

AGENDA ITEM

**REPORT TO
EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

9 JANUARY 2024

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR
OF ADULTS, HEALTH
AND WELLBEING**

WINTER PLANNING UPDATE

Summary

This briefing provides an update to the Committee on Winter planning work across the Council, working with partners. This includes measures in place across Adult Social Care (ASC) to respond to Winter pressures and the associated increase in service demands.

Recommended that the report be noted.

Detail

Winter Planning

1. Winter 2022/3 presented significant challenges to communities and the health and wellbeing system with cost-of-living pressures, ongoing COVID-19 circulation, flu and other respiratory infections.
2. The exact picture for the remainder of this Winter is not yet known but work continues, to monitor and mitigate the impacts as well as prevent escalation where possible. The Tees Valley Local A&E Delivery Board (LAEDB) has oversight of NHS planning and coordination with partners, feeding into regional (Northeast and North Cumbria) arrangements and has Local Authority representation. A winter planning event took place on 12th October 2023 across the ICB NENC footprint, to consider pressures from last Winter and collectively plan for this Winter based on the learning. Ongoing risk of respiratory infections including emerging variants, vaccination and impact of strikes were key considerations. Infection prevention and control continues to be crucial in preventing and mitigating communicable disease.
3. Adult Social Care Winter planning took place in April/May 2023 utilising key learning from previous years. High impact schemes agreed and implemented include: increased social care workforce; increased capacity for community equipment delivery; same day care provision for hospital discharge and community settings; and a clear network of escalation and communication across multiple organisations.

4. Cleveland Local Resilience Forum (LRF) also held a Winter planning meeting on 18th October 2023 to consider how the LRF supports wider system resilience. The LRF is instigating Project Viper – a system for identifying and ensuring better access to information about those at risk, who will need immediate assistance in the event of a major incident (including adverse weather events) e.g. those on oxygen at home, those with significant mobility needs. Stockton-on-Tees will be participating in this initiative.
5. The borough's Major Incident Plan was updated ahead of the Winter period to ensure that an appropriate response can be put in place in the event of a major incident due to adverse weather. This has also allowed for the introduction of a new notification and communications program known as RAYVN, which will allow better shared awareness amongst Council Officers and Members in the event of an incident within their wards.
6. In order to keep the borough moving throughout the Winter period, our comprehensive Winter maintenance plan is in place. This includes the response to cold weather and the deployment of gritters to ensure our priority highways are kept accessible and as safe as possible. Alongside this we have dedicated resource available at all hours as part of our snow and flood planning with specialised equipment which can be deployed when required.
7. Through our links to the national weather warning systems and communications resources through the Department of Health and Social Care, our usual arrangements are in place to communicate key messages to our communities when we are warned of adverse weather events. For example, advice on keeping warm and checking on vulnerable neighbours in the event of sudden cold snaps.
8. In addition to the LRF and local NHS-lead Winter planning infrastructure, there is a local multi-agency Health Protection Collaborative which reports to the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Collaborative maintains oversight of key health protection issues on behalf of the Board, facilitates joint working and brings updates to the Board for assurance. The Collaborative is chaired by the Director of Public Health and covers key issues such as infectious disease control, screening and immunisations and public health key messaging on protecting the local population's health and wellbeing in adverse weather events. It also provides local public health support and advice into the major incident planning process.

Infectious Disease Surveillance

9. The main national monitoring system for COVID-19 population prevalence through the ONS was stopped earlier this year. Recognising the ongoing need of broader surveillance than hospital data, a smaller version of the survey has been reinstated from October 2023 to ensure ongoing population surveillance.
10. According to the latest England data for COVID-19 infections, the percentage of people with COVID-19 is low with a 7 day PCR positivity of 7.5% up to the 27/11/2023, although it is important to note that testing rates are low. Hospital admissions increased by 10% (for week ending 1st December 2023) compared to the previous week and were highest in the 85yrs+ age group. However, they remained significantly below those seen in Spring 2023 and December 2022. Admissions for week ending 01/12/2023 were 2,064 compared to 3,936 in the same week in 2022. COVID-19 ICU admissions and deaths are also increasing but remain significantly lower than the same week last year. Trends in Stockton-

on-Tees are similar to national trends, however COVID-19 cases have started to increase from the start of December (see **APPENDIX 1**).

11. A new COVID-19 strain (BA.2.86) was detected mid-August. It has been identified in several countries within a short time, suggesting rapid transmission. It has been classified as a variant of concern (VOC) due to its large number of mutations, with consequent potential to escape existing immunity.
12. UKHSA confirmed that BA.2.86 is causing an early increase of cases, hospital admissions and deaths across England. Data is still evolving but there is no evidence to suggest that BA.2.86 is more likely to make people seriously ill than other circulating variants, while vaccination is likely to provide continued protection – hence the national booster vaccination programme was brought forward this September.
13. As expected for Autumn, Influenza infections remain low overall, but have risen in recent weeks. Higher influenza rates are most common between December and February. There has been a higher rate of Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) affecting mostly under 5s and norovirus affecting mostly over 65s in recent weeks.

COVID-19 / flu and vaccinations

14. The Tees Valley Vaccination Board continues to have oversight of the flu and COVID-19 vaccination programmes and reports into the regional ICB (Integrated Care Board) immunisation board. Locally, public health continues to monitor population vaccination coverage and works with the ICB to identify and plan targeted vaccination clinics for areas with lower vaccination coverage and higher risk groups.
15. To protect vulnerable groups at greater risk, the national decision was taken to start vaccination for flu and COVID-19 on 11th September 2023, starting with care homes and over 75 year olds. **APPENDIX 2** sets out eligible groups. In Stockton-on-Tees, 71% of those aged 65 and over have been vaccinated against COVID-19, compared with 68% in England. In Stockton-on-Tees, vaccination coverage within care home residents is 77.8% for COVID-19 and 76.5% for flu (up to 19/11/23). Vaccines are being evolved constantly in response to these viruses.
16. From 18th September 2023, the NHS started to invite people for their COVID-19 vaccination in priority order of risk and those eligible will be able to book an appointment through the National Booking Service website or by calling 119. The borough is well covered for COVID-19 vaccinations across the Primary Care Networks (PCNs – groups of GP practices) and the local GP Federation (Hartlepool and Stockton Health).
17. Community pharmacies also offer flu and COVID-19 vaccinations to those who are eligible. Flu vaccinations can also be purchased from community pharmacies by population groups who are not eligible for a free flu jab through the NHS. COVID-19 vaccinations are not available for purchase. (Please find a list of community pharmacies who have signed up to offer COVID-19 and Flu vaccines in **APPENDIX 3**). COVID-19 and flu vaccinations can be administered together, where this is available.
18. Roll-out of the COVID-19 booster has happened at pace; by 8th October 2023, 14,600 out of 85,000 eligible residents had had a COVID-19 booster. This increased to 37,216 by 26th November 2023 (45.9% of eligible residents) with substantial variation across the borough. As in previous COVID-19 vaccination campaigns, uptake is lowest in the most deprived areas with some having less than half the uptake (e.g. 27.4% uptake in Newtown

compared to 63.1% in Billingham West). Public health is working with the Tees Valley vaccination leads and GP Federation colleagues to deliver some bespoke clinics in areas of lowest uptake. Three (out of four) bespoke clinics have been delivered so far and have been successful in promoting vaccination in hard to reach groups including those with pre-existing health conditions, and those experiencing homelessness.

19. **APPENDIX 4** sets out eligible groups for the flu vaccine. Flu vaccinations for 2-3-year-olds, school-age children (reception to year 11) and children in clinical risk groups started in September, delivered by the school immunisation service and aiming to finish by 15th December 2023. As of 12th November 2023, 34.6% of 2 year olds and 34.2% of 3 year olds received their flu vaccination. Average uptake of flu vaccine across the borough for all eligible individuals is 45.1% up to 26th November 2023.
20. National communications messaging to promote flu and COVID-19 vaccinations has been disseminated widely, supported by local joint working between SBC and the NHS. SBC is also supporting messaging on COVID-19 and flu vaccines through our community wellbeing champions network. Funding has also been provided by the ICB to support addressing vaccine inequalities and local insights work has been commissioned to look at this.
21. Occupational health flu and COVID-19 vaccination programmes have started in NHS trusts and primary care. Free flu vaccinations for SBC employees are again provided this year by the Council's Occupational Health team with the aim to vaccinate 800 staff starting in October 2023. To reflect the changes in eligibility in the national flu programme, all SBC staff are eligible, but vaccination of frontline health and social care workers are prioritised. As of 12th November 2023, 28.9% of health and social care workers had received a flu vaccination and 25.8% of frontline health and social care workers had received a COVID-19 booster vaccination.

Health Protection work with key settings

22. People most at risk in Winter and more vulnerable from cold weather include:
 - people aged 65 and older
 - babies and children under the age of 5
 - people on a low income (so cannot afford heating)
 - people who have a long-term health condition
 - people with a disability
 - pregnant women
 - people who have a mental health condition
23. Work is continuing with the care sector through provider forums and monthly newsletters, as established in the height of the pandemic. This provides the opportunity to disseminate key messages and resources, 'temperature check' with providers on impact of Winter illness and provide support as required.
24. The Social Care Protection Group continues to oversee key updates and resources for the coming Winter months, including public health key messages on infectious illnesses, the COVID-19 / flu vaccination programmes, and the increased risks to health for older populations from cold weather plus interventions to mitigate these risks. Any urgent updates are also shared e.g. regarding the immunisation programmes. There are also plans to work further with care home managers on perceptions and uptake of key

vaccinations among staff and residents including flu, COVID-19 and pneumococcal infections.

Local health protection response

25. There is no indication of a shift in national policy in managing COVID-19. Therefore, general health protection principles and measures will apply into the Autumn and Winter. Should there be a new variant that warrants considering a step-up of response, SBC public health would liaise closely with the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) on this and any further action needed. In the meantime, we continue to monitor the position, liaise with UKHSA and offer support and advice particularly to our care sector as required.
26. Dissemination of consistent and clear messages on keeping well in Winter remains important and includes:
 - Good hand and respiratory hygiene
 - Avoid passing on infections – Stay at home if you are unwell
 - Flu and COVID-19 vaccinations – Get vaccinated
 - Keeping warm and getting help with heating
 - Getting advice if unwell (pharmacy, 111, GP)
 - Looking out for others

Adult social care support

27. Adult Social Care (ASC) service activity is processed through the First Contact team, sitting alongside the integrated single point of access (iSPA) team and wider community health teams, following a recent move to Billingham Health Centre. They provide a community hub of surveillance, decision making and coordination across care and health activity.
28. Regular meetings within ASC operational teams, brokerage and senior management are in place to identify and mitigate any areas of growing pressure within services. The frequency of this surveillance is adapted to reflect pressures within the system.
29. Business Unit Plans and Business Continuity Plan are in place across all of ASC to ensure continued service delivery throughout any increased activity / demand and adverse weather conditions. Operational teams have robust triage and review processes in place to ensure any persons in crisis are easily visible and get the services they require. Risk management policies are also in place and implemented for any referrals that cannot be allocated to a worker due to capacity.
30. Registered care homes and care at home providers continue to attend the care provider forums for key messages and support throughout the year. Resource was provided to the care market via the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund to support workforce retention across the care sector.
31. ASC in partnership with North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust have implemented new pathways to provide additional capacity for key priorities for Winter planning as outlined by North East North Cumbria Urgent and Emergency Care Board, including falls, reducing ambulance handovers and community services response into homes before ambulance arrival.

32. Virtual Frailty Wards (Hospital at Home) are live in Stockton-on-Tees. The current system has been in development over the last year and has capacity to support more people in their own home, negating the need to be taken to hospital, when safe.
33. A range of day opportunities are available to support service users and their families with 215 clients being supported as at 11th December 2023. The majority of these are for individuals with learning disabilities, with support also being provided for people with physical / personal care support needs, memory and cognition needs and mental health needs. Support is also available for people needing help with access and mobility, social support and isolation and sensory needs. Services remain available over the Christmas period in response to the wishes of the clients.

Supporting our communities

34. SBC public health arranged a Winter health conference on 19th September at the Employment and Training Hub, aiming to empower the VCSE sector and community groups with information, networks and resources to support the community this Winter. The event provided a platform for sharing information, experiences, good practice and building relationships, with presentations from a wide range of speakers with over 50 attendees from a wide range of communities and organisations.
35. As Members will be aware, in addition to the activities detailed above the Council (working with its partners across the VCSE sector) has a range of ongoing activities which will support the borough's residents, specifically those who are experiencing hardship due to the current cost of living challenge. These include:

Information and advice delivered through a range of initiatives including:

- A cost of Living Booklet ('Here to Help') which provides an extensive range of information on both Council and partner services
(https://www.stockton.gov.uk/media/3738/Cost-of-Living-Support/pdf/Cost_of_Living_booklet_2023-24_final_accessible.pdf?m=638327918630970000)
- A central 'Here to Help' one-stop shop of information on the Council's website
- Regular features in Stockton News promoting cost of living support services (see **APPENDIX 5**)
- A Winter Wellbeing support leaflet:



hlc2159_Winter
Wellbeing final access

The above leaflet is supported by a bespoke [webpage](#), both have been developed to support our residents through Winter

- 'Here to Help drop-in' events (commenced Sept. 2023 and will run through to March 2024, see **APPENDIX 6**). The Here to Help events are being undertaken across the

7 Community Partnership areas, bringing together internal and external colleagues to support our residents on a range of issues.

A recent event was covered by BBC Tees (can be heard at 2:17 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0gb6cf8>).

Some of the events which have taken place to date include:

- Egglecliffe Community Centre, Durham Lane, Egglecliffe, TS16 0EH - Friday 15 September 2023
- ARC - Stockton Arts Centre, Dovecot Street, Stockton, TS18 1LL - Tuesday 10 October 2023
- Norton Methodist Church, Norton Road, Norton, TS20 2QQ - Sunday 19 November 2023 12pm to 2pm
- Victoria Park Community Hall, Peel Street, Thornaby, TS17 6HL - Tuesday 5 December 2023 - 10am to 1pm

Three further events are planned across the borough - the next one is at Billingham Library, Kingsway, Billingham, TS23 2LN on Monday 15 January 2024 at 11am to 2pm. Further details can be found [here](#).

Food support:

- The Introduction of 'The Bread and Butter Thing' - 5 mobile food hubs across the borough, each providing affordable food for people on low incomes, while also reducing waste and providing support to our communities. Three hubs are currently in operation, with the remainder to be opened late 2023 / early 2024.

<https://www.gazettelive.co.uk/news/teesside-news/how-armys-worth-volunteers-supporting-28238870>

- The Food Power Network also continues to be in place, providing a coordination function for the efforts around food provision and food poverty through a post in Catalyst, working closely with SBC and wider partners.



Stockton.pdf

Community Spaces (previously known as Warm Spaces)

- A network of more than 60 Warm Spaces venues was established in October 2022 with outreach support from key organisations and activities to combat social isolation and positively impact outcomes for individuals and families. A number of these venues remained over the Summer and continue to operate.
- An [interactive directory and map](#) of venues across the borough is on the Council's website.
- The ongoing development phase of [Community Spaces - Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council](#) is aiming to deliver a year-round offer as venues are more than warm spaces (venues which provide communities with wider support, whilst also addressing social isolation). Further funds (£60k) have also been secured from Public Health to continue to support these organisations become sustainable in the long-term.

- The Warm Homes Healthy People programme in Stockton funded through public health offers support with boiler repairs, emergency heating, energy saving as well as debt and benefits advice. <https://www.stockton.gov.uk/Warm-Homes-Healthy-People>

Consultation and Engagement

36. In addition to the work set out above, the work to address inequality in vaccine uptake is done through working with our community wellbeing champions; behavioural insights work is being carried out working with our young people, their families / carers and professionals who work with them e.g. schools. The report also outlines our ongoing work with the VCSE and partners on staying safe and well in Winter and accessing cost of living support.

Next Steps

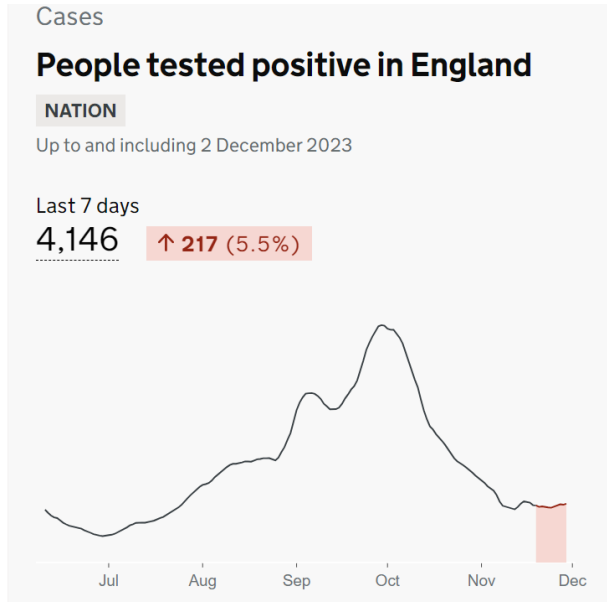
37. Beyond continuing the work described in this briefing, key updates or proposed changes in approach (e.g. in response to a new threat to population health) will be brought to the Corporate Management Team and on through to key Committees / Cabinet as needed.

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APPENDICES

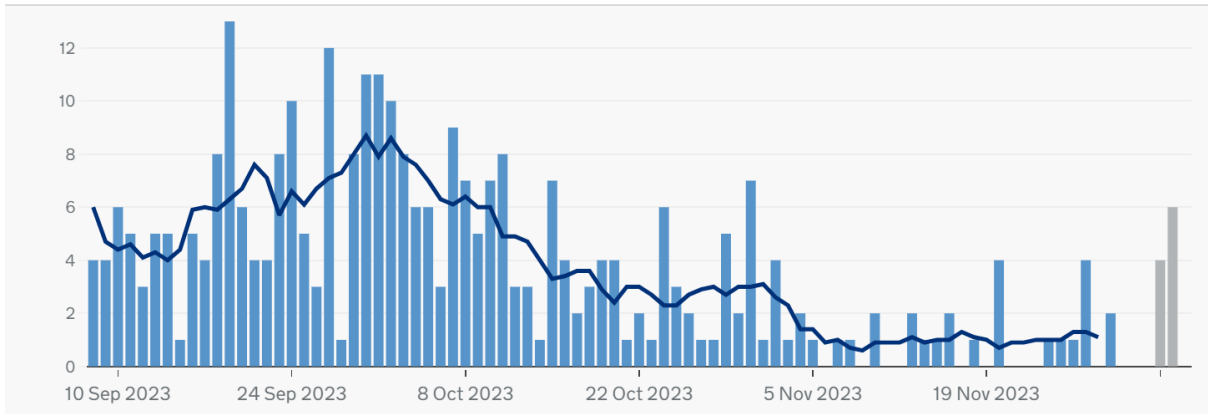
APPENDIX 1

COVID-19 update (8 December 2023)



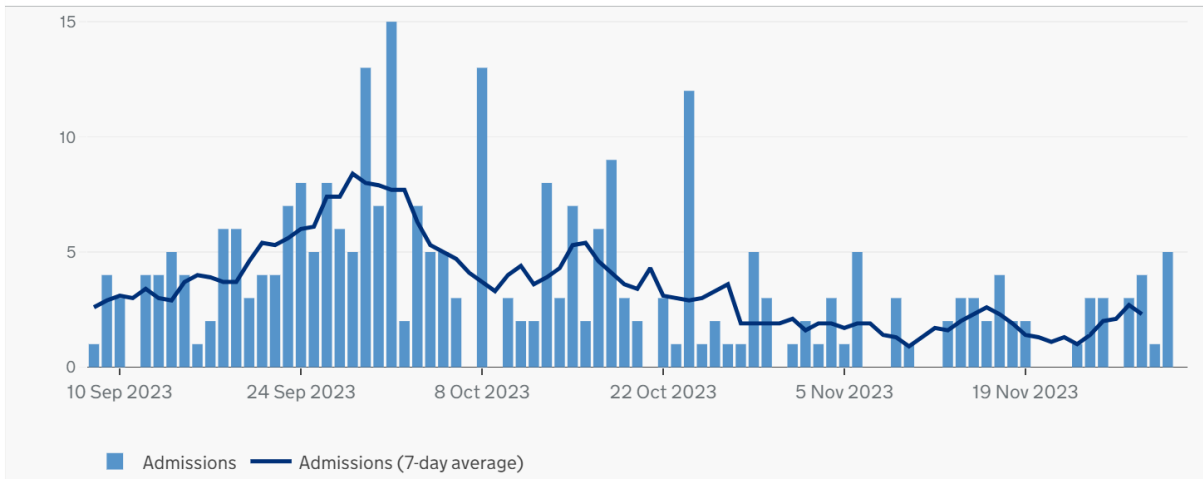
Cases of COVID-19, Stockton-on-Tees

Cases in Stockton-on-Tees ▾



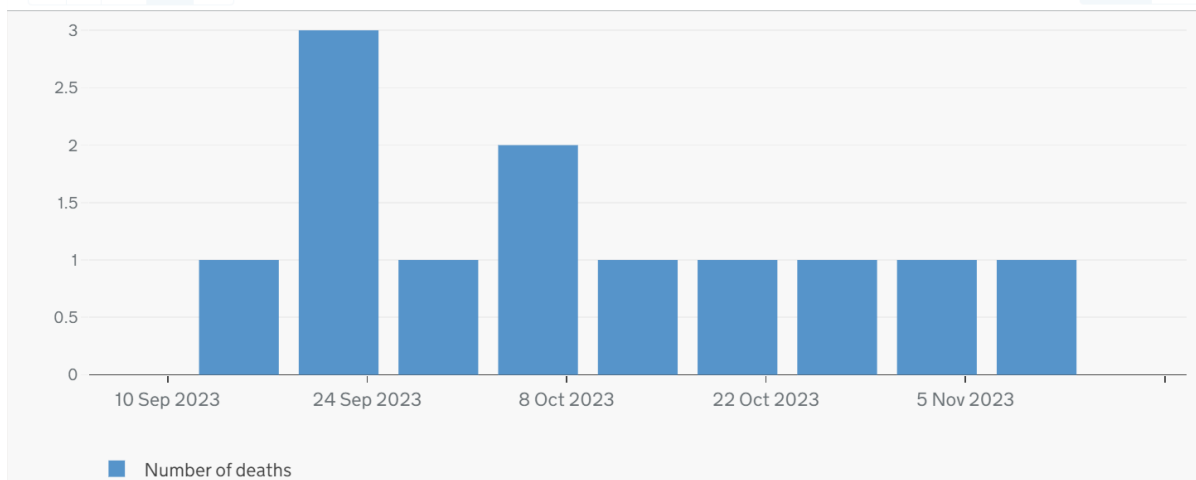
Hospitalisations with COVID-19, Stockton-on-Tees

Healthcare in North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust ▾



Deaths with COVID-19 on death certificate, Stockton-on-Tees

Deaths in Stockton-on-Tees ▾



APPENDIX 2

COVID-19 vaccination eligible groups

- Residents in a care home for older adults
- All adults aged 65 years and over
- Persons aged 6 months to 64 years in a clinical risk group
- Frontline health and social care workers
- Persons aged 12 to 64 years who are household contacts of people with immunosuppression
- Persons aged 16 to 64 years who are carers and staff working in care homes for older adults

APPENDIX 3

Community pharmacies offering flu and COVID-19 vaccinations

Ward	Participating Pharmacy
Billingham	The Pharmacy, Abbey Health Centre Harry Hill, Kenilworth Road
Yarm	Cohens Chemist Whitworth Chemist
Ingleby Barwick	Coulby Newham Pharmacy at Ingleby Barwick Community Hall
Eaglescliffe	Eaglescliffe Pharmacy Pharmacy Express
Mandale and Victoria	Pharmacy Express
Roseworth, Hardwick and Salters Lane	Pharmacy World
Stockton Town Centre, Newtown, Grangefield	Knights Pharmacy 365 Well Pharmacy Synergise Pharmacy
Fairfield, Hartburn, Bishopsgarth and Elm Tree	Fairfield Pharmacy

APPENDIX 4

Flu vaccination eligible groups

- those aged 65 years and over
- those aged 6 months to under 65 years in clinical risk groups
- pregnant women
- all children aged 2 or 3 years on 31 August 2023
- primary school aged children (from Reception to Year 6)
- those in long-stay residential care homes
- carers in receipt of carer's allowance, or those who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person
- close contacts of immunocompromised individuals

- frontline workers in a social care setting without an employer-led occupational health scheme

All frontline health care workers, including both clinical and non-clinical staff who have contact with patients, should be offered a flu vaccine as part of the organisations' policy for the prevention of the transmission of flu to help protect both staff and those that they care for.

APPENDIX 5: Stockton News (example of a recent article)

Cost of Living Support

With the price of energy, food and other bills rising, many people are finding it hard to keep up with the cost of living.

Here we've listed just some of the support available for you to help with your household finances. For more information about support and advice available, visit www.stockton.gov.uk/cost-of-living-hub

Check your benefit entitlement

The government's Help for Households website gives information on a range of financial support, from Universal Credit to Carer's Allowance. Its online calculator gives you a breakdown of benefits you are entitled to based on your personal circumstances, like tax support, and information on how to apply. Benefits advice is also available from the Council and Stockton and District Advice and Information Service (SDAIS).

To check your entitlement, visit helpforhouseholds.campaign.gov.uk/income-support

Energy efficiency schemes

There are schemes available for eligible residents to improve the energy efficiency of their homes which may also help to reduce energy bills.

The government's Boiler Upgrade Scheme (BUS) is providing households with up to £6,000 towards the cost and installation of a low carbon heating system such as heat pumps.

To find out if you are eligible and to find an authorised BUS installer visit the gov.uk website, email BUS.enquiry@ofgem.gov.uk or call 0330 053 2006.

The Home Upgrade Grant provides eligible households with fully funded energy saving measures such as double glazing, loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, draft proofing and low carbon heat systems.

To register your interest for this scheme visit www.teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/net-zero/home-upgrade-grant-hug

Tees Credit Union

Tees Credit Union is a community-based financial co-operative. It provides convenient and easy access to basic financial services such as loans, savings accounts, debt solutions and much more.

As bills get higher, the Tees Credit Union is here to help you to make the most out of your finances. The best way to find out how they can help is to call in to their shop on Stockton high street or visit their website at www.teescreditunion.co.uk

Warm Spaces

Warm Spaces are free, non-judgemental public places where people can go to get warm, save money on their heating costs, avoid social isolation, and receive vital support and advice while staying as well as possible.

The Council's A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees team is working with partner organisations to build a directory of Warm Spaces. Over 40 places have already signed up to welcome people into a warm space.

Visit www.stockton.gov.uk/warm-spaces where you can find a list of all the venues, the opening times and what facilities are on offer.

Warm Homes Healthy People

Warm Homes Healthy People offers emergency heating, boiler services, debt advice and energy efficiency measures. You may be eligible if you are:

- Over 65
- In receipt of disability benefits
- Have a long-term illness made worse by the cold
- Living with a child under 5 who has a long-term illness made worse by the cold
- Living with dementia

To qualify for free boiler servicing or repair you must be the homeowner and be claiming a qualifying benefit as well as one of the other categories above.

For further information please call the Warm Homes Healthy People team on 01642 528215 or visit www.stockton.gov.uk/warm-homes-healthy-people to apply online.

Our People

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APPENDIX 6: Here to Help events

- Are being held across the 7 Community Partnership areas between Sept. 23 – March 24, bringing together internal/external colleagues to support our residents on a range of issues.
- A recent event was covered by BBC Tees (can be heard at 2:17 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0gb6cf8>)

Got a lot on your mind? We're here to help – drop in with any of life's worries for advice and support tailored to you.

Here to Help drop-in

Coming together to create A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees for all



The Cost of Living
Mental Health
New Job
Money
Universal Credit
Caring duties
Health
Self-care
Loneliness

Tuesday 10 October, 12pm to 3pm
ARC - Stockton Arts Centre
Dovecot Street, Stockton, TS18 1LL
Join us on World Mental Health Day for support and free wellbeing activities.

