

### **Cabinet – 9 February 2023 - Question to the Leader from Cllr M Lilley**

In the light of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's latest report (attached) on Poverty in the UK in 2023, and the 2019 IW Council commitment to reduce child poverty in five years, what is the current child poverty figure (according to JRF it is between 20-25%) on the Isle of Wight and has it reduced?

Although, in the light a reduction in child poverty is unlikely or remains in the range of 20-30% due to Covid19 and the now cost-of-living crisis, please can the Cabinet reaffirm its commitment to reduce child poverty on the Isle of Wight in the next 5 years and set a specific target and outline a specific strategy to tackle child poverty and food insecurity on the Isle of Wight with reference to the JFP report and recommendations?

#### **Response:**

Thank you for highlighting this important issue. Free school meal eligibility is often used as a good indicator for child poverty, and the numbers of children eligible for income related free school meals has increased by 63% since 2018/19, from 2,452 in autumn 2018/19 to 4,008 in autumn 2022/23.

Our corporate plan will continue to focus on taking actions to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and cost of living crisis wherever we can.

Funding from the Department of Work and Pensions for food and fuel support and Department for Education for the holiday activities and food schemes have been used to tackle child poverty and food insecurity under the connect4communities programme. Through these schemes, vulnerable families have received support including free school meal vouchers during the holidays, discretionary funding available to schools for supporting families to pay for fuel bills and providing warm bedding and clothing. Over 18,000 individual awards were made to households with children between April 2021 to September 2021.

Activity schemes over the Christmas, Easter and summer holidays for children in receipt of benefits related free school meals and with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities are also running which include a hot meal. Nearly 900 children accessed this provision during the Christmas holidays.

Three community pantries have been established on the island supported by the connect4communities programme, providing food at a reduced rate for a small membership fee and open to all. A fourth pantry is due to open at Easter this year.

In taking decisions around preparing this year's budget, we have sought to prioritise the protection of our most vulnerable residents, and in particular our children and young people and will continue to support children through our connect4communities programme. We will continue to work hard to ensure that future money from the DWP and DfE continue to be targeted to our most vulnerable children.

I can therefore reaffirm our commitment to tackling child poverty and can confirm that as part of our all-age work across the council on poverty reduction.

As the cabinet member responsible for this area of work, I would like to personally thank all the providers who are part of our HAF Scheme, those who run the Community Pantries and the staff who work hard to allocate the funding in tight timescales.

## **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **DWP COVID Winter Grant December 2020 – April 2021**

This first grant had 80% ringfenced to households with children and the expectation was that food vouchers would be provided for children who were entitled for free school meals during the holidays. IWC provided £15 per week for all eligible children as determined below;

- Eligible for Benefits-related Free School Meals (FSM)
- Open to social care
- Open to Early Help
- 16-18 year olds previously eligible for benefits-related Free School Meals
- 2-4 year olds accessing Early Years' Pupil Premium

Vouchers were provided for the two-week Christmas holiday and one-week February half term.

Schools and Colleges were also provided with a discretionary hardship fund that could be used to support families with paying utility bills, clothing, bedding and energy-efficient cooking appliances.

Support was provided to Care Leavers by way of a £20 food or fuel voucher along with young carers supported by way of funding the YMCA who run the young carers programme and were able to provide vouchers to support these families.

The Holiday Activities and Food Scheme that is funded by Department for Education over Christmas, Easter and Summer Holiday periods was extended to also cover the February half-term. This provided children who were eligible for FSM or who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities with engaging activities over the school holidays whilst also providing them with a hot healthy meal.

Citizens Advice were funded to help with utility costs over the Winter period and working with community and voluntary organisations, as well as town, parish and community councils a number of schemes and programmes were delivered that mainly focussed on children.

Following on from the COVID-19 Winter Support Fund, the DWP released further funding by way of the COVID Local Support Fund which again the majority of which was to be ringfenced to Households with Children.

### **DWP COVID Local Support Fund – April – September 2021.**

Through this funding a number of schemes were delivered to support the community, again with a focus on households with children.

Funding was provided to Citizens Advice to help those struggling with utility costs, and by also funding emergency food provision.

We worked with community and voluntary organisations, charities and town, parish and community councils to help spread the breadth and form of support available, community groups such as Baby Box, West Wight Timebank were awarded funding.

Food vouchers were again issued to those eligible for FSM over the school holiday periods supporting over 4000 children across the Island.

## **DWP Household Support Fund 1 – October 2021 – March 2022**

When the Local Support Fund ended in September 2021, DWP released details of the Household Support Fund that would be used to cover the wider community as opposed to just targeting households with children. A higher level of funding was provided allowing us to deliver a variety of support schemes.

A minimum of 50% of the overall fund was to be used to support households with children, but other residents were also to be supported. A decision was made to continue with issuing food vouchers over the school holiday periods to eligible children as previous grant rounds, and again funding was provided to extend the Holiday Activities and Food Scheme over February half-term.

Citizens Advice were funded to provide support to residents with rising utility costs and we worked with community organisations such as Footprint Trust to provide energy efficient cooking appliances, Baby Box to provide warm clothing and bedding, Breakfast in the Bay to fund healthy cereals for school children in the Sandown area, Aspire Ryde to provide food hampers and other organisations such as South Wight Area Youth (SWAY) and YCMA to support children with cookery skills and food and hygiene essentials.

We also funded the Homeless Prevention Team to assist with exceptional housing costs.

Over 10,000 £25 food vouchers were also distributed across the Island to households in receipt of Local Council Tax Support.

This round of funding also enabled the opening of three community pantries across the Island. A community pantry allows members to obtain food at a higher value to that paid, including fresh fruits and vegetables. It is used to reduce the amount of money needed for a supermarket shop, as opposed to being the supermarket shop. Any Island resident can look to join a community pantry.

## **DWP Household Support Fund 2 – April – September 2022**

After an initial 6-month period DWP announced they would be extending the Household Support Fund for an additional 6-months, however the spend criteria changed and a minimum of 33% needed to be ringfenced to households with children, with a minimum of 33% also ringfenced to households with pensioners. This meant we were unable to continue with supplying food vouchers over the school holiday periods and therefore focus was given to community groups able to deliver schemes to households with children.

A number of schools applied for funding to target households most in need with food, utility and wider essentials. Community organisations such as the Learning Zone, and Sensory Support were funded to provide support and we worked with town, parish and community councils provided food vouchers to their local community.

Food vouchers were made available to households with children in receipt of FSM, in addition to residents meeting other eligibility criteria.

The community pantries were provided with top-up funding to provide food to existing and new members for longer.

The Isle of Wight Council's Leaving Care team were provided with funding to use the community pantries. A small cohort of care leavers were introduced to the pantry network and provided with a voucher allowing them to shop for 4 weeks. After the initial pilot, all care leavers were provided with vouchers to allow 'free' access.

### **DWP Household Support Fund 3 – October 2022 – March 2023**

The ringfencing of funding allocated to certain households was removed for the third Household Support Fund. Because we had previously informed residents that the funding of food vouchers covering school holiday periods had ceased, decision was made not to return to this exact form of support, however several cohorts were identified to be eligible to receive a food voucher which included

- A £500 food voucher to IWC foster carer households
- Two separate £50 food vouchers to care leavers
- A £150 food voucher to each child holding a gateway card
- A £100 food voucher to households in receipt of Local Council Tax Support and only the Housing Benefit element
- A £100 food voucher to working families in receipt of Local Council Tax Support that don't receive income-based Employment and Support allowance, income-based Job Seekers Allowance or Income Support.
- Two separate £100 food vouchers to adults with learning difficulties working with the IWC No Barriers team.

The Living Well Early Help hub received funding to assist with the cost of food for residents across the Island in need of a hot meal.

We have provided a central fund for schools to be able to access vouchers for families in need with food and wider essentials.

A fourth community pantry has been agreed, for Newport and will be open around Easter 2023.

Citizens Advice continue to help residents with the rising cost of utilities.

The Homeless Prevention Team have access to funding to help families and other residents with exceptional housing costs.

We continue to work with community and voluntary organisations, charities and town, parish and community councils to provide support to local residents with the cost of food and wider essentials. Some schools are requesting funding on top of the central fund so they can provide support on a wider basis.

### **Holiday Activity and Food scheme**

Alongside the DWP funding we have also been running the Holiday Activities and Food Scheme, funded by the Department for Education (DfE). This funding started during the pandemic and in 2022 was confirmed for the next 3-year period.

The funding has been used to work with community organisations and education provisions to run activity schemes over the two-week Christmas and Easter school holidays and the 6-week summer holidays for children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals and with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. There is

also an element of discretionary funding that can be used for children who may not meet this criteria. Organisations need to provide a hot meal alongside the activities being run.

On average there are between 6-10 schemes running over each holiday period.