

Title of report: **Holiday Activities & Food Programme 2025/26**

Decision maker: Cabinet Member Children and Young People

Decision date: 7 March 2025

Report by: Talk Community Children and Families Lead

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

The purpose of Department for Education (DfE) grants is for the Local Authorities to continue to facilitate the Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) in their areas. The programme has been successfully delivered from 2021-2024, the decision has been made by government to continue to fund the programme for 2025/26.

-The criteria are for Local Authorities to provide a range of activities and preferably a hot meal to children eligible for free school meals for the equivalent of least 4 hours for four days over six weeks a year. These need to be distributed as four weeks during the summer holidays, one week during the Easter break and one week during the Christmas holidays. The DfE have given permission for 15% of the grant to be made available to children and young people that are not eligible for free school meals, however, are considered to be vulnerable and meet an eligibility criteria.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **Herefordshire Council accepts the Department for Education grant for the delivery of the Holiday activities and food programme across Herefordshire to eligible children for 2025/26 and;**

- b) The Head of Communities be authorised to take all operational decisions necessary to implement the programme in line with the grant conditions.**

Alternative options

1. Not to accept or part accept the grant. This is not recommended as this would mean that eligible children will miss out on activities and food and could impact on children becoming isolated and withdrawn and not accessing nutritious food. The HAF programme provides a range of activities and nutritious food and not having these opportunities could lead to unhealthier holidays and less opportunities.

Key considerations

2. The HAF programme is provided to 4,264 school aged children in Herefordshire eligible for Free School Meals. Children will be provided with a nutritious meal and a broad range of activities preferably in a face-to-face setting during the holidays. This allows children to become healthier, gain knowledge of nutrition, participate in range of activities including physical activities, cooking, crafts, etc and enriching their lives whilst supporting them in development. The offer ensures children do not become socially isolated over the holidays and over the summer where it is commonly known that the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers widen.
3. The proportion of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) in Herefordshire is lower than the national average of 24.6%. However, over the past three years, the percentage of FSM-eligible children in Herefordshire has risen significantly from 16.5% to 18.9%. With the rising cost of living and increasing financial pressures on families, children receiving FSM are likely to have reduced access to a wide range of extracurricular activities, making programmes like HAF even more essential.
4. The criteria for the delivery of the programme includes:
 - a. Children will be exposed to enriching activities that will give opportunities to develop and consolidate skills or knowledge. This will have a positive impact on their physical and mental wellbeing.
 - b. Children will receive at least 60 minutes of physical activities at each session, helping to remain active throughout the school holidays.
 - c. Children and families who attend will be given the opportunity to receive information and signposting.
 - d. Children and their families will receive nutritional information to help them make healthier lifestyle choices.
 - e. Children will have reduced social isolation and improved mental health and wellbeing.
5. The Government initially funded a one-year pilot of the programme in all local authority areas during 2021/22. Following its national success, the programme has been extended until March 2026 Herefordshire has successfully delivered the programme each year, with over 1,500 children participating in the 2024 Easter, summer, and Christmas holidays. To facilitate this, Talk Community partnered with over 40 community providers, offering a diverse range of activities, including outdoor pursuits, pottery, trampolining, parkour, drama, aerial skills, boxing, and cooking.

6. The feedback received from the children, young people and their families has been extremely positive and demonstrates the impact of delivering the opportunities for children and young people. Children have remained engaged in physical activity throughout holiday periods, made new friends and eaten a nutritious meal,
7. The DfE have allowed up to 15% of the grant to be allocated to children and young people that are not eligible for free school meal but are considered vulnerable and meet an eligibility criteria. The eligibility criteria is determined by consultation with other local authorities and finalised with input from the steering group. We will ask that professionals working with children and young people, such as schools, family support workers and community groups assist us to identify the children that meet the criteria.
8. A panel of council officers has been established to assess the community provider applications against the set criteria above and providers who have been successful will be awarded a grant to deliver the programme.
9. Families can access and book the activities via an online booking portal system which provides an overview of the activity, date, time, location and offer. Families unable to access the online booking system can be supported to do this via the pastoral support within their child's school. An engagement plan has been developed to ensure all eligible families are aware and informed of the programme - this is via post, school communication, leaflets and social media. The activities are allocated on booking and families are able to access the entitled hours.
10. The attached appendix (appendix A) shows how Herefordshire compares to other small counties with similar characteristics. The benchmarking document shows reach during the Easter and summer programme and percentage of places booked and not attended.

Community impact

9. The majority of work to promote the best start in life is through the local delivery of the Healthy Child programme, as well as in other statutory settings such as early year's providers and schools. However, there is also work undertaken throughout the county by the community and voluntary sector, this includes the Holiday activity and food programme – Here for Herefordshire Holidays
10. The HAF programme is co-ordinated by the Talk Community team, it focuses on a strength-based approach, working in partnership with community settings are a key as part of the delivery. As a result of the HAF programme running over the last three years, the holiday activity providers have engaged with Talk Community, and some become a Talk Community champion or a Talk Community hub and all have been trained in using the Talk Community directory for signposting and information. The Talk Community network has reached the wider community and enhanced the collaborative working relationship with Herefordshire Council.
11. Talk Community over the last three years has worked with a wide range of providers and organisations including voluntary / community sector, schools and private organisations, an opportunity to extend their reach to the wider population
12. Children that are care experience children and young people and of school age and eligible for free school meals will qualify for the programme, however if they are not eligible and meet the discretionary criteria, a referral can be submitted by either the child's social worker, support worker or school.

13. The proposal seeks aligns to the following success measures in the Council Plan (2024 to 2028).
- a) The development of this programme and its principles is based on providing activities across the county to reduce travel and offer a local service to families and children. The aim is to increase the number of short-distance trips made by sustainable modes of travel—walking, cycling, or public transport. Where this isn't possible, consideration will be given to alternative travel options, such as minibuses and other suitable solutions.
 - b) The programme will work with local food providers to ensure they are considerate to environment. HAF providers are encouraged to use refillable drinking vessels, recycle waste and liaise with local farmers supermarkets to make use of any food surplus.
 - c) HAF providers are encouraged to make use of local green space in Herefordshire for children to access physical activities.

Equality duty

14. The DfE stipulate that the programme is available for all school aged children that are in receipt of free school meals. However, the DfE have approved that 15% of the grant can be used to support vulnerable children that meet an eligibility criteria, that is set by the local authority based on consultation with other local authorities and finalised with input from the steering group.
15. Due to the potential impact of this decision being low, a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required. However, the following equality considerations should be taken into account when making a decision about this activity:
- a) Providers will be required to specify the age range of children they can accommodate for the programme, based on their facilities, staff training, and qualifications.
 - b) Providers will be required to indicate whether they can offer the programme to children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), considering their facilities, staff training, and qualifications.
 - c) Some sessions may be gender-specific. Evidence suggests that single-sex activities can increase engagement for certain groups. For example, boxing sessions may be more appealing to teenage girls.

Resource implications

21. All aspects of programme delivery, including administration, promotion and staffing are covered by the DfE grant. The DfE have included £50,000 within the grant to Herefordshire as they recognise that smaller authorities require more than 10%. This will cover salary for a HAF support officer and all other administration and marketing costs.

| Revenue or Capital cost of project (indicate R or C) | 2025/26 | 2026/27 | 2027/28 | Future Years | Total |
|--|----------|---------|---------|--------------|----------|
| Revenue expenditure | £460,920 | £000 | £000 | £000 | £460,920 |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| TOTAL | £460,920 | | | | £460,920 |

| Funding streams (indicate whether base budget / external / grant / capital borrowing) | 2025/26 | 2026/27 | 2027/28 | Future Years | Total |
|---|----------|---------|---------|--------------|----------|
| DfE grant – 1 year funding | £460,920 | £000 | £000 | £000 | £460,920 |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| TOTAL | | | | | £460,920 |

| Revenue budget implications | 2025/26 | 2026/27 | 2027/28 | Future Years | Total |
|---|---------|---------|---------|--------------|-------|
| | £000 | £000 | £000 | £000 | £000 |
| Net nil budget impact – expenditure limited to the amount of the grant allocation | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| TOTAL | | | | | £0 |

Legal implications

22. There are no specific legal implications other than any contract with the providers will need to comply with any specific terms (if any) under the grant.

Risk management

23. Consideration should be given to the risks / opportunities to the council if the recommendation(s) are agreed and how these will be managed; and the risks / opportunities to the council if the recommendation(s) are declined and how these will be managed. Enter the risks / opportunities and associated mitigations into the table below;

| Risk / opportunity | Mitigation |
|--|--|
| Community provision – if there is insufficient groups to deliver the requirements of a programme then the scheme might not meet its potential. | Demand has previously been met and there is ongoing work to promote the HAF programme and expand the offer. |
| Poor uptake of the programme by eligible children – resulting in children missing out on opportunities and positive impact. | Targeted school communications, partnerships with community groups, and outreach via Talk Community channels |
| The programme is oversubscribed and the DfE grant does not cover the full costings of the programme. | Work closely with providers to maximise efficiency. Monitor take-up trends throughout the year to identify any potential shortfall early and adjust allocation strategies accordingly. |
| Financial uncertainty beyond 2025/26 if government funding changes – There is no guarantee that the Department for Education (DfE) will continue to fund the HAF programme beyond March 2026, which could impact the sustainability of holiday provision for eligible children | Continue to monitor government funding announcements and engage with relevant departments (DfE, Local Government Association) to advocate for continued funding. Evaluate the impact of the programme and collect robust data to strengthen the case for future funding. |

24. The identified risks will be managed at the directorate level within the Community Wellbeing risk register. Regular monitoring and mitigation strategies will be implemented to ensure the successful delivery of the HAF programme within the allocated funding

Consultees

25. None

Appendices

Appendix A – Holiday Activities and food programme – Benchmarking for Herefordshire – reach and average days

Background papers

None

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published

| | | |
|----------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Governance | John Coleman | Date 13/02/2025 |
| Finance | Wendy Pickering | Date 26/02/2025 |
| Legal | Sean O'Connor | Date 17/02/2025 |
| Communications | Luenne Featherstone | Date 14/02/2025 |
| Equality Duty | Harriet Yellin | Date 14/02/2025 |
| Procurement | Claire Powell | Date 15/02/2025 |
| Risk | Jessica Karia | Date 17/02/2025 |

Approved by Hilary Hall Date 26/02/2025

[Note: Please remember to overtype or delete the guidance highlighted in grey]

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.