

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cabinet

17 April 2019

Report of Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer

K.Jones

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All Wards

Poverty Project - Low Income Families Tracker

Purpose of Report

1. To seek authority from Cabinet to commission Policy in Practice to develop a Low Income Families Tracker for Neath Port Talbot.

The tracker will help us identify and better understand the vulnerabilities of low income households, inform strategic planning and better target those in most need.

Background

2. The local authority and its partners have been working together to provide help and advice to those adversely affected by welfare reform since the host of benefit changes introduced under the Welfare Reform Act 2012.
3. The roll-out of Universal Credit, one of the biggest changes to the welfare system since its inception is having a significant impact on residents of Neath Port Talbot who may already be dealing with long term health problems, disability or unemployment.

4. To determine which Neath Port Talbot residents will be most significantly affected by the cumulative impact of these reforms we must introduce advanced data analytics to the Housing Benefit and Council Tax figures we currently hold. Using our data for predictive rather than descriptive purposes will enable improve the way social policy and welfare support is delivered across local communities.

Proposal

5. Commission Policy in Practice to develop a Low Income Family Tracker for Neath Port Talbot. Policy in Practice will collect our Council Tax and Housing Benefit administrative data four times during the year, introduce advanced data analytics and assess the cumulative impact of all policies combined. Linking this data over time we will be able to track living standards to identify who is able to escape poverty and who is not and what the impacts of this will be on public finances.
6. Policy in Practice use household level data to understand and track the impact of the welfare reforms on residents. Using data analytics they can track the winners and losers for each welfare change, including Universal Credit, as well as looking at the cumulative impacts on residents. The reports and data analysis they are able to provide will allow the Council to view these impacts at Ward and street level. The segmentation of the demographics, showing the impacts of reforms by household type, tenure and employment status inform strategic planning and armed with this knowledge policy and strategy can be better targeted to those in most need.
7. It is also possible to track changes in the cohort, so that factors that impact residents are better understood. Looking at all aspects of those impacted, including the working poor they can help us find hidden pockets of poverty by:
 - Identifying who is at risk
 - Engaging those at risk
 - Tracking what happens

Consultation

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

Financial Appraisal

9. The cost of engaging Policy in Practice to develop a Low Income Families Tracker will be £23,101 + VAT. There is an underspend in the departmental budget which would accommodate the cost of the work.

Integrated Impact Assessment

10. An Integrated Impact Assessment is not required.

Workforce Impact

11. There are no workforce impacts associated with this report.

Legal Duties

12. In terms of commissioning Policy in Practice, it is proposed that paragraph 2.2 of contract procedure rules be applied, which allows a direct award provided best value is obtained.

Risk Management

13. The entries set out in the Corporate Risk Register have been reviewed to ensure relevant areas of work are reflected in the proposals set out in this Plan.

Recommendations

14. It is recommended that:
 - i. That Cabinet authorises the Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer to commission Policy in Practice to develop the tracker.

Reason for Proposed Decision

15. To ensure the Council are able to better identify and understand the vulnerabilities of residents in low income households. This in turn will help us to focus services and support where it is needed.

Implementation

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

Appendices

17. Appendix 1 – Poverty Project Briefing Paper

Background Papers

18. Welfare Reform Act 2012

Officer Reporting:

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Poverty Project – Briefing paper

Purpose

To determine which Neath Port Talbot residents will be most significantly affected by welfare reforms and whether existing services are sufficient to deal with the additional demand these changes may create.

By understanding the cumulative impact of welfare reforms on residents alongside existing service provision we will be able to target support to our residents that need it most.

Background

The roll-out of Universal Credit, one of the biggest changes to the welfare system since its inception is having a significant impact on residents of Neath Port Talbot who may already be dealing with long term health problems, disability or unemployment.

The local authority and its partners have been working together to provide help and advice to those adversely affected. However, in order, to ensure there is a full understanding of the profile of those in need of support, any changes in the needs of residents and the suitability and geographical placement of services further work has to be undertaken.

Method

Initially a desktop exercise will be undertaken to collate and analyse the information we have to better equip us to predict how the picture of need may change as Universal Credit is fully rolled-out.

The first stage of this work will help us understand:

- The profile of those currently accessing support and advice services

- Whether or not this profile is likely to change as more reforms are imposed
- What are the current levels of demand for support and advice services?
- How are existing services currently being funded (by the Council, third sector, Welsh Government)
- Are the Council's current policies and services adequate to meet increasing demand for support services?

The commissioning of additional analysis to inform our local understanding of the issues being faced will follow.

Legal must be consulted throughout this project to ensure full compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).