

City Voice – Newsletter No. 55

Welcome to the 55th Citizens' Panel newsletter. This newsletter gives a snapshot of the key findings from our latest City Voice **Economy** survey, which was shared with panel members in **January–February 2026**. The survey explored experiences of the cost of living, access to support, work and wages, and homelessness across Aberdeen.

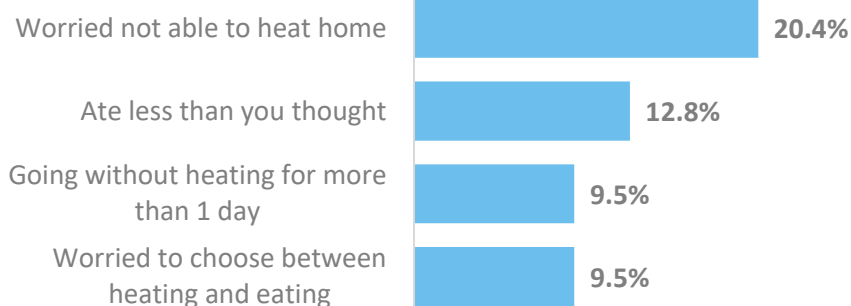
Response Rate

Of the 814 panel members who received the questionnaire, 278 completed responses were returned. This gives a response rate of 34.2%, slightly lower than the previous survey but still providing robust insight into local experiences.

Cost of Living

Some individuals and households are unable to access basic necessities such as heating or food for a number of different reasons. Firstly, we asked participants if, *during the last 12 months, was there a time when because of lack of money or other resources that you were worried you would not have enough food to eat, your household ran out of food, you had to go without heating for more than one day*, along with other statements related to heating and eating.

During the last 12 months, was there a time when, because of lack of money or other resources:

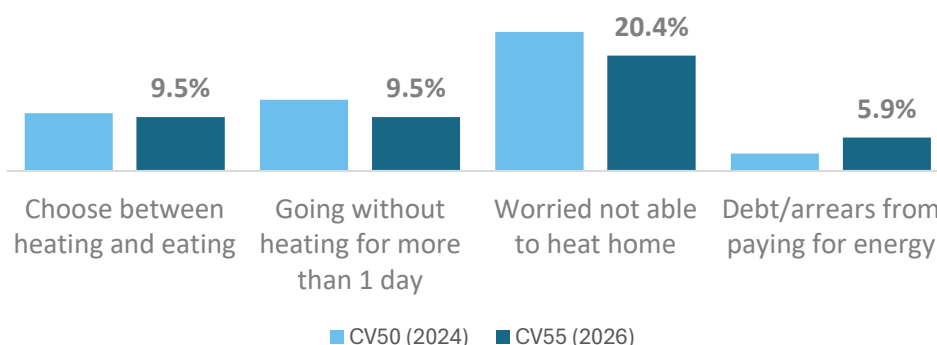


Overall, being **worried they would not be able to heat their home** was the most common concern with 1 in 5 respondents (20.4%). This was followed by **eating less than they thought they should** at 12.8% and both **worried about having to choose between heating and eating** and **going without heating for more than one day** at 9.5%. The least concern was for **household running out of food** with only 3.4% saying this had happened in the last 12 months.

Heating Trends

For most questions, there has been a slight decrease since similar questions were asked in 2024. For instance the percentage of respondents concerned **to choose between heating and eating** fell from 10.2% in 2024 to 9.5% in 2026. Similarly, in 2024, 12.6% were **going without heating for more than one day**, compared

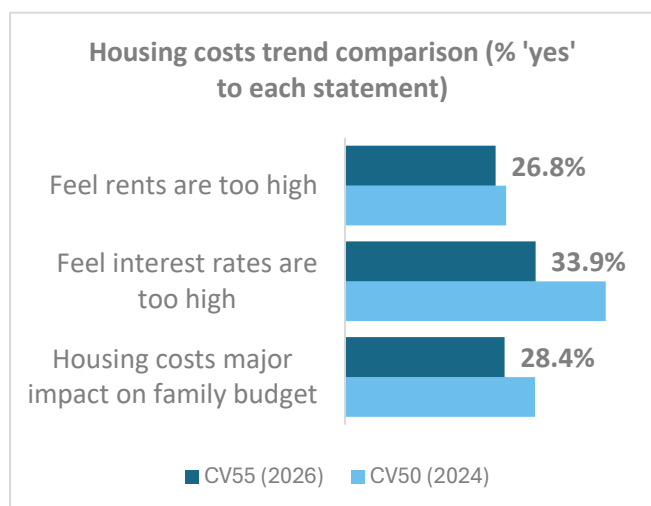
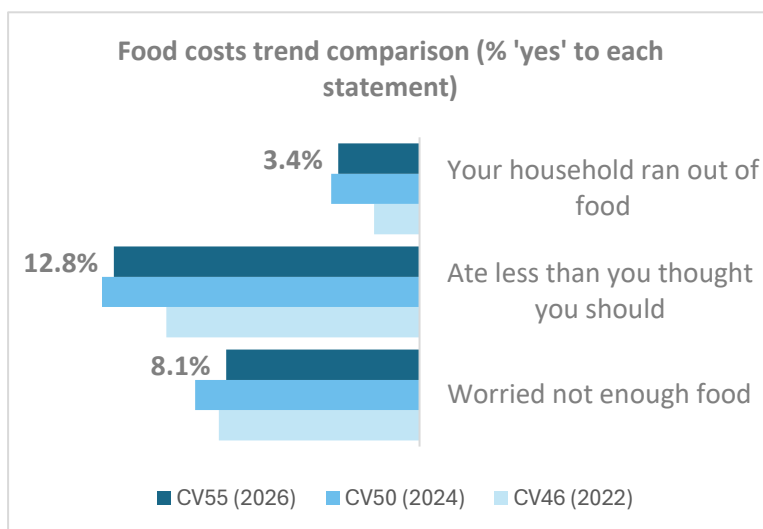
Heating costs trend comparison (% 'yes' to each statement)



to 9.5% in 2026. The only heating cost concern that saw a rise was **going into debt/arrears from paying for energy**: growing from 3.1% of respondents in 2024 to 5.9% in 2026. However, all remain higher than when these questions were first asked in 2021.

Food Trends

Since 2024, the percentage of panellists saying they had concerns over food security has decreased. **Worrying about not having enough food**, decreased from 9.4% in 2024 to 8.1% in 2026, and **eating less than you thought you should** went from 13.3% to 12.8% in the same period –ending the upward trend for both since 2019. While concern over **your household running out of food** fell from 3.7% in 2024 to 3.4% in 2026, it comes as part of a fluctuating pattern since City Voice 43 in 2019.

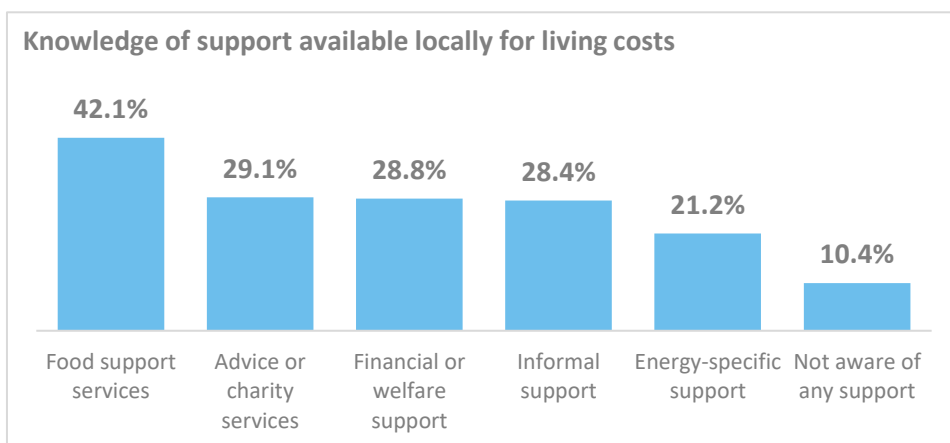


Housing Trends

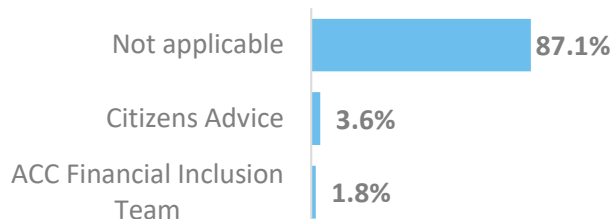
For City Voice 55, we asked participants to respond 'yes', 'no', 'don't know' or 'not applicable' to three statements about housing costs. This survey found that over 1 in 3 (33.9%) respondents said that they **feel interest rates are too high**, but this has decreased since 2024 when it stood at 46.4%. Over a quarter (28.4%) of panellists said that they do not think **housing costs have a major impact on their family budget**, down from 33.8% in 2024. Finally, 39.3% of City Voice respondents said that **they feel rents are too high** did not apply to them.

Access to Support

In this section of the questionnaire, panellists were asked about their use or knowledge of support services in Aberdeen for living costs and income concerns. We first gave participants a list of local support services available to them and asked if they had any knowledge of them, including food banks, financial or welfare services, charity services, and more. In total, 42.1% were aware of **food support services** (like **food banks**) and 29.1% were aware of **advice or charity services**. Under half (45%) of panellists said that this was **not applicable** to them.



Services used to help increase income in last 12 months



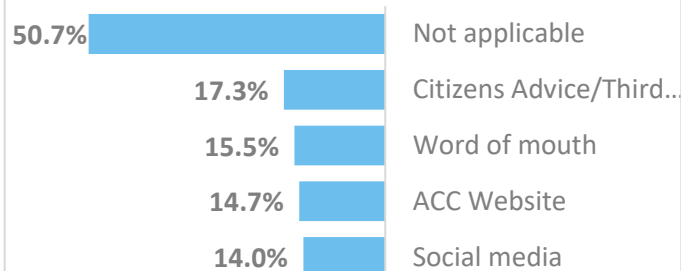
Our survey followed up this question asking *in the last 12 months, have you used any of the following services to help you increase your income?* A list of services was given. A large majority (87.1%) of City Voice panellists answered that this was **not applicable**, but the next most common answer was **Citizens Advice** at 3.6% and **Aberdeen City Council's Financial Inclusion Team** at 1.8%.

We then asked panellists where they *usually look for information about money and advice services*. Participants

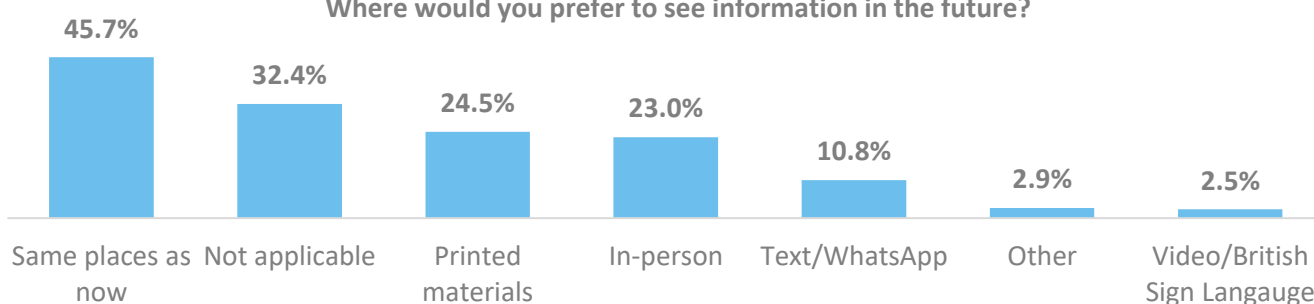
could select multiple options from a list to determine which channels were the most common. Again, the most common answer was **not applicable** at 50.7%. **Citizens Advice/third sector organisations** was the next most common at 17.3% of respondents followed by **word of mouth** at 15.5%, **Aberdeen City Council's website** at 14.7%, **social media** at 14%, **other** at 10.8%, **health partners** at 9% and **libraries** at 6.5%. Some of the 'other' channels for looking for information about money and advice services, which participants could write in, included MoneySavingExpert (Martin Lewis), banks and building societies, and the Scottish Government website.

The final question in this section asked about respondents' *preferences for where to find support information in the future*. Participants could select one or more answers. Just under half of respondents (45.7%) said they would **prefer the same place as now**, followed by 32.4% answering **not applicable**, 24.5% **printed materials**, 23% **in-person**, 10.8% by **text/WhatsApp**, 2.9% **other** and 2.5% by **video or British sign language**. 'Other' responses included direct letters, union services and pharmacies.

Where do you usually look for information about money and advice services?



Where would you prefer to see information in the future?



Service Response

Thank you to the panellists who took the time to respond to this survey. The responses help Community Planning Aberdeen get a more accurate picture of how the cost of living is impacting people in Aberdeen. It also gives us insights into the most effective ways of helping people cope with the pressures that the cost of living exerts on people's lives.

The cost of paying for a home, heating it and eating properly continues to place significant strain on people across Aberdeen. Although the survey results suggest that these pressures have eased slightly, it is clear that people are still having to make difficult compromises about how to prioritise their income. Having to choose between keeping homes warm, cutting back on meals or choosing cheaper or less nutritious food remains a challenge for a significant proportion of the people who responded to these questions. Cost of living pressures have moved from a short-term crisis to an enduring part of daily life. The ongoing impact of the increased cost of living is reflected in an increased number of people reporting that they have built up debt to pay for energy. We recognise that being forced into those choices has a serious impact on people's physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

Aberdeen City Council is working to prioritise supporting people who are struggling with the cost of living. Our online benefits calculator and money advice from our Financial Inclusion Team help people to maximise their incomes. We provide crisis support through the Scottish Welfare Fund. We also offer employability and training support through ABZ Works, helping people to improve their financial situations by securing new employment.

Aberdeen City Council works closely with partners in the public sector and third sector. In 2024-25, the Fairer Aberdeen Fund allocated £1.5 million to support schemes delivered by local partners to tackle poverty and inequality in Aberdeen. The Council has decided to invest the same amount in the coming year, which will fund further action to tackle poverty and inequality in Aberdeen.

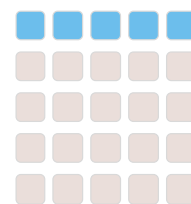
We recognise that we have more to do to improve knowledge and access to services that can help people navigate cost of living issues. While some respondents were aware of support around food, advice, income and energy, and knew how to find information about them, many others did not feel these services were relevant to them. A lack of awareness or confidence in accessing support can leave people feeling that they have to cope alone, which is something we are committed to addressing.

Looking ahead, these findings will shape our work over the coming years. Community Planning Aberdeen is consulting Aberdeen residents on its refreshed Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) for 2026 to 2036. The LOIP is Aberdeen's city wide plan setting out how we will work with local people and partners to improve outcomes and ensure that Aberdeen becomes a place where everyone can prosper. Our proposals include a community support and hub network that will offer community meals, income maximisation and employability support. Separately, we are proposing people panels and community collaboratives to ensure that people with lived experience can influence how services are designed and delivered in their communities.

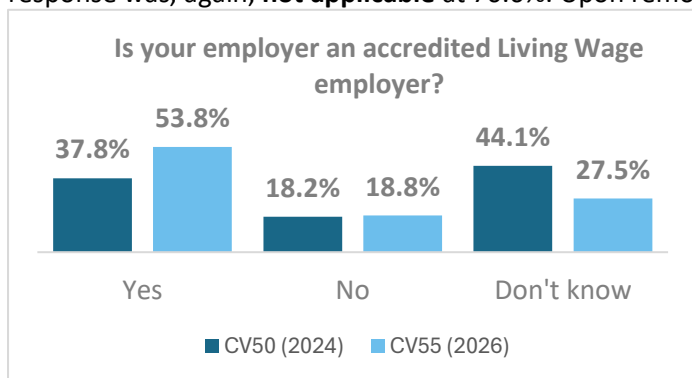
Real Living Wage

The next set of questions asked this Economy City Voice edition were about the Real Living Wage (RLW). Firstly, we asked participants *if during the last 12 months, was there a time when your wages/income did not cover your weekly/monthly outgoings*. Our survey results found that almost a fifth (18.1%) of respondents reported that **yes, there had been a time in the last 12 months when their income did not cover their outgoings**. A total of 26.2% said that the question was **not applicable**.

18.1% of respondents said **during the past 12 months, there was a time when their wages/income did not cover their weekly or monthly outgoings**.



Next, City Voice panellists were asked *if their employer was an accredited Living Wage employer*. The most common response was, again, **not applicable** at 70.6%. Upon removing these answers, the majority answer was **yes** at 53.8%



of participants. Since 2024 in City Voice 50, this shows a sizeable increase in the percentage of respondents who reported that their employer was an accredited Living Wage employer, going from 37.8% to 53.8%. Those who answered **don't know** decreased correspondingly from 44.1% in 2024 to 27.5% in City Voice 55. City Voice participants saying **no** remained relatively similar at around 18% in the same time period.

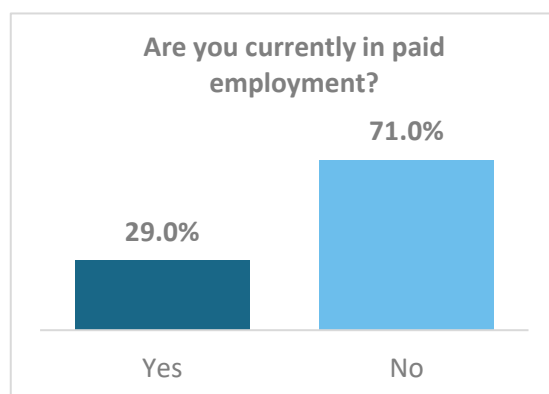
Service Response

With almost a fifth of respondents reporting that there had been a time when their income did not cover their outgoings, this highlights the ongoing need to support uptake of the REAL Living Wage, the only wage that keeps pace with the cost of living and is reviewed on an annual basis. It is positive to see awareness of employer accreditation increasing, and the Aberdeen & Aberdeenshire real living wage action group will continue to engage with employers to promote the benefits to their organisation and employees, alongside delivery of the wider action plan.

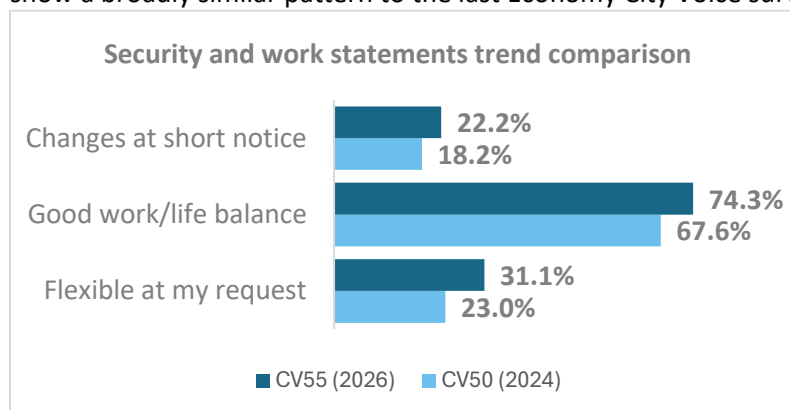
Security and Work

A number of questions in this section apply only to those currently in paid employment. Firstly, we asked City Voice panellists *if they were in paid employment at the moment*. A total of 29% out of 272 answered **yes**.

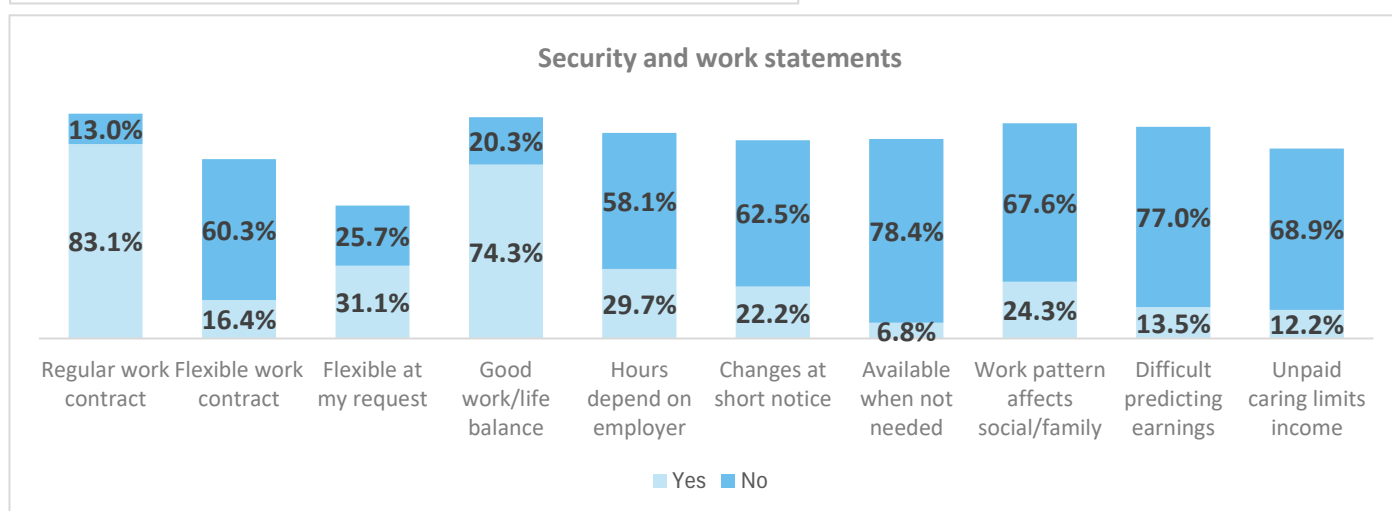
We followed up with a series of *statements related to employment* with answer options of 'yes', 'no', 'don't know', and 'not applicable', such as: *I have a regular work contract with mainly set hours and pay, I feel that I have a good work/life balance, I have difficulty predicting how much I will earn each month*, etc. These were only asked to those currently in employment.



Of the 79 respondents who completed these questions, the majority said they had a **regular work contract with mainly set hours** at 83.1% of participants. 74.3% said **yes** in reporting that their **work/life balance was good**. For having to **be available at work when I may not be needed**, 78.4% answered **no**. The responses to these statements show a broadly similar pattern to the last Economy City Voice survey, City Voice 50 (2024), although with some



notable changes. For example, the proportion of respondents who reported that they have a **good work/life balance has increased** (from 67.6% to 74.3%) as has the proportion who say that **their flexible work pattern is at their own request** (from 23% to 31.1%). There has also been an increase in the percentage who report **having changes to their work pattern at short notice** (from 18.2% to 22.2%).



The next question applied to *all participants*. It asked *if you or a family member needed to access employability support, would you know where to go?* Almost half of respondents answered **not applicable** (49.3%) to this question, with the next most common answer being **no** at 20.1% followed by **yes** at 17.9% out of 274 responses.

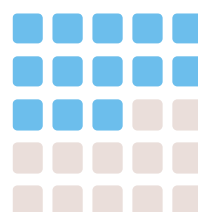
A total of 38 comments expanded on their **yes** answer above by letting us know *where* they would go. The replies included trade unions, job centres, the council, Citizens Advice, and more.

Service Response

We note the information provided by the panel members and will bear it in mind in future design and promotion of activities.

Social Enterprises

Within Security and Work, we next asked City Voice panellists about social enterprises. First, we asked participants if they *knew what a social enterprise was*. The answer options were 'yes' and 'no'. Over half of panellists (52%) said that **yes, they knew what a social enterprise was**. We then asked participants who answered 'yes' to continue to the next question, which was *have you ever used a social*



52% of respondents said **yes, they know what a social enterprise is**.

enterprise in Aberdeen? The vast majority (83.9%) of respondents said **no, they had not ever used a social enterprise in Aberdeen**. The remaining 16.1% said **yes, they had used one**.

Service Response

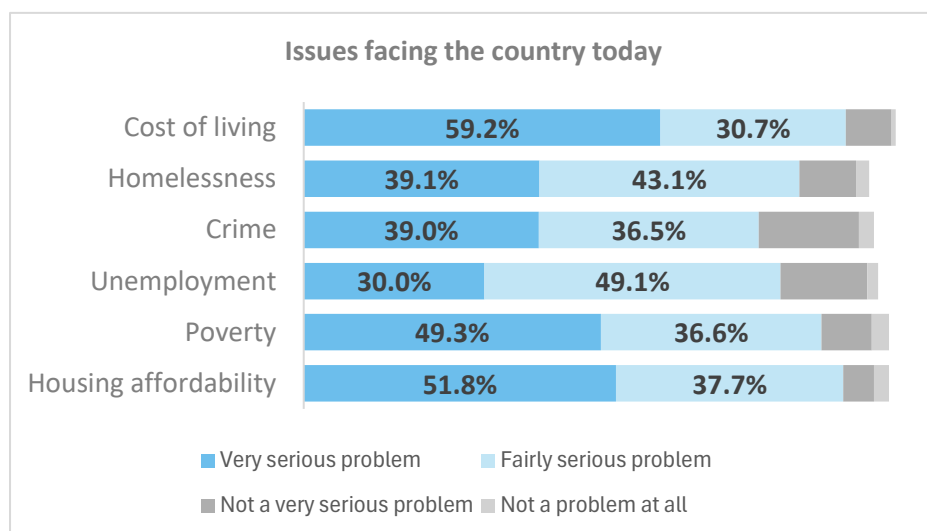
The data shows that while just over half of respondents (52%) say they know what a social enterprise is, very few (16.1%) have ever used one, highlighting low awareness and visibility across the city. We are proposing to respond to this through our draft Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2026–36 where we have a system change, “Clear Routes Into Growth and In-Demand Sectors and Network for Social Enterprises,” which aims to strengthen and promote social enterprises by establishing a citywide Aberdeen Social Enterprise Network. This will make social enterprises more visible, better connected and more accessible, helping residents understand what they offer while expanding local opportunities for work, skills development and community-based support.

Homelessness

Issues Related to Homelessness

The next set of questions were about housing and homelessness in your local area and nationally. We asked these questions to give us more information on levels of awareness and understanding of homelessness, its causes and potential solutions.

The first question gave participants a *list of issues facing the country today* and asked them to indicate *how serious a problem, if at all, they thought each was*. A ‘don’t know’ option was included. Our questionnaire asked about



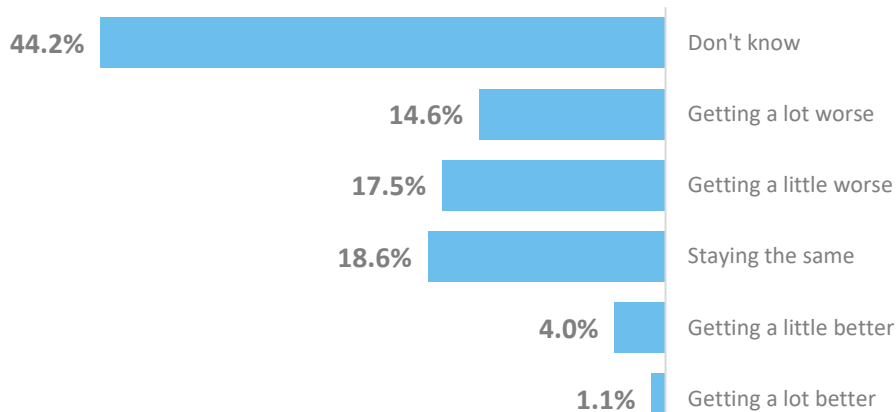
affordability of housing, poverty, unemployment, levels of crime, levels of homelessness and cost of living. The majority of respondents (over 75%) identified **all the issues** as **serious problems** (either **very serious** or **fairly serious**), with **cost of living** most commonly selected as a **very serious problem** (59.2% of respondents). This was followed by **housing affordability** at 51.8% and **poverty** at 49.3%.

Views on Homelessness

Next, participants were asked if *they thought that homelessness in Aberdeen City has gotten better, gotten worse or stayed the same over the past 12 months*. The most common response was **don’t know** at 44.2% of City Voice panellists. Nearly one third of respondents (32.1%) said homelessness in Aberdeen City was **getting either a little or a lot worse**. For getting better, 1.1% said **a lot better** and 4% said **a little better**.

Following this, we gave panellists a number of *statements about homelessness in the UK*, and asked whether they thought they were 'true', 'false', or they 'didn't know'. The statements were: *the UK has one of the highest rates of homelessness among richer countries; in the UK, there are more people experiencing street homelessness than other groups e.g. people who are sleeping temporarily in friends' houses, squatting, staying at hostels, etc.; most homeless people living on the streets have been doing that for less*

How has homelessness in Aberdeen City changed over the past 12 months?



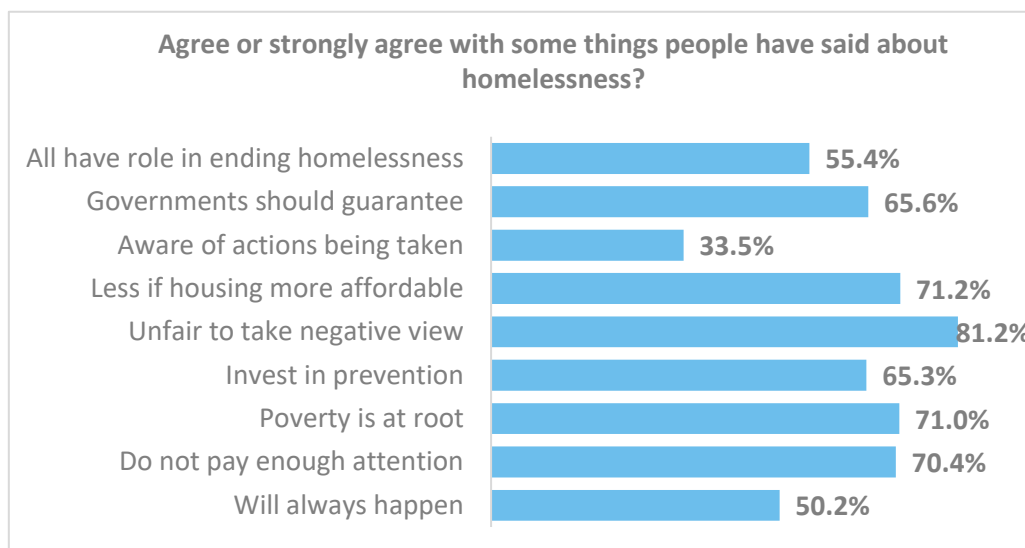
than 6 months and most people who are experiencing homelessness have been homeless before. The statement with the highest proportion of **true** responses was the **UK has one of the highest rates of homelessness among richer countries** at 38.3%, with only 12.3% of respondents saying they thought this statement was **false**. The statement **most homeless people living on the streets have been doing that for less than 6 months** had the highest percentage of people attributing the statement to being **false** with 23.1%. However, **all the statements** had a majority or near-majority of answers as **don't know**. **For most homeless people living on the streets have been doing that for less than 6 months**, 60.6% said **don't know**, 56.7% for **most people who are experiencing homelessness have been homeless before**, 50.9% for **more street homelessness than other groups** and 49.5% for **UK has highest rates of homelessness among richer countries**.

Statements about homelessness in the UK



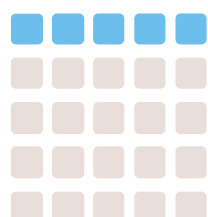
To finish this subsection, our questionnaire gave panellists a *list of some things that people have said about homelessness*, and asked whether they 'agreed' or 'disagreed' (strongly agree, tend to agree, neither agree nor disagree, tend to disagree, strongly disagree or don't know). Such as: *homelessness will always happen, poverty is at the root of many of the problems that can lead to homelessness, homelessness would be less of an issue if housing was more affordable, all of us have a role to play in ending homelessness*, etc. On the whole, most respondents

agreed (strongly agree or tend to agree) with **all of the statements**. The exception to this was **aware of actions being taken to tackle homelessness** where only 33.5% **agreed** with the statement. Levels of **agreement** were highest for **unfair to take a negative view of people who are homeless** at 81.2% followed by **homelessness would be less of an issue if housing was more affordable** at 71.2%, **poverty is a root cause of many problems that lead to homelessness** at 71% and **society does not pay enough attention towards homelessness** at 70.4%. The statements with the highest levels of **disagreement** (strongly disagree or tend to disagree) were **homelessness will always happen** at 33% followed by **awareness of actions being taken to tackle homelessness** at 17.1%. The latter also had the highest share of **don't know** responses at 22.5% of panellists.



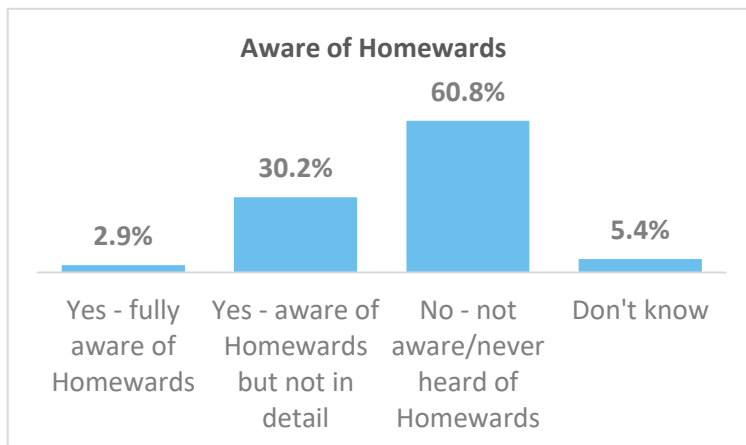
Experience of Homelessness

The penultimate subsection of City Voice 55 asked whether participants, or someone they knew close to them, had *experience of homelessness*. While most respondents (73%) **did not** report having experienced homelessness (either themselves or someone close to them), 8.3% reported that a **good friend** had experienced homelessness, 7.6% reported that a **partner/family** member had experienced homelessness, 7.2% that **they themselves** had experienced homelessness. Another 5.4% **didn't know** and 2.5% **preferred not to say**. Overall, 19.1% of respondents said that **either they themselves, a partner/family member or a good friend had experienced homelessness**.

 **19.1%** of respondents said **that either they themselves, a partner/family member or a close friend had experienced homelessness**.

Homewards

Homewards is a five-year programme founded by Prince William, the Prince of Wales, and The Royal Foundation which aims to demonstrate that together it's possible to end homelessness – making it rare, brief and unrepeatable. We asked participants to what extent they *familiar with Homewards*. The highest response rate was for **no – not aware/never heard of Homewards** at 60.8% followed by **yes – aware but not in detail** at 30.2%. Only 2.9% of 276 City Voice panellists **were fully aware of Homewards**.



Service Response

Latest homelessness data shows that the number of households experiencing homelessness in Aberdeen continues to rise, even as figures across Scotland have begun to stabilise. Between [April and September 2025](#), households assessed as homeless nationally fell by two per cent compared with the same period the previous year. In contrast, Aberdeen saw a 10% increase - the third-highest rise among Scottish local authorities.

Although concerning, these figures underline the importance of the work underway through Homewards Aberdeen. Halfway through the programme, Aberdeen has made significant progress in testing and developing solutions to prevent homelessness. This includes launching new initiatives to deliver homes, creating employment pathways for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, and improving how services work together to prevent people from losing their homes.

Encouragingly, public awareness of this work is growing. A third of people in Aberdeen (33%) are now aware of Homewards, demonstrating increasing local recognition of the programme. While there is more to do to build our profile, the foundations laid through Homewards Aberdeen will help to deliver more effective, preventative responses to homelessness in the months and years ahead.

Building awareness of homelessness and inspiring people to act together for change is a key priority of Homewards. In 2023, The Royal Foundation of The Prince and Princess of Wales published a [UK-wide survey](#) to capture public perceptions about homelessness and shape work to improve public awareness. Understanding how perceptions differ within Homewards locations helps to develop more targeted activity. Homewards therefore extends its sincere thanks to Aberdeen City Council for leading this research, and to everyone who contributed to it.

The report shows that public perceptions of homelessness in Aberdeen have remained broadly stable since Homewards launched. A large majority (81%) continue to think that it is unfair to take a negative view of people experiencing homelessness (compared to 80% of respondents to the UK-wide survey) and recognise key structural causes such as poverty (71% in 2026 and 68% in 2024) and the affordability of housing (71% in 2026 and 78% in 2024).

However, pessimism about the issue remains. Most (82%) continue to view homelessness as a serious issue (compared to 82% in 2024 and 88% of respondents to the UK-wide survey), and half of respondents (50%) still believe that homelessness will always happen (compared to 47% in 2024 and 45% of respondents to Homewards UK-wide survey).

This consistency is not unexpected, given recent data indicating that [economic optimism in the UK is at an all-time low](#).

Consistent with UK-wide data, there are still gaps in people's understanding of homelessness. Across a range of true or false statements about homelessness (e.g. whether most people experiencing homelessness have been homeless before), the most common answer was 'don't know' (between 49%-61%, across the four statements). In addition, 44% answered 'don't know' when asked if homelessness in Aberdeen is getting better or worse. This supports the need for ongoing work to raise awareness and build peoples understanding of the issue.

Encouragingly though, there are some promising signs that awareness of homelessness in Aberdeen is beginning to improve. The proportion of people who believe that street homelessness is more common than other forms has fallen by 10 percentage points (from 40% in 2024 to 30% in 2026) and one third (33%) now report knowing what steps are being taken - an increase of 10 percentage points from 23% in 2024.

There is also support for collective action to end homelessness and investment in prevention – both key features of Homewards. Most (65%) support investment in prevention and just over half (55%) believe that ending homelessness is a shared responsibility.

While challenges remain, the findings also highlight clear opportunities to build on the progress already made. Homewards Aberdeen will continue working with partners and the community to turn this momentum into lasting change and move closer to a future where homelessness in the city is rare, brief and unrepeatable.

...And Finally

This newsletter, together with the detailed report of the 55th questionnaire, is available to view on the Community Planning website [City Voice - Community Planning Aberdeen](#).

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:
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