

Free School meals provision

Proposed by Greg Hayman, seconded by Colin Heinink

This Council notes:

That numbers of pupils entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) are rising fast, and more needs to be done to tackle this issue.

National Picture: 17 per cent pupils eligible for FSM.

East of England: 14 per cent of pupils eligible FSM.

Norfolk: 18.2 per cent of pupils (19865) eligible for FSM.

North Norfolk: 12.8 per cent of pupils (1730) eligible for FSM.

That every child who is entitled to Free School Meals is a sign of a family under significant financial pressure.

It is a cause for serious concern that in two of our towns alone (Holt and North Walsham) 20.7 % and 24% of pupils are in receipt of free school meals – both far higher than the national average of 17%.

That this picture of increasing child poverty is supported by the rapid rise in the number of families dependent on food banks.

That children who are hungry are less able to learn and thrive at school.

That the extension of the school meals voucher scheme (campaigned for by Marcus Rashford) to cover the period of the summer holiday was incredibly important and valuable to families in food poverty.

This Council recognises that this second lockdown and any further lockdowns will have potential adverse financial impacts on struggling families and likely to lead to further increases in child poverty.

This Council therefore welcomes the decision to extend the scheme into 2021 as called for by the Child Food Poverty Task Force, supported by Marcus Rashford and many leading food suppliers and producers.

Therefore, we call for the expansion of free school meals provision to every child whose family is in receipt of Universal Credit or equivalent, or with a low-income and no recourse to public funds to be made permanent.

That ongoing provision be made for food vouchers to cover school holidays and periods of lockdown for all families in receipt of Universal Credit or with low-income and no recourse to public funds.

That Healthy Start vouchers should be increased in value to £4.25, and expanded to be made available to all those in receipt of Universal Credit or with a low-income and no recourse to public funds.

This Council therefore resolves to write to the Secretary of State for Education the Chancellor and our local MPs to call for:

- Extended eligibility for free school meals to every pupil whose parents or guardians are in receipt of Universal Credit
- Food vouchers for every one of those pupils in every school holiday and during any period of lockdown
- Extended eligibility for free school meals to pupils from low-income families whose parents or guardians have no recourse to public funds.

This council resolves to continue to work with local food bank charities, and will collaborate with local community groups to provide support for these groups if Central Government does not improve its haphazard approach to caring for the most vulnerable in our society.