

# **The People's Panel: Cost of Living**

**Research findings from People's Panel members on the cost of living from March 2022 to March 2023**

**November 2023**

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Social Impact and Wellbeing Team, Central Analysis Division  
Scottish Government

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## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank all of the individuals who gave up their time and energy to take part in the People's Panel. This project would not have been possible without your commitment and willingness to openly share your views and experiences. Thank you.

## Key findings

The 'People's Panel for Wellbeing: 2022 and beyond' was established with the aim to empower a diverse group of the public to come together and share their views over time. They provided their opinions, experiences, and ideas on the wellbeing of people in Scotland, alongside topics that were pertinent to specific policy areas. This approach to evidence gathering ensures that the in-depth realities of people's experiences are captured alongside other data sources, such as survey data, to help improve decisions and policies. This provides enhanced understanding of the wellbeing challenges faced by people in Scotland during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Twenty four people, with diverse experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, with representation across the protected characteristics, took part in the panel. Discussions about the cost of living were conducted across two panel events in June and September 2022. The key findings are:

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

- All members recognised the impact that the 'cost of living crisis' was having to their lives and that of people around them.
- Members had made a range of adjustments and sacrifices. They described experiencing a loss of choice and control.
- Those suffering severe hardship were faced with desperate situations and an overwhelming lack of choice, including relying on foodbanks, limiting food intake to pay their bills, sitting in the dark and not visiting family due to fuel costs.
- Others were making difficult adjustments that went beyond simple lifestyle changes, for example, making different food choices.
- A small group of members were able to manage their situation through smaller lifestyle adjustments, and had the ability to make choices for their personal circumstances.
- Those who were not struggling financially were still keen to speak up for people who may not have their voices heard.
- Frustration with the situation was evident, heightened by a perceived lack of action to solve the issues.
- The cost of living was having an impact on longer-term and future prospects, including buying a home and accessing education, and employment opportunities.
- Cost of living and COVID-19 were perceived as being entwined and exacerbated by each other.

## **Cost of living impact on health and wellbeing**

- Members associated severe mental health problems with the cost of living crisis.
- Measures to cope with the crisis, such as using strategies to save money, also affected self-esteem and caused feelings of guilt.
- Existing physical health conditions (including long-COVID) were perceived to be worsening because of the cost of living crisis. Further physical health problems were anticipated due to inadequate food and warmth.
- Members spoke about barriers to accessing healthcare. For example, not being able to contact a doctor without phone credit.
- Members with particular needs or with underlying health conditions expressed concern over needing to heat their homes more often and having the expense of specific diets.
- Members described the idea that the nation was experiencing 'collective trauma' due to the combined effects of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis.
- Members felt that the worst is yet to come. They were worried about both their immediate circumstances and the impact that the cost of living crisis would have on their future.

## **People's Panel support or help ideas**

- Members want the Scottish Government to become more vocal 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 ensure they were warm and fed, with more and better quality food.
- Members had ideas for support and help involving more funding for community food and warmth initiatives, which can help bring people together and help communities heal faster.
- Some favoured targeted help through benefits and grants to help, for example, working parents on lower wage, pensioners, asylum seekers and those living on savings. Others supported indirect help, such as through foodbanks.
- Panel members also wanted long-term strategic action on the cost of living crisis, whilst recognising that some ideas were not in the Scottish Government's remit.
- Members expressed frustration towards governments (across nations) because of their perceived lack of action on the cost of living crisis.



## Summary

- The insights gathered over the panel events have been extensive. They are relevant to a range of policy areas and priorities in the Scottish Government. As such, the member's experiences were included in a published analytical report on the impact of the cost of living crisis in Scotland.<sup>1</sup>
- The member's experiences also helped to inform some questions in Scottish opinion polling. Questions were added on mental and physical health impacts, and the extent to which respondents were making major trade-offs or sacrifices. This builds understanding of how these issues were perceived nationally.<sup>2</sup>
- The panel findings support wider research that has found low income households, with particular characteristics, are facing considerable challenges. This included households in receipt of means-tested benefits (and those narrowly ineligible for means-tested benefits), households who rent their homes, disabled households, households with an unpaid carer, rural and island households, single person households and single parent households.<sup>3</sup>
- This research has also provided new perspectives on how people have experienced the interconnection between COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis. This "perfect storm" has had significant negative impacts for people, communities, businesses and services. Members also shared novel ideas for support, to help bring people together and help communities heal faster.
- One of the key strengths of the panel, was in the way it provided a bridge between policymakers and the public. Gathering these diverse perspectives, enabled policymakers to gain valuable insights into the real-world challenges faced by Scottish communities.
- The principles of trust, respect and inclusivity were weaved throughout the panel setup and delivery (more details in the [Method](#) section). These foundational elements have allowed the panel to flourish as a platform for effective policy-making.
- To replicate the success of the People's Panel in other policy areas, careful consideration should be given to ensuring there are key decisions and priorities that will be informed by lived experience.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Cost of Living Crisis in Scotland: analytical report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/analytical-reports/pages/1.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> Questions added to September and November polling: [Public attitudes to coronavirus, cost of living and Ukraine: tracker - data tables - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/polls/pages/1.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> [The Cost of Living Crisis in Scotland: analytical report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/analytical-reports/pages/1.aspx)

## Introduction

The Scottish Government is committed to increased public participation in the policy making process. Inclusive approaches to participation are valuable. Hearing directly from the people of Scotland brings new, relevant insights in decision making and it creates a forum for people to question and challenge existing processes and assumptions. There can be positive benefits for those who contribute too, including learning new skills or knowledge, increased confidence and feeling valued.<sup>4</sup>

The ‘People’s Panel for Wellbeing: 2022 and beyond’ was set up with the aim to enable members of the public to provide up-to-date and relevant views, opinions, experiences, and ideas on the wellbeing of people in Scotland. This panel specifically focused on the COVID-19 recovery period, whilst also addressing other significant issues such as the cost of living crisis and community resilience.

Three reports have been published that detail the main findings from the People’s Panel events.<sup>5</sup> This particular report focuses on discussions related to the cost of living crisis alongside details on the background and motivation for developing the People’s Panel, how it was delivered and what impact it has had. Additionally, an independent evaluation on the Panel’s work has been published.<sup>6</sup>

## Background and Context

Since 2011, as set out in the [Christie Commission report](#)<sup>7</sup> but also articulated through the Scottish Government’s [National Performance Framework](#), the Scottish Government has been exploring ways of working with members of the public, to enhance policy development and delivery, and improve the quality of life and outcomes for the people of Scotland. Additionally, as a member of the [Open Government Partnership](#), the Scottish Government is working alongside governments across the world and committing to the values of openness, transparency, accountability and citizen participation.

For example, the Scottish Government employs a variety of approaches to engage the public in decision-making, such as: [citizen assemblies](#), [consultations](#) and [participatory budgeting](#). The Scottish Government has also introduced a new human rights-based Social Security system for Scotland, which emphasises dignity and respect through collaboration with individuals who have lived experience.<sup>8</sup> Building upon this positive practice, and as part of an Open Government commitment, the ‘Participation Framework’

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<sup>4</sup> [Participation Framework - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> The other two reports are: [People’s Panel: Covid](#) and [People’s Panel: Community Resilience](#)

<sup>6</sup> Evaluation report: <http://www.gov.scot/ISBN/9781835216613>

<sup>7</sup> This report, published in 2011, set out a series of recommendations for the future delivery of public services that can improve the quality of life and outcomes for the people of Scotland.

<sup>8</sup> In 2017, the Scottish Government set out that it will use the opportunities presented through devolution to develop a new Scottish system for Social Security based on the principles of dignity, respect and human rights: [Social security: policy position papers - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

was published in 2023.<sup>9</sup> This sets out that people have the right to contribute to, and to influence, the decisions that affect their lives. Furthermore, it underscores that involving the people likely to be affected by these decisions will lead to improved decision making. However, it is suggested that existing approaches to participation could be improved to be more inclusive, with a greater focus on diversity, accountability and evaluation.<sup>10</sup>

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Scottish Government gathered a range of evidence on the virus and the protective measures. As the country entered a period of recovery from COVID-19, decision makers needed access to timely, robust and appropriate evidence to enhance recovery efforts. It became evident that understanding the realities of COVID-19 recovery directly from people was crucial. This led to the establishment of the 'People's Panel for Wellbeing: 2022 and Beyond' with the aim of ensuring direct participation and contributions from the people of Scotland. As such, this sort of participation adds depth and nuance and it provides pointers for further exploration, alongside other forms of research and a wider triangulated evidence base.

## Aims and Outcomes

The People's Panel was established with two broad aims. These are:

- **To empower people in Scotland** to actively participate in a research panel where the outputs are shared with government.<sup>11</sup>
- **To test a participatory research model.** Drawing inspiration from the successful development of the Social Security Scotland Charter by individuals with lived experience<sup>12</sup>, the participants would receive capacity-building information to enhance their knowledge. Unlike the Charter groups, which had predefined policy questions, the People's Panel intended to address pressing issues as they arose, fostering dynamic and responsive discussions.

In addition, the People's Panel aspired to achieve two specific outcomes:

- Evidence showcasing the benefits of a particular **model of participation**.
- That the Scottish Government would make **informed decisions** on relevant policies and actions, fuelled by an **enhanced understanding of the wellbeing challenges** faced by people in Scotland during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>9</sup> This framework provides a guide to good practice in participation work in Scottish Government [Participation Framework - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/participation-framework/pages/1-1-introduction.aspx)

<sup>10</sup> [Open Government action plan 2021 to 2025 - commitment 5: participation - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/open-government-action-plan-2021-to-2025/pages/1-1-introduction.aspx)

<sup>11</sup> It's worth noting that the term 'people' is intentionally used instead of 'citizens' to ensure inclusivity, encompassing anyone living in Scotland and avoiding exclusion.

<sup>12</sup> [Social Security Scotland - Our Charter](https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-scotland-our-charter/pages/1-1-introduction.aspx)

## Method – What we did

### Recruitment

The goal was to recruit 30 adults living in Scotland with diverse experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring representation across the protected characteristics,<sup>13</sup> who could offer unique perspectives on wellbeing issues. Consideration was also given to intersectionality.<sup>14</sup> This means that individuals were selected based on the diversity of their experiences, which may have encompassed various social and personal identities. As such, this was not intended to be a representative sample of the Scottish population. The aim was to recruit people based on their breadth of experiences to provide rich, in-depth information. These lived experience perspectives can then be synthesized, alongside other evidence, to identify gaps or problem areas, formulate research questions and make better informed decisions.

Participants were identified in two ways:

1. **Recontact database.** Individuals who had taken part in two online surveys and had agreed to be contacted about further research.<sup>15</sup>

The Scottish Government research team emailed these individuals (around 2,500 people) a survey to gather their interest in joining the People's Panel. The survey included questions about their pandemic experiences, such as employment, housing, shielding, and compliance with guidance. Additionally, there were questions to identify the protected characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and disability status. 834 surveys were returned and 793 individuals expressed their willingness to be considered for the panel. Potential members were then selected based on their experiences (e.g., shielding or job loss) and their response to protective measures (e.g., adherence to rules/guidance). Random selection was conducted within these different categories.

2. **Through third sector organisations.** The Scottish Government research team also contacted a range of equality organisations to ensure representation of individuals with diverse protected characteristics. For example, this included individuals who might not have been able to complete an online survey due to not having access to digital devices.

29 members were invited to join the People's Panel, while an additional 31 individuals with closely matching experiences were placed on a reserve list. In cases where there was no response or a member withdrew, reserve members were invited to join the panel.

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<sup>13</sup> [Protected characteristics | Equality and Human Rights Commission \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/protected-characteristics)

<sup>14</sup> The concept of intersectionality refers to the lived reality of people who experience multiple and compounding inequalities. For example: [Using intersectionality to understand structural inequality in Scotland: evidence synthesis - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/evidence-synthesis/articles/using-intersectionality-to-understand-structural-inequality-in-scotland/pages/1-to-4.aspx)

<sup>15</sup> The 2 surveys were: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and society: what matters to people in Scotland? - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-and-society-what-matters-to-people-in-scotland/pages/1-to-4.aspx) and [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) impact on wellbeing: wave 3 - survey summary - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-impact-on-wellbeing-wave-3-survey-summary/pages/1-to-4.aspx)

One of the notable challenges was ensuring diverse representation within the panel. While efforts were made to include individuals from various backgrounds, there were segments of the population not included. For example, those who were under 16, or those who lived in a care home during the pandemic. However, for some groups of people the panel set up may not have been appropriate or it would have required facilitators with specific expertise.

A stakeholder advisory group was set up, including representation from colleagues working in the third sector across a range of equality organisations.<sup>16</sup> Following two panel events, an information session was conducted for these stakeholders. During this session, initial findings were presented to them, and their opinions were sought on the panel's formation, including potential constraints and suggestions for improvements. There was also engagement with a 'critical friend' – this was an academic, with a background in public participation. Their role was to listen to our planned approach for the events and offer guidance and constructive critique.

Across the six People's Panel events, a total of 24 members participated, with attendee numbers ranging from 15 to 23 for each event. Following each event, panel members were presented with a shopping voucher worth £125 per session attended as compensation for their time.

## **Panel Process**

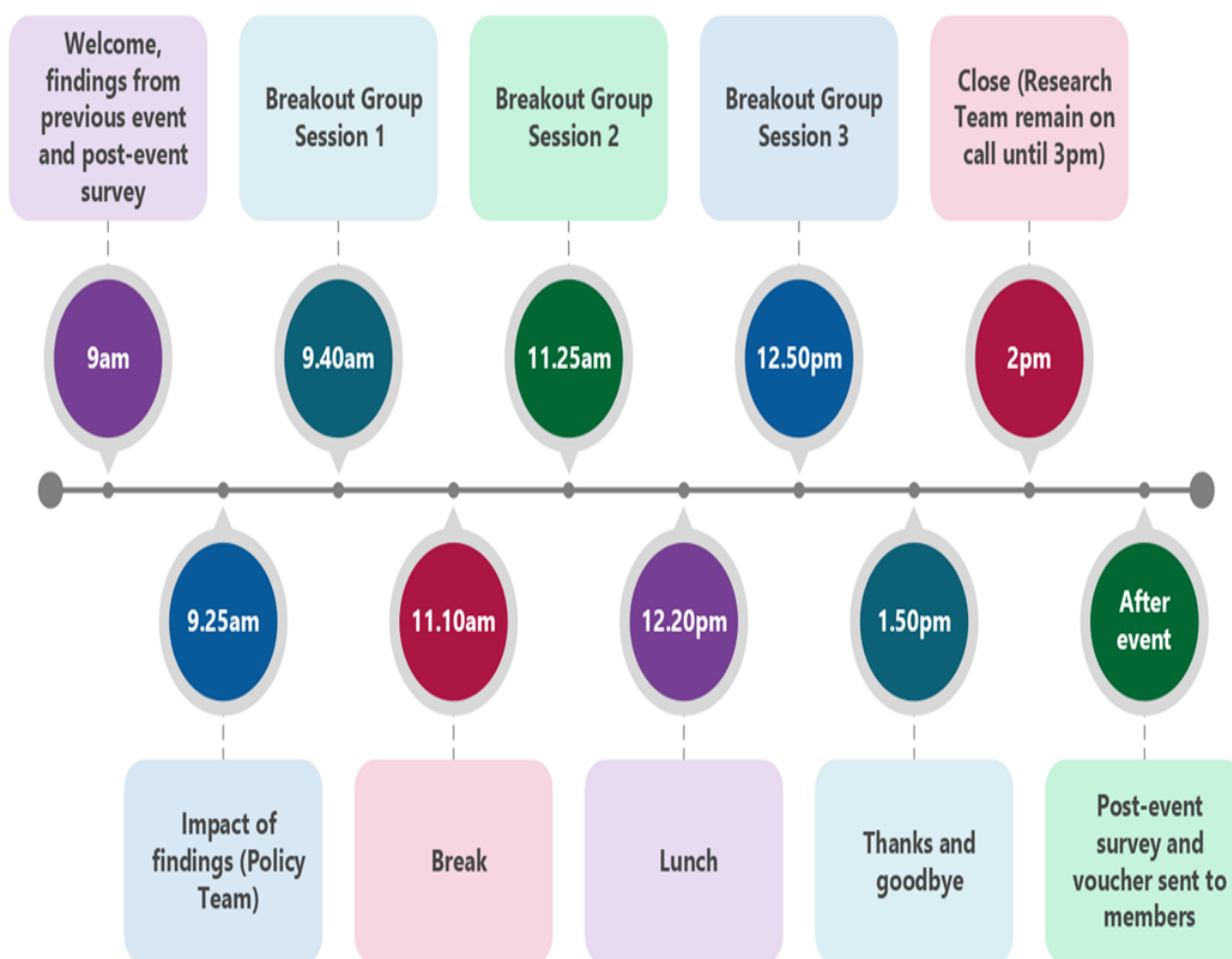
Two weeks before each online event, the research team initiated discussions with Scottish Government policy colleagues to identify pressing decision-making issues that would benefit from the input of lived experiences in order to impact policy outcomes. (See [appendix A](#) and [B](#) for the full list of People's Panel topics and timeline of how an event was organised).

Initially, a combination of whole panel sessions and breakout room sessions in smaller groups was planned. However, as the panel progressed, members expressed a strong preference for the smaller breakout room format. Consequently, the majority of discussions were conducted in this format. Figure 1 below details how each panel event was organised:

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<sup>16</sup> Stakeholders were approached, with the aim of trying to ensure representation across the equality groups. Knowledge of which stakeholders had an interest in pandemic related issues was built up from our own contacts and from stakeholders who responded to the consultation on the approach to establish the COVID-19 inquiry: [Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry: Analysis of the public and stakeholders views on the approach to establishing the public inquiry - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-covid-19-inquiry/analysis-of-the-public-and-stakeholders-views-on-the-approach-to-establishing-the-public-inquiry/pages/11/default.aspx)

**Figure 1: Panel event timings and activities**



Experienced facilitators from the research team and staff members from the Scottish Government Social Research profession facilitated the breakout sessions and took notes. See [appendix C](#) and [D](#) for the facilitator guides and research questions.

## Analysis

The analysis was conducted in two stages. After each People's Panel event, the aim was to promptly deliver the information to Ministers and policy colleagues within two weeks of each event. To achieve this, the research team performed interim thematic analysis to identify key themes and impressions. The findings were also reported back to the members at each subsequent event. Following this, the research team carried out systematic analysis to identify themes, ideas, or opinions that may have been overlooked in the interim analysis.

This report illustrates the findings using quotes from the panel members. The quotes reflect various viewpoints, and provide insight into the kinds of discussions that were had at the panel events. Some views were shared across most of the panel members and

some issues were more specific to a smaller group of people. However, it is important to highlight that it was not the aim here to achieve consensus or resolve differences, as might be appropriate in a deliberative process.

Descriptive terminology is used to add clarity on the views. For example, 'some' members or 'many'. It was not the intention to quantify the members' views, but it should be noted that in general, 'many' or 'most' members refers to views that were shared across a large section of the sample. Use of the term 'some' is used to reflect an idea or viewpoint but without specifying the number. Certain issues were more specific to a smaller sub-section of panel respondents but these are no less important just because fewer people experienced them.

After each event, panel members were invited to complete a post-event survey to provide feedback on their experience with the panel. This provided the research team with instant feedback and data on topics such as trust and confidence, over time. See [appendix E](#) for a summary of these survey responses.

## **Participatory Approach**

The goal was to facilitate and empower individuals with lived experience of the discussed topics, to have their voices heard by policymakers in the Scottish Government.

Therefore, the research approach was designed not only to collect people's opinions but also to help members further develop their ideas and opinions throughout each event and over the course of all six events. This involved capacity-building for the members and careful facilitation to encourage deep thinking about the issues at hand. As the panel progressed, members became increasingly knowledgeable, leading to more relevant and informed responses. Their growing confidence also expanded the breadth and depth of their contributions.

Unlike deliberative democracy approaches<sup>17</sup>, the intention was not to seek a consensus of opinion on the subjects. Instead, the aim was to uncover contrasting experiences and unearth distinct and possibly innovative perspectives. The objective was to present these voices to decision-makers, prompting them to reflect deeply on the realities of people's experiences.

Importantly, the research team sought to convey diverse views, ideas, and opinions on the issues that may not have otherwise surfaced or been given attention.

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<sup>17</sup> [Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Democracy Working Group: report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/institutionalising-participatory-and-deliberative-democracy-working-group/report/pages/13/index.aspx)



## Trust, Relationships and Ethical Considerations

Becoming familiar with panel members, their needs and culture and any barriers to participation, including communication, were vital considerations for planning and delivering this panel.

The subjects discussed during the People's Panel events were challenging and emotionally charged. Given the sensitive nature of these conversations, it was crucial for the research team to establish positive relationships and trust with the members, prioritising their wellbeing throughout the process. See [appendix F](#) for a summary of the main ethical considerations.

Trust was fostered by maintaining transparency with the members. They were made aware of how the information gathered would be used to inform policy decisions alongside other forms of evidence. It was important to manage their expectations, ensuring that they understood that their input was one of many sources that policy teams might consider. Each event included a segment where the policy team from the previous event shared how the gathered information had been utilised, providing an opportunity to update members and further engage them in the policymaking process (See [appendix E](#) for post event survey scores covering trust).

Steps were taken to protect the wellbeing of everyone involved in the People's Panel. Facilitators and notetakers were briefed before each event, and debriefing sessions were held afterward. Relevant support resources, such as mental health charities, cost of living assistance, or Citizens Advice, were provided during each session. It was identified in the first two sessions that it would be helpful to have a trained Mental Health First Aider<sup>18</sup> on standby throughout the events. This was implemented from event 3 onwards. Moreover, facilitators of each breakout group created a safe space where members could feel supported during sensitive discussions.

## Purpose of this report

This report was written in order to share with wider audiences how the panel was set up, and what was found out. It documents the panel approach and outcomes but it was not a underlying part of the panel process.

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<sup>18</sup> There are trained mental health first aiders (MHFAs) across Scottish Government directorates. They can provide on-site support and advice about where to find professional help. For example, [Scotland's Mental Health First Aid \(smhfa.com\)](https://www.smhfa.com)

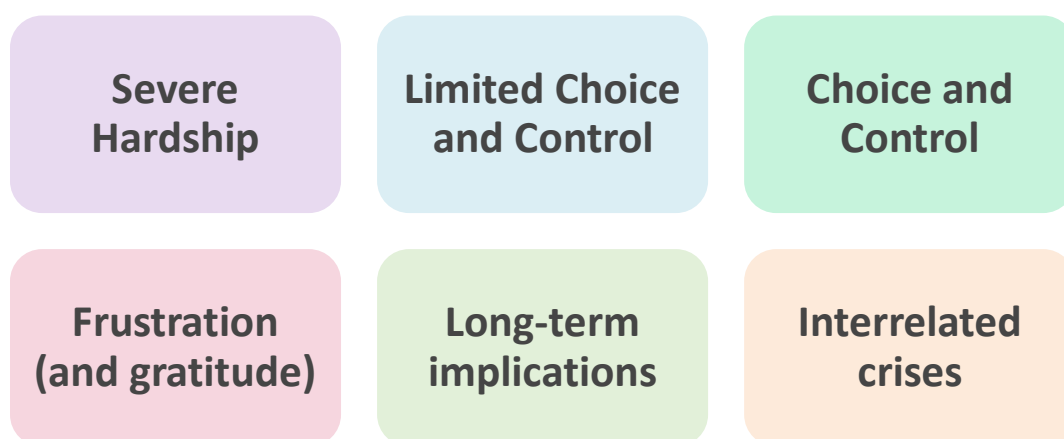


## Research Findings

This report sets out the findings from the People's Panel events on cost of living. The goal of the sessions dedicated to cost of living, was to gather information on people's experiences, behaviours, and attitudes towards rising costs. Cost of living was covered at two People's Panel events (June 2022 and September 2022). See appendix C for the session questions and overarching research questions.

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

Panel members were asked about the reality of the cost of living crisis for them. They had made a spectrum of adjustments to their lives, and experienced loss of choice and control. Members discussed their own experiences and those of people they knew. This section sets out these findings under the following themes:



#### Severe Hardship - members making overwhelming adjustments

Members described life as about “surviving” and prioritising basic needs, with several members feeling they were not in control of their circumstances.

“We’re all on fixed income, pay rises does not match the increased costs.”

Food was a main issue; the cost, the quantity and the quality of it. Members were impacted by increasing prices and specifically noted that even budget range costs were escalating. Some members described being ‘very careful’ with their shopping, opting to shop daily for the exact amounts of what they needed and nothing else. Others relied on supermarket ‘bargain bins’ or having to buy poor quality food.

“I don’t buy packs of things anymore I just buy the number I need.”

Others were totally reliant on food-banks or food parcels. They now found that the food they received was reducing in both the quality and the quantity.

Members with children also had particular issues. Some spoke about not being able to provide their children with enough food and feeling worried about how they would manage during the school holidays.

Trying to keep warm was a constant concern due to high energy costs and the difficulty in balancing this with the cost of food. This led to some members having to make decisions about whether to eat or heat their homes.

Members feared problems would become 'drastic' over winter. This was worse for a few members living in colder parts of the country. Some members were considering alternative plans to stay warm that did not involve putting on the heating on, including spending the day travelling on buses in order to stay warm.

Some members, due to health issues, described a need to keep their home at a certain temperature but this was taking an increasing amount of their income. Strategies to keep warm while cutting costs included, layering clothing, using hot-water bottles or staying in only one room in the house.

**"I have to use a hot water bottle to stop my feet from going black with the cold."**

Saving electricity had also become the norm for some, with members cutting down on the number of hot drinks they have, using the microwave instead of the hob or oven and sitting in the dark to save electricity.

Cost of living had also impacted on how people travel. However, for those in severe hardship it was an unaffordable luxury, with even local journeys cut to save money. Some members were now unable to afford to run a car despite needing it for their disability.

**"Biggest hit is to top up my car every week, it was £10 now closer to £30."**

This also impacted on the members' relationships. For example, being unable to afford the travel to see their parents, even though they only lived a few hours away. Some members whose families live abroad had not seen them for years, they missed family weddings and were even unable to visit very ill parents.

**"My sick father keeps asking for me, but I can't afford to get to him."**

Leisure activities were severely curtailed, in part due to the impact on travel by limiting members' ability to drive to places they used to visit. Members also cancelled entertainment subscriptions, losing access to television and music, or stopped activities they enjoyed, such as socialising or health and wellbeing activities.

“It’s a bit like ‘what do we not spend our money on’. I ask myself this question daily.”

Living in rented accommodation raised particular challenges. Members experienced a loss of control, being restricted to prepayment meters or pay as you go charges. Members also worried about rent costs increasing or becoming unaffordable.

“We are on a pre-payment meter and we want to move to monthly billing but they won’t let me. These meters are a lot higher.”

One member described being forced to make a choice between paying council tax or buying food, the fear of going into arrears to the council was so strong that in this example they went without food.

### **Limited choice and control – members making major lifestyle adjustments**

In the middle of the spectrum, members perceived that they still had some say in their circumstances, and some ability to forward plan, albeit in a limited way and with some choices forced upon them.

Food continued to be an issue. Members reported “tightening their belts”, and making different choices when food shopping, for example, buying tinned or frozen food instead of fresh. They also described making better use of left-overs rather than cooking fresh each day.

Members also described making adjustments to how they travelled. Walking to work and appointments was a common adjustment and undertaken to save on fares.

There was some limited forward planning, and the ability to make purchases to help reduce their outgoings. For example, buying a second hand bike to save money on bus fares and buying electric blankets to use rather than putting their heating on. Some of the choices were made to provide more peace of mind during this crisis.

“I have gone ahead and got a 5-year fixed rate so I know what I’m paying mortgage wise by fixing the rate. It might work out well it might bite me but I have certainty that I know what I am paying every month.”

Members with children described making difficult choices and major sacrifices. One member typified the dilemmas this group had to make. She felt forced into making the choice to cut her maternity leave short and get back to work to make sure the family had enough money.

## **Choice and control – members making minor lifestyle adjustments**

There was a small section of members who described the situation as being “manageable”. They had made adjustments to their lifestyle but had also retained the ability to make choices, for example, in what they consumed and when.

Their adjustments were characterised by forward planning and using their existing resources to make consumer choices in order to reduce their outgoings in the future.

When shopping for food, clothes and presents, these members reported being “careful” or “mindful”.

“I’m in control by watching my money and spending.”

Members at this end of the spectrum described working hard to move themselves into a comfortable financial situation, and to be able to feel financially secure. However, the cost of living crisis had shaken this comfort and this caused frustration.

One member described it as “irksome”. Another said:

“...this feels forced upon us, so that’s annoying.”

Members described both minor and major adjustments to their lifestyles. For example:

- More regularly switching ‘standby’ or power off at night for appliances
- Taking advantage of free charging for electric cars at supermarkets
- Sharing car journeys with family or friends
- Buying food in bulk
- Moving to either an electric car, or to a car that was cheaper to run

## **Frustration (and gratitude)**

Frustration was commonly experienced by members. This was related to having to change plans, or cut out enjoyable activities they used to do. Some frustration focused on the concern that nothing was being done about the issues, that the price increases would persist as people ‘higher up’ accepted them and were not fighting for them to be reduced.

These feelings were heightened for members when they perceived a lack of communication, they felt ‘kept in the dark’ about the reality of the situation. The lack of transparency caused uncertainty for members, adding to their frustration.

“My energy company went bust, and I was transferred to someone else and I discovered I was massively in credit, and the energy company had never told me! Things are not very transparent sometimes, which

makes it difficult, especially for people like me who don't pay attention to all that."

Not all members were struggling financially. The overwhelming emotion from them was being grateful, recognising that others were considerably worse off. They liked the idea of speaking up for this group of people who may not generally get their voices heard. Some members also positively considered the things they had to help them through difficult times.

"We are lucky we have a good income but vulnerable people won't."

## **Long-term implications**

Beyond day-to-day impact, cost of living issues were impacting on people's long-term plans and future prospects. Some members were putting off or scaling back on future plans, or using money they have saved for the future to get by.

"For me, it's about eating into my savings. I hope I don't eat so far into them that my healthcare – when I need it, when I am older – is badly affected."

Rising rent prices prevented people from being able to buy their own home. There was concern for tenants of private landlords and people who were "at the bottom, falling off the bottom".

"For all my generation, the idea of getting on to the property ladder – even in the next 10 to 15 years – seems impossible. I know the Scottish Government have talked about rent controls, which would be appreciated. You feel like you are just at the whim of a landlord."

Cost of living was also significantly impacting on some people's ability to access education and buy equipment. This left some members, who were students, with the dilemma of how to continue or in extreme circumstances causing them to drop out.

"My friend is struggling to afford travel to college for her classes. She [panel members' friend] can't afford £15 per week out of her £40 to spend on transport. She sometimes walks and can't go every day."

Similarly, there was also an impact on decisions around employment opportunities for members. COVID-19 continued to impact some members' ability to return to an office, who risked losing their job and income as their employer required them to be in an office environment. Other members were also concerned about employment opportunities, and not being able to find jobs that would get them through the cost of living crisis.

"In [city] there are loads of jobs available, cafes, pubs, student jobs, but the pay is not sufficient to live on. Especially when it's zero hours, so

you can't be guaranteed how many hours you get, managers can just send you home if they aren't making enough money that day. There are just no provisions there."

Those with their own businesses were also experiencing difficulties, with higher bills meaning being self-employed was becoming less sustainable.

"Now thinking how to get profit...my partner brings home £800 a month, this is not sustainable if bills continue this way. We can't pass on the prices to customers."

Members were overwhelmed by feelings of uncertainty, with members feeling that the situation was never-ending. As one participant put it: "there is just this huge economic gloom ahead". The general mood was pessimistic with a widespread assumption that things would not be getting better anytime soon. Indeed, they felt it was likely to get worse.

"I'm resigned to being ill over winter, I can't see how I can keep warm and feed myself."

## **Interrelated crises**

Members felt that the cost of living and the pandemic were two interrelated crises.

Firstly, members saw the pandemic as a contributory factor to the cost of living crisis, it felt like it had "emerged" from COVID-19. Secondly, members felt these issues were more "entwined"; not so much a cause and effect but issues that exacerbated the impact of each other.

"We can't think about cost of living crisis without thinking about the effects of COVID."

This "perfect storm", as one member described it, had significant implications for some members and how they coped. Members who described themselves as immunosuppressed or vulnerable to the health risks, found the risk of catching COVID-19 stopped them going out and earning an income. One member further described how long-COVID left them unable to work, impacting on their income and catastrophically affecting their family's lifestyle.

Other factors which compounded the cost of living impact included having a disability, being an asylum-seeker, having physical or mental health conditions, living in rented accommodation or looking for employment opportunities.

"As an asylum seeker what I get from government schemes is not enough to cover costs, not enough to cover basics like food and toiletries, never mind extra things. I'm not ungrateful for what is provided, but it's not enough."

## Cost of living impact on health and wellbeing

Members shared personal accounts of both their own struggles and that of friends or family. This section outlines the impact of the cost of living on health and wellbeing under the following themes:



### Impact on Mental Health

The impact on mental health ranged across members, from worries and anxieties to severe mental ill-health.

Some members described a visceral “sense of increased background anxiety” across their day to day lives: at work, with family and friends and when reading the media.

Members talked of layers of stress. Again, an overlap with COVID-19 was highlighted, with the cost of living crisis exacerbating the feelings of dread they were already experiencing. COVID-19 left many less resilient to the financial pressures of the cost of living crisis and their anxiety had escalated to a state of fear.

“I see people every-day that through no fault of their own are living in fear about what is coming ahead, people who are working, yet can’t feed their families.”

Measures to cope with the crisis, such as “taking handouts” or using strategies to save money also affected self-esteem and caused feelings of guilt. Members reflected that as a society, we feel shame in asking for help, and there was a concern among members that this was made worse by how those needing support are portrayed by the media.

“The link between charity and shame is so deeply entrenched in our culture... it needs to be more normalised in community (by more people using services) but not sure it is within the scope of this generation to change.”



Some felt the media caused additional stress and worry for members, with constant reminders that they needed to be careful with money. Others, however, felt the media has raised awareness of the issue and allowed people time to plan.

“Because we have had prices capped still, I wouldn’t have known if the media hadn’t raised it – but it’s a good thing. I wouldn’t want to come to October and find my bills have gone up by £150 a month and had no time to plan for that. So there has to be a balance.”

Furthermore, members experienced feelings of isolation due to the cost of living. With the increasing cost of travel previously discussed, visiting friends, family or partners was seen for some as a luxury. However, for others members, family connections were something they were not prepared to give up to reduce costs.

“I only spend money without thinking to see grandchildren in London, I’m not prepared to give that up.”

## **Impact on Physical Health**

Physical health was also suffering, and it was anticipated that this would worsen over winter when the weather was colder. Many feared their physical health would be impacted by not being able to afford healthy food, and that the real impact on health would not be seen for years to come.

“Eating poor quality food doesn’t impact right away, but it will do.”

Again, disabled people were particularly affected, with the cost of living intensifying physical health issues. Members reported needing to heat homes more often, the expense of specific diets, and being unable to shop around. One member described needing a special diet but this had become unaffordable when also balanced with other priorities.

“My doctor has told me I need to eat more to put on weight, but I’ve got kids to feed so they have to come first.”

## **Collective Trauma**

Members described feeling that the nation as a whole was suffering trauma from the effects of the pandemic, and this has been further exacerbated by the cost of living crisis. Members talked about people being “broken” and “traumatised”, and some feared the combination of these issues meant rioting or civil disobedience was a real possibility.

“[There is] unresolved trauma we are experiencing as a society. Intergenerational trauma, not something we should take lightly. The whole ethos of the British “Stiff Upper Lip”, “just soldier on”, “call to arms



to let's face this together" is not healthy, no wonder there is so much mental ill-health around."

There was particular concern for those who were considered vulnerable or in need of support and people on lower incomes.

"My Aunt works with vulnerable people in local areas and the number of referrals from charities for third sector support is astronomical – I dread to think the impact on vulnerable people."

There was a sense that children have missed out on normal childhood experiences, and fear for childhood memories being dominated by these crises. Members worried that this will have long-term implications for children and young people.

"The impact on children will define the health, social and wellbeing outcomes for them when they are older, not just mental health but physical as well."

## **Getting Help for Physical and Mental Health Issues**

Some members described how the cost of living was impacting on their ability to get help when they needed it.

There were costs associated with accessing healthcare, such as contacting a Doctor by phone, which caused barriers. Members were also conscious of waiting times, and some considered themselves "lucky" when they received support for their mental health.

"I got referred to the mental health clinic. It was set up and everyone in critical care with covid got an invite. I went along and got a session with a clinical psychologist. I hadn't thought of myself as being depressed until I sat down and started to talk with them."

Members were also taking their own steps to look after their health, in particular their mental health, by developing coping strategies.

"Since the pandemic I am doing more to keep my own mental health stable so that has helped."

## People's Panel support or help ideas

Suggestions for support and help centred on specific and general funding, and systemic changes including political solutions. They are grouped under the following themes:



### Keeping People Fed and Warm

Members felt that ensuring people were well fed and kept warm was an emergency. They saw this as short term protection for the most vulnerable, likening it to the measures taken during the height of the pandemic.

*“We saw how quickly things moved during COVID so we need a quick reaction here.”*

While there was some concern for support that had been previously removed from those who needed it, such as the warm discount scheme for people on disability allowance, members were supportive of policies that have been put in place to help, such as the Child Payment and rent controls.

*“Rent control announcements were such a relief. I’ve been in my rented flat for 7 years, and having not had many increases – it did increase by 25% at the top of the year. I was worried it would happen again so the action is very relieving.”*

Investment in the third sector and other community projects was emphasised as a priority action, with members recognising the value of such organisations but also the need to secure funding for them.

*“Fund food banks, give them money and space as we are in an emergency now and it doesn’t have to be long term. If there are spaces not used, owned by local or central government, loan them the space. Heat it and get food cooked and out.”*

It was suggested that warm clothing initiatives could mirror food initiatives. Allocating funds to communities specifically for this purpose would allow warm clothes to be distributed through existing initiatives, such as foodbanks or food parcels.

Some members favoured the idea of targeted help and support by delivering additional cash through the benefit system to working parents on lower wage, pensioners, asylum seekers and those living on savings. Some felt that a basic income should be provided for all, making help universal and to reduce the sense of shame experienced by those needing support.

“Ridiculous benefits system can’t keep up with cost of living. Not people’s fault and they are living in fear about what is coming ahead and people working can’t feed their families.”

Members also suggested that affordable public transport was necessary. Many supported the idea of targeted help for people suffering from low incomes in the form of subsidised bus fares, or vouchers to pay for journeys to work, study and medical appointments.

Accessibility of support was a concern for members, they feared for people who had to prove their needs or disability or who may slip through the net. Members highlighted circumstances where, either themselves or others, did not meet the criteria for support, but continued to struggle through the crisis.

“Because I work part time, I am not entitled to grants that are about, so I feel slightly punished for working and having young kids.”

## **Collective Healing – Community Funding**

Although members realised that there were no easy fixes for the sense of general trauma described above, many reported observing (and taking part in) community organisations and local initiatives that were working to foster community spirit and bring local communities together as a type of healing.

Some examples of local initiatives included:

- A warm hub set up in the community in the mosque
- A business delivering extra fish to customers
- A lorry from a local farm donating free fruit and veg locally
- A community cooperative – a yearly subscription of £5 a year and £3 every time to get £15 pounds worth of shopping
- A community larder with near sell-by date dried food, biscuits, fruit and vegetables donated by local shops

Members described the impact as being beyond tangible, they brought people together with those donating and those receiving both gaining a sense of community. However, it was recognised that these initiatives needed their own help and financial support if they were to continue.

“Some faith communities are opening their doors but they are struggling with food and energy. So they need support”.

Even small grants for specific purposes, such as administration costs or purchasing sanitising stations, were considered beneficial. Some members suggested this could be managed using umbrella organisations.

“Use organisations like Inter-faith Scotland. That’s an easy way to administer it. Give the organisation the money for across the whole of Scotland.”

When discussing the community, members also discussed local third sector services. They reported seeing that many charities were existentially damaged by the pandemic; suffering from “COVID burnout” or “COVID crash”. Further, that the sector was losing staff because they either cannot sustain the pace of the work needed in the community, or can earn more elsewhere.

## **Long-term Planning**

Pragmatic suggestions included planting fruit trees in community spaces, increasing the availability of allotments through local authority funding, and helping people to insulate older homes. Members wanted to see a strategic approach to dealing with the cost of living crisis, now and in the future.

“I hope the Scottish Government understands they need to do more than just increase the money they give out now. We need a more long-term thought-out approach.”

Re-distribution of wealth was one long-term measure discussed.

“This crisis has showed how badly we need a better system for the distribution of wealth.”

Housing policy was also discussed and some members saw building more affordable housing as key, specifically in the big cities.

“More and more, local people in cities are being priced out, eroding local identity. More affordable housing would make a huge difference”.

## Scottish Government Responsibilities and Limitations on Action

Members are looking to the Scottish Government for help and support through the cost of living crisis, viewing it as the responsibility of the government to look after people and mitigate the impact. However, the limits of the power of the Scottish Government were also recognised.

“Without all taxation coming back to Scotland, the Scottish Government's hands are tied to provide adequate mitigations.”

Members wanted to be heard by the Scottish Government, have their experiences recognised and for the government to focus on meeting people's needs.

Although some members described the Scottish Government as more likely to enact measures to help than the UK Government, they wanted them to put more pressure on Westminster. Members felt the Scottish Government should be more vocal about issues such as tax systems, environmental infrastructure, or ending zero hour contracts.

“The role of the Scottish Government is to put pressure on the UK government, we need more of this. Maybe join with Welsh and Northern Irish to make sure this [focus on helping people] is filtering through to Westminster. It can't just be done in Scotland it needs a UK wide solution.”

Long-term goals also included the need to move away from fossil fuels and support alternative means of producing energy. Members felt that this could come alongside investing in electric vehicle infrastructure and other measures to increase the use of electric vehicles. Other members felt that Scotland could work towards self-sufficiency in food with a particular focus on the islands including better transport infrastructure to facilitate distribution.

Members also wanted to see increased awareness of the support that is available to help people through the cost of living crisis, and more education about how people can save money.

“Might be worth letting people know that the warm Home discount is open in Scotland now. You have to apply in Scotland but not in England.”

## Summary points

- The insights gathered over the panel events have been extensive. They are relevant to a range of policy areas and priorities in the Scottish Government. As such, the members' experiences were included in a published analytical report on the impact of the cost of living crisis in Scotland.<sup>19</sup>
- The members' experiences also helped to inform the content of some questions in Scottish opinion polling. Questions were added on mental and physical health impacts, and the extent to which respondents were making major trade-offs or sacrifices. This builds understanding of the extent to which these issues were perceived nationally.<sup>20</sup>
- The panel findings support wider research that has found low income households, with particular characteristics, are facing considerable challenges. This included households in receipt of means-tested benefits (and those narrowly ineligible for means-tested benefits), households who rent their homes, disabled households, households with an unpaid carer, rural and island households, single person households and single parent households.<sup>21</sup>
- This research has also provided new perspectives on how people have experienced the interconnection between COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis. This “perfect storm”, has had significant negative impacts for people, communities, businesses and services. Members also shared novel ideas for support, to help bring people together and help communities heal faster.
- One of the key strengths of the panel, was in the way it provided a bridge between policymakers and the public. Gathering these diverse perspectives, enabled policymakers to gain valuable insights into the real-world challenges faced by Scottish communities.
- The principles of trust, respect and inclusivity were weaved throughout the panel setup and delivery (more details in the [Method](#) section). These foundational elements have allowed the panel to flourish as a platform for effective policy-making.
- To replicate the success of the People's Panel in other policy areas, careful consideration should be given to ensuring there are key decisions and priorities that will be informed by lived experience.

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<sup>19</sup> [The Cost of Living Crisis in Scotland: analytical report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

<sup>20</sup> Questions added to September and November polling: [Public attitudes to coronavirus, cost of living and Ukraine: tracker - data tables - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> [The Cost of Living Crisis in Scotland: analytical report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Timeline of events

### Event 1: June 10 2022

- Introduction to the People's Panel (how it will work, who is asking the questions and how the findings will be used), ground rules and housekeeping
- Information session: Scottish Government's (SG) approach to addressing COVID-19 harms
- Group session 1: Members' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Group session 2: Motivations for joining the People's Panel and what members want to get out of taking part

### Event 2: 24 June 2022

- Findings from Event 1 and the follow up survey
- Information session: Current SG protective behaviour guidelines and polling results
- Group session 1: What makes people feel safe and unsafe around COVID-19 and protective behaviours
- Information session: SG ventilation plans
- Group session 2: Cost of living crisis and what it means to members

### Event 3: 23 September 2022

- Findings from Event 2 and the follow up survey
- Impact session: How the findings have been used so far
- Group session 1: The impact of the cost of living crisis on members' behaviour and health and wellbeing
- Group session 2: Attitudes towards COVID-19 and potential protective measures in the autumn and winter
- Group session 3: Members' views on the new ventilation guidelines

### Event 4: 18 November 2022

- Findings from Event 3 and the follow up survey
- Impact session: How the findings have been used so far
- Information session: CO2 monitors
- Group session 1: CO2 monitors and the pressures on the NHS
- Information session: Resilience
- Group session 2: Resilience
- Group session 3: Accessing help in times of trouble

### **Event 5: 27 January 2023**

- Findings from Event 4 and the follow up survey
- Impact session: How the findings have been used so far
- Information session: coping with emergencies
- Group session 1: What would help members cope with emergencies
- Group session 2: How should SG communicate about coping with emergencies

### **Event 6: 24 March 2023**

- Impact session: How the findings have been used across all the events
- Thank you sessions from policy teams, volunteers and the research team
- Group session 1: How members feel about COVID-19 now and for the future
- Group session 2: Open session for members to talk about their priorities
- Group session 3: Highlights and lowlights of being members of the People's panel



## Appendix B: Timeline of how an event runs



## **Appendix C: Small group discussion questions on cost of living topics**

### **Group session: Cost of living crisis and what it means to members**

- What does the cost of living crisis mean to you?  
  
Follow-up:
  - When and how did you notice it? How is it affecting you? What are the realities of the cost of living crisis for you and your household?
- What are you most worried about?
- How are you coping with these difficulties?  
  
Follow-up:
  - What action have you had to take to pay your bills/buy food/ fill up your car?
  - What do you think the Scottish Government could do to help?

### **Event 3**

#### **Research Questions**

- Research Question 1: What impact, and in what way, is (or will) the cost of living crisis hav(e)ing on member's (or others they know) lives beyond choosing between heating and eating?
- Research Question 2: What impact, and in what way, is (or will) the cost of living crisis having on member's health and wellbeing?
- Research Question 3: What do members think would help them, their families and communities?

### **Group session: The impact of the cost of living crisis on members' behaviour and health and wellbeing**

- Firstly can we talk about what might have changed in terms of what you (or others you know) buy and what you do because of the cost of living crisis?  
  
Follow-up:
  - Do you have different priorities from before? Are you making any trade-offs or sacrifices? What decisions are you having to make? Do you have choices or has the crisis taken them away?
- Have you (or others you know) done anything in particular to help manage that change?
- How do you expect what you ( or others you know) buy or do to change over the next six months?

Follow-up:

- Will there need to be further trade-offs or sacrifices, further decisions to be made or further lack of choice?]
- Now we would like to talk about the impact of this on your health and wellbeing (or of others you know), so in what ways, has the cost of living crisis affected your health and wellbeing?

Follow-up:

- How are spending changes (whatever has come up in the first session but potentially - less food, poorer quality food, colder home, no holidays, less socialising) making you feel mentally and physically?
- How are any worries affecting your mental health?
- How are these changes affecting any physical health conditions you may have?
- How do you expect this impact to develop in the next six months? (Prompts as above)

Follow up:

- Do you expect health and wellbeing to get worse or better? And why?
- What support or help would make a difference to you, and others?

Follow-up:

- How would these things improve your situation?

## Appendix D: General briefing for facilitators/notetakers – an example

This is an extract from the briefing that was sent to Scottish Government facilitators:

**Please note:** Use of preferred pronouns

**Please note:** We have told people that they can walk about and come and go.

**Please note:** There is a debrief appointment for next week but if you need to talk to the research team before then please get in touch.

### **If someone gets upset**

We've had experience of some members becoming upset, some of the issues are sensitive and bring out strong emotions. [research member] has trained as a mental health first aider and is the first port of call if anyone is looking for emotional support.

So if it happens

1. Acknowledge their emotion and offer sympathy as appropriate
2. Ask them if they want to continue (they may want to be heard)
3. If they do want to continue, support them to say what they need to say
4. If they don't want to continue ask them if they want to have a break (acknowledge them when they come back and try to bring them back into the group). Or if they want to leave the event completely and in both cases also ask if they want to talk to [research team member].

### **Offensive remarks or behaviour**

If someone makes a remark that is offensive please in the first instance interrupt them, and repeat the 'Safe space and inclusive' mantra (see below ...all people in Scotland are welcome and respected, whatever their background, current circumstances and opinions or words to that effect).

If it persists and you need to exclude them please click on the three dots by their name and you should be able to block them. Then let the research team know in our Teams chat and we will deal with them. If you feel able please apologise to the others in the group and move on.

### **At each session:**

Welcome your guests, introduce yourself and ask them to introduce themselves one by one, telling them that using a false name is fine.

If you have a note-taker introduce them and tell members he/she/they will be writing down what they say. If not tell them you are recording and ask if they have any objections, if they do then I'm afraid you'll have to say that they can't take part as we need to record.

Make a promise to them to use plain English and tell them you won't use any government jargon. If you use jargon words, for example, 'inclusive' (see below) explain what it means. Go through ground rules (these will have been explained to them but just to remind them).

Cameras on if they are ok with it.

Mute when they are not talking.

Hands up if you want to talk.

Safe space and inclusive – what we mean by that is ...all people in Scotland are welcome and respected, whatever their background, current circumstances and opinions. Please respect each-others opinions, listen to other people, talk in turn don't tell anyone outside the event what anyone else has said and please don't say anything that might be disrespectful to other groups of people.

**Please note:** This being qualitative work the wording of the questions is not vital, they are just a guide; the most important thing is that you understand what we are trying to get evidence on and use your skills to get it.

### **Third-person technique**

As some of the subjects are sensitive we want to give members the opportunity to tell their stories in the third-person. As such I will go over this with them but would encourage you to stress it in the sessions.

## Appendix E: Post-event survey scores

The post event survey included scaling questions, with respondents asked to rate their views on a scale of 1-10. The mean score is reported. The higher the score the more positive the rating. Not all questions were included each time, and the survey additionally had some practical and open questions.<sup>22</sup>

Question	Mean scores at each event <sup>23</sup>					
[On a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 means not at all and 10 means completely):]	Event 1	Event 2	Event 3	Event 4	Event 5	Event 6
At the event how well do you think you understood the following:						
How the panel will work	8.5	9.3	9.5	9.6	9.8	-
How we will report what you say to Ministers and Policy makers	7.7	8.9	9.5	9.5	9.4	-
How the information collected from the Panel so far has been used	-	-	8.8	9.1	9.2	-
At the event did you feel able to raise issues that are important to you?	8.3	8.9	9.6	9.4	9.1	9.5
How confident do you feel that your personal information will be kept confidential?	9.4 <sup>24</sup>	9.3	9.3	9.8	9.6	9.8
At the event did you feel you were respected by:						
The research team	9.8	9.6	9.9	10.0	10.0	10.0
Other panel members	8.3	9.4	9.9	9.8	9.9	9.8
The speakers	-	-	-	9.6	9.7	10.0
Are you looking forward to the next event?	8.3	9.1	9.6	9.3	9.5	-

<sup>22</sup> The post event survey had additional questions around members' preferences around small groups, the number of discussion sessions, voucher preferences, length of the event and number of breaks, and ideas for new things to do in the events and for the final event. There was an open question for further clarification if members did not feel able to raise important issues. The surveys also included open questions on how members had found each event, what they would like to talk about next time, and a question in the 5<sup>th</sup> event survey on the concept of household resilience.

<sup>23</sup> Number of survey respondents – event 1 = 13, event 2 = 15, event 3 = 13, event 4 = 18, event 5 = 21, event 6 = 11

<sup>24</sup> Event 1 question 'How confident do you feel that your personal information will be kept confidential by the research team'. Events 2 – 5 the question was 'How confident do you feel that your personal information will be kept confidential'.

<b>At the event how comfortable did you feel:</b>						
Using Teams	7.3	8.7	8.8	9.5	9.6	9.4
Talking in the smaller group sessions	8.4	9.3	9.8	9.9	9.8	9.8
Talking in the whole panel sessions	6.8	7.1	7.4	7.6	7.1	7.6
Asking questions in the smaller group sessions	8.5	9.4	9.8	9.7	9.7	9.9
Asking questions in the whole panel sessions	6.8	7.3	7.3	7.1	6.5	7.6

<b>To what extent do you feel you trust:</b>						
The research team	9.1	9.6	9.9	9.8	9.9	10.0
Other panel members	6.9	9.3	9.5	9.7	9.8	9.8

<b>At the event we had Scottish Government policy makers telling you what they have done with information produced at the last event. To what extent do you think the information produced by the panel has been used?</b>	-	-	-	7.9	8.2	-
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Additional one-off questions were asked following events 1,2 and 6. These were scaling questions with respondents asked to rate their views on a scale of 1-10. The mean score is reported.

Event	Question	Mean Score
	<b>[On a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 means not at all and 10 means completely):]</b>	
<b>1</b>	At the event how well do you think you understood what the Scottish Government are doing for COVID recovery?	5.7
	At the event did you feel able to share your pandemic story?	8.9
	How confident do you feel that your personal information will be kept confidential by other panel members?	7.3
<b>2</b>	<b>At the event how well do you think you understood the following things:</b>	
	The presentation from The Scottish Government on their communications and marketing plans	8.6
	The presentation from The Scottish Government on ventilation	8.7
	COVID Recovery	8.0
	How we will report what you say	9.1
<b>6</b>	<b>To what extent do you think the following:</b>	
	The People's Panel has had an impact on decisions made in the Scottish Government	8.4
	The People's Panel's work will continue to have an impact on policy makers and Ministers in the Scottish Government	8.2

## Appendix F: Ethics

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed. In summary:

1. **Scottish Government Social Research Ethical Sensitivity Checklist:** The ethical foundation of the study was established by addressing ethical considerations, which commenced with the comprehensive completion of the Scottish Government Social Research Ethical Sensitivity Checklist. This ensured that the study was conducted with the highest ethical standards and upheld the principles of responsible research conduct.
2. **Informed Consent:** Prior to their involvement in the People's Panel, all participating members were informed about the purpose and nature of the research. They were provided with a clear and thorough understanding of the study's objectives, methodologies, and potential outcomes. Informed consent was obtained from each member, indicating their voluntary willingness to participate in the study based on a well-informed decision.
3. **Right to Withdraw:** Members were not only informed about their participation but also explicitly made aware of their right to withdraw from the research at any point. This was granted without the requirement to provide a reason, and it was underscored that their decision to withdraw would have no negative repercussions whatsoever.
4. **Data Protection Compliance:** Recognising the importance of safeguarding personal information, the study adhered to the guidelines outlined by the UK General Data Protection Regulations. All personal data and information collected from the members were treated with the utmost care and stored securely to prevent unauthorised access or breaches.
5. **Ethical Principles Governing Social Research:** The research was conducted in alignment with the ethical principles that underpin social research. These principles encompassed respect for individual autonomy, ensuring beneficence, upholding non-maleficence, and promoting justice throughout the research process.
6. **Confidentiality and Anonymity:** To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, stringent measures were implemented. The only individuals who had access to the identities and personal characteristics of the members were the designated research team members.
7. **Anonymization of Data:** The study anonymized all members' information and data before incorporating it into subsequent reports.





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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

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