

Council Meeting

14th April 2021

Motion submitted by Councillor Scullion under Council Procedure Rule 14

Covid Response and Recovery

This Council notes:

- That we have just experienced the anniversary of the first lockdown. Sadly the pandemic has had a huge impact on the lives of local people, on health and on the economy of the borough. Nationally over 150,000 people have lost their lives and locally over 300 people have died. We will remember them and we give our condolences to their families.
- That we are all faced with a huge challenge in mapping out the recovery from this point but in establishing the recovery we must build a fairer future for Calderdale where everybody benefits from economic success.
- That there has been an 8% increase in the number of people on low incomes who are eligible for Council Tax Reduction.
- That children are being adversely affected with a further 20% increase in the number of children eligible for free schools meals.
- That in Calderdale there has been a 71% rise in people claiming universal credit, including a significant rise in youth unemployment, with a 115% increase in 16-24s seeking work and claiming work related benefits.
- That the pandemic has highlighted existing structural inequalities, disproportionately affecting our most disadvantaged residents such as those living in poverty or on low incomes, vulnerable older people, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, people with disabilities and women. Wages have been held down for a decade with agency work and zero hour contracts on the rise.
- The £20 a week Universal Credit boost announced last March reflected the reality that the level of payments was not adequate to protect the swiftly increasing number of households relying on them as the crisis hit.
- In his 3rd March 2021 Budget, the Chancellor announced a six-month extension to the £20 uplift in the basic rate of Universal Credit. The government had previously planned to cut welfare for millions of claimants by ending the £20 increase this April. It will now implement the cut in October.
- Pressing ahead with the cut – whenever that comes – would see the level of unemployment support fall to its lowest real-terms level since 1990-91, and the lowest ever relative to average earnings.

- The government's isolation payment system rules saw 2044 people in Calderdale rejected for funding, making it difficult for people to feed their families and stay safe. This scheme ends in June.

This Council therefore resolves to:

- Invest in a fair recovery – working with our partners in health, the voluntary sector and local businesses to implement a Recovery Plan that benefits our communities.
- Invest through our inclusive growth schemes and with our WYCA partners in regeneration and in jobs, skills and education for people whose jobs may have been displaced during the pandemic.
- To take action on the Climate Emergency and grasp the opportunity to build a better, fairer and greener future for the borough putting the environment at the heart of growth – not a return to the old normal.

We therefore ask the Chief Executive to ask Government to:

- Fund regional economic recovery by investing £1.4bn in the West Yorkshire Economic Recovery Plan.
- Make the £20 increase for Universal Credit claimants permanent and extend to claimants on legacy benefits. This will both help hard-pressed families and support the Calderdale economy.
- Substantially increase its funding for councils and regions to invest in skills and jobs post-pandemic.
- Respond to our calls and lobbying for more support to affected individuals, especially to enable people to self-isolate and feed their families.
- Provide more tapered support for businesses to avoid cliff-edge job losses and company closures.
- Tackle health inequalities and properly invest in mental health support to meet the anticipated increase in demands for services post-pandemic.

Seconded by: