



NEWC
NATIONAL EQUINE
WELFARE COUNCIL
ESTABLISHED 1977

Caring for equines and the cost of living

Survey findings | June 2024

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In January 2024, a small group of NEWC members, led by World Horse Welfare, conducted a follow up survey to the 2023 Cost of Living Survey with the aim of investigating where horse owners were still feeling financial pressures and how this was impacting horse health and welfare.

Similar to the previous survey, the response was huge – over 6,000 horse owners took part – showing that horse owners were still engaged with informing NEWC charities about the financial challenges they were facing and how they were affecting their horse care.

Overall, the results of this year’s survey were similar to last years, with the overarching message being that owners are still making significant sacrifices in other areas of their lives in order to maintain their horses’ standards of care. Additional questions were added this year to enable us to drill down deeper into different horse owner demographics. These questions gave horse owners the option to identify their employment status and annual salary. This allows us the opportunity to tailor support and work with government to provide support to those most in need.

However, it is worth noting that across all demographics, the message was clear – horse owners were concerned about further rising costs and how they would manage over the next year.



The results clearly showed that despite owners' best efforts and the various money saving measures they are implementing, they are still feeling the pinch. Owners were especially worried about the cost of feed/forage, routine and emergency veterinary care – all necessities for their horses. Some were exploring their options regarding putting their horses on loan or finding a sharer, others might have to take more drastic action such as selling or euthanasia if costs remain high or continue to increase.

Generally, owners are continuing to maintain their horse's basic care needs, and in some cases there has been a positive impact on horse welfare e.g. horses being turned out for longer. However, there were owners who found themselves in the position of potentially negatively affecting their horse's health and welfare by taking measures such as having to extend the time between farrier visits, delaying veterinary treatment and not implementing a targeted de-worming programme. We urge owners that may find themselves in this position to be wary of false economies, and that delaying routine health interventions will potentially put their horses at greater risk. We also encourage owners who may be struggling to reach out to NEWC charities for help and advice as early as possible.

Our thanks to all those that took part in our survey and who provided such detailed and emotive accounts about the challenges they are facing to maintain their horse's health and welfare. The number of owners struggling to maintain their horse's welfare will only increase if the current economic climate continues into a third winter season. NEWC will continue to monitor the situation closely over the coming months and continue to devise ways to provide targeted advice and support where possible.



Ruth Court
NEWC Vice-Chair

Caring for equines and the cost of living
Introduction

Intro- duction

Founded in 1977, the National Equine Welfare Council was established as an important point of contact on equine welfare in the UK. Building on its beginnings as a forum for equine welfare organisations to discuss welfare issues, exchange experiences and air views, NEWC has evolved to become a united voice on equine welfare matters and continues to increase its advisory and education scope.

In early 2024, NEWC and its member organisations released a follow up survey to the 2023 cost of living survey to further examine how the continued financial pressures had impacted horse owners and keepers, and the resultant impact on horse welfare. The continued financial pressures refer to increases in consumer price inflation, rises in interest rates and energy price increases observed from October 2023 to January 2024 (Office for National Statistics, 2024a).



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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 the 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 further situations emerging where equine welfare falls below acceptable standards if economic conditions persist, particularly during the winter months.



The aims of the 2024 survey



To follow up on the initial 2023 [cost of living survey](#) to assess the impact of continued financial pressures and increased costs on horse owners and keepers.



To assess the impact of the implications of continued rising costs on equine health and welfare in the UK.

The survey was developed by six NEWC member organisations with the support of an independent consultant researcher. The survey was completed online through software licenced to World Horse Welfare and was open from 15th January 2024 to 16th February 2024.

The survey was anonymous and no personal information was collected. Only people who were over 18 years old, based in the UK and responsible for at least one equine were eligible to take part.

18+



- There were 6,143 responses
- Over 30,000 free text responses
- The majority of respondents were based in England (83%)



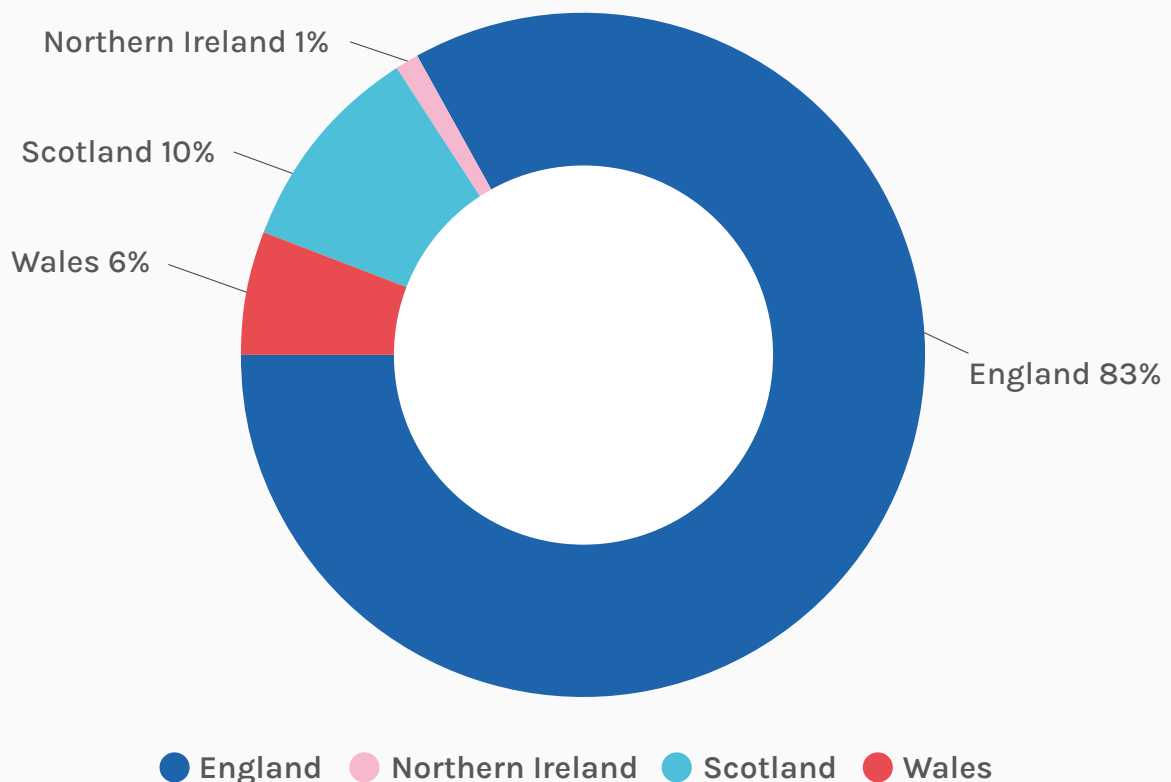
There was consistency across all countries regarding the main areas of concern and impacts of cost increases.

High level thematic analysis was undertaken and there is potential for more detailed analysis of the comprehensive responses provided by recipients.

Where appropriate, key variations in results from different demographics have been identified and examined in further detail.

All other data were representative of all demographics, as any differences were not significant.

Where in the UK are you based?



01.

How are
owners
coping?

The majority of owners were over 55 years of age (38%), with 16% identifying as retired.

45% of owners were employed full time with 73% of owners in full time employment reporting a salary greater than £25,001 per annum (pa).

35% of owners in full time employment reported a salary greater than £40,001 pa.

31% of all owners reported salaries greater than the national average, which in March 2024 was reported as £672 per week, equating to £34,944 per annum (Office for National Statistics, 2024b).

17% of owners were in part time employment, with 69% reporting an annual salary of less than £25,001.

2% of owners reported they were unemployed but received government benefits, with a further 1% reporting they were unemployed with no income.

75% of owners were financially responsible for 1-2 horses.

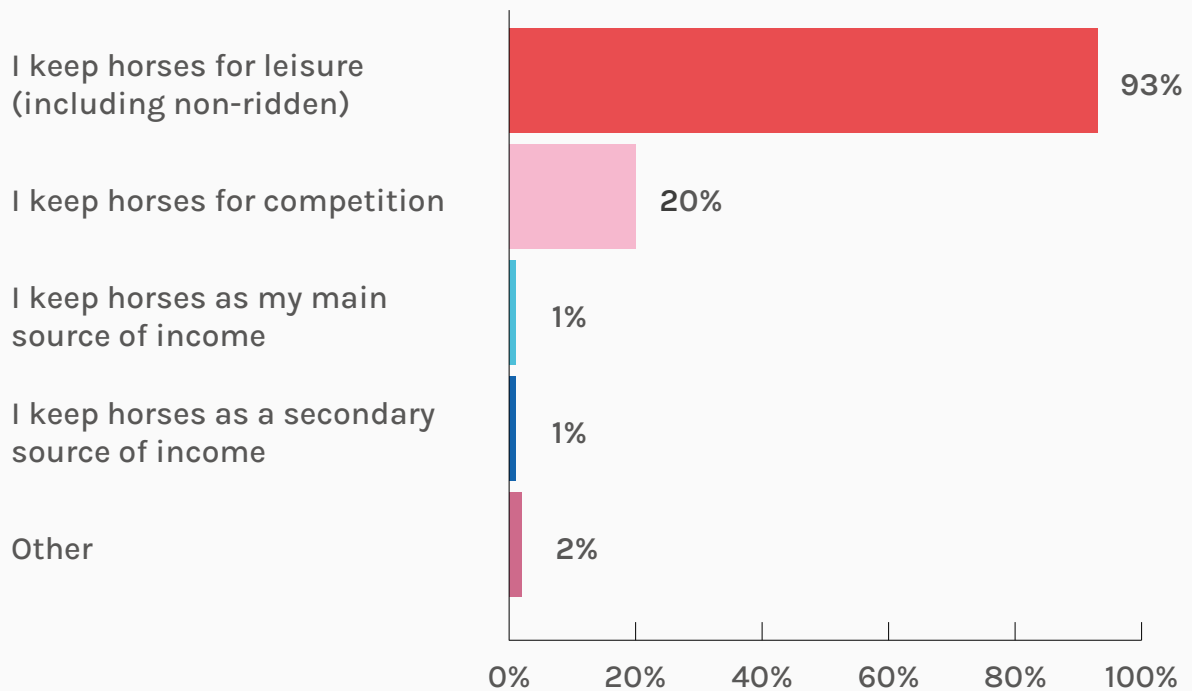
93% of owners kept their horses for leisure.

Just over half of owners kept their horses on livery yards while a further 40% of owners kept their horses at home or their own land.

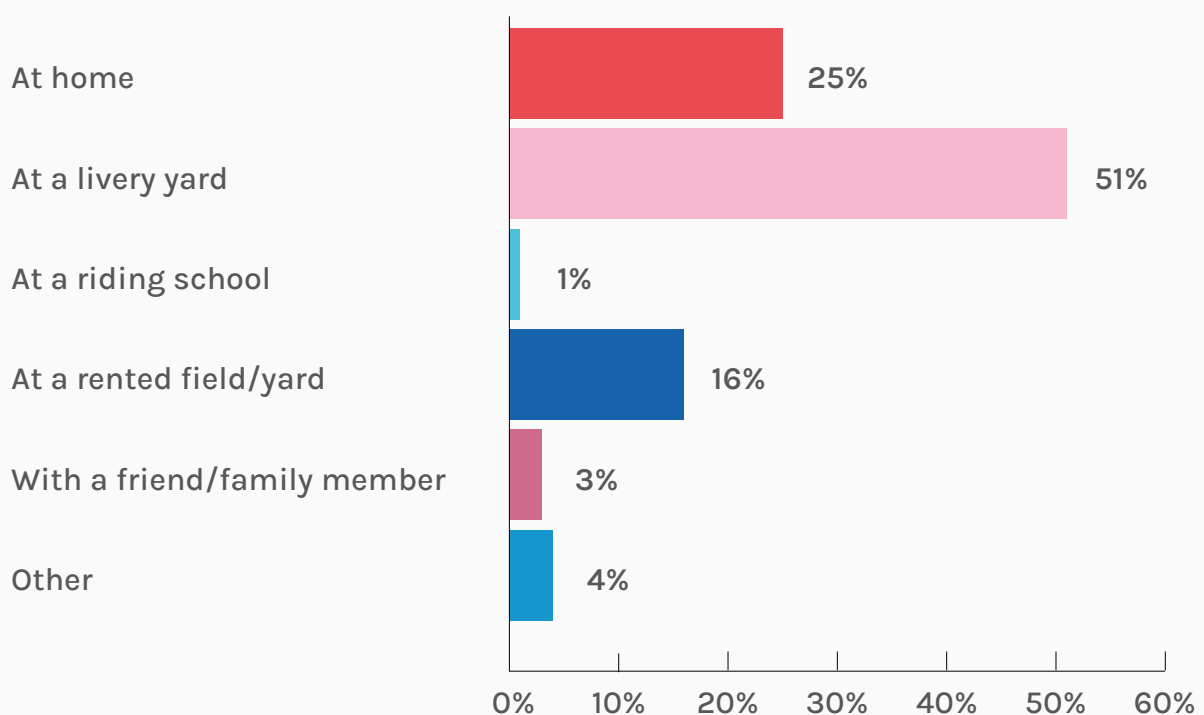
Of those that kept their horses on livery yards, 65% kept their horse on DIY livery.



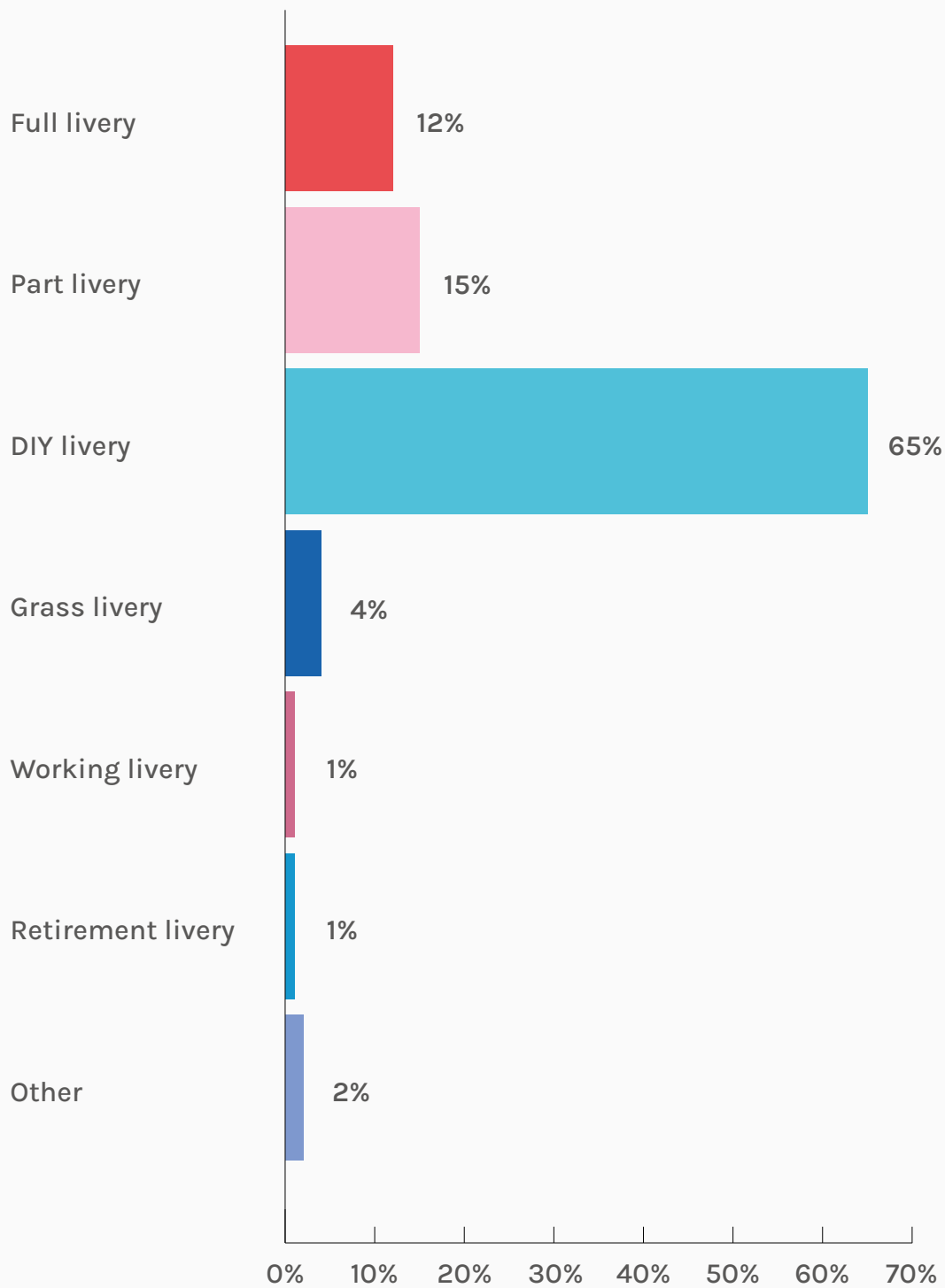
Which of the following best describes why you keep horses?



Where do you mainly keep your horse(s)?



What type of livery do you mainly use?



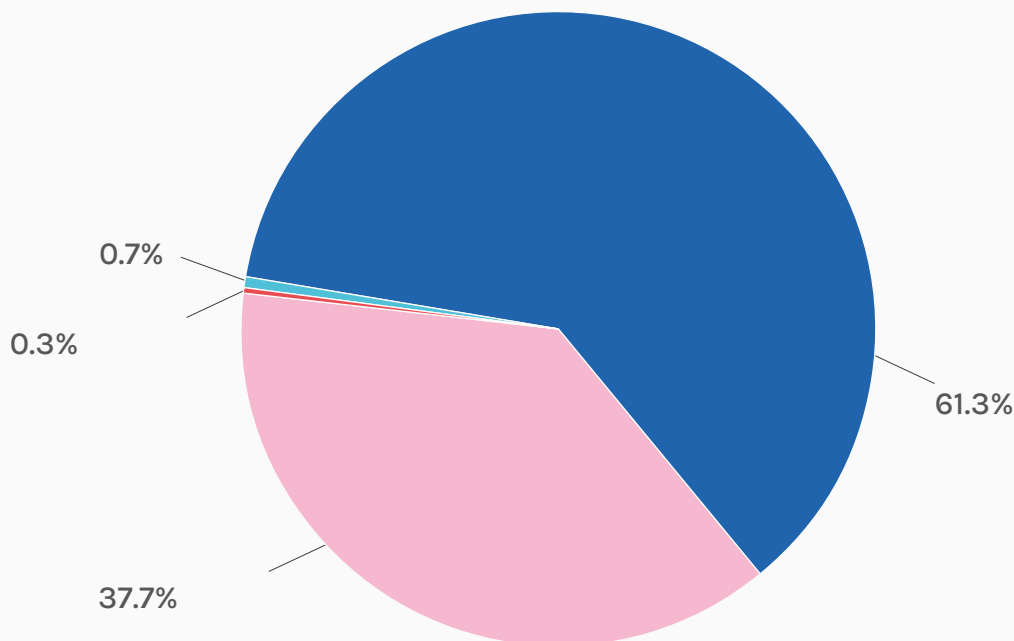
When asked if continued financial pressure due to rising costs had impacted their ability to provide basic care for their horses:

38% of respondents reported that cost increases have had ‘medium impact’ on their ability to provide basic care to their horses and that they have had to make additional sacrifices to meet their horse’s basic care needs.

0.7% (n=41) reported cost increases had a high impact and that they were not able to meet the basic needs of their horses.

The owners that reported they were not able to meet the basic needs of their horses predominantly owned one horse for leisure purposes, were over 45 years old, in full or part time employment with 22% reporting an annual salary of less than £10,001, 54% reporting salaries between £10,001-£30,000, and 77% keeping their horses on DIY livery.

Which of the following statements best describes how any cost increases have impacted on your ability to provide basic care for your horse(s) since this time last year?



- No or low impact - I have continued to be able to provide basic care for my horse(s)
- Medium impact - I have had to make additional sacrifices to provide basic care for my horse(s)
- High impact - I have not been able to provide basic care for my horse(s)
- Prefer not to say

How are owners coping?
Impact of continued pressure of rising costs

The main themes owners highlighted regarding their ability to provide basic care were:



Leaving longer gaps between vet/farrier visits



Not calling the vet out if they thought they could deal with the issue themselves



That they were already using cheapest bedding/feed



Many were considering selling their horses, transferring them to retirement livery or putting them out on loan



Most were already on DIY livery and there was no cheaper alternative in their area



Most were already making personal sacrifices (not using heating, selling items, not socialising, working overtime, not going on holiday)

"I can't afford to call vets out of hours anymore. I rent a field and can't afford a proper horse shelter or stables. I can't afford the farrier regularly anymore."

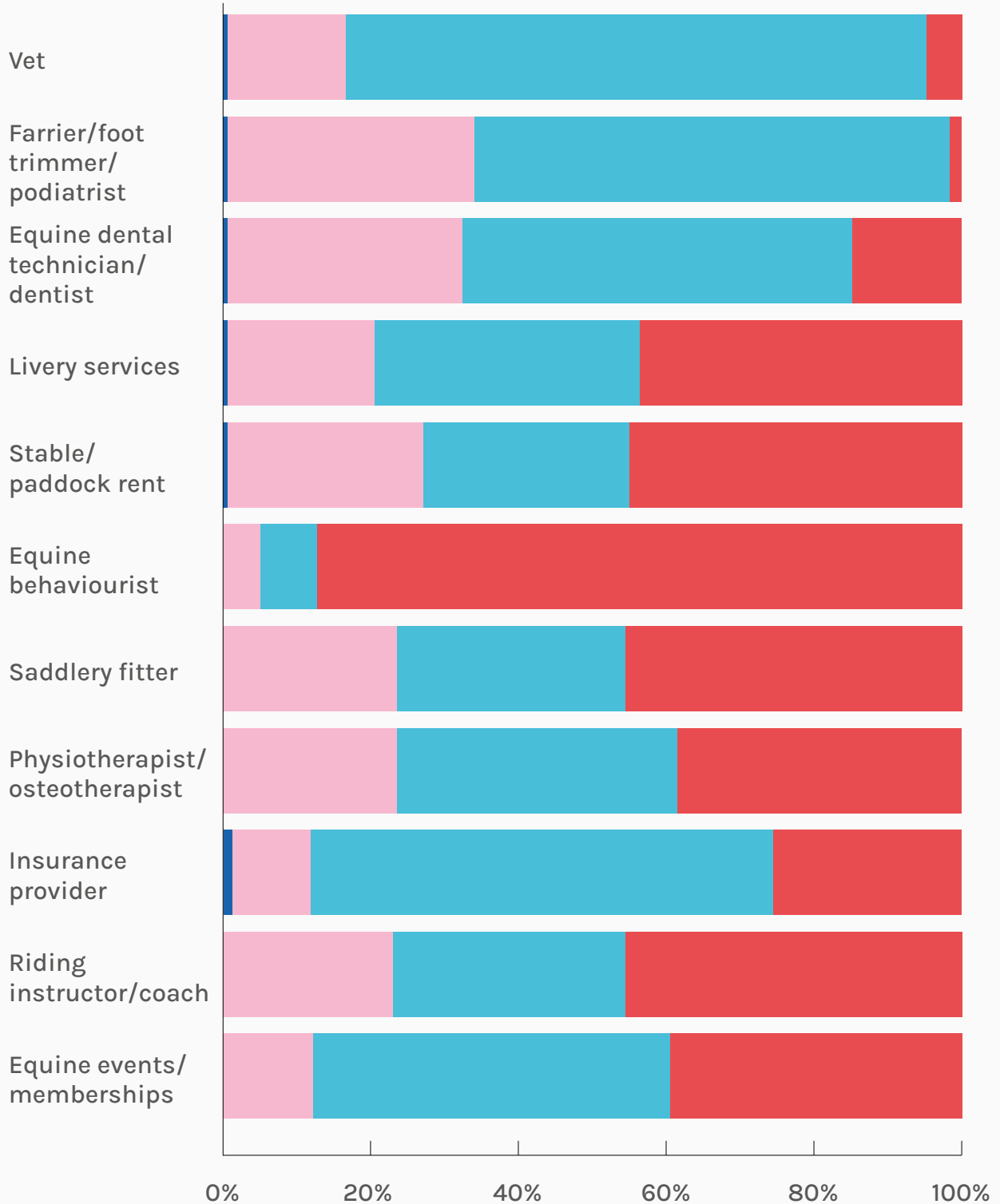
"I have not been so quick to call the vet when I feel I can deal with it myself or it is not life threatening."

"We work hard looking after our horses which reduces the financial cost. We do all our own maintenance, and land management."

"Costs have increased but the horses don't go without, and I have made sacrifices elsewhere to maintain the high level of care they are used to."

In terms of the year ahead, 81% of respondents were concerned (66% slightly concerned, 15% extremely concerned) about the continued pressure of increased costs.

Which, if any, of the following services that you use have changed their charges in the last year?



● Charges decreased ● Stayed the same ● Charges increased ● Not applicable

The top 3 services where owners reported increases in charges were veterinary services (80%), farrier services (65%) and insurance providers (62%).



“Don’t have lessons or go to competitions at the moment because I can’t afford these ‘luxuries’.”

“Vet has increased call out charge and now charge for their time on top of consultation fee and fees for taking bloods.”

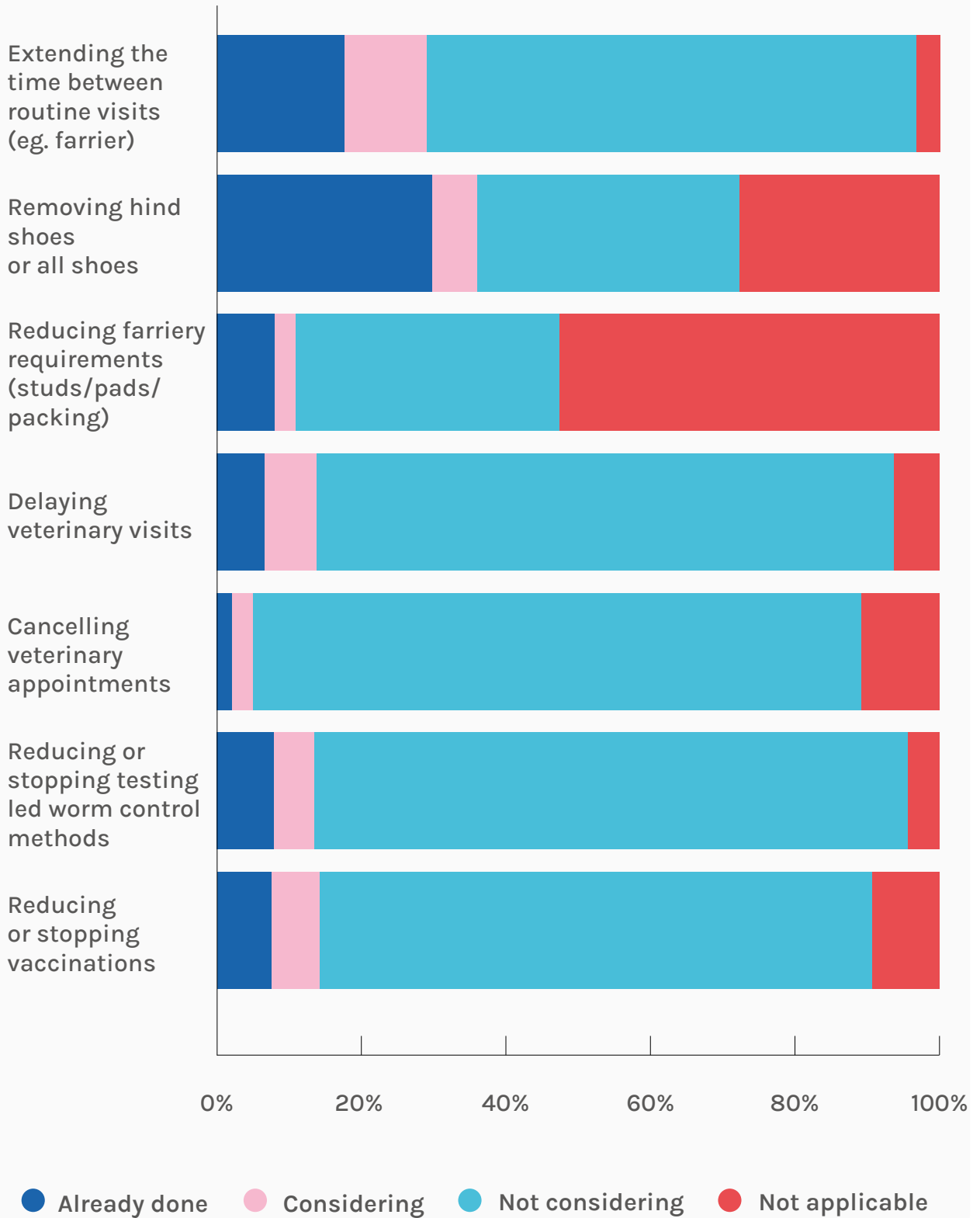
“I have cut hard into costs by turning my horse away. He is now costing about 30% of what he previously did.”

“I have not had certain things done in the past 6 months that I usually would have, like physio as the rise in price is just too much.”

“Everything increased resulting in it becoming impossible to continue to keep my horse in work, so she’s now been retired to a field.”



Have you made or are you considering changes to how you work with equine professionals in response to pressure of increased costs?



Encouragingly, many owners were not considering making changes to how they work with equine professionals, as the consequences of doing so could affect their horse's health and welfare. However, some had already made changes including reducing and stopping vaccinations and testing-led de-worming which could have a negative impact on their horse's welfare.

"I won't compromise on his care - would rather go without myself than not have him up to date with everything he needs."

"Will always do tape worm tests and worm egg counts as I consider this to be vital to my pony's health."

"I now just worm as it worked out more expensive to have the tests and needing to worm."

"Only have tetanus vaccination."

"Cutting cost corners with farrier/vet visits/worm count will only lead to more problems and cost long-term."

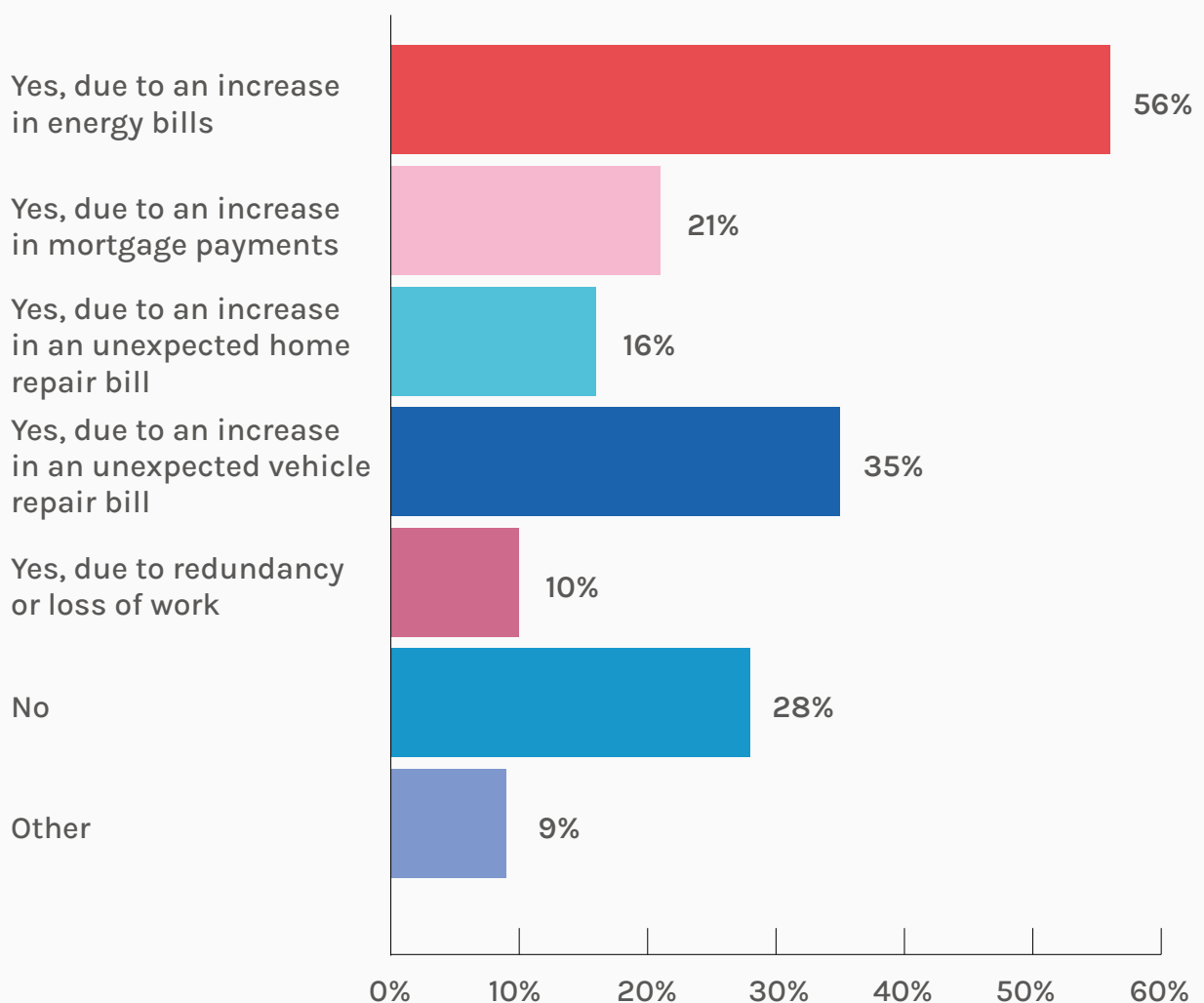
"I have had to delay taking my horse into the vets for x-rays/injections while I find £1,000!"

"Horse is not right, loss of performance at end of eventing season. I would normally get vet to do full work up but choose to turn out until spring & see what he's like then."

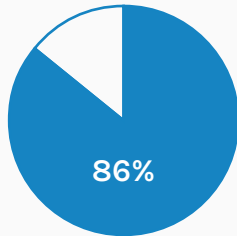
"I pay £15pm to the vets - this covers dentist, vaccinations, annual health check and worm testing 4x a year."

The increase in household energy bills was first observed in the UK during October 2022, and despite some households being eligible for additional grants and government support (UK Government, 2024a and 2024b), 56% of horse owners reported an increase in the cost of their energy bills as an unexpected financial challenge.

Have you, or has a person who helps you meet the costs of horse care, experienced any unexpected financial challenges in the last year?



How are owners coping?
Unexpected financial challenges



Many owners (86%) felt their unexpected challenge had either a slight or significant impact on their horse keeping budget.



“Horse given own monthly budget, and anything not spent that month goes into savings for himself for this reason.”

“I have to go without food to feed my horse every month.”

“Has meant my husband, who had retired, has had to take on a new job to support the family and our horses.”

“Looking to send horse back to owner due to struggling financially - mainly through vet bills and rising costs of living.”

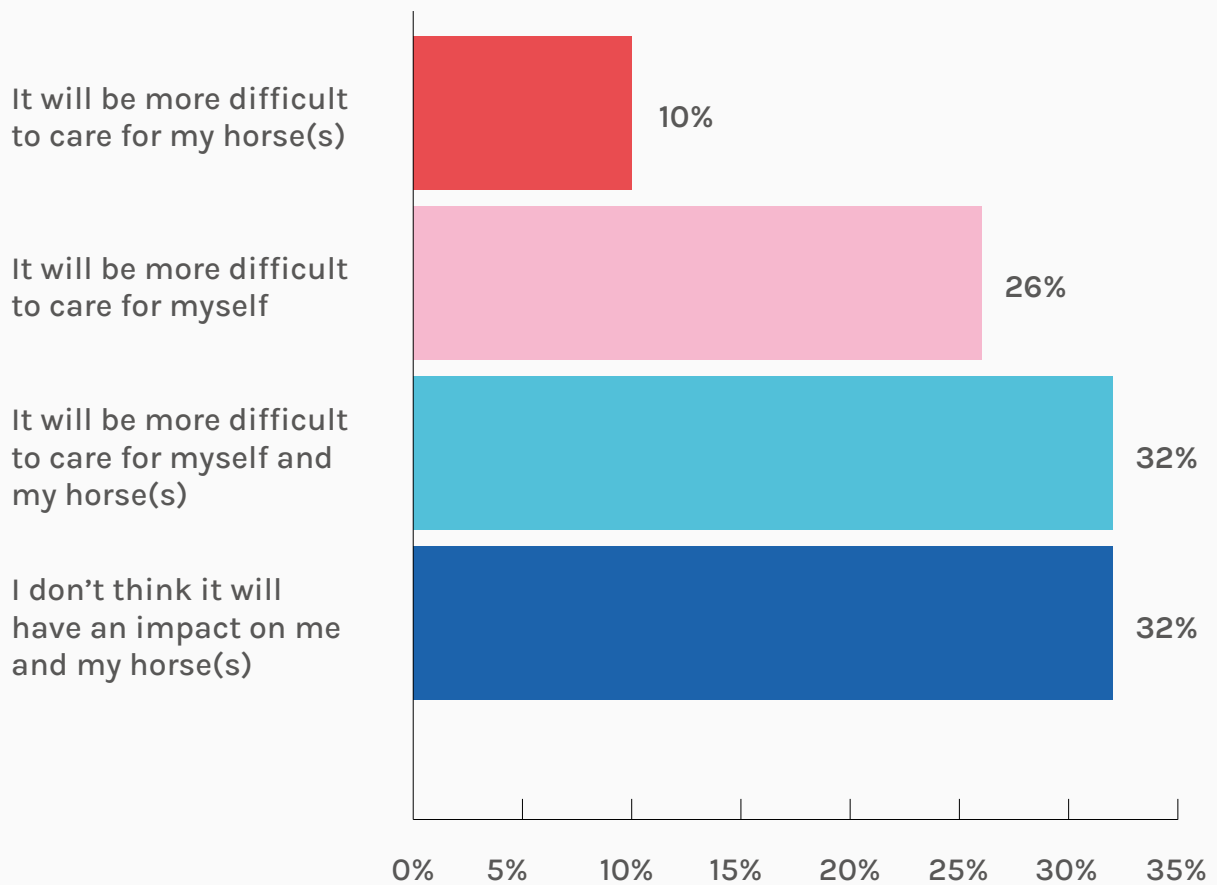
“One has been put to sleep which is very sad when I had kept him alive for 26 years and finances dictated his end.”

The majority (68%) of owners think it will be harder to care for either themselves and/or their horses over the next year due to the continued pressure of increased costs.

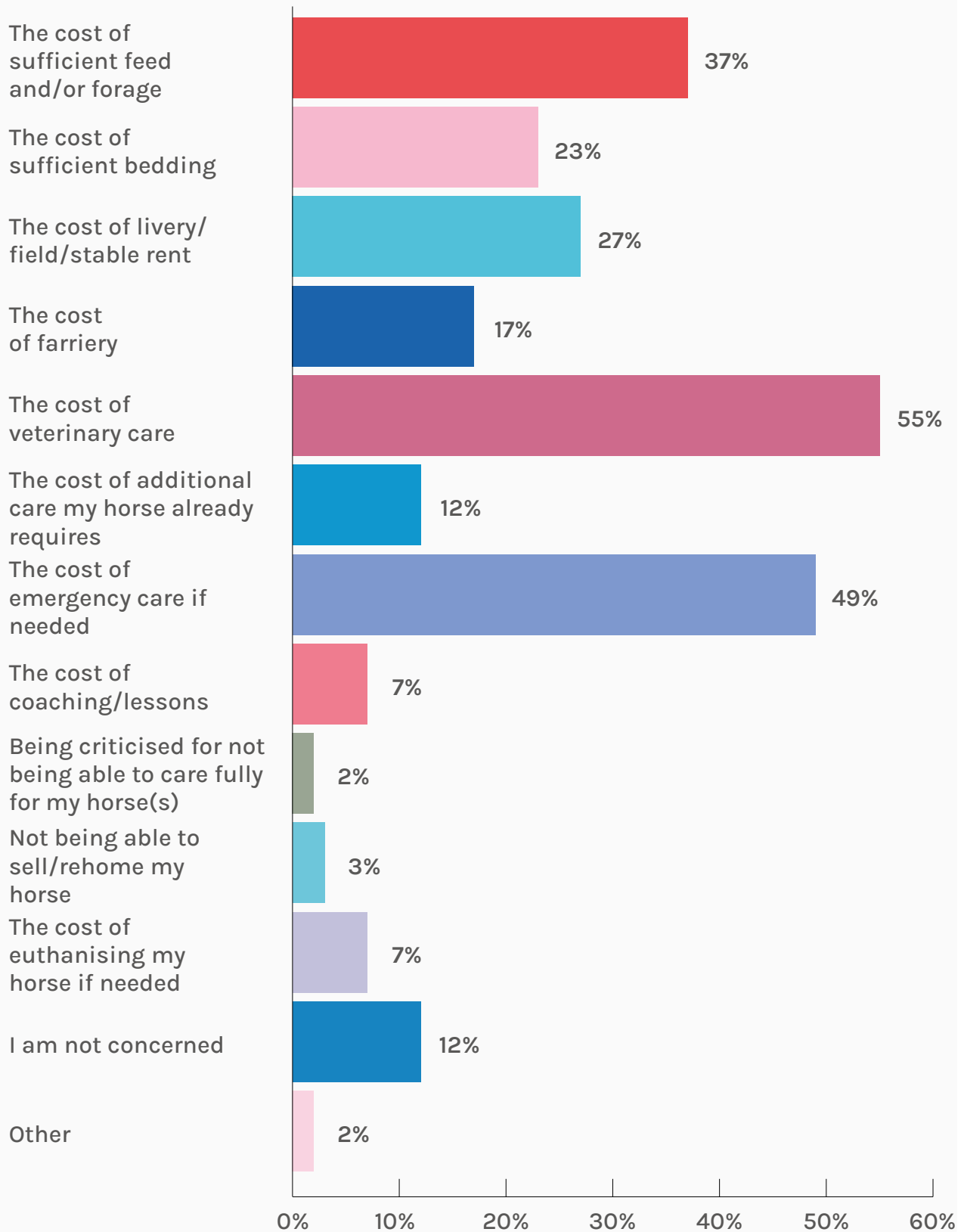
The top three areas of concern in relation to horse care over the next year were the cost of veterinary care, the cost of emergency care and the cost of providing suitable feed/forage.



In general, what impact do you think the pressure of increased costs will have on your ability to care for you and your horse in the next year?



Which three of the following are you most concerned about when thinking about horse care over the next year?



For the owners that provided an answer for 'other' their responses included:

"Being criticised if I don't compete my horse."

"As I get older, I do have some concern that the time will come when I can't care for my horses and the cost of getting adequate help may compel me to stop keeping them."

"The cost of maintaining the property/land - particularly labour costs getting suitably skilled people."

"The extra land management required to combat effects of climate change and with extra surface water and storm damage."

"Budgeting for the unknowns is my biggest concern."

The majority (76%) of owners were not looking to take on another horse within 6 months, with 13% of owners identifying they would have liked to have taken on another horse, but it was now too expensive. Most comments (41%) were related to affordability and the marked increase in the price of horses.

A further 12% of owners commented they had mares that were expecting foals and would need to sell youngstock to keep their costs down. Some owners identified that they would have liked to have rehomed a horse from a charity, but costs now mean this is not feasible.

"I'd love to take on a rescue, but can't afford to do that alongside my own horse at present."

"I am expecting 1 or 2 foals this year so numbers will increase unless I sell youngstock."



Most owners (75%) plan to make no changes to their involvement with horses over the next year, however, 10% were considering finding a sharer and 6% may need to sell their horse.

"I wouldn't ever sell my gelding due to his issues, but I am considering selling my youngster as costs are already high and still rising."

"My horse is advertised for loan/sale due to increasing financial pressures."

"I would never sell my horse, I love him he is my best friend. I will go without before he does."



A small proportion (2%) of owners were considering relinquishing their horses to an equine charity due to the pressure of increased costs.

Within this group of owners, their level of concern over the consequences of further cost increases over the next year rises to 90%, with 56% identifying as 'extremely concerned'.

Some (10%) owners that were considering relinquishing their horse to a charity were unemployed but receiving Government benefits or identified as unemployed with no income.

When asked to consider how their involvement with horses may change over the upcoming year, 5% of owners were considering euthanising their horse within the next 12 months due to the continued pressure of increased costs.

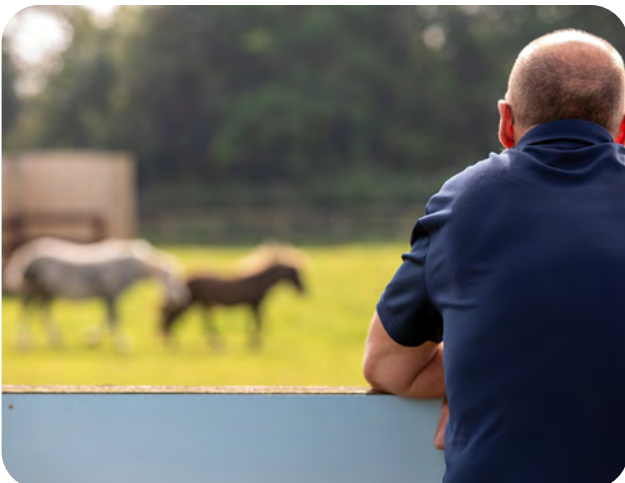
"I feel that at a time which is extremely distressing and emotional, I do not want to be worrying about money as well. Therefore, I have the money put aside for this situation."

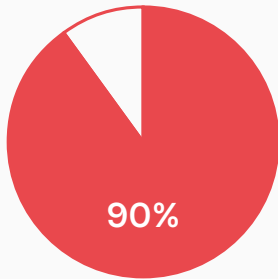
"I already have spoken to a family member who would be willing to pay for this if the worst was to happen."

"The cost to inject is prohibitive so I would have to use the knacker man."

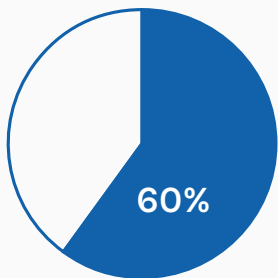
"Insurance would cover but I wouldn't have the funds to pay the excess."

"I would probably bury my horse to avoid collection and disposal charges (and personal preference)."





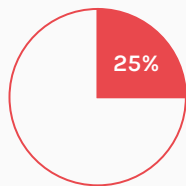
Most owners (90%) felt they would be able to cover the cost of euthanasia if required, either directly, via insurance, by borrowing money from family/friends or by further cutting costs elsewhere.



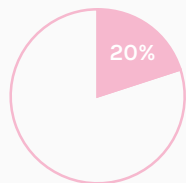
Almost 60% of owners would be in support of a government subsidy to aid euthanasia costs but many owners feared this would promote the euthanasia of healthy horses purely because their owners didn't want them anymore. Owners also raised questions about who would qualify for such a scheme and how it would be monitored.



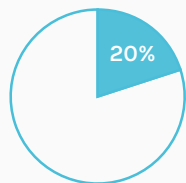
It was clear that owners were prepared to do whatever they could to maintain their horse's standard of living, even if it meant making sacrifices in other aspects of their lives.



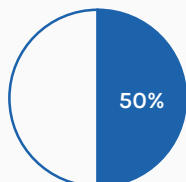
25% of respondents are already using credit cards, with a further 10% considering doing so.



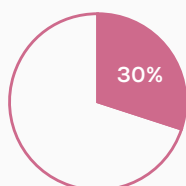
20% have taken on another job/increased hours, with 25% considering doing so.



20% have already reduced expenditure on horse care, with a further 25% considering doing so.



50% have already reduced expenditure in other areas of their lives, with a further 30% considering doing so.



30% have sold personal items, with a further 30% considering doing so.

“Put a lot on my credit card but do pay off each month in full.”

“I have taken on a sharer 3 days a week.”

“Large vet bills paid for by credit card.”

“Sold personal possessions to pay for saddle and backing of youngster.”

“At some point I will have exhausted all options. Where I go from there I don't know.”

Throughout the survey the emotional connection owners share with their horses was apparent.

When owners were asked why they keep horses, 'mental health' was mentioned in almost 20% of comments related to that specific question and was referred to in almost 50% of comments throughout other sections of the survey.



"I love caring for them and they help me cope with life's challenges."

"Caring for my horse helps me overcome my depression."

"Horses are my therapy, I suffer with my mental health."

"I have less money than ever, I didn't know I wouldn't be able to work when I got my horse, now I'm going without food/ heating/ diesel to provide for him. I have a life limiting illness which has brought on pretty severe mental health problems, as well as dire financial stresses, if I didn't have him, I'd have no reason to live but I can't afford him."

"I've noticed the mental health of fellow liveries has severely declined, wondering how they're going to afford their horses that are supposed to help relieve them from stress in the first place."



Caring for equines and the cost of living
How are horses being affected?

02.

How are
horses
being
affected?

Despite owner's best efforts, they were needing to cut back in areas that could affect their horse's health and welfare. When asked how the continued pressure of increased costs could negatively affect their horse's health and welfare, 20% of free text answers referred to the ability to provide routine and emergency veterinary care and 20% mentioned the cost of providing suitable feed and forage.

"The bedding issues are a worry as it keeps going up in price. My horse has CPL and I try to get the best dust free bedding as his legs will get sore."

"Not being able to do as many training/clinics/events which my horse enjoys and keeps him mentally and physically well."

"I have not been able to book my horse in for surgery to remove sarcoids as estimate was just too much and I did not have the money at the time."

"More concerned on climate changes (wetter winters and hotter, drier summers) and the impact that has on my horses."



Increases in feed, forage and bedding prices from 2023-2024 were reported by 90% of owners. 40% of owners had already or were considering changing to cheaper feeds or brands, however the majority were not considering reducing or stopping providing their horses with a hard feed (72%).

When asked about the use of feed supplements, 30% of owners had already or were considering reducing or stopping supplements, with 56% not considering doing so due to perceived health benefits.

The majority (77%) of owners were not considering making any changes to forage provision (e.g. reducing forage amount or changing type of forage).

“I’m looking at his current supplements & deciding if he actually needs them all still (he’s on 7 supplements).”

“I have not changed to a cheaper feed brand per se but have changed the feed regime to make it overall slightly less expensive and buying in bulk discounts where possible.”

“I have switched to balancers that include relevant supplements rather than buying individual supplements.”

“We stopped hard feeds and replaced with hay, and it had significant benefits to their welfare. We do use a balancer, that plus the forage should contain what they need.”

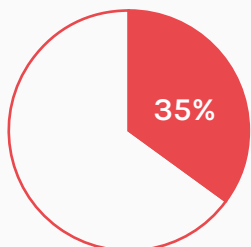
“Basic feed is included as part of livery, however it has changed to cheaper options.”

“Allowed winter grazing to go to standing hay, this has reduced our hay bill so far this winter. I am fortunate to have my own land and can do this.”

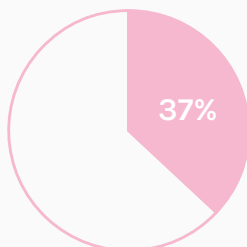
When it came to bedding, owners were more willing to make changes compared to changing feed or forage. Many owners (35%) had already implemented or were considering using less bedding, 37% had already changed or were considering changing the type of bedding they used (e.g. shavings to straw) and 30% had already started deep littering their beds or were considering doing so.

Interestingly, 38% had already increased or were considering increasing the amount of time their horse was turned out. This could have significant welfare implications both positively and negatively depending on the land management of the fields.

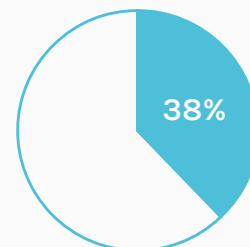
Up to 25% of owners indicated that their horses lived out 24/7 therefore bedding costs did not affect them. The impact of the wet weather over winter was a common theme (10%) in comments related to horses living out.



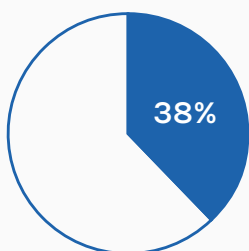
of owners had already implemented or were considering using less bedding



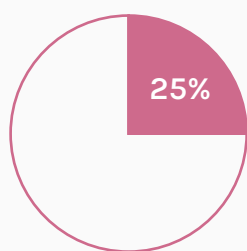
of owners had already changed or were considering changing the type of bedding they used (e.g., shavings to straw)



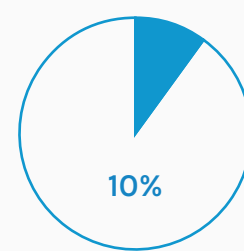
of owners had already started deep littering their beds or were considering doing so



of owners had already increased the amount of time their horse was turned out



of owners indicated that their horses lived out 24/7 therefore bedding costs did not affect them



of owners said the wet weather over winter had a negative impact on horses living out

How are horses being affected?
Feed and bedding

“Gone back to straw beds and semi deep litter through the week with a full muck out on weekend. Harder work but so much cheaper than shavings.”

“I have always advocated turnout over stable kept as I feel it is better for the horse and cheaper. However, it is very difficult to find livery in our area that offers this. DIY livery seems to have risen considerably and is increasingly hard to find. Full grass livery is extremely hard to find.”

“They have good beds but I’ve kept summer routine of having them in during day and out at night over the winter too unless the weather has been really horrible. They prefer being out and I use less bedding.”

“Weather and field conditions mean it’s not possible to turn out more. The extreme weather we have been having has significantly impacted on expenses for bedding.”

“I am limited to where else I can go in my location; no cheaper alternatives except one yard which does not have suitable facilities.”

The majority of owners (75-80%) were not planning to make any changes to their veterinary care, including delaying veterinary visits, cancelling veterinary appointments, reducing or stopping vaccinations and reducing or stopping testing-led worming control. However, there were some owners that had delayed veterinary treatment, reduced vaccination cover or have administered de-wormers without testing due to financial constraints, all of which could have welfare implications.



“I worm twice a year and now only have the vet in an emergency.”

“Faecal worm counts reduce costs in my opinion. I’d rather test and only treat when necessary plus I’d rather proactively manage worms than pay vet bills for worm related disease.”

“We use health care packages to cover vaccines, dentals, worm testing etc.”

“I brought a companion for my pony but I won’t be vaccinating him due to cost of starting the course.”

“My vet charged me £600 to treat an abscess and so I am reluctant to call them out in future.”

“Certain medicines will not now be prescribed without the vet seeing the horse every time, which increases the number of vet visits and the cost.”

How are horses being affected?
Veterinary and farriery care

Equally, the majority of owners were not considering making any changes to their horse's farriery requirements (68%), but some had already extended or were considering extending the time between farrier visits (30%) which could lead to potential health and welfare issues. Many owners reported that their horses were already barefoot or had their hind shoes removed, those that weren't considering removing hind or all shoes cited the need for remedial farriery to support musculoskeletal issues.

"I tried to extend time between farrier visits, but unfortunately had adverse effects. Now having her feet done more regularly than ever before."

"We have gone barefoot and found horses are happy. Farrier visits every 6 weeks but says that [they] don't always need trimming."

"Changed farrier to reduce cost as our previous farrier increased fees 3 times in 2023."

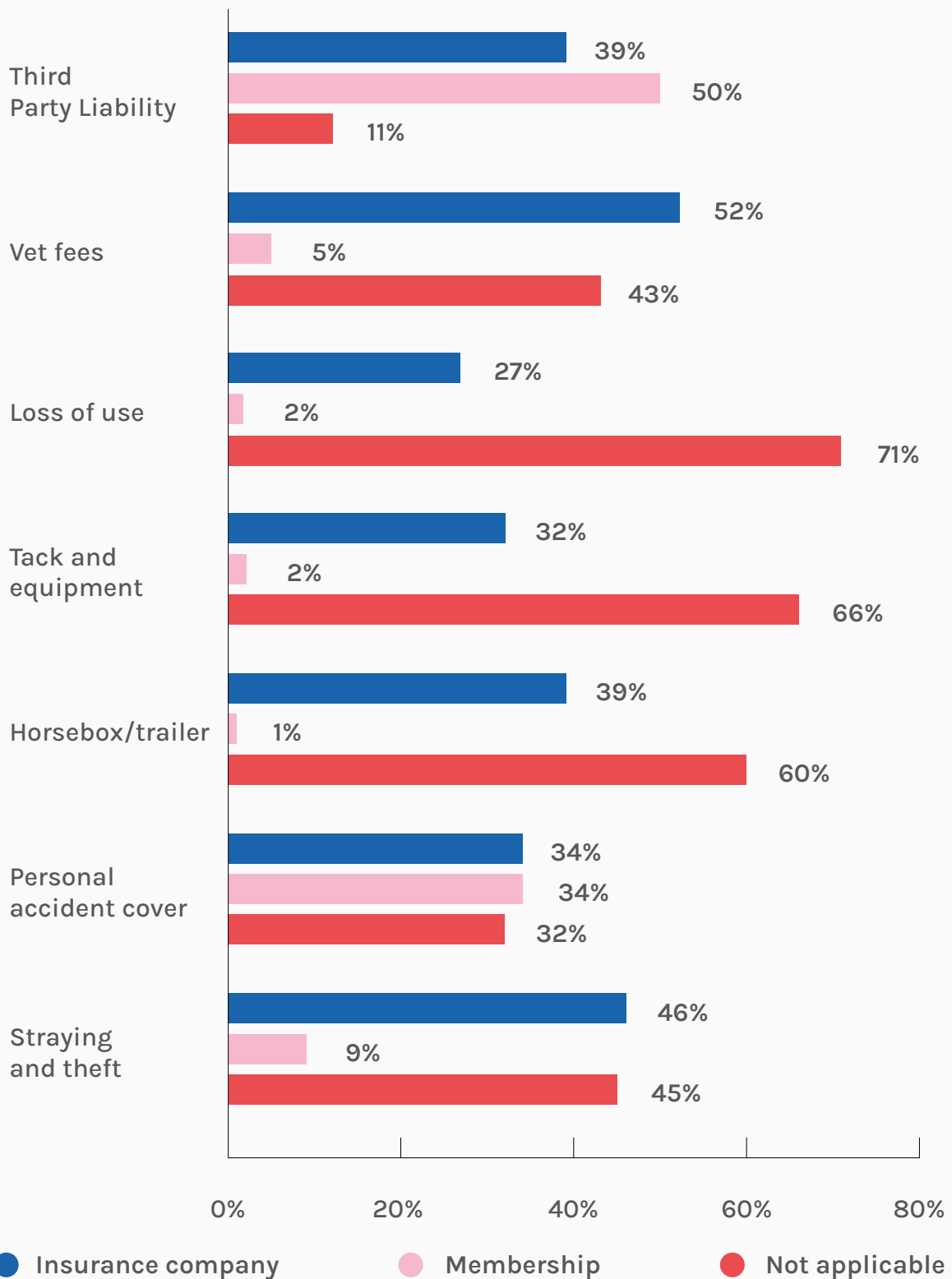


Most owners (75%) insured their horses, with almost half of respondents using a membership to a charity or organisation rather than an insurance company for their third-party liability cover. However, an insurance company was preferable for vets' fees (52%) and to cover for straying and theft (46%).

The owners that insured their horses reported increases in insurance premiums and administration charges, with 30% opting to decrease their level of cover to reduce the cost of their premium.

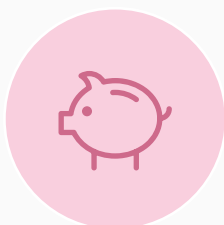


Please select all relevant types of cover and identify whether the cover is provided by an insurance company (e.g., PetPlan, KBIS, SEIB etc.) or membership with an organisation (e.g., BHS, World Horse Welfare)





Many of the owners that didn't insure their horses had set up an additional bank account and paid in a monthly sum to cover vets' fees, others opted to use credit cards to cover large vets' bills.



However, some owners had dipped into these savings accounts to cover costs in other areas of their lives meaning their funds to cover veterinary care were reduced.

"Only have liability insurance due to increased cost of insurance."

"Not planning to renew insurance this year as premium is too high for the amount of cover provided as he is 21 years old."

"My horse has a bank account. I put money in every month."

"I'm considering not renewing next time around and just saving what I'd usually pay into an account."

"Previously insured which was recently cancelled. Premium went from £55 lunar monthly to £189 lunar monthly with no claims or changes."

"Would have liked to increase cover, but already a £16/month increase from previous year so kept the same cover. Will be up for renewal again in Feb, not looking forward to the quote this year!"

How are horses being affected?
Insurance

“Having insurance is more important to me now. Any savings I put away for an emergency are reduced or might need to be used for other expenses.”

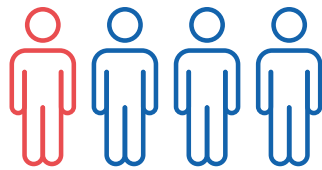
“I have increased vet fees premiums as I’m concerned about being able to afford vet care in the worst-case scenarios.”

“I cancelled my insurance and set up a savings fund instead as the insurance was so expensive and my horse has so many exclusions.”

“I paid £6,500 for my new horse but she is only insured for £3,000 as I can’t afford the monthly premiums for her true value.”



Many owners were already implementing a range of money saving options including sharing vet call out fees/using zoned vet visits, using testing-led worm control packages, using rug repair and reproofing services.



One in four horse owners were already buying feed, forage and/or bedding in bulk or were on livery yards that buy in bulk. Many owners that kept their horse in rented or sole use yards highlighted the lack of storage space which made buying in bulk prohibitive.

“I brought a second-hand washing machine to wash rugs and I do my own rug repairs & reproofing.”

“For routine vet/farrier work, we make sure we have at least 10 animals to be seen for the one call out charge.”

“Utilise zone days for vet call out as much as possible as it’s cheaper.”

“I have been able to share turnout and in duties with another owner so most days I only have to go once a day, saves an awful lot of fuel and time.”

“Cannot bulk buy as no storage room on the yard or at home.”

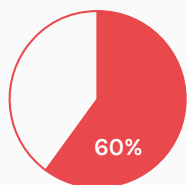
“I now try to cycle to the yard to save on fuel where I can.”

“We try and arrange things on our yard for everyone at the same time to share costs. We get forage deliveries together to share the delivery charge.”

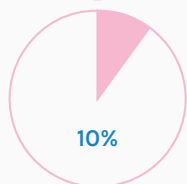
“I keep my horses on my own so no options to share.”

“Moving house to be closer to horses and save on petrol costs (currently live some distance away from stables).”

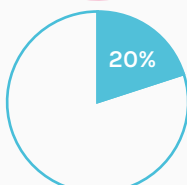
Owners were asked what money saving tips they had for other horse owners:



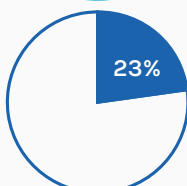
60% of comments related to feeds/forage - particularly shopping around for the best deals and making sure feeds are absolutely necessary.



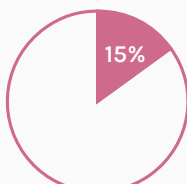
10% mentioned supplements with the majority asking other owners to challenge whether their horse really needed them.



20% mentioned bedding - particularly changing from shavings to straw.



23% mentioned buying in bulk and sharing costs with other owners.



15% mentioned increasing turnout and/or transferring horses to living out.

“Working out what you can and most importantly, cannot, afford and then making a realistic plan is the key and critical to horse welfare.”

“Stay on top of basic care such as farrier, vaccinations, worming, dentist, good fitting tack. Skipping these basics will only cost you more in the longer run.”

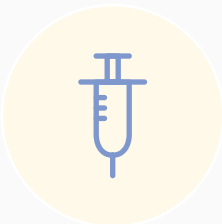
“Manage your grazing to allow maximum grass. Worm count, you may not need to worm. Consider full turnout with a shelter - this time of year is hard but it’s worth it long term.”

“Don’t be influenced into buying things you don’t need. That new gadget won’t miraculously change your pony. You don’t need to go to shows/clinics to enjoy your pony. We should all be a lot kinder to each other and less competitive.”

There had been some positive welfare outcomes for horses despite owners' financial pressures.



Horses being turned out for longer or full time which can be beneficial for both their physical and mental health.



Owners opting for testing-led worm control methods which are beneficial in tackling anthelmintic resistance in the equine parasite population (Mathews, 2014; Lightbody *et al.*, 2018).



Many owners are utilising a forage-based, low concentrate feed which will satisfy their horse's physiological and behavioural needs.



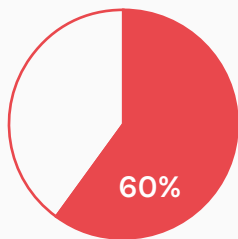
Delayed euthanasia is a significant welfare issue (McGowan and Ireland, 2016), but the results of this survey demonstrate that owners are acting quicker to make end of life decisions and although this may be due to financial pressures, ultimately, results in an improved welfare outcome for any horse that may be suffering.

03.

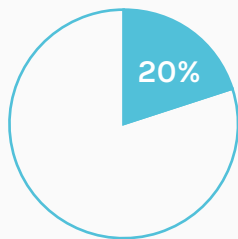
Implications
for the
equestrian
sector

Almost half of owners reported increases in charges for equine events and/or memberships. This is a potential driving factor in the reduction in participation of activities within the equine sector.

For example:



60% of owners had already reduced or stopped attending lessons, clinics and events with a further 30% considering doing so.



20% had already reduced or stopped equestrian memberships with 15% considering doing so.

“Reduced lessons and clinics and being more selective on event attendance.”

“Stopped lessons, stopped using trailer, haven’t been to dressage or TREC clinics in 2023. Sad as its good stimulation for my girl. But I cannot afford it anymore.”

“Considering unaffiliated rather than affiliated.”

“I’ve not renewed my riding club membership & have reduced competitions to one a month. I’ve currently stopped all clinics & lessons.”

Of the 432 owners that identified that they had at least one horse on loan from a charity, 3% thought they may have to surrender their horses back to the charity due to financial pressures. Of all respondents, 2% were considering contacting a charity to rehome their horse. This increase in returns and horses surrendered to charities could put further pressure on rescue centres and sanctuaries that are already experiencing financial strain.

“May need to consider relinquishing back to sanctuary if costs continue to increase.”

“I had 3 horses from a charity until last month when I had to send one back, which was heartbreaking.”

“Both my husband and I are retired and can afford to keep my horses well looked after. I am concerned that if something should happen to one of us our income would be very much reduced and I would have to return the pony I have on loan from a charity and probably euthanise my elderly pony, plus sell my beautiful riding horse.”

NEWC ran a complimentary survey to assess the impact of continued financial pressures on rescue centres and sanctuaries, the report can be found on the [NEWC website at newc.co.uk/equine-col-survey-2024/](https://newc.co.uk/equine-col-survey-2024/)

The equestrian sector strives to be as inclusive as possible, with many organisations and charities aiming to increase equality and diversity within the sector. Despite these interventions, owners felt that the level of ‘elitism’ within the industry is potentially growing due to prohibitive costs, particularly in relation to competition fees.

“Soon the equine world be only for the elitist.”

“It feels they don’t want people to take part.”

“Almost everything to do with equine care is more expensive and I would say prohibitively expensive for many people.”

“Nothing will affect my horse’s welfare as I will go without rather than him, but everything is becoming very expensive therefore pricing people like me (happy hackers) out of the market - it’s becoming an elite sport.”

“I fear that horse riding is now becoming an elite hobby and unless you have your own land or are earning a significant household income then it is becoming harder and harder to be a part of the sport/industry.”

“Shows and events are suffering. Entry fees for certain shows/qualifiers are extortionate. It’s becoming an elite sport the further up the game you get. Can’t compete with those who are very wealthy.”



Caring for equines and the cost of living
Summary

Summary



All horse owners are feeling the impact of continued pressure due to increased costs, which is of concern as many respondents were employed full time and were earning above the national average salary.



Horse owners are continuing to make considerable sacrifices in other areas of their lives to maintain their horse's standard of living and are concerned about how continued rising costs will further impact their horse keeping budget over the next year.



The cost of veterinary care, emergency care and suitable feed and forage are the top three areas of concern for horse owners.



Many horse owners are not looking to make significant changes to their involvement with horses in the next year, but if financial pressures continue some may need to sell their horses, find a sharer, surrender their horses to a charity or potentially euthanise their horses.



The key findings from this survey are similar to those from the 2023 survey, showing that horse owners may require further support to care for their equines if costs continue to rise. The findings have further highlighted that many owners are already doing all that they can, whilst making sacrifices in other areas of their lives, in order to provide basic care to their horses.

Caring for equines and the cost of living
Next steps

Next steps



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** or **education@worldhorsewelfare.org** if you would like to discuss the data or findings in more detail.



Lightbody, K.L., Matthews, J.B., Kemp-Symonds, J.G., Lambert, P.A., Austin, C.J. (2018). Use of a saliva-based diagnostic test to identify tapeworm infection in horses in the UK. *Equine Vet J.* 50; 213-219.

Matthews, J.B. (2014) Anthelmintic resistance in equine nematodes, *International Journal for Parasitology: Drugs and Drug Resistance*, 4:3; 310-315.

McGowan, C.M., and Ireland, J.L. (2016) Welfare, Quality of Life, and Euthanasia of Aged Horses, *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Equine Practice*, 32:2; 355-367.

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