



# Cost of Living and Health and Care

Report: March 2023

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## Introduction

Over the past 3 years, many major events have happened which have had a severe and negative impact on people's lives, both on their health and economically. From the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020, to the war in Ukraine in 2022. These events have caused skyrocketing inflation, huge energy bill price increases, a struggling health and care system and spiralling cost of food. This has severely impacted on people's standard of living.

We wanted to understand how the cost of living has/is affecting the people of Bolton, and, in particular - the impact this may be having on health and wellbeing. We also wanted to understand how people are coping and managing through these difficult times. We will share our findings with the Local Authority who have also been doing some work on this important issue. We will form recommendations based on what people have told us and look to work with the Local Authority and other partners to try and help improve people's quality of life.

## Summary of Findings

### Demographics

- ✚ 52 people responded to the survey. The majority of people lived in the BL1 postcode area. 46% of people were aged 25-49, 27% of people were aged 50-64, 25% of people were aged 65-79 and 2% of people were aged 18-24.
- ✚ 60% of people who responded were White British, 10% were Asian British Pakistani, 10% were Asian British Indian, 6% were Black African & White, 2% were Asian & White, 1% was Indian/African.
- ✚ 72% of respondents identified as women and 28% identified as men.
- ✚ 11% of respondents said they were a carer

## **Methodology**

We produced a simple survey. The survey ran from November 2022 to the end of January 2023. The survey was shared with groups in paper format to enable people to participate in the survey who did not have access to digital means. We also encouraged people to take part by telephone if they wished to.

The survey was promoted on our social media channels, our newsletter, our website and via community engagement sessions. Healthwatch Bolton engagement officers attended various events and meetings in the community to ensure a broad range of voices were included in the feedback. Face to face took place with the following:

Bolton Prostate Cancer Group

Caribbean/African Health Network

Zakiria Mosque Sisters group

Kildonan House Health Mela

Talk Changes

Changing Life Directions

Bolton Community College and ESOL department

Fleethouse Hostel

GP Federation / Social Prescribers / Bolton Council

Bolton Library/ Lets keep Bolton Moving

Bolton Health Information Partnership

## What People Told Us

### Q1. Have you been affected by the rising cost of living?

89% of people said **Yes**

10% of people said **No** and **one** said **Don't Know**

**The majority of people reported struggling with the rising cost of food and energy bills and not having enough income/benefits etc., to live on.**

#### Comments:

*"Can't afford things for children such as food and clothing"*

*"Very bad, affected by rising price, pension not enough, disability pension not enough"*

*"Have turned some heating off to avoid excessive bills"*

*"Food prices and gas and electricity prices"*

*"I am now homeless after my situation at home became unsafe. I now have no support from family and friends, and I am unable to work"*

### Q2. Have changes to the cost of living affected your physical and/or mental health?

63% of people said **YES**

24% of people said **NO**

13% of people said they were **NOT SURE**

**The majority of people who had answered YES reported struggles with mental health issues:**

#### Comments:

*"I feel very worried and stressed"*

*"Anxious and worried about meeting costs"*

*"It has made my mental health deteriorate to it's lowest point as my situation has worsened, causing family and friendship/relationships to completely break down. I now have no support then support through supported living. If I didn't have this support I would be destitute and I would be in a crisis"*

*"I suffer with anxiety, it has got a lot worse because I worry about how I am going to manage"*

*"I suffer with mental illness, and find it hard to open up. I did open up to my employer and friend at work but with the cost of living going up I had to move stores. So I have no support from the people I opened up to"*

*"Sometimes I think too much stress for my future"*

*"Feel more stressed and I have already had two strokes"*

**Some people report having physical issues:**

*"struggle with heating, this impacts on aches and pains, arthritis"*

*"My body aches in the morning, I find it difficult to concentrate, my hands and fingers ache when I get cold"*

*"had a bad case of eczema due to the stress"*

*"scared of getting pneumonia again"*

**Q3. Are you worried about how you will manage over the winter months?**

**75%** of people said **YES**

**10%** of people said **NO**

**15%** of people said they were **NOT SURE**

**Comments:**

*"I worry it's going to get colder and it's going to get more difficult for me, but I don't want to put my heating on because I worry how much it will cost"*

*"yes as I have children, and worried about them and keeping them fed and warm, worry about meters going below £20"*

*"my house is freezing already and it is only going to get worse over the winter months"*

*"heating, especially being a pensioner and being home all day"*

*"can't manage mortgage bills, food and heating"*

*"feel very worried"*

*"got children and need to run 3 bed property and safeguarding my children with warmth and essentials is vital"*

*"I have just separated from my husband and now only have one income coming into the house"*

*"I am currently in supported living so my costs are covered, but once I move on from here, I am not sure I will be able to afford rising prices"*

#### **Q4. Can you share any examples of ways you are managing your living costs?**

- ✚ Avoiding buying clothes
- ✚ Buying cheaper food and using less heating
- ✚ Taking out bank overdraft
- ✚ Spending less on luxuries
- ✚ No gym membership
- ✚ Boiling the kettle, then using a flask
- ✚ Getting a water meter
- ✚ Not paying bills
- ✚ Electric blankets, throws, heater
- ✚ Going to bed early
- ✚ Using candles, blankets
- ✚ Not putting radiators on
- ✚ Batch cooking, helping my family and freezing food
- ✚ Saving as much as possible for future costs
- ✚ Buying more supermarket brands
- ✚ Strategic cooking
- ✚ Using air fryer instead of cooking

#### **Comments:**

*"people with mental health issues who are rejected from hospital, do not know they can claim high rate PIP in the community costs"*

*"I am not really eating and taking care of myself as I am too worried and anxious. It can lead to panic attacks and being unable to ask for help, but I am not always supported by the appropriate services. It feels awful to have to limit the already small amount I have. I'm not sure how I will be able to cope if the cost of living rises any higher"*

## Summary and Recommendations

It is clear from the responses, that many people are struggling to pay for their basic living costs with energy bills being a particular worry. Many people report feeling stressed and anxious and worried about the future due to the rising cost of living. Some people are also reporting the impact it is having on their physical health also. People are looking for ways to save money by not using their gas and electricity as much, by finding innovative ways of cooking and by being smarter in the way they shop and budget.

However, the long-term effect of the rising cost of living will ultimately start to take its toll on people. Unless inflation and prices start to fall or stop rising, then the problems that people are experiencing will only get worse. Therefore, it is important to ensure that people can get support to help them cope.

### Recommendations:

1. Agencies need to work together to ensure that people know what welfare benefits they may be entitled to claim. There is money in the system that continuously goes unclaimed such as pension credit.
2. Continuously circulate information about warm spaces, food bank information, clothes banks, information and advice services. Be aware of the stigma attached to some groups of people which is a barrier to them seeking help
3. Increase support in the community to help people cope with their mental and physical health issues
4. Alert people to the threat of scammers and loan sharks, but also to signpost people to ways of managing budgets such as encouraging people to talk to their energy or utility providers if they find they are struggling.
5. Support people who are living alone and those with disabilities who may need extra support. Support carers. There may be people who struggle in silence.
6. Support children in schools who may also be struggling.
7. Be aware that some people may experience a worsening of pre-existing health conditions and therefore will need timely care and treatment



## Cost of Living and Health and Social Care

Thank you for taking part in our survey. We want to understand the impact of the rising cost of living on people in Bolton. We are particularly interested in how it is affecting people's physical and mental health.

1. Have you been affected by the cost of living?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

Please tell us more:

2. Have the changes to the cost of living affected your physical and / or mental health?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Please tell us more:

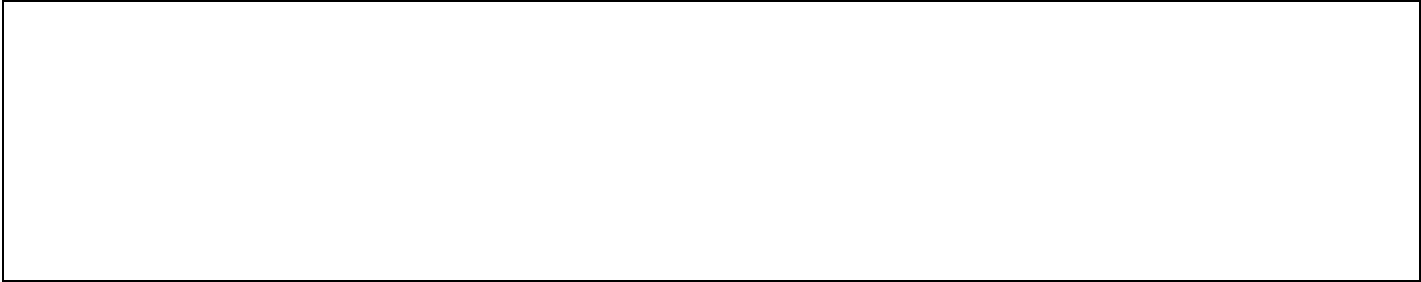
3. Are you worried about how you will manage over the winter months?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Please tell us more:

4. Can you share any examples of how you are managing your living costs?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure



## Equality and Diversity Monitoring

We seek to involve all our community in the work we do. We monitor this so we can identify significant trends and differences between groups to help us be more inclusive and to remove any unfair barriers. To ensure equal opportunities, please help us by answering the following questions. All responses in this survey are anonymous. Thank you for your help in this.

<b>10.</b>	<b>Please tell us your age:</b>	
	<b>0-12 years</b>	
	<b>13-15 years</b>	
	<b>16-17 years</b>	
	<b>18-24 years</b>	
	<b>25-49 years</b>	
	<b>50 to 64 years</b>	
	<b>65 to 79 years</b>	
	<b>80+ years</b>	

<b>11.</b>	<b>Please tell us which gender you identify with?</b>	
	<b>Woman</b>	
	<b>Man</b>	
	<b>Non-binary</b>	
	<b>Intersex</b>	
	<b>Prefer not to say</b>	
	<b>Prefer to self-describe (please state):</b>	

<b>12.</b>	<b>Please tell us which sexual orientation you identify with:</b>	
	<b>Straight/heterosexual</b>	
	<b>Gay Man</b>	
	<b>Gay woman (lesbian)</b>	
	<b>Bi-sexual</b>	
	<b>Asexual</b>	
	<b>Pansexual</b>	
	<b>Prefer not to say</b>	
	<b>Prefer to self-describe, (please state):</b>	

13.	<b>What is your ethnic background?</b>	
	Arab	
	Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	
	Asian/Asian British: Chinese	
	Asian/Asian British: Indian	
	Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	
	Any other Asian/Asian British background	
	Black/Black British: African	
	Black/Black British: Caribbean	
	Any other Black/Black British background	
	Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: Asian and White	
	Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: Black African and White	
	Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: Black Caribbean and White	
	Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic group	
	White: British, English, Northern Irish, Scottish, Welsh	
	White: Irish	
	White: Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller	
	White: Roma	
	Any other White background	
	Any other ethnic group (please specify):	

17.	<b>Are you a carer?</b>	
	Yes	
	No	
	Not sure	

**Thank you for sharing your feedback. Your views are important to help health and care services understand your health and social care needs**

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## Newsletter Sign-up

If you would like to sign up to receive our newsletter, to receive information about our work, then please leave your name and email address here. Alternatively you can do this via our website at [newsletter sign-up](#)

**Name:**.....

**Email:**.....

We will always make sure that your information is protected and treated securely. Any information that you give will be held in accordance with the data protection legislation introduced on May 25th 2018, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Bill. For further information, please see our privacy statement here: <https://www.healthwatchbolton.co.uk/privacy>

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