



vast



INVESTING IN  
COMMUNITIES

STOKE-ON-TRENT  
TOGETHER

# Welcoming Spaces

A guide for Stoke-on-Trent Organisations

## What is a Welcoming Space?

Organisations across Stoke-on-Trent are working together to set up a network of Welcoming Spaces over Autumn and Winter.

A Welcoming Space is a place of connection 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.

There are free-of-charge services available at each Welcoming Space - these 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



“Stronger Together Through Winter is a growing campaign that is bringing public services, voluntary and community groups, education providers and businesses together in a united response to support residents through rising energy bills, cost of living increases and the colder winter months. This work is already beginning to deliver, and I’m delighted to see our council library services become among the first welcoming spaces to be announced.

“These are locations where residents can meet in informal settings, have a chat, access advice and support and make use of services in a heated, welcoming environment. We know that the cold winter months can be an isolating time for some residents and that many households are feeling anxious about energy bills as the weather cools. We want people to know that there is support available to them if they need it, and that services are working together across public, voluntary, community and business sectors to help.”

*Council leader Abi Brown*

Introduction	03
Setting Up	04
Location and Accessibility	05
Transport	06
Heating Costs	07
Volunteers	08
Health and Safety	09
Food Safety	10
Safeguarding	11
Promotion	12
Advice for Welcoming Spaces	13
Appendix & Useful Links	14



Welcoming spaces can be anything from a community café to an advice drop-in; anywhere that people can access **free or low-cost services to support with the cost of living** in a warm environment.

This could be – a community cafe, an exercise/craft/activity club, drop-in sessions with advice organisations, a homework club, or just a warm space where people can socialise and be comfortable.

If you are thinking of converting your facilities or one of your existing activities into a Welcoming Space and would like some advice, please contact [SOTtogether@vast.org.uk](mailto:SOTtogether@vast.org.uk)

**Here are a few examples of Welcoming Spaces that have been established:**



**Libraries in Stoke-on-Trent are Welcoming Spaces where people can meet up, socialise, access support on issues such as money, welfare and mental wellbeing, access computers, free wi-fi and charging points, and heated spaces. They also run activity sessions for children.**

**Staff at the library can help with:**

- information about Universal Credit
- free access to computers (ends 15 minutes before library closes)
- free Wi-Fi
- free computer skills training
- support to complete your Universal Credit form online
- work clubs



**Fegg Hayes Futures runs The Hub@ST6, in Fegg Hayes. They offer a wide range of support to our community, from providing free food for anyone who needs it via the Fareshare scheme, to offering supported volunteer opportunities to those wanting to occupy some time whilst also giving back to their neighbourhood.**

Fegg Hayes Futures provide a variety of cost of living advice services, including surgeries at the Hub from Groundwork's Green Doctors who can offer energy saving advice and provide free energy saving measures, and Potteries Moneywise who offer support to help people increase their confidence with money. They also offer food provision.



**Blurton Community Hub is a charity based in Blurton, aiming to support our community in any way possible, and directing to further support from other agencies.**

Blurton Community Hub offer crafts, games, and children's activities, all of which are free entry – they also offer refreshments for 50p. They often have visits from the local police Community Support Officer, a social prescriber, and other organisations, to offer advice and support.

## Setting up

When setting up as a Welcoming Space, consider...

### What you already do

Welcoming spaces don't need to be open 24/7 – if you already run a club, café, drop-in, or social activity, you could use this as your offer of a welcoming space.

### What other people are already doing

As part of the [Stronger Together Through Winter](#) campaign, we've created a list of welcoming spaces – have a look to see if any organisations near you are already running something. You could offer your support for their existing service or see if they'd be interested in working together.

If your organisation doesn't have suitable premises but you'd be interested in opening something in a community venue near you, talk to VAST or reach out to other organisations in your area.

### What you want to offer

If you don't have any existing services to open as a welcoming space, think about what kind of support you want to offer – consider your service users and what they need the most. It may be useful to talk to people in your community about what they feel would be most beneficial for them.

If your service users are typically younger people, for example, you could think about opening a **homework club or games night**.

### Facilities and Funding

Consider what facilities you may already have available – **do you have access to free Wi-fi? Do you offer food or hot drinks? Can people use your location to charge their devices? Are you able to offer advice, or signpost to other services?**

If you want to open a new service as a Welcoming Space – do you have the space, facilities (e.g. if you're wanting to open a café – do you have enough cups, tea bags, places to sit), volunteers/staff?

A big concern for a lot of organisations is funding towards heating costs – see the **funding section below** or look on the [VAST Vault](#) for up-to-date funding opportunities.



# Location and Accessibility

*The following factors are important for good physical access:*

Approach to building (e.g. dropped curbs, signage, etc.).

Entrance accessibility (e.g. ramps, steps and handrails).

Doors (exterior and interior) with access for all and accessible routes.

Lifts and stairlifts that are easily accessible.

Keeping aisles, corridors, doorways and spaces free of obstruction and with space to accommodate wheelchair and buggy users.

Means for people with disabilities to leave the building quickly in the event of an emergency.

Alarm systems suitable for alerting the hearing impaired.

Critical distances (e.g. width of corridors, aisles and security sensors).

**Want to ask about accessibility in your building? Contact [Support@vast.org.uk](mailto:Support@vast.org.uk)**

**When planning your Welcoming Space, make sure you consider any potential access needs, and make this information available in advance.**

**For example, people with disabilities who would like to access your services may need to know about level access, accessible toilets, parking, public transport, hearing loops, sensory-friendly areas and more.**

**GUIDE**  
**EUAN'S**  
Warm Banks  
Accessibility  
Guidance



## Transport

For people to be able to access your welcoming space, it's important that they're able to get there. Travel costs could be a barrier to many potential users – including parking costs.

Consider:

- Do you have free parking available?
- Are there a limited number of spaces?
- Do you know where the nearest parking is?
- Do you know where the nearest bus stops are?
- Can you advise your visitors on bus times and public transport access?



**Door2Door Transport** is a community transport service for residents of **Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent**. Our fabulous team of Volunteer Drivers support people to get out and about in their communities helping reduce isolation and enabling people to maintain their independence.

### Who can use the service?

- Adults who are a resident of Newcastle-under-Lyme or Stoke-on-Trent and are unable to access public transport or do not have access to their own vehicle
- Wheelchair users where they are able to transfer to a standard vehicle and the wheelchair/walkers may be collapsed to fit into the boot of a car.

### Door2Door Transport can be used for a variety of journeys including:

- Health-related appointments (where transport is not the responsibility of the local health service)
- Social/recreational events and clubs
- Visiting friends
- Banking, shopping, hairdressing

01782 621936

Website

*A fare is charged based on the distance travelled.*



## Heating Costs

**Think about how your building is used.**

Consider changes so you're not unnecessarily heating underused or unused spaces. You might consider using smaller rooms or concentrating use of the building over fewer days. You could also use individual heaters (for example infra-red, or halogen heaters) to heat individual rooms, rather than heating the whole building. You can also use the thermostatic radiator valves (TRVs) on radiators to control which rooms receive the most heat, turning radiators down in rooms you use less often. But remember, if your building is left unheated for prolonged periods of time you may experience damp problems.

**More advice on saving energy in a community space:**

[How to save energy in your community building | Centre for Sustainable Energy \(cse.org.uk\)](#)



Use [THIS GUIDE](#) to estimate the heat demand of your building, to use when budgeting/applying for funding

Read the [ENERGY SAVING TRUST GUIDE TO SETTING YOUR HEATING CONTROLS](#) to ensure you're being efficient with your energy



### Looking for funding?

The VAST Vault is an online resource for Stoke-on-Trent's voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector.

We will help you to identify the best funding streams available for your organisation and work with you to develop your application. We'll do everything in our power to give you the best chance of success.

As part of our commitment to developing and advancing the local third sector, we want to provide the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire voluntary organisations with the most up to date funding opportunities and achieve the best success rate possible so that the local voluntary sector can continue to thrive.

You can contact us here:

**01782 683030**

**Support@vast.org.uk**

Or visit the Vault [here](#):





# Volunteers

Utilising volunteers is a fantastic way of providing a Welcoming Space and enabling people to feel like they are helping their community in these uncertain times.

In order to accommodate volunteers within your Welcoming Spaces, it's important to have the basics in place to ensure volunteers are treated fairly, safely and included within your organisation.

**You should have the below items in place:**

- **A volunteering policy, which covers the basics such as points of contact, expectations of the role and other important information relevant to volunteers.**
- **A safeguarding policy, which covers both adults and children.**
- **Confirmation that volunteers are covered under your public liability insurance.**

If you do not have these in place, then **don't panic!** VAST has premade templates that are ready to go, you just need to personalise them to your organisation.

**If you'd like any support around recruiting or engaging with volunteers, please email [volunteering@vast.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@vast.org.uk) where a member of our Team will be happy to help.**



## DBS Checks

DBS checks can help ensure that vulnerable service users are safe - but they're not always needed. For guidance on whether your volunteer role will require DBS checks, [see our flow chart here.](#)

## Looking to recruit volunteers?

VAST Volunteering can help to match you up with suitable volunteers. Email [volunteering@vast.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@vast.org.uk) or visit our website [HERE](#) for more information.

# Health and Safety

## Risk Assessments

Risk assessments - for both your building, and any activities you put on - are important to ensure that visitors to your Welcoming Space will be safe.

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, the minimum you must do is:

- identify what could cause injury or illness in your business (hazards),
- decide how likely it is that someone could be harmed and how seriously (the risk),
- take action to eliminate the hazard, or if this isn't possible, control the risk.

You can find more information on the [Health and Safety Executive website](#), including [templates and example risk assessments](#).

HSE also have a [health and safety checklist for village and community halls](#).

## Covid-19 Safety

With winter increasing the risk of both flu and coronavirus, it's important to ensure that your Welcoming Space is safe.

The World Health Organisation has created a collection of guides to help public spaces to be as Covid-19 safe as possible, including:

- Libraries
- Churches
- Streets
- Youth Clubs
- Community Centres
- Covered Markets
- Food Banks

[You can access these guides HERE.](#)



It's important to consider things like **ventilation, distancing, handwashing, food safety, seating and building temperature.**

If you have concerns about the safety of your welcoming space, please contact [SOTtogether@vast.org.uk](mailto:SOTtogether@vast.org.uk)

# Health and Safety

## Food Safety

If you handle, prepare, store, and serve food occasionally, and on a small scale, you do not need to register. You do not need a food hygiene certificate to make or to sell food for charity events, however you do need to make sure that you handle food safely.

[Follow the 4Cs of food hygiene – cleaning, chilling, cooking and avoiding cross contamination.](#)

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water, using hand sanitisers particularly if hand washing facilities are not readily available.
- Always wash fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Keep raw and ready-to-eat foods apart.
- Do not use food past its use-by date.
- Make sure food is bought from reputable suppliers.
- Always read any cooking instructions and make sure food is properly cooked before you serve it.
- Ensure food preparation areas are well maintained and fit for purpose.
- Ensure that food preparation areas are suitably cleaned and sanitised after use and wash any equipment you are using in hot soapy water.
- Keep food out of the fridge for the shortest time possible and cover where necessary.
- Dispose of packaging materials and food waste properly.
- Have a dedicated area for storing cleaning chemicals away from the foodstuffs.

**When you serve home-made cakes at community events there are a few guidelines to follow:**

- A recipe is used from a reputable source.
- The people who make the cakes/biscuits must follow good food hygiene advice.
- The cakes are stored and transported safely.
- Be particularly careful when cakes contain fresh cream.
- Label all the ingredients.

Information from the [places of welcome](#) site.

**The Food Standards Agency have free online food safety courses available to help you and your business comply with food hygiene and food standards. The e-learning courses include:**

- [Allergen training](#)
- [Labelling training](#)
- [Root cause analysis training](#)
- [Traceability training](#)
- [Vacuum packing training](#)

Useful Links:





# Health and Safety

## Safeguarding

Creating a safe and welcoming environment, where everyone is respected and valued, is at the heart of safeguarding.

It's about making sure your organisation is run in a way that actively prevents harm, harassment, bullying, abuse and neglect. It's also about being ready to respond safely and well if there is a problem.

Everyone in the organisation has a role to play in safeguarding. It should become part of your day-to-day activities.

Every organisation that delivers charitable activities has a duty to safeguard volunteers, staff members, participants and donors.

The Charity Commission has produced [detailed safeguarding guidance](#) that sets out the specific responsibilities for voluntary organisations.

Even if your charity is unregistered, you are expected to follow the guidance and treat safeguarding children and adults at risk as a priority. This applies to all charities, even if you do not specifically work with children or adults at risk.

The guidance is also good practice even if your organisation is not a charity, because these are standards the public will expect.

[NVCO offers a lot of guidance on safeguarding HERE](#)

[Find safeguarding training for staff and volunteers HERE](#)

NCVO Recommends these guides for policy writing:

- [NSPCC Learning](#)
- [Ann Craft Trust](#)

**Useful numbers:**

- ChildLine: 08001111
- NSPCC Helpline: 0808 808 5000 and [website](#)
- Elder Abuse Helpline: 0808 808 8141
- National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 2000 247

[You can find local organisations offering mental health support on the Stronger Together Through Winter site HERE](#)



## Promotion

### Stronger Together Through Winter

The [Stoke-on-Trent Together website](#) is a directory of cost-of-living support available in the city. Support is separated into multiple categories, including a Welcoming Spaces category.

You can register as a Welcoming Space by completing [Stoke-on-Trent City Council's application form](#), or emailing [SOTtogether@vast.org.uk](mailto:SOTtogether@vast.org.uk)

We want all organisations to use (and encourage their service users to use) the site to signpost through to other organisations.



### VAST Digital - Design and Printing



If you're looking to create leaflets or posters to promote your Welcoming Space, [VAST's Digital Team can support you.](#)

VAST Digital offers a full Graphic Design service to any client, whether that is a small charity or community group or a much larger organisation. We take the time to learn about your organisational needs and listen to your requirements before offering advice and guidance on the best possible solutions.

Our print service is extremely reliable and we can provide high quality printing at a fantastic price. We can provide a quote to print just about anything!

Some of our Digital services (website and graphic design) can be covered by the VAST Bursary - a grant of up to £500 towards VAST services. [More information on the Bursary here.](#)

### Social Media Advertising

Social media is a great way to promote your welcoming space. Some tips and tricks:

- Remember to post regularly - don't assume everyone sees every post!
- The best time to post on social media is in the morning.
- Make sure your posts are accessible - see our guide [here](#).
- Build your network - connect with other organisations and join groups.
- Use pictures, not just plain text - contact the VAST digital team if you'd like some support with designing a poster.

# Advice for welcoming Spaces



## COST OF LIVING SUPPORT



The **Stoke-on-Trent Together website** is a directory of cost-of-living support available in the city. Support is separated into multiple categories, including a Welcoming Spaces category.

You can register as a Welcoming Space by completing [Stoke-on-Trent City Council's application form](#), or emailing [SOTtogether@vast.org.uk](mailto:SOTtogether@vast.org.uk)

Lots of people are looking for help with debt, finances, energy bills and food, so connecting them with other local organisations is key to ensure that they are thoroughly supported. Please use the site to signpost your service users through to other organisations.

If you'd like help connecting or collaborating with another organisation, please contact VAST and we can arrange a meeting.

Keep an eye on the [News](#) and [Information for Organisations](#) categories on the Stoke-on-Trent Together site - we post regular updates and useful tips.

Remember - you don't need to be an expert! You can signpost to other organisations for support with specialist subjects, like financial, debt, or disability advice.

**VAST can support you with a range of things, including:**

- Governance Support
- Funding
- Volunteering
- Training
- Networking
- Accountancy
- Design and Digital
- Community Engagement and promotion

Contact us at [SOTtogether@vast.org.uk](mailto:SOTtogether@vast.org.uk) for cost of living advice, or [Support@vast.org.uk](mailto:Support@vast.org.uk) for other support.

### Useful Contact Numbers:

**Citizen's Advice**  
[0808 2787876](tel:08082787876)

**Groundwork**  
[01782 829909](tel:01782829909)

**Potteries Moneywise**  
[01782 408685](tel:01782408685)

**Staffordshire Mental Health Helpline**  
[0808 800 2234](tel:08088002234)

**Stepchange Debtline**  
[0800 133 1111](tel:08001331111)

**National Debtline**  
[0808 808 4000](tel:08088084000)

**Beat the Cold**  
[01782 914915](tel:01782914915)

**Money Matters**  
[01782 470980](tel:01782470980)

**Samaritans**  
116 123 or [0330 094 5717](tel:03300945717)

**Disability Solutions**  
[01782 638300](tel:01782638300)



# Appendix and Useful Links

[Stronger Together Through Winter - VAST's Cost of Living Directory](#)

[Energy Saving Trust - Useful articles and video resources about reading bills, energy saving etc.](#)

[Charity Finance Group - Cost of Living Hub](#)

## Places of Welcome

[Euan's Guide - Warm Banks Accessibility Guidance](#)

[Centre for Sustainable Energy - How to Save Energy in your Community Building](#)

[Centre for Sustainable Energy - Estimating the Heat Demand of a Community Building](#)

## Health and Safety England

[WHO - Covid-19 Safer Spaces](#)

[Food Standards Agency - Free Online Food Safety Training](#)

## Warm Welcome UK

[Great Winter Get-Together - Inclusion and Reaching Out Fact Sheet](#)

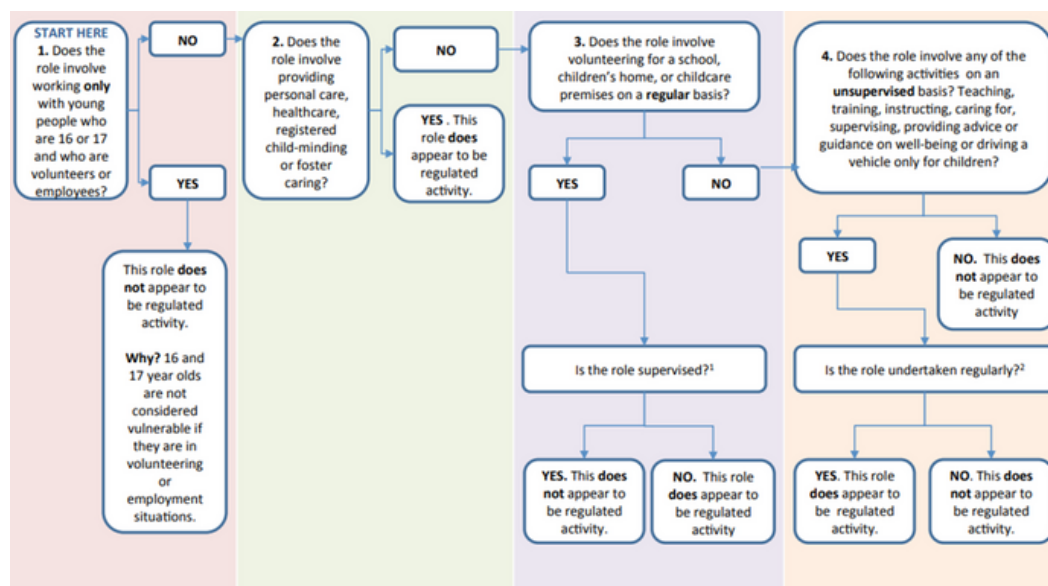
[Warm Welcome UK - Step by Step Guide to setting up a Welcoming Space](#)

[Camerados - Public Living Rooms Guidance](#)

[JustGiving - Free Guide - Winter Fundraising Guide](#)

[Charity Resource Hub - Cost of Living](#)

## Do I need to DBS Check? Flowchart:





STOKE-ON-TRENT  
TOGETHER

vast   
INVESTING IN  
COMMUNITIES

