



## NEATH PORT TALBOT PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD

### Highlight Report

<b>Well-being Objective</b>	
All our communities will be thriving and sustainable	
<b>Group/Partnership</b>	
Cost of Living and Poverty Prevention Partnership	
<b>Reporting Period</b>	
May 2024 to October 2024	
<b>Steps</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make sure those who need help and support with the cost of living know what support is available and how to access it</li><li>• Identify gaps in help and support and how those gaps could be addressed.</li><li>• Revisit the work undertaken with the support of the Bevan Foundation prior to the pandemic and reset the strategic objectives and actions to address the root causes of poverty now.</li></ul>	
<b>Current position/recent progress:</b>	<p><u>Shaping Places for Wellbeing in Wales (SPWW)</u></p> <p>Alongside the PSB Coordinator, the council's Corporate Policy Officer (Tackling Poverty) attended the first SPWW workshop in June. The officers have signed up to the two-year programme and will participate in the poverty and inequalities learning group. It is expected that the methodologies will help to support the development of the Steering Group's medium to long term Action Plan.</p> <p><u>Steering Group – Action Plan Workshop (July 2024)</u></p> <p>Steering Group partners took part in a workshop facilitated by the Health Board (SBUHB), framed around a context mapping exercise (mirroring an activity undertaken by participants of the SPWW in June 2024).</p>



Partners reviewed the spring workshop feedback in terms of:

- Factors under the direct control of the PSB
- Factors the PSB would be able to influence
- Factors the PSB could not influence, but were important
- Environmental factors

#### Steering Group Draft Action Plan

The output of the July workshop has been used to further develop the Steering Group's draft Action Plan. Supported by Marc Davies of SBUHB, the Policy Officers have collated Partner feedback and suggested future actions to produce a medium to long-term draft Action Plan.

The Steering Group met in mid-September to review the current draft. Feedback was shared in respect of the actions, with new Partners looped in to support the plan (such as actions linked to Community Focused Schools and Family Liaison Officers).

The Steering Group have also identified a number of 'broader' actions within the plan, that need to be broken down further to enable each organisation to contribute (recognising that the overarching action cannot be 'owned' by one single Partner).

Next steps include narrowing down the timeframe aligned to each action, to put firmer dates against them, and identifying the relevant measures to enable the Steering Group to measure progress and impact.

#### Child Poverty Workshop

Supported by the Steering Group, preparations are under way for a focus area workshop on child poverty. The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) will facilitate the workshop (October 2024), which will reflect on:

- The landscape of poverty – UK/Wales/NPT
- CPAG's 'Cost of the School Day (COSD) project'
- The importance of the 'youth voice'
- Themes related to the COSD project – including poverty stigma

The output of the focus area workshop will help to inform the Steering Group's draft Action Plan, which the group



expect to continuously evolve as they respond to the impact of the cost of living crisis in NPT.

#### Food Poverty

The allocation for 24/25 has now been confirmed: Capital £51,747 and Revenue £8,285.59 (note: the remaining balance of the 23/24 allocation will be rolled over into 24/25).

As evidence of the ongoing impact of the rise in the cost of living, intel shared by Neath Port Talbot CVS (August 2024) is that they are aware of at least four foodbanks that are now struggling financially due to the ongoing demand.

#### Warm Spaces

The SPF “Warm and Welcome Spaces Grant” launched in June 2024. Applicants were able to apply for a one-off grant of £1500, to be used by the 31st March 2025.

38 organisations applied and 20 were awarded grant money. Initiative dates vary, with some starting early August and others planned to start in early autumn to cover the winter period.

#### Hardship Relief Scheme (Warm Wales)

Between May and the end of August 2024, Warm Wales administered 751 interventions through the Hardship Relief Scheme. *Please note – September data unavailable at the time of writing.*

To date, 4,206 interventions have been delivered to 2,201 households (winter 2022 to end August 2024).

Over the summer, the Warm Wales team undertook some community engagement activity; this has been a success, as the team have already begun to receive engagement (referrals) from these areas.

#### Communications

Throughout the summer holidays, the team worked closely with services across the council (NPT Family, NPT Library Service, NPT PASS etc.) to deliver a ‘Summer of Fun’ campaign. This focused on promoting free and low-cost activities for families to enjoy throughout the school holidays.

The team also helped to promote the School Essential Grant, a school uniform and equipment grant worth up to



£125 / £200 per pupil. The first social media post alone led to 356 applications. The grant application also checks for free school meal eligibility for secondary school pupils.

In August and September, the team commenced preparation of a communications plan for winter 24/25, framed around the support available for the cost of living. This will feature a radio advert, leaflet drops, posters, social media posts and direct mail using the SPF SCGF grant money.

The 'Help with the Cost of Living' webpages continue to receive a consistent number of views throughout the warmer months (May to Aug 2024), which demonstrates that the impact of the crisis is far from over. *Please note – September data unavailable at the time of writing.*

- NPT Council's webpage – 12,003 views
- NPT CVS webpage – 573 views

CVS have highlighted the number of views of their carers cost of living webpage in August 2024, which has the highest number of views after the cost of living homepage. This is reflected in feedback from the Third Sector (see below), who have highlighted the impact of the COL crisis on unpaid carers.

#### Third Sector

CVS have continued to engage with partners locally, regionally and nationally to understand the cost of living challenges faced by the Third Sector and individuals.

CVS have been working with Faith in Families in relation to the 'Cwtch Mawr' multi-bank in Swansea. Visits to the multi-bank have been undertaken with partners including NPT Council and Tai Tarian. CVS Forum members have given their full support and would welcome seeing this service being rolled out to Neath Port Talbot.

CVS are working with the Sector to support the Tata Steel response; organisations are already seeing an increase in individuals coming forward for support and concerns have been raised regarding the capacity and resource to respond.

Intel from the Third Sector in this period has highlighted that unpaid carers are particularly vulnerable to the cost of living crisis, owing to the additional costs of caring, e.g., extra



energy is required for powering vital equipment such as hoists, specialised beds, breathing equipment, feeding pumps and monitors. In addition to increased costs, unpaid carers can face additional financial pressures from having to reduce their working hours or stop working so that they can fulfil their caring responsibilities.

CVS has continued to promote what support is available by making use of their webpage (*see above stats re: Comms*) and social media channels, whilst also engaging with those who are not online at community events such as the Community Safety Partnership events.

Case studies from Third Sector organisations – recipients of funding through the Third Sector Discretionary Cost of Living Crisis Grant Scheme (autumn 2023) – have been shared by NPT CVS, which evidence the local impact of the funding in supporting people in the county borough.

#### Citizens Advice Swansea Neath Port Talbot (CASNPT)

CASNPT have continued to deliver benefits awareness raising sessions to a number of local organisations.

As a regional service, CASNPT have been working with the Faith in Families 'Cwtch Mawr' project (multibank facility) in Swansea; it is hoped that the project will expand in due course to include Neath Port Talbot.

Recently, CASNPT have been successful at increasing their team of debt advisers which will help to increase their capacity.

From 1<sup>st</sup> September 2024, CASNPT will start working with Independent Age, to increase the take-up of welfare benefits with individuals over pension age.

#### **Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)**

##### Pension Credit Campaign

Between May and August 2024, a total of 186 letters were sent to individuals identified by the LIFT database as likely eligible for Pension Credit. Policy in Practice can confirm 27 successful Pension Credit claims in that period, with a total value of £91,068. The claimants will now be entitled to the Winter Fuel Payment value, which equates to a total value of £5,400. The estimated lifetime value of the 27 claims is £819,612. *Please note – September data unavailable at the time of writing.*



This now brings the overall number of Pension Credit claims to 73, with a total annual value of £232,326. The estimated lifetime value of the Pension Credit claims (based on average length of claim / average life expectancy) is over £2m.

Following the recent UK Government announcement of the removal of Winter Fuel Payments from ineligible pensioners (those not claiming the relevant means tested benefits), the Pension Credit campaign will be vital in helping Pension Credit eligible individuals to claim the financial support they so rightfully deserve. The 73 successful claimants will now receive the Winter Fuel Payment for winter 24/25, a combined total of £14,600.

In September 2024, the Policy Officers wrote to the Older People's Commissioner for Wales to share the success of the Pension Credit campaign, which has been carried out with the support of the Welfare Rights Team and Corporate Comms Team.

#### Think Families – Early Intervention & Prevention

In conjunction with the council's Think Families Team, the Policy Officers are working with Policy in Practice on a project to use the team's own data (Early Intervention & Prevention Panel [EI&P]) in identifying households that LIFT deems to be facing financial issues. The team hope this comparison will enable them to adapt and tailor the support they give to the families that are referred through the EI&P panel.

#### Poverty Interventions – The Bevan Foundation Research Project

In August 2024, the council gave their support to a research project being funded by The Bevan Foundation, which Policy in Practice will be undertaking. The project will model a range of interventions – such as removing the two-child benefit cap – using anonymised LIFT data, to identify which interventions would result in an increase of household income ('putting money in people's pockets'). Governance arrangements are currently being finalised.

#### Cost of Living Update Report

The Policy Officers have produced a report for the council's Corporate Directors, which has been supported by Steering Group Partners (data, case studies, local intel etc.).





	<p>The report reflects on the drivers of the crisis in 2024, the type and level of demand the crisis is bringing into council services and Partner organisations, as well as an overview of the many initiatives under way to tackle poverty in NPT and support residents and communities.</p>
<p><b>Next steps:</b></p>	<p><u>Action Plan</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partners to identify how they could contribute to the broader actions within their own organisations</li> <li>• Partners to refine timeframe aligned to their specific actions within the plan and identify how progress could be measured (to enable the Steering Group to monitor impact)</li> <li>• Partners to begin identifying measures to align to actions, to enable the Steering Group to monitor progress/impact.</li> </ul> <p><u>Child Poverty Workshop</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Venue to be confirmed – Kath Matthews (Community Focused Schools) has offered to lead on this, with a suggestion that the workshop be held in a local school</li> <li>• Invitees – the Steering Group have agreed that a mix of strategic leads/decision-makers and service delivery officers be invited to participate in the workshop (approx. 25 people).</li> <li>• Output of the workshop to feed into the development of the Action Plan – it is hoped that it will also be used by Partners to inform their own actions etc.</li> </ul>
<p><b>How is progress being measured?</b></p>	<p><u>Action Plan</u></p> <p>Monitoring &amp; Evaluation TBD (this will be discussed at the Steering Group’s next meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> Nov 2024).</p>
<p><b>Challenges Faced:</b></p>	<p><u>Demand</u></p> <p>Feedback from Steering Group Partners is that demand for services remains high. For some Steering Group Partners, they are in the position of ‘firefighting,’ rather than being able to plan or target certain cohorts.</p> <p>NPT CVS have shared information regarding foodbank challenges, with donations, funding and the amount of surplus food in the system being further stretched due to the</p>



	<p>level of need. As evidence of the ongoing impact of the rise in the cost of living, intel shared by Neath Port Talbot CVS (August 2024) is that they are aware of at least four foodbanks that are now struggling financially due to the ongoing demand.</p> <p><u>Recruitment/Retention</u></p> <p>The Third Sector report that recruitment and retention of staff and volunteers remain a challenge. Organisations are reporting that they're recruiting staff and providing training, only for some to move on to better paid jobs in other sectors.</p>
<b>Decisions Required</b>	N/A at this time.
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	<p>Report prepared by Victoria Petty, Corporate Policy Officer (Tackling Poverty) on behalf of:</p> <p><b>Gaynor Richards – Director, Neath Port Talbot CVS</b></p> <p><b>Noelwyn Daniel – Corporate Director, NPTCBC</b></p>