

Welcome to the 50th citizens' panel newsletter. This newsletter gives you a brief summary of the results of the 50th questionnaire on the theme of "Economy" which you received in May 2024.

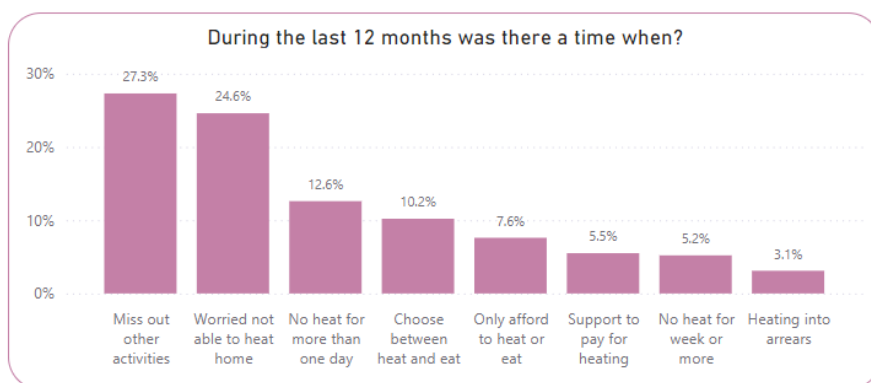
A total of 806 questionnaires were sent out to panellists and we received 391 completed questionnaires – equivalent to a response rate of 48.5%. This is slightly higher than the response rate for City Voice 49 (44.7%).

Cost of living

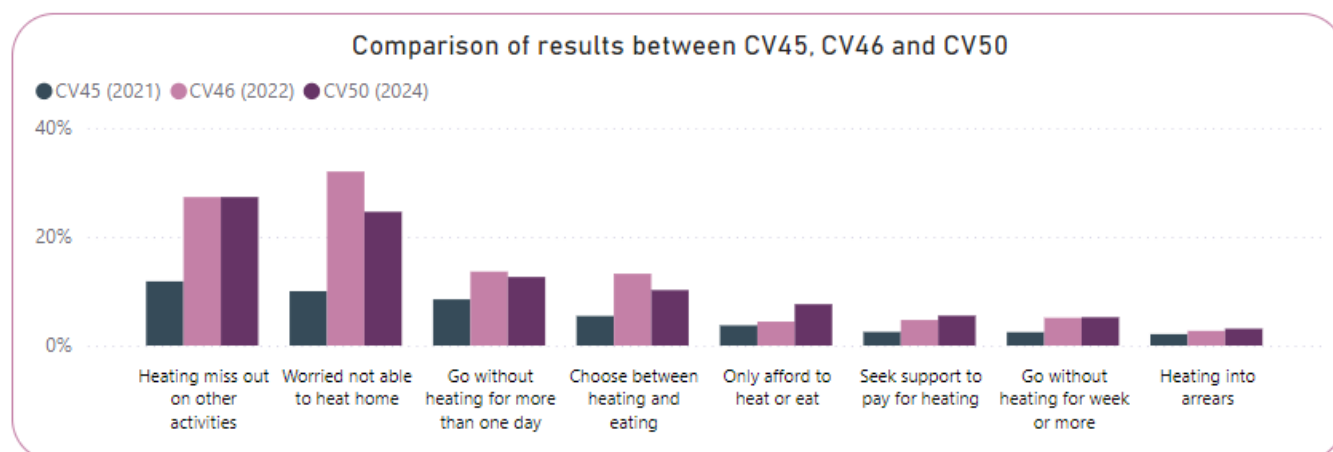
Heating and housing costs

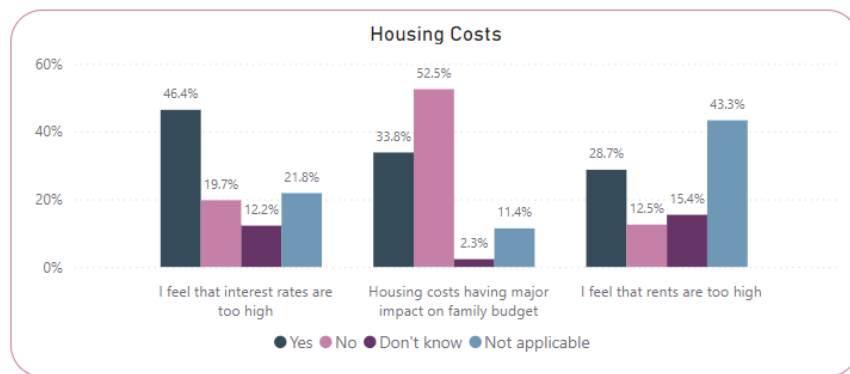
The first questions in this section asked about Heating Costs over the previous 12 months. While most respondents did not report concerns about their ability to heat their homes due to lack of money or other resources, over a quarter (27.3%) said that **paying for heating has meant missing out on other**

activities and 24.6% said that they were **worried that they would not be able to heat their homes**. 12.6% reported **going without heating for more than a day** and 10.2% said they were **worried about having to choose between heating and eating**. In a follow-up question, when asked only 18.9% of respondents said they knew of **support available locally to help with heating their home**.



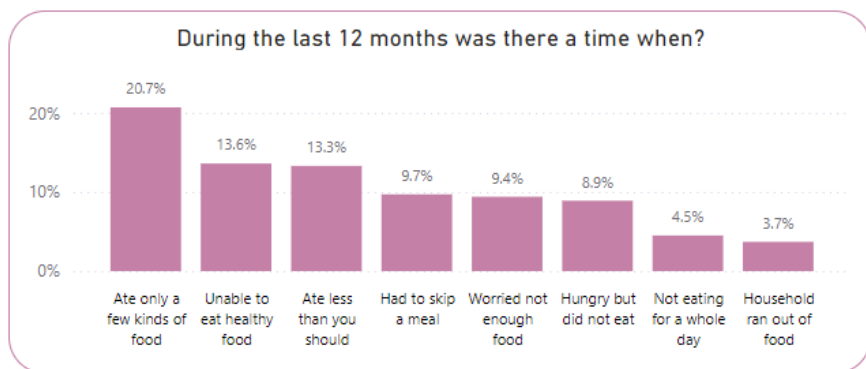
These questions have been asked in previous City Voice questionnaires (CV45 and CV46). The chart below shows the proportion of respondents who answered 'yes' to each question for all three questionnaires to allow comparison. With the exception of **worried not able to heat their home** which has gone down from 32% to 24.6%, the responses in CV50 are broadly similar to those in CV46. The largest increase is in the proportion of respondents who reported being **worried they could only afford to heat their home or feed themselves/their family** (from 4.4% to 7.6%).





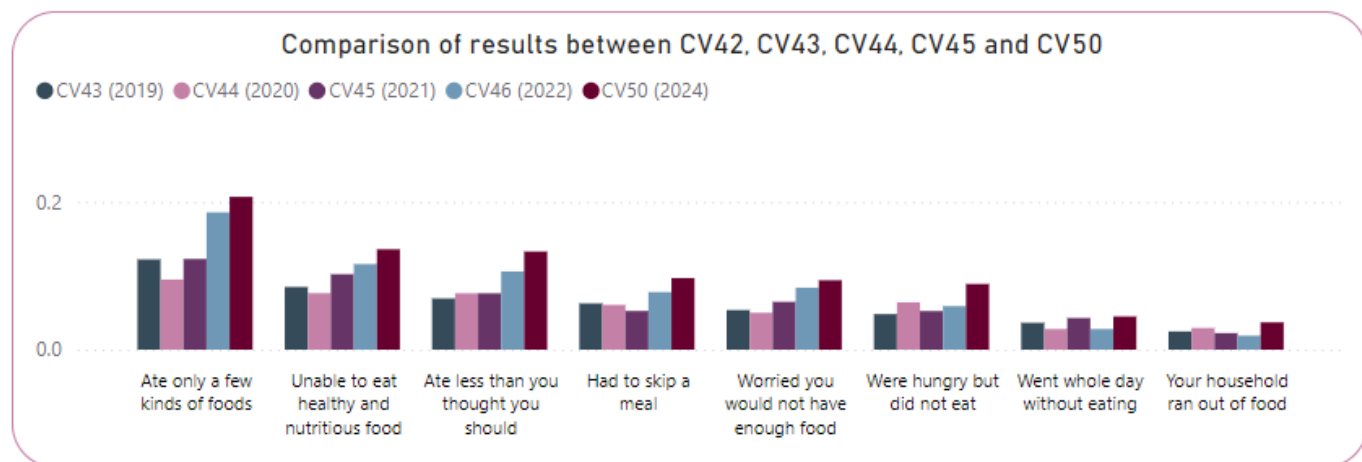
more than a quarter of respondents (27.6%) said they knew of **support available locally to help with their finances**.

Access to food



than they thought they should, 9.7% that they **had to skip a meal** and 9.4% that they **were worried they would not have enough food to eat**.

These questions were also asked in City Voice 43 (2019), City Voice 44 (2020), City Voice 45 (2021) and City Voice 46 (2022). The chart below shows the percentage of respondents who answered 'yes' to each question. Since the questions were first asked, the percentage of respondents who answered 'yes' has increased for every question. Similarly, since last asked in December 2022, the percentage who answered 'yes' has increased for all questions, with the largest increase being in the proportion who reported they **were hungry but did not eat** (from 5.9% to 8.9%).



The final question in this section asked participants if they were **aware of what is available in their community to support them to eat well**. Over half (58.7%) of respondents said that 'yes' they were aware of support available to them.

Service Response:

Thank you for answering these important questions on the cost of living. An understanding of your experience of the current cost of living crisis is essential for us to know how we might best respond to help the people of Aberdeen. The results have been considered by Community Planning Aberdeen's Anti-Poverty Group which is a partnership of public, private and third sector organisations working together to alleviate the impacts of poverty on people and families across the City.

We know that the combined impact of the pandemic and cost of living crisis across Aberdeen continues to have a negative impact on individuals and families, forcing many to make a decision between heating and eating due to a lack of income. The results of this questionnaire show that over a quarter of respondents are still missing out on other activities in order to heat their homes and almost as many are worried that they would not be able to heat their homes. We understand the physical and emotional toll this takes and it is with great regret that we note the increase since last year in the proportion of respondents who were worried they could only afford to heat their home or feed themselves/ their family.

Over the last year we have taken action to combat against these circumstances with a focus on increasing household income. We have been supporting people into fair work employment and more people to claim the benefits they are entitled to. Through initiatives such as the online benefit calculator and ABZ Works, a service offering employability support, we are empowering more people to access the support they need in a bid to prevent and reduce disadvantage and inequality across the City.

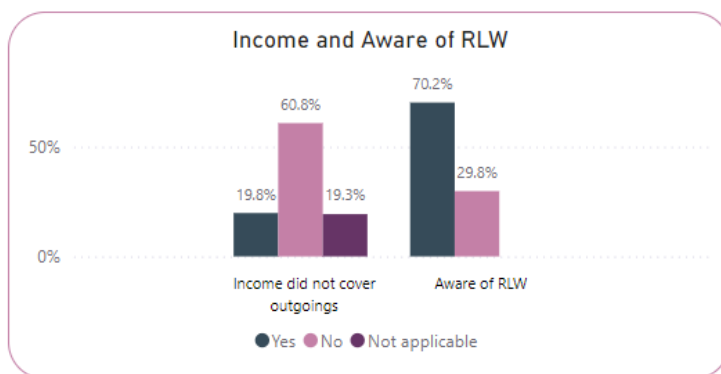
We also aim to ensure there is immediate support available for those that need it most and are working together to help people across the City access affordable food and support with energy. For example, working with CFine and Food Poverty Action Aberdeen to increase access to community food banks and pantries which offer free and low cost nutritious food. Also, working with SCARF to increase awareness of advice and support with fuel bills, insulation and energy efficiency.

This year Aberdeen City Council's Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee allocated £1m to mitigate against the impact of the cost of living crisis and help address poverty in the City. The funding has been used to help people in emergency need, going towards food procurement and pantries, fuel vouchers, help with the cost for winter clothing, every day essentials, discretionary housing payments and crisis grants and support for older people.

Reducing the number of people experiencing food and fuel poverty is a top priority for Community Planning Aberdeen as set out in the Local Outcome Improvement Plan. Over the next 18 months we will work with a wide range of partners to take forward initiatives that tackle the drivers of poverty to achieve our ambitions for improvement and help realise our vision of Aberdeen as a place where all people can prosper.

Real Living Wage

The next set of questions were about the Real Living Wage (RLW). The first asked participants if **during the last 12 months, there was a time when their wages/income did not cover their weekly/monthly outgoings**. A fifth (19.8%) of respondents reported that 'yes' there had been a time when their income did not cover their outgoings. Participants were then asked if they were **aware of the Real Living Wage set by the Living Wage Foundation**. Over two-thirds (67.5%) said that they **were** aware of it.



Participants were then asked what they thought the **current Real Living Wage** was and given a list of four options as well as a don't know option. Just over a fifth (22.9%) correctly identified £12.00 per hour as the current Real Living Wage. The most common response was £11.44 with almost a third (32.8%) choosing this option.

When asked if they were being **paid at least the Real Living Wage in their current role**, the most common response was 'not applicable' (58.8%) with 34.7% of respondents saying 'yes'. Excluding those who answered 'not applicable', 84.3% of respondents reported that they were being paid at least the RLW in their current role. Similarly, when asked if their **employer was an accredited Living Wage employer**, the most common response was 'not applicable' (63.0%). Excluding those, 44.1% of respondents said they 'didn't know', 37.8% said 'yes' and 18.2% said 'no'. Only 5.5% of respondents said they were aware of the work to **Make Aberdeen a Living Wage City**.

Service Response: Thank you for taking the time to complete these questions. The findings of the Citizens Panel will be taken on board by the Aberdeen real Living Wage Action Group, a collective of public, private and third sector employers seeking to increase adoption of the real Living Wage by employers across the City, with subsequent uplifts in wages for the lowest paid in society.

With nearly a fifth of respondents not being paid the real Living Wage, it shows there are substantial pockets of low pay in Aberdeen which may be contributing to in-work poverty and child poverty levels. With the cost of living remaining high, being paid a real Living Wage has never been needed more.

The Action Group are seeking ways to increase the profile of the real Living Wage to communicate the benefits both to employees and employers. This will be done mainly via social media and promotion of the benefits employers who adopt the real Living Wage experience, but also by events such as during Living Wage Week in November, for example. Direct engagement with employers will continue to be a key piece of work for the Action Group.

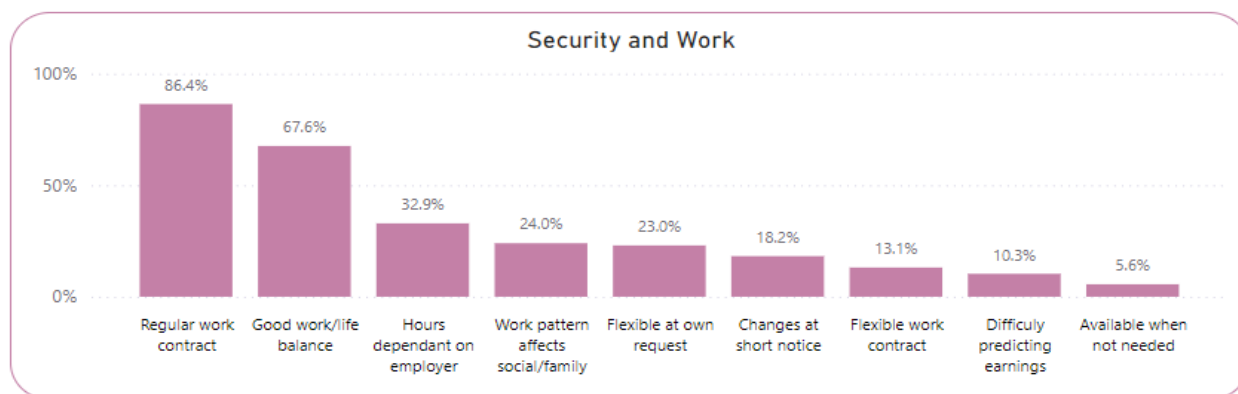
Whilst there is a cost of living crisis, there are also pressures facing employers across all sectors, alongside funding constraints for the public and third sectors. We must remain aware of these issues and ensure that the transition to paying the real Living Wage is sustainable for all employers.

There will also be work to expand the group's Action Plan into Aberdeenshire over the coming months, with the potential for many employees who travel to work in the neighbouring Local Authority to benefit from increases in the number of employers committing to paying the real Living Wage there.

The commitment to the real Living Wage remains embedded within both the Local Outcome Improvement Plan of Community Planning Aberdeen, and the Regional Economic Strategy.

Security and Work

The questions in this section related to job security. The first asked participants if they were **currently in paid employment**. 38.6% of respondents said that they **were** currently in paid employment and 61.4% that they **were not**. Those who were not in paid employment were asked to go directly to the next section of the questionnaire, while those who were in paid employment (number = 149) were asked to complete the remaining questions. These respondents were then given a series of statements relating to their employment. Most (86.4%) reported they had a **regular work contract with mainly set hours** and 13.1% that they had a **flexible work contract**. Over two thirds (67.6%) indicated that they felt they had a **good work/life balance**. Almost a third (32.9%) said that their **work hours are dependent on their employer's needs** and 10.3% reported that they had **difficulty in predicting how much they would earn each month**.



Homelessness

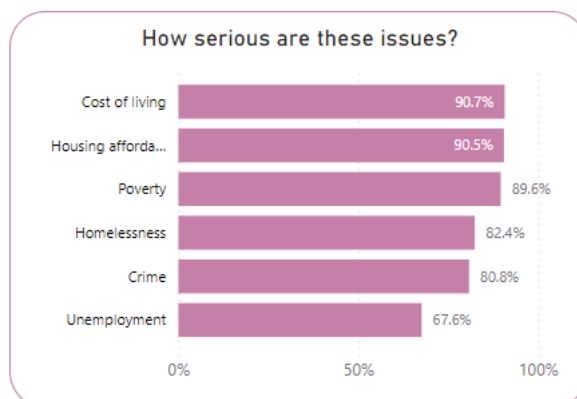
The first question in this section was gave participants a list of **issues facing the country these days and asked them to indicate how serious a problem, if at all, they thought each one was**.

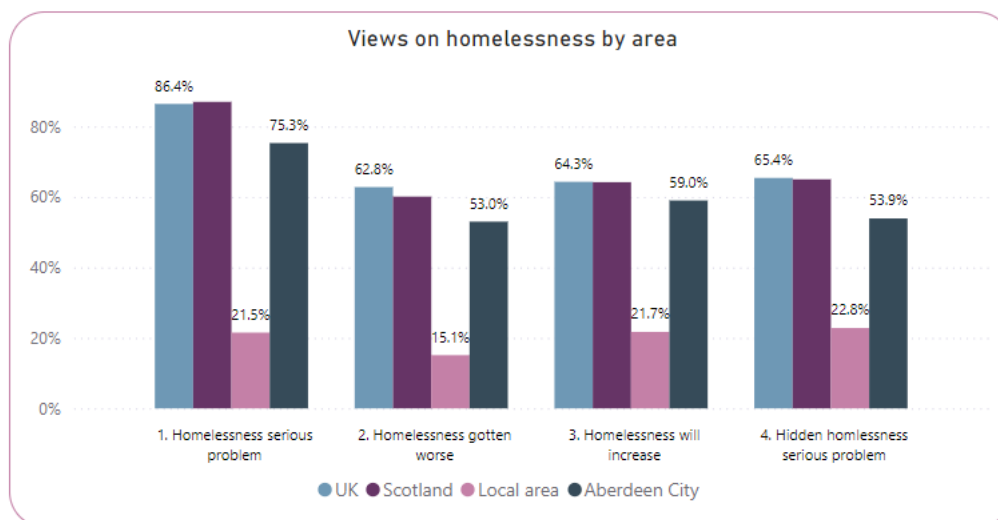
The majority of respondents identified all the issues as serious problems (either very serious or fairly serious) – over 80% for all issues with the exception of unemployment (67.6%).

How serious is homelessness

The next of question was specifically about **homelessness**, and asked participants how **serious a problem they thought it was in the following areas**: The UK as a whole; In Scotland; In Aberdeen City and In the area where you live (within about 15-20 minutes' walk). Most respondents reported they though homelessness was a **serious problem** (very serious or fairly serious) in the UK, Scotland and Aberdeen City. In contrast, the proportion of respondents who said they thought homelessness was a serious problem in their local area was much lower at 21.5%.

Participants were then asked if they thought that **homelessness has got better, got worse or stayed the same over the past 12 months** for each of the areas. For the UK as a whole, Scotland and Aberdeen City, most respondents said they thought homelessness had gotten worse (a little worse or a lot worse) over the past 12 months. Only 15.1% of respondents reported that they thought homelessness has gotten worse in their local area over the past 12 months with the most common response being 'don't know' (41.2%).





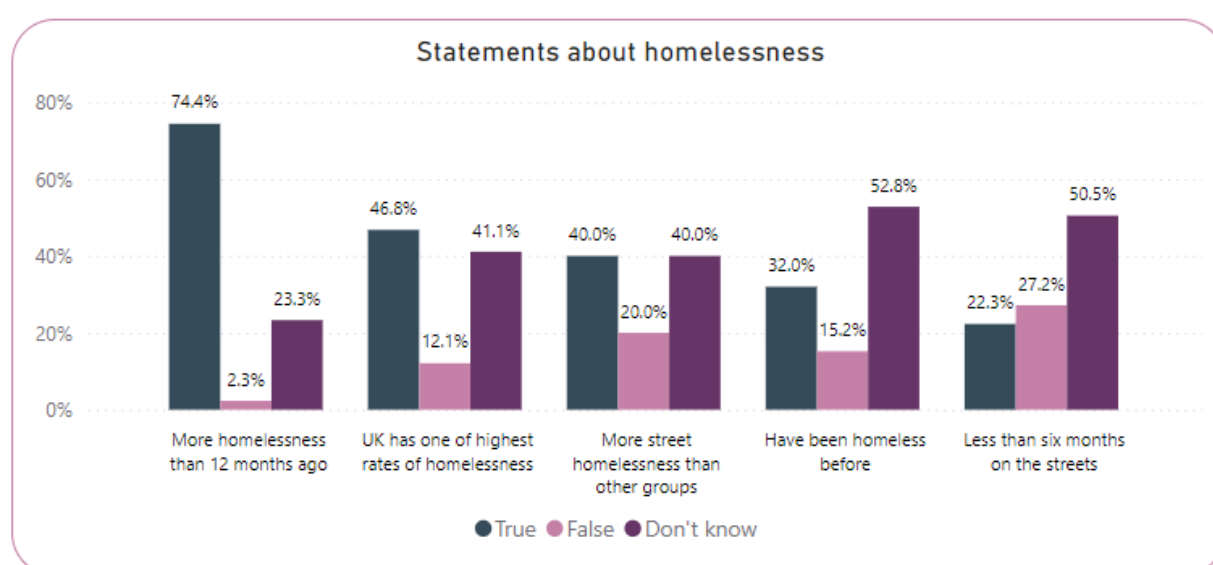
In follow-up to this question, participants were then asked if they thought **homelessness would increase, decrease or stay the same over the next 12 months for each of the areas**. Most respondents said they thought homelessness would increase (increase a lot or increase a little) over the next 12 months in the UK as

a whole, Scotland and Aberdeen City. Again responses differed when asked about their local area with the most common responses here being 'stay the same' (40.6%) and 'don't know' (35.1%) with 21.7% of respondents thinking it would increase.

Participants were then asked how serious a problem they thought '**hidden homelessness**' was each of the four areas. The pattern of responses here was similar to the previous questions relating to specific areas, with most respondents saying they thought hidden homelessness was a serious problem in the UK as a whole (65.4%), in Scotland (65%) and in Aberdeen City (53.9%). The most common response when asked about hidden homelessness in the area where they lived was 'don't know' with almost half (49.5%) choosing this option.

Views about homelessness

Participants were then given a series of statements about homelessness in the UK and asked whether they thought they were true or false or whether they didn't know. Most respondents (74.4%) said they thought that the statement **more people are experiencing homelessness in the UK compared to 12 months ago** was true, with only 2.3% of respondents saying they thought this statement was false. For the other statements there was a more mixed response. Although for most statements a higher proportion of respondents thought the statement was true rather than false, a high proportion of respondents (at least 40%) said that they didn't know.



Participants were then given a list of **some things that people have said about homelessness**. They were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with each. On the whole, most respondents said that they agreed (strongly agree or tend to agree) with the statements, with agreement being highest for **it is unfair to take a negative view of**

people who are homeless (78.8%) and homelessness would be less of an issue if housing was more affordable (78.2%). The exceptions were **I am aware of actions that are being taken to tackle homelessness (23.4% agreed)** and **homelessness will always happen – we cannot end it (46.9% agreed).**

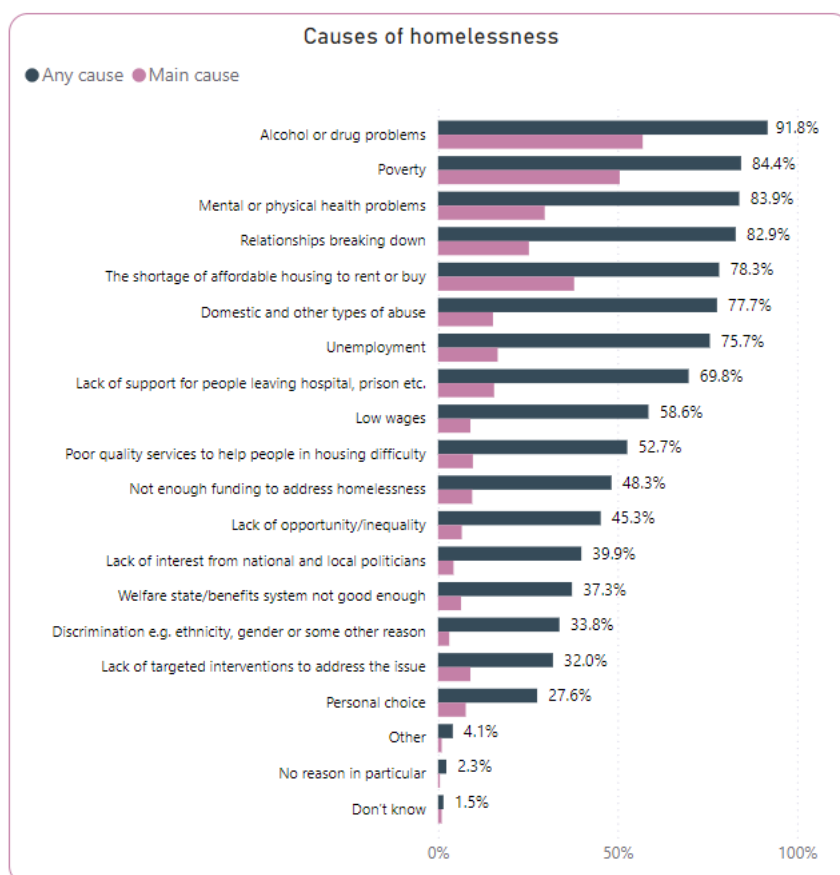
What has been said about homelessness	Percentage agreement
It is unfair to take a negative view of people who are homeless	78.8%
Homelessness would be less of an issue if housing was more affordable	78.2%
As a society, we do not pay enough attention to homelessness	75.7%
Governments should guarantee that everyone has the right to access decent and affordable housing	74.4%
Poverty is at the root of many of the problems that can lead to homelessness	67.9%
We should invest more money in preventing people becoming homeless rather than in services to help those who are already homeless	62.4%
All of us have a role to play in ending homelessness	58.4%
Homelessness will always happen – we cannot end it	46.9%
I am aware of actions that are being taken to tackle homelessness	23.4%

Causes of homelessness

The next question gave participants a list of issues and asked **which, if any of these things, they thought were the causes of why people are homeless.** Respondents could choose as many as they wanted. The most commonly chosen was **alcohol or drug problems** with 91.8% of respondents saying they thought this was a cause of homelessness. **Poverty (84.4%), mental or physical health problems (83.9%) and relationships breaking down (82.9%)** were the next most commonly chosen issues.

The next question gave the same list of issues and asked participants **what they thought were the 3 MAIN causes of why people are homeless.** Participants were asked to choose a maximum of 3 from the list. Again **alcohol or drug problems** was the most commonly

chosen issue with 57.0% of respondents saying they thought this was one of the main causes of why people are homeless. **Poverty** was the next most common choice with slightly over half (50.6%) of respondents choosing this.



The next most common issues chosen were **the shortage of affordable housing to buy or rent** (37.9%) and **mental or physical health problems** (29.7%).

Actions to address homelessness

Over the next two questions, participants were then given list of **suggested actions to address homelessness in the UK** and asked to what extent they supported these. On the whole there was broad support for the suggestions with over half of respondents saying they support (strongly support or tend to support) each of the suggested actions. The exceptions were **providing one-off payments for people at risk to prevent homelessness** (41.7%), **giving people more choice over where they live** (43%), **making sure all people who were previously homeless receive financial support even if they are not in work, to help them avoid homelessness** (44.8%) and **providing unpaid work opportunities to people who are homeless** (45.1%).

The suggestions with the highest levels of support were **providing support such as training to people who are homeless and in work to help them remain in employment** (88.5%), **make it easier for local councils/authorities to deliver more affordable housing available to those on low incomes** (85.1%), **improving access to services for people who are homeless e.g. to help with alcohol/substance or mental health problems** (84.3%) and **doing more to address homelessness** (82.6%).

Suggested actions to address homelessness	Percentage agreement
Providing support such as training to people who are homeless and in work to help them remain in employment	88.5%
Make it easier for local councils / authorities to deliver more affordable housing available to those on low incomes	85.1%
Improving access to services for people who are homeless e.g. to help with alcohol/substance or mental health problems	84.3%
Doing more to address homelessness	82.6%
Moving people experiencing homelessness to permanent accommodation rather than offering temporary solutions like hostels or B&Bs	80.1%
Providing better support for people leaving prison to prevent homelessness and reoffending	78.6%
Providing paid jobs to people who are homeless	77.5%
Creating a legal right to shelter for anyone who does not have a home	70.4%
Giving people access to legal advice to help keep their housing e.g. resolve their immigration status or challenge eviction notice.	69.2%
Improve legal rights and support for tenants so they don't have to move out of accommodation at short notice	68.6%
Working to change any negative views of people who are homeless	67.0%
Investing money in preventing homelessness rather than in services to help those who are homeless	66.6%
Increasing benefits (e.g. Universal credit, housing benefit) in line with inflation	59.1%
Increasing housing-related benefits to help those who need it to afford somewhere to live	57.8%
Giving higher priority to improving the rights of tenants to reduce the risk of homelessness	55.2%
Offering incentives to private landlords who are willing to rent their properties to people who are homeless	50.7%
Providing unpaid work opportunities to people who are homeless	45.1%
Making sure all people who were previously homeless receive financial support even if they are not in work, to help them avoid homelessness	44.8%
Giving people more choice over where they live	43.0%
Providing one-off payments for people at risk to prevent homelessness	41.7%

Experience of homelessness

The final question asked participants whether **they, or someone close to them such as a partner, family member or a good friend had ever experienced homelessness**. While most respondents (72.6%) did not report having experienced homelessness (either themselves or someone close to them), 7.9% reported that they had personally experienced homelessness, 6.6% that a partner/family member had experienced homelessness and 7.4% that a good friend had experienced homelessness. Overall, 18.4% of respondents said that either they themselves, a partner/family member or a good friend had experienced homelessness.

Service Response:

It is estimated that in the UK, over 300,000 people - nearly half of whom are children - are currently experiencing homelessness, sofa surfing, sleeping on the streets, staying in hostels or other temporary accommodation or living in their cars. In Aberdeen, 166 households per 10,000 applied as homeless in 2023, higher than the Scottish national average of 152.

There is great ambition in Aberdeen to challenge and review approaches to preventing and ending this issue. This local drive led Aberdeen to become one of the six Homewards locations.

Created by Prince William and The Royal Foundation of The Prince and Princess of Wales, [Homewards](#) is working with six locations across the UK over five years, including Aberdeen, and supporting them to form coalitions which will drive the project forward locally and build action plans to put each location on a trajectory to end homelessness. Since the launch of Homewards in June 2023, Aberdeen has formed a coalition of 55 committed organisations and individuals who are working together to drive the project forward locally and build action plans to put Aberdeen on a trajectory to end homelessness.

Over the first year of Homewards Aberdeen, substantial work has taken place to identify emerging priorities vital to ending local homelessness and to lay the foundations and set the area up for success. Improving understanding about the different forms of homelessness and shifting perceptions and boosting optimism that homelessness can be ended have been identified as key priorities. To be able to do this, it is important to first understand current public perceptions of homelessness not only at a national level, but at a local level too, and we are therefore grateful to Aberdeen City Council for undertaking this research.

The survey results provide helpful local context to the findings of the [national survey](#) that Homewards commissioned and published last year. Both surveys showed that a significant proportion of individuals (85% across the UK and 86% in Aberdeen) perceived homelessness as a serious problem in the UK as a whole. It is also clear from both studies that homelessness touches many people's lives. One in five people (22% UK and 18% Aberdeen) reported having experience of homelessness across its many forms, either themselves or through someone close to them.

People in Aberdeen were much more likely to consider homelessness to be a serious problem across Scotland more widely (87%), than in Aberdeen (75%) or their local area (22%), with a similar trend observed in the national survey. Whilst Aberdeen has been on a [downward trajectory over the last 10 years](#) when it comes to rough sleeping, this more visible form represents the tip of the iceberg and the number of people presenting as homeless in Aberdeen is in fact higher than the Scottish average. This finding supports the need to raise awareness of all forms of homelessness, including people in temporary accommodation or experiencing other forms of homelessness, to ensure that the true scale of the issue in Aberdeen is properly understood.

When thinking about the causes of homelessness, the top-ranking answers across both studies include both structural issues such as poverty and a shortage of affordable housing, as well as individual factors including alcohol and drug problems and mental and physical health problems, indicating some awareness of the complexity of the issue. However, as observed in the UK survey, drug and alcohol problems are reported as one of the main causes of homelessness by most people in Aberdeen, reflecting a common and persistent misconception about homelessness. This supports the need for further work through Homewards to raise awareness about the breadth of homelessness experiences and the range of drivers of homelessness for individuals, including structural factors.

Encouragingly, both studies demonstrate a strong commitment to do more to end homelessness, with the majority of respondents saying that as a society we are not devoting enough attention to homelessness, and that all of us have a role to play in ending the issue. The surveys show strong public support for a holistic range of interventions and policies to end homelessness, including preventative measures to support those who are homeless. This survey suggests there exists a strong base of public support and commitment to ending homelessness that Homewards Aberdeen can build on.

This report provides important insights into what it feels like to live in Aberdeen city today, including some of the challenges around seeking secure housing and employment, as well as awareness and understanding of the different forms of homelessness, its causes and solutions. These new findings will support the work and plans of Homewards Aberdeen's Coalition to challenge the local narrative that exists around homelessness, encourage understanding around the issue and inspire optimism that it can be ended. We welcome the valuable evidence that this latest Aberdeen City Voice survey provides.

And finally.....

This newsletter, together with the detailed report of the 50th questionnaire, is available to view on the Community Planning website [City Voice - Community Planning Aberdeen](https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/city-voice/).

If you have any further queries or would like to feedback your comments, please contact:

City Voice Co-ordinator

Email: cityvoice@aberdeencity.gov.uk

Useful web addresses:

City Voice: <https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/city-voice/>

Community Planning Aberdeen: <https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/>

Opportunities for communities to get involved in our work:

<https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/ourcommunities/>

Join the Community Empowerment Network: <https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/community-empowerment-network/>

Sign up for receiving more information through community update emails:

<https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/community-updates/>

Community Empowerment Strategy: <https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Final-Community-Empowerment-Strategy-Nov-2022.pdf>