

**Metfriendly Police Family  
Finance Index Report –  
October 2022**



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## **Metfriendly Police Family Finance Index Report – October 2022**

### **Key Findings:**

- Not eating, due to lack of money, in the past 12 months was mentioned by 22% of overall respondents
- 6% of all respondents stated that they, or a family member with whom they live, had accessed a food bank in the past 12 months
- Nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents reported financial concerns, with those aged between 25 and 55 showing higher levels
- Around 1 in 10 (11%) of respondents had missed payments on financial obligations in the past year.
- Overall, 1 in 5 (22%) of respondents considered themselves in significant debt outside a mortgage.

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Author: Martin Bellingham BA (Hons), MSc, MBA, MMRS, Membership Services Director, Metfriendly

### **Background:**

- Metfriendly, in partnership with Central East BCU, Metropolitan Police and the Metropolitan Police Federation, carried out a pilot survey in early 2022 to help understand and identify the financial well-being challenges faced by Police Families. Over 100 responses were captured.
- Following this successful trial, the survey was replicated in August 2022, again with support from Central East BCU and the Federation. Over 1,100 responses were captured.

The research aims to identify and measure critical financial challenges facing the Police Family and establish an ongoing measure to enable comparison over time. It is intended to highlight key themes to inform policy development and provide guidance for areas of financial well-being support. These questions have been established in academic financial research for a number of years and they are designed to give a broader insight into the state of a family's finances and so include all income sources, not just pay, along with actual tangible measures of financial stress such as accessing food banks and missing meals.

The research has been carried out in line with MRS guidelines, and further details can be obtained from Martin Bellingham, Membership Support Director, Metfriendly.  
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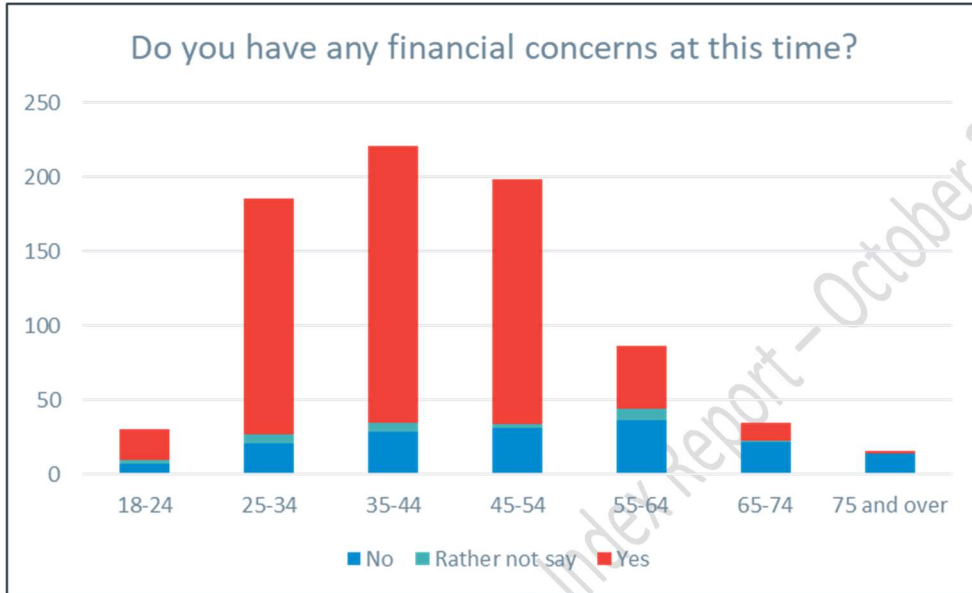
### **Executive summary:**

- The measures are combined to produce the Metfriendly Police Family Finance Index, which shows a significant increase in financial and food poverty levels over the past few months.
- As financial pressures have increased during 2022, this has led to a worrying rise in levels of food poverty. The result is that increased proportions of respondents report missing meals due to financial reasons, and food bank access from Police Families has also increased. The responses to this survey show that this is beyond a simple issue of Police pay. High inflation levels, cost-of-living increases, and easy access to loans, credit solutions and other buy-now-pay-later solutions are putting the finances of many Police Families under increasing pressure. Police Officers and Staff are arriving at work hungry, stressed and concerned about their family's future financial situation.
- Increased provision of financial education and support for all those who work in the Police, as well as support by the Police for the provision of savings and protection solutions, is required to help address the unprecedented financial challenges the Police Family will face over the coming months and years.
- This survey was carried out in August 2022 when interest rates were 1.75%, annual inflation as measured by CPI was 9.9% and consumer confidence, as measured by GFK's consumer confidence index, was down at -44, the lowest level since 1974. All these are expected to decline significantly over the next few months.

## 1. Financial focus

Respondents were asked whether they had any financial concerns during August 2022 and the results are detailed in Graph 1 below:

Graph 1: Numbers of respondents, by age, responding re financial concerns. n=1,161



- Nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents reported financial concerns, with those aged between 25 and 55 showing higher levels. Financial pressures appear to reduce as respondents pass the age of 55.
- Those aged 55 are likely to have received their pension lump sum, which will often help alleviate some financial pressures.
- Living at home with parents/other relatives, therefore reducing living costs, drives the under-25 responses.

Respondents mention the financial pressures of everyday living and have concerns relating to their declining financial situation:

*“Although I do not yet have significant debt, it is increasing, and things are getting harder. I am having to be much more cautious with my spending and reduce all non-essentials.”*

*“I have less money than I did eight years ago with no inflation/increments. Not able to save much. Having to think about vouchers, discounts, reduced food in shops.”*

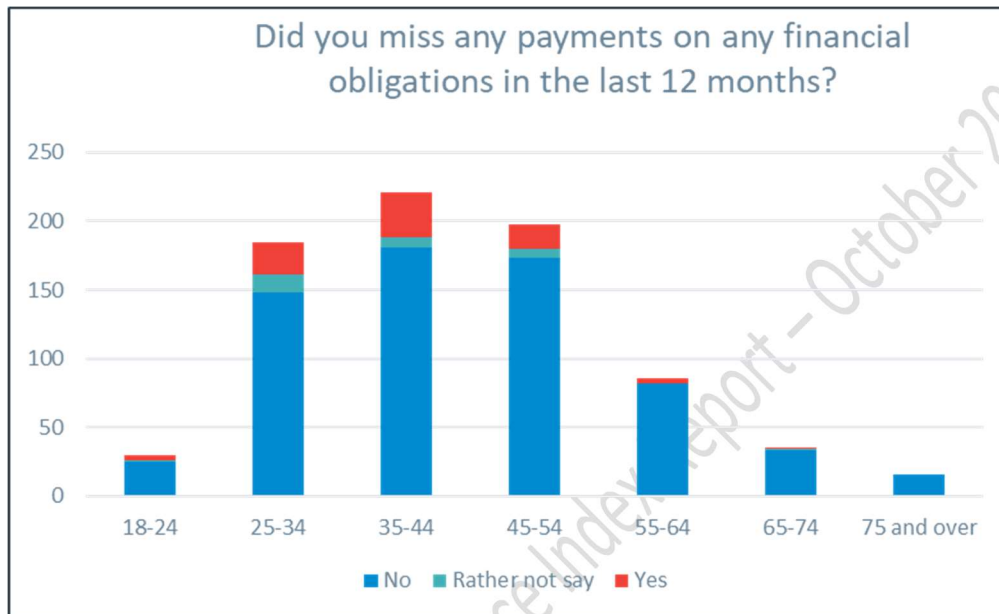
Further quotes are detailed in the Appendix.

## 2.0 Missing financial payments

The ability to meet financial obligations is a key indicator of a family's finances. With missed payments come increased costs and reduced access to affordable and regulated sources of credit.

The results are detailed in Graph 2 below:

Graph 2: Numbers of respondents, by age, responding re missed financial payments.  
n=1,1161



- Around 1 in 10 (11%) of respondents had missed payments on financial obligations in the past year.
- All age groups up to 45 showed similar proportions of respondents who reported missed payments. This proportion declined post-age 55.

*"I have missed my most recent gas and electricity bill due to lack of funds."*

*"I haven't missed any of my financial commitments but only because I've paid the bills by credit card, which has added to my debts."*

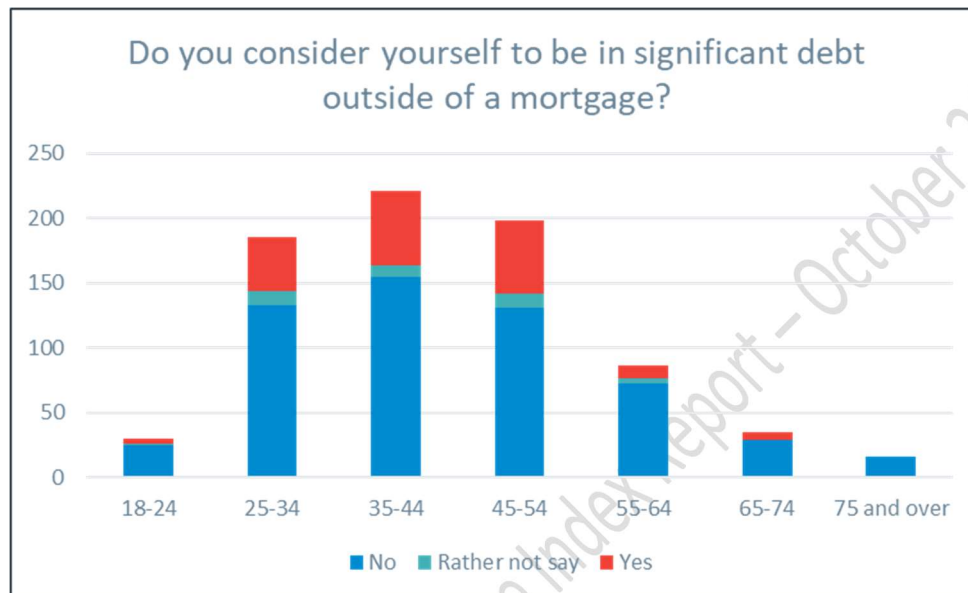
Further quotes are detailed in the Appendix.

### 3.0 Debt levels

Respondents were asked about their significant debt levels outside their mortgage.

For all respondents, just over 1 in 5 (22%) responded that they had significant debt levels outside their mortgage. The responses by age group can be seen in Graph 3 below:

Graph 3: Numbers of respondents, by age, considering themselves to be in significant debt outside of a mortgage. n=1,1161



- Overall, 1 in 5 (22%) of respondents considered themselves in significant debt outside a mortgage.
- Those aged 25-34, 35-44 and 45-54 show the highest levels of significant debt.

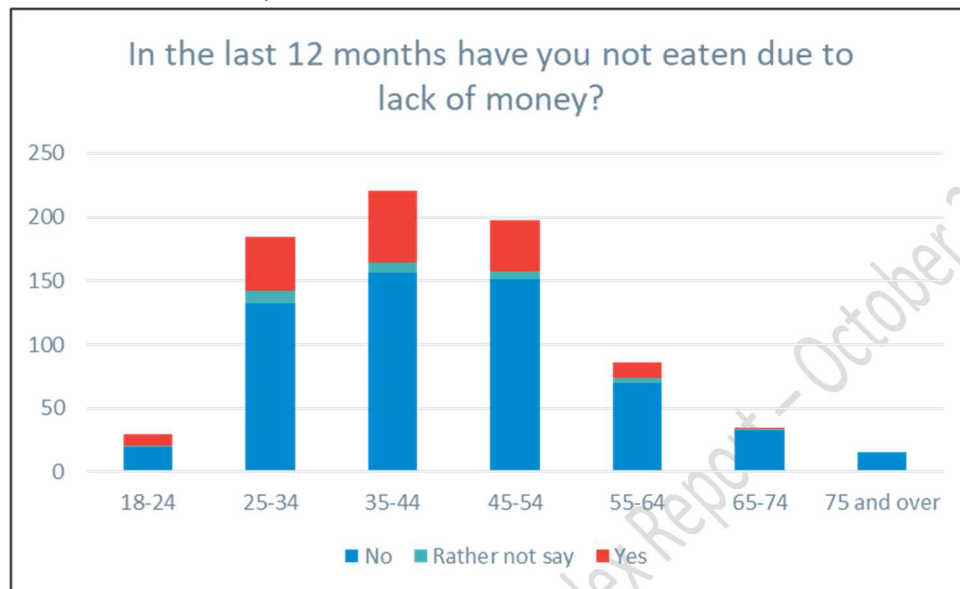
“My partner and I are both Police Officers. We have fairly significant debt outside the mortgage, not including the car payments. Every month we are using our credit cards to supplement petrol and food costs as our bills are so high. I don't feel our wages are bad but with the increased cost of living, our wages have not risen in line with this and we certainly do not have as much spare cash as we used to and now it is a constant balance of ensuring the bills are paid and then worrying what we have left to eat/pay for fuel/clothe our daughter.”

Further quotes are detailed in the Appendix.

#### 4.0 Food poverty

Missing meals due to lack of money is established as a key measure of household poverty, and data from The Food Foundation shows that this is an escalating crisis amongst UK households in 2022.

Graph 4: Numbers of respondents, by age, responding that they had missed a meal in the previous 12 months due to lack of money. n=1,1161



- Not eating due to lack of money in the past 12 months was mentioned by 22% of overall respondents, and the graph shows a high correlation to levels of significant debt, as shown in the previous graph.
- All age groups up to the age of 55 show similar situations. Unsurprisingly, lack of money and the cost of food appear to be the key drivers.

*“Currently, costs of food and petrol are more than I can afford. When I get paid, all of my money goes on paying off the credit card bill for the previous month. I have had to skip meals, I call this intermittent fasting, to lower my family food bill.”*

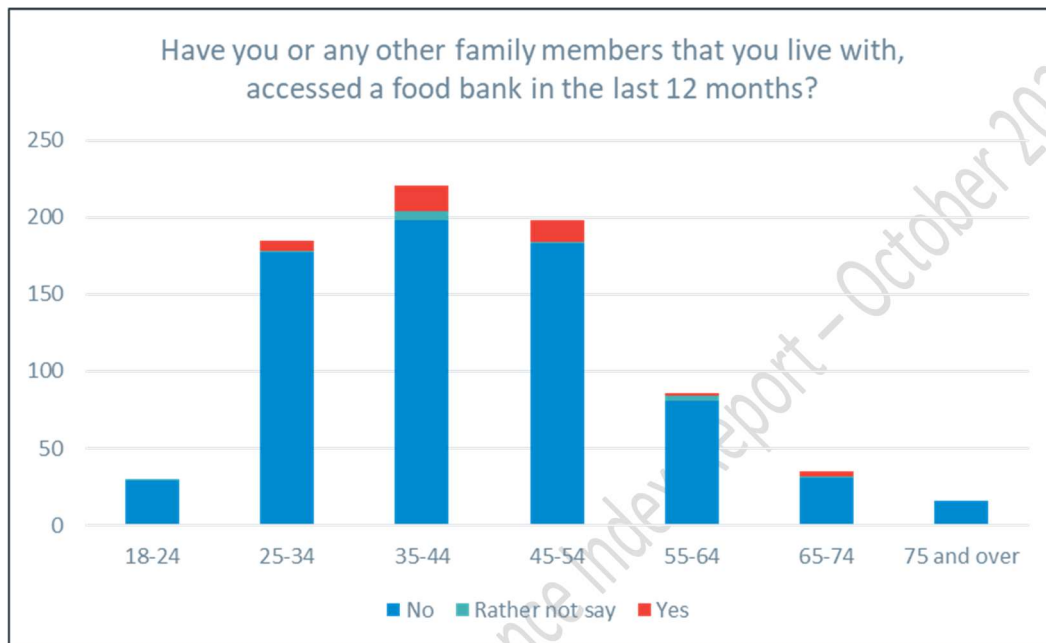
*“I am a single mother of two. I do not get overtime, so I am on basic pay, trying to pay a mortgage and household bills. I have no savings so what money comes in goes back out. I have gone without so that my kids get what they need: food, uniform, shoes, etc. Very worrying as gas/electric goes up.”*

Further quotes are detailed in the Appendix.

## 5.0 Food bank access

Respondents were asked whether they or any other family members with whom they live had accessed a food bank in the last 12 months.

Graph 5: Numbers of respondents, by age, responding re food bank access. n=1,1161



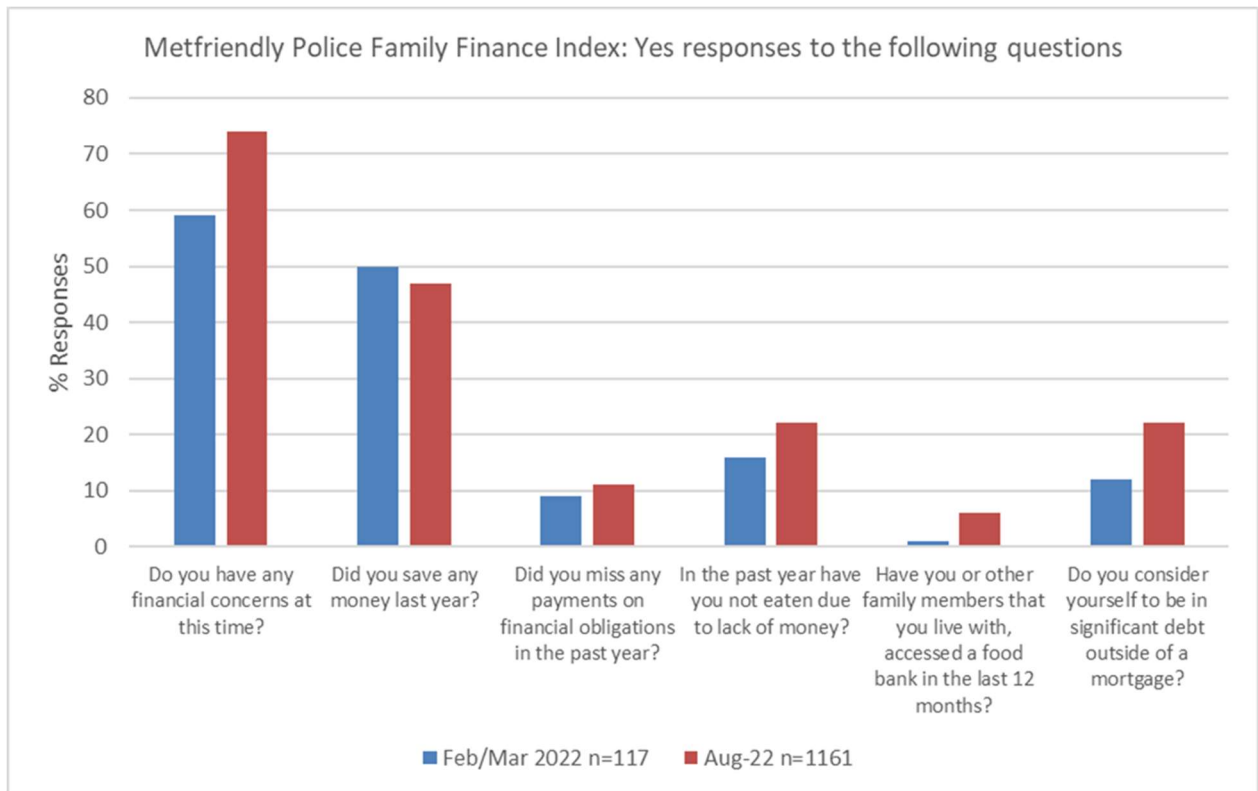
- Overall, 6% of all respondents stated that they, or a family member with whom they live, had accessed a food bank in the past 12 months (the average).
- Those aged 35-44 and 65-74 were above average, with 45-54 at an average level.

*“All my bills have increased over the last few months. I have to budget for everything and cannot allow any extra spending on unnecessary items. This includes treats for my child. I also recently had to pay for a leak in my bathroom; this extra expenditure meant that I was unable to afford enough food for the last few weeks of the month and had to visit a food bank. I do not live in a massive house; I am careful with all my spending and budget the best that I can.”*



## 6.0 Changes in responses so far in 2022

Graph 6 below shows how response percentages have changed for these questions between these two surveys in 2022.



An increase in financial concerns, missed payments, and rising debt levels, along with increased rates of food poverty and reduced savings levels, show a declining situation regarding Police Family finances

## 7. Emerging key themes

The themes have been broken down into a financial and food focus.

### Metfriendly Police Family Finance Index - money

The key financial themes identified during the research show this is a complicated situation with many contributing factors.

- Police pay not keeping up with inflation
- Cost of living challenges; bills are increasing, and allowances are reducing
- Cost of housing, especially in London/South East. A significant proportion of income is spent on housing costs, whether mortgage or rent, particularly amongst younger Officers. The affordability of moving out of the parental home for younger Officers or finding an affordable home to bring up a family was mentioned by many Officers who were considering other careers consequently.
- Pension implications: some Officers mentioned that they couldn't afford the pension and were simply not contributing without considering the consequences.

### Metfriendly Police Family Finance Index - food

The key themes from a food point of view are detailed below:

- Household financial pressures – lack of any spare money and reliance on savings to pay for living costs, including food, is a key concern
- Costs of food are an issue – food inflation is hitting low-income households disproportionately. The impact of the conflict in Ukraine on the cost of low-cost food staples such as pasta shows price rises of 50% in April alone.
- Access to affordable food – the ability to access affordable and good quality food at home is an issue mentioned by many respondents. The impact of shift patterns and variable hours means that they shop in more expensive convenience stores.
- Access to affordable food – where they exist, canteens are perceived as expensive and often not open and accessible for all shifts. Reliance on convenience stores and takeaways is mentioned by many respondents who find this a costly and unsatisfactory solution.

## 8. Conclusions, recommendations and next steps

Although not unexpected, some of the responses to the questions in this survey make for shocking reading, particularly considering that they are mainly from employed respondents in a respected profession. Policy Family finances are a genuine concern, as they look to be following a declining trend for the foreseeable future. The impact of these factors on the ability of the Police to attract and retain those looking to start and pursue a professional career is not examined within this research. There is an obvious need and requirement for Officers to be aware of their finances alongside an appreciation of the role that savings and protection products designed specifically for the Police Family can play in addressing the challenges facing the Police Family now and in the future.

## Appendix

Verbatim comments:

### **Financial concerns**

The financial concerns I currently have are around any sufficient pay rise over the last ten years and the ever-increasing rise of the cost of living. I have grave concerns I will fail to keep up with the increased energy costs, which is already impacting on my wages.

I have eaten into my savings to pay for essentials and have little savings left in case of an emergency with the house or unexpected bills.

Bills v income doesn't match up!

Having to rely on credit cards to pay off bills, which every month reduces any disposable income further.

I just have concerns that as a single parent I will have no other choice than to do as much overtime as possible rather than spend time with my son when needed. Luckily, he's 17 so he can be by himself, but we will definitely miss out on quality time we should be spending together and he will miss out on the guidance he deserves.

Financial concerns. Bills and cost of living going up. Wages have not for a long time, any increase has been so insignificant. This means I have to do overtime which then has a knock-on effect with family life. I am at work a lot more now than ever; this is having a detrimental effect on my family - could possibly cost me my family. I should be spending time with my family, saving, putting money away for kids, making overpayments on mortgage or seeing the rewards of working overtime, not using the extra money covering my bills and living.

I have been heavily reliant on credit cards and had to re-mortgage. I have had to apply to charity foundations for essential school expenses for my children (they attend a state school).

### **Significant debts**

I have maxed out my credit card for the first time in my life and am using other sources of credit such as PayPal and buy-now-pay-later services.

PCDA student - wages barely cover cost of living, I have a mortgage and essential bills. I pay them and it leaves me struggling for the month. I have maxed credit cards and two loans, all of which have been for basics, not extravagance. Some months I wonder how I'm affording fuel to get to work. Whilst on uni blocks my wages drop so much I struggle even more, I work overtime where I can but I still have a partner who I would actually like to see once in a while. The £1900 increase will help but honestly it's not enough.

Significant number of loans, etc. supporting living means significant monthly repayments. All of these were under control/manageable but inflation, interest rate rises on mortgage and disparity in pay has squeezed this and makes balancing the books incredibly difficult.

I have rising debts due to rise in cost of living, food, electric and gas bills. I have three children and a partner who is unable to work due to disability. At times I will go without food as long as it means that my children can eat. I have had to pay out over £300 in school uniform and stationery.

Household bills are paid but have to use credit cards to pay for living the rest of the month.

With two children and a house to keep I will always ensure they eat and have a roof over their head; however, this winter we cannot afford to heat our house so will all be sleeping in one room. No heating is better than no food.

Still managing just but I have had to save less than I wanted to.

The rising cost of everything is worrying! I'm also trying to buy a house with my partner so we are both trying to save but it feels very out of reach with the size of deposit we'll need and our outgoings with London rent to pay. Most months by the last week I'm using my credit card.

Recently found myself using credit cards to make ends meet. Not every month, but six months to a year ago that would not have happened.

Cost of living has crippled me financially. I am going further and further into debt each month just trying to cover basic living necessities.

I am constantly in financial hell, as my wages is not covering my outgoings and the current financial crisis have made it much, much worse. I've been unable to make the regular payments I used to make towards my loan due to never having sufficient funds and cannot get a second job due to shift work. I regularly choose to feed my five-year-old son rather than eat and regularly get food from an app called "too good to go" where one gets the leftover food from shops or bakeries. I've got zero savings, spend my child benefit once it's paid and even though I contribute £30 towards "copperpot" every month from my wages, I immediately withdraw that to use for our needs. This is the worse few years of my life financially and the problem is that I can't even see a way out.

### **Missing meals**

The huge rise in energy cost, fuel cost, food costs on basic items and a pay rise which does not counter the rise of cost of living has given me real concern. To not miss any of my financial obligations I'll miss the odd meal so I can meet payments.

Sometimes, at the end of the month, in the last few days before we are paid, we have been short of money and I will miss lunch in order to provide for our children.

I didn't eat as I wanted the money for my child.

Just skipped lunch at work so as to not have to purchase food, especially when having to park at expensive car parks in order to get to work on time. I can only do one or the other, not both.

Skipped meals towards the end of a month to make sure the kids can have something. Not buying teas or coffee on duty to save money. Routinely miss breakfast so the kids have something before school.

While we have answered no to most of these questions, at the moment that is because we recently retired and have used the commutation to pay off everything. The simple fact is that prices of the essentials - food, petrol, electricity - are rising far more than the headline figure of 10% and nothing is being done to alleviate this. I am seriously concerned that we will simply be using our remaining commutation money on bills rather than quality of life, which was the whole idea.

Cost of living will have a significant impact, particularly in the winter. In preparation, we are going down to two meals a day or substituting an evening meal with cereal. We wash clothes on a 30-minute wash rather than the usual one hour. We shower at the gym whenever we can. We sit in the dark whilst watching TV. When we boil the kettle we put the excess water in a flask instead of boiling the kettle again. We are not doing presents at Christmas this year. I'm trying to save some money to

pay the energy bills when they increase in the winter. We recently got married and didn't go on a honeymoon as we know we will need that cash to pay the energy bill. I love my job but I just can't afford to stay in it any longer, so looking elsewhere now.

Often only eating twice a day (breakfast and evening meal) as cost of lunch is prohibitively expensive, especially when buying outside of work, and also now that the reasonably priced and subsidised canteens are all gone, cheap lunches don't exist.

Skipping meals at work to save money, or buying the cheapest meal deals in order to save.

Try to take lunch to work but sometimes don't eat lunch so can save money.

Getting married next year, in order to save enough money, I often don't eat three meals a day as I'm conscious about spending money and saving enough. I'm also looking to start a family and can't do that with my current savings. If my partner didn't contribute to my mortgage payments I would be unable to save any money at all, even with eating two meals a day.

We couldn't afford more shopping so I rationed food so my daughter could eat and I cut down, I skip breakfast so I can have a lunch. We were on a fixed rate deal that came to an end. The new fixed rate is £200 a month more, my daughter's childcare fees have also increased by £50 a month. So just on that we are £250 a month worse off, which the pay increase won't even cover half of that. I'm skipping meals so we can afford food and be able to cover bills.

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