



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP DUTY ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25**

## CONTENT

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>3 - 4</b>
<b>Legislative Framework</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Joint Consultative Committee (Terms of Reference / Membership / Considerations and Outcomes)</b>	<b>5 - 12</b>
<b>Meetings outside of JCC</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Looking Ahead</b>	<b>13</b>

## **Foreword**



**Councillor Maureen Webber BEM**

### **Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Council Business and Corporate Estates**

As Chair of the Joint Consultative Committee, and Cabinet Member with responsibilities for Employee & Trade Union Relations at Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, I am pleased to present our Social Partnership Duty Annual Report for 2024/25.

Under the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 (SPPP), from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, public bodies in Wales are required to produce an annual report to outline our compliance with the Social Partnership Duty for the preceding financial year.

As part of this duty, we are encouraged to detail any steps taken as a local authority to ensure that trade unions and suchlike representatives for our staff are properly involved in the process of setting Council objectives and making strategic decisions.

The Welsh Government Act (SPPP) works on the basic principle that more can be achieved by employers and workers, predominantly through their trade unions, when we work together in a spirit of co-operation and collaboration.

As an administration, we fully support this notion and recognise the value this partnership holds. Therefore, throughout 2024/25 and indeed in previous years, we have embedded social partnership principles into decision-making at all levels and have worked closely with trade unions through structured engagement and open dialogue with Cabinet Members and our Senior Leadership Team.

In response to the Social Partnership Act and the addition direction set out with the Local Government & Elections Act (Wales) 2021, we re-introduced our Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) to provide an ongoing formal space for trade union colleagues to engage with key strategic policies and discuss important matters with Cabinet Members and senior officers.

Quarterly meetings are also held between myself, the Leader of the Council, and respective trade union colleagues, often providing an early opportunity for key policy proposals to be discussed, ensuring that trade union members thoughts and interests can be taken into consideration and documented in advance of policy setting.

This regular communication seeks to compliment the ongoing dialogue that takes place between senior officers and trade unions as part of the day-to-day activity of service delivery across the local authority.

Strong working relationships have been established with the Education and Human Resources Directorates in particular, especially in relation to school union representations and the council's workforce. Demonstrating the importance this local authority places upon maintaining a strong dialogue with our Trade Union Partners, the Council's Head of Democratic Services (Service Director Democratic Services & Communications) continues to act as a constant point of contact between Trade Union Officers and Elected Members and the Senior Leadership Team to facilitate ongoing communication and representation.

Information to support colleagues' awareness of important matters is shared consistently, and upon request, to allow for well informed discussions and understanding of strategic decisions.

Throughout the year, trade unions have been a key voice for the workforce and wider community, raising concerns, offering insights, and helping to inform council decisions. Notably, this includes support to maintain the Council's accredited Real Living Wage Employer status, extensive reviews into the distribution of Community Meals, Residential Care proposals and discussions regarding the Council's Budget being key examples of this. This is in addition to the valuable contributions made as part of the Council's Public Participation Strategy.

The Council and our trade union partners shared commitment to fair work, social justice, and improving public services has been at the heart of the collaboration, ensuring that workforce voices are not only heard but play an active role in shaping decisions.

I would like to thank our trade union colleagues, employees, and public service partners for their ongoing collaboration and dedication. By continuing to work in partnership, we will build on these strong foundations to ensure that Rhondda Cynon Taf remains a fair, supportive, and forward-thinking place to work and live.

**Cllr M Webber**

**Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Council Business and Corporate Estates.**

## **MEETING THE STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS OF THE SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP & PUBLIC PROCUREMENT (ACT)**

The SPPP Act provides for a framework to enhance the well-being of the people of Wales by improving public services through social partnership working, promoting fair work and social responsible public procurement. It is intended to complement other legislation, including the Socio-economic Duty and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFGA 2015).

The SPPP Act 2023 requires the council, in carrying out sustainable development, in so far as is reasonable, to seek consensus or compromise with their recognised trade unions, when setting their well-being objectives (in line with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015) and making decisions of a strategic nature about the reasonable steps they intend to take to deliver those objectives set.

Section 16(2) of the Act sets out a number of specific requirements relating to the Duty, which the council must comply with when 'seeking consensus or compromise'. The requirements are intended to ensure that trade unions are fully and properly involved when a public body sets its well-being objectives, or when making strategic decisions. It 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:
  - (i) providing sufficient information to enable them to properly consider what is proposed, and
  - (ii) providing sufficient time to enable them to adequately consider what is proposed and respond.

## **JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

To fulfil these statutory requirements, in 2023, the Council re-introduced the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place to engage with Trade Union colleagues in respect of key policies, the delivery of robust and balanced budget and key service changes.

The role of the Joint Consultative Committee is to discharge on behalf of the Council the following functions:

- (a) To provide a forum for the exchange of views between elected Members and trade unions on matters affecting employees.
- (b) To consider specific matters affecting employees that are referred to it by Council Members, the unions and officers.

This approach seeks to compliment the ongoing dialogue which takes place between Human Resources, senior officers and trade unions as part of the day-to-day activity of service delivery across the local authority.

### **JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

**County Borough Councillor:** Maureen Webber BEM (Chair)

**County Borough Councillor:** Andrew Morgan OBE

**County Borough Councillor:** Ann Crimmings

**County Borough Councillor:** Rhys Lewis

#### **Trade Union Attendees**

Unison - Mr P Crews, M. Edwards

GMB - Mr C Jones, Mr G Morgans

Unite - Ms L Davies, Mr A McCarthy

#### **Education Trade Unions - Invited attendees**

Mr M Thomas – NEU

Ms S Evans – ASCL

M Davies – UCAC

M Cleverly - NASUWT

The Committee would like to place on record their thanks to the following Trade Union representatives who have retired from service and therefore no longer form part of the Committee membership – Mr P Crews, Ms L Davies. We have also been advised that Mr A McCarthy will no longer be attending the Committee due to a change in roles.

We however welcome our new representatives to the Committee M Edwards and M Gilroy and look forward to their valued input.

### **JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

The Joint Consultative Committee is required to meet bi-annually, and with the permission of the Chair, additional special meetings can be arranged, where necessary, to consider and discuss any emerging matters. To further promote the importance and transparency of the discussions, the JCC meetings are held in the public domain and recordings of the meetings are available on the Council website. A link to the Meetings and recording can be found [here](#).

In the last *calendar* year, the Joint Consultative Committee has been convened to consider:

- The Annual Self-Assessment 2023/23 including the Council's Performance Summary
- Working with our Communities the Council's Draft Corporate Plan

- Budget Consultation Phase 1 & 2
- Residential Care for Older People

In support of these areas the Senior Leadership has sought to ensure that trade unions are provided with appropriate information to inform their involvement in any formal consultation processes and to enable them to effectively represent the interests of their members during the decision-making process.

## **DISCUSSIONS HELD WITH TRADE UNION MEMBERS IN RESPECT OF THE ABOVE AGENDA ITEMS**

***Wednesday, 20<sup>th</sup> December 2023***

### **THE ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT 2022/23 INCORPORATING THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Performance Manager and Chief Executive provided the Joint Consultative Committee with the Council's Self-Assessment for 2022/23, in advance of consideration by Council, which sets out duties to consult on the extent to which the Council is meeting its performance requirements.

Mr P Crews, (Unison) referenced the Local Government Settlement and how this would affect any strategies and priorities identified. The Chief Executive provided feedback on the importance of funding to deliver and inform the Council's priorities going forward.

**Outcome** – The Committee were content that the Self-Assessment provided an accurate and robust reflection of the position of the Council and its services

### **WORKING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES - THE COUNCIL'S DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2024-2030 (FOR CONSULTATION)**

The Chief Executive provided the opportunity for the Joint Consultative Committee to contribute to the development of the Council's new Corporate Plan from 2024/25 – 2029/30.

Mr P Crews, (Unison) queried how the Council will look to achieve its ambitions reflecting on the recent Local Government Settlement announcement, with particular reference to the cuts to protected business rates.

Mr C Jones (GMB) spoke of the leading way of the Council which always put the Council at the forefront and welcomed the ambitions in the plan. Mr Jones reiterated concerns in respect of financial challenges and commented on the importance of continual staff communication and early engagement.

Mr A McCarthy (Unite) commented on the support and value of social care and spoke of the importance of social partnership engagement and sought clarity on what lessons have been learnt around engagement following recent service changes and also reflected on the greater need for social partnerships with the financial pressures facing the Council and the potential erosion of facility time.

Trade Union members commented on the timings of service change proposals and the importance of collective partnership engagement for the benefit of all. The Chief Executive fed back that the Council continues to be fully committed to open and constructive engagement with trade unions and indicated that, in the context of the challenging financial outlook, the Council would welcome Trade Union colleagues coming forward with ideas and proposals to deliver more efficient services.

**Outcome** – Following observations in relation to the Draft Plan, the Committee supported the Council's Corporate plan which Committee believed to be:

- A clear vision and purpose for the Council.
- The right priorities/Well-being Objectives for the Council, namely
  - People and Communities
  - Work and Business
  - Nature and the Environment and
  - Culture and Heritage.
- The principal actions within each Well-being Objective that will have the greatest impact to achieve the new Vision.
- Clear commitments in respect of residents, staff and partners

### **BUDGET CONSULTATION 2024/25**

The Service Director Finance and Improvement Services presented the report to Members which sought the views and comments of the Joint Consultative Committee as consultees to the first phase of the Council's 2024-25 Budget Consultation.

Members were advised that the Committee's feedback would be incorporated into a Budget Consultation report, alongside all other feedback received from stakeholders, for consideration by Cabinet as part of developing a draft Revenue Budget Strategy for 2024/25.

Mr P Crews (Unison) thanked the Service Director for the presentation and the detail contained within. A query was raised as to the funding of Police Community Support Officers by the Council and also the Council's continued financial commitment to its Apprenticeship Scheme.

Mr C Jones (GMB) referenced the minimum general reserve balance level of £10Million as set out by the Council's Section 151 officer and requested clarity on the view of Audit Wales in this regard. Reference was also made to the earmarked reserve balances and how often these are reviewed.

The Trade Union Member also commented on the Council Tax level proposal and referenced the Welsh Government comments on local authorities keeping Council Tax at a low level and potential for capping, and sought clarity on what the cap might be, indicating that a higher Council Tax level may prevent future job losses and service change proposals. A further query was raised in relation to invest to save.

**Outcome** – The detailed feedback of the Committee were captured and presented to the Cabinet meeting of the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024 to form part of Cabinet's consideration and to agree the Cabinet's final revenue budget strategy for recommending to Council.

***Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2024***



## **BUDGET CONSULTATION 2024/2025 PHASE 2**

The Service Director Finance and Improvement Services presented a report to Members which provided the Committee the opportunity to formally respond to the second phase of the Council's 2024-25 Budget Consultation.

Mr P Crews (Unison) commented on the reduction in the Social Care Workforce Grant announced by Welsh Government, indicating the need to inform Welsh Government of the impact the reduction in funding would have on the Council. In addition, clarity was requested on the future funding arrangements for the Graduate and Apprenticeship schemes, referring to this being met by individual service areas, and what monitoring would be in place to ensure the continued success and momentum of these schemes.

Mr C Jones (GMB) welcomed the update regarding the apprenticeship and graduate schemes and went on to highlight concerns in respect of the proposed uplift to car parking charges and the potential financial hardship this would place on some staff.

Mr Jones also took the opportunity to note the Day Centre proposals and spoke of concerns of the impact on the most vulnerable residents in the County Borough. Ms L Davies (Unite) focussed on the proposed charge for Meals on Wheels and referenced whether there had been a decline in the service following the previous service change introduced.

Ms Davies noted the vulnerability of service users and the financial and social impact the proposed increase may have on them.

Mr McCarthy (Unite) requested further information in respect of Council investment to develop a solar farm and the associated generation and sale of energy.

Members of the trade unions highlighted the importance of good communication links between the Council and trade unions, and the need for on-going communication on budget savings and their implementation, if agreed by the Council.

Mr McCarthy posed a question to the Committee in respect of the ethical treatment of agency labour.

### ***Outcome -***

- *Detailed discussions and challenge of the Cabinet proposed draft 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy as part of phase 2 of the Council's 2024-25 Budget Consultation.*
- *Linked to the Budget discussion, and following requests within the meeting, Members were provided with bilingual versions of the Council Tax Booklet*
- *Further details of the Council's 3-year Capital Programme <https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s45818/Report.pdf?LLL=0> in relation to a query surrounding 'Council investment to develop a solar farm and the associated generation and sale of energy'.*
- *Referral to the Council's Scrutiny Committee – [Review of Community Meals on Wheels](#).*

***Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2024***

## **BUDGET CONSULTATION 2025-26 PHASE 1**

The Service Director - Finance and Improvement Services presented the report to Members which sought the views and comments of the Joint Consultative Committee as consultees to the first phase of the Council's 2025/26 Budget Consultation.

Members fed back support for the 2025/26 funding assumptions set out in the presentation and also the principle of prioritising available funding to schools.

Craig Jones (CJ) (GMB) fed back that he was in support of the detail outlined by the Service Director and that the Council should continue to make Social Services a high priority for investment.

Members agreed that a detailed approach to reviewing fees and charges was the preferred way forward, noting that a blanket approach would not adequately take into account the differing requirements across the wide range of services provided by the Council.

CJ commented that setting fees and charges levels needs to be finely balanced, taking into account affordability considerations of service users / customers, and indicated support for the proposed approach to setting fees and charge levels as outlined in the presentation.

CJ commented on the suggestions already made by the public, via Council surveys, on ideas to save money to help address budget gaps.

Mr Jones fed back that where service areas have already been subject to changes, such as Leisure Services, further proposals need to be carefully considered; proposed changes should not adversely impact the most vulnerable within communities and should ensure people are not digitally excluded; and should there be proposals to charge more for services, the impacts need to be fully considered.

CJ commented that if an increase in Council Tax would help protect jobs then the GMB would be supportive and noted the importance for Council Tax increases to not put extra burden on the most vulnerable residents within the County Borough.

CJ fed back that a cautionary approach was needed in respect of delivering further efficiency savings, noting that significant savings had already been made in previous years and for some areas no further savings were possible without having a detrimental effect on service delivery.

CJ agreed with the Council's approach to using reserves appropriately and proportionately to support balancing the budget and sought clarity on what scrutiny arrangements the Council's reserves are subject to.

Members agreed that the current arrangements in relation to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme were appropriate and should be retained

Michelle Edwards (Unison) commented on the Council's Well-Being objectives and agreed with the statements provided. This was supported by CJ.

Outcome - The detailed feedback of the Committee were captured and presented to the Cabinet meeting of the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2025 to form part of Cabinet's consideration and to agree the Cabinet's final revenue budget strategy for recommending to Council

### **RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES FOR OLDER PEOPLE – CONSULTATION**

The Service Director, Democratic Services and Communication provided Committee with an overview of the report which was to allow the Committee to formally respond to the Council's consultation in respect of residential care homes for older people within Rhondda Cynon Taf, linked with the aims of the Social Partnership Act.

The Service Director noted the engagement had with trade unions from the start in respect of the proposals and provided assurance that such engagement would continue throughout the process, with reporting back to Cabinet.

The Service Director also commented upon the receipt of two formal responses by the trade unions one from GMB and one as a Joint response, outside of the meeting, which would also be taken forward as the trade unions formal response to the consultation but sought whether any further comments wished to be made.

- The two formal responses can be found on pages 58 – 71, and pages 74 – 76 of the [Consultation Report - Review of Residential Care for Older People](#).

Craig Jones, GMB confirmed that they were opposed against the proposals and asked that the written submissions be taken forward as their formal responses. Mr Jones commented on the Cae Glas proposal and the potential opportunities this home could have for the Taff Well area.

Concerns were raised about the number of moves some residents would need to endure if this proposal progressed. Clarification in respect of the costings was also sought.

Reference was made to the 2 petitions that had been received in relation to the proposals and the local discontent in respect of the proposals and the disappointment highlighted in respect of the proposed closure of Ferndale House prior to the completion of the new extra care developments within the area.

Mr Jones concluded by commenting on the need for extra beds and the dementia requirements now and in the future.

Michelle Edwards, Unison also commented on the proposals, echoing the comments of Mr Jones. Ms Edwards commented upon what would be a sad loss to RCT if the proposals were taken forward, with local employees looking after local residents. Ms Edwards commented on the additional frustrations with the proposal due to the previous understanding that Ferndale House would remain open until the new development was complete rather than moving residents unnecessarily.

#### **Outcome –**

- That the comments and feedback of the meeting would be included as part of the public consultation, which would be presented to Cabinet to assist with their deliberations.
- The formal trade union letters presented to the Chief Executive would also form part of the trade unions response to Cabinets proposals.

***Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2025***

#### **BUDGET CONSULTATION 2025/26 (PHASE 2)**

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications presented the report to Members, advising of the opportunity for the Committee to formally respond to the second phase of the Council's 2025-26 Budget Consultation.

Members of the Committee were content with the proposed increase in Council Tax of 4.5%. Members commented that increases to Council Tax provided opportunities to preserve Council services which equated to the potential saving of jobs within the Council.

Members welcomed the proposed increase to school's budgets and felt reassured that no efficiency savings were expected of schools. One Member supported the increase but commented on the consequential negative impact of the increase to other Council services, again reflecting on the difficult balancing act needed to set a balanced budget.

Members spoke of the difficulties with the continued approach to efficiency savings, questioning whether any such efficiencies were achievable. Members of the Committee agreed to support non staffing efficiencies and non-compulsory redundancies.

Members agreed in principle with the Fees and Charges and the rationale to the increases proposed although again spoke of the difficulties of needing to generate income, but not to the detriment of the service provided, referencing for example the Councils Leisure for Life provision and the potential of pushing customers to private gyms due to fee increases.

One Member commented on the car parking increase with specific reference to Council staff working office based for 5 days a week and the inequality with some staff benefiting from free parking whilst others having to pay for parking and the increased costs some would now face.

Members were content to utilise the Councils reserves rather than taking forward any job cut proposals.

The local government rebate on NI costings was also discussed and the outsourcing of School cleaning contracts was also discussed, with Members questioning on the associated costs and whether these were absorbed by the Council or Schools.

**Outcome** - The detailed feedback of the Committee were captured and presented to the Cabinet meeting of the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2025 to form part of Cabinet's consideration and to agree the Cabinet's final revenue budget strategy for recommending to Council

### ***URGENT ITEM***

Members of the Committee took the opportunity to place on record their gratitude to the Council's Cabinet committee in relation to the recent decision in respect of residential Care homes with reference to Ferndale House.

## **QUARTERLY MEETINGS WITH THE LEADER & DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL.**

To further support the Council's statutory requirements as set out in the SPPP Act, regular meetings are held between the Political Leadership of the Council, senior officers and Local Authority Trade Unions representatives.

These meetings have been convened prior to the introduction of the SPPP Act or the requirements of the Local Government & Elections Act (Wales) 2021. These meetings seek to provide an early opportunity for trade unions partners to inform considerations of key policy proposals and represent the potential interests of trade union members.

Additional agenda items discussed during the meetings included but were not limited to:

- The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan
- Residential Care for Older People.
- The Future Commissioning of Domiciliary Home Care
- Commissioning of Supported Living Services for People with a Learning Disability
- School Reorganisation Proposals
- Review of the Council's Home to School Transport Policy
- Service Changes to Waste Collections

Trade union colleagues have also utilised the mechanisms available to them through the Council's Public Participation Strategy, to inform consideration of Scrutiny and decisions of Cabinet and attended regular Joint Consultative meetings for teaching with members of the Senior Leadership team - including the Chief Executive.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

The Council recognise the need to further improve the economic, social, cultural, and environmental well-being of people within the County Borough and recognise that a key component to this achievement is to continue to strengthen the role of social partnership within strategic decision-making.

We await the publication of the formal statutory guidance in respect of the Social Partnership Act to inform the future direction of working relationships with Trade Union colleagues.

Over the next year and ahead we will continue to Involve both employers and workers in key discussions regarding improvements to well-being, as we recognise and value the unique contribution and expertise brought by those directly engaged in public service delivery when addressing shared challenges and seeking innovative solutions. It is clear that such provisions will assist in further promoting cooperation, strengthen policy and improve outcomes, through dialogue between social partners, achieved in social partnership.

Going forward we will engage our Trade Union colleagues in our work for the Council's Panel Assessment, as we look to fulfil out duties of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, as again, we value the insight and input from our colleagues.

We look forward to our informative and challenging discussions with our Trade Union colleagues through the JCC meetings and in our quarterly meetings to assist us in this delivery.

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