



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cabinet

30 July 2020

Report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer

Matter for Information

Wards Affected:

All

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

Purpose of the Report:

1. To summarise the arrangements established by the Council to provide humanitarian assistance to the residents of Neath Port Talbot within the frameworks created by the United Kingdom and Welsh governments.
2. To draw out the main lessons learned from the work as a basis for developing the contingency plans that will need to be in place into the autumn should rates of infection rise.
3. To consider how the work undertaken through the NPT Safe and Well Service can inform the wider debate being developed within the Member Panel on the future role of the Council in community development moving forward.

Background:

As part of the national response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, the UK and Welsh governments 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 an extended period of time. Additionally, the governments identified a further group of people at risk who were told to strictly observe social distancing measures and to limit their contact with other people.

These measures were a key element of the initial governmental response to reducing the spread of the Coronavirus - in particular to minimise the number of people who would require treatment within intensive care settings.

Whilst many people who had to shield themselves or self-isolate to limit their social contact had the support of family and friends, the governments recognised that there were/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 was established to respond to the governments' request that councils mobilise humanitarian assistance to this most vulnerable group of people. The council was required to mobilise the response within a matter of days and it is noted that the governmental request was made after residents had started to form Covid-19 support groups at the neighbourhood level.

Description of the Service:

- Eligibility

Lists of people who had 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 were 4,056 people identified in need of shielding at the time but this has subsequently grown to over 5,500 people as GPs and consultants add additional people to the lists on a daily basis.

Local Members and officers also identified other groups of people who needed humanitarian support and these include:

- People who needed to self-isolate and had 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.

Approximately 1,300 people have received support from the Service between the end of March 2020 and the end of June 2020.

- Access to NPT Safe and Well

A letter was sent to every household across Neath Port Talbot explaining the NPT Safe and Well Service, encouraging people to contact the Council's main switchboard number 01639 686868 if they were in need of support.

This was important because the NHS letters to people who were advised to shield were significantly delayed.

The Council letter explained the service was available for the “shielding” group and also other vulnerable people, such as those advised to self-isolate, where they also had no family or 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. Social media influencers with a link to NPT have also helped to communicate the work of the Service out to residents.

Customer Services staff, working through the Corporate Contact Centre 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 elements of the service that have been mobilised.

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

We have worked with our main social housing providers – Tai Tarian, Pobl Group and Coastal from the outset and were able to identify all of their tenants who were being advised to shield. We have shared this information and worked together to support those facing the greatest restrictions on their daily living.

The Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Department also identified lists of young carers and parents of children entitled to a

free school meal who also needed support from NPT Safe and Well.

- Food

Where a resident was identified as needing help with food, there has been a choice of three services:

- **Receipt of a food box organised by Welsh Government** – This is the first option considered 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 have since been delivered to the Council's food hub for ongoing delivery to the community. The cost of this food is met directly by 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 was created at Tregelles Court so that be-spoked food parcels could be created for residents 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 and recovered 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 have been 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 pressures 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.

The establishment of the food hub at Tregelles Court has been a fantastic example of corporate working. Staff from a range of different disciplines and from a number of different departments collaborated together to source food, ensure its safe storage, handling and distribution, made deliveries, kept good records, prepared healthy menus that catered for specific dietary requirements and also ensured emergency food provision where circumstances have warranted it. The arrangements established in NPT were identified by Welsh Government as an example of good practice.

d) Prescription Medicines

Residents were helped to organise a delivery service from their community pharmacy or, by agreement between the resident and the community pharmacy, we have been able to organise a volunteer to collect medicines and leave them on the doorstep. There is no charge to the resident for this service.

There have been significant problems in some parts of the county borough accessing community pharmacy services. We have worked with the Head of Primary Care in Swansea Bay Local Health Board to address these problems and have seen a gradual improvement in services, although there remain problems in some areas and these are still receiving attention.

- e) Support with daily living
Residents have been helped with a wide range of daily living tasks, such as posting letters, walking dogs, topping up energy meters etc. We set up a system to deal with any costs associated with these services using Council credit cards (to avoid the need for staff or volunteers to handle cash or people's bank cards) but then re-charged to residents through the Council's sundry debtors system. This arrangements is meant to be exceptional.

- f) Keeping in Touch
We have been connecting some residents to existing groups or one of the volunteers we have recruited so that someone is in regular touch whilst they were self-isolating or shielding.

The Council has also tried to contact 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. However, we do not have a telephone number for everyone so this exercise has essentially been a large survey of the population of shielded people. We can be confident from the large number of calls we have made that people who did not contact us, have been receiving help and support from others, although it is striking from the conversations that have taken place how welcome that welfare check was.

- 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 were carried out by Council staff who volunteered to be redeployed into the service. Staff have undertaken 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;
- Readyng 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

Circa 100 employees also undertook volunteering duties in their own time. Circa 450 other residents also registered an interest to volunteer with the Service.

To support and manage the volunteers we set up a volunteer management function within the Council and have been assisted in developing our approach to the management of volunteers by NPT CVS. We developed a volunteer policy and induction programme and all volunteers used by the Council have had an induction programme and have completed DBS checks. We have also made checks on driving licences etc for those volunteers who indicated they could undertake driving duties. We made our volunteer training video available on the Council's social media and website channels on the request of some elected Members in the hope it would help some of the local Covid-19 groups in their own work.

The NPT Safe and Well volunteers have helped augment the arrangements that were developed at the neighbourhood level, particularly in areas where the volunteer network was not as well developed as in other areas. Through the Community Leads who were identified to replace the Local Area Co-ordinators we have worked hard through local Members to co-ordinate the NPT Safe and Well Scheme with the local community networks and appreciate that in the early days there was some confusion between arrangements which perhaps were inevitable in the early stages of the crisis response.

We have had a very positive experience from recruiting and supporting volunteers through NPT Safe and Well. We had already developed a pilot project, supported by NPT CVS, to encourage more staff to volunteer in our local communities – prior to the Covid-19 situation. This experience has shown that there are significant numbers of staff who are prepared to undertake volunteer activities and who have had a very positive experience over recent months.

We have also recognised that we use volunteers in a range of ways across the Council's many services and functions and there is scope to considerably strengthen the role of

volunteering within the Council's mainstream work moving forward. This would bring the Council into line with other large organisations, such as South Wales Police, Mid and West Wales Fire Service, Tai Tarian who all run corporate volunteering programmes.

In the short term, we will need to recruit a volunteer co-ordinator to relieve the person who has stepped into the role on a temporary basis and who will need to return to his normal duties in the near future.

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 they have been making 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 across neighbourhoods and providing a hot meal delivery services respectively.

For the most part, town and community councils were unable to mobilise capacity to work alongside the Council. There are notable exceptions, such as Glynneath Community Council, Crynant 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 who were playing an active role in setting up street champion networks across the county borough.

To fill the vacuum created by the redeployment of the Local Area Co-ordinators, eighteen Community Leads were identified from across the council. 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, through the local elected member, where this was appropriate.

Moving Forward - Transition

During June 2020, all cases open to NPT Safe and Well have been reviewed. A large number of people are now able to access services from within the community themselves, helped by changes in their personal circumstances or because the community itself has made changes – for example there are more local shops taking telephone orders and providing delivery services.

The number of open cases has since reduced significantly following the review exercise. The reasons given by people for continuing to need support with food and medication, the main themes being that people are still abiding by the shielding advice; people are anxious

about going outside; people cannot get delivery slots; some people were struggling before the crisis and their situations have since deteriorated. We also continue to support young carers and families who have children entitled to free school meals and cannot access the on-line payment arrangements for various reasons.

Therefore, we have made some good progress in helping people to regain their independence but there is clearly more to do. The Council cannot be involved in providing free food for residents into the future, nor is it the role of the Council to compensate for gaps in community pharmacy services.

By the end of July, it is our intention to transition the remaining people from the food 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. We will do this through the Community Leads and working with local members to ensure we find suitable and safe alternatives for everyone current receiving a service. This will pave the way for the pausing of the shielding scheme on August 16th 2020.

Officers are also continuing to work 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 we have some 5,500 residents whose underlying health makes them especially vulnerable, community health services will need to permanently adapt to respond to this risk 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.

In terms of the wider needs we have been meeting through NPT Safe and Well, the review of open cases, the calls we have made to those who are shielding and other information we have captured through our Community Impact Assessment exercise provide clear evidence

that there are some people – prior to the Covid-19 crisis – who were struggling to meet their daily living needs and who were isolated from their neighbourhoods. There are clear opportunities to find ways of connecting this group of people with their communities and services going forward.

This is considered an important potential legacy of the NPT Safe and Well Service that needs to feed into the Council's wider work on community development moving forward.

A further consideration within our forward planning is 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. These costs (£189,000) have been fully reclaimed from Welsh Government to date.

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 borne much of the expenditure. The benefits from redeploying staff have been numerous – morale has increased; people have learned new skills and it has also fostered a culture of working collaboratively across the Council, connecting much more closely to the needs of our communities.

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; have
- 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 forward 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 forward, 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 increased the number of slots to enable people to use this service but it is still insufficient on occasion);
- 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 has been explored. It is clear that there are a core of people who do not have access to the Internet but have no interest in accessing the Internet either. Our forward plans must therefore cater for those who are on-line and those who aren’t.

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 was providing an appropriate response in the different wards. Continuous adjustments have been made to service operations as feedback has been received. There is a risk as we move forward that we will see a further disruption to services as seconded staff have to return to their normal duties. This report has been prepared to agree actions that will mitigate this risk.

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 issues about long queues at pharmacies and problems with community pharmacy delivery services.

There is more opportunity in the next phase to involve and consult members and our local communities. We will agree this through the Member Panel.

Recommendations:

1. That the Cabinet notes and endorses the way in which the Council provided humanitarian assistance during the response phase of the Covid-19 crisis, in line with UK and Welsh governments' guidance.
2. That the Cabinet notes and endorses the steps that are being taken to transition people still receiving a service to more suitable and sustainable arrangements in respect of food and medication collection by the end of July and in anticipation that the shielding scheme will be paused 16th August 2020.
3. That the Cabinet remits the lessons learned from the work to the Member Panel established by Council to inform recovery planning, seeking views as to the way these lessons learned can be used to inform stabilisation and recovery planning.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To formally note and endorse the transition planning being undertaken to exit residents requiring humanitarian assistance from the Council in line with the timetables announced by the Welsh Government – ie that the national food delivery service will be paused on 16th August 2020, community pharmacy deliveries services are to be reviewed at end September 2020.

To ensure there is formal reflection on the lessons learned from the emergency response mobilised and that the lessons learned are used to inform stabilisation, longer term recovery planning and the wider work of the council.

Implementation of Decision:

For immediate implementation.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Residents Shielding Feedback

Appendix 2 – Data by Ward and Area

Appendix 3 – Info-gram of How Safe and Well Works

Appendix 4 – Lessons' Learnt

List of Background Papers:

- Urgency Action – NPT Safe and Well, May 2020
- Welsh and UK Government – various guidance issued in respect of shielded people

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