

This is the latest monthly summary of data from the Citizens Advice network in Scotland since the COVID-19 outbreak and covers February 2022. It shows data from the 59 Citizens Advice Bureaux in Scotland and our online advice site.

Month in focus:

Data across the Citizens Advice network in Scotland for February 2022 suggests that the cost of living crisis is fuelling increased demand for advice.

Webpages relating to paying for living costs in general experienced an increase in February and in some instances have reached peaks not seen since the beginning of the pandemic.

Elsewhere, the £150 council tax payment to help ease the cost of living crisis saw a large spike in demand around online advice for council tax and demand for energy related advice continued to grow.

Across the CAB network, advice for fuel debt continued to increase and is now more than double the level of before the pandemic. Demand for advice around the private rented sector also continued to grow, and is up 20% from before the pandemic.

Growing demand for advice relating to income and bills shows the extent of the cost of living crisis, and should concern policy makers as the data pre dates significant increases to energy bills on 1 April.

Key points

- > In February 2022 Citizens Advice Bureaux network helped **21,828** clients with **87,734** pieces of advice.
- > Meanwhile the Advice for Scotland website had **222,725** users, generating **371,050** unique page views.
- > The cost of living crisis fuelled greater demand for advice around income and bills

Web pages

- > Number of unique page views (UPV) in February 2022: **371,050** (decrease of **6%** from January 2022)
- > Number of website users in February 2022: **222,725** (**7%** increase in new users)
- > **81%** of these being new users.

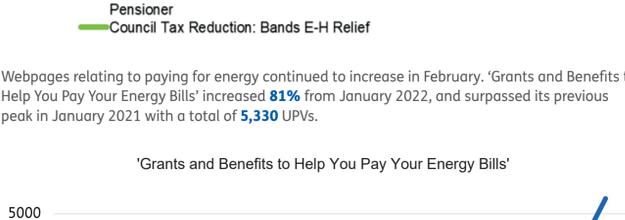
Trend data for visits to the Advice for Scotland website, as a proportion of all unique page views on the site, show some variation between January 2022 and February 2022, with a further increase in unique page views of webpages relating to benefits advice of **13%** (having increased by 5% between January and December 2021) and consumer up by **9%**. Notable decreases in webpage views was to health advice (down **38%**), and family (down **12%**).

Advice sought on the 'Advice for Scotland' website, as a proportion of all advice



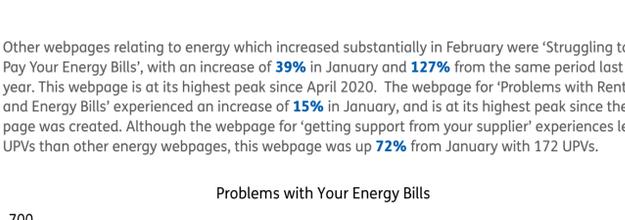
Webpages relating to council tax experienced a total of **16,383** unique pageviews in February 2022, almost double its previous peak in October 2021. Finding ways to reduce council tax bills were a main concern. The webpage for 'Can You Get a Council Tax Reduction', is up **166%** from January, and up **331%** from the same period last year. The webpage relating to how income is worked out for non-pensioners is up 37% from January, and **543%** from the same period last year. The webpage with information on reductions in bands E-F, is up **816%** from the same period last year, with **1,174** unique pageviews in February, an increase of **1,012** UPVs from its previous peak.

Council Tax



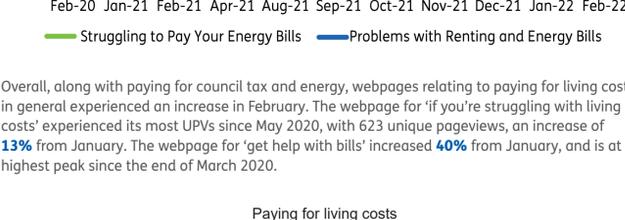
Webpages relating to paying for energy continued to increase in February. 'Grants and Benefits to Help You Pay Your Energy Bills' increased **81%** from January 2022, and surpassed its previous peak in January 2021 with a total of **5,330** UPVs.

'Grants and Benefits to Help You Pay Your Energy Bills'



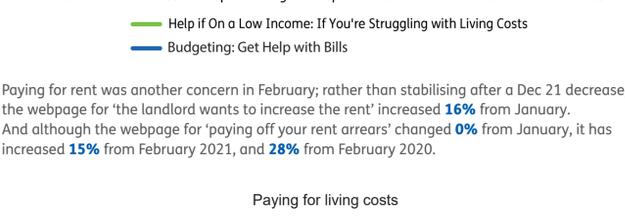
Other webpages relating to energy which increased substantially in February were 'Struggling to Pay Your Energy Bills', with an increase of **39%** in January and **127%** from the same period last year. This webpage is at its highest peak since April 2020. The webpage for 'Problems with Renting and Energy Bills' experienced an increase of **15%** in January, and is at its highest peak since the page was created. Although the webpage for 'getting support from your supplier' experiences less UPVs than other energy webpages, this webpage was up **72%** from January with 172 UPVs.

Problems with Your Energy Bills



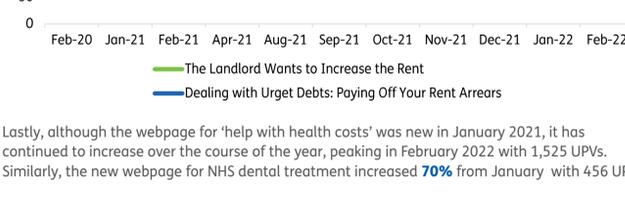
Overall, along with paying for council tax and energy, webpages relating to paying for living costs in general experienced an increase in February. The webpage for 'if you're struggling with living costs' experienced its most UPVs since May 2020, with 623 unique pageviews, an increase of **13%** from January. The webpage for 'get help with bills' increased **40%** from January, and is at its highest peak since the end of March 2020.

Paying for living costs



Paying for rent was another concern in February; rather than stabilising after a Dec 21 decrease, the webpage for 'the landlord wants to increase the rent' increased **16%** from January. And although the webpage for 'paying off your rent arrears' changed **0%** from January, it has increased **15%** from February 2021, and **28%** from February 2020.

Paying for living costs



Lastly, although the webpage for 'help with health costs' was new in January 2021, it has continued to increase over the course of the year, peaking in February 2022 with 1,525 UPVs. Similarly, the new webpage for NHS dental treatment increased **70%** from January with 456 UPVs.

'Help with Health Costs'

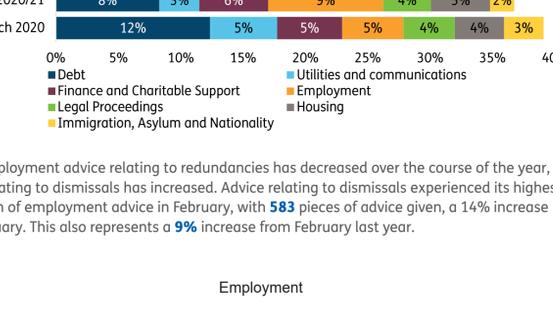


Citizens Advice Bureaux

- > **21,828** clients
- > **87,734** pieces of advice

Benefits remained the top advice area in February 2022 at **46%** of all advice. Notable changes were in advice related to Utilities and Communications (up **17%**) and Health & Community Care (up **12%**). Advice Relating to Immigration, Asylum, and Nationality decreased **15%**, and advice relating to Discrimination decreased **22%**.

Top advice areas, as a proportion of all advice (excluding benefits)



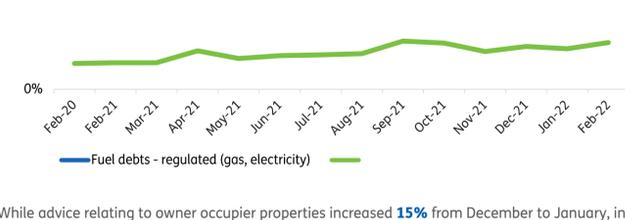
While employment advice relating to redundancies has decreased over the course of the year, advice relating to dismissals has increased. Advice relating to dismissals experienced its highest proportion of employment advice in February, with **583** pieces of advice given, a 14% increase from January. This also represents a **9%** increase from last year.

Employment



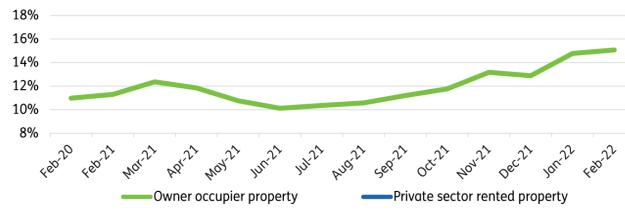
Advice relating to fuel debts increased **13%** from January; this advice area has continued to increase over the course of 2021, and overall is up 104% from February 2020, with 911 pieces of advice on fuel debts given. Although debts related to overpayments of benefits has stayed fairly stable over time, this advice area increased **15%** from January, and is up **76%** from the same time last year.

Debt



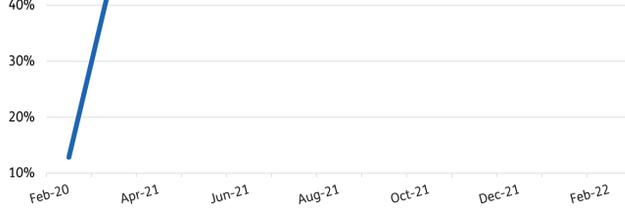
While advice relating to private occupier properties increased **15%** from December to January, in February advice relating to private sector rented properties increased **10%**; this is a **20%** increase from Feb 2020. Private sector rented property advice experienced its highest number of advice in this financial year, with 1,163 pieces of advice given.

Housing



Lastly, advice relating to community care increased **21%** in February, a **22%** increase from February 2021, and a **345%** increase from February 2020. 1,252 advice were given in this area in February, an increase of 246 from its previous peak in August 2021.

Community Care



During February 2022:

There was little change in the profile of how contact was made with the network between January and February 2022, with telephone contact direct with bureaux remaining the most common (**71%**) followed by email contact (**15%**).

Advice most commonly sought via **SCAH**:

- Immigration
- Education
- Consumer issues

Advice most commonly sought **face-to-face**:

- Immigration
- Travel

Advice most commonly sought through **direct contact with bureaux (telephone or email)**:

- Discrimination
- Employment
- Utilities & Communications

Almost all of those seeking discrimination-related advice did so through direct contact with bureaux (either telephone or email)