

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Standing up for LGBT equality
in local government

LOCAL COUNCILS DON'T REALLY MATTER, DO THEY?

Lots of the big issues aren't decided in the Senedd or at Westminster. Our councils make decisions about the schools we send children and young people to, the care our parents and grandparents get and the kind of communities we live in. The decisions they make affect lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGBT) people's lives – whether our schools talk about LGBT issues, the quality of care LGBT older people receive, how we respond to hate crime in our communities. These are decisions that really matter. These are decisions that affect us every day.

BUT SURELY I CAN'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

There are lots of different ways that you can get involved in changing things for the better. You can take part in local consultations and provide feedback on the services you use – whether they're good or bad. You can even protest when things are going badly. **But your vote really matters.**

In the 2012 council elections, more than 60 per cent of those who could vote didn't. That's over 1.3 million people in Wales - including LGBT people and their allies - who didn't make themselves heard.

Your voice can make a difference. Your council can change LGBT people's lives – but only if you ask them to.

STAND UP FOR LGBT EQUALITY – USE YOUR VOICE AND YOUR VOTE TO SUPPORT LGBT PEOPLE

GET INVOLVED!

Find out more about the ways your council can change LGBT people's lives.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Your council runs your local schools. They're responsible for providing children with an education, including making sure teachers are trained and supported and deciding what money is spent on. But too many LGBT young people are let down by their schools.

Bullying can stop LGBT young people achieving their best, and have a severe impact on their mental health. However, four in five secondary school staff and nine in ten primary school staff in Wales have not received any specific training on how to tackle homophobic bullying. *(The Teachers' Report, 2014)*

55 PER CENT OF LESBIAN, GAY AND BI PUPILS HAVE EXPERIENCED BULLYING BECAUSE OF THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION.

(THE SCHOOL REPORT, 2012).

WHAT CAN I DO?

Ask your councillors or candidates if they will:

- ensure that teachers in all schools in their local authority have received training on bullying and supporting LGBT pupils
- back initiatives to ensure that all schools have the guidance, training and facilities they need to support trans young people
- support and maintain LGBT youth groups and services in their local authority

83 PER CENT OF TRANS YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE EXPERIENCED VERBAL ABUSE AND 35 PER CENT HAVE EXPERIENCED PHYSICAL ASSAULT.

(METRO YOUTH CHANCES, 2014)

"I got bullied a lot around the time I came out. The teachers didn't do anything even when they did overhear the snide comments and gossip that was going round about me."

MELERI, 14

HATE CRIME AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

Local councillors have a key role to play in making sure that communities are safe and free from prejudice. By working closely with their communities, they can raise awareness of the role we all play in tackling hate crime, build community cohesion and encourage reporting.

We still live in a society where many LGBT people are insulted, intimidated, harassed or attacked because of their sexual orientation or trans identity. Trans people and Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) LGBT people are especially at risk of being a victim of hate crime.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Ask your councillors or candidates if they will:

- work with schools, community groups, third-party reporting organisations and the local police force to raise awareness of hate crime and encourage hate crime reporting
- work with community members and the local police force through Partnerships and Communities Together (PACT) meetings and other forums to identify and respond to the needs of LGBT people and their concerns about community safety

ONE IN FIVE LESBIAN, GAY AND BI PEOPLE IN WALES HAVE BEEN THE VICTIM OF A HOMOPHOBIC HATE CRIME OR INCIDENT IN THE LAST THREE YEARS.

(HATE CRIME, 2013)

TWO IN FIVE TRANS PEOPLE HAVE EXPERIENCED PHYSICAL INTIMIDATION AND THREATS FOR BEING TRANS.

(TRANS MENTAL HEALTH STUDY, 2012)

“I am sick of feeling bullied and intimidated on my own street when I have worked very hard to be able to buy my own house. How is it fair for me to be made to feel like a lesser individual?”

TOM, 33

SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

Your council is responsible for delivering social services and services relating to wellbeing. This includes social care, such as personal care for older people and support for disabled people, fostering services and support for substance abuse and addiction.

Although it's illegal for health and social care services to discriminate against LGBT people, many still experience poor treatment and discrimination. This can mean that some LGBT people don't have much confidence in their social care services, and expect they will not be inclusive for LGBT people.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Ask your councillors or candidates if they will:

- engage with LGBT people in their community – making sure they reach out to older people and disabled people who are LGBT – to understand and tackle the barriers to accessing social care services
- ensure that all care staff in local social care services receive training on best practice for providing care for LGBT people
- ensure that all staff working in fostering services have received training on providing an LGBT-inclusive fostering service

“I would, by virtue of the need to have carers in my home, be at a particularly vulnerable stage of life. The thought of being in my own home requiring help from someone who brings in with them the prejudices and judgements of the world I experience ‘out there’ fills me with dread.”

JAMES, 55

THREE IN TEN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE STAFF IN WALES HAVE HEARD COLLEAGUES MAKE NEGATIVE REMARKS OR USE DISCRIMINATORY LANGUAGE ABOUT LESBIAN, GAY AND BI PEOPLE IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS. ONE IN FIVE HAVE HEARD COLLEAGUES MAKE NEGATIVE REMARKS OR USE DISCRIMINATORY LANGUAGE ABOUT TRANS PEOPLE. (UNHEALTHY ATTITUDES, 2015)

THREE IN FIVE LESBIAN, GAY AND BI OLDER PEOPLE ARE NOT CONFIDENT THAT SOCIAL CARE AND SUPPORT SERVICES WOULD BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND AND MEET THEIR NEEDS. (LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL PEOPLE IN LATER LIFE, 2013)

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Councils are responsible for providing housing for those who need it locally, including social housing and temporary and emergency accommodation for people at risk of homelessness.

However, LGBT people often have poor experiences of housing services, including staff making assumptions about their sexual orientation or gender identity, and not having sufficient information about the housing issues LGBT people might face. This can lead to LGBT people having low confidence in housing services, and expecting to have poor experiences. LGBT people are also disproportionately affected by homelessness compared to the general population, often because of family rejection, abuse and violence.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Ask your councillors or candidates if they will:

- work with local housing services to ensure that staff are trained on the needs and experiences of LGBT people
- raise awareness of factors that can lead to homelessness among LGBT young people, and work with schools and community groups to ensure that all aspects of a young person's identity and family life are considered in keeping young people safe from harm.

ALMOST ONE IN TEN LGBTQ YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE HAD TO LEAVE HOME FOR REASONS RELATING TO THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY.

(METRO YOUTH CHANCES, 2014)

“I was laughed at by a local authority employee after enquiring about council housing.”

JIM, 26

SPORT AND LEISURE

Your council run local sport centres, as well being responsible for parks and green spaces. However, LGBT people often have negative experiences of sporting environments – half of sports fans in Wales have witnessed language or behaviour which was offensive to LGBT people in a sport setting and over one third of lesbian, gay and bi people have experienced abuse in a sporting context because of their sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation (*Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Sport, 2013*).

Trans people can face specific barriers to accessing sport and leisure facilities. More than half of trans people avoid going to gyms and other leisure facilities (*Trans Mental Health Study, 2012*). Fear of harassment, lack of privacy in changing spaces and concerns about the difficulties they may face in accessing gendered spaces can prevent trans people from taking advantage of sports and leisure opportunities in their local area.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Ask your councillors or candidates if they will:

- community groups to engage with national campaigns to end LGBT discrimination in sport, such as supporting the Rainbow Laces campaign and signing up to the LGBT Sport Cymru Charter.
- ensure that local leisure facilities consider and meet the needs of LGBT service users: in particular, that they follow a zero-tolerance approach to the use of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language in sport and leisure spaces, and ensure that trans people feel confident and able to use leisure facilities.

“Being trans means physical activities such as swimming are hard to access for fear of being ridiculed and stared at. A trans-only swimming session meant we were free to wear what we wanted, and have fun without the worry of other people possibly questioning us... I personally love swimming, and having the opportunity to do it again after so many years of being too scared to has been a liberating experience for me.”

PARTICIPANT OF THE TRANS SWIMMING PROJECT SET UP THROUGH A PARTNERSHIP OF SWIM WALES, LLANTRISANT LEISURE CENTRE, ACTIVE VALLEYS, YOUTH CYMRU AND LGBT SPORT CYMRU.

GET INVOLVED!

ASK YOUR COUNCILLORS AND CANDIDATES TO STAND UP FOR EQUALITY!

As a voter, you have power. Use it to contact the councillors or council candidates in your area and ask them to stand up for LGBT equality!

You can use the website [Write To Them](#) to write to existing councillors. You can also use your [local authority website](#) to find out who the candidates in your area will be – look under ‘Government’ or ‘Elections’.

You can write about one of the issues in this guide – our resource for councillors and candidates at www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/cymru-your-community contains more information on these.

Alternatively, use an issue of LGBT equality that matters to you personally. Your own experiences matter, and can be really powerful tools for persuading candidates and councillors.

Remember, be **polite, concise** and **positive** to increase your chance of a response.

“Dear Candidate/Councillor X

I live in Ward Y. As the father of a young trans person, it’s important to me that schools in Anytown are properly trained and supported to support trans pupils. At the moment, most teachers don’t get any training, and my daughter has had a terrible experience at school. What will you do to push for all teachers to have training?

Best wishes,

Your name”

You can also ask candidates to commit to standing up for LGBT people on social media. Use the hashtag #ByYourSide

“ Hi @localcandidate – if you’re elected, will you stand up for LGBT equality?

www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/cymru-your-community #ByYourSide ”

“ Hi @localcandidate - if you’re elected, will you advocate for LGBT training for teachers in MyTown?

www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/cymru-your-community #ByYourSide ”

“Great to see @localcandidate standing up for more inclusive sports facilities! RT.@localcandidate ‘Of course – very happy to support. #ByYourSide”

You should get a positive response - most candidates want to stand up for people in their community. But if you do get a negative response, remember that you don’t need to respond, particularly if you feel upset or angry.

All councillors are bound by the Code of Conduct for members of local authorities in Wales, which requires them to carry out their duties with due regard to the principle of equality of opportunity for all people (including for LGBT people), to show respect and consideration for others and not to use bullying behaviour or harass any person.

If you believe a councillor has breached this code and you would like to make a complaint, you can do so through the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. For more information, go to www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk.

ENGAGING WITH LOCAL POLITICS

There are lots of ways that you can get involved in local politics:

VOLUNTEER WITH A LOCAL CHARITY OR POLITICAL CAMPAIGN

Local charities and campaigns always welcome volunteers, and it can be a great way to make a difference. If there's a cause that you're interested in, see if there's an organisation near you campaigning on it. Phone or email them to see if they have any opportunities for volunteers. Have a think about skills you might want to offer – do you want to hold fundraising events? Can you offer time to talk to people who are lonely or need support? Do you prefer office work, like filing and working on computers?

JOIN A POLITICAL PARTY

Joining a political party can be a fun way to meet other likeminded people and campaign on the issues that matter to you. As a member, you'll have opportunities to campaign with others, including talking to voters and delivering leaflets. There are also local social events, meetings, and opportunities to learn more about political issues through conferences.

You can join up online for a small fee – these vary from party to party, but many will offer discounts for young people and those who are unemployed. If you're not sure about joining, volunteering with a party can be a good way to get a feel for the atmosphere. Contact your local party branch online to ask if you can join them for their next campaign day.

Most political parties have affiliated LGBT groups for party supporters who are LGBT that you could join as well.

STAND FOR COUNCIL

If you want to stand up for LGBT people locally, you could consider standing for council yourself. Standing for council means you can speak out about the issues that matter to you, whether that's LGBT inclusion in social care or better cycle lanes. It's an amazing opportunity to stand up for your local LGBT communities, either as an ally, or a visible LGBT role model.

To be effective, councils need to be representative of the communities they serve. However, LGBT people, women, Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people and people under 60 are seriously underrepresented in councils in Wales. We need councillors who bring a diversity of life experiences and perspectives.

To stand for council, you can either join a political party, or stand as an independent candidate. Find out more at www.wlga.wales/be-a-councillor-2017

"I'd been doing voluntary work in my community around mental health, as well as campaigning for trans equality. I was helping deliver leaflets for the party locally, and we'd just hit the headlines for having the first out trans mayor in the UK. I was inspired by what I'd seen, the difference one person can make, and I thought, 'if she can do that and be well received, maybe I can too.' When the local party was looking for people to stand for council, I said yes.

I made a difference over the four years I served as a councillor. Against the backdrop of austerity I was in charge of the budget for arts, sports and local community facilities, and made sure that vulnerable and minority groups had their funding protected. I also started a scheme to give free swimming lessons to underprivileged kids. I'm proud of what I did, and I think I will be as long as I live."

SARAH BROWN
FORMER LIBERAL DEMOCRAT COUNCILLOR

DEBATE TIME!

Hustings or debates can be really useful opportunities to talk with candidates, and ask them about their ideas and policies. Many communities will hold hustings, allowing you to ask all the candidates where they stand on issues that matter to LGBT people. But if there's not one planned in your community, why not organise one of your own?

TIPS FOR PLANNING A HUSTINGS

- Is there a theme to your hustings? Will it be on LGBT issues specifically, equalities, or a more general community hustings?
- Find a venue that's accessible to as many people as possible, including disabled people and people travelling into the area
- Find someone to chair the debate who is politically neutral - someone who will treat all the candidates fairly
- Set a date near the election, when people will be most engaged
- Contact all the candidates standing in your area to ask them to attend. Make sure you treat all the candidates fairly – if you choose not to invite someone, you may be subject to requirements about campaign spending. Contact the Electoral Commission for more information about this.
- Spread the word! Ask community groups and spaces (like libraries and places of worship) to put up posters for you, and promote the event through social media.

GET OUT AND VOTE!

Voting is your biggest chance to make your voice heard, so make sure you, your friends and your family members are registered to vote at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote - it only takes 5 minutes.

Next, make sure your friends and family are registered to vote! Any British, Commonwealth or EU citizen over the age of 18 can vote in Welsh local elections.

Once you've voted, get as many friends and family to vote as you can.

Tell your friends and family why voting in this election matters for LGBT equality. Decisions on schools, social services and housing are all made in your council – all issues that matter for LGBT people.

Voting makes a difference – don't throw away your chance to have your say!

AFTER THE ELECTION - WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

Even though the elections are over, that's not the end of the story. Now your councillors are elected, it's important to hold them **accountable** – make sure they do the things they said they would do!

Follow up with councillors you spoke to before the elections, and ask them what they'll be doing now they're elected. Invite them to carry on engaging with local LGBT groups and communities – building a relationship makes it more likely they'll continue to actively support LGBT causes.

“@CllrX, it was great to see your support for inclusive education during the election. Will you come and speak to our school about it?”

“@CllrX, it was great to see your support for tackling LGBT hate crime. Will you raise this at the council now you're elected?”

Remember, stay positive and friendly - you're much more likely to get a positive response!

RESOURCES

Download and order hard copies of our resources, including stickers, posters and research from our website at www.stonewallcymru.org/our-work/publications-cymru

KEEP CAMPAIGNING!

- Reach out to other campaigners! Join a local LGBT group, or meet up with other campaigners in your area, to keep pushing for equality for LGBT people.
- Represent LGBT issues in other areas of campaigning. If you're passionate about tackling LGBT homelessness, get your local housing or homelessness campaign to include it!
- If you're 16-21, apply for **Stonewall's Young Campaigners Programme!** Meet other young campaigners and develop the skills you need to campaign effectively on what matters to you

ABOUT STONEWALL CYMRU

Stonewall Cymru is Wales's leading lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGBT) equality charity. We were founded in 2003, and we work with businesses, public bodies, schools, the Welsh Government, the National Assembly for Wales and a wide range of partners in communities across Wales to work towards our vision of a world where lesbian, gay, bi and trans people are accepted without exception.

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