

Labour Group Motion - Free School Meals

~~The Council has previously acknowledges that we are in the midst of a declared a cost of living emergency, crisis that which is affecting households right across our borough, due to Putin's illegal war in Ukraine and the ongoing economic fallout of the Covid pandemic.~~ Families are really struggling, which is having an awful impact on children who are not getting the food they need to grow up healthy. The Council and the government have provided significant support to help Harrow's residents.

~~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 welcome and massive existing commitment to supporting less well-off families with cost of food during school holidays through the ~~recent and welcome funding from~~ central government's ~~via the~~ Household ~~s~~Support ~~f~~Fund, ~~however this is only short term with no guarantee for the future.~~ This has resulted in Harrow receiving £4.5 million over the last 18 months and we are projected to receive a further £3 million in 2023/24.
- ~~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.~~
- The Conservative government has implemented a number of measures to ease the cost of living, including:
 - A £150 Council Tax rebate and a £400 discount to energy bills in the autumn.

- £326, the first of two cost of living payments, was automatically paid into 7 million bank accounts in July 2022 as part of the government's £37 billion support package. The second instalment of £324 was paid to qualifying residents in October 2022.
- The government confirmed at the Autumn Statement that working age benefits would be uprated by 10%. On average, a family on Universal Credit will benefit by around £600.
- The government will provide an additional cost of living payment of £900 to households on means tested benefits in 2023/24.
- Harrow Council's new Conservative administration are introducing policies which will save residents money and supporting those in need:
 - 1 Hour of free on street parking commenced in August 2022.
 - 1 Hour of free parking in Council owned car parks will be available from January 2023.
 - In January 2023, the Council will introduce a free bulky waste collection service for residents.
 - Extended holiday free school meals through to Easter 2023. The Council transferred £753,817 to schools for them to provide free school meals vouchers for approximately 6,500 households with children during the school holidays.
 - Has supported Help Harrow and the London Community Kitchen to continue providing crucial food provision for those in need.

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.
- The government deserves credit for the extensive support Harrow Council has received.

This Council resolves to:

- Call upon the Leader of the Council to:
 - 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
~~December~~November 2022;

- Include the assessment in the development of the 2023 Council Budget as part of the budget setting process.
- ~~Implement~~Continue with the Auto-enrolment ~~for~~ free school meals.

Amendment:

Proposer: Cllr Paul Osborn

Seconded: Cllr Marilyn Ashton