



Strategic Equality Plan 2024 – 28

Consultation



monmouthshire
sir fynwy

Background to the Consultation

Addressing inequality is one of our biggest priorities. Every four years we produce a Strategic Equality Plan setting out some of the evidence, why it matters to us and the actions we'll take to make a difference to peoples' lives. The plan will also enable us to demonstrate that we are meeting the statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010.

This consultation proposes 7 objectives for the period 2024-28. They have been based on our initial analysis of the evidence. There may be other issues that you think we should take into account. This consultation asks you to give your views on our proposed equality objectives and the actions we will take.

Please complete the survey online here <https://forms.office.com/e/AEfS8aSNbA>

If you prefer, you can print the survey and return it in the post to: Equality and Welsh Language; Monmouthshire County Council; County Hall: The Rhaydr; Usk; Monmouthshire; NP15 1GA.

You can also request a paper version of the survey by e-mailing equality@monmouthshire.gov.uk or calling 01633 644644.

Completed paper copies can be returned to your nearest community hub. Details of locations and opening hours can be found at: <https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/community-hubs-and-libraries/community-hubs-opening-hours/>

We carry out an evaluation of our progress against our objectives every year. This is considered by one of the council's scrutiny committees. The latest evaluation can be found online at <https://democracy.monmouthshire.gov.uk/>

The Legal Context

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 protects people from unlawful discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. It covers 9 protected characteristics: Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Marriage and civil partnership, Pregnancy and maternity, Race, Religion or belief, Sex and Sexual orientation.

It also requires is to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between disabled people and people who are not disabled, in particular, the need to take steps to take account of disabled persons' requirements.

It also created the Public Sector Equality Duty requiring public bodies to

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

To ensure transparency, and to assist in the performance of this duty, the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 require public authorities, named on, to publish:

- equality objectives, at least every four years
- information to demonstrate their compliance with the public sector equality duty.

The Socio-economic Duty

The Socio-economic Duty seeks to improve the strategic decision-making of public bodies to better support those who are socio-economically disadvantaged in terms of income and/or status. It puts tackling inequality at the heart of decision-making and builds on the good work public bodies are already doing.

The duty refers to aspects of life 'socio' (your life chances and where you live) and 'economic' (how much money you have for essential and non-essential items).

Inequality can compound negative socio-economic factors. Our Strategic Equality Plan will set out objectives and actions which will help to improve socio-economic outcomes and well as focusing on group with protected characteristics.

Evidence of Inequality

Monmouthshire is geographically large compared to many local authorities in Wales. It is semi-rural in nature, with just over half of the population living in urban areas. The county is often perceived as affluent. However, headline statistics can fail to shine a light on the diversity that exists within our borders.

There are many existing sources of evidence produced in recent years that have been used to inform the development of this plan:

- The Well-being Assessment produced by the Gwent Public Services Board as part of its responsibilities under the Well-being of Future Generations Act
- Building a Fairer Gwent: improving health equity and the social determinants of Health – produced by the Institute of Health Equity
- The Population Needs Assessment - produced under the Social Services and Well-being Act.
- Is Wales Fairer 2023 – a document prepared by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.
- The National Survey for Wales

We've also examined a number of national action plans and strategies which look to advance the equalities agenda including:

- The Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan¹
- LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales²
- Advancing Gender Equality in Wales Action Plan³
- Action on Disability action plan⁴

We understand that the issues that are highlighted in the above documents are symptoms of complex problems, often at a societal level. They cannot be solved by one organisation alone. Public, third and private sector must work together. Most importantly, we must work with and alongside communities to co-produce sustainable solutions.

We also recognise the importance of intersectionality. Many people possess more than one protected characteristic and systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination intersect.

When you read this document you'll come across evidence that relates to multiple groups but is only shown in one section. We've done this to keep it as concise as possible, but we do recognise the overlapping issues and have taken them into account when proposing actions.

Strategic Equality Objectives

Monmouthshire County Council is committed to tackling inequality and working hard to decarbonise our county. We will work with and alongside our communities to achieve this⁵.

It is vital that we value and making the most of the abilities and contributions of everyone in our communities, irrespective of age, gender, race, sexual orientation of any of the other characteristics that make us who we are.

These objectives and the actions outlined on the following pages are the things that we are committed to delivering over the next four years to ensure that everyone in our county is able to achieve their full potential.

- **Objective 1:** Give every child the best start in life.
- **Objective 2:** Support the creation of fair employment and good work for everyone.
- **Objective 3:** Work with partners and residents to build inclusive and cohesive communities.
- **Objective 4:** Expand our provision of community-based services that extend people's healthy life expectancy.
- **Objective 5:** Ensure our services are accessible to the public.
- **Objective 6:** Ensure we have a diverse workforce and a fully inclusive workplace.
- **Objective 7:** Reduce the gender pay gap.

Each of the sections below describes why the objective matters to us; lists some of the evidence that has informed the development of the plan and the actions that we propose to take. It also indicates which of the groups possessing protected characteristics will benefit directly from the activity. We have opted for objectives that will make a positive difference across multiple protected characteristics rather than having separate objectives for each group.

There are a series of consultation questions relating to each section.

- Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
- Do you agree with the objective we have set? If not please indicate how it could be improved
- Do you agree with the actions we've identified?
- If there are actions you do not agree with or want to suggest things that we haven't included please let us know here

If you don't want to answer all of these individually, that's fine. Just use the free text box at the end to share your thoughts. There are also some more general questions including ones related to the Welsh language.

1. Give every child the best start in life

Why This Matters

The experiences we have in our childhoods have a huge impact on how we grow and develop, our physical and mental health, and our thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Research shows that it is associated with performance at school, future work outcomes and leads to higher income, better lifelong health and longer life expectancy.

Evidence

- Research shows that the first thousand days from pregnancy to age two offer a crucial window of opportunity to affect the future outcomes for children.
- Low birth weight is a predictor of a number of negative outcomes including lower life expectancy and educational attainment. Monmouthshire has the smallest percentage of low birthweight babies in Wales, 4.9% compared to a Wales average of 6.1%.
- There are issues with limited availability of early years providers across Gwent. Since 2020 Monmouthshire has lost 305 childcare spaces, 9% of its total.
- 27% of children in Monmouthshire live in poverty. This is the same as the UK average but below the Wales average of 34%.
- In Wales there are a range of disparities between the attainment of different ethnic groups at the foundation phase of primary education.
- Children who identify as neither a boy nor a girl are more likely to be bullied than those who identify as either a boy or a girl.
- Referrals to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) in Monmouthshire grew by 89% between 2020-21 and 2021-22. This is higher than the 39% rise across Wales. Wales also has the highest rate of any of the UK nations.
- Secondary school attendance has declined since the pandemic, we have also seen a rise in the number of exclusions from school.
- Children who are eligible for free school meals have lower levels of attainment than those who are not eligible.

This objective is related to:

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

Race			
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Actions we will take to address this:

- Work with partners across the Gwent Public Services Board, including Public Health and the NHS to embed actions to reduce health inequalities in early years services.
- Continue the roll out of universal free school meals.
- Poverty proof our schools to reduce the cost of the school day, recognising that every pound matters to many families.
- Ensure that every Monmouthshire school identifies a senior leader responsible for tackling poverty and raising the achievement of vulnerable learners.
- Develop a new Additional Learning Needs Strategy and related toolkits and resources, focusing on positive behavioural support.
- Continue taking a preventative approach to reducing school absences through the Emotionally Based School Avoidance programme for school leadership.
- Improve access to, and use of, data gathered by schools concerning bullying, harassment and discrimination.
- Provide an LGBTQ+ inclusive education through the Relationships and Sexuality Education section of the Curriculum for Wales.
- Work with others to increase childcare provision and quality in areas of higher deprivation with aim of reducing inequalities.

1. Give every child the best start in life:

Consultation Questions

- 1a. Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
- 1b. Do you agree with the objective we have set?
- 1c. If not please indicate how it could be improved.
- 1d. Do you agree with the actions we've identified?
- 1e. If there are actions you do not agree with or want to suggest things that we haven't included please let us know.

2. Support the creation of fair employment and good work for everyone

Why This Matters

Most people spend a substantial part of their time at work and this a significant part of their life. The job people do, and how valued they feel, is a powerful determinant of their quality of life. As well as the obvious financial effects, being unemployed can have long-lasting negative effects on health and wellbeing. It increases mortality and is a significant driver of inequalities in physical and mental health.

Evidence

- Between September 2022 and January 2023, 92% of people in Wales said their cost of living had increased in the past year.
- Disabled people are consistently much less likely to be employed than non-disabled people. The employment of disabled people in Monmouthshire fell from 60% in 2014 to 51% in 2023.
- Across Wales, disabled workers' median hourly earnings have stagnated while non-disabled workers' earnings have grown.
- Disabled people are more likely to be living in poverty and severe material deprivation. However, there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of disabled people living in severe material deprivation, from 40.5% in 2015/16 to 24.3% in 2019/20
- In Wales, ethnic minority workers are more likely to be in insecure employment (8.0%) than White British workers (14.2%). However, this gap in insecure employment has narrowed over time.
- Gay and lesbian adults are more likely to be employed (67%) than adults who identify as heterosexual (55%), bisexual (52%) or any other sexual orientation.
- The 2021 census found employment rates in Wales are higher among individuals whose gender identity was the same as their sex registered at birth (54.5%) than among those whose gender identity was different from their sex registered at birth.
- At 39% the proportion of women working part-time in Wales is far higher the proportion of men which is 12%.
- Rural communities can be more prone to poverty than urban areas with fuel poverty and access to services a particular problem.

This objective is related to:

Age	x	Religion or belief	x
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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 we will take to address this:

- Encourage local firms to become accredited disability confident employers.
- Ensure our tender documentation to encourage and promote diversity amongst our suppliers and contractors.
- Deliver employability programmes and build partnerships with employers and local businesses.
- Maintain a sustainable and accessible public bus network (including community transport) that serves our town centres.
- Offer networking, signposting and, where appropriate, grant funding opportunities to support diversification of rural businesses.
- Provide support for the creation of 6,240 sustainable job opportunities.
- Eradicate period poverty and promote period dignity.

2. Support the creation of fair employment and good work for everyone: Consultation Questions

- 2a. Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
- 2c. Do you agree with the objective we have set?
- 2c. If not please indicate how it could be improved.
- 2d. Do you agree with the actions we've identified?
- 2e. If there are actions you do not agree with or want to suggest things that we haven't included please let us know.

3. Work with partners and residents to build inclusive and cohesive communities

Why This Matters

Community cohesion can be undermined if some groups have different experiences or outcomes to others. This is especially true when it's as a result of a group's protected characteristics. The issues that undermine cohesion can be deep-rooted. We want to create and maintain the conditions in which local communities can flourish.

Evidence

- 73% of people who identified as heterosexual or straight felt they belong to their local area, compared with 63% who did not identify as heterosexual or straight;
- 83% of men felt safe when: at home, walking, on public transport, and in their car all, compared with 58% of women;
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have the worst outcomes of any ethnic group in Wales across a huge range of areas including education, health, employment, criminal justice and hate crime;
- In 2021/22, police forces in Wales recorded 6,295 hate crimes, an increase from 4,654 in 2020/21;
- The proportion of Monmouthshire residents identifying as from an Asian ethnic group is 1.3%, from a Black ethnic group was 0.2% from a mixed or multiple ethnic group was 1.2%; from a white group it was 96.7% with other groups making up 0.3%⁶;
- The proportion of disabled people reporting experiencing domestic abuse in the past 12 months is around three times greater than that reported by non-disabled people;
- Research indicates that childcare remains a particular and unchanging barrier to accessing English classes for speakers of other languages (ESOL), particularly for female asylum seekers and refugees in Wales.
- Between 2011 and 2021, the average (median) age of Monmouthshire's increased by four years, from 45 to 49 years of age;
- Monmouthshire's population aged 65 and over is projected to increase by 41% and, more significantly, those aged 85 and over by 96% by 2043.

This objective is related to:

Age	x	Religion or belief	x
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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 we will take to address this:

- Celebrate diversity and hold awareness raising events;
- Support and enable the creation of community groups to ensure everyone has a voice and is able to participate and help shape the future of our county;
- Become an age friendly county and seek accreditation from the World Health Organisation;
- Work with partners to tackle violence against women and girls and domestic and sexual violence;
- Ensure that we have a clear pathway for those with no recourse to public funds;
- Improve our use of data analysis and CCTV to prevent crimes and provide evidence to the police when they do take place;
- Improve housing support for refugees and asylum seekers;
- Become an accredited county of sanctuary and a place of sanctuary for LGBTQ+ migrants.

**3. Work with partners and residents to build inclusive and cohesive communities:
Consultation Questions**

- 3a. Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
- 3b. Do you agree with the objective we have set?
- 3c. If not please indicate how it could be improved.
- 3d. Do you agree with the actions we've identified?
- 3e. If there are actions you do not agree with or want to suggest things that we haven't included please let us know.

4. Expand our provision of community-based services that extend people's healthy life expectancy

Why This Matters

Health inequalities often result from social inequalities. There are huge differences in healthy life expectancy between people living in different communities and clear socio-economic inequalities in behaviours such as eating, exercising and drinking. Alongside this, rising fuel and housing costs are further reducing the available funds for a healthy diet.

Evidence

- Healthy life expectancy for males is 69.8 years, which is the highest in Wales, and 70.7 years for females;
- Those living in the least deprived areas of Monmouthshire expected to live longer than those in the most deprived, by on average 6.3 years for males and 3.6 years for females. Similarly, those in the least deprived parts of Monmouthshire are likely to live in good health for longer, by an average of 10.1 years for males and 11.1 years for females;
- Families with the lowest 10% of household income would have to spend nearly three-quarters of their entire income (after housing costs) to afford the recommended healthy NHS Eatwell plate;
- In 2021/22, 42% of adults with a longstanding illness, disability or infirmity participated in at least one sport or physical activity compared with 68% who did not have a longstanding illness, disability or infirmity;

This objective is related to:

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

Actions we will take to address this:

- Work with partners across the Gwent Public Services Board, including Public Health and the NHS to embed actions to reduce health inequalities in early years services⁷.
- Ensure new walking and cycling infrastructure reaches areas with the lowest rates of physical activity.
- Continue to provide a broad range of opportunities for people to be healthy and active including the National Exercise Referral Scheme.

3. Work with partners and residents to build inclusive and cohesive communities:

4. Expand our provision of community-based services that extend people's healthy life expectancy.

Consultation Questions

- 4a. Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
- 4b. Do you agree with the objective we have set?
- 4c. If not please indicate how it could be improved.
- 4d. Do you agree with the actions we've identified?
- 4e. If there are actions you do not agree with or want to suggest things that we haven't included please let us know.

5. Ensure our services are accessible to the public

Why This Matters

Public services play a vital role in the lives of tens of thousands of people very day. Many people face barriers accessing the things they need. This can be physical, like buildings not having accessible toilets, they can be caused by how we present information so not everyone can process it, or it may be people's attitudes to difference.

Evidence

- Only 24% of those aged over 70 are likely to use digital technology to support their health compared to 87% of people aged 16–19.
- Public and private return travel times to services such as doctors' surgeries, libraries or leisure centres in Monmouthshire are higher than the Wales average in every category except one⁸;
- 7.3% of Monmouthshire residents were identified as being disabled and limited a lot⁹;
- Young Carers re more likely than others of their age to live in deprived areas and experience disruption to their education¹⁰.

This objective is related to:

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

Actions we will take to address this:

- Continue to ensure our public buildings are fully accessible to all service users;
- Work with others to improve the provision of accessible toilets in out town centres;
- Ensure that all communications are accessible, including recognising the needs of neurodiverse people;
- Ensure we use the social model of disability when developing new services and reconfiguring existing ones;

- Promote courses to raise digital skills and literacy amongst all groups through community education courses and our community hubs;
- Increase the number of Welsh speakers employed by the council to improve access;
- Promote the active offer of language choice in social care;
- Ensure that training on equalities is available to all staff and councillors to improve inclusive decision-making.

5. Ensure our services are accessible to the public:

Consultation Questions

- 5a. Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
- 5b. Do you agree with the objective we have set?
- 5c. If not please indicate how it could be improved.
- 5d. Do you agree with the actions we've identified?
- 5e. If there are actions you do not agree with or want to suggest things that we haven't included please let us know.

6. Ensure we have a diverse workforce and a fully inclusive workplace

Why This Matters

When employees trust that they will be treated fairly regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or age, they are more likely to be happy and productive in their roles. Having an inclusive and accessible workplace helps attract a diverse pool of talent and ensures the organisation can retain the diverse talent we already have.

Evidence

- Data to be added.

This objective is related to:

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

Actions we will take to address this:

- Ensure that we attain disability confident level 2 status within the first year of this plan and then work towards levels 3;
- Put in place measures to support and accommodate the needs of neurodiverse colleagues;
- Actively target recruitment opportunities towards groups who are under-represented in our workforce;
- Address the data gaps that exist across all protected characteristics and disaggregate data by across policy areas.

**6. Ensure we have a diverse workforce and a fully inclusive workplace:
Consultation Questions**

- 6a. Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
- 6b. Do you agree with the objective we have set?
- 6c. If not please indicate how it could be improved.
- 6d. Do you agree with the actions we've identified?
- 6e. If there are actions you do not agree with or want to suggest things that we haven't included please let us know.

7. Reduce the gender pay gap

Why This Matters

The gender pay gap has wide implications for society. It affects women's pension contributions and results in a higher incidence of poverty and social exclusion in later life.

Evidence

- 89.1% of single-parent households in Wales are headed by women and are the most likely to be living in poverty.¹¹
- The proportion of women working part-time in Wales remains far higher (39.0% in 2022) than the proportion of men (12.1%)
- The pay gap between men and women persists, as women are on average paid 14.1% less than men in Wales. However, this gap has narrowed slightly between 2010 and 2019.
- Average female weekly pay in the county of Monmouthshire is £559 compared to £633 for males.
- Research by the Equality and Human Rights Commission highlighted that childcare needs and caring responsibilities continue to be a significant barrier to gender equality in employment and education.

This is related to:

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

Actions we will take to address this:

- Ensure that career pathways do not limit the ability of part-time staff to progress into senior roles;
- Continue to operate a transparent job evaluation scheme to ensure equitable pay rates;
- Publish information on the gender pay gap annually.

**7. Reduce the gender pay gap:
Consultation Questions**

- 7a. Is there any additional evidence that we need to take into account?
- 7b. Do you agree with the objective we have set?
- 7c. If not please indicate how it could be improved.
- 7d. Do you agree with the actions we've identified?
- 7e. If there are actions you do not agree with or want to suggest things that we haven't included please let us know.

Other Consultation Questions

Thank you for taking the time to read our consultation. Details of how to respond are shown on page 1.

We will use the things you've told us to develop our next Strategic Equality Plan and we will publish this at the end of March. You'll be able to see a summary of the consultation findings at <https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/consultations/>

8. Is there anything else you would like to tell us to help shape the development of this plan? This can be as much or as little as you like.

9. What, in your opinion, would be the likely effects of the proposals on the Welsh language? We are particularly interested in any likely effects on opportunities to use the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English.

- Do you think that there are opportunities to promote any positive effects?
- Do you think that there are opportunities to mitigate any adverse effects?

10. In your opinion, could the proposals be formulated or changed so as to:

- have positive effects or more positive effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English; or
- mitigate any negative effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English?

Sources

¹ <https://www.gov.wales/anti-racist-wales-action-plan>

² <https://www.gov.wales/lgbtq-action-plan-wales>

³ <https://www.gov.wales/advancing-gender-equality-action-plan>

⁴ <https://www.gov.wales/action-disability-right-independent-living-framework-and-action-plan>

⁵ Monmouthshire County Council, Community and Corporate Plan 2022-28.

⁶ Office for National Statistics, Census 2021,

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/W06000021/>

⁷ Along with other members of Gwent Public Services Board we are committed to becoming a Marmot Region.

Details of the Marmot principles can be found in Building a Fairer Gwent (2023),

<https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/building-a-fairer-gwent-improving-health-equity-and-the-social-determinants/main-report.pdf>

⁸ Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/welsh-indexmultiple-deprivation/?lang=en>

⁹ Office for National Statistics, Census 2021,

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/W06000021/>

¹⁰ Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023: Is Wales Fairer? (ibid)

¹¹ Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023: Is Wales Fairer? <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/our-work/equality-and-human-rights-monitor/equality-and-human-rights-monitor-2023-wales-fairer>