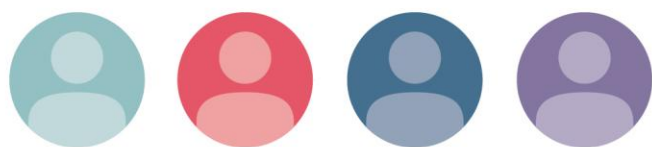


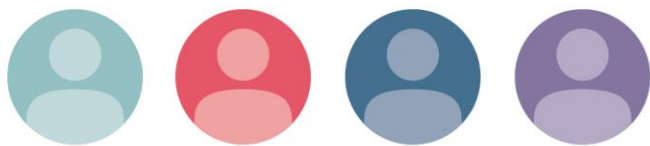
Social Partnership Duty Report 2025





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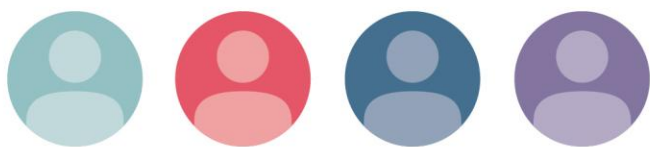
1. INTRODUCTION

Social partnership is a collaborative approach, designed to pursue mutual gains within the context of policy development and implementation, or operational change. It works on the basic principle that more can be achieved by employers and workers, predominantly through their trade unions, by working together in a spirit of co-operation and collaboration, to address economic, social, and workplace issues. Since devolution, the Welsh Government has suggested social partnership as a potential approach to addressing challenges in Wales.

There are many social partnership arrangements within and between individual organisations, sector-wide representative groups, and recognised trade unions, some with a long history. In the absence of any statutory underpinning, those existing partnership structures have developed voluntarily and organically over time, taking a variety of different approaches to partnership working. In 2021 the Welsh Government made a commitment to establish a statutory basis for social partnership in Wales, culminating in the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023. Under Sections 15, 16 and 18 of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023, on 1 April 2024, the new Social Partnership Duty (“the Duty”) on public bodies came into force in Wales.

As set out in the Explanatory Memorandum to the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023, the intended effect of the legislation is to improve the economic, social, cultural, and environmental wellbeing of people in Wales by strengthening the role of social partnership within strategic decision making. Involving both employers and workers in key discussions regarding improvements to wellbeing recognises and values the unique contribution and expertise brought by those directly engaged in public service delivery when addressing shared challenges and seeking innovative solutions. The intended effect of these provisions is to promote cooperation, strengthen policy and improve outcomes, through dialogue between social partners, achieved in social partnership.

The devolved public sector is a significant employer in Wales. It directly shapes the experience of work for those who work within it, and it can also have an indirect influence throughout the public sector and wider economy through leading by example on progressive approaches to workforce matters. The ability of the devolved public bodies to perform that direct and indirect role will be strengthened by the Duty.



2. WHAT IS REQUIRED BY THE DUTY?

The Social Partnership Duty applies to the forty-eight public bodies listed in section 6(1) of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, of which Monmouthshire County Council is one. Therefore, Monmouthshire County Council must meet four statutory requirements which will integrate social partnership principles into our activities and ensure that trade unions are actively engaged in decision-making processes, particularly in areas impacting the workforce.

Requirement 1: Social Partnership Duty

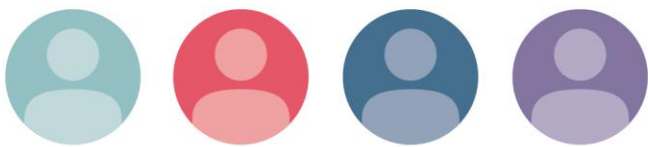
Councils must engage in social partnership with recognised trade unions when setting wellbeing objectives (in line with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015) and making significant strategic decisions, particularly those that impact employees or relate to sustainable development. This engagement requires efforts to seek consensus or compromise with trade unions, specifically at the formative stages of policy development or decision making. Councils must provide trade unions with sufficient information and adequate time to consider and respond to proposals.

Requirement 2: Reporting Obligations

Councils must prepare an annual report detailing compliance with the Social Partnership Duty. This report should include actions taken to engage trade unions in relevant decision-making processes. The report must either have the agreement of recognised trade unions or explain why an agreement could not be reached. Councils are required to publish this report and submit it to the Social Partnership Council, as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of the financial year, which may issue further guidance based on their content.

Requirement 3: Public Procurement Duty

Councils are expected to ensure their procurement processes align with social partnership and fair work principles, which include engaging trade unions where procurement decisions affect labour standards. This duty includes ensuring that suppliers adhere to fair work practices, thereby promoting ethical standards and fair working conditions in contracts involving public funds.



Requirement 4: Adherence to Social Partnership Council Guidance

Welsh Ministers, through the Social Partnership Council, can publish guidance on social partnership practices, which councils must give regard to.

Seeking Consensus or Compromise

Section 16(2) of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023, sets out several specific requirements relating to the Duty, which the Council must comply with when 'seeking consensus or compromise'. The requirements are intended to ensure that trade unions are fully and properly involved when the Council sets its wellbeing objectives, or when making strategic decisions about the reasonable steps the Council is taking to meet those objectives.

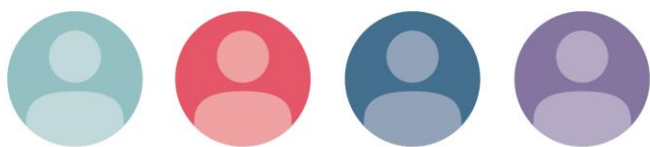
The Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 states that '*in order to seek consensus or compromise, a public body must include its recognised trade unions or other representatives of its staff in the process of setting objectives or making decisions, by (in particular):*

- (a) consulting them at a formative stage of the process, and*
- (b) otherwise involving them throughout the process by*

- (i) providing sufficient information to enable them to properly consider what is proposed, and*
- (ii) providing sufficient time to enable them to adequately consider what is proposed and respond.'*

3. CURRENT PARTNERSHIP WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

The current partnership working arrangements in Monmouthshire County Council are mainly through workforce matters. There is already an approach to partnership working which provides more collaborative opportunities than the traditional consultation model. The current level of discussion is wide reaching and includes regular trade union meetings and interaction with elected members.



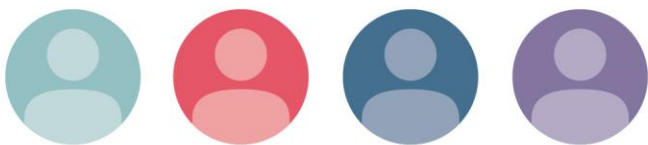
The Head of HR and Strategic Director, Social Care and Health, for Monmouthshire County Council attended the Welsh Government Social Partnership event in July 2024, which provided helpful information regarding the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 and reassurance that Monmouthshire County Council can already evidence a strong approach to partnership working.

The arrangements the Council already has in place, which contribute to the four statutory requirements, are set out below. These support how social partnership principles are integrated into Council activities.

Requirement 1: Social Partnership Duty

The range of activities already taking place, in which trade unions are actively involved and engaged, includes:

- Quarterly Joint Advisory Group Meetings (consisting of elected members, officers, including members of the Strategic Leadership Team, and trade union representatives):
 - Items brought to the Joint Advisory Group are determined by consensus and agreement from both the trade union and employer side.
 - Terms of reference for the Joint Advisory Group also include a commitment to gain consensus and agreement on all HR policies, which is not limited to contractual policies.
 - The Joint Advisory Group are involved in the statutory annual review of Monmouthshire County Council's Community and Corporate Plan and Wellbeing Objectives.
- Monthly informal meetings between officer and trade union officials:
 - Held for both corporate and education trade unions, to raise organisational wide issues, ensure employee voice is represented and heard, and to consult on topics from both the trade union and employer side.
- Formal consultation arrangements with trade unions exist for budget setting processes, workforce planning and restructuring processes.



- Formal invite for trade unions to attend the weekly Job Evaluation Panel.
- Regular informal dialogue with the Leader/Cabinet Member and trade unions.
- Informal meetings between HR, Workforce Development and trade unions on new ways of working/improving processes for colleagues and managers.

Requirement 2: Reporting Obligations

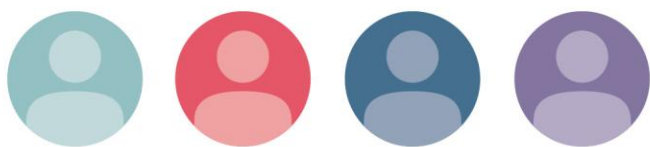
This Council has produced this annual report, the first under these requirements, detailing the current arrangements which are in place to comply with the Social Partnership Duty. The report also sets out proposed developments in partnership working arrangements, as agreed in consultation with trade union representatives, aimed at strengthening how the Council involves and engages trade unions on a broader scope of decision-making activity.

Requirement 3: Public Procurement Duty

The Council has an established Socially Responsible Procurement Strategy. The strategy includes the objective to Improve Fair Work, Equity and Safeguarding practices adopted by suppliers. This aims to facilitate the Council to deliver against the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act and the principles of the Code of Practice: Ethical Employment in Supply Chain. An annual evaluation of the performance of the aims of the strategy is produced. An assessment of the effectiveness of the Council procurement arrangements is also incorporated in the Council's statutory annual self-assessment report, which trade unions are actively involved and engaged in through the Joint Advisory Group.

Requirement 4: Adherence to Social Partnership Council Guidance

This annual report provides a mechanism for the Council to assess its arrangements in accordance with the requirements in the Social Partnership Duty. Including, adherence to any future Social Partnership Council Guidance published. The annual report will also be incorporated in the Council's statutory annual self-assessment of its wellbeing objectives in the Community and Corporate Plan.

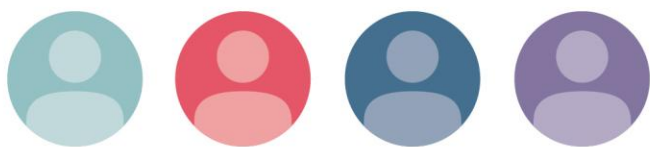


4. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENTS IN PARTNERSHIP WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

Under the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023, the Council is obligated to involve and engage trade unions on a broader scope of decision-making activity beyond that already underway. Specifically, as a minimum, consensus and agreement on setting wellbeing objectives should be gained, and trade union representative should have greater involvement in strategic decisions that have workforce or sustainable development implications.

Proposed developments in partnership working arrangements, as agreed in consultation with trade union representatives, include:

- Trade union representatives being involved to a greater extent in the statutory annual review of Monmouthshire County Council's Community and Corporate Plan and Wellbeing Objectives, with the option of including a statement in the final self-assessment report to Council.
- Holding annual briefings by the Section 151 Officer, for all parties, on the public finance outlook, Medium Term Financial Plan assumptions and inviting all parties to put forward future saving proposals for consideration.
- Trade union representatives being involved/engaged at an early stage:
 - of any savings proposals that have workforce implications.
 - in the development and review of the Strategic Equality Plan.
 - in the development of staff survey questions and actions to respond to findings.
 - in the changes to/development of corporate staff induction arrangements.
 - in procurement developments, in accordance with the Ardal partnership arrangements.
 - in a review of the Facilities Time Agreement.
 - in leading the roll-out of the 'Social Partnership the Welsh Way' training module on Thinqi (online training platform), across the organisation.
- Trade union representatives being invited to attend an annual meeting to discuss social partnership arrangements.



5. CONCLUSIONS

The Welsh Government has suggested social partnership as a potential approach to addressing challenges in Wales. Monmouthshire County Council already has an approach to partnership working which provides more collaborative opportunities than the traditional consultation model.

In order to involve and engage trade unions on a broader scope of decision-making activity beyond than that which is already underway, Monmouthshire County Council has developed and agreed a social partnership action plan (see Appendix 1), that encompasses the guiding principles of cooperation, respect, trust, voice and participation, and mutual gains, which will establish a consistent approach to fulfilling statutory duties under the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023.

The Council is confident that, through delivery of the action plan, the benefits of social partnership working will be realised to an even greater extent than they are currently, and the organisation's values of openness, fairness, flexibility, teamwork and kindness will be strengthened.

This report has the agreement of recognised trade unions in Monmouthshire County Council.



APPENDIX 1:

SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP ACTION PLAN 2025-26

Number	The action to be taken	Who is accountable
1	Trade union representatives being involved to a greater extent in the statutory annual review of Monmouthshire County Council's Community and Corporate Plan and Wellbeing Objectives, with the option of including a statement in the final self-assessment report to Council.	Chief Officer: People, Performance and Partnerships Trade Union Officers
2	Holding annual briefings by the Section 151 Officer, for all parties, on the public finance outlook, Medium Term Financial Plan assumptions and inviting all parties to put forward future saving proposals for consideration.	Chief Officers Section 151 Officer Trade Union Officers
3	Trade union representatives being involved/engaged at an early stage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) of any savings proposals that have workforce implications. b) in the development and review of the Strategic Equality Plan. c) in the development of staff survey questions and actions to respond to findings. d) in the changes to/development of corporate staff induction arrangements. e) in procurement developments, in accordance with the Ardal partnership arrangements. f) in a review of the Facilities Time Agreement. g) in leading the roll-out of the 'Social Partnership the Welsh Way' training module on Thinqi (online training platform), across the organisation. 	Chief Officer: People, Performance and Partnerships Section 151 Officer Trade Union Officers
4	Trade union representatives being invited to attend an annual meeting to discuss social partnership arrangements.	Chief Officer: People, Performance and Partnerships Trade Union Officers