

COST OF LIVING PODCAST

EPIISODE 1

0:03

Hello, I'm Nigel Clarke and I will be your host for Haringey's four part Cost of Living podcast series.

0:10

I am a parenting professional after setting up Dadvengers organization which helps dads on their journey through parenthood.

0:18

And I'm really interested in finding out how the residents of Haringey can re get some help with their money management and different sides of money and debt in today's episode as the prices of energy food bills and other living costs continue to soar.

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The council wants to make sure that all hearing residents are informed about the support available to help during this difficult time and beyond.

0:42

On this podcast, I'll be talking to experts from the council and other local organizations about funding and other initiatives that may be able to help you with your living costs on this first episode will be looking at help with money and debt ways that you can potentially increase or maximize your income, whether that's by accessing benefits you may not know were actually available to you as well as services available to help reduce your debt.

1:11

Today, I'm joined by leader of Haringey council Councilor Peray Ahmet, Martin Groombridge, the CEO of London Capital Credit Union, Anca Muntean citizens advice Haringey and Stewart Faulkner from the Council's Financial Support Team.

1:27

Thank you all for joining us today.

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Now, counselor Ahmet, would you like to start with a little introduction.

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Thank you very much, Nigel.

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So we know that many residents are finding it hard during this difficult time but hopefully this podcast will help to sign post them to help and support that is available for them.

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It's great to have representatives from the Credit Union and citizens advice who are working with our residents each and every day to improve their financial situations.

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And of course an officer from our very own financial support team who have collectively helped residents to reduce thousands of pounds in debt and access benefits and funding.

2:03

I just wanted to highlight our Haringey here to help pages for anyone that needs support right now.

2:07

We launched this campaign during the covid 19 pandemic and it has evolved a lot since then.

2:13

So please do head over to our website which is [www dot Haringey dot gov dot UK](http://www.haringey.gov.uk) backstroke here to help to see what support and services are available to help with these rising living costs.

2:24

And now I'll hand over to the experts.

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Thank you very much Nigel, Thank you, Councillor.

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I will make sure that the show notes have the here to help information you just mentioned. Now, I'm going to ask our guest speakers for today to introduce themselves and tell us a bit about their organization or teams.

2:42

So Martin, let's start with you.

2:44

Hi, my name is Martin Groombridge.

2:46

I'm the grand title of Chief Executive Officer.

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London Capital Credit Unions Financial Cooperative, Based in North London. Lovely and Anca.

2:57

Hello, my name is Anca Muntean and I work as a community advice worker for citizens advice in Haringey.

3:06

I work as a generalist advisor and a support advisor for one of the projects which is found advice project that supports London and quadrant Housing Association tenants with financial advice.

3:19

Great thank you for being here, Anca and last but not least Stewart.

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Hello, I'm Stewart Faulkner from the financial support team.

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We work with respect to residents improving their financial circumstances, finding grants and also other support, especially when it comes to dealing with utilities and the high cost of living.

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Great, thank you so much for your all being here.

3:44

I'm going to start with a question.

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I don't know who's best position to answer this but I'm sure you will help me.

3:51

What services or initiatives are there for residents who are finding it hard to keep on top of their finances right now.

4:00

Working for the financial support team, we provide help with regard to utilities.

4:05

We redirect residents to suppliers as some provide discounts.

4:11

Sign post to organizations such as Shine who look at budget approaches and all available help in the case of emergencies

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vouchers will be sent from our organizations to the residents to assist with topping up energy, whether it be gas or electricity.

4:28

In terms of problems with online services, a resident can drop into customer services and an officer will assist them in contacting us.

4:39

We also have a surgery at the Northumberland Resource Center where residents can drop in and acquire financial support and clothing regarding. Maximizing income,

4:52

we can take the residents through an automated benefit check and observe if they are receiving all the benefits support they qualify for.

5:00

We also encourage more independency, we counsel the residents to discover their motivations and ambitions.

5:06

This can help them utilize their talents and make them more entrepreneurial and in that sense we will redirect them to departments such as Haringey works and Haringey learns. Wow Stuart, that is a wide range of services.

5:23

There, can you give us any examples or success stories of how some of these services have been used.

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There was a success story that I can recollect from resident from the Tottenham area of Haringey

5:36

He had many money problems.

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All his belongings were taken from his household without his permission.

5:42

The resident was taken into custody, inebriated and aggressive emergency funds were found for the residents during this process and we were able to successfully find funding so he could apply for his passport, his travel and items for the household to the figure of £100.

6:01

Additionally, a Tesco's phone was obtained for the resident along with numerous food bank vouchers and an Haringey Support Fund award of £250. Advice was provided in terms of the support available to counter his alcohol dependency.

6:18

The resident extended his thanks by sending us an email outlining how his life had changed for the better.

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That is a really great success story.

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I mean it really shows how Haringey Council are there to help people.

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And I know that residents can often feel that, you know, organizations like the council maybe aren't as supportive to them, but that is a really great example there that you've given us Martin.

6:45

I've got a question for you,

6:47

what support can the credit union offer people to manage their money and or debt?

6:52

Well, credit unions are almost uniquely placed in a way it's a mutual self help organizations, a group of people coming to help out each help each other out with money and what we do.

7:05

We work on the basis that prevention is better than cure.

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So what's happening would currently we are members have got about £20 million worth of savings.

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Those members, the majority of whom said they had no savings before they joined the credit union.

7:21

So at this time were financial crisis where people are struggling to put petrol in the car to get to work or to be able to feed the Children.

7:28

Our members are able to use their savings to prevent getting into problem debt.

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The ability to access to savings is a crucial part in preventing crisis.

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The type of we've heard of.

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So the credit union provides support in a number of ways in helping encouraging our members to save primarily, but we also provide budgeting advice.

7:49

A whole range of working with the money advice and pension service of money management tools and guidance on debt.

7:56

Working with organizations like Haringey council citizens advice and many other voluntary sector organization to provide debt for those people we can't directly help, but promoting people to say we also provide low cost loans at times of need and crucially the ability to help people plan their expenditure.

8:16

Yeah, I'm gonna stick with you Martin because you mentioned money management, Anca will be coming to you in a second.

8:23

how do you learn those money management skills, money management skills best learned as part of life experience?

8:29

Most of us do that.

8:31

Unfortunately not a lot goes on in school teaching Children about the importance of money and how to budget, but the starting point is actually to sit down and write a list of where your money is going.

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One of the things we have with the money advice and pension service on our website is a budget planner where you can actually enter in and it prompts you the type of things to think about what you wouldn't conventionally think about how much you spend, sort of memberships of things and and it's a really good way of actually making sure you don't miss it and identifying those areas where you can actually make savings to make sure that you can the budget until the last two the last to the end of the week.

9:12

Yeah, that's really, really important.

9:14

The thing is though, sometimes we run into problems and situations and maybe our money management isn't top of our priorities.

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So Anca, debt can be really overwhelming.

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What services are there available to help people manage or reduce debt that they may have accrued.

9:32

Okay that's citizens advice.

9:35

We do offer help with that advice like management, money management benefit check.

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We advise people of all the grants and any financial help that is available for them.

9:48

So the first thing that people should do is to check if they are entitled to benefit or any financial help available and try and make application to get this help.

10:01

At the moment there's quite a lot of help available with cost of living payment.

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Probably people are aware that people on benefits who are on low income received a grant of £650 this year from the government as a cost of living payment.

10:22

There's a disability cost of living payment which is £150 and people on disability benefits are entitled to receive this one.

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And there is help available for pensioners as a national cost of living payment.

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And the amount depends on when the pensioner was born.

10:43

So all these payments are paid automatically into the people who are entitled to receive them by DWP, you don't need to make a claim.

10:54

So I just want to make people aware that you don't have, they don't have to make a claim.

11:00

So if they receive text messages, emails asking them to put their bank details or to make a claim don't do it because it's a scam.

11:10

One of the things you've mentioned quite a lot is different benefits.

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Now I want to cover something for people out there listening and I think Stewart might be able to help with this.

11:20

How do people know whether they're actually entitled to these certain benefits and how can they find out if they are? Alright, the resident can contact us on the phone number I can provide which is 0208 489 4431.

11:39

And we can go through a benefit check with them.

11:42

So we will outline their current circumstance and then we'll be able to discover whether or not they're maximizing their income that way.

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So this is a free service and the resident is welcome to call us at any point and then we will go through the benefit check and then provide them with a printout via email.

12:03

So when they go through that you will literally find out all the different things that they may or may not qualify for and provide a printout that has everything.

12:12

Yes.

12:12

No.

12:12

Yes.

12:13

No.

12:13

To which ones.

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And it makes it all simple.

12:16

Absolutely.

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It's a very good service.

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We use it on a regular basis and it does save the resident a lot of time.

12:25

They don't have to go into job centers or phone up.

12:28

universal credit for that type of information.

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It's a service that is free and available to all residents.

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That's really great because personally for me I thought you would have to be going from place to place finding out whether I qualify for this, whether I qualify for that and then go to somewhere else.

12:48

But knowing that there's sort of a one stop shop where you can find out everything that you qualify for and everything you don't qualify for is really, really helpful.

12:56

So thank you for that Stewart.

12:57

Yeah, I must add that.

12:58

We also provide for grant applications.

13:02

So we use the hair and a support fund and enables a resident to acquire white goods, furniture and clothing and support with some general expenses such as utility.

13:12

We also have access to the discretionary housing payments in terms of a resident struggling with rent arrears and shortfalls in their rent caused by benefit caps or local housing allowances.

13:24

So we support the residents throughout.

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So it's not just a one dimensional service where you'll pick up vouchers to assist you with utilities and so forth.

13:33

We really get into the murky waters where people are threatened with eviction and there are other grants available such as the Vickers Relief Grant which helps with rent arrears and threats of eviction in terms of residents that have disabilities and other medical issues.

13:51

There's also the hospital saturday fund which supports with orthopedic beds, medical expenses and also treatments, you've also got access to the benefit checker on the ear to help page on the website so residents can tap into that of their own accord and it's available 24/7 for them to use.

14:14

That's really, really great Stuart.

14:15

I'm going to try and make sure that we cover some of those in the show notes so that people can see, read and use those.

14:22

Now martin.

14:23

Everyone is feeling the pinch right now.

14:26

Are there ways that people can actually increase their income during these uncertain times?

14:31

There are indeed, I mean the biggest thing single way is to be able to reduce your expenditure, which is the most, you know the issue I go back to about planning your budget using the budget planners that are available.

14:43

I would also say not just about your financial health, but your mental health with so much terrible things being said in the media about and the experiences that people are genuinely having the importance of actually being in control of it and feeling better is really important in contacting other people.

15:02

Whether that be the credit union, the local authority or the local citizens advice is very important.

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As the old Adage, a problem shared is a problem halved.

15:11

And it goes a long way into feeling in control and taking those first steps to put yourself back in control of your money and feeling better about it in terms of reducing your expenditure.

15:22

probably the biggest way the credit union can do is one of the prevention that if you've got savings, you don't have to rely on credit too and you've got something to carry you through when times get hard because at the moment it seems it will get worse before it gets better.

15:35

But we will get through this.

15:36

I'm old enough to see many a recession and So I've just about but the key one at the moment we've seen there's a real trend is that people moving to us.

15:46

People have managed their debts perfectly well up until now, particularly credit cards.

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So they've been paying out there three or £400 a month, month in month out to their credit card.

15:57

They're now looking at ways because they are feeling the pinch.

16:02

They're looking at ways of reducing the amount they're spending servicing their debts so they're paying off credit cards with the Credit Union saver loan, which is almost always going to be cheaper, which reduces the monthly expenditure.

16:15

Now, obviously if you can reduce your monthly expenditure by £100 it's the same as a pay rise or benefits or grant and that's an important part that we play in the bigger picture in terms of supporting people through the cost of living crisis, say a few words a little bit about what the difference is with the Credit Union loans to I mean it's the Member's money which is being borrowed.

16:38

So it's about mutual self help.

16:40

Again with the bank, you can, the minimum bank loan there is £2,000. But if you only want a washing machine you don't need £2,000. So with the credit union you only borrow what you need.

16:51

In fact probably the only financial financial institution in the world.

16:55

Credit unions that actually encourage people to save and not to borrow.

16:59

So it does set us out is very different.

17:02

But the less you borrow the better.

17:05

But you, with the credit union, if you borrow money, you decide exactly how much you need to borrow and within reason you decide how much you want to pay.

17:13

If you change your jobs and you'll get more money, you can pay the loan off quicker.

17:18

If you're struggling for money, you can act, we can freeze interest until you find that you find yourself back in employment.

17:23

And fundamental way about how treating each other as you wish to be treated yourself

17:28

I guess. The big part of it is I mentioned a save alone,

17:32

The principle is that a member who is paying off their credit cards, reduce their monthly expenditure to be able to make sure the kids get fed properly our borrowing other members savings.

17:42

So we're required to save whilst they pay off the loan and ultimately anybody borrows money from us ends up with a lump sum of savings in their savings account, which in the longer term builds the financial resilience to avoid the crisis.

17:56

The next crisis as it comes along.

17:59

That's really, really good.

18:01

One of the things that you've touched upon there, that really resonated with me was how probably all the things we're talking about today, if we act upon them and use them in a good way, it's going to help our mental health and mental health is a top topic in all areas of people's lives right now.

18:19

So, knowing that the things we're talking about here can help your mental health, help take a bit of the pressure off as families and people trying to survive in this in this difficult time is really good to know.

18:31

Now a lot of people are in debt to numerous companies at one time.

18:36

So Anca, is there a way to manage the debts and make the payments easier when you've got so many different people that you might have to pay?

18:45

Yes, of course there is.

18:47

And just because you manage the mental health, a lot of people suffer with anxiety now because of the cost of legal crisis and we have more and more customers, clients come to us for advice and support.

19:04

He developed a phobia of opening the letters.

19:09

They know they've got that they know that probably the letter will ask them to make payments or they receive threatening letters.

19:20

So they choose not to open the letters and just to ignore them.

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And what we want to advise people that we are here, we do offer that advice we we are here to support them to advise them if they feel that every they can't cope with the letters.

19:42

They don't have to open them.

19:44

They just can they can come to us and we can support them open the letters and sort them out for them.

19:52

So it's important not to ignore the letters because the more you ignore them, the debt can go up.

19:59

You can be charged interest or other costs and you end up with a larger debt.

20:08

So it's really important to get advice.

20:11

There are options available to deal with your debt. If your circumstances changed and you've got that and you can't afford to make the monthly payments.

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We can help you to do to complete a budgeting form to see how much income you've got available and make offer to creditors.

20:32

So you can make an offer as little as £1 a month if you can't afford to pay more.

20:37

But this will help you too will help your well being because the creditor will not chase you up for other payments will not sending your letters.

20:49

So as long as you get to agree a repayment plan with a credit that is affordable for you,

20:57

The creditor is okay, you're okay.

21:00

So it gets off the pressure.

21:03

Also there are other other options that you can apply. If there is an emergency.

21:12

So people have to understand that the two type of debt is the priority that if you don't pay these debts, the consequences are very serious.

21:21

For example, the rent free is if you don't deal with them, you can be evicted.

21:26

So it's really important, rent arrears, gas, electricity, council tax, priority debt.

21:32

So these are the first one that you need to deal with and then the rest, which are the non priority debts when people come to us and they have a priority that we act straight away on that and we we support them and advise them what to do next.

21:51

There is the option of the breathing space.

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Probably Lots of people heard about the breathing space, breathing space is not a debt solution is just put a pause of 60 days on the action of creditors.

22:07

So you can't be chased off for for payments for 60 days.

22:11

But during the 60 days you need to work with that advisor to find a way to deal with your debts and agree a repayment plan for your debts.

22:24

Other options are the Debt Relief Order, which is an option to write off the debt if you qualify most of the debt qualifying debts for debt relief order.

22:35

But you need to have a debt advisor to make an application and to advise you to see whether you qualify for the debt relief order or not and support you to make the application.

22:48

And also there's the bankruptcy.

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If you're that the amount of that higher than £30,000.

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And again you need to work with the debt advisor to support you and to advise you on this on these applications.

23:07

There's a debt management plan I.

23:09

V.

23:09

A.

23:10

For all of this.

23:12

It's really important to get advice and you can contact us citizens advice in Haringey.

23:20

We have the you can contact us, we are our website via telephone.

23:25

You can come to our office in the world of cottons where we have volunteers who work at the reception and you can, you can have a chat with them.

23:37

Tell them what support you need, how you struggle and they can, if they cannot help you on the day then they will book an appointment with an advisor who will take on the case and support you further.

23:48

Also those other two organizations, you Step Change and National Debtline who are offering that advice.

23:57

You can find their contact details on their website and you can give them a call and they will be able to support you.

24:03

So the most important is not to ignore the debt or even if you don't have the debt but you know that you might end up in debt in the near future because you can't afford to pay the bills then just contact us and we can advise you on what support is available out there.

24:25

Thank you very much Anca, Martin

24:28

Would you like to chip in on?

24:29

Yes, reinforced what I was saying about the importance of seeking proper advice.

24:35

Whenever there are financial problems within the financial services industry, they're always sharks around, looking to make a quick buck out of somebody else's distress.

24:44

And there are a lot of I.

24:45

V.

24:45

A.

24:45

Companies and that currently are spending millions of pounds on daytime television advertising, radio saying they can magically wipe off everybody's debts and they are basically sharks.

24:57

So the really important is to make sure and the credit union make sure people were genuinely unable to meet the terms of their loans.

25:04

Gets proper advice from people like Citizens Advice, Step Change and National Debt Line.

25:09

But not to fall for these false advertising.

25:12

These I.

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Companies because they can cripple people long finances in the long term.

25:17

So make sure the importance of getting independent, free independent advice from a good source is critical.

25:24

That is a great tip.

25:26

Anca just want to go back to Breathing Space that you mentioned earlier on for people out there.

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This is not something you can do over and over again, is it?

25:35

Your if you're doing Breathing Space, you get 11 time deal at 60 days.

25:40

Is there, can you repeat that Breathing Space?

25:43

It's really important for people to understand that it's not a that solution.

25:48

It just will give someone with that the right legal protections from their creditors.

25:56

There are two types of Breathing Space.

25:58

One is called the standard Breathing Space that gives legal protection from creditors action for 60 days.

26:05

And this is available to everyone.

26:07

The other type of Breathing Space is the mental health crisis breathing space, which it's only available to someone who is receiving mental health crisis treatment.

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And it has some stronger protections.

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It lasts as long as the person's mental health crisis treatment continues plus another 30 days.

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And it doesn't matter how long the crisis treatment lasts.

26:30

So for example if you last for one year then you get protection for one year, plus another 30 days. Only that advisor can apply for operating space a qualified one.

26:44

So you need to speak with the debt advisor and you can't make more than one application per year.

26:53

So if you make one now, it would give you protection for 60 days.

26:57

But then for a year you can't make another application.

27:01

Okay.

27:01

Thank you very, very much.

27:03

we're coming to the end of this podcast but I'd like to just touch upon a couple of things.

27:08

Is there anything that any of our guests thinks we haven't covered yet?

27:13

And where can people go for more help and information?

27:17

There's the issue of residents having issues with their council tax and they can come into one of the customer service centers and we would look at affordability.

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And in some cases we can bring accounts back from enforcement agents if we discover that they are entitled to benefits.

27:37

So we'll liaise with enforcement agents and also collections in the back office.

27:43

And what that means is that we can put accounts on hold so then benefits can be revised and in some cases the amounts owing enforcement agents are reduced or alternatively the account in totality gets brought back to the council and handled based on the residents affordability.

28:03

Thank you very much Stuart and I'm glad that we managed to cover that. Martin,

28:06

Have you got anything for us?

28:07

I've just returned back to that area.

28:10

Prevention being better than cure really many of them, people who are currently facing terrible financial crisis, never thought it would ever happen to them.

28:17

And really is the important message to go out here is about whilst you can save, you should be saving.

28:23

Even if it's a few pence a week, the psychological effects of saving is really an important thing in the knowledge that you've got some control over your your money puts you in a better place to deal with those crisis when they come along.

28:36

So that's probably the big big one for me is about promoting saving because it's a better way of dealing with avoiding the crisis.

28:44

But then the importance of talking to people, you know, whatever whoever it is when you come to the credit union, when you go to CAB or if you go to the local authority, then it's it's really important.

28:54

You do talk to people, you don't you're not alone in facing these troubles.

28:58

There are people here who can help.

29:00

Thank you very much.

29:01

Martin.

29:01

Also thank you to Stuart and thank you to Anca all of you have provided some amazing information here for us.

29:07

Thank you for being here in the next episode of The Haringey Cost of Living Podcast.

29:13

We'll be looking at help with household costs such as energy bills, food and rent.

29:18

So make sure you have a listen to that.

29:20

Thank you very much for listening and we'll see you again soon.