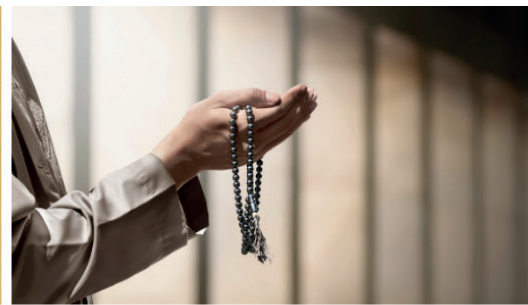
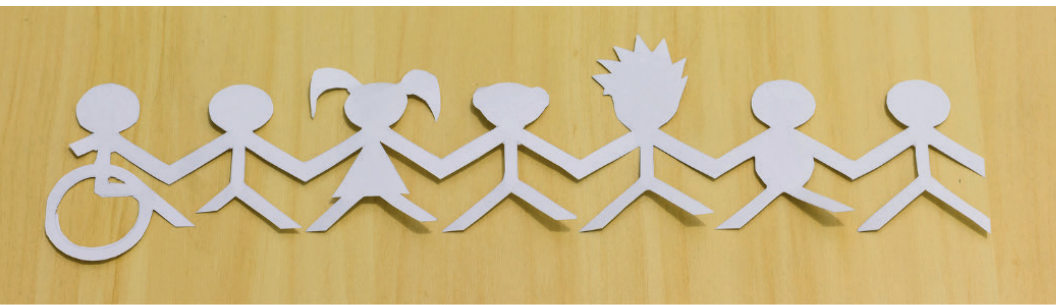


# Annual Equality Report Gwynedd Council 2020-21



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## Foreword

I must admit that the year from April 2020 to March 2021 has been a very unusual one! When I brought the 2020-24 Strategic Equality Plan to the Cabinet for approval at the beginning of March 2020, little did anyone know what was to come.

The pandemic has shown that a great deal of unfairness continues to exist in Gwynedd, as is the case in the rest of Wales. Covid-19 has struck some people worse than others, including older people and people with specific conditions or illnesses. It was also seen that it had a greater impact on people from ethnic minority backgrounds, which, according to statistics, are more likely to be suffering from economic inequality.

During the last year, a number of other factors became apparent, e.g. the work of the Black Lives Matter movement, economic problems, growth in mental health conditions and loneliness, and the excellent way that key workers and volunteers have supported communities during the pandemic.

As the importance of equality issues have become more apparent during the year, I am glad to say that we have been able to proceed with the work within the Objectives of our Equality Plan. Although we have had to do many things in a different way to what was intended, I am pleased to present our Annual Report for 2020-21, which shows the good work that has happened, despite the problems.

We now look forward to a world that is gradually improving because of the vaccine; however, we will not forget the lessons learnt during this unique period.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "N. Jeffreys".

Councillor Nia Jeffreys,  
Gwynedd Council Cabinet Member  
for Corporate Support

# 1. Introduction

In March 2020, the Council published the 'Gwynedd Council Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24' (the Plan) in order to continue with the work of ensuring fairness for all. This fulfils the public sector duties under the Equality Act 2010. The Act has been designed to reduce inequalities between specific groups by asking public bodies to give due regard to the need to:

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

The Plan looks at fairness in terms of nine protected characteristics, that is:

- Age
- Gender reassignment
- Gender
- Race (including ethnic or national origin, colour or nationality)
- Disability
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Sexual orientation
- Religion or belief - including a lack of belief
- Marriage and civil partnership

(Equality Act 2010)

The Plan sets out and describes the work that would form the Council's priority in this field for the four years in question, and we have divided the work into five objectives, namely:

- **Objective 1:** Strengthen and deepen the capacity and commitment of Gwynedd Council Staff and Elected Members in the field of Equality, by ensuring that they receive the right training.
- **Objective 2:** Improve the information we have from and about people with protected characteristics.
- **Objective 3:** Build on the work already carried out to embed Equality Impact Assessments as a tool to ensure better decision-making.
- **Objective 4:** Act to reduce the gender pay gap and identify any pay gap based on any other characteristic.
- **Objective 5:** Act to attract a range of applicants in order to increase the diversity of our workforce.

Of course, much has happened since the document was approved by the Cabinet on 10 March 2020. Although the Covid-19 crisis was looming, and the lockdown about to begin, no-one



could have thought that it would have continued to have such an impact for the whole year and beyond. Clearly the crisis has highlighted a number of inequalities and it is important that we look at our services in the light of this to ensure that we are acting fairly.

Another influential element during the year was the 'Black Lives Matter' campaign following the murder of George Floyd in the United States of America. This highlighted, of course, the need to continue to overcome any instances of racial discrimination.

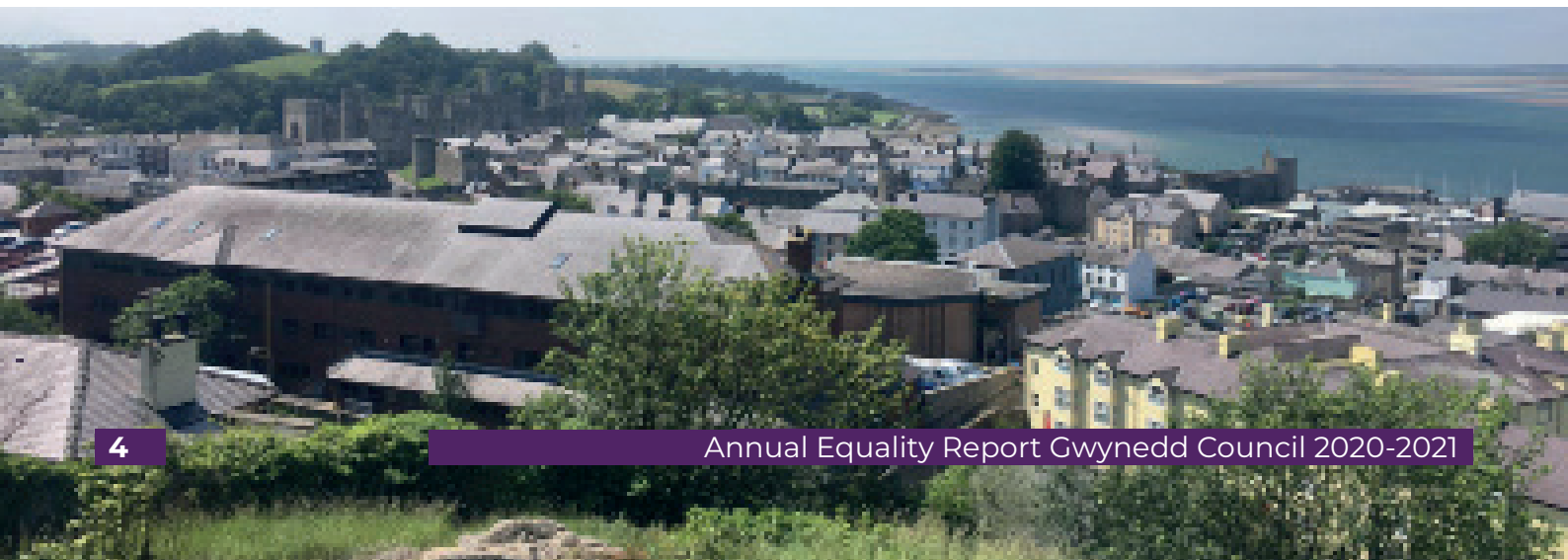
The Welsh Government has also brought into force the Socio-economic Duty which places a duty on us as a Council to consider socio-economic deprivation. This means reducing the gap between people who live in poverty and the rest of society. It means all kinds of poverty, be it financial poverty, digital poverty, difficulty in accessing services because of where they live, or any other form of poverty.

We have looked at the five objectives of the Plan as a result of these events. Although the Covid-19 crisis has meant that we have to operate differently, e.g. we have often had to work online only rather than face to face, we believe our objectives are still appropriate. Objective 2 – Seeking People's Views - is crucial in moving forward and considering how to operate. We will ensure that those who are most affected, i.e. people from ethnic minorities, disabled people and carers, young people, older people and people living under socio-economic disadvantage, are given a proper voice.

Training our staff (Objective 1) is very important as we proceed and we will include information about the impact of the Covid-19 crisis and the needs of minority ethnic groups, etc. This will also be the case with our employment objectives (Objectives 4 and 5). In addition, Objective 3 - Impact Assessment - will be important going forward and will include the above information. In response to the socio-economic duty, we have, as a region, adapted our approach of assessing the impact that changes in policies and services will have. It will include equality, the socio-economic duty and the Welsh language in order to strengthen them and avoid duplication.

Although we have not changed our objectives, our working methods and schedules have inevitably been adapted during 2020/21. This means that a number of action points will be achieved some months later than originally intended. There is more information about this as we look at the objectives in greater detail below.

This report outlines, according to objectives, what action points we have committed to in our Strategic Equality Plan, what we hoped to achieve during 2020/21 and what we were able to achieve in reality. The report also looks at the type of information the Council gathers in the field of equality and shows how equality is embedded in the Council's day-to-day work.



# Objective 1:

Strengthen and deepen the capacity and commitment of Gwynedd Council Staff and Elected Members in the field of Equality, by ensuring that they receive the right training.

As noted in the Equality Plan, the Council does not believe that all staff members fully understand the need to prioritise equality considerations, or are uncertain of how to do this properly. Our training materials too have become dated and we have identified the need to reassess them in order to make them more fit for purpose, and ensure that people are more willing to complete the training. Furthermore, we have identified the need for equality principles to be incorporated into other relevant training, in order to embed equality deeper within the Council's work.

Our aim in doing this is to ensure that members of the workforce, whatever their roles, have a thorough understanding of the field and the confidence to act on their duty towards individuals and groups with protected characteristics. Elected Members will also understand and be more confident in their duty to challenge and make decisions.

## **Action Point 1:**

We will create an equality training programme as a core field that will be varied, innovative, specific, and of the highest quality. It will be appropriately tailored for all staff members on all levels, along with Elected Members, in order to improve their understanding of their duty towards equality.

### **What did we promise to do in 2020/21?**

- consider the effectiveness of our current training and discover what would help staff to understand more about the field
- work with Council Managers in order to discover which presentation methods would be most suitable for the needs of various staff, e.g. front-line staff, managers
- commission training providers who have life experience of the field to provide specialist face-to-face training to our staff as required

### **What did we do?**

Unfortunately, it was not possible to undertake any training during the early months of the year as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, as our usual face-to-face approaches were not possible in line with the new public health guidelines. It is also fair to say that priorities changed during that period. Services had to give priority to serving the people of Gwynedd through the Covid-19 crisis rather than discussing the provision of appropriate training to staff. There has therefore been slippage in the schedule for this action.

However, over the past year, we have engaged with staff to identify barriers and the reasons why not all staff are completing the training available in the equality field. Due to the Covid-19 crisis, we were unable to undertake any face-to-face engagement activities with staff, therefore staff were invited to complete the questionnaire online. The questionnaire was launched in March, with the engagement period open for eight weeks. In addition, we undertook work to assess staff's IT skills and access.

We have also been piloting a range of distance learning techniques creating a DLE (Distance

Learning Environment) online resource which is much more than 'e-learning'. The overall vision for the training is that we can create a 'learning space' which includes a wide range of learning opportunities (including formal learning, modules, Teams sessions, webinars, etc.) as well as resources (documents, books, video, audio clips, links to articles) and discussion forums (online forums including social media). Individuals can control and tailor their own learning and take responsibility for what to study as well as how and when. The environment is 'live' and evolving, growing continuously.

During 2021/22, we will proceed to develop the programme and learning materials, including updating the e-learning module as well as identifying a specialist trainer with first-hand experience of the equality field, as was intended in 2020/21. We know that the same solution is not for everyone and that some staff members do not have access to Council computers. We will work with the Services to help them with their responsibility to ensure that all their employees can benefit from training. We will do this by preparing various methods, appropriate to the Service, such as videos that can be viewed on smartphones, face-to-face sessions or the provision of a tablet on loan.

## Action Point 2:

Elected Members have access to the Members' Portal, an electronic intranet which contains information about training and events relevant to them. Over the period of the Plan, we will update the Portal with training guidelines and information relevant to equality. We will also hold a promotional campaign by using the Members' e-newsletter, 'Rhaeadr', to improve understanding about the information available on the Portal.

### What did we promise to do in 2020/21?

- Update the Members' Portal, providing information on equality such as information about accessibility or organisations working with disabled people. We would also include information about the Council's duties, e.g. the need to carry out equality impact assessments when making any changes to services or policy.
- Undertake work to include information on the new Socio-economic Duty on the Members' Portal too.

### What did we do?

Parts of this work have slipped due to the need for final guidance on the Socio-economic Duty from the Welsh Government before commencing the work. The publication of the duty was postponed from April 2020 to April 2021 and as a result this work was put on hold.

By working with our partners regionally, we have created a new composite impact assessment template (see Objective 3, Action Point 1) and are in the process of adapting it for the Council's use.

In addition, the newly-designed Members' Portal will be launched, as the Members' Intranet, in early 2021/22. The relevant information will be posted on the new intranet during the first quarter of the year.



## **Action Point 3:**

'Ffordd Gwynedd' is the name given to the 'way' we in Gwynedd Council ensure that we place the people of Gwynedd at the heart of everything we do. Ultimately, the success of Ffordd Gwynedd will be judged on whether an individuals' experience when they come into contact with the Council is a positive one that meet their needs. In moving forward, we will continue to work on strengthening the equality element as part of the Ffordd Gwynedd training. This will also be the case for the Welcome to the Council sessions for new staff members.

### **What did we promise to do in 2020/21?**

- modify the Ffordd Gwynedd training to include more consideration of equality issues, and
- adapt the Welcome to the Council system to include more about equality

### **What did we do?**

Work was undertaken to modify Ffordd Gwynedd training, and the new-look training is beginning to be rolled out to staff.

We have also worked on the content of the Welcome to the Council system, and are pleased to report that equality is now an integral part of it.

## Objective 2:

Improve the information we have from and about people with protected characteristics.

Putting the people of Gwynedd at the centre of everything we do is a cornerstone to the way the Council works and this, of course, includes people with various protected characteristics. It is not possible to do this without receiving and acting on the expert opinion of the people in question. Although information has been gathered about the residents of Gwynedd, we have identified that we are not doing enough as a Council to ensure that the voices of people with protected characteristics are included as a matter of course when making everyday decisions.

Our aim in doing this is to acquire a better understanding of the needs and barriers faced by people with protected characteristics who receive our services, and we can put that to use in order to improve our procedures. We can use our existing networking groups to take advantage of meetings and events that have been organised already.

## **Action Point 1:**

In order to understand any barriers that the residents of Gwynedd who have various protected characteristics may face when dealing with the Council, we will conduct a comprehensive public survey. The survey will identify those barriers and what we could do to respond. This work will include a variety of different methods in order to reach a cross-section of people, especially those who do not usually participate. We will ensure confidentiality for all participants.

### **What did we promise to do in 2020/21?**

- Complete the aforementioned survey by the end of March 2021.

### **What did we do?**

Although the Covid-19 crisis meant that our way of working had to be significantly adapted, we were able to undertake research on the information we hold from previous surveys. We also succeeded in forming a project plan, mapping stakeholders and liaising with groups and organisations to draw their attention to the exercise.

The public survey was open between 22 February and 30 April, therefore it was open for anyone to complete for 10 weeks. The aim of the exercise was to find out if the people of Gwynedd faced barriers or unfairness when dealing with the Council. An online/paper survey was also opened with the Gwynedd Residents' Panel for the same purpose. In addition, a staff survey was opened, aimed at gaining information for the same purpose as the public survey, but also included questions about working for the Council and the training available.

We also carried out a comprehensive campaign to encourage individuals to take advantage of the opportunity to have their say by producing materials such as video clips, BSL clips, paper copies, press statements, articles and web pages to promote the exercise. Paper copies of the questionnaire were produced and promoted for those individuals who did not have internet access, as well as easy read copies.

The need to reprioritise resources and look at different ways of working due to the Covid-19 crisis has led to some slippage in the schedule from 2020/21 to 2021/22. Because of this, we

extended the time for which the questionnaire was open to the end of April 2021 instead of February 2021. This allowed more Gwynedd residents to have their say. Various engagement exercises with individuals and groups online or face to face are also planned for the future, subject to Covid-19 restrictions.

## **Action Point 2:**

We will work to develop more contact with groups or individuals who have protected characteristics, by continuing to work with the Equality Core Group and extending it, and making contact with additional groups of people with specific protected characteristics in order to continue to receive various views. We will also undertake further measures to ensure that our Residents' Panel includes a variety of people with protected characteristics, by targeting as required.

### **What did we promise to do in 2020/21?**

This is ongoing work, therefore no specific action had been identified for this period.

### **What did we do?**

We have contacted a number of organisations to raise awareness of the Equality Core Group. However, communication with some organisations has been challenging during the year for a number of reasons including the fact that staff were not in work due to the Covid-19 crisis or that individuals had no internet access.

This work will continue during 2021/22 and we hope that the situation will continue to improve and that it will be easier to connect with people. Also, if the situation continues to improve people should return to work and it will be easier to contact people.



### **Action Point 3:**

By working with managers and heads of departments, we will ensure that everyone who works for the Council understands the needs of people with specific protected characteristics. We will use the information gathered to improve our services and create Equality Impact Assessments. Our Access/Equality Policy will need to be reviewed, whilst also considering the operational recommendations of the Equality Core Group.

#### **What did we promise to do in 2020/21?**

This action point was ongoing work but we set a goal of reviewing the Access/Equality Policy by September 2021.

#### **What did we do?**

The work of addressing this action point is progressing. The Equality Adviser has been assisting managers in adapting services to comply with the constraints of the Covid-19 crisis. The Adviser has also been making information available about the impact of Covid-19 on different characteristic groups.

It is anticipated that the Access/Equality Policy will be in place by September 2021 as intended.

# Objective 3:

Build on the work already carried out to embed Equality Impact Assessments as a tool to ensure better decision-making.

Although the number and quality of our assessments have improved during the time of the Equality Plan 2016-20, there is room for further improvement. By using the assessments to their full potential, we can ensure that we put all the people of Gwynedd at the centre of everything we do as a Council, by giving due attention to equality matters. This Objective is closely linked to Objective 2, as use of the engagement work will be required to undertake Equality Impact Assessments.

Our intention in doing so is to ensure that decisions are made on a firm basis at every level of the Council as staff and Elected Members fully understand and are able to carry out their duties.

## **Action Point 1:**

We will set up specific additional training for relevant staff and Elected Members. It will focus on the advantages of an Equality Impact Assessment and provide guidance and advice on undertaking them in order to give thorough consideration to any potential impacts on the residents of Gwynedd. The content of the training will be regularly reviewed in order to ensure that it is up to date.

### **What did we promise to do in 2020/21?**

Set up specific training on assessing the effect of a new/adapted policy or procedure for Members.

### **What did we do?**

As with Objective 1 training, the planned completion date has slipped to April 2022 due to the need to find new ways of delivery. We will work to complete this by the end of 2021/22.

## **Action Point 2:**

Over the coming years, we will strengthen arrangements by ensuring that Elected Members are increasingly confident to challenge the quality of Equality Impact Assessments as a natural part of their work in receiving reports/information as a basis for decision-making in the Cabinet, Scrutiny Committees and Performance Challenge meetings. The above training will be essential to ensure that this procedure works well, and we will provide guidelines for the various meetings.

### **What did we promise to do in 2020/21?**

Complete the guidelines for Members who are members of different committees by September 2020.

### **What did we do?**

There was a slippage to April 2021 in the Welsh Government's schedule for the publication of the Socio-economic Duty. As a result, because information on the duty needed to be included in the guidelines, there was a slippage in this schedule too - from April 2020 to April 2021. The work has then slipped further as we had decided to create a new Composite Impact Assessment form based on a new regional form and this was not ready by the end of the year. We will ensure that we complete this work during 2021/22.

### **Action Point 3:**

We will continue to work with Council Departments to ensure that due attention is given to equality requirements within any process of identifying savings or cuts. During the period of this Plan, we will ensure that timely and high quality Equality Impact Assessments are maintained and that they contribute to the process of identifying any plans. We hope that through this, we will be aware of any negative implications that decisions on budgetary cuts will have for specific minority groups in Gwynedd, and mitigate them where possible.

#### **What did we promise to do in 2020/21?**

This work is continuous and takes place as required.

#### **What did we do?**

As there was no need to find new savings or cuts during the period in question, no action was required on this particular point. However, Council staff and departments have received ongoing help and support with impact assessments in other fields.



## Objective 4:

Act to reduce the gender pay gap and identify any pay gap based on any other characteristic.

Although the previous two audits have demonstrated that the Council provides equal pay to women and men, the average pay gap continues, similarly to every other local authority. On the whole, this is due to the fact that women are less likely to apply, and therefore are less likely to be offered jobs on higher pay scales within the Council. We have already identified this as a matter of priority that needs to be addressed, which is why the 'Women in Leadership' project is included in the Gwynedd Council Plan 2018-2023.

Although national evidence shows that other wage gaps exist, such as the difference between disabled people and the rest of any workforce, it proves difficult to gather enough information within the Council as we depend on staff members to provide the information voluntarily. As with every other public organisation, the numbers who do so are low.

Our intention in implementing this goal is to have more women applying for leadership positions, to monitor and reduce the gender-based pay gap, and to identify other gaps and begin work to mitigate these.

## **Action Point 1:**

Over the next few years, we will focus on encouraging more staff to complete the optional equality data questionnaire in order to increase the amount of data we have on our workforce. This will allow us to set a baseline, identify gaps in our workforce and to undertake audits based on other protected characteristics. We will employ various methods of doing this during the period of the Plan, including an advertising campaign and raising the awareness of staff members who are new to the self-service system.

### **What did we promise to do in 2020/21?**

This is ongoing, long-term work therefore no specific work had been identified for this year.

### **What did we do?**

In common with other organisations, the numbers who have provided this information are low. Numbers are rising slowly but despite the extra efforts, the number is still low with just over 40% having completed it by the end of the year. We believe that the main reason is that it is optional and that the information we seek is information that not everyone would be comfortable sharing.

We have been encouraging staff to complete the questionnaire to identify the protected characteristics of our workforce since the questionnaire was updated approximately three years ago. During the year, we have:

- published an article in Gair o Gyngor (the Council's in-house newsletter)
- ensured that the Chief Executive raised and mentioned it during his live virtual session for any Council staff who wished to attend on the 17 December
- encouraged staff members who are new to our self-service system to complete it

We will continue to encourage staff to complete the questionnaire over the next year through various means such as:

- sharing a message twice a year to remind people that the information can be changed, e.g. in a situation where a member of staff has got married or has had a long-term illness
- reminding anyone who has not completed it of the need to do so
- discussing with individual Heads to discover the best methods of reaching their workforce.

## **Action Point 2:**

We will continue to conduct an annual audit on the wage gap between men and women, and by collecting the data in accordance with Action Point 1, will work to develop our ability to undertake such an audit in relation to other protected characteristics. In addition, we will undertake a pay audit every three years in order to ensure that we continue to pay equal wages for the kind of work being done. We will also work towards putting plans in place to reduce any gaps that emerge in light of the audit.

### **What did we promise to do in 2020/21?**

- Conduct an audit on the wage difference between men and women (gender pay gap)
- Undertake a gender-based pay audit (equal pay audit)

### **What did we do?**

There has been a slippage in the schedule for conducting both audits. The intention is that we conduct the wage difference audit internally within the Council, whilst as is customary and required, we pay an external consultant to complete the gender-based pay audit. Both pieces of work rely to a degree on producing the same data set, and the need to simplify the computerised system to produce the information. There has been some delay on this element, which in turn has affected the schedule. Our intention in the short-term is to continue to try and resolve the internal problem while proceeding with the external audit. We hope to be able to achieve this by mid-summer.

## Action Point 3:

Work has also been ongoing as part of the Women in Leadership Project (one of the projects contained within the Council Plan 2018-23). We have identified that the number of women in management roles in the Council is disproportionately low, given that women form 70% of the entire workforce. The project's main objective is to increase the number of women who apply for and attain leadership positions within the Council by reviewing the conditions and the working environment in order to attract more women to undertake these posts in future.

### What did we promise to do in 2020/21?

- Review the conditions and the working environment to ensure that we are innovative in encouraging Women in Leadership and identify and seek to remove any barriers that could prevent women from reaching leadership and management posts within the Council.
- Implement a work programme that includes introducing a potential development programme for women, carrying out an audit of our recruitment and appointment methods for managerial posts and creating a forum for female leaders and prospective leaders within the Council.

### What did we do?

A series of forums was arranged for Council staff and Elected Members who are women, facilitated by some of the Council's senior female officers. Topics such as experiences of leading and managing during the Covid-19 crisis were discussed and a discussion held on preparing for senior jobs. They were attended by a total of 40 women. The sessions received positive feedback and it was expressed that it would be beneficial to hold more sessions.

The main messages deriving from these 'conversation sessions' have been recorded and consequently further activities were held - namely sessions on 'imposter syndrome' which were attended by a total of 79 staff, and 18 Elected Members. There are further arrangements in the pipeline to introduce a mentoring programme for the Council's female leaders and prospective leaders as part of a programme of developing potential for women while the 'conversation sessions' have been established as a continuous arrangement.

The work of reviewing recruitment and appointment arrangements for managerial posts has slipped during the year but the Project Group has received a presentation on matters to be considered further by the Human Resources Manager.



# Objective 5:

Act to attract a range of applicants for posts in order to increase the diversity of our workforce.

The Council is one of the county's largest employers. It is important, therefore, that we work towards ensuring that our workforce reflects the Gwynedd working age population as far as possible. The Cabinet has identified this as one of its main priorities for the Plan in its initial discussions. We have already identified a lack of data in relation to the protected characteristics within our workforce and, unfortunately, this deficiency creates problems as we attempt to take appropriate action. Therefore, the success of the work outlined above under Objective 4 is integral to accomplishing Objective 5. It should be noted that we have no intention to undertake the work in an artificial manner. Rather, we will seek to highlight the opportunities available to people from various backgrounds, in order to ensure that we can attract the broadest possible range of applicants. This will provide us with assurance that we find the best person for every job in order to enable us to offer the best service consistently throughout the county and to meet the needs of our population.

Our intention in doing so is to ensure greater diversity of applicants for posts, which will lead to a workforce that reflects our population.

## **Action Point 1:**

We will use the information that has been gathered from the equality questionnaire (see Objective 4, Action Point 1) and will conduct research and engage with the public and our staff in order to discover any factors that prevent specific cohorts of people with protected characteristics from applying for jobs. We will also work to discover ways of encouraging them to apply, e.g. by advertising jobs on a wider level than the Council's website alone, in order to attract a broader range of applications.

### **What did we promise to do in 2020/21?**

This work is ongoing but we aimed to complete the public survey to identify the barriers facing the people of Gwynedd who have different characteristics (in accordance with Objective 2, Action Point 1) before the end of the year.

### **What did we do?**

We have begun the work of engaging with staff and the public to understand what prevents people with protected characteristics from applying for jobs with the Council as part of the work outlined in Objective 2. However, as explained under Objective 2, the need to reprioritise resources and look at different ways of working due to the Covid-19 crisis has led to some slippage in the schedule from 2020/21 to 2021/22.

Because of this, it was decided to extend the time for which the questionnaire was open to allow the residents of Gwynedd to be able to contribute and have their say. This also allowed more time to reach groups that are often not heard. We also hope to be able to conduct various engagement exercises with individuals and groups online or face to face, subject to Covid-19 restrictions.

## **Action Point 2:**

Collaborate with other public bodies within our region such as North Wales Police or Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board in order to address any barriers identified. This could also provide access to a wider range of people, bearing in mind that the equality profile of all workforces are unlikely to be the same.

### **What did we promise to do in 2020/21?**

This work is ongoing, therefore no specific work had been identified for this year.

### **What did we do?**

We planned to collaborate across north Wales to hold events that would encourage people from diverse backgrounds to apply for work in the public sector. The meetings would address the incorrect assumptions that some people have about working in the sector and provide useful information such as help on how to complete an application form effectively. It was not possible to move this work forward as it was being organised by a sub-group of the North Wales Public Sector Equality Network and work related to the crisis meant that they were unable to meet. The Network will reconsider its priorities for the future and decide whether this work will continue in the same form.

## Action Point 3:

Prioritise working towards reaching Level 2 of the 'Disability Confident' scheme in order to be a 'Confident Employer', and look into becoming a Stonewall Champion.

### What did we promise to do in 2020/21?

No specific work had been identified for this year.

### What did we do?

Work on achieving Level 2 is progressing and it is anticipated that the timetable will be reached (September 2022). We have already identified what will need to be achieved to attain Level 2 of the scheme, with the actions covering the following themes:

- Seek to influence other organizations to become disability confident
- Ensure staff have access to bespoke training in the field
- Continue to take steps to remove barriers that may hinder in-service development for disabled staff
- Further develop the opportunities for disabled staff to provide feedback, by encouraging conversations between managers and staff but also by developing specific networks.
- Further develop how we recruit and appoint disabled staff.

We have not yet fully completed the task of understanding Stonewall's membership; that work is ongoing, with a decision on whether or not to pursue this particular direction in the coming year.

## Information

In accordance with the guidelines of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Gwynedd Council is required to report annually on the information we gather in the field of equality.

### Monitoring Staff Equality Details

Because filling the form is optional (in accordance with the guidelines), not enough people have completed it. We have recognised this, and have pledged to work to encourage more people to complete it (Objective 4, Action Point 1). Once we have sufficient information, we will be able to identify pay gaps, initially between the genders, then more widely (Objective 4, Action Point 2) and see if action is needed to improve the diversity of our workforce (Objective 5). This will aim to identify and deal with any discrimination, harassment and victimisation, whilst advancing equality of opportunity and creating better relationships between people who share a particular protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

The information on the equality characteristics of our workforce can be found in Appendix 1.





## Complaints and concerns

The Equality Adviser advises on any complaint made on the grounds of a protected characteristic or equality duty. We also look for patterns annually which will enable us to identify and learn lessons. This ensures that we are able to identify and deal with any discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a specific characteristic and those who do not.

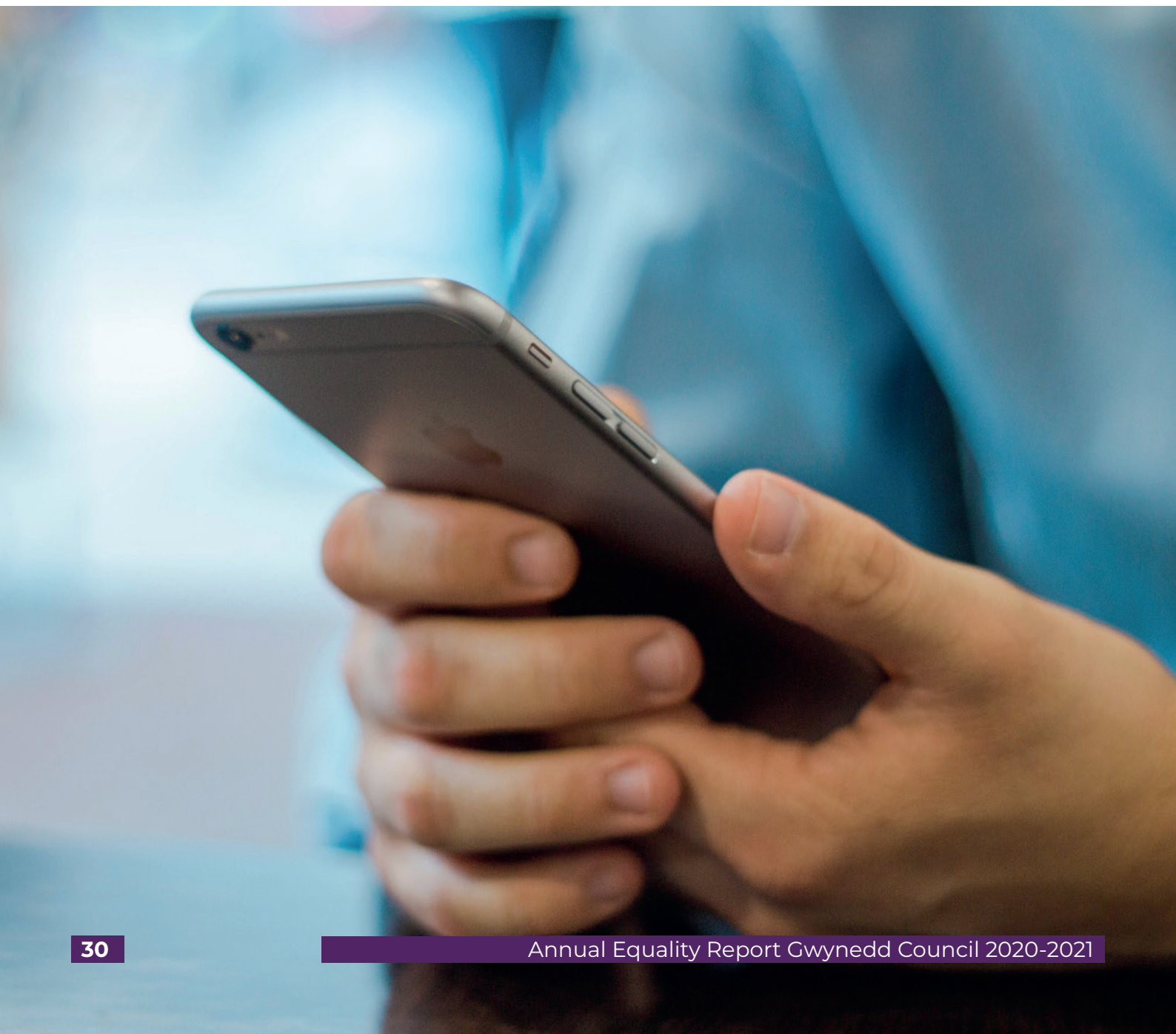
Most of the complaints and concerns on the grounds of equality this year were allegations of racism against the Council or specific officers. Most were connected to the Covid-19 crisis with claims that the Council had not acted appropriately because of their nationality. Two were also received alleging racism on the grounds that they were from a minority ethnic group, including one that went to the Ombudsman. All these complaints were investigated and found to be unfounded because the Council was acting in accordance with legislation or guidance. The Council is considers what action needs to be taken as a result of this pattern.

Complaints were also received on the grounds of disability but there were no patterns to be identified.



## Engagement

Although the Council often engages with the public on all sorts of topics, we have realised that we do not have enough specific information about the precise barriers facing the people of Gwynedd when engaging with the Council. Objective 2 recognises and addresses this. We will use the information to assess the impact of our services which meet the three aims of the duty (i.e. to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations).





## Data

The North Wales Public Sector Equality Network, in conjunction with the Public Service Boards, created a regional data document in 2019/20 along the lines of the Welsh Government's 'Is Wales Fairer?' to create the Equality Plan 2020/21. It shows that there is a lack of information available in some core areas at a county or regional level. This is likely due in part to the low numbers. But there is useful information that shows how the region or county compares with Wales as a whole in areas such as education, housing and socio-economic disadvantage. This information is available to draw up impact assessments that meet the three aims of the duty (i.e. to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations). We are aware, however, that there are gaps in this information especially at county level and this is something we will be looking at when moving forward.





## Day-to-day Work

As each one of us possesses at least five protected characteristics, every part of the Council's work contributes towards well-being based on equality. However, a fair amount of the Council's day-to-day work is also involved with meeting the needs of people with specific protected characteristics and responding to the three general duties. Although things have been difficult over the last year, the Council has continued to do this, and working with partners of all kinds has been central. The Council is indebted to all the organisations and individuals who have been involved in this work, especially all the volunteers who have provided invaluable service during the lockdowns.

Below are examples of the work under the three duties:

### **a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act.**

The Council has arrangements in place to respond to this duty. We have policies to prohibit harassment and victimisation, e.g. a whistle-blowing policy and a dignity at work policy as well as policies to prevent discrimination in the workplace, e.g. a menopause policy and transgender policy. We also of course have procedures to ensure respect and dignity for our service users. The Equality Policy and Access Policy will be updated during 2021/22 in line with Objective 2 above.

The impact assessments that are undertaken on changes to policies or projects help us to identify and mitigate potential unlawful discrimination. As we have had to adapt our ways of working to ensure safety during the lockdown periods, assessing the impact helped to ensure that the changes did not discriminate against people with specific equality characteristics.

We attempted to make the pages on the Council's website providing information on Covid-19 as accessible as possible, by including audio clips in both English and Welsh. The Council also worked with the Recite company to make sure the information on the website was in the most appropriate format for them - it was possible to change the text size, change the colour and contrast of the text and background. There was also a screen reader in several different languages along with an easy read version.

### **b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a characteristic and those who do not.**

To enhance the educational opportunities for learners and their families, Storiell in Bangor initially used the historical resources they have in the museum to create information leaflets for the whole family and to help with home education.

Food poverty can affect some cohorts with equality characteristics more than others, and the Covid-19 crisis certainly brought those changes to the fore, as already stated. The Council was pleased to work with a range of partners, companies and other individuals to help distribute food in different ways:

- The Council supported the work of food banks during the lockdown by distributing food from school kitchens, which would otherwise have gone to waste. In addition, two of the county's schools, Ysgol Maesincla in Caernarfon and Ysgol Hafod Lon in Penrhyndeudraeth, were used as hubs to collect and distribute donations from companies and individuals, along with food newly ordered by the Council. The food was distributed to the Food Banks across the county by Adra, the Gwynedd and north Wales social housing provider.
- The Council was also a key part of the Welsh Government's scheme to distribute food packages to nearly 3,500 people across the county who had to shield and self-isolate, ensuring no individual faced any barrier to receiving food due to personal circumstances.
- For those who did not fall into the Welsh Government's shielding and self-isolation category, but who still could not access food, the Council set up a custom-made scheme entitled Neges, in conjunction with Menter Môn, Anglesey County Council and the company, Dylan's. A weekly food package was distributed to young people who had just left care circumstances, homeless people in temporary accommodation, and children and their families with extra care needs.





Also to ensure the safety of people during the lockdown period, the Council offered support to the friends groups who were carrying out invaluable work in their local areas, doing all sorts of favours for the residents who were self-isolating, e.g. shopping, fetching medication and walking the dog. The main source of support was to find personal protective equipment (PPE) for them, especially at a time when there was a great shortage of it. Adra distributed this equipment too.

As a means of tackling women's period poverty, Gwynedd Council was able to run campaigns to ensure access to period products with dignity, thanks to a grant from the Welsh Government. It was also a chance to raise awareness of the environmental benefits of reusable products. The work involved diverting the supply that would normally be in libraries, so that a free supply was available in the food banks and products from the schools were distributed to the pupils who needed them. There were advertisements on social media sites to encourage disadvantaged young people who are not engaged in the mainstream education system to get in touch to obtain period products too and distribution continued through Flying Start Centres' six family support centres.



To realise its vision of ensuring that every pupil in the county can achieve his or her full potential, Gwynedd Council's Cabinet aims to provide laptops or electronic devices for all school pupils in the county. The intention is to provide pupils from year three upwards with a laptop and foundation phase children with a tablet over the next few years. The scheme is part funded in the early years by the Welsh Government. Year 10 and 11 pupils will be the first to receive the equipment, with the process starting during 2020/21. The programme will then be extended to the rest of the pupils in Gwynedd.

Dealing with homelessness is an important part of ensuring equality as some specific equality characteristics such as disability and minority ethnicity and homelessness are linked. The homelessness percentage in Gwynedd has increased by almost 40% over the last five years. With an increase in Universal Credit cases this year and job losses as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, demand for this type of accommodation and service is at an all-time high. As part of implementing the Gwynedd Housing Strategy 2019-22, a number of initiatives were undertaken to meet the growing needs in homelessness:

- An innovative new housing scheme began in October 2020, Gwynedd Council's first home-building project for more than a quarter of a century. Four eco-friendly units (which use 90% less energy than traditional homes, keeping costs low for tenants) have been built on the site of the old Ysgol Pendalar building in Caernarfon. Their purpose is to house those at risk of homelessness in our communities.
- In a joint scheme between Gwynedd Council and Adra, the north Wales housing provider, local older people were offered comfortable and suitable homes in the Llŷn area in November 2020. It involved the development of 28 purpose-built flats on the site of former Gwynedd Council buildings at Frondeg, Pwllheli, a convenient location close to the town centre. The development responds to the lack of suitable accommodation for local people aged 55 and over and/or anyone with care needs.
- In December, planning permission was obtained to redevelop the vacant site in Bangor into 12 flats with support to prevent homelessness in Gwynedd. Adra is leading on the development, with the building then being managed in partnership by Gwynedd Council and North Wales Housing.
- In January, Gwynedd Council's Cabinet approved a report seeking permission to borrow £15.4 million to buy approximately 100 houses to let at an affordable rent to local people over the next six years.
- In order to provide accommodation and opportunities for vulnerable young people to develop their life skills, substantial funding has been secured for an innovative regeneration scheme to transform two prominent buildings on the Maes in Caernarfon. The £950,000 scheme is being led by Gwynedd Council and the young people's support charity GISDA with funding from the Welsh Government. It will create four apartments for up to five vulnerable young people, training space and offices for GISDA. The existing training café will be extended to support more young people to develop their skills in order to increase opportunities to join the local workforce. The project supports the Council's efforts to ensure that the young people of Gwynedd have access to the support they need from GISDA's experienced workers so that they can live independently and achieve their full potential in their communities.

To help maintain the well-being and mental health of their pupils, at the end of 2020, the





Frondeg development, Pwllheli

Council's primary schools began using a series of daily videos through the medium of Welsh. The videos were prepared by Leisa Mererid, a yoga and mindfulness teacher, and were funded by Hunaniaith - Gwynedd's language initiative.

To start 2021 in a positive way, supporting mental well-being after a difficult year for all, creative activities were offered online by Gwynedd Council's Well-being Team and the Arts Council of Wales. The 'Well-being for Me' project is based on the 'five ways to well-being', which are five actions that contribute positively to mental well-being - connect, keep learning, be active, take notice and give. The programme was offered through a closed Facebook group with a small team sharing their experiences and ideas for creativity and well-being. It is not a programme of treatment or therapy but rather a programme to inspire and share ideas that may support the people of Gwynedd.

Due to safety measures during the crisis, the Council has had to significantly adapt its ways of working. We have sought to ensure that we do so in the most appropriate way for people with various needs. Here are a couple of examples:

- Following some months of closure due to the first lockdown, the Library Service was restarted at the end of June in safe ways that were suitable for all. The library had to be contacted in advance to order books and the library then contacted the users when the books were ready for collection. Recognising that this would not be suitable for everyone, home delivery of books was also arranged. Because the Home Library Service, which works in a slightly different way, is more suitable for some people, it was also possible to re-establish it later.
- At about the same time, live online sessions for young people started because Youth Services were unable to meet face to face. 100 young people enrolled within the first

week alone. The sessions are run by Gwynedd youth workers who are trained to run online sessions with young people.

### **c) Foster good relations between people who share a characteristic and those who do not.**

The Council celebrated Carers Week on 8-14 June 2020 in a different way from the usual. Instead of meetings across the county, a series of videos were posted on social media to celebrate and recognise the valuable contribution of carers. It is estimated that there are approximately 12,500 carers in Gwynedd. These are the people who look after a family member or friends (they are sometimes called unpaid carers) and they are often hidden carers.

Black History Month in September 2020 also had an added poignancy this year following the death of George Floyd and the 'Black Lives Matter' campaign. Gwynedd Council asked people to send inspirational stories, pictures and memories of black people, and of other minority ethnic communities, which have enriched our communities in many ways. These will be collated electronically and retained as a basis for future initiatives to celebrate the diversity of Gwynedd.

Although it was not possible to attend an event on this occasion, Gwynedd Council marked Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January 2021 by posting a message on social websites. We believe that this day needs to be commemorated more than ever. The day is an opportunity for communities to reflect on how all of us can make a better, safer future for all by learning from the past. It is important to remember that a range of people were affected including Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, gay men, gypsy and Roma people and disabled people.

Dementia Go is a physical activity programme for people affected by dementia, including those who have been diagnosed and their carers, family and friends. With the advent of the Covid-19 crisis, face-to-face sessions had to end including 13 exercise classes throughout Gwynedd, community sports events, outdoor pursuits, dances, awareness sessions and special events. The team responded to the crisis by offering ongoing support to members including online activities with a new user-friendly website. It included support activities, and put people in touch with services and organisations in Gwynedd that can help and support them. To convey all the different aspects, the team, in consultation with their members, chose a new name - Gwynedd Dementia Active. The website was funded by donations from families in memory of loved ones and the Council is extremely grateful to receive them.

Blaentroed is an exciting and innovative project to offer a period of work and training for unemployed young people in Gwynedd, and offer an opportunity for local businesses to receive help at no cost as they reopen and recover. The aim of the project is to add value to the Welsh Government's £2bn Kickstart scheme, which aims to create thousands of job opportunities for young people for six months, without the need for the employer to contribute any money. But as it can be difficult for smaller businesses to take advantage of the scheme and there are so many small businesses in Gwynedd, a partnership was established between social enterprises in Nantlle, Ogwen and Bro Ffestiniog along with Gwynedd Council and Grŵp Llandrillo Menai to make it easier for young people and local businesses to get involved.

Gwynedd Council, on behalf of several stakeholders, is developing a nomination to attempt to secure world heritage site status for the slate landscape of north-west Wales, which includes six key areas. Alongside this, the Council has secured funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund Great Place Scheme, Snowdonia Partnership Fund and Gwynedd Rural



Innovation Fund, to create the 'LleCHI' Scheme which focuses on community engagement, local empowerment, improving destinations, community regeneration and pride. A recent example of its work in primary schools is the artwork of Ysgol y Felinheli pupils on a flood defence wall in the village. At secondary sector level, 15 young people from the Welsh Slate areas have come together, in conjunction with the National Slate Museum, to gain a wealth of diverse experiences such as becoming Young Ambassadors for the World Heritage Application. Other experiences include creating blogs, designing a logo, a virtual meeting with an assessor for the World Heritage Site application, and asking international goalkeeper Owain Fôn Williams how the quarrying landscape of Dyffryn Nantlle inspires his artwork.

