



Quarterly Cost of Living Analysis

Scotland's Citizens Advice Network provides an essential community service that empowers people in every corner of Scotland by providing free, confidential, and impartial advice through our local Bureaux and national services. We use evidence about people's real-life experiences to influence policy and drive positive change. We are on the side of people in Scotland who need help, and we change lives for the better. In 2021-22 the Citizens Advice network helped over 174,500 almost 640,500 times. This helped unlock over £132 million for people through things like social security payments and employment entitlements. Around 1 in 6 people who sought advice from the network saw a financial gain, the average value of which was over £4,200.

This latest analysis from Citizens Advice Scotland shows how the cost of living crisis is impacting upon the lives of people across Scotland.

The report also details the types of people particular at risk as they seek cost of living advice at a higher rate than advice generally, and where advice demand cross over.

We see higher levels of demand for cost of living related advice from single, non-pensioner households.

While there are understandable reasons why policy makers will want to target support to pensioners and families, there is a risk single person households are left behind when it comes to support.

In a similar vein, council rented tenants are also seeking cost of living advice at a higher rate than they do advice generally. With significant policy debate around owner occupiers and private rented sector tenants in recent months, it is again crucial this group are not forgotten about.

The report also sees a worrying link between energy advice and food insecurity, and demand for consumer debt advice linked to priority debts like council tax, as well as with Universal Credit

This analysis covers the first 9 months of the 2022/23 financial year and where appropriate compares data with the whole of the previous financial year.

Key facts and figures at a glance



Online advice for help with bills up **156%**



Online advice on topping up prepayment meters up **78%**



Online advice around help to pay energy bills up **194%**



People unable to work are more likely to seek advice around a risk to income



People out of work more likely to need **food insecurity advice**



People in full time work more likely to need help with **debts like credit cards**



Council tenants more likely to need **utilities and food insecurity advice**



Single, non-pensioner households more likely to need **crisis support**



Big crossover between **energy advice** and **food insecurity**



Links between **consumer debt** and **Universal Credit**



Online advice around **people struggling with living costs** up **146%**



Online advice around **food banks** and **other crisis help** up **39%**

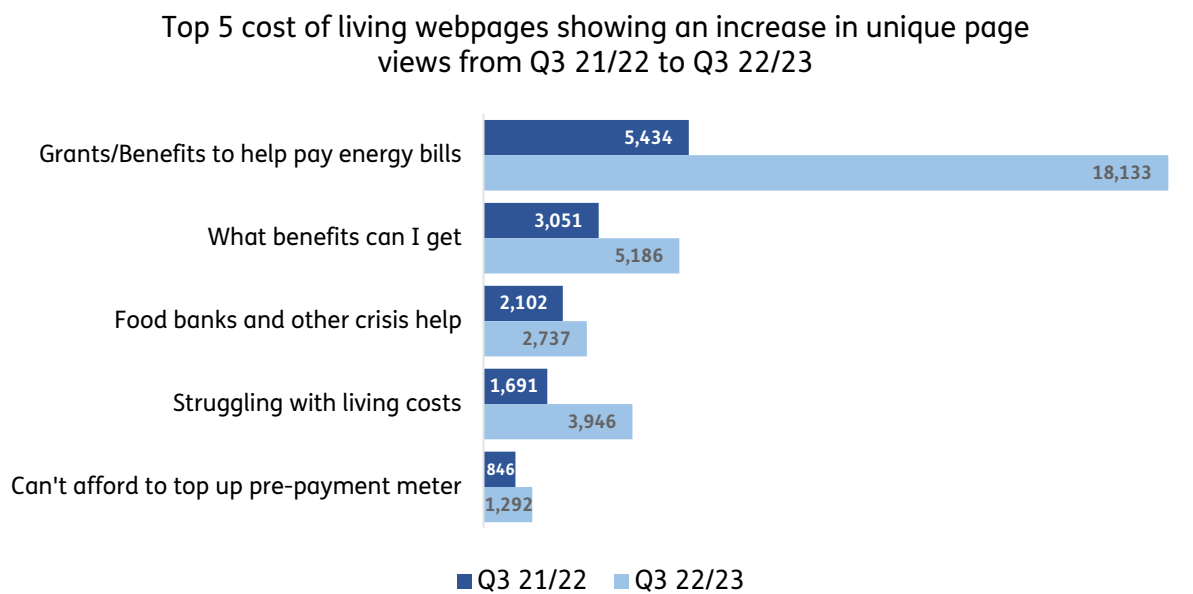
Online advice

The Advice for Scotland website has around **2.5 million** users a year and gives us a good insight into general trends and concerns across the wider population in Scotland.

In the first 9 months of this financial year there have been huge increase in page views of online advice relating to the cost of living compared to the whole of 2021/22, including:

- > Grants and Benefits to help pay energy bills up by **194%**
- > Get help with bills up by **156%**
- > Struggling to pay energy bills up by **147%**
- > Struggling with living costs up by **146%**
- > Can't afford to top up pre-payment meter up by **78%**
- > What benefits can I get up by **64%**
- > Food banks and other crisis help up by **39%**
- > Extra support from energy supplier up by **23%**

Examples of the increase in unique page views can be illustrated by comparing the figures between Q3 of 2021/22 and Q3 of 2022/23:

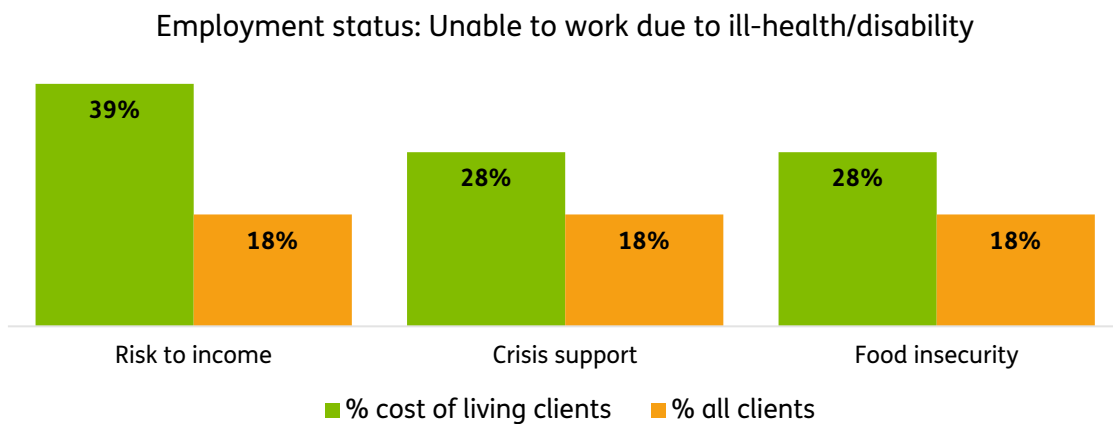


The people more likely to be seeking cost of living related advice

Those unable to work

Those unable to work make up **18%** of all advice demand across the network, however in certain cost of living areas demand is higher such as

- > Food insecurity **28%**
- > Risk to income **39%**
- > Crisis support **28%**



Those out of work

Those out work make up **9%** of advice demand across CABs, but **19%** of crisis support advice and **28%** of food insecurity advice

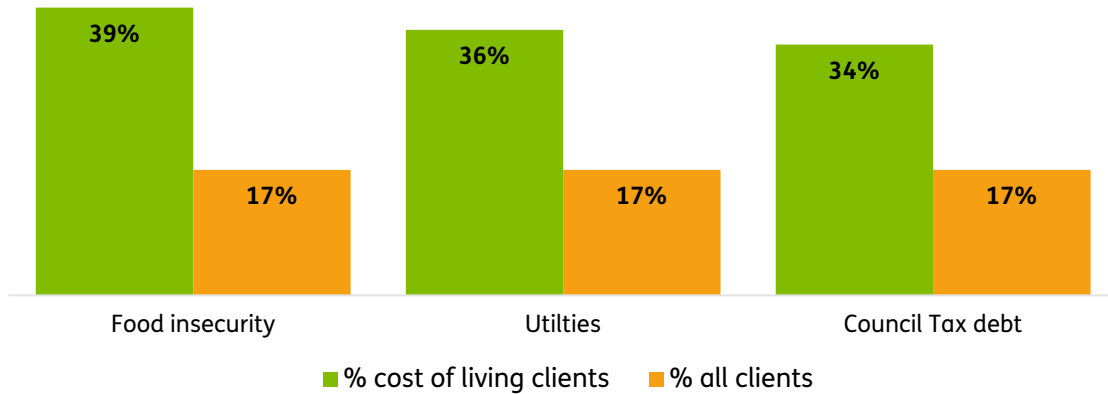
Those in full time work

Full time employed people make up **12%** of all advice demand, but for non-priority debts like credit cards this rises to **20%**. This may suggest people in work are struggling to keep up with everyday essential spending and are relying on consumer debt to pay bills.

Council rented tenants

Council tenants make up **17%** of all advice demand across the CAB network, however this rises in key cost of living areas, such as food insecurity where they make up **39%** of demand and utilities where they make up **36%** of demand. For Council Tax debt advice council tenants make up **34%** of demand.

Housing tenure: council-rented tenants



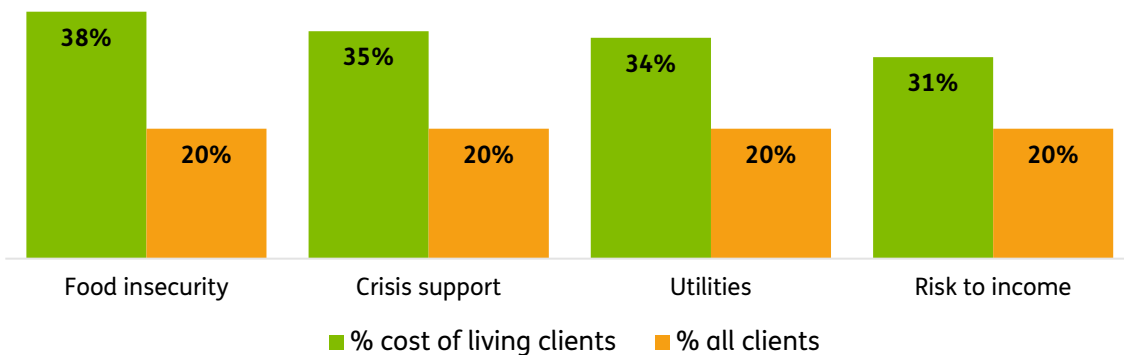
Single, non-pensioner households

Policy responses to the cost of living crisis have understandably focused on families with children and pensioners, however CAB data suggest a key at risk group are single non-pensioner households.

These people make up **20%** of demand for CAB advice, but advice demand in key cost of living areas is higher such as

- > **34%** for utilities
- > **38%** for food insecurity
- > **31%** for risk to income
- > **35%** for crisis support

Household composition: Single, non-pensioner household

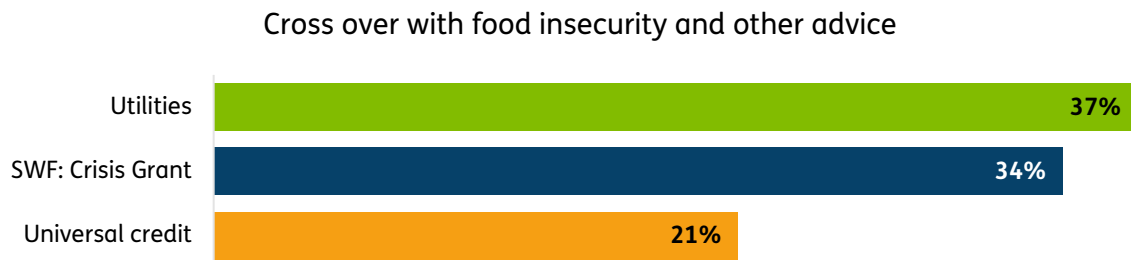


It is essential these people are not forgotten about in terms of policy responses to the cost of living crisis

Advice patterns

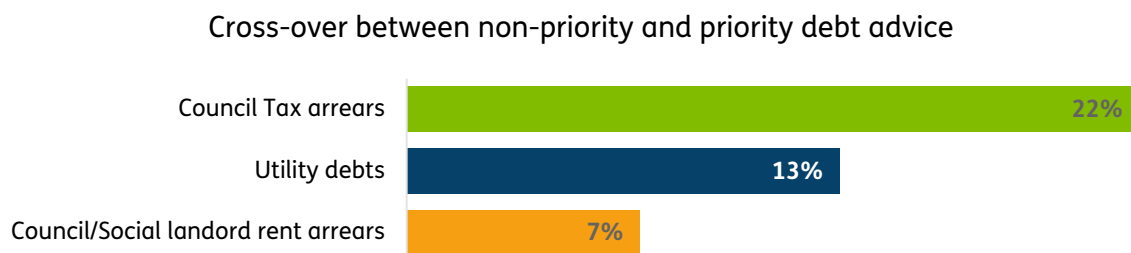
For those seeking food insecurity advice from a CAB, **15%** also needed help with utilities.

When we exclude clients who only received fuel insecurity advice and focus on clients who received more than one type of advice, **37%** of people needed help with utilities, **34%** needed help with crisis grants and **21%** needed help with Universal Credit.



Fuel debt appears to be a growing concern. We see that **6%** of utilities clients needed advice on fuel debt with that figure growing to **18%** when we only consider utilities clients who needed another type of advice.

Non priority debts are consumer debts like credit cards, store cards and loans. However looking at advice patterns we see a large crossover between people seeking help with these kinds of debts and with priority debts like council tax. More than 1 in 5 people (**22%**) seeking non-priority debt advice also needed help with council tax debt and more than 1 in 10 (**13%**) needed help with fuel debts to their energy supplier.



Worryingly, there is also a significant crossover between people seeking help with these consumer debts and things like Universal Credit (**8%**) and local authority rent arrears (**7%**)

This may suggest people are using consumer debt to cover shortfalls in every day essential spending.