



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot  
Neath Port Talbot Council

# Social Services, Health & Housing Director's Annual Report 2022-23

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## Foreword



Welcome to my annual report reflecting the period April 2022 to March 2023. In my introduction last year I noted that we had faced one of the biggest healthcare challenges in a century and that the social care system had been pushed to the limits.

While we have emerged from the other side of a global pandemic, Social Services continues to deal with the legacy of Covid and faces new challenges. A cost-of-living crisis is putting additional pressure on our resources, services, staff and citizens.

Local volunteers and our team of Local Area Coordinators are busier than ever, while our Community Mental Health Teams have seen ever-increasing numbers of referrals, with so many people impacted by lockdowns and social isolation. And we have seen a sharp rise in the number of high risk victims of domestic abuse supported.

Staff, partners and communities continue to show remarkable commitment, compassion, adaptability, and determination to maintain services in these challenging times and for this I send my sincere thanks. Services affected by the pandemic have now fully reopened, with all such as our day services and respite services now operating at full capacity.

The deplorable war in Ukraine has led to a local Neath Port Talbot response with 267 citizens travelling around 2,000 miles, fleeing from their communities and welcomed into ours.

Recruitment and retention of carers remains a challenge across NPT and Wales as a whole. We continue to invest in staff training and advocate the benefits of working in the social care system.

With so much demand on services we continue to innovate, with increasing emphasis on supporting people in their own communities including through Assistive Technology, and adaptations to homes via Disabled Facilities Grants.

We have many challenges to face as a public service and as a community. By continuing to work together we will achieve our goal of ensuring the most vulnerable people get the support they need and deserve.

**Andrew Jarrett**  
**Director of Social Services, Health & Housing**

## Director's summary of performance

As at the end of the year 2,117 adults had a service and care plan (compared to 2,344 in the previous year), a near 10% fall, while those aged 65+ receiving a service was 1,788 (1,758 the year before).

We have remodelled Adult Services into three area networks mirroring the Health Board's GP Clusters to bring care and support closer to our communities, and we are building on our Prevention and Early Intervention, including identifying unpaid carers sooner.

Last year 225 adult carers assessments were completed, up one-third on the previous year, as well as 20 parent carer assessments, as demand returned following the pandemic.

Helping people return to their own homes and communities after leaving hospital is key, and the percentage of adults who received reablement who needed no further package of care increased to 71% from 64% the previous year.

NPT has seen a growth of recruitment agencies entering the local market which are presenting increased competition for social care staff recruitment. This trend could potentially destabilise the ability of local service providers to maintain and grow their local workforce.

As people continue to want to remain at home and providers unable to recruit and train staff this impacts on the residential care sector. When a person either in hospital or in the community requires a domiciliary care package, and the ability to meet this need is not available due to staff shortages the person has to be placed in a residential home which impacts on their independence and skills over time.

We strongly believe that a child's needs are best met by their own families if this can be safely supported. I am pleased to report that the number of Children Looked After continues to fall, standing at 258 (of whom 14 were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) at the end of March 2023, down from 268 in the previous year.

During the year 97% of children's assessments were completed within the target 42 days from point of referral.

The use of children's residential care home placements has increased by 40% over the last 12 months; this increase is due to a number of factors including

the impact of insufficient local placement availability within the local foster care market.

We continue to engage with Welsh Government including its 'eliminate profit from care' agenda and the potential risks and implications such approaches present to the local markets.

Hillside Secure Unit is continuing to review its service model to 'future proof' its service to ensure it is able to accommodate the future demands of the provision as well as being financially sustainable in the long term, and NPT's use of secure residential care home placements has remained stable.

The overall number of children and young people accessing advocacy services has increased in NPT by 11% over the last 12 months due to continued efforts to embed advocacy within local practice.

The last year saw 2,650 presentations to the Housing Options Service; an increase of 11% on the previous year, with an average of 40% due to some form of relationship breakdown either with a partner or within the family.

The service also saw an increase in presentations from private sector tenants, with an average of 25% being from tenants who have been served a notice to quit. This has increased due to the implementation of the Renting Homes Act in December 2022 which has resulted in over 50 landlords in NPT leaving the rental market. Temporary Accommodation (TA) numbers continue to increase with 205 households in TA at the end of the 2022/23 financial year.

The time taken to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) is recovering well, with the number completed for 2022/23 standing at 272, up a third on the previous year while the end to end time (referral to completion) improved to 245 days from 339 days in 2021/22.

Our Commissioning Unit provides support to and undertakes monitoring of the various service providers, including care homes, domiciliary care and others.

Partnership working remains important to us; we work closely with colleagues in Swansea Council, Swansea Bay University Health Board, the third sector and the West Glamorgan regional partners on a plethora of activities including hospital discharges and mental health placements.

As usual we set a number of key priorities for the directorate last year to ensure we continue to meet the care and support needs of the people of NPT.

## Priorities for 2022-23 – What we said we would do and what we achieved

- **To strengthen opportunities for early offers of help, to ensure vulnerable children, their families, and adults in need of support are having access to community based support services at the earliest opportunity.**
- ✓ We continue to invest in supporting families at an earlier stage through the strengthening of support services and the recruitment of a full time principal officer with responsibility for prevention and family support. We work in partnership with our colleagues including community services to ensure that we respond to challenges such as the current cost of living crisis and ensure that families have access to support when they need it. We provide family focussed support by working in partnership with families and building on strengths.
- ✓ We work collaboratively with families to build resilience and prevent problems escalating by providing early offers of help and support. We understand that children's needs are best met by their own families, if this can be safely supported. Helping families stay together is a key focus of Children's Services. Early intervention and prevention services helps reduce the number of children and young people reaching the threshold for care and needing to become care experienced, or support them to return safely to their families in a timely way. It is important that families receive the right support at the right time.
- ✓ We reviewed and aligned Adults prevention and early intervention services to place based clusters to ensure people have access to streamlined and timely support.
- ✓ We enhanced the number of Local Area Coordinators across the county borough to 14. The team work with circa 500 people on a 1-2-1 basis and another 400 people in community group settings. 40% of case work is being undertaken with people who aren't known to services and we are looking to increase this number.
- ✓ We completed the mapping of community hubs across the county borough, including food banks. Information from this exercise was fed into the Local Development Plan and used to support services through the cost-of-living crisis.
- ✓ We completed the review and restructure of Safe and Well Volunteering, to create an adult volunteer befriending service. There are currently 40 active volunteers working across the networks and work is ongoing to look at

more specialist volunteering opportunities for people with additional learning needs.

- ✓ We strengthened partnership working with the third sector, bringing a more coordinated approach to community engagement and development.
  - ✓ We provided support and funding of the warm spaces with partner organisations during the winter period to support individuals and communities with the cost-of-living crisis.
  - ✓ We piloted a falls response service within the Afan network, for individuals with a life line. This has been very successful with calls being responded to within 45 minutes, with over half of fallers remaining at home, avoiding a conveyance to hospital. Work is ongoing to support further rollout of the service.
  - ✓ We delivered targeted individual and community interventions directed and influenced by population health mapping undertaken with Public Health Wales.
  - ✓ Continued cross directorate partnership working, with the aim of bringing together services to support community accessibility and help people remain resilient.
  - ✓ Developed a draft Adults Social Isolation and Loneliness Strategy. The implementation plan is being coproduced with the community and partner organisations.
  - ✓ Implementing the development of a community focused school in partnership with Awel Y Mor primary school based in Sandfields, Port Talbot.
- **To support children and young people to live in safe, stable and permanent families and to ensure that only those children who need to be looked after are in care.**
- ✓ In the leaving care cohort, there is now a drive to focus on revocation of care orders where appropriate. We are developing a *When I am ready* cohort and supported accommodation including transitional models for post 16 young people.
  - ✓ In Youth Justice Services, young people in care would be supported by Children's Services and the teams involved with care experienced children, and plans are created in conjunction with Youth Justice and Early

Intervention workers to ensure that only young people who need to be looked after remain in care.

- ✓ Our 'business as usual' approach has enabled us to maintain a concerted effort in managing our Children Looked After population and ensuring that the long term care plans for our children and young people are regularly reviewed. During the period we have seen **65** children discharged from care in a planned way. This is a decrease on the previous year (**78**).
  
- **To further embed participation and engagement across the directorate, to ensure the voice of vulnerable children and adults are at the forefront of our services.**
  
- ✓ We have developed a Most Significant Change (MSC) approach which gathers stories from the frontline that are focused on capturing change outcomes that have resulted from an intervention or programme. Using MSC to capture stories provides a rich suite of qualitative information that can be used to inform practice, policy and decision making throughout the directorate.
  
- ✓ The Engagement and Participation Officer and the Youth Justice and Early Intervention Service have continued to deliver the Life Skills programme to support care leavers and the YJES service users. Over an 8 week period young people attend every Tuesday 10am to 1pm. The participants successfully learn a range of culinary skills and become competent at cooking healthy, budget meals. Further training around budgeting and laundry are also delivered. It has become evident the project offers more than basic life skills as the participants enjoy the social aspect and improved wellbeing from regular interaction with peers and professionals. The voice of the young people continues to be captured in the Exit Questionnaire conducted when young people no longer need the support of the service.
  
- ✓ A Young Persons Interview Panel was set up to help appoint a Principal Officer. Four young people designed questions to ask the applicants and feedback their thoughts and opinions to the senior panel. It was pleasing to see the chosen applicant was also one of the top interviewees selected by the young people. The YP Panel will continue to be involved in future management interviews.



➤ **To ensure a robust, resilient, compassionate and consistent approach to safeguarding practice across Social Care.**

Our approach to Safeguarding across Children and Adults continues to be streamlined and strengthened by the following:

- ✓ We have brought consistency in the recording of strategy discussions and strategy meetings across the Directorate; our designated safeguarding officer role is now well established and proving effective in response to professional abuse;
- ✓ A neglect tool has been developed in conjunction with the University of Birmingham, practitioners, parents and partner agencies to enhance our response to neglect, whilst recognising social harms and how such skews perceptions of neglect;
- ✓ We have worked regionally to understand our assessment of mental capacity and best interest meetings and the findings of audit work will shape standardised assessment tools moving forward; our response to harm outside the family home continues to be developed and refined and has extended across Adult Services;
- ✓ The rapid response to suspected suicide forum has been extended to respond to 'significant attempted' suspected suicides.
- ✓ The Corporate Safeguarding Group has led on the revision of the Corporate Safeguarding Policy, which brings it in line with Wales' national Corporate Safeguarding Practice Guidance. The group has also revised its Terms of Reference and has also revised the Safeguarding Self-Assessment – to be administered in 2023/24. Unfortunately the rollout of Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) has been halted, however the LPS project group will continue to take forward the key central tenets of LPS: necessity, proportionality and the need to better front-load the process. Our work on transitional arrangements has continued and we received funding from Welsh Government to make Parent Advocacy operational over the coming three years. We remain committed to make Neath Port Talbot the safest place in Wales for Citizens and are working closely with the many partnership boards: Community Safety, Area Planning, VAWDASV, Serious Organised Crime, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, Regional Safeguarding, Junior Safeguarding and CONTEST to achieve this goal.

- **Support people to live a fulfilling life at home, connected to the community and resources around them, and provide care and support where needed.**
- ✓ For both Leaving care and the Youth Justice services, community and resources are key. Most of our young people remain living in our area, and in education or further education where they are supported by either Youth Justice Intervention workers or social workers and Young People’s Advisors. We have developed and opened a fully functional resource centre where life skills training, interventions and support are provided, and young people across both cohorts are encouraged to develop their skills whilst maintaining their community links.
- ✓ Our 14 Local Area Coordinators cover the whole county borough, and work with on average 534 individuals who are supported through 1:1 provision at any one time, with community groups and activities promoted throughout the year.
  
- **To enhance the support afforded to unpaid carers of adults and the contribution they make to our communities.**
- ✓ In September 2022 we employed a full time Carers Development Officer focused on enhancing engagement with carers, identifying unpaid carers, improving access to support services, and improving the link between statutory and non-statutory support. We continue to contract with NPT Carers Service and have directly supported them in a successful bid for Carers Trust grant funding for short breaks. We also allocated time of the Carers Development Officer to provide NPT Carers direct support for administration of this grant.
- ✓ Since November 2022 we have undertaken an internal review of carer support, including the Council’s current Service Level Agreement for carers. This work initially focused on adult carers but has now been expanded to include both young carers and parent carers also. To date this has resulted in a demonstrator pilot in Neath Cluster that focuses on enhancing:
  - ✓ Integration of support, by identifying carers where individuals who are being cared for are receiving social work support and liaising between ‘cared for’ and ‘carer’ support providers;
  - ✓ Prevention and Early Intervention, by proactively identifying carers earlier in their carer journey. Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA),

signposting and general (non-statutory) support provided to carers as early as possible from presentation to services;

- ✓ Response time to meet carers' needs, by undertaking a proportionate carers needs assessment, which will identify if a carer needs statutory or non-statutory support;
- ✓ Learning from the model and the outcome of the review of existing processes which will help shape a robust model of support for carers;
- ✓ To date we have been involved in the design and delivery of the Regional Carers Strategy and a recent engagement event held in Swansea.com Stadium to understand 'what matters' to unpaid carers.
- ✓ We have supported the Carers Partnership Board to undertake a carers' survey to enquire into carers respite/short breaks provision. These two exercises will form the basis of our own engagement with carers with the view to shaping our services for the future.
- ✓ We have also employed a manager who now holds responsibility for services to unpaid carers.

➤ **To further develop the local social care market to improve the range and quality of services.**

- ✓ Our Commissioning Unit have continued to follow robust processes to ensure quality care is provided to vulnerable people when they need it. We have worked closely with a number of providers throughout the year to ensure that they are meeting quality standards of care and contract compliance and implemented Performance Management measures where providers have fallen below acceptable standards.
- ✓ In addition to this we have commissioned a number of new services to support diversifying and transforming the way we deliver social care.
- ✓ We delivered our first pan-disability Extra Care scheme, enabling individuals to live independently with access to support when needed. The scheme is made up of self-contained flats and access to 24-hour staff support to enable individuals to live independently. Those living at the scheme utilise communal areas to take part in activities such as cooking workshops and mindfulness sessions.
- ✓ Officers have also worked with families to co-produce a supported living scheme, which specialises in supporting individuals with an ASD diagnosis. The scheme has been developed to ensure that the environment and care and support commissioned is centred on the needs of the individuals identified for the scheme. Officers worked with families, Care Managers, OT

and the Registered Social Landlord (RSL) on the property development and procurement of a support provider.

- ✓ We have piloted an outcome focused Domiciliary Care Model to move away from prescribed call times and ensure calls are delivered in line with people's changing needs and requirements. The pilot has had a positive impact and made an improvement to how quickly we can respond to requests for Domiciliary Care.
  
- **To continue the use of technology in supporting people to achieve their personal outcomes.**
- ✓ We have expanded our Assistive Technology offerings to include a mobile lifeline option to support confidence with independent outdoor mobility and access to communities.
- ✓ We secured capital funding and began remodelling and refurbishment work to provide a Digital Solutions Suite, to showcase and demonstrate how mainstream digital technology can support independent living, and/or enhance other care/telecare support.
- ✓ Prevention and Early Intervention Team are developing a digital platform to support community connections, reduce loneliness and isolation, and provide easy access to helpful resources to support self-management and wellbeing both online and in their communities.
- ✓ We are on target regarding our planned programme for upgrading all lifeline units to be ready ahead of retirement of analogue telephone lines and switch to digital by December 2025.
- ✓ Working closely with the Community Medicines Management Team we are supporting individuals to safely take their medicines using reminder and /or automatic dispensing devices.
- ✓ We continue to work with supported living residents to identify how technologies can support their independence, quality of life and personal outcomes.
- ✓ Working with the Fire Service we now ensure all lifeline packages include a smoke alarm that connects to the lifeline call response centre to ensure timely alert to emergency services.
- ✓ We have undertaken some exploratory work to establish how mainstream digital and Assistive Technology can support developing life skills in Bspoked which will go into work plans for 2023-24.

- ✓ We have also been piloting a mobile response service in Afan cluster area to explore how a lifeline based mobile response can impact on wellbeing for non-injurious falls and other non-medical emergencies.
- **To continue to develop a robust social care workforce.**
- ✓ We use succession planning, HR policies and procedures to sustain and maintain a strong stable workforce. We monitor sickness and absence from work and ensure staff maintain their training and development.
- ✓ In addition to areas of training and management oversight, we ensure everyone has a clear role, good supervision, and quality appraisals. Everyone has supervision in line with the NPT supervision policy and appraisals will form a part of that process going forward. We are committed to the health and well-being of our staff, and this is covered in our development days and will form part of everyone's appraisal. Staff well-being will be kept a priority. The building of staff morale has been essential to maintain commitment to reduce sickness and improve staff continuity.
- ✓ We are championing a research culture by promoting evidence-based guidance to support evidence-informed social care practice.

How are people shaping our services?

*This is about how we find out what people think about our services so we can build on good practice.*

### **Most Significant Change (MSC) Stories and Story Telling Panel**

MSC is an approach which starts by gathering stories from the frontline that are focused on capturing change outcomes that have resulted from an intervention or programme. Unlike case studies, MSC stories are *by* people, not *about* them. They are first person stories that are led by the people being interviewed. We continuously seek the views of individuals that are involved within services in Social Care. This sometimes takes the form of a view on their plan or assessment, or historically we have sent feedback questionnaires at the point of case closure. But some of the evidence gathered in this way lacks the depth we would like to have. Using MSC to capture stories will provide a rich suite of qualitative information that can be used to inform practice, policy and decision making throughout the directorate. We will be offering opportunities

regularly for individuals to share their stories. Enabling and empowering individuals to have a voice more generally rather than specific to an intervention, a plan or an assessment will help illicit quality information that may not otherwise be captured. As well as those receiving services, the views of staff also inform internal practices and strategic planning.

This year we have been gathering stories from individuals receiving services across the directorate which are then be heard at a Story Selection Panel. The group listen to and reflect on a small number of stories by exploring what is significant and why. Participants will have different opinions on this, and exploring these differences helps them to deepen their understanding of the stories and each other. The learning and implications of the panel discussions are compiled into a short feedback report, with the stories and lived experiences of the individuals we support used to shape and inform policy and practice.

### **Community Safety Team**

The Crime & Disorder Act places a duty on local authorities to ensure they work in partnership to reduce and prevent crime in their local area. One of the best ways for us to raise awareness of crime prevention campaigns and initiatives is to actively engage with our local communities whenever and wherever possible.

In order to achieve this, the Community Safety Team ensure delivery of a programme of suitable events and community talks in various areas of the county borough. During 2022/23 the team organised and/or attended **35** community engagement events to promote crime prevention campaigns and initiatives, and talk to residents about any crime or anti-social behaviour issues that are affecting them.



***Community Safety event***

We use the opportunity to talk to residents about: Domestic Abuse; Anti-Social Behaviour; Hate Crime; County Lines; Scams; Community Tensions; Business Crime; Terrorism.

We use the anecdotal information from these events to steer our future work and campaigns. Information is also fed back to any relevant forum like Tasking, Problem Solving Groups, or the Community Safety Partnership Board.

Since the pandemic and the start of the cost of living crisis, the nature of issues that our residents experience is different and ever changing. It is a challenge for the team to keep abreast of emerging issues and trends, ensuring we are able to provide the most appropriate advice and signposting, and develop campaigns to prevent crime and reduce the fear of crime.

**A Safer Croeserw**

In partnership with

WILDFOX  
Youth For Talent  
Communities on Watch  
Communities for Work

Friends of Croeserw - FREE 'Roly Poly Entertainments LTD' providing Disco, Games and Dances

FREE Activities provided by NPT Youth Service Information from Wildfox Resorts

Partner Agencies Offering Advice - Communities For Work Plus - NPT Paws on Patrol  
Community Safety - South Wales Police - Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service  
Family Information Service - The Childcare Offer - Housing Justice Cymru - Flying Start  
Devon Wales Information - Victim Forum - NPT Recycling - NPT Road Safety Team  
Local Area Coordinator - CVS

DATE	TIME	VENUE
16 MAR 2023 <small>Children must be accompanied by an adult</small>	3PM - 6PM	CROESERW COMMUNITY CENTRE SA13 3PL

**Advert for one of our events organised during 2022/23**

The team also deliver talks to local community groups to provide information on home security and to promote our Feel Safe Scheme, which offers home security surveys and appropriate safety items to those who are vulnerable, on a low income and / or are impacted by domestic abuse.

During 2022/23 the team delivered **6** talks to local community groups.

The team produced 'Safe and Sound' newsletters every quarter, which were shared with the general public, local Councillors, members of our CSP Board, and partner agencies. These newsletters help to further raise awareness of crime prevention messaging

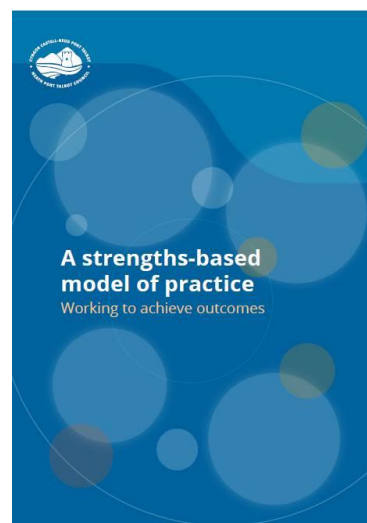
and campaigns, as well as notify residents of any emerging trends or matters to be aware of.

The team runs the Safer NPT Facebook page which reached **2,600** followers during the year.

Quality Standard 1 - Working with people to define and co-produce personal well-being outcomes that people wish to achieve  
*This is about how we work in partnership to help people achieve positive outcomes.*

We have continued to implement across all services the Outcomes Focused Approach introduced via the *Framework for Strengths-Based Practice Working to Achieve Outcomes* which was co-produced with Social Care Wales (SCW).

We focused training and development on linking in co-production, improving case recordings and working with parents and partners. Training is now part of all induction for new starters and students working in the authority to ensure that all are aware of the underpinning ethos of NPT to support the people we work with to better outcomes.



Following auditing plans within Children's Services we have developed additional training which will specifically look at how plans can be co-produced with families ensuring we are capturing the voice of the children and families we work with. This will also look at the introduction of the use of one page profiles in practice.

Consultant Social Workers (CSW) have continued to champion outcome focused practice within their teams holding peer group reflection sessions and this has been supported by three multi-agency training days completed on a patch basis with partner agencies from health, housing and third sector organisations. This training looked to improve joint understanding of communities and strengthen collaborative working and relationships between multiagency practitioners. There have been some challenges with this work to ensure that we get the right people to attend, however it is hoped that we will continue to build on this and hold regular repeats of the training to continue to spread the word across the Children's Services community teams. Discussions have begun regarding how this can be replicated in Adult Services.



## Unpaid Carers

The pandemic has had a notable impact on unpaid carers with many reporting significant increased feelings of loneliness and isolation and worsening mental health. The pressures of caring for others has also increased, as community services have yet to return to pre-pandemic levels and traditional ‘face to face’ health care has been replaced by more online or telephone consultations. As such, the opportunities to identify and support carers has reduced.

The existing availability of formal care and mounting pressure on the NHS to release patients from hospital may also cause carers to provide longer-term care, including for patients with more complicated needs, adding to the pressure already placed on unpaid carers.

The care that unpaid carers provide is essential in the delivery and sustainability of Adult Social Care services. There would be significant costs if a carer were unable to carry on their caring role and therefore supporting carers to remain resilient should help to avoid any breakdown in caring.

An evaluation of support provided to adult unpaid carers has been completed which has identified several areas of improvement that would enable an unpaid carer to access more timely support, and work to progress these improvements is ongoing. To understand the “whole system” the next phase of the review will include carers engagement and a broadening of the scope to young carers and parent carers with the aim to enhance carer support in the county borough.

**There are more than 20,000 unpaid carers in Neath Port Talbot**

### Supportive performance data for this quality standard

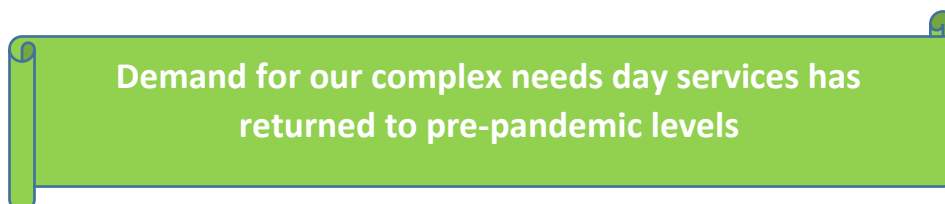
PI Reference	PI Description	April 21 - March 22	April 22 - March 23
New Measure PI24	The percentage of assessments completed for children within 42 days from point of referral	99.2%	97.0%

Quality Standard 2 – Working with people and partners to protect and promote people’s physical and mental health and emotional well-being

*This is about how we help people to look after their physical, mental and emotional health.*

### **Complex Needs Day Services**

Day services for people with complex needs are delivered across three sites in Neath Port Talbot, (Trem Y Mor, Brynamlwg and Rhodes House), providing high levels of care from day services staff and enabling individuals to receive support from Health colleagues including nursing staff, therapists and behavioural support. There are over 60 individuals attending the complex needs day services. Surgeries with Health staff have been set up at Brynamlwg facilitating direct contact between Health, Social Services and parents and carers. The day services also provide valuable respite care to families and carers, enabling them to take a break from their caring role. **Demand for day services remains high and the services are currently operating at full capacity.** Individuals attending day services are offered a range of activities within the day services bases and also in the community to enable them to meet their personal outcomes.



Demand for our complex needs day services has returned to pre-pandemic levels

### **Direct Payments**

Direct Payments (DP) are offered, following an assessment, to people as an alternative to either in house services or commissioned care, allowing them to employ Personal Assistants (PAs) of their choice. Direct Payments enable people to exercise choice and control over the care they receive to meet their outcomes. 405 people were being supported with a Direct Payment package at the end of March 2023 compared to 395 at the end of March 2022.

The service has started to grow again following the effects of the Covid pandemic. As with other sectors of the social care market, **recruitment of PAs**

**remains challenging** and the service has focused on expanding its recruitment strategy. DP recipients employ people from the social care market, from within their network of family and friends, or use their DP to commission services themselves, and find creative solutions in using their DP for care and support.

Support to individuals is provided by the in-house Direct Payments Support Service (DPSS) which sets up new packages, provides employment guidance and supports with the recruitment of PAs as well as providing a range of other services including a training programme. The DPSS continued to deliver a comprehensive service throughout the year supporting employers and PAs to work as safely as possible and in line with employment law. Payroll support is provided by external organisations from the approved providers list. A Suitable Persons Service is commissioned from *Me, Myself and I* (Trading with Care) which provides valuable support to enable individuals who lack mental capacity to still access DP.



**More than 400 residents in Neath Port Talbot have greater choice and control over their care and support by using Direct Payments.**

**We want more people to benefit but recruiting Personal Assistants is challenging.**

We want to recruit more Personal Assistants (PA) so that more people can experience the benefits of Direct Payments for their care and support.

We think there are many people who haven't considered being a PA who would enjoy the role.

## Case study – recruiting a Personal Assistant

After 35 years of working in the engineering sector, Ron had retired but realised he missed the routine and social interactions of a job. Ron decided he wanted to get a new part time job, something different to his previous role.

Working Wales referred Ron to the Neath Port Talbot Workways+ team. Workways+ helps people get jobs through 1-1 support, training, paid work experience and introductions to employers. Workways+ welcomed Ron and assigned him a mentor, Vicky.

Vicky suggested working in the hospitality sector, but Ron felt that wasn't what he was looking for, so Vicky then suggested social care as a Personal Assistant (PA) funded through Direct Payments.

The PA role really appealed to Ron and, with support from Vicky, interviewed for two care posts and was successful in both. Ron now supports two Neath Port Talbot residents and is employed for 16 hours per week, doing something he enjoys.

Ron said, "*Vicky was absolutely excellent, wonderful. The PA role is a million miles from my previous career and it is such a positive change for me. The role of a PA appeals to my caring side and it is very rewarding helping people enjoy their lives. I would say that anyone looking to get back into work, no matter their age, should give Workways+ a call*".

Workways+ is part funded by the European Social Fund through the Welsh Government.

### **In-house Domiciliary Care and Reablement Service**

The Council's Community Wellbeing Team (CWT) and Reablement Service delivers domiciliary care to people across the county borough. The teams focus largely on providing personal care (washing, dressing, toileting) and supporting people with medication and feeding. Offering both short- and long-term support, the teams use a reablement ethos to support individuals in their own homes to enable them to remain as independent as possible. Regulated by Care Inspectorate Wales, the in-house service (CWT and Reablement) delivers

care to 202 people, which is approximately one quarter of the local domiciliary care market. During the course of the year the service delivered a service to over 650 people. Plans remain in place to increase the share of the market and a recruitment and training officer has been employed to drive this forward.

## **Bspoked**

Bspoked provides opportunities for adults with a range of disabilities, focusing on what each individual is interested in and what they'd like to achieve from the service. In the last year ICF (Integrated Care Fund) funding has been granted to enhance the Bspoked service from its previous training and employment model and develop it to become an independent living hub by creating two new training flats where people can develop daily living and independence skills, and where assessments can be carried out by practitioners. It is anticipated that this will support people to reach their potential and in some cases reduce their need for statutory care and support. The purpose is to create an environment which prepares and provides service users with the skills to develop their potential. Alongside the two training flats a range of other activities are offered which focus on supporting people to become as independent as possible, for example cooking, gardening, IT skills, woodwork, and a bicycle workshop. **There are currently 75 adults attending Bspoked but this figure is likely to rise as the opportunity to use the training flats becomes available.**



*One of the training flats at Bspoked*



## **Respite at Trem Y Mor**

Overnight respite care for Adults with Learning and Physical Disabilities is provided in the Local Authority's respite unit at Trem Y Mor, a 16 bedded unit located on Aberavon seafront. The service provided care to 115 individuals in the last year. **This facility is now operating at full capacity and demand for the service is extremely high.** There are a number of residents who live there on a longer term basis whilst waiting for alternative permanent accommodation to be arranged which reduces the capacity for respite care for others. This service provides valuable respite care for families and carers enabling them to take a break from their caring roles. The residents receive a high level of care from an experienced and well-trained staff team, and are able to enjoy activities both within the home and in the community to enable them to meet their personal outcomes.



*Trem Y Mor respite and day service*

## **Sensory Support Team**

The Sensory Support Team (SST) aims to maintain, promote and maximise independence for those with a sensory impairment so that they are able to live more productive and enjoyable lives, supporting them to achieve their personal outcomes.

The SST undertakes functional assessments of need and meets those needs via a range of interventions, including provision of advice, specialist equipment and signposting to relevant organisations. Mobility training is also provided. The SST works closely with other Social Services teams, Audiology and Ophthalmology Services in the local health board, and have well-established links with third sector community and hospital based sensory organisations as well as local Opticians.

In 2022/2023 the team received 387 requests for assessments across the Neath (145), Afan (140) and Upper Valleys (102) hubs.

During the year, SST:

- Closed 339 cases
- Undertook 279 home visits
- Assisted 81 clients to be registered as sight impaired/severely sight impaired
- Assisted 15 clients with Audiogram registration

## **Community Occupational Therapy Service (COTS)**

The Community Occupational Therapy Service (COTS) aims to maintain, promote and restore independence for people of all ages, so that they are able to live more productive and enjoyable lives and achieve their personal outcomes. In the last year the team has integrated with social work teams in the network areas facilitating seamless and co-ordinated services for individuals. The team undertakes functional assessments of need and meets those needs via a range of interventions, including the provision of advice, equipment and adaptations. They also undertake manual handling assessments to support in-house and external domiciliary care providers and

informal carers, working closely with colleagues and partner agencies to provide a comprehensive service to maximise independence for people of all ages and to minimise risks.

In 2022/2023 the team received almost 2,000 referrals (including 519 manual handling assessments) across the Neath (738), Afan (797) and Upper Valleys (462) hubs, and provided a services to 1,617 people (up 10% on the previous year).

During the year, COT:

- Closed 1,873 cases
- Undertook 2,718 home visits
- Undertook 436 manual handling assessments
- Undertook 103 wheelchair assessments
- Placed 1,358 equipment orders
- Assessed 638 clients and recommended works of adaptation via Disabled Facilities Grant
- Assessed 369 clients and recommended works of adaptation to be processed by Tai Tarian and Registered Social Landlords

*“All I can say is that I can’t fault her she was courteous, excellent and I would recommend to anyone. Brilliant service”*



## **Community Mental Health Teams (CMHT)**

Since coming out of lockdown the CMHTs have seen an increase in the number of people requesting support and mental health assessments undertaken. Both teams now have a Consultant Social Worker in post to support social work staff in developing outcome-based practice as part of the quality assurance mechanism. They also act as a resource to improve links with other Adults and Children's Services teams to develop an understanding of referral pathways in both primary and secondary mental health services.

Within the last year 24/7 mental health support is now available over the phone in Swansea Bay. People living in Neath Port Talbot (and Swansea) who need urgent support with mental health issues, or relatives seeking advice, can now call a team of mental health professionals for free, day or night. Calling 111 and choosing option 2 puts callers in direct contact with a team of 20 mental health professionals based at Neath Port Talbot Hospital, staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, offering a triage service and support or signposting as appropriate. Callers will be supported by fully trained clinicians working as part of a multi-disciplinary team including mental health nurses, psychological wellbeing practitioners and occupational therapists.



The CMHTs continue to remain responsive to the challenges of increasing demands on services and have a good working relationship with inpatient care services to ensure timely discharges from acute mental health units throughout the Swansea Bay University Health Board area.

One of the most significant issues for CMHTs is the lack of specialist accommodation (including residential, supported living and extra care) for people with a severe and enduring mental illness. As a consequence a number of service users are currently accommodated in high cost placements in neighbouring authorities. NPT Commissioning Unit are working proactively to understand the level of demand and in the process of developing a range of accommodation in NPT to address the identified deficits. A recent success story has been the development of a 5 bed Pan-Disability Extra Care facility in the Margam area. There are several service users known to the CMHT in this

particular resource where significant progress in achieving recovery-based goals has been made. One of our clients, who was previously street homeless and spent a number of years in acute mental health units and subject to a Supervised Community Treatment Order (CTO), is now ready to move to her own flat nearby and supported as part of a core and cluster arrangement.

### **Assistive Technology**

Working with people's strengths, Assistive Technology (AT) can be used to promote health, wellbeing and self-management, and has potential to enable more resilient communities, thus reducing demand/reliance on more traditional support services.

The switch from analogue telephone lines to digital by December 2025 necessitates a timely upgrade of all analogue Lifeline based equipment and systems to ensure a safe and smooth transition. A key priority for the service, AT are now in the second year of the roadmap to achieve this 'digital switch' for 2,500 users of the service, and this is well underway with 38% of lifeline units having been upgraded so far.

Although challenging for AT and the technology enabled care industry, the switch to digital technologies opens many new possibilities and improved choice for citizens. Recently we introduced the Lifeline mobile service using a wearable device allowing individuals to raise an alarm when they are out and about. This has been well received by the 100 users of this service so far and proved valuable in promoting confidence to maintain outdoor activities and engage with their communities. This impacts positively on wellbeing, reducing loneliness and isolation, as well as playing an important role in falls prevention by maintaining levels of physical activity.

*"My mum is 'severely sighted' and has not been out on her own since before Covid - she had lost her confidence and feared falling and not being able to use her phone to get help.*

*Since having the [mobile lifeline device] she started to go out for short walks. This was quickly followed by attending coffee morning by herself and now catching a bus and going into town alone. Mum takes the [mobile lifeline device] with her everywhere and finds it easy to use and charge up, it has really improved her confidence and increased my peace of mind knowing she can call me or the contact centre if she falls or needs any assistance."*

Other exciting initiatives this year have included piloting a Mobile Response Service in the Afan Cluster Network area and creating a Digital Solutions Suite at Cimla Health & Social Care Centre to enable citizens to view and experience mainstream smart technology. It is anticipated this will be ready to launch in July 2023, and development will include wraparound facilities to support digital inclusion, working in partnership with Digital Communities Wales and NPT's Digital Inclusion ambassador.

### **Substance misuse**

The Area Planning Board (APB) is a regional (NPT and Swansea) multiagency group which aims to ensure that people with substance use issues and their families are able to get the support they need when they need it. Our work is also focused around education and prevention, such as commissioning educational services in schools and ensuring that people have access to timely information and advice.

Each substance use agency commissioned by the APB has a testing target of 45 per quarter.

For the first time since pre pandemic we have tests recorded by every commissioned service, albeit some services have significantly lower figures. However, the total agreed target across all services has been more than achieved. There is still work to be done to ensure consistent levels of testing are being seen across all services, and a 'Test on Assess' model has been agreed.

One of the main priorities for the Team is to ensure robust oversight of overdoses and drug related deaths in the region, along with improving the harm reduction provision available for people.

We now have access to a wealth of data from key partners such as South Wales Police and the Health Board and consequently have a better understanding of where and when the overdoses are occurring. In addition, we have delivered, in conjunction with service providers, a 72 hour outreach response in which 70% of reported overdoses during the year received a follow up visit from an outreach worker. The number of specialist harm reduction interventions that have been delivered in the region has also improved. Data shows that there has been a 20% decrease in needle and syringe transactions

in 2022/23 compared to the previous year; a 31% decrease in unique individuals accessing the needle and syringe programme and a 55% increase in naloxone supply across the county borough. There has also been a 170% increase in the number of BBV (blood-borne viruses) tests completed during the year.

### **Ukraine response**

NPT Council has condemned in the strongest possible terms the actions of Vladimir Putin and the Russian Government and has publicly expressed its dismay at the disregard for human life, national sovereignty and the international rule of law. This Council is committed to helping those displaced from their homes and arriving in Wales through the family sponsorship, Homes for Ukraine, or Welsh Government's super sponsorship route.

Through the "Team NPT" approach, we ensured that relevant people in the Council and across our partnerships were connected and involved. Together we ensured that families and individuals felt safe, welcome and got the help they needed to start a new chapter of their lives and be part of communities which are thriving and sustainable. This included ensuring that housing advice and support was in place, and that financial support was available. Together we put in place orientation support to help people settle and feel part of our communities, and that our communities remained cohesive, including signposting in respect of welfare benefits as well as employment and employability, and extolling the benefits of living in NPT.

Team NPT ensured that the children were safe and safeguarded and that they were enrolled into schools to get the best education, received free school meals, help with uniforms, pastoral care, transport to school and learning support including language support, and so get the best start in life or their new chapter in life.



In addition to the community response, Welsh Government asked NPT Council to host a welcome centre and also to provide support into a hotel commissioned for Ukrainians. There were considerable technical difficulties with the welcome centre site, which had to be overcome, and this would not

have been achieved without the support and expertise from our technical services directorate, IT and external partners.

The welcome centre opened in August 2022, and Adult Services established a Ukrainian support team to provide orientation support to guests at the welcome centre and the hotel. They have been innovative and creative in the support provided and have worked extensively with internal and external partners.

### Supportive performance data for this quality standard

PI Reference	PI Description	April 21 – March 22	April 22 – March 23
Measure 20a	The percentage of adults who completed a period of Reablement and who have a reduced package of care after completion	19.5%	18.8%
Measure 20b	The percentage of adults who completed a period of Reablement needing no further package of care	63.8%	70.9%
Measure 21	The average length of time in calendar days adults (aged 65+) are supported in residential care homes	798	786
Measure 22	Average age of adults entering residential care homes	84	84
New Measure PI30	The percentage of children seen by a dentist within 3 months of becoming looked after	48.8%	21.6%
New Measure PI31	The percentage of Looked After Children at 31 <sup>st</sup> March registered with a GP within 10 working days of the start of their placement	91.6%	85.2%

Quality Standard 3 – Protecting and safeguarding people from abuse, neglect or harm

*This is about helping to protect people who might be at risk of abuse, neglect, harm or exploitation.*

### **Community Safety Team**

The Community Safety Team help to ensure the residents of Neath Port Talbot feel safe and are safe, by delivering effective crime prevention initiatives and support across the county borough. The team deliver appropriate, relevant initiatives through a variety of means, in partnership with other organisations. Community Safety ensure that the effect any Crime and Disorder has on our local communities is minimised; with oversight, problem solving and providing support on key issues such as Domestic Abuse, Anti-Social Behaviour, Hate Crime, County Lines, Scams, Community Tensions, Business Crime, Terrorism.

During 2022/23 the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) decided on its six agreed priority areas for the next 3 years;

- Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Community Cohesion
- Serious Violence
- General Crime Prevention (including Community Engagement & Acquisitive Crime)
- Substance Use

### **Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)**

The NPT VAWDASV Leadership Group is coordinated by the Community Safety Team. The Group continues to meet quarterly, and oversees the implementation of our local VAWDASV strategy. Excellent progress has been made in the 7 areas of work: Communications & Engagement; Children & Young People; Perpetrator Interventions; Early Intervention & Prevention; Staff Training; Accessible Services; Courts and Criminal Justice.

A lot of hard work has gone into the development of our revised VAWDASV strategy '*Healthy Relationships for Stronger Communities*' for 2023-2026. This

is a joint strategy with the local health board that sets out the work we will do over the next 3 years.



*Chief Exec Karen Jones pledges her support for White Ribbon Campaign*

Our Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) Service, within Community Safety, supported **650** high risk victims of domestic abuse during the year. This compares to **522** in the previous year. The team continued to work to increased demands since pre-Covid, and the nature of the cases is far more complex in many instances. This remains an ongoing pressure within the service and an area of concern.

The Community Safety Team were able to utilise some grant money to purchase Christmas presents for the children of the high risk victims we were supporting. This was the first time the team have been able to do this, and these gifts were so gratefully received by the families who were experiencing very difficult, traumatic times. The team also really enjoyed coordinating this project and it really boosted morale.

The Community Safety Team were successful in receiving funding to purchase target hardening items to help victims feel safer, and be safer – alongside all other additional, usual support. This funding allowed us to buy Ring Doorbells, Dash Cams, Mobile Phones, Window Locks, Door Jammers and Personal Safety Alarms. It was reassuring for staff to give physical items to the individuals they support, as well as the holistic support and safety planning they offer. Items were so gratefully received by the families we are working with.

**Last year we supported over 650 high risk victims of domestic abuse**



The team have responsibility for coordinating the Domestic Abuse MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) forum. During 2022/23 there were **952** referrals into MARAC. There were **1,559** children linked to these referrals. **427** of the referrals were repeat cases, having been discussed at MARAC before.

One of the work streams of our VAWDASV strategy 'Healthy Relationships for Stronger Communities' is centred on Communications & Engagement, ensuring we raise awareness of all forms of domestic abuse, encouraging people to seek help and support. The Communications & Engagement sub group organised a successful White Ribbon campaign during Nov 22 – holding an engagement event at NPT Hospital, gaining the support of Welsh Singer Bronwen Lewis in promoting our work, and running a successful “16 days of action” on our Safer NPT social media platforms.



***Bronwen Lewis lends her support to the White Ribbon campaign.***

### **Anti-Social Behaviour**

The **Street Vulnerability MARAC** (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) meetings are coordinated by the Community Safety Team and chaired by South Wales Police. The group meet bi-monthly to discuss some of the most vulnerable people in our communities, ensuring everyone has access to the most appropriate services for their needs. Last year the group discussed **16** new referrals. The meetings are well attended and well supported by partners, with good engagement. However, there are growing concerns regarding availability or access to mental health support post Covid. With changes to rules and regulations of rental properties, many Landlords have sold on their properties, limiting many of our options to support individuals into suitable, affordable accommodation. This adds further pressure to our Housing Options colleagues within the directorate.



**Problem Solving Groups** have been reinstated, with one for Neath and Pontardawe, and one for Port Talbot. These forums allow us, the Police and other partners to bring ongoing community issues for a partnership discussion and action plan. Issues raised here that cannot be resolved are escalated to the Community Safety Partnership Board. During 2022/23 there were increasing concerns of the use of Cannabis in private dwellings, youth anti-social behaviour in our town centres, and derelict properties. The group helps to inform campaigns of the Community Safety Engagement Team, such as ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour) Awareness Week.

### ASB Awareness Week

**ASB Awareness Week**

We're working together to make communities safer

#ASBAwarenessWeek

Join us at these upcoming events to find out more

Neath Town Centre	Port Talbot Market	Pontardawe Market
Angel Square	Transport Hub	Herbert Street
Friday 22nd July	Thurs 28th July	Friday 29th July
14.00 - 16.00	15.00 - 17.00	15.30 - 17.30

The team supported the first ever ASB Awareness Week – a national campaign to raise awareness of anti-social behaviour and to encourage victims to report incidents through to the right channels. The team held engagement events in Neath Town Centre,

Pontardawe Market and Port Talbot Market. These events proved really useful in speaking to many members of the public and local businesses. Colleagues from South Wales Police, Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service, Tai Tarian, Coastal and Pobl attended these events alongside us.

**We are working with partners to tackle anti-social behaviour**

## Paws on Patrol

We have been coordinating the Paws on Patrol scheme for over seven years, and it continues to go from strength to strength.

Paws on Patrol asks dog walkers to be our eyes and ears in their community whilst on their regular dog walks. It is usually dog walkers who will spot a change in their local area, such as graffiti, fly tipping, faulty street lighting, and anti-social behaviour. Dog walkers are also often the first on the scene of a crime, or may witness a crime taking place. We want to capture all of this information and empower our residents to report the issues they see.

The scheme has over **1,400** members, including 163 who signed up during 2022/23, and members receive quarterly newsletters or latest advice and information, as well as any crime trends or issues to be aware of.

The team regularly promote the scheme via social media and at regular engagement events. The scheme also offers us a 'light touch' way of engaging with our residents about more serious matters that they perhaps may not otherwise discuss, such as domestic abuse or hate crime.

During the year we were approached by Pembrokeshire Council who had heard about our scheme and wanted to develop their own. It was a pleasure to share our experiences and see their own scheme come into being.

Our Paws on Patrol Facebook page reached a total number of **1,100** followers during 2022/23, with some individual posts reaching as many as **70,000** people.



**COMING SOON**

**Exclusive safety items for our members**

Limited availability\*

*Advert to promote Target Hardening / Personal Safety item*

During the year we were able to utilise some Target Hardening funding to provide our members with exclusive personal safety items. These reward members for their loyalty and support, but also act as an incentive to encourage new members to sign up.



***Paws Event at Taibach***

### **Hillside Secure Children's Home**

Hillside Secure Children's Home continues to provide a unique environment, the only secure establishment in Wales providing care and support to some of the most vulnerable and complex children in the country, that cannot be met in other settings. We believe that all children deserve a safe, stable, happy, nurturing environment to grow up in and have the childhood they deserve. This year the completion of the extensive refurbishment to the home was completed which has gone a long way to providing the children with a more homely feel to their personal spaces whilst also enabling them to collaborate in choosing the décor of the communal areas. The children reporting the difference to their mental health and wellbeing as a result of the refurbishment is significant. Hillside is now aiming to be a centre of excellence, and will achieve this through:

- Having an experienced, resilient and happy staff group
- The children are happy and thrive in a home where they feel safe and valued
- The environment is bright, friendly and well-maintained where children have a voice in changes that are being made
- There is a trauma responsive ethos and culture that is embedded throughout the home.

## Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

In December 2021, Neath Port Talbot Council was given formal notice directing it to comply with the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for UASC under the UK Government's Immigration Act 2016. A UASC is defined as an individual who is under 18 when the asylum application is submitted, is not being cared for by an adult who by law has responsibility to do so, is separated from both parents and has applied for asylum in the UK in their own right. The aim of the NTS approach is to achieve a fair and equitable distribution of UASC across the UK.

Initially NPT were asked to support two young people under this scheme, however this has increased over the last year and we have to date supported 16 young people, two of whom are now care leavers. All the young people that we are supporting have different nationalities, different cultures, different languages and different life experiences.

It has been challenging to find appropriate placements in very short timeframes, putting additional pressures on available foster placements and supported accommodation. The asylum process is significantly delayed at this time, therefore there will be a delay in young people being able to move on and access housing / benefits, meaning they are likely to be reliant on the Local Authority for a much longer period than initially anticipated.

There are significant pressures on placements for children and young people therefore it is important that we continue to develop a specific provision to meet the needs of these young people whom we are and will continue to support. To help them feel part of the local communities, some of the young boys have regularly attended training as part of the Kicks Project run by Swansea City Football Club. The club wanted



UASC boys form a Guard of Honour at Swansea City FC

to raise awareness of refugees and asylum seekers, so the boys were invited to attend one of the matches and acted as ‘Guards of Honour’ for the game.

**In the last year we have supported 16 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children**

### Supportive performance data for this quality standard

PI Reference	PI Description	April 21 - March 22	April 22 - March 23
<b>New Measure PI27</b>	The percentage of re-registrations of children on the local authority Child Protection Register	11.6%	14.7%
<b>New Measure PI28</b>	The average length of time (in days) for all children who were on the Child Protection Register during the year	278.1 days	269.2 days



Quality Standard 4 – Encouraging and supporting people to learn, develop and participate in society

*This looks at how we help people to learn and interact with other people so they can be part of their communities.*

### **Community Independence Service**

This service focuses on prevention following an increase in presentations of homelessness in NPT due to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. This includes tenancy support and reduction of homelessness supporting adults 16+ who are at risk of tenancy breakdown due to mental health, substance misuse, financial/debt issues. During the year 131 referrals accepted and started as new individuals to the service, with the team focus on outcomes for individuals based on their specific needs to develop independent living skills and facilitates a positive sense of wellbeing to ensure they are able to integrate and retain control in their day to day lives. This support is tailored and can often be diverse ranging from short term intervention around managing finances to multifaceted support over a longer period involving liaison between a number of professionals.



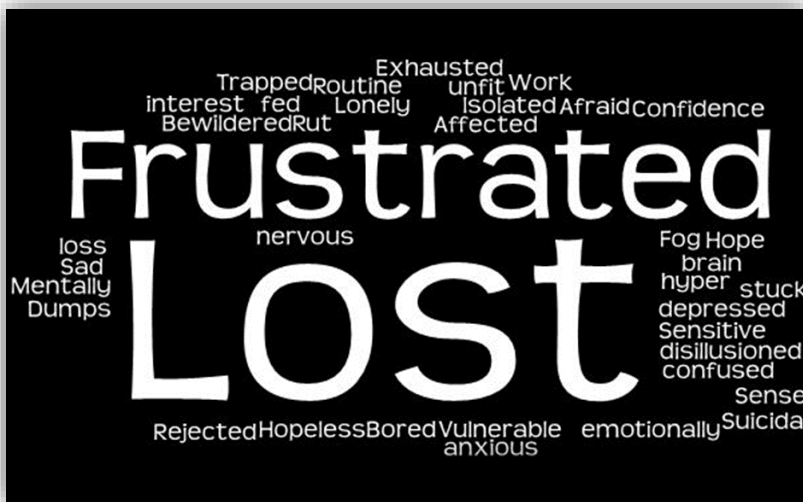
**We have seen an increase in people presenting as homeless**

**Community Connecting Team**

The Community Connecting Team (CCT) provide community based opportunities to vulnerable people from the age of 16 years' old living in Neath Port Talbot. This includes local activities for the people they work with to support them to become active members of their community. Groups include exercise, gardening and craft activities. We now have over 30 groups facilitated weekly (Monday to Friday) with more than 65 people known to attend groups regularly, not including occasional attendees that vary week to week.



Below are word clouds created from community group feedback:



**How I felt before attending the group**

**How the group has changed my life**



## **Local Area Coordination**

Local Area Coordination aims to support people within the community to help them help themselves in order to build a better life, with more connected and inclusive communities.

There is no formal assessment or eligibility to be introduced to a Local Area Coordinator (LAC). LACs are introduced to people through their network of relationships in the community, membership of associations or groups or via formal service.

Local Area Coordination starts with a positive conversation with a person and a focus on strengths, skills, natural supports and finding non service solutions to make their vision of a better life happen.

Our 14 LACs cover the whole county borough, with population sizes ranging from 4,200 in the most rural area to 16,000 in the more urban areas. On average 534 individuals are supported through 1:1 provision at any one time, with 20% of referrals made for socialisation and 15% of all referrals with a mental health requirement. One third of those making referrals require intensive support of once a week or more, with most common support provided consisting of:

- Intervention to access to basic food, utilities and emergency benefits
- Support to maintain a safe living environment (practical and emotional)
- Support linked to poor mental health
- Navigation of services / advocacy e.g., housing, carer support
- Development of personal resilience and confidence
- Identification and maintenance of local connections to provide meaningful activity

On average direct support is given to three individual community groups by each LAC at any one time, with at least 65 other community groups across the county borough linked to a LAC on an ongoing basis. Circa another 500 individuals access these groups whilst regaining their confidence.

On average a LAC's workload is split 60/40 1:1 vs Community, although this varies by area and demand.

During quarter 3 alone 10 Safeguarding Referrals were made because of LAC involvement.



Approximately 40% of all individuals supported are not currently accessing other statutory services.

### **Safe and Well – NPT’s Volunteer Befriending Service**

The Council’s Safe and Well service was established to provide a critical lifeline of support to people who needed to isolate during the pandemic. Through using volunteer support the service was able to provide shopping, prescription collection, and wellbeing checks to over 1,500 people across Neath Port Talbot. In September 2022 a service review began to ensure that it continues to respond effectively to the needs of our residents as the impact of the pandemic reduced. In February 2023 the service was relaunched as NPT Safe & Well – Befriending Service in response to the negative health and wellbeing impacts of loneliness and isolation on the people of Neath Port Talbot that had been significantly worsened as a result of the pandemic. We have developed the service slowly and carefully with the support of Befriending Networks Scotland to ensure that we have a clear and effective model of support for those who are the most isolated in our communities. Currently the service has 27 volunteers who provide regular befriending support to 42 people chronically affected by social isolation and loneliness. During the year our volunteers also provided support to local church donation points to sort through the vast amount of donations received from the public in response to the Ukraine conflict. These donations were transported to a temporary donation hub set up in Llandarcy Institute and the volunteers were a huge support to the Safe & Well team by assembling the shelving units and clothes rails, sorting over 150 bags and boxes of donations of toiletries, baby items, clothing and shoes, etc. and putting items out on display. Their invaluable support helped to quickly set up a well organised facility for Ukrainian families to have easy access to the supplies that they needed.

*The facility is well organised and has been a fantastic support. It was such a comfortable and dignified way for them to have easy access to much needed supplies in difficult times.*

**Feedback from families**

A new recruitment exercise has started with the hope of at least doubling our volunteer capacity to be able to provide more support to those that need it. Ongoing reviews of the service will continue to ensure the Safe & Well

Volunteer Service is able to continue to provide much needed support alongside our Health and Social Care Services.

Some of our successes with the Volunteer Befriending Service:

An 85 year old retired District Nurse wanted to volunteer but was unable to go out herself and was socially isolated, so she became a volunteer befriender for our service. She and the gentleman she supports speak on the phone twice a week. They have both lost their spouses and understand the impact of losing your loved one. Even though they have never met in person 'they feel like they have known each other for years'.

*"I am relatively new to the area and from a different culture. Befriending helps me reach out to the community, learn the local culture, history and effortlessly integrate here and be a part of the society.*

*It also gives me satisfaction and happiness that I can provide support and companionship to older members of the society here, even if it's for a few hours a week. For me, it's important not only to have a career and family, but also to make a positive impact on the society I live in."*

**Feedback from a Volunteer**

### Supportive performance data for this quality standard

PI Reference	PI Description	April 21 - March 22	April 22 - March 23
New Measure PI32	The percentage of children looked after at 31 March who has experienced one or more change of school, during a period or periods of being looked after, which were not due to transitional arrangements, in the 12 months to 31 March.	5.3%	3.6%

Below are some quotes from people attending one of our community groups:

## LAC Community Development Sandfields Library Case Study

Beatrix (Trixi)

*"I'm originally from Germany and since my partner died I was on my own as I didn't know anyone. Now, although I'm a confident person, I'm also shy when meeting new people. I have new friends and really feel part of the community. I attend 3 different activities in the library, a few months ago, I didn't know where the library was."*

John

*"I hadn't left the house for 2 years until Aled introduced me to the coffee morning at Sandfields library. I now feel more confident, in-fact, I've even started going to gigs again. I'd never have done that a few months ago as I'd lost contact with my friends. I've now reconnected with them"*



Terry - "I didn't leave the house for 2 years following a fall. I'm 90 and from London originally. Aled took me out for a few walks to build my confidence and also introduced me to Aileen. I now share a taxi with her. I have early stages dementia and I'm conscious of my speech. My new friends at the coffee morning have helped me realise that my speech is ok and I'm much more confident now and feel part of the community"

Aileen - "Due to my disability, I lost my confidence and sat in the house watching TV all day. Not only am I now attending the weekly coffee morning, I also go on Wednesdays too. I share a taxi with Terry and made a friend for life in Trixi. I often go and visit her at the weekends. My confidence was a 0 now it's through the roof"

**Of the 8 people asked –**

- 100% said that their confidence has improved as a result of attending the weekly drop in
- 100% said that they now feel part of their local community
- 100% said that they have improved their social circle and have made new friends
- 100% said that they are more aware of services available to them in the community or have a contact (LAC) that can connect them if needed

Quality Standard 5 – Supporting people to develop safely and to maintain healthy domestic, family and personal relationships  
*This is about helping people to achieve healthy relationships at home and with the people they are close to.*

### **Participation and engagement**

The Engagement and Participation Officer (EPO) and the Youth Justice and Early Intervention Service (YEIS) have continued to deliver the Life Skills programme to support care leavers and the YEIS service users. Over an 8 week period young people attended every Tuesday, where participants successfully learn a range of culinary skills and become competent at cooking healthy, budget meals. Further training around budgeting and laundry was also delivered. It has become evident the project offers more than basic life skills as the participants enjoy the social aspect and improved wellbeing from regular interaction with peers and professionals. The voice of the young people continues to be captured in the Exit Questionnaire conducted when young people no longer need the support of the service.



Girls' Rights Group "Hope" won a High Sheriff of West Glamorgan Award, NPT Children's Services Award and a NPTCVS Awards for their outstanding work. They have created an animation video to raise awareness of Period Dignity and improve girls' and young women's health. The video will be launched in due course and has attracted interest from the BBC. The group enjoyed their first ever residential stay. 15 girls enjoyed three nights in the wilderness and enjoyed numerous team building exercises. Hope have been awarded a £2000 grant and started work on their new project 'Safer Spaces for Girls'.



***Safer Spaces for Girls project***

To provide opportunities for children and young people with disabilities the EPO has continued to support the music group in Ysgol Hendre Felin. The group enjoy fun activities along with singing. Through links developed by the EPO, Circus Eruption attended the group on a fortnightly basis to teach circus skills. Music tuition has been provided giving members the opportunity to learn the piano and enjoy drum sessions. 15 children were taken on a trip to the Wales Millennium Centre to watch The Lion King theatre show.

In late November 2022 the Beaches 2 Beacons (B2B) project concluded. The project developed by the EPO in collaboration with Brecon Beacons National Park aspired to improve the emotional health and well-being of our children and young people through accessing the natural environment. The group participated in activities and environmental work throughout the year and received a John Muir Award for their efforts. B2B included hiking up Pen Y Fan, environmental work in Craig Y Nos Country Park and Talybont on Usk, rock climbing in Pontneddfechan, gorge walking, visiting an Iron Age Fort and more. The project cost £7,000 and 19 children participated. Due to the success of the B2B project planning is underway to deliver B2B in 2023.

### Supportive performance data for this quality standard

PI Reference	PI Description	Apr – Mar 21 (4th QTR) Cumulative	Apr – Mar 22 (4th QTR) Cumulative
<b>New Measure PI26</b>	The percentage of Looked After Children returned home from care during the year	35%	Reported annually by Welsh Govt.
<b>New Measure PI33</b>	The percentage of children looked after on 31 March who has had three or more placements during the year.	4.08%	Reported annually by Welsh Govt.

Quality Standard 6 – Working with and supporting people to achieve greater economic well-being, have a social life and live in suitable accommodation that meets their needs

*This is about helping people to improve their income, benefit from a social life and have a suitable place to live.*

### **Disabled Facilities Grants**

The demand for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) remained high and exceeded the available budget. Since the removal of the means test for small and medium works in August 2022 there has been a significant increase in demand for smaller adaptations. Recovery from the pandemic continued with the delivery time of a DFG reducing, however the contractors that carried out larger works were still very busy in the private housing market which is still causing a significant delay in larger work starting on site, while smaller works such as shower conversions have returned to pre-pandemic levels of delivery.

The time taken to deliver a DFG is recovering well, for 2022/23 the end to end time improved to 245 days from 339 for 2021/22, while the number of DFGs completed was 272 for 2022/23.

The rise in building material costs has had a significant impact on the budget, with extensions costing 50% more than pre-pandemic, such that larger extensions are now exceeding the maximum value for a grant.

The service has received a number of compliments from applicants where the new adaptations have made a huge difference in their lives by making their property a far safer place for them to live in, or the installed adaptations have given them more independence in the home.

### **Housing Options**

The last year has seen a further increase in presentations to the Housing Options Service, rising from 2,406 in 2021/22 to 2,650, an increase of 11%. There were various reasons for presentations but an average of 40% were due to some form of relationship breakdown either with a partner or within the family (15% breakdown with partner, 25% breakdown within family).

The service also saw an increase in presentations from private sector tenants, with an average of 25% being from tenants who have been served a notice to quit. This has increased due to the implementation of the Renting Homes Act in December 2022 which has resulted in over 50 landlords in NPT leaving the rental market.

Temporary Accommodation (TA) numbers continue to increase with 205 households in TA at the end of the 2022/23 financial year.

The service has seen an increase in the number of families needing to access TA and a factor in this will be the increased presentations from the private sector as many larger families rely on the private sector due to limited stock of larger family homes within the county borough.

On average the split in TA is 80% single people and 20% families with as many as 40 families in TA at any one time, which is a considerable increase compared to pre-pandemic levels where average family numbers were in single figures.

The changes that were implemented by Welsh Government as part of the pandemic response have now been embedded into the Housing Wales Act as a secondary legislation change in October 2022.

All of the above have contributed to a significant budget overspend during the year.

We have a homeless prevention target of 60% of all cases where a prevention duty is owed. However, due to the implementation of the Renting Homes Act, many landlords were declining any offer of prevention support due to needing to sell their properties, so the level achieved of 53.7% was under target.

### **Use of B&B/hotels**

Numbers of households, both single people and families, in B&B's and hotels is unprecedented. On average there are 120 households within NPT living in these types of accommodation, and it is acknowledged that this is unsuitable and should only be used in the short term. It is therefore part of the ongoing work to ensure use of these is reduced as much as is feasible within the current structure and demand, with a long term view of use being the exception.



## **Prevention**

The longer term plan of reducing presentations and number of households in TA is very reliant on a robust prevention service. Early intervention work will increase to reduce the presentations that are made to the service at crisis point, or where prevention is currently no longer possible.

Part of this is to create a Tenancy Sustainment Panel, which will bring together RSLs to discuss cases as soon as an issue is identified that may result in the tenancy being lost. It is hoped the panel will be running by the end of the summer.

## **Empty properties**

In response to the number of long term empty properties across Wales, the Empty Homes Scheme was developed by Welsh Government (WG) to provide grant aid to owners of long term empty properties for them to undertake the required works to bring them back into use.

WG have made an allocation of £50 million across Wales to fund the Scheme for a period of two years. Each participating Local Authority has been allocated a percentage of the funding based on the number of empty properties registered in the Authority area.

NPT has been awarded 4.8% of the available £50 million, which equates to £2.4 million over the two years of the Scheme with a required contribution from the authority of 10%. This Scheme could potentially result in over 100 empty properties being brought back into use across Neath Port Talbot over the period of the Scheme.

## **Social Housing Grant (SHG)**

The SHG is the main capital grant provided by Welsh Government for the provision of affordable housing. It is used to fund housing schemes that meet local housing need and priorities as identified by the Local Authority. Local Authorities are responsible for choosing their Housing Association partners, who are paid SHG to develop, own and manage the affordable housing.

Examples of SHG Approved Schemes are:

- Social Rent, Intermediate Rent or in some instances Tenure Neutral;

- General needs, older persons, wheelchair adapted, supported housing, extra care, homebuy or mortgage rescue;
- New build, rehabilitation (or a combination) and existing dwellings/empty properties;
- A variety of procurement routes ranging from conventional tender, design and build, and package deals to off-the-shelf projects.

### **SHG Budget**

The SHG budget is an annual budget allocated to Local Authorities by Welsh Government. The SHG programme is planned over three financial years with Local Authorities given a final confirmed budget for the first year and indicative budgets for the following 2 years. These are provided for planning purposes to enable Local Authorities to plan the delivery of their strategic housing priorities via their Programme Development Plan (PDP). Funding cannot be carried forward into future years, therefore it is important that Local Authorities monitor delivery of their programmes and maintain a reserve programme to ensure full spend.

NPT has experienced a significant increase to the SHG budget over the last few years with a 158% increase in 2022/23 (£12.8m) when compared with 2019/20 (£4.9m). The total allocated grant over the three year period of 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 is circa £40 million. This is welcomed as the latest NPT Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) states that, to meet demand, 412 affordable homes per annum need to be delivered in the first five years of the assessment period.

NPT SHG budgets are fully allocated for 2023/24 and 2024/25 and will continue to be monitored very closely to ensure all grant monies are spent in full.

### **SHG Programme Development Plans (PDPs)**

Local Authorities are required to submit their PDPs which contain all Registered Social Landlord (RSL) schemes to Welsh Government on a quarterly basis. The PDPs provide key information on the timescales for delivering Local Authority strategic priorities. PDPs are monitored very closely through monthly PDP scheme update meetings with the RSLs, quarterly meetings with all RSLs

and Welsh Government, and regular meetings with our internal Planning and Estates departments.

### **SHG Developments**

Circa £8.3m of SHG was drawn down during 2022/23 to supply a mixture of general needs housing, older person's housing, mental health supported living and learning disability supported living.

Assuming there are no unforeseen issues or delays SHG schemes typically take around 2 years to develop from start to finish, with an RSL typically drawing down a portion of their allocated SHG to purchase a plot of land (*Acquisition*) in year 1 and then the remainder of the grant drawn down in year 2 to build (*Construction*).

We are currently projected to deliver a total of 685 homes via the SHG scheme during the period 2022/23 to 2024/25.

### **Welfare Rights**

The Welfare Rights Unit is a specialist section, which deals with supporting people claim the benefits, to which they are entitled. The Unit helps local residents via a self-referral, Social Services or other support services; advice is provided on their benefits entitlement. The Unit offers a public helpline, support with form filling and representation at appeals tribunals, assisted via funding from Communities for Work/Families First. During 2022-23, the unit ran a number of outreach advice surgeries throughout the county borough.

The Unit also continues to work in partnership with Macmillan, who provide funding for Macmillan benefit advisors.

Despite the on-going resource challenges during the year, the Welfare Rights Unit assisted **2,704** people and was successful in obtaining **£7,046,831** in benefits for people within Neath Port Talbot, with a **95% success** rate at appeal representation. The Unit retains the ***Advice Quality Standard*** through Recognising Excellence Limited; this is a significant achievement for the Unit and means that the people of Neath Port Talbot can be confident in the service and the advice given by the Unit. Of these figures, the Macmillan team opened over **810** cases during 2022/23; this was carried out completely via telephone,

given the Covid restrictions still in place in Health settings and the inability to provide advice clinics at the hospitals bases. Macmillan raised **£2,389,357** in benefits during the period. The re-establishment of a hospital-based service will be considered in 2023-24.

## Welsh Language

Social Services continued to consolidate arrangements in relation to the Welsh Language and the **“More Than Just Words”** Active Offer (whereby a service is provided in Welsh without someone having to ask for it). Directorate senior officers work with corporate colleagues to promote and support the implementation of the Welsh Language Standards and the development of the Council’s Welsh Language Promotion Strategy (WLPS) 2023-28, which will be out for public consultation early in 2023-24. Additionally, the Welsh Language Standards Annual Report will be published by 30 June 2023 to meet the statutory deadline. The directorate received no Welsh language complaints during the year.

## Supportive performance data for this quality standard

PI Reference	PI Description	April 21 - March 22	April 22 - March 23
<b>New Measure PI25</b>	The percentage of children supported to live with their family	69.70%	70.90%
<b>New Measure PI34</b>	The percentage of all care leavers who have completed at least 3 months of education, training or employment in the past 12 months since leaving care	63.60%	63.3%
<b>New Measure PI34</b>	The percentage of all care leavers who have completed at least 3 months of education, training or employment in the past 24 months since leaving care	33.30%	66.6%
<b>New Measure PI35</b>	The percentage of care leavers who have experienced homelessness during the year	3.51%	3.52%

How we do what we do

*This is about how we support our workforce, make best use of our resources and financial planning, as well as our governance arrangements.*

Our workforce and how we support their professional roles

We continue to offer a blended approach to training across Adults and Children's Services, which has been beneficial in both supporting the recruitment of staff to the sector, as well as the continuing professional development of existing staff to support their re-registration with Social Care Wales. We have continued to raise the profile of the various roles within Social Care and worked with Neath College to offer Health and Social Care students work experience opportunities in the Community Wellbeing Team; their experience was further reinforced by access to other training that supports the role of a Social Care Worker, such as Client Manual Handling.

Five Training Officers have completed a Digital Learning Design (DLD) Level 3 Award qualification which has enabled them to design interactive e-learning training for staff across Social Care Services, continuing to build upon a blended-learning approach to learning and development.

We have continued to embed Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) and Positive Behaviour Management (PBM) across Learning Disability and Complex Needs Services to ensure staff safely manage and support individuals' behaviours that challenge when accessing our Day Service and Respite provisions. They provide expert advice and guidance and support the multi-disciplinary process when exploring the most appropriate and safest way to manage behaviours.

Training Officers have been trained to carry out Dementia Care Mapping, which provides the service with an action plan for staff to adapt how they provide care and support to individuals living with Dementia to avoid placement breakdown. We also offer a rolling programme of Dementia Training to internal and commissioned staff including; Introduction to Dementia, Understanding Difficult Behaviours and Meaningful Activities.

We also work closely with Community Occupational Therapists, Health, Community Wellbeing Team, and commissioned providers in developing knowledge, skills and practice relating to the implementation of Single-Handed Care (SHC). This involves exploring safe and alternative ways of providing client handling care and support in the community with one staff member, with commissioned providers actively engaging in this way of working.

During 2022/23 a total of **2,696** training places were accessed by staff across Adult Social Care Services.

In Children & Young People's Services (CYPS) there has been an emphasis on an outcome focused care and support approach and training on outcomes has continued to be rolled out. Using the *NPT Strength Based Model of Practice: 'Working to achieve outcomes'*, bespoke training has been developed to improve joint understanding of communities and strengthen collaborative working and relationships between multiagency practitioners.

We continue to support Consultant Social Workers to deliver refresher training and provide ongoing mentoring within their teams regarding personal outcomes. Focus has been given to linking in co-production, improving case recordings, working with parents and partners, and the development of principles and practice guidance to support a consistent approach to outcome-focused case recording.

The roll out of our Safeguarding Adults and Children from Exploitation interactive training pack continued, raising awareness of county lines, criminal and sexual exploitation, trafficking, radicalisation, and hate crime for both adults and children. Further training has been provided on the role of the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian.

In response to recommendations around work with child sexual abuse, sessions have been provided on harmful sexual behaviour, women who sexually abuse, understanding and preventing online child sexual abuse, sibling abuse, and understanding and assessing the protective carer in the context of child sexual abuse. Specific sessions have been delivered directly to parents.

We have also made significant strides forward ensuring Children's Services has a trauma informed workforce.

During 2022/23 a total of **3,891** training places were accessed by staff across Children's Social Care Services.

During the year we have provided **51** Social Work Degree Practice Learning Opportunities (placements) across Levels 1-3, for students from Cardiff Met and Swansea University. This includes 12 students that are seconded from Neath Port Talbot to the social work degree programme through the Open University. Social work teams across Adult and Children's Services have been invaluable in offering high quality placement experiences and, for the first time

in a while, we have had enough practice educators within the authority which meant that we have not had to outsource to independent external practice educators.

### **Championing a Research Culture**

In 2022 The NIHR Academy were seeking to support individuals or teams to develop team or organisational-level research skills and/or capacity as practice-based research leaders, and by doing so to become research champions within the adult social care sector. We have two Consultant Social Workers (CSW) in Social Services, Liza Turton and Rachel Scourfield, who were successful in their bid to focus on developing a research informed culture in NPT Adult services. This research award will run for a 14-month period where the two CSWs will work intensively with pilot teams in developing practitioners to use guidance and research to support evidence-informed practice. By providing the opportunity for our CSWs to be involved in a research project such as this has led to a number of collaborations that we are able to utilise with other organisations such as the London School of Economics, Social Care Wales, NICE, Swansea University, CARE and Cardiff University and the IMPACT Assembly. Research like this is often undertaken led by academics. For practitioners to be afforded the opportunity to do this is firmly putting Neath Port Talbot on the map in developing and championing a research culture within the organisation.



*Launching a research-informed culture in Adult Services*

### **Quality Assurance across the Directorate**

Our quality assurance activity across the directorate, overseen by the Quality Practice Strategic Group, provides confidence to the department and other stakeholders that its processes and services are being well managed. It validates the consistent use of procedures and standards, and ensures that staff have the correct knowledge, skills and attitudes to fulfil their roles and



responsibilities in a competent manner. This is undertaken through the Quality Practice and Learning Framework which sets out how NPT will learn from all activity completed to ensure that children, adults, families and carers are being supported in the right way at the right time, and understand what difference has been made. This framework provides a level of confidence about service delivery and the positive impact on children, adults, families and carers in NPT, whilst also measuring impact, such as what difference are NPT and its partners making.

Our guiding principles for embedding the Quality Practice and Learning Framework are that:

1. Children, young people, adults, families and carers are at the heart of what we do. The focus of quality assurance must be on impact and outcomes for the child, young person or adult in their journey through our social work and safeguarding systems.
2. The approach to Quality Assurance will be underpinned by Restorative Practice, and a desire to examine and capture best practice. This means that quality assurance activity is done “with” staff, rather than “to” or “for”, in ways that build relationships and are characterised by respecting each other’s perspectives, high expectations, high support and high challenge, to enable use to learn, improve and change.
3. Throughout the quality assurance processes the views of children, young people, adults, families and carers are integral to improving our services, we will where reasonable and practicable to do so, gain the voice of those who have received our services.
4. Our multi-agency and collaborative working with our partners, whether statutory or third sector will be enriched and where practicable we will include them within our quality assurance processes.

## Our financial resources and how we plan for the future

Following last year's local elections, NPT saw a new 'Rainbow Alliance' administration and political leadership. Good working relationships between Councillors and Officers have been maintained and developed, and the Directorate continues to enjoy the advice, support and guidance provided by its Cabinet and Committee Members and, indeed, the wider Council. Partnership working is paramount to the planning and sustainability of service provision, and the Directorate works closely with partners across Health, private and third sector organisations, as well as neighbouring local authorities.

### **Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)**

The medium term financial outlook over the next five years is extremely challenging. With inflation currently running at 8.7% (CPI May 2023) and the national living wage rising by 9.7% in 2023/24 there looks to be no let-up in the cost increases facing the Council. In addition, the Directorate is having to support more people with more complexities. The current MTFP to 2027/28 includes pay and inflationary increases, unavoidable service pressures and local growth pressures arising from changing demographics. The Council have continued to support the Directorate financially with considerable growth in the budget. However, it is clear that without significant additional central government funding in coming years the outlook is bleak and some difficult decisions will need to be made about the prioritisation of services.

After taking account of assumed Welsh Government funding over the period 2023-2028, there remains a significant funding gap. Work is ongoing in relation to developing a number of strategies to close this gap.

### **Children's Services and the not for profit agenda**

A key component of Welsh Government's new vision for children's services is the *Programme for Government* commitment to remove private profit from the care of looked after children. Whilst the principle of not taking profit out of the care market is absolutely supported this is a significant policy of change which risks driving more supply out of Wales. The delivery of this commitment will affect change across the whole care system in Wales. The duty on NPT in

relation to children looked after is that services are not contracted out to for-profit companies but remain with public sector and not-for-profit providers.

[Our partnership working, political and corporate leadership, governance and accountability](#)

### **Governance**

The Council has adopted the 2016 Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework, developed by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE). To comply with the Framework, the Council must publish an Annual Governance Statement (AGS), which explains the processes and procedures in place to enable the Council to carry out its functions effectively. Senior Officers from within the Directorate play an active part in the production and monitoring of the AGS.

### **Complaints & Representations**

The Social Services Complaints and Representations Procedure is based upon the good practice guidance issued alongside the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Representation Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014. The procedure is available to ensure that everyone who makes a complaint about social services in Neath Port Talbot has a right to be listened to properly. Their best interests must be safeguarded and promoted. Their views, wishes and feelings must be heard. Their concerns should be resolved quickly and effectively.

Following the easing of Covid restrictions, face-to-face meetings have been reinstated where requested and the Complaints Team has continued to provide a responsive service in supporting complainants in addressing their complaints and their desired outcomes.

The Complaints Team dealt with 68 formal Social Services Stage 1 complaints during 2022-23 across Children's Services, Adult Services and Business Management (including Corporate complaints); with a further three Stage 2 complaints. This is an increase from the previous year. Activity in dealing with

complainants on an 'informal' basis is far greater, with the Team being proactive in supporting Managers to achieve satisfactory outcomes for service users, their families and carers.

The Team also recorded/reported on 115 compliments received across Social Services.

### Looking ahead: our priorities for 2023-24

Our services are now fully reopened after the pandemic, but this does not signal a complete return to 'business as usual'; rather we look to continue to promote innovative and sustainable ways of providing social care and support. We therefore set out the following as our key directorate priorities for the coming year:

#### **Children and Young People Services**

##### **Placement sufficiency**

- We are committed to an approach that puts children – and families – first. We will work with families to help them stay together, but we will also ensure there are enough foster placements available for those who need a safe and stable environment.

##### **Recruit, retain and develop a highly skilled workforce**

- When social workers have the tools and time to do their job well, it makes a huge difference to children's and families' lives. We want a valued, supported and highly-skilled social worker for every child and family who needs one.

##### **Demand and complexity**

- For the majority of children, the best place for them to be is at home with their family, but some families need support to do this. We will provide specific and targeted support to families facing a range of challenges.

## **Adults Services**

### **Helping people to help themselves**

- We will promote self-care and help people to remain in their own communities with minimal intervention.

### **Building relationships and making connections**

- People are the most important asset we have in NPT. It is the relationship between family and friends, between the cared for and the carer, within communities, and between businesses, employees, and customers that has the biggest impact on people's lives.

### **Living the life you want**

- We will continue to promote prevention and early intervention as well as informal care and support. But there will always be people who need more formal care and support. This should put the individual first so that their desired outcomes - how they want to live - are met.

## **Housing and Homelessness Services**

### **Implement a more strategic approach**

- We will work more closely with partners and other Council departments to ensure we make best use of our resources.

### **Reduce homelessness**

- We want to make sure that homelessness is rare, and when it does occur it is brief and doesn't happen again.

### **Increase access to appropriate affordable housing**

- We want to work with landlords and others to increase the amount of available accommodation.

### **Support those with social care needs to live well in their communities**

- We will offer new models of care to help people live in their communities longer, whether they are older, disabled or are young people leaving care.