

## Full Council – 17 January 2024

### Written question from Councillor M Lilley to Councillor J Bacon Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Corporate Functions.

At the IWC Full Council meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023, the put forward the following motion:

*“Isle of Wight council resolves to reaffirm its motion of 16th January 2019, to reduce child poverty on the Isle of Wight over five years up to 2028, through development of a specific child poverty reduction strategy with targets and outcomes.”*

We are now in 2024 and 10 months have passed. On the 13<sup>th</sup> February 2024, I will be holding my 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Food Poverty Awareness (Pancake Day) event in Ryde.

One measure of child poverty is free school meals, have the number of children on free school meals on the Island increased or decreased and by what percentage? What is the progress of child poverty reduction on the Isle of Wight and will the new Director of Children's Service have a focus on child poverty reduction?

I raise this issue as nationally the NHS has in December 2023, reported a huge increase in hospital admissions due to poor malnutrition including children. Informally, local food projects such IW Food Bank are reporting a huge increase in use of their services in last 10 months.

## **Response**

In relation to Free school Meals, Isle of Wight has a rate of 25.1% in 2022/23, compared to a national average of 24.78%. The increase from previous years was in line with the national increases.

In respect of the new Director of Children's Services, the statutory duties associated with the role mean there is a focus on all disadvantaged children.

In terms of tackling poverty, school holidays can be pressure points for families in low-income households and can lead to a holiday experience gap for children. The Holiday Activities and Food programme continues to provide a response to this challenge on the Island and, during Easter Summer and Christmas 2023, has provided almost 9,300 holiday scheme places to over 2,500 children.

Through the fourth round of the Household Support Fund, we are targeting Households with children across a number of different initiatives. Food vouchers have been proactively issued to vulnerable groups including young carers, care leavers, children in need registered with Children's Social Care, Early Help and the Disabled Children's Team. We are also targeting every Island household in receipt of Local Council Tax Support with a £50 food voucher issued in October; a number

of which are Households with children. Schools have access to vouchers which can be issued to households they identify as in need, to assist with the purchase of food, weather appropriate clothing, generic school uniform costs or bedding. Households struggling with food and utility costs can apply to Citizens Advice for assistance with both emergency provision and help with utility arrears.

We have opened a fourth Community Pantry (located in Newport) and a mobile pantry to help strengthen the network and reach more households in need of food support. We are strengthening the food supply to the Isle of Wight Foodbank network where we know approximately 85% of those visiting are households with children. We are also helping them to establish a community garden which can be used by those visiting, helping provide access to fresh fruit and vegetables moving forward.