



NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cabinet – Urgency Action

April 28th 2020

Report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected:

All

NPT Safe and Well – Humanitarian Assistance Provided by the Council in response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

Purpose of the Report:

To confirm the arrangements established by the Council to provide humanitarian assistance to the residents of Neath Port Talbot which is operating within the framework created by the United Kingdom and Welsh governments.

Background:

As part of the national response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, the UK and Welsh governments have advised certain groups of people whose health is deemed to be at high risk if they were to contract the Coronavirus to shield themselves for a period of at least 12 weeks. Additionally, the governments have identified a further group of people at risk who have been told to strictly observe social distancing measures and to limit their contact with other people.

These measures are a key element of the governmental response to reducing the spread of the Coronavirus but in particular to minimise the number of people who will require treatment within intensive care settings.

Whilst many people who have to shield themselves or self-isolate to limit their social contact will have the support of family and friends, the governments recognise that there are some people who will not be able to call on such support. Consequently, local authorities were advised that they should make arrangements for people to:

- Receive support with food shopping,
- Get hold of necessary prescription medicines,
- Receive help with other daily living tasks; and also to
- Enable people to have social contact by telephone, on-line or other suitable means.

NPT Safe and Well is a new service that has been established to respond to the governments' request that councils mobilise humanitarian assistance to those whose health is at greatest risk and where those people do not have family and friends who can provide support.

Description of the Service:

- Eligibility

Lists of people who have been identified by the NHS and told to shield themselves were received 30th March, slightly delayed from the date we were initially advised we would receive the details. There are 4,056 people identified in need of shielding at the time of writing this report in Neath Port Talbot and the list is growing as

GPs and consultants add additional people to the lists on a daily basis.

Local Members and officers have identified other groups of people who need humanitarian support and these include:

- People who need to self-isolate and have no support;
 - Young carers;
 - Parents of children entitled to free school meals unable to receive BACS payments; and
 - Carers of people shielding and self-isolating.
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- Access to NPT Safe and Well

A letter was sent to each of the people on the list to be shielded by the NHS and advised to contact the Council's main switchboard number 01639 686868 if they were in need of support.

Because the NHS letters were delayed, the Council also distributed information about the NPT Safe and Well service to every household in the county borough. The Council leaflet explained the service was available for "shielding" group and also other vulnerable people, such as those advised to self-isolate, where they also had no family of friends to provide support with basic daily living tasks. The service has been continuously promoted by radio, social media, the Council website, through communications with elected members, in communities through the network of Community Leads who replaced the Local Area Co-ordinators, through the NPT CVS and other partner agencies.

Customer Services staff are now all deployed into the Corporate Contact Centre. Staff were provided with a script and training to enable them to undertake a brief assessment when contacted by

people seeking to access the NPT Safe and Well Service. Details are recorded on a database designed by the Council's Digital Services Team and this feeds through to the different strands of the service that have been mobilised.

A referral process into NPT Safe and Well has also been created for Social Services to enable some support to be provided to vulnerable people open to that service. This will help to alleviate some of the increased pressures that Social Services has and is expected to experience.

The Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Department has also identified lists of young carers and parents of children entitled to a free school meal who also need support from NPT Safe and Well.

- Food

Where a resident is identified as needing help with food, there is a choice of three service options:

- **Receipt of a food box organised by Welsh Government –** this is the first option selected where someone is able to make food, able to pick a box up from the doorstep and has no specific dietary requirement. Food boxes are delivered weekly. Initially, they were delivered to the doorstep of the resident by the wholesaler but, due to various operational problems, the food boxes are now delivered to the Council's food hub for ongoing delivery to the community. The cost of this food is met directly from Welsh Government through the contractual arrangements they have established with wholesalers. There is no cost to the recipient;
- **Receipt of a food parcel organised by the Council –** a food depot has been created at Tregelles Court so that be-spoked

food parcels can be created for residents needing help with food who either: cannot make a meal for themselves and require ready meals; have specific dietary requirements that cannot be met by the Welsh Government service; are vulnerable but not on the ‘shielding list’ or require assistance to carry food into their home. This food is being paid for by the Council with a view to recovering the cost of the service from the Welsh Government. There is no cost to the recipient. Deliveries are organised on a weekly basis and transported via the Council’s fleet management service.

- **Hot food delivery services** – where people cannot make a meal for themselves they are signposted to local organisations who are able to provide a paid-for meal delivery service – eg Age Cymru have partnered with Care and Repair to provide a “meals on wheels” style service.
- **Young carers** have been included in the food delivery service to alleviate pressure on them given that the people they are caring for are amongst those to be shielded or who need to self-isolate.
- Food deliveries are also available for parents of children entitled to **free school meals** and who are unable to receive the cash payments into a bank account.

d) Prescription Medicines

Residents can be helped to organise a delivery service from their community pharmacy or, by agreement between the resident and the community pharmacy, we are able to organise a volunteer to collect medicines and leave them on the doorstep. There is no charge to the resident for this service. We do not expect to incur significant costs but would seek to reclaim them from the Welsh Government.

e) Support with daily living

Residents can be helped with a range of daily living tasks, such as posting letters, walking dogs, topping up energy meters etc. The costs associated with any of these services will be initially met by the Council (to avoid the need for staff or volunteers to handle cash or people's bank cards) but then re-charged to resident through the Council's sundry debtors system.

f) Keeping in Touch

We can connect residents to existing groups or one of the volunteers we have recruited so that someone is in regular touch whilst they are self-isolating or shielding. The Council is also contacting everyone on the shielding list who has not yet rang the NPT Safe and Well helpline to make sure there are no people falling through the net. Where we have a telephone number we will contact people by phone. Where we do not have a contact number we will contact people by letter and also try to make contact through the network of volunteers at the neighbourhood level. We will seek to recover the cost of contacting residents from the Welsh Government.

g) Volunteering

The NPT Safe and Well Service had to be mobilised within days of the governments making a request for councils to provide the humanitarian assistance described above. Initially, roles within the service have been carried out by Council staff who have volunteered to be redeployed into the service. Staff are undertaking a range of roles:

- Picking and Packing food in the food depot;
- Delivering food into the community;
- Designing menus and ordering food;
- Recruiting and inducting volunteers;

- Liaising with local councillors, town and community councils and existing community groups;
- Setting up processes, systems and accounting arrangements;
- Auditing arrangements;
- Processing payments and keeping track of costs incurred;
- Readying the depot for use as a food depot;
- Liaising with partners
- Collecting medicines/shopping for residents
- Trouble shooting
- Processing data
- Promoting the service
- Creating and delivering training

To support and manage the volunteers we have set up a volunteer management function and have been assisted in developing our approach to the management of volunteers by NPT CVS. Attached at Appendix 1 is the Neath Port Talbot Safe and Well Volunteer Policy established to support the volunteering effort within NPT Safe and Well.

h) Partnership Working

At a very early stage in setting up the NPT Safe and Well Service the NPT CVS was approached as were all the town and community councils and a number of other voluntary organisations to work with the council in establishing the humanitarian assistance. The response was mixed.

Tai Tarian, Coastal and Pobl Group housing associations were able to mobilise an immediate response, receiving details of those to be shielded who were their tenants and undertaking to make additional checks on those tenants during the emergency situation. Likewise, Age Connect, Age Concern and Care and Repair were already mobilised and co-ordinating voluntary efforts at the neighbourhood level and providing a hot meal delivery services respectively.

For the most part, town and community councils were unable to mobilise capacity to provide humanitarian assistance although there are notable exceptions, such as Glynneath Community Council.

For other voluntary agencies, some were mobilised to meet needs within their immediate geographic area - for example Canolfan Maerdy - but for others, they found themselves with capacity problems as some of their staff/volunteers were in the groups to shield/self-isolate.

i) Community and Covid-19 Groups

There were many groups formed or forming as the outbreak and the government restrictions were implemented. Because of pressures in Social Services, a decision was taken to free up staff to prepare to meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups receiving care and support from Social Services. This included redeployment of the Local Area Co-ordinators.

To fill the vacuum created by the redeployment of the Local Area Co-ordinators, eighteen Community Leads were identified within the Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Directorate with community development experience. The Community Leads were identified to provide co-ordination of the NPT Safe and Well volunteers at the neighbourhood level and to ensure that the NPT Safe and Well Service worked to complement and

add value to the existing community groups where this was appropriate.

j) **Recovery Planning**

As part of recovery planning, the intention will be to transition people from the food services and the daily living support service to more sustainable local alternatives. This will include, by way of example, working with local businesses so that more of them can take orders and payments on-line/by telephone and more of them can offer a delivery service. Similarly, officers are working with the primary care team in the Local Health Board to ensure there is sufficient capacity for community pharmacies to offer a medicines delivery service to those who need it. Given that some 4,000 residents may need to shield/self-isolate for a considerable time it is important to develop alternatives to the crisis services that the Council has established so that people have more choice and independence and that where possible community capacity is improved to meet the needs of the people who live in all of our neighbourhoods.

A further consideration within recovery planning will be to consider the Council's ongoing role in community development. There has been a tremendous community response to the crisis situation and it is already clear that there is considerable learning to draw out from across the board. It will be important that we draw on these lessons to plot the recovery path, informed by what the community considers to be important and with local Members central to this exercise.

Financial Impacts:

The main cash impact for the Council from the establishment of NPT Safe and Well is the operation of the food service with the main cost element being the purchase of the food items. It is anticipated that these costs can be either offset against specific grants that were not

fully committed in 2019-20 or claimed back as part of the discussions taking place with Welsh Government about the overall costs of the crisis response.

The non-cashable costs relate mainly to the time of officers seconded into the service from other roles. The redeployment is seen as a good use of staff and vehicles as otherwise those staff and vehicles would have been stood down over the period but the Council would still have born much of the expenditure.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

The main impact of this initiative is positive, seeking to mitigate the negative impacts of the shielding and self-isolation advice on those people whose health presents the greatest risk of admission to hospital, intensive care and ultimately of death if they were to contract Coronavirus.

The groups of people who are the main beneficiaries are those identified in Government guidance as in need of shielding or self-isolation. The main groups include:

- People over 70
- People with severely compromised immune systems;
- People with compromised respiratory function;
- Carers of people with significant health conditions;
- Young Carers

Valleys Communities Impacts:

The NPT Safe and Well Service operates across the entire county borough and has been set up in a way where the service complements existing community and neighbourhood volunteering effort.

Workforce Impacts:

Staff have enthusiastically committed to the creation and delivery of the NPT Safe and Well Service. The Service was mobilised at very short notice and staff have volunteered in significant numbers to undertake the various different roles that have been needed to meet the needs of our most vulnerable residents.

Staff have also worked over weekends and into evenings where needed to ensure needs have been met.

As we move into recovery it is crucial that we take an opportunity to clarify the Council's role in ongoing community development and that capacity is identified as part of legacy arrangements to enable this important work to move forward on a strong footing.

Legal Impacts:

The legal powers for creating and operating this service are derived from the emergency legislation enacted by the UK and Welsh government and the associated guidance and regulations.

Risk Management Impacts:

The Service has, overall, sought to reduce the risk that people who have to shield or self-isolate are unable to access food, medicines, and other basic daily living activities as well as becoming socially isolated. Without mitigating this risk vulnerable people would experience significant detriment to their physical and emotional wellbeing.

As we move into recovery there are a number of risks that need to be addressed to ensure that, as far as it possible, communities can provide safe and sustainable local support to these vulnerable groups for an extended period of time, supported by statutory and other agencies where appropriate. Risks identified to date include:

- Local shops unable to take orders and payments by phone/on-line and unable to offer a local delivery service;

- Local shops unable to offer sufficient on-line/telephone ordering and payment facilities (the large supermarkets have been unable to offer enough slots to enable people to use this service);
- Community pharmacies unable to offer a medicines delivery service for all those that need it;
- Sustaining and strengthening the community response in each neighbourhood to ensure that vulnerable people are not left isolated and unable to support themselves.

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); and
- b) The misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances in its area; and
- c) Re-offending the area”

As part of the Council’s NPT Safe and Well Service, all Community Leads and volunteers have been provided with safeguarding training to ensure they can spot and report crime and disorder matters.

As part of the recovery plan, the degree to which people are digitally excluded and/or at risk of scams on-line or over the telephone will be explored and a programme put in place to prevent/reduce the risk.

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.

Community Leads and volunteers have been provided with brief training to make them alert to the potential of domestic abuse and to have the confidence to report concerns. There is a need to ensure that carers, in particular, are supported well to alleviate the heightened level of stress they will be experiencing.

Consultation:

Due to the need to mobilise an immediate response to the emerging crisis there was very limited opportunity to consult. As explained in the body of the report, an attempt was made to partner with community councils and third sector organisations initially. Where it was possible to work with partner agencies, we have worked hard to align the development of NPT Safe and Well with those agencies and also with the pre-existing community groups.

After the initial mobilisation of the service, officers have spoken with many councillors from across the county borough to ensure NPT Safe and Well is providing an appropriate response in the different wards. Continuous adjustments have been made to service operations as feedback has been received.

Where feedback on issues being experienced by the community has been received, officers have taken those issues up with the appropriate agency/department. For example, Internal Audit and Finance were consulted about the best way to accommodate payment of urgent items; the Local Health Board was contacted to

work through issued about long queues at pharmacies and problems with community pharmacy delivery services.

There will be more opportunity in the recovery phase to consult and this will feature in the recovery planning arrangements.

Involve the community in our ongoing work and it will be important that local Members are able to fully participate in this as part of their important community leadership role.

Recommendations:

That the Cabinet endorses the actions taken to set up and operate the NPT Safe and Well Service in response to requests received from the UK and Welsh governments to mobilise a humanitarian assistance service.

That the Cabinet notes that additional costs have been incurred to set up the service and that officers are seeking to recover these costs by offsetting them against uncommitted grant income where this is feasible or making representation to the Welsh Government to recover any remaining balance.

That the Cabinet supports the proposal to establish a plan to transition residents from the crisis service to more sustainable alternative arrangements during the recovery phase based on the involvement of the community and ensuring local Members can play a full and active part in recovery planning activities.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To ensure there is formal record of actions taken by officers in the emergency situation that has prevailed. To set up the framework for recovery planning, ensuring all Members of Council can play a full and active part in determining the legacy arrangements that need to be established.

Implementation of Decision:

The decision is an urgent one for immediate implementation, subject to the consent of the relevant Scrutiny Chair (and is therefore not subject to the call-in procedure.)'

Appendices:

Neath Port Talbot Safe and Well Volunteer Policy – Appendix 1

List of Background Papers:**Officer Contact:**

Mrs K Jones, Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer. Tel: 01639 763284 or e-mail: k.jones3@npt.gov.uk