

I give an absolute commitment that the city council will do all that it can to make sure Leicester children get the food they need at Christmas, if by then the Government has not changed and backtracked and accepted its position on this is not only politically inept but also cruel.

Even normally loyal Conservative council leaders and MPs are telling them they have got this wrong.

- We will remain committed to doing all we can to make sure children don't go hungry during the school holidays.
- Working with partners we've run very successful holiday hunger clubs for the past five years, providing nutritious food through adventure playgrounds and community groups, and also through our own school kitchens during the pandemic.
- We find that working with partners in this way reaches many children in need, and not just those whose parents have made a claim for free school meals.
- Last summer we provided more than 30,000 free lunches across the city, despite receiving not a penny of Government funding.
- There are 12,800 children currently claiming free school meals in Leicester, that's 24% of the city's child population.
- Providing support over the Christmas holidays may need to be done in a different way, but we will find the funding to do this, if the Government doesn't step up and provide the resources needed.

Longer term, any future Labour Government will need to relook at who is eligible for free school meals. The work we've done in developing our anti-poverty strategy and from our experience of running Leicester's holiday hunger programmes these past five years has led me to believe that a wider, more inclusive provision is required.

In the meantime however, rest assured I will provide the resources needed to cover the immediate need the Christmas holidays will present to many families in the city.

Peter Soulsby  
**City Mayor**