

THE GOVAN LETTER

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CUTS IN PUBLIC SERVICES SOME OF THE MOST SEVERE EVER

Arising from the Westminster government's autumn budget, and decisions at Scottish government level, we face some of the toughest cuts ever. The Budget adopted by Glasgow City Council requires £18.5m cuts for schools – with 800 teachers to go over the coming years and another 100 support staff. More posts are being cut in adult education. Twenty GMB members lobbied the council in March when they discovered their jobs were to go within the month.



Schools suffer worst hit for years

Overall cuts will amount to £68m. Cuts by Glasgow Life have not yet been fully detailed but are likely to involve further closures and increases in charges. Cleansing will change for garden waste. The capital budget for transport has been cut to zero – with detrimental consequences likely for the franchising of bus services. In order to raise extra cash charges for visitor parking will be introduced as well as a more general extension of parking charges to 10 pm. Cuts for social work services, part of the Health and Social Work partnership have not yet been detailed. To make matters worse, the Westminster government's recent Spring budget is, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility, likely to require even tighter budgeting for public services next year. We deal with cuts for housing, fire and police services on other pages.

BUSES - GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS



One of Manchester's newly franchised buses

Govan Community Council has long campaigned for buses to be taken back under public control, says our chair Danny O'Neill.

The good news is that this ambition came a step closer on 15 March, when the regional transport authority, Strathclyde Passenger Transport (SPT), announced they will start work on introducing a franchising system. Local councils would then be able to control bus fares, routes and timetables and private bus companies would simply bid for the contracts to run these services.

Franchising

This type of system has worked successfully in London for years. Since Manchester introduced franchising last November passenger numbers have already increased by 8%, reversing years of decline. **Continued page 4**

NO BANK LEFT IN GOVAN



On 9 January, writes Gordon Mackay, the Bank of Scotland closed its branch at 816 Govan Road. This was the only remaining bank in Govan after the closures of TSB and the RBS. The closure was vigorously opposed. Chris Stephens MP contacted the Chief Executives of Lloyds Bank which owns the Bank of Scotland and also delivered a petition signed by over 1,000 local residents. Our MP, supported by Govan Community Council, is seeking to set up a Banking hub similar to those recently established in Troon and Cambuslang.

The bank represented 125 years of history. The building at 816 Govan Road was opened in 1899 by the British Linen Bank and was transferred to the Bank of Scotland in 1969.

In Govan town centre we urgently need a cash machine to replace that taken away from the Bank of Scotland - those remaining in local shops are only available in working hours. An ideal site for a replacement would be in Govan underground station open for much longer hours. Councillor Stephen Dornan is taking this proposal forward to SPT who operate the subway.

GOVAN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

PUBLIC MEETING

Pearce Institute Café, Govan Cross

HOUSING CRISIS

AND

COUNCIL CUTS

Speakers include Karin Goodwin of the Ferret and Hannah Salome (GCC)
All welcome (esp new residents)

7 p.m. THURSDAY 25 April

Housing & Homelessness: Our Meeting on 25 April

Hannah Salome, vice chair GCC

The panel at our 25 April public meeting focuses on Housing and Homelessness and opens up a conversation from local, lived experience perspectives. Our first speaker, investigative journalist and co-editor of *The Ferret*, Karin Goodwin, has long been working on housing, homelessness and intersecting topics.

In Govanhill *The Ferret* and *The Greater Govanhill Magazine* provide through their Community Newsroom a space where residents can make their voices heard. Earlier this year, a new series of monthly, open 'editorial meetings' started off with a focus on Glasgow's housing emergency, inviting contributions from all over the city, and bringing together people with homeless experience, from the third sector and academics.

Another shared community empowering building tool practiced by both media outlets is their solution-focused approach. We hope that Govan communities find inspiration from these collaborations.

Our lived experience speakers are women from our community, sharing their insights and knowledge and providing vital perspectives to learn from and hopefully take forward into grassroots-led activism in Greater Govan. Women's homelessness is often hidden and less acknowledged as such, and women need to be far more visible and listened to if we want to identify the wide range of factors behind the multiple, related crises facing us: from housing, food, and health care to safety, to name a few of the human rights our governments fail to protect. Which leads to one of the issues at the core of our crisis: the lack of representation – how we make everyone part of the conversation, ensuring all perspectives, skills and experiences are employed in pursuing solutions.

As your Community Council, we want to provide a platform for the community, facilitating networking and cooperation. We encourage you to come to our meetings that are open to all residents, to put forward any issues, questions and suggestions, and sharing your ideas on how we can make our community a better place to live for everyone. Community Councils are the most accessible, local engagement opportunity in our democracy, where all levels of governments are represented: you can directly address your Glasgow City councillors, MSP and MP (or their staff standing in for them).

In my view, another issue at the core of ongoing homelessness and housing crises is the lack of accountability. Corruption, lack of transparency, and short-termism thrive because those responsible are not held to account. This is your and our chance to make a start at the community level, with your Community Council, where we can educate ourselves and enable each other to make informed decisions for our future.

For more information: <https://theferret.scot/tag/homelessness/>
<https://govanlawcentre.org>, see Women's Rights Project/
<https://shelter.scotland.org.uk/> Scottish Housing Regulator
www.housingregulator.gov.scot/ TIS Tenants Information Service
<https://tis.org.uk> /Living Rent www.livingrent.org

Asylum Seekers and Refugees: homelessness

Ruby Kelly

Due to increasing conflict and human rights abuses around the world, more and more people are fleeing their homes and seeking safety elsewhere. Glasgow has the second highest number of refugees and asylum seekers of any city in the UK.

When a person claims asylum, they are dispersed to temporary asylum accommodation, while they await their decision from the Home Office. This can be a flat, hostel or hotel. As of June 2023, there were just over 4500 asylum seekers living in Glasgow. All asylum housing is owned and maintained by Mears, who won the contract from Serco in 2019.

No time limit: 11 year wait

There is no time limit on how long a person must wait for their asylum decision. For some it can be months and for some it can be years. For a Govan resident granted asylum in 2023, it was an 11 year wait for her asylum to be granted by the Home Office. When people are awaiting this decision, they are not allowed to work or access any benefits such as Universal Credit. They survive on Asylum financial support, which is just under £50 a week (about £7 a day). This time is often incredibly harrowing, especially for those who have escaped torture and trauma in their home countries.

When people are eventually granted their refugee visa, it should be a time of relief and hope- a chance to start the next chapter in their life in safety. However, with the current housing and cost of living crisis, newly granted refugees in Glasgow and across the UK are at serious risk of destitution and street homelessness. When a person is granted a refugee visa, they are no longer eligible to live in Mears asylum accommodation. People are served with eviction notices as soon as 7 days after their asylum decision, and if they fail to find new accommodation in the given time they are served with court summons, or forcibly evicted.

Altogether no homeless accommodation available

Even if a person makes a universal credit application on the day they receive their decision, it can still be a couple of months before they receive their first payment. On top of this, with the current housing shortage crisis, the waiting list for social housing can be as long as 18 months, even for highest priority vulnerable applicants. Through my work at Maslow's, I have seen regular cases of clients coming in for help after either receiving imminent eviction notices or physically being evicted from their asylum accommodation. In these instances, I have made calls to the HSPC Homeless team, and on every single one of these occasions over the past six months (so far 7 instances) I have been told that there is no homeless accommodation available.

Even when the client has exhausted all other options (staying with friends, sleeping at the church or mosque etc) and will be sleeping on the street, the Homeless Team have not been able to offer any accommodation, temporary or otherwise. This is an extremely dangerous situation, especially over winter. It is not an exaggeration to say that the current housing crisis is killing vulnerable people. In 2022 alone, 244 homeless people died in Glasgow. Govan Law Centre has recently taken a case against Glasgow City Council, claiming that the local authority "was under an absolute legal obligation to provide accommodation suitable for occupation by a homeless household". They have recently been granted appeal rights by the supreme court to pursue the case.

The wider housing shortage has led to extremely long waiting lists for social housing, which in turn keeps people in temporary accommodation for longer, which then leads to situations like the ones I see in Maslows; people who are physically street homeless, not even able to access temporary accommodation through the council-run Homeless team and Health and Social Care Partnership. For those most vulnerable in our society, including asylum seekers and refugees, this is a life or death situation. **Something needs to change, and fast.**

Firefighters condemn removal of appliances - including from Govan - as endangering life



The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has made the biggest cut to its operational readiness since the Second World War. Ten front line appliances have been removed from some of the busiest Fire Stations in Britain - removed without consultation and the firefighters who crewed those appliances, thrown to the wind. Experience and knowledge of Station areas, so crucial in our business, disregarded.

The Government slashed the budget. Fire appliances removal was the Service Chief Officer's decision. But how much money does the removal of Fire Cover save?

The wages bill hasn't changed. All that's changed is the increase in time for us to arrive at an incident, with sufficient numbers to begin Fire Fighting or rescues. Oh! and the saving in Diesel. Except supporting appliances will now attend five to ten minutes later and will travel further. The Service have declared the removal as Temporary. However, there is no declared intention to have them returned.

Our Chief Officer advised the Justice Committee that, if the budget cuts to the Service go ahead, he would be forced to consider the further removal of another 18 front line appliances, which equates to 25 percent of our wholtime capability. These figures are inconceivable to Scotland's Firefighters. We believe they represent a death stroke to our Service.

So, the Fire Brigades Union started with their appropriately named 'CUTS LEAVE SCARS' Campaign. Firefighter's from across the UK gathered in our major Cities. Glasgow saw a well attended, well supported, rally in George Square. We headed to Edinburgh and lobbied our Parliament. We brought passion and noise and we made our presence felt. But the Fire Appliances removed from Cowcaddens, Govan, Maryhill, Hamilton, Greenock, Dunfermline, Glenrothes, Methil, Perth, and Kingsway East, were just as gone.

In the budget, the Government released some money into the Fire Service, it was nowhere near the amounts we had been told the Service required, but it seemed to be enough to stave off the second wave of cuts. No more cuts this year! announced our strategic leaders, But there WILL be a second-round next year!

So far, we haven't been advised if the ten appliances will return anytime soon. Rank and file Firefighters believe this is the fruition of a plan to reduce the wage bill by slashing the number of Firefighters in Scotland's Fire and Rescue Service. Reducing the appliances will automatically reduce the number of Firefighters required to Crew them. Not necessarily in the short term, no. But this a Long Game. Retire them off, don't replace them. Slash the wage bill.

BUT our Firefighting procedures have been honed and sharpened in experience and in tragedy. The numbers we require at an incident is reflected in the experience of those who came before us. We have learned hard and tragic lessons and we have evolved into one of the finest services in the world.

The slashing of our Service is shameful. The Government dripping money into our budget like benevolent overseers is disgraceful. Scotland needs to properly fund its Fire Service and it needs to do it now.

Fire Brigades Union Scotland.

Police Service Cuts

New cuts of up to 1,000 officers were announced last autumn. David Threadgold of the Scottish Police Federation commented: "That is simply not acceptable for the Scottish Police Federation, the police service of Scotland or anyone who lives in Scotland, because the only consequence of that can be reduced service to the communities and communities in Scotland being less safe than they are at the moment."

GOVAN'S MUSIC FESTIVAL

Esme Clark reviews

This year's Festival, again with Paul MacAlinden as artistic director, took place from 13 to 16th. March, beginning with Govan Schools Choirs Consort in the Fairfield Club.



We all had our favourite moments but tiny ones belting out 'I will walk 500 miles' and the Gaelic Choir ending their performance by breaking into an energetic reel were highlights as was another choir swaying gently to the rhythms of an African folk song. Continuing that evening, Govan's adult dancers and singers gave us a Community Cabaret.

Then on Thursday, on one of the wettest nights of the year, the Glasgow Barons managed to fill the pews of Govan and Linthouse Parish Church to present the Carmen Jazz Suite and Mahler's 4th Symphony. Also featured were a soprano and a brilliant performance on soprano saxophone by the young Lewis Banks. Young people in the audience whooped and cheered their friends in the orchestra. Wonderful to see.

The Four Barons Quartet in the Kinning Park Complex gave us folk music and Freed Up Friday celebrated sober with rave tracks and live strings.

Glasgow All Sorts and the Glasgow community Pipe Band lent their enthusiasm.

The Festival ended with Musicians in Exile and the award-winning Dlu group of Celtic Connections at Edmiston House with a night of World Music and Gaelic folk rock. As one of the songs from the children's choirs went "We are Diversity". The Festival offered music for all Govanites to share and the music was affordable and accessible at a venue near you. What's not to like? Thanks, Paul.

Additional reporting from Gordon MacKay

Supporting Govan's Families



Our picture shows volunteers staffing the Pantry in the Pierce Institute – which supplies local families.

Many of the volunteers come from the Govan Community Project and are asylum seekers and refugees.

Viv Sawers, Chief Officer of Govan HELP, is pleased that the organisation has been able to secure funding to support the continued delivery of services for the coming year and that its invaluable services for families in Govan will be maintained. Along with Operations Manager, Steph McFadden, Viv is working to develop the range of services and the capacity within each of them in line with the demand from the local community.

Govan HELP's Family Support service offers a range of support including one to one intensive support, Govan Tots Early Years Group, Family Learning and Talk Autism for families with neurodivergent children, recent funding awards have meant that they are currently recruiting additional family workers to join the team. A recent partnership opportunity with Govan Housing Association has allowed for a Money Advice worker post based within the team each week to provide financial advice and guidance alongside other supports. In the last year Govan HELP has also been able to expand the Play Therapy team with the addition of a second Play Therapist enabling access to the service for more local children and the expansion of the service into four local primary schools. Adult Counselling is also available for parents engaged with Govan HELP's Family Support services. The Govan Pantry is continuing to support the community to meet the cost of food and basic essential items, now with 3,076 members of the community registered to use the service. The project has a footfall of around 300 people per week and is supported by 28 volunteers from the local community.

This time last year, says Viv, we were quite worried that, given the general economic climate, some of our funding sources might dry up. In fact, this has not been the case – although cuts in the public sector budgets have made our work even more necessary.

Simply in terms of food poverty we have seen the number of households registered with the Pantry increase by over 20 percent over the past year to 3,076. They include older citizens, students, working families, asylum seekers and refugees – and the situation on this front is likely to get more challenging over the coming year.

Govan HELP and The Govan Pantry are based within the Pearce Institute. Viv hopes that over the coming year its services will be able to meet the demands of our now very diverse community – one also with very diverse and increasing needs.

BUSES: GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

Predictably, this announcement was met with outrage from the private bus operators, with McGills even threatening legal action against SPT to stop franchising. A disgraceful response, when the private bus companies already receive more than half their income from public subsidies provided by councils and the Scottish Government. Without taxpayers' money, McGills wouldn't have a business, and they should be more grateful. Manchester successfully defeated legal challenges from the private operators and we expect SPT to show the same determination.

The Bad News

The bad news is that the franchising process is likely to take 5 to 7 years and, in the meantime, SPT intend to sign up to a so-called 'Bus Service Improvement Partnership' (BSIP) with the private bus companies. This would be a massive waste of time and money. For years the councils have had partnerships with the private operators. They have all failed, and more and more public money has already been siphoned off. SPT should concentrate all their time and resources in making sure that franchising is introduced as soon as possible.

The other piece of bad news is the decision of the Scottish Government to reduce SPT's capital budget to zero. We believe the government should be investing more rather than less on public transport so this was a massive disappointment.

SPT will hold a six week public consultation in April/May on the franchising proposals. The progress made so far would never have happened without mass public pressure, for instance the petition by Get Glasgow Moving that was signed by over 10,000 people.

We would encourage Govanites to take part in the SPT consultation and make your voices heard. Also please support grassroots campaigns for better public transport, such as Get Glasgow Moving (<https://www.getglasgowmoving.org>) or Better Buses for Strathclyde (<https://www.facebook.com/BetterBusesSPT>).

Govan Community Council welcomes new members

Community Councils represent the third layer of government. They exist to represent the needs of local communities – on planning and the provision of services. Their success depends on how far they represent all sections of the local community. If you want to be involved, contact either the Secretary Esme Clark (0141 425 1318) or the Chair Danny O'Neill (07753 126593). This newsletter is produced with financial assistance from Glasgow City Council.