

Finance, benefits and employment

Overview

Around 30% of disabled people live in poverty (Schwendel, 2020). Likewise, 42% of people who live in a family reliant on disability benefits are in poverty, and 66% of people living in an out-of-work family where someone is disabled are living in poverty (Pardoe, 2021). The research for this report was carried out before the impact of the cost of living crisis was clear. Said research reflects the degree of poverty and financial anxiety prior to the inflation and price rises we currently face.

When surveyed in March 2022, many respondents were struggling financially, especially those who were also paying adult social care charges. People often didn't receive the benefits they felt they were entitled to, and felt that they could not have a good quality of life while on benefits.

While many found employment a positive experience, there were many people who were not in employment and wanted to be, as well as people not able to be in employment. Different strategies are needed to ensure each of these groups has its needs met. This is without the presumption that employment is an inherently good thing for disabled people; instead, we should aim to break down barriers which prevent disabled people who wish, and are able to, from entering the workforce.

Recommendations from the report

The report made recommendations in a number of areas, including finance, benefits and employment. Many of these related specifically to the cost of living crisis:

- A review of the financial impact of the cost of living crisis on disabled people.
- An analysis of the impact on people who may not have received significant support from the Central Government, or who may have recently lost eligibility from the Warm Homes Discount Scheme and are struggling as a result.
- A process of financial support for disabled people facing additional, disability-related energy costs (e.g., considering the energy use of carers, need for a more heated house than others, or to run medical equipment).
- An uplift to the Minimum Income Guarantee and Personal Expenses Allowance to reflect the rate and impact of inflation.
- A commitment to ensuring that charging for adult social care never takes anyone below the poverty line, currently at £141 per week (Trust for London, 2022).

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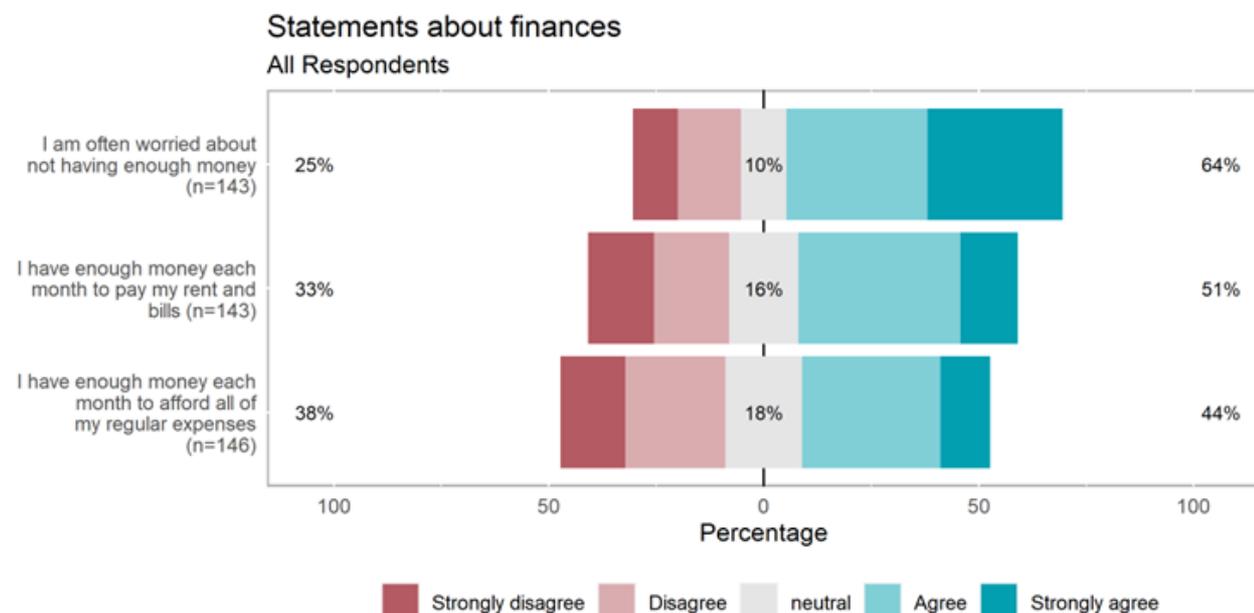
- A commitment to the principle that social care should be free at the point of access, working towards achieving this, exploring interim steps such as reduced charging, financial modelling, and work with other Local Authorities to explore feasibility.
- Personal Independence Payments (PIP) should be discounted from this calculation, as it is there for additional costs of disability.

Other recommendations related to the development of a 'single point of contact' service for disabled people engaging with the Council, which would ideally be run by a DDPULO. This service would also offer broader community navigation, providing support and signposting for Deaf and disabled people with issues affecting their lives. This would include support around employment, finance, benefits, and debt.

Evidence and reflections

Finance

Many respondents reported being in very challenging financial situations. This is true even in March 2022, prior to the significant worsening of the cost of living crisis.



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Almost ⅔ of respondents were, “...often worried about not having enough money,” while only ½ of respondents agreed that they have enough money each month to pay their rent and bills. Similarly, less than ½ of respondents said they have enough money each month to afford their regular expenses.

This is concerning, as this report suggests that ⅔ of respondents were unable to afford regular expenses even prior to inflation hitting 10% (the cost of living crisis). This sense of ‘barely-getting by’ was notable in survey responses.

“

...I manage, but staying on top of things is a challenge, and I have a constant anxiety about going back to a situation where I don’t have enough money to live.

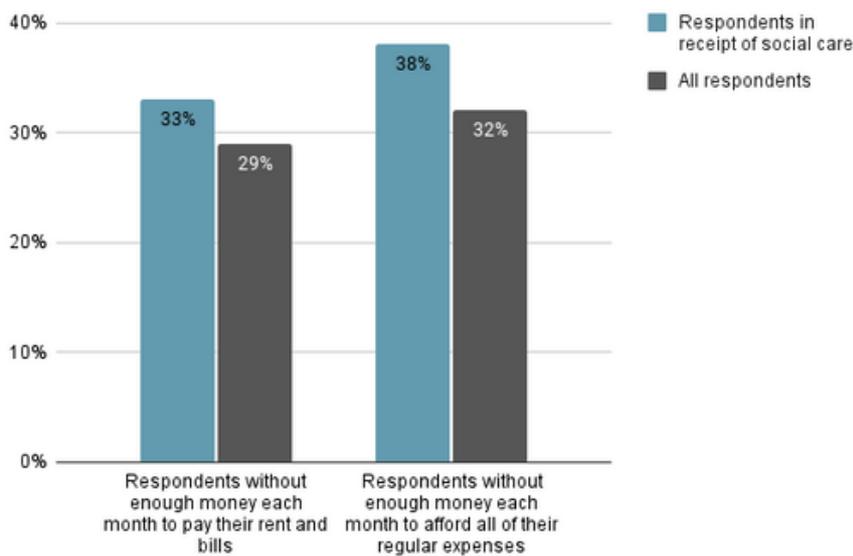
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“

...When bills go up, I will not have enough.

”

Financial situation of respondents split by those in receipt of adult social care



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...I'm worried as everything is going up, i.e., gas, electric, food, and as my benefits are not going up as much I will struggle to pay for [adult social care] services.



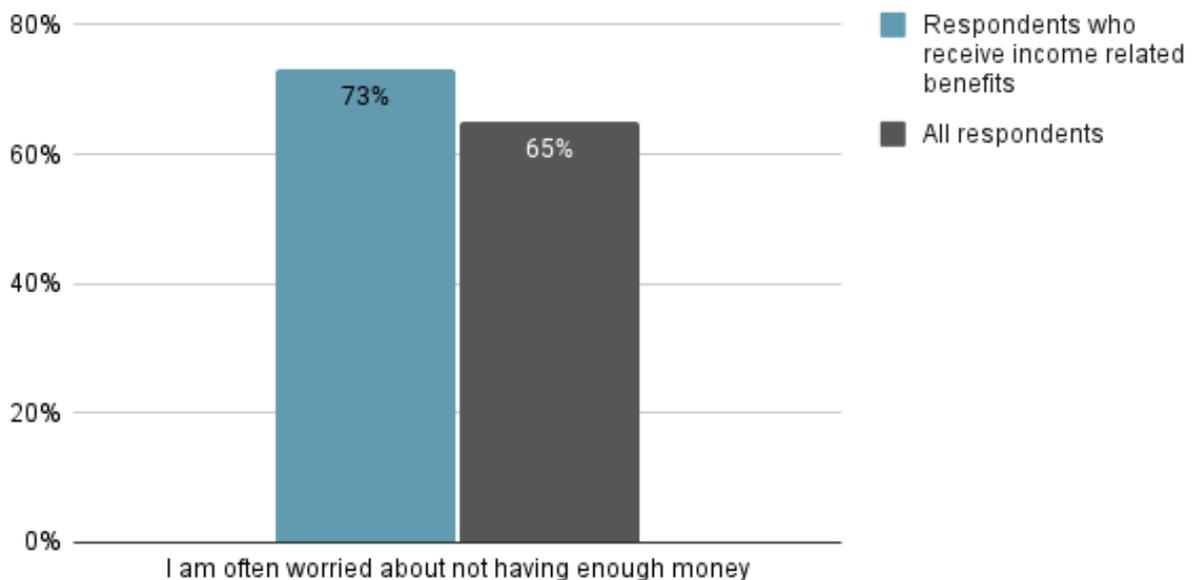
Charging for adult social care

Respondents in receipt of social care were more likely than all other respondents not to have enough money to pay their rent and bills, with 33% of respondents in receipt of adult social care vs 29% of all respondents. Likewise, respondents in receipt of social care were more likely to not have enough money each month to meet all of their regular expenses, with 38% of respondents in receipt of adult social care vs 32% of all respondents.

The impact of charging for social care on the financial situations of respondents was significant. Whilst only 44% of all respondents had enough money to afford all their regular expenses each month, only 29% of people paying for social care had enough money to meet their needs - while 32% didn't.

Benefits

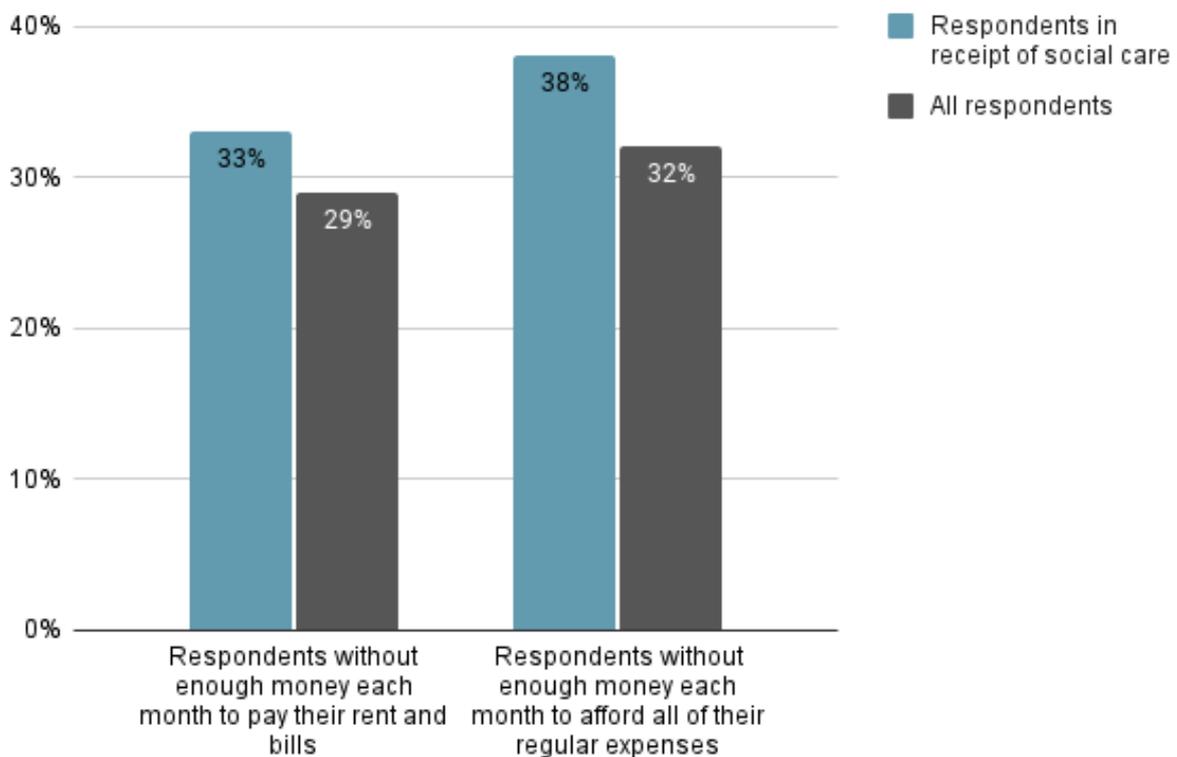
Respondents who are often worried about not having enough money



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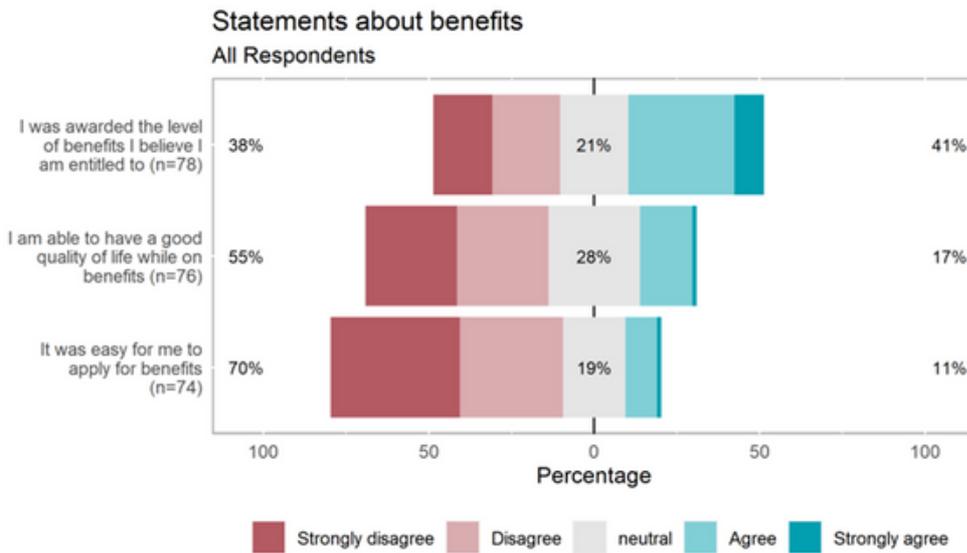
Respondents in receipt of income-related benefits were more likely than all respondents to often be worried about not having enough money. As such, these respondents were more likely to report being unable to pay rent and bills, and being unable to afford regular expenses.

Financial situation of respondents split by those in receipt of adult social care



As well as the financial challenges faced by respondents in receipt of these benefits, there were also challenges in accessing benefits and the correct level of benefits. Only two in five respondents were awarded the level of benefits they believe they were entitled to, and less than half of respondents reported being able to have a good quality of life on benefits. Three out of four respondents reported that applying for benefits was difficult.

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The assessment and provision of benefits is in part handled locally (e.g., housing benefits) and partially nationally (e.g., disability benefits). However, a lack of information concerning what people are entitled to often limits their ability. This suggests that benefits support and signposting would be beneficial in Lewisham.



...Disabled people need to know where to get help when it comes to benefits as the process is very stressful.

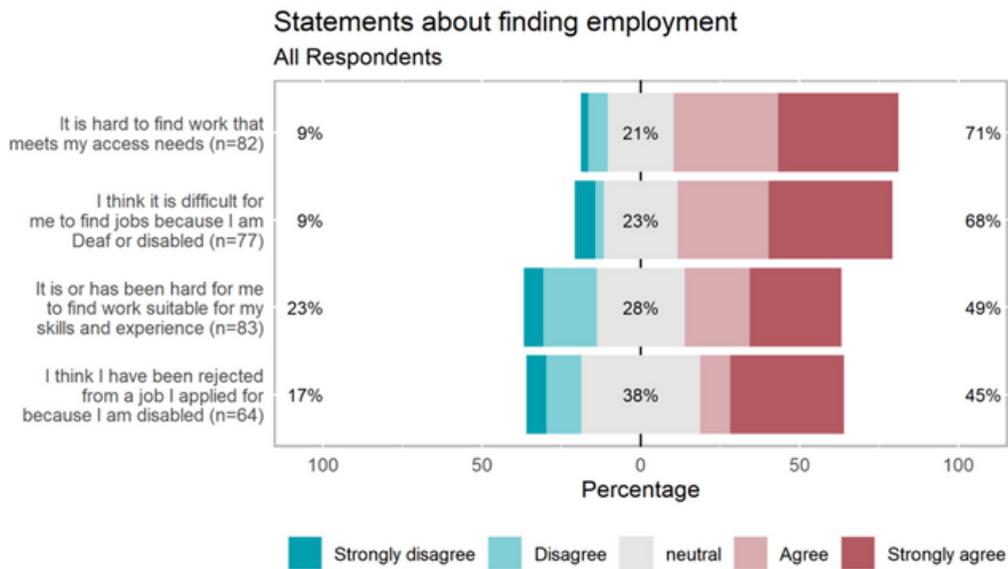


Employment

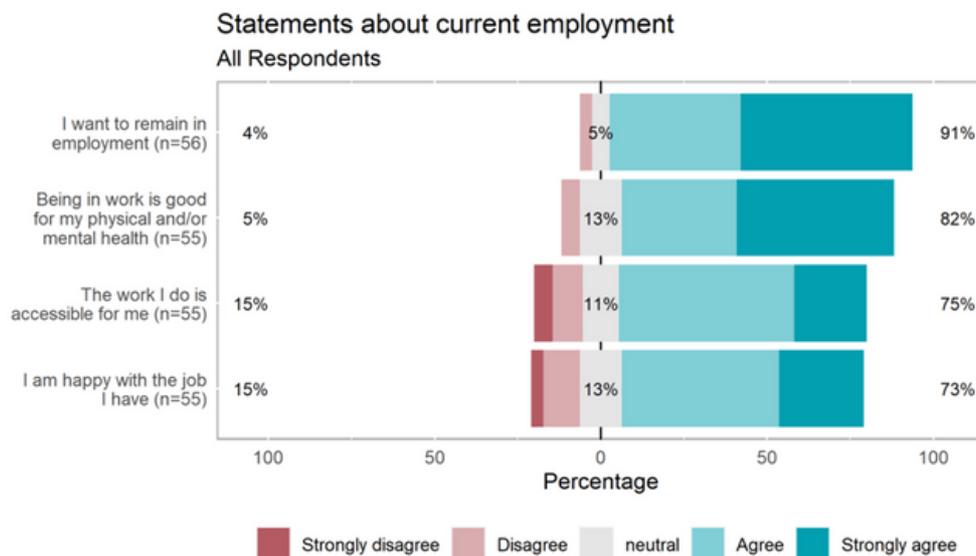
While some disabled people are unable to work, others would be able to and would like to, but cannot find appropriate employment due to societal ableism, and have difficulty finding work that fits their access requirements. For those that are in work and wish to remain so, supporting them to remain in work is important. For others, it is important that everyone is supported to find work which meets their access requirements, whilst not pressuring those who cannot work into working.

Respondents trying to find employment struggled to find appropriate work, with almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents finding it hard to find work that met their access needs, and $\frac{1}{2}$ of respondents struggling to find work suitable for their skills and experience. These responses reflect the prevalence of under-employment of disabled people. More than $\frac{2}{3}$ of respondents found it difficult to work because they are Deaf or disabled, and almost half believe they were rejected for a job they applied for because they are disabled.

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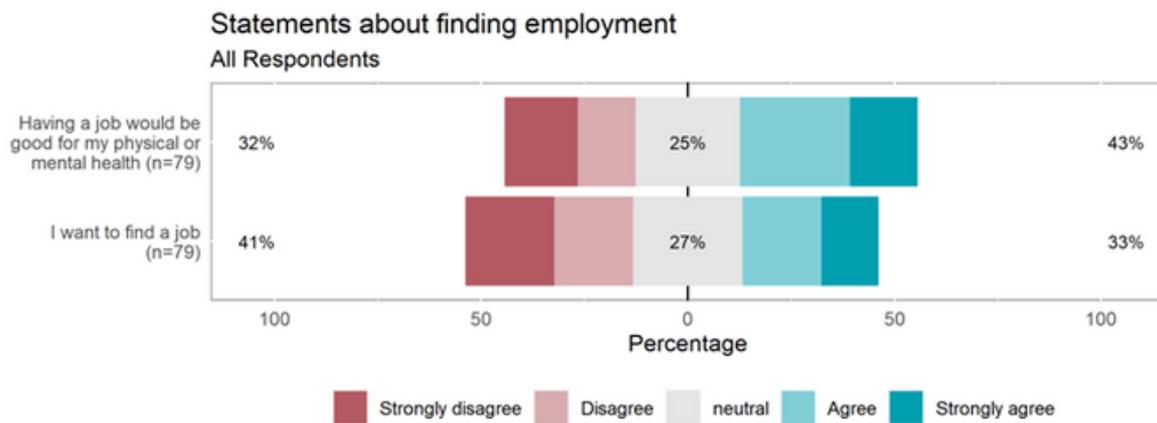


For those who were in work, many respondents reported a positive experience. For ¾ of respondents, they were happy with the job they had, and felt their work was accessible for them. ¼ of respondents reported that being in work was good for their physical and mental health, and 9/10 of respondents wished to remain in employment.



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This data illustrates one respondent's comment of, "...work per se isn't good for anyone. The right kind of work, that pays a good wage and with a good employer can be good for most people most of the time."

The welfare system has the stated intention of using conditionality (making receipt of benefits conditional on certain actions) to encourage people into work, but this is often counterproductive (Wright and Dwyer, 2022) and harmful (Dwyer et al., 2020).

The evidence of our research suggested that where people wanted to be in work, the major blocks to finding employment were around navigating gaining employment and the benefits system. The challenges to gaining employment related to finding work involved assigning work appropriate for the job-seeker's skills, experience, and access requirements.

“

...the benefits system is made to keep you down, and if they would allow you to work perhaps you could find a job and then build up to full-time in a healthy work environment. Then you wouldn't need to be reliant on the benefits system anymore.

”

Other respondents recognised that being in work was not appropriate for them. People who are unable to be partially or fully in work require access to welfare benefits set at a level where they can afford a good standard of living. Whilst benefit strategy is set at a national level, these findings should also be cause for local reflection.

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There is a clear need for support for those disabled people who are unable to gain appropriate employment and wish to do so. This is especially true around employment trials that do not risk access to benefits, and with the right support in place. The key element to implementing support is to ensure there is no conditionality in this process, and that the focus is on supporting the people who want to, and feel able to, be in work. At the same time, there is a second, obvious, clear need for increased financial support for disabled people who are not in work (especially given the extent to which they are in poverty).