

NEWS RELEASE



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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FREE SCHOOL MEALS TO CONTINUE THROUGH EASTER HOLIDAYS

Wokingham Borough Council is using a combination of government grants and its own funds to ensure pupils who receive benefits-related free school meals during term time continue to have access to healthy meals during the upcoming Easter holidays as well as the rest of the school holidays in 2021.

The council has joined the government's Holiday Activities and Food Programme which will provide access to enriching activities and healthy meals during six weeks of the school holidays in 2021 and use its own funds to provide vouchers to cover the remaining six weeks of school holidays. The grant provides for free activities and meals for one week at Easter, four weeks in the summer and one week at Christmas. Due to the uncertainty around offering face-to-face activities at Easter, the council will provide an additional week of holiday clubs in the summer instead of the Easter week.

For the Easter holidays, the council is providing food vouchers for two weeks and an activity pack with exercises, games and healthy recipes. The food vouchers are £15 per week per child. The activity packs are full of activities and exercises for children and young people to do at home on their own or with a family member, like scavenger hunts, simple craft activities and even some human charades. The packs also contain healthy recipes for families to make together.

The Holiday Activities and Food Programme is designed to encourage children and young people to eat more healthily, be more active, take part in engaging activities, be safe and spend time with others, learn about healthy nutrition and be more engaged with school and other local services. More information about how to access the summer holiday activities will be available in the summer term.

Cllr UllaKarin Clark, executive member for children's services said: "The last year has been difficult for so many of us, but particularly for children and young people and their families. For a five year old, they have now spent a fifth of their life under Covid restrictions. While it's important that we follow the rules and stay safe, we recognise how hard it's been on our young people and their families.

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“We have used our Covid Winter Grant to support 2,200 children and young people through food vouchers, 75 care leavers and 330 families and individuals so far. But we want to do more.

“That is why we as a council decided to cover the costs of free school meals for the rest of this year. The government grant will fund six weeks of the school holidays this year and we as a council will fund the other six weeks. For the Easter holidays we are giving £30 food vouchers for each eligible pupil along with an activity pack full of fun exercises, games and recipes to help families fill the holidays with exciting activities.

“This past year has been a struggle for many of us in so many ways. It has been our priority throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to support our residents. We topped up the £280,000 Government Covid Winter Grant to allow all residents who have struggled to feed themselves and their families or to heat their homes to receive the support they need. We are using £100,000 of the council’s funds to keep this important grant going.”

The council is set to approve a supplementary estimate for the additional £100,000 in council funding to support the Covid Winter Grant at its executive meeting on Thursday 25 March. This follows on from a commitment by leader of the council John Halsall at the 2 December 2020 executive, when he said: “Should it be necessary, we will find more funding, via a properly accounted supplementary estimate, to support those most in need.”

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Further information:

1. **More from Cllr UllaKarin Clark, executive member for children’s services:**
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