

Epping Forest Youth Council Cost of Living Survey Report April 2023

The Youth Council's latest project focuses on the cost-of-living crisis. The cost-of-living is rising at its fastest pace in 40 years. Everyone must find new ways to make savings where they can, but for those where money was already tight, the choice is now between eating and heating their homes. The Citizens Advice reported that 80% of referrals from GP's, are patients experiencing stress related illness, due to financial worries. Nationally, the Citizens Advice service have seen over 100% increase in the number of people not able to top up their prepayment meters, and there has been over a 200% increase in foodbank usage.

(Source: figure is according to the UK's biggest voluntary food aid network The Trussell Trust)

Whilst families were cutting back on day-to-day costs and luxuries. We wanted to identify if these struggles were having a knock-on effect on young people.

The Youth Councillors created a twelve-question survey, entitled 'Repair My pocket.' We piloted the survey during October half term on the Ninefields estate in Waltham Abbey, where we conducted street interviews at the Essex Police and EFDC, community day of action. This survey is completely anonymous and aims to Highlight.

- How young peoples' aspirations are being affected by the current financial pressures
- How the educational system is being affected
- How students perceive how their schools are coping
- How young people perceive how their parents are coping

An amazing 1,048 young people completed the school survey. A majority of those taking part were in the lower school. 408 students were aged 13 to 14 years. Followed closely by 382 students, aged 11 – 12 years.

In summary almost a third, that is 365 students, said they were worried about the Cost-of-Living Crisis.

We feel that young people are disconnected from advice and support services and parents are likely to shield their worries or problems from them.

Therefore, these findings reflect that more than half of those surveyed, that is almost 700 students were not worried or were not sure.

Question 1.

How worried are you about the cost of living?

When asked how worried are you about your family having less money?

Over half, which is 743 students, said they were worried or not sure.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Worried	34.83%	365
Not worried	29.10%	305
Not sure	36.07%	378
	Answered	1048

Question 2.

How much has the cost-of-living crisis affected you and your family?

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740 students said a lot or a little.

Answer Choices	Responses	
A lot	12.12%	127
A little	58.49%	613
I don't know	29.39%	308
	Answered	1048

Question 3.

How worried are you about your family having less money?

546 students said they were worried.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Worried	52.50%	546
Not worried	47.50%	494
	Answered	1040
	Skipped	8

Question 4.

In what ways has the cost-of-living crisis affected you or your family?

(Multiple choice question)

793 their families were turning the heating down or off. Almost a third, that is 320 students, said their families were buying cheaper food. 54 students said their families were hungry and 38 students said their families were using a food bank.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Turning heating down	51.90%	492
Turning heating off	31.75%	301
Buying less food	14.77%	140
Buying cheaper food	33.76%	320
Buying less healthy food	6.75%	64
Being hungry	5.70%	54
Buying "less important" items such as new clothes	25.00%	237
Not going on social events (holidays, away days)	23.21%	220
Using the car less	13.08%	124
Using a food bank	4.01%	38
Pooling resources such as car sharing	4.85%	46
Worrying about affording things	32.38%	307
Other (please specify)		141
	Answered	860
	Skipped	188

Ninety young people said they were not eating three meals a day. Students also commented that school meal prices had increased, they had also reduced in quality and portion size. These ninety young people and their families are going hungry.

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Question 5.

Have you or your family ever had to choose between heating or eating?
997 students said No, 51 students said Yes.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	4.87%	51
No	95.13%	997
	Answered	1048

Question 6.

Does your family eat 3 meals a day?
957 students said Yes, 91 students said No.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	91.32%	957
No	8.68%	91
	Answered	1048

Question 7.

Has your family used a foodbank?

43 Students said Yes, 810 said No and 195 don't know. The families that are struggling financially and rely on a Foodbank to feed the family, may not tell the children. Therefore, students may not be aware of the full extent of the pressures that families are under, to provide for them.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	4.10%	43
No	77.29%	810
Don't know	18.61%	195
	Answered	1048

Question 8.

How has the cost-of-living crisis made you feel worried about the future? (Multiple choice question)

Importantly we can see from this data that young people are worried about their future, 318 students surveyed said they had a general lack of hope for the future. 408 students were already worrying about the affordability of university. Youth Councillors supported these concerns as they worry about not being able to fulfil their career paths due to the lack of teaching staff, and the reliance of less specialist supply teachers, covering their exam course work.

Many parents may be trying to conceal the pressures they are under from their children, but this survey highlights that young people are worried, as they are feeling the knock-on effects, by going without, or seeing less food choices, and luxuries at home.

Answer Choices	Responses
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Paying for food	30.25%	317
Keeping my pets	17.75%	186
Buying or renting a home	45.04%	472
Paying for university	38.93%	408
Ensuring that family is comfortable and able to provide for themselves	29.01%	304
Paying electricity and gas bills	48.47%	508
Paying car bills including fuel	31.68%	332
Paying for public transport	15.84%	166
General lack of hope for the future	30.34%	318
If yes, what are your concerns?	14.41%	151
	Answered	1048

Question 9.

Is your school struggling with their budgets?

308 students said Yes and 637, many of the students, don't know.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	29.39%	308
No	9.83%	103
Don't know	60.78%	637
	Answered	1048

Question 10.

What kinds of changes have you noticed, at work or school/college, due to the cost-of-living crisis? *(Multiple choice question)*

474 students said, the cost of canteen items has increased. 394 students said they did not have enough teachers. This is supported by several Youth Councillors reporting the lack of teachers. One Youth Councillor said, to date, their form has had fourteen different form teachers in this school year, thus resulting in a lack of continuity for the student's schoolwork.

518 students said that heating had been turned off or down at school but not all schools were allowing pupils to wear their coats in school time. 233 students said that schools had less resources such as books and subscriptions for essential materials for course work.

67 students gave additional information to this question. They mentioned that teachers striking, had led to school timetables being disrupted, there were fewer teachers in school, and staff shortages are putting extra strain on everyone. Students felt supply teachers were not there long enough to get to know the students. School repairs have gone on hold in some schools and the toilets were in a poor state, often with more closed than open. One Youth Councillor had reported that their school had reduced the amount of toilet paper available and handwash. Several students complained there was no printing facilities in schools, or that printing was limited, they were no longer allowed to print in colour for course work. Bottled water is so expensive, students are drinking from the taps in the toilets.

Answer Choices	Responses
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Heating turned down	29.39%	308
Heating kept off	20.04%	210
Turning lights off as much as possible	20.52%	215
Cost of canteen items has increased	45.23%	474
Have schools got less resources (books, subscriptions etc.)	22.23%	233
Buying less food	10.40%	109
My employer does not pay me more for working more hours	3.63%	38
Have not noticed any changes	24.43%	256
Not enough teachers	37.60%	394
Other (please specify)		67
	Answered	1048

Question 11.

The cost-of-living crisis is affecting people of all ages. Where would you go for help or support? (Multiple choice question)

Most young people (1327) said they would go to family members for help and support.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Parents	77.77%	815
Brothers and sisters	20.52%	215
Grandparents	28.34%	297
Friends	30.92%	324
Local Council	13.07%	137
Citizens Advice Bureau	4.10%	43
Gov.uk	10.78%	113
Foodbank	11.07%	116
Look out for advice on news	12.40%	130
Places of worship or faith group	6.49%	68
School teacher	16.41%	172
Internet	19.56%	205
TV	8.49%	89
Other	7.16%	75
	Answered	1048

Question 12.

How old are you?

A majority of those taking part were in the lower school. 408 students were aged 13 to 14 years. Followed closely by 382 students, aged 11 – 12 years.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Under 11	0.48%	5
11-12	36.45%	382
13-14	38.93%	408
15-16	16.41%	172
17-18	6.49%	68
Over 18	1.24%	13
	Answered	1048

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Question 13.

What area do you live in?

A majority of those surveyed lived in Epping (234) and Loughton (211), Waltham Abbey (107) and Buckhurst Hill (105). 119 (11%) of those surveyed lived outside of the district.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Abess Roding/Beauchamp/Berners Roding	0.10%	1
Abridge	1.81%	19
Buckhurst Hill	10.02%	105
Chigwell	7.06%	74
Debden	2.39%	25
Epping	22.33%	234
Fyfield	0.10%	1
Lambourne	0.19%	2
Loughton	20.13%	211
Matching	0.10%	1
Moreton/Bobbingworth/Lavers	0.48%	5
Nazeing	0.38%	4
North weald	6.77%	71
Ongar	1.24%	13
Roydon	0.76%	8
Sheering	0.00%	0
Stanford rivers	0.10%	1
Stapleford	0.48%	5
Theydon Bois	3.91%	41
Waltham Abbey	10.21%	107
Willingale	0.10%	1
Live outside Epping Forest District	11.35%	119
	Answered	1048

In Summary

Almost a third, that is 365 students, said they were worried about the cost-of-living crisis. Young people are aware of the changes being made at home, with reduced heating and a reduction of food choices and luxuries available to them.

Pupils reported that schools are struggling with the rising costs of fuel, heating is reduced and in some schools, it was turned off. Students said they are struggling to study as they are cold. Food and water are expensive to buy at school, hand gel and toilet paper is being rationed in some schools. Printing and subscriptions are restricted, affecting course work, and temporary teachers are in an abundance. The level of education is affected, as temporary teachers are unfamiliar with the students and their course work.

Students are feeling their education is suffering and that they were not hopeful

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of the future as they may not be able to afford to go to university, due to the escalating costs.

We spoke to Safer Schools, and there is a general concern that, as money becomes harder to come by, young people may become the target for criminal activity such as exploitation. For young people, this may be seen as a way of making money.

The Youth Councillors also contributed to the Childrens Society, **the Good Childhood Report 2022**, the report highlights young people's unhappiness continues to decline. Young people are on average less happy with their life than ten years ago. 1 in 8 young people were unhappy with school and 1 in 9 young people have low well-being. 85% of parents and carers were concerned about the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on their family.

<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/good-childhood>

To complement the Cost-of-Living survey, the Youth Council worked closely with Thames Police and the Fraud Prevention co-ordinator at Essex Police to create a school presentation about how to avoid being scammed. The target audience was the upper years in secondary schools' as they would be using online services and making online purchases. The presentation raises awareness, educates, and gives tips on how to protect your money and be safe.

The 'Little Book of Scams.' Is an **online resource for all ages of the community**, made into a booklet, it has been distributed to all secondary schools, as a library resource. The book has been produced by Thames Valley Police. It can be downloaded using the link below.

<https://www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/central/advice/fraud/met/the-little-book-of-big-scams.pdf>