

OPEN

Children and Families Committee

10 November 2025

Holiday Activity and Food Programme 2026 to 2029

Report of: Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director of Children's Services

Report Reference No: CF/36/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: All

For Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 Approval of the Holiday and Activity Food Programme (HAF) to run an open procurement procedure to spend the total amount of the HAF grant as allocated by the Department for Education (DfE) each financial year.

Executive Summary

- 2 On the 28 August 2025, the DfE announced an extension to the HAF programme, with a total allocation of £200m worth of funding across England. As of 02 Sept 2025, we do not have grant conditions or a final budget allocation for Cheshire East, but we expect it to be in line with previous years.
- 3 Since 2021, the HAF programme has been delivered in Cheshire East by open procurement, which has amassed a total of 29 providers, providing over 100 clubs each year to over 10,000 income related free school meal (IRFSM) young people.
- 4 So far, in 2025/26, this has resulted in over 74,000 hours of provision being accessed by over 2,746 IRFSM young people.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Children and Families Committee are recommended to:

1. Approve the Supplementary Revenue Estimate Request for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding over £500,000 up to £1,000,000 relating to the 2026/27 Holiday Activity and Food Programme. The estimated amount based on previous years is £900,000.
2. Approve the HAF to be delivered via open procedure from April 2026 to March 2029 plus optional extensions of 3 years.
3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Families Committee, for the dispersal of funds and contract awards to providers for the delivery of the Holiday Activity and Food Programme up to the allocated HAF grant amount each financial year.

Background

- 5 The HAF programme has the purpose of providing healthy meals and enriching activities for income related Free School Meal (FSM) eligible young people during the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays, with current eligibility for the programme requiring a minimum of 85% of the programme to be delivered to income related FSM eligible young people and 15% of the programme available for young people with identified needs and vulnerabilities by providers/professionals who aren't eligible for FSM. The funding is available to support clubs and organisations in offering comprehensive, inclusive, and accessible offers in line with grant conditions.

HAF Proposal

- 6 Commission the future HAF programme on behalf of Cheshire East through an open procurement exercise.
- 7 We would like to commission up to the entire HAF budget through this process, which would come to a maximum of £2.46m for the 3 years of secured funding, with a further 3-year optional extension subject to funding. The full value including optional extensions would be approximately £4.9m. The purpose of the optional extension is to provide the local authority flexibility in procuring in the future.
- 8 Take 10% admin fund each year for a total of £90k per annum, which will be used to fund the project team. This team is responsible for delivery of the HAF programme, which includes:

- (a) Project Finances, safeguarding, procurement, payments, advertising, provider vetting, booking platform management, provider visits, council governance, grant returns, management of HAF inboxes, liaise DfE advisors and attend DfE national meetings, as well as other tasks inherent to running a project of this scale.
- 9 In addition to this, we suggest we continue to use EEQU, commissioning them for the entirety of the programme for a total cost of £60k (+£60k for optional extensions). EEQU is our online booking platform which manages eligibility checking by automatically checking a user against their FSM eligibility as well as providing a user-friendly experience for HAF attendees, where they can easily access activities and book on. The platform then provides Cheshire East with a gold standard of live data to indicate on provider performance and log necessary information.
- 10 Recommission the marketing provider, as recommended by the Cheshire East communications team, to support marketing and awareness campaigns throughout the lifetime of the grant. In 2025/26 the HAF team commissioned marketing support which resulted in over 1m impressions, 200k unique users and 12,530 clicks onto the HAF booking page.
- 11 Please note, the above costings are currently predictive as we are yet to receive our official grant.

Other Options Considered

- 12 Grants – we could go out to deliver the programme through a grant process, but this would provide significantly less protection for commissioners in comparison to a contract. For example, we would have no legal basis to be able to challenge how the monies were spent once granted. For this level of spend this would not be advised.
- 13 Not deliver – return the money to the DfE and not deliver the programme, although this would mean we were not supporting the most vulnerable children and young people in Cheshire East in line with the council's priorities.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 14 The Department for Education (DfE) has announced that the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) programme will be extended for 2026/29. Despite the fact that this is an extension to the previous HAF scheme, it is a new grant subject to its own grant conditions which have not been provided to CEC. CEC must nominate a HAF coordinator who will assume responsibility for the delivery of the HAF programme for the local authority.

- 15 The DfE has yet to provide the grant conditions for the HAF programme 2026/2029. However, the DfE has now (as of 18/09/2025) been provided with email confirmation on 28 August 2025 from the Department of Education for the period 2026/29. CEC's allocation of HAF funding - £908,330 will be paid to CEC and must be spent in compliance any grant conditions that are provided to CEC.
- 16 The HAF has been determined by the Secretary of State for Education in exercise of the powers conferred by section 31 Local Government Act 2003. The HAF programme will provide funding for health meals, enriching activities and free childcare places to children from low-income families, benefiting their health, wellbeing and learning. The HAF will be used throughout the Easter, summer and Christmas school holidays during the period of 01/04/2026 to 31/03/2029. Underspends from previous schemes will have been returned to DfE and cannot be carried forwards or utilised. Funds not spent or committed before 31/03/2029 will be returned to DfE upon conclusion of the programme.
- 17 Local authorities are expected to provide funding to benefit eligible children and families within their area. Local authorities should provide assistance to school aged children who receive benefits-related free school meals. A maximum of 10% of the expenditure can be spent on administration costs for coordinating the HAF programme. The remaining 90% must be spent on the provision of assistance for eligible children.
- 18 The service must ensure that spend is in line with eligible expenditure as well as the grant conditions which will be provided by the Department of Education and should not exceed CECs allocation of funding. CEC will ultimately be held accountable for the reporting of spend to DfE. Consequently, any contracts awarded (or support given) by way of HAF funding to third parties must contain obligations pertaining to record management/sharing & reporting requirements so that CEC may in turn comply with the reporting obligations outlined within the grant conditions that the Department of Education will provide.
- 19 CEC must abide by any reporting requirements that may be provided as part of HAF. CECs HAF coordinator should ensure that the associated data and costs of the HAF programme are submitted to DfE in time to prevent a breach of the grant determination provisions and to mitigate any risk of clawback of grant funding.
- 20 We anticipate that the grant conditions that will be provided pursuant to the HAF will contain clawback provisions for recovery of the grant monies by DfE. The service must ensure that grant monies are not distributed in contravention of the provisions within any such grant conditions. We expect that in the event of a breach, DfE may request a reduction in the grant monies to CEC, suspend any such payment, withhold grant

payments or require repayment of the whole or any part of the grant monies paid to CEC. Please note that Legal will be able to confirm the exact requirements of any grant conditions when these are received from the Department of Education.

- 21 [Further legal comments may be provided upon receipt of the grant conditions for HAF programme 2026/29.]

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 22 The council has received allocations of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme over the last four years as tabled below. The grant has been received on an annual basis. However, for the last two years the confirmation that the grant is continuing has been received in March of the previous year. This has left little time for planning and making changes to the programme that Cheshire East offers. The short term notice and limited time period has meant that the council has not been able to reconsider the offer and enter into a procurement tender process.

Year	Amount
2022/23	£878,640
2023/24	£896,470
2024/25	£906,480
2025/26	£908,330

- 23 The DfE have now committed to a further three years funding for 2026/27 to 2028/29 which now gives local authorities certainty around the future of the programme.
- 24 Allocations for individual local authorities have not been provided yet but the national level is just over £200m. This is comparable to the £205m allocation for 2024/25 so reasonable to assume the allocation for Cheshire East will be in the region of £900,000.
- 25 The second recommendation is dependent on funding being in place and approval of the budget at the first recommendation. Committee are therefore being asked to approve the revenue supplementary estimate on the basis of the expected grant amount from the information that has been published.
- 26 Expenditure on the Holiday Activity Fund will be fully funded by the government grant allocation. Grant allocations are expected later in the

year following the autumn budget and will be included in the 2026-2030 Medium Term Financial Strategy.

- 27 The council will spend the grant in accordance with the conditions and not exceed the amount advised by the DfE. There will not be any unfunded ongoing commitments as a result of this expenditure. Any unused grant at the end of the grant period will be returned to the DfE.
- 28 If the council has not spent the grant in accordance with the conditions, then there is scope for clawback. The service will manage that risk.
- 29 It is expected that the council will be required to provide a return outlining their grant spend and data on attendance following each holiday period in-line with previous grant conditions.
- 30 This is a revenue-based activity and income, and expenditure relates to specific financial years. The risk of underspend occurs due to take up of activities.

Policy

- 31 The HAF grant is part of the government's package of support, targeted at those vulnerable families who are most in need, to help them to cope with food poverty and inequality.

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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 32 An EIA is currently in place which explores all equality, diversity and inclusion aspects. The EIA can be found [here](#).

Human Resources

- 33 The grant conditions enable Cheshire East to take a portion of the grant for administration. We have already taken steps to extend temporary contracts to ensure the programme is staffed going forward.

Risk Management

- 34 Risks are routinely assessed and reported on at the monthly holiday activity and food programme multi-agency steering group, chaired by the Head of Service responsible for the programme, and remedial action is taken, as required.

- 35 We regularly review provider data and performance through the data provided by EEQU, we then report on this data at our steering group, and if appropriate, remedial action is taken with the provider directly. This ensures attendance and value for money are achieved.
- 36 The HAF team also visit providers whilst sessions are underway. They ensure provider insurance meets children's procurement stipulations, safeguarding policies are in place and being adhered to including named designated safeguarding leads. All staff delivering HAF must have the appropriate DBS checks. Providers must confirm they have health and safety policies that complies with current legislative requirements, a behaviour policy, a member of staff who is first aid trained and that they are signed up to OFSTED as appropriate, as well as risk assessments are in place regarding the venue. They also observe activities and speak to the children and young people.

Rural Communities

- 37 Children, families, and adults in rural areas of the council will directly benefit from receipt of the new grant in line with financial need. There is no restriction on funding decisions dependent on where service users live.
- 38 The programme is primarily focussed on areas of the highest need, but the HAF team do endeavour to ensure the programme is as accessible as possible, with activities being in areas where public transport is available.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 39 Children and young people who suffer the greatest inequality in terms of lack of household income will directly benefit from the HAF grant.

Public Health

- 40 Poverty poses a threat to the public health of our residents as they are less likely to be able to access the conditions that promote a healthy physical and mental lifestyle. An adequate income can help people to avoid stress and feel in control, to access experiences and material resources, to adopt and maintain healthy behaviours, and to feel supported by a financial safety net.

Climate Change

- 41 There are not expected to be any climate change implications from the Holiday Activity and Food Programme.

42 Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy) :</i>			
Ashley Hughes	S151 Officer	09/10/25	20/10/25
Kevin O'Keefe	Interim Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)	09/10/25	09/10/25
Legal and Finance			
Diane Green	Finance Manager	09/09/25	16/09/25
Adrian Lesley	Principal Lawyer	18/09/25	18/09/25
<i>Other Consultees:</i>			
<i>Executive Directors/Directors</i>			
Dawn Godfrey	Executive Director of Children's Services	15/10/25	16/10/25
Tracy Stephen	Director of Family Help & Children's Social Care	15/10/25	21/10/25

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Douglas Hubbert, Business Development Manager Douglas.hubbert@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – HAF Eval

	Appendix 2 - Table 1 – LSOA Mapping Appendix 3 - Table 2 – Recipient Feedback Appendix 4 - Table 3 – HAF Feedback Statements
Background Papers:	HAF DfE Grant Conditions – TBC Full Council item 88 - Delivery Proposal for the Holiday Activity and Food Programme 2025/26. Agenda for Council on Wednesday, 26th February, 2025, 11.00 am Cheshire East Council