



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Social Partnership The Welsh Way

## USER HANDBOOK

March 2025

[gov.wales](https://gov.wales)

---

# Contents

## Chapter 1

The Key Principles of the Act	1
The Main Provisions of the Act	2

## Chapter 2

Getting Ready for the Social Partnership Duty	3
Introduction	3
The Social Partnership Duty	3
Purpose of the new Duty	3
The Public Bodies captured by the Duty	4
Annual Reporting	5
Social Partnership: The Welsh Way	5
Social Partnership in Operation	5
The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (“WFG Act”)	6

## Chapter 3

Online Learning	7
-----------------	---

## Chapter 4

Self-Assessment Tool	8
Characteristics of Effective Social Partnerships	8
How to use the Tool	9
Preparation	9
Completing the Assessment	10
Using the findings	10
Undertaking the Assessment	11
Social Partnership Approach	12
Relationships	13
Principles and Values	14
Collaborative Action	15
Reviewing Success	16
Understanding the results	17

## Chapter 5

Further Reading and Contact details	18
Contact us	18

# Key Principles and Main Provisions of the Act

## The Key Principles of the Act



### Social Partnership

Working to achieve a mutually agreed goal, to the benefit of all involved groups.



### Socially Responsible Procurement

Taking action when purchasing goods, works and services, to improve economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being.



### Fair Work

A wide range of potential activities undertaken by employers in agreement with the workforce, which contribute to well-being and improved public service delivery.



### Sustainable Development

Doing things now in a way that takes into account the impact on people living their lives in Wales in the future.

The Act fulfils a Programme for Government commitment to place social partnership on a statutory footing in Wales. It provides for a **framework** to enhance the well-being of people in Wales by improving public services through **Social Partnership working, promoting Fair Work and Socially Responsible Public Procurement**.

## The Main Provisions of the Act

<b>The establishment of a statutory Social Partnership Council</b>	The Social Partnership Council (SPC) is a tripartite statutory advisory body, chaired by the First Minister, with representation from a range of social partners that represent employers and workers in Wales.
<b>A statutory Social Partnership Duty on certain public bodies</b>	<p>Public bodies listed in section 6 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFG Act) must, in so far as is reasonable, seek consensus or compromise with their recognised trade unions, or (where there is no recognised trade union) other representatives of their staff when:</p> <p>setting well-being objectives under section 3(2)(a) of the of the WFG Act, and</p> <p>when making decisions of a strategic nature about the reasonable steps the body takes to meet those objectives under section 3(2)(b) of the WFG Act.</p>
<b>A statutory Social Partnership Duty on Welsh Ministers</b>	A duty on the Welsh Ministers to consult employer and worker representatives through the SPC when making decisions of a strategic nature about the reasonable steps they take to meet their well-being objectives set under the WFG Act.
<b>Amendment of section 4 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015</b>	By replacing 'decent work' for 'fair work' within the existing "A prosperous Wales" well-being goal, public bodies subject to the WFG Act will need to consider 'fair work' when setting and publishing well-being objectives that are designed to maximise the public body's contribution to the well-being goals.
<b>A statutory duty on certain public bodies to consider socially responsible public procurement</b>	A statutory socially responsible procurement duty on certain contracting authorities set out in the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023. This duty requires contracting authorities to set and publish socially responsible procurement objectives, that are designed to maximise their contribution to achieving the well-being goals under the WFG Act.
<b>Certain public bodies to carry out contract management duties</b>	To ensure that socially responsible outcomes are pursued by using contract clauses which flow through whole supply chains for large construction projects. The duty also requires that these are monitored.
<b>Reporting duties on public bodies and Welsh Ministers</b>	Welsh Ministers and public bodies must publish annual reports on their compliance with the Social Partnership Duty. Welsh Ministers and contracting authorities who have awarded prescribed contracts must publish annual reports on procurement. Welsh Ministers must lay reports before the Senedd.

# Getting Ready for the Social Partnership Duty

## Introduction

The Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 (“SPPP Act”) fulfils a Programme for Government commitment placing social partnership on a statutory footing in Wales. On 1 April 2024 the new Social Partnership Duty (“the Duty”) on public bodies will come into force in Wales. The Duty is set out in sections 15, 16 and 18 of the SPPP Act. It complements existing well-being duties to which certain public bodies are already subject to under Part 2 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (“WFG Act”).

## The Social Partnership Duty

In carrying out sustainable development, public bodies listed under section 6(1) of the WFG Act, will be required, in so far as is reasonable, to seek consensus or compromise with their recognised trade unions, or, where there is no recognised trade union, other worker representatives, when setting their well-being objectives and making decisions of a strategic nature about the reasonable steps they intend to take to deliver those objectives set under section 3(2) of the WFG Act.

Section 16(2) of the SPPP Act, sets out a number of specific requirements relating to the Duty, which a public body must comply with when ‘seeking consensus or compromise’. The requirements are intended to ensure that

trade unions or other representatives of the staff of public bodies are fully and properly involved when a public body sets its well-being objectives, or when making strategic decisions about the reasonable steps the body is taking to meet those objectives.

## The Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act states that:

In order to seek consensus or compromise a public body must include its recognised trade unions or other representatives of its staff in the process of setting objectives or making decisions, by (in particular) —

(a) consulting them at a formative stage of the process, and (b) otherwise involving them throughout the process by

- (providing sufficient information to enable them to properly consider what is proposed, and
- providing sufficient time to enable them to adequately consider what is proposed and respond.

## Purpose of the new Duty

As set out in the Explanatory Memorandum to the SPPP Act, the intended effect of the legislation is to improve the economic, social, cultural, and environmental well-being of people in Wales by strengthening the role of social partnership within strategic decision-making. Involving both

---

employers and workers in key discussions regarding improvements to well-being recognises and values the unique contribution and expertise brought by those directly engaged in public service delivery when addressing shared challenges and seeking innovative solutions.

The intended effect of these provisions is to promote cooperation, strengthen policy and improve outcomes, through dialogue between social partners, achieved in social partnership. The devolved public sector is a significant employer in Wales. It directly shapes the experience of work for those who work within it, and it can also have an indirect influence throughout the public sector and wider economy through leading by example on progressive approaches to workforce matters.

The ability of the devolved public bodies to perform that direct and indirect role will be strengthened by the Duty.

### **The Public Bodies captured by the Duty**

As of December 2023, there were forty-eight public bodies listed in section 6(1) of the WFG Act that are required to meet the well-being duty set out in the WFG Act. The bodies listed under section 6(1) of the WFG Act are the bodies to which the Social Partnership Duty will apply. Responsibility for complying with the Duty sits with the individual public body. The bodies currently listed under section 6(1) are:

- Local Authorities (the 4 Corporate Joint Committees established in 2021 have been included since December 2021)
- Local Health Boards
- Public Health Wales NHS Trust
- Velindre NHS Trust
- National Park Authorities

- Fire and Rescue Authorities
- Natural Resources Body for Wales (Natural Resources Wales)
- the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
- the Arts Council of Wales
- the Sports Council for Wales (Sport Wales)
- the National Library of Wales
- the National Museum of Wales (National Museum Wales)

As of June 2024, eight further public bodies were listed under section 6(1) of the WFG Act.

- Social Care Wales
- Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW)
- Welsh Revenue Authority
- Transport for Wales
- Centre for Digital Public Services
- Digital Health and Care Wales
- Welsh Ambulance Service
- Qualifications Wales

This made a total of fifty-seven (including MEDR) public bodies to which the Social Partnership Duty now applies.

- MEDR – Commission for Tertiary Education and Research

---

## Annual Reporting

The SPPP Act requires in-scope public bodies to produce an annual report to evidence how they have complied with the duty, which must be submitted to the Social Partnership Council (“SPC”) for scrutiny. Section 18 of the SPPP Act states:

### Social Partnership Reports

- (1) A public body must prepare, in respect of each financial year, a report of what it has done to comply with the duty.
- (2) The report must be agreed with the public body’s recognised trade unions or (where there is no recognised trade union) other representatives of its staff, or contain a statement explaining why it was not agreed.
- (3) The public body must publish the report, and submit it to the SPC, as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of the financial year.

The SPPP Act does not provide a template for the Annual Report.

### Social Partnership: The Welsh Way

Partnership and collaboration are distinctive characteristics of how we work in Wales. Since devolution, the Welsh Government has encouraged social partnership working as a means of finding the best solutions to the challenges facing us. The Welsh Way embodied by the SPPP Act showcases the potential for a new way of working that starts with the aim of building consensus and compromise and encourages worker participation. It represents the first step of a journey towards a more cooperative, equitable and forward-thinking approach to employer-worker relations in Wales.

Social partnership is a way of working designed to pursue mutual gains within the context of policy development and implementation, or operational change, but not primarily used as forums for information exchange, collective bargaining or consultation. It works on the basic principle that more can be achieved by employers and workers, predominantly through their trade unions, working together in a spirit of co-operation and collaboration. The Welsh Way of Social Partnership aims to find consensus, which differs from positional bargaining or adversarial winner and loser approaches. Both sides should enter into discussion in good faith. There will be occasions where common ground is impossible to establish; but where there is conflict, it should be managed within a culture of respect and problem-solving. Social partnerships, therefore, need to create an environment which encourages participants to be open with each other and agree working arrangements that are mutually acceptable to each partner in a spirit of co-operation and collaboration.

### Social Partnership in Operation

Social partnership is a process, but the principles on which it is built can help deliver behavioural and culture change. As set out in the Explanatory Memorandum to the SPPP Act, working consistently in social partnership can develop trusted relationships and engender behaviours that promote cooperation, respect, trust, increase participation as well as delivering mutual gains. These values and behaviours have been created as reference points for successful social partnership in Wales and are described as follows:

Social Partnership Principle	Shared commitment
Cooperation	Success through joint problem solving, compromise and reaching consensus.
Respect	Mutual recognition of legitimate and potentially conflicting interests.
Trust	Relationships based on integrity, authenticity, transparency, openness and selflessness.
Voice and Participation	Proactive and timely information, consultation and engagement.
Mutual Gains	Achieving improvements in public services, social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being and fair work outcomes.

## The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (“WFG Act”)

The WFG Act places a well-being duty upon listed public bodies across Wales to carry out sustainable development. In doing so, public bodies must set and publish well-being objectives that are designed to maximise contribution toward the national well-being goals and take all reasonable steps to meet those objectives.

The link below provides guidance to public bodies and public services boards on key definitions, how to carry out sustainable development, understanding the well-being goals, applying the sustainable development principle, an explanation of the individual duties (public bodies and public services boards) and collective duties, how public bodies fit into the architecture of the WFG Act and where the key changes in organisations are expected to be seen.

See here: [www.gov.wales/well-being-future-generations-statutory-guidance](https://www.gov.wales/well-being-future-generations-statutory-guidance)



# Online Learning

A new online learning package to help people to learn more about the benefits of social partnership and the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 is now available through the Learning@Wales platform.

The online learning provides access to free, interactive modules to help learn more about social partnership in Wales.

The learning consists of three chapters:

Chapter 1 – Social Partnership – The Welsh Way

Chapter 2 – The Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023

Chapter 3 – The Social Partnership Duty

The platform offers a great opportunity to learn more about social partnership and embed social partnership within your organisation.

The online learning was developed in social partnership and provides a bite sized and flexible approach which enables learners to work through the package at their own pace.

To access the learning:

- If you already have a Learning@Wales account, sign in and click this link: **<https://learning.nhs.wales/course/index.php?categoryid=550>**
- If you don't have an account, you will need to register first and then use the link above to access the course. To register please do so here: **<https://learning.nhs.wales/login/index.php>** or email **[eateb@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:eateb@wales.nhs.uk)**
- NHS Wales staff can access the online learning via the Electronic Staff Record (ESR).

Additionally, if partners are using their own training platform we can discuss the option of a SCORM file – with an agreed monitoring function in place.

If you have any questions, please contact us at **[SPEFW@gov.wales](mailto:SPEFW@gov.wales)**

# Self-Assessment Tool

The purpose of this tool is to provide a simple way of assessing the effectiveness of partnership working.

It enables a rapid check which identifies problem areas. This allows partners to focus remedial action proportionate with the seriousness and urgency of any problems.

For those just setting up partnerships the tool provides a checklist of what to ensure and what to avoid.

It has been designed explicitly as a developmental tool rather than as a means for centrally assessing social partnership performance.

## How can the Self-Assessment Tool help you?

- It provides material to help you assess the current effectiveness of your partnership working.
- It provides a focus on ways to strengthen existing partnerships by engaging in discussion about issues and ways forward.
- With repeated use, it can allow you to chart changes in partnership working overtime.
- It can highlight a range, and possible diversity, of perspectives.
- It will not on its own tell you how all the problems associated with partnership working should be addressed.

- It does, however, provide a common framework (and vocabulary) for partners to develop a jointly owned approach to tackling some of the barriers to effective partnership working.

## Characteristics of Effective Social Partnerships

Officials in Welsh Government have undertaken a review of social partnership across the Department.

The review provided a better understanding of the current landscape and to work toward recommendations to support effective partnership working.

Phase 2 of this review explored the behaviours, principles, and relationships underpinning social partnership in Wales and sought to identify common beneficial characteristics which support social partnership at a national level.

The review found that there are a set of common fundamental characteristics which underpin effective social partnership at a national level in Wales regardless of the sector. These characteristics appear to provide the catalyst required for meaningful engagement that can lead to improved outcomes. The characteristics have been split into five categories:

---

## 1. Clarity of group purpose and objectives

Social partnerships based on a clearly defined purpose and goals are more likely to produce and maintain effective engagement. Clarity helps to set the context and parameters for engagement and ensures each partner understands their role and the role of others. This also helps to set individual and group expectations for partnership working.

## 2. Early, continuous, and consistent engagement between partners

Social partnership relies on high levels of involvement and participation from all parties. It is therefore highly beneficial for partners to have meaningful and continuous engagement from the outset and throughout the problem solving/policy development process. This re-enforces the collaborative element of partnership working and places value on the input of all partners.

## 3. Commitment to collaborative working and social partnership principles

Social partnership principles include cooperation, respect, trust, voice and participation, and the pursuit of mutual gains. The pursuit of mutual gains sits at the heart of the concept of social partnership and differentiates it from other forms of engagement. It relies on an environment in which all partners feel equally valued and respected and is underpinned by strong informal and formal working relationships. Moreover, where working relationships are effective the commitment to partnership working appears sufficiently robust to withstand most challenges.

## 4. Clear understanding of how information and decisions are cascaded and implemented

In successful social partnerships these are two-way channels passing information and decisions down to all levels and returning feedback and insight from working on the ground, making it meaningful to employees.

## 5. Formal arrangements and willingness to review success

Clear arrangements to monitor and review success are key to maintaining commitment to social partnership between partners. Periodic reviews provide regular opportunities to strengthen social partnership by identifying areas which can be improved or by learning from examples of good practice.

## How to use the Tool

This Tool has been developed to use either:

- to provide a focus for discussion between partners, or
- through facilitated workshops.

## Preparation

It is important at the start of the process that partners agree the reasons for using the Tool. Is the process to be mainly developmental, more of a routine check in or part of a more extensive remedial programme?

Those participating need to be assured not only that taking the trouble to undertake the assessment is worthwhile but that they can be, and should be, frank and honest in their responses.

Opening this initial debate can enable individual partners to be more honest in their views about the workings of the partnership.

Agree at the outset whether facilitation is needed. Facilitation can be conducted internally. Sometimes, and especially where it is expected to be difficult or sensitive, it may be better conducted externally.

---

## Completing the Assessment

Each partner should initially complete the assessment individually, indicating their responses to a set of statements grouped under each of the six headings.

Partners then need to share and discuss their individual assessments, examining areas of common or differing views about partnership strengths and weaknesses.

Collectively agree the scores for each of the six sections. A grid to interpret the results is at Page 8.

Collectively you should also consider how you would weight the six areas in terms of their current significance for your partnership – given its nature and stage of development (Page 9). This will help prioritise where any remedial action is needed.

The assessment tool should provide a clear indication of the nature and scale of problems, of where action is needed most and where it is required most urgently.

## Using the findings

Partners can look behind their scoring and explore comments about individual elements and their weighting of significance. The essence of this feedback and analysis is to better understand partnership strengths and weaknesses and, if necessary, plan remedial action. What this Tool does is to reveal simple areas upon which to concentrate and allows a focus of effort and resources.

What becomes readily, apparent is where there is broad agreement or disagreement across partners. The depth to which the responses need to be explored – and the way in which they are explored – depends largely upon the degree of consensus, the nature of the findings, and the significance attached to the findings by partners.

Thus, if all partners are agreed that the partnership is reasonably healthy across all areas, including those generally agreed to be the most significant, there is little need of action planning beyond agreeing when and how to conduct the next ‘health check’.

If, however, some partners have assessed the partnership as ‘unhealthy’ in some respects – and especially if this is in areas generally agreed to be significant – this will require further detailed examination. Depending upon the sensitivity of the issues and the size of the partnerships this examination is often best done in a facilitated feedback workshop.

The principal aim of this Tool is to enable generic assessment of partnership working. It cannot offer detailed prescriptions for addressing the problems identified in any partnership.

Where some problems or weaknesses are identified, action planning should focus on these areas. Where there is little sensitivity about the issues raised – whether individual or organisational – more detailed analysis of what underlies the assessment findings may well be conducted internally and informally. Where there is greater sensitivity external facilitation may be preferable.

---

## Undertaking the Assessment

In the following pages individuals are asked to consider a series of statements about the Partnership – as a whole. Indicate the extent which you agree or disagree with each of these statements by ticking, or marking, the appropriate boxes.

### Clarity and Purpose

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Not sure	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
Our partnership has a clear goal					
We have clearly defined joint aims, objectives, and service outcomes					
In my opinion, there is a shared understanding of and commitment to these among all partners					
The lines of communication, roles and expectations of partners are clear					
All partners are willing to share some of their ideas, resources, influence, and power to fulfil the goals and aims of the partnership					
Score					
<b>TOTAL</b>					

## Social Partnership Approach

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Not sure	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
I believe there is a clear commitment to social partnership working from the most senior levels of each partnership organisation					
There is widespread ownership of the partnership across and within all partners					
There is a clear understanding of each partners' contributions towards achieving the goals of the partnership					
The perceived benefits of the partnership outweigh the perceived costs					
There have been substantial past achievements within the partnership					
Score					
<b>TOTAL</b>					

---

## Relationships

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Not sure	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
There is a history of good relations between the partners					
I can express alternative views within the partnership and believe others are also able to do so					
There are formal structures or procedures for resolving disputes					
There are informal ways of achieving this					
Commitment to partnership working is sufficiently robust to withstand most threats to its working					
Score					
<b>TOTAL</b>					

---

## Principles and Values

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Not sure	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
The principles / values / behaviours expected of members are explicit and understood					
Partners share the commitment to success through joint problem solving, compromise and reaching consensus					
Relationships are based on integrity, authenticity, transparency, openness, and selflessness					
There is sufficient trust within the partnership to survive any mistrust that arises elsewhere					
In my opinion, there is equal participation based on proactive and timely sharing of information, consultation, and engagement					
Score					
<b>TOTAL</b>					



## Collaborative Action

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Not sure	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
The administrative, communication and decision-making structure of the partnership is as simple as possible					
All partners are involved in planning and setting priorities for collaborative action					
All partners have the task of communicating and promoting the partnership in their own organisations / to their members					
There is a clear understanding of how information and decisions by the partnership are actioned at workplace level					
The roles, responsibilities, and expectations of partners for collaborative actions are clearly defined and understood by all partners					
Score					
<b>TOTAL</b>					

## Reviewing Success

	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Not sure	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
The partnership has clear arrangements to monitor and review how successfully its objectives are being met					
There are clear arrangements to review how the partnership itself is working					
There are clear arrangements to ensure that partnership working arrangements are reviewed and, where necessary revised					
The partnership can demonstrate or document the outcomes of its collective work					
There is a clear need for and commitment to continuing the partnership in the medium term					
Score					
<b>TOTAL</b>					

---

## Understanding the results

In simple terms you can interpret the results as follows:

### Assessment Scores

	<10	11-15	16-20	21-25
Clarity and Purpose	The partnership lacks any clarity or sense of purpose.	Only limited clarity and purpose exists.	There is reasonable understanding of purpose.	The purpose of the partnership is very clear.
Social Partnership approach of the need for social partnership is minimal.	Recognition and acceptance of the need for social partnership is minimal.	Recognition and acceptance of the need for social partnership is limited in some areas.	The need for social partnership is recognised and accepted.	There is very high recognition and acceptance of the need for social partnership.
Relationships	Relationships amongst partners is poorly developed.	Relationships need building.	Good relationships are in place.	Relationships are very strong and based on mutual trust.
Principles and Values	Principles are not well understood and need development.	Work is needed to embed principles for social partnership working.	Principles are understood and show signs of embedding.	Principles are very well understood and embedded.
Collaborative Action	Partnership working arrangements are poor.	Partnership working arrangements are insufficiently clear and robust.	Arrangements for collaborative working are reasonably clear and robust.	Clear and robust arrangements lead to collaborative action.
Reviewing Success	Monitoring is poor in most respects or not at all.	The partnership could improve how it monitors and learns from its performance.	The partnership monitors, measures and learns from its performance reasonably well.	The partnership monitors, measures and learns from its performance very well.

# Further Reading and Contact details

## Further reading

Animation: The Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023:  
<https://youtu.be/7TKNrVNkp-I>

Animation: Social Partnership – The Welsh Way  
<https://youtu.be/TF-rhxQqGfg>

Animation: Socially Responsible Procurement:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=M41wUb\\_v0nA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M41wUb_v0nA)

Animation: The Social Partnership Council: <https://youtu.be/pzg7tfEV7-g>

Case Studies: <https://www.gov.wales/social-partnership-and-public-procurement-wales-act>

Conferences: short films

Swansea: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwZ7uFJu160](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwZ7uFJu160)

Cardiff: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxDOFZSVJeU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxDOFZSVJeU)

Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act – Easy Read Guide:  
<https://www.gov.wales/social-partnership-and-public-procurement-wales-bill-easy-read-version>

Newsletter sign up:  
[www.gov.wales/subscribe-social-partnership-newsletter](https://www.gov.wales/subscribe-social-partnership-newsletter)

Stakeholder video: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3nzcipgJWY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3nzcipgJWY)

Social Partnership Webpage: [www.gov.wales/social-partnership-and-public-procurement-wales-act](https://www.gov.wales/social-partnership-and-public-procurement-wales-act)

The Social Partnership Council (SPC) Webpage:  
[www.gov.wales/social-partnership-council](https://www.gov.wales/social-partnership-council)

## Contact us

Website: [www.gov.wales](https://www.gov.wales)

E-mail: [spefw@gov.wales](mailto:spefw@gov.wales)

Phone: 0300 0604400

X: @WGEconomy

LinkedIn: <https://uk.linkedin.com/showcase/llc-economi-wg-economy>

The Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023:  
[www.legislation.gov.uk/asc/2023/1/contents/enacted](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asc/2023/1/contents/enacted)

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:  
[www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/2/](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/2/)