

## Stockton-on-Tees Health and Well Being Board

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Prepared by:	Jon Carling, Chief Executive, Catalyst Stockton-on-Tees Ltd
Point of Contact:	07851 011361
Email:	<a href="mailto:Jon.carling@catalyststockton.org">Jon.carling@catalyststockton.org</a>

### Purpose of report

1. To enable the Board to have a discussion about responding to the Cost of Living Crisis.

### Background

2. Board members will be well aware of the issues facing households and business as the rate of inflation rises, well beyond the rates of increase in pay. The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rose by 10.1% in the 12 months to July 2022, whilst the ONS has also revealed that, nationally:
  - Growth in average total pay (including bonuses) was 6.2%, and growth in regular pay (excluding bonuses) was 4.3% among employees in March to May 2022.
  - In real terms (adjusted for inflation) in March to May 2022, growth in total and regular pay both fell on the year, at 0.9% for total pay and 2.8% for regular pay; this was a record fall for regular pay.
  - Average total pay growth for the private sector was 7.2% in March to May 2022, and for the public sector it was 1.5%.
3. The rate of employment in the public sector is significantly higher in Stockton-on-Tees than nationally, and of course Stockton also faces notable disadvantage. Overall it is the 47<sup>th</sup> most deprived borough, which masks the fact that 112 lower super output areas are amongst the most deprived 10% in England, whilst 71 are in the least deprived 40% (indices of multiple deprivation). That implies that there is a high proportion of people on low

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incomes, whilst the costs of food and heating cannot be adjusted to reflect income levels.

4. The effect of this situation is that many residents of Stockton-on-Tees are likely to be more severely affected by the Cost of Living Crisis than those of some other parts of the UK. In particular, demand for food banks has risen this year, to the point where demand is outstripping the supply of food. A further issue will be the rising cost of heating this winter, with bills already around 250% higher than in the same period last year.
5. In the last quarter, Stockton and District Advice and Information Service (the CAB) dealt with 1933 energy related queries, compared to 878 energy queries in same period 12 months before; this is an increase of 120%
6. These issues are often described as having an effect on spending power, but they will also affect people's health. Shortages of food, the affordability of healthy food, and colder homes can all affect health and it therefore likely that more people will be ill, and some may die, as a direct consequence of this situation.

## **Issues for consideration by the Health and Well Being Board**

7. Against that background, the VCSE Senior Leaders Group discussed these issues at their regular meeting on 31 August. There is activity in the VCSE sector to address these issues:
  - The Food Power Network continues to make food available to people facing hardship
  - The Infinity Partnership will be carrying out a welfare benefit take up campaign with SDAIS, SBC Welfare Rights and North Star providing the specialist welfare benefits advisers
  - Stockton-on-Tees Housing, Neighbourhoods and Affordable Warmth Partnership and Stockton & District Advice & Information Service is holding a conference on 9 September, entitled Fuel Poverty in 2022-2023 – What are we going to do about it?

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- Work is underway, through the Fairer Stockton Framework, to develop closer working relationships (leading to increases in efficiency and outputs) between VCSE organisations, although this will take some months
- The Cost of living Crisis will be the theme of this year's Catalyst Annual Conference on 18 November

The Group felt that action is needed to ensure that activities to mitigate the financial and health impacts on vulnerable people are as effective as possible, through meaningful joint working- eg the welfare benefit take up campaign needs to be co-ordinated with and practically supported by GP practices/primary health care staff as they will be able to identify people who are most at risk from cold homes and who need to be targeted for financial and welfare support. One practical example might be for the CAB to integrate the benefit take up campaign with the work that GP surgeries are doing, and possibly link in with flu jabs etc.

8. The VCSE Senior Leaders Group requested that the Health and Well Being Board consider these issues in partnership, perhaps looking at these questions:

- what are the partner organisations doing, individually and collectively, to address the Cost of Living Crisis?
- what opportunities are there for further collaborative working to address these issues?
- is there a need to publicise initiatives further?

### **Recommendation**

The Board is asked to consider these issues, and the development of an action plan to address them, collectively.

### **Jon Carling**

Chief Executive, Catalyst Stockton