

26th October 2020



Chief Executive

West Berkshire Council
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Good afternoon,

Over the weekend there has been debate in the media and in our communities around the extension of free school meals during the holidays. It's an important issue and one which has prompted residents to write and ask what we are doing here in West Berkshire.

As residents would expect from us, we are fully committed to ensuring people are supported during this difficult period and we already have in place arrangements which mean that no child needs to go hungry in West Berkshire.

Unfortunately there are families who struggle to make ends meet and this is often for reasons outside their control. In these situations it can be a very upsetting and anxious time, and particularly so for those with children to feed. We know this is a tough situation to be in and we're here to help.

People do not have to face these situations alone and there is support available to those who need it. Our Community Support Hub is available to provide support directly, as well as to refer people to other local groups and organisations who might be able to help. Anyone who needs help can phone the Hub on 01635 503579 or email westberksbct@westberks.gov.uk.

Our support to families facing financial hardship extends beyond the Community Support Hub. The government has provided additional resources to local authorities to support families in financial hardship through the pandemic. If we were to direct this towards the Free Meals scheme it would benefit a limited set of residents who are eligible for that particular scheme. Instead we are using the funding on a wider range of measures which will allow us to help more people.

Recently the Government has announced more funding to councils and we will consider how we can use this to continue to address the issues around access to food to support struggling families with children of all ages. As part of this we will be looking at what support we will make available during the Christmas holidays.

It is not just the Council who are supporting families in need – although we are certainly playing our part in the response. Over the course of recent months we have worked proactively with local community groups and charities, as well as West Berkshire Volunteer Centre and Greenham Common Trust to ensure that those facing hardship as a result of the COVID pandemic are supported. We have worked hard, and worked together to help those who need it.

More recently, we have seen in recent days local restaurants, pubs and shops coming forward to help feed families who are struggling this half-term. It has been wonderful to see, and is a further demonstration of the passionate community spirit we've seen in recent months. To all those who have been willing to help we say thank you, and know this can also help to make a difference.

To find out more about the Community Support Hub visit www.westberks.gov.uk/SupportHub

Yours sincerely,



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