

People Select Committee

Scrutiny Review of Cost of Living Response



**Draft Final Report
February 2024**

People Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 1LD

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Acknowledgements

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Foreword

TBA

Cllr Marilyn Surtees - Chair



**Councillor
Marilyn
Surtees
Chair-
People
Select
Committee**



**Councillor
Paul Weston
Vice-Chair-
People
Select
Committee**

Original Brief

Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

This review will contribute to all areas of the Council Plan 2023-2026 vision:

A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm.

This means the Borough will be a place where:

- people live in cohesive and safe communities
- people are supported and protected from harm
- people live healthy lives

A place that is clean, vibrant and attractive.

This means we will enjoy:

- great places to live and visit
- clean and green spaces
- rich cultural experiences

A place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed.

This means that the Borough will have:

- a growing economy
- improved education and skills development
- job creation and increased employment

A Council that is ambitious, effective and proud to serve.

This means that we will make sure that we provide:

- financial sustainability and value for money
- dedicated and resourceful employees
- strong leadership and governance
-

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

The North East Child Poverty Commission has stated that almost two in five children in the North East (38 per cent) are living in poverty, rising to almost half – 47 per cent – of North East children living in a household with an under five.

The consequences of inequalities are significant and impact on quality of life, life chances and life expectancy. There are affluent areas alongside disadvantaged areas in the Borough. Nine of the Borough's 26 wards are in the 10% most deprived in the country and there is an average male life expectancy gap of 21 years between the most and least deprived areas.

Currently, the rising costs of food, fuel and other essentials are combined with this existing disadvantage and vulnerability with households being placed under significant pressure. In the short term, this leaves those residents at risk of hardship and poor wellbeing as well as reduced opportunities in the long term.

In response to the ongoing cost of living crisis, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) has introduced a number of initiatives (for example the Cost-of-Living on-line HUB / Warm Spaces / Food Aid Fund) to support the Borough's residents.

This review will build on the 'Scrutiny Review of the Cost of School Uniform' which was undertaken in 2020 and the recommendations of the 'Scrutiny Review of Child Poverty' undertaken in 2022.

This review would consider SBC's response to ensure the Council effectively supports the current and emerging needs of its residents, whilst also evaluating its current approach to inform/provide a steer for ongoing and future activity.

As detailed in the 13 July Cabinet report "Powering Our Futures – Delivering People, Place Economy", the Council is committed to the development of an Anti-Poverty Action Plan (to be co-developed with partners and those with lived experience). The plan will focus on how the Council can help prevent and mitigate the impact of poverty. This review will inform the development of this plan.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

- 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?
- How has advice and support been communicated to residents and SBC staff? Can this be improved?
- How does SBC's approach compare with other Local Authorities?
- What are the main 'cost of living' issues facing residents? How have these changed over time?
- How do 'cost of living' issues vary across the Borough?
- In what ways has the cost of living crisis impacted on staff retention and recruitment?
- How have SBC staff been supported if they are struggling financially and mentally as a result of the cost of living crisis?
- What can the Council learn from the Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector?
- How will the 'Powering our Future' programme support the delivery of the Council's cost of living response?

Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:

This review would consider the key components of the cost of living approach adopted by the Council at a time of increasing service demands (for both advice and support). Consequently, it would seek to explore the possibility to develop, change and, if appropriate, grow the Council's services around the cost of living work to support more residents in our Borough.

1.0 Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the People Select Committee's scrutiny review of Cost of Living Response.

In response to the ongoing cost of living crisis, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) has introduced a number of initiatives (for example the Cost-of-Living on-line HUB / Warm Spaces / Food Aid Fund) to support the Borough's residents. This review has built on the 'Scrutiny Review of the Cost of School Uniform' which was undertaken in 2020 and the recommendations of the 'Scrutiny Review of Child Poverty' undertaken in 2022. This review has considered SBC's response to ensure the Council effectively supports the current and emerging needs of its residents, whilst also evaluating its current approach to inform/provide a steer for ongoing and future activity.

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This review has considered the key components of the cost of living approach adopted by the Council at a time of increasing service demands (for both advice and support). Consequently, it has explored the possibility to develop, change and, if appropriate, grow the Council's services around the cost of living work to support more residents in the Borough.

The Select Committee 's key findings were as follows:

- Poverty in the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees is a long-term issue which has been exacerbated by the ongoing cost of living situation. There is a notable disparity in life expectancy across the Borough, with a difference of 21.1 years for males and 17.1 years for females. 9 of the Borough's 26 wards are in the 10% most deprived in the country.
- The Council's Cost of Living response has included both immediate short-term interventions and long-term strategies. This approach has gained recognition from the Local Government Association (LGA) and praise from external partners in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector. It has also been recognised by being nominated for an APSE award.
- Examples of the Council's Cost of Living response include: the online 'Here to Help Hub', which provides information on benefits, advice and support available; the 'Cost of Living Booklet', which is updated quarterly and available online and in print; quarterly newsletters, energy crisis support; and the establishment of Warm Spaces (Community Spaces) in partnership with the VCSE sector. There are also a wide range of other projects to meet any emerging needs, for example The Bread and Butter Thing (TBBT), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) work, employee support, work around Child Poverty etc.
- As part of the review, site visits were arranged to two TBBT hubs, Victoria Park Community Hall, Thornaby and The Salvation Army, Stockton. This provided Members with the opportunity to speak to staff, co-ordinators and volunteers and witness the bag preparation and packaging processes prior to collection from members of the public. Members who attended acknowledged the importance of

this initiative in alleviating some of the financial pressures residents are currently facing in light of high food prices.

- During the review, an additional online session was held to receive evidence from an LGA representative on local authority management of the Cost of Living situation. It was evident that Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council was leading the way on many aspects of this work. However, it was noted that the challenges around this will continue to grow. Therefore, it is important to continue to provide support to those affected by the Cost of Living.
- The importance of 'lived experience' has been repeatedly highlighted throughout this review. It has been evidenced that, as the Cost of Living situation has developed, services across the Borough have noted that the demographics of those seeking helping and support has changed. For example, there has been increase in those with mortgages or residents from more affluent wards approaching the Council and agencies for help.
- Debt advice and debt management has been a consistent and prevailing theme throughout the evidence gathering process. It is necessary to consider the value that income maximisation support can have in providing one solution to this problem.
- The continuation of issues with the affordability of school uniform has been discussed at length and this is an area where long term intervention will be needed if school uniform policies across the Borough remain restrictive.
- The stigma associated with poverty and receiving support has been raised. However, innovative approaches to reducing this stigma have also been evident, particularly support provided to young people and families through schools.
- In response to the Cost of Living situation, the Council's Customer Services team has been the first point of contact for concerned residents approaching the Council. The volume of calls received, and level of residents in deep distress, has significantly increased since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic. This has impacted on call response times, staff retention, recruitment, training, and the mental wellbeing of Customer Services staff. In response, additional support and training has been put in place for Customer Services staff.
- A range of benefits and initiatives are available to all Council staff members. Targeted support and training have also been provided to staff across the Council. Worthy of note, work with the Council's Community Service staff on men's health and wellbeing has resulted in the achievement of an LGC Award for Best Wellbeing Initiative. This targeted approach could possibly be extended to other areas of the Council where there is a need.
- This review has demonstrated the integral role of the Council's Cost of Living response, and its continued partnerships with external organisations, in supporting residents through the ongoing cost of living situation and the development of the Council's 'Powering Our Futures' initiative. It is essential that the Council continues to maintain and foster relationships with the VCSE sector to provide the best possible solution for residents during these unprecedentedly challenging times.
- As stated above, it is apparent that Cost of Living challenges will continue to grow and evolve. Therefore, the need to continue to develop this work is necessary.

Conclusion

This review has highlighted how the existing challenges associated with poverty and inequality across the Borough have been compounded by the ongoing cost of living situation. Additional challenges have arisen through the widening demographic of those affected by the cost of living. However, the evidence submitted has confirmed that the Council's proactive approach has provided a comprehensive response and resulted in regional and national recognition. The contribution of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector in mitigating the effects of poverty must not be underestimated and the continuation of partnership working is essential for future strategic planning.

Consequently, the review's recommendations seek to respond to persistent concerns (such as the affordability of school uniform and debt management) and provide a commitment to develop an anti-poverty strategy to cement the Council's long-term coordinated approach. Ensuring that residents and Council staff continue to be sufficiently supported is integral in this endeavour.

Recommendations

1. That findings from this review will inform the development of the Council's Anti-Poverty Action Plan/Strategy as part of the 'Powering Our Futures' programme. This will be coordinated with partners and will advocate the importance of lived experience.
2. That the Council continues to work with schools and governors to address the issues around the affordability of school uniform and provide options to expand the provision of pre-loved uniforms are explored, through devising an action plan clearly outlining the steps to be taken to address these issues. In addition, the Council will meet with Multi-Academy Trust school improvement leads to advocate the need for affordable school uniforms and the ongoing promotion of pre-loved ones.
3. That the income maximisation service is widely promoted through Stockton News and social media channels as a means of assisting residents with debt management and financial difficulties.
4. That, building on the success of previous staff drop in sessions around Cost of Living this targeted approach continues where there is a need.
5. That, building on the existing success of the work undertaken, to continue to build on best practice from across the country working alongside the LGA.

2.0 Introduction

2.1. This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the People Select Committee's scrutiny review of Cost of Living Response.

2.2. In response to the ongoing cost of living crisis, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) has introduced a number of initiatives (for example the Cost-of-Living on-line HUB / Warm Spaces / Food Aid Fund) to support the Borough's residents. This review has built on the 'Scrutiny Review of the Cost of School Uniform' which was undertaken in 2020 and the recommendations of the 'Scrutiny Review of Child Poverty' undertaken in 2022. This review has considered SBC's response to ensure the Council effectively supports the current and emerging needs of its residents, whilst also evaluating its current approach to inform/provide a steer for ongoing and future activity.

2.3. As detailed in the 13 July 2023 Cabinet report, "Powering Our Futures – Delivering People, Place Economy", the Council is committed to the development of an Anti-Poverty Action Plan (to be co-developed with partners and those with lived experience). The plan will focus on how the Council can help prevent and mitigate the impact of poverty. This review will inform the development of this plan.

2.4. It was envisaged that a review of cost of living response could potentially lead to the following efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:

- This review would consider the key components of the cost of living approach adopted by the Council at a time of increasing service demands (for both advice and support). Consequently, it would seek to explore the possibility to develop, change and, if appropriate, grow the Council's services around the cost of living work to support more residents in our Borough.

2.5 The Committee undertook the following key lines of enquiry:

- 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?
- How has advice and support been communicated to residents and SBC staff? Can this be improved?
- How does SBC's approach compare with other Local Authorities?
- What are the main 'cost of living' issues facing residents? How have these changed over time?
- How do 'cost of living' issues vary across the Borough?
- In what ways has the cost of living crisis impacted on staff retention and recruitment?
- How have SBC staff been supported if they are struggling financially and mentally as a result of the cost of living crisis?
- What can the Council learn from the Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector?
- How will the 'Powering our Future' programme support the delivery of the Council's cost of living response?

2.6 The Committee received evidence from Council Officers, Bright Minds Big Futures, Thrive Teesside, Catalyst, Stockton-on-Tees Food Power Network, Unite the Union, Local Government Association, Tees Credit Union, Stockton & District Advice & Information Service.

2.7 In November and December 2023, site visits to two of The Bread and Butter Thing Hubs were arranged. The Hubs were located in Victoria Park Community Hall, Thornaby and Salvation Army, Stockton.

2.8 Recognising the increasing pressures on the Council's finances, it is imperative that in-depth scrutiny reviews promote the Council's policy priorities and, where possible, seek to identify efficiencies and reduce demand for services.

3.0 Background

- 3.1. Further background information in relation to this scrutiny topic includes:

His Majesty's Government, *1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024: Household Support Fund guidance for county councils and unitary authorities in England*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils/1-april-2023-to-31-march-2024-household-support-fund-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england>

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, *Cost of Living Support webpages*. Available at: <https://www.stockton.gov.uk/cost-of-living-hub>

4.0 Evidence

A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees: Background Presentation

4.1 Fairer Stockton-on-Tees (FSOT) is the Council's strategic framework to reduce inequalities, address the underlying causes of poverty whilst focusing activity on our most deprived neighbourhoods.

Key statistics

4.2 In the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees, the average male life expectancy is 77.4 years. It is lowest in the Stockton Town Centre Ward (67.4 years) and highest in the Ingleby Barwick East Ward (84.1 years), a difference of 21.1 years.

4.3 The average female life expectancy is 80.4 years. It is lowest in the Stockton Town Centre Ward (71.8 years) and highest in Ingleby Barwick East Ward (90.3 years), a difference of 17.1 years.

4.4 The under 75 mortality rate from all causes (2018-2020) in the Borough is 395.3 compared to the rate for England 336.5. This is a directly age-standardised rate per 100,000 population.

4.5 19% of the population live with a limiting long-term condition compared with 21.6% in the North East. The percentage is highest in Stockton Town Centre (27%) and lowest in Ingleby Barwick West (8%).

4.6 7.5% of the local population aged 18-24 (965) are claiming out-of-work benefits against 4.6% nationally.

4.7 23.9% of the local population aged 16-64 are economically inactive against 21.4% nationally.

4.8 24.3% of children in the Borough are living in poverty compared with 15.1% nationally (after housing costs).

4.9 There are 560 children in the Council's care, a rate of 132 per 10,000 children, compared with a national rate of 67.0 per 10,000 children.

4.10 The following examples demonstrate Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's ongoing work in reducing inequalities:

- Delivered Council Tax Rebates and Discretionary payments made to residents.
- Delivered 3 rounds of the Household Support Grant.
- Provided energy saving schemes and advice services delivered i.e. Warm Homes Healthy People.
- Delivered the Holiday Activities Fund and Free School Meals initiatives.
- Supported residents via our Welfare Assistance programmes i.e. Back on Track.
- Worked with partners to deliver Household Health Checks.
- Provided employment and training support through our Training & Employment Hub.
- Supported families through our network of Family Hubs.

- Valued the VCSE sector (worked collaboratively with Catalyst, SDAIS and Moneywise to deliver/support essential services).
- Tackling poverty –Community Partnerships.

The Cost of Living situation

4.11 The pandemic has left many households in the Borough facing financial difficulties. The current cost of living situation led to many in the Borough facing new challenges. The impact of the cost-of-living situation led the Council to take immediate steps to support its residents.

4.12 The Council's key areas of focus have been the Energy Crisis, Food Crisis, Employee Engagement, Employee Upskilling, Child Poverty and Corporate Social Responsibility.

Cost of Living response

4.13 Examples of the Council's cost of living response include the Cost of Living Hub, Here to Help booklet, Warm Spaces (Community Spaces), and the Food Aid Fund.

Community Spaces: Warm Spaces in Stockton-on-Tees

4.14 Warm Spaces are inclusive, non-judgemental spaces where the Borough's residents can go to get warm, take part in activities, receive support and advice, avoid social isolation, reduce their anxiety about the cost of living and generally stay well.

Food Aid Fund

4.15 Organisations, groups and schools involved in the food aid fund include:

Amal Project Teesside
A WAY OUT Charity
Challoner House Community Centre
Groundwork NE & Cumbria
Iron Guidance Charity
NiteLight CIC
Purple Rose Stockton
The Moses Project
Thornaby Food Bank | Chad's Pantry
Stockton Baptist Church
Mill Lane Primary School
BCT Aspire CIC
Billingham Town Council
Norton Methodist Church
Salvation Project
St John the Baptist Primary
Yarm Wellness
High Clarence Primary School
Friends of Ropner Park
ReGenerate-Hope For Autism
Portrack Baptist Church
Billingham and Stockton Borough Foodbank
North East Migration Project
Teesside Vineyard Church

Thornaby FC Women
Oxbridge Lane
Community Grocery Ragworth
St Therese of Lisieux Parish
Billingham South Primary School
Bowesfield Primary School

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

4.16 CSR activity can support immediate priorities, such as work to tackle the problems arising from the ongoing cost of living challenges. An example of this is provided in a video on the Warm Spaces initiative which can be accessed via the following link: <https://vimeo.com/838617168/6a9bfc9770>

Child Poverty

4.17 The Council's work on child poverty includes feeding into service issues affecting children in poverty as a result of the Cost of Living situation and exploring possibilities around breakfast club provisions, the Child Poverty Fund, promotion of HAF services etc.

4.18 The Council also provides representatives at the North East Child Poverty Commission.

4.19 A previous Scrutiny Review of Child Poverty has also been undertaken and an action plan has been agreed by the Children and Young People Select Committee.

Employee Support

4.20 Cost of Living support drop-in sessions have been provided for employees across the organisation and a forthcoming roadshow has also been planned.

Employee Upskilling

4.21 A video has been created to provide employees of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council with information on Cost of Living support that is available for themselves and residents across the Borough. The course aimed to provide employees with the wide range of support options available, useful links and details on how to help our residents with Cost of Living related matters. The video can be accessed via the following link: https://vimeo.com/794893327/8938a2c5ee?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&wner=117080616

Other Cost of Living projects

4.22 The following examples demonstrate partnership working to support residents during the cost of living situation:

The [A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees](#) team have also partnered with Tees Active Leisure to offer discounted leisure sessions from Monday 28 November (term-time only) including swimming for £1.50 at Thornaby Pool (Mondays 1.30pm to 2.45pm, Tuesday to Friday 1.30pm to 3pm) and soft play for £1.50 at Billingham Forum (Monday, Wednesday and Friday – 10.30am to 11.30am and Tuesday and Thursday – 1.30pm to 2.30pm).

Home Alone, Elf and Frozen 2 among free films for movie lovers at warm space this winter

Stockton Arc is offering a string of great films to watch as families stay warm during the cost of living crisis

WHAT'S ON By Jamie Smith
16:44, 23 NOV 2022

Bookmark



Catalyst

4.23 Catalyst have been working alongside partners to address inequalities and have secured a bid to the National Lottery Fund which is directly aimed at reducing inequalities. Catalyst is also currently recruiting a FSOT Co-ordinator. Catalyst's Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Directory also gives details of over 300 organisations in the (VCSE) sector in Stockton-on-Tees.

Cost of Living –next steps

4.24 Planned activity includes an ongoing quarterly newsletter for all employees and partners and work to develop the Cost of Living Hub. An up to date Cost of Living booklet will also be developed.

4.25 Cost of Living events are scheduled across the seven Community Partnership areas through a task and finish project between September 2023 and March 2024.

4.26 Cost of Living Network meetings are held bimonthly with Senior Officers from across directorates to ensure that the work reflects current priorities. Related projects include the Databank Project which will be developed to support the most vulnerable.

4.27 The Council has been nominated for an APSE award for Best Community and Neighbourhood Initiative.

4.28 Work is ongoing on an Anti-Poverty Action Plan to be agreed by Cabinet/Council in 2024. An Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment Toolkit is also being developed.

The Bread and Butter Thing

4.29



Introducing The Bread and Butter Thing



*** Save over £20 a week on your shopping**
*** New hub opening: 1.30pm, Tuesday 12 September**
At The Salvation Army, Palmerston Street,
Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 1NU



4.30 Opening in September 2023:

- Salvation Army, Palmerston Street, Stockton, TS18 1NU –Tuesdays @ 1.30pm [launches Tuesday 12 September]
- Victoria Park Community Hall, Peel Street, Thornaby, TS17 6HL –Mondays @ 1.30pm [launches Monday 18 September]

4.31 Discussions are ongoing with community partners and volunteer networks with a view to establishing the remaining three hubs by December 2023:

- Newtown Community Resource Centre, Durham Road, Stockton, TS19 0DE –Wednesdays @ 1.30pm

- St Andrew’s Methodist Church, Hardwick, TS19 8PH –Fridays @ 1.30pm
- Community venue in Billingham East (TBC) –Thursdays @ 1.30pm

4.32 It was confirmed that The Bread and Butter Thing scheme would be accessible to all residents who needed to access the hubs. The hub locations were selected based on evidence of where there was the greatest requirement for the service.

Warm Homes Healthy People (WHHP)

4.33 The Warm Homes Healthy People (WHHP) programme is a collaboration of partner organisations, managed by the Council’s Environment Team to deliver interventions that support affordable warmth and contribute to reducing fuel poverty. The funding comes from Public Health.

4.34 These assistance measures are targeted at the most vulnerable households, particularly those with the highest needs and whose health and wellbeing is more likely to be negatively impacted without intervention.

4.35 The programme is currently running for the thirteenth time, the main programme runs from October to March each year.

4.36 This year, the Council has also introduced a handyman initiative which will identify small energy efficiency measures which can be undertaken when visiting properties. These measures include providing LED lightbulbs, draft excluders, window repairs etc which all contribute to energy savings. The Council has also provided a proactive summer boiler servicing scheme, which runs from June to September.

4.37 The programme accepts self-referrals as well as referrals from front line workers who have identified concerns for the health and well-being of vulnerable persons through lack of heating and poor housing conditions.

4.38 A household experiences fuel poverty if they are on a low income and face high costs of keeping adequately warm and ensuring other basic energy services. Fuel poverty is driven by three main factors: household income, the current cost of energy and the energy efficiency of a home.

4.39 One in five UK households containing dependent children experienced fuel poverty in 2020. Rates of fuel poverty have increased since summer 2021, largely due to the increasing cost of fuel, which is predicted to continue to rise. By January 2023, it is estimated that 66 per cent, or 18 million households, in the UK will be in fuel poverty unless there are effective interventions to prevent this.

4.40 Homes that are cold due to fuel poverty exacerbate health inequalities. Cold homes can cause and worsen respiratory conditions, cardiovascular diseases, poor mental health, dementia, hypothermia and problems with childhood development. In some circumstances, health problems may be exacerbated to a degree that they may cause death.

4.41 In 2019, it was estimated the NHS spends at least £2.5 billion per year on treating illnesses that are directly linked to cold, damp and dangerous homes. Cold homes and fuel poverty contribute to the phenomenon of excess winter deaths. England saw an estimated 63,000 excess winter deaths in 2020–21. Estimates suggest that some 10 per cent of excess winter deaths are directly attributable to fuel poverty and 21.5 per cent are attributable to cold homes. England's excess winter deaths index is higher than the Northern European average.

Rates of Fuel Poverty

4.42 The estimate for Stockton-on-Tees 12.9% (10,816 households). The Estimate for North England 14.4% In the Tees Valley the estimates are:

- Darlington - 13.4%
- Hartlepool - 14.6%
- Middlesbrough 16.6%
- Redcar & Cleveland 14.3%

4.43 Stockton fuel poor households range from 30.5% in a Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) (12C) in Mandale & Victoria down to 3.4% in an Ingleby Barwick LSOA (23E).

What has been delivered?

4.44 Warm Homes Healthy People is the longest investment in an intervention Public Health have made. The scheme is popular with Elected Members, and all the staff delivering the scheme go out of their way to be as "flexible" as possible with customers. The officers receive regular commendations from customers.

4.45 Since 2012, the Council has supported 4,024 households across the Borough. 1156 boiler services/repairs have been conducted. 117 replacement boilers have been installed. This summer the Council's offer of boiler servicing to prevent winter breakdowns is very popular and has currently been taken up by 59 homes.

4.46 Stockton & District Advice and Information Service's (SDAIS) work on income maximisation has brought £5,364,446 of previously unclaimed benefit entitlement to vulnerable people across the Borough.

4.47 Warm Homes Healthy People continues to adapt to customers' needs and for season 13 (the current season) the Council has reduced the qualifying age criteria to 65 from 75.

4.48 In response to the Cost of Living crisis, the Council used a saving to commission SDAIS to deliver their element of the scheme during the spring and summer 2023. Savings from previous years have also been used to provide a new handyman service, when visiting properties to identify any other measures that can be provided to make the home more energy efficient. The Council also commissions SDAIS to deliver support dementia clients and their carers.

4.49 WHHP leaflets had been produced for those who did not have access to the internet. Information on the WHHP scheme was also included in Stockton News, and leaflets were distributed to a wide range of community spaces.

4.50 Those who used the WHHP scheme were mainly homeowners, however the Council was committed to assisting anyone in need. Cleveland Fire Brigade also provide emergency heating services, including electric heaters and blankets.

4.51 The Council dealt with every request directly through the WHHP scheme and Heating Ventilation Electrical Building Services (HVE Services) colleagues assisted with the installation of replacement boilers, if necessary.

4.52 Responses to requests were dealt with as soon as possible, and usually within twenty-four or forty-eight hours. Replacement boilers were usually installed within a week of a request. The Council ensured that residents were not left in a vulnerable.

Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF)

4.53 In October 2023, Select Committee received evidence from a Council Community Engagement Officer and Bright Minds Big Futures' (BMBF) Head of Community Safety.

4.54 BMBF had been involved in several projects in response to the ongoing issues associated with the cost of living. This included work with Tees Credit Union to develop a money management training programme for young people. The programme was available for schools, and youth groups. An online resource was also available. The programme was tailored for different age groups. Two schools have already utilised the programme.

4.55 The Borough's Member of Youth Parliament had been involved in the campaign for free school meals.

4.56 The Council's Community Engagement Team and BMBF have worked with three local primary schools to establish community pantries. This involved working with children for 6 weeks and activities included meal planning and soup making. The pantries were set up as a fundraising initiative for the school to remove the stigma of families accessing it as a food bank. Families were able to purchase 5 items for £1. Leaflets including information on further support available across the borough were included in each food pack.

4.57 A further example of BMBF's work in response to the Cost of Living was the 'pay as you feel' teddy bear stall at the Stockton Sparkles event. Donations of teddy bears were received, and young people were able to purchase a bear for a price they could afford or name a bear if they were unable to purchase a bear.

4.58 BMBF tried to be as inclusive as possible, and the group supported its young volunteers by providing food at group meetings and events and paid for travel expenses.

4.59 The 'pay as you prom' saving scheme was discussed as an option to assist parents and carers with planning for end of school proms.

Thrive Teesside

4.60 In October 2023, the Select Committee received evidence from the Manager of Thrive, Teesside, a local organisation.

4.61 The 'grassroots anti-poverty charity' was established in 2007, and was originally based in Newtown, Stockton and was now based in Norton. The charity worked with people on a one-to-one basis and focussed on the importance of lived experience.

4.62 Thriving Women, a project which was designed to give local women a voice through poetry was highlighted. A collection of poetry and essays was published as part of this project.

4.63 National anti-poverty work included involvement in the APLE Collective (founding member) and Poverty 2 Solutions.

4.64 Thrive worked to give a voice to people who felt silenced in local and national debates.

4.65 It was reported that the ongoing cost of living situation had exacerbated existing poverty issues. There had been an increase in mortality and long-term illnesses for those living in disadvantaged communities.

4.66 It was also reported that within the past twelve months, Thrive had experienced an increase in people asking for advice about debt, deductions in benefits, rent arrears, and problems with school costs, such as school uniform and school trips. Mothers had increasingly commented that they felt inadequate as parents because they could not provide for their children.

4.67 Some parents and carers could no longer afford to fund paid activities for children which they had previously struggled to afford.

4.68 Thrive had also experienced an increase in requests concerning mortgage difficulties. Staff were not trained to provide targeted mortgage support but assisted with referrals and signposting.

4.69 It was commented that the Cost of Living situation was also linked with an increase in issues with mental health.

4.70 A lack of access to online platforms increased some people's difficulties with accessing services and support.

4.71 Persistent cuts to local authority budgets across the country was raised as an issue of concern.

4.72 Further information on this organisation and its projects is available via the Thrive Teesside website, which can be accessed via the following link: <https://thrive-teesside.org.uk/>

4.73 In response to the evidence received, the Committee questioned if there was anything that the Council could do to improve its cost of living support. The importance of retaining printed leaflets and promoting information in print and in person as well as online was highlighted. It was also noted that ward Councillors were in a unique position to engage with residents and ask what specific support they needed.

4.74 The addition of toiletries was suggested as an improvement for the 'The Bread and Butter Thing' initiative.

4.75 Council officers confirmed that Thrive Teesside would be involved in the Council's anti-poverty strategy to ensure that the importance of lived experience was included.

School Uniforms Update

4.76 As requested, in November 2023, the Committee received an update on school uniform guidelines and the work of the Council in this area.

School Uniform: Scrutiny Recommendations

4.77

- 1) That Academy Trusts and Governing Bodies of Stockton Schools be asked to review their school uniform policies as a matter of urgency in consultation with parents and children taking account of the DfE advice to give the highest priority to cost.
- 2) That school governing bodies and leadership teams review the support they provide to families struggling to meet uniform costs taking account of the ideas and initiatives in place across Stockton schools gathered as part of this scrutiny exercise.
- 3) That all support provided by schools is clearly published on school websites alongside their uniform policies.
- 4) That improved co-ordination/ signposting of community and school-based support is co-ordinated through the new Community Partnerships.
- 5) That Government is urged to pass legislation to put the DfE best practice guidance on a statutory footing and support is sought from local MPs towards this end.
- 6) That the findings from the scrutiny review and the best practice from the school survey be shared with all Stockton Schools and reinforced at appropriate forums.

DfE policy on school uniform

4.78 The DfE produced statutory guidance on the cost of school uniforms which schools must have regard to when developing and implementing their school uniform policy.

4.79 This guidance requires schools to publish their uniform policy on their website. The published uniform policy should be easy to understand and, where a school has a school uniform, should:

- clearly state whether an item is optional or required
- make clear if the item will only be worn at certain times of the year (for example, if it's summer or winter uniform)
- make clear whether a generic item will be accepted or if a branded item is required

- make clear whether an item can only be purchased from a specific retailer or if it can be purchased more widely, including from second-hand retailers.

4.80 *“It is for the governing body of a school to decide . . . what (the school uniform policy) should be. This flows from the duties placed upon all governing bodies by statute to ensure that school policies promote good behaviour and discipline amongst the pupil body. It is also for the governing body to decide how the uniform should be sourced. The Department strongly encourages schools to have a uniform as it can play a valuable role in contributing to the ethos of a school and setting an appropriate tone.”*

Best Practice and Resources

4.81 The School Uniforms Guide, produced by the Child Poverty Action Group can be accessed via the following link:
https://cpag.org.uk/system/files_force/files/page/Final-School-Uniforms-Guide_0.pdf

Content of the School Uniforms Guide

4.82 The School Uniforms Guide covered new legislation, advice on updating school uniform policies and setting up a pre-loved school uniform shop. Promoting pre-loved uniform provision and case studies are also included within the guide.

Considerations

- 4.83 The following considerations should be noted regarding the updated legislation and guidance on school uniform policies:
- The impact of stipulating variations in uniform
 - Avoiding frequent changes to minimise financial impact
 - How the costs affect different groups of pupils
 - The views of parents and pupils
 - Avoiding additional uniform requirements for extra-curricular
 - The use of branded items is kept to a minimum
 - Parents are not required to purchase multiple expensive items
 - Contracts and arrangements with suppliers help parents get value for money.

Questions for governors/ trustees

4.84

- 1) Based on this information, what changes should be made to our uniform policy to ensure that it is affordable to families and reflects the circumstances of the communities we serve?
- 2) How are stakeholders –including pupils and their families –being consulted on our uniform requirements? Have we been proactive in seeking views from all groups?
- 3) What are parents telling us about the impact of our uniform policy on them?
- 4) Does the information/data on compliance with our uniform policy suggest any issues with affordability and inclusivity?
- 5) How do we support families to comply with our uniform policy and ensure that issues of non-compliance are dealt with sensitively?
- 6) How do we positively promote our second-hand uniform provision and remove any stigma parents may attach to it?
- 7) How are we using good procurement practice and developing relationships with uniform suppliers to ensure costs are kept low?

Poverty Proofing the School Day (Children North East)

4.85 Further information on Poverty Proofing the School Day, and contact details for the regional officer, are below:

Lorna Nicoll
Poverty Proofing the School Day Team Manager
Children North East
07809215387
Lorna.nicoll@children-ne.org.uk
@povertyproofcne
www.povertyproofing.co.uk

Dissemination

4.86 Policy changes and best practice guidance have been circulated to headteachers and senior leaders at the termly Closing the Gap sessions, Education Matters, and Pupil Premium Leadership training forums.

4.87 Information has also been disseminated to school governors at half termly briefings and Pupil Premium Governor training sessions.

4.88 Updates to school uniform policies have also been included on agendas at wider forums, such as the Education Improvement Service, Cost of Living network, Child Poverty and Fairer Stockton. Council Officers have also worked with Catalyst on this area.

4.89 In response to evidence received, The Committee raised concerns about a perceived general lack of support from school governors to make school uniforms more affordable. It was acknowledged that the Council was restricted in its influence on academies and free schools.

4.90 For maintained schools, an annual check of school websites was undertaken by Council officers to ensure that schools were compliant with current legislation and school uniform policy was included in this check.

4.91 Officers explained that the crucial role of school governors was to challenge and support school policies. Officers agreed that this was a continual process and regularly updated governors on school uniform and the promotion of 'pre-loved' uniforms. The Council also continued to run its termly 'Closing the Gap' sessions to ensure governors remained well informed.

4.92 Catalyst had carried out an online mapping exercise to catalogue the different services available to recycle uniform and purchase/obtain pre-loved uniforms. The possibility of opening a pre-loved uniform shop in Stockton Town Centre had also been discussed.

Stockton-on-Tees Food Power Network: Stockton-on-Tees Community Food Leaflets
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4.93 Stockton-on Tees Food Power Network has produced six-page information leaflets including details of Foodbanks, pantries, free or low-cost hot food options currently available in the Borough. The leaflets have been viewed 20,000+ online. The interactive map has been viewed 12,000+ times online.

4.94 A copy of the latest leaflet (October 2023) is attached as appendix 1.

Catalyst/ Food Power Network

4.95 Catalyst is the VCSE infrastructure organisation for Stockton-on-Tees with 205 members, but the services are available to all VCSE partners. In 2022/23, Catalyst held 60 1:1 appointments (funding and other support), ran 24 training courses, facilitated 43 forums and represented the sector on 9 strategic Boards. The organisation also sent a weekly e-bulletin to 1000+ subscribers and disbursed £1,200,000 to the VCSE sector.

Partnerships

4.96 Catalyst’s partnerships include:

- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, NHS, PCC
- Food Power Network
- Community Mental Health Transformation (Lived Experience Forum)
- Youth United Stockton Alliance
- Health and Well-Being Forum
- Stockton Climate Action Network
- Volunteer Coordinators Group
- Roseworth Big Local
- HEP/HAF Providers Network
- Youth Providers Network

What is the Stockton-on-Tees Food Power Network?

4.97

Who we are:

A network of over 45 local organisations

Foodbanks, community pantries, ecoshops & support services

Working together in Stockton-on-Tees.

Our aims:

- Tackling food poverty
- Produce healthy & sustainable food
- Build community knowledge and skills to promote healthier lifestyles
- Reduce food waste locally

Our SFPN electric van:



Collecting surplus food from supermarkets

Delivering to food support services



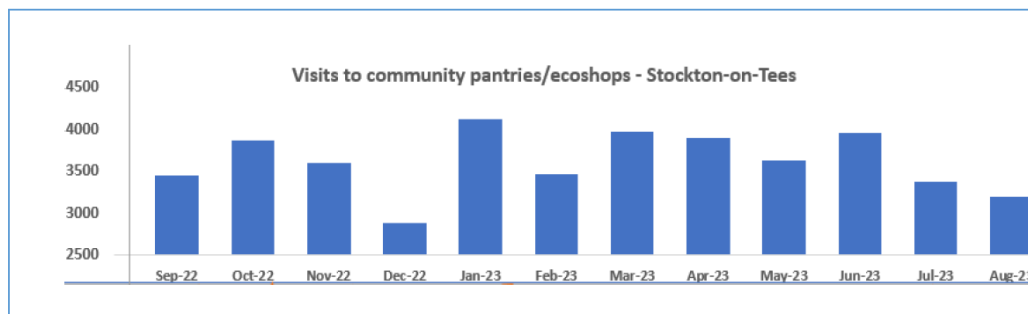


Foodbanks	Community Pantries	The Bread and Butter Thing
Works to alleviate food poverty	Works to alleviate food poverty	Works to alleviate food poverty
Prepacked food parcels are free of charge	Food items are sold at a discounted price, e.g. £1 for 8 items. Customer can choose the items.	Prepacked food bags sold at a fixed, discounted price. Three bags sold for £8.50 (worth approx. £25 if bought in a supermarket)
Referral required to access food parcels	No referral needed, not means-tested	No referral needed, not means-tested
Designed to be short-term, crisis point help	Designed to be a longer-term solution to food poverty	Designed to be a longer-term solution to food poverty, often used as a 'top-up shop'

Most reliance ←
→ Least reliance

Community pantries in Stockton-on-Tees Borough – usage statistics

4.98



(Sept 22 - Aug 23)

Average number of visits experienced by all **community pantries**:

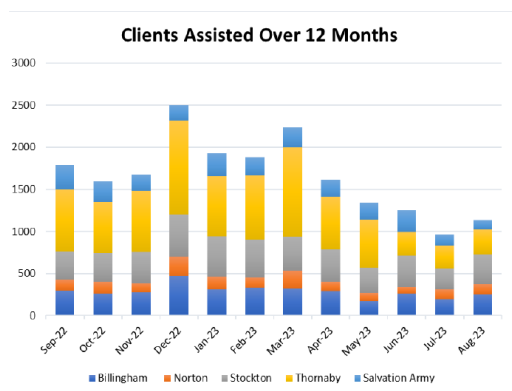
3615 visits per month, average

Trends in demand

- ↑ Increase after Christmas (Jan)
- ↑ Increase after new school term starts (Sept/Oct)
- ↓ Reduction throughout the summer holidays (July/Aug)

Foodbanks in Stockton-on-Tees Borough – usage statistics

4.99



Average number of clients supported with food parcels per month by **all foodbanks in the Borough** Sept 22- Aug 23:

1660 clients supported per month

Trends in demand

- ↑ Increase during and after Christmas (Dec/Jan)
- ↑ Increase at end of summer holidays, and new school term starts (Aug/Sept)
- ↓ Reduction before and during *first half* of summer holidays (June/July)



Providing additional support for food support services

4.100 In Summer 2023, a local pilot scheme was launched for a local produce donation scheme with Oxbridge & Spennithorne allotments. The aim was to establish a produce donation scheme. This enabled allotment holders to donate their surplus produce to local causes. Accessible donation boxes were provided, and the scheme included buy-in and promotion by Stockton Allotment Association. Donations were collected and delivered weekly by volunteers using the Stockton Food Power Network electric van.

4.101 Approximately 50 large crates of fresh produce were donated to Sprouts & Hebron Church Foodbank between July and September 2023. By Catalyst’s estimations, this donation supplemented 500 food parcels. The project was praised and named a success by the allotment association and a repeat of the scheme was approved for next summer.

Food support services & the Cost of Living Stockton: How food support services support residents with the Cost of Living (CoL)

4.102 Foodbanks offer crisis-point support to residents feeling the acute effects of the Cost of Living. (62% of referrals to Catalyst's three local *Trussell Trust* foodbanks are due to 'rising costs of essentials'). Community pantries and Bread & Butter Thing Food Hubs offer longer-term support, while reducing reliance on foodbanks. They alleviate the burden of rising costs in the Borough's communities.

Support to the VCSE Sector

4.103 For the Reducing Inequalities Support Fund, £156,000 allocated to 12 organisations to reduce inequalities. This fund is part of the Reducing Inequalities Project which aims to reduce health inequalities in Stockton-on-Tees. £30,000 is to be distributed across 2 years and groups can bid for up to £1000. This fund allows organisations to expand an existing project by either launching in a new area or increasing capacity for new people to attend. So far, £7500 has been distributed, including to community pantries, a martial arts group, and local Men's Sheds.

Grantfinder online tool

4.104 Local organisations can come in for an appointment to look for funding for projects and core funding. Examples include a food bank moving to larger premises and looking for ways to subsidise costs for service users. Catalyst's online 'Grantfinder' tool enables organisations to search for funding.

Fairer Stockton-on-Tees Coordinator –Tackling inequalities

4.105 The following projects are included within the remit of the Fairer Stockton-on-Tees Coordinator:

- Community Spaces
- Thornaby Warm Welcome
- Clarences –Working Group and Support
- Here to Help Events and Stockton Wellbeing Festival
- Reducing Inequalities National Lottery Project -12 organisations
- Linking organisations together
- Information sharing via mailing list
- Fun Fridays in John Whitehead Park
- Developing a Bike Recycling Initiative
- Supporting the development of a Volunteer Driver Scheme

Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF)/ Holiday Enrichment Programme

4.106 The Holiday Enrichment Programme has provided free activities including trips, experiences, and most importantly hot meals, snacks and additional food to go home with to over 2,500 young people across summer. This eased the financial burden for families and helped with the pressure of not only food poverty but the cost of childcare/days out. All of these are continuously rising with the Cost of Living crisis.

4.107 The number of non Free School Meal families accessing our services increased by 10% from Summer 2022 to Summer 2023 and is continuously increasing. This shows the need in provision for those on the breadline and not currently claiming benefits. Young people are using HAF as a gateway to further free/ low-cost provision

in term time, with providers offering those they identify as significantly in need additional support and membership into their clubs.

Roseworth Big Local

4.108 Through the Roseworth Big Local project funding has been obtained for a Stockton & District Advice & Information Service (SDAIS) Worker to support the local residents. Support has also been provided to the Eastern Ravens afterschool club & holiday programmes for non free school meals children. Funding has also been provided for an Eastern Ravens Trust Link Worker to support and direct to services of young families. Other achievements include funding a Community Garden through Cultivate Tees Valley, supporting young people to attend the National Young Carers Festival, the mobilisation of Kiara Hall Community Space, supporting St Chad's & Community Pantry and awarding Rosebud Grants – Hardwick & Roseworth Scouts.

Roseworth
Big Local

Roseworth Big Local Advice Service

Housing costs are going to increase a lot this year, and with other prices going up as well, making sure you can manage your bills is more important than ever. To help, Stockton & District Advice & Information Service (Citizens Advice) has set up a new Advice Service to give you specialist and independent advice.

The Advice Service is:

- Independent
- Free
- Confidential
- Impartial



Call us now and we will:

- telephone you back with free and independent advice
- make an appointment for you to see an adviser
- arrange a Home Visit as necessary

 Stockton & District Advice & Information Service

Roseworth Big Local
Advice Line
Tel: 01642 626135



Charitable funding sources in 2022-23

4.109 A Food Power Network Coordinator has been funded through the National Lottery & County Durham Community Foundation. Grants of approximately £1500 have been brought in by the (Stockton Food Power Network) SFPN Project Coordinator to buy food and for food-related projects. Various Lottery grants have also been secured to support community needs.

4.110 In terms of foodbanks & community pantries, Catalyst have worked with the Trussell Trust and businesses and have received public donations, supermarket surplus and other donations. Volunteers have assisted with roles as van drivers, community pantry and foodbank personnel, and in Citizens Advice. Clothing donations have been received for uniform schemes and for charities collecting winter clothes.

Conclusions

4.111 The Cost of living remains a significant priority for partners in Stockton. Foodbank & pantry donations have significantly reduced. It has become more difficult to recruit and retain volunteers for food support services. Additional collective promotion has also been required. Foodbanks, community pantries and The Bread and Butter Thing are complementary.

4.112 On average, at least 4428 individuals are supported every month by foodbanks, community pantries and the Bread and Butter Thing in the Borough. Many are also supported by free/low-cost hot food services, such as lunch clubs. Compared to last year, local Trussell Trust foodbanks are experiencing 30% increase in new clients, and 50% decrease in donations. In the first half of 2022 compared to 2023, community pantries are experiencing an approximately 18% increase in visits. There is huge amounts of activity in VCSE sector and statutory organisations which is being effectively coordinated.

What can the Council learn from the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector?

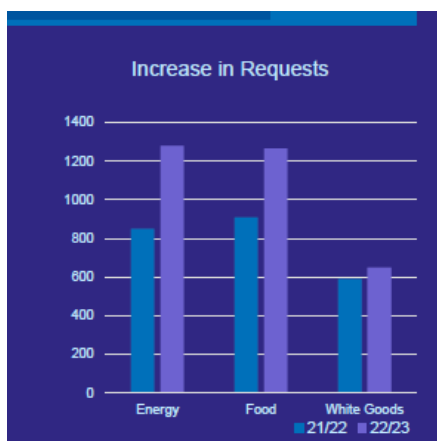
4.113 The VCSE sector includes small, focused organisations with a reach into specific demographic groups with specific needs –not ‘hard to reach’. The VCSE sector has access to volunteers, and to funding streams which others don’t, making the sector very efficient and effective. The sector is also good at engaging with, and disseminating information to, partners and communities, and building trust. Collaborative and partnership working is particularly effective in the Borough. The VCSE sector is grassroots, agile, and can identify gaps and respond quickly and creatively.

Stockton on Tees Borough Council: Welfare Support Approach in response to The Cost of Living

4.114 In November 2023, the Select Committee received a presentation from the Council’s Head of Revenue, Benefits and Welfare.

The Impact of The Cost of Living

4.115 In 2022/23 there was a record demand for advice and support. The Council received 11,600 requests for support versus 9,600 in 2021/22. Demand had increased for food, energy, and white goods. Housing debt was also increasing. Every ward in the Borough has been impacted by the Cost of Living situation.



Financial Support

4.116



2022 Financial Support at a Glance

4.117 In 2022, 17,000 households were assisted with Council Tax Reduction. 7,500 were assisted with Housing Benefits and 679 awards were granted as Discretionary Housing Payment. There were 1,200 food awards and 325 white goods awards. In terms of energy, 814 residents were supported, plus vouchers were provided to 17,000 households.

Income Maximisation

4.118



2022 Income Maximisation at a Glance

4.119 In 2022, there were 1173 Basic Benefit Checks, 501 Applications for Welfare Benefits, 74 Decisions overturned at appeal and £3.6m additional income raised for residents.

Internal and External Partners

4.120 Internal partners include Adults, Childrens, Fairer Stockton on Tees, Housing.

4.121 External Partners include Infinity Partnership, Stockton District Advice and Information Service, Department for Work and Pensions, Money and Pensions Service and social and private landlords.

Engaging with Residents and Staff

4.122 The following methods are used to engage with residents and council staff:

- Newsletters, KYIT
- Website, Social Media
- Stockton News, Press Releases
- Using Data for Direct Awards
- Targeted Campaigns
- Referrals from Partners
- Staff Cost of Living Events
- Merged Service – council tax collection, benefit and support
- Large Employer Events
- Outreach Worker
- Event Attendance
- Care Home Drop In

Employment & Training Hub

4.123 In November 2023, the Select Committee received a presentation from the Council's Economic Development Manager and Employment and Training Hub Manager.

Skills & Employment: Employment & Training Hub

4.124 Over 500 people have been into work since the Hub launched in Feb 2022
Large Recruitment Events, over 300 attendees per event
Sector Based Work Programmes –Care Academy
'Work Ready Wednesday' support

Hub on Tour Pilot

4.125 The aim of the Hub on Tour Pilot was to reach residents across the Borough and events were held in 10 locations across the Borough, including cafes, churches and schools. Locations were selected to partner with the existing 'warm spaces' provision. The pilot will be extended over the winter 2023/2024. The offer included CV support, advice, interview tips, and promotion of the hub delivery. In total, over 70 people registered via the 'Hub on Tour'.

New Portal

4.126 The portal, which launched in July 2023, allows residents to access support 24/7. The facilities for residents included CV upload function, vacancy search and apply online. The portal also allows residents to register and search for courses and provides resources and advice. Businesses can upload their vacancies directly. There have been over 5000 'hits' since the portal launched.

Working with businesses

4.127 Employment and Training Hub staff work with businesses on what the hub can offer and have also hosted larger recruitment campaigns utilising the hub. Staff also work with residents to get them 'job ready'.

What's next?

4.128 Future plans for the Hub include the creation of 3 full time roles and an expansion of the 'Hub on Tour' & Community offer. The Hub's recruitment framework and portal are also to be developed.

Learning and Skills: Cost of Living Response

4.129 In November 2023, the Committee received evidence from the Council's Adult Learning and Skills Manager.

Service Overview

4.130 In 2022/2023, there were over 3600 adult learning enrolments. Apprenticeship Funding amounted to £200,000 which equated to over 60 apprentices. Multiply Funding amounted to £300,000 which equated to over 300 enrolments. £1.6 million was granted from the Tees Valley Combined Authority for the Adult Education Budget, of which £675,000 was allocated to Adult Skills and £940,000 was allocated to Learning for Inclusion.

Learning for Inclusion

4.131 Funding was ringfenced to Local Authorities focused on people who are disadvantaged and least likely to participate. The aim was to widen participation and transform people's destinies as well as to improve confidence and a willingness to engage in learning. The initiative aimed to address the specific needs of adults within a Local Authority area such as isolation, social exclusion, mental health and well-being and to improve and develop stronger community engagement. It also provided an opportunity for learning that supported voluntary and third sector organisations to adults in disadvantaged areas.

Cost of Living Responsive Courses

4.132 Cook The Costs was a collaborative SBC and community partnership course, which provided one-pot and slow cookers to residents and taught them the skills and knowledge to produce cheap yet nutritious meals. More than 20 courses were held across warm spaces / community venues including Family Hubs such as Billingham, Stockton, Redhill and Thornaby.

4.133 Other catering and nutrition courses designed to support people manage their budgets in response to rising food and energy costs included Air Fryer Recipes, Family

Dinner Favourites on a Budget, Festive Cooking on a Budget and Skills to Pay The Bills.

Wider Examples of Inclusive Courses

4.134 Health and Wellbeing Programmes included:

- Live Well – Stay Well
- Man Made – Wellness for Men
- Art for Wellbeing
- Mindfulness and Meditation
- ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages
- Community Interpreting – supporting community integration
- Steps into Volunteering

Wider Examples of Skills Courses

4.135 An example of a Sector Based Work Academies (SWAPs) was the Care Academy delivered in partnership with the Employment and Training Hub with guaranteed interviews linked to local job vacancies.

4.136 Examples of Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications in priority sectors qualifications are:

- Health and Social Care
- Diploma in Care
- Medication in Adult Care
- Mental Health
- Dementia Care
- English, Maths and ICT Courses to support core life and work skills

Cost of Living Future Plans

4.137 Future plans include work to address digital poverty through work with the Hope Foundation to facilitate access to FurbedIT programme for learners to access laptop/tablet device. Work with national charity, Good Things Foundation, is also planned to facilitate access for learners to access national data bank (6-12 months). Work with Teesside University is also planned to deliver a Skills pilot to provide learners with digital skills to use devices and access services.

Local Government Association(LGA) Presentation

4.138 In November 2023, the Committee received a presentation from a representative of the Local Government Association (LGA) during additional evidence gathering session held via Microsoft Teams.

4.139 An assessment of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's (SBC) Cost of Living work had been undertaken. This encompassed Fairer Stockton-on-Tees and Catalyst projects, Case Studies for LGA – warm spaces and support for children, Child Poverty action plan / scrutiny review, and Local data and research e.g. North East Child Poverty Commission.

4.140 It was stated that SBC was already a sector-leader, and needed to consider how it could accelerate learning and delivery. Therefore, what other councils were doing, how cost of living issues were changing needed, and the priorities for the public sector and LGA were to be considered. It was also important to keep informed of national policy, case studies and research.

4.141 Other areas to consider in terms of cost of living support included moving from 'crisis' to 'prevention' and whether responses needed to be time limited or long term. It was also necessary to understand where cost of living response sat within the council's overall strategic approach to community leadership and service delivery and if there were any new approaches which could be delivered.

4.142 Cross-cutting and strategic considerations included putting equality and financial / economic / social wellbeing at the heart of council services - without 'boiling the ocean'. The value of lived experience was also noted. Service planning such as utilising Community Hubs, referral pathways and ensuring that there was 'no wrong front-door' was also highlighted. Of course, a balance between an need with a longer-term plan had to be sought and funding and resources were also integral to strategic planning.

4.143 Other specific areas highlighted included income maximisation and benefit take-up and the role of the local government in the welfare system. Linking financial wellbeing to housing, employment, health was also highlighted.

4.144 The LGA's Cost of Living work included employment and benefits for disabled people; fair and effective debt management; the future of 'local welfare'. It was argued that it was essential to keep inequality on the agenda and learn from the past and it was hoped that national government would provide guidance on a long-term and strategic approach to poverty prevention.

4.145 It was noted that the LGA was a cross-party organisation, so its message on issues, such as the Cost of Living, did reflect the views of the public sector as a whole.

4.146 It was expressed that it was expected that the current fall in inflation would lead to a 'national narrative' that the Cost of Living crisis was over but this narrative was not reflective to experiences 'on the ground'.

4.147 Measures to deal with the Cost of Living should not be described as short-term fix because the situation was more complex and some of the associated problems are 'entrenched'.

4.148 Difficult decisions must be made in the public sector and Councils are having to look at the resources already available because funding has been reduced.

4.149 The LGA advocated that Councils approached the Cost of Living Situation with an increased lived experience/people centred approach.

4.150 Councils across the country varied in their approach to the Cost of Living. Some Councils embedded support/resources within every service whereas others had created dedicated Cost of Living teams.

4.151 The Committee were reminded that the LGA website includes a 'Cost of Living Hub'.

Tees Credit Union

4.152 In November 2023, the Committee received evidence from the Chief Executive of the Tees Credit Union during an additional evidence gathering session held via Microsoft Teams.

4.153 It was noted that an increasing number of employed, as opposed to unemployed, residents had been applying for loans from the credit union.

4.154 There had been an increase in applicants for the hardship fund.

4.155 There had been an increase in arrears from customers and the union had put aside additional money to cover this.

4.156 The union had been doing a lot of work to stop loan sharks in the local area and it was highlighted that it was important to inform the public that the credit union should be used instead of loan sharks.

4.157 It was acknowledged that individuals did not feel comfortable talking about arrears but the credit union urged customers to get in touch because there were processes in place to support people in managing their debts.

4.158 SBC was recognised as the best Council that the Credit Union worked.

4.159 The work of SBC staff in encouraging staff members to open savings accounts via the salary sacrifice scheme was commended.

4.160 The issue of memberships numbers declining was raised. Roughly 899 members had been lost across the Moneywise organisation in the previous year. The organisation was trying to reach workers in different industries for payroll savers, for example, social care workers, taxi drivers, local small businesses.

4.161 The Committee confirmed its commitment to signposting residents to the Tees Credit Union to assist with increasing membership numbers.

SBC: Customer Services and Digital

4.162 In December 2023, the Committee received a report on the Cost of Living work of the Council's Customer Services and Digital teams.

4.163 ***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?***

Customer Services and Digital and Web Teams have responded through the co-ordinated provision of services, promotion and signposting customers. This has been achieved through working in strong partnership with internal Council services and external partners and agencies, particularly colleagues in Libraries and Information, Revenues and Benefits and Fairer Stockton on Tees.

Customer Services

4.164 In response to customers who come through via the Customer Contact Centres, Telephone lines and email, Customer Services provide direct support and promote and signpost customers to various support schemes, services and charities as follows:

- We have worked in partnership with the Money Advise Network to train our Customer Service Advisors to enable us to directly refer customers who would benefit from this advice
- Assisted customers to apply for extra support who are adversely affected by the change to Council Tax support schemes.

- Increased support for customers to complete financial statements and make payment arrangements for Council Tax where they are struggling to pay
- Eligibility checks, advice and guidance for Warm Homes Healthy People (Summer and Winter Schemes)
- Provide support and advice regarding Household Support Fund
- Supported customers to obtain the Energy rebate payments
- Promotion and signposting to Warm Spaces (Community Spaces)
- Promotion and guidance for the Big Community Switch
- Promotion of the 'Bread and Butter Thing', including posters in Customer Service Centres
- Promotion of the Infinity Financial Inclusion Leaflet (Available in centres)
- Signposting to the Citizen's Advice Bureau where appropriate
- Signposting to the Stockton on Tees Food Power network
- Signposting and promoting Billingham Town Council food vouchers at Christmas, free meals for children, Period poverty, uniform exchange
- Signposting to the following pages on the Council website:
 - o Food Insecurity and Poverty Webpage
 - o Cost of living support Webpage
 - o Fairer Stockton on Tees Webpage

Digital Services

4.165

- Development and implementation of online booking solutions for Holidays Are Fun (HAF) working with Children's Services and Catalyst to deliver solutions for providers and parents.
- Development and implementation of online Household Support Fund Solution
- Development and implementation of online sign-up solution for Warm Spaces (renamed to community spaces).
- Development and implementation of a GOSS template to allow search and filtering solution and introduction of mapping to identify locations of Warm Spaces

4.166 ***How has advice and support been communicated to residents and SBC staff?***

- KYIT
- Stockton News
- SBC Website
- Cost of living support intranet page
- Cost of living Newsletter
- Social Media
- Communication via Management meetings
- Email signature promotion
- Advertisement boards in town centres
- Seasonal Newsletters

4.167 ***Can this be improved?***

- MyCouncil - Newsletter
- Use TVs in Customer Service Centres to promote help and advice
- Targeted messages on phones lines during hold periods

4.168 *What are the main 'cost of living' issues facing residents? How have these changed over time?*

- Change to the Council Tax scheme has impacted on residents
- Rent Increases
- Mortgage increase
- Council Tax increase
- Food
- Energy Bills
- Fuel prices

4.169 *In what ways has the Cost of Living crisis impacted on staff retention and recruitment?*

The job role of a Customer Service Advisor has changed significantly since before the pandemic. Staff are supporting more customers with their mental health and financial situations as well as their service enquiry. Call handling times and call wait times have increased as a result.

Staff sometimes find it difficult to switch off after work often thinking about calls they have dealt with during the day.

There has been an increase in customers saying they are going to harm themselves.

We have experienced a high turnover of Customer Services staff who deal with Council Tax, Housing Benefits, Back on Track and Welfare Support. This has had an impact on our capacity to respond to customers and as a result call wait times have increased.

4.170 *How have SBC staff been supported if they are struggling financially and mentally as a result of the Cost of Living crisis?*

Staff have been provided with training to help them deal with customers in crisis and distress.

Staff have been signposted to the MIND service and encouraged to attend the Council's personal resilience training.

Staff have been granted additional short breaks to help relieve the pressure of the difficult conversations with customers.

SBC: Human Resources

4.171 In December 2023, the Committee received evidence relating to the work of the Council's HR team on employee benefits and support. The Council employees around 3,200 people, and two thirds of those employees live in the Borough.

4.172 *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. The Council continues 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.

4.173 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

The Council continues to assess other options to communicate with its employees.

4.174 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.

4.175 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. The Vivup website also signposts employees to financial help through Ask Bill.

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. Work has also been undertaken with community services on men's health and wellbeing which included financial wellbeing. The Council has recently won the LGC Award for Best Wellbeing Initiative.

A table outlining Employee Benefits and Initiatives is attached as appendix 2.

Unite the Union

4.176 In December 2023, the Committee received evidence from the Regional Officer, Unite the Union.

4.177 It was noted that there had been an increase in signposting to mental health services.

4.178 There had also been an increase in enquiries regarding loans over the past few years.

4.179 It had been reported that lower paid workers, especially cleaners, had been undertaking more than one job. There were also reports that those with more than one job still needed to use foodbanks and pantries.

4.180 SBC, as an organisation, provided a 'good level of support' compared to other organisations.

4.181 At one of its offices, the union provided help with CV writing, interview techniques and suits and makeup were available for those in need to use for interviews.

4.182 Upcoming projects included a workers uniform exchange and a baby equipment bank.

4.183 Unite Community was highlighted as a community initiative to campaign for a more equal society.

Stockton & District Advice & Information Service (SDAIS): **Cost of Living Crisis**

4.184 In December 2023, the Committee received a presentation from representatives from the Stockton & District Advice & Information Service (SDAIS).

4.185 **How has SBC responded to Cost of Living by working with external partners and agencies?**

The Council has undertaken income maximisation work with SDAIS and Infinity partners, resulting in £1,349,799 of unclaimed benefits being secured between Oct and Dec 2022. The Council has also worked with SDAIS to establish the Schools Advice Project which has been rolled out to 6 schools so far. In addition, through the Community Spaces Development project an extra £10,000 has been secured by SDAIS from energy suppliers. Other examples include, inter-agency referrals between The Council's Welfare Support team and SDAIS (more than 18 other departments) and the Older Persons Advice Project in partnership with Home Care Support services.

4.186 **How has advice and support been communicated to residents and SBC staff?**

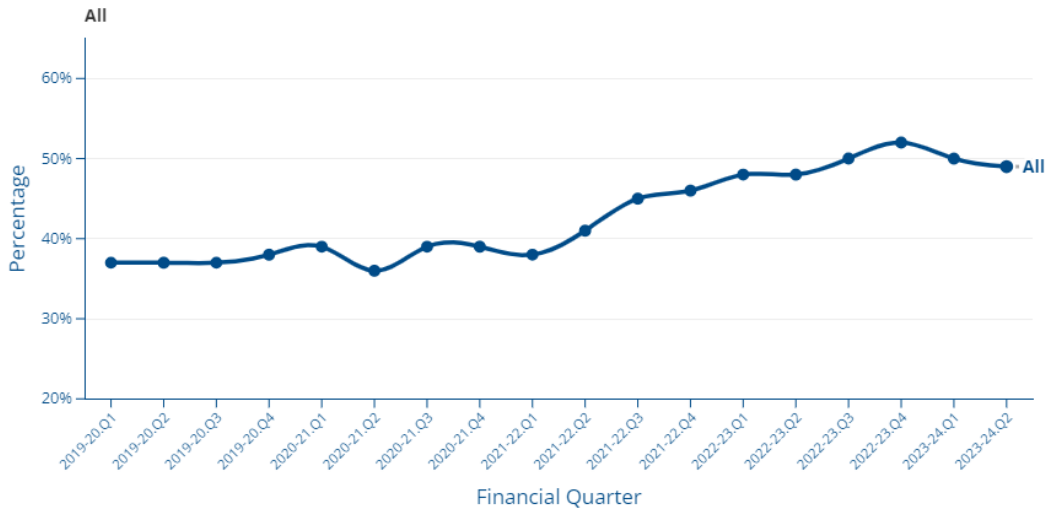
Information material has been circulated, such as the Cost of Living Support booklet, in venues such as banks/building societies. Material on Winter Wellbeing Support and Energy costs has also been circulated.

Advice and support have also been provided to residents at Here to Help events and market stalls, including a stall managed by SDAIS and SBC Environment team. Direct communication has been provided to SDAIS clients on assistance such as the Household Support Fund. The Infinity & Housing, Neighbourhood & Affordable Warmth Partnerships have also been utilised.

It was noted that SBC's response to the cost of living situation was far better than other Local Authorities.

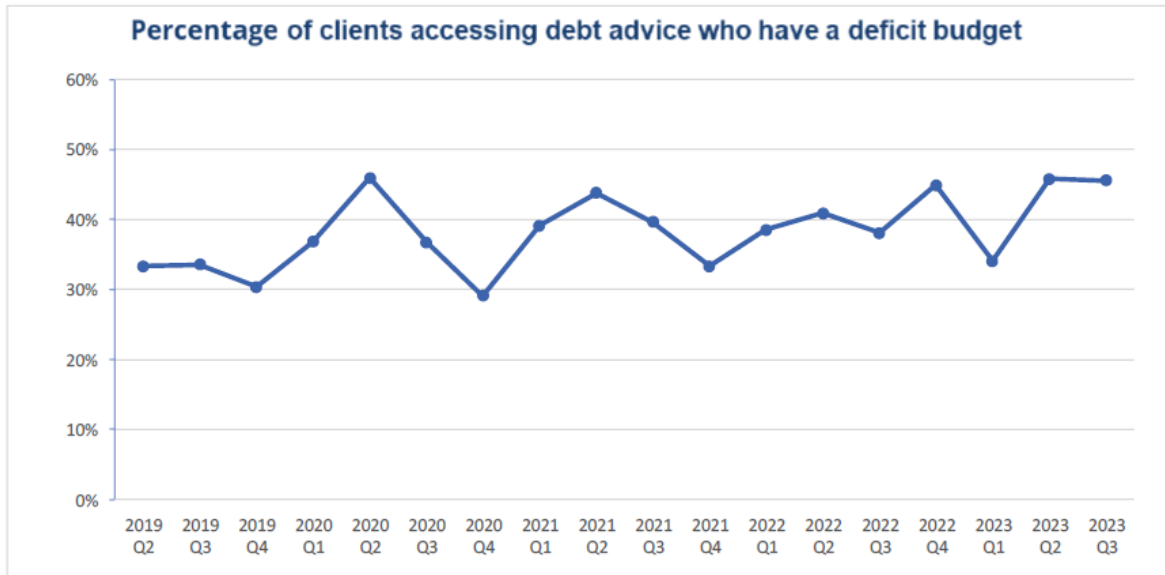
National Picture

4.187 The graph below depicts the percentage of clients accessing debt advice who have a deficit budget. Half of the people SDAIS help with debt advice are in a negative budget. Someone is in a negative budget when their necessary expenditure exceeds their income.



Local Picture

4.188 The local picture shows similar trends to the national picture but with more dramatic variations, this is probably due to smaller numbers. In most recent quarters, 46% of clients have a deficit budget.



How do Cost of Living issues vary across groups?

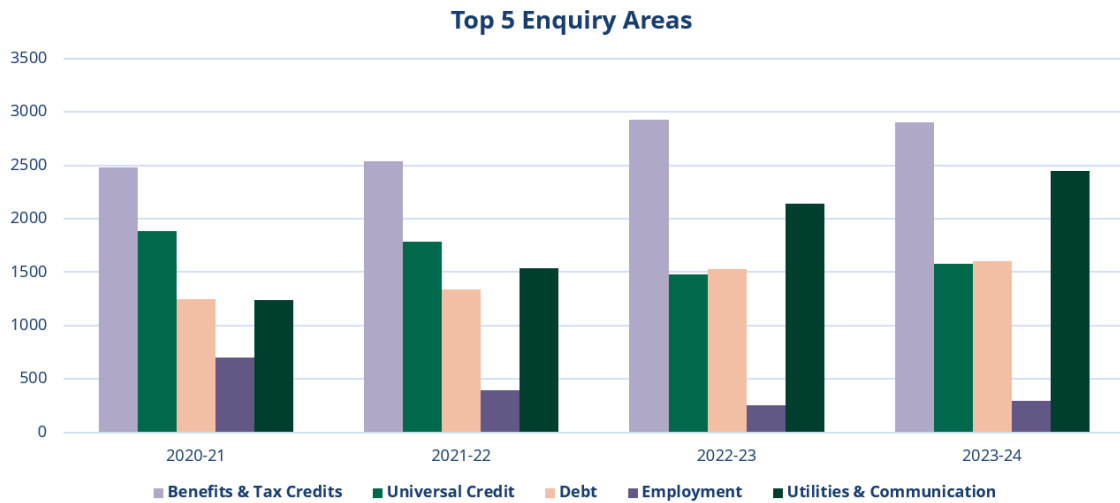
4.189 Graphs providing data on average monthly surplus among debt clients by group are attached as appendix 3.

Local Picture

4.190 Of those in deficit, the average amount of the deficit is £218per month. The average monthly income is £1,409. The average monthly rent is £479 compared to £381 per month in 2019-20 (this is a 25% increase). The average grocery spend is £365 compared to £284 in 2019-20 (this is a 28% increase).

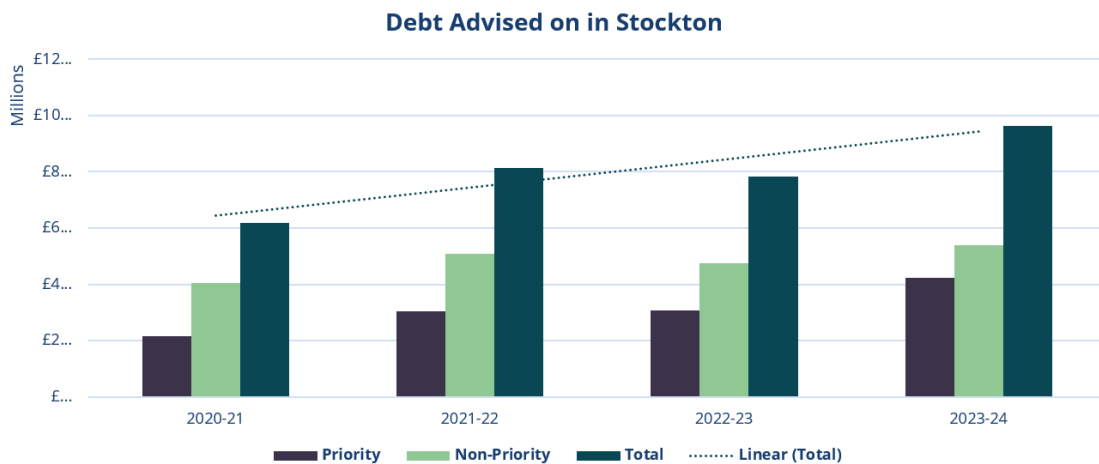
Local Picture – Top 5 Enquiry Areas

4.191 In 2021-2022, utilities (i.e. energy) overtook debt as the third biggest enquiry area. 2022-2023 was the busiest ever year for utilities, overtaking Universal Credit as the second biggest enquiry area. The complete 2023 data is incomplete but utilities are still on track to be the second biggest enquiry area.



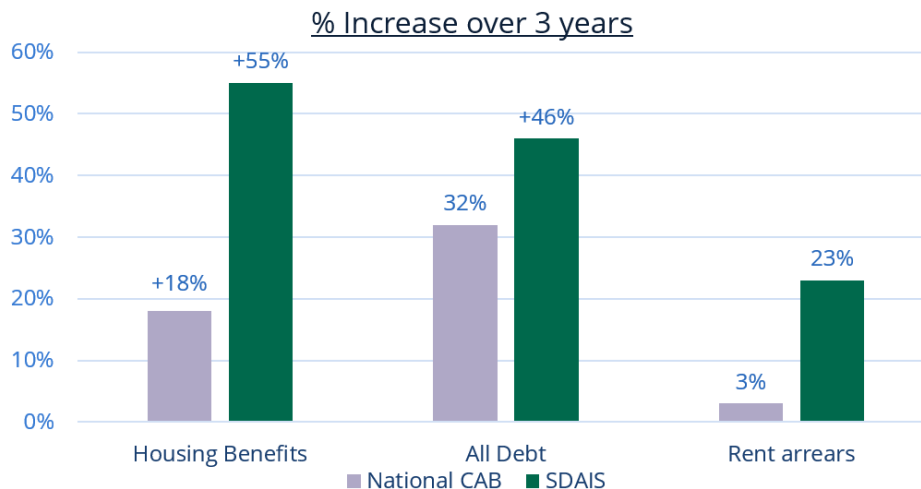
Debt Advised on

4.192 Already this year, SDAIS has seen more priority debt than any time in the last 4 years. The total projected debt is £9.6million, which is over £1million higher than any previous year.



**Cost of Living – sample enquiries
National v Local Increase over 3 years – Q2**

4.193



How have SBC staff been supported through Cost of Living crisis?

4.194 SBC staff have been able to access SDAIS’s Specialist Debt Casework Service and SDAIS have spoken to staff at support events. Fuel Vouchers (£162,330 of Fuel Vouchers were provided in 2022/23 as well as Data Vouchers. SBC staff also have access to SDAIS Welfare Benefits, Energy + Housing advice services. An SDAIS and Mental Health Hub co-location is also available.

What can SBC learn from VCSE (benefits of joint SBC/VCSE working)?

4.195 The VCSE sector can access funds that are not available to SBC. The benefits of independent support provision were also highlighted. The VCSE sector has access to local communities but partnership working can provide complimentary and supplementary services.

Other Issues

4.196 In terms of income maximisation for 2022/23, £1,179,000 had been confirmed but £5,947,000 was expected. The amount of Debt Assisted with in 2022/23 totalled £7,828,058. Referral is key to assisting the public. There is an increasing need for the public to be provided with targeted help and support.

4.197 The Committee thanked SDAIS for their work in assisting residents and providing an invaluable service. SBC staff were commended for referring members of the public to a specific contact at SDAIS and other services for help and ensuring that they received direct support.

Site Visits

4.198 In November and December 2023, site visits to two of The Bread and Butter Hubs were arranged. The Hubs are located in Victoria Park Community Hall, Thornaby and Salvation Army, Stockton.

4.199 The site visits provided a valuable opportunity for Members to view the preparation process of grocery bags (delivery of goods and packaging) and to speak to volunteers and The Bread and Butter Thing staff.



5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 This review has highlighted how the existing challenges associated with poverty and inequality across the Borough have been compounded by the ongoing cost of living situation. Additional challenges have arisen through the widening demographic of those affected by the cost of living. However, the evidence provided has confirmed that the Council's proactive approach has provided a comprehensive response and resulted in regional and national recognition. The contribution of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector in mitigating the effects of poverty must not be underestimated and the continuation of partnership working is essential for future strategic planning.

5.2 Consequently, the review's recommendations seek to respond to persistent concerns (such as the affordability of school uniform and debt management) and provide a commitment to develop an anti-poverty strategy to cement the Council's long-term coordinated approach. Ensuring that residents and Council staff continue to be sufficiently supported is integral in this endeavour.

Recommendations

The Committee recommend:

- 1. That findings from this review will inform the development of the Council's Anti-Poverty Action Plan/Strategy as part of the 'Powering Our Futures' programme. This will be coordinated with partners and will advocate the importance of lived experience.**
- 2. That the Council continues to work with schools and governors to address the issues around the affordability of school uniform and provide options to expand the provision of pre-loved uniforms are explored, through devising an action plan clearly outlining the steps to be taken to address these issues. In addition, the Council will meet with Multi-Academy Trust school improvement leads to advocate the need for affordable school uniforms and the ongoing promotion of pre-loved ones.**
- 3. That the income maximisation service is widely promoted through Stockton News and social media channels as a means of assisting residents with debt management and financial difficulties.**
- 4. That, building on the success of previous staff drop in sessions around Cost of Living this targeted approach continues where there is a need.**
- 5. That, building on the existing success of the work undertaken, to continue to build on best practice from across the country working alongside the LGA.**

APPENDIX 1 - Stockton-on-Tees Community Food Leaflets (Stockton-on-Tees Food Power Network)



Foodbanks

and other food resources in Stockton-on-Tees



Scan with phone camera to view interactive map

Please double check with the organisation before travel, as details are subject to change. Usually, foodbanks require a referral from an organisation. Like the Stockton District Advice and Information Service (SDAIS): 01642 633877

Billingham & Stockton Foodbank, Stockton Central <i>(referral essential)</i>	Open Wednesdays & Fridays, 10am - 1pm.	Proof of identification is required when collecting a food parcel, such as a letter with recipient's name and address. <i>Hebron Church, Corner of Vicarage Street & Bishopton Street, TS19 0AJ. Telephone: 07535 865140</i>
Billingham & Stockton Foodbank, Norton Central <i>(referral essential)</i>	Open Mondays & Fridays, 12.30pm - 2.30pm.	Proof of identification is required when collecting a food parcel, such as a letter with recipient's name and address. St Michael's & All Angels Church, Imperial Avenue, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees, TS20 2EN. Telephone: 07854 108393 Email: nortonfoodbank@gmail.com
Billingham & Stockton Foodbank, Billingham Central <i>(referral essential)</i>	Open Tuesdays & Thursdays, 11 - 2pm.	Proof of identification is required when collecting a food parcel, such as a letter with recipient's name and address. 4-6 West Precinct, Billingham Town Centre, Billingham, TS23 2NH. Telephone: 07583 575522 Email: info@billinghamstocktonborough.foodbank.org.uk
Salvation Army Stockton Foodbank, Stockton Central <i>(referral essential)</i>	Open Mondays & Fridays, 9 - 12pm	Palmerston Street, Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 1NU. Telephone: 01642 617629 Email: stockton.citadel@salvationarmy.org.uk
Thornaby Foodbank, Thornaby <i>(referral essential)</i>	Open Thursdays, 12pm - 1pm	Thornaby Baptist Church, Thorntree Road, Thornaby, TS17 8DH. Donations can be left directly on Wed 10.30 - 12pm & Thurs 10-12 noon. (Other drop off points are available, please message their Facebook page for more details). Telephone: 07469 920606 Email: thornabyfoodbank@gmail.com
NiteLite free monthly stall, Stockton Central (no referral required)	First two Mondays of every month, 11am - 1pm	Free food, toiletries & hygiene essentials. First two Mondays of every month, 11am-1pm (except bank holidays, date is moved to the following Monday). On Stockton Highstreet, opposite Darlington Building Society. Telephone: 07790627499 Email: info@nitelightcic.co.uk
The Salvation Project, Thornaby Methodist Church (no referral required)	Open Wednesdays 1-2pm	Help with food, toiletries, adult & child clothing/footwear and other household items, when available. Wednesdays food bag pick up at 1-2pm, community group with hot food & drinks at 4 - 5.30pm. Telephone: 07934 409010. Email: salvationproject@outlook.com. Stanstead Way, Thornaby, Stockton-on-Tees TS17 9DZ

Leaflet updated: October 2023

Stockton-on-Tees Food Power Network

SFPN@catalyststockton.org



Community pantries & Ecoshops

Offering low-cost food items in Stockton-on-Tees



Please double check with the organisation before travel, as details are subject to change. Community pantries & ecoshops do not require a referral, just come along. Items are sold at discounted price.

Arlington Park EcoShop, Ropner	Open Thursdays, 11 - 1pm	Arlington Park, Adderley Street, Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 3GT Telephone: 07970 088003 or 07980 808920. Email: amalprojectteesside@gmail.com or info@littlesprouts.org.uk
Stockton Hope Community Larder, Hardwick	Open Wednesdays, 11 - 1.30pm	St. Andrews Methodist Church, Hardwick Rd., Stockton-On-Tees, TS19 8PH. Telephone: 07810 521255 Email: glynnis01@hotmail.co.uk
Sprouts Community Shop, Thornaby	Open Wednesdays, 10 - 12pm	Food, toiletries, clothes and kitchenware. Community Shop (behind Victoria Park Community Hall), Peel Street, Thornaby, TS17 6HL. Telephone: 07980 808920. Email: info@littlesprouts.org.uk
Pantry in the Park, Billingham	Open Mondays, 10 - 12.30pm	Open Mondays 10 - 12.30pm (on bank holiday Mondays, moves to Tuesday 10-12pm). John Whitehead Community Hub, John Whitehead Park, Billingham, TS23 2DD. Telephone: 01642 551171. Email: info@billinghamtowncouncil.co.uk
Holy Rosary Community Pantry, Billingham	Open Fridays, 1 - 5pm	The Medway, Sidlaw Road, Billingham TS23 2EP (building in between Holy Rosary Church and Holy Rosary School). Telephone: 07757 062798
Ragworth Community Grocery, Newtown	Open various days, see detail	Mon & Tues 9.30am - 4.30pm, Wed 9.30am - 7pm (Wed 9.30-4.30pm in summer holidays), Thurs & Fri 9.30am - 4.30pm. The Shack, Dover Road, Ragworth, Stockton, TS19 0JU. Telephone: 01642 925115. Email: ragworth@communitygrocery.org.uk
St. John the Baptist Community Swap Shop, Newtown	Collection system	(For families of the school only) Collection system, see their Facebook page: <i>St John The Baptist school community swap shop</i> : St John's Way, Ragworth, Stockton on Tees, TS19 0FB Email: cate.taylor@hotmail.co.uk
Norton Methodist Church Pantry, Norton	Open Sundays 12.30 - 1.30pm	Pantry in building behind Church. 439 - 445 Norton Rd, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees TS20 2QQ. Telephone: 01642 533379. Facebook page for updates: www.facebook.com/nortonmethodist
Norton Grange Community Pantry, Norton	Open Wednesdays 12 - 2pm	64 Somerset Rd, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees TS20 2ND. Telephone: 07881 940592 Email: Kelly.Potts@groundwork.org.uk
Chad's Pantry, Roseworth	Open Thurs 9 - 11.30am & Sun 9 - 10.30am.	St. Chad's Church, Ragpath Lane, Stockton-on-Tees, TS19 9AY. Telephone: 07729 794222 Email: lana.green354@btinternet.com
Challoner House Community Pantry, Yarm	Open Fridays 1 - 4pm	Challoner House Community Centre, Challoner Road, Yarm, TS15 9DS
Mill Lane Primary Community Pantry, Stockton Central	Fridays 2.30 - 3.30pm, term-time only	(For families of the school only) . Mill Lane Primary School, Wellington Street, Stockton-On-Tees, Cleveland, TS18 1QX. Telephone: 01642 860055 Email: milllane@sbcschools.org.uk
Living Proof Pantry, Stockton Central	Open various days, see detail	Sat from 5pm, Sundays 2- 4pm, Mon- Wed from 5pm. 21 Prince Regent Street, Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 1DB. Telephone: 07496 571125 Email: rccjpscc@gmail.com

Leaflet updated:
October 2023



Stockton-on-Tees Food Power Network



SFPN@catalyststockton.org



The Bread & Butter Thing

Food hubs offering groceries at a discount



Scan with phone camera to view interactive map

The Bread & Butter Thing food hubs do not require a referral. To access, you need to sign up via their text message system - see below.

What is the Bread & Butter Thing?

Bread and Butter Thing food hubs offer groceries at a discounted price. They are a new food support service in Stockton-on-Tees.

At Bread & Butter Food Hubs, residents can buy three bags of fruit and vegetables, chilled food, and cupboard staples for £8.50. It is estimated this helps save around £25 compared with buying the items elsewhere.

How do I access the new hubs?

Interested residents can register as members for free.
All you need to do is text 07860 063304 with a full name, postcode and which hub you would like to collect from.

Once registered, you will receive a text message 48 hours before your hub's 'service day' each week, asking if you would like to shop there. You then simply reply to the message to confirm if you would like to access the hub.

Prices at the hubs are as follows:

Single bags with a condensed offer are priced £5
Standard three-bag family packages are £8.50
Large family six-bag packages are £17

Cash, card, NHS Healthy Start credit & Aspen cards are all accepted as payment upon collection.

Bread & Butter - Food Hub locations

(two additional venues to be confirmed later in 2023)

Sprouts Community Shop, Thornaby	Every Monday at 1.30pm	Community Shop (behind Victoria Park Community Hall), Peel Street, Thornaby, TS17 6HL. Telephone: 07980 808920. Email: info@littlesprouts.org.uk
Salvation Army Stockton, Stockton Central	Every Tuesday at 1.30pm	Salvation Army Stockton, Palmerston Street, Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 1NU. Telephone: 01642 617629 Email: stockton.citadel@salvationarmy.org.uk
New Life Family Centre, Billingham	Starting Wednesday 11th October, at 1.30pm	New Life Family Centre, Low Grange Avenue, Billingham, opening on October 11th at 1.30pm. Telephone: 01642 370880

Leaflet updated: October 2023



Stockton-on-Tees Food Power Network



SFPN@catalyststockton.org



Hot Community Food - (page 1/3) low cost or free in Stockton-on-Tees



Scan with phone camera to view interactive map

**Please double check with the organisation before travel,
as details are subject to change.**

Community meals at Stockton Family Hubs - Stockton, Billingham & Redhill *Booking essential* - Telephone: 01642 528525

Join your community for a free meal - serving up a different meal every week.

- Week 1: Jacket potato with Filling
- Week 2: Spaghetti Bolognese with Garlic Bread
- Week 3: Chicken Curry with Rice and Naan Bread
- Week 4: Mince and Dumplings with Vegetables

Stockton Family Hub	Tuesdays 3.30 - 4.30pm	Stockton Family Hub, Yarm Rd, Stockton-on-Tees TS18 3PJ
Billingham Family Hub	Wednesdays 3.30 - 4.30pm	Billingham Family Hub, Ochil Terrace, Stockton-on-Tees, Billingham TS23 2QL
Redhill Family Hub	Thursdays 3.30 - 4.30pm	Redhill Family Hub, Redhill Rd, Roseworth, Stockton-on-Tees TS19 9BX

Nitelight stall, Stockton Central	First two Mondays of every month, 11am - 1pm	70 free pie, peas and roasties meals in partnership with Just Love Pies, subject to availability. Other free food items, clothing and hygiene essentials on the stall. First two Mondays of every month, 11am-1pm (except bank holidays, date is moved to the following Monday). Telephone: 07790 627499 Email: info@nitelightcic.co.uk
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Stockton Baptist Church, Stockton Central <i>(booking necessary)</i>	Thursdays 12 - 2pm	Booking necessary. Three course meal for £3, running weekly (except holidays). Everyone over 60 years is welcome. This service pauses over the summer (pauses in mid-July and resumes in September). Concessions available, ring to ask. A short Christian-themed talk is held at 1pm. The Square, Stockton on Tees, TS18 1TE. Telephone: 01642 050696 Email: office@stocktonbaptistchurch.co.uk
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Stockton Parish Church, Stockton Central	Wednesdays 12 - 2pm	Free soup, sandwiches & hot drinks. Everyone is welcome, no booking required. Part of the session is a Bible teaching, although there is no obligation to stay for this. High St, Stockton-on-Tees TS18 1SP Telephone: 01642 611734 Email: office@stocktonparishchurch.org.uk
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Stockton Salvation Army, Stockton Central	Mondays 12.20 - 1.30pm	Free takeaway meal every Monday from 12.20-1.30pm. Palmerston Street, Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 1NU Telephone: 01642 617629 Email: stockton.citadel@salvationarmy.org.uk
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St. Peter's Church, Ropner <i>(for asylum seekers & refugees)</i>	Wednesdays 11 - 2.30pm	Free hot meal every Wednesday from 11-2.30pm (for asylum seekers and refugee community only). Craft activities from 11-12pm, lunch from 12-1pm. Clothes and housewares available, advice & information available. Telephone: 07958 345177 Email: info@stpetersstockton.org
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Leaflet updated:
October 2023



Stockton-on-Tees Food Power Network




SFPN@catalyststockton.org



Hot Community Food - (page 2/3)

low cost or free in Stockton-on-Tees

Please double check with the organisation before travel,
as details are subject to change.




Scan with phone camera to view interactive map

<p>The Lighthouse Drop-in Centre, Ropner</p>	<p>Mon to Fri 10 - 1.45 pm, Sunday 10 - 1.45pm</p>	<p>Low cost café with surplus food items, sold at 50p each at the counter, subject to availability. 34 Yarm Rd, Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 3NG. Telephone: 01642 640033</p>
<p>Purple Rose, Newtown</p>	<p>Fridays 4pm - 6.30pm, see details</p>	<p>Free hot food drop-in meal & drinks, music, socialisation & donated items. Everyone welcome. Fridays 4pm - 6.30pm (except 1st Friday of the month). Newtown Community Resource Centre, Durham Road, TS19 0DE Telephone: 07359 573557 Email: purplerosehealthandwellbeing@yahoo.com</p>
<p>The Shack, Ragworth</p>	<p>Tuesdays & Fridays, see details</p>	<p><i>Tasty Tuesdays</i> (term-time) - 10-1pm - food & hot drinks (e.g. soup, breakfast buns, muffins, may vary) <i>Friday breakfast</i> (term-time) - doors open 9am, food served at 9.30am: breakfast with drink. Donations welcomed. The Shack, Dover Rd, Stockton-on-Tees TS19 0JU. Telephone: 07557 381808 Email: theshackcommunityprojects@gmail.com</p>
<p>St. Michaels and All Angels Church, Norton</p>	<p>Specific Fridays, see details</p>	<p>Free hot food on specific Fridays, please contact venue for further dates. Imperial Ave, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees TS20 2EW Telephone: 07854 108393 Email: nortonfoodbank@gmail.com</p>
<p>Norton Grange Community Centre, Norton</p>	<p>Wednesdays 12 - 2pm</p>	<p>Free lunch club on Wednesdays 12-2pm, running alongside their community pantry. At the lunch club, access support & referrals for employment, housing, budgeting and more. Lunch club pauses during the six week summer holiday. 64 Somerset Rd, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees TS20 2ND. Telephone: 07881 940592 Email: Kelly.Potts@groundwork.org.uk</p>
<p>St Mary's Parish Hall, Norton Green</p>	<p>Specific Mondays, see details</p>	<p>Free lunch on specific Mondays, check with venue for further dates. 70 The Green, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees, TS20 1DT Telephone: 07505 464005</p>
<p>Holy Trinity Parish Church, Hartburn</p>	<p>Thursdays 12 - 1.15pm (term time only)</p>	<p>*Service temporarily postponed, contact organisation for reopening date* Gener8 Luncheon Club - everyone is welcome. Food menu items between £1.50 - £3.15. Soup, toasted sandwiches, specials, cake - subject to availability. Upsall Grove, Stockton-On-Tees, TS19 7QU Telephone: 01642 570102 Email: holytrinitywithstmarkoffice@gmail.com</p>
<p>Sprouts Community Café at Victoria Park, Thornaby</p>	<p>Tuesdays & Wednesdays, 10 - 2pm</p>	<p>Serving low-cost hot food, snacks and drinks. Victoria Park Community Centre, Peel St, Thornaby, TS17 6HL. Telephone: 07980 808920 Email: info@littlesprouts.org.uk</p>
<p>The Vine Café at Teesside Vineyard Church, Thornaby</p>	<p>Wednesdays 10 - 12pm</p>	<p>Free community café. Free hot drinks, pastries, cake (subject to availability). A place to connect with others, everyone welcome. Free childrens' breakfast (term-time) at the café. Runs alongside Grow Baby Teesside's free shop for baby clothes. Acklam Rd, Thornaby, Stockton-on-Tees TS17 7HD. Email: hello@teessidevineyardchurch.co.uk</p>

Leaflet updated: October 2023

Stockton-on-Tees Food Power Network


SFPN@catalyststockton.org



Hot Community Food - (page 3/3)

low cost or free in Stockton-on-Tees

Please double check with the organisation before travel,
as details are subject to change.



Scan with phone camera to view interactive map

Teesside Dementia Link Services, various locations

Telephone: 07722 958610 Email: tdls2016@virginmedia.com

Thornaby Methodist Church (over 60s welcome)	Every first Thursday of the month, 11.30 - 2pm	Thornaby Methodist Church hot meal, everyone over 60s welcome. Donation of £2.50 encouraged. Stanstead Way, Thornaby, Stockton-on-Tees TS17 9DZ
Breakfast Club at Café 81, Oxbridge Lane (see details)	Every Wednesday, 10.30 - 12pm	Breakfast Club at Café 81, Oxbridge Lane - every Wednesday 10.30-12pm. Safe and welcoming breakfast group for those with dementia, their families and their carers to relax and make new friends. Full english breakfast starting at around £5.

Local Dementia Cafés: Relaxed and supportive cafés for people with dementia, their families and carers. Make new friends and get advice & information. Hot drinks & light refreshments available.

Thornaby Dementia Café	Every second Friday of the month, 1.30 - 3pm	Thornaby Dementia Café at Thornaby Library, free refreshments.
Stockton Dementia Café	Every first Monday of the month, 11.30 - 2pm	Stockton Dementia Café at Stockton Parish Church, low cost refreshments.
Yarm Dementia Cafés (In two locations)	(See details)	Yarm Dementia Cafés: <i>Yarm Methodist Church</i> , low cost refreshments. Every first Saturday of the month, 10-12.30pm. Also runs at <i>Yarm Wellness</i> , every third Monday of the month, 12.30 - 2pm.
Billingham Dementia Café	Every second Monday of the month, 11.30 - 2pm	Billingham Dementia Café at St. Aidans Church, low cost refreshments.

Sunday Lunch Service, Billingham	Delivery service, referral required (see details)	Free two course Sunday meal for older residents within the Billingham Community, delivered to residents' homes. Referral required - this could be from social worker, GP or other agency. Billingham Town Council. Telephone: 01642 551171 Email: info@billingham-tc.gov.uk
Low Grange Community Centre, Billingham	Tuesdays 12 - 3pm	Free tea and toast with the Tea, Toast and Talk community group, everyone welcome. Run by Billingham Environmental Link Programme. Telephone: 01642 564077. 169 Low Grange Ave, Stockton-on-Tees, Billingham TS23 3PF
Yarm Wellness, Yarm Youth & Community Centre	Fortnightly Tuesdays, 1.30 - 3.30pm (see details)	Free coffee, cake and company, 1.30-3.30pm. Sept 26th and continuing on Tuesdays, fortnightly. Everyone is welcome - enjoy a warm space, and meet new friends. Wellness Centre, High Church Wynd, Yarm TS15 9BQ Telephone: 07732 395441 Email: yarmwellness@gmail.com
Casserole & Crumble, Yarm	Delivery service (see details)	Meals delivered to older residents, to be reheated at home. Enquire with organisation. Telephone: 07801 531044 Email: cschyde@hotmail.com
Yarm Lunch Club, Yarm Community Centre	Fortnightly on Tuesdays, (see details)	Fortnightly on Tuesdays, a two course hot meal for older residents. Enquire with organisation, may be a waiting list. Yarm Community Centre, High Church Wynd, Yarm TS15 9BQ. Email: yarmlunchclub@gmail.com

Leaflet updated: October 2023

Stockton-on-Tees Food Power Network
 SFPN@catalyststockton.org

APPENDIX 2 - SBC 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.

Benefit/Initiative	Details of the Initiative and the Impact on Employees
	<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

Benefit/Initiative	Details of the Initiative and the Impact on Employees
	<p>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.</p> <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>

APPENDIX 3 - Citizens Advice – Average Monthly Surplus among debts client by group

Average Monthly Surplus among debt clients by group

Surplus equals income minus essential expenditure. Groups below the blue line are in a negative budget on average.

All Household Type Ethnicity Disability or Health Condition Housing Tenure Age Group Employment Status Gender Universal Credit



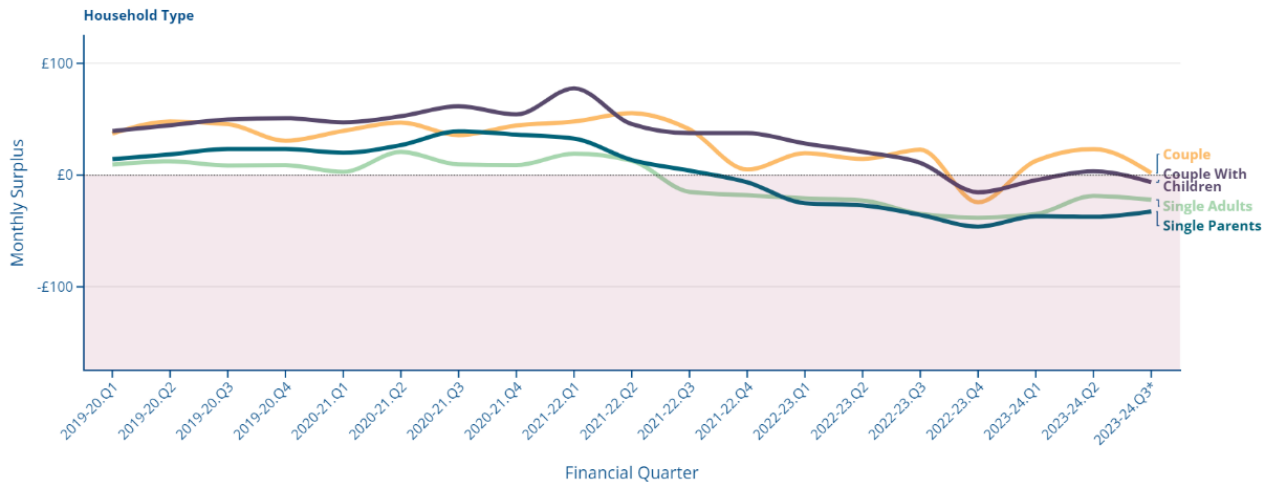
Source: You can access this visualisation directly here. For more insight into negative budgets look at our In the Red Index. Data for England and Wales. Average is the 20% trimmed mean.



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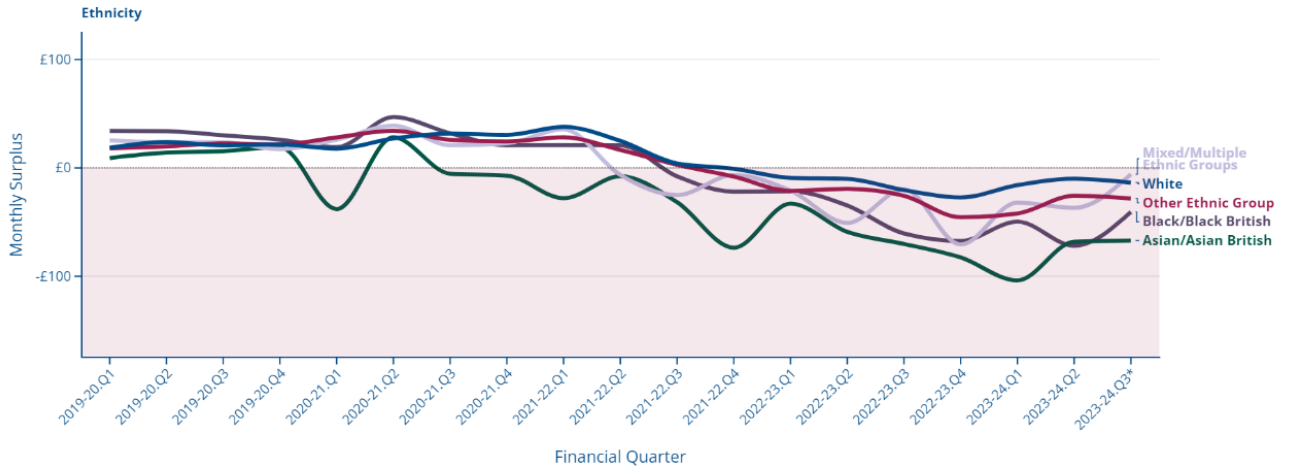
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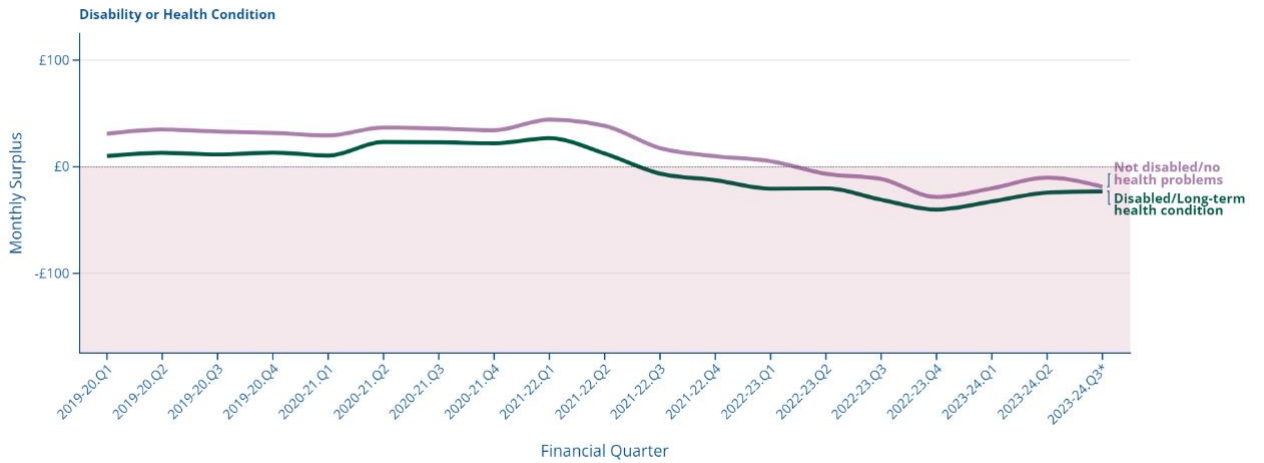
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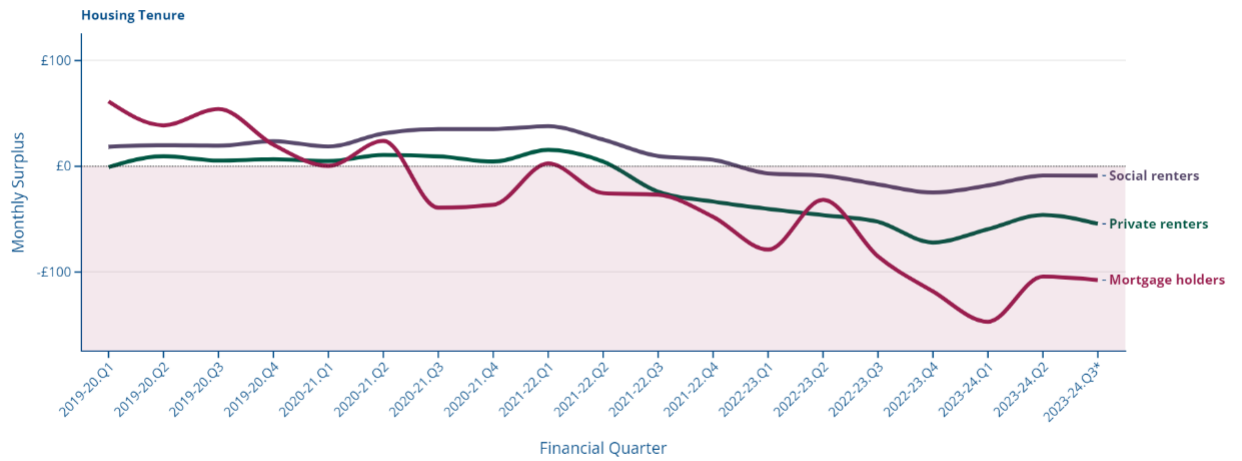
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Average Monthly Surplus among debt clients by group

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All Household Type Ethnicity Disability or Health Condition **Housing Tenure** Age Group Employment Status Gender Universal Credit



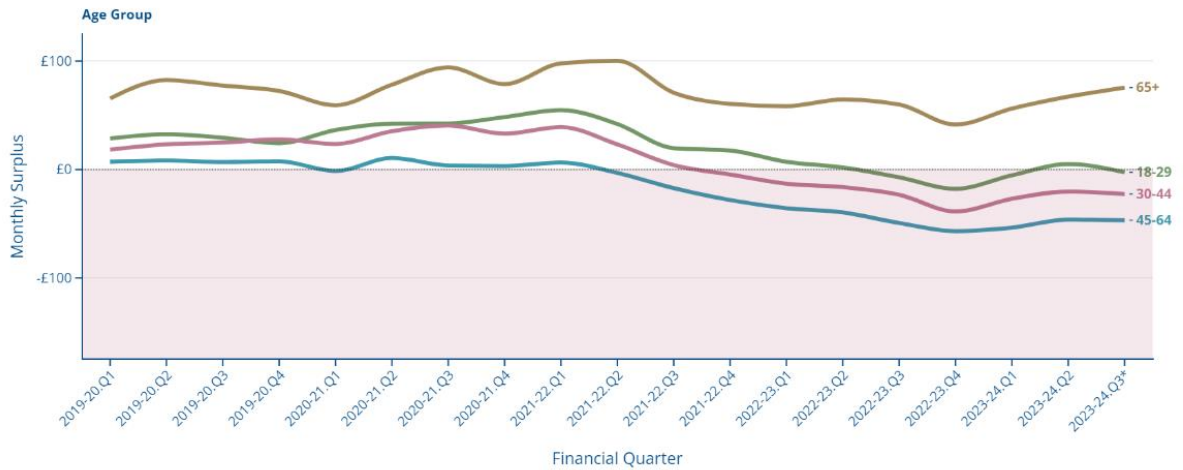
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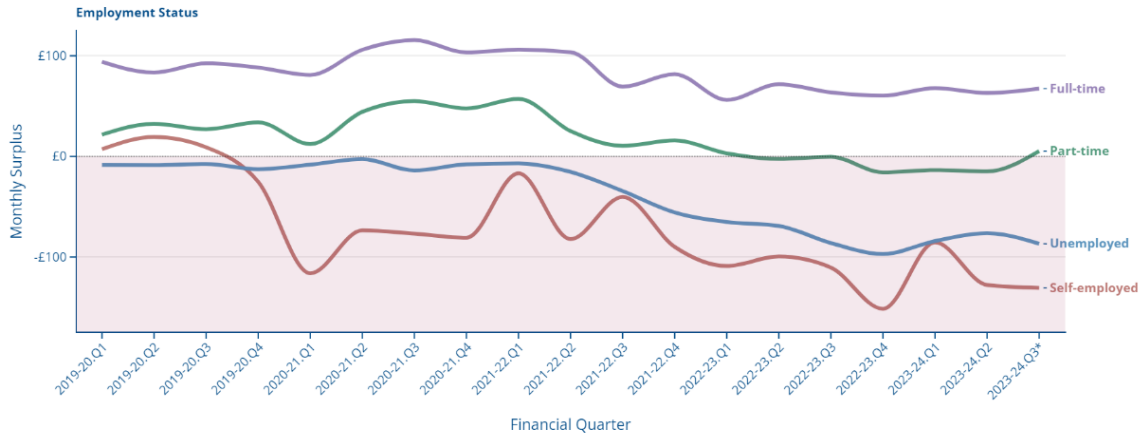
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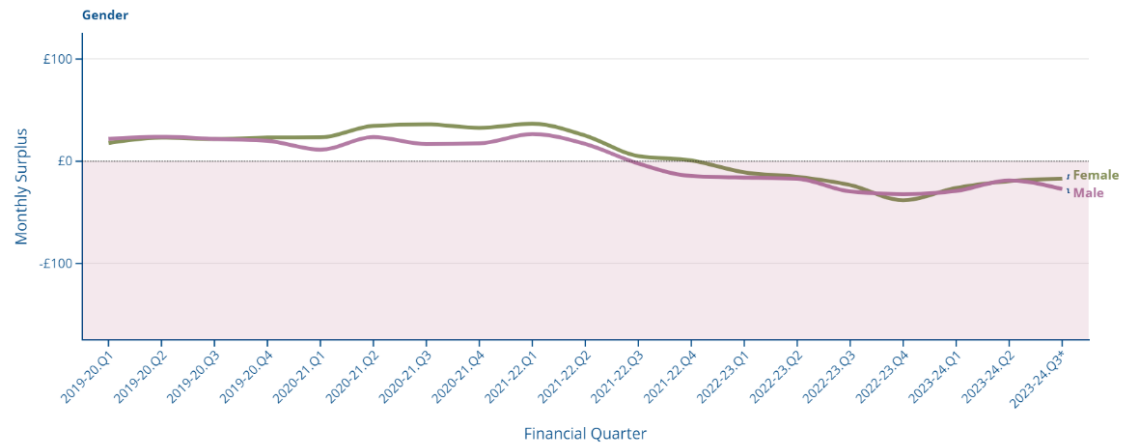
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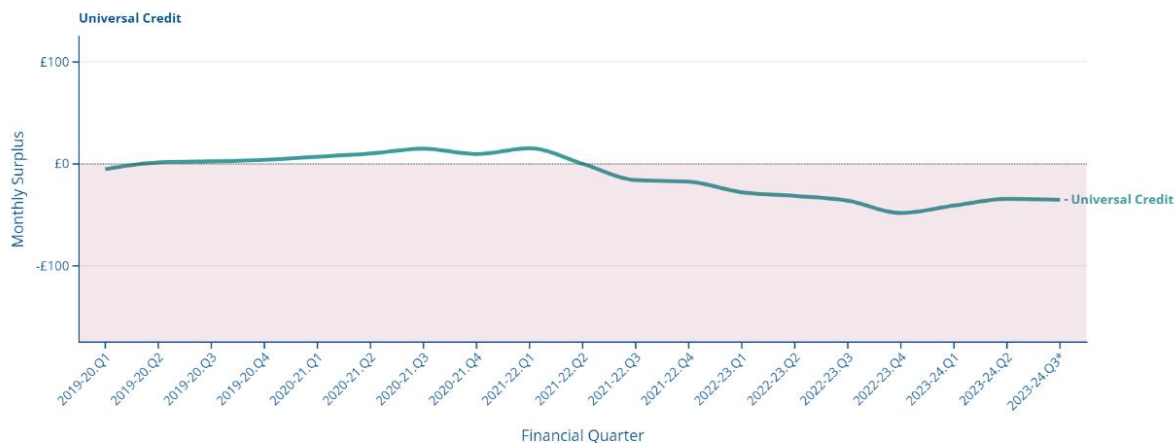
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All	Household Type	Ethnicity	Disability or Health Condition	Housing Tenure	Age Group	Employment Status	Gender	Universal Credit
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