers to employment and promotion opportunities for BME Employees and have done so by trialling anonymised application forms and adding a clear Anti-Racism Statement to our Jobs website. We have added Employee Network and Anti-Racism Action Plan information into Corporate Induction sessions.

Action: We will work with staff to determine the appetite to form a BAME Employee Forum to help ensure voices are heard

Progress 2023-2024:

The Ethnic Employee Network was established with support from the UNISON Cymru National Black Member, who was seconded part-time to help us get the network up and running. The network received intensive support from a HR Manager to begin with and this is gradually reducing as the network gains confidence. The Network currently has 20 members and meets every 2-3 months. The network have established a chair from within and are now able to manage meetings and agenda self-sufficiently.

The network is consulted on major employee policy developments as a key stakeholder and help us to develop policy in a way that supports ethnic minority employees.

The Network supported a BME Recruitment Day at Port Talbot in February 2023 in partnership with the NPT BME Community Association. This was well attended and received positive reviews. Discussions are underway between HR and Network representatives to hold a similar event this year with the next taking place in Neath in late spring 2024.

Action: We will work to improve our Corporate Culture, to ensure each member of staff is valued and respected

Progress 2023-2024:

As part of the Anti-Racism Action Plan, we aim to remove barriers to employment and promotion opportunities for BME Employees and have done so by trialling anonymised application forms and adding a clear Anti-Racism Statement to our Jobs website. We have added Employee Network and Anti-Racism Action Plan information into Corporate Induction sessions.

The numbers of BME job applicants to the Council has increased steadily this year:-

- 2021-2022 = 286 applicants
- 2022-2023 = 447 applicants

Number of applicants shortlisted:

- 202-2022 = 38 (13%)
- 2022-2023 = 97 (21%)

Number of BME applicants appointed:

- 2021-2022 = 9 (3%)
- 2022-2023 = 23 (5%)

The Council has signed the Unison Anti-Racism Charter. In signing, the Council pledges that it will introduce the commitments outlined in the Anti-Racism Charter within 12 months. Doing so will demonstrate our commitment to addressing any racial disparities in recruitment, in promotions, in training opportunities, in employment relations procedures such as disciplinary and in pay. The charter aligns with our Future of Work Strategy ambition to become a proud Anti-Racist Council

Action: We will offer opportunities to young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) to help them gain experience and skills in order to enter the world of employment

Progress 2023-2024:

Apprentice numbers continue to increase with 185 Apprentices currently on programmes. 75 new Apprenticeship placements were created in 2023-2024 with 13 achieving a qualification.

A UKSPF funded programme will see the number of apprenticeships increase further in 2024-2025

Action: We will revisit staff training on equalities, particular re-visiting people's understanding of disability, including non-visible disabilities

Progress 2023-2024:

A draft comprehensive Equalities Training Programme was developed in 2023-2024. Implementation of this has been put on hold pending the implementation of a new Corporate Training Management Platform, Thingi.

Priority 4.2 Our Gender Pay Gaps are reduced

Action: We will implement the Fair Play Employer Scheme Gender Diversity Action Plan.

Progress 2023-2024:

The Gender Diversity action plan has been implemented and efforts are going through partnerships to remove barriers in the workplace for all employees.

Action: We will address the gender pay gap within the Council by implementing the Fair Play Employers Action Plan

Progress 2023-2024:

Whilst the gender pay gap has been reduced through our partnership with Chwarae Teg, the aim remains for this to be reduced further and closed.

Participation

To ensure services are accessible for all and people and communities are able to better influence decisions that affect them

Priority 5.1 Our services, digital and traditional, are accessible to all

Action: We will ensure that the many services available to the Armed Forces Community are accessible on line, but also by telephone through the Veteran Gateway.

Progress 2023-2024:

The Regional Armed Forces Liaison Officer continues to support the armed forces community helping ensure that services available specifically for members of that community are accessible to all be that online or through the Veteran Gateway.

Action: We will work with organisations that support the Armed Forces Community to help reduce isolation and loneliness, which is felt by many when they leave the services or by a member of the family when the serving family member is deployed on active service or training

Progress 2023-2024:

The Regional Armed Forces Liaison Officer works closely with organisations that support the Armed Forces Community in NPT, including Bulldogs Boxing & Community Activities and Reorg Veterans Hub.

In 2023-24, Bulldogs Boxing & Community Activities were awarded £10,000 under the council's Third Sector Grant Scheme. The organisation work alongside many Armed Forces Support Organisations to help those in the Armed Forces Community, including dedicated Armed Forces Support Mentors, free access to gym classes, social events, one-to-one support and signposting to support partners.

Action: We will work through the Community Safety Partnership and the Safeguarding Board to prevent Cybercrime and protect people against exploitation

Progress 2023-2024:

Cyber Crime continues to be a standing agenda item at our Community safety Tasking Group – we receive regular updates on any cyber scams or similar, to help us develop appropriate awareness raising, training, or campaigns. Issues of concern are escalated to our Community Safety Partnership Board if further work is required.

Work continued in schools via the Police Schoolbeat Programme to educate young people on online safety.

Action: We will continuously review and update our website to improve its accessibility

Progress 2023-2024:

New public sector accessibility regulations mean that all public sector websites must meet the 'AA standard'. Our website meets this AA standard. The AA standard is part of the internationally recognised Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (known as WCAG 2.1) which sets recommendations for improving web accessibility.

Our ongoing commitment to ensure that our website meets accessibility compliance against the 'AA' standard or above is being highlighted as best practice with our council ranked in the top 20 most accessible council websites across the UK.

Action: We will work to address the barriers people and organisations face to participate on-line

Progress 2023-2024:

Digital Exclusion – A successful bid for SPF funding has enabled a cross-departmental project to tackle digital exclusion of vulnerable groups. The NPT Digital Inclusion and Digital Enablement project seeks to improve the lives of individuals by helping them stay connected, manage daily activities and be more independent and engaged. The project develops and scales up existing work to reduce digital inequality for disadvantaged groups, increasing access to digital technologies which enhance daily living/ ageing well, and supporting digitally excluded citizens to access services they need.

A multifaceted approach includes:

- A network of Digital Inclusion/Enablement staff and volunteers providing targeted support for individuals, including those with additional learning or access needs.
- Enabling affordable/free access via an Equipment Loan Library and Databank Scheme.
- Delivery of interactive courses to support digital and life skills with a qualification to improve future prospects for targeted school year 11 students

Action: We will work to identify the opportunities across the County Borough for citizens to improve their digital skills and understanding

Progress 2023-2024:

Digital Inclusion: We travel to locations all across NPT, We currently hold 13 regular Digital Inclusion drop in sessions across the whole of NPT borough. With informal welcoming Digital Inclusion Officers offering face to face Digital Inclusion sessions. Helping to reduce the barrier of limitations in transport. We also offer support on Digital Devices/Kit, that can present as a barrier.

Exclusion is a barrier of paramount importance for us to address and overcome. It is the essence of our main objective. We work with all our local libraries and community groups and centres, keeping it central in discussion when developing and delivering our services.

We work with 'The Good Things Foundation' and refer/ signpost to 'Data Banks' in our local area (Neath YMCA and NPT Digital Enablement and Assistive Technology based at Old Cimla Hospital) Overcome data poverty, whereby free SIM's can be obtained for people on low income/disabled/pension credits/unemployed, can gain free calls/txt/40GB of data per month for 6 months absolutely free. We also signpost to 'Better Broadband' service, to allow for affordable internet access to all the above demographics, in their homes. Where information on financial assistance grant schemes can be given, and set up, as part of the 'Swansea Bay City Deal'

Action: We will work with local businesses and organisations to explore alternative arrangements in accessing retail services for those experiencing difficulties due to limited digital access etc.

Progress 2023-2024:

The Digital Inclusion Team continue to offer support for those with limited digital access. we take further practical action to ensure the availability of non-digital information and services in our community spaces, by giving talks, information sessions throughout all areas, shopping centres, church groups, coffee mornings Hubs and warm spaces. We link with wider council services such as our Safe and Well, Early Intervention & Prevention, Fraud department of Trading Standards. Local Police and our Local Area Coordinators. To make sure we have a wrap around support.

Action: We will continue to support the key principles as contained in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill: including programmes to support disabled candidates standing at elections, and the production of a public participation strategy

Progress 2023-2024:

Work has continued to create and maintain links and partnerships with external key stakeholders to assist with engagement with under-registered groups including young people, students, home movers and travellers aiming to link in with specific electoral event based activity where possible prior to the May 2024 Police and Crime Commissioner election as well as the July 2024 UK Parliamentary general elections. Activity will shift over the next 12 months to providing clear and accurate voter information messaging for the upcoming Senedd elections in May 2026 which will utilise a system of proportional representation for the first time alongside significantly enlarged constituency boundaries.

The council's Public Participation Strategy was adopted in April 2023, and progress has since been made against a number of actions in the action plan during 2023-24.

For example:

- General outreach activity has taken place utilising Electoral Commission democratic resources to engage with young people including better understanding of voting and voter registration for 16-17 years olds at Senedd and local elections.
- A Children and Young People's Participation and Engagement Strategy is in place, with children and young people's and an easy read versions available. Associated training has been developed and work has been undertaken with all teams within Education.

Priority 5.2 Our communities will enjoy increased social and community cohesion

Action: We will implement the action plan in support of the Digital Charter Award for which we have recently been recognised

Progress 2023-2024:

This action plan has been implemented by the Digital Inclusion Team who run ongoing community drop in sessions, openly accessible throughout the borough

We have worked to identify networks and forge good relationships with the staff/organisations we meet through Digital Inclusion and continue to provide accredited learning pathways, through Digital Inclusion and Adult Learning provisions. We also offer in house accredited staff training, for organisations wishing to upskill their digital/I.T skillset.

Action: We will provide information and a signposting service for those who wish to learn English and/or Welsh

Progress 2023-2024:

The Council's revised Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2023-2028 was adopted by Council on 12 July 2023. The strategy sets out how we will work toward realising of the themes of:

- Increasing the number of Welsh speakers
- Increasing the use of Welsh
- Creating favourable conditions – infrastructure and context

Our Children and Family Service has published a webpage signposting parents to useful links for learning Welsh, improving your language skills, raising your child bilingually or finding out about Welsh and bilingual services in Neath Port Talbot - <https://beta.npt.gov.uk/children-and-family-services/family-information-service/help-for-families/parenting/welsh-language/>

The Welsh language area of the council's website www.npt.gov.uk/welsh contains a page on learning and using Welsh.

Action: We will establish engagement mechanisms, for example a new Citizens' Panel, and use responses to ensure that the Council's policy making and service development is informed by what matters to people

Progress 2023-2024:

A recruitment drive to increase membership of the NPT Citizens' Panel began in October 2023. By the end of March 2024, membership was at 579.

Action: We will work with members of the Trans community to help raise awareness

Progress 2023-2024:

Appropriate mechanisms have not been in place to work with the Trans community to help raise awareness, this will be taken forward by the LGBTQ+ staff network and partner agencies in 2024-2025.

Action: We will develop/strengthen policies to respond to an aging population and support the formation of a new group to address this

Progress 2023-2024:

In May 2023, an Ageing Well Engagement officer was appointed into post.

In the year 2023-2024, the officer has engaged with approximately 200 older people and attends around fifteen groups per week

Action: We will improve physical access to the committee facilities in both Neath and Port Talbot Civic Centres

Progress 2023-2024:

Work has been undertaken in Port Talbot Civic Centre on the ground floor to create a range of accessible meeting rooms with digital connectivity. The chamber will be considered as part of a wider potential package of works in the next 18 months.

Action: We will work in partnership with relevant groups to address our shared history and explore ways to better express this within our communities

Progress 2023-2024:

2023-2024 saw the consultation and implementation of the Culture and Heritage Strategy.

January 2024 saw the commencement of Heritage, Culture, Tourism and Events Fund Case Study Investment to rejuvenate and enable the community of Pontrhydyfen to celebrate its heritage in 2025 and beyond.

Living standards

To work to reduce poverty and support independent living

Priority 6.1 People and communities will benefit from interventions to alleviate poverty

Action: We will develop an action plan to address the issues for those with low net disposable income.

Progress 2023-2024:

The anti-poverty team were established on 31st July 2023. As part of this work, The NPT PSB's Cost of Living & Poverty Prevention Partnership's Steering Group are in the process of developing an Action Plan, while also considering The Bevan Foundation's 'NPT Poverty Report 2020' solutions, which remain relevant in response to the cost of living crisis.

The plan is currently being refined, with Steering Group Partners identifying actions they can commit to for the medium to long-term, as well as how their organisations could each contribute to the overarching actions within each focus area.

The focus areas have been taken from The Bevan Foundation work that began prior to the pandemic, which the Partnership's Steering Group have committed to revisiting:

- Helping Families Make the Most of Their Money
- Supporting Families & Communities
- Fair Work & Growing Employment
- Better, More Affordable Transport

Within these focus areas, the plan includes actions such as:

- Targeted interventions framed around maximising household income and reducing living costs
- Communications campaigns – raising awareness of the help and support available
- Collaboration – building on and making effective use of partnership working
- Advocating and sharing insights

Action: We will embrace the new socio-economic duty

Progress 2023-2024:

We have embedded our socio-economic duties into the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) template, and run training sessions for officers to consider the importance of IIAs for decision-making.

In November 2023, the IIA first stage assessment tool was updated to include socio economic and biodiversity sections, as well as a separate section on evidence.

At the same time the monitoring section in the Integrated Impact Assessment guidance was also strengthened to ensure arrangements for monitoring the identified impacts are robust.

Action: We will ensure those families entitled to free school meals continue to receive support throughout the school holidays in line with Welsh Government guidelines.

Progress 2023-2024:

Food & Fun run by Youth Service strength to strength – more than doubling in one year from 7 schools in the summer of 2022 to a total of 15 schools in the summer of 2023.

Action: We will work with local organisations and local businesses to explore how to maintain access to appropriate cultural foods during periods of restricted movement/lockdown going forward.

Progress 2023-2024:

This is an ongoing action for the Prevention & Early Intervention Service.

Priority 6.2 People will benefit from programmes and support to live as independently as possible

Action: We will support the Regional Partnership Board to develop and continue to provide a sustainable range of services that meet demand, enabling individuals to remain at home maintaining their independence for as long as possible receiving appropriate support at times of need

Progress 2023-2024:

We continue to work with Regional Partners to look at opportunities for partnership working. We have worked with the Health Board to develop a number of supported living schemes and are currently working on a reablement offer. We are taking a regional approach to establishing true cost of care and implementing consistent uplifts.

Adult Services Principal Officers attend regional meetings and workshops applicable to their service area and are progressing with various workstreams that come out of the regional meetings.

Action: We will continue to help people to learn and interact with others so they can be part of their communities

Progress 2023-2024:

The Community Occupational Therapy Team and the Sensory Support Team continue to support people to live independently by providing aids and adaptations.

We will be implementing a residential reablement service in the new year which will support people who have become unwell to reach their full potential.

Action: We will help support people to live as independent a life as possible

Progress 2023-2024:

We are committed to fostering inclusive communities where everyone, including people with learning disabilities, has the opportunity to learn, interact, and thrive. To achieve this, we continue to support individuals in developing their skills and building meaningful connections within their communities. Our approach includes the implementation of a progression model of support, designed to help people maximise their potential.

This model provides tailored assistance at various stages of persons development, ensuring that each person receives the right level of support to achieve their goals. By empowering individuals through independent living skills and social engagement, we aim to create a more equitable and connected society.

Action: We will consider the continuation of the Safe and Well scheme to help support vulnerable members of our communities

Progress 2023-2024:

In 2022, a review of the Safe and Well scheme was conducted. The review led to the creation of a volunteer befriending service for chronically isolated individuals and a community programme for vulnerable adults. Currently, efforts are being made to review the volunteer pathway to streamline opportunities across departments.

Action: We will improve communications with our vulnerable groups through a wide range of formats to better inform and support them to live as full a life as possible during the current coronavirus outbreak

Progress 2023-2024:

This action is no longer applicable since the end of the pandemic.

Priority 6.3 Transport links are maintained or enhanced

Action: We will support community transport initiatives

Progress 2023-2024:

We continue to support Community transport initiatives. In 2023-2024, funding from third sector grants was provided to DANSA, a not-for-profit community transport service for those who are unable to access conventional public transport. Third Sector Grant awarded to DANSA Transport for 2023-2024, as a Third Sector strategic organisation, was £37,000

Action: We will lead the regional transport work with the Swansea Bay City Deal

Progress 2023-2024:

We work in partnership on the regional transport projects with the Corporate Joint Committee.