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## **Social Partnership Duty Annual Report 2025/26**

### **How Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Has Strengthened Social Partnership**

**Date:** September 2026

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This report outlines how Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has complied with and further strengthened the Social Partnership Duty under Section 16 of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 during the period April 2025 to September 2026.

The report demonstrates how Merthyr Tydfil CBC has worked collaboratively with its recognised trade unions, Unison and GMB, in relation to:

- The Council's Well-being Objectives.
- Strategic decision-making.
- Workforce planning and organisational change.
- Policy development.
- Service modernisation.
- Employee wellbeing and fair work.
- Regional collaboration and continuous improvement.

Throughout the reporting period, the Council has remained committed to meaningful engagement with recognised trade unions, ensuring that they are consulted at a formative stage of decision making and provided with sufficient information and adequate time to consider proposals and respond.

This report has been discussed with and agreed by recognised trade union representatives.

### **Demonstrating Compliance with the Social Partnership Duty**

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council recognises that social partnership is more than a consultation exercise. It is a collaborative approach that seeks consensus or compromise between employers and recognised trade unions when making decisions that affect employees and the services delivered to our communities.

Throughout the reporting period, the Council has strengthened its approach by:

- Consulting recognised trade unions at the earliest practicable stage of policy development and organisational change.
- Providing detailed information to enable informed consideration of proposals.
- Allowing sufficient time for consultation and response.
- Maintaining dialogue throughout consultation processes.
- Actively considering trade union feedback before decisions are finalised.
- Seeking consensus and compromise wherever possible.
- Embedding social partnership principles across service areas rather than solely within Human Resources.

The Council continues to view social partnership as an essential component of good governance, effective decision making and sustainable service delivery.

### **Our Approach at Merthyr Tydfil**

Merthyr Tydfil CBC has a long-established culture of constructive industrial relations and meaningful partnership working with recognised trade unions.

Monthly consultation meetings continue to be held between senior management and trade union representatives to discuss:

- Workforce planning.
- Organisational change.
- Budget pressures.
- Policy development.
- Health and safety matters.
- Employee wellbeing.
- Strategic service delivery issues.

Trade unions have direct access to senior leaders, including the Chief Executive, who regularly attends consultation meetings. This demonstrates the Council's commitment to ensuring employee voices are heard at the highest levels of the organisation.

Social partnership is embedded from the start of employment. Trade union representatives continue to attend the Corporate Induction Programme, where they engage directly with new employees and explain the benefits of membership and partnership working.

The Council maintains an open-door approach, encouraging both formal and informal engagement with trade union representatives to support collaborative problem solving and positive industrial relations.

### **How We Have Strengthened Social Partnership During 2025/26**

During the reporting period, Merthyr Tydfil CBC has taken several significant steps to strengthen social partnership arrangements.

## **Strengthening Early Engagement**

A key focus has been ensuring that trade unions are involved at a much earlier stage in decision making.

This has included:

- Sharing proposals before formal consultation begins.
- Providing detailed change management documentation.
- Discussing ideas during the design and development phase rather than once decisions have been made.
- Seeking trade union views before proposals are presented to employees.
- Using informal engagement alongside formal consultation arrangements.

This approach has improved trust, strengthened relationships and enabled more collaborative decision making.

## **Broadening Social Partnership Across Services**

The Council has actively encouraged service areas to demonstrate ownership of social partnership principles.

As a result, examples included within this report extend beyond Human Resources and include operational service areas, demonstrating that social partnership is becoming embedded across the organisation.

## **Raising Awareness of the Duty**

Further work has been undertaken to improve awareness and understanding of the Social Partnership Duty across managers, staff and trade union representatives.

This has included:

- Promoting Welsh Government learning resources.
- Discussions regarding awareness raising initiatives.
- Sharing good practice with other authorities.
- Exploring future training opportunities with trade union partners.

Recognising that awareness can vary between services, the Council remains committed to further strengthening understanding of the Duty across all levels of the organisation.

## **Contribution to the Corporate Wellbeing Plan**

### **An Aspirational Merthyr Tydfil, Focused on Learning**

The Council continues to work closely with trade unions to support workforce development, learning and continuous professional development.

Trade union representatives continue to participate in Corporate Induction events and have opportunities to engage directly with new employees.

Trade unions have been consulted on apprenticeship programmes, training initiatives and workforce development opportunities. Their feedback continues to inform learning priorities and support employee development.

### **A Healthier Merthyr Tydfil**

The Council works in partnership with trade unions on issues affecting employee health, safety and wellbeing.

Examples include:

- Consultation on health and safety policies.
- Employee Assistance Programme promotion.
- Workplace adjustments and support arrangements.
- Flexible working initiatives.
- Violence at Work policy reviews.
- Fire safety and workplace wellbeing initiatives.

Trade unions continue to play an important role in ensuring employees have access to support mechanisms which promote both physical and mental wellbeing.

### **A Safe and Prosperous Merthyr Tydfil**

The Council works with trade unions to promote fair work, secure employment and good working conditions.

Trade unions contribute valuable insight regarding services, workforce issues and organisational development. Their involvement helps ensure that changes are implemented fairly and sustainably.

### **Clean and Green Merthyr Tydfil**

Trade unions continue to support the Council's environmental and sustainability ambitions.

Building on the One Planet Standard achievement and ongoing Decarbonisation Plan activity, unions have been involved in discussions regarding environmental initiatives, sustainable working practices and workforce impacts associated with climate change measures.

## **Strategic Decision Making**

Trade unions continue to be involved in strategic decisions affecting both employees and service delivery.

## **Workforce Planning and Organisational Change**

Trade unions have been actively consulted on:

- Service restructures.
- Departmental reviews.
- School reorganisation proposals.
- Workforce redesign initiatives.
- Service integration projects.

The Council provides detailed information to trade unions and encourages feedback at the earliest possible stage.

## **Transformation Programme – Better Tomorrow Board**

Including recognised Trade Unions on the Better Tomorrow Board reflects the Council's commitment to genuine social partnership and ensures that employees' voices are represented as transformation proposals are developed and delivered. By involving Trade Union representatives at a strategic level, the Council can benefit from their insight, challenge and understanding of workforce impacts, helping to shape solutions that are practical, sustainable and supported by employees.

This approach promotes transparency, trust and meaningful engagement, ensuring that organisational change is developed collaboratively rather than imposed. It also aligns with the Council's commitment to early engagement and partnership working, strengthening industrial relations and helping to secure successful delivery of transformation initiatives that support both organisational sustainability and the wellbeing of our workforce.

## **Budget Setting and Financial Planning**

Trade unions continue to be consulted on financial planning decisions which may impact employees and service delivery.

This includes:

- Workforce restructures.
- Budget considerations.
- Efficiency proposals.
- Redeployment opportunities.
- Workforce planning arrangements.

Detailed information is shared with trade union representatives, enabling meaningful consultation and informed feedback before decisions are taken.

Trade unions are routinely provided with information regarding budget pressures, savings requirements and organisational impacts.

Their input helps inform decision making and ensures workforce implications are properly considered before proposals are finalised.

### **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

Trade unions continue to be consulted on employment policies and initiatives that promote equality, diversity and inclusion.

This collaborative approach helps create fair, inclusive workplaces and supports positive employee outcomes.

### **Industrial Relations and Pay**

Trade unions continue to participate in Job Evaluation Appeal Panels and are consulted on workforce policies, terms and conditions and pay-related matters.

This strengthens transparency and promotes confidence in decision-making processes.

### **Case Study: Public Protection Service Modernisation**

One of the strongest examples of successful social partnership working during the reporting period was the modernisation of service delivery within Public Protection.

The service identified a need to move away from a traditional 9am to 5pm Community Warden model and introduce wider service coverage through:

- Early morning shifts.
- Evening shifts.
- Occasional weekend working.

Initially, consideration was given to changing employees' terms and conditions.

Before any decisions were taken, management entered into consultation with affected employees and recognised trade unions.

A series of constructive meetings took place involving management, employees and union representatives.

Through open dialogue and collaborative working, an alternative approach was agreed whereby employees voluntarily participated in the revised shift arrangements as part of a trial period.

The trade unions played a critical role in ensuring that employee concerns were fully considered whilst allowing the Council to modernise service delivery.

The trial proved successful and has now become part of routine service delivery.

### **Key Benefits**

- New service model implemented without changes to terms and conditions.
- Avoidance of potential legal challenge.
- Improved service delivery for residents.
- Increased employee engagement and ownership.
- Positive industrial relations maintained.
- Continued collaboration with trade union colleagues.
- Long-term sustainability of Community Warden posts through continued funding support.

### **Evidence of Social Partnership Principles**

This case study demonstrates strong compliance with the Social Partnership Duty because:

- Trade unions were involved before decisions were finalised.
- Employees and unions were provided with sufficient information regarding proposed changes.
- Multiple meetings allowed adequate consideration and feedback.
- Alternative options were jointly explored.
- Consensus and compromise were achieved.
- A solution was reached that met service needs whilst protecting employee interests.

This represents a practical example of social partnership in action and demonstrates how collaborative approaches can deliver positive outcomes for all parties.

### **SPF – Shared Prosperity Fund – Local Growth Fund**

At the end of 2025, the Council was made aware that Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) funding was coming to an end and that the new Local Growth Fund (LGF) was being developed as part of the next phase of regional and local growth funding. This created a period of significant uncertainty for the Council, partner organisations, funded projects and employees whose posts were directly or indirectly linked to SPF-supported activity.

Welsh Government and UK Government confirmed that the LGF was not a direct like-for-like replacement for SPF. The proposed LGF transition year was intended to support movement towards a new funding model, rather than continue all existing SPF activity on the same basis. As a result, a number of existing projects became ineligible or could no longer be supported at the same level. The change in funding criteria and the reduction in available revenue funding meant that some projects had to be reduced substantially, and in some cases ceased altogether.

The allocation provided under the new arrangements was based on a 70% capital and 30% revenue split, which represented a significant shift from the previous SPF programme. This required the Council and its partners to undertake a detailed and challenging review of existing commitments, project delivery models and staffing implications in order to reduce the revenue profile for the following financial year to the required 30% level. This process was complex, as revenue-funded activity often directly supports staffing, employment costs and ongoing service delivery.

From December 2025 onwards, the Human Resources team worked closely with recognised trade unions to manage the workforce implications arising from this funding transition. Group consultation meetings were arranged with affected employees, followed by one-to-one meetings with individuals whose roles were potentially at risk or whose employment circumstances may have been impacted by changes to funded projects. Trade union representatives were involved throughout this process and were provided with information as it became available, enabling them to support employees, raise concerns and contribute to discussions about possible options.

Like all local authorities across Wales, this was an extremely difficult period for all concerned. There was limited guidance available during the early stages of the transition, and the Council was required to respond quickly to emerging information while ensuring that employees were treated fairly and sensitively. Through regular engagement with trade unions, the Council sought to ensure that consultation was meaningful, that employees had an opportunity to ask questions and that all reasonable options were explored before final decisions were made.

### **Regional Collaboration with Vale of Glamorgan Council**

A significant development during the reporting period has been the establishment of collaborative working arrangements between Merthyr Tydfil CBC and Vale of Glamorgan Council through a Social Partnership Champions Network.

Three formal meetings were held during:

- November 2025.
- February 2026.
- June 2026.

The network includes:

- Human Resources professionals.
- Trade union representatives.
- Social Partnership leads.
- Organisational development professionals.

The purpose has been to share learning, discuss challenges and identify opportunities to strengthen social partnership across local government.

### **Sharing Good Practice**

During meetings, both authorities shared examples of successful partnership working including:

#### **Merthyr Tydfil CBC**

- Corporate induction involving trade union representatives.

- Monthly consultation arrangements.
- Early engagement during restructures.
- Open-door approach to industrial relations.
- Informal consultation before formal processes commence.

### **Vale of Glamorgan Council**

- Joint Consultative Forum arrangements.
- Social worker progression framework.
- Directorate-level consultation mechanisms.
- Shared service consultation arrangements.

Both authorities recognised the value of learning from each other's experiences and identifying opportunities for continuous improvement.

### **Training and Awareness Raising**

A major theme throughout the meetings was improving understanding of the Social Partnership Duty.

Discussions included:

- Welsh Government learning modules.
- TUC Cymru training opportunities.
- Awareness raising amongst managers.
- Member and senior leader engagement.
- Simplified learning resources and executive summaries.
- Discussion-based learning opportunities.

Both organisations recognised that awareness of social partnership remains inconsistent and agreed that further training and communication activity is required.

### **Policy Development and Early Engagement**

Both councils recognised the importance of involving trade unions at the earliest stages of policy development.

Discussions highlighted:

- The value of pre-engagement.
- Lessons learned from policy reviews.
- Benefits of collaborative decision making.
- Opportunities for greater involvement of unions in workforce-related policy development.

Merthyr Tydfil shared positive examples of early engagement on employment policy development whilst Vale of Glamorgan shared examples relating to workforce progression frameworks.

## **Integrated Impact Assessments**

Both authorities discussed the importance of ensuring Integrated Impact Assessments and Health Impact Assessments are completed early enough to influence decisions rather than justify them.

There was agreement that:

- Assessments should be undertaken at the start of the process.
- Trade union involvement should be built into assessment activity.
- Workforce impacts should be considered alongside service impacts.
- Early engagement supports better outcomes.

This mirrors the core principles of social partnership and will help strengthen consultation arrangements in future.

## **Outcomes and Benefits of Collaboration**

The partnership between Merthyr Tydfil CBC and Vale of Glamorgan Council has delivered a number of positive outcomes:

- Improved understanding of the Social Partnership Duty.
- Sharing of good practice and resources.
- Greater consistency in approaches to implementation.
- Stronger relationships between employers and trade unions.
- Enhanced approaches to Annual Social Partnership Reporting.
- Identification of future training opportunities.
- Increased focus on early engagement and meaningful consultation.

The partnership has demonstrated the benefits of regional learning and continuous improvement.

## **Measuring Success**

The Council recognises the importance of demonstrating the impact of social partnership activity.

Evidence of success during this reporting period includes:

- Continued positive industrial relations.
- No significant collective disputes.
- Increased examples of collaborative service redesign.
- Improved engagement with trade unions on strategic matters.
- Regional sharing of good practice.
- Greater awareness of the Social Partnership Duty.
- Positive outcomes arising from consultation and compromise.

The Council will continue to develop methods for measuring and evidencing the impact of social partnership activity in future reports.

## **Conclusion**

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to the principles of social partnership and fair work.

During 2025/26 and 2026, the Council has strengthened social partnership through:

- Earlier engagement with recognised trade unions.
- Increased involvement of employee representatives in strategic decision making.
- Collaborative workforce planning and organisational change.
- Service redesign achieved through partnership working.
- Regional collaboration with Vale of Glamorgan Council.
- Greater awareness raising and knowledge sharing.
- Increased use of practical case studies to evidence outcomes.

The Council can clearly demonstrate that recognised trade unions have been consulted on wellbeing objectives and strategic decisions at a formative stage, provided with sufficient information to consider proposals and given adequate opportunity to respond.

The Public Protection service redesign and collaborative work with Vale of Glamorgan Council provide strong examples of how the principles of social partnership have been translated into practical action.

Merthyr Tydfil CBC remains committed to continuous improvement and will continue working alongside recognised trade unions to ensure employees have a meaningful voice in shaping the future of the organisation, improving services and supporting the wellbeing of our communities.