



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

Dyddiad/ Date 11 July 2023
Rhif Ffôn/ Direct Line 01639 763309
E-bost/ Email leader@npt.gov.uk
Cyswllt/ Contact
Eich cyf / Your ref
Ein cyf/ Our ref SH/SC

Rebecca Evans, MS
Minister for Finance and Local Government

Dear Minister

Poverty and the Cost of Living

As partners of the Public Services Board in Neath Port Talbot, we have historically prioritised the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities. We are acutely aware of the impact the current unsustainable costs of living are having on our residents and the pressures they are facing.

In our Well-being Plan 2023-28, we have set out the steps we will take as partners to combat the impacts of poverty in our communities by ensuring all our residents are aware of and able to access the support available. We have also planned a more long term piece of work looking into the root causes of poverty in our area and the influence we can have on these as anchor institutions.

Whilst we are committed to collaborating to provide the best possible outcomes for our residents, we are also aware that many of the levers to tackling the root causes of poverty lie with the Welsh and UK governments. We are also aware that while inflation may be brought under control in the coming months, this will simply slow the rate at which costs are increasing and by itself addresses neither the lack of affordability of essentials nor the issue of increasing indebtedness.

We are writing as a Board to express our deepest concerns that the hardship being experienced by local residents will continue to increase without more fundamental economic reform. A recent workshop involving those working to provide frontline advice and support services highlight a growing problem with debt and associated mental health impacts, additional to ongoing problems associated with food, energy, housing and basic skills. We also heard that third sector organisations are also being stretched both in terms of the growing complexity of caseloads and the financial viability of organisation given inflationary and other cost pressures. I attach a copy of the output from the workshop for your reference.

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Croesewir gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg a byddwn yn ymdrin â gohebiaeth Gymraeg a Saesneg i'r un safonau ac amserlenni.
We welcome correspondence in Welsh and will deal with Welsh and English correspondence to the same standards and timescales.

I would highlight in particular the alarming increase in debt assessments carried out by Citizens Advice and a 112% rise in the number of food vouchers distributed during 2022-23 as opposed to 2021-22. Age Connect Neath Port Talbot reports that queries and associated casework around welfare benefits has increased by 140% and information and advice cases by 185%. Its Local Energy Action Partnership Service (which provides energy efficiency checks and provision of equipment) experienced a 75% increase from quarter 3 to quarter 4 of 2022-2023.

There is no doubt that the cost of living is now a public health emergency. We appreciate that the Welsh Government has already taken a number of steps to alleviate hardship, however, we are very concerned at the deteriorating picture across our county borough. Whilst we will continue to work together to support our communities using the levers at our disposal, this will not be sufficient to address the structural causes of poverty and indebtedness in our communities and our communities will need further help from both the Welsh and UK Governments to make a sustainable difference. We would welcome an opportunity as a Public Services Board to discuss our concerns in more detail.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. K. Hunt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish over the name.

Cllr S K Hunt
Chair of Neath Port Talbot Public Services Board