



NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

17th May 2023

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER – HUW JONES

Matter for Information

Update in relation to the delivery of the Neath Port Talbot Hardship Relief Scheme

Wards Affected: All

Purpose of report

To update Cabinet Members in relation to the delivery of the Neath Port Talbot Hardship Relief Scheme.

Background

At the Cabinet meeting of 28th February 2022, Members set aside £2m into a hardship relief reserve and tasked the Chief Finance Officer with developing a hardship relief scheme.

On 29th June 2022, Cabinet agreed a hardship relief scheme to be delivered in partnership with an external organisation, Warm Wales.

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update as to the delivery of the scheme to date.

Progress to date

Prior to the scheme being launched a legal agreement was developed and entered into by both parties. This was followed by a period of staff recruitment to ensure that Warm Wales were able to commence delivery of the scheme.

The Neath Port Talbot Hardship Relief Scheme was officially launched on 29th November 2022. Due to the unprecedented demand for the scheme the application process was paused for a number of weeks between 12th December 2022 and 20th January 2023 to avoid an unmanageable backlog in applications.

As at 31st March 2023, five hundred and eighty six households across the County Borough had received support through the scheme. Support provided has included payment of fuel debt directly to energy providers; the provision of white goods; support with water debt and the provision of small items such as electric blankets.

Expenditure as at the end of March totalled £188k with the level of support currently now running at approximately £80k per month.

In relation to the eligibility criteria for the fund following discussions with Warm Wales, it does not appear that the income thresholds are proving to be a barrier to accessing the scheme. Given that the scheme eligibility criteria allow for support to be provided in exceptional circumstances it is not felt necessary to make any amendments to the aforementioned criteria.

In relation to a geographical overview of the support provided the graphic in Appendix 1 details the geographic areas where support has been provided. Members should note that there may be multiple households supported within each area.

Appendix 2 includes some feedback from householders who have received support from the scheme.

Financial Impact

Based on expenditure patterns to date, the £2m set aside for the scheme will be sufficient for the scheme to continue for an 18-24 month period.

Integrated Impact Assessment

This report is for information only.

Valleys Community Impacts

Positive impacts as households across the County Borough including many in Valley's communities have benefited from the scheme.

Workforce impacts

No impact

Legal impact

No impact

Risk management

No impact.

Consultation

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

Recommendation For Noting

It is recommended that Members note the progress to date in relation to the delivery of the hardship relief scheme.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Geographic overview of support provided

Appendix 2 – Householder feedback

List of background papers

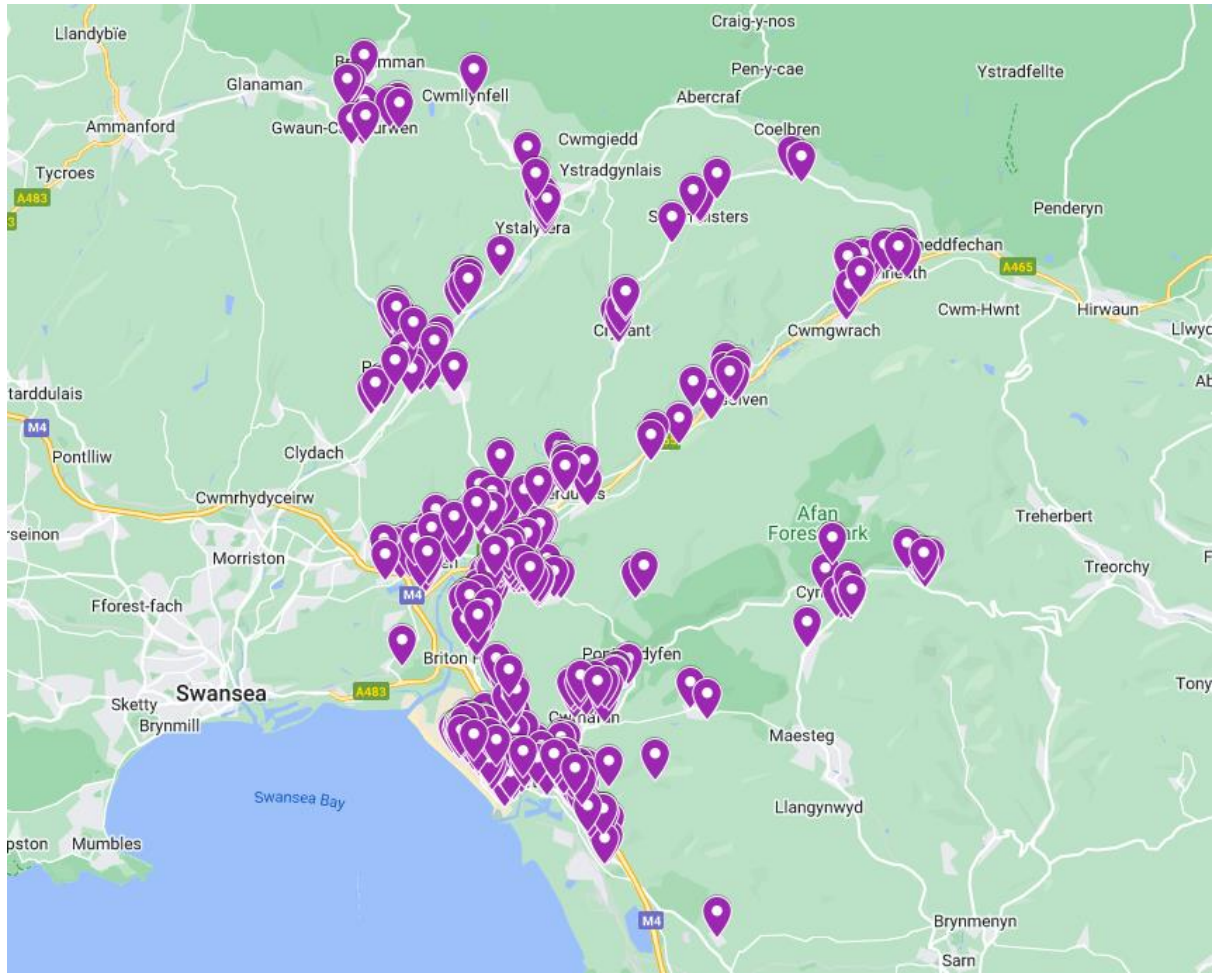
Cabinet papers February 2022 and June 2022

Officer contact

Mr Huw Jones – Chief Finance Officer

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Appendix 1- Geographical overview of support provided



Appendix 2- Householder Feedback

HH = Householder

B – 73, lives with his wife

HH originally got in touch as his house was cold and costing them a lot to keep warm – he is recovering from cancer and struggles to maintain a good body temperature.

Hi

Please escalate this email to your manager. Being 73 years of age and having suffered with throat cancer the last few years and not being very computer literate I would like to highly praise how supportive and helpful you have been in helping me. You are a star and I am sure I am not the first to praise you. Thank you so much and please show this email to your manager.

Regards

B

J – 34, lives with her partner and their 3 children

HH originally got in touch for help with heating and the cost of gas. She is on UC and has some mental health problems, her partner works and they have 3 young children. Her Community Worker was able to get onto a discounted water tariff, saving £350 a year, as well as support her with an energy payment and an Argos voucher via the fund.

Mr E and his wife – in their 80s

HH got in touch as they were nearly out of oil. In discussion with his Community Worker he explained that he has a bad memory due to strokes and cannot walk well. His wife also has mobility issues after having multiple hip and knee replacements.

They rent the property from an RSL and are responsible for the white goods in the house.

He said that they struggle to keep the house warm – the house loses heat very quickly once the heating is off. He also said their fridge-freezer was leaking and not keeping things fresh.

Appendix 2- Householder Feedback

The Community Worker was able to arrange an oil delivery and also a new fridge-freezer.

The HH's daughter sent a card to the office to say thank you on behalf of them all – the support has meant a great deal to them.

SP – 29, lives with her 3 children

HH originally got in touch as her fridge-freezer had broken. In discussion with her Community Worker she explained she had accrued some fuel debt due the increase in prices, and that she was being threatened with legal action over this. This was very stressful for her and we were able to pay the debt off.

Text from HH:

Just wanted to let you know the payment went through finally all sorted thank you so much for your help x

Mr K and wife, late 70s.

HH got in touch to see if we could help with their heating as the oil fuelled heating they use is expensive but they need the heating on regularly due to breathing issues they have.

An oil delivery was arranged.

From KB, his Community Worker:

Rang Mr K and explained he will have oil delivered and if I can find out a date I will call him back, and he asked how he pays the money back bless him. When I said he doesn't need to pay it back he nearly burst into tears.