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Teachers pay for pupils' meals but MP highlights Holiday Hungry scheme

SAFFRON WALDEN MP Kemi Badenoch, who was one of the 12 Conservatives in Essex who voted against the funding of out-of-term free school meals, found herself under attack from all sides this week.

This despite the fact that the Tory-led Essex County Council announced they were extending their Holiday Hungry Programme with special funding from the government.

Teachers and other staff at Saffron Walden County High school hit social media with the news that they had raised money to pay for children's meals during half term.

The response was an avalanche of messages from angry residents.

Said Jenny Smith of Saffron Walden: "Whatever happened to the Government's promise to do whatever it takes and put their arms around the country?"

"They could have chosen to do the right thing for once and simply agree to extend the free meals voucher system which was already up and running."

Said Residents for Uttlesford councillor Alex Armstrong who is the Uttlesford District Council Portfolio Holder for Education and Libraries: "As a result of Covid-19 many more families on low incomes in our district are now in financial hardship."

"Research by food poverty charity Trussell Trust, backer of the Uttlesford Foodbank, shows that a quarter of UK parents with under-18s skip meals because of money."

"Our society has long-established principles of supporting those most in need and the national Free School Meals programme is part of ensuring that no child should go hungry."

R4U's Cllr Petrina Lees added: "MPs' food is taxpayer subsidised to an eye-watering £4million a year."

"That is the equivalent of 1.7 million free-school lunches."

"Teachers and staff at Saffron Walden

Teachers and staff at Saffron Walden County High School dug into their pockets to fund free school meals for students. It is heart-warming but it is the Government's responsibility to protect its most vulnerable citizens

County High School dug into their own pockets to fund all the free school meals required by the school's students over half term.

"They have been joined by local businesses, including Saffron Fish Co and Bicycletta, plus community groups and residents who have offered the same either directly or via donation programmes."

"This is heart-warming but at the end of the day it is the government's responsibility to protect its most vulnerable citizens."

Mrs Badenoch said: "Despite the malevolent insinuations made by opposition members and headlines on various news outlets, Tory MPs did not vote to take free schools meals from children."

"It is disgraceful that some have chosen to politicise such an important matter in this way. It is heartening to see so many businesses offering to help families."

"However, it must be stressed that this is in addition to government support and not instead of it."

"The government chose to support vulnerable families by funding councils directly instead of using vouchers which can often be

stigmatising.

"Councils know their communities best."

"For example last week the Government allocated an additional £100,000 to Uttlesford District Council to support local communities but we are yet to hear what this money will be used for by R4U."

"This is what I expect the R4U leadership to be focusing on, not food in the House of Commons canteen."

"In June, Essex County Council received over £1.4 million as part of a welfare assistance fund to distribute locally."

"That money was to last till the end of October and already covered the half-term period."

"Last week the Government announced a further £11.7 million of additional support for Essex."

"Since the start of the pandemic, Essex County Council has received over £127 million directly in additional funding."

"There are many ways to support vulnerable children and families."

"Free school meal vouchers are just one of them and they don't always target those most in need. It is shameful that some people have chosen to exploit these families for their own personal gain."

"It is also shameful that R4U are using this matter for political point scoring. This despite the fact they would be well aware that last week Essex County Council announced they would be extending their Holiday Hungry Programme with the financial support of central Government allocated for this very purpose."

"As well as this, Essex County Council has ringfenced funding to support local food banks and food distribution organisations across Essex. "If people want to know what the Government is actually doing, I urge them to visit my website or contact me directly for accurate and factual information."

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Rev Tim Hardingham: he touched the lives of everyone who knew him

TRIBUTES poured in this week for a popular teacher and church man who died following a tragic road accident between Wendens Ambo and Arkesden on Sunday afternoon.

Rev Tim Hardingham, 71, was cycling with his family along Wenden Road on Quicksie Hill when he was in collision with a black Mini.

He was pronounced dead at the scene.

Rev Hardingham joined Saffron Walden County High School in 1999 and was a respected physics teacher and school chaplain there. He was Priest in Charge at St Mary's, Wendens Ambo.

Tim Hardingham gained a degree in physics and decided to become a teacher, gaining experience at the co-educational Island School in Hong Kong and later taking up position at Saffron Walden County High School where he also ran the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

Attending St. Mary's church in Wendens Ambo, he decided in his 60s to be ordained and as Priest in Charge became, in the words of a member of his congregation, the first 'home-grown' priest there for many years.

The Rev. Alex Jeewan, Team Vicar in Saffron Walden for Wendens Ambo, Littlebury and Great Chesterford, said: "Tim was a very special person – a wonderful priest, teacher, father, friend and colleague."

"He was a true gentleman or gentle man who was wise beyond words. He was often quietly spoken but when he spoke you knew you had to listen because wisdom was on the way."

"He will be missed greatly. He touched the lives of so many people, be it his congregation, his community or his pupils."

"The church which Tim served and loved was open for parishioners to honour and remember him and I was struck by the outpouring of love and affection from those who visited."

"When the shock is over we will honour and remember Tim properly."

"He would want us to continue to love one another and to grow in faith together."

■ The driver of the car, a 20-year old man, was arrested on suspicion of causing death by dangerous driving and has been released under investigation.

Enquiries are ongoing – police wish to speak to anyone who saw the accident or has any dashcam footage.



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