

RECORD VIEW

Poverty action is needed right now

IT IS not acceptable in modern Britain to have mothers going hungry to feed their children.

Yesterday, Scotland's biggest-ever cost-of-living summit rightly highlighted an obscene gap between the country's haves and have nots.

While billionaires count their dividends, the poor count pennies, faced with the stark choice of food or fuel and of their children eating or going without themselves.

Diane is a working mum yet she has had to turn to charity Govan Pantry to put food on her table.

Across the country, charities are having to mop up the mess of a government which has failed to mitigate unprecedented increases in the cost of living.

Bonuses to fat cat City bosses have hit a record high as millions suffer below the breadline.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics, show that over the last year bonuses in the financial and insurance sector rocketed by 27.9 per cent.

Workers' wages went up by only 4.2 per cent, while inflation soars and increasing numbers in employment are queuing at food banks.

Those on benefits have seen their already paltry payments slashed by inflation and Tory austerity.

Yesterday, STUC general secretary Roz Foyer told the summit that people are facing not just a crisis but an emergency which is causing widespread suffering.

The summit called for a rise in wages, increases in tax for higher earners, a windfall tax and immediate rent caps.

The Government must now urgently take action and implement such desperately needed measures to ease the pain of poverty for millions across Britain.

Song Contest bid shows Vision

THE Eurovision Song Contest is set to come to the UK after the show's producers decided it couldn't be held in war-torn Ukraine.

The often-derided competition isn't everyone's cup of tea but is watched by millions across the continent.

BBC bosses are now said to be mulling over where to hold the event and Glasgow's OVO Hydro has already thrown its hat into the ring.

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has backed Eurovision coming to Scotland's biggest city but her SNP colleague Kevin Stewart, the Aberdeen Central MSP, has said the Granite City is "the place to be".

Both cities would be great hosts of Eurovision, which would bring a lot of fun and colour to Scotland.

And let's be honest, it's probably our best hope of getting back into Europe.
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SINGLE MUM TELL OF HARSH REALITY OF LIVING CRISIS

Cash was so tight it was choice between feeding my baby.. or me. It was emotional torment

Charity's food facility has been a lifeline for thousands in deprived areas of a city

BY ANNIE BROWN Associate Editor

A MUM has told how money was so tight she faced going hungry so she could afford to feed her baby.

Single mum Diane is one of millions trapped in poverty who were the focus of Scotland's biggest-ever cost-of-living summit yesterday.

Unions and poverty campaigners met at the conference in Glasgow to call for solutions to the crisis, which has pushed people like Diane to their knees.

The 34-year-old nursery worker, who lives in the city's Govan with her one year-old son Joe, had barely survived on low wages before he was born.

Having a child pushed her below the breadline, to the point where she was forced to turn to charity the Govan Pantry for food.

Diane said she was out for a walk one day when she found the pantry and it was her saviour.

She said: "It was the last week in January and the money was so low. It was literally a choice between my baby eating or me. It was emotional torment. I was terrified."

The Pantry supplies heavily subsidised food to those in need and has seen numbers using the facility quadruple in a year.

Increasingly, organisations like it are picking up the pieces of economic freefall. It caters for 2000 people across two of the most deprived local postcodes in Scotland.

The Pantry, run by charity Govan Help, has had as many as 100 new users every month as soaring living costs hit families.

While Diane is on maternity leave, she and Joe now live on £200 a week, including a top-up of Universal Credit.

She said: "When I first went to The Pantry, the staff treated me like a person and I burst out crying. I'd never gone to a food bank because I felt that I'd be taking food from someone even worse off than me."

Diane struggles to fight her tears as she remembers the relief when she was able to pick up fresh meat, cereal, fruit and vegetables, and tins.

She said: "I cried as I knew I could eat and Joe would be eating fresh fruit and vegetables. It was nice to feel there was help there."

Diane is returning to work later this month but having a job makes little difference because her wages are low.

She said: "I don't hold out any hope of ever doing anything but struggle."

She needs to find £60 a week for food - and that's before bills and basics for Joe.

The summit called for rent caps, fairer wages and taxing higher earners more as well as an end to chronically low wages for workers amid soaring inflation.

STUC general secretary Roz Foyer told delegates it is time to "get angry, come together and start fighting back" against a wealth gap.

She added people across the UK are "facing not just a crisis, but an absolute emergency which is causing suffering for a huge proportion of people right across the country".

Peter Kelly, director of the Poverty Alliance, said the crisis is like "no other" he has seen in the three decades since the network was established.

He said: "I don't remember another time like

DIGNITY
Viv Sawers



AID Govan Pantry and Merry-go-round provide access to affordable food and baby clothes to people in desperate need. Pic: Garry F McHarg

Shopping is child's play for mums in need



A MUM has told how a baby supplies charity helped her cope after her benefits were cut.

Glasgow-based Merry-go-round has seen a surge of demand for baby essentials during the cost-of-living crisis.

Mary, 30, is a single mum with four children aged 15, 11, five and 15 months, and found the charity a "massive help".

She has fallen foul of the Rape Clause which stop benefits beyond a second child unless a mother can prove the birth is a result of sexual assault.

Her Universal Credit payments are £767 a month for the five of them which sometimes has to stretch across a five-week period.

She has tried to hold down a job but has found it impossible to juggle childcare and working.

Mary said: "I lie to my children about whether I've eaten or have some

toast and ham for dinner.

"Merry-go-round helped me with packs of things my children really needed. They grow out of everything so quickly and get through so many books and toys. I can't afford to keep up."

Mary cried as she added: "Sometimes I literally have no money. I get really upset and there is constant anxiety. It is a life of stress and I know it's only going to get worse. I'm so scared for the future."

Alison Burns, the organisation's community engagement officer, said: "We see more and more people needing the service.

"Families were really struggling already. It is frightening that it will get worse when it's already so bad. The worry and stress of where money is going to come from is crippling."



Stenny put the fans first with prices freeze

BY RORY CASSIDY

A SCOTS football club is freezing prices on season tickets and strips to ease the burden on supporters.

Stenhousemuir chair Iain McMenemy says the Stirlingshire-based side has opted to allow teens in to their Ochilview ground for just £2.22 per game.

The League Two club, nicknamed the Warriors, will lose out on thousands, with full kits costing £58 for children, £62 for teenagers and £65.50 for adults.

Season tickets are priced at £130, or £13 per month, for adults; £90, or £9 per month for concessions; and £40 for 16 to 21-year-olds.

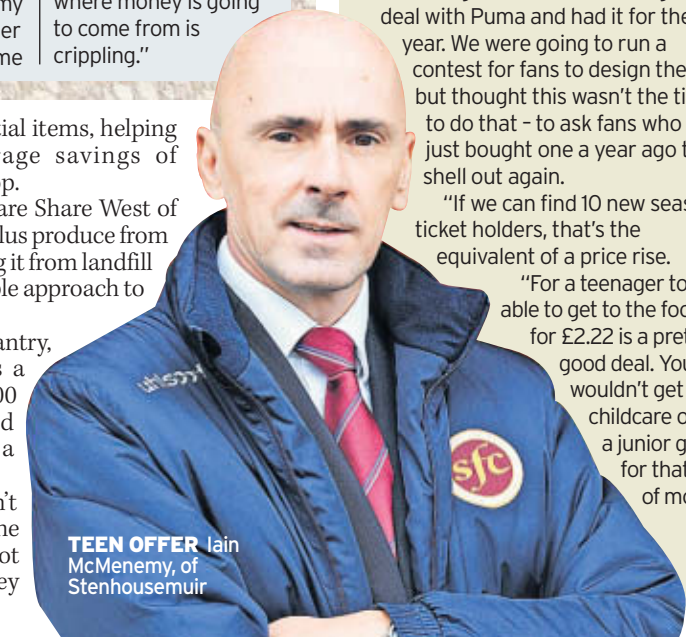
He said: "We'd dropped the price of season tickets during the Covid years because we didn't know if fans were going to get in to games or not.

"When we came to the prices for this year, we thought we could put them back to the old 2019-20 prices. "We're as affected as everybody else by cost increases but thought we couldn't ask fans for more, adding to concerns about paying bills and putting food on the table. So we decided to freeze the season ticket prices at the same amount and still offer monthly direct debits to spread the payments.

"With regards to the kit, we signed a deal with Puma and had it for the year. We were going to run a contest for fans to design the kit but thought this wasn't the time to do that - to ask fans who have just bought one a year ago to shell out again.

"If we can find 10 new season ticket holders, that's the equivalent of a price rise.

"For a teenager to be able to get to the football for £2.22 is a pretty good deal. You wouldn't get childcare or into a junior game for that kind of money."



TEEN OFFER Iain McMenemy, of Stenhousemuir

this. We've been through some really tough times over the last 30 years, poverty-wise but I don't recall anything quite like this.

"There are workers I've heard about who are struggling to get to work because they can't fill up their car.

"And can they afford to put their heating on. There are people who are going to food banks and unable to cook the food.

"They might have been able to get there but they're having to decide, 'What do I spend my precious pounds on in terms of my energy?'"

The impact of the crisis is being felt across the country and organisations such as Govan Help are witnessing desperation on the frontline of the problem.

The project's chief officer,

Viv Sawers, said: "People just can't afford the very basic costs of living.

"If there is not a penny left in your budget, you can't even afford to buy new shoes for your kid. It's grim for families and it's only going to get worse.

"We've had people who are suicidal, who come in and just break down.

"The toll on their mental health is terrible. It is crisis to crisis.

"It is already tough and isolating for people - the worry of not having money and thinking they are a failure because they can't afford to feed themselves when it's not their fault. It's the system that's wrong and a policy change that's needed to lift people out of poverty."

Pantry membership costs £2.50 per week and allows each subscriber to select 10 items from a range of fresh, frozen and chilled food

products and other essential items, helping families to make average savings of approximately £15 per shop.

The food comes from Fare Share West of Scotland, which takes surplus produce from big supermarkets, diverting it from landfill and promoting a sustainable approach to food insecurity.

Since April 2020, The Pantry, which is open two days a week, has distributed 100 tons of food and supplied 268,683 meal portions, for a value of £385,025.

Sawers said: "People aren't just handed a bag of food. The dignity is in choosing and not giving them the sense they are getting a handout."