



COST OF LIVING & COMMUNITY SAFETY 2022/2023

PURPOSE

Inform members and stakeholders of anticipated consequences to community safety of the cost of living emergency, across Scotland and the United Kingdom.

BACKGROUND

Inflation and interest rates are rising. The cost of energy - heating and lighting - for individuals, families, public services and businesses is at record highs. Citizens' wages and benefits are falling in real terms as the price of everything rises. The effects are being felt now and are forecast to become broader, deeper and more severe as winter grips. The least well off and the vulnerable will be disproportionately affected. This has been widely reported and is universally accepted as undisputed, objective truth.

On 28 September, the Scottish Community Safety Network (SCSN) convened a virtual roundtable of key partners from across the community safety sector in Scotland. Representations were made by several urban and rural Local Authorities (LAs) and departments, the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service (SFRS), Community Justice Scotland (CJS), Neighbourhood Watch Scotland (NWS), Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) and others.

The objective was to bring together informed practitioners with meaningful insight, experience and knowledge, to examine the immediate dangers to community safety; to highlight foreseeable risks and issues of concern; and alert partners to provoke consideration and mitigation.

This summary is not exhaustive. The group agreed it was important to avoid overwhelming readers. Instead, this list is deliberative and curated, targeted and - to varying degrees - actionable.

KEY ISSUES (10)

- **ROAD SAFETY**
Citizens may delay or avoid costs of car maintenance and ownership, including insurance, annual servicing and MOTs, replacing lights, tyres, wipers and other essential components. Owners might consider second-hand or unsafe alternatives. The risks to road users will be exacerbated in winter, as the weather deteriorates and conditions become more hazardous, the risks will become more pronounced.
- **WATER SAFETY**
Local swimming pools may increase prices, reduce opening hours or close premises altogether, due to prohibitive running costs. Children and adults may lose access to essential lessons, limiting opportunities for learning or improving basic water skills. The consequences

of this – more injuries and deaths in Scottish waters – may be felt in the months and years ahead, particularly in summertime. Children will be particularly vulnerable, during a critical age of development, with many already experiencing disruption caused by national lockdowns and the pandemic.

- **HOME SAFETY**

- **PURCHASING**

Residents with reduced budgets may choose to purchase cheaper, counterfeit goods, particularly as the pressure of Christmas presses on families. Risks of electrical fires may rise, and items such as fake children's toys could increase risks of suffocation, strangulation, contamination and choking. Small retailers, particularly unregulated and online, may try to sell items by concealing true origin, and pass bogus, unsafe products as legitimate originals.

- **CHILDCARE & CARE GIVERS**

Working families with children in supervised care will feel cost increases acutely. Some parents may feel they have to compromise and cut back childcare arrangements – perhaps leaving children alone – in order to continue working. Care givers, to the disabled and vulnerable will also be under severe financial and mental pressure, and might contemplate similar cost cutting. The risks to children and the vulnerable in these scenarios are profound.

- **HEATING & LIGHTING**

Desperate householders - those who feel they have no alternative - are already attempting to bypass electrical meters, re-open unused chimneys, burn fires in uncontrolled spaces inside the home, cook on disposable barbecues indoors, and seal doors and windows with makeshift and unfit insulation. Gas boiler maintenance and replacement will become unaffordable for many. Upkeep of electrical wiring and safe sockets will be too expensive for some. Mooted national blackouts means a significant number of the public will use candles to light rooms, substantially increasing fire risk.

- **MAINTENANCE & PREVENTION**

The cost of installing mandatory smoke, heat and carbon monoxide alarms – now required by law in Scotland – is unaffordable for some, and will be for many more. Stair gates, hand rails, child safe blind cords, window latches and cupboard locks, furniture edge-guards and secure wall-mounts will become an expense too far for lots of people. Small changes, such as not salting icy pathways in winter to save money could have significant adverse impact, increasing likelihood of slips and falls, placing residents at heightened risk and putting the NHS under added pressure.

- **AQUISITIVE CRIME**

Increasing numbers of thefts, break-ins and shoplifting are certain. Some people may turn to crime, to try to meet basic needs. Others might try to exploit blackouts, aging or broken alarm systems, and less secure or poorly maintained premises and properties.

- **COMMUNITY JUSTICE**

More people will enter the criminal justice system for the first time. Exposure to the law, especially for 'lower end' offences can have profound consequences, damage life chances and trap people – particularly the young – in a cycle which adversely impacts confidence,

behaviour and trust, and disproportionately pushes people towards a cycle of reoffending and stigma. The cost of living emergency will likely exacerbate this issue.

- **DOMESTIC ABUSE**

Those suffering domestic abuse are likely to feel a greater sense of entrapment, owing to financial ties and complexities with partners and families, unable to escape abusive relationships. The cost of living emergency is expected to exacerbate some abuses, resulting in higher volumes of coercion, assault, serious injury and fatalities.

- **SCAMS & FRAUD**

Citizens will be increasingly exposed to attempted online phishing scams and fraud via email, and blackmail through social media, email and mobile phones. There has been an increase in these crimes since the pandemic began in 2020. This is expected to accelerate as organised criminal gangs (OCGs) exploit these avenues further. OCGs are expected to expand these activities and continue to recruit children, young adults, the vulnerable; those most susceptible to coercive suggestion and intimidation. Loan sharks will also seek to exploit an increasing number of citizens, including those who perhaps have never known destitution.

- **STAFF RESILIENCE**

Frontline staff across the sector will be exposed to higher volumes of publics in distress, including incidents involving suicide, aggression, anger, upset and desperation. In many circumstances, staff will feel helpless or unable to assist which may be detrimental - after prolonged periods - to the mental health, safety, happiness and judgement of employees. The effects of the cost of living crisis are expected to be most acute in winter, at the time flu and covid typically reduce staffing capacity. This will further increase the burden on already stressed workforces.

- **IMPACT TO THIRD SECTOR**

Volunteer numbers are expected to fall, leading to reductions in essential services such as care giving, food deliveries, befriending and mentoring. This will happen as demand for the same services is expected to increase dramatically.

- **BEHAVIOUR CHANGES**

Life will feel bleak and hopeless for many communities. Access to drugs and alcohol as a means to cope, medicate and escape may be attractive for some. Dependency, injuries and fatalities, and stress on health services are all likely to increase. Some individuals may seek medical prescription of opioids which could lead to cycles of dependency and addiction.

NEXT STEPS

It is important to predict and identify critical community safety issues like these. But there also needs to be realistic alternatives, to help divert away from dangerous activities and behaviours mentioned. Desperate people will do desperate things to stay warm, feed their family, or withdraw from pain.

We encourage all partners to work together, with creativity, invention and single purpose, to find collective solutions to difficult, harrowing realities:

- **Effective messaging** is something we can all do. Consider using your existing platforms and in-person groups, and coordinate to amplify safety messages aimed towards those most at risk.

- Organisations learnt [valuable lessons from the pandemic](#), particularly the significance and impact of collaboration and multi-agency working. Think how you might apply similar, effective practices and processes in this crisis; joint briefings, tasking meetings, data sharing etc.
- Anticipating the risks and dangers ahead gives opportunity to prepare and mitigate through [early interventions and diversion](#), such as consideration of direct measures as an alternative to court appearances and criminal convictions.

SCSN welcomes further input from partners.

We hope you find this briefing helpful.

ARTICLES OF NOTE

- ROAD SAFETY
<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/sep/07/cost-of-living-crisis-is-risk-to-uk-road-safety-says-halfords-boss>
- LOAN SHARKS
<https://www.thenational.scot/news/21326589.fears-raised-loan-sharks-preying-glasgow-families-amid-cost-of-living-crisis/?ref=psapp>
- DOMESTIC ABUSE
<https://www.themj.co.uk/Cost-of-living-crisis-to-lead-to-catastrophic-winter-/224101#>
- VOLUNTEER NUMBERS
<https://tfn.scot/news/targeted-volunteer-support-for-most-vulnerable-communities-needed-report-warns>
- SHOPLIFTING
<https://1919magazine.co.uk/october2022/>
- EXPLOITATION OF YOUNG & VULNERABLE
<https://crimestoppers-uk.org/campaigns-media/news/2022/sep/exploitation-of-vulnerable-people-highlighted-in-new-campaign-to-tackle-county-lines-drug-dealing-in>
- WORKFORCE CAPACITY & STRAIN
<https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/warning-of-civil-unrest-as-police-scotland-numbers-left-unsustainable-3860246>