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**Interviews available with Imran Hussain, director of policy and campaigns at Action for Children – 07718 114 038 /** **huw.beale@actionforchildren.org.uk**

**New FIGURES show A QUARTER**

**OF CHILDREN IN SOUTH WEST living in poverty**

* Across the South West region a quarter (25 per cent) of children are living in poverty
* The highest levels are in Bristol where a third (33%) of children are living in poverty
* Child poverty levels in the South West and across the UK have remained stubbornly high over the last decade. This was the year the temporary £20 uplift to Universal Credit was introduced, which helped reduce overall UK child poverty levels by four percentage points in a single year. The uplift has since been removed.

Today the End Child Poverty Coalition launches its annual child poverty statistics for the UK, revealing child poverty levels at a local authority and Westminster constituency level.

This research, carried out by Loughborough University on behalf of the coalition, shows that a quarter (24.7 per cent) of children and young people in the South West region are living in poverty, the equivalent of eight children in a classroom of 30. In Bristol this figure reaches a third (32.6%) of all children and young people – or a staggering 10 children in a classroom of 30 (see table below for a list of the 10 highest Local Authority areas in the South West).

Across the region the number of children living in poverty has barely changed in the last 10 years, in 2010/11 25.4% of children were living in poverty. Meaning there has only been a decrease of less than 1 percentage point between 2010/11 and 2021/22.

For low income families this can mean using food banks and parents skipping meals to feed their children, not being able to afford winter coats or school uniforms, or suffering from the mental worry that comes when you are not able to pay your bills. We know that certain families are more likely to experience poverty. In 2020/21 40% of children in lone parent households were in poverty (compared to 24% of those in couple parent households).\* The latest data available\*\* also shows children from Black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to be in poverty, at 46 per cent, compared with 26 per cent of children in white British families.

**CASE STUDY**

The cost-of-living crisis is a constant struggle for Victoria, a mum-of-four from Bath supported by Action for Children’s Bath West Children’s Centre.

The rising prices in the shops and soaring energy bills have left her struggling to make ends meet in recent months.

Victoria’s money problems began a few years ago when the relationship with her former partner and the children’s dad broke down and she moved away with the family.

Unable to work because of her caring responsibilities for her youngest children who have a mix of additional needs and serious health conditions, Victoria has had to stretch her benefits income further and further to the point now where she skips meals to make sure her children have enough to eat.

She said: ‘I’m not having much for breakfast and skipping lunch every day now - I just survive on tea and coffee during the day. As I speak to you this morning, I’ve had two bananas and that will have to last me until the evening. I then sit my children down with their food and I just have whatever is left over for my main meal. Sometimes that’s just one or two fish fingers and a little bit of beans.

‘What’s in my cupboard at the moment is just pasta, cereal, baked beans and bread – most of it’s from foodbanks. I get a food bank parcel from the nursery every week and the girls collect a bag or two of foodbank food from the school too.

‘I’ve got really bad anxiety, I’m not sleeping with all the money worries keeping me awake at night. I had to find money for one of my daughter’s school trips yesterday and I had to ask my mum for the money as I just couldn’t afford it. It makes you feel you’re not good enough to be a parent when you have to ask for help.

‘My children miss out on after-school clubs as I can’t afford them. My eldest daughter goes to a dance club which you normally have to pay for but they’ve been kind and funded her place. I feel like a charity case and it makes me feel awful. She had a dance show recently and I dressed her in second hand clothes – I didn’t have the money to buy the new, dance clothes – I don’t think anyone noticed but I felt it.’

Explaining what she would have to do if prices and bills continued to rise, Victoria said: ‘It’d come to having to turn the electricity off or something. I never have the TV on when I’m on my own and I try and do just one load of washing a week and that’s really difficult when you’re a family of five. In an evening we have a hot bath – but we all use the same water.'

Imran Hussain, director of policy and campaigns at Action for Children, said:

“Child poverty isn’t inevitable, the government can make changes to ensure that families are able to afford the basics for their children. We need urgent decisive action to ensure that next year we aren’t reporting exactly the same figures for the South West. All children in the South West, and across the UK, deserve to live free of poverty and to have the same chances as their peers.”

This data covers the first year of the Covid 19 pandemic, which was also the year that saw poorer households receive the £20 Universal Credit uplift. Whilst in other regions across the UK it seems that this uplift has had more of an impact on child poverty figures, this trend is not reflected in the South West. This could be because many people in the region were in receipt of legacy benefits, so were not receiving Universal Credit payments during the pandemic. As a result they would not have received the extra cash uplift.

The End Child Poverty coalition believes if the government truly wants to ‘level up’ the country and begin to tackle child poverty, MPs must continue to find ways of making social security more adequate in the long term so that every family can afford the essentials. Specifically, the government must ensure:

1) Universal Credit payments deductions are reduced and the benefit cap abolished.

2) There is improved access to free or affordable childcare.

3) Free School Meals in England and Wales are extended to all children in families receiving Universal Credit.

The table below shows the 10 Local Authorities in the South West with the highest levels of child poverty

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| --- | --- |
| **Local Authority** | **Percentage of children living in poverty in 2020/21** |
| Bristol, City of  | 32.6% |
| Torridge | 30.4% |
| Cornwall | 29.5% |
| Torbay | 28.8% |
| Plymouth | 28.4% |
| Gloucester | 28.0% |
| North Devon | 28.0% |
| Forest of Dean | 26.1% |
| Sedgemoor | 25.8% |
| Mid Devon | 25.6% |

**ENDS**

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**NOTES TO EDITORS**

1. The End Child Poverty coalition (www.endchildpoverty.org.uk) is made up of around 75 organisations from civic society including children’s charities, child welfare organisations, social justice groups, faith groups, trade unions and others, united in our vision of a UK free of child poverty. These include Child Poverty Action Group, The Children’s Society, Buttle UK, Gingerbread, Oxfam GB, Action for Children, TUC, Save the Children, and the National Children’s Bureau.
2. You can get in touch with the coalition by emailing rachel@endchildpoverty.org.uk or on 07918 567577.
3. [The full report is available here](https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Local-child-poverty-indicators-report-2022_FINAL.pdf) and [data tables here](https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Child-Poverty-AHC-estimates-2015-2021-FINAL.xlsx)
4. The figures are based on the Department for Work and Pensions Children in low income families: local area statistics which estimates the poverty rate before housing costs. A statistical model is used to estimate child poverty after housing costs which draws on household survey data alongside local area statistics on private rent levels. The statistics are calibrated to regional 3-year averages from Households Below Average Income (HBAI) for the financial years 2018/19 to 2020/21. The HBAI figures for 2020/21 are less reliable than earlier years due to sampling issues related to the pandemic. This should be kept in mind when interpreting the statistics released today, but the impact is lessened by the use of three-year averages for regional figures. More information on HBAI is available here.

Users are advised that the data for individual local authorities and parliamentary constituencies are subject to small statistical fluctuations year-on-year and should be considered within the context of the regional or the longer-term local trend.

\*Calculated from Households below Average Income for the financial year 2020/21. Note that caution should be used in interpreting HBAI statistics for 2020/21 due to sampling issues related to the pandemic. Further information is available [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-for-financial-years-ending-1995-to-2021)

\*\* Calculations from Households Below Average Income statistics on the number and percentage of people living in low income households for financial year 2019/20, Tables 4\_3db & 4\_5db. Department for Work and Pensions.

Action for Children protects and supports vulnerable children and young people by providing practical and emotional care and support, ensuring their voices are heard and campaigning to bring lasting improvements to their lives. With 512 services across the UK, in schools and online, in 2020/21 we helped 604,885 children, young people and families. [actionforchildren.org.uk](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.actionforchildren.org.uk%2F&data=04%7C01%7CHuw.Beale%40actionforchildren.org.uk%7Cf8d8bf2195554e7e41d408da004d9d2f%7C472f2d2100a94fe28b1451e21d7e6f9f%7C0%7C0%7C637822630586731428%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=aNIfL5%2Fjf%2B168j%2BWwmbQSQN583JLqsdGl8H0jAGXICg%3D&reserved=0)