

JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 30th June, 2025.

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

Representatives of Trade Unions: L. Campbell (GMB), M. Canavan (NEU), R. Craven (NEU), J. Davis (UNISON / Vice-Chair), G. Davies (UNISON), J. Green (UNISON), G. Pappas (UNISON) and D. Roberts (UCAC).

Officers: T. Baker, J. Ballantine, L. Bonni, T. Dickinson, I McMillan, H. Moses, M. Thomas, K. Waite and S. Williams.

(a) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from Councillor S.D. Perkes and M. Morris (NASUWT).

(b) Minutes and Matters Arising –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 31st March, 2025 be approved as a correct record.

(c) Declarations of Interest –

No declarations were received.

(d) Trade Union Items –

None received at this time.

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

(i) **Environment and Housing Trade Union Consultative Meeting Minutes - 5th March 2025**

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Environment and Housing Trade Union Consultative meeting held on 5th March, 2025.

It was subsequently

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

(ii) Social Services Consultative Forum Minutes - 6th March 2025

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Social Services Consultative Forum meeting held on 6th March, 2025.

It was subsequently

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

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

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) Social Services – 17th July, 2025 and 10th September, 2025;
- (ii) Visible Services & Housing – meetings held on the first Wednesday of every month (subject to availability of agenda items).

(g) Reports and Updates –

(i) Social Partnership Duty

The Forum considered the appended report, which was outlined to them by the Operational Manager – Corporate Strategy and Insight. This work had been a collaborative effort between the Operational Manager and colleagues at Human Resources. The Forum was given an overview of the Duty for their consideration and comment, and which picked up on several key points, including a request for Social Partnership Champions to be nominated and details on the Social Partnership Annual Report that would need to be produced as part of this Duty.

The Social Partnership Duty was introduced by the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 and became law in April 2024. It placed a statutory requirement on certain public bodies (including Local Authorities) to work in social partnership with recognised trade unions (or other workforce representatives) when:

- Setting well-being objectives under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015;
- Making strategic decisions related to achieving those objectives.

The Duty also required Local Authorities to:

- Publish annual reports on their compliance with the Social Partnership Duty;
- Ensure socially responsible procurement outcomes by using contract clauses which flow through whole supply chains for large construction projects.

The Duty represented a more collaborative approach between public bodies and trade unions / employee representatives for mutual benefit, i.e. in terms of setting the wellbeing objectives as part of the new Corporate Plan, etc. Its core principles included co-operation, respect, trust, voice and participation, and mutual gains.

All Welsh public bodies had been requested to nominate at least 4 Social Partnership Champions (two Employer Representatives and two Trade Union Representatives) with the option to extend to six (but it must have equal numbers from each side). An email had recently gone out at the Council to garner interest in this role. The Champions' role would be to work together to promote the main aspects of the Social Partnership Duty within the organisation and through that joint working and with the other public bodies covered, for example, the Vale of Glamorgan Council had been paired up with Merthyr Tydfil Council. The Council would work with Welsh Government and Merthyr Tydfil Council to set up the regular Quarterly Partnership Meetings with the Champions / representatives of both Councils.

In terms of the Social Partnership Annual Report, work on pulling this together had started, outlining the work undertaken as part of the consultation, the development of the well-being objectives, the key aspects that had been discussed through the different meetings between the Council and trade unions, outlining what areas of work need to be taken forward, etc. The report would require trade union / employee representative approval and agreement, with the aim of taking the report to the Forum in September this year. The Council intended to produce a standalone report but would probably publish this as part of the Annual Self-Assessment Report.

Following the presentation of the report, several Forum Members made comments or raised questions on this, including the following:

G. Pappas (UNISON) told the Forum that the Vale of Glamorgan Council had been one of the last Councils in Southeast Wales to participate in this process and he had raised this issue previously. He was in contact with a UNISON colleague who had been leading on Social Partnership and had been seconded to Welsh Government. They were willing to come to the Vale to help guide the relevant persons through the whole process. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development stated that she had been made aware of the representative's concerns, and she was disappointed that the Council had not been invited to any of the relevant groups working on this. However, the Council had acted to engage with this process as soon as they had been made aware of the Welsh Government initiative. It was not necessarily the case that the Council was behind other Authorities on this initiative, and although Merthyr Tydfil Council had drafted their Annual Report (which had been shared with the Vale), it appeared most Authorities were in a similar position to the Vale in terms of compiling and drafting the Annual Report. Currently there was not much information from Welsh Government on what the format of the report should be despite the Council's efforts on trying to glean this information from them. Following the last Forum, the GMB trade union had been asked to share any information they had on working groups that covered this area. G. Pappas stated that he had been to two or three of these forums / working groups looking at areas such as health and social care. There had only been UNISON participation at these

meetings, and it was therefore important that other trade unions and other employee representatives participated in these as well, in order for this initiative to work.

The Chair asked for more information on the Social Partnership Champions, with the Operational Manager – Corporate Strategy and Insight explaining that an email on this had gone out to trade unions and employee representatives asking for nominations. This would be co-ordinated with and progressed by the Operational Manager and the relevant Human Resources (HR) Business Partner (the two employer representatives for the Vale's Social Partnership Champions). There would also be training for Champions etc. available online to help their understanding of what the requirements of the Social Partnership Duty were.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, following the comments made by G. Pappas earlier, asked whether trade unions and employee representatives were aware of the Social Partnership sessions and forums being held, as it did not seem these had been widely communicated by Welsh Government, which could explain the lack of attendance, to which G. Pappas agreed this could well be the case. L. Campbell (GMB) and M. Canavan (NEU) added they had not been aware of these events until recently. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development stated that this lack or 'patchiness' of communications on these events had also been experienced by other Welsh Local Authorities. She welcomed the suggestion by G. Pappas for a UNISON colleague who had been leading on Social Partnership to come to the Council and provide information and support on the Duty going forward. Another useful outcome from discussions on the Duty at the Forum today was the importance of greater communication with trade unions and employee representatives on this.

Councillor Thomas stated this was an important initiative that needed the full backing of all trade unions and other relevant parties and asked if such representatives could be communicated and engaged with directly rather than through the more formal and structured processes, including setting up their own group to help choose their own representatives for this work, to co-ordinate, to ensure their voices were heard in this process and to streamline communications. G. Pappas felt this approach was a good idea and would benefit the partnership approach.

Councillor Campbell also felt it would be beneficial for the Council to understand how its partner, Merthyr Tydfil Council, was approaching and managing the engagement with trade unions and others in terms of its Social Partnership Champions.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development and the Operational Manager – Corporate Strategy and Insight were keen for the employee champions to be put forward by the trade unions and employee representatives as soon as possible to help move this work forward. The Council would also be looking at examples of best practice from Merthyr Tydfil Council and other partners. Most Local Authorities had put forward Champions from non-teaching unions, following Welsh Government advice, but the Vale trade unions could take a different approach on this if they so wanted to. The nominated Champions would be expected to be involved in the processes and the meetings involved with the Duty, with the relevant internal networks also engaging and informing trade unions of the process.

Councillor Cowpe felt it was important that the work around the Social Partnership Duty should have a positive effect on the local communities and residents in the Vale which the Council served and provided services to. G. Pappas explained that the forums already being undertaken as part of this initiative looked at protecting public services, making them as efficient as possible and to avoid outsourcing. He and other trade union representatives wished to see outsourcing stopped and to reintegrate the services affected back into public ownership and Council-run to ensure high standards and sustainability. This also related to private care services and the commissioning of reputable providers.

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

AGREED – T H A T the report be noted.

(ii) Proposals for Strategic Themes People Strategy 2025-2030

The item was presented by Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development to the Forum, and this was directly linked into the agenda items concerning (iii) Brilliant Basics Update and (iv) Customer Charter, which were highlighted as part of it.

The proposals for the Strategy followed on from the new Corporate Plan 2030 which would engage with Council staff in order to meet and deliver on the themes of the Corporate Plan and align with the Council's Wellbeing objectives. The People Strategy would help in tackling the key challenges and issues the Council and the Vale of Glamorgan faced (poverty, climate and nature emergencies and inequalities), as well as changing how staff worked as part of meeting these challenges and as part of the Strategy, such as through digital reshaping, but also cultural reshaping as well and other areas. From the discussions undertaken by management, various measures had been developed as part of the Strategy including 'Brilliant Basics', with a charter being developed on this, as well as one for customer services. Also, 'Tone of Voice' had been developed on how the Council aimed to talk to residents, local communities and how it wanted to engage with them both in terms of the over the telephone approach but also through letter writing and more broadly how the Council wanted to engage and talk to local communities moving forward.

As part of the above, the Council was developing a cultural plan that would bring all of those themes together and what these would mean for both its employees (including Social Services, C1V and schools) and for residents. It would make the connections between the Tone of Voice, the Brilliant Basics and the Customer Service Charters currently in development.

Reference was also made to the development of five strategic themes as part of the engagement around this process, with this shared with the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) and the newly established People Board, a cross functional group across the Council, in order to seek their feedback. Various staff networks, youth forums and others within the Vale of Glamorgan, including the Joint Consultative Forum, would be engaged with to seek their views and feedback on this. Therefore,

feedback from the Forum was requested, and further engagement with trade union representatives and other stakeholders would be sought.

The proposed strategic themes and priorities included:

- Delivering Public Value through People;
- Empowering leadership at all levels;
- Creating Modern, Flexible Workplaces;
- Flexible and Purposeful Career paths;
- Progressing with Unity (led through a unifying vision statement).

A key measure for these was the difference made to people's lives as a result.

The PowerPoint presentation given at the Forum was by no means the final draft, with the intention of sharing this with the Council's Heads of Service and SLT and to finalise the presentation with the intention of making it more accessible in terms of language and tone. The aim was to produce a final draft of the Strategy by Autumn for ratification and then to start to properly implement this.

Following the presentation and overview of the Strategy and the interlinked agenda items around Brilliant Basics and the Customer Charter, the Forum raised the following points:

G. Pappas (UNISON) suggested that the presentation be shared more widely with the Change Forums and with teaching staff and colleagues. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development explained that a new group or forum would be set up from September that would cover the relevant union, employee and teaching colleagues as well as other representatives and stakeholders.

On the Chair's question on who sat on the People Board, it was explained that a number of people sat on the Board, including representatives from each of the Council's Directorates, such as Social Services, Learning and Skills, Schools and Corporate Resources. Also, there were representatives for the Council's staff networks and trade unions.

Councillor Thomas cited the national issue of the public perceiving Local Authorities as being effectively 'opponents' to local communities, due to raising money from local residents and taxpayers and the negative press and media around this. He felt that Council staff should be proud of the work they did across the Council's services. It was important that the Council looked at its communications, and the need to highlight the positive work and successes across its Directorates and services in conjunction with trade unions and employee representatives. Working in Local Authorities and the public sector should be seen as something to be proud of and aspire to, as seen in Europe. Such negative attitudes here could be acting as a barrier to recruitment, when such roles in local government had relatively good and secure pay and pensions. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that the Council was aware of this issue and was trying to address the negative stereotypes, particularly among younger generations, through greater engagement and encouraging younger people in terms of work experience and graduate opportunities at the Council, as well as meeting with the Youth Forum, but there was still a lot of work to do in this space.

Councillor Thomas also referred to the need to look at more apprenticeship type opportunities for school leavers, as well as lifelong learning opportunities and developing skills for a role or career in the Council for them, and for the Council to present these better in the context of job opportunities. The Operational Manager - Employee Services replied that the Council would like to do a lot more with schools concerning the careers and opportunities available at the Council, as well as to emphasise the broad range of jobs and careers there. The Council had started to create opportunities for managers and staff to get involved in school career events, such as at Whitmore High School, where mock interviews were undertaken with students and newly trained managers from the Council in terms of recruitment and selection.

D. Roberts (UCAC) felt this matter and discussion should be linked to the one around the Social Partnership Duty and ensuring that the public were given a unified message on work done by Local Authority staff, which had been undertaken in other Welsh Authorities such as Carmarthenshire including addressing the relationship between the employers and employees.

G. Pappas (UNISON) referred to the rise of populism in national and local politics, and the need to counter negative, false, perceptions of Council staff as being lazy and not helping local communities, through effective messaging to the public on the positive work staff undertook and acting as the 'backbone' to local communities, as well as countering negative social media, etc., such as with Cosmeston Aqua Park.

On the above points around the Council promoting a more positive image and countering negative social media, Councillor Cowpe stated that when the Council put out social media posts, it did not always respond to or address subsequent posts from the public which were incorrect, negative or untrue. The Chair stated that this could be in relation to something as simple as a typo picked up on an online agenda which is then picked up by a member of the public. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development replied that the Council was looking into how best to address these issues and to respond in the right and proper way so that the Council was correcting misinformation, for instance, or putting its perspective across more clearly. But it was really challenging for employees to see some of the social media activity and a disincentive for people to apply for the Council. Councillor Cowpe echoed the concerns around negative social media and its impact on Council staff, many of whom were residents within the Vale of Glamorgan and who could be friends, family or neighbours to the people making negative comments on social media about them or the Council as a whole. She had herself challenged these negative views on social media, looking to challenge and rebut these by referring to the facts rather than opinions.

Following consideration of this and the other related agenda items by the Forum, it was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Proposals for Strategic Themes People Strategy 2025-2030 and related agenda items (Brilliant Basics Update and Customer Charter), having been considered together, be noted, including the comments made by the Forum.

(iii) Brilliant Basics Update

This was considered in conjunction with Proposals for Strategic Themes People Strategy 2025-2030 (above) and any details, decisions and comments included with that agenda item.

(iv) Customer Charter (verbal update)

This was considered in conjunction with Proposals for Strategic Themes People Strategy 2025-2030 (above) and any details, decisions and comments included with that agenda item.

(h) Date of Next Meeting –

To be confirmed. Possible dates would be considered around the latter part of September 2025, to ensure availability, and the Forum would be updated accordingly.

Prior to the meeting closing, both the Chair and the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development wanted to take the opportunity of thanking M. Canavan (NEU) for her contribution to the Forum and related matters for the Vale of Glamorgan over the last few years, due to her retiring and stepping back from this and other roles. R. Craven would be stepping into the role of NEU representative at the Forum going forward, but M. Canavan would still be involved to some degree, through her ongoing role as District Secretary for NEU.

The Chair also wished to reiterate her and the Forum's welcome to all the new trade union / employee representatives in attendance at the Forum today.