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Social Partnership Duty Annual Report 2025

Summary of Report

This report will detail how Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has complied with the Social Partnership duty as imposed under section 16 of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023. It will detail where the Council has sought consensus or compromise with our recognised trade unions, namely Unison and GMB on:

1. The Wellbeing objectives with the Council's corporate plan
2. Decisions of a strategic nature

The report will detail how the Council consults at a formative stage of a process, what information is provided for consideration on proposals and the timescales we suggest for our trade union colleagues to adequately consider any proposals and methods to respond. This report has been discussed with and agreed by our trade union representatives.

Our approach at Merthyr Tydfil

Merthyr CBC works collaboratively with our trade unions to promote fair work, social justice and sustainable wellbeing. Our Council is actively embedding the principles of the Social Partnership Act by fostering meaningful engagement with employees and trade unions. We hold regular monthly meetings with our trade unions to ensure staff voices are heard in decision making processes, particularly on issues relating to employment conditions, staffing changes such as restructures and changes in rota's, fair pay, policy development and workforce wellbeing. Our trade unions have direct access to the Senior Leadership team including the Chief Executive who will regularly attend the monthly meetings which shows the level of commitment Merthyr has to partnership working.

Our trade union colleagues are embedded in the culture of Merthyr. From the very start of their employment, our employees are introduced to our commitment to social partnership. As part of our corporate induction programme, our trade union representatives deliver a presentation outlining how we work collaboratively. We foster a culture of transparency and mutual respect, ensuring employees feel supported and empowered in their roles.

Our Employee Relations Manager attended the Welsh Government Social Partnership event in September 2024 which was very beneficial and provided reassurance that Merthyr can already evidence a strong history of working closely with trade unions. Merthyr Tydfil prioritises partnership working to create a more sustainable, fair and socially responsible local government.

Merthyr's Corporate Wellbeing Plan

Our Corporate Wellbeing plan 2023 – 2028 was devised with trade union consultation. Meetings were arranged and a presentation given to our trade unions for consideration and feedback on the objectives. Below are some examples of how we have worked in social partnership to deliver our wellbeing objectives.

- **An aspirational Merthyr Tydfil, focussed on learning**

Our Council has worked closely with trade unions to prioritise learning, skills development and lifelong education. A key focus has been on workforce development, ensuring our employees have access to high quality training and career progression.

Our trade unions attend the Corporate Induction which allows them to have firsthand engagement with all new employees of Merthyr Tydfil CBC for them to actively showcase and highlight the benefits of becoming members.

The trade unions have been consulted on Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Apprenticeship Programme and during our national apprenticeship and training campaigns have participated in providing training on themes in which the chosen trade union's have supported, for example in 2024 Sexual Harassment in the Workplace was the theme. We have engaged with the trade union's on our training compendium and are open to any suggestions they suggest regarding learning opportunities.

- **A healthier Merthyr Tydfil**

We ensure that our trade union representatives have a strong voice when shaping any policies that have an impact on employee health and welfare. Together we ensure that employees have access to our Employee Assistance Programme Vivup, that our employees have any reasonable workplace adjustments implemented such as desktop assessments, specialist chairs and amended working hours and that there is training available for managers to recognise and respond to mental health concerns.

Our health and safety officer collaborates with our trade unions when writing new policies, most recently the violence at work policy was reviewed. Recent changes to our fire action plans were also actioned with trade union involvement. In the future, we would like to look at joint workplace inspections and risk assessments to proactively address potential hazards.

We also promote flexible working arrangements to promote work-life balance and reduce stress. In addition, we have consulted on our Employee Assistance programme which includes the cycle to work scheme.

Our trade unions play a key role in advocating for fair pay and secure employment which directly impacts public health by reducing financial stress and inequality.

- **A financially stable Merthyr Tydfil**

Our Council works in partnership with trade unions to ensure financial stability while maintaining fair employment and quality public services. Through regular meetings (monthly) we engage trade union representatives in budget and efficiency saving discussions, ensuring transparency and collaboration in financial decision making.

One key area of cooperation is during workforce restructures. We provide a detailed change management proposal pack to our trade unions for consideration and feedback prior to any staff meetings taking place. By working together, we have developed strategies to restructure services with little impact to jobs or services. We work together to consider potential redundancies and the offer of voluntary redundancy schemes and redeployment opportunities to help avoid compulsory redundancies.

Our trade unions are also included in discussions about improving efficiencies, such as modernising working practices, reducing reliance on costly agency staff and implementing flexible working requests / flexible retirement that reduce costs. Their input has been invaluable in ensuring that any financial savings are made in a way that protects employees and frontline services.

Additionally, we collaborate on procurement strategies to ensure best value for money while upholding fair work practices. By supporting ethical procurement, we aim to secure sustainable contracts that benefit both workers and the local community.

- **A prosperous Merthyr Tydfil**

Our trade unions are involved in supporting this objective through ensuring employee's are paid fair wages, have good working conditions and are protected in the workplace whilst contributing to Merthyr's economic growth. Our unions often voice their ideas on how local services such as public transport, education and waste services can be improved or changed. Our unions have put forward many arguments against outsourcing of services to ensure that local workers benefit from economic growth.

- **Safe, clean and green Merthyr Tydfil**

Merthyr Tydfil CBC obtained the One Planet Standard, Bronze level award in June 2024 with union involvement. This is a standard, so we had to meet a level of criteria and this focused on implementing climate change continuous improvement into our delivery of services and ways of working at the Council. It took 6 months to work towards the standard, and this included having an adopted Decarbonisation Plan for Merthyr Tydfil CBC and a strong governance framework to deliver the plan, through action plans, regular meetings with key managers and reporting this to CMT. In addition to this the e-module for Carbon Literacy was rolled out to all staff.

Our unions are heavily involved in our Neighbourhood services teams, attending meetings with management and staff advocating for sustainable practices, worker safety and community wellbeing.

Strategic Decision making

Merthyr's strategic decision making involves trade unions in longer term planning and policy development to improve services, manage resources, and address community needs. Examples include:

- **Industrial Relations and Pay Negotiations**

Merthyr Tydfil CBC collaborates with trade unions to set fair pay structures, implement workforce policies, and address disputes in a way that supports staff and maintains service delivery. Our trade unions sit on the appeal panel for job evaluation. Where appeals are submitted by employees our unions will review the implementation of the job evaluation scheme and explore fair pay grading and role allocation and have a vote as to whether the role should be evaluated to a different grade. Where there is a case of potential industrial action, we engage in negotiations with unions to address employee concerns and find mutually acceptable solutions.

- **Workforce Planning and Restructuring**

Decisions on staffing levels, departmental reorganisations, and workforce development strategies to ensure efficient service delivery while maintaining fair employment practices. Recent examples of working with our trade unions in this area include the creation of a new Catholic 3-16 school, which includes the closure of 3 primary schools and one secondary. Trade unions have been consulted at all stages and provided with a change management document for review. A recent amalgamation of our Community Safety and Parking team also included consultation and amendment of the structure based on union feedback.

- **Budget Setting and Financial Planning**

Our trade unions are included in discussions and provided with business cases regarding allocation of resources to different services, managing funding cuts, and deciding on council tax rates to encourage a consultative approach to balancing public service demands and financial sustainability. Our trade unions have access to the senior leaders within the Council to challenge proposals made and suggest alternative courses of action prior to them being taken to Council for consideration.

- **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion**

We work closely with the trade unions when introducing policies to promote workplace diversity, tackle discrimination, and ensure services are accessible to all residents.

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