

BERKHAMSTED TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of

BERKHAMSTED TOWN COUNCIL

Held via 'Zoom' video conferencing on

Tuesday 3 November 2020 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT:

Councillors G Stevens – Town Mayor
A Armytage
W Conian
P de Hoest
P Fisher
R Freedman
J Jones
T Porter
N Taylor
P White
N Woolner

OTHERS PRESENT:

Mr J Bushby, Town Warden
Mrs D Beecroft, Finance Officer
Mrs J Harley, Deputy Town Clerk
Mr Tony Noakes, Town Clerk

NOT PRESENT:

A Peeler
M Hardinge

FC 133/20 To receive **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Cllr G Corry and Cllr S Cloughton.

FC 134/20 To **receive declarations of interest** regarding items on the agenda

There were no declarations of interest.

FC 135/20 **Minutes of the last meeting**

Minutes of the Berkhamsted Town Council held on 07 September 2020 (previously circulated) were **approved**.

Minutes of the meeting of Berkhamsted Town Council held on 21 September 2020 will be forwarded to the next scheduled Full Council meeting on the 23 November 2020.

FC 136/20 Public Participation

To **suspend standing orders** to allow any members of the public present to speak.

Three members of the public attended with RF making a strong representation in favour of the motion to support FSM's for eligible children at Berkhamsted Schools.

FC 137/20 Town Mayor's Communications

Deferred.

STANDING COMMITTEES

To **receive and adopt** the minutes of the:

FC 138/20 Transport and Environment Committee

Deferred.

FC 139/20 Town Planning Committee

Deferred.

FC 140/20 Finance & Policy Committee

Deferred.

FC 141/20 Town Council support to local school pupils entitled to free school meals

Full Council discussed the provision of funding support from the Town Council to local schools in order to provide free school meals to all eligible pupils during the Christmas 2020 break.

The motion before the Council was as follows:

***PROPOSAL FOR EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF FC
RE SCHOOL VOUCHERS FOR RECIPIENTS of FSM – Berkhamsted Schools and
children of residents.***

Introduction

There is a public debate about the need to provide support for children who would normally benefit from Free School meals [FSM] during the Christmas Holiday period. The recent precedent was in the Summer holidays when COVID19 had impacted family incomes resulting in the Government funding a Food Voucher scheme in England for children normally benefitting from FSM: the conduit was via the County Council. It is uncertain whether the Government will agree to special funding for the

2020 Christmas period, or whether the County Council will take on the role drawing on its reserves.

Given the uncertainty, and with growing levels of unemployment, Berkhamsted Council is minded to undertake steps to set up a grant fund to be drawn down as set out in the Motion below.

MOTION

WHEREAS -

- a) We note that during school holidays children, who would normally benefit from Free School Meals, may otherwise experience what is called 'Holiday Hunger' where family circumstances may result in the absence of adequate sustenance;
- b) During the current year with the adverse impact of COVID19 there has been widespread reductions in family incomes and job losses which gave rise, prior to the summer holiday [the Marcus Rashford initiative], to the Government paying for Vouchers that were distributed via the County Council to children entitled to FSM;
- c) It is uncertain whether the Government or Herts. County Council will make Vouchers available for the 2020 School Christmas holidays to those eligible for FSM;
- d) From previous investigations, there are approximately 338 children eligible for FSM;
- e) We note that rising levels of unemployment will give rise to as yet undetermined need for access to support that the normal benefit system may be unable to meet;

The Council agrees the following measures:

- i) In the event that School Vouchers for the 2020 schools' Christmas Holiday, are not made available to children eligible for FSM by Government, Herts County Council or Dacorum Borough Council, this Council will make funds available to Schools for this purpose.
- ii) A contingency grant fund of £10,000 is hereby agreed, to be vired from Council's General Reserves.
- iii) The Clerk is authorised to contact Schools to ascertain the numbers of pupils of Berkhamsted residents who are eligible for FSM and invite Schools to make timely applications for such grant funding to be drawn from the contingency fund so that Vouchers can be assured for use during the holiday. Discretion is to be applied for non-resident pupils.
- iv) To the extent that the contingency grant fund is not drawn down for FSM Vouchers, it is agreed that the funds will be made available to residents experiencing hardship or charitable bodies making sustenance available to residents experiencing hardship.

After debate, Cllr N Taylor proposed and Cllr P de Hoest seconded that the Town Council should **RESOLVE** to adopt the motion.

Cllr P White proposed an amendment to the above motion as follows:

The purpose of this amendment is:

- To clarify the process and give authority to the Town Council staff to implement the motion
- To confirm to members of the public that Berkhamsted Town Council stands ready to use our wider funds to benefit the community, using the existing funding systems.

Proposed amendment:

To replace the 4 paragraphs following "The Council agrees the following measures:" with:

- i) In the event that vouchers to support food purchasing for the 2020 schools' Christmas Holiday are not made available to parents or guardians of children eligible for FSM by Government, Herts County Council, Dacorum Borough Council, or any other agency, this Council will make funds available to Schools for the purpose of purchasing vouchers in line with existing standard support rates.*
- ii) A budget of £10,000 is hereby agreed, to be vired from Council's General Reserves to cover the anticipated spending in point i). The clerk and their team shall have authority to distribute this money to Berkhamsted schools, or other suitable agency providing vouchers in order to enable distribution of funding.*
- iii) The Clerk shall contact Schools in Berkhamsted to ascertain the numbers of pupils who are eligible for FSM and invite Schools to make timely applications for such grant funding to be drawn from the budget so that vouchers can be assured for use during the holiday. Discretion is to be applied for non-resident pupils.*
- iv) Any unspent budget shall revert to general funds at the end of the financial year. Berkhamsted Town Council stands ready to use general funds in order to support the town and its residents during the ongoing economic and health crisis. Berkhamsted Town Council welcomes enquiries and proposals from community organisations who are able to use this support to assist Berkhamsted households in need.*

After debate, Cllr P White proposed and Cllr R Freedman seconded that the Town Council should **RESOLVE** to adopt the motion.

Cllr N Taylor requested that a recorded vote be taken on the amended motion.

A recorded vote on the motion with the amended paragraphs (i – iv) was taken, resulting in the following votes:

For the motion with amended paragraphs (i – iv) - Cllrs G Stevens, P de Hoest, A Armytage, W Conian, P Fisher, R Freedman, N Taylor, P White, N Woolner.

Against the motion with amended paragraphs (i – iv) – Cllr J Jones.

Abstention – Cllr T Porter.

The motion with the amended paragraphs (i - iv) was therefore carried and adopted by the Town Council.

FC 142/20 Close of Meeting

The meeting closed at 8.43 pm.

Signed.....

Date.....