



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Workforce Partnership Council meeting: 18 November 2024

Minutes of the Workforce Partnership Council meeting held on 18 November 2024 (12:00 – 13:30pm) via Teams.

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Item 1: Introduction

1. The Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership (Chair) welcomed everyone to the Workforce Partnership Council (WPC). The Minister noted there had been some changes to membership since the last meeting and welcomed Sian Boyles (PCS) replacing Darren Williams, Mererid Boswell (Library Wales) replacing Emyr Evans, Georgina Haarhoff (Welsh Government) replacing Owain Lloyd and Sharon West (Welsh Government) replacing Neil Surman.
2. The Minister provided an update on the Budget. He said that following the UK Government's Budget statement on 30 October, the Welsh Government would be making spending decisions as it developed its Draft Budget for 2025-26; this would be published on the 10 December. He explained that whilst the additional funding from the UK Government was welcome, the wider financial context remained challenging and that difficult decisions would need to be made.
3. The Minister confirmed the Social Partnership Duty on public bodies came into effect on the 1 April. Welsh Ministers were subject to the Duty which required them to consult with the Social Partnership Council (SPC) when taking "decisions of a strategic nature". He explained that at the SPC in February it was agreed that the Council would be consulted on the three overarching drivers for the strategic delivery of the Welsh Government's Programme for Government. These were: budget priorities, the legislative programme's priorities, and the delivery of Welsh Government's well-being objectives as set out in the annual review. The Minister confirmed all of these had been consulted on this year.
4. The Minister said the next meeting of the SPC would take place on 5 December and that the draft agenda would include an update on the UK

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Government's Employments Right Bill, the WPC's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Report and SPC expectations regarding annual reporting on how public bodies were meeting their responsibilities under the Social Partnership Duty. He added that the SPC had also agreed to a pattern of annual meetings going forward.

5. The Minister outlined the agenda, explained meeting etiquette and confirmed that apologies or substitutes would be recorded in the minute.

Item 2: WPC Communications Plan – Working Group update

6. The Minister explained that the paper for this item offered a series of recommendations for how to develop a shared understanding of social partnership across public bodies. He invited Liz Rogers to deliver the item on behalf of Sue Green (NHS Employers) the formal WPC Joint Executive Committee (JEC) lead.
7. Liz Rogers (NHS Employers) explained that at the JEC meeting on the 30 September it had been agreed she would remain as chair of the Communications Working Group but that to maintain the composition of the JEC, Sue Green would act as the employer side link to the WPC. Liz Rogers confirmed the Group had met twice and that the paper for this item asked members to agree a series of recommendations for supporting the promotion of social partnership within the devolved public services. These included developing messaging and case studies for dissemination across organisational networks, as well as reviewing take-up of social partnership training.
8. Liz added that the 30 September JEC meeting also included a discussion on

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how to ensure the work of the WPC was shared between sectors to develop an understanding of the role of the Council. The discussion included how to promote the agreements of the WPC which had led to the recommendation to merge the Agreements and Communications strands of the Council's Work Plan. She asked the WPC if they were content to agree the recommendations in the paper and stressed the importance of members' support in delivering these.

9. Darron Dupre (UNISON) offered support for the paper on behalf of the trade unions, feeling it provided a series of meaningful proposals for promoting social partnership across the devolved services. Darron specifically referenced the need to promote the WPC's agreement on the Acceptable use of Non-Guaranteed Hours Arrangements as well as the reports of the Council's Artificial Intelligence Working Group.
10. Liz Rogers welcomed Darron's views, highlighting the importance of engaging with trade unions in making social partnership a reality. She referenced the appetite for social partnership within the public services and the strong mechanisms in place to engage with the trade unions within the Welsh Ambulance Services University NHS Trust.
11. The Minister supported Darron's comments and asked members if they were content to agree the recommendations in the paper and these were accepted by the WPC.

Item 3: Artificial Intelligence – Working Group reports

12. The Minister explained that when the JEC met on the 23 October members had been provided with copies of the final reports from the WPC's Artificial

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Intelligence (AI) Working Group. He said that the paper for this item asked members to agree a series of recommendations for promoting them and that copies of the reports would be provided to the SPC ahead of their publication. The Minister invited Ruth Brady, as the JEC lead and Chair of the AI Working Group to present the paper.

13. Ruth Brady (GMB) explained that following the last meeting of the WPC in March, the AI Working Group had continued to meet on a monthly basis to complete the reports. Ruth referenced the Group's progress and the expert support it had received from Peter Thomas, Centre for Digital Public Services and Dr Phillipa Collins of Bristol University. She reminded the WPC that the AI Group had been tasked with creating guidance for managers, workers and trade unions regarding the use of AI in the public sector; that this also included reviewing progress against actions 6i-6iii of the WPC report: The future of work: the impact of innovative technology on the workforce.
14. Ruth explained that the final report had been divided into two documents, as agreed by the JEC on the 23 October so they could be revisited separately as AI technologies evolved. She said that the 'WPC Managing Technology that Manages People - Social Partnership Approach' document provided a series of definitions, case studies, and a risks/benefits analysis for using AI; this included overarching guidance principles as well as pre and post implementation advice. The second document, 'Using AI at Work - A Benchmarking Report on the Awareness and Understanding of AI in the Welsh Public Sector' assessed the understanding of AI among public sector workers based on original research conducted by the Group. Included within this, was a series of recommendations and findings highlighting key aspects of AI awareness.
15. She confirmed that the Group had agreed to continue meeting to help promote the reports through their social partner networks, to undertake a

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series of engagement events (including an AI webinar) and to liaise with the WPC's Communication Group to discuss dissemination. Ruth said the AI Group would next meet on the 22 November to plan the engagement events and that it was recommended the WPC agree to share the reports with the SPC before their publication.

16. The Minister thanked Ruth for the Group's work, emphasising the importance of ensuring the reports were properly implemented moving forward.
17. Councillor Anthony Hunt (WLGA) highlighted the significance of AI to public services and said he would welcome a presentation on the reports to the Joint Council for Wales (JCW).
18. Bethan Thomas (UNISON) confirmed the trade unions supported the reports, adding that the AI Group had shown the effectiveness of social partnership in practice. Bethan explained that the reports were the beginning of a dialogue with public services and that the benchmarking document had demonstrated a need to promote a wider understanding of AI. She said that the AI Group looked forward to working with employers to identify a suitable pilot for this work.
19. Darron Dupre (UNISON) asked the AI Group to consider producing an easier to read version of the AI reports so their content would be understandable to people at all levels.
20. Ruth thanked members of the AI Group for their work. She said she would arrange for someone to present the reports to the JCW and ensure producing easier to read versions was discussed at the next meeting of the AI Working Group.
21. The Minister also thanked the AI Group for their work. He asked the WPC if

they were content to agree the recommendations in the paper for this item, including that the reports would be provided to the SPC ahead of their publication. This was accepted by the WPC.

Action:

The WPC AI Working Group to arrange a presentation to the Joint Council for Wales on their reports and to discuss producing easier to read versions of these at their next meeting.

Item 4: Worker Protection Act 2024 - update

22. The Minister introduced Daniela Mahapatra, Deputy Director of Legal and Risk Services, NHS Wales **to provide a presentation on the amendment to the Equality Act 2010 (the Worker Protection Act)** (<https://www.gov.walesnull>). He added that the presentation would complement the next item on the Equality Action Plans strand of the WPC Work Plan, specifically the prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace.
23. Daniela Mahapatra explained that her presentation would provide a high-level overview of the Duty now placed on employers to take reasonable steps in preventing sexual harassment in the workplace. Daniela described the new Duty as preventative rather than reactive, seeking to create a culture where sexual harassment, in any form, would not be tolerated. She added that her presentation would also provide members with an overview of work being conducted in the NHS to address the Duty.
24. The Minister thanked Daniela for the presentation and explained **the WPC Support Team would provide a copy** (<https://www.gov.walesnull>) to members following the meeting so it could be shared through their networks.

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25. Shavanah Taj (TUC Cymru) thanked Daniela and explained that TUC Cymru had developed a toolkit and training programme (including a webinar) for preventing sexual harassment in the workplace. Shavanah outlined the TUC's own research which had identified sexual harassment as a problem across organisations and sectors. She referred to the new Duty as a health and safety priority that required employers to consider the risks and harms of sexual harassment to their staff. Shavanah stressed the important role the trade unions would play in making the Duty a reality, ensuring it was used to change workplace culture through social partnership.
26. Darron Dupre (UNISON) referred to the broader problem of addressing attitudes towards women within workplace cultures created by men and designing policies that could effectively tackle this.
27. The Minister noted the important work of the White Ribbon campaign as a way of involving men in confronting unacceptable behaviours towards women.
28. Councillor Anthony Hunt (WLGA) supported Darron's views and said he would consider how best to promote the Duty through the different levels of Local Government to ensure everyone understood its requirements.
29. Dawn Docx (Fire and Rescue Service) emphasised the importance of people feeling confident in reporting unacceptable behaviour in the workplace. Dawn referred to four workshops that had been delivered within the Welsh Fire and Rescue Service which had taken the approach of helping managers to better understand how they could address sexual harassment.
30. Shavanah Taj highlighted the amount of time it often took to train staff on sexual harassment prevention and the need for employers to provide sufficient resources for this.

31. Daniela Mahapatra agreed with the views expressed, acknowledging the importance of training and the need to hold difficult conversations within workplaces to confront sexual harassment. Daniela invited members to contact her outside of the meeting if they wished to discuss any of the issues raised further.

Action:

The WPC Support Team to provide a copy of Daniela Mahapatra's presentation to Council members so they can promote awareness of the amendment to the Equality Act 2010 (the Worker Protection Act) through their networks.

Item 5: WPC Equalities Action Plans – update

32. The Minister explained that this item outlined further proposals for how the WPC could support the prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace as well as implementation of the refreshed Anti-racist Wales Action Plan (ArWAP). He invited Bethan Thomas, as the JEC lead, to present the paper for this item.
33. Bethan Thomas (UNISON) explained that this item built upon previous discussions from the March WPC and the JEC held on the 12 June, exploring ways to share learning on preventing sexual harassment in the workplace. Bethan said the paper proposed establishing a roundtable and a working group with social partners to explore how to promote best practice guidance. She also referenced specific work within the trade unions which had established a task and finish group to develop guidance for their own members accused of sexual harassment.

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34. Regarding the ArWap, Bethan explained that the Welsh Government implementation team had been leading a refresh and extension process for the Plan covering 2024 to 2026. She said their focus was on refining existing goals and actions to strengthen implementation and improve the mechanisms for measuring impact. Bethan added that at the JEC meeting on the 30 September, members agreed to invite a speaker on the refreshed ArWAP to a future meeting to explore how the WPC could add value to that work.
35. Daryl Williams (Unite) welcomed the proposal to develop a working group to create best practice guidance for tackling workplace sexual harassment but emphasised the need for a broader culture change within public services.
36. Councillor Antony Hunt (WLGA) supported the paper and stressed the importance of breaking down organisational barriers to achieve agreement on how to tackle sexual harassment. Councillor Hunt said the JCW would welcome a presentation on this issue.
37. Bethan Thomas emphasised the value of TUC Cymru's toolkit on sexual harassment as a strong platform for building future activity. Bethan noted Councillor Hunt's suggestion that the JCW receive a presentation on the [amendment to the Equality Act 2010 \(the Worker Protection Act \(https://www.gov.walesnull\)\)](https://www.gov.walesnull).
38. The Minister asked members if they were content to agree the paper for this item and this was accepted by the WPC. He advised that a link to TUC Cymru's sexual harassment prevention toolkit would be provided to members with a copy of Daniela Mahapatra's presentation.

Action:

The WPC Support Team to ensure a copy of TUC Cymru's Sexual Harassment

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Prevention toolkit is provided to WPC members with Daniela Mahapatra's presentation.

Action:

The WLGA to liaise with Daniela Mahapatra to organise a presentation to the Joint Council for Wales on the amendment to the Equality Act 2010 (the Worker Protection Act).

Item 6 - WPC Minutes / Matters Arising

39. The Minister confirmed there were no actions arising from previous meetings of the WPC and asked members if they were content to agree the paper for this item. This was agreed by the WPC.
40. The Minister thanked members for their time and confirmed the next meeting of the WPC would be on the 14 May 2025.

Attendance List: WPC – 18 November 2024

Minister

- Chair: Jack Sargeant MS – Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership

Trade unions

- Shavanah Taj – TUC Cymru

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- Ruth Brady – GMB
- Bethan Thomas – UNISON
- Darron Dupre – UNISON
- Sian Boyles - PCS
- Daryl Williams – Unite

Devolved Employers

- Councillor Anthony Hunt – WLGA Spokesperson for Workforce
- Chris Llewelyn - WLGA
- Karen Higgins – WLGA
- CFO Dawn Docx - Fire and Rescue Service
- Mererid Boswell - Devolved Sector Group

Welsh Government

- Jo Salway - Social Partnership, Employability and Fair Work Directorate
- Georgina Haarhoff – Education and Welsh Language Directorate
- Sharon West - Social Partnership, Employability and Fair Work Directorate

Guest speakers

- Daniela Mahapatra - Legal and Risk Services NHS Wales
- Liz Rogers – Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust

WPC Support Team

- Mark Lewis – Welsh Government
- Jessica Khoshooee – Welsh Government

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- Gerwyn David – Welsh Government

Observers

- Philippa Marsden – Welsh Government
- Niall Murphy – Welsh Government
- Dr Phillipa Collins – Bristol University
- Peter Thomas – Centre for Digital Public Services
- Lisa Gostling – Hywel Dda UHB
- Amber Courtney – Welsh Government
- Gavin Jenkins – Welsh Government
- Ceri Williams – TUC Cymru

Apologies

- Jessica Turner – UNISON
- Rosie Lewis – UNISON
- Tom Hoyles - GMB
- Nathan Holman – GMB
- Neil Butler – NASUWT
- Gareth Lloyd – UCU
- Sue Green – NHS Wales Employers
- Nicola Prygodzicz – NHS Chief Executives
- Sarah Simmonds - NHS Workforce/OD Directors Group
- Robert Thomas - Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE)
- Reg Kilpatrick – Welsh Government
- Helen Arthur - Welsh Government
- Dom Houlihan – Devolved Sector Group
- Judith Cole – Welsh Government
- Albert Heaney - Welsh Government

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