



COST OF LIVING SURVEY



This report has been kindly produced by Alpha Autism working with FVP in a SEND consultancy capacity. The report details the findings of a coproduced survey seeking the views of parent carers on the impact of the current cost of living crisis.

info@alphaautismcare.co.uk

Introduction

The aim behind this survey was to develop an understanding of how changes in cost of living have affected SEND families based in Peterborough.

Data was gathered from various sources including social media platforms and face to face interactions.

We had thirty-eight respondents, 71% of the respondents identified themselves as white English, an additional 10.5% identified as other white background. The research therefore has its limitations in terms representing the diverse ethnic communities in Peterborough.

44.7% of the respondents stated that they are married and 39.5% stated that they are single parents. Half of the respondents stated that they are full time carers. 23.7% stated that they are self-employed. A large proportion of the respondents also self-reported that they claim carers allowance and of all those who responded 55.2% are in receipt of disability/ caring based benefits.

Findings

Budget

All the respondents stated that they have noticed changes in their weekly budget, this would indicate that working families including couples are struggling with the rise in cost of living. These families have reported that they are in receipt of benefits including carers allowance, majority however are full time carers. To summarise the impact of cost of living has been noted by all the respondents.

Have you noticed any changes in your weekly budget?

38 responses



Energy and Food Bills

100% of the respondents stated that they have noted an increase in energy bills. Disabled people on average face an extra cost of over £1000 a month even after they have claimed all the benefits. Families caring for disabled children face an

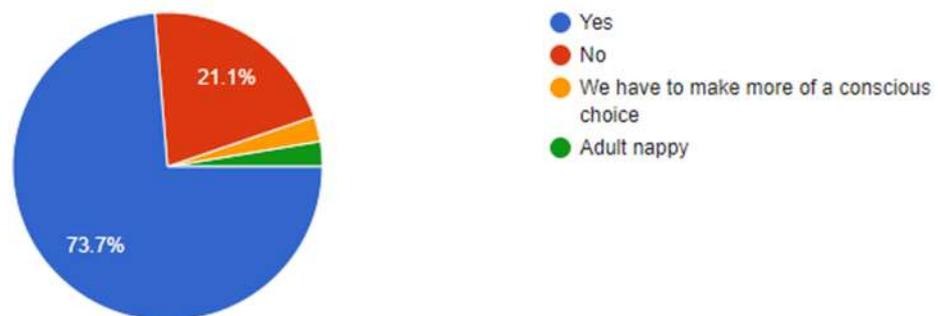
average cost of £581 per month more so than the general population (John, Thomas & Touchat, 2019).

Our research suggests that second to electricity bill, families report that the cost of food was the biggest challenge. This has been reflected in the numbers of local families who have used the Family Voice food bank and Community Café.

In the past 3 months have you struggled with buying basic food items?



38 responses

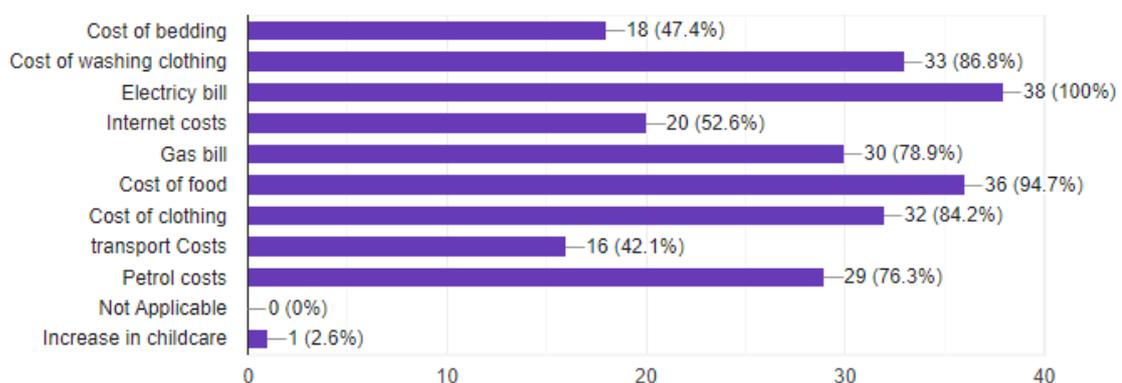


A large proportion of the respondents reported that they have struggled to purchase basic food items, where cost of living has been higher for families prior to the cost-of-living crisis our report findings indicate that families are struggling to purchase the essentials. The impact of which can be widespread.

Has there been an increase in costs specific to your child's SEND needs? (Choose Any That Apply)



38 responses



A further impact on SEND households in particular relates to having to find the money to purchase specialist food, prescription items and fuel to ensure children get to school (some parent carers have CYP attending schools to support their SEND where travel has to be by car due to distance). When asked the following question a range of responses were elicited that demonstrate this:

What in particular have you seen increase in price, that you now find difficult buy?

1. *diesel but it is essential to take children to school and back*
2. *Travel cost so unable to afford days out for the boys*
3. *The petrole and travelling cost as no school transport and long distance*
4. *Clothing and footwear for more daughter*
5. *Dairy free alternatives due to milk allergies*
6. *Petrol but need the car for Tommy to attend all his specialist hospital*
7. *Essential Extremely Sensitive Skin Toiletry & Hygiene products, Vegetarian, Vegan & Freefrom products, Antihistamines and Ventalin, Decongestants, Non-dairy food and drink items, Petfood and Petcare items, bottled still or spring water, Disability aids and equipment, including maintenance of equipment. Water, gas, electricity, clothing and footwear (including essential winter wear and winter coat. I suffer from being cold frequently all year being quite unwell for a long period of time) , Entertainment for my children (including cost of equipment, subscriptions and accessories) , Mobile tariff with VAT, essential takeaways (for days / nights I'm completely physically unable to get dinner sorted out myself) adding on card service charges, delivery fees, tip fee and so on. Home food shop delivery fees extremely high with little availability or I have to traverse the local community shops as I'm unable to get supermarket delivery, home electrical goods equipment maintenance and servicing / repair / replacements, Extra Services high charges (gardener, window cleaner and so on). General grocery shopping budget is already a massive challenge.*
8. *All eczema creams mine inhalers for asthma bills*
9. *Send child's very limited diet.*
10. *Medicines from a pharmacy prescription or non-prescription*
11. *Nappies, fresh fruit and veg*
12. *meat, cereals, fruit.*
13. *Chicken, fish, meat, drinks (so we only have water now and are eating tinned stuff and vegetables more)*
14. *Energy Bill's and cost of food*
15. *Fruit is hard to buy at a good price*

Mental Wellbeing

As the demands of providing for a family increase, the impact of cost of living on wider aspects including mental health are represented in how the cost-of-living impacts on other areas of life including access to the gym and activities which help maintain and promote health mental health and wellbeing.

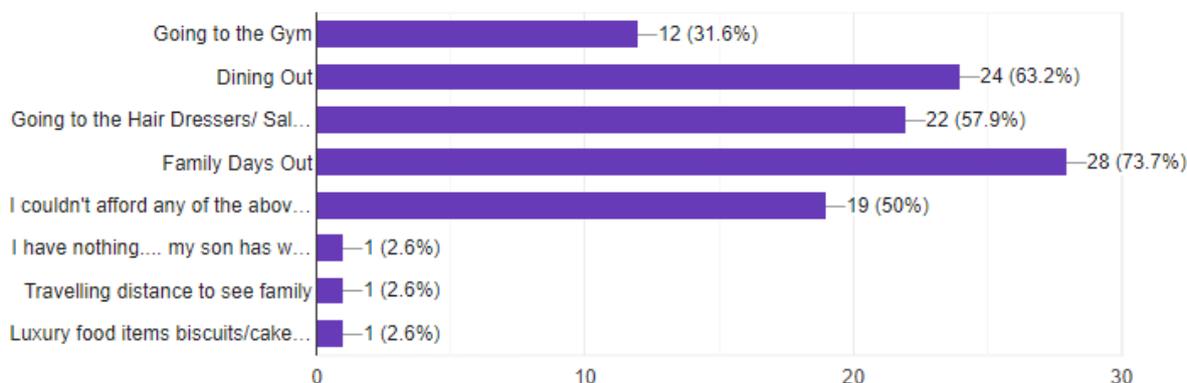
“Can't afford to go on holidays and spend money on leisure activities that support mental well-being”

“We cannot go for holidays and eat out like before pay bills cost of living”

Has the increase in the cost of living impacted on any other areas of your life? Choose any that apply



38 responses



Further to this when asked if prioritisation in relation to spending was taking place the overwhelming majority of respondents selected heating, eating and transport over all other areas such as leisure activities, TV/ Internet packages, staying COVID safe (purchase of lateral flow tests). Staying COVID safe came bottom in relation to prioritisation.

Overall Cost of Living Impact

A final supplementary question provided the opportunity to state more general views about the cost of living crisis.

Is there anything else you would like to add regards your current situation and the increase to the cost of living?

- *Unable to sustain permanent work due to child's high needs.*
- *I make sure my boys costs are cover and then the house*
- *Please help*
- *Not being able to work due to caring but having carers allowance deducted from Universal credit.*
- *Finding it really hard to pay everything and keeping out of debt*
- *Paying £30 a month more for utilities, food bill has gone up £15 a week too. Petrol is more expensive so going less places. The belt gets tighter every month.*
- *I am also assisting a homeless YA with needs of his own that helps me care for my eldest son. He requires access and use of /;to all my facilities . So this has also placed extra financial burden onto us. He only has us though and we rely on his support in caring for my 20yr old son with ASD. My needs are challenging and require a lot of resources of different types including financial. I do not have the required income and have not for some time. I force my body to keep going just so I can try and get paid employment to cover our ever increasing costs. As a result of Benefits, energy (including food and drink),medical & dental health care ,housing inequity. My health is in Urgent need of attention that it is not receiving due to Ineffectiveness of the Status*

Quo system imposed upon us by our government and their denial that people like myself and family can exist in Modern Day, supposedly Wealthy Britain. I believe my circumstances of birth and subsequent years struggling were completely avoidable had our government been doing the jobs the British Taxpayers Pay them to Thoroughly and Competently Do.

- *We are not frivolous family. Any more cost rises and we will be going into debt.*
- *We cannot go for holidays and eat out like before pay bills cost of living*
- *Clothing is so expensive my daughter is 3 but due to a genetic condition she wears age 7-8 in clothes which are much more expensive*
- *Can't afford to go on holidays and spend money on leisure activities that support mental well-being*
- *Not entitled to some benefits (PIP) as we lived out the country for a few years - where my ex husband divorced me and took away our passports under shariah law - so we couldn't return home until the British Embassy helped us*
- *Every day is struggle .birthdays of children are more hard they want present cake take away party*
- *Threats because i cant pay bill. So if i pay bill we dont eat*
- *Make government increase universal credit for Sen adults who receive enhanced uc as will never work, get better job or even work. Also give warm home payment to these people.*
- *I would like the benefits to go up in line with the cost of living*

This demonstrates the wide range of areas of life that are being impacted by rising costs, and that having to cut back on areas that improve mental wellbeing are going to have a detrimental effect on households.

Limitations of Results

The survey participant number was small however when linked with other survey research data including food bank and community café numbers can be generalised to the wider population. A large proportion of the participants identified themselves as White/ English; this does not reflect the ethnic minority landscape in Peterborough, which is not to say that there was any particular issue with the survey, just that numbers are low for some communities. It is not possible to draw and specific conclusions, although though inference can be made about general issues facing local households.

Summary

Overall, the data indicates that families caring for disabled children are struggling to provide essentials for their families. All participants reported that they have noted that their bills have increased and that the cost of purchasing basic food items has increased, which has had impact on mental wellbeing.

The increasing numbers of families accessing the food bank service at Family Voice and the attendance at the Community Café only supports the findings of this

research. In that families caring for disabled children are increasingly vulnerable to the rising cost of living and the wider impact of this included mental wellbeing.

There are also often hidden costs associated with raising a CYP with SEND relating to specialist food for example that may go unacknowledged if parent carers are not provided the opportunity to speak up. The hypothesis in terms of long term impact is of concern for both parents and disabled children.