



**SOCIAL SERVICES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY CABINET
BOARD**

**IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING SOCIAL SERVICES, HOUSING AND
COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

THURSDAY 18th APRIL 2024

**MICROSOFT TEAMS MEETING / HYBRID CONFERENCE ROOM
PORT TALBOT CIVIC CENTRE**

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

Webcasting/Hybrid Meetings:

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Part 1

1. Appointment of Chairperson
2. Chairpersons Announcement/s
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Minutes of Previous Meeting (*Pages 5 - 10*)
5. Public Question Time
Questions must be submitted in writing to Democratic Services, democratic.services@npt.gov.uk no later than two working days prior to the meeting. Questions must relate to items on the agenda. Questions will be dealt with in a 10 minute period

For Information:

6. Engagement & Participation Annual Report (*Pages 11 - 30*)
7. Annual Complaints Report (*Pages 31 - 46*)

For Decision:

8. Policy on Rent and Service Charge Arrears Prevention and Recovery (*Pages 47 - 72*)
9. Grant Arrangements for the Provision of Warm and Welcoming Spaces SPF Sustainable Communities Grant Funding (*Pages 73 - 84*)
10. Urgent Items
Any urgent items (whether public or exempt) at the discretion of the Chairperson pursuant to Regulation 5(4)(b) of Statutory Instrument 2001 No. 2290 (as amended).

Part 2

11. Access to Meetings - Exclusion of the Public (*Pages 85 - 90*)
To resolve to exclude the public for the following items pursuant to Regulation 4 (3) and (5) of Statutory Instrument 2001 No. 2290 and the relevant exempt paragraphs of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

For Information:

12. Contractual Arrangements for Third Sector and Non-Regulatory Services funded by Social Services, Health and Housing (*Pages 91 - 98*)
13. 2024/25 Contractual Arrangements for a Range of Services Funded Through the Housing Support Grant (*Pages 99 - 108*)

For Decision:

14. Commissioning of a Disability Residential and Supported Living Framework (*Pages 109 - 146*)

K.Jones
Chief Executive

Civic Centre
Port Talbot

Friday, 12 April 2024

Social Services, Housing and Community Safety Cabinet Board
Members:

Councillors. J.Hale, S.Harris and A.Llewelyn

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EXECUTIVE DECISION RECORD

SOCIAL SERVICES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY CABINET BOARD

21 MARCH 2024

Cabinet Members:

Councillors: J.Hale, S.Harris and A.Llewelyn

Officers in Attendance:

A.Jarrett, A.Thomas, C.Howard, K.Warren, N.Aleksanyan, P.Chivers, J.Hodges, M.Selby, V.Smith, S.Waite, N.Jones, A.Thomas and S.McCluskie.

Scrutiny Invitees:

Councillor C.Galsworthy and H.C.Clarke

1. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRPERSON**

Agreed that Councillor Llewelyn be appointed Chairperson of the meeting.

2. **CHAIRPERSONS ANNOUNCEMENT/S**

There were none.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

4. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (21ST SEPTEMBER, 25TH JANUARY AND 2ND FEBRUARY)**

The minutes of 21st September 2023, 25th January 2024 and 2nd February 2024, were approved.

5. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24**

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

6. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

No questions from the public were received.

7. **QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 3**

Decision:

That the report be noted.

8. **NEATH PORT TALBOT SOCIAL SERVICES STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN FOR NEURODIVERGENCE (AUTISM AND OTHER CONDITIONS) 2024-2027**

Decision:

That Members grant permission for Officers to conduct a 90-day public consultation period for Neath Port Talbot draft Strategic Action Plan for Neurodivergence 2024-27 as detailed in Appendix 1.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

The strategy will promote a cultural shift so that community and services are understanding and welcoming for neurodiverse individuals, families and carers.

Implementation of Decision

The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

9. **THE CORPORATE PARENTING CHARTER**

Decision:

That having had due regard to the Integrated Impact Assessment it is recommended that Members approve the Council adopting the Corporate Parenting Charter, as detailed in Appendix 3.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

To ensure that the Council has signed up to Welsh Government's Charter as a good Corporate Parent.

Implementation of Decision

The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

10. **POLICY ON FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS FOR TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION**

Decision:

That having had due regard to the integrated impact assessment, it is recommended that the Council implement a charging policy linked to HLA rates, for the provision of Temporary Accommodation to those households that are not in receipt of Housing Benefit.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

To ensure that there is a transparent and equitable process to determining fees for the provision of Temporary Accommodation.

Implementation of Decision

The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

11. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were none.

12. **ACCESS TO MEETINGS - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

13. **DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS**

Decision:

That the report be noted.

14. **WESTERN BAY AREA PLANNING BOARD: CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS 2024/2025 FOR A RANGE OF FOR SUBSTANCE USE SERVICES**

Decision:

That the report be noted.

15. **SPOT PURCHASE CONTRACT FOR A SOLE OCCUPANCY CARE AND SUPPORT PROVISION.**

Decision:

That the report be noted.

16. **THE MANAGER'S REPORT ON HILLSIDE SECURE CHILDREN'S HOME**

Decision:

That the report be noted.

17. **THE REGULATED SERVICE (SERVICE PROVIDERS AND RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUALS) (WALES) REGULATIONS 2017 AND HILLSIDE SECURE CHILDREN'S HOME UPDATE**

Decision:

That the report be noted.

18. **COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS FOR DEVELOPING NPT MOBILE RESPONSE SERVICE**

Decision:

That delegated authority be granted for the Head of Social Services to enter in a contract with Llesiant Delta Wellbeing for the delivery of a further Mobile Response Pilot, from April 2024 to the March 2025 to be provided to all areas of Neath Port Talbot.

For information in accordance with Contract Procedure Rule 7.2 that the requirement for competitive tendering is excluded for the direct award to Llesiant Delta Wellbeing, as it is a social care service contract in accordance with Contract Procedure Rule 7.1.11.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Decision on the recommendation is required to enable progression of the NPT agenda for an appropriate and timely response to falls as part of a wider fall's prevention strategy. The tight timescales imposed by the funding arrangements do not allow for procurement via tender at this point. Developing in house service may or may not offer more cost-effective solution, however, is not possible to achieve in the times scale, and we do not currently have the infrastructure to support this safely. Putting out to the open market at this point will cause delay and discontinuity of the developing mobile response service, resulting in a loss of momentum. A direct award for 1 year will ensure continuity and realistic timescale for scoping and implementation of the longer-term solution.

Implementation of Decision:

The decision is proposed for implementation following the three-day call-in period.

CHAIRPERSON

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NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL

NEATH PORT TALBOT SOCIAL SERVICES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY CABINET BOARD

18TH APRIL 2024

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES – K. WARREN

-

Matter for Information

Wards Affected All Wards

ENGAGEMENT & PARTICIPATION ANNUAL REPORT

1. Purpose of Report

To inform Cabinet of the Engagement & Participation work undertaken across the Directorate. This will include Adult and Children's Services. We will look at Children's Rights and how opportunities for children and young people are provided to give them a voice in matters that affect their lives. The report will also provide an overview of engagement within Adult Services. We will also outline future plans that are currently being developed for 2024.

2. Background

The Engagement & Participation Team provides platforms for service users to have a voice in service development and help shape the services they receive. The Engagement & Participation Team liaise with staff across the Directorate to help embed Children's Rights into daily practise and ensure that our children and young people see and experience their rights under the UNCRC. It is important to constantly seek the voice of residents in NPT to co-produce services and achieve the best possible outcomes. Community links are forged to promote adult engagement and number of platforms are used to capture their views and opinions.

3. Financial Impacts

There are no financial impacts arising from this report.

4. Integrated Impact assessment

There is no requirement for an integrated impact assessment as this report is for information purposes only.

5. Valleys Communities Impact

There are no implications.

6. Workforce Impacts

There is an expectation across the Directorate that the workforce has due regard to Children's Rights. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure Children's Rights are at the forefront when working with care experienced children and young people. Appropriate support and training will be provided. These same principles apply within Adult Services where service users are actively encouraged by staff to have a voice on decisions that affect them, and this informs practise.

7. Legal impacts

There are no legal impacts arising from this report.

8. Risk Assessment Impacts

There are no risk management requirements arising from this report.

9. Crime and Disorder Impacts

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a duty on the Council in the exercise of its functions to have "due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent:

- a) Crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment);
- b) The misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances in its area; and
- c) Re-offending the area".

There is no impact under the Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

10. Counter Terrorism Impacts

There are no counter terrorism requirements arising from this report.

11. Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Impacts:

Section 2(1) of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 introduced a general duty where a person exercising relevant functions must have regard (along with all other relevant matters) to the need to remove or minimise any factors which:

- (a) increase the risk of violence against women and girls, or
- (b) exacerbate the impact of such violence on victims.

The proposals contained in this report are likely to compliment and work alongside the impact on the above duty. VAWDA SV is included in the priorities of the Board under exploitation.

12. Consultation

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item. The ethos of the role of the Engagement & Participation Officer is to continually consult with children, young people and their families and adults.

13. Recommendations

Paper for information only.

14. Reasons for Proposed Decision

Paper for information only.

15. Implementation of Decision

Paper for information only.

16. Appendices

Appendix 1: Engagement & Participation Report 2023-2024

17. Background Papers

None.

18. Officer Contact

Darren Bartley, Engagement & Participation Officer, Children & Young People Services, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Email: d.bartley@npt.gov.uk

Rhiana Smith, Engagement and Participation Officer, Children & Young People Services, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

E-mail: r.smith3@npt.gov.uk

Keri Warren, Head of Children and Young People Services

k.warren@npt.gov.uk

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Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

Appendix 1

Social Services Engagement and Participation Annual Report 2023/2024

Prepared by

Darren Bartley Engagement and Participation Officer Childrens Services

Rhiana Smith Engagement and Participation Officer Adult Services

April 2024

Background

As a Local Authority it is important that we consistently capture and hear the voice of those we support. We want to ensure that we offer the best opportunity to listen and respond to people's views. Participation is an integral part of our planning and development of services. Therefore in Social Services we have a strategic lead for Engagement and Participation, and also a dedicated officer for both children and adult services to promote collaborative working. In Neath Port Talbot we work in an outcome focused way and ensure that we have 'what matters conversations' with those that we support. Across the Directorate it is a requirement that workers evidence that plans are being co-produced with the individual child, adult and their families to ensure that their voice is being heard and that meaningful and best outcomes can be achieved. There are Engagement and Participation Champions across the service who support this work within their teams.

This annual report will provide information from the last 12 months of the work undertaken by the Engagement and Participation Team to engage with those people who access our service, the report will also detail the priorities for team for the next 12 months across the Directorate.

National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales

The National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales are a set of ten principles for engaging with the public and service users. The principles aim to guide the way engagement is carried out to make sure it is good quality, open and consistent. The principles were developed by Participation Cymru and have been endorsed by the Welsh Government (www.participationcymru.org.uk)

1. Engagement is effectively designed to make a difference
2. Encourage and enable everyone affected to be involved, if they so choose
3. Engagement is planned and delivered in a timely and appropriate way
4. Work with relevant partner organisations
5. The information provided will be jargon free, appropriate and understandable
6. Make it easier for people to take part

7. Enable people to take part effectively
8. Engagement is given the right resources and support to be effective
9. People are told the impact of their contribution
10. Learn and share lessons to improve the process of engagement.

Engagement and Participation across Children and Young People's Services.

The Engagement & Participation Team works across Children's Services to embed children's rights into our daily practice. It provides opportunities for children and young people up to the age of 25 to develop the confidence and skills to understand and exercise their rights, co-produce services and have a voice in matters that affect them and aims to advance the education of duty bearers to understand their role in enabling children and young people to access their rights. The Engagement and Participation Team support a wide range of children and young people with different backgrounds, needs and experiences.

Throughout the last year, we have supported a wide range of activities, trips, projects, consultations, established groups and training to actively seek the voice of the child. This report outlines the work undertaken.

Children's Rights Champions

Children's Rights are everyone's responsibility and in order to embed children's rights into practice Children's Services committed to the concept of 'Children's Rights Champions'. In 2021 'Champions' were recruited and committed to a list of actions they set to embed children's rights into practice in their specific roles. Implementation of actions is overseen by the Quality Practice Group and the Practice Improvement Group, and we meet 'Champions' every six months to review progress and support with future plans. To further support the work of the Engagement and Participation Officer a Participation Champions group meets quarterly and is made up of staff from across the Service. It is an opportunity to share good practice, promote events and discuss common themes. The Engagement and Participation Team deliver an 'Introduction to Children's Rights' session during new staff's induction. The session also provides an opportunity to share the work of the Team and promote upcoming opportunities.

Children's Commissioner for Wales project 2024

The Engagement and Participation Team are participating in a project being led by the Children's Commissioner for Wales. The project is funded by ENYA (European Network of Young Advisors) and includes groups from across Europe. The project's focus is around the 'Protection and promotion of the rights of the child in alternative care'. We attended two workshops in March and there will be regular sessions throughout 2024, this will culminate in a trip to Slovakia where two young people will present findings on behalf of Hope.

Children's Rights Promises

Everyone working with children and young people should be aware of and consider children's rights in their practice and should consider themselves as 'duty-bearers', ensuring that they support children to access their rights. As the UNCRC states, children have many different rights, children should be aware of every one of them, and be able to understand and access them.

Throughout 2023 the Engagement and Participation Team with the support of Children's Rights Unit designed a Children's Rights Charter. The design was shared with professionals, foster carers and children and young people and was launched in the Autumn of 2023. The charter has been distributed to staff and will be shared at Children's Rights training.

The purpose of the Neath Port Talbot Children's Services Children's Rights Charter will be to:

- Raise awareness and inform children and young people of their rights
- Ensure children and young people feel supported and empowered
- Outline the help and support children and young people can expect
- Emphasise Neath Port Talbot's commitment to protect and respect children and young people's rights
- Ensure Neath Port Talbot Children's Services take their responsibilities seriously
- Improve service delivery through listening to children and young people



YoVo – Your Voice Matters

YoVo is a young person's action group open to children 11+ who are receiving support. This mixed group is another platform for children and young people to have a voice and improve their well-being. 2023's focus has been on mental health and well-being. Work has been delivered around emotional health and resilience in partnership with Action for Children and the Children's Rights Unit. They delivered Skills Plus which is a psychosocial-skills building intervention for young people leaving care aged between 14 and 24. The workshop helped the young people to understand thoughts, feelings and behaviour and provided tools to manage daily obstacles.

Members of YoVo were invited by Southwest Wales Connected and Transport for Wales to take part in their 'Joy of the Journey' initiative. The project is about arranging hosted train journeys across the region that show how wonderful - as well as easy - rail transport can be; bringing people together, tackling isolation and loneliness, along with promoting sustainable, healthy and accessible travel and tourism. Young people enjoyed a journey from Neath to Burry Port and were joined by Transport for Wales staff and British Transport Police.

In order to support YoVo to enjoy various activities and have their voices heard on issues that are important to them, an application to the 'Community Changemakers' grant scheme was submitted in late 2022. The application was successful and YoVo were awarded £800 for activities to improve their health and wellbeing.

Members of YoVo have made a list of the activities they would like to take part in throughout 2023/24. For their first activity, YoVo attended boxing/fitness sessions with Bulldogs Boxing in Port Talbot. The aim of the sessions is to challenge them to take part in something new, improve their fitness, build their confidence and improve their overall health and wellbeing.

The remaining Community Changemakers grant was used to fund art therapy workshops with local artist. Members of YoVo were able to spend a few sessions learning creative techniques whilst relaxing with friends and listening to music.

HOPE – care experienced girls' rights group

HOPE is a care experienced girls' rights group. Hope have concluded their Safer Spaces project raising awareness of sexual harassment. Hope received a £2000 grant to support their work and worked tirelessly throughout the year planning and delivering a variety of events and workshops. These included,

- Photography sessions to highlight the impact of sexual harassment. Hope produced a short video.
- Bushcraft workshop which included axe throwing and a fire pit. The girls recorded names and sexual harassment they have experienced and threw these into the fire.
- Self-defence classes – over 20 girls and women attended Krav Maga in order to build confidence, learn to be street safe and aware of dangers.
- Sexual Harassment workshops – Hope helped develop a 45-minute workshop to educate boys on sexual harassment and its consequences. The workshop has been delivered to over 120 boys in Neath Port Talbot Secondary Schools.
- At the start of April Hope put on wetsuits and braved the waterfalls of Pontneddfechan. Working in collaboration with outdoor activity company Anturfit the group painted sexual

harassment they have encountered on their suits and went under a waterfall to wash it off in a symbolic gesture. The event caught the attention of BBC Wales, and the girls were filmed and interviewed. Their story was a feature of the news and promoted the excellent work being undertaken in NPT by Social Services.

- Art Exhibition at Base 15. Guests met members of Hope and experienced the outstanding work they have achieved. The event was supported by the local police who regularly attend group meetings and a representative from the Crime Commissioners Office.
- To celebrate the work the group travelled to London to meet girls' rights groups from across Wales and share the great work they have been doing. Hope even enjoyed a trip on the London Eye. Furthermore, the Engagement and Participation Officer attended an event at the Senedd as a guest speaker to share the important message Hope are working to convey.



Members of Hope participated in a two-day creative research project with international charity Plan UK to look at issues that are important to girls and young women. Hope were the only voices from Wales to be included in the report which will be published in due course. Hope members received a qualification from the University of Dundee for their contributions.

The Hope 2023 Residential took place at the end of July. 15 girls spent 2 nights and 3 days at Call of the Wild. The group enjoyed hiking, team building, gorge walking, climbing and more significantly built friendships, confidence and memories. The residential included inspirational talks from women one of whom was singer songwriter and radio host Bronwen Lewis. This successful partnership with Call of the Wild has helped secure funding for a further group to experience this adventure in Autumn 2024.

Care Experienced Mum's Group

Efforts were made to establish a care experienced mum's group. Working in partnership with Roots Foundation Swansea and Jig-So, our mums were invited to attend the incredible Roots venue to learn how to cook cheap, nutritious meals for their children, socialise and network with other mum's and access services from guests such as Action for Children. The group failed to attract the numbers needed to sustain it, we will review this again in 2024.

The Language We Use

Big Chat Events are an opportunity for our children and young people to have a voice and be listened to – Article 12 UNCRC. They are a significant event in the Engagement and Participation Officer's calendar and offer an opportunity for Children's Services Team's to engage with children and young people and further improve our service. Big Chat Easter 2023 collaborated with the Independent Reviewing Officers to scrutinise the Child Looked After Review Booklets. Children and Young People gave their views and opinions on the booklets, scrutinised the language used and better ways to communicate with them. For participating the children enjoyed a fun session in The Climbing Hangar, pizza and a voucher.

The children and young people we support have told us we need to communicate in a child and young person friendly manner that's inclusive to all. Over the past 12 months the Engagement and Participation Officer has consulted with children and young people along with professionals, carers and parents to ensure all documents and information leaflets are presented using clear, child friendly language that is free of corporate jargon and confusing acronyms. A working group has been set up made up of young people who attend Hope and YOVO. The Engagement and Participation Officer attended Parent Advocacy Network meetings to incorporate parents into the consultation and working alongside professionals in the Consultant Social Workers and Practice Improvement Groups. An additional event was organised to look at information booklets viewed by young people and supported by Circus Eruption, the group participated in tight rope walking, uni-cycles, juggling and more. The young people involved helped produce a report highlighting their work and promoting change. This report will be available in May 2024. Below outlines two projects undertaken to support this work.

Fashion Project

To challenge the language and terminology used in children's services, members of Hope were involved in a fashion project throughout the summer. The project aimed to raise awareness of the language used by professionals, foster carers and others when referring to care experienced children and young people by making the language used more child and young person friendly. The goal is to encourage everyone to use different language and to ensure all information, for example documents, reports and questionnaires are easy to understand and free from acronyms and corporate jargon.

Working with a local fashion designer a number of sessions were held throughout the Summer. The project was launched at the Consultant Social Worker conference in November.



“When I get stressed I block things out, I put up these walls. I shut everything out. It’s how I protect myself. When someone is in front of me talking about LAC Reviews, placements and meetings I just nod and say yes. When I walk away, I realise I haven’t understood anything. I get more confused and stressed. What does this mean for me? My mind goes in a whirlwind.” Amber

Children and Young People’s Consultation Event at Plantasia



In collaboration with the Looked After Children’s Team a consultation event was held at Plantasia to give children and young people the opportunity to re-name the LAC Team. As part of the ongoing ‘Language We Use’ work the children and young people highlighted the need for change. A friendlier name is needed to reflect the ethos of the Team. To facilitate the event, spoken word artist Duke Al Durham delivered a creative session to provoke thought and discussion and help find an appropriate name. Next steps include collating the ideas, sharing the outcome and with approval re-naming the Team. The wonderful location lent itself to some promotional opportunities for the new Comments Compliments & Complaints process for care experienced children and young people. Children and Young People’s Services have developed a leaflet, informative postcard and magnet to ensure all our children know how to contact us. Over the coming months the material will be promoted to Foster Carers, Staff, Children & Young People.

Let’s Keep Talking

With Children’s Rights at the heart of all activities the Engagement and Participation Officer provides opportunities for our children and young people to participate in Local Authority consultations. The Let’s Keep Talking consultation was promoted at events and activities for children & young people to have a voice in the future development of services. Pupil Voice Training has been delivered by the Children’s Rights Unit to members of the Junior Safeguarding Board. The training incorporates ‘how to be a board member’ and prepares young people to become involved in decision making. Our young people continue to be part of the recruitment process and form a young person interview panel.

Corporate Parenting Panel

The Engagement & Participation Team is working more closely with the Corporate Parenting Panel as part of our commitment to championing the voice of the child. Work has been undertaken to establish how children and young people would like to be engaged with access to Corporate Meetings. An event was held at Base 15 to improve communication between the Panel and our care experienced children and young people. Councillors enjoyed a Salsa Drumming session with young people and an afternoon of STEM challenges all to improve teamwork. Further events are planned for 2024.

West Glamorgan Safeguarding Board

The Junior Safeguarding Board meets every half term in order to determine safeguarding topics that the members would like to champion throughout the year. Meetings have been hosted by Secondary Schools and attract a healthy number of students from across Neath Port Talbot

. Schools are currently engaged in projects to raise awareness of Sexual Harassment. These projects will lead up to National Safeguarding Week 2024. During National Safeguarding Week in November

2023 a promotional event was held in Ysgol Maes Y Coed to launch the British Sign Language video and widget board to educate frontline emergency service staff to communicate with children and young people with communication difficulties. The event was attended by South Wales Police, Welsh Ambulance & M&WWF&R Service. The students enjoyed exploring the vehicles and services have committed to sharing the resources.

Events Planning

The Engagement and Participation Officer organised a programme of events for the summer holidays along with supporting other Teams with the planning and promotion of further activities. Events include weekly surf sessions at Aberavon Beach, Beaches 2 Beacons, Hope Fashion Project, Foster Wales recruitment, UASC programme and consultation work. The events calendar is shared via Padlet for all staff to access and share. Events give children and young people an opportunity to engage in consultations such as 'Let's Keep Talking'.



Beaches 2 Beacons Project (B2B)

The mental health and wellbeing benefits of the great outdoors is well documented and between Neath Port Talbot and Banau Brycheiniog National Park we have an abundance of natural beauty. The Beaches 2 Beacons Project enabled our Children and Young People to access these spaces and enjoy the wilderness, support the environment and have a lot of fun. In 2023, B2B have undertaken an intergenerational project with Men's Shed to produce bird boxes to be placed in Country Parks in Neath Port Talbot and Banau Brycheiniog. The Engagement and Participation Officer secured funding from LBS Builders Merchants to purchase timber, Men's Shed made templates and the children enjoyed a day of DIY building them and learning about the environment. A further event took B2B to the National Park Visitor Centre to learn how to make dead hedges, bug hotels, fire pits with marshmallows, woodland management and more with a John Muir Certificate to be awarded at the end of the year. The project supported 13 children. Further events included hiking in Waterfall Country supported by MAWWF&R Service and RNLI to teach the group water safety.

Weekly Surf Lessons

2023 saw another successful summer teaming up with Surf School Wales on Aberavon Beach. The school provided weekly 2hr surf sessions for our children and young people to enjoy. Groups of up to

12 attended every Monday and not only improved their surf skills but learnt water safety and teamwork.

Youth Justice & Early Intervention Service

In partnership with the Youth Justice and Early Intervention Service (YEIS) the Engagement & Participation Team delivers a project with the aim of learning life skills such as cooking, money management, food hygiene & laundry. The Life Skills project focusses on Neath Port Talbot's commitment to giving our young people the tools to live independently. Weekly cooking sessions are delivered to care leavers, young people preparing for independent living and young offenders. The sessions also provide opportunities to signpost services and most significantly improve well-being. In 2024 this project has expanded to a full day and includes several sessions delivered by staff to include well-being sessions, substance misuse, fitness, guest speakers & educational opportunities. Young people working with the YEIS are given the opportunity to complete an Exit Questionnaire to help glean their experiences and improve services going forward.

Outreach Team

A substantial amount of work has been undertaken by the Outreach Team to work in collaboration with partner agencies to safeguard our children and young people in the community. This work ranges from raising awareness with local businesses about sexual and criminal exploitation, focussing on areas within NPT that are ASB hotspots to working with schools to identify areas of need. The voice of the child and their family is captured at every opportunity. Events are organised to raise awareness and initiatives such as Forest School and local gym sessions are provided to create a more cohesive community.

Hillside Children's Secure Home

The Engagement & Participation Officer collaborates with Hillside staff to ensure Children who reside there have equal opportunity to have a voice and be listened too. Children are encouraged to complete questionnaires at the start and end of their stay to help improve services. A young person's action group called LOVE has been established by Hillside staff to promote children's rights. In November 2023 young people worked with a Spoken Word Artist to share their thoughts and feelings and enjoy a number of fun challenges. Staff at Hillside prioritise wellbeing through fun and engaging events. More recently all the staff and young people dressed up to celebrate World Book Day.

Care Leavers

Young people attended a ministerial visit where they voiced their opinions regarding the Basic information Pilot (BIP) also young people attended two events held at Merthyr and Cardiff to gain their views regarding BIP. The Team have liaised with Voices from Care Cymru and young people have participated in the development of Independence Journals which have gone to print. Furthermore, the Team have held consultations to shape the new Mosaic IT system.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children & Young People (UASC)

As part of Neath Port Talbot's commitment to UASC as part of the National Transfer Scheme; activities and experiences have been organised throughout the summer in order to help the young people settle in to their new environment, improve their language, look after their well-being and educate them on Welsh culture and explore the area. Working closely with the UASC Team and established partners in the community the Engagement and Participation Officer organised weekly events throughout the

summer holidays. These included rock climbing at Dinas Rock, gorge walking, canyoning, coastering on the Gower and paddle boarding. There have been arranged visits to Bulldogs Community Gym to engage in activities and emotional and well-being support offered by the Bulldogs Team. All activities helped build rapport with staff and going forward the UASC Team and Engagement and Participation Officer will be facilitating young person consultations to give our UASC a voice and improve services and assist us with developing our practice guide.

Children with Additional Learning Needs

All engagement groups and activities are inclusive of all abilities and needs where appropriate and safe. The Engagement and Participation Officer supports a weekly group at Ysgol Hendrefelin. Thursday Club is for a group of children with additional needs that receive support from the Local Authority. Circus Eruption attend and also music lessons are delivered. The group have enjoyed ju-jitsu lessons and were part of the Gorseinon Christmas Parade.

Foster Wales Neath Port Talbot

An event was held at Base 15 to recognise and support the contributions of Foster Carers Sons and Daughters. The event included lots of craft-based activities, face painting, games and pizza making. The event was an opportunity to build relationships with Foster Carers and their families.

Care experienced young people from across Neath Port Talbot worked alongside Foster Wales and Rewise Learning to develop promotional material to help recruit new Foster Carers. The four day project included writing poetry, learning IT skills such as animation, script writing and music production. The young people shared their positive experiences of life in care and what they think it takes to be a Foster Carer. The completed animated video along with their poetry will form part of the upcoming promotional campaign. Below is an extract of one poem:



Soothing Balm by Ruby.

All I wanted was a hug, but you just dug and dug
You kicked me out. And all you ever did was shout and
shout.

You were so loud that you filled me with doubt.

You always silenced everything I said
And you made me emotionally dead.

When no one would listen, I'd talk to the stars as they
glistened.

Realising that my first home wasn't meant to be.

Child Protection Rapid Review Survey

The Engagement and Participation Team conducted the Child Protection Rapid Review Survey with the Parents/Guardians of children on the child protection register. The aim of the National Survey was to gather a multi-disciplinary perspective on child protection arrangements. Care Inspectorate Wales will consider responses alongside other review activities to support the completion of a national report.

Care and Support Project

Throughout Autumn 2023 the Engagement and Participation Team have worked in collaboration with a Colleague who has been seconded to conduct research project within Children's Services focused on Care and Support. In a support capacity, the Team has attended all focus groups with relevant Stakeholders. The Team has also designed, built and managed the accompanying surveys within the project.

Engagement and Participation across Adult services

Bird Boxes Inter-generational project

The NPTCBC Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 outlines priority 5:2 – our communities will enjoy increased social and community cohesion. Since December 2022 the Engagement and Participation Officers have attended the Men's Shed project in Skewen on a regular basis. The Team identified the opportunity to conduct an inter-generational project between the Men's Shed and Looked After Children in the existing 'Beaches 2 Beacons' project which includes placing Bird Boxes in nature around Neath Port Talbot. The Men's Shed cut wood that the Engagement and Participation Team provided to size so that the Children and Young People who attend the Beaches to Beacon events could construct them, resulting in a Bird Box constructed by both Elderly and Young people that were later placed within various areas around the Local Authority. This contributed to a sense of shared achievement, belonging and community cohesion.



Substance Use Transformation Programme

The Substance Use Transformation Manager is currently leading on a Transformation Programme which will aim to re-commission drug and alcohol services. Western Bay Area Planning Board are aiming to develop an 'Alliance' across the Swansea and Neath Port Talbot.

A key part of the programme is to pursue an outcomes-based commissioning approach supported by co-production. It is vital that the outcomes are decided by the people they belong to. For this reason we have been undertaking a number of workshops (from January to April) with people who will be supported by the substance use services and the development of the outcomes that matter to them. These workshops have been facilitated to co-design the future service model with all the stakeholders, including commissioners, providers and people with lived experience using a tried and tested interactive approach based on the appreciative inquiry process. This enables providers to play an integral part in creating the services they will be delivering and begin the process of collaborating and building strong, trusting relationships so that when procurement opens, they are already in a good position to create an alliance.

Service User Engagement Officer for the Area Planning Board

The Council receives a grant from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (via the Home Office) which pays for a Service User Engagement Officer (SUEO) for the Area Planning Board to increase participation with people who use substance use services in Western Bay (Swansea and NPT). Our officer commenced work in September 23 and will be in post until Mar 25. The SUEO coordinates the Peer Interventions Project that delivers all three specialist harm reduction interventions across the region to provide advice support and guidance and distribute naloxone kits and needle and syringe kits and carry out dry blood spot testing for Blood Borne Viruses. They also coordinate the Service User Involvement Groups across Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. The SUI Groups (due to be renamed Co-Production Forums) run monthly in both Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. The groups have developed appropriate governance arrangements so people with lived and living experience can engage with the Area Planning Board in line with co-production guidelines. The

forums are looking at work plans in going forward and these will help shape the ongoing work. The forums are working to the mantra of “nothing about us, without us”.

Engagement with Community Groups/Organisations

NPTCBC strategic equality plan 20-4 priority 5:2 – our communities will enjoy increased social and community cohesion. Action 4.5.4.54

Throughout 2023 the Engagement Officer continued to develop strong links with a range of groups and organisations for Adults within Neath Port Talbot to remain visible and approachable. These groups include:

- Skewen Men’s Shed
- Skewen OAP Ladies Group
- Your Voice Advocacy
- Sunflower Café Dementia Group
- Chai and Chat Neath
- Chai and Chat Port Talbot

Engagement and Participation across the Directorate

Networking & Fundraising

Meeting with various agencies including Mid and West Wales Fire Service, South Wales Police, Children’s Rights Unit, Youth Service, Barnardos, NPT Education, Swansea City FC, Ospreys Community, Voices From Care, NPTC Group to name but a few.

Co-production Training

The Engagement and Participation Team acknowledge the importance of Co-production and how it can equip and encourage individuals to engage in the democratic processes that affect them. In light of this, the Team deliver regular training sessions on Co-production to the Teams within Children and Adult Services and sessions during the directorate’s induction sessions. The Co-production training ensures that the directorate continues involving people in the decision making processes that affect them; one of the 5 ways of working enshrined within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Board – Co-Production

Throughout 2023 the Engagement and Participation Team attended both the weekly Task and Finish Groups of the West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Board Co-production group alongside the Full Co-production meetings, representing Neath Port Talbot Council. The meetings are an opportunity for Stakeholders and Volunteer Representatives from across the RPB to Co-produce pieces of work, requested by Welsh Government.

SNAP XMP Software

Throughout 2023-4 the Engagement and Participation Team continued to hold the SNAP XMP Software license for the Directorate and be the officers responsible for the design, building and management of

surveys for colleagues across the Directorate, particularly the Contract and Commissioning Team and Conference and Review Service. Currently, there are around 50 live surveys.

Outcomes survey

The Directorate continues to operate within an outcomes-focused framework, placing emphasis on the desired outcomes of individuals they work with. The Engagement and Participation Team undertook the completion of an Outcomes Survey on two occasions in January and June 2023. The survey was a telephone survey conducted with Children and Adults who receive care and support from Children's or Adult services. The survey was an optional opportunity for individuals to provide feedback on their experience with Social Services, with particular focus on their individual outcomes and What Matters conversations. The survey questions explored whether they felt that these outcomes were being met and whether their strengths were recognised.

What Matters Youth Housing Consultation – Phase 2

Over the last year, the Engagement and Participation Team assisted colleagues within the Contract and Commissioning Team on a consultation on Youth Homelessness and Housing. This included conducting interviews with Young People who were homeless and living within one of the commissioned Housing Providers within the Local Authority and was considered Phase 1 of the consultation process. The Engagement and Participation Officer held workshops with Stakeholders and Young People across the Dewis and Clarewood provisions to further explore the themes identified in Phase One. The findings of all three workshops were presented in reports and informed the next phase of the consultation.

Dewis Cymru

The Engagement and Participation Team are Editors of Dewis Cymru; responsible for both approving new resources and monitoring existing resources, ensuring that services listed are accurate and appropriate. The Team also facilitate the delivery of presentations to Teams within the Directorate and Community Councils to outline the opportunities and benefits that Dewis Cymru can offer.



Completion of the Continuum of Need document

The Engagement and Participation Team completed the Continuum of Need document, a piece of work requested by Principal Officer Chris-Frey Davies to aid multi-agency professionals in decision making by outlining the processes and services of the Directorate. The purpose of the document is to act as an Early Intervention and Prevention toolkit, signposting professionals on the course of action that would be safe and proportionate when concerns arise. The document will be published in due course and disseminated across relevant bodies.

Most Significant Change Interviews

From May 2023 the Engagement and Participation Team conducted Most Significant Change interviews that focused on the transition of Young People from Children's to Adult Services. The interviews reflected the Most Significant Change template and training that the Team attended with Nick Andrews of Swansea University. The interview process continued throughout the course of the year with varying

topics of focus and culminated with the Most Significant Change Panel, held in December 2023. The Panel was comprised of The Director of Social Services, Health and Housing, The Heads of Children’s and Adult Services, representatives from the PAN Parent Network, Consultant Social Workers and the Engagement and Participation Officer. The panel was an opportunity to explore the stories and engage in dialogue to identify which Story individuals thought was Most Significant and why; sharing good practice and success stories.

Engagement with Private Landlords in Housing & Communities

Housing & Communities recently held a Private Landlord Forum Meeting in partnership with Environmental Health. The event was held to engage with private landlords within NPT and a number of guest speakers (National Residential Landlords Association, Rent Smart Wales, Welsh Government) attended. We held the event at Neath Civic Centre, and we worked on a collaborative approach with the NRLA and Rent Smart Wales to publicise the event. The event was very well attended with over 100 attendees, an increase from the 6 that attended a similar event a few years back. The private rented sector has a crucial role to play in us delivering our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and this event has provided us with a platform to engage with landlords in a way they want to be engaged with and the next steps are to adopt a co-production/design phase with landlords.

Priorities for 2024/2025

1	Supporting the consultation in respect of the Neuro Divergent Strategic Plan	Children and Adult Services
2	Supported Accommodation – capturing the voice of service users to improve experiences in supported accommodation.	Children’s services
3	Voice of care experienced children and young people – provide ongoing opportunities and platforms for Child and young people to have a voice in improving service delivery. Deliver Children’s Rights and Co-Production training to staff.	Children’s services

4	Early intervention and prevention – working with community teams to support children and families in the community. Working closely with education to capture the voice of the child.	Children’s services
5	YJES – embed the voice of the child in Youth Justice Services	Children’s services
6	Capture the voice of the young person and their parent/carers going through the process of transition.	Children and Adult Services



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL SOCIAL SERVICES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY CABINET BOARD

18th April 2024

**Report of the Director of Social Services, Health & Housing -
Andrew Jarrett**

Matter for Information

Wards Affected: All

SOCIAL SERVICES COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

Purpose of Report

To report on the operation of the Directorate's Complaints and Representation procedures from 1st April 2022 - 31st March 2023, including comparisons, where relevant, against activities in previous years.

Executive Summary

Social Services Departments have been required by statute to operate a complaints and representation procedure since 1991. Neath Port Talbot Council operates its procedure in line with Welsh Government guidance.

The Annual Report, attached as Appendix 1, provides Members with a summary of the complaint and representation activities during 2022-23.

Financial Impacts

No Implications.

Integrated Impact Assessment

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

Valleys Communities Impacts

No Implications.

Workforce Impacts

There are no workforce impacts associated with this report.

Legal Impacts

There are no legal impacts associated with this report.

Risk Management Impacts

There are no known risks associated with this item.

Crime and Disorder Impacts

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a duty on the Council in the exercise of its functions to have “due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent:

- a) Crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment);
- b) The misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances in its area; and
- c) Re-offending the area”.

There is no impact under the Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

Counter Terrorism Impacts

There is no impact on the duty to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Impacts

Section 2(1) of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 introduced a general duty where a person exercising relevant functions must have regard (along with all other relevant matters) to the need to remove or minimise any factors which:

- (a) increase the risk of violence against women and girls, or
- (b) exacerbate the impact of such violence on victims.

There is no impact on the above duty.

Consultation

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

Recommendation

This item is for monitoring purposes.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

Not applicable.

Implementation of Decision

Not applicable.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Social Services Complaints and Representations
Annual Report 2022-23.

List of Background Papers

A Guide to Handling Complaints & Representations by Local
Authority Social Services – Welsh Government (August 2014).

Officer Contact

Leighton Jones, P.O. Governance & Policy Support (Designated
Complaints Officer) Tel. No. 01639 763394 email: l.jones@npt.gov.uk

Lisa Cody-Davies, Governance & Policy Support (Complaints Team)
Tel. No. 01639 763445 email: l.cody-davies@npt.gov.uk

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NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL

**SOCIAL SERVICES
COMPLAINTS
AND
REPRESENTATIONS**

**ANNUAL REPORT
2022 / 2023**

**SOCIAL SERVICES
COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS 2022-23**

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7. Statistical information 2022/2023
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1. INTRODUCTION

This report covers the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 and relates to the Children's Services and Adult Services, within the Directorate of Social Services, Health and Housing, which jointly comprise the social services function within Neath Port Talbot Council.

Legislation requires social services authorities to maintain a procedure for considering complaints and representations and the purpose of this report is to provide a review and statistical analysis of the complaints, comments and compliments received by Social Services during the reporting period.

2. WHY DO PEOPLE COMPLAIN?

The most common reasons reported for making a complaint include:-

- to be heard;
- that concerns be recognised, acknowledged and taken seriously;
- that appropriate action be taken to remedy problems and avoid similar incidents in the future;
- to receive an apology.

3. SUMMARY OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Social Services Complaints and Representations Procedure is based upon the good practice guidance issued alongside the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Representation Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014.

The procedure is available to ensure that everyone who makes a complaint about social services in Neath Port Talbot has a right to be listened to properly. Their best interests must be safeguarded and promoted. Their views, wishes and feelings must be heard. Their concerns should be resolved quickly and effectively.

The procedure is a positive response by the Directorate to create an atmosphere of partnership and participation with users of services. They are also established to protect the rights of the service users.

It is the Directorate's policy that all complaints must be resolved as quickly as possible and as close to the point of delivery as is possible. The aim is to resolve complaints, informally at a local level with speed, fairness and understanding.

There are two formal stages to the procedure which covers both adult and children's complaints.

Stage 1: Local Resolution

The policy and procedure aims to ensure that people who complain have their concerns resolved swiftly and, wherever possible, by the people who provide the service locally.

The complainant/service user is provided with the opportunity to discuss their concerns with local staff and management. A response must be provided by the manager within 10 working days of the date of receipt of the complaint. The timescale can be extended with the agreement of the complainant (usually a further 10 working days).

Stage 2: Formal Consideration

Where a complaint cannot be resolved at Stage 1, it will be referred to Stage 2. An Independent Investigating Officer (I.I.O.) is appointed by the Director (or their representative) to investigate the matter. In the case of children's complaints, an Independent Person (I.P.) is also appointed to oversee the investigation process in accordance with statutory requirements. Both individuals are not permitted to be employees of the local authority.

The I.I.O. produces an investigation report. A formal written response (which will include reference to any recommended action(s)) is then provided to the complainant by the Director of Social Services.

Completion of the investigation and the accompanying report should be achieved within the statutory timescale of 25 working days; again, an extension can be made with the agreement of the complainant.

4. THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES

The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales provides an external independent service for the purpose of considering complaints made by members of the public in relation to all local authority services, including social services. The Public Services Ombudsman also has jurisdiction to examine and determine complaints of injustice as a result of maladministration on the part of the local authority.

The Ombudsman will normally require complainants to have sought redress, in the first instance, via the local authority's complaints procedure prior to accepting and investigating a complaint of maladministration on the part of the local authority.

5. MEMBER REFERRALS

The Complaints and Representations Procedure does not preclude the right of an individual to approach their Local Councillor, Assembly Member or Member of Parliament. They undertake an important role in handling concerns and queries that individual constituents may have. Collectively, these are called Member referrals and they can range from comments and queries to complaints.

If an elected Member does not consider it to be appropriate to deal with a concern, the matter can be referred to be dealt with under the Complaints Procedure.

6. SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN AND ADULT PROTECTION

Protecting children and vulnerable adults from abuse has to be the paramount consideration. Child abuse or the abuse of vulnerable adults will include in this context physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, financial or material abuse, and neglect. Appropriate guidance is available relating to both adult and child protection.

Any complaint or representation that raises concerns about child protection the protection of a vulnerable adult should be referred immediately to the appropriate safeguarding officer or where a criminal act is known or suspected, the police. There should be no complaints investigation while there is any chance of compromising the child or adult protection investigations. This does not rule out aspects of the complaint being pursued at a later date where and when this is right.

7. STATISTICAL INFORMATION 2022/2023

Number of Representations Received

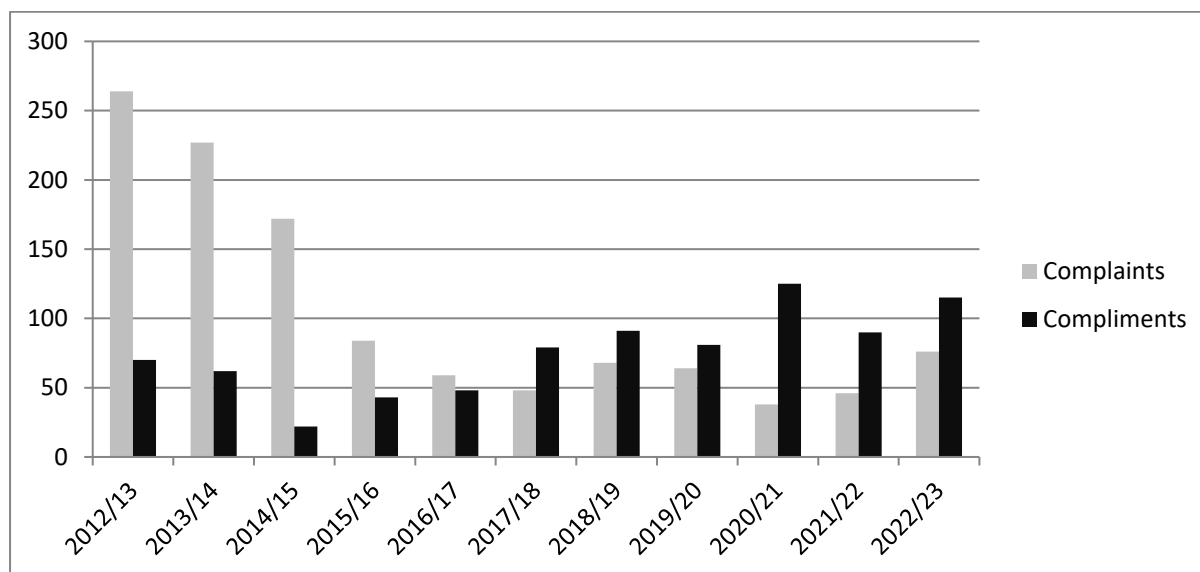
The following information provides details of the number of representations (complaints and compliments), received in relation to the delivery of social services during the reporting period:

Table 1 – Number of Representations Received 2022/2023

	Complaints	Compliments	Total
Adult Services	30	52	82
Children's Services	31	50	81
Business / Corporate	15	13	28

The following table provides a comparison with previous reporting periods.

Table 2 - Number of Representations Received - Year-on-Year Comparison



Stages at which complaints were resolved

Table 3 - Statutory Complaints Procedure 2022/23

	Adult Services	Children’s Services	Business / Corporate
Stage 1	25	29	14
Stage 2	0	0	3

Timescales for Completion of Complaints (Stage 1)

As mentioned earlier in the report, the timescale for completion of Stage 1 complaints is 10 working days, with a further 5 working days for a written response (15 working days in total).

Table 4 - Timescales for Completion of Stage 1 Complaints

	Response within (working days):	
	2022/23 15 days	2022/23 15+ days
Adult Services	13	12
Children’s Services	13	16
Business / Corporate	8	6
Total	34	34

As can be seen from Table 4, 50% of formal Stage 1 complaints during 2022/23 were responded to within the agreed extension time.

It should be noted that there are genuine reasons for being unable to meet the prescribed timescales, for example, some cases can take longer due to the complexity of the issues raised and the need to ensure that cases are thoroughly investigated. In these cases, an extension to the timescale (of a further 10 working days) is normally agreed with the complainant.

Despite the relatively low performance, it has improved year-on-year, 2020/21 at 40% and 2021/22 at 46%. The Complaints Team work closely with officers to ensure complaints are responded to in the most timely and efficient way possible.

Outcomes

The Directorate records outcomes to complaints, therefore, each complaint outcome is generally identified within one of the following categories:-

- Upheld
- Partially Upheld
- Not Upheld

The focus upon outcomes is seen as an important aspect and is utilised in measuring performance, learning from complaints and continuously improving services. Outcomes for each service area have been recorded as follows:

Table 5 – Complaint Outcomes 2022/23

	Adult Services	Children’s Services	Business Strategy
Not Upheld	10	21	10
Partially Upheld	6	3	1
Upheld	6	4	3
Other	3	1	0

A total of 13 complaints were upheld in 2022/23 which equates to 19% of complaints received. A further 10 (15%) were partially upheld.

How Complaints were resolved

A variety of methods were used to resolve complaints. Each complaint was considered separately and the most appropriate method of resolution applied. Methods include:

- liaison by complaints officers with senior managers to identify/agree immediate resolution;
- managers meeting with complainants to discuss their concerns;

- provision of explanation (written) as to reasons for decisions;
- provision of an apology (written), where appropriate;
- action taken to change a decision;
- independent investigation; and
- mediation.

All statutory complaints received a written response offering an explanation, outlining recommendations and/or identifying corrective action. Those complaints found to have been upheld or partially upheld received a written apology, where appropriate.

Complaints found to have been not upheld did not normally involve provision of a written apology, although, in some cases, it was appropriate to apologise for a particular aspect if there was a need to focus upon individual learning issues highlighted as a result of the complaint.

Nature/Range of Complaints

Examples of the most common complaints received were as follows:

- lack of / poor communication
- staff attitude / conduct
- disagreement with assessment / care plan / reports / statements
- unacceptable delays

Corporate Complaints Procedure

There are instances whereby aspects of a complaint do not fall within the remit of the social services statutory complaints procedure and in such cases, the Authority's Corporate Complaints Procedure is utilised.

Complaints Resolved at the pre-Complaints Procedure stage

The Complaints Team also carries out a significant amount of work in dealing with and resolving concerns at source, for example, in cases whereby the issues raised are able to be immediately resolved and do not require being formally addressed at Stage 1. This involves Complaints Team staff ensuring that they liaise quickly with appropriate Team Managers to identify and agree swift actions to be taken so as to resolve concerns immediately.

This is an area where significant improvements have been made by the individual service areas to ensure these complaints are dealt with appropriately and effectively.

Welsh Language

There have been NO complaints received during this reporting period that have been communicated via the medium of Welsh, nor has there been any complaints in relation to the Welsh language/Welsh standards.

Compliments

Compliments are also regarded as important information that can be used to identify good practice. Compliments are therefore reported centrally and the statistics included in management reports.

Table 6 – Compliment Examples

A selection of the compliments received during 2022/23 are set out below:

<p>Adult Services</p> <p><i>“Firstly, thank you from the bottom of my heart for the assistance and problem resolution that you provided us yesterday. I will never be able to thank you enough. We have only had you assigned to us less than a month and since then your care, explanation and support has been immense.”</i></p> <p><i>Service user to the NPT Hospital Social Work Team</i></p>
<p><i>“Hi X, I just wanted to express my gratitude for everything X has done for our family. X is the social worker for my elderly parents, X and X. X has really helped ease the stress of a difficult few weeks for our family and we are so grateful.”</i></p> <p><i>Relatives in relation to Afan Network Team</i></p>
<p>Children’s Services</p> <p><i>“I would like to just make a few positive words about X. She has been absolutely fantastic with my son X. She is so confident in her role and not only has she helped X she is also helping myself and my wife X. We have a LOT of faith in X and trust her extensively. No matter what we have called her about she has shown total compassion to us and done what she thinks is right for us and mostly X. We simply can’t thank her enough. She is a very polite helpful well-mannered lady. Can’t say many more words about how satisfied with her services and help.</i></p> <p><i>I know you as a team don’t get much praise but I am so pleased with the service most of all X..”</i></p> <p><i>A parent in relation to the Child Disability Team</i></p>

"My 3rd and final hero is my social worker X, she is a hero because she put a stop to the physical and verbal actions that shouldn't have been happening in my household. X is a really trustworthy & helpful person and even though I get really mad with her sometimes I truly do appreciate her. Even though I can wait to get rid of her to have a normal family that doesn't have a social worker, I am grateful for her."

A child (age 11) regarding her Social Worker, Dyffryn CCT

Business Strategy

"X and X wish to acknowledge the support and advice received from NPTCBC's Complaints Team, X and X. This has been totally sincere and consistent throughout the complaint process. They would like the local authority to formally recognise the positive work that X and X have done in this case."

Complainant to Complaints Team

*"Hello X,
It goes without saying, how very grateful my wife X and myself are to you personally for submitting the very successful grant application to Macmillan on our behalf. I can assure you it will be spent wisely.*

It is very humbling to us to receive this money from Macmillan as it is the first time this has happened. For over 50 years we have volunteered for various charities shaking the tin etc. cancer being one of those charities. It all started in the early sixties, first it was Mencap, Mind, Cancer, but our longest serving charity was Muscular Dystrophy. The reason being X who are no longer with us suffered from this cruel illness.

But life goes on. But once again we are very grateful to you X, and to Macmillan for your support. Yours Thankfully".

Service user to Macmillan Welfare Benefits Team

8. LESSONS LEARNED

Evaluation of the information generated from complaints has highlighted a range of actions to be taken to improve services for clients. Action plans, where necessary, are formulated to reflect the actions agreed as part of the resolution process. Monitoring of the action plans is undertaken by each service to ensure that actions are implemented.

9. ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2022/2023

Achievements during 2022/23 include:

- Developed arrangements surrounding independent investigators, including a wider pool of resources;
- Regular attendance at Social Work Induction sessions;
- Rollout of Ombudsman training across front-line managers;
- Attendance at All Wales Complaints Officer Group.

10. OBJECTIVES FOR 2023/2024

Plans for 2023/24 include:

- Data cleansing exercise surrounding current Complaints database, in line with records retention policies;
- Assisting in the development of Children's Services' Complaints literature;
- Preparation for implementation of new, external database;
- Supporting the introduction of *Llais* Advocacy Service;

11. CONTACTS

Designated Complaints Officer,

Neath Port Talbot Council,
Social Services, Health and Housing Directorate,
Neath Civic Centre, Neath, SA11 3QZ
Tel: 01639 763445 email: complaints@npt.gov.uk.

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

1 Ffordd Y Hen Gae,
Pencoed, Bridgend, CF35 5LJ
Tel: 03007 900203
website: www.ombudsman.wales

Llais Advocacy Service

Neath Port Talbot & Swansea Region,
Cimla Hospital, Cimla,
Neath SA11 3SU
Tel: 01639 683490
website: www.llaiswales.org/in-your-area/neath-port-talbot-and-swansea

Care Inspectorate Wales

Welsh Government office,
Sarn Mynach,
Llandudno Junction, LL31 9RZ
Tel. 0300 7900 126 email: ciw@gov.wales

Children's Commissioner for Wales

Llewellyn House,
Harbourside Business Park,
Harbourside Road,
Port Talbot, SA13 1SB
Tel. 01792 765600
Email : post@childcomwales.org.uk

Older Person's Commissioner for Wales

Cambrian Buildings,
Mount Stuart Square, Butetown,
Cardiff, CF10 5FL
Tel: 03442 640670
email: ask@olderpeoplewales.com

Leighton Jones
Designated Complaints Officer
July 2023



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL SOCIAL SERVICES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY CABINET BOARD

18th April 2024

Report of the Head of Housing and Communities – Chelé Zandra Howard

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected All Wards

POLICY ON RENT AND SERVICE CHARGE ARREARS PREVENTION AND RECOVERY

Purpose of the Report

To seek approval to implement a rent and service charge arrears prevention and recovery policy for tenants living in Temporary Accommodation (“TA”).

Executive Summary

This report requests permission to establish a policy with regard to preventing tenants going into arrears on their rent and service charges for TA, and to recover those sums where arrears have occurred.

Background

Neath Port Talbot Council (“the Council”) have a number of statutory duties under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 in regard to the prevention and alleviation of homelessness.

Over the last 24 months, the Council has seen a significant increase in people requiring TA in order to alleviate their homelessness situation. This is due to multiple national and system wide factors that impact on people's ability to access and retain affordable housing, alongside new legislative and strategic requirements from Welsh Government ("WG") that have increased the range of people owed a statutory homelessness duty.

The Council's homelessness budget for 2023/24 is anticipated to overspend by £1.3 million, this overspend is driven by high demand for TA and this demand is anticipated to increase without putting in measures to prevent people from becoming homeless and to quickly move those that become homeless into permanent housing.

As part of improving budget management it is recommended that the Council implements an arrears prevention and recovery policy. This will also improve tenants' individual accountability as well as promote budgeting skills.

The process for debt recovery of sums owed would be in line with the Council's debt and enforcement process and in line with the Council's Charter for the Collection of Debts. This process would be overseen by the Council's Debtors' Team (Background Paper 1 and 2).

In addition, Landlords often require evidence that a prospective tenant has a good history of making regular rental payments. By promoting the prevention of arrears occurring, this policy will enable households to evidence their ability to make payments and maintain a tenancy to Landlords, which will help to prevent individuals from becoming 'stuck' in TA.

This policy will also help those households that may have developed rent arrears evidence to a new Landlord that they are now in a more stable position and can make regular payments against their debts, again enabling these individuals to be able to move out of TA and into a more permanent home more quickly.

The existing policy was first implemented in 2013 and reflected legislation at the time, namely Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. The draft policy appended to this report has been updated to reflect current legislation, namely the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

Financial Impacts

The high numbers of people currently in TA is creating a significant cost pressure for the Council and whilst the Council receives some income in way of Housing Benefit, this does not cover the full cost of TA provision.

The Council's homelessness budget for 2023/24 is anticipated to overspend by £1.3 million, this overspend is driven by high demand for TA and this demand is anticipated to increase without putting in measures to prevent people from becoming homeless and to quickly move those that become homeless into permanent housing. A strategy to reduce homelessness was presented to Members on the 25th January 2024 (Background Paper 3).

It is anticipated that the implementation of this policy will also contribute to the mitigation of homelessness budget overspend.

Integrated Impact Assessment

A first stage impact assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016). The first stage impact assessment has indicated that a more in-depth assessment was required.

An overview of the Integrated Impact Assessment has been included below in summary form only and it is essential that Members read the Integrated Impact Assessment, which is attached to the report at Appendix 1, for the purposes of the meeting.

The aim of the Rent and Service Charge Arrears Prevention and

Recovery Policy is to prevent debt from arising in the first place, reduce its occurrence and recover monies wherever possible. As such it promotes safeguarding of vulnerable clients and contributes towards service sustainability to meet the outcomes of a growing population with housing needs.

Valleys Communities Impacts

It is not anticipated that this policy will have any specific or disproportionate impact on valley communities.

Workforce Impacts

Establishing this policy will have a positive impact on the workforce as there will be a framework in place with regards to managing situations where a person is in arrears with their rent and/or service charges for TA.

Legal Impacts

The policy has been established in line with the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and existing Council debt recovery policies and procedures.

Risk Management Impacts

Failure to implement the policy will leave vulnerable groups without support to prevent arrears accumulating in the first place or an adequate means of recovering debt when it has been accrued. It will also require financial savings to be made by other means, as well as:

- Risk to the Council's budget if debts are allowed to accrue;
- Risk of disenabling those that require TA and people losing daily living skills such as budgeting;
- Risk that people in TA may be unable to find long term accommodation due to an inability to evidence a history of paying rent or make payments towards debts.

Consultation

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations

Having had due regard to the integrated impact assessment, it is recommended that the Council implement a Rent and Service Charge Arrears Prevention and Recovery Policy.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

To ensure that there is a transparent and equitable process to preventing rent and service charge arrears and to recover those sums where arrears have occurred.

Implementation of Decision

The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Rent and Service Charge Arrears Prevention and Recovery Policy;

Appendix 2: IIA Frist Stage Assessment.

List of Background Papers

Background Paper 1: NPT CBC Debt and Enforcement Policy - <https://beta.npt.gov.uk/business/business-rates/debt-and-enforcement-agents/>

Background Paper 2: NPT CBC Charter for the Collection of Debts - <https://beta.npt.gov.uk/business/business-rates/debt-and-enforcement-agents/charter-for-the-collection-of-debts/>

Background Paper 3: Housing and Homelessness Strategic Plan 2024-2027 - [App.1 Housing and Homelssness Plan 2024.pdf \(npt.gov.uk\)](#)

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Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

Rent and Service Charge Arrears Prevention and Recovery Policy

April 2024

This document is also available in Welsh

A Place to Call Home

www.npt.gov.uk

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1. Scope

This Policy describes the approach required by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (“the Council”) to enforce the terms of the licence/tenancy agreements of people in occupation of temporary accommodation granted to them by the Council in discharge of its duties under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

Specifically, this concerns the prevention and recovery of rent and service charge arrears. The term “arrears” covers rent, water and other utilities and service charges incurred for occupation of the temporary accommodation.

2. Legal Framework

Part 2 of [The Housing \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) (HWA 2014), and regulations made and Codes of Practice issued under it, provides legislation on homelessness. It replaced [Part VII of the Housing Act 1996](#) and reforms existing homelessness law in Wales by placing new or wider duties on local housing authorities.

The HWA 2014 sets out how to improve the supply, quality and standards of housing in Wales. This includes a strengthened duty on Local Authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent and relieve homelessness.

Other key legislation includes:

- Equality Act 2010
- Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016
- Welsh Government Financial Inclusion Strategy for Wales 2016
- Civil Procedural Rules – Pre-action Protocol for Possession Claims by Social Landlords in County Court

3. Introduction

The Council have a number of statutory duties under the HWA 2014 in regards to the prevention and alleviation of homelessness. The Council is committed to promoting and encouraging sustainable licences/tenancies for tenants. This document outlines the Council’s policy for the prevention and management of current and former tenant rent and service charge arrears.

4. Objective and Aims of the Policy

The objective of this policy is to ensure that income collection is effectively managed and continuously improved. Further, this policy provides direction in supporting tenants to pay their rent and the steps the Council will take to support tenants throughout each stage of their tenancy to pay their rent.

This Policy aims to ensure:

- Tenants are prevented from getting into arrears (increased early intervention)
- Sustained reduction in rent and service charge arrears owed by tenants
- Tenants have the information, support and advice they need to maximise their income and prevent or minimise debt
- Helping tenants sustain their tenancies and prevent homelessness
- Services are accessible, transparent and accountable
- Tenants are treated fairly and equally
- Contact maintained at all stages of the recovery process, particularly vulnerable tenants
- High quality, value for money service
- Sustainable income collection

5. Background

The Council has seen a significant increase in people requiring temporary accommodation (TA) in order to alleviate their homelessness situation. This is due to multiple national and system wide factors that impact on people's ability to access and retain affordable housing, alongside new legislative and strategic requirements from Welsh Government ("WG") that have increased the range of people owed a statutory homelessness duty.

In the interests of good financial management and accountability, the Council needs to demonstrate to our residents, clients, elected members and council tax payers that it collects all sums due as a result of the Council meeting a person's eligible housing needs, from whatever source, as effectively and efficiently as possible.

This policy describes the approach that the Council will take in managing and recovering sums due to the Council in respect of rent and service charges for temporary accommodation.

Effective financial management is fundamental to being able to fund the quality of services the Council provides. The best method of debt collection is the prevention of debt arising and this policy covers both prevention and recovery.

6. Council Responsibilities

- The Council may alter the rent and service charges from time to time and this is reviewed each year in line with Welsh Government policy.
- The Council will give tenants a minimum of four weeks' notice of any changes.
- The Council also has the discretion to offer additional services, which have to be paid for as part of rent or additional service charges, which have to be agreed by the Housing Manager. However, tenants will be consulted before new services are introduced and are given an opportunity to end their tenancy before new services and charges are introduced.
- The Council aims to ensure that tenants are able to pay their rent and service charges as easily as possible. Payment can be made by phone/debit card or standing order.
- If the Council is aware that a tenant has difficulty in reading or understanding information given regarding their rent account and arrears, reasonable steps will be taken to ensure that the tenant understands any information given. This may include carrying out additional home visits and signposting to appropriate advocacy and support services. The Council will also provide translation and interpreting services, and information in alternative formats.
- In delivering the policy, the Council adhered to the Pre-Action Protocol for Possession Claims by Social Landlords, which aims to:
 - Encourage more pre-action contact and exchange of information between landlords and tenants
 - If possible, enable landlords and tenants to avoid litigation and settle disputes out of court
 - If court proceedings are necessary, enable an effective use of court's time and resources

7. Tenant Responsibilities

- All tenants will sign a licence agreement initially followed by a standard occupation contract (if appropriate, based on time as resident in temporary accommodation), which is a legal document that contains the terms and

conditions of the licence/tenancy. The licence/tenancy agreement includes a condition on the tenant to pay rent and service charges on time.

- Joint tenants are each fully responsible for the payment of rent, service charges and any arrears.
- If a tenant is eligible for Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, it is the tenant's responsibility to apply for these benefits. Tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit also have a responsibility to notify the Council of any change of circumstances; and, tenants in receipt of Universal Credit must notify any change in circumstances to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It is especially important for tenants to contact the Council, through their allocated Support Accommodation Officer, at the earliest opportunity if they are experiencing difficulties.

8. Application of the Policy

In all circumstances, the Council will ensure that the most effective measures are put in place to prevent the accrual of rent and service charge arrears. This ensures the sustainment of tenancies and reduced costs further down the line. This will always be the Council's first approach to rent collection and is the key emphasis of this policy.

Prevention and early intervention

Measures to prevent arrears will be taken at the earliest opportunity. Preventing arrears is important as rental and service charge income is vital to the delivery of the Housing Service. Arrears are not only a financial burden on the Council, but are financially and socially damaging to the individual, as they risk incurring court costs, being unable to obtain credit if they receive a county court judgment, and ultimately they risk eviction and the loss of their home.

Pre-sign up stage

Before the sign up stage, an Officer of the Housing Options Service will meet the prospective tenant and advise on the rent and service charge payment methods and, if applicable, to apply for Universal Credit or Housing Benefit. The pre-sign up appointment also determines if the prospective tenant has any support needs with any other agencies.

Applicants will be advised on their interim placement by either a Housing Options Officer or Support and Accommodation Officer depending where they are in the process. They will also be advised of the need to complete a required

Housing Benefit application form; the possibility of any cost implications if they are not eligible for full Housing Benefit or non-completion of a Housing Benefit application; as well as any associated service charges depending on their placement.

Support needs will not be assessed until the individual is allocated a Support and Accommodation Officer and support plan completed.

Sign up stage

After an offer has been accepted, a Housing Options Service Officer will meet with the prospective tenant to sign the licence/tenancy agreement/occupation contract and hand over the keys. During this time the Housing Officer will:

- Remind the tenant of their responsibility to pay rent and service charges on time and explain the circumstances of non-payment
- Ensure the tenant provides details for payment of their rent and service charges over the phone
- If applicable, ensure that the tenant has applied for Housing Benefit or Universal Credit (housing cost element)

Ongoing

- The Council commits to working with tenants to establish their individual circumstances and to provide support where necessary. We commit to working with other internal, external and relevant partners and organisations to provide support, understand their circumstances and identify opportunities to maximise tenants' incomes, as appropriate. At the tenancy offer and sign-up stage, all new tenants will be clearly made aware of their obligations to pay rent and other charges and the importance of making regular payments, and payment methods will be discussed.
- A wide range of communication tools are utilised as appropriate for each tenant's needs. Tenancies will be monitored in order to identify any early issues with rent payments in order to prevent arrears accruing.
- The Council will actively promote standing orders as the preferred method of payment and card payments made by phone will also be an option for payment.
- The Council will ensure that consideration is given to the Equalities Act 2010, by undertaking individual Equality Impact Assessments, where

appropriate, to ensure that tenants' vulnerabilities are identified in order to ensure effective support mechanisms are introduced.

- The Council will run regular publicity and communication campaigns with the purpose of informing tenants of the support and assistance available to minimise arrears.

Current Tenant Arrears

- Arrears recovery will focus on personal contact at the earliest opportunity, ensuring high quality support and advice is readily available as well as informing tenants of the debt and consequences of non-payment in writing.
- All communication with tenants will make it clear that rent and service charges are a priority debt and written correspondence will highlight the seriousness of particular arrears situations. Regular letters will be issued highlighting the importance, as well as ongoing discussions with the allocated support worker.
- All members of staff responsible for the collection of rent and arrears recovery will receive the appropriate training.
- The Council will balance resources in order that there is both a proactive and a reactive approach to rent and service charge recovery.
- The Council will use the most cost-effective method to recover the debt depending on the amount owed.
- The Council will ensure that tenants have access to appropriate financial/debt advice.
- In cases where arrears continue to increase and tenants do not engage with officers to resolve the situation, the Council will commence legal action to repossess the property. At all stages of the legal process, tenants will be informed of the action being taken, the implications of the action and offered continued help and advice from Council Officers and external partners.
- Failure by the tenant to engage with officers may also result in the Council discharging its statutory homeless duty to the household, resulting in an end to all assistance to that individual/household.
- The Council will comply with the requirements of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 for claims relating to rent arrears in social housing. The aim is to encourage more pre-action contact and exchange of information with the

intention that litigation is avoided where possible. Repossession of a property as a result of rent arrears will always be a last resort.

- The Council will always request that court costs are awarded against the tenant and that a money judgment is included in the Order for Possession.
- If a Suspended Possession Order is granted and subsequently breached by the tenant, no more than one opportunity will be given for the tenant to remedy the breach. Should the breach not be rectified quickly or of the order is breached on more than once occasion, an application will be made to the County Court for a Warrant of Eviction.

Former Tenant Arrears

- The former tenant debt recovery process starts when a tenant's period of occupation has ended
- The Council will pursue the recovery of former tenant arrears in accordance with the Former Tenants procedures.
- In cases where payments are not forthcoming and Officers are unable to trace the whereabouts of a former tenant, consideration shall be given to writing off the debt in accordance with financial regulations. When a debt has been written off, it will no longer be shown as outstanding in the Council's accounts. However, the debt remains due to the Council in law and if the tenant is subsequently traced, the debt will be reinstated.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

A DHP may be awarded when a local authority considers that the claimant requires further financial assistance towards housing costs and is in receipt of either Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. This may include tenants affected by the spare room subsidy or benefit cap. Officers will provide support and advice to tenants in making applications for this funding where appropriate. Any applications will be considered by the Revenues and Benefits department in accordance with the Council's Discretionary Housing Payment Policy. The Council recognises the adverse impact of the current economic position and how this affects tenants due to a reduction in income and job losses. To support the most vulnerable tenants who find themselves in financially difficult positions, we aim to ensure tenants are in receipt of all benefits they are entitled to, such as DHP.

9. Complaints / Appeals Procedure

Complaints in relation to the implementation of this policy will be managed in line with the normal complaints procedure.

Complaints should be addressed to:

Social Services Complaints Officer
Social Services, Health & Housing
Neath Port Talbot Council
Civic Centre Neath
SA11 3QZ

Tel: 01639 763445, or via email: complaints@npt.gov.uk

Details of the complaints procedure can also be accessed online via the Council's website www.npt.gov.uk, which is available in accessible formats and different languages.

If a person believes that there are exceptional circumstances which mean that they are unable to pay the full amount requested, this can be assessed on a case by case basis by the Housing Options manager and a lower amount may be agreed in line with the outcome of an affordability assessment.

10. Review of the Policy

The policy reflects the Council's current position and will be reviewed annually.

Glossary of terms

- DHP – a Discretionary Housing Payment is subject to eligibility criteria and can be awarded to help with housing costs. You can only get DHP if you are eligible to claim either Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit.
- LHA / Local Housing Allowance – This is used to work out how much Housing Benefit that can be paid as rent.
- Licence / Occupancy agreement – An agreement signed by the tenant, it will clearly set out responsibilities for the tenant and the Council.
- Licence fee – A fee charged for the use and occupation of the property. The licence fee is equivalent to the household's reduction in housing benefit due to excess income up to a capped amount. The capped amount will be in line with the current Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates.
- Provider charge – The cost the Council pays to private sector providers of temporary accommodation.
- Subsidy gap – the limit the Government will pay through Housing benefit towards the cost of Temporary Accommodation, any difference or gap is covered by the Council.
- TA – Temporary Accommodation, Accommodation used to house clients who are homeless and owed a statutory duty under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.
- Tenants – Licence holders within temporary accommodation, assured shorthold tenancies are never used for temporary accommodation.

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Impact Assessment - First Stage

1. Details of the initiative

Initiative description and summary: Policy on Rent Arrears Prevention and Recovery
Service Area: Housing and Communities
Directorate: Social Services, Health & Housing

2. Does the initiative affect:

	Yes	No
Service users	x	
Staff		x
Wider community		x
Internal administrative process only		x

3. Does the initiative impact on people because of their:

	Yes	No	None/ Negligible	Don't Know	Impact H/M/L	Reasons for your decision (including evidence)/How might it impact?
Age		x				The policy will apply to people who pay rent and/or service charges as part of their agreement when staying in temporary accommodation (TA). The aim is to prevent individuals accruing payment arrears in the first place and, where it this has happened, to provide the Council with the means of recovering any debt accrued.
Disability		x				
Gender Reassignment		x				
Marriage/Civil Partnership		x				
Pregnancy/Maternity		x				
Race		x				The means test for Housing benefit is outside the scope of this policy and is not applied by Housing Options. The
Religion/Belief		x				

Sex		x			
Sexual orientation		x			<p>eligibility for Housing Benefit is based on a person's income, while eligibility for housing is linked to individual need and as such is not linked to a persons protected characteristics. This means that the policy will not impact on people because of their protected characteristic(s).</p> <p>People that will be required to pay a fee for TA would have paid rent for accommodation prior to accessing TA and so this policy will not result in any changed position or impact for the household.</p> <p>The required fees are in line with Local Housing Allowance Rate (LHA), which is a proportionate, equitable and fair way of implementing a charge and ensures that a household would not be put at any disadvantage, given that the household would need to pay rent for accommodation if they did not require TA.</p> <p>If the Council move a household into a TA property with more rooms than is required due to a lack of available suitable sized properties, the Council would align its charge to the LHA rate for accommodation with the required number of rooms (e.g. if the Council moved a single person into a two bedded TA unit because there were no available one bedded TA units, the person would be charged the same amount as the LHA for a one bed property – i.e. we would not implement a 'bedroom tax'). This means that a household will not be placed at a disadvantage which might give rise to this policy being applied.</p> <p>Complaints in relation to the implementation of this policy will be managed in line with the normal complaints procedure. If a person believes that there are exceptional circumstances which mean that they are unable to pay the full amount requested, this can be assessed on a case by case basis by the Housing</p>

					<p>Options manager and a lower amount may be agreed in line with the outcome of an affordability assessment.</p> <p>This policy may also impact on those people that are eligible Housing Benefit but have failed to apply for eligible benefits where it is deemed reasonable to do so. A decision to implement the policy in this type of situation will be undertaken on a case by case basis to ensure that it does not have a disproportionate impact on the person's welfare.</p> <p>The policy is likely to have a positive impact on people that it applies to, as it will enable households to evidence that they are able to make regular rental payments to a prospective landlord and will prevent households from losing their daily living skills, for example budgeting household costs. This should make it easier and quicker for the household to find a permanent home and reduce the length of time they require TA. It will also reduce the likelihood of individuals falling into arrears.</p> <p>Preventing and managing rent arrears will have a positive impact on the current homelessness budget overspend and will support long term sustainability in respect of the Council's ability to meet demand for homelessness services. A sustainable budget will have a positive impact on all those that require support from Housing Options, including those with a protected characteristic.</p>
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4. Does the initiative impact on:

	Yes	No	None/ Negligible	Don't know	Impact H/M/L	Reasons for your decision (including evidence used) / How might it impact?
People's opportunities to use the Welsh language		X				A copy of the policy will be made available in Welsh.
Treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English		X				

5. Does the initiative impact on biodiversity:

	Yes	No	None/ Negligible	Don't know	Impact H/M/L	Reasons for your decision (including evidence) / How might it impact?
To maintain and enhance biodiversity		x				Not Applicable.
To promote the resilience of ecosystems, i.e. supporting protection of the wider environment, such as air quality, flood alleviation, etc.		x				Not Applicable.

6. Does the initiative embrace the sustainable development principle (5 ways of working):

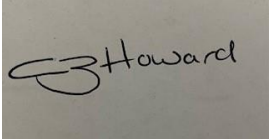
	Yes	No	Details
Long term - how the initiative supports the long term well-being of people	x		<p>The policy will help prevent households from losing their daily living skills, such as budgeting, which will have a positive impact in the long term as they will be able to move quickly into permanent housing and be at less risk of repeat episodes of homelessness and rent arrears.</p> <p>Preventing and managing rent arrears will have a positive impact on the current homelessness budget overspend and will support long term sustainability in respect of the Council's ability to meet demand for homelessness services. A sustainable budget will have a positive impact on all those that require support from Housing Options, including those with a protected characteristic.</p>
Integration - how the initiative impacts upon our wellbeing objectives	x		<p>The policy supports Well-being Objective 2: All our communities will be thriving and sustainable – by ensuring that people that require TA do not lose their daily living skills, such as budgeting household costs, which will then help to ensure that they will be able to move quickly into permanent housing and be at less risk of repeat episodes of homelessness. The policy takes account of the need to investigate reasons as to why payments have not been made. Furthermore, under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 it promotes sustainability of services. This collectively contributes to the well-being objectives.</p>
Involvement - how people have been involved in developing the initiative	x		<p>Consultation with people that have lived experience of homelessness have highlighted the impact of remaining in TA for extended periods of time on their mental well-being.</p>
Collaboration - how we have worked with other services/organisations to find shared sustainable solutions	x		<p>Landlords have informed us that one of the reasons why they refuse to provide a tenancy to a household in TA is that the household is unable to evidence that they are 'tenancy ready'. By making regular payments to the Council for the provision of TA, it will better demonstrate to landlords that a</p>

			household is able to sustain a tenancy and is therefore 'tenancy ready'. The policy Various staff representatives have been involved in the development of the policy, including Housing, Commissioning, Finance and Legal Services.
Prevention - how the initiative will prevent problems occurring or getting worse	x		The aim of the Policy is to prevent debt from arising in the first place, reduce its occurrence and recover monies wherever possible.

7. Declaration - based on above assessment (tick as appropriate):

A full impact assessment (second stage) is not required	x
Reasons for this conclusion	
<p>People that will be required to pay a fee for TA would have paid rent for accommodation prior to accessing TA and so this policy will not result in any changed position or impact for the household.</p> <p>The required fee is in line with Local Housing Allowance Rate (LHA), which is a proportionate, equitable and fair way of implementing a charge and ensures that a household would not be put at any disadvantage, given that the household would need to pay rent for accommodation if they did not require TA.</p> <p>The policy is likely to have a positive impact on people that it applies to, as it will enable households to evidence that they are able to make regular rental payments to a prospective landlord and will prevent households from losing their daily living skills, for example budgeting household costs. This should make it easier and quicker for the household to find a permanent home and reduce the length of time they require TA. It will also reduce the likelihood of individuals falling into arrears.</p> <p>Preventing and managing rent arrears will have a positive impact on the current homelessness budget overspend and will support long term sustainability in respect of the Council's ability to meet demand for homelessness services. A sustainable budget will have a positive impact on all those that require support from Housing Options, including those with a protected characteristic.</p>	

A full impact assessment (second stage) is required	
Reasons for this conclusion	

	Name	Position	Signature	Date
Completed by	Andrew Potts	Commissioning Officer	A.Potts	06/03/24
Signed off by	Chelé Zandra Howard	Head of Housing & Communities		07/03/24

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Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL NEATH PORT TALBOT SOCIAL CARE HEALTH & WELL-BEING CABINET BOARD

18th April 2024

Report of the Head of Adult Services – A. Thomas

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected All Wards

GRANT ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF WARM AND WELCOMING SPACES SPF SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES GRANT FUNDING

Purpose of the Report

To request that the Head of Adult Services be given delegated authority to award monies comprising the Sustainable Communities Growth Fund (SCGF) and enter into grant agreements with several organisations to tackle the cost-of-living crisis through the provision of warm and welcoming spaces across the Neath Port Talbot Area.

Executive Summary

Neath Port Talbot Council (“The Council”) is committed to supporting local resident in need of help and support during the cost-of-living crisis. One element of the support being offered is the provision of warm and welcome spaces for which the Council successfully received a £30,000 grant from the SCGF (Levelling up Fund).

To allow for prompt allocation of the funding to successful applicants, permission is requested for the Head of Adult Services to be given delegated authority to enter into grant agreements with those

organisations whose applications best meet the warm and welcome spaces funding requirements.

Background

The Council submitted a successful bid for £30,000 from the SCGF as part of the Levelling up monies. This one-off fund is to support local communities to develop (or expand and enhance existing) warm spaces as places where individuals are provided with a welcome, accessible, safe and warm environment.

Warm spaces are intended as places in local communities where people can find a safe and warm environment during the day to reduce isolation and loneliness and help people facing poverty and stay as well as possible.

The funding provides the Council with a unique opportunity to work with partners, (voluntary, faith groups and community organisations) to develop (or expand and enhance existing) warm and welcome spaces, based on local need.

Best practice indicates that to be effective warm spaces need to consider the following elements:

- Travel to and from the venue is affordable.
- Providing a purpose for people to attend. Whereby the warm space can offer something people want to engage with, such as cooking, crafts, exercise.
- The provision is part of a wider package of support. The warm space is an opportunity to signpost to other support, from mental health services and help with benefits to giving people energy advice and warm packs.
- People are made to feel cared for. A space should be welcoming as well as warm.

- Link into/compliment wider community activities, to provide a co-ordinated approach to tackle poverty and cost of living.

The application process is due to be launched in May 2024 and will be open for applications until 30th July. This opportunity will be circulated directly to organisations who have registered their warm space with the Council. A directory of Warm Hubs has been compiled and is available for people to access via the Council's website.

- Applications will be evaluated by a panel against the following criterion.
- Based in Neath Port Talbot or directly benefit the people of Neath Port Talbot.
- Be a constituted community group, a registered charity or not for profit organisation.
- Have aims and objectives in line with the grant scheme.
- Have a bank account in the name of the group/organisation with at least two unrelated people to approve transactions.
- Be willing to share your experiences and demonstrate how the funding has benefited the organisation and those that attend.
- Evidence a public acknowledgement of the funding using appropriate logos of all funding partners. All logos will be provided with the grant offer letter.
- Only one grant application per group or organisation will be considered for this grant.

The panel will consist of representatives from across the Council, including Social Services, and the Education Directorate and external strategic partner, NPT Council for Voluntary Services (CVS), and a service user representative. Each application will be assessed on its merits and in context of provision across Neath Port Talbot.

It is requested that the Head of Adult Services be granted delegated authority to award funding to, and enter into agreements with, those organisations that the panel have evaluated as best meets the requirements of the Warm and Welcome Spaces SPF Sustainable Communities Grant Funding and local provision.

Financial Impacts

Approval of these proposals will not have an adverse impact on the Council's base budget as the successful bids will be allocated monies from the SCGF.

Integrated Impact Assessment

A first stage impact assessment (Appendix 2) has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

The first stage assessment has indicated that a more in-depth assessment is not required. A summary is included below:

- The proposal brings additional resources to support vulnerable people and there will be no reduction in services already provided.
- The warm and welcome spaces initiative is designed to support people to address many of the challenges experienced by groups referred to within the equality legislation.
- Warm and welcome spaces are required to be inclusive and accessible to all people regardless of disability and care and support needs. Bidders will need to demonstrate how they will ensure this.
- Biodiversity not applicable to this proposal
- The proposal is in line with the 5 ways of working.

Valleys Communities Impacts

No impact – the proposed bids have no spatial impact on our valleys communities and does not link to the impacts identified in the Cabinet's

response to the Council's Task and Finish Group's recommendations on the Valleys.

Although, this proposal is not linked to the above policy, it will give valley communities the opportunity to submit applications for activities that will strengthen community assets and local people.

Workforce Impacts

No implications.

Legal Impacts

The funding is subject to SCGF grant conditions, with which the Council is obliged to comply. The process of the award of the funding by the Council via the Warm and Welcome Spaces will be in line with the grant conditions. The allocation of the funding will require a grant agreement which will oblige the recipient to comply with the grant conditions. The grant agreement will entail the recipient only being permitted to use the grant monies for the specific purposes for which they are made available by the Council. The Council will have the right to claw back monies, if they are not used or if misused.

Grants are outside of the procurement regime and are excluded from the Council's Contract Procedure Rules under rule 7.1.21.

Risk Management Impacts

No risk management impacts.

Other Impacts

Organisations may submit applications for projects that could have a positive impact on the Council meeting its wider general duties such as, Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015.

Consultation

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations

For the Head of Adult Services to be provided delegated authority to award monies comprising the SPF SCG Fund and enter into grant agreements with organisations whose applications for warm and welcome spaces funding has been evaluated as best meeting the grant application requirements.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

To maximise the benefits of the Warm and Welcome Spaces funding to the residents of Neath Port Talbot by awarding funding in a timely way to the successful applicants.

Implementation of Decision:

The decision is proposed for immediate implementation.

Appendices

Appendix 1: First Stage Integrated Impact Assessment.

Officer Contact

Angela Thomas, Head of Adult Services

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Sarah Waite, Principal Officer for Prevention and Early Intervention

Phone: 01639 685221 Email: s.waite@npt.gov.uk

Impact Assessment - First Stage

1. Details of the initiative

<p>Initiative description and summary: Allocation of Warm Spaces Grant Funding</p> <p>To seek approval from members to allocate Warm and Welcome Spaces Funding to help support community, voluntary and third sector organisations tackle the cost-of-living crisis across Neath Port Talbot.</p>
<p>Service Area: Prevention, Early Intervention and Community Support</p>
<p>Directorate: Social Services Health and Housing</p>

2. Does the initiative affect:

	Yes	No
Service users	x	
Staff		x
Wider community	x	
Internal administrative process only		x

3. Does the initiative impact on people because of their:

	Yes	No	None/ Negligible	Don't Know	Impact H/M/L	Reasons for your decision (including evidence)/How might it impact?
Age	x					The Warm Hubs and associated activities are designed to support individuals to address many of the challenges experienced by groups referred to within the equality legislation.

						<p>The proposal brings additional resources to support vulnerable people and there will be no reduction in services already provided.</p> <p>Successful projects have demonstrated, how they will ensure that the service/activity is accessible and inclusive of all people including those who may have a disability and/or a care and support need.</p>
Disability	x					<p>The Warm Hubs and associated activities are designed to support individuals to address many of the challenges experienced by groups referred to within the equality legislation.</p> <p>The proposal brings additional resources to support vulnerable people and there will be no reduction in services already provided.</p> <p>Successful projects have demonstrated, how they will ensure that the service/activity is accessible and inclusive of all people including those who may have a disability and/or a care and support need.</p>
Gender Reassignment	x					<p>The Warm Hubs and associated activities are designed to support individuals to address many of the challenges experienced by groups referred to within the equality legislation.</p> <p>The proposal brings additional resources to support vulnerable people and there will be no reduction in services already provided.</p>
Marriage/Civil Partnership	x					<p>The Warm Hubs and associated activities are designed to support individuals to address many of the challenges experienced by groups referred to within the equality legislation.</p> <p>The proposal brings additional resources to support vulnerable people and there will be no reduction in services already provided.</p>

Pregnancy/Maternity	x					<p>The Warm Hubs and associated activities are designed to support individuals to address many of the challenges experienced by groups referred to within the equality legislation.</p> <p>The proposal brings additional resources to support vulnerable people and there will be no reduction in services already provided.</p>
Race	x					<p>The Warm Hubs and associated activities are designed to support individuals to address many of the challenges experienced by groups referred to within the equality legislation.</p> <p>The proposal brings additional resources to support vulnerable people and there will be no reduction in services already provided.</p>
Religion/Belief	x					<p>The Warm Hubs and associated activities are designed to support individuals to address many of the challenges experienced by groups referred to within the equality legislation.</p> <p>The proposal brings additional resources to support vulnerable people and there will be no reduction in services already provided.</p>
Sex	x					<p>The Warm Hubs and associated activities are designed to support individuals to address many of the challenges experienced by groups referred to within the equality legislation.</p> <p>The proposal brings additional resources to support vulnerable people and there will be no reduction in services already provided.</p>
Sexual orientation	x					<p>The Warm Hubs and associated activities are designed to support individuals to address many of the challenges experienced by groups referred to within the equality legislation.</p>

						The proposal brings additional resources to support vulnerable people and there will be no reduction in services already provided.
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4. Does the initiative impact on:

	Yes	No	None/ Negligible	Don't know	Impact H/M/L	Reasons for your decision (including evidence used) / How might it impact?
People's opportunities to use the Welsh language			x			Bidders have been assessed against how their proposal will impact on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and its equal treatment with English.
Treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English			x			Bidders have been assessed against how their proposal will impact on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and its equal treatment with English

5. Does the initiative impact on biodiversity:

	Yes	No	None/ Negligible	Don't know	Impact H/M/L	Reasons for your decision (including evidence) / How might it impact?
To maintain and enhance biodiversity		x				N/A
To promote the resilience of ecosystems, i.e. supporting protection of the wider environment, such as air quality, flood alleviation, etc.		x				N/A

6. Does the initiative embrace the sustainable development principle (5 ways of working):

	Yes	No	Details
Long term - how the initiative supports the long term well-being of people			Warm hubs support the long term well-being of people by helping to delay, prevent and/or reduce care needs. The hubs and the initiatives linked to the delivery of the Warm hubs are designed to help keep people healthier and maintain maximum levels of wellbeing for longer.
Integration - how the initiative impacts upon our wellbeing objectives			The delivery and provision of Warm Hubs is underpinned by the values and principles of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act 2015 and the Councils wellbeing objectives.
Involvement - how people have been involved in developing the initiative			The application process was supported by CVS, and circulated directly to organisations who have registered their Warm Hub with the Council. A directory of Warm Hubs is currently being compiled and will be available for people to access via the Councils website. Applications were evaluated by a panel against a set criterion that links to the application form (Appendix 1). The panel will consist of representatives from across the Council, including Social Services, and the Education Directorate and external strategic partners including NPT Council for Voluntary Services (CVS), and a service user representative. For an organisation to be successful in being awarded Warm Hubs Funding their application needed to evidence how the money will directly support Warm Hubs and the people who attend them.
Collaboration - how we have worked with other services/organisations to find shared sustainable solutions			The proposal is to work in partnership with organisations to support people in the local community to tackle and address issues raised due to the cost-of living crisis.
Prevention - how the initiative will prevent problems occurring or getting worse			For an organisation to be successful in being awarded Warm Hubs Funding their application will need to evidence how the money will directly support Warm Hubs and the people who attend them.

7. Declaration - based on above assessment (tick as appropriate):

A full impact assessment (second stage) is not required	x
Reasons for this conclusion	
<p>The Warm and Welcome spaces are designed to support individuals to address many of the challenges experienced by groups referred to within the equality legislation.</p> <p>The proposal brings additional resources to support vulnerable people and there will be no reduction in services already provided.</p> <p>Successful applicants have demonstrated how they will ensure that the service/activity is accessible and inclusive of people with disabilities and care and support needs.</p> <p>Successful applicants have been assessed against how their proposal will impact on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and its equal treatment with English.</p> <p>Biodiversity not applicable to this proposal.</p> <p>The proposal is in line with the 5 ways of working.</p>	

A full impact assessment (second stage) is required	
Reasons for this conclusion	

	Name	Position	Signature	Date
Completed by	Sarah Waite	PO Prevention, Early Intervention and Community Support	S.Waite	04/03/2024
Signed off by	Angela Thomas	Head of Service	A.Thomas	



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

Report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Name and date of Meeting

ACCESS TO MEETINGS/EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

Purpose:	To consider whether the Public should be excluded from the following items of business.
Item (s):	Agenda Item 12, 13 & 14
Recommendation(s):	That the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item(s) of business on the grounds that it/they involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as set out in the Paragraphs listed below of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007 subject to the Public Interest Test (where appropriate) being applied.
Relevant Paragraph(s):	14

1. Purpose of Report

To enable Members to consider whether the public should be excluded from the meeting in relation to the item(s) listed above.

Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007, allows a Principal Council to pass a resolution excluding the public from a meeting during an item of business.

Such a resolution is dependant on whether it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings that if members of the public were present during that item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information, as defined in section 100l of the Local Government Act 1972.

2. Exclusion of the Public/Public Interest Test

In order to comply with the above mentioned legislation, Members will be requested to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the item(s) of business identified in the recommendation(s) to the report on the grounds that it/they involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as set out in the Exclusion Paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007.

Information which falls within paragraphs 12 to 15, 17 and 18 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended is exempt information if and so long as in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

The specific Exclusion Paragraphs and the Public Interest Tests to be applied are listed in Appendix A.

Where paragraph 16 of the Schedule 12A applies there is no public interest test. Members are able to consider whether they wish to waive their legal privilege in the information, however, given that this may place the Council in a position of risk, it is not something that should be done as a matter of routine.

3. Financial Implications

Not applicable

4. Integrated Impact Assessment

Not applicable

5. Valleys Communities Impact

Not applicable

6. Workforce Impact

Not applicable.

7. Legal Implications

The legislative provisions are set out in the report.

Members must consider with regard to each item of business the following matters.

- (a) Whether in relation to that item of business the information is capable of being exempt information, because it falls into one of the paragraphs set out in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended and reproduced in Appendix A to this report.

and either

- (b) If the information does fall within one or more of paragraphs 12 to 15, 17 and 18 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended, the public interest test in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information; or

- (c) if the information falls within the paragraph 16 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 in considering whether to exclude the public members are not required to apply the public interest test by must consider whether they wish to waive their privilege in relation to that item for any reason.

8. Risk Management

To allow Members to consider risk associated with exempt information.

9. Recommendation(s)

As detailed at the start of the report.

10. Reason for Proposed Decision(s):

To ensure that all items are considered in the appropriate manner.

11. Implementation of Decision(s):

The decision(s) will be implemented immediately.

12. List of Background Papers:

Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972

13. Appendices:

Appendix A – List of Exemptions

Appendix A

NO	Relevant Paragraphs in Schedule 12A
12	Information relating to a particular individual
13	Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual
14	Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
15	Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority
16	Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.
17	Information which reveals that the authority proposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To give under any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person, or • To make an order or direction under any enactment.
18	Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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