CYNGOR PARTNERIAETH Y GWEITHLU
WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL

Agenda

20 March 2024 – 10:00 – 11:30am

Video Conference on MS Teams

Chair – Deputy Minister for Social Partnership

Item	Agenda Item	Lead		Style
1	Introduction	Welsh Government	Chair	Verbal
2	WPC Agreements – Update	JEC	Shavanah Taj on behalf of the JEC	Paper
3	Disability Confident Employer Scheme	Welsh Government	Welsh Government	Presentation
4	Equality Action Plans - Update	JEC	Bethan Thomas on behalf of the JEC	Paper
5	Four Day Working Week Group - Final Report	JEC	Reg Kilpatrick on behalf of the JEC	Paper
6	Communications Plan for Embedding Social Partnership - Update	JEC	Chris Llewelyn on behalf of the JEC	Paper
7	Artificial Intelligence – Working Group - Update	JEC	Ruth Brady on behalf of the JEC	Paper
8	WPC Minutes/Matters Arising	Welsh Government	Chair	Paper

Meeting of the Workforce Partnership Council (WPC)

Wednesday 20 March 2024 – (10:00 – 11:30am)

Microsoft Teams Meeting

Item 1 - Introduction

1. The Deputy Minister for Social Partnership (Chair) welcomed everyone to the Workforce Partnership Council (WPC) following its last meeting on the 8 November 2023. She noted there had been changes to membership and welcomed Daryl Williams (Unite) replacing Richard Munn, Tom Hoyles (GMB) replacing Kelly Andrews, Dom Houlihan (Welsh Government) replacing Peter Kennedy, Sarah Simmonds (NHS) replacing Julie Rowles, Emyr Evans (Library Wales) replacing David Michael and Chief Fire Officer Dawn Docx (Fire and Rescue) replacing Huw Jakeway.

2. The Deputy Minister confirmed the first meeting of the Social Partnership Council (SPC) had taken place on the 1 February. She said that discussions covered the procedures of the SPC, Socially Responsible Public Procurement, the Social Partnership Duty on Welsh Ministers, Fair Work, and the Welsh Government's Budget. The Deputy Minister confirmed the minutes would be circulated to SPC members and once approved would be published. In the meantime, she explained that arrangements for the next SPC were under way and would be agreed with the incoming First Minister.

3. The Deputy Minister confirmed that Microsoft's Artificial Intelligence Model Co-pilot would not be used to produce the minute of the meeting following concerns raised by some members. She explained that due to another diary commitment, Chris Llewelyn would present his item on the Communications Plan for Embedding Social Partnership after her opening remarks rather than as item 6 on the agenda. The Deputy Minister outlined the agenda, explained meeting etiquette for participating in discussions and confirmed that apologies or substitutes would be recorded in the minute.

Item 2 – Communications Plan for Embedding Social Partnership - Update

4. The Deputy Minister explained that this item would provide an update on the key aims of the Communications Plan Working Group including proposed membership and invited Chris Llewelyn to present the paper on behalf of the WPC's Joint Executive Committee (JEC).

5. Chris Llewelyn (WLGA) acknowledged the need for an employer to Chair the Communications Plan Working Group and confirmed that a solution had been identified which would be discussed at the next meeting of the JEC. He listed the key aims of the Plan around which the Working Group would operate and referenced annex 2 of the paper detailing proposed membership. Chris emphasised the importance of developing a shared understanding of social partnership but also the importance of having a collective approach to implementation. He reiterated the need to move quickly to appoint a Chair from the employer side and invited views from members. No further views were offered.

Item 3 - WPC Agreements – Next Steps

6. The Deputy Minister explained that when the JEC met on the 26 February members were provided with an update on how work was progressing to better understand the implementation of WPC agreements and documents endorsed by the Council. She explained that the paper for this item captured progress and included a draft survey that would be issued to social partners in the summer to assess implementation. In the absence of Shavanah Taj (Wales TUC), the Deputy Minister invited Bethan Thomas to present the paper on behalf of the JEC.

7. Bethan Thomas (Unison) said that when it last met on the 8 November the WPC agreed a series of actions for better understanding the implementation of the Council's agreements and other documents it had endorsed. Since then, the WPC Support Team had issued the agreements as a single pack to members of the Council with a covering letter from the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership. Whilst asking members to disseminate the agreements through their networks, she explained that the letter also asked them to signpost the agreements on their websites in order to embed them at an organisational level.

8. Bethan confirmed that a short, draft survey had been provided with the paper for this item setting out a series of questions designed to test how the agreements had been disseminated and implemented. The survey also asked organisations to outline any barriers that had been identified and what steps were being taken to review future implementation. Bethan explained that the survey exercise would be carried out through designated leads who would act as a focal point for disseminating the agreements through their networks to better understand implementation.

9. Bethan said that another action under this strand had been to develop a refreshed WPC newsletter. She confirmed this would now be developed within the WPC Support Team and that an update would be provided to the JEC in due course. Bethan asked the WPC to note the paper and invited views from members, explaining that any further queries should be directed to the WPC Support Team.

10. Sarah Simmonds (NHS) welcomed the survey but as a new member to the WPC she was keen to learn more about the nature of the Council's agreements. She asked for an email address for the WPC Support Team so she could direct any further questions to them and this was provided in the side-chat of the meeting.

Item 4 - Disability Confident Employer Scheme

11. The Deputy Minister said that this item would consist of a presentation from the Welsh Government's Disabled People's Employment Champions regarding the Disability Confident Employer Scheme; one element of their role within Welsh Government. She explained that the Scheme was a UK Government initiative which encouraged employers to take action to improve how they recruit, retain, and develop disabled people in the workplace. The

Deputy Minister outlined the different tiers of the scheme which organisations could work towards and explained that this item would complement the next on the Equality Action Plans strand of the WPC Work Plan. She invited James Wilkinson and Terry Mills to make the presentation.

12. James Wilkinson (Welsh Government) provided the latest data regarding disabled people in Wales, explaining that there was currently a disabled person employment gap of 29.4% compared to the UK gap of 26.3%. He outlined the Welsh Government's commitment to use the network of Disabled People's Employment Champions to close this gap and its national milestone to eliminate the pay gaps for gender, disability, and ethnicity by 2050. James provided an overview of the different tiers of the Scheme and the Social Model of Disability which recognised that disabled people were hindered by the barriers created by society rather than by any impairments they might have. He anticipated that the presentation would generate further conversations within members' networks and offered to talk further outside of the meeting.

13. Terry Mills (Welsh Government) provided more detail on the specifics of the Disability Confident Scheme. He confirmed that it was designed for both public and private sector employers and was developed by the Department of Work and Pensions in conjunction with employers. Terry explained that the scheme encouraged employers to think differently about disability and take action to improve how they recruit, retain, and develop disabled workers. He outlined the benefits of signing up to the Scheme, including how it demonstrated an organisations commitment to inclusivity, made an employer more attractive to disabled people and showed a real commitment to creating a fairer and more accessible workplace.

14. Terry outlined the ways in which both he and James could help members to progress the Scheme. He listed some of the organisations already signed up but stressed the need for more to be involved and the ambition to eventually see all public bodies registered with the Scheme. Terry referenced the benefits of employing disabled staff and reiterated the need for more employers to be involved.

15. Councillor Anthony Hunt asked if James and Terry could give the same presentation to the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and invited them to email him to arrange.

16. James Wilkison emphasised the importance of understanding different sectors and having a flexible approach to engaging them in the Scheme.

17. Darron Dupre (Unison) suggested the presentation could also be made to the Joint Council for Wales (JCW) in the autumn.

18. Councillor Anthony Hunt supported this proposal.

Action: WPC Support Team to provide James Wilkinson and Terry Mills with relevant contact details for further engagement with the WLGA and the JCW.

Item 5 – Equality Action Plans – Update

19. The Deputy Minister noted that the WPC had previously committed to a series of recommendations regarding the Equality Action Plans when it last met on the 8 November. She explained that this included 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. The Deputy Minister invited Bethan Thomas, on behalf of the JEC to provide an update to the WPC.

20. Bethan Thomas (Unison) thanked James Wilkinson and Terry Mills for their presentation and emphasised the importance of continuing a dialogue with them beyond this meeting. She explained that at the meeting of the JEC in January, it was agreed tackling sexual harassment in the workplace would be added to this strand of the Work Plan, recognising the recent amendment to the Equality Act 2010. Bethan confirmed this would commence in October 2024 and place a new duty on employers to take "reasonable steps" to prevent staff from sexual harassment at work. She highlighted the opportunity for the WPC to show leadership in this area by raising awareness of the duty within their networks and sharing good practice.

21. Bethan confirmed that technical guidance on the Duty would be produced in due course and explained that the Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Strategy Group had discussed representatives of the WPC sitting on its board to ensure there was no duplication of effort. Moving to the Ethnicity and Disability Pay Gap survey, Bethan confirmed that the results had been analysed and a report provided to the WPC as an annex to the paper for this item.

22. Bethan explained that as part of the equalities workplan a review into diversity monitoring arrangements within three devolved public bodies had also been completed and a related joint statement had now been published on the WPC's website. She listed the recommendations in the paper for this item which were to encourage take-up of the Disability Confident Scheme, adding sexual harassment in the workplace to the Equalities Plan and next steps for disseminating the findings of the Ethnicity and Disability Pay Gap Report.

23. Darron Dupre (Unison) asked whether intersectional work could be conducted to better understand the pay gap across different social groups. He suggested that analysis of the pay gap as it related to women could better inform discussions around the wider issue of pension poverty.

24. Bethan responded outlining the complexity of gathering intersectional data at this stage. As an example, she explained that collating data on women would need to encompass abuse and harassment at work as well as the different experiences of women from ethnic minority backgrounds.

25. Karen Higgins (WLGA) outlined some of the on-line learning resources that had been developed by VAWDASV and local authorities. She suggested something similar could be developed through the WPC to raise awareness.

26. Bethan felt the VAWDASV Group was the correct place to consider some of the issues that had been raised and explained that she would feedback Karen's point to the Group outside of the meeting.

27. The Deputy Minister asked members if they were content to agree the recommendations in the paper for this item and these were accepted by the WPC.

Agenda Item 6 – Four Day Working Week Group - Final Report

28. The Deputy Minister informed members that they had been provided with a copy of the final report of the 4 Day Working Week Working Group. She explained that this set out a series of five recommendations for members to consider and invited Reg Kilpatrick to deliver the report on behalf of the JEC.

29. Reg Kilpatrick (Welsh Government) outlined the complexities and benefits of the 4-day week and referenced the different approach that had been adopted by the UK Government regarding this issue. Reg explained that the Group had agreed that the 4-day week approach (though it preferred the term shorter week) needed to recognise the different types of jobs and work patterns in operation so that an equitable approach could be developed. As an example, he cited the demanding nature of shift work carried out by NHS staff versus more regular forms of employment and the need to avoid the creation of a two-tier workforce.

30. Reg confirmed that the Group had unanimously agreed that driving this issue at pace and scale was undesirable, highlighting the presentational challenges of disseminating the report to employers at a time of significant budgetary pressures. He referenced paragraph 49 of the report containing the Group's central conclusions and its five main recommendations which were: to identify an organisation to pilot the shorter week, that any pilot should follow the eight principles contained in the report; that the pilot should consider the benefits and costs of engaging external expertise in its design and evaluation; that the definition of a 4-day week proposed by the Group might be used flexibly by organisations to make it work for them and that consideration should be given to the use of the term 'shorter working week' or 'shorter working day' as opposed to '4-day week'.

31. Reg stressed the importance of evaluating the 4-day week to build a clear evidence base to support broader adoption in the future. He thanked the chairs of the sub-groups that had been established to consider the different elements of this work and all those who had participated.

32. The Deputy Minister also extended her thanks to those who had participated in the 4 Day Week Working Group.

33. Daryl Williams (Unite) acknowledged the work that had gone into the report but questioned why the subject of Artificial Intelligence (AI) had not been included. He suggested the issue of the 4-day week and AI could be

dovetailed to streamline activity and make any approach to public sector organisations more desirable, reducing costs and demands on staff time.

34. Jess Turner (Unison) concurred with Daryl's comments and stressed the challenging pace with which AI was developing.

35. Tom Hoyles (GMB) also stressed the fast pace of AI but highlighted the difference between this and automation, explaining that they were often confused in discussions around new technologies.

36. Dawn Docx (Fire and Rescue) stressed the importance of all the workforce benefitting from proposals for a shorter working week and the need to ensure there was a fair and equal approach adopted within organisations. She also referenced the challenge of identifying a suitable organisation for the pilot.

37. Neil Butler (NASUWT) recommended schools should be considered within the context of shorter weeks. He explained that evidence suggested that quality rather than quantity of time was more beneficial to children's learning. He stressed the risk of exacerbating inequalities within schools if the issue was not considered carefully.

38. Bethan Thomas explained that the Working Group had agreed that it was not the optimum time to run a pilot and that a number of issues needed to be explored first. She explained that the report had been drafted to offer organisations the flexibility to pilot in the future under better circumstances.

39. Reg reiterated that the Working Group's mandate had been to produce a relatively quick report on the issue of the 4-day week. He explained that if a broader range of issues had been considered then the Working Group would have needed to operate for a significantly longer period of time. Reg confirmed that mandating a pilot now had been ruled out but that in the future a pilot would help to develop the concept of a shorter working week.

40. Darron Dupre explained that the Senedd's Petitions Committee had discussed the shorter working week and as part of this had considered evidence from other countries who were operating a similar approach. He asked if the Working Group had considered this evidence.

41. The Deputy Minister confirmed that the Petitions Committee's deliberations had been the origin for this work.

42. Reg confirmed that the Working Group had considered a range of evidence including data from other countries and offered to share with the WPC.

43. The Deputy Minister asked members if they were content to agree the report for publication and this was accepted by the WPC.

Action: The WPC Support Team to provide information on the Four Day Working Week Group's consideration of evidence from other countries on the shorter working week.

Action: The WPC Support Team to arrange publication of the Four Day Working Week Group's Final Report on the Council's website.

Item 7 - Artificial Intelligence – Working Group - Update

44. The Deputy Minister emphasised that Artificial Intelligence (AI) had enormous implications for the future of work and was a rapidly developing technology. She reminded the WPC that last November members agreed to establish an AI Working Group to respond to the opportunities and threats of AI for the public sector workforce. The Deputy Minister confirmed that the Working Group had been established and had met twice since the last meeting of the WPC. She invited Bethan Thomas, in the absence of Ruth Brady (the AI Working Group Chair) to present the item on behalf of the JEC.

45. Bethan Thomas reminded members that Ruth Brady had been nominated to Chair the AI Working Group at the 13 December meeting of the JEC and reiterated that it had met twice. Bethan confirmed that terms of reference, core membership and a workplan had been agreed. She explained that membership had been expanded to include representatives from organisations that could offer expert advice, including the Centre for Digital Public Services.

46. Bethan said that to deliver the work plan the Group had agreed to the establishment of subgroups and would look to develop best practice and guidance on how to engage employees when implementing AI. Bethan emphasised the challenge of responding to the pace of AI and confirmed the Working Group was focussed on developing a report for the WPC when it next met on the 13 November.

47. Tom Hoyles gave apologies on behalf of Ruth Brady for not being able to attend the meeting. Tom emphasised the challenge of understanding the full implications of AI and the ambition to produce a report for the November WPC.

Item 8 - WPC Minutes/Matters Arising

48. The Deputy Minister confirmed that the action for the trade unions to provide a written proposal to the Schools' Partnership Forum detailing their concerns regarding social partnership working within schools had now been completed. She explained that there were no other actions arising from previous meetings of the WPC and asked members if they were content to agree the paper for this item which they did. The Deputy Minister thanked members for their attendance at the WPC and confirmed the next meeting was scheduled for the 13 November.

Attendance List – WPC – 20 March 2024

Minister
Chair - Hannah Blythyn MS – Deputy Minister for Social Partnership

Trade unions
Jessica Turner - Unison
Bethan Thomas – Unison
Darron Dupre – Unison
Rosie Lewis – Unison
Tom Hoyles - GMB
Nathan Holman - GMB
Gareth Lloyd – UCU
Daryl Williams – Unite
Neil Butler – NASUWT
Darren Williams – PCS

Devolved Employers
Councillor Anthony Hunt – WLGA Spokesperson for Workforce
Chris Llewelyn - WLGA
Karen Higgins – WLGA
Sarah Simmonds - NHS Workforce/OD Directors Group
CFO Dawn Docx - Fire and Rescue Service
Natalie Pearson – Devolved Sector Group
Anwen Isaac - Devolved Sector Group

Welsh Government
Reg Kilpatrick - Local Government Directorate
Jo Salway - Social Partnership, Employability and Fair Work Directorate
Neil Surman - Social Partnership, Employability and Fair Work Directorate
Owain Lloyd – Education Directorate
Emma Coles – NHS Workforce and Operations Division

Guest Speakers
Terry Mills – Welsh Government
James Wilkinson – Welsh Government

WPC Support Team
Mark Lewis – Welsh Government
Angharad Steele – Welsh Government
Jessica Khoshooee – Welsh Government
Gerwyn David – Welsh Government

Observers
Stephen Layne – Welsh Government
Sharon West - Welsh Government
Zoe Holland – Welsh Government
Amber Courtney – Welsh Government
Julian Carpanini – Welsh Government
Elin Rowlands – Welsh Government
Isabel Mortimer - Welsh Government
Ceri Williams – Wales TUC

Apologies
Shavanah Taj – Wales TUC Ruth Brady – GMB Sue Green – NHS Wales Employers Nicola Prygodzicz – NHS Chief Executives Dom Houlihan – Devolved Sector Group Emyr Evans - Devolved Sector Group Robert Thomas - Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) Helen Arthur - Welsh Government Judith Cole – Welsh Government Albert Heaney - Welsh Government