



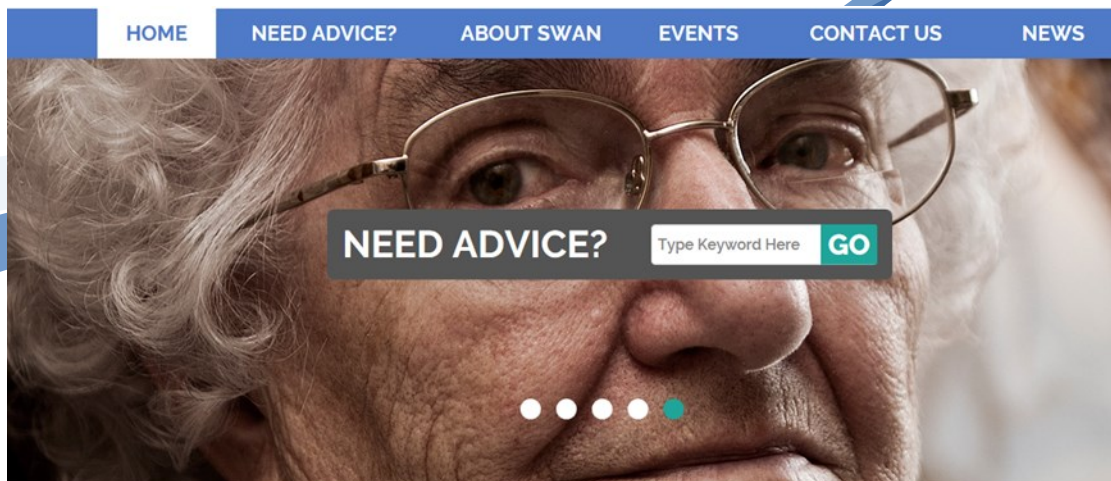
## Stockton Welfare Advice Network

NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2017

**SWAN WEBSITE** [www.stocktonadvice.org.uk](http://www.stocktonadvice.org.uk)

The website was officially launched in March 2015 and in that time over 83,000 pages have been viewed and it continues to be a valued source of information on welfare advice for the Borough for both residents and professionals.

The site continues to be updated regularly and further avenues for advice are given as more agencies join SWAN.



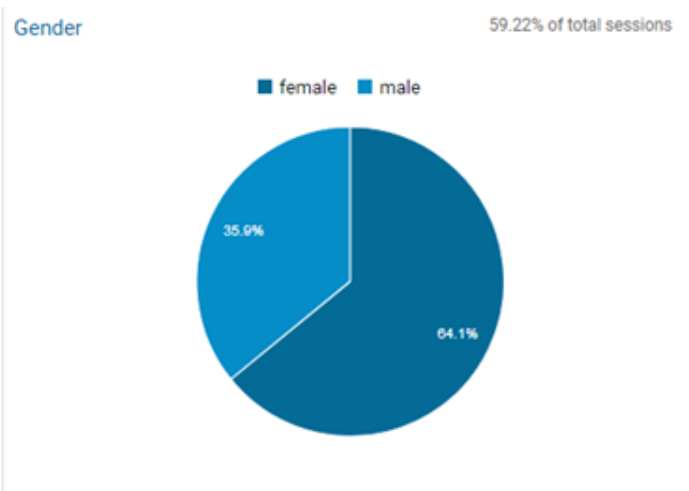
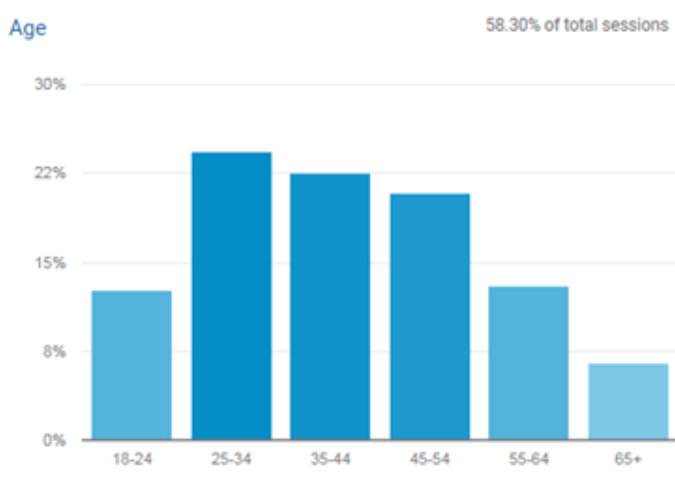
Getting the right advice at the right  
time from the right place

**NEED ADVICE?**

The table below shows the number of visits and page views for this quarter

		Q1 2017/18
NUMBER OF VISITS	Visits are the individual periods of time that visitors spend on your site. A visit is ended either after 30 minutes of inactivity or if the user leaves your site for more than 30 minutes (if a user leaves your site and returns within 30 minutes, this is counted as part of the original visit).	3384
USERS	Users that have had at least one visit in the quarter (inc new and returning)	2691
PAGE VIEWS	This is the number of times users view a page. This covers all page views; so if a user refreshes the page, or navigates away from the page and returns, these are all counted as additional page views.	6293
% OF NEW VISITS	% of visitors who are new in the quarter	75.03

The demographics of users show that most are female. The age group most likely to access the site is 25-34.



### Pageviews

This is the number of times users view a page. This covers all page views; so if a user refreshes the page, or navigates away from the page and returns, these are all counted as additional page views.

#### The biggest changes (comparing Q1 2016/17 with Q1 2017/18 are:

- **Tees Credit Union – page views increased from 17 to 226 (1229% increase)**
- **CGL Stockton – page views increased from 18 to 167 (827% increase)**
- **Where to get advice for benefit problems also increased by 337% demonstrating more people looking for assistance with benefit problems/ queries**

## **SUBJECT AREAS** (comparison of Q1 2016/17 to Q1 2017/18)

Benefits remains the most popular category of information. Grants and Assistance remains in second place however the increase of sessions in this category has had the most dramatic increase of 38.16% on the comparative quarter. Immigration has commonly been the third most visited category however this quarter saw over a 55% drop in sessions compared to Q1 2016/17.

**Benefits** (decrease of 2.63% on the same quarter, previous year)

**Grants and Assistance** (38.16% increase on the same quarter, previous year)

**Health & Social Care** (45.71% decrease on the same quarter, previous year)

**Housing** (decrease of 36.11% on the same quarter, previous year)

**Family and Relationships** (49% decrease on the same quarter, previous year)

## **AGENCY INFORMATION**

Users of the site have viewed the details on the following agencies-

**Welfare Rights** (503 page views- an increase of 47.94% on the same quarter, previous year)

**Endeavour/ North Star** (336 page views- 7.69% decrease on the same quarter, previous year)

**Housing Options** (237 page views- 20.47% decrease on the same quarter, previous year)

**Tees Credit Union** (226 page views- 1229% increase on the same quarter, previous year)

**CGL Stockton Recovery Service** (167 page views- 827.78% increase on the same quarter, previous year)

## **FORTHCOMING CHANGES TO THE WEBSITE**

Many SWAN members will know that one of the objectives of SWAN was to increase inter- agency referrals. This has made a great difference to Stockton clients and has replaced vague signposting which was inappropriate for many of our vulnerable clients.



To further encourage referral practice, we will be asking SWAN Members to provide their referral forms to be uploaded onto the site. This will allow other agencies to have quick access to the correct paperwork.

The referral forms will sit in “HOW YOU ACCESS OUR SERVICE”

We hope that all agencies will have this information on by the end of September.

## ADVICE UPDATE



*We should all be aware by now that Universal Credit (UC) is fast approaching full implementation in Stockton Borough from next April. We are all keen to learn more about how our clients can be prepared for its arrival but are we, as agencies, prepared for the impact on how we operate?*

**Ross Brooks, Hartlepool Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)** is a Financial Inclusion and Debt Adviser with Hartlepool CAB, with nearly four years experience. Hartlepool has already moved to full service so Ross has first hand experience of how this new benefit has effected the delivery of advice services through his role at the CAB.

Ross kindly gave SWAN some top tips on how members can prepare.

### **Be ready for an online service**

Hartlepool CAB previously had interview rooms in which to advise clients. None of these rooms had computer access. As UC is very online focused, there was a recognition that how advisers worked would have to change. The advisers found that they were less likely to telephone the DWP and could usually access all required information by logging on to a client's journal. Advice proved more difficult without adviser and client looking at the same journal. Ross's advice is that computers in interview rooms make advice and support so much easier.



Although many clients may have access to smart phones, Ross states that advisers should be aware that some can only access the internet through Wi-Fi so if your office does not have Wi-Fi you will have to use a computer. Even if a client can access 3G/ 4G, many clients have limited data and therefore may not be able to access their journal when seeking advice.

Agencies will therefore have to consider access to a computer with the client : are the interview rooms large enough? Have you as an agency enough capital to invest in more computers? Are the computers secure? Do you need to start sourcing funding now to ensure your service can provide the best service to UC claimants?

## **You may need to help clients to create a new email account**

One of the first requirements in claiming UC is to have an email address. This is needed to verify your identity at the beginning of the claim. Ross noted that several clients did not have an email account or how to use an email account. Ross found that the introduction of computers in the interview room made it easier for advisers to help clients with this. If you do not have



computer access with the client, agencies may wish to consider draft instructions to help claimants do this elsewhere. He stated that web based email accounts e.g. Gmail were the best because :

- They are secure and free
- They can be accessed from any computer/laptop/smartphone/iPad etc. regardless of location
- Clients are not tied to any Internet/broadband contracts with any provider.

## **Timing is everything**

Once you have verified your claim through an email, you are given a code. A claimant cannot continue with their claim unless they have this code. The code is usually sent promptly and has to be put into the claim within an hour. If a claimant is assisted with creating an email account, it is important that you advise them that once they are sent a code, they are time limited.



This may be very important for those accessing community centres etc. for IT as they may have to book an appointment or be time limited when using computers

## **Vulnerable clients and UC**

One of the main concerns for Ross was how he was going to help vulnerable clients, especially those prone to sanctions, missing appointments and those with mental health issues. Ross stated that he will help clients access their journal on a routine basis when they come to the bureau, even if their enquiry is not benefit related.

Ross finished by stating that although this is a major change for both claimants and agencies, the positive side of UC is that the speed and responsiveness of the online benefit.



These are issues which agencies need to consider now, especially if they are regularly providing welfare benefit advice.

Even if you are not providing direct advice, the issues connected to Universal Credit are widely publicised and your organisation may be effected by clients needing more support than usual.

Thirteen are planning a Universal Credit Event in November. We would encourage SWAN members to attend and take part. In addition, SWAN will be working with the Infinity Partnership and other partner agencies to map access to computers in the Borough before April 2018 so that clients can be correctly signposted for access.

**FURTHER HELP:** Catalyst provide support in bid writing and locating funders to all VCSE organisations in the Stockton Borough. If you are struggling to find funding, look at Catalyst Stockton's website for more information on the Grantfinder Service: <http://www.catalyststockton.org/vcse-events/grantfinder-catalyst/>

## **WINTER AND WARMTH**

**Warm Homes Healthy People has been delivered since 2012 in an attempt to provide help and support to residents whose health conditions make them more vulnerable during the winter months.**

Warm Homes Healthy People is specifically aimed at:

- Over 75's
- Those in receipt of disability benefits
- Those who have a long term illness made worse by the cold
- Those who live with a child (under 5) who has a long term illness made worse by the cold

### **We can help with:**

- Emergency heating
- Energy debt advice and welfare benefits advice and assistance
- Home handyman service – which can assist with minor repairs
- Installation of smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors and falls prevention advice where needed
- We also offer wider advice and support to help keep you healthy and more able to cope with cold weather

### **and if in receipt of qualifying benefits**

- Boiler servicing and repairs

For help and advice contact Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council 01642 528215 8.30am - 4.30pm Monday - Friday.

If you need help with emergency heating outside these hours contact Cleveland Fire Brigade on their 24 hour helpline – 01429 874063.



## BE ENERGY SMART THIS WINTER

Lots of people in Stockton Borough are paying too much for their energy/fuel and as a result are not heating their home effectively.

A cold home can:

- Respiratory conditions worse
- Affect young people and older people
- Seriously affect the health of you and your family
- Mean you are spending more on energy than you might need to



**Stockton and District Advice & Information Service has a new team of Energy Advisers who can:**

- Help you check you are on the best fuel tariff
- Give you free and confidential advice on energy costs to help you improve energy efficiency in the home and save money
- Give independent advice on energy matters including Smart Metres

**To arrange a free appointment or home visit:**

- **Contact Stockton & District Advice & Information Service on 01642 633877 (please mention that you want to see an Energy Adviser)**
- **Email [support@stockton-cab.co.uk](mailto:support@stockton-cab.co.uk)**



If any SWAN member would like to promote a new service or contribute to the SWAN Newsletter , please get in contact with Marie Kerr, SWAN Project Manager :

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