

The People's Panel: Cost of Living Report



Easy Read version

Introduction: The People's Panel



The Scottish Government wants to involve people when making decisions. This means better decisions for the people. It can also help people to learn new skills, become more confident and feel valued.



The 'People's Panel for Wellbeing: 2022 and beyond' was set up for people to tell us their views, experiences, and ideas on the wellbeing of people in Scotland.



This panel looked at the COVID-19 recovery period. It also looked at other issues such as the cost of living crisis and how to make communities stronger.



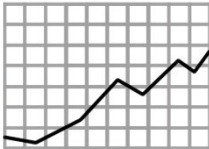
Three reports will be published about what the People's Panel found out about these issues. This report is about the cost of living.

Aims of the People's Panel

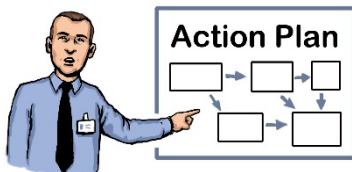
The People's Panel was set up with two main aims. These are:



- **To give people of Scotland more power.** People can take part in a research panel and the results are shared with government.



- **To test a new way of doing research.** People would be part of a new way of getting information and dealing with issues like COVID-19.



This would help the Scottish Government make the best decisions when dealing with these issues in future.

Recruitment



We asked 30 adults living in Scotland to become the People’s Panel. People were picked because of their different backgrounds and experiences. This meant we would get a wide range of different views.



We tried to include as many different people as possible. Some groups were not included, like people under 16 or people who lived in care homes during the pandemic.



Just under 800 people said they wanted to join the panel. We picked 29 people from this group. There was also a reserve list.



There were six People’s Panel events. They were all held online and a total of 24 members took part. Members were given a shopping voucher worth £125 per event for giving their time.

The Panel Process



The research team asked the Scottish Government which issues they wanted the Panel to discuss. At the online events, these issues were discussed involving the whole panel and in smaller groups.



Staff from the research team and the Scottish Government took notes on what was said by the Panel members.

Looking at what was said

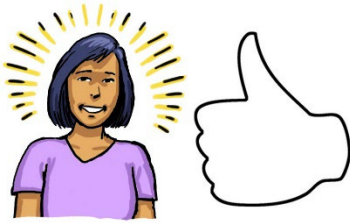


After each People's Panel event, the research team looked at the main things people talked about. They then gave a report of the results to the Scottish Government.



Panel members were asked to complete a survey. This was to find out what the panel members thought about each event and if they were happy to continue.

Trust and Relationships



The issues discussed could be challenging and emotional. It was important to have good relationships with panel members. We made sure their wellbeing was looked after.



Members were told clearly how their information would be used to make decisions. The members were told how their views from the previous event had been used and what changes had been made.



We protected the wellbeing of everyone involved in the People's Panel. We had contact details for support services like mental health charities and Citizens Advice.



A Mental Health First Aider was available. We tried to create safe spaces where members could feel supported during difficult discussions.

Cost of living Panel - main findings



24 people with different backgrounds and experiences took part in this panel. There were two panel events in June and September 2022. The main findings are:

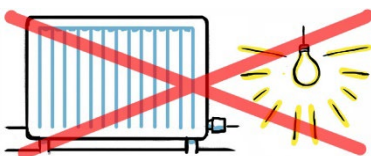
The day-to-day impact of the cost of living



All members said the 'cost of living crisis' was having an impact on their lives and the people around them.



Members have had to make changes in their lives and give up things. They said they had less choice and control.



Those suffering the worst had to rely on foodbanks, eat less food to pay their bills, sit in the dark and not visit family due to fuel costs.



People were frustrated with the situation. They felt that not enough was being done to solve the issues.



The cost of living was having an impact on longer-term issues like buying a home, education, and employment opportunities.



Cost of living and COVID-19 were seen as being linked and making each other worse.



Cost of living impact on health and wellbeing

Members said serious mental health problems were caused by the cost of living crisis.



Ways to cope with the crisis, like having to save money, made people feel bad about themselves.



Existing physical health conditions (including long-COVID) were made worse because of the cost of living crisis. More physical health problems were expected because people did not have enough food and warmth.



Members said they had problems accessing healthcare. This included not being able to contact a doctor without phone credit.



Members with special needs or health conditions were worried about heating their homes or having to pay for special diets.



Members said Scotland was experiencing 'collective trauma' due to the effects of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis.



Members felt that the worst is yet to come. They were worried about how bad things are now and how the cost of living crisis would affect their future.

Ideas for support and help



Members want the Scottish Government to speak up more about issues that matter in society and focus on meeting people's needs.



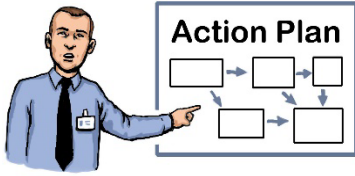
Members felt this was an emergency situation. They wanted immediate help for people to make sure they were warm and properly fed.



Members had ideas for help involving more funding for community food and warmth projects. These would help bring people and communities together.



Some thought benefits and grants could help people like working parents on lower wages, pensioners, asylum seekers and those living on savings. Others said help should be available through foodbanks.



Panel members also wanted a long-term action plan on the cost of living crisis. They understood that some decisions were not made by the Scottish Government.



Members said they were frustrated about governments in general because they were not doing enough about the cost of living crisis.

Summary



The Panel member's experiences have given us a lot of information to work with.



We have learned more about the challenges that low income households are facing. We have also found out more about the mental and physical impacts of the cost of living crisis.



We learned more about how COVID-19 has made the cost of living crisis worse. This has been bad for people, communities, businesses, and services.



Getting these views has given the Government an opportunity to look at the challenges faced by Scottish communities. These views will be very useful when making future decisions.



The Government will learn from the success of the People's Panel. We will look at how to involve the public more in making important decisions and dealing with serious issues.