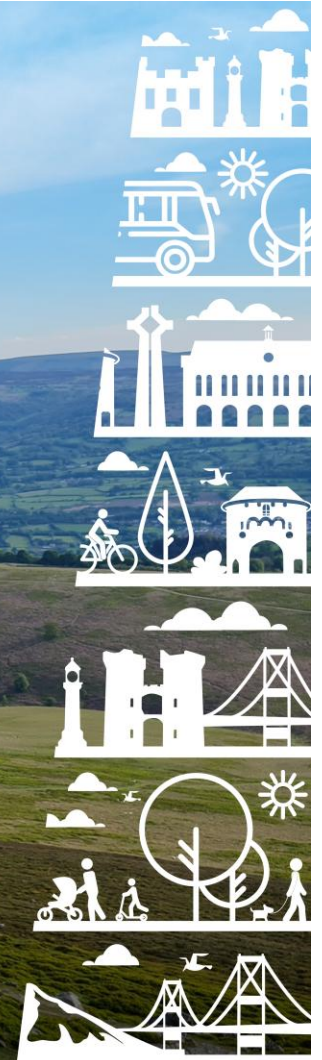


Strategic Equality Plan Annual Monitoring Report 2025 - 2026



monmouthshire
sir fynwy



Introduction and Policy Context

This annual monitoring report covers progress during the year ending March 2026. It reports on the Strategic Equality Plan, which Council approved on 20 February 2024. The latest plan is available at: <https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/equality-and-diversity/>

Links to strategies

This is not a standalone plan. It links closely to key council, partnership and national strategies, plans and policies. Some focus specifically on equality, while others include equality as a key theme. Examples include:

- Community and Corporate Plan 2022-28
- Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011
- Cymraeg 2050 (1 million Welsh speakers by 2050)
- Strategaeth Mwy na geiriau/More than words strategy
- Monmouthshire Replacement Local Development Plan
- Strategy for Older People Wales
- Well-Being of Future Generations Act
- Social Care and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
- Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan
- LGBTQ+ Action Plan
- Action on Disability Plan
- Advancing Gender Equality Plan

The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council to meet the general and specific duties set out below. It also provides an opportunity for the Council to show its commitment to equality, which has long been part of its work.

Legislative Context

The General Duty of the Equality Act 2010

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

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

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

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

The Specific Duties in Wales

The specific duties help public bodies, including the Council, meet the general duty and improve transparency. In Wales, the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 set out these duties.

The following are the specific duties:

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

Our Foundation: Purpose and Values

Our Purpose

Monmouthshire will be a zero-carbon county, supporting well-being, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life.

This purpose is at the heart of everything we do to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Monmouthshire.

Our Values

Our values matter. They set out what we expect of ourselves, each other and the organisations we work with on your behalf. Our values are:

Teamwork

Collaboration is at the heart of everything we do. We will work with you and our partners to support and inspire everyone to get involved. We will make the best of the ideas, and resources available to make sure we do the things that most positively impact our people and places.

Openness

We are open and honest. People have the chance to be involved and tell us what matters.

Flexibility

We are flexible, enabling delivery of the most effective and efficient services. This means a genuine commitment to working with everyone to embrace new ways of working.

Fairness

We provide opportunities for all people and communities to thrive. We will always try to treat everyone fairly and consistently, recognising that we will sometimes need to take positive action to overcome some of the challenges faced by people with different protected characteristics.

Kindness

We will show kindness to all those we work with, putting the importance of relationships and the connections we have with one another at the heart of all interactions

Monmouthshire's strategic equality objectives 2024-2028

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

- **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.
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This report provides an update on progress against these objectives.

1. Give every child the best start in life

This objective is related to:

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

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
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.	Children, young people and families are supported to improve their health and well-being.	Strategic Partnerships Manager	The Gwent Public Services Board (PSB) has continued to progress its 'Best Start in Life' priority, focusing on tackling inequality at the earliest stage and improving outcomes for children and young people. The PSB has committed to embedding the Marmot principles within its delivery approach. The regional 'Best Start in Life' leadership group is progressing this work, with Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) continuing to play an active role. The group is working across Gwent, including Monmouthshire, to identify and address the key drivers of inequality. At a local level, the Monmouthshire Local Delivery Group (a locality subgroup of the PSB) will play a key role in shaping and overseeing delivery. This group will support the implementation of local actions

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
			aligned to PSB priorities, ensuring that regional objectives translate into meaningful outcomes for local communities and contribute to improving the lives of children, young people and families across the county.
Increase the take up of free school meals focusing on those schools where the need is greatest.	No child goes hungry in school.	Chief Officer – Place and Community Wellbeing	Universal Primary Free School Meals are available to all primary pupils in Monmouthshire, with average uptake of 75% across the county. A Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2025 and Entitlement to Free School Meals (eFSM) uptake analysis has identified priority schools where deprivation is highest and uptake lowest, supported by a newly established School Meals Working Group to deliver targeted interventions in 2026/27. Chwedlau Bwyd Food Stories was delivered across ten schools between 2024–2026, with a toolkit in development for wider rollout from September 2026. Chefs in Schools training has been delivered across 25 of 31 schools since 2025, with further rollout planned. Both programmes have focused on priority schools, working with staff, parents and pupils to understand barriers to uptake, build food confidence, and increase school meal engagement.
Poverty proof our schools to reduce the cost of the school day, recognising that every pound matters to many families.	Children, young people and families are supported to improve their health and well-being.	Chief Officer – Children and Young People	Training for Family Engagement Officers and Family Liaison Officers has helped these key staff support vulnerable young people, particularly with attendance. Their work also supports families who may be experiencing wider challenges. Work to teach cooking skills and increase uptake of free school meals has continued. A toolkit is being developed so all schools can use the project resources after the project ends. Families can also use the resources at home to build confidence in cooking with fresh ingredients, which can cost less than ready-made meals. Welsh Government allocated just over £450,000 to Monmouthshire

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
			schools to help them become more community focused. Three project ideas were put forward. These included support for families with the cost of living, such as creating a community kitchen, building a multi-use games area for community use at a minimal fee, and renovating a secondary school classroom for community groups and organisations that support families with cost-of-living advice, benefits information and wellbeing support.
Ensure that every Monmouthshire school identifies a senior leader responsible for tackling poverty and raising the achievement of vulnerable learners.	Children, young people and vulnerable learners are supported to achieve their full potential.	Chief Officer – Children and Young People	All schools outline their support for Vulnerable Groups, defined as those who may be more likely to experience emotional, social and developmental barriers and hold data as part of their School Improvement Plan. These may include financial and social hardships within pupils' families including pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and pupils from low-income families.
Develop a new Additional Learning Needs Strategy and related toolkits and resources, focusing on positive behavioural support.	Vulnerable learners are supported to achieve their full potential.	Head of Inclusion	We have completed the Inclusion Strategy, additional learning needs (ALN) policy and supporting resources. The local authority Estyn inspection report (January 2026) highlighted our clear strategic vision for inclusion and improved provision for pupils with ALN. Reshaped systems and stronger collaboration have increased confidence and competence in meeting a wide range of pupil needs.
Continue taking a preventative approach to reducing school	Children, young people and families are supported to achieve their full	Head of Inclusion	We continue to offer a strong programme of Professional Learning, combining whole-school preventative approaches with targeted interventions. This includes refreshed EBSA resources, a multi-agency EBSA Forum and an MCC EBSA Working Group, alongside multi-tiered

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
absences through developing Emotionally Based School Avoidance and Trauma Informed approach in schools.	potential.		trauma-informed practice training and supervision. Guidance for schools and settings is being finalised. Attendance has continued to improve. Primary attendance rose from 93.6% in 2023/24 to 93.8% in 2024/25, reaching 94.4% by the end of Spring 2025/26. Secondary attendance increased from 89.0% to 89.5%, reaching 90.7% by Spring 2025/26. Overall attendance for compulsory school-age pupils was 92.4% at the end of Spring 2025/26, the highest in Wales. Attendance for pupils eligible for free school meals remains lower but has also improved. By the end of Spring 2025/26, primary eFSM attendance had risen to 89.6% and secondary eFSM attendance to 80.4%, up from 89.1% and 79.0% respectively in 2024/25.
Improve access to, and use of, data gathered by schools concerning bullying, harassment and discrimination, and provide support.	Better data to provide support for children and young people to feel safe in their school environment.	Head of Inclusion	We have reviewed and simplified the Rights, Respect and Equality template with school colleagues. Schools use this template each term to report bullying and discriminatory incidents to the local authority. This supports the Public Sector Equality Duty, the Equality Act 2010 and the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan. We have developed an electronic system for secondary schools to collect consistent information and streamline reporting. The system is being rolled out in stages, and all four secondary schools will use it from autumn term 2026. The quality of reported data has improved, but further work is needed. Two of the four school clusters have participated in anti-racism leadership courses. Curriculum resources have been shared with those schools to support their anti-racism and diversity curriculum development. MCC Challenging Bullying Guidance for Schools and example policies have been shared. All schools have an anti-bullying policy in place that has been quality assured.

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
Provide an LGBTQ+ inclusive education through the Relationships and Sexuality Education section of the Curriculum for Wales.	Children, young people and vulnerable learners are inclusively supported.	Head of Inclusion	We continue to provide regular LGBTQ+ lunch-time groups in schools: At King Henry VIII School (Abergavenny), the Youth Service delivers a protected LGBTQ+ lunch club providing a safe, youth-led space. This delivered 30 LGBTQ+ provisions with 267 school-based contacts, exceeding the annual target. Sessions focus on peer support, identity, wellbeing, relationships, and practical issues such as <i>coming out</i>, with informal activities (games, crafts, quizzes) supporting engagement. We established a new LGBTQIA+ lunchtime provision in Caldicot School, following discussions with school leadership, responding directly to learner need. This had an average attendance of around 14 young people per session, with consistent weekly engagement. Activities are young-person-led, including LGBTQ+ history and flag quizzes, badge/sticker making, music and discussion-based sessions. LGBTQ+ young people are supported to access inclusive open-access youth centres (The Cabin, The Zone), ensuring continuity between school and community provision. Targeted trips (e.g. Cardiff Escape Rooms) and Pride engagement (e.g. Caldicot Pride, with over 220 contacts) broaden social networks and visibility. LGBTQ+ young people benefit from wider targeted support such as the Shift mental health project and peer-based wellbeing work, which has delivered high perceived wellbeing improvement overall.
Work with others to increase childcare provision and quality in areas of higher deprivation with the aim of reducing	Children, young people and families are supported to improve their well-being.	Head of Achievement and Extended	We started the 2025-26 financial year with 94 childcare providers, including day nurseries, sessional care settings, childminders and out-of-school clubs. During the year, two new day nurseries opened, one in Monmouth and one in Caldicot. One sessional provider changed its registration to day care to meet parents' requests for longer hours. One after-school club added wraparound childcare for pre-school children, and another after-school club opened in Caldicot. We will continue to

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
inequalities.			monitor childcare supply and demand and develop provision to address any gaps. Between April 2025 and March 2026, childcare practitioners accessed 64 training opportunities across 23 courses. These included statutory courses, such as Paediatric First Aid and Safeguarding, and best practice courses, such as Trauma Informed Practice and Non-Racist to Anti-Racist Practice. This has helped to maintain and improve the high-quality provision in our childcare settings.

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

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	x
Pregnancy or maternity	x	Poverty	x
Race	x		

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
Encourage local firms to become accredited disability confident employers.	Disabled people have better access to employment. More local firms with disability confidence status	Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships	During the last year, the number of local firms registered as Disability Confident Committed (Level 1) fell from 39 to 27. Some of the businesses that were previously committed have ceased trading. As of 31 March 2026, six local firms are Disability Confident Employers (Level 2), a slight reduction from seven in March 2025. From May 2026, we are working with DWP on an authority-wide engagement programme with SMEs that have premises in Monmouthshire. This work will promote the Disability Confident pledge and inclusive work practices. We hope it will increase the number of Monmouthshire businesses that become Disability Confident.

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
Tender documentation complies with the relevant Procurement and Equality legislation and encourages and promotes diversity amongst our suppliers and contractors.	Tenders / Contracts are compliant with legislation and diversity is supported within the workplace	Equality and Welsh Language Manager / Procurement Lead	We are using tendering to promote diversity in the supply chain. We use criteria to identify if potential suppliers have been involved in Employment Tribunals; have ongoing investigations or charges, in relation to human rights/modern slavery. We also ask that suppliers have a clear and up to date equality, diversity and inclusion policy to evidence their obligations under the Equalities Act 2010 and they ensure all employees receive equalities training and that Welsh language requirements are adhered to. For some higher-value tenders, we ask bidders to include community wellbeing commitments in their contracts. These may include actions to tackle homelessness, reduce inequalities and improve employability for disadvantaged people and young people. MCC's Community Delivery Team supports this work. There are also opportunities to include further information within specifications on each individual project meaning the client teams can promote deliverables specific to their projects.
Deliver employability programmes and build partnerships with employers and local businesses.	Diversity is supported within the workplace and with partners	Head of Economy, Employment and Skills	We continue to deliver a range of employability programmes. Since April 2025, we have delivered the 10-week Future Focus employability programme for 18 to 24-year-olds in partnership with DWP. Since it began, the programme has supported about 60 young people, with 27 moving into employment. A number of participants are neurodivergent. We have also started running sector-based Pathway Programmes. These four-day programmes include accredited qualifications, employer engagement and employability skills. We have completed two hospitality pathways, one with Kahva Café in Abergavenny and one with Marmalade Tea Rooms in Chepstow. The next two pathways will focus on support work in collaboration with Taff Housing.

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
Maintain a sustainable and accessible public bus network (including community transport) that serves our town centres.	Accessibility to town centres is maintained.	Head of Transport	We have applied our Local Transport strategy, adopted in May 2024, working with the Cardiff Capital Region to develop and adopt a Regional Transport Plan and Regional Transport Delivery Plan, which will form the framework of Transport grant funding for the next 5 years. Additionally, we have engaged with TfW and WG around the upcoming Bus reform Bill and the impacts franchising will have on Monmouthshire, maximising the benefits for the County. All the additional bus services added to the network in 2024/25 were continued, with additional late departures on the 60 service. Improvements have been made to the Grass Routes bus service, to ensure it is accessible to the most in need.
Offer networking, signposting and, where appropriate, grant funding opportunities to support diversification of rural businesses.	Diversity is supported within the workplace and with partners.	Head of Economy, Employment and Skills	Business Monmouth and MCC's Sustainable Food Team have offered networking, support, signposting and some grant funding opportunities to support diversification of rural businesses during 2025/26. Five businesses were supported during 2025/26.
Provide support for the creation of up to 6,240 sustainable job opportunities.	More people have access to employment opportunities.	Head of Placemaking, Regeneration, Highways and Flooding	We have developed a Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP). This was endorsed by Council in October 2025 before being submitted to Planning and Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW) for examination in early November 2025. The RLDP will be subject to an independent examination in June and July 2026. We continue to provide support to anyone interested in starting their own business via the Business Monmouthshire project (funded by Shared Prosperity Fund). We assisted 43 businesses in 2025/26 against a target of 50.

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

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	x
Pregnancy or maternity	x	Poverty	x
Race	x		

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
Celebrate diversity and hold awareness raising events, including key dates in the calendar such as Black History Month and Ramadan	Increased awareness of diversity within the community	Equality and Welsh Language Manager	We held several events during the year. These included an interfaith event at County Hall, where faith leaders from Muslim, Christian, Bahá'í, Buddhist and other faith communities helped attendees develop a deeper understanding of different faiths. Wales' National Armed Forces Day event at Caldicot Castle which drew thousands as the community showed its appreciation, including serving personnel, veterans, reservists, cadets, and their families. Women In Business - Taking the Leap event aimed to empower, inspire and support female entrepreneurs. Changing Faces of Chepstow in a new gallery, which was funded by the Welsh Government as part of their Anti-Racist Wales programme for Culture, Heritage

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
			and Sport. Other events included: The Monmouthshire Ukrainian Group (MUGiC) event in Chepstow (MUGiC), the county's biggest ever Fairtrade Coffee Morning during this year's Fairtrade Fortnight, celebration of International Day of Older People, Holocaust Memorial Day event, Age Friendly Community Events, Welsh Music Day, St David's Day. We also raised awareness of Mental Health Awareness week, Pride month, Armed Forces week, Black History month, LGBTQ+ History month and Neurodiversity week.
Support and enable the creation of community groups to ensure everyone has a voice and can participate and help shape the future of our county.	Increased diversity in consultation	Equality and Welsh Language Manager Community Development and Delivery Manager	We have focused on supporting and enabling community-led activity, helping both new and existing groups to grow and take an active role in their communities. This has included providing: • Practical support such as advice on setting up groups, governance and funding • Access to training, mentoring and development opportunities • Opportunities for groups to connect, collaborate and learn from one another Through this approach, we have supported over 170 community organisations, alongside volunteers and residents, helping to build confidence, capacity and leadership at a local level. We have also created space for people to come together and influence what matters to them. For example: • Community events and engagement activities have brought together over 1,200 residents to share information, ideas and local priorities • Initiatives such as the Community's Budget have enabled residents to

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
			have a direct say in funding decisions affecting their area Alongside this, our work has helped to increase opportunities for participation, including supporting over 260 volunteering opportunities and strengthening the role of community groups in delivering local activity. Overall, this has helped ensure that more people feel able to get involved, have a voice, and contribute to shaping the future of their communities. Our role has been to enable and support, rather than lead, creating the conditions for community groups and residents to take ownership and drive change locally.
Become an age friendly county and seek accreditation from the World Health Organisation.	Older people are supported in maintaining their health and well-being. Accreditation from World Health Organisation	Partnerships Officer (Age Friendly Communities)	Monmouthshire was officially welcomed into the WHO (World Health Organisation) Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities in summer 2025. Alongside this, Monmouthshire County Council signed the Centre for Ageing Better's Age-Friendly Employer Pledge. Work is now underway to convene the Age-Friendly Partnership, with the aim of developing a coordinated action plan and driving forward delivery to support older people to live and age well across Monmouthshire.
Support the development of a forum for disabled people.	Disabled people have a forum to inform policy making and service delivery.	Equality and Welsh Language Manager Community Development and Delivery Manager	We have held three forum meetings online attended by disabled groups to engage and build capacity and to understand their needs. We are currently discussing the development of a face-to-face forum and whether this is needed. The forum meets six-weekly online at present.

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
Work with partners to tackle violence against women and girls and domestic and sexual violence.	Women feel safer within their environment.	Strategic Partnership Manager	We are working with regional partners and Public Health Wales (PHW) to develop a VAWDASV (Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence) needs assessment. This will support the Regional VAWDASV Board in strengthening monitoring, outcomes and commissioning arrangements. It is anticipated that this work will improve the flow of information to Monmouthshire's Community Safety Partnership (CSP), enabling partners to take a more intelligence-led approach and strengthen prevention, early intervention and outcomes for victims and survivors of VAWDASV across the county.
Ensure that we have a clear pathway for those with no recourse to public funds.	Assistance and advice is available to those with no recourse to public funds.	Strategic Partnership Manager	We have developed guidance on a no recourse to public funds pathway and distributed it to all front-line colleagues. This should minimise the risk that the most vulnerable in our communities do not fall through any gaps in the systems of support.
Improve our use of data analysis and CCTV to prevent crimes and provide evidence to the police when they do take place.	People feel safer within their environments.	Strategic Partnership Manager	We continue to utilise CCTV across the county, primarily focused on the main town centres, to deter and detect anti-social behaviour (ASB) and wider crime and disorder. A review of town centre CCTV provision has been undertaken, which identified that, due to the age of the system, limitations in effectiveness, and issues with reliability, there is a need to upgrade the network infrastructure, which is now being undertaken. This will ensure the system is robust, fit for purpose, and capable of effectively supporting the prevention, disruption and detection of crime. Work is also underway to develop a comprehensive strategic needs assessment for crime and ASB within the county. This will draw on a range of regional needs assessments, including those relating to perpetrators of VAWDASV, the Serious Violence Duty, and a Domestic Abuse needs assessment currently being finalised. The needs assessment will establish a clear evidence base to inform priorities for the Community Safety Partnership, with the aim of

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
			strengthening an intelligence-led approach to tackling crime and disorder.
Improve housing support for refugees and asylum seekers and other marginalised groups.	Marginalised communities receive housing support.	Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships Housing and Communities Manager	Our proposal to join a rural consortium with a neighbouring authority to provide temporary accommodation for asylum seekers under the All-Wales Dispersal programme did not progress as expected with the Home Office. The Council is now working with the Strategic Migration Partnership, the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office on the Afghan Resettlement Programme and the regional allocation for Wales. The Council has agreed to develop a local authority-led pilot to provide transitional accommodation for up to nine months. Under the pilot, the Council would manage the process from arrival and support households on their journey to resettlement in other local authority areas. The Council will help the UK Government test whether direct management by the Council can simplify casework and speed up the move to settled housing.
Become an accredited county of sanctuary and a place of sanctuary for LGBTQ+ migrants.	Monmouthshire is an accredited county of sanctuary.	Strategic Partnership Manager	Monmouthshire was formally awarded County of Sanctuary status on 20th March 2026, with work now continuing to sustain and further develop this approach. Monmouthshire County Council has continued to progress its commitment to being a County of Sanctuary, building on its long-standing support for people seeking sanctuary and strong partnership working with community and regional organisations. This work is embedded across council services and frameworks, with a focus on inclusion and community cohesion. We also have the Pride in Veterans Standard.

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
Address period poverty and promote period dignity.	People have access to affordable period products.	Community Development Lead- Tackling Poverty & Inequality	All primary and secondary schools in Monmouthshire received free period products to distribute to pupils, parents and others who need them. We secured additional funding to provide a free pair of period pants to learners in years 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 across the county. We extended our Menstrual Ambassador programme, delivered with Womb Wisdom, to all four secondary schools following a successful pilot at Monmouth Comprehensive School. The programme is improving menstrual education and period dignity. A full report will be available in August 2026. We are encouraging all organisations and community groups to have a stock of free period products to distribute. We link with community venues to ensure stock and supply levels are met. 43 community-based organisations have received products as a result of the Period Dignity Grant. Of these organisations, 84% of the organisations said they have reached young people through the period dignity project, whilst 52% have reached low income households. 84% of the organisations said access to free period products has changed how their organisation thinks about supporting menstrual health and tackling period poverty. 92% of organisations feel there is a demand for free period products in the community. 88% of organisations said the period dignity project has increased access to products. 80% of organisations said the period dignity project has reduced financial pressure. We have installed period product dispensers in our leisure centres and hubs to increase access to products. In total, we distributed; 30,644 sanitary pads, 23,860 tampons and 4,761 period pants over the financial year. With the support of 140 external staff or volunteers involved in the project. We have secured Welsh Government funding for the next financial year to continue the project.

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

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		

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
Ensure new walking and cycling infrastructure reaches areas with the lowest rates of physical activity.	People are supported in their physical activity.	Head of Transport	We work to support the development of sustainable transport infrastructure with reference to the WIMD and a focus on inclusive benefit for the greatest number of people. We use grant funding to develop active travel routes that encourage people to walk and cycle to towns, schools and local key destinations. This includes route large construction schemes in 25-26 in Monmouth, Gilwern and Caldicot, providing coherent direct links which were previously missing from the network, and smaller enhancement schemes on the existing network, with improvements to dropped kerbs, crossings and footways. Promoting walking and cycling is also critical. It provides an alternative to

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
			driving and improves access to affordable, sustainable and healthy travel options. We continue to deliver promotion and behaviour change work, including launch events, consultation on the Active Travel Network Map, road safety work in schools, bike maintenance courses and support for repair cafés. We also work with planning colleagues to make sure new developments are well connected from the start. This helps residents adopt healthier travel habits when they move in.
Continue to provide a broad range of opportunities for people to be healthy and active including the National Exercise Referral Scheme.	People are supported in their physical activity.	Chief Officer – Customer, Culture and Wellbeing	Our NERS completions rose to 522 (71%) in 2025/26, up from 456 in 2024/25. Participants reported improved wellbeing, happiness and energy. Our Passport to Leisure membership reached 460 by year-end. A clearer and more accessible offer helped reduce cost barriers, improve awareness and increase participation. Our Food & Fun supported 798 children, delivered 6,377 attendances, 452 hours of summer provision and 194 additional attendances, including 483 children eligible for free school meals. Our school sport festivals increased participation, enjoyment and physical literacy. Overall, 2,217 children accessed free or subsidised play provision through programmes including Food & Fun, Active Play, Positive Futures, the Monmouthshire Games, Junior Passport to Leisure and Free Swim. Active 60 had a 100% completion rate at week 8, helping participants maintain mobility, independence and social connection. The Free Swim Initiative supported 480 under-16s and 496 over-60s, and included holiday swim safety sessions with Swim Wales. Gilwern Outdoor Adventure supported 4,517 users, including 172 with additional learning needs, 62 with accessibility requirements and 407 eligible

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
			for free school meals. Twenty pupils also took part in bespoke Duke of Edinburgh expeditions. Nature Networks 2 invested over £143,000 in 45 organisations, delivering 68 projects or events, engaging 1,183 participants and improving 121.9 hectares of land. Ten Nature and Wellbeing Hubs were created to improve access to nature, wellbeing and local skills.
Support community groups in raising awareness of health inequalities and access to information in the most deprived areas.	A reduction in health inequalities through access to information	Head of Leisure and Wellbeing Community Partnerships and Wellbeing Lead Equality and Welsh Language Manager	We have focused on supporting communities and partners to bring about social change and improve quality of life across Monmouthshire. We have: - Supported over 170 community organisations during the year, helping to strengthen local activity and resilience - Engaged over 1,200 people through events and activities across the county - Enabled 260 volunteering opportunities and supported over 70 community activities - Delivered training and support that reached around 500 people and 120+ organisations through the Be Community programme alone Alongside this, specific programmes have delivered significant impact, including: 31 warm spaces operating across the county, with over 1,200 attendees and 10,000+ meals or refreshments provided - A distributed network of 43 community organisations and all schools providing free period products Through this work, we have strengthened more inclusive, connected and resilient communities, helped people access support earlier, and contributed

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
			to preventing and reducing the impact of poverty. Much of this work has been targeted in communities experiencing higher levels of deprivation, with a focus on reducing health inequalities by improving access to information, advice and support. This has included cost of living initiatives, warm spaces, health and wellbeing events, and strengthened links into services. Our approach has been to work with communities, not deliver to them. We build on local strengths, assets and partnerships to achieve shared outcomes.
Support community groups to tackle isolation and loneliness with a focus on rural communities.	A reduction in the effects of isolation and loneliness	Community Development and Delivery Manager Equality and Welsh Language Manager	We secured further funding from Cadw to enable the weekly Creative Conversations programme to continue at Caerwent through the year. We confirmed a fully functional Natural Resources Wales (NRW) agreement for volunteers to operate in NRW sites (We are the only LA in Wales to achieve this). We have increased the number of Countryside volunteer hours from 1,226.5 hours to 3,742.25. The work they have achieved has led to more maintenance issues being resolved, particularly for surface clearance, signage and gates. New groups continue to express interest, and more are being developed.

5. Ensure our services are accessible to the public

This objective is related to:

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

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
Continue to ensure our public buildings are appropriately accessible to all service users.	Buildings are fully accessible to all people.	Head of Landlord Services	The UK SPF Destination for All project awarded £62,621.67 in accessibility grants to Monmouthshire organisations, businesses and events. We exceeded our target for the number of organisations, enterprises and events supported. We have also added the first of what we hope will be a collection of Accessible Virtual Tours of our sites to our Caldicot Castle & Country Park web page. This tour represents a new standard for digital accessibility, helping ensure that our virtual spaces are fully accessible and open to everyone:

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
			<u>Caldicot Castle & Country Park – Monlife</u> Development work has taken place throughout 2025/26 on the Shire Hall Museum project which will provide a new cultural offer in Monmouth, incorporating Monmouth Museum within Shire Hall. This project aims to improve accessibility and has been engaging and consulting with relevant groups within the community as part of the planning and design stages. 2025/26 also saw the development of plans for a Dementia-friendly gallery at Chepstow Museum, working in partnership with MENCAP Chepstow. We conducted consultation sessions with the community and have secured funding from Welsh Government. The outdoor facilities at Abergavenny Leisure Centre are being developed to be fully accessible and are due to open in September 2026.
Work with partners to ensure the provision of accessible toilets in our town centres.	Town centre toilets are accessible to all people.	Head of Landlord Services	In accordance with the Council's Local Toilet Strategy, we continue to give consideration to investment in MCC owned town centre toilets. A number of toilets continue to be managed and maintained via partnership arrangements with town and community councils, or via third party lease with adjacent operators. The Local Toilet Strategy is under review, which will be completed in 2027. We are currently updating some of the facilities for the Stoma Friendly/Bins for Boys initiatives - to provide sanitary bins, shelves, mirrors and hooks in male toilets.
Ensure that all communications are accessible, including recognising the	All people can access communications.	Head of Customer, Communication and Engagement	We are developing on-going improvements to our website to ensure it remains accessible for all users in accordance with national guidelines known as WCAG2.2 specifications. We now track the progress of this project monthly and have seen continued progress. Our continued updates to the site see us improving month by month. We are collaborating with stakeholders to

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
needs of neurodiverse people.			improve accessibility including enhanced screen reader performance. Early engagement with SRS is currently taking place around the future platform that our website (Monmouthshire.gov) is built on which could further enhance accessibility if the project progresses. We launched Let's Talk Monmouthshire in January 2025. This provides residents with a single place to visit for all consultations and digital engagement opportunities across the organisation to improve resident engagement. Since Let's Talk Monmouthshire launched we have seen over 47,000 visits and 14,165 contributions, giving our residents the chance to positively influence projects and policies across the organisation.

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
Ensure we use the social model of disability when developing new services and reconfiguring existing ones.	Barriers for disabled people are removed. Social Model of Disability is embedded across the organisation	Equality and Welsh Language Manager Head of Social Care, Safeguarding and Health	We continue to embed the social model of disability by focusing on removing barriers. This helps children and young people with disabilities to develop independence, make choices and have their voices heard. Practice and service development increasingly focus on empowering young people to take control of their lives and take part in decisions that affect them. Direct Payments, Short Breaks services and the commissioned Disability Support service help meet individual needs and preferences. They also support parent carers, reduce pressure on families, and build confidence, resilience and skills in young people and their families. The Monmouthshire Autism in Schools and Settings programme is now governed by a partnership board. It continues to build capacity in schools and settings by promoting autism as a difference, not a deficit, and by developing enabling environments where autistic children and young people can make progress. The programme was highlighted as a spotlight of good practice in the local authority's recent Estyn report. All schools and most early years settings have received the initial whole-school or setting training, Making Sense of Autism. The rollout of Good Autism Practice training is now underway. All schools and settings have a named Autism Champion. We provided F2F training on the Social Model of Disability, delivered by the Disabled People's Employment Champion at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP,) to all HR and Workforce Development colleagues. This training is also available online to all colleagues. Regular sessions are advertised in our training newsletter.
Promote courses to raise digital skills and literacy amongst all groups through community	Accessibility is improved through digital skills.	Community Hubs, Community Education & Libraries Manager	We offer Entry Level 1 and 2 Digital Literacy learning opportunities as part of the 2025-26 curriculum. We deliver these accredited courses in partnership with Coleg Gwent, and Agored Cymru awards them. Courses are available at Abergavenny, Caldicot, Chepstow and Monmouth Hubs. They provide a flexible, supportive and welcoming environment where residents can re-engage with learning, overcome barriers and build confidence in digital skills.

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
education courses and our community hubs.			
Increase the number of Welsh speakers employed by the council to improve access.	Welsh speakers can fully access services in their own language.	Equality and Welsh Language Manager	From April 25 to March 26, we published 717 job adverts. 689 (96.1%) of these were Welsh Language Desirable and 28 (3.9%) of these were Welsh Language Essential. We include the Welsh language skills framework in every job advert. We also use Welsh language recruitment sites to advertise posts that are assessed as Welsh language essential, as well as some Welsh language desirable posts. By advertising roles on these dedicated recruitment sites, we make it easier for Welsh speakers to find our vacant posts, and we have successfully appointed Welsh speakers as a result. 40 colleagues are currently completing a Welsh course. Classes started in September 25.
Promote the active offer of language choice in social care.	People can access services in their language of choice.	Equality and Welsh Language Manager	We use the Wales Interpretation and Translation Service (WITS) to provide translation. This year 146 requests have been made to the service through social care. Vietnamese was the language most often requested. Our More Than Words Active Offer for Social Care included 2238 assessments where there was evidence of the active offer of Welsh and 14 where the active offer of Welsh was accepted. For children, there were 701 assessments where there was evidence of the active offer of Welsh and 9 active offers of Welsh were accepted.
Ensure that training on equalities is available to all staff and councillors to improve inclusive	Inclusive decision making is improved.	Equality and Welsh Language Manager	Mandatory Equality Training for our new Leaders/Managers Development Pathway is available through Thingi. This includes Protected Characteristics, Intersectionality, Inclusion and Belonging, Inclusive Language and Unconscious Bias. A separate equality training course is also available through Thingi as part of

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
decision-making.			the Essential Training for all of the workforce. A Reasonable Adjustment presentation is available for all colleagues as well as other training such as Cultural Awareness, Neurodiversity and Understanding Autism.
Review Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process	The Integrated Impact Assessment process is fit for purpose and embedded.	Equality and Welsh Language Manager Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships	We have revised and updated the Integrated Impact Assessment template and guidance. This has been published on Sharepoint for all colleagues to access. Directorate Management Teams have been informed, and it was also advertised in Compass, our internal newsletter. A guidance film has been made which will be available to all managers via Thingi and the Leader/Managers Development Pathway. The new Health Impact Assessment (due April 2027) will be integrated into this process.

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

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		

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
Ensure that we attain disability confident level 2 status within the first year of this plan and then work towards levels 3.	Disability Confident Level 2 is attained.	Equality and Welsh Language Manager	We attained Level 2 Disability Confident Employer in May 2024. We are continuing to work on the three-year action plan which is monitored and updated quarterly by the Accessibility Inclusion Group. We are working in partnership with the Department of Work and Pensions and Welsh Government to ensure our progress and share information. We are intending to attain Disability Confident Leader within the next three months.

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
Put in place measures to support and accommodate the needs of neurodiverse colleagues.	Neurodiverse colleagues are supported within the workplace.	Equality and Welsh Language Manager	We have developed a Neurodivergent/Disability Colleague Network, which currently has 14 members. The network has met three times and will continue to meet every 6 weeks. It provides a safe space to discuss experiences, network with peers and build a workplace community based on shared identity. It also provides a source of support by giving easy access to colleagues who can empathise, share their own experiences, and offer practical advice. Some of the subjects we have covered are reasonable adjustments, both physical and digital, as well as the creation of a 'colleague toolkit'.
Actively target recruitment opportunities towards groups who are under-represented in our workforce.	Under-represented groups have more representation with the workforce.	Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships	Our jobs website actively promotes our desire to receive applications and enquiries from all members of the community. We have a proactive offer to those who are disabled, have a sight or hearing loss, have a learning difficulty, or are neurodiverse to get in touch to find out more about employment opportunities. We have a guaranteed interview scheme for disabled people as well as armed forces veterans and care leavers. 87.1% of colleagues reported that they felt MCC promoted an inclusive working environment. This is an increase from 86.8% last year. We have developed work experience opportunities for young people aged 14 to 18 through our local secondary schools. This helps us engage people at the start of their working lives and increase representation of 18 to 24-year-olds in our workforce, where they are currently under-represented.
Address the data gaps that exist across all protected characteristics	Data gaps are reduced to better inform decision making.	Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships	We are working to gather data to identify where there are gaps. Our gender pay gap report is published annually by 31st March each year. We will start reporting on ethnicity and disability pay gaps from 2026/27. Additional data fields have been added to our reporting systems, to broaden the

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
(particularly ethnicity and disability) and disaggregate data by across policy areas.			scope of data we are able to collect. Prompts have been shared through colleague communication channels, to support the updating and sharing of information, via a self-service system. Our new recruitment system and induction materials will support the collection of data from colleagues who move posts internally and new starters to the organisation.
Provide access to inclusion training for all staff to ensure awareness of inclusivity and diversity within the workplace	Diversity within the workforce is celebrated.	Equality and Welsh Language Manager Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships	The Leadership and Manager Development Pathway is a mandatory module on Thingi, our e-learning platform. It covers protected characteristics, intersectionality, inclusion and belonging, inclusive language and unconscious bias. Equality training is also a mandated module available on Thingi. Reasonable Adjustment in the Workplace, Cultural Awareness, Neurodiversity, Understanding ADHD, Understanding Tourette's, Understanding Autism, LGBTQ+ Awareness, Anti-Racist Modules and Hate Crime module are also available on Thingi. F2F training on the Social Model of Disability has been delivered and various online dates were added throughout the year, open to all colleagues.
Develop staff networks to raise awareness of under-represented groups within the workforce	Staff networks developed.	Equality and Welsh Language Manager	We have developed a Disability/Neurodivergent Colleague Network and a BAME Colleague Network, who meet 6 weekly online. These have been well attended and are a safe space for colleagues to share experiences, network and build a community. We are currently developing a Network page on the intranet to raise awareness of all Colleague Networks and share information. We continue to survey, on a regular basis, whether there is interest in an LGBTQ+ Network. We also hold a Menopause Café last Wednesday of every month (online).

7. Reduce the gender pay gap

This objective is related to:

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

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
Ensure that career pathways do not limit the ability of part-time staff to progress into senior roles.	Part time staff are not limited in progressing into senior roles.	Head of HR	Our Flexible Working Policy supports colleagues' entitlement to request part-time working. Our Recruitment and Selection Policy and Protection of Employment Policy also support colleagues, including those working part time, to move into new and senior roles. Our People Strategy and newly developed Workforce Plan aim to strengthen strategic workforce planning across the organisation. This will include developing more career pathways, supported by policy reviews, to help part-time staff

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
			progress into senior roles. Our developing strategic workforce planning approach, Developing a Future Focused Workforce, will support both traditional and non-traditional career pathways. It will focus on colleagues and help all those who wish to progress into senior roles.
Continue to operate a transparent job evaluation scheme to ensure equitable pay rates.	Equitable pay rates are ensured.	Head of HR	Monmouthshire County Council uses the GLPC (Greater London Provincial Council) Scheme for all National Joint Council (NJC) roles. It is implementing the Local Government Association (LGA) Scheme for all Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) Chief Officer posts. Revised governance arrangements for using the GLPC Scheme were introduced in October 2024, and the LGA Scheme will follow the same arrangements. Revised policy and guidance documents were approved in May 2026 to ensure equitable pay rates for officers whose posts are subject to NJC and JNC terms and conditions.
Publish information on the gender pay gap annually, evaluate the reasons for the difference in pay and explore appropriate actions to address them.	Annual publication of gender pay gap information and actions to address this are explored.	Head of HR	Our Gender Pay Gap Report was published in March 2026, relating to data as of 31st March 2025. This report outlined a reduction in both the mean and median gender pay gap, in Monmouthshire County Council, when compared to 31st March 2024 and over the past three years. <i>'The Council has seen a reduction in both the mean and median gender pay gaps in the past three years; the mean gender pay gap has shown a reduction from 5.8% in 2021/22 to 4.29% in 2024/25 and the median gender pay gap has shown a reduction from 7.6% in 2021/22 to 3.22% in 2024/25.'</i> The report explores and evaluates the reasons for gender pay differences and considers appropriate actions to address them. A full copy of the report can be found here: Gender-Pay-Gap-Report-2026.pdf. Monmouthshire County Council officers' attendance and participation at the Convention on the Elimination of All

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Progress
			Forms of Discrimination Against Women in March 2026 will also support the development and implementation of actions to address gender-related pay differences.