

Uniform Poverty Program

With regard to my report on uniform poverty at the last full council meeting I ask the committee to support a Uniform Poverty Program (UPP) for Keighley.

To help you make a decision I will explain in depth the workings of the program as I see it, including, benefits and checks and balances the council will need to perform to ensure we comply with Financial Regulations and best practice.

As I said in Council, School children face isolation and bullying caused by lack of school uniform, this is backed up by many reports into child poverty and the situation is not getting any better as more parents are struggling to pay for their children's uniform.

Put yourself in the shoes of a parent with three children of school age, before you can even think about P.E kit school trips and the like you have a bill of £225, if you have two adults working this may not be too much of a problem but if only one or neither are working the situation can be quite impossible, where will the money come from to be able to send your children to school dressed in the correct uniform in order that they don't stand out from the rest of their school mates. What adds insult to injury is the Government warns that a child can be suspended or even expelled if they repeatedly attend school without the proper uniform.

Difference causes all sorts of problems and a school environment can be a breeding ground for the bully who looks for someone who is different from the rest, unfortunately an individual without the correct school uniform is a target for the bully.

A school has the responsibility of helping students deal with issues such as self discipline, peer pressure and individualism, uniforms help address some of these issues, they eliminate some unwanted distractions, allowing children to focus on their studies and not worry about the school bully who identifies targets by difference.

School uniform cultivates equality and spares children from spending too much time thinking about what to wear or worrying about not having the latest fashions. School uniforms can spare unnecessary social embarrassment removing the opportunity to judge a child on their appearance and can remove some children feeling inadequate because they don't have the latest fashion.

We can now show that as a Council we can change that for disadvantaged children in our town, for the first time we can make a positive difference to many children's lives in Keighley, help them reach their full potential, not by education that's not our remit, by enabling them to go to school attend classes and more importantly be the same as the rest, remove the

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stigma and potential as a target and be on a level playing field with friends who's families can afford a school uniform.

Despite community involvement, charitable giving, and other forms of economic balancing, there are always families who struggle to put their children into school uniform. Punishing a child by removing them from a school because of an inability to afford a uniform is ridiculous and goes against the principals of equal learning opportunities. Schools are trying to ensure that their pupils are properly attired but that can mean diverting funds from the main budget this means that there is less money to spend on books, stationary and teaching aids so with this scheme **all** pupils benefit.

The program must always be conducted in a way that remains confidential, no individual person should be identified by any form produced by the Council, and no name should be attached or sought. By using the Unique Pupil Number (UPN) rather than identifying the child it refers to, this information is confidential and only the relevant school staff will know to whom it refers. This program ensures confidentiality and prevents any Council Staff Member or Councillor from obtaining any information they are not legally entitled to.

In conversation with the Schools it was ascertained that some parents are very reluctant to be seen as a charity case, so it has been decided to offer the option for any parent or guardian that wishes, can contribute on a voluntary basis and the monies collected by the school.

This money will be returned to the Council so that the scheme will be part funded year on year by the parents themselves.

Cllr Brian Morris

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How it works

To qualify parents must be in receipt of either:

- Income Support
- Job Seekers Allowance (Income Based)
- Employment and Support Allowance (Income Related)
- Child Tax Credit only with annual income below £16,105
- Child Tax Credit & Working Tax Credit with annual income below £6,420
- Universal Credit including those with a take home of pay of up to £610 per month
- Long Term Incapacity Benefit
- Child Tax Credit & Working Tax Credit with annual income below £16,105

The final qualifying criteria to be eligible for the grant in the form of a voucher the child must not just qualify for, but be in receipt of free school meals on a weekly basis.

The School will inform parents who are eligible for the program by letter in the normal way but with a slight change of wording, the letter will include.

(As a recipient of this voucher you may if you are able make a contribution toward the cost of the uniform over the School year, if you do, this will be reinvested back in to the program where we will be able to help more children in future, this is purely voluntary, if you do take up this offer any monies can be paid to the School who will forward any funds received to the Council).

All the above will be the responsibility of the School to check as they already receive the information required direct from Government agencies and the District Council, we as a Council do not need to know these personal details, all we need is confirmation by each school that the vouchers they issue are going to parents whose children meet our required criteria.

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Issuing of Vouchers

A voucher will be completed by a designated person at each school. Each voucher will contain the following information:

Front.

- Voucher Number
- School name
- UPN (Unique Pupil Number)
- Date of Issue
- Signature of designated person issuing voucher
- Signature of Head Teacher or Deputy

The School will maintain a copy of all voucher numbers corresponding to the UPN numbers they refer to, for accounting purposes of the council.

Back.

- Supplier Business Name
- Date
- Uniform supplied (Using a tick box system)
- Total cost of uniform (If different from voucher value, any excess over the voucher value will not be borne by the Council)
- Printed Name of shop employee who served customer
- Signature of shop employee who served customer.

Supplier Invoice.

It is the responsibility of the supplier to invoice the Council for any voucher they have received and fulfilled and they must identify on the invoice. Only one school per invoice.

- Voucher Number
- The School that issued the voucher
- The UPN (Unique Pupil Number)
- Uniform supplied
- Date

The supplier must include the voucher with the corresponding invoice as no payment will be made without the voucher.

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Checks and Balances.

The Clerk should be given the authorisation to monitor and have delegated Powers for the UP Program; this will ensure a constant in monitoring and payments.

The Clerk will ensure the program is conducted in a manner that is legal and run with all best practice and transparency on behalf of the council.

On receipt of an invoice and the corresponding vouchers from a supplier the Clerk will:

- Ensure the claimed for vouchers are on the invoice.
- Check at random a selection UPN numbers with the school.
- If all is correct the Clerk can authorise payment in the normal way.
- If a problem is found with the invoice or a voucher the Clerk will hold payment until the issue has been resolved. (And inform the Finance and Audit Committee at its next regular meeting)
- The Clerk will report to the Finance and Audit Committee the funds used from the designated budget including any anomalies and the uptake of the program.