

# Caring for equines and the cost of living

Survey findings  
June 2023

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**The National Equine Welfare Council (NEWC) has been a united voice on equine welfare matters for over three decades. Member organisations from across the equine sector have seen for themselves how sharply horse care costs have risen in recent months. In December 2022 and January 2023, a small group of members, led by Redwings Horse Sanctuary, conducted a survey on behalf of NEWC.**

The objective was to gather evidence about the impact of the cost-of-living rises on equines and their owners, share that information with the United Kingdom and devolved governments, and identify what advice and support may be helpful.

Equines are at the heart of life for many people. They are more than a hobby - they are family members, a passion, a purpose. For many they are a route to a healthier, happier, more fulfilling life. The contribution horses can make to positive mental health and physical wellbeing is well documented and is echoed consistently throughout these survey findings.



The high number of responses to the survey - more than 8,000 - shows how important this issue is for many people, and that the impact of these financially challenging times is being felt across the whole of the UK.

The report makes clear that large numbers of horse owners are having to make significant personal sacrifices in order to continue caring for their horses. Many were already budgeting hard to keep an equine in their life and are now having to take steps such as working longer hours, borrowing money and selling possessions in order to cope. Some are considering options including selling their horse or very sadly having to make the decision to euthanase their elderly or injured horse, rather than keep them long into retirement. The impact of high living costs is not only a concern for equine welfare, but also for human welfare as the stress of struggling to provide for much-loved horses and donkeys is taking a significant toll for many.

Owners are also adapting how they care for their horses in order to make savings. Alongside steps such as increasing turnout or reducing feed, some owners are also reducing or stopping vaccinations, delaying visits from professionals such as vets and farriers, and opting for home remedies for horse health issues. This is naturally a concern to NEWC and its members, particularly as equine rescue centres, sanctuaries and rehoming organisations are also facing unprecedented challenges due to increased costs, meaning their capacity to support owners and offer space to those equines most in need is very limited.

While only a small number of survey respondents had already reached a point where they were unable to meet their horses' basic care needs at the time of completing the survey, there is clear concern among many more owners about the effect of continued financial pressures through 2023. The number of owners struggling to maintain their horses' welfare will only increase if the current economic climate continues into a second winter season.

NEWC will be monitoring the situation closely over the coming months, and devising ways to provide targeted advice and support where possible. A follow-up survey is planned for later this year to assess the continued impact of living costs on horses and their owners.



**Carolyn Madgwick**  
Chair, National Equine Welfare Council

Horses have been an integral part of human society for thousands of years.

While our day-to-day reliance on equines has been largely replaced in the UK through mechanisation and other technological advances, horses retain a unique place in our leisure pursuits, culture and affections.



£8.5bn

The equestrian sector is worth an estimated **£5 billion**<sup>1</sup> with horse racing contributing a further **£4.1 billion**<sup>2</sup>. The sector as a whole employs around **250,000 people**<sup>3</sup>.



In 2023 there were around **850,000 horses in Great Britain**<sup>4</sup> and **331,000 horse-owning households**<sup>5</sup>.



Many more people are involved in equestrianism, with **1.82 million people riding horses regularly in 2022**<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> British Equestrian Trade Association, *National Equestrian Survey 2023*, [Weatherby: BETA, 2023]. (Contact [info@beta-uk.org](mailto:info@beta-uk.org) for more information.)

<sup>2</sup> British Horseracing Authority, *Written evidence submitted by the British Horseracing Authority - Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee inquiry into impact of Covid-19 on DCMS*, <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/7020/pdf/> [accessed 21.06.2023].

<sup>3</sup> Lantra Sector Skills Council, *A Study into the Business and Skills Requirements of the UK Equine Industry*, [Kenilworth: Lantra, 2011]; British Horse Industry Confederation (now British Horse Council), *BHIC Briefing - Size and Scope of the Equine Sector*, [London: BHIC, 2009]: 2.

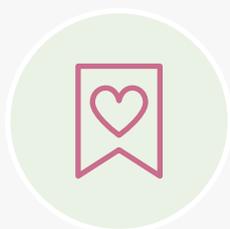
<sup>4</sup> Minimum number of horses 726,000 - British Equestrian Trade Association, *National Equestrian Survey 2023*; maximum number of horses 1.2 million adjusted from 1.5 million to take duplicate records and deceased equidae into account - Equine Register, *About us*, [www.equineregister.co.uk/about-us](http://www.equineregister.co.uk/about-us) [accessed 21.06.2023].

<sup>5</sup> British Equestrian Trade Association, *National Equestrian Survey 2023*.

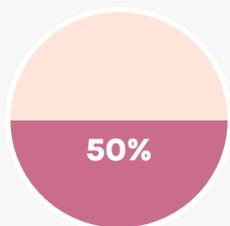
<sup>6</sup> Where a regular rider is a rider who has ridden at least once a month for the last 12 months. British Equestrian Trade Association, *National Equestrian Survey 2023*.

Horses make much more than an economic contribution to society.

Research shows repeatedly that interaction with horses can have multiple positive benefits on human wellbeing.



Equine-centred activities are used to support a wide range of vulnerable people, from the long-established Riding for the Disabled Association<sup>7</sup> to the increasing use of equine-assisted therapy to help alleviate a range of mental health issues<sup>8</sup>.



In one study more than 50% of veterans with PTSD showed sustained improvements<sup>9</sup> in PTSD and depression symptoms after equine-assisted therapy<sup>10</sup>.

The term 'horses' is used for familiarity in this report but refers to horses, ponies, donkeys and mules. The word 'owner' includes those who loan or share a horse without having legal ownership.

<sup>7</sup> Riding for the Disabled Association, *Impact*, <https://rda.org.uk/impact/> [accessed 21.06.2023].

<sup>8</sup> Maker, A.H., *Equine Assisted Therapy: A Unique and Effective Intervention*, Psychology Today, [www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/helping-kids-cope/201903/equine-assisted-therapy-unique-and-effective-intervention](http://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/helping-kids-cope/201903/equine-assisted-therapy-unique-and-effective-intervention) [published 23.03.2019, accessed 21.06.2023].

<sup>9</sup> PTSD UK, *How horse riding and 'equine therapy' has helped PTSD sufferers*, [www.ptsd.uk.org/how-horse-riding-and-equine-therapy-has-helped-ptsd-sufferers/](http://www.ptsd.uk.org/how-horse-riding-and-equine-therapy-has-helped-ptsd-sufferers/) [accessed 21.06.2023].

<sup>10</sup> Jurga, F., *Horsing Around In Childhood Really Can Change Your Life*, Equus Magazine, <https://equusmagazine.com/blog-equus/horsing-childhood-wsu-evidence-cortisol-stress-hormone-16393/> [published 10.03.2017, accessed 21.06.2023].

In the UK the price of consumer goods and services rose at the fastest rate for 40 years in the 12 months to October 2022<sup>11</sup>.

A range of factors have significantly affected markets, including high inflation, continued recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, extreme weather events at home and abroad, and the war in Ukraine.



The outcome has been that salary increases have largely not kept up with price rises, resulting in what is widely termed a cost-of-living crisis<sup>12</sup>.



<sup>11</sup> Office for National Statistics, *Cost of living latest insights*, [www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/costofliving/latestinsights](https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/costofliving/latestinsights) [published 21.06.2023, accessed 21.06.2023].

<sup>12</sup> Institute for Government, *Cost of living crisis*, [www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainer/cost-living-crisis](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainer/cost-living-crisis) [published 07.02.2023, accessed 21.06.2023].

The survey was developed by six NEWC members with the support of a consultant researcher.

It was made available online through survey software under licence to Redwings Horse Sanctuary between 21st December 2022 and 31st January 2023.



The survey was anonymous and no personal information was collected. Only people who were over 18, based in the UK and responsible for at least one equine were eligible to take part. There were a maximum of 59 questions for people to answer.

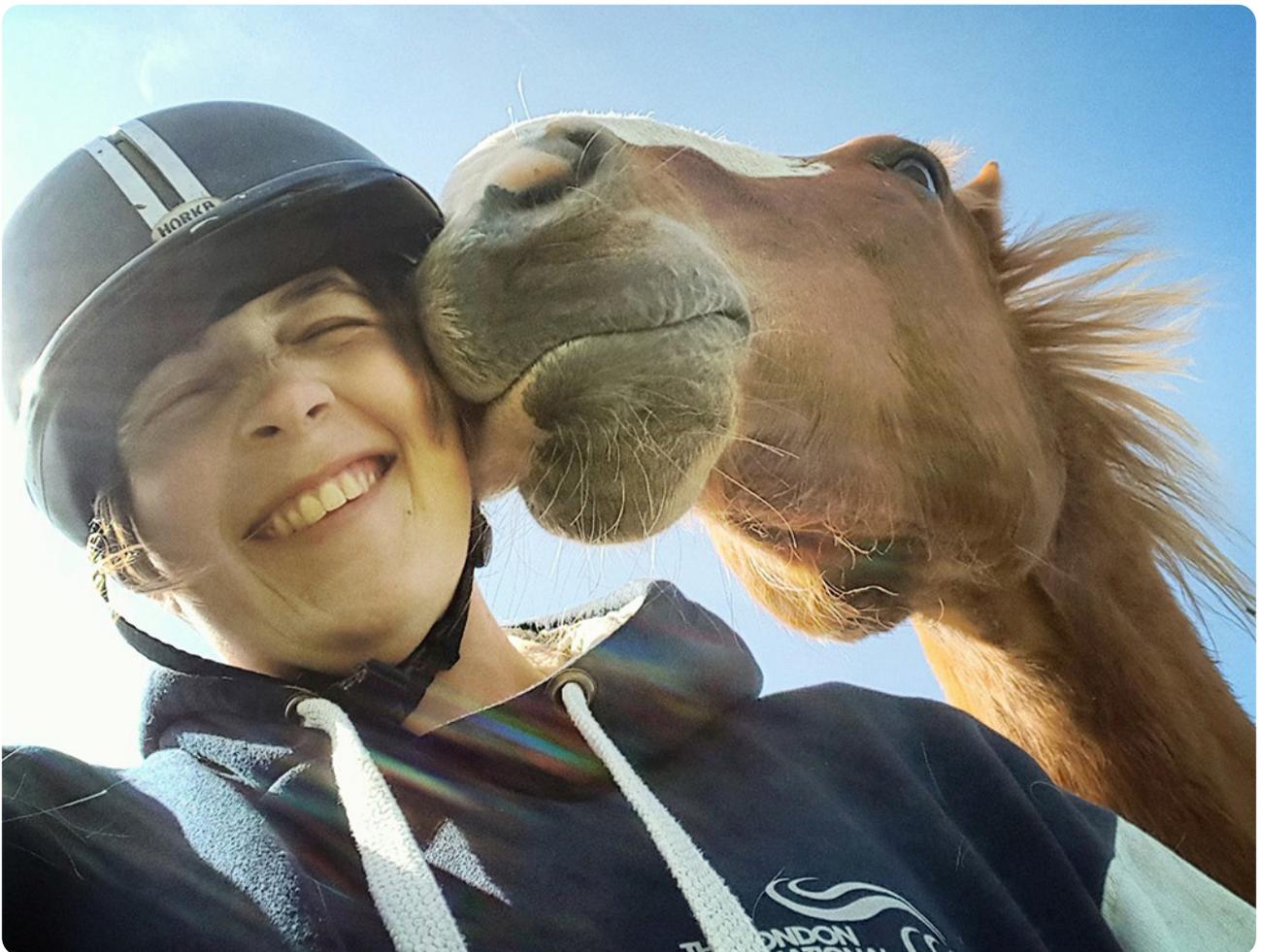
- A total of 8,252 complete responses were submitted
- More than 22,000 open text responses were provided
- Responses were received from across the UK

The free-text responses provided powerful insights into the issues faced by owners. A selection has been included that are taken directly from survey comments. Some quotes have been lightly edited for clarity.



**While overall horse care costs vary depending on the circumstances of individual equines and their owners, the resources and services needed to provide for any equine are rarely cheap. The cost of equine goods and services have risen alongside those in other sectors, putting additional financial pressure on many owners in addition to increased household bills.**

Members of NEWC voiced concerns over the potential impact of rising living costs on the ability of owners to provide for their horses in autumn 2022. The decision was made to use a survey to investigate the impact of high prices on the sector in order to target efforts to provide support from within the welfare sector, and to share findings more widely where relevant.



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Reference: NEWC (2023)

National Equine Welfare Council.  
*Caring for equines and the cost  
of living – Survey findings June  
2023.* Norfolk: Redwings Horse  
Sanctuary, 2023.

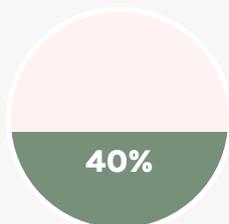


Survey findings were collected a few months after living costs had started to escalate and just a few weeks after inflation peaked in October 2022. Yet at this stage, it was clear that horse owners were already feeling the effect of increased costs and squeezed incomes.



Just over half of owners said that the cost of living has had little or no impact on their ability to provide basic care for their horses.

“We are reasonably comfortably off so can still afford horse care but for the first time I am having to look at the cost of everything and work out if it's really needed and if there is a cheaper option.”



However, by January 2023 more than 40% of owners were already having to make additional sacrifices in order to meet their horses' needs.

“Significant increases in general living costs have severely affected my disposable income. My ponies are now a luxury I can ill afford.”

“If I didn't work six days-plus a week, it would be a high impact.”

“My animals come first. I have mitigated impact on them by foregoing things such as heating, dental care and eye test/new glasses for me.”

“This winter I made the decision to go without heating and hot water and change my own eating to be able to provide the same level of care for both my horse and dog.”

“I have to eat less food or lower quality food, I try not to turn the heating on unless absolutely freezing, etc. I don't want to sell my horse, so I have to find ways of meeting the extra costs to keep her.”

“Although I say medium impact on how I care for horses, it has been a huge impact on my mental health worrying about it.”

“My horse keeps my mental health stable (no pun intended) so I will do whatever I need to do to keep him and enjoy him.”

“I'm basically not eating anything other than cereal and toast.”



A small but worrying proportion of respondents report that they are already unable to provide basic care for their horses due to rising costs. While this group makes up less than one per cent of survey respondents, this still equates to 55 individuals struggling to care for horses in difficult circumstances.



Together, this group are responsible for more than 140 equines whose welfare may already be compromised.



If cost-of-living pressures continue, the number of horse owners who find themselves unable to meet horses' basic needs alongside their own will inevitably increase.

“I cannot afford jabs anymore or to have their teeth checked, and the supplements have gone out the window. They are also having to live out all year round as can't afford the bedding (even though they are all in their 20s now) and I can't afford fuel to visit them twice a day.”

“I have not been able to offer my ridden horse the proper lameness investigation and treatment that she needs.”

“I'm going to have to try and sell or rehome to a charity as it's getting too much.”

Like costs in almost all areas of life, survey findings show that horse care has become significantly more expensive since prices began to rise sharply in 2022.



We asked owners about their experience of cost changes in five broad areas relating to horse care, and more than half of people had seen increases in all five areas. In particular, more than 90% of people had experienced increases in the price of fuel and of forage, feed and bedding.



Forage, feed and bedding are basic resources that owners may find difficult to cut back on without compromising basic horse care.

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Fuel is essential for many owners to attend horses that don't live close to their own home.

“Fuel is crippling me even though my horse is only 15 mins away and I only go once a day.”

“My horse was at a riding school livery yard but they put their monthly fee up twice in a year, making it £100 a month more expensive.”

**The cost of using equine professional services had also increased for the majority of people.**

**The most widely reported rises were for veterinary fees and insurance.**



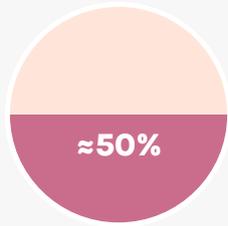
More than half of respondents experienced a rise in the cost of booking a farrier, physiotherapist, equine dentist, saddlery fitter or equine behaviourist.

“Insurance premium increased by £200.”

“My farrier costs have gone up... medications have gone up a lot and I now get POMs [prescription only medicines] online rather than from vet.”

“Vet fees are horrendous - a call out on Saturday - just after 5.30pm - cost me £180 just for the vet coming out.”

“He also needs regular physio which will have to stop or significantly reduce, therefore, he'll be more sore.”



Almost half of survey respondents said they had experienced an unexpected financial challenge in the previous year.

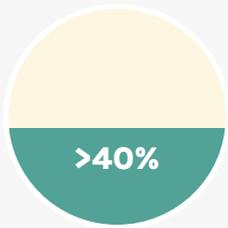


More than 1,000 comments for this question gave reasons from redundancy, illness and bereavement to childcare challenges, large vet bills and vehicle repairs.

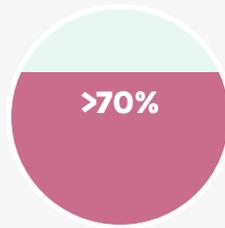
**Of the people who had experienced these additional challenges, more than 90% said it had impacted their horse care budget, showing that equine welfare is inextricably linked to wider personal and societal issues.**

“My husband was in a coma at the beginning of last year. He was off work for nearly six months. That was challenging. Then my horse suddenly became fatally ill. Financially, that was a challenge. Then, two days after our horse died one of our dogs had a stroke. That was yet another financial challenge.”

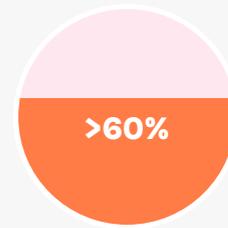
## The level of anxiety is clear...



More than 40% were affected by the cost of living at the time of completing the survey.



Over 70% anticipate being directly impacted by high costs in the coming months.



More than 60% are concerned about their horse care finances as 2023 progresses.

“Only just covering it and will need to make sacrifices soon (in the next month) to continue.”

“I am concerned for this coming year and the future with household basic bills increasing so much which will affect spare money.”

“Currently coping, but worried how many more increases there will be.”

“The price rises are worrying and may become more difficult when my mortgage deal ends this year.”

“I'm impacted more by the stress of anticipated financial struggles as household bills will increase.”

“In the longer term it is unsustainable, which is why we are leaving the UK.”

**When asked about horse care cost concerns over the coming months, the biggest worries were around the price of forage and feed, veterinary care and emergency care.**

**More than one in ten owners were also worried about the cost of livery or field/stable rent.**



## One in five owners are facing difficult decisions relating to horse ownership due to the cost of living.



The most common options being considered are looking for a sharer, selling their horse or, very sadly, having to euthanase their horse (often referred to as putting a horse to sleep).



## While the survey indicates more owners will be looking to rehome horses because of financial pressures, the market is also likely to be affected by fewer people able to take on a new horse.



Four out of five people said they are not planning to take on another horse in the next six months.

Almost one in ten respondents said they would have liked another horse, but that it is now too expensive.

"I am already trying to sell one of my horses, and I'm considering selling another as costs are too high for me to live. I'm struggling to meet my own basic needs."

"I'm looking for options if I can no longer care for my horses - loaning, sharing, support from an equine charity, horse retirement homes - but without success."

"I can see it getting worse, it may mean some difficult choices about my old boy."

"I've already had my old mare put to sleep because of costs and I'm considering selling one if not all of them - the stress is overwhelming."

**Deciding to put a horse to sleep is not easy for any owner, but the issue is especially heartbreaking and challenging when finances have an impact on the options available.**



“My horses are getting older and have served me well. They are all well at the moment and ticking over. I would hate to have to make a choice to euthanase based on finance alone.”

“I wouldn't choose to have expensive veterinary treatments and would consider euthanasia probably sooner than with previous horses.”

“My income has decreased and the cost of household bills has skyrocketed - making me have to consider having my older horse put to sleep because the increased costs are almost impossible to meet.”

“I've seen more horses put to sleep in the last 18 months than in the previous five years - costs of ownership are main reason.”

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In addition to the number of people having to consider euthanasia due to financial pressures, there are also indications that some people may struggle to afford to put a horse to sleep if it was necessary on welfare grounds.



Over a quarter of people would have to borrow money, or cut other costs, to pay for the euthanasia of their horse.

“I would find it a struggle to pay back [debt] as I’m already cutting back and doing overtime.”

“I have an ISA which is my horse ‘emergency’ fund. However, I keep having to make withdrawals to cover things like hay deliveries or a new rug.”



Research in 2015 identified **delayed euthanasia**<sup>13</sup> as one of four key equine welfare concerns in the UK.

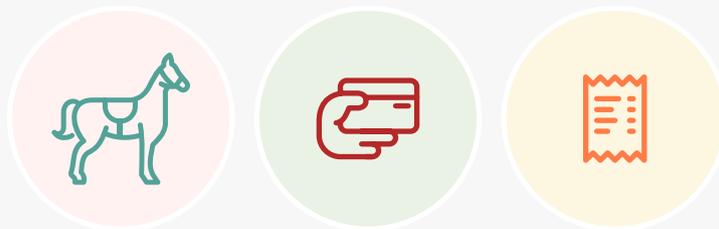


While there has been a lot of subsequent work in the welfare sector to raise awareness of quality-of-life assessment, it is a concern that economic factors may increase the risk of delayed euthanasia.

<sup>13</sup> Horseman, S., Whay, B., Mullan, S., Knowles, T., Barr, A., & Buller, H., Horses in our Hands, [Norfolk: World Horse Welfare, 2016]. Available from [https://storage.googleapis.com/worldhorsewelfare-cloud/2019/09/14b98a4b-horses-in-our-hands\\_august-2016.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/worldhorsewelfare-cloud/2019/09/14b98a4b-horses-in-our-hands_august-2016.pdf).

The survey asked people about financial strategies they were using to help them care for their horses.

Far fewer respondents were willing or able to reduce horse care costs compared to cutting costs in other areas of their life, showing that horse care is generally a high priority.



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Other steps owners are making to help them pay for their horses include taking on extra work, using credit cards or loans, selling possessions and looking to family and friends for support.

“When livery, farrier and hay costs went up I picked up an additional part-time job to safeguard the ponies.”

“My family now funds my horse. House bills rises are equal to what my whole livery costs used to be.”

“I had to take out a loan to keep my monthly bills on course, which has landed me with yet another commitment.”

“I've had to sell personal belongings to help care for my horses, I make sure they don't go without, but I'm struggling a lot. I can't bear the thought of losing them.”



Farms for City Children

## The significant personal sacrifices being made by many owners to care for their horses in the face of financial pressures is testament to the central role horses and horse ownership play in the lives of those who care for them.

“My ponies have been - and continue to be - my reason for living since losing my husband six years ago.”

“My horses are my mental health therapy so need to keep going.”

“I would never sell my horse, he is 23 and has been my life for 14 years. He is my sanity.”

“My horse is my sanity. He has helped me through very difficult times, including mental health problems. I will do whatever I have to - to care for and keep him.”

“I've had my horse for 23 years. If I fail him now, I won't want to go on living.”

“I thought of giving up my pony but she is my life now and I'd rather be poor than lose her.”

“I think the impact of stress and anxiety may not be understood by non-equestrians who perceive horse owners as rich. However, the positive impact of horses on their owners' mental health should be considered.”

“My beloved horse brings love and happiness into my life.”

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There is a clear sense of the very strong emotional attachment owners feel for their horses throughout the survey. This attachment often goes far beyond that of a hobby or leisure activity and demonstrates that domestic horses are consistently implicated in the health and wellbeing of those who care for them.



**There is no doubt that, despite the best efforts of owners to protect their horses from the impact of rising costs, financial pressures are affecting horse care decisions and ultimately equine welfare.**

“I have reduced the bute I give to my 31 yo horse. I am feeding low quality, cheaper hay. I am not doing the routine test for Cushings this year.”

“Not being able to provide basic needs so not doing extra things like vaccines, saddle fittings, farriery treatment, physios etc.”

“My horse is due a dental visit and a vaccine next month which I cannot afford.”

“I was hoping to get my veteran TB hock injections as she's very stiff and has trouble now with the farrier with her back feet. She is unriden but had back shoes on longer at the back to help support her fetlocks and pasterns. It will take me longer to save for the hock issue now and the longer I can't have those back shoes on I'm fearing more damage will be done to her lower legs.”

“Has suspected ulcers but cannot afford to get scoped or treatment.”

“My horse has health issues. I'm so stressed that I won't be able to afford his vet care, so the only option is to consider putting him to sleep - which costs an arm and a leg, so he might just have to be left in some sort of pain in the field.”

“I delayed calling out the vet because I didn't have a job. It ended up costing my horse's life.”

Horse owners are responding to high prices not only by making personal sacrifices to enable them to continue caring for their horse, but by adapting management practices to help them make ends meet.

With feed, forage and bedding being particularly affected by price rises, it is unsurprising that many owners have made changes or are considering changes to help reduce expenditure on these products.



Over a quarter of survey respondents have already moved to cheaper types of feed or cheaper brands of feed.

More than 12% have reduced the amount of feed being provided to horses, or have stopped hard feed altogether. Others are considering making these changes.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, owners are more reluctant to reduce or change their forage provision.

“My horses used to receive extremely high quality haylage for their entire foraging and now receive half high quality and half cheaper haylage - I don't think it will affect them but I feel bad.”

“Cost of electric and food for family will make me cut down on bedding and hard food but not forage.”

“Having to provide more hay because I can't afford both hay and bucket feed every month.”



The most common adaptations horse owners have made to help reduce bedding costs are to increase turnout, use different bedding (such as switching from shavings to straw) or use less bedding.



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More than a quarter of survey respondents say they are using a deep litter system.

“I've had to start deep littering which I've never done before.”

“Sometimes they have to go without fresh bedding for a couple of days.”



Almost one in five people on livery have changed their package (moving from part-livery to DIY for example) with more respondents considering this step.

More than one in ten have already moved to a cheaper livery yard with another 16% thinking of moving.

“I moved my horses to a more affordable establishment. This cut my bills in half and is closer to home saving on fuel.”

“Moved horses nearer home from livery to rented field to save money on rent and fuel.”



## There is evidence that making decisions about where to keep a horse is not affected by cost alone.

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“Mentally she may have to move to live in a yard where she will not be as happy.”

“If I am forced to leave my full livery yard for a cheaper but less reliable/knowledgeable yard that is further from my home, I know her wellbeing will suffer.”

“I worry that if our yard closes I could be forced to keep him at an expensive full livery yard with poor turnout, which will make him dangerous again to ride and handle.”



**Some owners are also making changes to how they use professional services. The most common change is to remove some or all shoes to reduce farriery costs, with more than a third of respondents having already taken this step.**



Changes that may have more potential impact on horses include extending the time between routine visits from service providers, such as farriers and equine dentists, and reducing or stopping vaccinations. Some owners are also delaying or cancelling veterinary visits.

“...vet care is the biggest worry. I now have to consider if I really need a vet, I think they’re pushing towards forcing people into neglect almost. Last night I had a colic and I had to stop and think for 10 mins as to if I really needed a vet, if it was severe enough... A couple of years ago I’d be on the phone before I’d have even stepped out of the car...”



Two thirds of people had some form of equine insurance policy in place, but almost a quarter said they had reduced or cancelled their insurance in response to the rising cost of living.

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Others were thinking about reducing or cancelling their coverage, comments showing that many people naturally make those decisions at the point when their policy is due for renewal.

“I had the best/fullest insurance you could get but now just have third-party liability etc.”

**Many horse owners were already using cost-cutting steps to help them care for their horse before the cost of living escalated.**

**By already budgeting well, there are fewer options for people to make additional cost savings in the face of new financial pressures.**



The survey found that over half of survey respondents were already sharing vet and clinic call-out fees with other owners.

Just under half were buying items in bulk.

Almost two thirds repair and reproof their rugs rather than buying new ones.

“As they were already being kept economically it has been very hard to find savings in the horse care budget.”

## Some management changes made in response to rising costs could be having a positive impact on the welfare of individual equines.

Increased turnout is better for horses' mental and physical health, and reducing hard feed and rugging can both support weight management at a time when equine obesity remains a significant welfare issue in the UK.<sup>14</sup>

Many survey respondents also report switching from routine worming to using faecal worm egg counts, which will support vital efforts to tackle the increase of resistance to worming products.



“Probably be better for them as they will spend more time outside and be fed slightly less so will be correct weight.”

“Changed from livery yard plus services to now living out in a field all year round (to be fair my horse appears to be happier with this).”

<sup>14</sup> Rendle, D., Argo, C.M., Bowen, M., Carslake, H., German, A.J., Harris, P.A., Knowles, E., Menzies-Gow, N.J., & Morgan, R., Equine obesity: current perspectives, UK-Vet Equine: 11.09.2018. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.12968/ukve.2018.2.S2.3>.



## Many owners are reducing horse-related activities that come at a cost.



More than 40% are reducing or stopping lessons and a similar number are reducing or stopping attendance of equestrian events, with more people considering cutting back in both these areas.

This is likely to be having an impact on the income of professionals and businesses such as coaches, trainers, event venues and sport membership bodies.

“We have been unable to support our local riding school over the last few months with lessons. We are no longer seeking a horsebox/trailer replacement and will try to make do without. We have cancelled our BHS membership as well as insurance.”

“Reduced memberships, comps, demos, schooling etc. - I'd rather happy hack than sell up.”

“I can't afford to do anything with her or insure her now!”

“We used to compete across the South of England and into Wales. This year, we do not intend to leave our county.”

“Joined free online events, sold trailer and stopped showing. Just hacking now - would like to go competing but no transport now.”

“In 2022 I cut travelling to train to fortnightly from weekly. I also cut the number of competitions I entered. I plan to reduce both these further in 2023.”

## The survey was targeted at horse owners, but findings also provide insight into equestrian businesses.

Alongside the impact of increased charges by businesses on their clients, reduced spending by clients also affects businesses, with potential to lead to a reduction in income in addition to dealing with increased costs themselves.

“For me as an Accredited Professional Coach, my income is reliant on my clients paying on time. Over the last year it has been a struggle to continue to chase individuals for payment. I understand that it is hard, as I have kept my prices down to help to keep the education flowing.”

“We have passed costs on to school clients.”

“...business costs have gone up by 20% but if I put my livery prices up that much I'll have no clients!”

“Business income of the riding school funds the horses.”

“Business costs up by 20% but I can only increase livery by 5% meaning my income has dropped 15% plus inflation at 10%... Income is 25% down on last year.”

“We used to hold events/shows for our members and attend external ones ourselves. Due to lack of support (caused mainly due to rising costs in the families that attend) these are not seeing the same attendance. This reduces achievement recognition, reduces the amount of work put into producing the animals, the amount of attention they receive and the varied life they lead. I think this will have an effect on pony and rider both mentally and in terms of fitness and bonding.”

“Farrier bills have gone up but he is suffering in his business.”

“Have actually ended up paying more for a new feed as previous supplier has gone out of business.”

“We run a business maintaining horseboxes and trailers. If people start cutting cost on maintaining horse transport this could prove dangerous.”

“As livery yards are not licensed, the number of owners looking for ‘cheap’ yards will increase making it harder for those businesses running correctly (insurance, paying rates, safeguarding in place etc.) to survive. This will have a knock-on effect on the welfare of both people and horses.”

“We have to increase our prices to stay viable - I fear they may move to other establishments for less monthly ££, yet I query how such yards can care for horses at such a decreased cost!”

“I am not getting as much ‘horse work’ as I would expect this time of year as folk are definitely trying to save where they can. I know that horses will already be experiencing various levels of neglect and the future is very worrying for us all.”

“Livery yards are closing down as it is hard to run a financially viable business. I'm moving yard due to my current yard closing down.”

“Livery yards and riding schools need help - what grants are available, what help is available to advise these businesses? We are running at a brick wall of no one being able to learn to ride/learn about horses because riding schools will close. Costs of running centres is bonkers - and business rates - especially in Wales (we get half the rates allowance compared to England!). Something must be done!”

“Business rates for livery yards are killing them. As are the costs they are having to face. It's not just us as horse owners who are facing tough times. More and more livery yards are closing or refusing to take on new liveries.”

“My field rent was DOUBLED last week and, while I can pay in the short term, it is not sustainable long term and I now feel that I am paying for not only my grazing but also the costs of running the farmer's business.”

“Huge problem is council taxation and business rates on livery yards and riding schools. Sadly forcing loads to close.”

## While equine welfare charities are always keen to increase the support they can offer during challenging times, organisations are also vulnerable to a challenging economic climate.

The sector has been voicing concerns over its ability to address systemic welfare issues in the UK for many years. A report published in 2020<sup>15</sup> highlighted that most rescue centres were consistently operating close to, at, or even over capacity in terms of the numbers of equines they care for, and had been for many years. In addition, many charities have still not fully recovered from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.



**A survey of equine rescue organisations**<sup>16</sup> run in parallel with this horse owner survey found that the experience of cost increases was similar to that of horse owners.

Most centres report an increase in calls from horse owners asking for help with a horse they can no longer care for, and almost half have seen a rise in welfare cases involving horses.

However, all organisations are concerned about the rising cost of living, with more than half being extremely concerned.

Almost half say they will have to take in fewer equines than would have previously been the case, and almost a quarter say they will stop taking in new equines altogether.

<sup>15</sup> Redwings Horse Sanctuary, *Leading charities release Britain's Horse Problem report*, [www.redwings.org.uk/news-and-views/britains-horse-problem](http://www.redwings.org.uk/news-and-views/britains-horse-problem) [published 14.12.2020, accessed 21.06.2023].

<sup>16</sup> National Equine Welfare Council, *The impact of the rising cost of living on equine rescues, rehoming centres, and sanctuaries*, <https://newc.co.uk/mp-files/col-establishments-report.pdf/> [published 27.06.2023, accessed 27.06.2023].

## Caring for equines is not a cheap undertaking, and horse ownership is often associated with those who are reasonably well off and/or own their own land.

The benefits of interacting with horses are well documented and the equestrian sector has been working hard in recent years to create **a more welcoming, inclusive sector**<sup>17</sup> that can be enjoyed by a broader cross-section of society.

The financial pressures faced by horse owners and equestrian businesses present a substantial risk to the progress that has been made in moving beyond the perception of equestrianism as an elitist pursuit for an affluent minority.

“Horses have always been seen as an elite activity but it's not, yes there are extremely wealthy owners but I class myself as poor!”

“Sadly horse ownership is becoming an elitist sport once again, this is a shame.”

“If the prices continue to rise, this will be my last horse as everything has gone up and I won't be the only one. Eventually this will become an elitist hobby for the rich.”

“Horses shouldn't be enjoyed only by the elite. My godson has ADHD and massively benefits from being around my horses. I have been around horses since I was eight. I drove my non-horse parents mad. So 35ish years loving and owning horses... but could sadly become priced out of ownership.”

<sup>17</sup> British Equestrian, *British Equestrian and member bodies pledge to improve equality, diversity and inclusion*, [www.britishequestrian.org.uk/news/british-equestrian-and-its-member-bodies-pledge-to-improve-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-in-the-equestrian-community](http://www.britishequestrian.org.uk/news/british-equestrian-and-its-member-bodies-pledge-to-improve-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-in-the-equestrian-community) [published 08.06.2022, accessed 21.06.2023].



To be eligible to complete the survey, respondents were required to be over 18 years of age, based in the UK and have responsibility for at least one equine.

The 8,252 complete responses represented all the UK countries in general proportion to the populations of each.



Owners of a range of ages took part in the survey. More than half were between 45 and 64.



More than one in ten respondents kept horses for leisure purposes and more than half had kept horses for over 20 years.



More than 80% were the legal owner of at least one equine they cared for. Other respondents had loan or share arrangements in place.



More than 300 respondents cared for donkeys and/or their hybrids.



Almost half kept their horses at a livery yard while just under a third kept horses at home.

## Large numbers of horse owners are working incredibly hard to minimise the impact of the high cost of living on the horses they care for and love.

Many have exhausted the cost-cutting avenues available to them and are now taking steps that involve significant personal sacrifice, sometimes even to the point of compromising their own wellbeing.

There is also a growing tendency to reduce use of routine preventative horse care and delay veterinary involvement to investigate and treat health issues, which could leave equines more vulnerable to compromised welfare.

Not being able to provide fully for their equines further increases the stress placed on owners.

It is evident that some people have already reached a point where they are no longer able to fully meet their horses' essential needs.

There is a clear risk of more situations emerging where equine welfare falls below acceptable standards if economic conditions persist, particularly during the winter months.

## This report has been compiled so that findings are freely available to all.

It is hoped that an accurate picture of how living costs are affecting owners and their horses will enable government, local authorities, industry bodies, businesses and more to apply an evidence-based approach to assessing and addressing increased risks to equine and human welfare within the scope of their own activities.





The National Equine Welfare Council will continue to extract information from the dataset but is also keen to make the findings available to other organisations, public bodies and researchers.

Please contact [info@newc.co.uk](mailto:info@newc.co.uk) or [campaigns@redwings.co.uk](mailto:campaigns@redwings.co.uk) if you would like to discuss the data or findings in more detail.

As living costs remain high, NEWC intends to carry out a follow-up survey in autumn-winter 2023 to assess whether, and how, the situation may have changed for equines and their keepers across the UK.

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