

JOINT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 22nd September, 2025.

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

Representatives of Trade Unions: L. Bonni (GMB), L. Campbell (GMB), R. Craven (NEU), G. Davies (UNISON), J. Green (UNISON), G. Pappas (UNISON) and D. Roberts (UCAC).

Officers: T. Baker, J. Ballantine, M. Booker-Southard, T. Dickinson, M. Gelder, E. Jones, I McMillan, J.M. Rogers, J. Saif, M. Thomas (Democratic Services), M. Thomas (learning and Skills), K. Waite and S. Williams.

(a) Apologies for Absence –

These were received from J. Davis (UNISON / Vice-Chair), M. Morris (NASUWT) and Councillor N.J. Wood.

(b) Minutes and Matters Arising –

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 30th June, 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) **Social Services Consultative Forum – 14th April, 2025**

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Social Services Consultative Forum meeting held on 14th April, 2025.

It was subsequently

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

(ii) **Directorate of Learning and Skills – Schools Health and Safety Committee – 6th May, 2025**

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Directorate of Learning and Skills – Schools Health and Safety Committee meeting held on 6th May, 2025.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Directorate of Learning and Skills – Schools Health and Safety Committee meeting be noted.

(iii) **Environment and Housing Trade Union Consultative Meeting – 4th June, 2025**

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Environment and Housing Trade Union Consultative meeting held on 4th June, 2025.

It was subsequently

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

(iv) **Health and Safety Forum – 16th June, 2025**

The Forum considered the minutes relating to the Health and Safety Forum meeting held on 16th June, 2025.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the minutes of the Health and Safety 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) Environment and Housing – 1st October, 2025;
- (ii) Learning and Skills – 6th October, 2025;
- (iii) Social Services – 24th October, 2025.

(g) Reports and Updates.

(i) **Staff Network Updates (Verbal)**

Diverse Staff Network

The first update came from the Co-Chair of the Diverse Staff Network and steering group, M. Booker-Southard. She explained that the network was highly inclusive, with all Council employees and Elected Members welcome to be part of the network.

M. Booker-Southard referred to National Inclusion Week and the work undertaken by the relevant 'champions', L. Carver and T. Dickinson, from the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT). She encouraged trade union members and employee representatives to be more engaged with the network, with its next meeting being on the 23rd October.

As part of the questioning from the Chair and M. Booker-Southard, G. Pappas (UNISON) stated that he and UNISON were trying to set up a self-organising group (SOG) regarding diversity, as part of a national project. There had been some interest around this and this group could work side by side with the network. M. Booker-Southard stated that the Diverse Staff Network was happy to work alongside with SOG but the Diverse Network focused on areas and issues specifically for the Vale of Glamorgan for people from the global majority and allies, and therefore it was important for UNISON and other unions / representatives to encourage and promote this network to their members.

Councillor N.C. Thomas explained that he was a member of the Diverse Network and it would be useful to have trade union delegates from SOG attend the network as well to help co-ordinate between these groups.

G. Pappas explained that the SOG was a joint project with Cardiff Unison and Councillor Richards from Penarth Town Council to look at diversity and to have a rotating Chair for SOG between the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff Council UNISON branches.

T. Dickinson (Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development) stressed the importance of trade union involvement with the Diverse Network (as well as SOG) and to attend their meetings and to provide input from a trade union perspective on a rotational basis. L. Campbell (GMB) was keen to support the Diverse Network and work with them on this, with the Chair and the Forum welcoming this as a positive step to greater multi-union and employee representative involvement with the Diverse Network.

M. Booker-Southard wanted to make the Forum and union / employee representatives aware of the next Diverse Staff Network on 23rd October at 3.30pm (later confirmed as rescheduled to 1.00pm on that date). The Chair suggested that this information be shared with the wider trade union and employee representatives, with the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advising that an email would go out to all of the relevant members and representatives about this.

GLAM Network

The next update came from the Co-Chair of the Vale of Glamorgan (LGBTQI+)

Staff Network (known as GLAM), M. Gelder, who shared with the Forum a presentation covering the achievements and challenges for the network over the last six months, when he and his Co-Chair started to take the lead on the work of GLAM, which included:

- Marked Pride Month with the raising of the flag;
- Reviewed membership and engagement;
- Attended Pride Events across the Vale and Pride Cymru in Cardiff;
- Staff showing of the film Pride at Penarth Pavillion;
- Connecting with Colleagues in Cardiff Council LGBTQ+ Network to foster collaboration and shared resources;
- Starting to improve membership / network communications; and
- County of Sanctuary Application – feeding in from the GLAM perspective

The Co-Chair also referred the Forum to the next steps that GLAM intended to take, such as:

- Stonewall Diversity Champions and Top 100 Employers work was due to begin for GLAM to feed into;
- General advertising and Awareness Raising of Employee Networks;
- Establishing easy access to Pride and Proud Ally Lanyards; and
- Representing and sharing the voice of local communities in relation to the Council's Corporate Plan, Strategies, Policies and Procedures – ensuring representation, recognition and support.

Also, in terms of awareness raising and social events involving GLAM:

- Pride Gala Events or Series of events – in support of GLAM / Community Diversity Groups;
- Celebrity Engagement – Wayne & Wyburn, Catrin Feelings etc.;
- Bitesize E-Learning; and
- Reception Coffee Morning to raise funds for Pride Events (currently pencilled in for Tuesday, 14th October).

Following the update Councillor Thomas asked whether GLAM had engaged with the relevant Elected Members' Champion, and with Councillor Emma Richards, the Mayor at Penarth Town Council who was keen to have a Pride presence and events in Penarth. The Co-Chair explained that he and GLAM would be reaching out to Councillor Richards about working together to hold a Pride event in Penarth at next year's Pride month. Similarly, the Co-Chair and GLAM would be reaching out to the Elected Members' Champion as well in due course.

G. Pappas suggested this was the type of co-working that he and Councillor Richards would like to undertake with the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff Councils and other bodies like the NHS, as part of a wider effort to set up diversity events in

both counties, which the Self Organising Group would tie into. Councillor Perkes, who worked at the Cardiff and Vale Health Branch also talked about her and the branch's involvement and the establishment of their own SOG. They would also be keen to be involved in any Pride and diversity events in Penarth and Barry and she would pass on the comments from today's meeting to the Branch Secretary. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development was keen to collaborate with the Cardiff and Vale Health Branch and the Council's various staff networks (including Abl (Disability Network) which unfortunately had not been able to attend the Forum this time), as well as trade unions and employee groups. The GLAM Co-Chair highlighted the importance of co-operation between the various groups and the benefits in terms of events and boosting the attendance of these.

It was subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Vale of Glamorgan Staff Network(s) Updates be noted, with any actions raised to be undertaken following the meeting of the Forum.

(ii) Management of Attendance Update – 1st April to 30th June 2025

This was presented to the Forum by L. Bonni, Operational Manager – Employee Services, which gave an overview of attendance figures for the period 1st April, 2025 to 30th June, 2025 and comparative data for the same period in 2024 (Q1), which had been recently shared with the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT). The headlines included:

- The overall figure of 2.80 days lost per FTE for June 2025 showed a decrease in sickness absence compared to the same period in the previous year (3.02), but this was slightly above the target figure of 2.69 days lost per FTE. This covered all Council staff (both corporate and schools).
- Stress related absence (both work and non-work) equated to 20.9% of all absence however, this figure had decreased since 2024 (29.9%).
- Long-term and short-term absence continued to hover around the 70/30 split but was slightly lower than the same period in 2024/25.
- A breakdown summary showing the order of absence by reason across the Authority for April to June 2025 was in Appendix C to the report with comparative data. This included new reasons for absence resulting from feedback from Cabinet and Scrutiny, and work with Human Resources, Health and Safety officers, trade union representatives, etc., in order to provide better understanding, monitoring and analysis around sickness absence.

Councillor J.E. Charles raised concerns around the percentage of absence which was stress-related and queried what the main cause(s) were concerning this. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development outlined that this was the result of a number of factors, not just one specific determinant of stress related absence. From the data looked at and from the conversations that Human Resources Business Partners had on a regular basis, such as with trade union colleagues, the factors involved were a mixture of family circumstances, bereavement, or significant loss, as well as specific mental health causes, or a mixture of these. It could be a combination of both work and home related stress

that had become too much or overwhelming for an individual. Human Resources were working with Health and Safety teams in terms of stress risk assessments to look to continue to reduce or mitigate this reason for absence. This would help to keep those staff impacted by stress, etc., in work for longer and support them without the need for taking absence. There was a need to call on the Council's Occupational Health teams and upscale line managers to enable them to deal with stress related absence.

On Councillor Charles' subsequent comments about staff shortages in certain areas due to retirement, etc., and these not being replaced leading to stress and other pressures on the remaining staff, it was explained that although capacity issues within the Council could be impacting staff and their health and wellbeing (with some emerging information, such as through staff surveys suggesting this as a factor), this was not the sole reason for stress related absences and others. Work was being undertaken to support staff with these issues, in tandem with trade union and employee representatives, such as the use of advanced technology and digitisation technologies to help alleviate work pressures and upscale line managers in helping to address staff concerns and having conversations around this.

Councillor Thomas highlighted the need for early intervention in tackling stress related absence, including looking at how the Council could encourage staff to identify or self-reflect on whether they were starting to display symptoms of stress due to work / home pressures and other 'red flags', and to look for support from Human Resources and others. Early intervention would help mitigate long term sickness and ultimately save money and resources. The Operational Manager – Employee Services outlined the sources of support that staff could use such as the Occupational Health team and the employee programme provider, Westfield Health. There was a need for greater communication on what advice and support was available for staff. Information could currently be accessed on this topic and others via the Health and Safety page on the intranet, as well as the work of Human Resources with line managers to handle staff stress.

Following up on Councillor Thomas' comments, the Chair asked if there was a 'self-help' section on StaffNet (the Council's intranet) to help staff with various triggers of stress, such as money management, budgeting, bereavement and other concerns or issues. It was explained that this was being worked on in terms of bringing together these areas covering potential triggers for staff stress and to make StaffNet more accessible for staff to find and to search for these topics. It was added that a new version of StaffNet was looking to be unveiled in December 2025 and this presented an opportunity to revisit and build on the existing 'Wellbeing Hub' webpage. There were already easy to find pages on stress counselling and others on the Health and Safety webpage which could be incorporated into an overall wellbeing page in future.

Councillor C.M. Cowpe spoke about the Council's policy on unreasonable actions by citizens and the impact of such actions on staff in terms of stress and wellbeing. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development stated that the policy was looked at frequently and panels had been set up to address such instances, but it was important to note that residents were entitled to access staff when required and have the support they were entitled to. G. Pappas and other trade unions

worked closely with the Council and staff / teams impacted by this type of alleged behaviour in order to help minimise this and address it as quickly as possible.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development wanted to reassure the Forum that the wider causes and factors behind absences for staff were being looked at and addressed, such as financial management and retirement. She was also very keen to see wellbeing, stress and other issues under the same webpage.

The Forum subsequently

AGREED – T H A T the Management of Attendance Update be noted, with any actions raised to be undertaken following the meeting of the Forum.

(iii) People's Strategy (including a Brilliant Basics and Customer Charter Update)

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development outlined this item to the Forum, with a finalised draft having gone to the Strategic Leadership Team for their consideration and this documentation had subsequently been shared with members of the Forum just prior to the meeting. This draft would now be consulted on until the end of October. Various discussions and feedback had already been undertaken and received from relevant groups, such as the Council's various staff networks and trade unions. This document would go out again to trade unions / employee representatives, to the staff networks, the Equalities Group, to this Forum and the Change Forum, as well as the Council's People's Board and to discuss it as part of Directorate Management Team (DMT) meetings. The strategy had also been shared with various external partners and groups, the Age and Youth Forums, as well as teaching and education groups.

A new People's Board had been developed which has already met several times to review the draft strategy. The Board would oversee the delivery of the actions contained in this strategy once finalised and hold the Council to account on its delivery. The information on the Council's progress in this regard would be published through its regular performance reports, as well as in dedicated reports to the Council's Cabinet. This information would form an important part of the Council's annual self-assessment work and show the contribution of staff to delivering the Council's vision of strong communities with a bright future and the 'people' elements of the Corporate Plan. This included the aim of building a value led, inclusive and high performing culture and deliver public value. It had four main strategic themes, which were leadership, a workforce for the future, a great place to work and making a difference. Under those four themes there would be action items that the People's Board would hold the Council to account on, with dashboards and social metrics to monitor and track this as well.

Work was also being undertaken with the Council's Communications Team as part of this, looking at how to communicate the strategy once it had been finalised and agreed to Council staff and groups as well as looking at incorporating the results of the recent staff survey, to be shared with the Forum in January.

The document also included 'Brilliant Basics' with this programme to be launched in the near future to engage with staff on how best to communicate with residents and doing work-based activities effectively and efficiently in a way that residents understood, could access and feel proud of. It would help inform line managers exactly of what level of support they would have to be able to deliver this programme and it would also, on a longer term basis, continue to refresh the message around Brilliant Basics and share some examples of stories from staff in terms of what they had been doing to make a difference to those within local communities in a simple way.

Regarding the Customer Charter, this had not been developed yet, but it was part of a significantly wider group of people that were now looking at how the Council engages with its staff from a customer perspective. That group consisted of about 40 persons currently, and they met on a regular basis to develop that Charter and whatever was stated in that Charter would also be reflected in the action items from a People's Strategy perspective as well. Following consultations and feedback, schools needed to be reflected more in the document(s) concerned and to see a move away from these being potentially 'corporate centric'.

Members could raise comments at the Forum or separately, by the end of October. The Chair added that there was a task and finish exercise being undertaken by the Resources Scrutiny Committee with regards to corporate communications and this could potentially tie in with the Customer Charter. Council officers should reach out to the task and finish group about possible connections with these two pieces of work.

It was subsequently

AGREED – that the People's Strategy (including a Brilliant Basics and Customer Charter Update) be noted, with any actions raised to be undertaken following the meeting of the Forum.

(iv) **Reshaping Programme: Corporate Landlord**

This was presented to the Forum by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, in order to make Members of the Forum aware of the report which had gone to Scrutiny and Cabinet to look at the operating model for the Corporate Landlord approach and how the commissioning of this work tied in with the Council's emerging transformation programme, Reshaping, and links with the Target Operating Model and Service Transformation themes in particular. The Corporate Landlord approach looked to ensure the more efficient and effective operation of the Council's property assets and building resilience. This brought the functions of all the Council's property assets together into a central focus. This would be led by an appointed Head of Corporate Landlord.

Engagement with trade unions had been undertaken around this approach, such as in relation to shaping some of the communications going out to Council staff and co-producing what the services would look like under the Corporate Landlord model.

They would also support in the process with engaging with those individuals impacted by the proposed model and changes.

The model was cost neutral at best, but this would help the Council to look at more efficient and effective ways of working in terms of its property assets moving forward. This model had been adopted by a number of Local Authorities and was seen as a model of best practice.

Councillor Thomas asked whether this approach would entail possible redundancies, or removing posts through natural wastage or redeployment and how this was being received. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development explained that redundancies, etc. would be mitigated as much as possible through the relevant processes, and any individual staff impacted had been communicated with via letter, prior to the report going to Cabinet. A dedicated page had been set up on StaffNet to provide answers and information on frequently asked questions for staff impacted by this, in tandem with liaising with the trade unions.

G. Pappas (UNISON) stated that the Corporate Landlord approach would be beneficial by putting all relevant areas in one place but had some issues where some teams / staff sat under this new model and that any related services should be independent from any Chief Officer below Director. Any redundancies would be opposed from a trade union perspective. Senior appointments would be needed due to the need to acquire the relevant skills around this model. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development explained that any trade union concerns or feedback on the proposed model or approach for the Corporate Landlord model would be part of the consultation process and would be considered. Following the appointment of the Head of Corporate Landlord, they, with other relevant Council officers, would sit down with trade unions and the relevant teams to look at how the approach / model would look like in its finalised form. Any potential risk of redundancies would be mitigated as much as possible. L. Campbell (GMB) stated that she would also work with the Council's Human Resources and other trade unions on this approach and to mitigate the risk of redundancies, etc.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development explained that the teaching unions had not been involved in discussions around the proposed Corporate Landlord approach as it would not likely impact teaching staff.

It was subsequently

AGREED – that the Reshaping Programme: Corporate Landlord report be noted, with any actions raised to be undertaken following the meeting of the Forum.

(h) Date of Next Meeting –

To be confirmed. Possible dates would be considered around the latter part of January 2026, to ensure availability, and the Forum would be updated accordingly.