Vale of Glamorgan Council

Social Partnership Duty Annual Report 2025-26

VALE of GLAMORGAN
BRO MORGANNWG

Introduction

This annual report outlines the partnership work undertaken between the Vale of Glamorgan Council and trade unions in relation to the Council's corporate wellbeing objectives during the period April 2025 - March 2026. It highlights how the Council has continued to meet its obligations under the Social Partnership Duty, following the agreement and publication of Vale 2030, the Council's Corporate Plan in April 2025.

Introduced through the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023, the Social Partnership Duty places a statutory requirement on Local Authorities in Wales to work collaboratively with recognised trade unions (or other staff representatives). This includes engagement and consultation when setting wellbeing objectives under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and when making strategic decisions to deliver those objectives. During 2025/26, the Council has focused on embedding and delivering the wellbeing objectives set out in Vale 2030 while maintaining a strong partnership with trade unions. This has involved ongoing engagement to ensure that workforce perspectives inform the delivery of Vale 2030 and wider strategic decision-making. This report sets out how the Council has worked in partnership with trade unions, based on our values of being **Ambitious, Proud, Open, and Together**, demonstrating engagement at a formative and ongoing stage to ensure all views are considered in:

- the implementation and delivery of the five well-being objectives within the Vale 2030 Corporate Plan
- strategic decisions impacting the workforce in support of achieving these objectives

The report also provides an overview of the approach to partnership working between the Council and trade union representatives ensuring we are all well informed, able to participate effectively, and can contribute to meaningful dialogue and shared outcomes. This report has been discussed with and agreed by our trade union representatives.



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Our Approach at the Vale of Glamorgan

The Vale of Glamorgan Council continues to work **collaboratively** with our trade unions to support effective and informed decision making that reflects the needs of our workforce. This is based on strong relationships built on **trust, respect** and **open discussion**, in line with the Social Partnership Duty.

Engagement takes place through established forums including the **Joint Consultative Forum (JCF)**, as well as the **Change Forum**, and **Terms and Conditions Forum**, which meet monthly. These are supported by regular directorate level consultative meetings and bi-monthly **Health and Safety forums**, ensuring trade unions are involved at both corporate and directorate service levels:

- The JCF enables collaboration between elected members, Council officers, and employee representatives, providing an oversight of organisation-wide matters.
    - Each Council Directorate (apart from Corporate Resources, which reports directly to the JCF) also has their own Directorate Consultative Forum to warrant engagement at all levels of decision making.
- The Change Forum focuses on key issues such as corporate plans, budgets, strategic planning, restructures, and transformation.
- The Terms and Conditions Forum supports joint working on employment policies and contractual matters.

This collaborative approach is supported by the **Council's Partnership Statement** included within Vale 2030 as 'Our commitment to those working with us', which is complemented by wider staff engagement through networks, learning cafés and development sessions. Together, these arrangements ensure trade unions are well informed, actively involved, and able to influence decisions at a formative stage.

An example of these forums in practice is budget setting and financial planning, as both staff and members of the public have previously highlighted the importance of having greater transparency surrounding the **Council's budget**. Additional information on budget and financial plans from Welsh Government and the Council are shared with staff through multiple methods,



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including the Chief Executive's all staff End of Week Messages. Last year's efforts to connect the Corporate Plan consultation and Budget Setting consultation are reflected in JCF meetings, highlighting our commitment to partnership working.

Throughout the 2026/27 budget setting process trade unions were actively engaged via the JCF, receiving updates on financial pressures, and contributing to discussions on potential workforce impacts. Partnership working continued through the year with detailed presentations on budget gaps and proposals, with meaningful trade union input leading to further information sharing, and agreement to take issues into other forums for broader staff discussions.

Vale 2030 Corporate Plan and Wellbeing Objectives

In April 2025, the Vale of Glamorgan Council finalised and published Vale 2030 the Council's Corporate Plan. The Plan details **five wellbeing objectives** for the period 2025 - 2030:

1. Creating great places to live, work and visit
2. Respecting and celebrating the environment
3. Giving everyone a good start in life
4. Supporting and protecting those who need us
5. Being the best Council we can be

The Council worked in collaboration with trade unions throughout the development, consultation and finalisation of the wellbeing objectives, ensuring meaningful engagement. By March 2025, the JCF had considered the finalised framework, including detailed discussions of the five wellbeing objectives and 50 proposed delivery actions, including consideration of their impact on staff ways of working. The new Corporate Plan was published in April 2025and reflected the feedback through our consultation processes which included the JCF, staff, staff groups, and trade union representatives.

The Corporate Plan provides the Council's long-term blueprint for delivering **Strong Communities with a Bright Future.** It was developed in line with the principles of social partnership and informed by evidence including the

feedback from the Council's Peer Panel Assessment, the Let's Talk Residents Survey, annual self-assessment findings, and organisational performance data identifying key challenges such as poverty, inequality, and the climate and nature emergency. Through engagement with the trade unions in the development of Vale 2030, union colleagues confirmed these challenges resonated with them, their experience of the workforces they represent and wider work of the trade unions.

Through these structured engagements, the Council has demonstrated compliance with the Social Partnership Duty by:

- Engaging trade unions at a **formative stage** in setting wellbeing objectives
- Providing opportunities for **challenge, scrutiny and feedback** through **formal and informal engagement**
- Demonstrating how staff and trade union input **influenced final decisions**
- Maintaining **ongoing dialogue** following agreement of the Corporate Plan

This approach ensured that the development and final agreement of the Corporate Plan was undertaken in genuine partnership with trade unions, supporting both improved decision-making and shared ownership of the Council's strategic direction.

Building on this, the Council's **Reshaping Programme** supports delivery of the Corporate Plan by providing a framework for organisational change across five themes: Target Operating Model, Service Transformation, Strengthening Communities, Digital Innovation, and Economic Resilience. Trade union engagement and feedback have been gained on the programme throughout its development and delivery with briefings to the JCF and Change Forum. Supplementing this has been strong engagement between the trade unions and Council on specific transformative projects, such as the Corporate Landlord Service's development as described later in this report.

Our Work to Deliver the Five Wellbeing Objectives

The Vale of Glamorgan Council continues to work collaboratively with our trade union partners to develop and deliver our wellbeing objectives, ensuring that partnership working remains central. Throughout 2025/26, we engaged with partners on a range of activities and projects that supports the achievement of our objectives. While the following case studies have been linked to specific Vale 2030 objectives it should be recognised that many of these projects contribute to multiple objectives in practice, reflecting the interconnected nature of our work and shared priorities.

People Strategy - Being the best council we can be

The development of the Council's People Strategy (2026-2030) reflects strong partnership working between trade unions, staff, and management to shape a shared vision for the workforce. Through early engagement at the JCF in September 2025, the draft strategy was collaboratively discussed and refined, ensuring its alignment with the Corporate Plan, well-being objectives, and long-term ambitions. Partnership working was evident throughout these discussions, with trade union representatives providing valuable input on key issues, including staff experience, recruitment challenges, morale, and the importance of strengthening staff voice. They also advocated for wider engagement across the organisation, including school staff and those involved in Change Forums and JCF meetings. In response, a commitment was confirmed to ongoing collaboration, ensuring that trade unions, staff networks, and stakeholders would continue to shape the strategy before it was finalised.

This collaborative approach extended beyond formal consultation. The strategy was informed by feedback from staff surveys, engagement with staff networks such as GLAM, Abl and Diverse, and input from headteachers, Heads of Service, and external partners. The establishment of a People Board, representing a variety of the workforce, further demonstrates a joint commitment to monitoring delivery and maintaining continuous discussions.

The People Strategy recognises that organisational culture and staff support are fundamental to delivering high-quality services. It provides a shared framework for how the Council will value, develop, and empower its workforce, demonstrating how effective social partnership working can shape strategic priorities and drive meaningful organisational change.



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Corporate Landlord: Being the best council we can be and Creating great places to live, work and visit

The establishment of the Council's **Corporate Landlord Strategy** demonstrates a strong commitment to partnership working with trade unions, employees and management working collaboratively to design and implement a new service model. The dedicated service is a centralised approach which brings together colleagues from multiple directorates into a single, more coordinated structure to manage property assets, budgets, maintenance, and compliance to improve efficiency and strategic planning.

Trade unions were invited to contribute to the development of the new service by providing feedback on the proposed structure and its potential impact on staff. One-to-one meetings, group sessions and drop-in events were also held for employees across multiple locations, ensuring that staff, both office-based and frontline, had accessible opportunities to engage, ask questions and share their views. Trade unions attended many of these sessions, reinforcing a visible and supportive partnership presence for staff. This approach enabled engagement with approximately 30 office-based employees and over 200 frontline colleagues across services such as security, premises, sewer and cleaning. Similar work has been underway across our schools, supported by multiple trade union partners as we manage through a period of significant financial pressures and growing ALN need.

By working in partnership, the Council and trade unions were able to ensure that staff voices were heard, concerns were addressed, and specifically in relation to Corporate Landlord the transition was managed in a fair and inclusive way. This highlights how early involvement and ongoing collaboration with trade unions can strengthen organisational change processes. Through co-ordinated consultation, shared decision-making and continued dialogue, the Corporate Landlord model has been developed in a way that supports employees and lays the foundation for a successful and sustainable service.

Social Care Therapy Dolls: Supporting and protecting those who need us



The **Therapy Doll initiative** was developed through effective partnership working between trade union representatives from GMB Union and Social Services staff to enhance the wellbeing of care home residents living with dementia. The approach combined staff insight and union-led funding to introduce specially designed therapy dolls that provide comfort, reassurance, and improved quality of life. The GMB Union worked with Residential Services to identify this opportunity, drawing on training and external insight, and secured funding through the GMB Regional Committee to purchase seven dolls. These were distributed across Tŷ Dewi Sant, Catref Porthceri, Southway and Tŷ Dyfan care homes, enabling quick and effective implementation and visible contentment within our resident groups.

Partnership working continued throughout delivery, with care staff and managers supporting the introduction and appropriate use of the dolls within residential settings, ensuring the initiative complemented existing care practices. The dolls have encouraged social interaction, prompting conversation, reminiscence, and engagement among residents, while also providing a sense of purpose, comfort, and reassurance. This demonstrates how collaboration between staff, trade unions, and management can generate practical, low-cost solutions that enhance person-centred care.



The outcomes of this joint approach have been positive, with staff reporting improvements in residents' emotional wellbeing, including reduced anxiety and increased engagement. The initiative was also featured in a segment on ITV News in February 2026. All residents have benefited from interaction with the dolls, highlighting their broad appeal and therapeutic value in supporting those living with dementia.

White Ribbon Campaign: Supporting and protecting those who need us and Giving everyone a good start in life

The **White Ribbon Campaign for Domestic Violence** demonstrates strong partnership working across the Council, including employees, senior leadership, and external partners. The campaign raises awareness of violence against women and girls and promotes positive cultural change by engaging men and boys as part of the solution. White Ribbon Awareness Day (25th November) and Domestic Violence Awareness Month (October) are key, however activity is delivered throughout the year.

A coordinated programme of events was delivered in 2025/26 through collaboration with the Safer Vale Partnership and internal services. This included a large-scale Barry Island awareness event, targeted education sessions, and a Candlelight Vigil. A multi-agency subgroup (Community Safety, Building Services, and



Education) planned and delivered the June 2025 Barry Island event, which featured a large

White Ribbon display on the sand and direct public engagement to promote male allyship and challenge violence against women and girls.

Awareness-raising continues through training programmes, with 100% of staff reporting increased confidence in supporting affected individuals. This partnership approach has enabled shared ownership, wide community reach, meaningful conversations, and reinforcement of the #ItStartsWithMe message across services and communities.



In March 2026, the Council achieved White Ribbon Accreditation, reinforcing its commitment to tackling violence against women and girls. A White Ribbon Steering Group is also being established, led by one of the Council's directorates alongside the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) lead, to coordinate activity across services, continuing our collaborative work. Trade Union representatives have consistently championed the Campaign, actively supported events and contributing as valued members of the Steering Group. As the Council progresses towards accreditation, the union members will continue to provide leadership and insight, helping to shape, sustain, and strengthen the campaigns ongoing development and impact.

Street Scene Service: Respecting and celebrating the environment and Creating great places to live, work and visit



The development and implementation of the new Street Scene Service was effectively supported by trade union representatives and service managers, ensuring workforce considerations were embedded within the significant service redesign. This new service replaces the existing street cleansing model with a proactive, place-based and community-focused approach, improving environmental quality under the Environmental Protection Act (1990), and aligning with the Council's placemaking priorities and Vale 2030 objectives. The enhanced model introduces increased workforce capacity, dedicated town-based teams, improved responsiveness, and greater engagement with residents and partners. It also strengthens collaboration with Town and Community Councils, volunteers and external partners, creating cleaner, safer and more attractive spaces for Vale residents and visitors.

Trade unions were actively involved during consultation, engagement, and information sharing phases, with regular updates being shared and discussed through Cabinet, Scrutiny Committees, and department meetings. This enabled both union and employee perspectives to be represented throughout the process, ensuring the new model is practical and deliverable. The





collaborative approach supported constructive dialogue, allowing unions and management to identify solutions and address challenges early. Partnership working continued throughout the transition phase, supporting implementation activities such as recruitment, workforce planning, and reducing reliance on agency staff. This joint approach has helped create a more stable and sustainable workforce, while improving service visibility and responsiveness within communities. Residents are expected to benefit from higher cleansing standards, quicker resolution of issues such as littering and fly-tipping, and increased opportunities to engage with and support their local environment.

Next steps focus on embedding and developing the service following its launch in April 2026. This includes completing recruitment, refining operational delivery, and working with partners and communities to increase involvement in maintaining local areas. A five-year Street Scene Strategy (2026-2031) will be developed to set long-term priorities, alongside ongoing performance monitoring and continuous improvement, with trade unions remaining key partners in the reviewing process.

Real Living Wage: Being the best council we can be and Giving everyone a good start in life

In November 2025, the Council successfully achieved Real Living Wage (RLW) Accreditation, reinforcing its commitment to supporting the well-being of its workforce and communities. Trade unions were actively engaged throughout the process via established consultation and engagement forums including the JCF Forum. Information was shared openly, and unions played an important role in representing staff views, highlighting the impacts of low pay, and supporting the case for accreditation. This partnership working ensured that the decision to implement the RLW was informed by workforce insight and reflected shared priorities around fairness, financial security, and staff well-being.

The accreditation positively impacted over 700 employees across the Council and local schools, increasing the lowest pay rate from £12.60 to £13.45. Early feedback indicates improved motivation, greater financial stability for staff, and a sense of pride in working for the Council. Trade unions have also reported

positive feedback from members, particularly in relation to the difference the pay uplift has made during ongoing cost of living pressures.
This collaborative approach has strengthened relationships between the Council and trade unions, demonstrating the value of partnership working in delivering meaningful change. The Council will continue to work with trade unions to embed the RLW into long-term financial planning, monitor its impact, and ensure that fair work principles remain central to employment practices.

We have also continued to work alongside commissioned care providers to monitor their progress on implementing the RLW through our contract monitoring quality assurance processes. When we have provided fee uplifts to commissioned care providers, we have made it clear that we in turn expect the RLW to be paid to their staffing groups. All providers of residential care pay the RLW as do the majority of domiciliary care agencies. The uplift in salaries for 26/27 for Personal Assistants who are employed to deliver packages of Direct Payments, now also means that they receive the RLW.
This progress is set against significant cost of living pressures, with 78% of residents reporting concern and many reducing their energy use. In response, the Council has provided targeted assistance to thousands of households, including £150 payments to over 35,000 residents, and Alternative Fuel Payments to over 500 households, while continuing to explore energy efficiency measures and ensure staff are supported with advice and resources to manage ongoing financial challenges.

Staff Networks

Staff networks continue to play an important role in supporting the Council's commitment to inclusion and wellbeing at work. Insight from trade union partners, including through JCF discussions, has helped shape several elements linked to staff wellbeing and inclusivity within the Council's Culture Book (2021), our alternative to a traditional employee handbook. Their insight includes feedback and support for the development and strengthening of key staff networks such as **GLAM** (LGBTQ+), **Diverse** (global majority staff), and the establishment of **Abl** (disability staff and allies). These networks provide safe spaces for discussion, offer peer support, and act as a collective voice to inform management decision-making and organisational policies.

Through JCF engagement, trade union partners have continued to highlight priorities for strengthening an inclusive workplace culture, including increasing awareness and understanding of neurodivergence across the workforce and ensuring staff voices are reflected in the Corporate Plan. The contribution of staff networks, supported by social partnership working, aligns with and reinforces the Council's commitments and external accreditations such as **Disability Confident Employer** and **Stonewall Diversity Champion Employer**. This work demonstrates how staff networks and trade union engagement enable meaningful collaboration, ensuring that equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded in both policy development and day-to-day practice.

The Learning Café is also a unique initiative designed to encourage continuous learning, collaboration, and reduce organisational barriers. It provides a dedicated forum for discussion and questions on key issues, including financial wellbeing, community power, and personal development.



Abl



Diverse (Refugee toiletry collection)



GLAM (Pride, 2025)

Training and Engagement

Training and engagement opportunities have been developed across different roles to support implementation of the Social Partnership Duty. For public sector staff, the Welsh Government provides accessible courses through their e-learning platform, covering the principles of social partnership, the legislation, and its practical application. The Council are also planning to offer a Social Partnership Duty training day, bringing trade union representatives

and staff members together to understand and engage with what it means to work collaboratively.

To support the development of this year's annual report, we engaged with directorates across the Council to identify and capture examples of partnership working in projects that demonstrate the principles of the Social Partnership Duty in practice. This collaborative approach is reflected in our case studies, enabling us to showcase a diverse range of projects, and help raise further awareness and understanding of the Duty amongst our services. Throughout this process, we have continued to encourage teams to reflect on how they involve trade unions and stakeholders in decision making, strengthening a **culture of openness, collaboration, and shared responsibility** across the organisation.

Next Steps

The Council will continue to build on the strong foundations of partnership working established through the delivery of Vale 2030 during 2025/26, focusing on how strengthening social partnership informs implementation, monitoring, and continuous improvement. Work will continue to ensure that trade union representatives are engaged at both a strategic and operational level through established forums, including the JCF, Change Forum, and Directorate Consultative Forums. These forums support ongoing discussions on key priorities such as workforce planning, service transformation, and the delivery of major programmes, ensuring insightful decision making.

Opportunities to further develop understanding of the Social Partnership Duty will also be explored, including the potential for targeted training and awareness-raising activity for managers, officers, and trade union representatives. In addition, the Council will continue to engage with Merthyr Tydfil Council through quarterly meetings of **Social Partnership Duty Champions**, supporting shared learning, collaboration and the continued development of best practices.

The Council will also review and enhance its approach to increasing awareness of the Social Partnership Duty across the organisation and identifying opportunities to improve engagement. This will ensure that partnership

working continues to deliver mutual benefits for staff, the organisation, and the communities we serve.

Agreement Status:

This annual report has been agreed with trade union partners at the Joint Consultative Forum meeting held on 14th September 2026.