Welcome to the January 2024 edition of the Cost of Living briefing which has been compiled to help you and the people you work with navigate these difficult times, using the help and support that is available from the council and our partner organisations.

You can also visit and direct people to the **Here To Help Hub,** an online one-stop shop of available support and information.

If you have any feedback, content you wish to be included in a future edition or wish to unsubscribe – contact the Fairer Stockton-on-Tees team at **fsot@stockton.gov.uk.**

Community Spaces

£60,000 to develop the scheme has been confirmed over the next two years, with the first tranche distributed to venues who are expanding their offer at this challenging time for vulnerable residents.

Sessions around mental health and wellbeing, employment, and training as well as welfare support and extended opening hours are being rolled out across venues. Visit www.stockton.gov.uk/community-spaces for more information and updates.

Here to Help Events

In collaboration with Catalyst and our thriving VCSE sector, the Council are holding several drop-in events across the Borough providing a range of advice, support and taster sessions for residents.

The next event takes place on 'Blue Monday', Monday 15 January 2024, 11am to 2pm, at Billingham Library, TS23 2LN.

If your team or organisation can support these events by attending as an exhibitor, please contact fsot@stockton.gov.uk or engagement@stockton.gov.uk

Visit www.stockton.gov.uk/here-to-help for the full information.

Learning something new for 2024!

The new Spring/Summer 2024 prospectus for the Stockton Learning & Skills Service is now available! Copies have been posted to every household in the Borough, or you can visit www.slss.ac.uk to download a copy. Here's hundreds of free courses to choose from, including distance learning that you can complete from the comfort of your own home!

Household Support Fund are you missing out?

£300 payments towards energy bills are available to low-income households who do not get Council Tax Reduction and don't benefit from the Government's Cost of Living payments.

You may be eligible if your net weekly household income does not exceed £400 for a single person, £500 for a couple or £600 for a family (single person or couple with one or more children).

Visit www.stockton.gov.uk/HSF to check your eligibility and apply. It's quick and easy to do!

If you have any questions or need any help, email HSF@stockton.gov.uk or call 01642 526070.

Community Food

The **Stockton-on-Tees Community Food Leaflets** detail all the foodbanks, community pantries, ecoshops and free or low-cost hot food currently available in Stockton-on-Tees. There are many dedicated food support services on our doorstep, so please reach out if you, or someone you know, would benefit from some extra support. Details are subject to change, therefore please check with the organisation before travel. The leaflets are updated every 2-3 months with updated information, the below link will redirect you to the most up-to-date leaflet information.

- **Foodbanks require a referral** to access food parcels. Referrals can be issued to clients by GPs, social workers and other agencies like Citizens Advice, if the client is eligible.
- **Community pantries and ecoshops do not require a referral** – residents can just pop along to the service in opening hours. Food items and other supplies are sold at an affordable price, for example £1 for 8 items.

https://bit.ly/communityfoodleaflets-stockton

Scan with phone camera to view interactive map

The Bread and Butter Thing

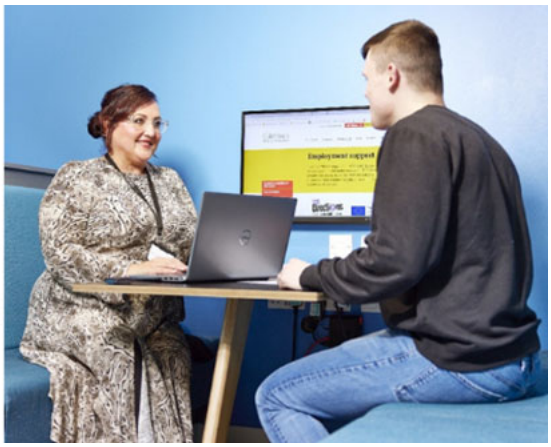
In partnership with Thirteen, TBBT is now live at three venues across the Borough with a booming membership at each enjoying high-quality food shopping at lower costs to help boost financial resilience. Each shopping session has been at full capacity of 80 households served, so the impact of this initiative and demand for its support is clear to see. Currently, you can register to shop at:

- Salvation Army, Stockton (Tuesdays)
- Victoria Park Community Hall, Thornaby (Mondays)
- New Life Family Centre, Billingham (Wednesdays)

The remaining two hubs, which will operate on a Thursday and Friday, are due to go live to the public as soon as arrangements can be finalised. Please check www.stockton.gov.uk/tbbt for the latest information and details on how to join.

Get help from Thirteen with finding a job, new skills and training

thirteen
Managing and building homes



The employability team at Thirteen provides a free service for people looking to get into work, learn new skills, do some training or gain a qualification.

The dedicated team can help you to prepare for finding a job, including help with your CV, and support you with preparing for an interview.

The service is open to anyone – you do not need to be a Thirteen customer.

Their employer engagement specialists have access to exclusive jobs from a wide range of employers.

Get in touch with Thirteen's employability team today by:

- calling 01642 947840
- emailing employability@thirteengroup.co.uk
- search for the 'Hot Jobs & Training' Facebook page
- visit a Thirteen Touchpoint store in Stockton-on-Tees, Middlesbrough or Hull

Visit the Thirteen website for more information, including cost-of-living advice.

Warm Homes Healthy People

Working with the Cleveland Fire Brigade and Stockton and District Advice and Information Service, the service can help with:

- emergency heating
- energy saving and debt advice
- welfare benefits advice and assistance
- support to keep you healthy and more able to cope with the cold weather

Boiler repairs are also available to eligible residents. You must be the homeowner and claiming a means-tested benefit as well as being 65 or over, or under 65 in receipt of disability benefits, or under 65 and have a long-term illness made worse by the cold (or live with a child under 5 in the same circumstances) or living with dementia. This scheme is for gas central heating systems only. For any air source heat pump repairs, contact the original installer or manufacturer for assistance.

Visit www.stockton.gov.uk/warm-homes-healthy-people or call 01642 528215 for more information and to check eligibility.

Holidays are fun (HAF) is back in February!

We are pleased to announce that the online booking system for HAF in February half-term will be going live soon on the SBC website, with more than 1,400 places available to book over the five days.

Parents and carers across the Borough will be able to access our vast timetable of activities for school-aged children and book their desired places. The HAF programme gives vulnerable children on benefits-related free school meals a safe space to go during the holidays and provide them with a range of enriching activities that they may not have the chance to otherwise

experience. Not only that, but every child attending receives a high-quality, nutritious meal that meets School Food Standards.

Booking early is recommended with tonnes of interests catered for through the various activities. Look out across SBC's social media channels for the booking system going live at https://digital.stockton.gov.uk/book-HP

Chat at Low Grange Community Centre

Would you like to join a social group that runs every Tuesday from 12noon until 3pm at Low Grange Community Centre in Billingham?

The group offers a warm, welcoming spaces for people to enjoy meeting others and making friends.

Come along free of charge and enjoy a brew, slice of cake and a good natter!

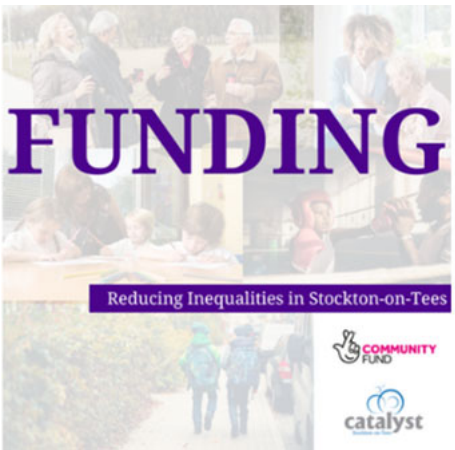
Warm welcome in Thornaby expands

We are delighted to announce that Five Lamps are joining the Warm Welcome scheme in Thornaby and will be offering a social drop-in on Wednesday afternoons between 1pm and 3pm, starting on Wednesday 6 December.

The sessions are open to all and free of charge, taking place at The Youthy on Thornaby Road.

Pop in and enjoy a cuppa, game of dominoes or cards and the chance to chat and make new friends and in a warm and friendly atmosphere.

Reducing Inequalities Support Fund Round 3



Catalyst's Reducing Inequalities Support Fund (RISF) opens to applications for the third round of funding on the 4 January 2024. VCSE organisations can bid for up to £1,000 to help support their work across the Borough. Applications must show how the money will help increase their capacity to provide support and demonstrate how this will help reduce health inequalities.

Organisations who were unsuccessful in earlier rounds are welcome to apply again. If an organisation is awarded funding in one round, they cannot apply again for the found immediately following.

For full details and to access the application form, please visit https://www.catalyststockton.org/

Roseworth Big Local

The HEET scheme offers help to homeowners and private renters who do not have gas central heating in their properties. To qualify, your property must have an Energy Performance Rating of D, E, F or G.

You may qualify for funding if your gross household annual income is less than £31,000 or you are in receipt of one of the benefits listed on the HEET website. You may also qualify if you are located in an economically deprived neighbourhood based on your postcode.

If your HEET application is successful, the funding will provide FREE installation of measures such as insulation, double glazing, air source heat pumps and solar panels.

To check if your postcode qualifies and for more information, visit the HEET website.

- Debt and financial problems
- Housing matters
- Reducing energy costs
- Employment issues and much more

To arrange an appointment, please call 01642 626135.

The Roseworth Big Local Community Garden is held at the Hope Centre on Ragpath Lane. It's open on Tuesdays during term-time, between 1pm and 3pm, all are welcome.

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Energy saving schemes and advice

For general support on the range of schemes available that can help to reduce energy consumption and make your home more energy efficient, visit www.stockton.gov.uk/energy-saving-schemes

Home Improvement Agency

A handyperson scheme is in operation offering up to two free hours of work in a resident's home which helps them remain safe including preventing slips, trips and falls. Small-scale DIY style tasks requiring replacement items are expected to be purchased by the resident, but the labour to install the products is free of charge. Landlord permissions may be required where relevant. Examples of recent works completed include gutter cleaning, light bulb changing, bleeding radiators, clearing pathways of leaves and more.

To request assistance and discuss available options, please call 01642 526904.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Employee Support

SBC employees can access a range of benefits and support thanks to Vivup.
Their offers include:

- E-vouchers for use at supermarkets
- Spreading the cost of significant purchases such as white goods and electronics
- Online advice on debt management, reducing utility bills and a 24/7 confidential telephone helpline with qualified counsellors who you can talk to about any emotional, personal or work-related issue. Access via the Your Care Wellbeing Platform on Vivup

If you need supporting accessing any Vivup offers, please contact the HR team via workforceplanning@stockton.gov.uk

Stockton & District Advice and Information Service

SDAIS are on-hand to help with a range of money matters and welfare concerns:

- Debt advice – free and confidential specialist debt advice is on offer including negotiations with creditors, DROs, Breathing Space initiatives and more that is fully regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Call 01642 626124
- Welfare Benefits advice – free and confidential specialist advice service including applications, reviews and appeals. Call 01642 633877
- Energy advice – free and independent advice on how to reduce energy costs and improve energy efficiency. Emergency fuel vouchers are also available. Call 01642 626106
- Housing, employment, family and health advice is also available by calling 01642 633877

Service is available via home visits, face-to-face appointments in Stockton-on-Tees, telephone call back, email or online sessions. For more information, visit www.stockton-cab.co.uk and www.stocktonadvice.org.uk

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Tees Credit Union and Moneywise

For SBC employees, this financial cooperative offers safe, affordable loans, payroll saving schemes as well as budgeting support.

Payroll saving is taken straight from your pay and is an easy way to save. You can keep control and change the amount you save and you're able to withdraw your money quickly when you need it.

Having some savings behind you can be a huge help if you're hit with an unexpected cost. It's also handy for putting something away for Christmas, holidays, weddings, a car or home improvements. Call 0330 165 5337 or visit www.moneywise.org/savings/payroll-savings

Moneywise also offer affordable cash loans with repayments taken from your pay. They range from £100 to £15,000 (subject to status and credit union rules) and it's a simple online application with interest rates set at 2% per month (26.8% APR). Visit www.moneywise.org or call 0330 165 5337 to find out more.

If you'd like to submit content for the next edition of the Cost of Living Briefing, please send the information to **fsot@stockton.gov.uk.**