

Bristol Older People's Forum

Cost of Living (CoL) - snapshot report

March 2023

Key findings

- 103 out of 113 older people in Bristol responding to this survey have been affected by the cost of living (CoL) challenges.
- Energy and food costs are top issues, with housing, transport and health also a priority.
- Older disabled people and older non-White British¹ people appear to experience greater challenge.
- Older people asked to think about the cost of living gave a range of responses, but are often fearful of the future for themselves, family or friends.
- Welcoming spaces² were appreciated and essential for some older people, but not seen as spaces for all, and inaccessible to some.
- Bristol Older People's Forum (BOPF) should provide more information about cost saving measures and ensure its messaging does not add to older people's worries about the CoL increases.
- BOPF should look at focusing efforts to support older people most affected, including supporting members to undertake social action.
- BOPF should promote social connection and peer support between all its members and their wider social circles.

¹ [Section 5 contains the demographic profile of respondents.](#)

² [100 Welcoming Spaces open in Bristol - The Bristol Mayor](#)

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1. Introduction

As Bristol reflects on a long period of substantial public and voluntary sector effort and looks for sustainable ongoing solutions, Bristol Older People's Forum's contribution as a Community Hub is to share older people's perspectives: develop a picture of older people's experience of Cost of Living challenges and support and future ideas.

Initial insight from BOPF members at the February 2023 Open Forum shaped a snapshot survey in March capturing the perspectives of 113 older people (50+). We are grateful to community partners for promoting the survey across their networks.

This short report presents the survey responses, considered against the national CoL context. It prioritises sharing of observations, data and direct quotes for discussion, learning and future policy making.

2. National context

In the UK and around the world the cost of living, particularly around food and energy, has been sharply rising.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS)³ reports that more than a third of British adults paying rent or a mortgage say these costs have risen in the last six months and more than half of adults are using less fuel in their homes. Black or Black British adults and Asian or Asian British adults appear more likely than White British adults to find it difficult to afford their energy bills, rent or mortgage payments. Disabled adults are more likely to experience difficulties than non-disabled adults. The Spring Budget⁴ extended energy bill support (extending the price cap but removing the subsidy it had been paying to energy users) until June and brought pre-paid energy cost in line with direct debit payments.

3. Research approach

This research was designed to test the hypothesis that older people in Bristol are affected by the cost of living in a similar way to national trends and gather insight about individual Bristol experiences. We developed the survey based on

³ [Cost of living latest insights - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

⁴ [Spring Budget 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

insight from BOPF members at the February Open Forum. We set out to openly explore, gather ideas and insight of value to BOPF membership and older people across Bristol, Bristol City Council and community partners.

This research captured perspectives from 113 older people aged 50+years during the 12-day period 13 to 24 March 2023. It was carried out using desk research and an online survey shared with all online BOPF members and promoted by community partners. At least 15 paper-based responses were received.

67 BOPF members and 38 non-members completed the survey.

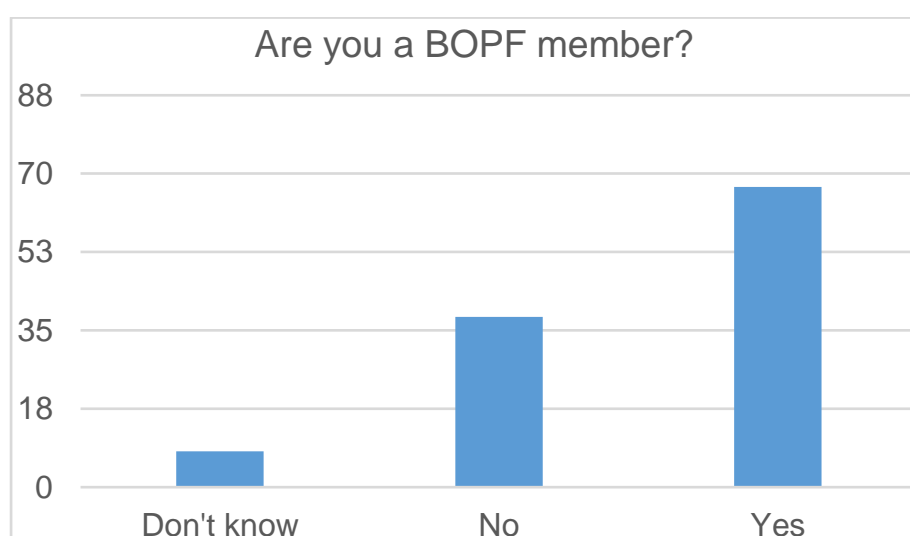


Image description: the first of a series of graphs included in this report. All data is included in text. Where figures included in the text don't add up to 113, the response omitted is either 'don't know' or 'prefer not to say'

We received responses from older people living in at least 29 out of 34 Bristol wards. See Appendix for the full data.

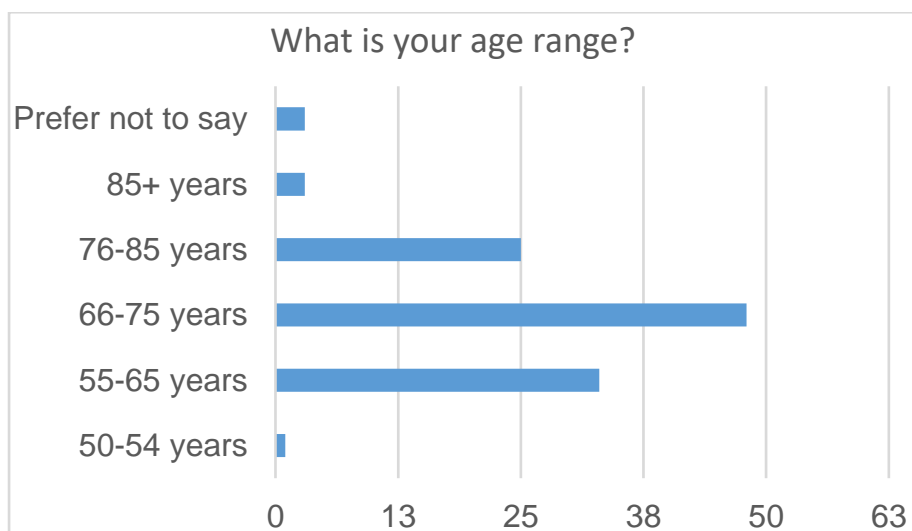
Observations

- The dataset is small and should be acknowledged as such if shared outside this report.
- Resources and timeframe meant we were unable to survey most of two-thirds of BOPF membership who are offline.
- While this research is not co-designed, it was developed from BOPF member insight and signed off by BOPF leadership, all older people.

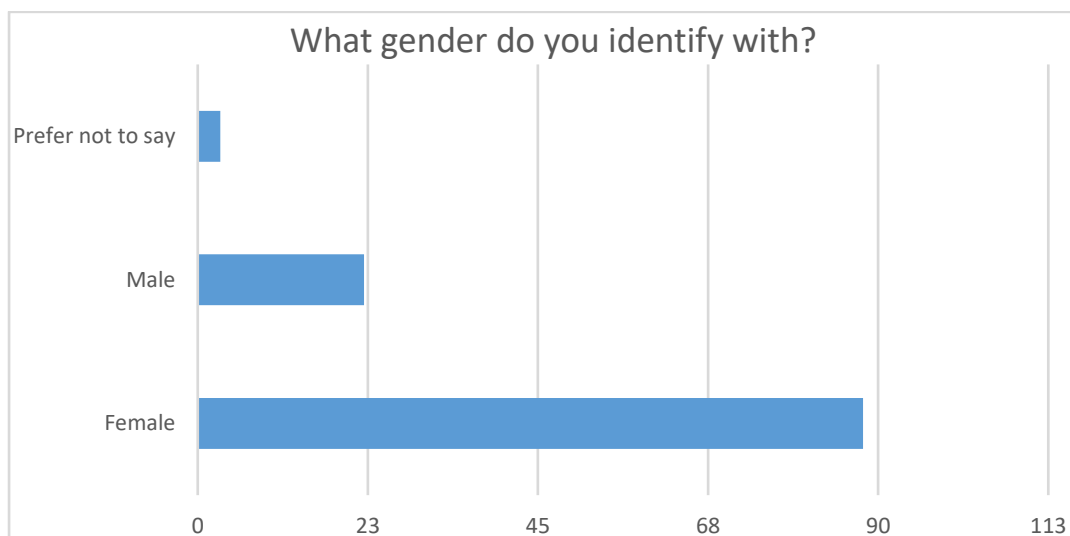
- We asked a specific question about Welcoming Spaces and would have received different insight if we had enquired more broadly about ‘what support have you found valuable?’

4. Observations on the survey responses

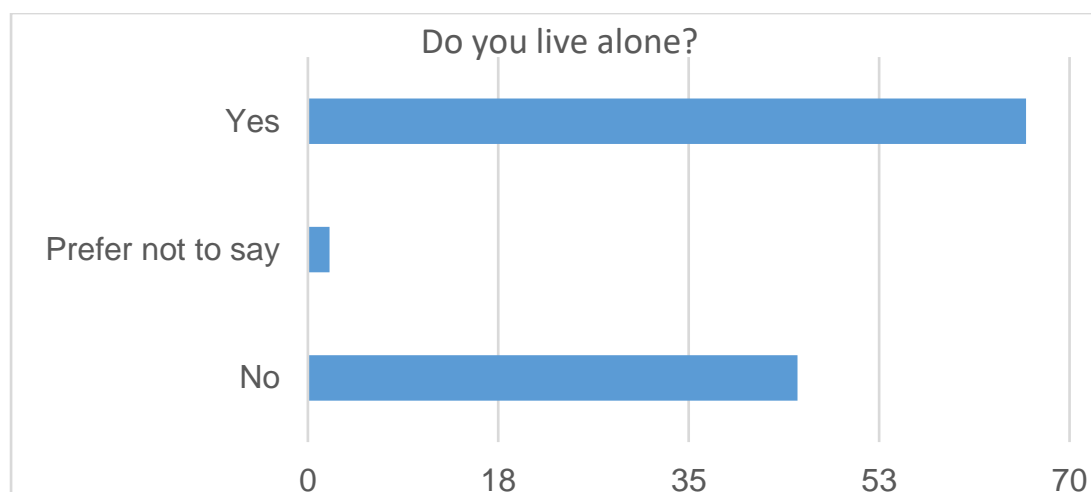
The survey was completed by one older person aged 50-54 years, 33 aged 55-65 years, 48 aged 66-75 years, 25 aged 76-85 years and three respondents over 85.



88 people identify (or describe their sex) as female and 22 as male.

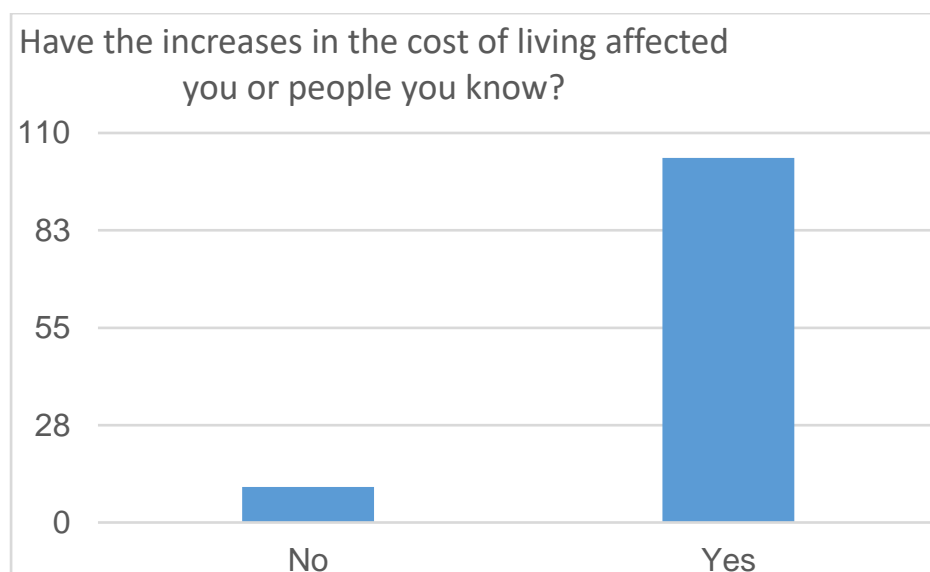


66 people live alone. 45 live with others. 79 own their own home, 23 are in rented accommodation and seven provide specific detail about their living arrangements (included in Appendix).

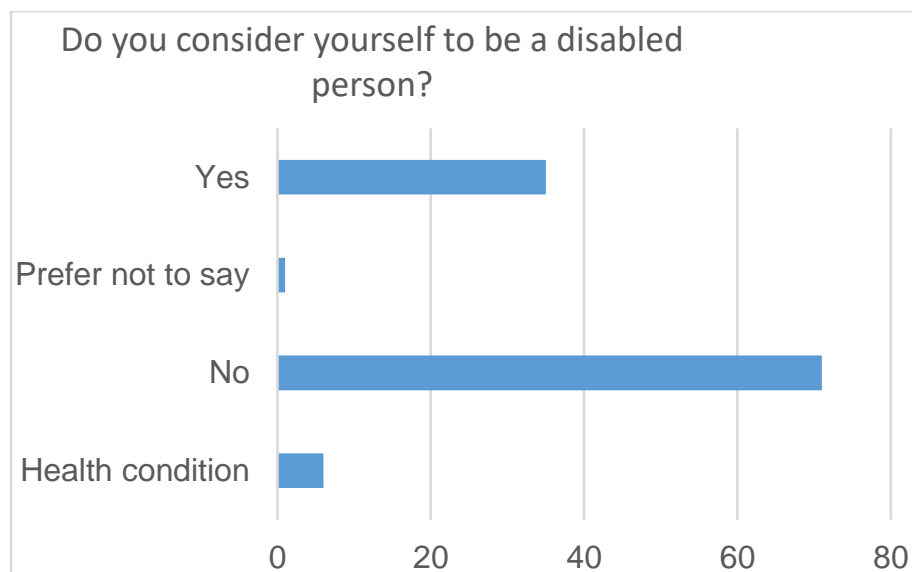


Impact of the cost of living

103 respondents told us that the increases in the cost of living have affected them or people they know. 10 people said they have not been affected.

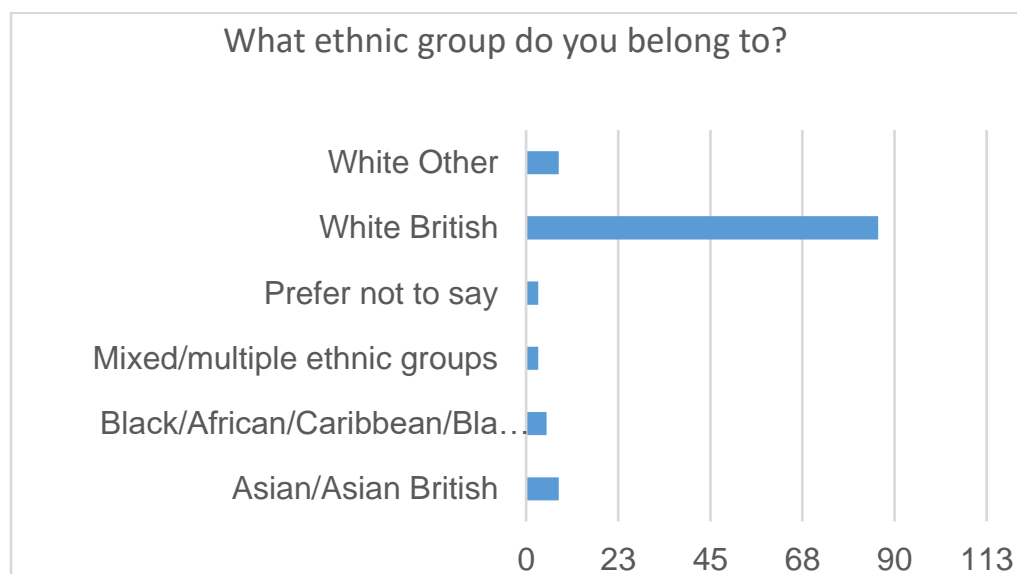


35 respondents told us they considered themselves to be a disabled person. Six described themselves as having a health condition. 39 out of 41 of these respondents reported that increases in the cost of living have affected them or people they know.



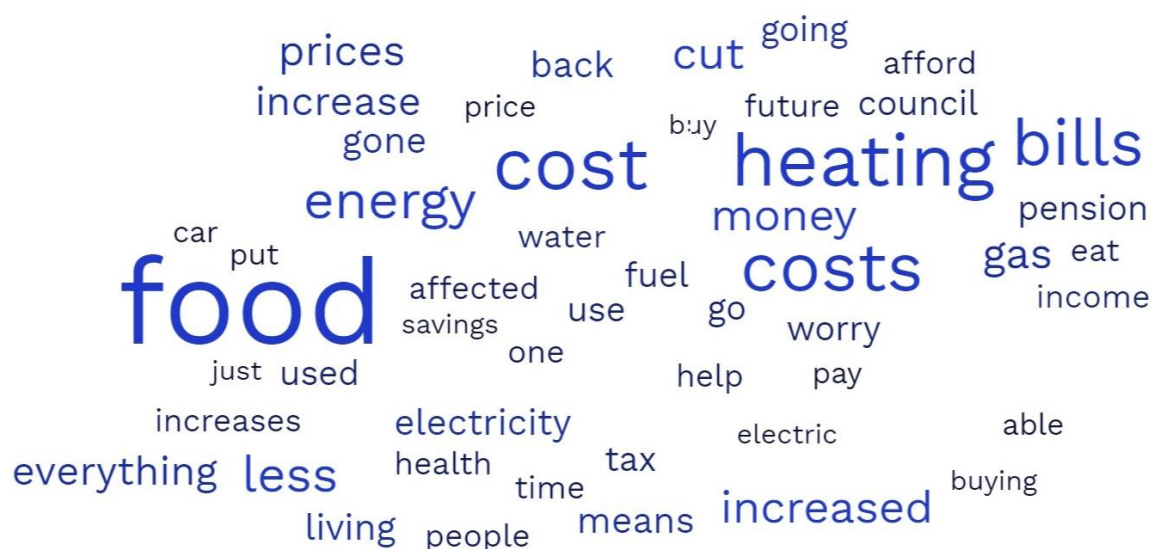
The respondents are mostly from the White British ethnic group (86). Eight people selected White Other. Of the 10 people unaffected by cost of living challenges, nine responses are from White British people and one from White Other.

Eight people are Asian/Asian British, five are Black/African/Caribbean/Black British and three from Mixed/multiple ethnic groups.



Seven of the 10 people unaffected by cost of living challenges were in the age group 66-75 years.

We asked people to tell us how the cost of living has affected them or people they know. This word cloud was created using the responses. The larger the



word the more frequently it appears in the word cloud image. A list of words in size order is included in Appendix.

- We observed the majority of respondents experiencing increased food and energy costs.
- Increased costs mean lifestyle changes, tight budgets and reduced quality of life.

"The huge rise in gas and electricity costs have impacted on every other area of costs. Economising on food, not buying new clothes, going out less."

"Energy bills dramatically increased, limit heating being used. Food bills, have to be more selective where I shop. More veg, less meat. Go to Lidl and Aldi. Limit the number of times I use public transport, condense journeys in to one ticket. Cut back on food money to save for things like outings/presents."

"Energy bills have gone up a LOT. I only put the heating on if I have to and we think more about how we cook. Problem is I'm pretty much housebound at the moment. No room for a microwave or other energy saving gadgets in tiny kitchen. Luckily one of us works part time for a supermarket so can get discount on shopping. Eat more from the reduced section. Use seasonal veg & make larger amounts to freeze some. I grew up poor so I've a few tricks up my sleeve to save money."

"Struggling with paying bills heating my home and buying food. The contribution for my care package and the energy bills take up nearly all my pension living struggling to pay for all other necessities."

"Service charge in flats where I live has gone up. Heating costs have risen. Basics e.g. food have shot up in price. My income hasn't - basic state pension."

"Rent gone up by £30 a week hard to find money to cover this. Food much more expensive. Hard to eat well."

"I can't afford the food I used to. I don't shower as often as I used to. I get worried about turning the heating on."

"As a professional freelancer I worry more about securing work to meet loan repayments"

"Energy prices have affected my budget which means I don't know if I can make it to my pension date without running out of money."

- Concerning impact on physical and mental health.
- Respondents are worried about the future.

"Increased energy costs and food costs causing stress and anxiety, especially as heating is necessary to stay healthy physically (I have rheumatoid arthritis + pain increases in cold and damp) and mentally (being cold triggers clinical depression.) Uncertainty about the future is very stressful"

"I buy less food and non-essential items and generally cut back. This reduces my social contacts with friends in similar financial circumstances. Winter weather means free outdoor socialising doesn't happen as we have health conditions that include reduced mobility."

"I can no more buy fruits, meat, even bread as I used to. The increase in electricity and gas bill means I had to turn the heating off most of the time and cut on the number of showers and baths. I hardly go out because of the increased fuel cost for the car. I worry a great deal about the future and what would happen to me if the cost of living remained that high. These worries affected my mental health as it increased the incidents of anxiety and panic attacks".

"I hardly put heat on anymore, so in the day I curl up under blankets and hot water bottle as its too cold to do much. So my mobility is getting worse, so is my arthritis and other health issues. I am really careful about buying food, and often just have soup or eggs, cheap things to eat. I am really scared that I won't be able to pay my bills, then what will happen to me. I don't qualify for any benefits as just over the limit, so I am stuck"

"Have to turn off hot water heater every second day - saved up to get an air fryer as cheaper then using electric cooker, turned of storage heater and got a halogen heater for living room, and sleep in living room"

"Catastrophic. Unbearable. A complete and utter nightmare. Electricity and gas costs are obscene. The profits are great. It's just beyond a joke."

- Worried about family and friends

"The cost of living increases have affected my family members and has caused a lot of stress and worry. it is fortunate that I have been able to help them from my savings"

"I would not be able to stay in my accommodation on my own. I share with my two daughters who both contribute a third each to rent and bills. One of them is very low waged and would struggle to afford a place of her own. We have been keeping as low as possible, between 14-16 and off at night."

"Cost of gas and electric has escalated and food up 17% has affected the amount of money I spend each month. I see the difficulties that my children and grandchildren have because of the increases."

"Hardship living on benefits money. You can't spread that far - don't get enough to cope. Friends, family members and myself find it difficult".

How to improve the situation in Bristol

We asked people to tell us how they thought the current cost of living challenges should be addressed to improve the situation in Bristol.

- Lots of ideas about ongoing practical support.

"There should be more practical ways for people to understand how to spend less ... classes on cooking from scratch , power usage and how to spend less on energy, more free spaces to go and keep warm/do your ironing /or share info with others in the same situation."

"Extend the help on energy costs. A delivery service of short-dated food for those who can't get to shops?"

"Better heated libraries. More bus routes reestablished..."

"I often see discounts available to students for food and also cinema etc. and think such provision could be extended to older people to help costs and increase social life."

"Bus service should be taken very seriously so people feel confident about going to the stop! It has been a very cold winter for standing in bus stops without a bus in sight for 20 mins."

"Make it easier to get buses to cheaper shops like Aldi. Local shops are far too expensive in Brislington even though I could walk to them."

"Doctors to check on vulnerable patients who are alone and disabled."

"There must be a plan to sell fresh foods at a discounted price for old and non-working people, otherwise their health deterioration will end up costing other sectors like the NHS. All big food stores should announce certain hours for the public to buy at a discount before the food become expired every day and get wasted, especially dairy products like milk. More support to local food producing companies and farmers."

"Supermarkets should stock items that are suitable for people who live alone. E.g. big bags of carrots are no fun when you're catering for single portions."

"Warm interesting places to go. Places for cheap meals. Anything to help with fuel costs."

"Bristol has set up a large number of warm spaces, which are helpful and growing in popularity..."

"I would like to see more schemes that support neighbourhoods / communities to set up sharing projects. Where tools, equipment and household goods could be loaned rather than purchased."

"More activities like BDP (Bristol Drugs Project) offer. Warmth and a meal, meters top-up installed in homes for most vulnerable. The poorest people in our Community are charged the highest tariff. It's discriminating against the most needy."

- Some respondents talked about lobbying for a fairer tax system, to improve wages and pension and ensure access to basic food provisions.
- Some acknowledged feeling powerless and that issues will not be solved by Bristol City Council without government help.

"The government should insure that everyone who is working should not be expected to then have to use food banks because their wages are too low to live on."

"A fairer tax system should tax the rich and tax wealth and assist the less well-off and employment law should protect those in precarious employment"

"The council and the government needs to understand how we try to live on a pension. Maybe then they would give us an amount that we could live on."

"Reduce council tax for older people and make more of a reduction in council tax for people living alone. Improve public transport and local shops."

"Targeted help for vulnerable- increase universal/ pension credit. Double discount energy vouchers."

"Pay rise for essential workers, young and older people and disabled who are on limited income to be supported better."

"Chase tax evasion companies and use that money to help now and in the future. UK should work quicker to make us independent in our energy use. Be creative, pay for solar panels to be put on roofs, use central reservations on motorways (like other countries), speed up on wind power etc. In the meanwhile help families and individuals."

"It's a basic human right to have sugar, milk, tea bags, baked beans, eggs, bread. If that food is going through the roof - how is this a civilised country? The government could control these - the basics."

"I have no answer for this, it is not within our power to control or mitigate costs when the City Council itself is facing massive budget deficits."

"It isn't just a local issue, it's a national one. Government should be ensuring people who have contributed all their lives are able to get enough money back in their pension so they can live a normal life. We should be able to bath or shower every day, iron all our clothes (not just the ones we go out in) and use our ovens when we want to. These are basics not luxuries. Tax on occupational pensions should be reduced and state pension should not be taxed when the person has paid in all their life."

"Difficult because many of the facilities that help - library, advice, health are affected by council income cuts. Older people are assume to all be wealthy therefore there is less emphasis on helping us."

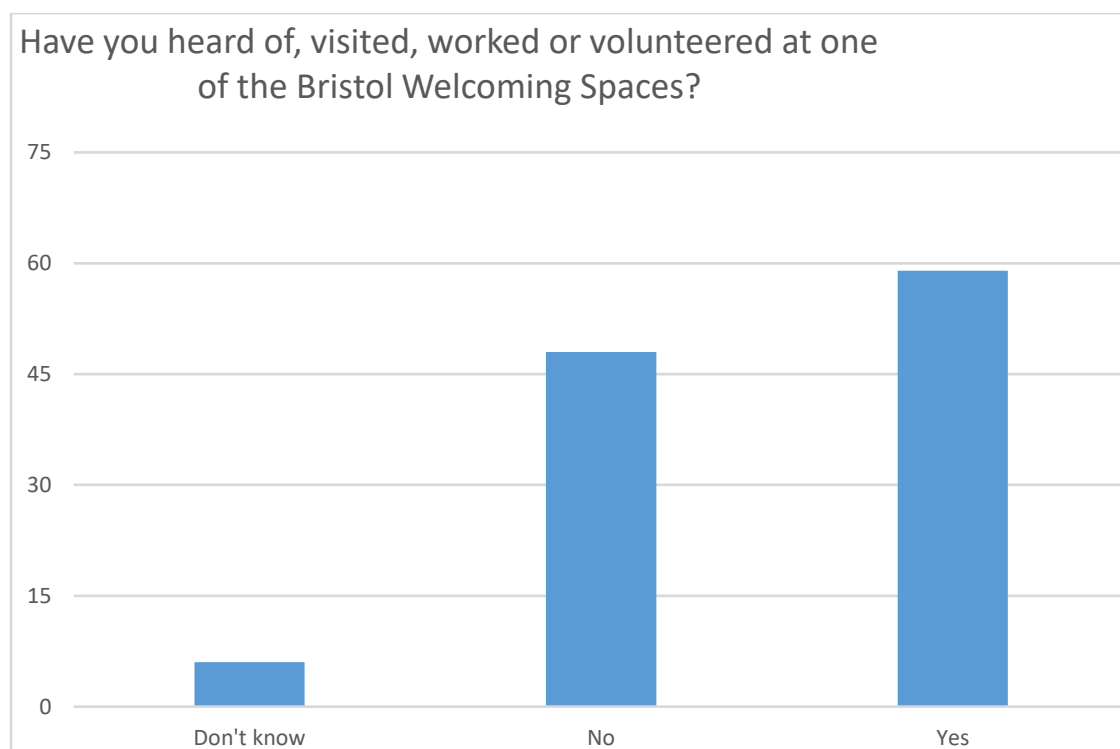
"All Bristol council have to stand up to the government and say, where's the charity money we should be able to access? Also they need to look at access to NHS dentists."

Welcoming spaces

We asked older people if they have heard of, worked or volunteered at one the Bristol Welcoming Spaces?

We used this description "Welcoming Spaces are community centres, libraries and other spaces situated across the city that are providing advice & information, social activities, low-cost meals etc."

We observed that welcoming spaces are appreciated and essential for some, but not widely used by respondents. 59 yes (of this number 29 people had heard of them but not used personally). 48 had no knowledge.



The 26 people who indicate they have attended (including volunteers) include 21 females and five males.

We are aware of several churches or Christian affiliated organisations providing Welcoming spaces. We observed no relationship between survey respondents who identify with the Christian religion and their knowledge or use of Welcoming Spaces.

We received responses from 47 people who identify with no religion or belief system, 40 Christian, five Muslim, four Buddhist and four people identified with a form of Spiritualism.

Older people told us:

“...They are a lifeline for me, always welcoming, and a warm place to be”

“Friendly. Nice to have free food. Opportunities to make social connections. Lots of local information and guidance.”

“Useful to visit these spaces and find people to chat with.”

“...low cost meals, shared reading, tai chi, seed swap, book sharing.”

“Go to Afternoon tea session and meet up... after... our committee led group. Get cup of hot drinks and snacks. At least mind stay free from cost [of] living crisis [for] few hours.”

"I am aware of them but do not know if anyone in my network does need to use it. I have friends who volunteer with them."

"Only been to one of them to see how it was working. I'm grateful that there are so many people who help community this way."

Some respondents felt the Welcoming Spaces were not for them.

"Welcoming but not always warm."

"Heard of them but not within walking distance and when it's bitterly cold I don't want to go out to get to the venue."

"Only heard of them, not poor enough to visit them. Let other people benefit."

"I haven't been but have heard of them. Might be OK to visit for a couple of hours but the idea of spending a day somewhere with nothing to do is not appealing to me. There isn't one in my area."

"Not able to attend as not fully accessible, only one has a changing places facility, other side of city."

"Ask why Welcoming spaces are not well advertised beside Social Media. maybe older people want to be around other 'Olders' rather than small children ..."

Priorities for BOPF over the next year

We asked what cost of living priorities BOPF should focus on over the next year.

- Many responses focused on energy and food costs, also health and transport.
- Information, advice and support (including emotional) and lobbying.

"Energy saving measures in the home. Good easy cheap food recipes"

"A fair tax system. Locally to offer emotional and practical support to older people in Bristol."

"Energy bills. Advice on insulation and how to get help with that. There are a lot of scams and cowboys out there so advice on how to get good tradesmen? Many houses round here aren't suitable for heat pumps and don't have cavity walls".

"Energy bills- support to manage these and campaigning to address fuel poverty. Making sure that older people know all the discounts and benefits available to them."

"Providing members with information about where they can get advice about grants or other benefits they may be entitled to but unaware of."

"... ensuring older people can afford the basics in life, putting pressure on Government to increase tax allowances for older people and increase pensions. Government needs to penalise energy companies making huge profits and plough that money back into supporting pensioners."

"Helping people with their bills i.e. gas, electric, food, it can cause them mental health issues, also staying in causes depression. So need some to collect them, bring them to warm place like Greenway Centre."

"NHS Dentists and hospital waiting times."

"Pressure to keep the buses running on all routes and find drivers. Help us find public toilets, preferably not in cafes, so we can use warm spaces that don't have them. Fund food banks to make sure they are able to offer more."

"Many older people do not live near a bus stop and have to rely on taxis or other people. Buses are scary places if you are alone and unsteady on your feet. Also they are not comfortable if you are in pain, due to the bus jolting over potholes. I think more could be achieved with more local round robin mini-bus service that could fill in the many gaps where there are no buses. If only a few per day."

"All groups should speak out even more. Better transport links all over the city."

- Targeted support for those with greatest needs.

"To insure that the homes of children and vulnerable people are warm enough and that they can afford the basic essentials to maintain their health and wellbeing."

"Helping those who are financially or emotionally struggling."

"Focus on older people who are particularly vulnerable, living on state pension and benefits and who are not confident to use new technology to access help. More direct help and face to face contact for people who are not able to access help."

"BOPF should focus on the costs of living priorities of people who are on benefit & those who are just over the benefit level, as they fall through the gaps."

"Helping people access warm spaces, affordable food, fight for more support for individuals as some people are sick or have disabilities that stop them going out. Advice on benefits etc., and how to keep warm at home. Cook cheap warm meals."

"More help for older people under 65 who don't get any benefits and working who don't seem to qualify for any financial help."

"Getting isolated people out. Making sure they are getting the right benefits they are entitled to, so they can afford to heat their home and have food, not having to choose which to have."

"Energy and food. Advise people how to spend less on gas. There are no drop in places that work for Somalian people (food, language). Access to transport - minibus for community".

Summary

Older people told us that BOPF should

- Provide more information about cost saving measures and ensure its messaging does not add to older people's worries about the CoL increases.
- Look at focusing efforts to support older people most affected, including supporting members to undertake social action.
- Promote social connection and peer support between all its members and their wider social circles.

5. Next Steps

Over the next few weeks this survey will be presented to a number of key networks and meetings across the city. These will include;

- **The Bristol Support Hub**
- **The Adult & Social Care Equalities Group**
- **The Cost of Living Coordination Group**
- **The Community Exchange Meeting**
- **The BOPF Open Forum**
- **Older people's groups and organisations in Bristol**

It will also be sent through to relevant Bristol City Councillors and officers, and via the Council's City Office team. This will ensure that older people with lived-experience of the cost of living challenges are helping to shape an effective and strategic approach to future cost of living work.

In addition to this, BOPF will be looking to support local groups of older people, by advising on grant applications, signposting people on to cost-of-living advice and information. We will build further dialogue and community-based conversations (with a less fear-based and stigmatising narrative) and developing a second research survey during the autumn/winter of 2023.

Comments, connection and ideas welcomed. Open sharing of activity and learning will continue for the rest of the project.

Suzi Mackenzie, BOPF Project Worker

Appendix – Data tables

Bristol Ward

Ashley	3
Bath and North East Somerset	1
Bedminster	6
Bishopston and Ashley Down	8
Bishopsworth	2
Brislington	6
Brislington East	5
Brislington West	1
Bristol Central	3
Clifton	3
Cotham	3
Easton	6
Eastville	3
Frome Vale	4
Hartcliffe and Withywood	2
Henbury and Brentry	2
Hillfields	1
Horfield	5
Hotwells and Harbourside	3
Kingsweston	1
Knowle	5
Lawrence Hill	4
Other	7
South Gloucestershire	4

Southmead	3
Southville	1
St George Central	2
St George Troopers Hill	4
St George West	2
Stockwood	2
Stoke Bishop	1
Westbury-on-Trym and Henleaze	9
Windmill Hill	1

Type of housing respondent is in currently

Council Property	1
Elderly preferred one-bedroom flat	1
Housing Association flat	1
Mortgage due to end in August	1
Own your own home	79
Prefer not to say	4
Rent a property	23
Shared housing	1
Sheltered housing	1
Stay with a friend	1

Sexual orientation of respondents

Bisexual	2
Gay man	2
Gay woman/Lesbian	7
Heterosexual	89
Prefer not to say	13

Word cloud words in size order (largest first)

Food, heating, cost, costs, bills, energy, less, money, increased, cut, gas, prices, increase, worry, everything, electricity, council, afford, pension, future, affected, use, water, fuel, eat, increases, car, health, tax, means, pay, help, time, income, buying, electric, savings, buy

