

**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.

2 November 2020