

Employee Benefits and Initiatives

Benefit/Initiative	Details of the Initiative and the Impact on Employees
Counselling Service	The Council has had a Counselling Service for employees since January 2000 and the current provider is Teesside Mind. They provide free access for employees of up to 6 sessions (further sessions can be requested for approval if it's deemed critical for recovery or while external longer-term support is sought) to provide support for depression, anxiety and other mental health related issues which could stem from concerns about their financial situation. The Mind team have also attended away days/events/activities providing confidential drop-ins for employees.
Physiotherapy Service	The Council has had a Physiotherapy Service since 2000 and the current provider is Body2Fit. They provide free access for employees of up to 5 sessions for employees who are experiencing movement disorders arising from conditions, injuries, and diseases. The initial assessment will then determine if you require further appointments for treatment or if you can self-manage your condition with the aid of exercises and advice. In addition, they also provide workplace assessments and a podiatry service. Body2Fit also offer a 20% discount to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council employees who wish to pay for physiotherapy treatment privately.
Flu Vaccination Programme	The Council has provided a flu vaccination programme since 20???. Initially the programme was free for frontline employees with other employees being able to access the service at a small charge. Since 2021, the service has been free to all employees who wish to take up the offer.
Additional Annual Leave Purchase	Employees can purchase up to an additional 10 days holiday, the cost of which is spread over the year. This can assist employees who need additional time off such as, to assist with childcare.
Leave of Absence, Work Life Balance	The Council has a generous Work-life Balance Policy to allow employees who are struggling with certain caring responsibilities additional time off.
Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVC)	AVCs are a tax-free way for employees to save for retirement. Any employee who is a member of the LGPS can contribute to AVCs. The Council has partnered with the Prudential for many years to provide this benefit to employees. In 2021 the Council partnered with AVCWise to provide Shared Cost AVCs to employees. The investment remains with the Prudential however, as it is a shared cost scheme the deductions from the employees pay is also free of National Insurance as well tax which makes it a very attractive pension saving option. The Council also benefits from employer NI savings.

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	<p>Whilst this might not seem it would be a benefit in the current climate more employees are planning for retirement and the number of employees accessing this benefit has increased from 132 before the introduction of this new scheme in September 2021 to 302 at August 2023.</p>
Car Lease Scheme	<p>The Council has had a car lease scheme since 2010 and the current provider is NHS Fleet Solutions. The scheme is for electric, hybrid and ultra low emission cars and the costs of the lease cover the car, insurance, servicing and breakdown cover. A car lease scheme is a salary sacrifice scheme which means that the payments are free of tax, NI and pension which is a saving for employees. The Council also benefits from employer NI savings.</p>
Tees Credit Union	<p>Tees Credit Union provides loans to employees at a reasonable rate. As the loan is deducted from the employee's salary at source there are no credit checks which means employees with a poor credit history can access these loans.</p>
B&Q Trade Point Discounts	<p>B&Q Trade Point give SBC employees discounts of 10% on the majority of products in store and on-line. This benefit was introduced in 2022 and has proved to be very popular with employees.</p>
Tees Active Discounts	<p>Council employees receive a discount on joining fees for gym membership with Tees Active. We have reached out to Tees Active to discuss other potential discounts for our employees.</p>
Bus and Train Discounts	<p>Council employees can take advantage of discount offers on annual tickets from Arriva, Stagecoach and Northern Rail.</p>
Vivup	<p>In 2022 the Council partnered with Vivup to provide a number of employee benefits to employees. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee lifestyle savings which allows employees to access instant savings of around 7% on high street and online shopping, health and beauty, travel and entertainment, home and garden, mobile, broadband and utilities, restaurants and takeaways and supermarkets. These savings have been negotiated by Vivup and new discounts continue to be added. • Home and Electronics which allows employees to buy products at Currys PC World. and John Lewis and pay for them through the payroll. Employees being able to spread the cost of purchases over 12, 24 or 36 months as a payment directly from their pay. Whilst this is a net deduction scheme it has proved to be very popular with employees as there is no credit check and it is hoped that by accessing this benefit, they are not accessing pay day loans at extremely high interest rates.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cycle to Work Scheme which allows employees to purchase a bike from Halfords, Evans Cycles and also any local retailer. This is a salary sacrifice scheme which means that employees benefit from a reduction in tax, NI and pension contributions.• The Bike Shop which allows employees to purchase bikes and accessories for their family and pay directly from their salary over a 12 or 24 month period. This is a net deduction scheme. <p>There is no cost to the Council for these benefits and actually benefits from employer NI savings for the salary sacrifice. In addition, by partnering with Vivup for the above benefits we are able to access a free Employee Assistance Programme which would provide further choice for our employees to access support for mental health issues. In particular, the service has a number of self-help resources for employees to access, including assistance with financial well-being.</p>