

Cost of Living Report – Update to Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

13th October 2023

Cost of Living and Poverty Prevention Partnership

This report provides the most recent update of the work of the partnership.

Cost of Living Report and PSB Letter to Welsh Government

In June 2023 the partnership finalised its Cost of Living Report. The report included information on:

- Cost of Living and Poverty Prevention Partnership achievements
- Impact on the Third Sector (Voluntary and Community Sector)
- National Picture
- Feedback from the Cost of Living Workshop (March 2023)

The PSB agreed to raise concerns as a board regarding the cost of living crisis with Welsh Government. In July 2023, a letter was sent to the Minister for Finance and Local Government (Rebecca Evans MS) from the PSB, attaching the partnership's Cost of Living Report as evidence of the scale of the impact being experienced in Neath Port Talbot.

A copy of the PSB's letter and the partnership's Cost of Living Workshop (March 2023) Report are appended for your information.

Autumn Workshop

Following the success of the spring workshop, the Cost of Living and Poverty Prevention Partnership Steering Group set an action to schedule six-monthly workshops with the wider partners. The workshops will help to maintain the strong relationships already established across the wider partnership, enabling partners to meet in person and share the highly valued 'on the ground' feedback in the face of an evolving cost of living crisis.

An autumn workshop will take place on 10th October 2023, at the Princess Royal Theatre in Port Talbot. Over 65 individuals are expected to gather together from across NPT Council, Neath Port Talbot CVS, members of the Steering Group, Reference Group and Third Sector Strategic Forum.

The focus of the workshop will be preparing for winter, and working together to ensure that people who need help during the cost-of-living crisis know how

to get it. It is important to be proactive to help prevent people getting into crisis, as the level of need remains significant within our communities.

Purpose of the workshop:

- Reporting back to the wider group of partners about the work the Steering Group have been doing;
- Provide information about what is planned for the winter period to ensure it makes sense from the partners' point of view, and whether there's anything missing;
- Develop a logic model that captures current actions and suggestions on how we can work together to achieve the three PSB key outcomes.

Key Themes

Presentations will be delivered that reflect the work currently under way, as well as the plan for winter. These presentations will reflect key themes:

- Benefits Take-Up
- Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) / Corporate Policy Officer Role
- Warm Spaces
- Hardship Relief Scheme (inc. Energy)
- Food Poverty
- Housing
- Debt
- Mental Health and Wellbeing

Breakout sessions are planned to enable attendees to reflect on the work already under way; is there more that partners could do in advance of winter, and are there any gaps that need to be considered/addressed.

Logic Model

Public Health Wales (PHW) will facilitate an activity at the workshop, which will focus on the partnership's logic model. The logic model will evidence the inputs/actions as to how the partnership will support Neath Port Talbot PSB's Wellbeing Objective 2: *All our communities are thriving and sustainable*.

The logic model should enable the partnership to test that what they're doing is making a difference, and identify those people in our communities impacted by the actions. The logic model will ensure accountability back to Neath Port Talbot PSB, with detail of who is going to contribute to each part.

The focus of the activity will be the 3 outputs:

- Those who need help and support with the cost of living know what support is available and how to get it
- Gaps in help and support are identified, and a way of addressing them found
- The strategic objectives and actions will be reset

To develop the logic model and ensure the partnership have the right actions in place to achieve them, attendees will be asked to share feedback on the actions outlined in the draft logic model.

To ensure that the activity of the wider partners is built into the logic model, the activity will ask attendees:

- What actions are taking place within your organisation?
- What additional actions do we need to take as a partnership?

Autumn Workshop – Next Steps

All feedback provided by attendees will be captured and a summary produced.

The summary document will pull together the feedback from each of the workshop activities:

- Plan for Winter
 - Is the plan sufficient, or are there any gaps?
 - What more could we do in advance of winter?
- Logic Model
 - Actions to achieve the 3 key outputs

The document will be shared with the wider partners, to enable them to reflect on the information and add any further feedback that they feel was not captured at the workshop.

The updated document will then be presented to the Steering Group (at their November meeting), which will include a collated action plan of activity under way in Neath Port Talbot to support citizens and communities facing hardship as a result of the cost-of-living crisis.

Reporting back to the Neath Port Talbot PSB

To ensure accountability back to the PSB, a report will be produced by the Corporate Policy Officer (Tackling Poverty) that brings together the work being done across the county borough to address hardship.

The report will be presented at the PSB meeting on 23rd January 2024.

Develop Further Priorities for 3-6-9 months

As a result of the workshop, the Cost of Living and Poverty Prevention Partnership's Steering Group will produce an action plan that looks ahead to winter 23/24 and focuses on what partners can do in the 'here and now.'

Communications will continue to be a key element of the partnership's plan to ensure that those who need help and support with the cost of living, know what support is available and how to access it.

With regards to the longer-term approach to tackle hardship, the partnership will look to develop a plan that makes best use of the 'levers' the partnership has to address the root causes of poverty and deprivation.

Revising the Structure of the Partnership

As part of the longer-term approach the Steering Group are proposing to revisit the structure of the wider partnership, to ensure meaningful engagement.

At the spring workshop (March 2023), feedback from partners highlighted six themes in relation to 'on the ground' cost-of-living pressures: energy, food, debt, housing, mental health, and basic skills. Over the summer expressions of interest were sought from the Reference Group and Third Sector Strategic Forum, who were invited to align themselves with one (or more) workstream associated with their area of expertise/interest; 19 responses were received.

As focus areas are agreed and the action plan developed to outline what initiatives will be taken forward, and by whom, the Steering Group will revisit the structure of the partnership and ensure it is 'fit for purpose,' to ensure accountability back to the Neath Port Talbot PSB.

NPT Council Poverty Officers / Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT)

Two officers are now in post (as of end July 2023) at NPT Council, to support the poverty agenda. The posts are both 100% funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF).

The posts will provide additional capacity to coordinate services across the county borough, to further enhance support for households, and to utilise intelligence about what additional support is needed to support our communities (which in turn will inform the development of a Poverty Plan).

Utilisation of the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) database will enable us to identify people who may not be accessing the benefits they are entitled to. We will target interventions at those most in need, raising awareness of additional support they may be entitled to (e.g., Pension Credit).

LIFT's functionality will also enable us to track the outcome of the intervention, so that we can see what difference has been made (e.g., the financial impact of the benefits claim).

Alongside the specific poverty campaigns, it is intended that the LIFT officer will provide additional capacity to support the wider poverty agenda (e.g., employability). The data within LIFT could provide useful insight to service areas who want to target their own campaigns and projects at supporting people and communities across NPT.

Hardship Relief Scheme – Phase 2

Since its launch in autumn 2022, the Hardship Relief Scheme – delivered in partnership with Warm Wales - has supported 1,020 households (as of 31-Aug-23).

As autumn/winter approach, Warm Wales will move into 'phase 2' of their operation. This will take an outreach approach in order to reach those members of the community not previously engaged with, taking a particular focus on those who don't have access to the internet.

Activities will include attending community events, as well as building networks to support with cross-referrals.

Lived Experience

Feedback received from wider partners at the spring workshop was that 'lived experience' would be an important element of the plan to tackle poverty.

The Corporate Policy Officer will work with Neath Port Talbot CVS to explore options of obtaining 'lived experience,' and how the partnership can incorporate information and feedback from people experiencing hardship.

Neath Port Talbot Third Sector Discretionary Cost of Living Crisis Grant

Neath Port Talbot CVS, in partnership with Neath Port Talbot Council, have launched a one-off grant scheme aimed at supporting third sector organisations that have experienced increased demand for their services due to the cost-of-living crisis.

A total of £70,000 has been made available under the Third Sector Discretionary Cost of Living Crisis Grant Scheme, to support organisations that:

- Provide advice and information to individuals
- Promote income maximisation
- Provide a community facility that offers a range of support services and activities

The scheme is open to applications (max. £10,000) up to 5pm on 18th October 2023.

<https://www.nptcvs.wales/neath-port-talbot-third-sector-discretionary-cost-of-living-crisis-grant-scheme-launched/>

Communications

Communications remains a key element in the response to the cost of living crisis.

The cost of living webpages on both the NPT Council and NPT CVS websites have continued to receive views during the warmer months.

NPT CVS:

- Total views since setting up the page (November 2022): 1,300
- Views between 1st April and 26th Sep 2023: 428

NPT Council:

- Views between 1st Sep 2022 and 31st March 2023: 34,505
- Views between 1st April and 30th Sep 2023: 8,451

Stakeholder e-bulletins continue to be circulated, highlighting information about the support available from local and national organisations to help people who are struggling with the cost of living.

NPT Council's social media has been utilised to promote schemes such as the School Uniform Grant, Free School Meals, Food and Fun, as well as free activities for children and families during the summer holidays.

Recent social media activity in September and October has included promotion of the Port Talbot Opportunity Hub, NPT Employability recruitment events, the 'Gathering Place's' community-driven initiative, as well as signposting to help and support available with the cost of living this winter.

Appendix 1

PSB Letter to Welsh Government

Appendix 2

Final Cost of Living Report June 2023

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