



Cymedd i'r Arfordir
Valleys to Coast

Our Approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion



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Valleys to Coast will take a mosaic approach to equality, diversity and inclusion recognising individuality but at the same time celebrating the picture that is the sum of all the pieces. Our approach aims to embed **equality, diversity** and **inclusion** in all we do, making it part of our fabric and not just a tick box exercise.

This approach brings together **ideas, thoughts and ways of working** to ensure that different backgrounds, experiences and identities are represented and **all voices are heard**. This fosters a culture of creativity and innovation and supports better decision making which in turn benefits our customers and colleagues.



Definitions

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) describes the importance of **equality, diversity** and **inclusion** in the following statement:

"Promoting and delivering equality, diversity and inclusivity in the workplace is an essential aspect of good people management. To reap the benefits of **equality, diversity, and inclusion**, it's about creating working environments and cultures where every individual can feel safe, a sense of belonging and is empowered to achieve their full potential. "



While **equality, diversity** and **inclusion** often go hand in hand it is important to have an understanding of each.

Equality

At its core, equality means fairness, in particular that individuals, or groups of individuals, are not treated less favourably because of their protected characteristics. Equality also means equality of opportunity and how we must ensure that those who may be disadvantaged have the tools they need to access the same opportunities as others.

Diversity

Diversity is recognising, respecting and celebrating each other's differences. A diverse environment is one with a wide range of backgrounds and mindsets, values collective intelligence and allows for an empowered culture of creativity and innovation.

Inclusion

Inclusion means creating an environment where everyone is welcome, valued and feels a sense of belonging. To create a truly inclusive environment we need to be aware of our unconscious biases and learn how to manage them.

Organisational Objectives and Strategic Aims



Everyone has a right to feel that they belong in their workplace and community. Valleys to Coast is committed to improving the **equality, diversity** and **inclusion** of the organisation, its customers, communities and colleagues.

The overall aim of our approach is to ensure a sense of fairness and inclusion for our customers and instil a sense of belonging for all colleagues and Board members. We want to **celebrate diversity and challenge stigma**. We want everyone to understand and appreciate how diversity makes us stronger and that we can learn and benefit from each other's different backgrounds and experiences.



Our 10 year corporate plan sets out our strategic priorities. Our foundation stage sets out our brilliant basics from which the organisation will grow. One of the core principles of our brilliant basics is:



"Understanding what the customer wants, needs and then meeting it. We want to be a positive , visible, accessible, diverse and inclusive organisation that supports and invests in our local communities"

Organisational Priority Commitment

Deeds Not Words



Since its inception in 2005, Tai Pawb has been working with the housing sector to tackle race inequality. To make this happen they called upon members in Wales to sign up to the Deeds not Words pledge and deliver on them in the next five years. They see these as the **necessary first steps** to begin the process of addressing the concerns of communities threatened as a result of racial inequalities.

Valleys to Coast **signed the pledge** along with other housing associations and is committed to delivering on the pledge for customers and colleagues alike.



The Pledge

- Mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on Black, Asian and minority ethnic colleague and communities
- Improve the ethnic diversity of board and colleagues at all levels
- Communicate and engage
- Develop an inclusive culture

Key considerations for our approach

When considering where we wish to focus our resources and efforts we need to be mindful of a number of factors including the legal context, Welsh Government regulations and guidance, and the demographics of our customer and colleagues. The Welsh Government has provided a very clear direction in terms of the Deeds not Words pledge as identified above. In addition to that we know there are very specific requirements relating to the Equality Act and protected characteristics which must underpin our actions.



In addition to those legislated areas the organisation wishes to reflect its demographic by including additional focus on socio economic factors, digital inclusion, health and wellbeing and retain a focus on the Welsh Language.

The Equality Act (2010) and Protected Characteristics

We work within the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 which offers legal protection from discrimination in the workplace.

There are nine protected characteristics covered by the Act, namely:

- Sex
- Disability
- Age
- Race
- Marriage
- Gender reassignment
- Religion or belief
- Pregnancy or maternity
- Sexual orientation



We are working to ensure that all of our policies undergo a thorough impact assessment to ensure that none of the protected characteristics will suffer a detriment.

Other barriers to equality

Whilst legislation regulates certain people and activities and we are fully committed to supporting these, we know that there are other factors that present barriers to **equality** and **diversity** that need addressing if we are to be a truly **inclusive** organisation.

We therefore state our commitment to the following:



Socio Economic Factors and the Poverty Agenda

As socio economic factors can be a significant barrier to equality. As an organisation **we are committed to working to overcome these barriers.**

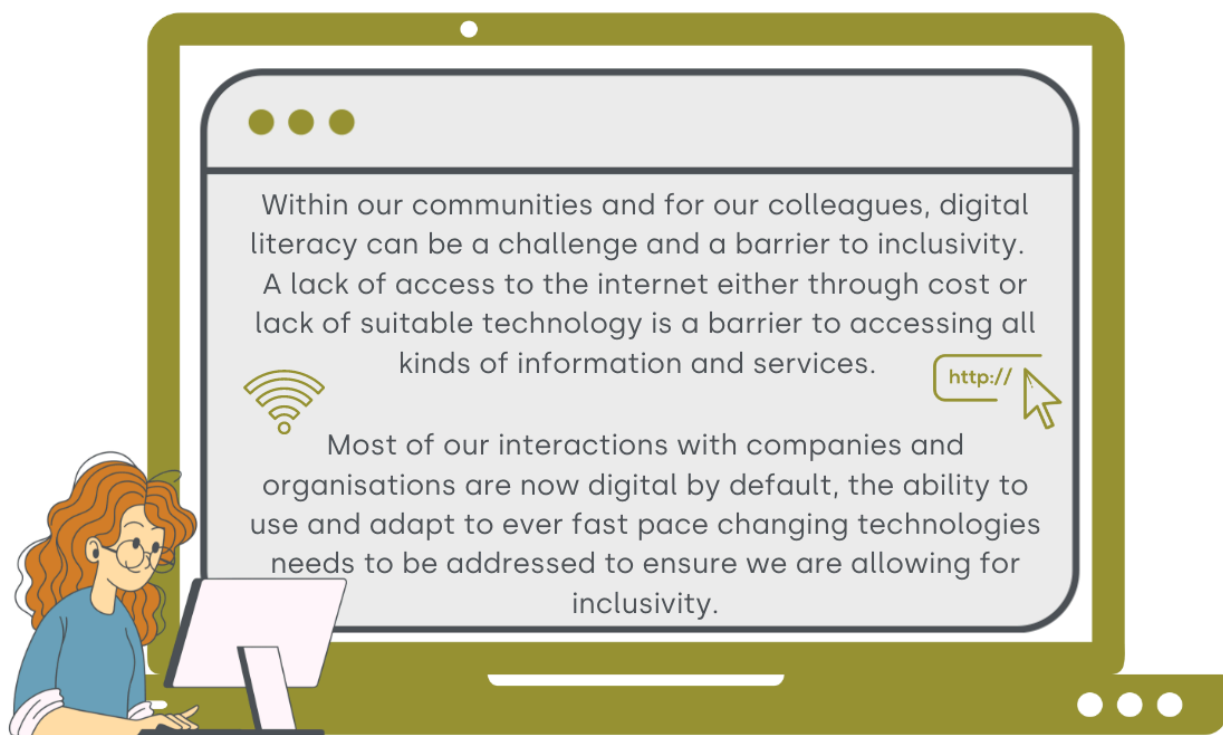
The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. There are seven well-being goals, including:

“A more equal Wales; A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic background and circumstances)”.



Poverty in the Bridgend area is a significant barrier to **equality**, in particular the following points impact on customers and colleagues in how they are able to access services, enter and remain in employment:

Digital Inclusion



Health & Wellbeing

The most recent census highlighted a key issue in the area is one of ill health, both physical and mental.

Only 46% of residents described their health as very good



We need to be responsive and proactive to the needs of these residents both as potential colleagues and customers. Both are considered as part of the four year plan to expand on the achievements already in place, such as new build considerations, our adaptations programme and workplace support and adaptations for colleagues.



Welsh Language



We will be compliant with Welsh Government regulations, including our commitment to the Welsh language.

Our commitment to the Welsh Language is to encourage its use in the workplace for colleagues and customers alike. Under the provisions of the Welsh Language Measures the Welsh Government aims to ensure that the Welsh language is not treated less favourably than English.

The provisions give Welsh speakers the right to speak Welsh without interference, and they should be able to live their lives through the equality, diversity and inclusion of Welsh.

Bridgend County and Borough had **9.2% of residents** who speak Welsh as of the 2011 census.

We need to ensure that as an organisation we are able to respond to and support both these key provisions.

BCBC has a Welsh language promotion strategy which aims to "raise the profile of the Welsh language, culture and local activities and events organised by the council and our partners in a structured way."

Neurodiversity

Neurodivergent describes an individual with a cognitive variation. This might affect the way they think, read, move, interact with others or process information. It's generally seen as a preferable, more inclusive term than has been used in the past.



We need to ensure that we consider and implement different ways of social interaction for customers and colleagues so people can choose what they feel comfortable with and not inadvertently disadvantaged in any way.

Communication is key to delivering information and options such as having pre-reading in advance to give people time to process information, for example in recruitment processes where they may find the traditional process difficult.



There is **no one size fits all** approach, we need to create a supportive environment for all, considering how we can engage with customers and colleagues alike.

How will we deliver on our plans?

Through our organisational values

- Value People

We see the potential in people, those we work with and those we are here to serve.

- Think Differently

We try new things to improve peoples' lives and careers.

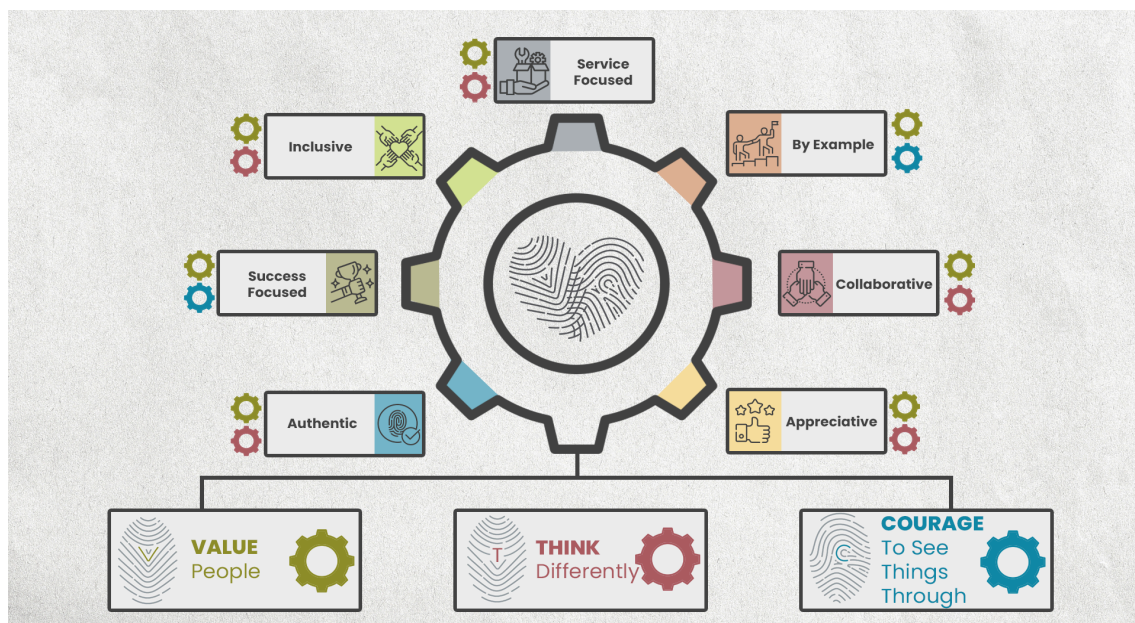
- Courage to see things through

We want the best for ourselves, our colleagues, and our customers, so we speak, work and act with conviction, strength and determination.



Through our behaviours framework

The organisation has a set of behaviours that **all colleagues** should strive to demonstrate in all that they do. Colleagues have undertaken training to understand these behaviours and what they look like in our everyday activities.



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One of the seven core behaviours is around being “**inclusive**” and during the colleague training the following three questions were addressed:

What does it mean to be inclusive?

We celebrate diversity, inclusion and opportunities for all. We recognise that we are not all the same and respect differences. We do not make assumptions, particularly around things we cannot see. We are respectful of other opinions and perspectives. We make people welcome and encourage a sense of belonging.

Why is it important?



A diverse workforce, rich with a variety of skills, experiences, ideas and approaches, improves problem solving, decision making, innovation and creativity. Colleagues who feel they belong in an organisation are also generally happier, more engaged and likely to stay in a role.

What it is not?

Viewing EDI as a tick box exercise and failing to embrace it in our daily working lives. Being prone to bias; excluding people or treating them inappropriately because they are, or appear, different or don't hold the same views as us.



Through our colleagues

With around 260 colleagues there will be a range of backgrounds and experiences within the organisation. Working on accurate data is part of our four year plan so that we can accurately see who our colleagues are and how they can best be supported.



Belonging survey



We undertook a survey of colleagues in September 2022 to gauge the sense of belonging that they have to the organisation. An encouraging **48%** felt they had a good understanding of our **equality, diversity** and **inclusion** action plan, with **60%** of all colleagues stating they felt Valleys to Coast was a truly inclusive employer (answering 4 or 5 on a scale of 1-5).

There were several helpful ideas on how we can work together to increase people's feeling of belonging, in particular for those with hidden disabilities.

Colleague Voice & Engagement

There are a number of ways in which we engage with colleagues – we have a colleague engagement group that meets on a regular basis; we carry out colleague surveys and work in partnership with recognised Trade Unions.



Through meeting our customers' needs

We commit that all our customers deserve to have an equality of outcome of all Valleys to Coast services. Everyone should feel they are able to access our services, have an equality of voice, and parity in the quality of service they receive.



We understand to give assurances on this – information on the diversity of customers is vital. Currently the data held on customers is patchy and difficult to access via the current IT systems.

Once collected this data can be used to provide a deeper understanding of the services we provide

and help us talk to the right people on the right issues. Reviewing our services through the lens of **equality**, **diversity** and **inclusion** data will enable us to identify unintended bias and for bespoke services to be developed.



Census data for the area

Due to the lack of customer specific data we have chosen a 'start where you are' approach to **equality**, **diversity** and **inclusion**. We do not want to wait while we gather and analyse data before making a start on our EDI journey.

In light of this, the 2021 Bridgend census data has been used to give us insights into the priority needs of our customers. Here we can see there is an ageing population, with

nearly a quarter of people self defining as having a disability.

There are a **high number of people who are economically inactive but not classed as unemployed** – this group would include people claiming pensions and long term disability payments.

There are very **low numbers of people who are not white or English speaking** as a main language.

Largest age range is 50-59



22 % of people self define as disabled

2.5% of individuals define as LGB+



0.33% of individuals are of a different gender than at birth

96.8% of individuals are White/British/Welsh

1.5% Asian, Asian British/Welsh

98.24% of individuals have English as a preferred language

Polish being the next highest at 0.49%



0.04% of individuals cannot speak English well or very well

43.5% of individuals are economically inactive with 2.29% unemployed.

Priorities

With the information we currently have available, we have identified three main priorities to help meet the needs of our customers:

Our 3 Priorities

1. Improving the data capture on our customers and analysing it to better understand how the service we provide meets customers needs.
2. Given the census data our first area to understand and address is disabilities. However this may change as we develop our understanding of our customer base.
3. Understanding that due to the low levels of diversity within Bridgend that we need to ensure individual customers aren't missed or isolated from our services

Our actions will not be limited to these priorities as we understand there is a vast array of work to be done and this will give us a direction to begin our four year journey.

Through our developments

All of our new developments are built to the Lifetime Homes standard. The properties are built so that they can always be adapted for future use allowing customers to remain in their homes as their needs change.



We build above standard building regulations in terms of considerations for access, including things such as level access to properties and future proofing for future adaptation. We also work in partnership with Bridgend Borough and County Council if a customer has specific needs.

With our current housing stock our Adaptations Team works with customers to ensure their changing needs are met. We have secured Physical Adaptation funding from the Welsh Government, and are the only LSVT (Large Scale Voluntary Transfer) to secure this funding.

What challenges do we anticipate?

We know we will face challenges but by proactively identifying these upfront we will be in a better position to tackle them.



Culture

We need to consider how we foster a positive approach to equality, diversity and inclusion in all we do. To fully embed it into our fabric and ensure it is more than a tick box exercise, driving it through our values and behaviours. As part of our four year plan we intend to improve cultural diversity through training and engagement, however we know that it takes time to foster an environment that embeds this. We need to empower colleagues to prioritise work that supports equality, diversity and inclusion and ensure it is a key consideration in anything that we do.

Data & Performance

We will need to have accurate and up to date data that can help us shape our focus and decisions. Capturing and maintaining meaningful data on customers and colleagues is one of the key building blocks of our approach and forms part of our Year 1 action plan. We will be able to gauge our performance by having clearly defined outcomes, milestones and utilising effective project management techniques. We must commit to supporting colleagues to prioritise the work needed to fully deliver on the agreed action plan.

People

EDI cannot be something that is seen as a people team or leadership initiative and so we need to encourage curiosity around EDI and a commitment to all playing a part. It can be difficult to find the right channels to encourage people to come forward to share their experiences and propose ideas and so meaningful engagement with colleagues and customers and giving them a voice will be central to our success.

Financial

While there is no separate budget allocated to EDI within the organisation, different budgets incorporate an element of EDI. For example, the Assets Team would include a budget for adaptations whereas training for EDI would be covered by the Learning & Development Team. It is therefore important that any additional costs for implementation **must** be factored into decisions and budgets.

Measuring Progress



In **our four year plan** we will lay out our specific goals and targets for the key pieces of work that will underpin our approach. They will each have clear measurable outcomes that will be monitored. The Tai Pawb baseline audit recommendations form part of our four year plan. The baseline shows where we are and what we need to improve on.

Our plan will look at the ways we work and see if there are ways we can make this even better. Working and engaging with colleagues and customers we will seek to improve their experience of the organisation and ensure everyone has a chance to give their views.



Through training and celebration we want to improve understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion.

Our four year action plan shows how we will monitor, check on progress and see the changes made.