Cyngor Gwynedd

Annual Report on the Social Partnership Duty 2025-26

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:

i. setting their **well-being objectives**; and
ii. making **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 consensus or compromise".

In order to seek 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) including 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.

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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.

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 various cohorts (including staff).

Cyngor Gwynedd has established a Liaison Group between the Council and the trade unions for several years, to reinforce the healthy relationship that has largely existed for more than a decade. 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 contentious 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

During 2025/26 Cyngor Gwynedd continued to develop and strengthen its social partnership arrangements with the trade unions, building on a constructive working relationship that has existed for a number of years. This relationship is based on open discussion, joint working in practice, and the common aim of supporting the Council's workforce and ensuring effective services for the residents of Gwynedd.

We usually meet as a Liaison Group on a monthly basis, and there is also an arrangement to meet the union officers individually each month, to try to resolve any situations that are unique to that union. There is also a strong link between the union officials and the management teams of some individual departments, although there is still scope to develop this further.

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The social partnership arrangements were strengthened during the year by holding meetings between the Council's Chief Officers, including the Chief Executive and Directors, and the trade unions. These meetings were used to discuss strategic matters that are affecting the organisation and the workforce, including the Council's Plan and budget. There is now a programme of meetings in place twice a year, or as required, to maintain an ongoing dialogue and support the Welsh Government's aspirations in relation to the Social Partnership Duty.

As part of the process of producing the Council's Self-Assessment for 2025/26, the recognised trade unions were asked for their feedback and comments on the authority's performance and potential areas for improvement. Specifically, they were 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?

We did not receive a formal response to this request, but we will continue the discussion at the Liaison Group meetings and in the meeting with the Chief Officers.

Adopting *Twf – The Welsh Language at Work Charter* is a positive example of a social partnership in practice between Cyngor Gwynedd, TUC Cymru and the recognised trade unions which are Unison, GMB and Unite. By signing and adopting the Charter, Cyngor Gwynedd became the first workplace in Wales to do so, demonstrating a clear commitment to promoting and strengthening the Welsh language as a working language within the organisation.

Through this work, a shared commitment is reflected to ensure that employees' linguistic rights are respected, that inclusion is promoted, and that there is clear leadership and accountability in developing the use of Welsh in the workplace. In addition, it supports the principle that employees are able to access union representation in their preferred language, which strengthens the voice of staff and the working relationship between the Council and the unions.

A **Staff Equality Forum** has been established, which provides an important channel for staff to contribute to discussions on equality, inclusion, well-being and experience at work. The arrangement strengthens the voice of staff and enables the Council to use employees' experiences and feedback to inform the development of policies, employment

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arrangements and working practices. This underpins the principles of social partnership by promoting open dialogue, staff participation and a fair and inclusive work culture.

As part of the review of working conditions, issues that directly affect the workforce are addressed, including working conditions, equality and inclusion, Whistleblowing arrangements, responding to sexual harassment, transparency and accountability, and relevant legislative changes.

By engaging with the trade unions on these issues, the Council can ensure that the views and experiences of the workforce are taken into account when developing policies and working practices. This endorses the principles of social partnership by promoting constructive dialogue, early participation, and working together on matters that have direct implications for staff.

Since April 2025 the Council has secured funding to enable us to support the unions in releasing staff to undertake union activities. This gives greater assurance that staff can be released from their posts in order to undertake their roles with the unions.

In future the Council will continue with efforts to embed the principle of social partnership and build constructive relations with the trade unions. During the coming year we will focus on the following areas:

1. **Social Partnership:** Further strengthen the constructive relationship with the trade unions and develop social partnership arrangements across the Council.
2. **Workforce Planning:** Develop a strategic workforce plan to support succession planning, skills development and ensure that the Council has the necessary capacity and expertise to deliver services in the future.
3. **Policies and Training:** Review employment policies and procedures in order to respond to legislative changes (e.g. Employment Rights Act) ensuring that managers receive the appropriate support and training to implement those changes consistently and effectively.
4. **Attendance, Health and Well-being:** Continue to develop arrangements that support positive attendance at work, with a particular focus on reducing long-term absences, supporting staff mental health and well-being, and ensuring that managers have the tools and confidence to manage cases effectively and sensitively.
5. **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:**
   Implement the relevant actions from the Equality Plan 2024-28, ensuring that equality, diversity and inclusion considerations are embedded in all aspects of the service's work and employment decisions.

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