



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

**NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL
NEATH PORT TALBOT SOCIAL SERVICES, HOUSING AND
COMMUNITY SAFETY CABINET BOARD**

16th November 2023

**Report of the Head of Children and Young People Services –
Keri Warren**

Matter for Information

Wards Affected All Wards

**SOCIAL SERVICES CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLES SINGLE
POINT OF CONTACT (SPOC)**

Purpose of the Report

To provide an update on our Single Point of Contact in Children and Young Peoples Services

Executive Summary

Officers of Neath Port Talbot Council (NPTC) will provide an update to Cabinet Members on the current demands and pressures faced by our Single Point of Contact (SPOC) in Children and Young Peoples Services (CYPS), along with the plans in place which allow us to continue to ensure we are meeting our statutory responsibilities whilst also supporting the wellbeing of staff. The report is accompanied by relevant data to support the narrative being presented.

Background

Members will be aware that during and post the COVID19 pandemic

there has been an increase in the demands faced by Social Services Departments generally across the country; with a rise in referral rates, and challenges in recruitment and retention of qualified social workers. It is also recognised that although Social Work as a profession has been overheated over the last three years, few teams have felt the same level of relentless pressure as intake teams have done across Wales. The same factors have impacted Children's Services in NPT.

Children's Services in NPT has also faced the same challenges over the recent years, but through a dedicated workforce driven by outcomes focused practice, we have been able to maintain a level of stability and consistency when responding to the needs of the most vulnerable members of our community. However, over the last 12 months, we have seen the impact of the pressures on the stability of our workforce, especially on our Single Point of Contact (SPOC) Team. Since March 2023, eight experienced staff members have moved on from SPOC, leaving front line Children's Services altogether for other positions in the wider directorate (five of the eight social workers have moved onto Adults Social Care in NPT) and also to other Local Authorities outside of frontline Social Work. Staff have taken part in exit interviews and have spoken about a seeking a better work life balance, in a less pressurised environment and cite feeling burned out from the pressures of working in a front line children's team post pandemic and in the midst of a cost of living crisis. It is also recognised that NPT is not competitive (despite a market supplement) in relation to financial remuneration with neighbouring authorities. Since the end of March 2023 we have lost the following staff members:

- 1 team manager;
- 2 deputy team managers;
- 2 consultant social workers;
- 3 social workers.

The demand in SPOC continues to have an upward trend and there is no indication that this will slow down at any point in the near future. We took time to reflect on whether the increase in the referral rates was as

a result of a temporary flux however given the data and the continued increase we have come to the conclusion that this is now our new post-pandemic norm.

The below chart shows the comparison month to month over the last three years.

| Year / Month | Jan - Dec 2020 | Jan - Dec 2021 | Jan - Dec 2022 | Jan - Dec 2023 |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| January | 1002 | 967 | 1229 | 1562 |
| February | 974 | 962 | 1145 | 1591 |
| March | 961 | 1318 | 1352 | 1674 |
| April | 817 | 1233 | 1210 | 1291 |
| May | 926 | 1279 | 1535 | 1551 |
| June | 1124 | 1437 | 1341 | 1807 |
| July | 1139 | 1450 | 1480 | 1648 |
| August | 894 | 1294 | 1561 | 1515 |
| September | 1049 | 1325 | 1534 | 1723 |
| October | 1220 | 1328 | 1547 | 1863 |
| November | 1219 | 1233 | 1522 | |
| December | 1049 | 1091 | 1043 | |
| Total | 12374 | 14917 | 16499 | 16225 |

Even though we continue to see a rise in the demand, the team works hard to maintain a high standard of practice that is outcomes focused and ensures we are supporting families appropriately. At this current time, we are confident that all referrals are sighted and actioned by a manager within 24 hours with appropriate and proportionate enquiries made with partner agencies. In order to ensure we are meeting our statutory responsibilities, all safeguarding related referrals are prioritised and allocated once signed off by a manager.

It is recognised that without an experienced team that is fully staffed, we would not be able to meet our current demands, which would result

in delays in completing care and support assessments and potentially (in the longer term) not being able to meet our safeguarding responsibilities. We have therefore drawn on the support of the wider service to ensure that there is sufficient capacity within the team and we have also increased the number of agency staff to three full time social worker posts at an additional cost of £270,000 per year. It is anticipated that this will further increase by another two agency posts before the end of the 2023.

The plan of support in place includes:

| Action | By When | Review Arrangements | Impact |
|--|-------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 3 Agency Social Workers | Currently in post | Monthly | Additional Financial pressures on the service Relieves pressures on the team and allows for referrals to continue to be responded to in a timely fashion Promotes staff wellbeing and maintains a work life balance |
| Additional 2 Agency Social Workers (based on demand) | Christmas 2023 | Monthly | Additional Financial implications Relieves pressures on the team and allows for referrals to continue to be responded to in a timely fashion Promotes staff wellbeing and maintains a work life balance |
| Drawing on wider workforce experience | Current | Monthly | Increases pressure on wider workforce |

| | | | |
|--|-----------------|--------|--|
| (Social Workers) | | | Results in non-essential business being delayed/postponed Relieves pressures in SPOC |
| Drawing on wider workforce experience (Management) | Current | Weekly | Increases Pressures on wider workforce Supports management structure in SPOC Ensures all referrals are sighted within 24 hours |
| Staff Wellbeing Sessions | Ongoing/Current | Weekly | Positively impacts on retention Supports staff wellbeing |
| PO support | Ongoing/Current | Daily | Reduces Pressures Supports management structure Supports staff wellbeing and retention |

As members will be able to see, there are several layers of support going into SPOC at this current time. All of the arrangements are temporary and have been implemented in recognition of the needs of the service. Each action has its own review time frame, however the overall plan is reviewed by the Team Manager and Principal Officer on a weekly basis. As already indicated, although we recognise there is vulnerability in the team, given the number of vacancies, we are sufficiently satisfied and reassured that the current plan of support allows us to ensure we are continuing to meet our statutory responsibilities and practicing to the high standard we have come to expect of our Children's Services department over the years.

Positively, we have been able to recruit an experienced team manager into SPOC, Carly Crocker and have been able to promote two deputy team managers from within the team. We continue to actively recruit into the remaining vacancies and have interviews lined up within the next four weeks.

Financial Impacts

No implications.

Integrated Impact Assessment

There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as this report is for monitoring / information purposes.

Valleys Communities Impacts

No implications.

Workforce Impacts

No implications.

Legal Impacts

The report outlines the respective legal duties and impacts.

Risk Management Impacts

No implications.

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”

SPOC has a positive impact in respect of this duty.

Consultation

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

Appendices

None.

List of Background Papers

None

Officer Contact

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