



All to pay for

SCOTLAND'S public finances are in a mess.

And it is not going to get any better any time soon.

For Nats ministers, that puts them in a bind. We reveal today that they are yet to settle on how much they will pay their public sector workers.

Make no mistake – that decision will affect millions. It's nurses, doctors, teachers, police officers, council workers, civil servants.

And after years of low or non-existent pay rises, SNP ministers buckled under severe pressure from striking workers last year and paid out huge new deals.

These – experts later said – had not been budgeted for and worsened an already terrible outlook. They were unaffordable.

You would think ministers may learn their lesson and sit down with unions early doors in a bid to see off any potential repeat.

But no. Instead of negotiating a sensible deal, it has been fingers-in-ears time from Finance Secretary Shona Robison.

No offers put on the table, not even a whisper of how much has been budgeted in for the 2024/25 financial year which began at the start of this month.

This not only breaks with the tradition of publishing a public sector pay policy ahead of time so opposition politicians and the press can scrutinise spending.

But it irritates unions, makes workers wait for often well-deserved increases in pay, and sows distrust and anger.

Industrial relations in Scotland are at a post-devolution low. Workers and unions do not trust ministers and vice versa.

It is past time for ministers to pull their fingers out and be honest with unions on what they can afford.

Crowing about record pay deals again would cast serious doubts on how bad Scotland's finances supposedly are.

You cannot claim there is no money for housing (a £200million cut in the budget) and then hand out equivalent or higher amounts found down the back of the sofa in new pay deals just to avoid strikes.

But that scenario – as happened last year – could be set for a repeat.

And it would only further underline Humza Yousaf's weak grasp on Scotland.

Greens woe

PATRICK Harvie admitted yesterday he did not know if the Scottish Greens would stay in government with the SNP.

Their vote – set for May – is a significant moment for the party. And a defeat for the leadership would likely see them rapidly replaced, given their personal pushes for a coalition deal.

Green members are furious at the decision to scrap climate targets.

And while Mr Harvie attempted an olive branch to the LGBT wing of his party by disgracefully labelling the Cass review into gender healthcare unscientific, he looks like he is on an increasingly shoogly peg.

It is clear the co-leader knows he is defending the indefensible.

Only time will tell if his membership agrees.

EARTH DAY PLEA TO PURGE SYNTHETICS..NOT RECYCLE



That's a wrap for plastic

GREEN campaigners have insisted recycling is not the answer – instead we have to drastically cut our use of plastic.

Today marks Earth Day, when people around the world come together to make an impact on climate change and sustainability.

This year's theme is Planet vs Plastics and the organisation's goal is to reduce production of synthetics by 60 per cent in the next 16 years.

Communications director Sarah Davies says microplastic particles have contaminated 80 per cent of the coastal waters in Scotland.

Meanwhile, research has revealed that synthetics have an adverse impact on many aspects of human health.

Here, Sarah urges Scots to take part in Earth Day and help in their fight to purge the planet of plastic.

TODAY is Earth Day, celebrated by over one billion people globally, many of them here in Scotland.

Ever since it was founded in 1970 to shine a light on environmental pollution, Earth Day has been associated with cleaning up rubbish, defending water and air quality and speaking up about climate change.

Given that Earth Day's Theme this year is Planet vs Plastics, you might think this is just a continuation of the long tradition of advocating for the health of the planet.

This year, however, it's not just plastic pollution and its environmental impact that Earth Day has its sights on, we're also talking about the impact of plastics on human health.

When plastics started to become popular back in the 1940s – post-war – nobody could predict that, by 2024, we'd globally be producing more than 400million tonnes of it annually, creating mountains of unsightly plastic rubbish.

We also failed to predict that plastics are not inert but degrade over time into trillions of tiny fragments, often smaller than a grain of rice, called microplastics.

As I discovered while researching a report for EarthDay.Org called Babies vs Plastics, there's compelling evidence that microplastics are associated with a whole host of health issues, especially in infants, from interrupting maternal-fetal communication to cancers.

The latest research has found the presence of microplastics in the plaque that clogs human arteries, quadrupling the risk of heart disease and strokes and death. Anyone who lives in Scotland will be aware that heart disease



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and stroke are two of the country's biggest killers.

While we know that diet and lifestyle play a significant part in both – and as a Buchlyvie native, I love a good Friday night curry – but could microplastics also be partially responsible?

Compared to global levels, Scotland seems to have relatively low sea surface microplastics concentrations – with the most impacted areas being Solway, Loch Long, northwest of Skye and the Firths of Clyde and Forth.

But we can't be complacent as microplastic particles have contaminated 80 per cent of the coastal waters around Scotland.

As a mother of two kids, I took my children for fish and chips back in their school days. Had I known what I know now about what they were probably ingesting – and I'm not talking about the oil and salt – I would have reconsidered.

All the microplastics in our waters are almost certainly being consumed by shrimp, fish and other small sea creatures that in turn get eaten by larger fish. When we eat those fish, we also ingest microplastics.

Scottish universities are trying to work out how much damage all these microplastics are having on human health.

One study by a team from Stirling University discovered microplastics carry dangerous

bacteria from our sewage plants onto Scottish beaches, giving these often drug-resistant bacteria a landing spot where they can potentially infect anyone enjoying the beach.

If, by some miracle, the plastics getting directly into the food chain and onto our beaches don't manage to get inside us, then drinking from plastic water bottles and eating food wrapped in plastics will almost certainly do the job. Plus, we are all inhaling microplastic fibres from our polyester clothes and carpets.

Faced with this onslaught of microplastics, what can we do to limit our own plastic intake?

The type of food we eat plays an important part in our plastic consumption so try cutting down on red meat and shellfish – both of which have shown to contain microplastics.

Learn to love vacuuming

Studies have found leafy vegetables contain less microplastics than root vegetables and stop drinking from single use plastic water bottles as new evidence found that a single bottle can contain up to 240,000 nano particles of plastic per bottle.

Ditch microwaving your food in plastic containers as the heat releases plastic chemicals into your food.

Learn to love vacuuming because dust is full of plastic fibres which have been shed from polyester clothes and carpets.

While these daily swaps are critical, the single most important thing you can do is tell your local MP to back calls for a stricter UN Global Plastic Treaty.

Today, on Earth Day, governments from around the world are in Ottawa, Canada, discussing this – and they need to know that we want to limit our exposure to microplastics by capping plastic production worldwide.

No other action will have as big an impact as this one.

So, if you do one thing today, sign the EarthDay.Org Global Plastic Treaty Petition and send a clear message that Scotland has had it with microplastics.

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