



CYNGOR PARTNERIAETH Y GWEITHLU
WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL

Agenda

8 November 2023 – 10:00 – 11:30am

Video Conference on MS Teams

Chair – Deputy Minister for Social Partnership

Item	Agenda Item	Lead		Style
1	Introduction	Welsh Government	Deputy Minister for Social Partnership	Verbal
2	WPC Agreements – Next Steps	JEC	Shavanah Taj on behalf of the JEC	Paper
3	Four Day Working Week – Working Group Update	JEC	Reg Kilpatrick on behalf of the JEC	Paper
4	Equality Action Plans - Update	JEC	Bethan Thomas on behalf of the JEC	Paper
5	Short-term Communications Plan - Update	JEC	Sue Green on behalf of the JEC	Paper
6	Artificial Intelligence – Opportunities and Threats for the Public Sector	Welsh Government	Mike Thomas	Paper
7	One Welsh Public Service – Update	Welsh Government	Chris Stevens	Verbal
8	Strikes (Minimum Service Level) Act	Trade Unions	Shavanah Taj	Verbal
9	WPC Minutes/Matters Arising	Welsh Government	Deputy Minister for Social Partnership	Paper

Meeting of the Workforce Partnership Council (WPC)

Wednesday 8 November 2023 – (10:00 – 11:30am)

Microsoft Teams Meeting

Item 1: Introduction

1. The Deputy Minister for Social Partnership (Chair) welcomed new WPC members Gareth Lloyd (UCU), Nicola Prygodzicz (NHS Chief Executives), Sue Green (NHS Employers) and Tim Moss (Welsh Government). She thanked previous members Phillip Markham, Mark Hackett, Richard Tompkins and Peter Kennedy for their previous contributions at the Council.
2. Before proceeding to the agenda, the Deputy Minister explained that concerns had been raised with Welsh Government regarding cuts to facility time for trade union activities. The Deputy Minister acknowledged the difficult funding choices facing public bodies but stressed that facility time was an investment rather than a cost, emphasising the important role the trade unions were playing in implementing the Social Partnership Duty and making Wales a Fair Work nation.
3. The Deputy Minister signified her intention to write to public sector bodies represented through the WPC to stress the importance of protecting facility time for trade union activities and asked that this be communicated at a sectoral level by social partners.
4. Ruth Brady (GMB) explained that a protest would be held outside the Civic Centre in Merthyr following the Council's decision to cut facility time.
5. Jess Turner (Unison) thanked the Deputy Minister for her efforts in promoting the importance of facility time and voiced concerns over the potential for further cuts in the future.
6. Shavannah Taj (Wales TUC) explained that this issue had been discussed at Wales TUC's last General Council meeting. She outlined concerns that cutting facility time undermined trust and the trade unions' ability to work effectively in social partnership. Shavanah welcomed the activity outlined by the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership.
7. Gareth Lloyd (UCU Cymru) supported the Deputy Minister's approach and stressed the amount of money that was being saved by allowing trade unions sufficient time to resolve disputes within public sector bodies.
8. The Deputy Minister thanked members for their views, outlined the agenda and explained meeting etiquette for participating in discussions. She confirmed that apologies and substitutes would be recorded in the minute.

Item 2: WPC Agreements – next steps

9. The Deputy Minister confirmed that when the JEC met on the 14 June members agreed that there was a need to better understand how WPC agreements had been disseminated and implemented by public bodies. She explained that this item would outline a series of proposals for developing a targeted approach to the dissemination, implementation, and review of WPC agreements as well as other documents endorsed by the Council. The Deputy Minister invited Shavanah Taj, as the JEC lead for this work, to present the paper to the WPC.
10. Shavannah Taj (Wales TUC) confirmed that this work had originated from previous discussions at the Council regarding the review of the WPC's agreement on the Acceptable Use of Non-Guaranteed Hours Arrangements (NGHAs). She explained that this review had identified a number of issues regarding interpretation and implementation by public bodies, prompting the need to better understand how agreements were being handled through social partner networks. Shavannah also referenced previous discussions at the WPC which had emphasised the importance of trust in implementing the agreements and explained that Wales TUC had developed an easy-to-understand guide to the NGHAs agreement on their own website.
11. Shavannah explained the different channels and methods of communication used by social partners to disseminate agreements and outlined the key proposals in the paper. This included issuing the existing agreements with a covering letter from the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership as a single pack to nominated leads and then reviewing their implementation after a six-month period via a short survey. Shavannah asked members for their support in signposting the agreements on their organisational websites and proposed that a WPC newsletter should be produced to help promote the work of the Council; this would issue after each meeting of the WPC.
12. Darren Dupre (Unison) welcomed the report and highlighted the concerns of the trade unions regarding the low response rate to the review into the WPC's agreement on the Acceptable use of NGHAs. He outlined the challenges of reaching overarching agreements within Local Government and the measures the trade unions were developing to strengthen their networks and representation at the Joint Council for Wales (JCW).
13. Councillor Jane Gebbie explained that each of the 22 Local Authorities were sovereign bodies and that the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) would encourage but could not instruct them to sign up to WPC agreements. Councillor Gebbie highlighted the pressures facing local authority staff in responding to different requests for information and asked if a schedule of surveys emanating from the WPC could be provided to aid planning.
14. Sue Green (NHS Employers) supported the request for a schedule if there were a number of planned surveys. Sue explained the important role of the NHS Partnership Forum (NPF) in responding to requests from bodies such as the WPC, clarifying between what was mandatory and discretionary. She

referenced the new digital hub created by the NHS to support the NPF and advised that it would be helpful to link this with the WPC's website.

15. Shavannah thanked members for their practical contributions to aid implementation and stressed the importance of targeting requests in order to avoid duplication.
16. The Deputy Minister asked members if they agreed to the proposals in the paper for this item and these were accepted by the WPC.

Action: The WPC Support Team to progress the actions in the paper for this item and keep the JEC informed of progress.

Action: The WPC Support Team to engage with Sue Green to link the NHS' digital hub with the WPC website.

Item 3: 4 day working week – Working Group update

17. The Deputy Minister informed members that an interim report from the 4 Day Week Working Group had been provided to the WPC with a revised timeline for submitting their final report to the Council next year. The Deputy Minister invited Reg Kilpatrick, as the JEC lead for this work, to present the paper.
18. Reg Kilpatrick (Welsh Government) thanked social partners for their involvement in the Working Group and highlighted the different approaches that had been taken in Scotland and England. He outlined the complexity of this issue and the need for Wales to carefully consider its position ahead of making any final decisions. Reg confirmed the Working Group had agreed a definition for the 4 Day Week and provided this to the WPC:

“A 4-day working week means no loss of pay or benefits, combined with a 20% reduction to normal contracted hours, while maintaining current levels of service delivery.”
19. Reg emphasised the collective view of the group that maintaining current levels of service delivery would be key to its overall ambitions. He outlined the 4 different subgroups that had been established to take forward next steps and emphasised the need for these to have sufficient time to conduct their work. On this basis, Reg explained the Working Group would need to submit its final report to the WPC in March next year instead of the original deadline of the current meeting. He outlined the different options in the paper for progressing a potential pilot of the 4 Day Week and recommended members also consult some of the annexes in the paper which provided further context.
20. Bethan Thomas (Unison) emphasised that piloting the 4 Day Working Week was one of a number of potential options which would be considered once all the evidence had been explored.
21. Darren Williams (PCS) welcomed the report and acknowledged the complexities of the issues raised. Darren stressed the importance of the next

few months in developing this work but highlighted trade union commitment to providing a 4 Day Working Week to ensure greater flexibility and fairness for workers in Wales. He referenced the different issues that had been raised in Scotland and England but flagged the importance of maintaining momentum.

22. Huw Jakeway (Welsh Fire Service) acknowledged the importance of the Fire Service being represented in discussions at the Working Group and confirmed he would address this outside of the meeting.
23. Nicola Prygodzicz (NHS Chief Executives) supported the paper for this item but highlighted the importance of addressing the needs of staff working within clinical and 24-hour service settings.
24. Sue Green (NHS Employers) welcomed the cautionary approach to timescales by the Working Group, referencing the complexity regarding piloting in Scotland. Sue flagged that the March deadline might ultimately have to be reconsidered due to the challenges of this work. She referenced the tripartite group that had been established within the NHS to explore the viability of developing a 36-hour working week and the need to ensure membership from this forum aligned with the 4 Day Week Working Group for consistency.
25. Nathan Holman (GMB) supported the suggestion made by Sue Green and stressed the importance of ensuring the impact of inflation is part of the Working Group's discussions.
26. Bethan Thomas explained that membership of the subgroups was flexible and welcomed any additional nominations from the WPC. She acknowledged the ambition of the March deadline but also stressed the importance of maintaining momentum.
27. Councillor Jane Gebbie stressed the importance of ensuring any consideration of equal pay within the Working Group acknowledged the over representation of women in 24-hour service work.
28. Bethan Thomas explained that equal pay and related issues were being addressed under one of the sub-groups.
29. Reg Kilpatrick reiterated the complexity of this issue and that piloting an approach was only one potential option. He explained that he would explore how the Group might better communicate the scope of its work going forward.
30. The Deputy Minister asked members if they agreed to the extended deadline for the submission of the 4 Day Week Working Group's report and this was accepted by the WPC.

Action: The 4 Day Week Working Group to progress the next steps outlined in the paper for this item and consider the issues raised at this meeting.

Action: WPC members to provide any further nominations for the sub-groups of the 4 Day Week Working Group to Stephen Layne and Bethan Thomas.

Agenda Item 4: Equality Action Plans – update

31. The Deputy Minister confirmed that the WPC had previously committed to supporting the delivery of the Welsh Government's Equality Action Plans as part of its Work Plan. She explained that the paper for this item contained a series of recommendations for widening participation in the Equalities Work Plan and invited Bethan Thomas, as the JEC lead to present the paper.
32. Bethan Thomas (Unison) outlined the webinars that had taken place in October to increase understanding of equalities work across Wales and their links to the WPC's own workstream. Bethan explained that the report on Diversity Monitoring Arrangements within three Public Sector Bodies had been produced and best practice was being developed to identify the barriers to the disclosure of protected characteristics information. She explained that, subject to the WPC's agreement, the report and a related joint statement were ready to be published on the WPC's website.
33. Bethan explained that a survey on disability and ethnicity pay gap reporting had also been produced to underpin the WPC's work in this area. She explained that the deadline had been extended to the 10 November and asked members to encourage responses through their networks.
34. The Deputy Minister reiterated the request to the WPC asking for their agreement to publish the report on Diversity Monitoring Arrangements within three Public Sector Bodies and the related joint statement on the Council's website.
35. Jess Turner (Unison) endorsed the paper on behalf of the trade unions and asked how they could further support staff in disclosing ethnicity information. She encouraged employers to engage locally with their trade unions on this and confirmed they would also explore, as unions, what they could do to improve reporting.
36. Councillor Jane Gebbie reiterated the importance of allowing sufficient time to respond to surveys emphasising the pressure Local Authorities were under.
37. Bethan confirmed the WPC Support Team would now prioritise the publication of the report on Diversity Monitoring Arrangements within three Public Sector Bodies and the related joint statement on the WPC's website.

Action: The WPC Support Team to take forward the recommendations within the paper for this item keeping the JEC informed of progress. To include prioritising the publication of the report on Diversity Monitoring Arrangements within three Public Sector Bodies and the related joint statement on the WPC's website.

Item 5: Short-term Communications Plan – update

38. The Deputy Minister explained that this item was intended to provide an update on work regarding a package of communications activity including engagement, learning and next steps to embed social partnership working. She emphasised that the purpose of the Short-term Communications Plan was to promote the new Act and establish a shared understanding and narrative regarding social partnership. The Deputy Minister invited Sue Green, as the JEC lead to present the paper.
39. Sue Green (NHS Employers) outlined the five key areas under the Short-term Communications Plan and acknowledged the impact on peoples' time of engaging with work proposed by the WPC. She confirmed that at the last JEC on the 13 September members had considered feedback from a series of communications' workshops held earlier in the year and had agreed to disseminate key resources and messaging from this through their networks.
40. Sue explained that each JEC member had also agreed to provide a 150-word example of social partnership working but that the WPC Support Team had only received one response. She asked members to reconsider the request, suggesting they ask their staff to write up the actual examples before providing them to the WPC Support Team. Sue highlighted the progress on engagement with social partners that had been made and asked members to consider whether there were any new opportunities for the Short-term Communications Plan to develop. She then outlined the proposed next steps and actions contained in the paper for this item.
41. Darren Dupre (Unison) supported the paper but asked who the audience for its proposals were intended to be. He stressed the importance of the 150-word examples of social partnership reflecting the real experiences of workers in order to promote positive outcomes from this approach.
42. Tim Moss (Welsh Government) supported the comments made but also stressed the importance of having a clear understanding of what the outcomes of the Short-term Communications Plan would be and having effective methods in place to evaluate them.
43. Sue Green emphasised the importance of stakeholder mapping and the need to use social media effectively. Sue supported the need to clearly define outcomes and establish what the benefits and risks were of the social partnership approach. She recommended the case studies were developed in social partnership and identified the challenges involved with the examples provided in order to demonstrate how they were overcome.

Action: The WPC Support Team to take forward the recommendations in the paper for this item keeping the JEC informed of progress.

Action: JEC members to reconsider and provide 150-word examples of effective social partnership working to the WPC Support Team.

Item 6: Artificial intelligence – opportunities and threats for the Public Sector

44. The Deputy Minister emphasised the significant and rapidly developing implications posed by the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for the future of work. She explained that this subject was highly relevant to the WPC agreement on the Principles for Digitalisation and invited Mike Thomas, Welsh Government Policy Lead for AI, to present the item.
45. Mike Thomas highlighted the recent summit hosted by the UK government on AI and the high-profile attention that had been focussed on this subject over the last 2 years. Mike referenced some of the benefits of AI for public service delivery but also the challenges it presented including the propagation of bias, discrimination, and inequality as well as the ability to place workers under greater surveillance. He explained that in March the UK government published a consultation on its approach to AI regulation which the Welsh Government had co-ordinated a response to; central to this had been the lack of focus on social justice issues within the UK government's approach. Mike explained that it was anticipated the UK government's response to the consultation would be published in December or January.
46. Mike acknowledged the importance of the social partnership approach in developing an effective response to the challenges presented by AI. He referenced the support that had been offered at the JEC in September for establishing an AI Working Group and acknowledgement over the pace at which AI was developing. Mike asked members if they were content to agree to the establishment of the Working Group and that once it was operational for Welsh Government officials to make introductions from its members to the Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS) to assist in considering the full implications of AI.
47. Gareth Lloyd (UCU Cymru) supported the proposal to establish an AI Working Group on behalf of the trade unions. Gareth stressed the dangers of bias and discrimination regarding AI and the inequity of the technology relating to the education sector. He referenced positive work on AI being conducted by Coleg Cambria which was considering inherent bias and suggested the College's work was a good example of social partnership working to highlight.
48. Bethan Thomas (Unison) stressed the potential impact of AI to make people redundant and the importance of having a just transition towards the use of this technology. Bethan reiterated the potential for discrimination and surveillance of workers through AI and the need for the Working Group to consider these. She referenced the AI manifesto produced by Wales TUC and the importance of acknowledging the human dimension to this area and its impact on workers.
49. Shavannah Taj (Wales TUC) flagged that trade unions and other worker representatives had not been invited to the UK government's AI summit. Shavannah explained that the TUC had written an open letter to the UK government outlining their concerns re AI. She highlighted the importance of capturing lived experience during discussions and the need to ensure the

Working Group had a consistent approach which did not duplicate the work of other forums.

50. Darren Dupre (Unison) stressed the importance of transparency regarding procurement and AI. He referenced existing standards that would ensure employers are mandated to ensure the AI products they use are safe.
51. Mike Thomas acknowledged the concerns regarding bias and explained that data created by humans was the origin of this rather than AI itself. Mike also supported the concerns regarding procurement, referencing an AI seminar that would be delivered the following day to consider this (a link to the seminar was provided in the side conversation of the meeting). He explained that Wales was unlikely to build many AI models itself but would purchase the technology instead. In so doing, Mike explained evidence developed from looking at supply chains for AI products would be considered carefully to ensure they were appropriate and cost effective.
52. The Deputy Minister asked members if they were content to agree to the establishment of the AI Working Group and this was accepted by the WPC.

Action: The WPC Support Team to establish the WPC's AI Working Group and keep the JEC informed of progress. Once established, for this to include engagement with the Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS).

Item 7: One Welsh Public Service – update

53. The Deputy Minister explained that this item would provide a further update since the last meeting of the WPC in March regarding the ambition to deliver a One Welsh Public Services (OWPS) approach. She emphasised that the item would provide an opportunity for members to discuss how the approach could be effectively embedded across Wales. The Deputy Minister confirmed the WPC would revisit this item at its first meeting in March next year and invited Chris Stevens, Welsh Government Policy Lead for OWPS to present the item.
54. Chris Stevens explained that the OWPS approach built on the provisions of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and also stressed the importance of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 as a further platform for this work. He highlighted the effectiveness of the social partnership working that had taken place to produce a common definition of OWPS and a set of shared principles focussed on the needs of the individual. Chris explained that Welsh Government had started to embed the approach within its own policy processes and emphasised the importance of all social partners doing the same. Chris confirmed that next steps would involve identifying the barriers to the delivery of the OWPS approach.
55. Shavannah Taj (Wales TUC) reiterated the effectiveness of social partnership working in this area and the results it had produced.

Action: The WPC Support Team to ensure the One Welsh Public Services approach is placed on the next agenda of the WPC.

Item 8: Strikes (Minimum Service Level) Act 2023

56. The Deputy Minister explained that this item had been requested by Wales TUC on behalf of the trade unions and invited Shavannah Taj to outline the issue.
57. Shavannah Taj welcomed the WLGA's and the NHS' statements that they would seek to avoid using strike notices wherever possible. She also supported the Welsh Government's approach to the Strikes (Minimum Service Level) Act including the representations it had made to the UK government opposing the legislation. Shavannah highlighted the positive news that the Minimum Service Level Regulations in England for the Ambulance Service would not apply to Wales.
58. Huw Jakeway (Welsh Fire Service) confirmed he would further consider the issues raised by this legislation within his own service area.
59. The Deputy Minister highlighted the importance of developing a common position on the Strikes Act with all social partners.

Item 9: WPC minutes/matters arising

60. The Deputy Minister confirmed that there was one outstanding action from the previous meeting of the WPC regarding the trade unions writing to the Schools' Partnership Forum outlining their concerns regarding social partnership arrangements within schools.
61. Neil Butler (NASUWT) was critical of the update in the paper for this item describing the remaining action as having been superseded. He emphasised that whilst on hold, the issue remained live and that further activity would be taking place on this matter.
62. The Deputy Minister confirmed this would be considered by the WPC Support Team and thanked members for their involvement at the Council.

Action: The WPC Support Team to reconsider the action relating to the Schools' Partnership Forum and social partnership arrangements within schools and remove the description of it having been superseded.

Attendance list: WPC – 8 November 2023

Minister
Chair - Hannah Blythyn MS – Deputy Minister for Social Partnership
Trade unions
Shavanah Taj – Wales TUC Bethan Thomas – Unison Ruth Brady – GMB Jessica Turner - Unison Darren Dupre – Unison Nathan Holman - GMB Gareth Lloyd – UCU Richard Munn – Unite Neil Butler – NASUWT Darren Williams – PCS
Devolved Employers
Councillor Jane Gebbie – WLGA Spokesperson for Workforce Karen Higgins – WLGA Sue Green – NHS Wales Employers Nicola Prygodzicz – NHS Chief Executive Tim Moss - Devolved Sector Group CFO Huw Jakeway – Fire and Rescue Service
Welsh Government
Reg Kilpatrick - Covid Recovery and Local Government Owain Lloyd – Education Directorate Neil Surman - Social Partnership, Employability and Fair Work Judith Cole – Local Government
Guest Speakers
Mike Thomas – Welsh Government Christopher Stevens – Welsh Government
WPC Support Team
Mark Lewis – Welsh Government Angharad Steele – Welsh Government Jessica Khoshooee – Welsh Government Gerwyn David – Welsh Government Lauren Goulder – Welsh Government
Observers
Stephen Layne – Welsh Government Janine Pepworth – Welsh Government Sharon West - Welsh Government Amber Courtney – Welsh Government Isabel Mortimer - Welsh Government Lisa Walters – Welsh Government David Hooson – Special Advisor Ceri Williams – Wales TUC Nisreen Mansour – Wales TUC

Tom Hoyles - GMB
Angharad Hobson - WLGA

Apologies

Councillor Anthony Hunt – WLGA Workforce Spokesperson
Chris Llewelyn - WLGA
Robert Thomas - Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE)
David Michael – Devolved Sector Group
Jo Salway – Welsh Government
Helen Arthur - Welsh Government
Albert Heaney - Welsh Government
Rosie Lewis – Unison