

JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 31st March, 2025.

Present: Councillor S. Campbell (Chair); Councillors J.E. Charles, C.M. Cowpe, P. Drake, W.A. Hennesy and N.C. Thomas.

Representatives of Trade Unions: M. Canavan (NEU), R. Craven (NEU), J. Davis (UNISON / Vice-Chair), G. Davies (UNISON), M. Davies (UCAC), M. Morris (NASUWT), G. Pappas (UNISON) and N. Savage (GMB).

Officers: T. Baker, L. Bonni, T. Dickinson, G. Jones, E. Jones, H. Moses and M. Thomas.

(a) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from Councillor S.D. Perkes and J. Green (UNISON).

(b) Minutes and Matters Arising –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd December, 2024 be approved as a correct record.

(c) Declarations of Interest –

No declarations were received.

(d) Trade Union Items –

GMB facility time.

N. Savage (GMB) asked the Forum that the item be put into abeyance at this time, due to ongoing discussions with representatives for the Vale of Glamorgan Council, with the aim of this matter being resolved in the near future.

(e) Minutes of Directorate Consultative Groups (For Information) –

(i) Social Services Health and Safety Forum – 7th October, 2024

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Social Services Health and Safety Forum held on 7th October, 2024.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Social Services Health and Safety Forum meeting be noted.

(ii) Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative Meeting – 6th November, 2024

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative meeting held on 6th November, 2024.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative meeting be noted.

(iii) Learning and Skills JCF – 6th November, 2024

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Learning and Skills JCF held on 6th November, 2024.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Learning and Skills JCF meeting be noted.

(iv) Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative Meeting – 4th December, 2024

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative Meeting held on 4th December, 2024.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Visible Services and Housing Trade Union Consultative meeting be noted.

(v) Social Services Health and Safety Forum – 12th December, 2024

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Social Services Health and Safety Forum held on 12th December, 2024.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Social Services Health and Safety Forum meeting be noted.

(vi) Social Services Consultative Forum – 13th January, 2025

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Social Services Consultative Forum held on 13th January, 2025.

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Social Services Consultative Forum meeting be noted.

(vii) Learning and Skills JCF – 17th February, 2025

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Learning and Skills JCF held on 17th February, 2025.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Learning and Skills JCF meeting be noted.

(f) Dates of Other Directorate Consultative Groups for Noting –

These were shared with the Forum prior to the meeting.

Following consideration by the Forum, it was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the following dates for the Directorate Consultative Groups as detailed below be noted:

- (i) Learning and Skills – 16th June 2025.
- (ii) Social Services – 14th April 2025, 3rd June 2025, 17th July 2025 and 10th September 2025.
- (iii) Social Services Health and Safety Committee – 16th June 2025.
- (iv) Visible Services & Housing - meetings held on the first Wednesday of every month (subject to availability of agenda items).

(g) Vale 2030 – Draft Vale of Glamorgan Corporate Plan 2025-30 –

This Cabinet report had been taken to the Forum to update them and provide an opportunity for them to consider, comment and be engaged with the Plan, which had recently been approved by Full Council.

The report (and accompanying presentation) was presented by the Operational Manager – Corporate Strategy and Insight. She set out the plan, focusing on the following:

- This was the new five-year plan for the Vale of Glamorgan Council, which set out the 5 new well-being objectives and 50 actions that would be undertaken between 2025-30. These would provide the framework for the plan and set out the direction of the Council over the next five years. Also, within the plan, it outlined the outcomes and data that would be utilised to help show the plan's progress.
- The plan also detailed the critical challenges the Council faced, and as part of this was more future, and outcome, focused, with it rooted in partnership and cross Council working to help deliver its goals and bring about positive change. The plan would also help the Council to comply with various areas of

- legislation, such as the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.
- The plan would help tackle the big issues that the Council and local residents faced, particularly around poverty, climate and nature emergencies, as well as inequality.
- The importance of Placemaking and Reshaping within the plan was also highlighted, and working with communities and partners around these key areas.
- The impact and influence of the “Let’s Talk about Life in the Vale” residents’ survey 2023 and the Panel Performance Assessment on the plan and helping to inform and shape it.
- The emphasis on the plan of partnership, as demonstrated by the drafting of a partnership statement and commitment to those bodies and community groups, etc., that worked closely with the Council.
- The new approach of having 5 strategic level Directorate Plans replace 15 Annual Service Plans as primary plans for the Council was highlighted and discussed.
- The various activities and means of bringing about the commitments and workstreams around the plan and their impact on residents and Council staff were highlighted, such as the ‘Brilliant Basics’ Guide, Learning Café Programme, changes to Scrutiny and the Member Development Programme Refresh.

Following the report, Councillor Thomas stated that he welcomed the new Corporate Plan for 2025-30 and this was an exciting development. He felt the plan reflected the ethos and principles of the Council very well and was interested to hear the views of trade union and employee representatives, including those at the Forum today, as it would have an impact on ways of working, etc. It was in everyone’s interests, including the Council and trade union / employee bodies to work together on the plan, which would help to strengthen all parties and build on the existing good industrial relations.

M. Morris (NASUWT) welcomed the ongoing commitment, through the plan, of the Authority to work in line with Welsh Government legislation.

G. Pappas (UNISON), following on from the previous points made, stressed the close working relationship that had been developed between trade union, employee bodies, Elected Members and senior management over a number of years, and would continue to do so as part of the plan, despite the challenges ahead. He referred to the work he had done with Welsh Government and other local authorities regarding social partnerships, and that it would be good to see more engagement from other trade union members, staff, Elected Members at such meetings and events. In response, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development was not aware of this but would be keen to have the relevant invite / details in order to attend future meetings. G. Pappas suggested that a future meeting could be held at the Vale of Glamorgan and / or a representative from Welsh Government come to the Council to do a talk about this work around social partnerships and local communities to senior management, Councillors and trade union / employee representatives. The Operational Manager – Corporate Strategy and Insight explained that she had been in contact with representatives from Welsh Government on social partnership work, but this was in the context of reporting and

was not aware of the meeting referred to by G. Pappas. However, she would be keen to be involved in such discussions going forward. N. Savage (GMB) sought clarification about what this social partnership meeting entailed, as she referred to the Social Partnership Council which met and that it consisted of nine people on the employer side, nine people on the trade union side and was chaired by the First Minister. There had also been a number of social partnership courses which were taking place and were being facilitated by the Welsh Government and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in conjunction with higher education establishments, which were recommended. She also stressed that there was a difference between working in social partnership (as in having a healthy relationship) and social partnership in terms of the requirements of the relevant legislation itself (the Social Partnership Act). G. Pappas explained that the meetings he had been attending on social partnerships over the last 24 months were at the Welsh Government buildings at Cathays Park. There had been a mixture of Unison, GMB and Unite trade union representatives in attendance, but this had been sporadic. He would share further details with the Forum after the meeting. Similarly, the Chair asked if N. Savage could share the details on the social partnership course so this could be disseminated to the trade unions, etc.

Following consideration of the report by the Forum, it was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the report be noted.

(h) Draft Budget 2025/26 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 to 2029/30 –

This item was presented to the Forum by the Operational Manager – Accountancy, the purpose of which was to update Members of the Forum on the proposals for the Budget 2024/25 and outline the financial position across the medium term 2024/25 to 2029/30. This had also gone to Cabinet, Scrutiny and finally Full Council.

The Operational Manager also shared a presentation with the Forum, which Included the following key points and headlines:

- Details on the Budget gap at November 2024.
- Details on consequential(s) for Wales with the relevant modelling / assumptions on AEF and Council Tax, as part of the final Budget settlement.
- An update on the Welsh Government Settlement on 10th December, which was better than expected across Wales and for the Vale of Glamorgan. The Council, as part of the consultation period for this, had lobbied and requested for a better overall settlement, funded floor, as well as requesting a review of schools and social care formulas.
- The overall financial position of the Council was also outlined, including the relevant adjustments to the Budget, cost pressures, use of reserves, efficiencies and savings to help close the funding gap, broken down by the relevant service areas.
- There had been a concerted effort to pass through the SSA increases for School Services and Social Services and this had been largely achieved but this been particularly difficult for 2025/26 given the wide disparity in the growth

in the individual SSA funding blocks in the Settlement from Welsh Government. There was not a direct alignment between the blocks and the organisation of the Council's directorates, Home to School Transport with its growth counting against the Schools Block but managed in Environment and Housing.

- The Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) position was outlined, and, following feedback from Audit Wales, steps were being taken to set out a framework to address the cost pressures going forward. This also assumed quite a limited grant settlement increase over the MTFP, with a Council Tax increase at 3.9%, etc.
- The Council's position on savings and efficiencies was detailed, including over the medium term, with the Reshaping and Savings proposals outlined, including those relating to schools and service transformation for additional learning needs (ALN), Social Services and school transport. Efficiencies and savings proposals would also be looked at in terms of decarbonisation of / energy savings from Council assets and areas such as procurement and increasing use of digital technology and automation.

Following the presentation, N. Savage (GMB), queried the reference to a 'schools agency staff model' in both the presentation and report, and what this entailed. She asked for a copy of this to be forwarded to her. It was explained that the relevant details would be shared with her and an explanation was given on the background to this model, with the Council's aim to reduce the cost of schools' agency staff spend, which had been found to have increased significantly. There were also differentials between the various schools in the Vale's spending on agency staff, which could vary significantly as well. Therefore, other proposals were being looked at in order to find alternative arrangements which would help reduce the costs for schools in this area. It was also suggested that the proposals be brought to the relevant consultative forum(s) by the Schools team, in order to raise awareness and to discuss this further with the relevant staff.

The Forum, having considered the report,

AGREED – T H A T the report (and accompanying presentation) be noted.

(i) Hybrid Working Review –

The verbal update was given by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development to the Forum, in order to apprise members and representatives of the work being undertaken around the review.

A Hybrid Working Strategy had been introduced following the pandemic, to allow operational and other Council staff to work in the office / at home, subject to the needs and requirements of citizens and communities within the Vale of Glamorgan.

However, it was recognised that significant sections of the Authority's staff could not work under hybrid policies and principles, such as those working in schools, which was still being looked at a national level.

Due to the above, it was now timely to review the Hybrid Working Strategy, which was currently out for review. The original deadline was for the second week of April, but there was a possibility this would be extended due to the Easter break. The views of staff were being actively sought on this topic, and the Head of Service would be looking to circulate this to trade union colleagues within this Forum to get feedback as part of that process of review which also included the heads of service, operational managers and via the Council's staff networks, such as GLAM, Diverse Staff Network and Abl. The intention was to take the working document to Cabinet in May.

Following the verbal update, Councillor Thomas commented on the recent media coverage on hybrid working, working from home versus working in the office and productivity, where there had been mixed opinions, results and support. He asked what the Council had found in terms of using a hybrid working model and the level of productivity involved. It was explained that in terms of levels of productivity for staff following the implementation of hybrid working, this had not significantly changed, but there had not been any 'dip' or decline. The key concern for the Council remained that there was no negative impact on the work it did for residents and local communities, due to the working practices it used. There were many different perspectives on hybrid working and related issues on performance, but there were also considerations from a work-life balance and sustainability perspectives (i.e. the impact on commuting times, etc.) too. There were also benefits in terms of making jobs at the Council more attractive for potential applicants and increasing the number of applicants for such roles due to having hybrid working practices. Staff surveys also reflected the attractiveness and benefits of hybrid working for staff. From a work perspective, hybrid working meant that staff could also be more agile by being able to work from various, multiple, locations and much closer to local communities. Councillor Thomas stated that he was a supporter of hybrid working and could see its benefits versus the return to more traditional working practices and stressed that these too had drawbacks, such as the potential for 'presenteeism'.

Following consideration of the verbal update, it was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the verbal update be noted.

(j) New People's Strategy –

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development introduced the update to the Forum. She explained that the current strategy was coming to its end shortly, and the intention was to revise and refresh the strategy in tandem with the new Corporate Plan.

The new, draft, strategy was going out for consultation within the next month, and the views and feedback of the Forum was being sought to help inform part of it, as well as other trade unions and employee representatives.

The strategy would build in various areas, which had already been mentioned at the meeting, such as the 'Brilliant Basics' Guide, 'Tone of Voice', the way in which the Council wishes to work with its citizens, but also the Culture Plan. This would also

tie in with Welsh Government policies, such as the All-Wales Anti Racist Plan, as well as around disability and sexual orientation. Social partnership would also be incorporated as well. The Council was looking to state where it believed it was as an organisation and where it was looking to move towards.

Subsequently, the Chair asked when the consultation process would be happening. It was explained that this would start once the draft document and strategy had been completed. This would be done in the next few weeks.

M. Davies (UCAC) asked if the strategy would include a commitment of helping Council staff to develop their Welsh language skills in light of the Welsh Government's aim to increase the number of Welsh speakers by 2050. It was explained that this was a key consideration but also a challenge, with support given to staff in terms of the development of their own Welsh language capability or ability and improving this across the Authority, in the face of finite resources and capacity to support this, as well as staff juggling this learning whilst undertaking their main roles and operational work and duties. Any feedback or best practice in this area from other Authorities, which Members of the Forum may have experienced, was also welcomed to help develop the Council's approach. M. Davies (UCAC) stated that opening the Council up to more roles and opportunities in undertaking work on a hybrid basis could also help establish roles that encompassed having bilingual speakers.

Councillor Thomas explained that he attended the Diverse Network meetings, and at a recent meeting there was a discussion on the lack of trade union representation at these meetings, and the network would like to see greater engagement from trade union and employee representatives. The Councillor was keen to see greater trade union members' and employee representatives' participation at the network, and for their voices to be heard there in helping to support diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI). In response, N. Savage (GMB) asked for the details of future Diverse Network meetings to be shared with her to ensure that a GMB representative could try to attend these meetings going forward.

Following consideration by the Forum, it was

AGREED – T H A T the update be noted, with the draft New People's Strategy to be brought to the Forum at its next meeting as part of the consultation process.

(k) Guide to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) –

The item was presented to the Forum by the Operational Manager – Employee Services, in order to update the Forum on what was happening with the scheme and what was being done in order to promote it. This included extensive communications put out to staff and a joint presentation involving the Operational Manager and G. Pappas (Unison) to visit primary schools and to outline this to the Business Managers and schools' staff there. This had proved to be extremely popular and well received, with requests for further presentations to be given at other schools. This was part of a different approach to delivering communications and raising awareness among Council staff and frontline workers concerning the LGPS.

This would also be extended to other frontline staff, such as in social services / care and waste management.

The benefits of being within the LGPS were outlined, including Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVCs) and the benefits in terms of National Insurance to both employers and employees as a result.

G. Pappas stated that he was looking to set up a similar event and exposition on LGPS at the Civic offices for secondary school staff and others. The Council was a big, diverse, organisation and it was important to find suitable venues in order to accommodate these presentations. It was important to cascade this information down to the frontline staff in an accurate way and to engage with those frontline and other Council staff who traditionally had been harder to reach.

Following consideration by the Forum, it was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the presentation and guide to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) be noted.

(I) Date of Next Meeting –

To be confirmed. Possible dates would be considered around June 2025 and the Forum would be updated accordingly.