

COST OF LIVING CRISIS

SPECIAL

In September, Congleton Town Council carried out an online survey looking at the impact of the soaring cost of energy and food prices on residents.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

- 23% struggling to make ends meet
- 15% fallen behind on some or all payments
- 53% kept up with bills, but with a struggle
- 30% not experiencing difficulty paying bills
- 69% were worried or extremely worried about bills over the next 12 months
- 46% buying less food and essentials
- 65% using less water, energy or food

- 62% reduced spending on non-essential items and leisure
- 52% eating or drinking out less frequently

This is based on 229 responses. The questionnaire was answered by people across Congleton. 50% were in full-time employment, 19% part-time and 20% were retired. 77% owned their own home, 8% in private rented and 15% in social housing. 70% were aged 30 to 59.

AREAS OF HELP ASKED FOR

Most requested was information about cheaper food options, support for mental health, understanding household finances and information about how and where to get financial help. Comments made it clear that the cost-of-living crisis is affecting the majority of residents, including many who have never needed or expected to have to ask for help before.

Food Help Available Locally

Congleton Social Supermarket – Open on Lawton Street on Wednesdays and Fridays 10am–2pm. It is run by the Green Tree House Café Charity. You can pick up 10 items of food for £4.50, 20 items for £9 or 30 for £13.50. Some items are limited. No referral needed.

StoreHouse, New Life Church, West Road has run a free food bank for the past 13 years for people facing an emergency or extreme hardship. They have helped more than 31,200 people. Help is available Monday to Friday 9.30am – 2.30pm. Parcels are by referral and there are more than 50 agencies that can refer you. More at: www.nlchurch.org.uk/storehouse

Congleton Chat's Back – the community is trying to help each other in extreme need. See the Chat's Back Facebook group.

Recipe Ideas – there is a wealth of information online about nourishing meals and purchasing cheaper food. Such as www.frugal.org.uk, BBC Good Food, Good Housekeeping Magazine. There are also many recipe books in Congleton library to help inspire people wishing to cook from scratch. Many supermarkets discount products when on their use by/best before date.

Friendly Places to Go

- **Old Saw Mill** – Community Café and so much more on Back River Street. Various groups and organisations, just call in for a chat.
- **Bear Grills and Wild and Wild** – Gift a coffee or meal – customers often leave a free donation for those who need it more.
- **Cricket Club** – Company Corner, every Monday 10am – 12noon.
- **New Life Church** – Jubilee Club– tea and toast every Tuesday.
- **Town Hall** – Mark's Events– food and friendship – starts Monday 17 October, 11am-3pm and Thursday 3.30-6.30pm – donations welcome if you can afford to contribute.
- **Congleton Library** – mixture of events – Story and Tea for grown-ups, Keen Cooks recipe swap, Crafternoon Tea, Crafty Natter, Good Vibrations sing along, Let's Chat sessions – or just a warm place to sit down and read a book!
- **Counting House** – refillable coffee - £1.25.

Mental Health Support

With increased pressure brought about by financial worries, it is not surprising that mental health concerns are also rising. Like physical illness, mental illness can affect anyone. And just like with a physical illness it is important that you seek support particularly if you:

- Feel sad and worthless
- Have lost interest in things that you once enjoyed
- Have feelings of worry and panic

Your local doctors' surgery is usually the best place to start. They will be able to provide you with different options of support which may include talking therapies, and/or medication.

There is a 24 hour, 7-day-a-week local NHS Mental Health Crisis Line run by NHS staff for people of all ages needing mental health support in our area. The number is: **0800 145 6485**.

If you suspect a friend, work colleague or family member is suffering one way you can support them is simply by listening, not interrupting, just letting them talk and respond in a non-judgemental way.

Details of local mental health groups can be found on: www.congleton-tc.gov.uk

Financial Support

Whatever the issue, you are not alone and millions of others are in a similar position. The issue will not magically resolve itself. If you can't make your payments it is best to speak to your lenders or suppliers and try and come to an arrangement. www.nationaldebtline.org has useful information on making the most of your money and dealing with high electric and gas bills. They can also be contacted on: **0808 808 4000**.

There is also a wealth of information at:

www.moneyhelper.org.uk which is a free service provided by the money and pensions service and sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions. For self-employed people:

www.businessdebtline.org or tel: **0800 197 6062**.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk has specialist debt advisors who can talk you through your options – call: **0808 808 4000**.

You can use a free and anonymous benefits calculator to check what benefits you could be entitled to – see: www.gov.uk/benefits-calculator

