



Budget Consultation 2023-24

Consultation, Engagement Communications Plan

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1.0 Introduction

This Communications, Consultation & Engagement Plan sets out how we intend to encourage as many people living and working in NPT as possible to respond to the consultation on the setting the council's budget for 2023/24

2.0 Consultation & Engagement Principles

The financial situation and council's budget setting will affect the lives of everyone living and working in NPT.

We will encourage and support people, as far as is possible, to participate in the engagement process by undertaking our activities in ways that are inclusive and accessible, reflect the diversity of our communities, are responsive and meet the requirements of the relevant legislation and guidance (The Equalities Act 2010; The Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act (2014); The Welsh Language Standards).

In keeping with the council's commitment to a rights-based approach to involvement and engagement, this engagement plan will follow the principles of:

- **Accessibility** – ensuring our engagement activities are available in the formats that people need
- **Inclusivity and Non-discrimination** - the characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership;

pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation. Protected Characteristic Groups have been considered in the stakeholder mapping undertaken by the CoP (see section 5) and engagement activity will collect standard equality information from respondents (provided that they are agreeable to disclosing this).

- **Empowerment** – making sure our communities are part of the process, enabling them to influence meaningful change, and demonstrating back to them that their voices have been heard.

3.0 Messaging

Effective communications will be critical to the consultation and engagement activity. The campaign will utilise the branding '**Let's Talk Budget**'. It will aim to make the consultation and engagement activity visible; boost responses; help to stimulate responses from traditionally hard to reach groups; and enhance the sense of community and collaboration.

Moving forward, the 'Let's Talk' campaign will be used to support us in updating people on how their views are used to influence the budget for 2023-24.

Overarching narrative:

All councils in England and Wales have to deliver a balanced budget by law. In Wales the 2023/24 budgets must be set by 11 March 2023.

Like councils across the whole of the UK, the financial position for Neath Port Talbot Council is one of the most, if not the most, challenging we have ever faced.

The estimated budget gap for the council next year is almost £24m - more than any single year gap faced through the recent period of austerity.

The combined impact of the war in Ukraine, the Covid pandemic and Brexit has resulted in a number of pressures for the council, just as it has for businesses and households:

- Energy prices and energy security - we estimate energy costs for the council to rise by 162% in 2023/24 (approx. £8 million).
- Inflation has already reached levels not seen since the 1980s – affecting contract and other costs, as well as contributing to a cost of living crisis across all of our communities.
- The UK Government has increased the National Living Wage by 10% and is set to increase it by a similar figure in 2023/24.
- Ongoing supply chain disruptions are adding to cost pressures.
- Income levels have been affected by the pandemic, with many residents having made significant changes to their lifestyles – this is particularly affecting theatres, car parks and leisure services where the number of paying customers is yet to return to pre-pandemic levels.
- The labour market is far more competitive with post-pandemic unemployment rates at very low levels and more employers seeking to fill jobs than there are people looking for work. This is placing pressure on recruitment and retention with consequential implications for pay and our wider employment offer.
- On a positive note, the county borough is also seeing an unprecedented level of investor interest from existing and new investors. Whilst very welcome, this is placing

considerable pressure on Planning, Economic Development and other regulatory services.

As a council, we are doing and will continue to do everything we can to save money and protect the services we all rely on. We have identified significant savings, but these alone are not enough to close the budget gap for 2023/24, so are proposing a number of options to balance the budget in 2023/24. We would welcome your views on these.

The closing date for responses to this consultation is midnight on Friday 10 February 2023.

Key messages

A list of key messages has been developed. All of our communications and engagement activity will reflect the relevant key message(s) from this to ensure we effectively set the context in a balanced way that conveys the severity of the financial situation whilst not panicking people.

Headline messages

- The Council has a statutory responsibility to set the 2023/24 budget prior to 11 March 2023
- The budget position for this council and across local government, will be one of the most, if not the most, challenging we have ever faced.
- The 2023/24 draft budget for NPT Council focuses on protecting hundreds of vital services and safeguarding jobs
- The key objectives of the strategy are:
 - Maintaining a clear focus on recovery from Covid-19
 - Supporting our communities through the cost of living crisis
 - Facilitating and enabling economic growth
 - Delivering local and Welsh Government policy priorities
 - Ensuring a sustainable council – i.e. the council will need a robust strategy to transform the way services and functions are delivered, whilst also ensuring financial sustainability and good governance
- The key proposals for achieving this are:
 - To use £3.5m of the council's general reserves to balance the budget next year
 - To utilise £1.4m from specific reserves to help meet the cost of running indoor leisure services next year whilst further options are developed
 - To increase council tax by 4.5% to run council services in Neath Port Talbot next year
 - To close a number of satellite buildings and relocate staff from these to the main civic centres
 - To look for ways to reduce energy consumption

Context messages

- The Public Sector has faced a sustained period of real term reductions in funding levels for more than ten years
- Neath Port Talbot Council has seen reductions in the revenue budget of around £100 million in real terms since 2008
- There are several factors contributing to this situation:
 - Most additional costs and income losses incurred during the Coronavirus pandemic were funded by the Welsh Government through their Hardship

Fund. This Fund ceased on 31st March 2022 and it is now up to councils to meet any costs or financial shortfalls from loss of income from within existing resources.

- The combined impact of the pandemic and Brexit has also had a mixed impact across our local economy. Ongoing supply chain pressures, a highly competitive labour market and the rise in inflation are clearly having negative impacts.
- The county borough is also seeing an unprecedented level of investor interest from existing and new investors. Whilst this is very welcome, it is placing considerable pressure on Planning, Economic Development and other regulatory functions.
- We estimate energy costs for the Council to rise by 162% in 2023-24 (circa. £8 million).
- Inflation has already reached levels not seen since the 1980's which is feeding through in terms of contract and other costs as well as contributing to a cost of living crisis across all of our communities.
- The Council is actively supporting the national humanitarian effort to support Ukrainian refugees. This is a task we have taken on willingly, however, it is happening at a time when housing services are already operating under enormous pressure.

Key messages: Keeping Essential Services Running & solutions

- We will need to review how we use buildings in the council's ownership
- The impact on our services and council tax levels is clearly going to be largely and directly determined by the level of settlement we receive from Welsh Government, the outcome of 2022/23 and 2023/24 pay negotiations and related funding arrangements.
- Maintaining stability in the council and supporting our workforce through another significant period of change will be critical to enable us to protect our most essential services, and maintain our commitments to our communities

Key messages: NPTCBC employees

- The council will not be considering compulsory redundancies and is confident that we can give our employees security of employment
- Part of achieving this and an important factor in keeping essential services running will be to ask employees to be flexible
- As we embark on a new programme of change we need to help people prepare for doing different roles.
- We need your ideas to save money and increase income
- Every little bit you can save or bring in will help to chip away at the problem

Key messages: pulling together

Our Part	Your Part
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work with our partners and communities to identify ways of addressing the financial situation together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sign Unison's petition to Welsh Government calling for more funding for NPT Council

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide leadership, both politically and professionally • Offer security of employment for NPT Council employees • Keep essential services going • Keep our expenditure as low as possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign Unison’s petition to UK Government calling for more funding for Local Government • Ask others to sign these petitions • Think about what you can do – can you reduce the cost of something or bring income in? • Where you have good ideas, please contribute these • access council services/make payments online if you can
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4.0 Approach

Engagement and ‘Context setting’ Phase

This took place in November/ December 2022 and included:

1. **‘Let’s Talk’ public meetings** in at 12 locations across the county borough (Cymmer, Cwmavon, Cwmgors, Briton Ferry, Seven Sisters, Glynneath, Resolven, Port Talbot, Pontardawe, Neath, Ystalyfera, Skewen. The context setting at the meetings was recorded and published on the LetsTalk web page www.npt.gov.uk/LetsTalk
2. **Staff briefing sessions led by the Chief Executive** – around 70% of NPT Employees are also residents so this is an important stakeholder group for financial situation/budget discussions as they are able to give a unique and valuable viewpoint. There were
3. **Fair Funding For NPT Event organised by the Trade Unions** – a hybrid (Council Chamber/Teams) “Question Time” type event.
4. **PR** – press release and social media setting the context in which the 2023/24 budget will be set.
5. **Internal communications via Yammer and the staff sway** – as above

Consultation Phase – 19 January to 10 February 2023

Subject to agreement to consult from Cabinet, a public consultation will run from Thursday 19 January (following Cabinet) to midnight on Friday 10 February 2023.

The rise of digital technology presents new opportunities to involve and engage with our communities. Equally, we are aware that digital technology is not available to, or the preference of everyone, so we will ensure that there is a choice of ways to engage. To help ensure that the engagement is as inclusive and accessible as possible the following feedback methods will be used:

- **Online** - a self-completion questionnaire has been created using Snap Survey software and will be published following Cabinet.
- **Paper Questionnaires** – will be made available in public buildings across the county borough. These will replicate the online version and responses will be entered into Snap survey software for analysis. We will also post paper questionnaires to individuals who request these.
- **Email** – Respondents will be able to submit their views via email LetsTalk@npt.gov.uk

- **Focus groups** – if a topic needs a more detailed discussion or where the specific needs of a stakeholder group dictate, focus groups will be considered
- **Corporate social media accounts** – ‘Let’s Talk’ messages on the Council’s corporate social media accounts will be monitored for relevant comments to include in the feedback.

In addition to the above, members of the NPT Community of Practice on Involvement and Engagement (CoP) have been asked to support the budget consultation as they did with the previous ‘Let’s Talk’ campaigns.

The CoP has mapped all our stakeholder groups engagement channels currently used by the council and identified any gaps (see [section 9](#)). This will enable us to carry out consultation activities directly with specific stakeholder groups using a set of agreed questions/themes. We have asked for support from the CoP to do this as they are in regular contact with these groups via existing meetings and networks.

Working with the CoP will also help to ensure that appropriate engagement techniques will be utilised to meet the specific needs and characteristics of each of our identified stakeholder groups.

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5.0 Action plan

This action plan will be continually reviewed and updated to reflect progress, incorporate any new developments as they arise, and to make the most of any new opportunities that may present themselves.

Date	Activity	Status	Lead	Notes
January 2023				
Fri 13.1.23	Cabinet Report Published			
Fri 13.1.23	PR - NPT Council's 2023/24 budget proposals recommended for public consultation	Completed 13.1.23	Comms	Link to PR https://www.npt.gov.uk/1410?pr_id=7162 Covered in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WalesOnline • SW Guardian • Wales 247 • FYI Neath
By Thurs 19.1.23	Create QR code to link to online questionnaire	Completed 13.1.23	Engagement	
By Thurs 19.1.23	Questionnaire created on Snap in Eng & Wel	Completed 17.1.23	Engagement	
By Thurs 19.1.23	Paper version of questionnaire created and sent for printing	Completed 18.1.23	Engagement	
Thurs 19.1.23	CABINET – Draft Budget: permission to consult			
Thurs 19.1.23	Public Consultation on Budget begins (subject to Cabinet approval)			
Thurs 19.1.23	Snap Questionnaire live		Engagement	
Thurs 19.1.23	Updated 'Let's Talk' web page published		Engagement	
Thurs 19.1.23	Details and link published on the NPT Council consultation web page www.npt.gov.uk/consultations		Engagement	
Thurs 19.1.23	Social media - draft We are consulting on our draft Budget proposal for 2023/24. The consultation will run until Friday 10 February 2023. More information and have your say ↓ www.npt.gov.uk/LetsTalk		Comms / NC	

	#nptbudget Rydym yn ymgynghori ar ein cyllideb ddrafft arfaethedig ar gyfer 2023/24. Cynhelir yr ymgynghoriad tan ddydd Gwener 10 Chwefror 2023. Mwy o wybodaeth a Ddweud eich dweud ↓ www.npt.gov.uk/sgwrsio #CyllidebCnPT			
19/20.1.23	Social headers change to 'Let's Talk Budget'		Comms	
Thurs 19.1.23	Posters sent to BG for TV screens in bus and train stations			
Thurs 19.1.23	Filming of Cabinet Member interview style		Comms	
Thurs 19.1.23	Complete filming of social short videos on Q&As from public meetings in Nov/Dec 2022		Engagement	
Thurs 19.1.23	Email to NPT Citizens' Panel, announcing that the consultation has started and asking for their feedback		Engagement	
Thurs 19.1.23	Yammer announcement - NPT Council's budget consultation starts		Engagement	
Thurs 19.1.23	Messages to 'Let's Talk NPT – keep me informed' list via Gov.Notify (with details of consultation and relevant links		Engagement	'Let's Talk' Gov.Notify account already created. SMS and email messages
Thurs 19.1.23	Post message on CoP Team to advise of outcome from cabinet, signpost to webpages and questionnaire and ask for support in disseminating this to stakeholder groups – also ask what assets CoP members need		Engagement	
Thurs 19.1.23	Circulate webpage and questionnaire links to all elected members - also ask what assets members need and		Engagement	

	request they amplify social media messages			
19/20.1.23	PR - NPT Council's budget consultation starts		Comms	
19/20.1.23	'Let's Talk Budget' Article in Staff Sway		Engagement	
19/20.1.23	Budget packs (including paper questionnaires) distributed to public buildings		Engagement / Libraries / courier / etc	
19/20.1.23	Link to "Let's Talk Budget" as top task on website		Web team	
TBC	Animations "Our budget proposals will help/ensure/mean.....that:" CTA please complete the questionnaire		Comms	
Ongoing	Ongoing social media posts		Comms	
30.1.23	Budget Consultation Meeting with Third Sector Organisations		Corp Policy	
31.1.23	Article in NPT News		Comms	
Date TBC	MS Teams online public event		All	
2.2.23 (TBC)	Ldr, Dep. Ldr., & Cab Member to meet with Youth Council		Corp Policy	
3.2.23	PR "One week left to have your say on council's budget proposals"		Comms	
Dates TBC	Public meeting / events around the county borough		Engagement	
Dates TBC	Staff roadshows		Engagement	
Weekly	Contact staff at public buildings to find out if they have any completed paper questionnaires and arrange for these to come back to for inputting onto Snap		Engagement	
By Wed 8.2.23	Contact staff in public buildings and ask if they can remove the		Engagement	

	consultation packs on the Saturday morning/before Monday morning			
Fri 10.2.23	Public Consultation on Budget ends			
10.2.23	Close consultation on Snap		Engagemen t	
From 10.2.23	Collect consultation packs back in		Engagemen t team / libraries /courier	
From 10.2.23	Input any outstanding paper questionnaires to Snap		TBC	
End Feb	NPT News		NC	

7.0 Consultation, Engagement & Communications Risks

Risk/Issue	Action	Owner
Communications & Marketing Teams staff capacity to deliver Communications elements of plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial situation communications and marketing activity to be prioritised in business and work plans 	Strategic Marketing & Comms Advisor
Corporate Policy, Performance and Engagement Team staff capacity to deliver consultation and engagement elements of plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial situation communications and marketing activity to be prioritised in business and work plans Work with CoP to deliver engagement activity 	Corporate Policy, Performance & Engagement Manager
Funding to deliver plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilise existing resources where possible Develop robust business case(s) for any necessary spend 	Both above
People don't engage/consultation fatigue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Let's Talk Budget' marketing activity 	Strategic Marketing & Comms Advisor

9.0 Stakeholder Grid

Existing channels for engagement have been mapped with input from the CoP

Agencies and professionals across the CYP&F sector				
Mechanism	Contact	Email	Frequency	Profile
Think Family Partnership Board				Children, young people and parents accessing early intervention support

Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups				
Mechanism	Contact	Email	Frequency	Profile
NPT Black Minority Ethnic (BME) Community Association				
West Glam BAME Coronavirus Vaccination Forum				
Neath Port Talbot Mosque				

Businesses				
Mechanism	Contact	Email	Frequency	Profile
Destination Management Steering Group				
Tourism Business Email Distribution List				
Afan Forest Park Tourism Stakeholder Group.				
Economic Forum Group				

Business Email Distribution List				
Buy Local Campaign				

Carers				
Mechanism	Contact	Email	Frequency	Profile
Neath Port Talbot Carers Service				
Community Independence Service				See 'residents' section below
Foster Carers Association			Regular carer briefings / Email Bi-monthly meetings to be set up	

Children and Young People				
Mechanism	Contact	Email	Frequency	Profile
Neath Port Talbot Youth Service				Various Youth Work provisions including Community Based Youth Clubs, Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, Relationship and Sexuality Education and needs lead activities for young people.
Youth Council				Elected members of the youth council where young people have a say in matters that affect their lives. Youth Mayor and Deputy Youth Mayor.
Youth Homeless Prevention Team				Support young people aged 14 – 24 to prevent youth homelessness. Universal awareness raising in schools, colleges, training providers and youth groups.

				<p>Targeted, prevention and early intervention sessions for young people identified as at risk of youth homelessness.</p> <p>Youth work support for young people who have experienced homelessness and are in supported/ temporary accommodation.</p>
Youth Emotional Health Team				<p>Support young people aged 11–24 addressing social isolation and loneliness. Youth and community based interventions, through group work or one-to-one support based on the needs of the young people. Support is available Electively Home Educated, Care Experienced, Young Carers, EOTAS, Young Parents or LGBTQ+.</p>
Legacy				<p>Youth Work support for pupils in year 11 both inside and outside of the classroom environment to prepare and support young people into a positive post 16 destination.</p>
Families First				<p>The Families First Youth Work team is an early intervention and prevention service, designed to work with young people and their families in order to prevent problems from escalating.</p> <p>Targeted group work is delivered weekly for young people with speech, language and communication needs, young carers and young people who identify as lgbtq+.</p>
Keeping in Touch				<p>Support young people aged 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and help them make an effective transition to a positive EET destination.</p> <p>Targeted support along with tailor made action plans are devised for individuals, which may provide formal qualifications such as CSCS, CCNSG, Food Hygiene and a variety of other courses. The provision also offers the participants help and advice</p>

				with job search activities, C/V creation and interview techniques. In addition the team are tasked with working in partnership with Careers Wales to reach out to young people aged 16-18 whose EET status is unknown and post 16 EHE young people.
Engagement & Progression Coordination				Local Authority lead in the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework: Identifying young people most at risk of disengagement. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better brokerage and coordination of support. • Stronger tracking and transitions of young people through the system. • Ensuring provision meets the needs of young people. • Strengthening employability skills and opportunities for employment. • Greater accountability for better outcomes for young people.
Your Voice – (Yovo)			Monthly	Care experienced youth forum for 11+. Jnr Yovo is for 7-11.
Junior Safeguarding Board			2 times per school term	Working with West Glamorgan Safeguarding Board.
Cynnydd Project				Young people at risk of becoming NEET- low attendance, SEBD
Inclusion Service				Children and young people with ALN, including ASD, SEBD. Emotional & mental wellbeing support for children and young people.
Young People's Mental Health Forum			Every 6 weeks	Young people representatives from all secondary and special schools in NPT focusing on emotional wellbeing & mental health.
Kickstart Project				

Communities for Work / Communities for Work Plus	See below in 'Residents'			offering employment support via 1 to 1 mentoring service for young people and adults
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LGBTQ+ Groups				
Mechanism	Contact	Email	Frequency	Profile
LGBTQ+ Forum				
Families First				See above under 'Children & Young People'

NPT Council Employees				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chief Executive, Corporate Directors and Heads of Services ○ Accountable Managers and PO's ○ All other council employees ○ Trade Unions 				
Mechanism	Contact	Email	Frequency	Profile
Staff Council Committee (HR, Unions, Cabinet)				
Llan – head teachers				Primary Headteachers
NAASH				Secondary Headteachers
NPT Council Internal comms			ongoing	Intranet, Chief Exec's engagement sessions, Employee Portal, staff sway, monthly magazine 'In the Loop', email all users, staff area of web, new social networking platform (pilot due)
School Governor Board Primary Schools School Governor Board Secondary Schools NPT Governor Association				

Older People				
Mechanism	Contact	Email	Frequency	Profile
Age Connects NPT (50+ year olds)				adults aged 50+
lobbying and campaigning for Older Peoples' Housing				
Digital Inclusion				
RSLs				

Partners				
Mechanism	Contact	Email	Frequency	Profile
Public Service Board (PSB)			Quarterly	Statutory partners – Local Authority, SBUHB, MAWWFRS, NRW
Safer NPT Partnership (Community Safety)				
Social Care Wales Workforce Development Partnership (SCWWDP)			Quarterly	Statutory, third sector, private care sector, people who use care & support, carers. training providers, Education, Social Care Wales, Care Forum Wales
NPT Employers Support Group (Chair)			Bi-monthly	A wide range of local organisations offering business and employment services to companies in NPTC
NPT Engagement Group (Chair)				
NPT Safe and Well partnership			Fortnightly, but likely to move to every other month	
VAWDASV leadership group			quarterly	

Area Planning Board for substance misuse (including its subgroups)			quarterly	
West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Board				

Private sector care companies active in the NPT area and council officers				
Mechanism	Contact	Email	Frequency	Profile
Care Providers Forum – Residential and nursing - private sector				
Learning Difficulties Provider Meeting				
Mental Health Provider Meeting				
Domiciliary Care Provider Meeting				

Residents				
Mechanism	Contact	Email	Frequency	Profile
Communities for Work / Communities for Work Plus				Employment support for people aged 16+ (youth mentors and adult mentors) – offering employment support via 1 to 1 mentoring service for young people and adults, with funding available for training to move participants closer to the job market
Local Area Coordinators				Communities of Baglan, Aberavon, Sandfields East, Sandfields West
Local Area Coordinators				Communities of Briton Ferry East, Briton Ferry West, Cimla, Neath East, Neath North, Neath South, Tonna

Local Area Coordinators				Communities of Aderdulais, Bryncoch North, Bryncoch South, Cadoxton, Coedffranc Central, Coedffranc North, Coedffranc West, Dyffryn
Local Area Coordinators				Communities of Blaengwrach, Crynant, Glynneath, Onllwyn, Seven Sisters, Resolven
Local Area Coordinators				Communities of Alltwen, Rhos, Cwmllynfell, Godre'graig, Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen, Lower Brynamman, Pontardawe, Trebanos, Ystalyfera
Local Area Coordinators				Communities of Cymmer, Glyncorwg, Gwynfi, Bryn & Cwmavon, Pelenna, Port Talbot, Taibach, Margam
NPT Citizens' Panel				NPT residents
Bspoked and Fresh Start and Disability Support Group.				People with a range of impairments e.g. from mild behaviour/mental health/learning disability/challenging behaviours.
Community Independence Service				People with a range of impairments e.g. from mild behaviour/mental health/learning disability to more significant levels of impairment
Community Connecting Team				Connecting disabled people (predominantly those with learning impairments and mental ill health) to community activities, creating and maintaining community activities.
Deaf Club				
Vision Impaired West Glamorgan				
Voice & Choice				
Your Voice				
Regional Coproduction Group				
NPT Safe & Well Community Leads				Under Review

Welsh Speakers

Mechanism	Contact	Email	Frequency	Profile
Welsh Language Officer Group			Quarterly	Internal group comprising Directorate representatives

Publications				
Mechanism	Contact	Email	Frequency	Profile
The Ponty Mag			Monthly	Community magazine for the Pontardawe area
Paws on Patrol				Newsletter for dog walkers who report matters of concern to Safer NPT

Senedd Members (MS/AS)
David Rees MS, Welsh Labour Aberavon constituency Thomas Giffard MS - Welsh Conservatives Sioned Williams MS - Plaid Cymru – The Party of Wales Altaf Hussain MS - Welsh Conservatives Luke Fletcher MS - Plaid Cymru – The Party of Wales Jeremy Miles SM, Welsh Labour, Neath

Members Parliament (NPT)
Stephen Kinnock MP, Aberavon Christina Rees MP, Neath

NPTCBC Elected Members	
Leader, cabinet members, relevant ward members, all other elected members	Via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cabinet Support Office - Democratic Services

Town & Community Councils x 19
No single point of contact within the council – see contact details on NPT Council website – link