

WESTERN BAY AREA PLANNING BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025

Working Together for Positive Changes, we aim to reduce harm and improve outcomes for individuals, families, and communities.

Executive Summary

In 2024/25, the Western Bay Area Planning Board (APB) continued to lead a collaborative, multi-agency response to substance use across Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. This year's focus was on strengthening service delivery, enhancing harm reduction, reviewing the Board's governance to include improving transparency and decision-making processes. We also focused on embedding lived experience into service planning and governance. The Board embarked on commissioning a new public health service model as an Alliance, pooling criminal justice, APB and other partner funds. This will result in a new fully integrated service with one front door for all. The first of its kind across Wales.

The Western Bay Area Planning Board (APB) leads the strategic response to substance use across Swansea and Neath Port Talbot, bringing together:

- Neath Port Talbot and Swansea Council
- Swansea Bay University Health Board
- South Wales Police
- Probation Service
- Police and Crime Commissioner
- Councils for Voluntary Services
- People with lived and living experience

Key Highlights of 24/25

Funding was strategically allocated to frontline services, harm reduction, workforce development, and innovation.

Service performance showed improvements in waiting times and continuity of care, with strengthened re-engagement pathways.

Harm reduction efforts expanded, including naloxone distribution, needle exchange, and outreach targeting emerging threats.

Drug-related deaths remained stable overall, with a decrease in Neath Port Talbot and a slight rise in Swansea.

Audits and Independent Review Panels informed service improvements, focusing on safeguarding, communication, and timely access to treatment.

Co-production with people with lived experience shaped service design and delivery, supported by events like the Pen y Fan Recovery Walk.

Services Available Across Western Bay

The Western Bay Area Planning Board commissions a wide range of substance use services across Swansea and Neath Port Talbot, delivered through the **Newid** partnership and by the Dyfodol Consortium for criminal justice.

These services are designed to meet the diverse needs of individuals, families, and communities affected by substance use, offering support from early intervention to specialist treatment and recovery.

The services available are designed to be accessible, inclusive, and person-centered, ensuring that individuals receive the right support at the right time. Whether someone is seeking harm reduction advice, medical treatment, or long-term recovery support, the Western Bay region offers a comprehensive network of care.

More detail about each of our services can be found on the Newid Cymru website.

Financial Overview

The Western Bay Area Planning Board (APB) receives funding to support a wide range of substance use services across Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. This funding enables the delivery of prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery support through a network of commissioned providers.

Where the Funding Comes From

Most of the funding is provided by the Welsh Government, allocated through the **Substance Misuse Action Fund**. This year additional contributions come from:

- Local authorities (Swansea and Neath Port Talbot)
- Swansea Bay University Health Board
- Home Office via South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner

Neath Port Talbot Council acts as the banker for the APB, managing contracts and financial governance on behalf of the partnership.

How the Funding Was Spent in 2024/25

Funding was allocated based on local priorities, performance data, and feedback. Key areas of expenditure included:

Frontline Treatment Services
Harm Reduction Initiatives
Workforce Development
Community Engagement & Co-Production
Commissioning & Service Improvement

Financial Governance

In 2024/25, the APB strengthened its financial governance and risk-sharing framework, ensuring that all responsible authorities share accountability for funding decisions and contractual arrangements. Funding was allocated by the APB based on:

- Local priorities
- Performance data
- Feedback from communities

Service-Level Performance

Delivering high-quality, accessible substance use services remains a core priority for the Western Bay APB. Throughout 2024/25, we monitored performance across key indicators to ensure services are responsive, effective, and aligned with national standards.

- Referral numbers fluctuated
- Waiting times improved for clinical services
- Completion rates varied
- Re-engagement pathways strengthened
- Services aligned with national standards
- Collaborative working ensured continuity of care

Monitoring & Evaluation: Driving Improvement Through Insight

Monitoring and evaluation are essential to ensuring that substance use services across Western Bay are effective, accountable, and continuously improving. In 2024/25, the APB strengthened its framework to better track outcomes, identify gaps, and inform strategic decisions.

Key Activities and Progress:

- **Performance Dashboards:** Regularly updated dashboards provided real-time insights into referral trends, waiting times, treatment outcomes, and service engagement.
- **Data-Driven Reviews:** Quarterly performance reviews with providers helped identify areas for improvement and share best practice across the region.
- **Outcome Monitoring:** Services reported against national KPIs and local priorities, with a focus on harm reduction, recovery, and safeguarding.
- **Lived Experience Feedback:** Service user surveys and LEAF input were integrated into evaluation processes to ensure services reflect real-world needs.
- **Learning Loops:** Findings from audits, case reviews, and community engagement were fed back into planning and commissioning cycles.

This robust approach to monitoring and evaluation ensures that services remain responsive, evidence-based, and aligned with the needs of individuals, families, and communities.

Audits & Learning from Practice

Regular audits are a cornerstone of continuous improvement across the Western Bay APB. These structured reviews help identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities within service delivery, safeguarding, and multi-agency collaboration.

By analysing real cases and frontline practice, audits generate actionable recommendations that inform training, policy updates, and service redesign. The key themes emerging from recent audits and the progress made in implementing improvements are:

- ☑ Services to improve risk management – In progress
- ☑ Services to enhance the quality of their case record keeping – In progress
- ☑ Strengthen multi-agency communication around shared cases – In progress
- ☑ Increase harm reduction intervention coverage – Completed in some areas work ongoing

Drug-Related Deaths and Overdose Trends

Monitoring and responding to drug-related deaths and non-fatal overdoses is a critical part of the Western Bay APB's harm reduction strategy. In 2024/25, the region saw notable shifts in these indicators, reflecting both the impact of targeted interventions and the evolving nature of substance use.

Key Changes from Last Year:

- Neath Port Talbot recorded a 23% decrease in suspected drug-related deaths, marking a significant improvement and aligning with broader harm reduction efforts
- Swansea, however, experienced a slight increase in drug-related deaths, prompting renewed focus on outreach and early intervention
- Non-fatal overdoses showed a small decline across the region, supported by expanded naloxone distribution and assertive outreach in hotspot areas

Despite these improvements, the APB remains vigilant. Emerging threats such as synthetic opioids (e.g., nitazenes and xylazine) continue to pose serious risks. Multi-agency collaboration and real-time data monitoring are essential to adapting responses and protecting vulnerable individuals.

Learning from Suspected Drug Related Deaths

The Western Bay APB remains committed to understanding and addressing the complex factors contributing to drug-related deaths. **The Independent Review Panel (IRP)** plays a vital role in this process by reviewing individual cases where a suspected drug-related death has occurred.

Through a multi-agency lens, the IRP identifies missed opportunities, systemic gaps, and areas for improvement in service delivery and safeguarding. These reviews are not about assigning blame—they are about learning, improving, and preventing future harm. The insights gained inform strategic planning, staff training, and service redesign, ensuring that lessons learned translate into meaningful change across the region. The IRP reviewed cases of suspected drug-related deaths this year to identify learning opportunities and improve service responses. These reviews brought together professionals from health, social care, criminal justice, and third sector organisations to reflect on what could have been done differently.

Learning Themes in 24/25:

- The need for services to strengthen communication and handovers of cases
- The need to Improve access to timely treatment
- For services to enhance their assessment of risk and how they respond to safeguarding concerns
- The importance of supporting staff with reflective practice and providing regular supervision

Harm Reduction Efforts: Expanding Reach and Impact

Harm reduction continues to be a central pillar of the APB's approach to substance use. In 2024/25, the region made significant strides in expanding the reach and effectiveness of harm reduction services, with a focus on saving lives, reducing health risks, and responding to emerging drug threats. The highlights below reflect the APB's commitment to evidence-based, person-centred harm reduction.

Key Progress Highlights:

- **Naloxone:** Widely distributed through trained staff in overdose hotspot areas. Individuals at risk are encouraged to carry kits to assist others, even if they cannot self-administer.
- **Blood-Borne Virus Screening:** Achieved a 22% decrease in positive screenings—reflecting successful prevention and early intervention efforts.
- **Hepatitis C Elimination:** Neath Port Talbot became the only authority in Wales to achieve micro-elimination of Hepatitis C, aligning with WHO targets.
- **Drug-Related Deaths:** A 23% decrease in Neath Port Talbot, demonstrating the impact of targeted harm reduction and outreach.
- **Emerging Threats:** Ongoing monitoring and response to synthetic opioids such as nitazenes and xylazine, with multi-agency coordination to mitigate risks.



LIVED AND LIVING EXPERIENCES

"INCLUDE US, WHEN IT'S FOR US"

At the heart of the APB's work is a commitment to co-production—ensuring that people with lived and living experience of substance use are actively involved in shaping the services that support them. In 2024/25, this approach was strengthened through meaningful engagement, peer-led initiatives, and community-based activities.

This year we have seen how co-production and community engagement have driven innovation, improved accessibility, and fostered a culture of inclusion across the region.

Key Highlights:

- LEAF (Lived Experience Alliance Forum) members played a central role in service design, planning, and review processes, ensuring that lived experience informs every stage of decision-making.
- The Pen y Fan Recovery Walk brought together individuals, families, and professionals in a powerful show of solidarity, resilience, and hope.
- Peer volunteers supported harm reduction outreach, naloxone distribution, and engagement with hard-to-reach groups.
- Community events and workshops promoted awareness, reduced stigma, and built stronger connections between services and the people they serve.

Co-Production & Community Engagement:

Shaping Services Together



Christmas Celebration of Achievement



Pen Y Fan Recovery Walk



Literature Development Workshop



Cardiff Co Production Conference



Alliance Workshop



ASH Cymru Conference

Looking Ahead to 2025/26: Building on Progress, Deepening Impact

As the Western Bay Area Planning Board moves into 2025/26, the focus is on consolidating progress made over the past year and driving forward key strategic priorities.

- The transition to the Alliance model will be central to this evolution, fostering deeper collaboration, shared accountability, and more integrated service delivery.
- The coming year will also see renewed efforts to strengthen clinical governance, enhance safeguarding, and expand harm reduction and overdose prevention initiatives.
- The APB is committed to developing an overarching Strategy and Delivery Plan taking into consideration the recommendations made by the Swansea Bay Drug Commission.
- Workforce development will remain a priority, with a focus on trauma-informed practice, reflective supervision, and lived experience leadership.
- Importantly, services for children, young people, and families will be further developed, ensuring that support is holistic, inclusive, and responsive to emerging needs.
- Co-production will continue to shape service design, with people with lived and living experience playing a vital role in shaping the future of substance use support across the region.