Cyngor Gwynedd

Social Partnership Duty Annual Report 2024-25

1. Introduction

The aim of the report is to show how Cyngor Gwynedd has complied with the Social Partnership Duty.

The **Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023** (the "SPPP Act"), which came into force on 1 April 2024, requires public bodies, including **Cyngor Gwynedd**, to produce an annual report to show how they have complied with the **Social Partnership Duty** established by the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act.

The Social Partnership Duty requires local authorities to seek a **consensus or compromise** with their recognised trade unions, when they:

i. determine their **well-being objectives**; and
ii. make **strategic decisions** about the reasonable steps they intend to take to achieve those objectives.

Section 16(2) of the Act sets out a number of specific requirements relating to the Duty, which a public body must comply with when "seeking a consensus or compromise".

To seek a consensus or compromise, a public body must involve its recognised trade unions or other representatives of its staff in the process of setting objectives or making decisions, by (specifically):

a) consulting with them in the **early stage** of the process, and
b) include them throughout the process by:
    i. providing **sufficient information** for them to be able to give due consideration to what is proposed, and
    ii. providing **sufficient time** for them to consider what is proposed and respond appropriately.

According to **Section 18** of the Act:

1. A public body must prepare, for each financial year, a report of what it has done to comply with the duty.
2. The report must be **agreed with recognised trade unions** or include a statement explaining why it was not agreed.
3. The public body must **publish the report**, and submit it to the **Social Partnership Council**, as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of the financial year.

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2. Background

In addition to duties under the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act, there are requirements within other Acts such as the Future Generations Act and the Local Government and Elections Act to consult with different cohorts (including staff).

Cyngor Gwynedd has established a Liaison Group between the Council and the trade unions for a number of years, to reinforce the healthy relationship that has largely existed for more than a decade. This forum meets approximately every 6 weeks. The aim of this group is to place emphasis on maintaining good working relationships between the Council and the Trade Unions, proactively discussing and resolving constituent employment issues, as well as handling and discussing the development of local working conditions and other employment initiatives. The meetings are chaired by the Human Resources Service Manager and include representation from the Council (HR Service Manager, Health, Safety and Well-being Service Manager, human resources officers) and representatives from the Trade Unions (GMB, UNISON and Unite).

The trade unions recognised by Cyngor Gwynedd are:

- GMB
- UNISON
- Unite

3. How we met/complied with the Social Partnership Duty

While we normally undertake an annual review of the Council's Plan, only a light review was carried out during 2024/25, with only one new project being added to the Plan. There was no wider consultation by the Council beyond Elected Members (through Cabinet and Full Council meetings) in making this decision.

As part of the process of producing the Council's Self-Assessment for 2024/25, a consultation was carried out with the recognised trade unions, seeking their feedback and comments on the authority's performance and potential areas for improvement. Specifically, it was asked:

- Is the Council carrying out its duties effectively?
- Is the Council making the best use of available resources?
- Does the Council have robust arrangements in place to ensure effective performance?
- What suggestions do they have for improving staff engagement and well-being?

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Among the responses, it was noted that there was room to improve communication with the unions on staffing issues in some departments. It was also recognised that our approach to the Social Partnership needs to be further developed as it remains a process of learning and evolving. While the corporate relationship is generally healthy, and there are also positive links within some departments of the Council, it is recognised that the next step is to go further and establish a constructive relationship between the trade unions and each of the Council's departments. This will be a further proactive and positive development.

As mentioned above, the corporate Liaison Group between the Council and the trade unions meets approximately every 6 weeks to discuss employment issues. While some attention has been given to the Social Partnership Duty in the past, we will ensure that it is included as a standard item on the agenda of all future meetings.

During 2024/25, the corporate liaison group met approximately every 6 weeks. Here are some of the issues that received attention during the year:

1. Introduction of a new alcohol and drug testing policy.
2. Develop and introduce a new staff sickness absence management policy and system.
3. The possibility of adopting the TUC's Welsh language charter
4. Dealing with change within services/departments, in a sympathetic manner that provides support to staff.

One example of the partnership working constructively is the development of the new policy on conducting drug and alcohol testing among the workforce, and the introduction of a new sickness absence management policy and system. The success of these two examples has been based on inclusion and collaboration with the unions from the very beginning – from identifying the 'problem' to formulating solutions. Both topics can be contentious and have involved considerable change in policy, but by working together from the outset we have been able to reach a solution that is acceptable to both sides.

From April 2025, the Council will take decisive steps to facilitate the participation of local representatives in their union duties, including identifying and allocating a specific budget to support this process and releasing representatives from their permanent roles.

Historically, we have not specifically sought to achieve a consensus with the trade unions in making strategic decisions or in setting our well-being objectives. This shortcoming has been recognised as a weakness in the process, and looking to the future, we will take decisive steps to ensure that sufficient time is earmarked in the planning process, to enable meaningful and productive collaboration with the unions.

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Our goal is to embed the principle of social partnership in everything we do. As part of this commitment over the next year we will put steps in place to strengthen our contribution, including:

- Raising awareness of the requirements arising from the Welsh Local Government Act and the Social Partnerships Act and to provide a suggestion as to how to meet the requirement.
- Submit a draft of Cyngor Gwynedd's Annual Performance Report and Self-Assessment 2024/25 so that unions have an opportunity to submit any recommendations or comments before the document is considered by the Governance and Audit Committee, Cabinet and Full Council. (July 2025)
- Arrange a face-to-face meeting with the unions to discuss the current well-being objectives and priority projects within the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023–28. This will provide a proactive opportunity for unions to share their views directly, ensuring their input is considered as part of the review process. (November 2025)
- Actively involve the unions in the drafting process of the review of the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023–28 by sharing a draft and allowing them to submit recommendations and comments for consideration by the Cabinet/Full Council prior to adoption. (January 2026)
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