



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council



Social Services, Health & Housing Director's Annual Report 2023-24

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Foreword



Welcome to my annual report reflecting the period April 2023 to March 2024. It has been another eventful year and one with mixed outcomes. Starting on a positive note, we again saw a reduction in the number of Children Looked After, and we continue to support people fleeing the war in Ukraine as well as refugees from Afghanistan.

However, the social care sector continues to experience the fallout of the Covid pandemic. Our Community Mental Health Teams are seeing increased referrals. A number of providers are still experiencing staff recruitment and retention challenges. More significantly, however, was the closure of the largest older people's care home within Neath Port Talbot, with 90 beds and more than 70 residents.

The challenges faced by public services generally and the social care sector in particular are well-rehearsed, however the next year is likely to be one of the most difficult times any of us working in social services has experienced. Tightening budgets mean that we will have no option but to do things differently. This will almost certainly involve making tough decisions – even to the point of seeing services reduced.

To mitigate this as far as possible we continue to promote new ways of working, such as greater use of Assistive Technology to help people maintain independence in their own homes. But we also have to get smarter in the way we spend taxpayers' money. The last year has seen efforts to save money where possible, including bringing services in-house where we believe this will support the council in gaining better control of services. This is part of Welsh Government's Rebalancing Care agenda, and you will see more progress on this in the coming year.

We are also placing more emphasis on fairness of service provision. Put simply, we want to make sure people are not missing out on essential services as others may be receiving more than they need.

But we in NPT are resilient and innovative, working closely with the Council's Leadership, Members, regional partners and local providers. And we will continue to do everything we can to meet the care and support needs of the vulnerable people of our communities.

Andrew Jarrett
Director of Social Services, Health & Housing

Director's summary of performance

As at the end of the year 2,456 adults had a service and care plan (compared to 2,117 in the previous year), a 16% increase, while those aged 65+ receiving a service was 1,793 (1,788 the year before). The increase is partly due to a greater number of referrals for Mental Health Services and an ongoing consequence of the pandemic. The year also saw 1,948 new assessments completed for adults, almost half (43%) of whose needs could only be met with a care and support plan.

People are typically happiest in their own homes and communities, with minimal intervention from Health and Social Care. Last year the number of reablement packages completed during the year stood at 289, up by 55% on the previous year's 186 packages.

Over 16,300 contacts were received for children during the year, 2,000 more than the previous year. Despite this the number of Children Looked After continues to fall, standing at 251 (of whom 17 were Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) at the end of March 2024, down from 260 in the previous year.

We also saw a reduction in the average number of days children were on the Child Protection Register during the year, falling from 269 to 228 days.

The Social Care sector is still experiencing challenges in terms of provider stability. During the year two older people's care homes closed, representing over ten per cent of the locally available beds and resulting in dozens of vulnerable people having to be moved to alternative care homes. We continue to work closely with the wider sector to ensure we have sustainable service provision, as domiciliary care providers are still experiencing staff recruitment and retention challenges.

Work is ongoing to promote Prevention and Early Intervention services to help people live in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. This includes increasing the uptake of Assistive Technology and the Mobile Response Service to deal with non-emergency calls.

Our support for unpaid carers continues to increase. Last year 304 adult carers assessments were completed, up from 225 in the previous year.

During the year 97% of children's assessments were completed within the target 42 days from point of referral, while the use of children's residential care home placements has remained at the same level as last year.

Reflecting Welsh Government's Rebalancing Social Care agenda, during the year we undertook the necessary preparatory work to bring the Adult Family Placements Service back in-house, with the new service going live on 1st May 2024. This is the first of a number of services anticipated to be brought in-house during the current year.

The overall number of children and young people accessing advocacy services has increased in NPT by 21.2% over the last 12 months due to continued efforts to embed advocacy within local practice.

Although the number of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) completed has increased to 293, up from 272 during the previous year, the time taken to deliver (between referral and completion) has gone up from 245 to 325 days. This is due to some longstanding jobs finally being signed off and closed.

Our Commissioning Unit played an active and key role in the closure of an older people's care home during the year. A huge logistical exercise involving the need to transfer around 70 people to alternative care homes in the area. This was unfortunately necessary but highlights the Council's responsibility in ensuring the social care needs of vulnerable people are met.

We continue to work closely with colleagues and partners across the Council as well those in Swansea Council, Swansea Bay University Health Board, the third sector and the West Glamorgan Regional Partnership.

Further data highlighting a number of measures can be found throughout this document.

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. Our progress in meeting those is laid out in the section below.

Priorities for 2023-24: What we said we would do and what we achieved

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.
 - ✓ We continue to develop our recruitment and retention and have a marketing timetable in place
 - ✓ We have seen an increase in enquiries, and we are starting to see a slow pick up in the enquiries proceeding to assessments
 - ✓ We have launched our foster plus to look for step down from residential care foster carers

- **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.

We have:

- ✓ Had a very successful year of recruitment
- ✓ Continued to actively promote staff wellbeing as a means of retaining staff; promote a positive work culture with HR support, low caseloads, consistent management support and regular supervisions
- ✓ Attended universities to discuss NPT and recruit. PO has attended in Colleges and Universities, presenting about what it's like to work in NPT, including the strengths-based model, in open days
- ✓ Hosted Jobs Fairs for Newly Qualified Social worker
- ✓ Provided regular training, including senior officers and training officers delivering "in house" training
- ✓ Promoted NPT on a more national level, presenting our outcomes focused model of practice. Resulting in us attracting applicants from all over Wales and England.
- ✓ Had Consultant Social workers present on areas of expertise at universities, overseen by a Principal Officer

- ✓ Introduced year 10 placements for local comprehensives in NPT to build career paths into Social Work early on
 - ✓ Increased the number of practice assessors in the service which means we are able to host more students. Students in their final year of placements choose to remain in NPT to start their careers in social work
- **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.

We have:

- ✓ Continued to provide early offers of support to children and families
- ✓ Continued to work collaboratively with partners to ensure that families access the right support at the right time
- ✓ Continued to support families to achieve their outcomes
- ✓ Continued to work to the ethos that children's needs are best met by their own families and provide support for this to be achieved safely
- ✓ Developed a 'Be Safe' service in response to increasing concern around young people carrying knives and being at increased risk of exploitation, to disrupt these behaviours and provide awareness and support. Working in partnership with other agencies the Be Safe service has supported young people, their families and staff on the risks associated with exploitation, violence and knife crime
- ✓ Established the Working Together Service, which specialises in supporting families where there are concerns around neglect and/or home conditions. This service offers practical support as well as using motivations interviewing to develop the confidence of families and build their skills. Given the increased cost of living and the impact of poverty/deprivation, this service has continued to be integral in supporting families
- ✓ Continued to see an increase in demand in our referral rates as needs of families become more and more complex, up 15% year on year to over 20,000 referrals
- ✓ Seen the wider impact of the increased cost of living. The emotional and mental wellbeing of young people is an ongoing need and there is

a gap in services supporting these young people. There are regional groups set up to look at how we meet the emotional wellbeing needs of young people

- ✓ Seen added pressures in schools with an increase in young people being on reduced timetables/excluded which increases the risks outside of the family home
- ✓ Resourced our Single Point of Contact in order to respond to the increase in demand to ensure we are responding proportionately and in a timely manner. All referrals received in the service are seen and actioned by a Social Work team manager within 24 hours

Adults Services

- **Helping people to help themselves:** We will promote self-care and help people to remain in their own communities with minimal intervention.
 - ✓ This overarching theme is centred on empowering individuals to help themselves and supporting them to remain in their own communities with minimal intervention. This is achieved through a multi-faceted approach that includes promoting self-care through education and resource access, offering assistance in navigating services with tailored support plans, minimising intervention through preventative measures like home safety assessments and health monitoring, building community support networks, and empowering individuals through assistive technology. By focusing on these key areas and leveraging the expertise of social workers and occupational therapists, the department aims to enhance the quality of life for individuals while also contributing to the sustainability of health and social care systems by reducing the need for more intensive services.
- **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.
 - ✓ NPT's collaborative approach includes conducting comprehensive short-term assessments, empowering individuals through accurate information, providing personalised advice, offering supportive assistance, building strong relationships with individuals and the

community, and promoting community connections to enhance well-being and reduce isolation. By prioritising relationships and community connections, NPT aims to help individuals maintain their independence and thrive with minimal intervention, ultimately making a positive impact on their lives and well-being.

- **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.
- ✓ Our mission is to empower individuals to live their desired lives by focusing on their personal goals and outcomes. We emphasize prevention, early intervention, and informal care to ensure minimal reliance on formal support. Our holistic assessments, conducted by social workers and occupational therapists, prioritise individual needs and goals. By providing comprehensive information and advice, we enable informed decision-making and self-management, fostering independence. Early intervention and support networks help address issues promptly, while home adaptations and health programs enhance safety and well-being. Our tailored support plans ensure minimal intervention, promoting autonomy and quality of life. This integrated approach supports individuals in maintaining their independence and living comfortably in their own homes.

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.

- ✓ In the past year, our Housing and Homelessness Services have adopted a more strategic approach, working closely with partners and other Council departments to optimise our resources effectively. Our inter-disciplinary team, including social workers, occupational therapists, and a newly appointed housing consultant social worker, focuses on helping individuals remain in their homes with minimal intervention. Through comprehensive short-term assessments, we identify specific needs and

provide tailored support plans to enhance independence. Our holistic evaluations and adaptive solutions, such as home adaptations and assistive devices, ensure safety and mobility. We also offer detailed information, advice, and assistance to empower individuals and their families. The housing consultant plays a crucial role in assessing housing suitability, recommending modifications, and liaising with housing services. Strategic collaboration with Council departments and strengthening community partnerships have been key to our success, ensuring integrated, efficient service delivery. Additionally, we aim to reduce homelessness by ensuring it is rare, brief, and non-recurring. This comprehensive, collaborative strategy not only promotes independence but also enhances the quality of life for those we serve. 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.
- ✓ **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.
- ✓ For the Financial Year 54 schedules were prepared and passed for processing, equating to £1.6m worth of work carried out.
- ✓ **Leasing scheme:** There has currently been no take up from Private Landlords, the scheme has generated a large number of enquires which have been followed up by 28 expressions of interest. The main reason for no landlords participating in the scheme is due to WG capping the rent at the local housing allowance. Private Landlords can have a much better

return sourcing their own clients or using a high street letting agent, therefore this is not seen as a viable option. (*Estimate - £750-£1200*).

- ✓ To attempt to stimulate the market a 'Private Rented Landlord Forum Event' was held and proven to be incredibly positive. Over 100 landlords attended, and useful feedback was received, and these events will continue. WG property standards have been reviewed which may now be more attractive to landlords and contact is being made with landlords that were originally rejected based on previous standards.

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.

- ✓ We are committed to supporting individuals with social care needs to live well in their communities through innovative and comprehensive strategies. Our approach includes proportionate assessments by social workers and occupational therapists to identify minimal yet impactful support, personalised information and advice, and holistic support plans developed collaboratively. We are also exploring innovative housing solutions with the assistance of housing consultant social workers and promoting adaptable living spaces. Community-based supports such as local services and volunteer networks play a crucial role in reducing isolation and enhancing daily living. Furthermore, we are integrating technology to boost safety and independence through smart home devices and health monitoring tools. For long-term community living, we focus on sustainable support systems with ongoing monitoring and reassessments, and we provide resources for family and caregiver support. By leveraging these comprehensive efforts, we aim to create a supportive environment that enables individuals with social care needs to maintain their independence and enjoy a higher quality of life in their own homes.

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.

As a Local Authority it is important that we consistently capture and hear the voice of those we support. We want to ensure that we offer the best opportunity to listen and respond to people's views. Participation is an integral part of our planning and development of services. Therefore, in Social Services we have a strategic lead for Engagement and Participation, and a dedicated officer for both children and adult services to promote collaborative working. In Neath Port Talbot we work in an outcome focused way and ensure that we have 'what matters conversations' with those that we support.

Engagement and Participation across Children and Young People's Services.

The Engagement & Participation Team works across Children's Services to embed children's rights into our daily practice. It provides opportunities for children and young people up to the age of 25 to develop the confidence and skills to understand and exercise their rights, co-produce services and have a voice in matters that affect them and aims to advance the education of duty bearers to understand their role in enabling children and young people to access their rights. The Engagement and Participation Team support a wide range of children and young people with different backgrounds, needs and experiences.

Throughout the last year, we have supported a wide range of activities, trips, projects, consultations, established groups and training to actively seek the voice of the child. This report outlines the work undertaken.

Children's Rights Champions

Children's Rights are everyone's responsibility and in order to embed children's rights into practice Children's Services committed to the concept of 'Children's Rights Champions'. In 2021 'Champions' were recruited and committed to a list of actions they set to embed children's rights into practice in their specific roles. Implementation of actions is overseen by the Quality Practice Group and the Practice Improvement Group, and we meet 'Champions' every six months to review progress and support with future plans. To further support the work of the Engagement and Participation Officer a Participation Champions group meets quarterly and is made up of staff from across the Service. It is an

opportunity to share good practice, promote events and discuss common themes. The Engagement and Participation Team deliver an 'Introduction to Children's Rights' session during new staff's induction. The session also provides an opportunity to share the work of the Team and promote upcoming opportunities.

Children and Young People's Consultation Event at Plantasia



In collaboration with the Looked After Children's Team a consultation event was held at Plantasia to give children and young people the opportunity to re-name the LAC Team. As part of the ongoing 'Language We Use' work the children and young people highlighted the need for change. A friendlier name is needed to reflect the ethos of the Team. To facilitate the event, spoken word artist Duke Al Durham delivered a creative session to provoke thought and discussion and help find an appropriate name. Next steps include collating the ideas, sharing the outcome and with approval re-

naming the Team. The wonderful location lent itself to some promotional opportunities for the new Comments, Compliments & Complaints process for care experienced children and young people. Children and Young People's Services have developed a leaflet, informative postcard and magnet to ensure all our children know how to contact us. Over the coming months the material will be promoted to Foster Carers, Staff, Children and Young People.

Neurodivergence Strategy

We have worked closely with partners and stakeholders, including Education and Health, to draft NPT's Strategic Plan for Neurodivergence (Autism and Other Conditions) 2024-27. Our aim is to create an inclusive and understanding culture, which supports neurodiverse children, young people, adults, families and carers within their communities, and across the County.

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.

NPT is a member of the West Glamorgan Regional Partnership, alongside City & County of Swansea Council, Swansea Bay University Health Board, as well as representatives from across the third and independent sector partners, members of the community, and unpaid carers.

Regional working for Wales is an important part of a wider reform of the way public services are managed. The Partnership has developed a five-year Learning Disability Strategy, which represents a regional response to the needs of adults with learning disabilities and describes the commitment to a long-term strategic mission for meeting their needs within the context of national legislation and guidance, regional plans, and available resources.

Work has already begun to ensure that people living in NPT, and across the wider region, have access to the right care and support, accommodation, transport and employment opportunities to enable them to live the lives they want to.

Co-production and Involvement of People with Lived Experience

The Council receives a grant from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (via the Home Office) which pays for a Service User Engagement Officer (SUEO) for the Area Planning Board to increase participation with people who use substance use services across NPT and Swansea and NPT. Our officer commenced work in September 2023.

During the year the SUEO coordinated the Peer Interventions Project that delivers all three specialist harm reduction interventions across the region to provide advice support and guidance and distribute naloxone kits and needle and syringe kits and carry out dry blood spot testing for Blood Borne Viruses.

They also established two Co-Production Forums run monthly in both Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. The groups have developed appropriate governance arrangements so people with lived and living experience can engage with the Area Planning Board in line with co-production guidelines. The forums are looking at work plans



Co-Production Forum meeting, January 2024

in going forward and these will help shape the ongoing work. The forums are working to the mantra of “nothing about us, without us”.

Working across all organisations the post holder is scoping what currently exists in terms of Service User engagement, and then work with partner organisations in developing a coherent joined up approach that ensures Service Users have a voice in the future development and delivery of services.

The SUEO is supporting on a wide range of other work streams, strengthening the views and opinions for those with lived and living experience.

Reducing social isolation

A Local Area Coordinator working in the Upper Valleys identified a number of elderly individuals who were isolated and lonely and desperately seeking ways to improve their quality of life. The Community Connection Team were keen to get involved and Thursday Lunch Club was born!

The first Lunch Club took place in August of last year, with around 15 people attending. This now varies from anything from 15 to at our highest at 22 attending. Each week, everyone gathers for teas, coffees and biscuits in the morning for a quiz, followed by a light lunch ordered in from one of the local cafes. We order from a different cafe each week so that we keep the menu choices varied but this also helps to support the local businesses. In the afternoon we either have a game of bingo, or an activity. So far, we have had pottery sessions, willow weaving, wreath making, visits from Citizen’s Advice and the Tackling Poverty Team, Tai Chi, the RNIB, Digital enablement, Multiply craft sessions and regular visits from Dan from Ageing Well, which are proving

very popular. Very soon we have Defibrillator training planned as well as a visit from the Fire Service, Greyhound Rescue and a Paint Along Session.

Weekly visits from the Digital Inclusion Team have been arranged, so that people can access support with any IT, mobile phone and other related issues. The group have got to know Neil from the team really well and he has had a good response, with a number of people bringing tech-related problems for him to solve each session.

We enjoyed a fantastic Christmas lunch in December, supplied and served by one of the local cafes, with children from the local school coming along to entertain us with Christmas carols.

The group have a lot of fun and it has helped mend some previously broken friendships along with forge some new ones. For many individuals the group is the only social event of their week and as such, it means a lot to them to attend. One of my gentlemen has macular degeneration, he lives alone and has no family. Prior to coming to the group, he was completely isolated in his flat, willing the time to go by. He's now reunited with an old friend that he had not seen for years, and the highlight of his week is meeting up with him for a chat on a Thursday. Having seen how enriched his life can be with people around him and activities to engage in, he's looking forward to visiting a residential home this week, with the hope of securing a placement. We have already managed to secure Community Transport if he does make the move, which will enable him to continue to attend the club on a Thursday.

The club has helped those who attend to find out about events and services that they would never have been aware of, which they say as helped to improve their quality of life and increase their social circle. So much so, that some meet a couple of times a week, to attend other groups, go shopping, or meet at one of the local cafes for a chat. Some of them have even arranged to go on day trips and holidays together.

Unpaid Carers

Internal Review: We have continued our comprehensive internal review of support for unpaid carers, engaging with various council teams and gathering insights from 224 carers across Neath Port Talbot.

Pilot Project: Based on our learning we initiated a pilot project within the Neath Network Team. A new dedicated role was created to bridge the Prevention & Early Intervention and Social Work Teams, enhancing the operational link between carer support and social services provided to those they care for. The feedback from carers and staff on the pilot was overwhelmingly positive, leading to the role's adoption as a permanent feature across our other two Networks.

Carers Assessment Form and Procedures: As part of the pilot, we revamped our carers assessment form and procedures, significantly reducing waiting times for assessments.

- **Pilot Successes:**

- Raised the profile of carers within teams.
- Promoted early identification of carers.
- Reduced waiting lists.
- Ensured a holistic consideration of both statutory and non-statutory support for carers and those they care for.

Carers Assessments

In our ongoing commitment to enhance the support provided to unpaid carers, we have significantly revamped our assessment process to focus on “what matters” conversations with adult unpaid carers. This approach aims to better understand the unique needs of each carer, enabling us to identify and provide the necessary support earlier, ensuring they can continue in their vital caring roles.

To further strengthen our support network, we have appointed Carers Development Officers within each of the cluster networks. These officers act as unpaid carer champions, conducting comprehensive unpaid carers needs assessments and fostering stronger connections to short break provisions and broader early help support services.

We are also in the process of formalising a comprehensive training program for our staff. This training will be rolled out shortly and will emphasize the identification and support of unpaid carers, equipping our staff with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively assist carers in their roles.

In addition, we are enhancing our partnership with Primary Care Clusters, particularly in the Upper Valleys, and local pharmacies. This collaboration aims to identify opportunities for training, improve the identification of unpaid

carers, and establish clear pathways of support. By working closely with these partners, we aim to create a more integrated and supportive environment for unpaid carers.

These initiatives reflect our dedication to providing timely and effective support to unpaid carers, ensuring they receive the recognition and assistance they deserve.

What Matters Youth Housing Consultation – Phase 2

Throughout 2023 the Engagement and Participation Team assisted colleagues within the Contract and Commissioning Team on a consultation on Youth Homelessness and Housing. This included conducting interviews with Young People who were homeless and living within one of the commissioned Housing Providers within the Local Authority and was considered Phase 1 of the consultation process. The Engagement and Participation Officer held one workshop with Stakeholders and two workshops with ten Young People across the Dewis and Clarewood provisions to further explore the themes identified in Phase One. The findings of all three workshops were presented in two reports and informed the next phase of the consultation which will consist of further workshops to facilitate the Young People designing an information pack and webpage, intended to be provided at the initial stage of homelessness.

Outcomes survey

The Engagement and Participation Team undertook the completion of an Outcomes Survey on two occasions in January and June 2023. The survey was a telephone survey conducted with Children and Adults who receive care and support from Children's or Adult services. The survey was an optional opportunity for individuals to provide feedback on their experience with Social Services, with particular focus on their individual outcomes and What Matters conversations. The survey questions explored whether they felt that these outcomes were being met and whether their strengths were recognised.

The Engagement and Participation Team conducted the Child Protection Rapid Review Survey with the Parents/Guardians of children on the child protection register. The aim of the National Survey was to gather a multi-disciplinary perspective on child protection arrangements. Care Inspectorate Wales will

consider responses alongside other review activities to support the completion of a national report.

Most Significant Change Interviews

From May 2023 the Engagement and Participation Team conducted Most Significant Change interviews that focused on a number of specific interventions and processes. The interviews reflected the Most Significant Change template and training that the Team attended with Nick Andrews of Swansea University. The interview process continued throughout the course of the year with varying topics of focus and culminated with the Most Significant Change Panel, held in December 2023. The Panel was comprised of The Director of Social Services, Health and Housing, The Heads of Children's and Adult Services, representatives from the PAN Parent Network, Consultant Social Workers and the Engagement and Participation Officer. The panel was an opportunity to explore the stories and engage in dialogue to identify which Story individuals thought was Most Significant and why, sharing good practice and success stories.

Care Home Surveys – Ongoing

Throughout 2023 and currently ongoing, the Engagement and Participation Team provided support to the Adult Services Contract and Commissioning Officers in their monitoring processes of commissioned Care Homes. The E&P Officers build, monitor and compile surveys and offer in-person support in going out to the Care Homes to assist residents, relatives and staff in completing the surveys in-person.

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.

We continue to use technology in supporting people to achieve their personal outcomes.

Remodelling and refurbishment work to provide a Digital Solutions Suite was completed. This facility was formally opened in August 2023 to showcase and demonstrate how mainstream digital technology can support independent living, and/or enhance other care/telecare support. Guided tours of the Digital Solution Suite can be booked by all NPT residents, carers and staff, and since opening we have received more than 150 visitors.

A successful bid for SPF (Shared Prosperity Fund) funding has enabled a cross-departmental project to provide wraparound services supporting Digital Inclusion and Digital Enablement. The project is managed by the Prevention & Early Intervention Team in collaboration with Adult Learning and the Youth Service.

The Prevention and Early Intervention Team have continued work to develop 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. This is undergoing beta testing and is anticipated to launch in summer of 2024.

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 – maintaining a service for 2,500 residents.

Working closely with the Community Medicines Management Team we continue to support 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.

Collaborative working is ongoing with our day service BSpoked and the individuals they support to identify opportunities for technology to help achieve personal outcomes and independent living skills. We have provided training and

installed mainstream digital and Assistive Technology in the Independent Living Suite which has been well received, and we will continue to develop and include this in work plans for 2024-2025.

Initial pilot of a response service in the Afan Cluster area has been completed and demonstrated positive impact on wellbeing for non-injurious falls and other non-medical emergencies. Funding has been allocated to undertake a further 1-year pilot from 2024-2025, to roll out a Mobile Response Service to all NPT Lifeline users which will inform models for ongoing service provision.

Short breaks

There are occasions when the role of therapeutically parenting a child is exhausting and this has an impact on the effectiveness of the foster carers to parent effectively. To support relationships and placement stability, we have supported foster carers by matching the children with another household and providing short breaks.

Hospital Team

Last year the Team won a joint award with the Local Health Board for its multi-agency working within Home First. The functions of this team include preventing unnecessary hospital admissions by working across the community and hospital; facilitating discharge from hospital in a timely manner; implementing national guidance on discharge requirements; and ensure patients are supported in the community post discharge to reduce readmissions. The team has expanded over the past year, with a base in Morriston Hospital as well as Neath Port Talbot.

The Team is working towards improving the time taken to respond to referrals and support a D2RA (Discharge to Recover and Assess) response, with plans to further focus on early intervention to identify support needs earlier in an individual's journey through hospital.

Community Wellbeing / Reablement Team

An inspection of the Community Wellbeing Team (CWT) took place in November 2023 and noted a positive working relationships between Social Care and Health; strong management support; caring and supportive staff; personal plans meet people's needs; people are safe from abuse and neglect; and that robust systems are in place to regularly check on the quality of care and support.

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. Installations, maintenance and decommissions of equipment are now delivered in house from February 2024. This has enabled efficiencies in the service which will ensure adequate capacity for digital upgrades and reduce waiting times for the service.

Negotiating the switch from analogue telephone lines to digital by December 2025 is a key priority for the service is to ensure all lifeline and telecare equipment is replaced ahead of this time to ensure a smooth and safe transition as individuals are migrated from analogue phone lines to digital voice networks. We have now entered stage 2 of the roadmap and are on track as planned to achieve this 'digital switch' for 2,500 users of the service, and 56% of clients having been upgraded so far.

We continue to link with communication companies to ensure safe migration of lifeline & telecare clients as we move to phase 2 of our digital switch roadmap. Our upgrade programme will pick up pace over the next year and we are well on target to have upgraded all equipment ahead of the original December 2025 deadline.

The Mobile Response Service pilot provides timely support for individuals at home who experience non-injurious falls and other non-medical emergencies. The majority of call outs are responded to within the hour, which means fallers avoid a long lie and associated negative outcomes and are less likely to be admitted to hospital. The service also reduces carer burnout and gives confidence for individuals to continue stay in their own home.

The SPF funded NPT Digital Inclusion and Digital Enablement project seeks to improve the lives of individuals by helping them stay connected, manage daily activities and be more independent and engaged. The project develops and scales up existing work to reduce digital inequality for disadvantaged groups, increasing access to digital technologies which enhance daily living/ ageing well, and supporting digitally excluded citizens to access services they need.

A multifaceted approach includes:

- A network of Digital Inclusion/Enablement staff and volunteers providing targeted support for individuals, including those with additional learning or access needs.
- Enabling affordable/free access via Equipment Loan Library and Databank Scheme.
- Delivery of interactive course to support digital and life skills with a qualification to improve future prospects for targeted school year 11 students.

Case study

“I am almost 85 years old, and I have only just had my first mobile phone where I am looking forward to the next step of being shown how to use it.

I am now using my iPad every day. I would say that the iPad is a lifeline to me. It has opened the world up for me. I feel less lonely, as it's widened my social life as I can now see people on the screen not just hear their voice on the telephone which has made a massive difference. I feel like I have regained my independence as I can now shop online, Google any information I need and check my online banking.”

Substance Use

The Area Planning Board Support Team works on a regional basis across Neath Port Talbot and Swansea, governed by the Area Planning Board (APB) and hosted by NPTCBC acting as the banker for the Substance Misuse Action Fund (SMAF). NPTCBC is a voting member of the APB as one of the responsible authorities.

We are the only region in Wales that routinely reviews non-fatal drug overdoses. Our process involves assessing each case and assigning it to the appropriate service to make contact within 72 hours of the overdose being picked up. These professionals provide guidance, support, naloxone, and referrals to specialised

services. The progress of each person is closely monitored until identified risks are mitigated.

The Team plays a pivotal role in coordinating and facilitating the Independent Review Panel (IRP) for suspected drug-related deaths. The primary objective is to identify recommendations, learning points, and best practice from these cases. Subsequently, we share the findings with relevant services, enabling them to adapt their practices and improve service provision.

Service Development and Transformation

The APB is embarking on a programme of transformation to create an integrated Public Health approach to the prevention of and treatment for substance use. During 2023/24 a Programme Manager commenced and partners agreed a Business Case to implement a new 'whole system approach' to replace the current range of substance use services through commissioning an integrated highly visible, accessible and effective substance use service that delivers integrated treatment and support to meet the needs of the diverse population of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. We have included people with lived/living experience, staff working in the services, current providers and commissioners to attend workshops, where partners have had the opportunity to co-design the new service across Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. The Commissioning exercise will commence in the summer of 2024.



Stakeholders at an Alliance
Development Workshop, March 2024

The Western Bay Drug Commission established to investigate why the region had been suffering with high levels of drug related deaths and harms associated with substance use. It has worked throughout the year to gather evidence. This independent panel held several public facing meetings and heard from a wide range of invited guests on identified key themes. The Commission will publish its report in the summer of 2024. The recommendations will be used to improve systems and will inform the development of the new whole system approach.

Mental Health & Learning Disability Services

Our services are continuing to see increased demand which is proving challenging both in terms of a lack of suitable service provision and the high costs attached to making placements.

Mental Health Services

Challenges facing Mental Health Services include:

- Absence of a range of models of accommodation and care. This results in over-reliance on high-cost placements to manage risk to self and others, and wider public safety.
- Lack of providers who are confident to manage individuals with forensic risk therefore no alternative but to utilise high-cost placements
- Managing risk - Expectation from partner agencies to safeguard individuals and those who present risk to others, as a single agency
- Gaps in service – Mental Health and Therapeutic interventions.
- Shortage of domiciliary care providers that specialise in supporting individuals with mental health needs.
- The Mental Health Act (MHA) places on local authorities the duty to provide Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHP) services. Local authorities are responsible for ensuring that enough AMHPs are available to carry out their roles under the MHA. There are challenges in being able to provide a 24-hour service that can respond to patients' needs in a timely way. There is a dwindling number of AMHP, and difficulties with recruitment and retention of AMHP workforce.

Learning Disabilities Services

- The service is increasingly supporting individuals with more complex health care needs. Budgetary and resource pressures are being passed down to the local authority which typically would have sat with the NHS. As a result, we are seeing escalating placement costs for meeting complex needs.

- We have seen an increase in the number of individuals who have an autism diagnosis, where offering practical support often falls solely to the local authority. Recent analysis of young people moving through transition to Adult Services indicated around 50% had an autism diagnosis. There is also a lack of services able to meet the diverse needs of autistic individuals.
- Service scarcity is impacting on the ability to offer individual's choice and control.
- Management of behaviours is becoming more challenging to meet, with a lack of trauma informed services and practice approaches. This results in the local authority having to become experts where we would have previously relied upon close relationships with partner agencies to provide that expertise. Local authorities are now plugging the gap in service delivery.
- Lack of resource, skills set and environment to meet the needs of individuals who present with behaviours that challenge.

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.

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

- ✓ We continue to develop the quality of our strategy discussions by ensuring all key partners are involved at the outset.
- ✓ We have introduced outcome strategy meetings post S47 enquiries to ensure all those, including parents and children, who contribute to the enquiry have sight of the final report, which allows them to understand how decisions are reached and affords an opportunity to challenge.
- ✓ We continue to engage parents, family and carers as partners in all safeguarding forums.
- ✓ Our offer of Family Group Conferencing continues to be well received, and we have extended the offer of Family Group Conferencing to those families who are separating and not open to the Local Authority.
- ✓ Over the course of the last year Mental Capacity Act training has been rolled-out across Children's and Adults Social Care to ensure consistency in assessment and subsequent intervention.
- ✓ Our response to harm outside the family home has been strengthened by the SAFE Strategic Partnership and oversight of responding to this form or risk and harm.
- ✓ We are due to deploy our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Tracker (MAST) to ensure partnership systems are interfaced to identify and respond to risk and harm.
- ✓ More young people have transitioned to adult services owing to concerns of risk and harm and we will continue to develop our response to harm outside the family home across the life-course.
- ✓ We have concluded the review of our response to DVA (Domestic Violence and Abuse) across Social Care and will now convert the findings

into an Action Plan to strengthen our response to DVA, with our partner agencies across social care.

- ✓ Our rapid response to suspected suicide has been extended to respond to significant suicide attempts, which allows us to ensure support is targeted and learning elicited.
- ✓ The regional Parent Peer Advocacy Service, the first in Wales, will be delivered by Mental Health Matters and is due to go live in July 2024.
- ✓ Our Parent Advocate Network (PAN) continues to go from strength to strength supporting parents and their families across Neath Port Talbot.
- ✓ 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, Youth Justice Board, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, Regional Safeguarding, Junior Safeguarding and CONTEST to achieve this goal.

Single Point of Contact (SPOC)

The safeguarding component of the SPOC team's work saw 432 Adult at Risk referrals, with 36 cases escalating to the level of a s126 enquiry. The remaining 396 cases were either stepped down to proportionate assessments or resolved by managerial enquiries, indicating a robust triage process that ensures only the most critical cases receive intensive investigation.

The multidisciplinary composition of the SPOC team, which includes social workers, occupational therapists, a specialist nurse, and a newly added housing consultant social worker, has been pivotal in addressing a wide range of needs. The plan to integrate a police officer into the team will likely bolster the safeguarding efforts further. Overall, the SPOC team has demonstrated a comprehensive and efficient approach to managing social, physical, and health-related needs while maintaining a strong focus on safeguarding.

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 borough. The team deliver appropriate, relevant initiatives through a variety of means, doing so 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.

The Community Safety Partnership Board's six agreed priority areas for 2024-2027 are:

- Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence
 - Anti-Social Behaviour
 - Community Cohesion
 - Serious Violence
 - General Crime Prevention (including Community Engagement & Acquisitive Crime)
 - Substance Use
- (The substance use priority being led on by the Area Planning Board and its Team, on behalf of the CSP, rather than the Community Safety Team itself)*

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 for 2023-2026. 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.

Our Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) Service within Community Safety supported **615** high risk victims of domestic abuse during the year. This compares to **650** in the previous year. This drop in numbers can be attributed to a change in our approach when referrals are received, one change being all male victims now being supported by Calan DVS. The nature of the cases received into

the service remains very complex in many instances, which requires a careful and measured approach by the team.

The Community Safety Team were successful in receiving funding to purchase target hardening items to help victims feel safer and be safer. 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.

The team have responsibility for coordinating the Domestic Abuse MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) forum. In the year there were **1,223** referrals into MARAC. There were **2,045** children linked to these referrals. **426** of the referrals were repeat cases, having been discussed at MARAC before.

The NPT MARAC Steering Group was setup in 2022/23 and has continued throughout 23/24, this year implementing the new MANTA system which has changed the way in which the meetings are coordinated and how they function. This is a long-awaited development, and the MARAC Coordinator from Community Safety has been instrumental in its early successes, with support from our partners.

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 subgroup organised a successful White Ribbon campaign during November 2023 – holding our annual engagement event at NPT Hospital and running a successful '16 days of action' on our Safer NPT social media platforms.

We continue to deliver age-appropriate Healthy Relationship lessons into all schools and colleges, to ensure young people have an awareness of what an unhealthy relationship looks like, and where to seek support if they need it – whether that is for themselves, a friend or family member. During 2023/24, **3,716** young people received this lesson.

Asylum Dispersal

Following the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, UK policy has been to relocate asylum seekers to a series of 'dispersal areas' in regional urban centres. The Home Office has mandated that all Councils receive asylum seekers under the national housing dispersal scheme. The Home Office commissions a company called Clearsprings to source properties and to provide limited support. A number of families have been dispersed to this area.

Afghan Resettlement Scheme

We continue to commission British Red Cross to support four families settle under the Afghan resettlement scheme for locally employed Afghan staff. One family arrived through a find your own accommodation route, and a further person as family reunification. In the first year, people receive intensive orientation support, but this tapers off in years 2 and 3.

Ukraine response

NPT continues to provide extensive humanitarian support to people who have fled the conflict in Ukraine

Last year I highlighted that the Council had helped Welsh Government set up a Welcome Centre and Temporary Accommodation for people fleeing the conflict, and I acknowledged the incredible work to settle and orientate families.

Although the welcome centre and hotel have since closed, ongoing extensive work has been undertaken to support Ukrainians within NPT. Many of these families were supported to move from their temporary accommodation into private rental, settling and building homes within our communities. The Ukraine response team have been highly successful in preventing people from needing statutory services such as homelessness. Additionally, some people moved out of the hotel/welcome centre to live with sponsor households within the borough and we will need to work with them to find further settled accommodation.



The orientation support given by the team covers many aspects of support from school enrolments, seeking employment opportunities, managing tenancies, health care and community engagement. This required great partnership work and coordination with both internal and external partners.

People have continued to arrive via Homes for Ukraine into NPT both through Welsh Government super sponsor route but also individual sponsor (where a resident offers an additional room) for Ukrainian families to seek sanctuary. The team have supported many people via the individual route to move on from hosted accommodation into more permanent accommodation and will continue to do so.

To date, we have settled 175 people within NPT who are living and managing independently. From arrival, the team support the guests to embed within their local communities and start to rebuild their lives; a lot of people arriving with little to nothing. Part of the work is around community links and ensuring people have a network of support, lessening the pressure on statutory services.

Strong links with the health board have been formed to ensure trauma-informed practise is embedded throughout the work. This was also offered and rolled out to colleagues within other sections of the council, providing consistency in the way we support people who have experienced trauma.

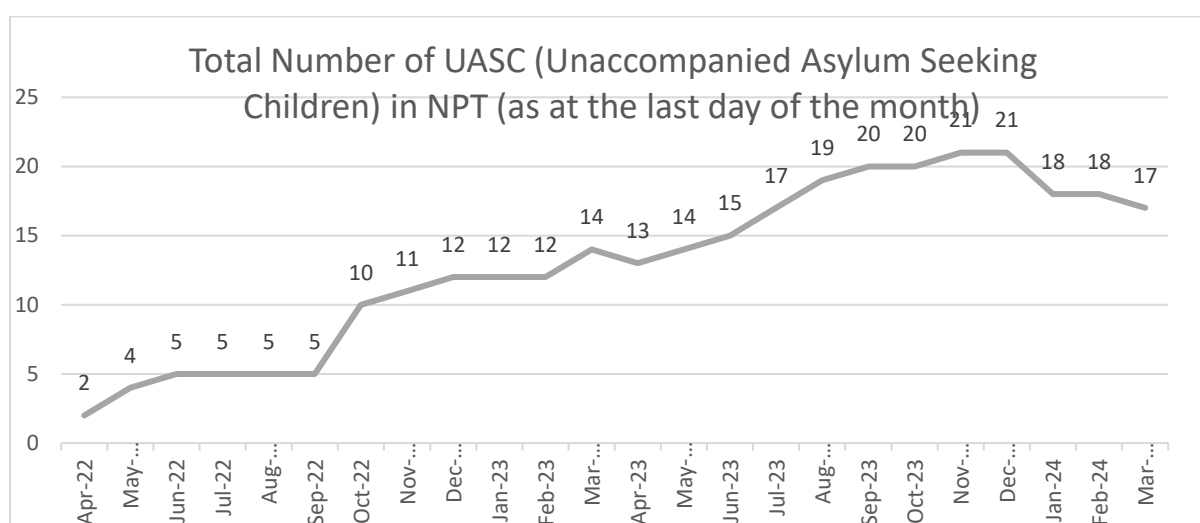
There continues to be a Team NPT approach when providing support, pulling in expertise from colleagues across the council.

"We don't know how our lives will turn out in the future, but at this stage we are safe and happy. We are eternally grateful to all the people who help Ukrainians stay safe, live, work and grow our children under peaceful skies."

Ukrainian family supported by NPT

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children & Young People (UASC)

Neath Port Talbot have continued to receive referrals for UASC under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). This is a new area of practice for NPT and the numbers of young people have continued to grow. Along with this so has our knowledge in this area. As of the end of March 2024 we are supporting 17 UASC, 3 of whom are placed in foster care with the rest being supported in Supported accommodation. All young people are 16+. One of our Local Authority foster carers has supported UASC and it interested in supporting future placements.



As part of Neath Port Talbot's commitment to UASC as part of the National Transfer Scheme, activities and experiences have been organised throughout the summer in order to help the young people settle into their new environment, improve their language, look after their well-being and educate them on Welsh culture and explore the area. Working closely with the UASC Team and established partners in the community the Engagement and Participation Officer organised weekly events throughout the summer holidays. These included rock climbing at Dinas Rock, gorge walking, canyoning, coastering on the Gower and paddle boarding. There have been arranged visits to Bulldogs Community Gym to engage in activities and emotional and well-being support offered by the Bulldogs Team. All activities helped build rapport with staff and going forward the UASC Team and Engagement and Participation Officer will be facilitating young person consultations to give our UASC a voice and improve services and assist us with developing our practice guide.

Anti-Social Behaviour

The **Street Vulnerability MARAC** meetings are coordinated by the Community Safety Team and chaired by South Wales Police. The group meet bimonthly to discuss some of the most vulnerable people in our communities, ensuring everyone has access to the most appropriate services for their needs. In 2023/24 the group discussed **19** cases, of which **8** were new referrals into the forum. The meetings are well attended and well supported by partners, with good engagement. There continue to be concerns regarding availability or access to mental health support, and the lack of suitable, available accommodation.

Problem Solving Groups continue - one for Neath & Pontardawe and one for Port Talbot. The Community Safety Team assist with the coordination of these meetings, whilst South Wales Police Chair. These forums allow us, the Police and partners to bring ongoing community issues to the table, for a partnership discussion and action plan. Issues raised here that cannot be resolved are then escalated to the Community Safety Partnership Board. The group helps to inform campaigns of the Community Safety Engagement Team.

Shared Prosperity Fund – During 2023/24 we were successful in securing £98,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to allow us to continue with our youth ‘Hangout’ provision. Following outreach work with young people they told us they wanted somewhere to hang out with friends, where there were no prescribed activities, but rather phone chargers, Wi-Fi, music and food. With funding from the Police & Crime Commissioner we were able to pilot ‘The Hangout’ with support from Youth Justice, South Wales Police, the Youth Service and ‘Be Safe’ Team. This additional funding will also allow us to purchase a mobile unit, to be responsive to emerging hotspots of youth related anti-social behaviour, rather than our services being at a fixed site. A small portion of the money will also be used to develop a food bank run by young people, for young people. This will enable young people to develop their skills and work towards accreditation, whilst also removing the stigma they feel is attached to using a foodbank.

Safer Streets – During the year we were successful with our Home Office Safer Streets funding bid, securing £51,000. The focus of this funding is to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls, to reduce anti-social behaviour and to reduce acquisitive crime. Eligible areas were those with the highest recorded incidents of this nature. The funding has been utilised to:

- Employ two street marshals in Neath town centre during weekends
- Purchase home security kits for the Neath North ward
- Introduce a 'My Green Town' initiative, implemented by Adferiad – allowing their service users to contribute to community-based activities such as litter picks and developing community gardens
- Design and implement a 'Safe Routes Home' campaign

Operation Sentinel – We were successful in our application for £34,000 to support the work of Operation Sentinel, to ensure an increased presence in recognised anti-social behaviour hotspots. This money was split between Community Safety, the Youth Service, and Be Safe Team to provide community events and engagement, joint patrols, and outreach. South Wales Police also received funding to carry out additional patrols in the hotspot areas, and our element of the funding enabled us to complement the additional police presence, with funding will continuing into 2024/25.

Anti-Social Behaviour Awareness Week - The team supported 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 across the borough and held a social media campaign. Partnership events prove 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.

Community Cohesion

Our Community Cohesion Officer within Community Safety is helping to implement the Welsh Government's Community Cohesion Programme in our local area, alongside colleagues across the region in Swansea Council and Bridgend Council. The Officers ensure a regional programme of events to promote cohesive communities, and work to reduce any community tensions.

These are some of the NPT events that took place during the year:

- **Windrush Coffee Morning**

A coffee morning was held in Port Talbot Library to mark the 75th anniversary of Windrush. Keynote speakers gave a presentation on Windrush history, followed by an arts and crafts session with flag keyring making.

- **NPT Pride**

NPT's first Pride weekend took place, with many local businesses on board with Pride themed events over the weekend including flash mobs, drag queens, art competitions and film screenings. There was also a parade on Aberavon beach front.

- **Channel Panel**

The team continue to coordinate all PREVENT related work for the Local Authority, which aims to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. As part of this work, the team coordinate monthly Channel Panel meetings where individuals of low level concern are referred in and provided with appropriate support and interventions to reduce any risks. This acts as Early Intervention and Prevention, complimenting the work that South Wales Police and Counter Terrorism policing conduct with any higher risk individuals.

Referrals remain low, but we cannot assume this means there are no concerns; we must continue to raise awareness with staff and partners of the concerns to look out for, and how to refer individuals of concern into the process.

- Our **Community Cohesion Officer** provides support two days per week to the NPT BME Association – assisting them with funding applications, their board meetings, and the development of a quarterly newsletter.

Engagements

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 team ensure delivery of a programme of suitable events and community talks in varying areas of the borough.

During 2023/24 the team organised and / or attended **43** community engagement events. During these events we promote crime prevention campaigns and initiatives and talk to residents about any crime or anti-social behaviour issues that are affecting them.

We use the opportunity to talk to residents about Crime Prevention, 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 itself.

The team continue to host 'A Safer' events which are bespoke to the area they are delivered in. During the year we hosted six of these events, with support from relevant partner agencies to respond to any emerging issues of crime or antisocial behaviour. These events were held in; Dulais Valley, Cadoxton, Glynneath, Sandfields, Ystalyfera, Aberavon. Other areas will be visited during 24/25, starting with 'A Safer Pontardawe'.

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.

The team produced 'Safe and Sound' newsletters every quarter, which were shared with local Cllrs, members of our CSP Board, partner agencies and the general public. 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 has **now reached 2,900** followers during 2023/24.

CRUCIAL CREW is Community Safety's flagship event in our annual calendar. It sees **1,600** Year 6 pupils visit us over a 2-week period, to receive personal safety workshops from a number of partner agencies, before the young people transition to secondary school.

Its aims are to **encourage good citizenship and reduce** accidents, injury and crime, and protect young people through education and awareness.

The event is designed to educate pupils to make informed decisions when faced with danger and respond effectively to emergency situations and accidents.

The 2023/24 Crucial Crew event took place at Ffrwydwyllt House in Taibach.

Some of the workshops covered were:

- Healthy Relationships – delivered by Thrive, Calan DVS and Hafan Cymru
- Water Safety – by RNLI
- Railway Safety – Network Rail
- Food Hygiene – By Food Standards Agency
- Electrical Safety – By Western Power
- Fire Safety – MAWW Fire and Rescue Service
- Online Safety – South Wales Police
- Staying Safe Around Dogs – By Dogs Trust
- Road Safety – By NPT Road Safety

Paws on Patrol

We have been coordinating the Paws on Patrol scheme for nine 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 **1,572** members, **111** of those signing up during 2023/24.

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 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.

Our Paws on Patrol Facebook page has **1,500** followers, with some individual posts reaching as many as **70,000** people.

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.

We also launched the **‘Respect The Lead’** campaign in response to legislative changes around some dangerous dogs, and feedback from our local residents about their feelings of safety whilst out in the community. This campaign has been well received and well supported by local Councillors.

Business Crime Reduction Partnership (BCRP)

The BCRP sits within the Community Safety Team and is a partnership approach to help reduce crime against businesses in our town centre areas. This is a partnership with South Wales Police, the Fire Service and others. Town centre businesses can sign up to our scheme at a small cost, which gives them access to a Storennet Radio, and an app which provides information on the most prolific offenders in our area. Members of the scheme can make decisions on excluding prolific offenders from their premises.

Our monthly walkabouts were introduced to ensure we are visible to local businesses, and so that they have regular opportunities to see us and report in any concerns they may have, aside from the usual telephone or email contact.

The BCRP Steering Group, coordinated by Community Safety, continues to ensure we have a scheme that is fit for purpose and is meeting the National BCRP standards.

Hillside Secure Children’s Home

Hillside Secure Children’s Home continues to be the only secure establishment in Wales of its kind, providing trauma informed and trauma responsive care to the most vulnerable, traumatised and complex children in Wales and England.

As a therapeutic placement we provide care for children between the ages of 10-18 years old of either gender. In line with the Corporate Strategic Objective of the local authority, Hillside aims to “Improve the well-being of children and

young people” to empower “All of our children and young people to have the best start in life, so they can be the best they can be”. We believe that creating stronger bonds with children and young people helps to create better futures, this is achieved through an approach centred on healthy relationships and meeting basic needs.

To continue to grow as a centre of excellence and support the children accordingly, we are striving for all the staff to be trained to a diploma level in trauma. As a result, the children will feel loved and thrive in a home where they feel a sense of belonging and are valued.

The Engagement & Participation Officer collaborates with Hillside staff to ensure Children who reside there have equal opportunity to have a voice and be listened too. Children are encouraged to complete questionnaires at the start and end of their stay to help improve services. A young person’s action group called LOVE has been established by Hillside staff to promote children’s rights. In November 2023 young people worked with a Spoken Word Artist to share their thoughts and feelings and enjoy a number of fun challenges. Staff at Hillside prioritise wellbeing through fun and engaging events. More recently all the staff and young people dressed up to celebrate World Book Day.

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.

Engagement and Participation across Adult services

Sandfields Library of Things

Launched in November 2023, the Sandfields Library of Things was developed to provide tangible volunteering opportunities for local residents, many of whom had physical, emotional or mental health disabilities that they advised discouraged them from accessing opportunities outside of their local area.

Following the success of the weekly Multi Agency Drop/coffee morning developed by the Local Area Coordinator, people became connected in their community and as a result developed confidence to progress into other community-based opportunities. To date over 20 people attend the coffee morning having engaged with their LAC. The volunteering opportunities have been a regular topic of conversation between the Local Area Coordinator, Library staff and residents. Through Co-Production, the concept of a Library of Things was discussed and agreed using Sandfields Library (the beating heart of the community) as the natural place-based facility that would aim to encourage local residents to borrow a range of equipment that would not only help people in a disadvantaged community during a financial crisis to borrow, not buy, but in turn, would help our environment through a circular economy.





Working in partnership with Awel Y Mor Primary School whose ambition is to become a community focused school, the Local Area Coordinator (who has used his Community Regeneration background to help the school) was able to access financial support to make the project a reality. Engaging with local residents and working in partnership with Benthg Cymru, various items were

purchased, including jet washer, strimmer, carpet cleaner, hedge trimmer and various other gardening and hand tools.

To date, 12 local residents have accessed the Sandfields Library of Things. We have 6 volunteers all of whom have completed Manual Handling Training and have signed up with the council's Safe and Well programme. The project is also working in partnership with the recently launched Repair Café (Adult Learning Wales) who will maintain and PAT test the equipment, whilst its success has generated further discussion around developing a mixed-use community garden at the library. Phase 1 has recently been completed thanks to Community Benefit support from Tai Tarian. This overarching project has a working title of Lend, Mend and Tend.

Bird Boxes Inter-generational project

The NPTCBC Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 outlines priority 5:2 – our communities will enjoy increased social and community cohesion. Since December 2022 the Engagement and Participation Officers have attended the Men's Shed project in Skewen on a regular basis. The Team identified the opportunity to conduct an inter-generational project between the



Men's Shed and Looked After Children in the existing 'Beaches 2 Beacons' project which includes placing Bird Boxes in nature around Neath Port Talbot.

The Men's Shed cut wood that the Engagement and Participation Team provided to size so that the Children and Young People who attend the Beaches to Beacon events could construct them, resulting in a Bird Box constructed by both Elderly and Young people that were later placed within various areas around the Local Authority. This contributed to a sense of shared achievement, belonging and community cohesion.

Community Development: Local Area Coordinators and Community Connects Team

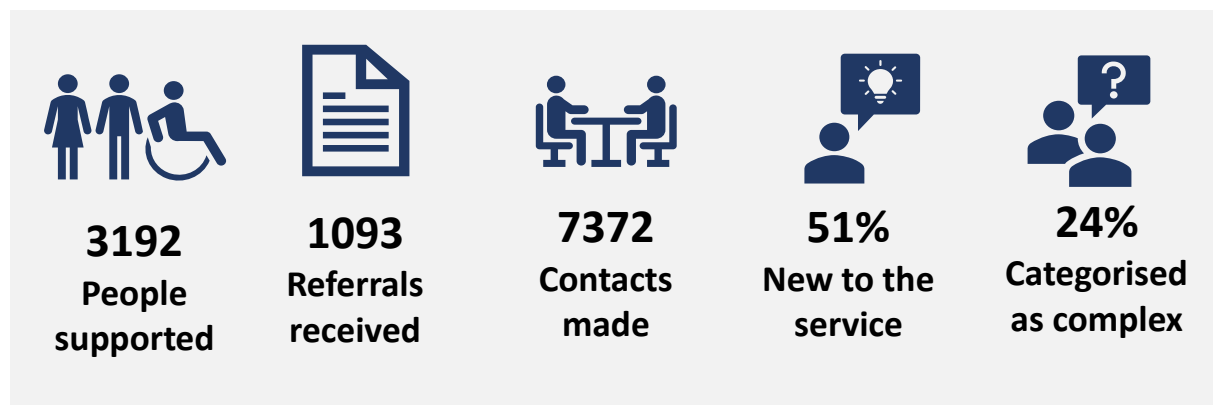
Our Local Area Coordinators and Community Connects Team have continued to engage with people and communities to reduce social isolation and help people maintain their independence. This has included:

- ✓ Direct support of Local Area Coordinators to **a minimum three individual Community Groups** each area on a weekly basis whilst they develop
- ✓ Circa **54 individuals** case managed to access community groups (CCT)
- ✓ Presence at least **65 other community groups** across the county on an ongoing basis.
- ✓ Around **450 additional individuals** access groups whilst regaining their confidence who seek support from the LACs at these groups as required.
- ✓ On average, the LACs workload is split **70 / 30 (1:1 vs Community)** **although this varies by area and demand.**

Reasons for referral (Local Area Coordination)

Reason	Percentage
Community Engagement	20%
Loneliness/Isolation	15%
Mental health	8%
Physical issues/disability	7%
Low confidence	7%
Anxiety	5%
Food poverty	4%
Housing/homeless	4%

Prevention & Early Intervention Overall Service Activity (2023/2024)



	Total
Number of Volunteer hours provided	2279
Number of new Local Area Coordination referrals	617

Experience



It's been an excellent service thank you and lots of information I didn't know about . Thankfully I didn't have to move thank you so much its been wonderful.

It's great to be back out and about again - thank you so much

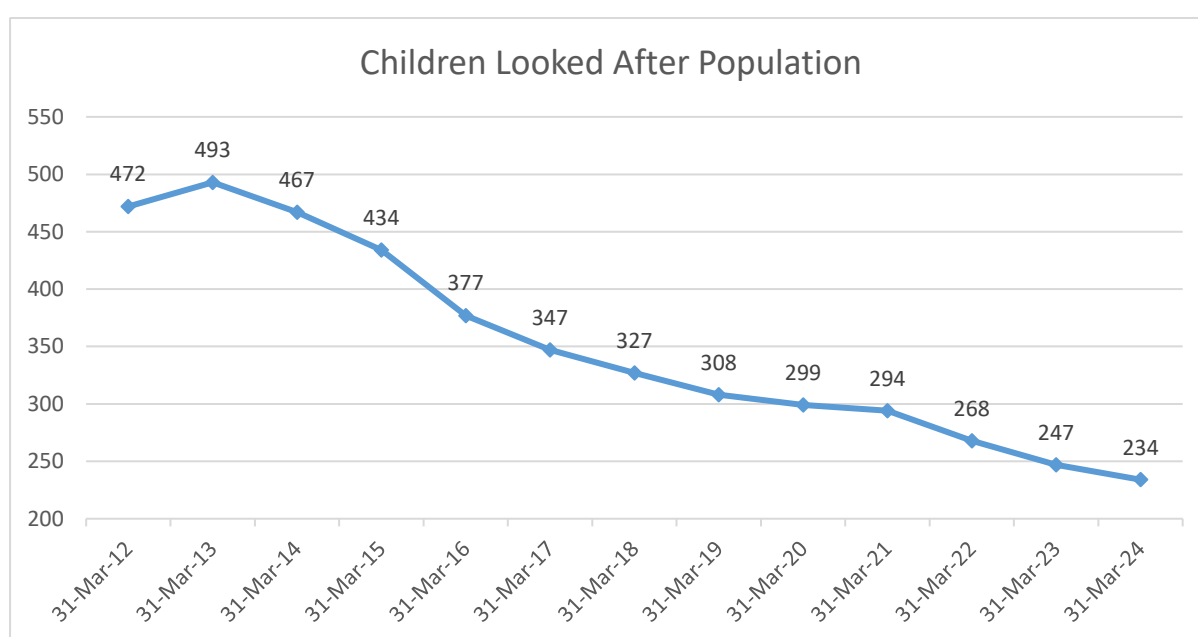
Supported me and my children and grandchildren during the hardest time of my life

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.

Looked After Children

The number of Children and Young People Looked After in Neath Port Talbot has continued to decrease year on year from 2012. From 472 in March 2012 to 234 at the end of March 2024. (This figure does not show the number of UASC young people accommodated)



We have continued to review the plans for our children looked after and have ensured that only those children that need to be looked after are looked after. We have invested and continue to invest in early intervention and prevention to ensure that families receive the right support at the right time which prevents escalation of risks and concerns. We work collaboratively with families in an outcome focused way to build resilience and prevent problems from escalating. When children and young people are on the edge of care, we are very reactive in our response to support. We ensure that we consider plans and support permanency for children and young people outside of the care system wherever it is possible to do so. This has been instrumental in reducing the children looked after population. However, where it is deemed appropriate for children and young people to come into care, they will continue to do so. All the admissions into care were fully considered in Admissions Panel, taking into account the best interests and level of vulnerability of each individual young person. Fortnightly

meetings are chaired by the Principal Officer to review the care plans for children and young people looked after.

It is our aim to ensure that children and young people are placed as far as possible in their own community with Neath Port Talbot Foster carers. When children and young people come into our care our priority is securing their protection from harm. However, wherever possible, we are committed to ensuring that they are able to leave our care and be reunited with their families where it is safe and appropriate to do so. Early and robust care planning ensures we work with families proactively and explore options for children and young people's safe return home.

Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel makes a recommendation on whether to approve prospective carers or recommend continued approval of existing carers following a foster carer review being presented at panel. This recommendation goes to the Agency Decision Maker (a Senior Manager in Children Services). They either ratify or reject the recommendation, and this is referred to as the 'Qualifying Determination'. If the ADM does not give approval the applicants have the right to challenge the 'qualifying determination', either requesting a return to Panel for the case to be reheard on the basis that there is new or different information that the panel need to consider, or to apply through the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for Wales who will hold their own panel independently of the Local Authority and give their recommendation. The outcome of this panel is then returned to the original ADM for their final decision.

There are currently 13 panel members on the central list (not including the Panel Chair). This consists of 7 independent panel members and 6 Social Workers. The Panel Chair is Social Work qualified.

Transition from childhood to adulthood

The transition period, from children's to adults' services, usually between the ages of 14-25 years, can involve a wide range of professionals working across a number of different agencies. This includes social services, education and health. Ensuring a seamless transition from children's to adults' services has

been a challenge but one that we are committed to working towards achieving. We work in a person centred, strengths-based way to support children, young people and young adults and their families/carers to achieve their personal outcomes.

At the start of 2020, we commenced a review of transition arrangements in Neath Port Talbot Social Services. Following the COVID-19 pandemic it was apparent that there was an increase in vulnerability, with an impact on emotional wellbeing, lack of social opportunities and increased social isolation.

As part of this work, it became clear that there was no standard pathway for transition between children and adult services with varied approaches within different adult services teams/geographical areas. This was especially evident for young people who do not have a diagnosed learning disability.

Therefore, to support a successful transition to adult services, a decision was made for transition to be managed within the Complex Disability Team, with designated transition Social Workers. The shift was in consideration of how we improve and deliver a consistent service to enable a young person to make a successful transition to adulthood. We also improved our data to ensure that young people were identified at the age of 14 if they were likely to need support from adult services in the future. This has enabled us to look at the resources that are available and required to meet this need. We have also recognised that there is further work to do in respect of prevention early intervention and the support that Local Area Coordinators can provide in the community outside of statutory involvement.

We have worked to identify and map the accommodation and care needs of young people transitioning to inform the future commissioning of services. This will enable us to work towards solutions and to identify gaps in provisions and pathways. This has provided us with a far better understanding of those children and young people transitioning.

We have been able to undertake joint capacity assessments at an earlier point to inform care planning. There is early planning, sharing of information via existing well-established pathways. There are monthly transition meetings between children and adult services for information sharing. There is an interface meeting with education in respect of young people in transition particularly from Ysgol Maes Y Coed. We have been working with Education in respect of the Additional Learning Need (ALN) development and attend the 16

plus education group to develop services. Work is being undertaken in respect of developing children and young people's independent living skills.

Systems are in place to identify young people who will move from Children's to Adults' Services (aged 14) and to start involving them and their families or carers in planning their transition by the age of 16. The current pathway planning is also to inform commissioning priorities.

There are currently 40 referrals open to the Complex Disability for young people under 18 and there are 86 young people between the ages of 18-21 who are being supported (most but not all of whom will have been referred through a transition pathway). There are 32 young people aged between 18-21 who are known and supported by the Clinical Learning Disability Team.

For some young people who leave residential care, moving to a foster family is not the right care plan for them. Some young people's needs are better suited to a supported housing provision. We have been developing young people's independent living skills in readiness for this. We have seen some young people successfully step down to these arrangements. We are currently undertaking a placement sufficiency exercise and considering the in-house and external commissioned market options to provide this accommodation for young people aged 16 plus.

Pressures facing Children's Services

Placement Sufficiency

This relates to having sufficient fostering, residential and supported accommodation placements to meet demand and the needs of children and young people. Cabinet will be approving our revised placement commissioning strategy which includes an action plan to address this issue. We also have transformational projects underway to help address this challenge.

Eliminate Profit from Children's Care

Our challenge is from the impact of the Welsh Government's programme of eliminating profit from children's care. Providers are reporting uncertainties with what the market impact will be. Officers are monitoring the situation closely and we are working regionally and with Welsh Government to fully embrace the eliminate profit agenda.

Budgets

The commissioning landscape is one where service providers are facing increasing costs whilst our budgets are under significant pressure. This is a key challenge officers will seek to effectively manage with commissioned providers.

Training support

In order to build a resilient fostering community, the Training Officer (TDO) has spent time developing a new wellbeing programme “Mindful Mondays”. This has 30 bite size learning points, a course workbook and reflective journal, on essential skills for foster parents, to resolve feelings of anxiety and intense emotions often felt when parenting children and young people who have experienced adverse childhood experiences and trauma. The trainer is utilising the knowledge and skills acquired having qualified as a TISUK Trauma and Mental Health Practitioner in March 2023. Additionally, the TDO has developed a new training session, again to support foster parent resilience when working with children and young people affected by trauma, social, emotional and mental health-based behaviour, Understanding the Behaviour Assessment Impact and Resolution Tool. The Fostering Team and Therapeutic Service also had training on using the tool.

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.

Engagement with Private Landlords in Housing & Communities

Housing & Communities recently held a Private Landlord Forum Meeting in partnership with Environmental Health. The event was held to engage with private landlords within NPT and a number of guest speakers (National Residential Landlords Association, Rent Smart Wales, Welsh Government) attended. The event was held at Neath Civic Centre, working on a collaborative approach with the NRLA and Rent Smart Wales to publicise the event. Over 100 attendees took part, an increase from the six that attended a similar event a few years back. The private rented sector has a crucial role to play in us delivering our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and this event has provided us with a platform to engage with landlords in a way they want to be engaged with, and the next steps are to adopt a co-production/design phase with landlords.

Disabled Facilities Grants

The number of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) completed increased to 293, an 8% increase on the 272 completed in the previous year. However, the time taken between referral and completion increased from 245 to 325 days as some longstanding jobs were finally signed off and closed.

Contractors that carried out larger works were still very busy in the private housing market which is still causing a delay in larger work starting on site, while smaller works such as shower conversions are being delivered quickly.

The rise in building material costs is still having 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. Due to this there are less extensions in the system.

Due to a combination of increased demand and increase in costs, the service is already starting to commit the budget for financial year 2025/26.

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 year 2023/24 saw a total of 2,460 presentations to the service. Of that figure, 1085 resulted in an assessment with 1,375 contacting the service for advice/not being homeless at the point of contact.

The overall presentation figure was down 180 from the previous year. This was not unexpected as the implementation of the Renting Homes Wales Act in December 2022 saw an increase in demand due to private sector landlords leaving, however this was expected to have settled by the end of the first year with fewer households being served notice for that reason.

Homelessness Prevention

Some 343 assessments resulted in a S66 prevention duty being owed. Of those, 210 had their homelessness successfully prevented and an overall success rate of 60.9% was reached for the year compared to a 60% target. This is an increase from 53.7% in 2022/23. The prevention was successful due to the following:

- 16 applicants were able to remain in their current property
- 73 were rehoused in RSL accommodation before becoming homeless
- 3 moved into supported accommodation
- 43 moved into the private rented sector
- 11 returned home or moved in with other family/friends
- 64 provided with other forms of support

Temporary Accommodation (TA)

TA numbers continue to increase, with 233 households in TA at the end of the financial year. Despite the numbers not currently reducing, an average of 7

households per week move on from TA into longer term, sustainable accommodation.

The average stay in TA is currently 39 days which is a reduction from 137 days at the end of 2022/23. It remains that there are a small number of longer-term TA residents that cannot be moved on due to barriers, but work is ongoing to reduce those barriers and maximise the likelihood of a successful outcome.

Currently there is an average split of 85% single people/adult households and 15% families with dependent children. This is a small decrease from the previous year where families were accounting for 20% of all households in TA.

A significant amount of work has also been carried out to reduce the reliance and use of hotels for families. At its peak in July 2023 there were 28 families, including 39 children in hotels. During the same month a total of 142 children were at some point placed in TA. Families in hotels are now in single figures and only used for a short period of time while a dispersed unit is being prepared.

Dispersed units

To be able to reduce reliance on hotels, particularly for families it is crucial that we increase the number of TA units managed by ourselves. Over the past year this has been continually increasing and numbers are now as below:

- 18 units owned by the council
- 9 units leased as hostels
- 67 leased dispersed units
- **Total of 94 council managed units**

Prior to Covid the leased units were in single figures so there was a maximum of 34 managed units at any one time. There has therefore been an increase of almost 300% over recent years and a significant factor in reducing hotel use for families.

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.

Assuming there are no unforeseen issues or delays, SHG schemes typically take around 2-3 years to develop from start to finish, with an RSL (Registered Social Landlord) drawing down a portion of their allocated SHG to purchase a plot of land (*acquisition*) in year 1, the remainder drawn down in year 2 and or 3 (*construction/construction part payment*), with build completion the following year.

Along with our apportioned 2023/24 NPT SHG budget (**£12.8m**) we also applied for and were awarded an additional **£9.4m** in slippage monies bringing to the total amount of SHG awarded in 23/24 to **£22,227,302** compared to **£8,294,190** in 22/23, an increase of circa **£14m** (+166%).

We are currently projected to fund a total of **428** affordable homes via the SHG scheme during the period 2024/25 to 2026/27.

Recycled Capital Grant (RCG)

Recycled Capital Grant (RCG) is Social Housing Grant (SHG) that is recycled by an RSL, usually following the sale of land or property. All schemes are subject to 50% homelessness nominations.

There is no timescale in which to spend RCG, however, Welsh Government encourage RSLs to spend it sooner rather than later.

£1.5m of RCG was spent during 2023/24: Approximately half towards a scheme within the 2023/24 SHG Programme Development Plan (PDP) and the remainder to purchase six properties from the open market.

Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP)

TACP provides grant funding to Local Authorities and RSLs to bring forward longer term accommodation at pace to support those in temporary accommodation. All schemes are subject to 100% homelessness nominations.

NPT received circa **£2m** via TACP in the year resulting in 20 affordable homes: 14 Acquisitions (*properties purchased from the open market*) and 6 Voids (*RSL properties unoccupied for a period of time*).

Welfare Rights

The Welfare Rights Unit (The Unit) is a specialist section, which deals with supporting people claim the Welfare Benefits, to which they are entitled. The Unit helps local residents via a self-referral, Social Services or other support services; advice support is provided on their benefits entitlement. The Unit offers a public helpline 5 days a week, support with form filling and representation at appeals tribunals; the Unit is able to advise on entitlement via our advice line service or at one of our 7 outreach advice surgeries situated throughout the county borough.

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

The Unit has been successful in gaining an advice quality standard award in recognising excellence. The Unit has successful partnerships working with our in house teams and Elected Members, along with various third party organisations such as The Wallich, Thrive Women's Aid and JobCentre Plus. The Unit has a 90% success rate at overturning decisions at Benefit appeal Tribunals. The Unit has represented at 110 benefit tribunals during the year.

The advice line is extremely popular with over 1,002 service users receiving advice in the financial year 2023-24. There are **837** cases open to the Unit, with over **3,468** cases opened in the last financial year.

Welfare Rights have raised **£10,554,113.00** in the last financial year, which has exceeded previous year's monies of **£7,032,076.80** in 2022-23 and **£6,708,763.50** in 2021-22.

Welsh Language

Social Services continued to consolidate arrangements in relation to the Welsh Language and ***More Than Just Words***; 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.

The Directorate received no Welsh language complaints during the year.

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.

A health and safety programme of training has been made available across the Directorate allowing staff to learn the knowledge and skills to keep themselves and others safe in their workplaces. For some courses we continue to offer an accredited eLearning alternative to face to face learning or used eLearning as part of a blended approach to delivery of training to reduce the time staff need to be available in a classroom. Competency assessments in the workplace take place where possible, a new refreshing way of assuring knowledge and competence over traditional classroom-based methods.

In Adult Services we continue to ensure that relevant internal staff complete the PBS eLearning module and have been attending a 2-day workshop for Positive Behaviour Management (PBM) Theory and PBM Practical Breakaways. This is an ongoing training programme to support the service in the quality and safety of their delivery. This includes a blended approach of both eLearning and then face to face Theory and Practical training with some bespoke training for identified

individuals whose presentations are more complex. In the past year **135 staff** have received training in this area in both the theory and practical elements.

We continue to support internal services and our commissioned providers with a suite of training opportunities to ensure they have access to timely training opportunities to drive up the skills and knowledge of the workforce to enable them to provide good standards of care. These range from dementia, safeguarding, recording and reporting, to pressure ulcers, catheter care and other health related areas of care and support. Dementia training continues as an area of focus and a suite of courses have been identified through consultation with the providers and the Care Home In-Reach Team (CHIRT) to address what they need to support them. The Training Officer in this area has continued to upskill her knowledge and practice to ensure this is passed on through training to the staff. The opportunity for Dementia Care Mapping continues to be made available, 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. **163** staff have undertaken training in these areas.

During 2023/24 a total of 4,928 training places were accessed by staff across Adult Social Care Services.

In Children & Young People's Services (CYPS) there has been a continued emphasis on an outcome focused care and support approach. 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.

A new eight-day strength based, outcome focused training programme has been developed and delivered by Consultant Social Workers (CSWs) and Managers to synthesise existing training on the outcome focussed approach, to include the integrated family support services model, outcome focused case recording, scaling, direct work skills and motivational interviewing. Attendees have said that they have found it useful to develop new skills regarding motivational interviewing and put these into practice between sessions. It has also helped to give clarity regarding how social services work and will therefore hopefully create consistency across the service.

Almost 100 Children's Services workers have attended training on outcome focused care planning. Formal audits have been conducted and a marked difference was found by staff who had undertaken the training, particularly in respect of the voice of the individuals being captured and simplified or clean

language being used. It was noted that this was the beginning of the process, and we need to continue to offer training and development around this particularly when the new MOSAIC system is implemented.

Some 16 Social Workers have been trained in the Most Significant Change Model (MSC) by Nick Andrew, Research and Practice Development Officer for Developing Evidence Enriched Practice with Swansea University. This storytelling technique was also facilitated by consultant social workers at a “Championing Research Culture” conference for NPT partner agencies in November with 86 attendees.

Further training has been provided in response to recommendations around work with child sexual abuse, sessions have been provided on 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. Four trainers have been accredited to deliver the Brook Traffic Light Tool and roll out of the tool for Sexual Behaviour in children and young people will commence in the second half of the year following additional specialist training for 12 CYPS practice leads from the Centre of Expertise for Child Sexual Abuse. This training will be reinforced with access to the electronic tool and further eLearning.

A suite of Lucy Faithful Stop It Now “practitioners protect” training has been delivered to 113 regional multiagency partners. The outcome has been to support both parents and practitioners in understanding the issues around child sexual abuse, provide information and resources to help in confidently protecting children. Also, to explore how to engage families in abuse prevention, develop knowledge of conversation starters for parents and carers to use with increased confidence in giving prevention advice and encourage practitioners to effectively use the toolkit in their role. 9 professionals were trained to deliver the “parents protect” programme to parents within their communities.

We have also made significant strides forward ensuring Children’s Services has a trauma informed workforce. 48 members of staff attended an event on Trauma and Mental health informed schools and communities. Eight experienced Children Services’ workers have been trained by Dr Sheena Webb of the Tavistock Institute to deliver workshops on “Working with trauma experienced parents”. This was developed as a structured reflection to support

practitioners working with parents who have experienced complex and/or sustained trauma.

During 2023/24 a total of 1,701 training places were accessed by staff across Children's Social Care Services not including independent, third sector or partner agencies.

Social Work Education & Training

During 2023/24, we have provided 44 Social Work Degree Practice Learning Opportunities (placements) across Levels 1-3, for students from Cardiff Met and Swansea University. This includes 19 students that are seconded from Neath Port Talbot to the social work degree programme through the Open University across Levels 1-3. Social work teams across Adult and Children's Services have been invaluable in offering high quality placement experiences and, for the second year running we have had sufficient internal practice educators, which meant that we have not had to outsource to independent external practice educators. This is because of the continued support to the Practice Educator Award. In 2023/24 we supported seven social workers achieve the award through Swansea University. Our Social Work Education Co-ordinator has taught two sessions as part of this course. Fourteen Practice Educator candidates also completed the qualification in August 2023.

All newly qualified social workers who have started with NPT this year have commenced the First Year in Practice Programme. They have also had the opportunity to attend Newly Qualified training programme arranged by BASW.

Research, Development and Innovation across the Directorate

Our research, development, and innovation 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 NPT and its partners are making. Our guiding principles for embedding the Research and Learning Framework are that:

- **Children, young people, adults, families, and carers are at the heart of what we do.** The focus of research, development, and innovation must be on impact and outcomes for the child, young person, or adult in their journey through our social work and safeguarding systems.
- **The approach to Research, Development, and Innovation will be underpinned by Restorative Practice and a desire to examine and capture best practice.** This means that activity is done “with” staff, rather than “to” or “for” them, in ways that build relationships and are characterised by respecting each other’s perspectives, high expectations, high support, and high challenge, to enable us to learn, improve, and change.
- **Throughout the research processes, the views of children, young people, adults, families, and carers are integral to improving our services.** We will gain the voice and stories of those who have received our services and hold story panels to learn, improve and change.
- **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 learning activity such as learning reviews and audits.
- We are embedding a culture of research informed practice with the success of the championing a research culture project in Adult Services being replicated across the Directorate.

Our financial resources and how we plan for the future

Excellent working relationships between the 'Rainbow Alliance' political leadership, Councillors and Officers have been maintained, 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. Social Services is still feeling the effects of high inflation which peaked at 11.1% in October 2022. With minimum wage rising by 9.8% in 2024/25 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 2028/29 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 2024-2029, there remains a significant funding gap. Work is ongoing in relation to developing a number of strategies to close this gap.

Commissioning

Over the last year, the Commissioning Team have faced a number of challenges around market stability. Issues with staffing within the social care sector, continue to add pressures to our Provider support.

The biggest impact was home closure, which resulted in the relocation of 68 residents to alternative homes within the county borough.

As the market continues to show evidence of instability, Officers are working on tightening contractual arrangements with our Providers to strengthen our oversight on sustainability issues and our ability to proactively respond to potential market failure.

Welsh Government's Rebalancing care and support programme, recognises the continuous pressure on Local Authorities managing the external Provider Market and recommends rebalancing social care services with consideration of bringing services in house.

Commissioning have supported this agenda by considering options for insourcing services as part our business planning process. Over the last year we have presented the business case to bring Adult Family Placements service in house, which transferred back to the Council in May 2024.

In addition to this, Commissioning will support with the transformation programme, which includes in sourcing of Trem y Glyn Residential home and diversifying the service options available for Adult Services.

For Children and Young People, the focus has been on strengthening our support for care leavers, young people facing homelessness and eliminating profit from children's residential care.

Our first care leavers project will be delivered in July 2024. The project will support care leavers to manage their own tenancy, develop independent living skills and then move on to independent living. A business case setting out options for a Children's residential home to be delivered in house will be presented this year.

Across both Adult and Young people services, we have reviewed our housing and homelessness support services and over the coming year will make recommendations on any remodelling requirements. In addition to this we are developing internal processes to support streamlined referrals to housing support.

Transformation Programme

Across the directorate, Officers are working on a transformation programme to address the deficits within Social Care, Health and Housing.

The transformation programmes are an ambition programme of work to Rebalance Social Care and remodel services. The programme includes development and in-sourcing of care and support services and diversifying services.

An example of this is the in-sourcing of our Adult Family Placements service, which will be diversified to support a wider cohort of people, including older adults with dementia and adults with mental health support needs.

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.

The Complaints Team received **70** formal Social Services Stage 1 complaints during 2023-24 across Children's Services, Adult Services, Housing & Communities and Business Management (including corporate complaints); with a further **three** Stage 2 complaints. 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 **114 compliments** received across the Directorate.

West Glamorgan Safeguarding Board



The Junior Safeguarding Board meets every half term in order to determine safeguarding topics that the members would like to champion throughout the year. Meetings have been hosted by Secondary Schools and attract a healthy number of students from across Neath Port Talbot.

Schools are currently engaged in projects to raise awareness of

Sexual Harassment. These projects will lead up to National Safeguarding Week 2024. During National Safeguarding Week in November 2023 a promotional event was held in Ysgol Maes Y Coed to launch the British Sign Language video and widget board to educate frontline emergency service staff to communicate with children and young people with communication difficulties. The event was attended by South Wales Police, Welsh Ambulance & M&WWF&R Service. The students enjoyed exploring the vehicles and services have committed to sharing the resources.

Looking ahead: our priorities for 2024-25

Social care faces yet another challenging year with increasing budgetary pressures. New and sustainable ways of working are paramount to ensure we continue to meet the social care and support needs of vulnerable people. We therefore set out the following as our key priorities for the year ahead:

Children and Young People Services

- All young people leaving care will have access to sustainable and appropriate accommodation.
- There will be a wider range of foster care placements available which will include opportunities for paid carers to support children with the most complex needs.
- Young people identified as having care and support needs when they reach adulthood will be supported into Adult Services appropriately.
- All children and young people will be safeguarded effectively.

Adult Services

- More people feel that they are involved in decision making and are empowered to develop local solutions to address issues that affect them locally.
- There is a wider range of community services able to support the unique needs of people with disabilities and complex needs which draw on a range of community resources and which enables them to enjoy and contribute to community life.
- The needs of people with complex care and support needs are being met in more appropriate ways through a wide range of housing and support services.

Housing Services

- We will have strengthened our partnerships with housing developers and those arrangements are delivering more quality, affordable and low carbon housing.
- More people are prevented from becoming homeless and fewer people are living in emergency and temporary accommodation.
- Empty properties have been brought back into use through the Empty Property Grant, helping to address the demand for housing.

Appendix - Supportive performance data for the quality standards

PI Reference	PI Description	April 22 - March 23	April 23 - March 24
PI24	The percentage of assessments completed within 42 days from the point of referral	97.00%	97.10%

PI Reference	PI Description	April 22 – March 23	April 23 – March 24
Measure 20a	The percentage of adults who completed a period of Reablement and who have a reduced package of care after completion	18.8%	19.0%
Measure 20b	The percentage of adults who completed a period of Reablement needing no further package of care	70.9%	67.8%
Measure 21	The average length of time in calendar days adults (aged 65+) are supported in residential care homes	786	825
Measure 22	Average age of adults entering residential care homes	84	84
PI30	The percentage of children seen by a dentist within 3 months of becoming looked after	21.6%	35.6%
PI31	The percentage of Looked After Children at 31 st March registered with a GP within 10 working days of the start of their placement	85.2%	81.9%

PI Reference	PI Description	April 22 - March 23	April 23 - March 24
New Measure PI27	The percentage of re-registrations of children on the local authority Child Protection Register	14.7%	0.0%
New Measure PI28	The average length of time (in days) for all children who were on the Child Protection Register during the year	269.2 days	228 days

PI Reference	PI Description	April 22 - March 23	April 23 - March 24
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.	3.6%	1.9%

PI Reference	PI Description	April 22 - March 23	April 23 - March 24
New Measure PI33	The percentage of children looked after on 31 March who has had three or more placements during the year.	9.30%	6.80%

PI Reference	PI Description	April 22 - March 23	April 23 - March 24
PI25	The percentage of children supported to live with their family	70.90%	67.80%
PI34	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	63.3%	63.6%
PI34	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	66.6%	53.0%
PI35	The percentage of care leavers who have experienced homelessness during the year	3.52%	2.90%