

# Risk of 'hardship and destitution' after mini-budget

## Campaigners say poverty ignored by Sunak

**SPECIAL REPORT**  
BY JUDITH DUFFY

**F**OOD banks are warning of a struggle to keep up with demand in the coming months as the cost-of-living crisis hits the poorest families in Scotland.

Campaigners say the UK Chancellor's decision to "bypass" the growing poverty crisis in his Spring Statement last week means there is the risk of "hardship and destitution" on an unprecedented scale. However, measures announced in Scotland means it is hoped levels of child poverty will begin to reduce, while they are expected to continue to rise in the rest of the UK.

Joyce Leggate, chairperson of Kirkcaldy Foodbank, said demand had been rising every week.

She said: "We are not a crisis service any more – that is what we thought we were. But the reality is we are almost an essential service for some of our clients."

Leggate said the majority of people who seek support say it is because of increased costs of heating and food, rather than issues to do with benefit sanctions or unemployment.

She added: "We are also seeing a number of older people – pensioners – who we didn't really see many of in the past. People that were on the edge are getting pushed over the edge now and really I don't think we have seen even the beginning of it all yet, I think there is worst to come."

She added: "We are really looking at that very closely at the moment to see how we can continue to meet the demand. What we were doing is purchasing fresh fruit and veg, but we will probably have to give people a choice of either having tinned fruit and vegetables or fresh, we can't give both."

Mairi McCallum, project manager at Moray Food Plus, said it had experienced its busiest ever Christmas and demand had not slowed since.

She said: "The general feedback we are getting from people is that with the the cost-of-living and the impact



**Mairi McCallum, project manager at Moray Food Plus, and John Dickie, director of the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland**

of the energy prices, it is really just leaving people with no money.

"Maybe they go for three weeks and then they are a week short before their payment comes in. It is folk in work, so it is not just people on benefits being impacted. It is a very general 'everybody is feeling it'."

She said she expected the coming months will be "incredibly difficult" for both people who use the food bank and the organisation itself.

"We are working flat out and it is quite a challenge for us to meet that increased demand," she said.

"We have concerns around our stock and we have been fortunate to access funding, but that is only lasting for so long.

"It is not really sustainable for us as an organisation moving forward and I know a lot of food banks have the same concerns. We are being treated as an emergency service, but we have to look at other ways of supporting people."

The Chancellor was met with fierce criticism last week after he failed to heed calls to take action to help struggling households in his Spring Statement, such as increasing benefits in line with inflation.

The day after his mini-budget, the Scottish Government announced measures to tackle child poverty, including increasing the Scottish Child Payment to £25 a week by

the end of 2022 and spending £10 million annually to "mitigate the UK Government benefit cap".

Sabine Goodwin, co-ordinator of the Independent Food Aid Network, urged the Scottish Government to keep the vision of having a Scotland without the need for food banks.

She said: "Scotland's independent food banks are doing their utmost to support yet more people unable to afford food. The Chancellor chose to bypass the UK's growing poverty crisis in his Spring Statement but at least the Scottish Government has committed this week to further increasing the Scottish Child Payment and mitigating the impact of the benefit cap."

She added: "Further cash first, income-based measures must be introduced rapidly if we are to avoid hardship and destitution on an unprecedented scale."

**J**OHAN Dickie, director of the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland, said a recent report had found the combined value of Scottish government policies and reduced childcare costs is likely to reduce the net cost of bringing up a child by up to 31% for lower income families.

He said: "We don't hold back from calling the Scottish Government to account, but there is significant additional investment now going in to support families in Scotland."

"The announcement of the Scottish Child Payment being increased again and further action being taken to mitigate the impact of the benefit cap, these will have real beneficial impacts for families."

He added: "There is now a real divergence – the gap [between income and costs to bring up a child] is significantly smaller than it is elsewhere in the UK."

"Clearly none of this goes far enough yet, but all the evidence is we will start to see reductions in levels of child poverty as a result of the interventions and investment which has been made in supporting families in Scotland. Whereas elsewhere in the UK we will expect to see child poverty continuing to rise."

