

## **Labour Group Motion - Free School Meals**

Council acknowledges that we are in the midst of a cost of living crisis that is affecting households right across our borough. Families are really struggling, which is having an awful impact on children who are not getting the food they need to grow up healthy.

Given the scale of the challenge, Free School Meals guarantee children a hot, nutritious meal every lunchtime. They help hard-working families save money, and support pupils to learn and concentrate at school.

### **Council Notes:-**

- The financial burden food costs place on families, particularly those on lower incomes.
- The evidence from the voluntary sector and community and faith groups, who are supplying food to an increasing number of Harrow residents.
- The evidence of the growing number of Harrow primary schools offering food parcels to the families in their communities.
- Reports from school leaders that more children are bringing in an unsatisfactory lunch with many going without.
- Currently only pupils in reception and KS1 are entitled to universal Free School Meals in Harrow. Given the cost of living crisis, this Council is deeply concerned that Nursery children in our maintained schools and nurseries are excluded from this offer and that the eligibility is set too low for many families who are struggling to benefit (currently £7,400).
- The existing commitment to supporting less well-off families with cost of food during school holidays through the recent and welcome funding from central government via the Household support fund, however this is only short term with no guarantee for the future.
- Currently there are 800,000 children in England who are living in poverty but don't qualify for Free School Meals.
- Children of parents who receive Working Tax Credits do not qualify for free school meals.
- The recent Government report published on the 29th September, with the Resolution Foundation estimating that absolute poverty will increase by over 3 million people between 2021/22 and 2022/23, including 1 million children.

### **Council believes that:-**

- We should do all we can to help children living in poverty to achieve and thrive.
- That ensuring our youngest students are included in our Free School Meal offer is a critical tool to achieving the longer-term benefits a healthy start in life brings and that it is right that the potential of such a scheme be explored.

### **This Council resolves to:**

- Call upon the Leader of the Council to:

**November 2022**

- Publish a detailed assessment of the issues and costs associated with an extension of Harrow's Free School meal offer to include all 3 and 4 year olds in maintained nursery and primary schools in the Borough, given the importance of this, to do so by the end of November 2022;
- Include the assessment in the development of the 2023 Council Budget as part of the budget setting process.
- Implement the Auto-enrolment to free school meals.

**Proposer: Cllr. Rashmi Kalu**

**Seconded: Cllr. Simon Brown**