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**❄️Winter 2024 Cost-of-Living Support | #HelpIsAtHand**

VCSE Communications Toolkit

This toolkit has been developed by VAST to help voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations to highlight the cost-of-living support available for people in communities across Stoke-on-Trent.

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Contact Information

For enquiries about this toolkit, please contact Faye Angus, Communications and Content Manager, by email: [faye.angus@vast.org.uk](mailto:faye.angus@vast.org.uk).

For information on Welcoming Spaces, please contact Kezia Liddle, Project Officer via [kezia.liddle@vast.org.uk](mailto:kezia.liddle@vast.org.uk).

For help and support with the Stoke-on-Trent Community Directory, please contact Monienne Stone, Projects Administrator via [monienne.stone@vast.org.uk](mailto:monienne.stone@vast.org.uk).

Introduction and Purpose

This VCSE communications toolkit has been developed to highlight the support available during the winter period. The toolkit will help to compliment Stoke-on-Trent City Council’s ‘Help is at Hand’ campaign, supporting residents through the cost-of-living crisis during the winter period.

The focus of this toolkit is bringing attention to support and services organisations like yours deliver within the VCSE sector for all members of society. This includes support for harder to reach communities and especially for those who aren’t necessarily able to access means-tested support.

This toolkit has been developed in consultation with representatives from the voluntary sector in Stoke-on-Trent, Stoke-on-Trent Food Partnership, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and members of the Communications and Events Engagement Network.

For more information on **#HelpIsAtHand** and the support available from Stoke-on-Trent City Council, please visit: <https://www.stoke.gov.uk/helpisathand>

Audience(s) and Key Messages

Local voluntary sector organisations

* 1. Winter Cost of living pressures will hit residents hard across Stoke-on-Trent, and we need to let people know where they can get help.
  2. Help your neighbours, residents, staff, volunteers, and service users cope with the cost-of-living crisis, particularly during the winter period.
  3. The Stoke-on-Trent Community Directory is a one-stop-shop where everyone can find the support and services they need; make sure your organisation and the support you offer is listed.
  4. Many organisations request donations of items such as food, clothing or school uniforms so that they can be distributed to those in need and have designated drop-off points or times when donations can be made. If you haven’t done so already, add details of drop-off points to your entry on the Stoke-on-Trent Community Directory.
  5. Welcoming Spaces provide a safe and friendly environment for people who might be struggling. Welcoming Spaces are somewhere people can go to have a hot drink and maybe something to eat, charge their phones and other devices, and get some much-needed social interaction. Some even help with information and advice on money, saving energy, access to food, and more. If you’re not already registered as a welcoming space, why not think about setting one up.
  6. The cost-of-living crisis is affecting people in communities; people from various backgrounds, cultures, socio-economic status, and walks of life. Regardless of circumstances, help can come in many forms and from all sorts of places.

Residents and communities.

* 1. The Stoke-on-Trent Community Directory is a one-stop-shop where everyone can find the support and services they need, this includes cost-of-living support that isn’t necessarily means-tested.
  2. It’s important for people to seek help before crisis sets in. Just because you’re working and earning a wage, it doesn’t mean you aren’t able to get some help.
  3. Don’t stick your head in the snow – support is out there and it’s important to get it when you need it.
  4. There are lots of Welcoming Spaces across the city where people can go for a free cuppa and a biscuit, charge their phones or tablets, access online services, or simply to have a chat with others. Some places also offer financial, energy and other helpful advice around the cost of living.
  5. Venues across Stoke-on-Trent may offer special or extra events during the winter such as pre or Christmas Day meals, activities, or other community events.

Resources

List of Useful Resources

* Website: Stoke-on-Trent [Community Directory](https://helpforhouseholds.campaign.gov.uk/energy-saving-advice/).
* Website: Directory [Cost-of-Living Support](https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/money-benefits-financial-support/).
* Website: Community Directory [Registration](https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/login/).
* Guide: [Getting your organisation on the Directory](https://vast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Community-Directory-User-Guide-2024.pdf).
* Website: #StokeonTrentTogether [Welcoming Spaces](https://sottogether.vast.org.uk/cost-of-living-support/).
* Website: [Stoke-on-Trent City Council Help is at Hand](https://www.stoke.gov.uk/helpisathand).
* Website: [Stoke-on-Trent City Council Live Life To The Max.](https://www.stoke.gov.uk/info/20010/adult_care_and_wellbeing/703/live_life_to_the_max_campaign)
* Guide: Welcoming Spaces – [Getting Started](https://vast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Welcoming-Spaces-Guide-VAST.pdf).
* Social Media Images: Available to download [here](https://vast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Help-is-at-Hand-Social-Images.zip).

Stoke-on-Trent Community Directory

Ahead of the winter, and to ensure all cost-of-living support is listed, we highly recommend adding your organisation, services, Welcoming Spaces, and any support groups to the Stoke-on-Trent Community Directory. This will help local people to find you and your services easily. If you need help with adding your listing, please email [Monienne.stone@vast.org.uk](mailto:Monienne.stone@vast.org.uk).

If you do offer services and support with the cost-of-living or you are a ‘Welcoming Space’, please list your services on the [Stoke-on-Trent Community Directory here](https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/login/). The Community Directory is a one-stop-shop for support and services across Stoke-on-Trent and includes lots of information and listings that is split into a number of categories:

* Things to do, including community spaces, cafes, and clubs.
* Health, mental health, and wellbeing support.
* Education, training, and skills.
* Food, money, and energy support – especially useful for cost-of-living support.
* General information and advice including advocacy, legal support, and more.
* Support and advice for carers.
* Safety information and advice including around domestic and sexual violence, safeguarding and more.
* Family support.
* SEN and disability support, and
* Help with housing and home support.

Find out more about the Directory here: [https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/about-us/](https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/)

You can find a step-by-step guide for adding your listing(s) to the directory [here](https://vast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Community-Directory-User-Guide-2024.pdf).

Welcoming Spaces

A Welcoming Space is a place of connection already established in the community (such as a community centre, library or place of faith), where people can meet up, socialise, and access support, relating to the cost of living. Services available at each Welcoming Space will vary but may include:

* access to support about money, welfare, and mental wellbeing
* community activities
* access to computers, free Wi-Fi and charging points
* heated space

**If your premises is a Welcoming Space, please** [**list your details on the directory**](https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/) **as this will be the best way for people to find you online.**

If you would like to turn your premises into a Welcoming Space, please contact Kezia Liddle by email [kezia.liddle@vast.org.uk](mailto:kezia.liddle@vast.org.uk) for support. You can also use our [Welcoming Spaces Guide](https://vast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Welcoming-Spaces-Guide-VAST-1.pdf) to find out how you can open your own Welcoming Space.

Stoke-on-Trent Food Partnership.

**Stoke-on-Trent Food Partnership** is a newly formed network of like-minded organisations who want to ensure that Stoke-on-Trent has an equitable, resilient, and environmentally sustainable food network that supports the health, wellbeing, and prosperity of our communities. The partnership meets regularly to look at key issues that impact access to food across the city, such as affordability, access to healthy ingredients and education around food sustainability and kitchen skills. For further information or details of future meetings, please email: support@vast.org.uk

Social Media Content

Images

Social media images for this toolkit are available to download here: <https://vast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Help-is-at-Hand-Social-Images.zip>

Social Media Content Overview

This content is a general overview of support and where people can get help. It is followed by more tailored content shaped around the three themes of the winter Cost-of-Living campaign:

1. Money
2. Energy
3. Food
4. Donations of food / other items

Please share these posts through your social media channels to help your communities access the support they need.

This content can also be changed and adapted to meet your needs and to match your organisation’s support, services, availability, and/or brand voice.

Where possible and where character count allows, please use the hashtag **#HelpIsAtHand**, and tag VAST in your posts. Our social media handles are:

* Facebook: [@VASTstaffordshire](https://www.facebook.com/VASTstaffordshire)
* LinkedIn: [VAST Services (1920)](https://www.linkedin.com/company/vast-staffordshire)

General Content

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| The cost-of-living crisis is affecting lots of people in communities, people from all walks of life. But help is out there, even if you’re working! #HelpIsAtHand - find support on the #StokeonTrent Community Directory ⬇️  🔗 <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/> |
| Don’t stick your head in the snow this winter ❄️– #HelpIsAtHand, support is out there, and it’s important to get it when you need it. Find cost of living support at on the #StokeonTrent Community Directory ⬇️  🔗 <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/> |
| Don’t feel left out in the cold this winter 🥶 #HelpIsAtHand  Access cost of living support you’re entitled to ⬇️  🔗 <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/> |
| We’re all facing tough financial challenges. If you’re struggling the council has several grants, benefits, relief funds… and other #HelpIsAtHand too ⬇️  🔗 <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/> |
| #HelpIsAtHand even if you might not be eligible for means-tested support! Check out the #StokeonTrent Community Directory for support in your area.  Directory ➡️ [https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/](https://sottogether.vast.org.uk/) |
| Many of the #StokeonTrentTogether Welcoming Spaces are also Council Community Lounges where you can access advice and guidance, as well as a nice cup of tea and some much-needed social interaction.  Find out more about welcoming spaces ⬇️  🔗 <https://sottogether.vast.org.uk/cost-of-living-welcoming-spaces/> |
| @SNS\_CAB are offering financial health check surgeries to make sure you’re getting the support you’re entitled to. No need to book, just turn up. Head over to #HelpIsAtHand for all the details ⬇️  🔗 <https://www.stoke.gov.uk/helpisathand> |
| Some of the #CostOfLiving support in #StokeonTrent includes:  🥕 Help with food and accessing foodbanks or community pantries.  💡 Help with gas and electric bills or energy-saving advice.  💷 Help managing money and debt advice.  Find support over on the Community Directory or at @SoTCityCouncil’s #HelpIsAtHand page ⬇️  🔗 Directory ➡️ <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/>  🔗 City Council ➡️ <https://www.stoke.gov.uk/helpisathand> |

Content for Theme One: Money

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| Are you getting the benefits you're entitled to? 🤔  If you're not sure where to start, #HelpIsAtHand 🤝  Try this benefits calculator to make sure you're not missing out on money you're entitled to 👇  🔗 <https://stoke.entitledto.co.uk/Home/Start> |
| The #CostOfLivingCrisis is affecting almost everyone, even those who work are struggling to make ends meet. Don’t feel frozen out - there is support available. Check out the #StokeonTrent Community Directory to find lots of listings for money and benefits advice and support 👇  🔗 <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/directory/categories/money-benefits/> |
| Is the #CostOfLiving getting you down? It’s not easy to ask for help when you’re struggling, but #HelpIsAtHand, even if you think you can’t claim benefits. Head over to the #StokeonTrent Community Directory to find the support you need 👇  🔗 <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/directory/categories/money-benefits/> |
| #CostOfLiving pressures weighing you down?  🤝 #HelpIsAtHand if you're struggling, and there's support out there to help you make the most of your money, even if you're working. The #StokeonTrent Community Directory has lots of details about who can help ⬇️  🔗 <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/> |
| Improving your confidence and skills with money 💷  @SNS\_CAB’s Potteries Moneywise project can help you to manage your money, make the most of your wages, help you create a budget, and make sense of your bills.  Head over to the Directory for their details ⬇️  🔗 <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/directory/listing/potteries-moneywise-part-of-citizens-advice-sns/> |
| 🎓 Education  🤝 Support  💷 Income  📈 Budgeting  🗣️ Advice  @Saltbox's Money Matters project offers free, confidential and impartial debt advice to help you take back control of your money. All the details are on the #StokeonTrent Community Directory 👇  🔗 https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/directory/listing/money-matters-saltbox/ |
| Christmas can be a stressful time – particularly when money is tight and you are struggling to make ends meet.  Using charity shops or re-gifting can help your budget go a little further this Christmas. #HelpIsAtHand |
| Our city has some amazing second-hand and charity shops that can help you to stretch your budget this Christmas when buying gifts. 🎅  Why not give them a try and see if you can pick up a Christmas bargain!  #HelpIsAtHand |

Content for Theme Two: Energy

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| 💡 Are you worried about your energy bills?  Even when you're working it can still be tough to stay on top of your gas and electric bills, especially during the winter months.  But #HelpIsAtHand 🤝  The #StokeonTrent Community Directory has listings for orgs that can help you take back control ⬇️  🔗 <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/directory/categories/energy-warmth/> |
| Just because you're working, doesn't mean you're not feeling the #CostOfLiving pinch. Get helpful advice and support on how you can manage your gas and electric usage and bills.  #HelpIsAtHand 🤝 on the #StokeonTrent Community Directory 👇  🔗 <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/directory/categories/energy-warmth/> |
| #WeAreTotallyStoked | Community Support  💡 If you need help managing or understanding your energy bills, head over to the #StokeonTrent Community Directory to find info on local organisations that can help you make sense of it all 👇  🔗 <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/directory/categories/energy-warmth/> |
| Are your energy bills blowing your mind? 🤯😵‍💫  Struggling to keep up with payments?  Don't stick your head in the snow this winter, #HelpIsAtHand, support is out there, and it’s important to get it when you need it.  Find support near you on the Directory ⬇️  🔗 <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/> |
| The #CostOfLiving is having a huge impact on #StokeonTrent and more people are feeling the pinch 😥  With gas and electric costing more and more, you might want to think about how you can save energy and try to keep costs down.  Find support here ⬇️  🔗<https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/directory/categories/energy-warmth/> |
| #WeAreTotallyStoked | Community Support  "With energy bills at an all-time high, knowing how to save energy has never mattered more." @EnergySvgTrust  Head over to their website to get some tips on how to save energy at home ⬇️  🔗<https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/energy-at-home/> |

Content for Theme Three: Food

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| #WeAreTotallyStoked | Community Support  Just because you can't get a foodbank voucher, doesn't mean you can't get help with accessing food. There are lots of options across the city. You can find them on the Community Directory ⬇️  🔗 <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/directory/categories/food/> |
| Are you struggling to feed yourself or your family?  Access to foodbanks is limited, and it depends on your income, but there are other options. Community pantries and social supermarkets could help you ⬇️  🔗<https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/directory/categories/food/> |
| The #CostOfLiving is affecting everyone. Even those who are working and earning are struggling to make ends meet and feed themselves or their families 🥕🍞 #HelpIsAtHand  If you need access to free or affordable food, find support on the Community Directory ⬇️  🔗<https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/directory/categories/food/> |
| #WeAreTotallyStoked | Community Support  No one in our community should have to face going hungry, and anyone can find themselves at crisis point. If this sounds like you, don’t worry, #HelpIsAtHand🤝  See the list of community pantries where you can access affordable (and sometimes free) food 🥕🍞🍎  👇👇👇  🔗 <https://www.stoke.gov.uk/helpisathand> |
| There is a whole network of Welcoming Spaces across #StokeonTrent where you can get a nice cup of tea and a bite to eat in a warm space, as well as somewhere to charge your phone, and some much-needed social interaction ☕  Find one near you 👇  🔗 <https://sottogether.vast.org.uk/cost-of-living-welcoming-spaces/> |
| No one should go without food this winter. Many organisations are offering a warm space and a hot meal over the winter period. Find out where is offering meals near you 👇  🔗 <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/directory/categories/food/> |
| The winter months can be hard for those who live alone or who are struggling to make ends meet. Don’t feel frozen out this winter. Visit the #CommunityDirectory to find out where you can meet new people and enjoy a hot meal this winter 👇  🔗 <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/directory/categories/food/> |
| Community Pantries: accessible food you don't need a foodbank voucher for 👇  🍞Swan Bank: 12 items £5  🍎Port Vale Foundation: 10 items £5  🥕The Community Can: 15 items £7.50  🥦Your Local Pantry (YMCANS): 10 items £4.50  🥔Chell Parish Pantry: free shop  🔗 <https://www.stoke.gov.uk/helpisathand> |
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Content for Theme Four: Donations

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| The winter period can be tough for those struggling to make ends meet, but together we can make sure no one goes hungry this winter #HelpIsAtHand 🤝  Donations are welcome at foodbanks across the city. Find your nearest food bank, where you can donate food this winter 👇  🔗 <https://stokecommunitydirectory.co.uk/directory/categories/food/> |
| Christmas Food Bank & Toy Collection 🪀🍞  Stoke-on-Trent Bid & businesses are coming together to gather donations to give to food banks this Christmas 🥕🍞🍎  Do you have items you would like to donate?  You can donate them at The Dudson Centre, Hanley |
| Do you have food, clothing or personal hygiene items that you would like to donate to help someone this Christmas?🎄  We have a donation drop-off point at The Dudson Centre! We’re open weekdays 8:30-5.  Together, we can make sure no one goes hungry this winter! 🥕🍞🍎  #HelpIsAtHand🤝 |
| This winter, help someone in need by donating food at your local supermarket! All major supermarkets provide baskets for donations – so this winter, if you can, why not buy an extra few items to donate to help those in need? 🤝  #HelpIsAtHand |
| Have you received unwanted gifts this Christmas? 🎁🧧  Don’t let them go to waste! Charity shops throughout the city welcome new and preloved items that can be sold to benefit charities!  #HelpIsAtHand |
| Having a clear-out to make room for all those new presents? 🎁  Don’t throw them away – recycle today! ♻️  Charity shops across the city welcome new and preloved items! |

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Additional Resources.

The Bread and Butter Thing winter helpline contact information [Winter Poster](https://vastservices.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/EWkVk35G6gxCn0c2UOIPVBoBqF_8PO_gthpn_wWKZQ4_IA?e=dKGqMF)

Pre-written social media posts to help encourage new or exisiting members to make the most of Bread and Butter’s affordable food this Christmas. [Bread and Butter WInter Social Media Posts.](https://vastservices.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/EVsuYMeaVMNHou_Y6CSi-94BkaTd8jGGEL_SLCR7mGcY0w?e=k6lKRA)