

# Scrutiny Review of Cost of Living

Jill Douglas, Assistant Director - HR

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The Council employees around 3,200 people, and two thirds of those employees live in the Borough.  
This presentation relates to our work that HR undertakes around employee benefits.

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**How has Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) responded to the ongoing cost of living crisis both internally and by working with external partners and agencies?**

- The Council has been working with external partners to provide employees with a number of initiatives and employee benefits to assist employees, not only with the current cost of living crisis, but for a number of years. We continue to build on these initiatives and provide additional employee benefits.
- Details of these and the benefits and the impacts that they can have for employees have been circulated.

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**How has advice and support been communicated to residents and SBC staff? Can this be improved?**

- In relation to employees, the new benefits and initiatives are communicated via:
  - KYIT
  - Employee benefits leaflet
  - Attending team meetings across the authority
  - Attending service away days
  - Employee Engagement Days
  - Digital Screens in Depots
- We continue to assess other options to communicate with employees

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## How does SBC's approach compare with other Local Authorities?

- We have a close working relationship with the other Councils within the Tees Valley. Whilst all Councils will provide services in slightly different ways there are also similarities. All of the 5 Boroughs provide counselling and physio services, they all have AVCWise and most have Vivup.
- Each authority has a car lease scheme but from our experience NHS Fleet Solutions provide a much better service to both the Council as the partner and employees.

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## In what ways has the cost of living crisis impacted on staff retention and recruitment?

- Recruitment is a major issue across the whole Council and this began post-covid as many people reassessed their priorities. The number of people applying for each role dropped significantly and we have had to change our approach to recruitment to attract candidates. We have done this by changing our advertisements, advertising more in social media and working with the Employment & Training Hub to promote our roles.
- Retention of staff in some areas is a challenge as organisations pay more than Stockton, for example, HGV drivers can earn more working for a private haulage company or an agency than we pay for a refuse driver. This is the same in children's social care where social workers are paid significantly more through an agency. Whilst we do pay recruitment and retention payments for some roles, this is not sustainable.
- The delay in the agreement of the NJC pay award has not helped the cost of living crisis for employees, but this has now been agreed and will be paid to employees in November pay.

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## **How have SBC staff been supported if they are struggling financially and mentally as a result of the cost of living crisis?**

- The Council has a counselling services provided through Teesside Mind and Vivup can provide financial wellbeing support.
- Tees Credit Union can provide loans to employees at a reasonable rate.
- HR Advisors are aware of these services and if they are involved with an employee, they do signpost them to the service. Managers are also aware and can offer support.
- We have also undertaken some work with community services on men's health and wellbeing which included financial wellbeing. We have just won the LGC Award for Best Wellbeing Initiative.
- Vivup website also signpost to employees to financial help through Ask Bill.