



CABINET

**IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY 17 May 2023**

**MULTI-LOCATION MEETING –
COUNCIL CHAMBER PORT TALBOT AND MICROSOFT TEAMS**

**ALL MOBILE TELEPHONES TO BE SWITCHED TO SILENT FOR THE
DURATION OF THE MEETING**

Webcasting/Hybrid Meetings:

This meeting may be filmed for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet Site. By participating you are consenting to be filmed and the possible use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purposes.

Part 1

1. Appointment of Chairperson
2. Chairpersons Announcement/s
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Public Question Time
Questions must be submitted in writing to Democratic Services, democratic.services@npt.gov.uk no later than noon on the working day prior to the meeting. Questions must relate to items on the agenda. Questions will be dealt with in a 10 minute period.

For Decision

5. Grant of Officer Indemnity to Karen Jones in respect of Local Government Data Unit Wales (*Pages 3 - 14*)

6. APSE Wales Chair - Climate Change and Renewables Advisory Group (*Pages 15 - 18*)

For Information

7. Audit Wales - Assurance and Risk Assessment Financial Position (*Pages 19 - 30*)
8. Update in relation to the delivery of the Neath Port Talbot Hardship Relief Scheme (*Pages 31 - 36*)
9. Urgent Items
Any urgent items (whether public or exempt) at the discretion of the Chairperson pursuant to Statutory Instrument 2001 No. 2290 (as amended).

K.Jones
Chief Executive

Civic Centre
Port Talbot

Thursday, 11 May 2023

Cabinet Members:

Councillors. S.K.Hunt, S.A.Knoyle, N.Jenkins, D.M.Peters, J.Hurley, S.Harris, J.Hale, A.Llewelyn, W.F.Griffiths and S.Jones

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

17th May 2023

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

MATTER FOR DECISION

WARDS AFFECTED – ALL

GRANT OF OFFICER INDEMNITY TO KAREN JONES IN RESPECT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT DATA UNIT WALES

Purpose of Report

1. To seek authority from Members to grant an officer indemnity to the Chief Executive in light of her role as director of the Local Government Data Unit Wales (Data Cymru).

Background

2. Local Government Data Unit Wales (Data Cymru) (“the Company”) is a Welsh local government company with a board of directors elected by the Welsh Local Government Association offering a range of specialist support including
 - a. Help to source, collect, or collate data
 - b. Data analysis and effective data presentation
 - c. Advice on the best ways to undertake research
 - d. Help to find out what citizens, service users/customers think
 - e. Training staff in relevant topics such as *Basic Statistics, Presenting Data, Managing Performance, Survey Design & Analysis, Questionnaire Design etc.*
 - f. Providing cost-effective access to a range of commercial data sets.
3. The Company allow for the eight Welsh Local Government Association members of the Company to be directors of the Board, and for the Board to appoint up to five additional people as directors, including a chief executive of a member council and the Chief Executive of the WLGA.
4. At its Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 9 December 2020, the Board approved the re-appointment of Dr Chris Llewelyn, the Chief Executive of the WLGA as a director of the Company. Members of the board also agreed to pursue the appointment of a chief executive of a Welsh local authority as a director of the Company.
5. In accordance with the board’s wishes, Dr Chris Llewelyn approached Karen Jones, the Chief Executive of Neath Port Talbot Council about taking on the

vacant director position. Karen Jones took up her current Chief Executive role in December 2020, prior to which, she was the Council's Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer and accordingly can bring expertise and support to the work programme of the Company.

6. When appointed as a director to a company it can expose an individual to personal liability for various matters. Accordingly, it is recognised that where an individual is appointed as a director due to their role within a local authority, it is appropriate for a local authority to consider offering an indemnity to that officer to not expose them to any personal or financial liabilities. Accordingly, it would be proposed that members extend an indemnity to the Chief Executive of Neath Port Talbot Council in respect of her role as a director of the Company for the duration of her tenure as director

Legal Implications

7. Section 101 of the Local Government Act 2000, the Local Authorities (Indemnities for Members and Officers) (Wales) Order 2006 and Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 grants local authorities the power to grant indemnities to officers where such personal liability may arise i.e. when an individual is appointed as a director to a company. The indemnity is a standard form indemnity and a copy of this enclosed at Appendix 1.

Financial Implications

8. None at this stage. In the event that the indemnity is required to be implemented the financial obligations are as set out in the indemnity.

Consultation

9. There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

Integrated Impact Assessment

10. As this report relates to governance arrangements, there would be no requirement for an integrated impact assessment.

Workforce Impact

11. None.

Recommendations

12. It is recommended that the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council grant an indemnity to Karen Jones (in her capacity as Chief Executive) in the form annexed to this report at Appendix 1, in respect of her role as director of Local Government Data Unit Wales (Data Cymru).

Reason for Proposed Decision

13. To agree consider offering an indemnity to an officer appointed as a director due to her employment within the Council and to not expose them to any personal or financial liabilities

Implementation of Decision

14. Implementation is proposed after the three-day call in period.

Appendices

15. Appendix 1 - Draft Officer Indemnity

Background Documents

None

Officer Contacts

Craig Griffiths - Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Tel: 01639 763368 Email: c.griffiths2@npt.gov.uk

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DATED

2023

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

- and -

KAREN JONES

**DEED OF INDEMNITY to OFFICER
RE: LOCAL GOVERNMENT DATA UNIT WALES**

Mr. Craig Griffiths
Head of Legal and
Democratic Services
Neath Port Talbot County
Borough Council
Civic Centre
Port Talbot

DATED

2023

PARTIES

1. Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council of Port Talbot Civic Centre
Port Talbot SA13 1PJ (“the Council”)

2. Karen Jones of _____ (“the Officer”)

RECITALS

- (1) On the _____, the Officer was appointed as a company director of Local Government Data Unit Wales (“Company Registration Number 04082312) (“the Company”).

- (2) The Company is a Welsh local government company with a board of directors elected by the Welsh Local Government Association offering a range of specialist support including
 - (a) Help to source, collect, or collate data
 - (b) Data analysis and effective data presentation
 - (c) Advice on the best ways to undertake research
 - (d) Help to find out what citizens, service users/customers think
 - (e) Training staff in relevant topics such as *Basic Statistics, Presenting Data, Managing Performance, Survey Design & Analysis, Questionnaire Design etc.*
 - (f) Providing cost-effective access to a range of commercial data sets.

- (3) The Council may in order to cover any possible liability of the Officer provide an indemnity to her to cover any risks not covered by any insurance policies.

- (4) It has been agreed that subject to the terms appearing hereafter the Council shall indemnify the Officer acting in her capacity with the Company.

- (5) By virtue of a decision of the Council's Cabinet on
the Council agreed to provide the indemnity to the officer in this form.

This **DEED OF INDEMNITY** is made under section 101 of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Indemnities for Members and Officers) (Wales) Order 2006, section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 and all other enabling provisions as follows:

1. Indemnity

- 1.1 Subject to clauses 2 and 3 the Council shall (to the fullest extent permitted by the laws of England and Wales) indemnify and keep indemnified the Officer on demand against all actions, claims, liabilities, charges, demands, proceedings, investigations and judgments which may be made against him or which he may suffer or incur as a consequence of, or which relate to or arise from, directly or indirectly, her powers, duties, responsibility as a Director of the Company (including legal and professional fees) and tax incurred in relation thereto from the date of the appointment.

1.2 All sums payable by the Council hereunder shall be paid free of, and without any rights of, counterclaim or set-off and without deduction and withholding on any ground whatsoever.

2. Exclusions and Limitations

2.1 Without prejudice to the generality of this indemnity but subject to the provisions of clauses 2.2 below this indemnity shall extend to:

- (a) the defence of criminal proceedings brought against the Officer;
and
- (b) any civil liability arising as a consequence of any action or failure to act which also constitutes a criminal offence

PROVIDED THAT:

the Council shall not be liable to make any payment to the Officer or any other party under the terms of this Deed of Indemnity nor in relation to any action or failure to act by the Officer that:

- (a) constitutes a criminal offence; or
- (b) is the result of fraud or other deliberate wrongdoing or recklessness on the part of the Officer; or
- (c) relates to alleged defamation of the Officer.

2.2 Where the Officer is convicted of a criminal offence and that conviction is not overturned following an appeal the Officer will reimburse the Council for any and all sums expended by the Council pursuant to this Indemnity in relation to those criminal proceedings.

3. Matters that exceed the powers of the Council and/or the Officer

3.1 This Indemnity extends to matters which exceed the powers of the Council and or the power vested in the Officer only to the extent that:

(a) Where the act or failure to act exceeded the powers of the Council the Officer reasonably believed at the time of the action or failure to act that the action or failure to act in question was within the powers of the Council;

or

(b) Where the action or failure to act comprised the issue or authorisation of a document containing a statement as to the powers of the Council or any statement that certain steps had been taken or requirements fulfilled, the Officer reasonably believed the contents of that statement to be true;

or

(c) Where the action or failure to act exceeded the powers vested in the Officer by the Council the Officer reasonably believed at the time of the act or failure to act that it was within his powers.

4. Reimbursement

4.1 Where the Officer is obliged to reimburse the Council pursuant to clause 2 of this Indemnity those sums shall be recoverable by the Council as a civil debt.

5. Conduct of claims

5.1 If the Officer becomes aware of any circumstances which may lead to the Council being required to make any payment under clause 1, the Officer shall:

5.1.1 as soon as practicable give written notice of such circumstances to the Council;

5.1.2 not make any admission of liability, agreement or compromise with any person in relation to any such circumstances without the prior written consent of the Council, such consent not to be unreasonably withheld or delayed; and

5.1.3 consult the Council regarding the conduct of any claim arising in connection with such circumstances and provide the Council with such information and copies of such documents relating to any such claim as the Council may reasonably request.

5.2 In the event of any payment under this Deed being made, the Council shall be subrogated to the extent of such payment to all of the Officer's rights of recovery against third parties (including any claim under any applicable director's insurance policy) in respect of the payment and the

Officer shall execute all papers required and shall do everything that may be necessary to secure any rights, including:

- (a) the execution of any documents necessary to enable the Council effectively to bring an action in the name of the Officer; and
- (b) the provision of assistance as a witness.

6. Jurisdiction

6.1 This Deed shall be governed by and construed in accordance with the law of England and Wales as they apply in Wales. The parties agree to submit to the exclusive jurisdiction of the courts of England and Wales in respect of any disputes or differences arising under this Deed.

THE COMMON SEAL OF)
NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY)
BOROUGH COUNCIL was affixed)
to this **DEED** in the presence of:)

Proper Officer

EXECUTED as a **DEED**)
by **KAREN JONES**)
in the presence of:)

Witness signature:

Witness name:

Witness address:

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

17th May 2023

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

MATTER FOR DECISION

WARDS AFFECTED – ALL

APSE Wales Chair – Climate Change and Renewables Advisory Group

Purpose of Report

To authorise the Leader of Council to act as Chair of the APSE Wales Renewables & Climate Change group and that an officer from the Environment and Regeneration Directorate be identified as the Lead Officer associated with this advisory group.

Background

APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) is a not for profit unincorporated association working with over 300 councils throughout the UK, with the aim of promoting excellence in public services.

APSE operates on a UK wide basis with self-governing branches, of which Wales is one. Each area determines its own work programme and in Wales that includes 4 advisory groups.

APSE (Wales) have established an advisory group called Renewables & Climate Change, which aims to look at all aspects of carbon reduction, local authority energy generation and the effects of climate change including flooding and coastal erosion. It is free and open to all officers and elected members from APSE's Welsh authority membership.

The chair of this particular group has been offered to the current Leader of Council, Cllr Steve Hunt who role is it is to chair the meeting and agreeing the agenda in advance. The position carries an honorarium of £500 per annum.

Approval therefore is sought for the Leader of Council to be authorised to act as Chair of the APSE Wales Renewables and Climate Change

The advisory group would usually be supported by a lead officer from the same authority of the Chair. Following discussions with officers, the Council has identified that the Environment and Regeneration Directorate is able to provide a lead officer for this group with the benefits of participation anticipated to justify the officer time that would be committed. These appointments will reinforce the Council's commitment to responding to the climate emergency and illicit learning that should

benefit or work programmes in an area identified as a priority within the Council's Corporate Plan.

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications associated with this report as it relates to an outside body appointment

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report as the honorarium mentioned above is met by APSE.

Consultation

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

Integrated Impact Assessment

As this report relates to governance arrangements, there would be no requirement for an integrated impact assessment.

Workforce Impact

As indicated above, the advisory group though would usually have a lead officer from the same authority of the Chair and following discussions with officers, the Council has identified that the Environment and Regeneration Directorate could provide a lead officer for this group, without it having a detriment on officer workloads. The benefits that Council could gain from this group will in turn hopefully benefit work programmes that this Council will embark on.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council authorise the Leader of Council to act as Chair of the APSE Wales Renewables & Climate Change group and that an officer to be confirmed by the Director of Environment and Regeneration be identified as the Lead Officer associated with this advisory group.

Reason for Proposed Decision

To provide authorisation for the Leader of Council to act as a representative to an outside body and to authorise officer participation in the same work.

Implementation of Decision

Implementation is proposed after the three-day call in period.

Appendices

None

Background Documents

None

Officer Contacts

Craig Griffiths - Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Tel: 01639 763368 Email: c.griffiths2@npt.gov.uk

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NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

17th MAY 2023

Report of the Chief Finance Officer

Huw Jones

Matter for Information

Wards Affected: All Wards

Audit Wales – Assurance and Risk Assessment, Financial Position Update 2021- 2022

Purpose of Report

1. To present Members with the Audit Wales Assurance and Risk Assessment Financial Position update for 2021-2022.

Executive Summary

2. The Assurance and Risk Assessment undertaken by Audit Wales, provides a point in time assurance on the particular aspects of their work undertaken to date. This update refers to the council's financial position.
3. The Assurance and Risk Assurance Financial Position update attached at Appendix 1 sets out the work completed by Audit Wales to review a number of areas including financial strategy, useable resources and performance against budgets.
4. Audit Wales' findings demonstrated that:
“The Council is financially stable, helped recently by additional Welsh Government funding, but it needs to develop a sustainable plan to address cost pressures and close its medium-term funding gap in an increasingly challenging financial climate”.
5. Audit Wales makes reference to future budget pressures and economic uncertainty. The Medium Term Financial Plan will address these challenges and set out our options for the next financial year.

Financial Appraisal

6. The programme of local audit and improvement assessment work undertaken by the Audit Wales during the period has been delivered within the budget allocated for audit and inspection work.

Integrated Impact Assessment

7. There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as this report is for information purposes.

Valleys Communities Impact

8. No implications.

Workforce Impact

9. There are no workforce impacts.

Legal Impact

10. The Auditor General is required to conduct local government value for money studies and assess compliance with the remaining requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

Risk Management

11. The findings of Audit Wales are a key input into the Council's corporate governance arrangements and the areas identified for improvement work inform the Annual Governance Statement and the associated improvement action plan.

Consultation

12. There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations For Noting

13. For Cabinet to note the work undertaken by Audit Wales as contained in the Assurance and Risk Assessment Financial Position Update 2021-2022.

Appendices

14. Appendix 1 – Audit Wales – Assurance and Risk Assessment Financial Position Update 2021-2022.

List of Background Papers

15. None

Officer Contact

16. Huw Jones, Chief Finance Officer

Email: h.jones@npt.gov.uk

Caryn Furlow-Harris, Strategic Manager – Policy & Executive Support

Email: c.furlow@npt.gov.uk

Louise McAndrew, Corporate Strategic Planning & Governance Officer

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Mrs Karen Jones
Chief Executive
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Reference: 3281A2022

Date issued: December 2022

Dear Karen

Assurance and Risk Assessment 2021-22 Financial Position update

Following on from our recent 2021-22 Assurance and Risk Assessment (ARA) progress update letter we said that we would feedback on some further specific aspects of our assurance and risk assessment work that we have undertaken. This letter provides a progress update on the Council's financial position for 2021-22.

This work was undertaken as part of our 2021-22 Assurance and Risk Assessment project to help discharge the Auditor General's duties¹.

¹ These duties include under section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 (the 2004 Act). It may also inform a study for improving value for money under section 41 of the 2004 Act, and/or an examination undertaken by the Auditor General under section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

This feedback provides a point in time assurance and risk progress update on the Council's arrangements in this area. Overall we found that:

The Council is financially stable, helped recently by additional Welsh Government funding, but it needs to develop a sustainable plan to address cost pressures and close its medium-term funding gap in an increasingly challenging financial climate.

What we looked at

- 1 We reviewed the Council's financial position during October and November 2022. This included consideration of the Council's financial reserves position, the delivery of planned savings and performance against the planned budget for the year.
- 2 We also published a Local Government Financial Sustainability Data tool in February 2022 which includes a range of financial data for councils, national parks and fire and rescue authorities in Wales. The tool can be accessed via the following link – [Financial Sustainability data tool](#).

Financial strategy

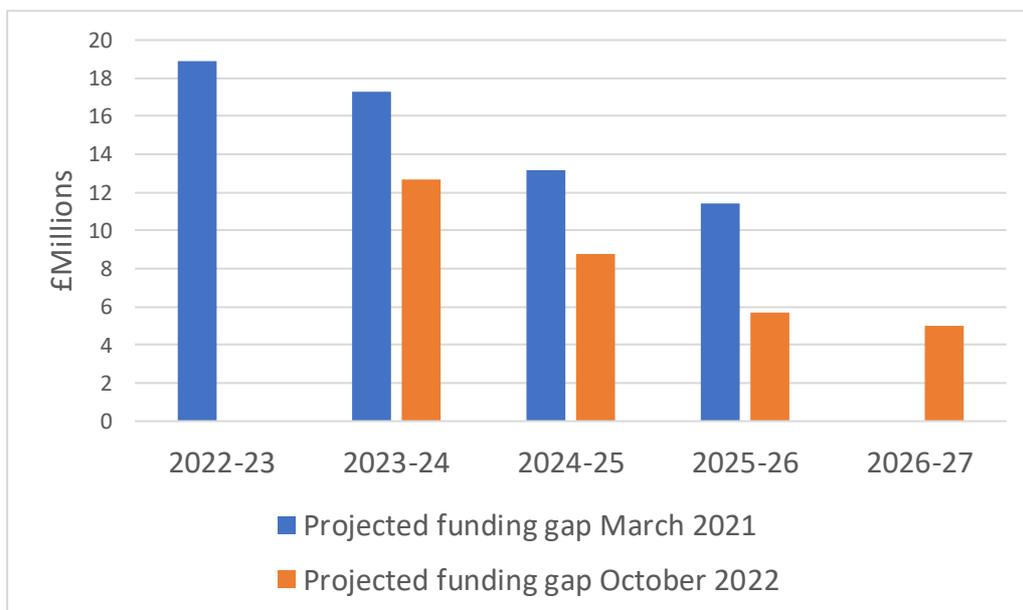
- 3 Our previous work, reported in September 2021 ([Financial Sustainability Assessment](#)) found that the Council focusses on annual budgeting and did not have a published Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). The financial plan was revised annually to help inform the annual budget setting process and set out the Council's medium-term financial projections. The Council recognised that it had scope to strengthen its medium-term financial planning and its links to the achievement of its corporate objectives.
- 4 The Council's 2022-23 budget, published in March 2022, did not quantify its medium-term financial position, reporting that it would subsequently undertake a comprehensive exercise to develop a MTFP. In October 2022, the Council reported the progress it had made in developing its MTFP for the period 2023-24 to 2027-28 to Cabinet. It has made assumptions about cost and income patterns based on 2 scenarios each, all of which result in a significant budget gap for the Council over the next 5 years. Its modelled gap ranges from £23.5

million with an optimistic Welsh Government settlement and 4% pay inflation, to £42.7 million with a realistic Welsh Government settlement and 6% pay inflation.

- The Council's forecast cumulative funding gap for the period 2023-24 to 2025-26 has decreased by £14.6 million since March 2021 (based on a realistic settlement and 4% pay inflation) – **Exhibit 1**.

Exhibit 1: the Council's cumulative projected funding gap for the three years 2023-24 to 2025-26 is £27.2 million - £14.6 million less than last year's forecast

This graph shows the cumulative funding gap that the Council identified in March 2021 and October 2022 for the three year period 2023-24 to 2025-26.



Source: 2021-22 budget report to Cabinet (March 2021), Medium Term Financial Plan 2022-23 to 2027-28 to Cabinet (October 2022)

- The Council recognises that it has more work to do to identify service pressures and increased service demand which are likely to further increase its projected gap. It has identified some areas for consideration in closing the projected gap which will take time to deliver savings and the Council recognises that further options need to be identified in case the 2023-24 Welsh Government settlement is insufficient to close the 2023-24 budget gap. In addition, the Council's estimated £4 million pressure from in-sourcing leisure services has not been

included in its assumptions although the Council plans to identify options to mitigate this as part of developing its leisure services business plan.

Useable reserves

- 7 The Council has historically had a healthy level of reserves and has not had a history of using reserves to fund revenue budget pressures. Although it budgeted to use £1.65 million of general reserves to balance its revenue budget in 2020-21 and £3.1 million in 2021-22, underspends on its net revenue budget and additional covid related funding from Welsh Government saw useable reserves increase by a further £25.7 million to £104.8 million at 31 March 2022.
- 8 The Council's 2022-23 budget was balanced without the use of general reserves but anticipated earmarked reserves being reduced by £13.8 million. The Council has subsequently identified additional pay and inflation pressures which it plans to fund from useable reserves, and it projects that its useable reserves will decrease to £77.1 million by 31 March 2023.

Exhibit 2: the net cost of services versus the amount of usable reserves

This exhibit shows the amount of usable reserves the Council had during 2021-22 and the previous five years as a proportion of the net cost of the services the Council delivers.

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Net Cost of Services in £ millions ²	283.3	281.8	296.1	307.0	267.9	284.5
Total Useable Reserves in £ millions ³	51.3	59.5	61.4	59.1	79.1	104.8
Total Useable Reserves as a percentage of the net cost of services ⁴	18.1%	21.1%	20.7%	19.3%	26.3%	32.8%
Comparison with other Welsh Councils	10 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	10 th	n/a

Source: Annual statements of accounts

Savings delivery

- 9 The Council has made significant savings in recent years, achieving the majority of its planned savings. In 2020-21 the Council balanced its budgeted funding gap through planned savings of £1.97 million. In 2021-22, this target was set at £135,000 as responding to the COVID pandemic reduced the Council's opportunity for service changes.

² Value used is the net cost of services charged to the general fund from the Expenditure and Funding Analysis plus precepts, levies and debt interest. Source: Statement of Accounts

³ By usable reserves, we mean the total general fund balance, together with earmarked reserves that councils are not legally prevented from redirecting to use for another purpose. Source: Statement of Accounts

⁴ Audit Wales calculation.

- 10 The Council continues to remove individual identified savings from its budgets at the start of the year which are monitored through its budget monitoring process. Unless significant budget variances are highlighted, the Council assumes that in-year savings are being achieved. The Council's outturn position for 2020-21 and 2021-22 confirms that it achieved most of its planned savings.
- 11 The Council's 2022-23 revenue budget was balanced without the need for planned savings. In response to in-year budgetary pressures, the Council is reviewing its activities and budgets, and is progressing actions to mitigate the cost and income pressures brought about by Covid. The Council's recovery plan – Recover, Reset and Renew (approved by the Council in March 2022) outlined several initiatives to reduce its net revenue budget requirement with reserves being used to fund its invest to save and invest to earn initiatives. The Council recognises that further work is required to identify efficiencies as part of work underway to develop its MTFP for the period 2023-24 to 2027-28.

Performance against budget

- 12 We previously reported in September 2021 ([Financial Sustainability Assessment](#)) that the Council has a good track record of financial management and that it had consistently delivered its services within agreed budgets, transferring small surpluses to its general reserve.
- 13 In 2021-22, receipt of additional Covid related funding from Welsh Government meant that the Council's planned £3.1 million use of general reserves was not needed and enabled the Council to increase its useable reserves by £25.7 million. Whilst the Council has overspent in some services, it has offset these by underspends elsewhere. The main causes of these variances continue to be Covid related and due to additional Welsh Government funding, the underlying position continues to be unclear in some areas.
- 14 For 2022-23, the Council's month 6 revenue budget monitoring report is forecasting a £2.7 million overspend after reserve transfers of £4.0 million. The main overspend relates to pay awards which are projected to be £9.7 million higher than budgeted for. This will be partly funded by re-purposing underspent central budgets but other cost and service pressures have also been identified.

Future Budget Pressures

- 15 The Council's medium-term financial planning will need to rely on a range of assumptions, and when coupled with the changing socio-economic landscape

in this period of significant economic uncertainty, planning for financial resilience and future budget rounds will continue to be challenging for councils.

Yours sincerely

Audit Wales

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NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

17th May 2023

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER – HUW JONES

Matter for Information

Update in relation to the delivery of the Neath Port Talbot Hardship Relief Scheme

Wards Affected: All

Purpose of report

To update Cabinet Members in relation to the delivery of the Neath Port Talbot Hardship Relief Scheme.

Background

At the Cabinet meeting of 28th February 2022, Members set aside £2m into a hardship relief reserve and tasked the Chief Finance Officer with developing a hardship relief scheme.

On 29th June 2022, Cabinet agreed a hardship relief scheme to be delivered in partnership with an external organisation, Warm Wales.

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update as to the delivery of the scheme to date.

Progress to date

Prior to the scheme being launched a legal agreement was developed and entered into by both parties. This was followed by a period of staff recruitment to ensure that Warm Wales were able to commence delivery of the scheme.

The Neath Port Talbot Hardship Relief Scheme was officially launched on 29th November 2022. Due to the unprecedented demand for the scheme the application process was paused for a number of weeks between 12th December 2022 and 20th January 2023 to avoid an unmanageable backlog in applications.

As at 31st March 2023, five hundred and eighty six households across the County Borough had received support through the scheme. Support provided has included payment of fuel debt directly to energy providers; the provision of white goods; support with water debt and the provision of small items such as electric blankets.

Expenditure as at the end of March totalled £188k with the level of support currently now running at approximately £80k per month.

In relation to the eligibility criteria for the fund following discussions with Warm Wales, it does not appear that the income thresholds are proving to be a barrier to accessing the scheme. Given that the scheme eligibility criteria allow for support to be provided in exceptional circumstances it is not felt necessary to make any amendments to the aforementioned criteria.

In relation to a geographical overview of the support provided the graphic in Appendix 1 details the geographic areas where support has been provided. Members should note that there may be multiple households supported within each area.

Appendix 2 includes some feedback from householders who have received support from the scheme.

Financial Impact

Based on expenditure patterns to date, the £2m set aside for the scheme will be sufficient for the scheme to continue for an 18-24 month period.

Integrated Impact Assessment

This report is for information only.

Valleys Community Impacts

Positive impacts as households across the County Borough including many in Valley's communities have benefited from the scheme.

Workforce impacts

No impact

Legal impact

No impact

Risk management

No impact.

Consultation

There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendation For Noting

It is recommended that Members note the progress to date in relation to the delivery of the hardship relief scheme.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Geographic overview of support provided

Appendix 2 – Householder feedback

List of background papers

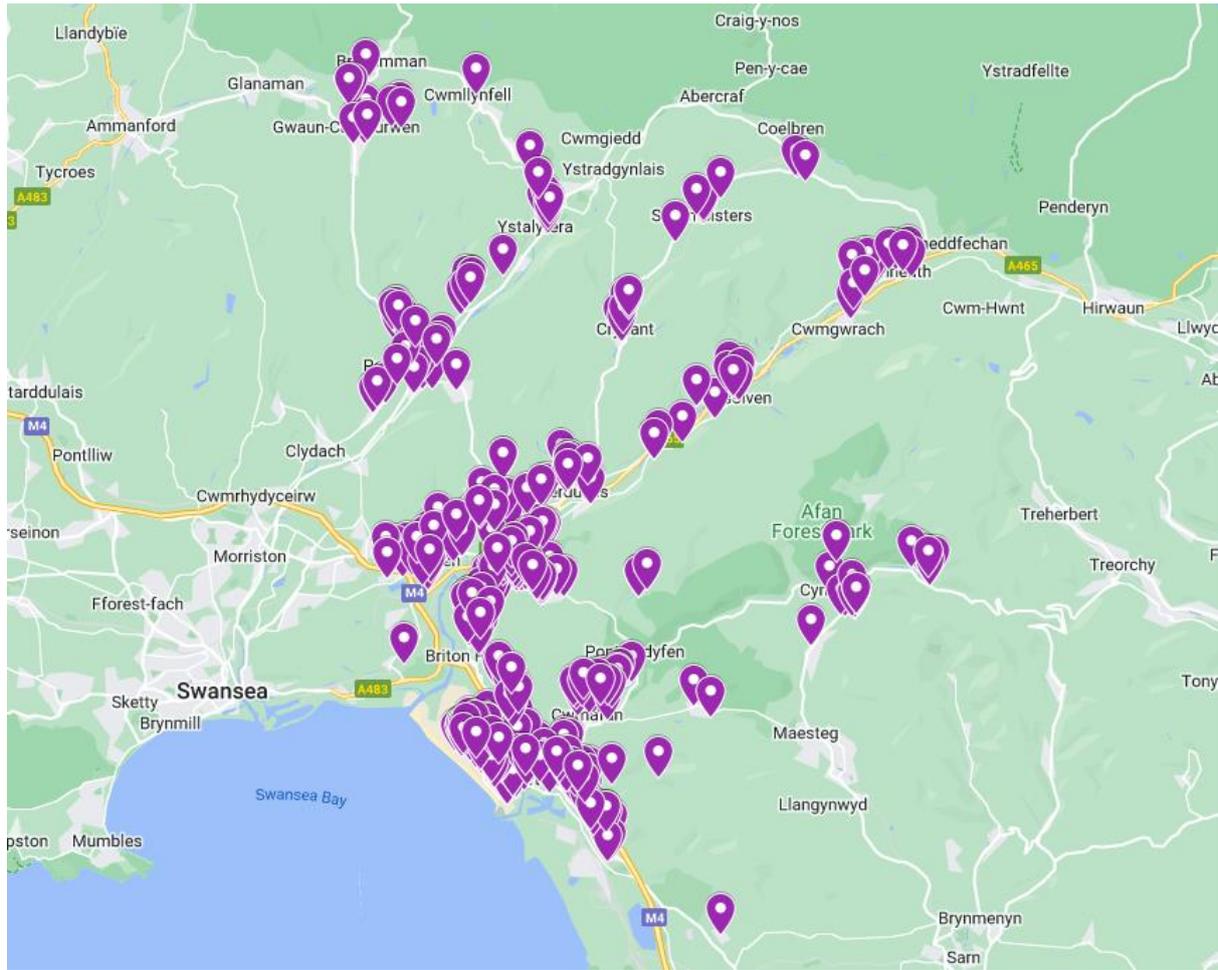
Cabinet papers February 2022 and June 2022

Officer contact

Mr Huw Jones – Chief Finance Officer

Email: h.jones@npt.gov.uk

Appendix 1- Geographical overview of support provided



Appendix 2- Householder Feedback

HH = Householder

B – 73, lives with his wife

HH originally got in touch as his house was cold and costing them a lot to keep warm – he is recovering from cancer and struggles to maintain a good body temperature.

Hi

Please escalate this email to your manager. Being 73 years of age and having suffered with throat cancer the last few years and not being very computer literate I would like to highly praise how supportive and helpful you have been in helping me. You are a star and I am sure I am not the first to praise you. Thank you so much and please show this email to your manager.

Regards

B

J – 34, lives with her partner and their 3 children

HH originally got in touch for help with heating and the cost of gas. She is on UC and has some mental health problems, her partner works and they have 3 young children. Her Community Worker was able to get onto a discounted water tariff, saving £350 a year, as well as support her with an energy payment and an Argos voucher via the fund.

Mr E and his wife – in their 80s

HH got in touch as they were nearly out of oil. In discussion with his Community Worker he explained that he has a bad memory due to strokes and cannot walk well. His wife also has mobility issues after having multiple hip and knee replacements.

They rent the property from an RSL and are responsible for the white goods in the house.

He said that they struggle to keep the house warm – the house loses heat very quickly once the heating is off. He also said their fridge-freezer was leaking and not keeping things fresh.

Appendix 2- Householder Feedback

The Community Worker was able to arrange an oil delivery and also a new fridge-freezer.

The HH's daughter sent a card to the office to say thank you on behalf of them all – the support has meant a great deal to them.

SP – 29, lives with her 3 children

HH originally got in touch as her fridge-freezer had broken. In discussion with her Community Worker she explained she had accrued some fuel debt due the increase in prices, and that she was being threatened with legal action over this. This was very stressful for her and we were able to pay the debt off.

Text from HH:

Just wanted to let you know the payment went through finally all sorted thank you so much for your help x

Mr K and wife, late 70s.

HH got in touch to see if we could help with their heating as the oil fuelled heating they use is expensive but they need the heating on regularly due to breathing issues they have.

An oil delivery was arranged.

From KB, his Community Worker:

Rang Mr K and explained he will have oil delivered and if I can find out a date I will call him back, and he asked how he pays the money back bless him. When I said he doesn't need to pay it back he nearly burst into tears.