

**OPEN**

**Council**

**26 February 2025**

**Delivery Proposal for the Holiday Activity and Food Programme  
for 2025/26**

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**Report of: Theresa Leavy, Executive Director of Children's Services**

**Report Reference No: C/20/24-25**

**Ward(s) Affected: ALL**

**For Decision or Scrutiny: Decision**

**Purpose of Report**

- 1 Approval of the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programme Delivery proposal for 2025/26.

**Executive Summary**

- 2 The current 3 year holiday activities and food programme has been providing healthy meals, enriching activities, and free childcare places to children from low-income families since Easter 2022.
- 3 During 2024/25 we have supported 2,384 young people and provided 2,538 healthy hampers to free school meal (FSM) young people and their families across our most disadvantaged areas.
- 4 On the 20 January 2025, the Department for Education (DfE) announced plans to extend the HAF programme for another year, from April 2025 to March 2026. The Medium Term Financial Strategy includes an estimated value of £0.9m for this. On the 14 February 2025, the council received the official grant determination letter from the DfE.
- 5 To enable the delivery of the HAF programme in Easter 2025, we are seeking approval of our recommendations from full council. This is because it is not possible to seek approval from the Children and Families committee prior to the first HAF delivery period. The next Children and Families committee is on the 10 April 2025, which will overlap with the Easter HAF delivery period.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

Full Council is recommended to:

1. Approve the supplementary revenue estimate of £8,330, which is above the estimated value of £900,000 in the 2025/26 budget.
2. Approve the extension of the delivery model of Holiday Activity and Food for a further year in line with the proposals set out in this paper.
3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to incur expenditure in line with the grant conditions.

## Background

- 6 The current 3 year HAF programme has been running since Easter 2022 following an open procurement exercise that commissioned providers up to winter 2024. An evaluation of the 2024/25 programme is attached at Appendix 1.

## Proposed Delivery for 2025/26

- 7 Based on the evaluation of the existing programme, it is proposed to extend the existing HAF provider contracts until the end of the 2026 financial year.
- 8 As the DfE have amended the delivery protocol to allow local authorities to use remaining funds for October and February half terms, it is proposed that we request this flexibility and engage in a procurement process to adopt providers for the October and February half terms.
- 9 To enhance our SEND local offer, we will also align this programme with the short breaks offer.
- 10 We will recommission our booking platform provider, after excellent feedback over 2024/25.
- 11 Any projected underspend will be well planned so that those families with the greatest need will benefit. This may, for example, include food hampers.
- 12 We propose to recommission our booking platform provider following excellent feedback in 2024/25. This platform has also been adopted by other teams within Cheshire East under the HAF license including, short breaks and the Family Hubs.

- 13 The proposed funding proposal for 2025/26 is set out in Appendix 2. This mirrors our spend from 2024/25 and allocates appropriate amounts to mainstream and SEND funding streams, which reflect attendance over the 2024/25 period.

### **Other Options Considered**

- 14 An open procurement exercise could be adopted for all providers (existing and new) to re-tender by the summer deliver programme. This option was not chosen as we want to build on the relationships and good practice already established with our existing providers.

### **Implications and Comments**

#### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 15 The Department for Education (DfE) has announced that the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) programme will be extended for 2025/26. Despite the fact that this is an extension to the previous HAF scheme, it is a new grant subject to its own grant conditions as is set out in the grant determination letter. CEC must nominate a HAF coordinator who will assume responsibility for the delivery of the HAF programme for the local authority.
- 16 The DfE has yet to provide the grant conditions for the HAF programme 2025/26. However, the DfE has now (as of 14/02/2025) distributed the grant determination letter for 2025/26. The determination letter outlines CEC's allocation of HAF funding - £908,330 will be paid to CEC and must be spent in compliance with Annex B of the grant determination letter.
- 17 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 01/04/2025 to 31/03/2026. Underspends from previous schemes will have been returned to DfE and cannot be carried forwards or utilised. Funds not spent or committed before 31/03/2026 will be returned to DfE upon conclusion of the programme.
- 18 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.

- 19 The service must ensure that spend is in line with eligible expenditure (Annex B, paragraph 4-8 of the grant determination letter) as well as the grant conditions [TBC] 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 determination letter (Annex B, paragraph 18-24).
- 20 CEC must abide by the reporting requirements outlined within Annex B, paragraph 18-24. 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.
- 21 Annex B, paragraph 40-42 – outlines 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 paragraph 41 of Annex B. 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.
- 22 [Further legal comments may be provided upon receipt of the grant conditions for HAF programme 2025/26.]

#### *Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 23 Expenditure on the Holiday Activity Fund will be fully funded by the government grant allocation of £908,330. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (also on the meeting agenda) includes an estimated grant value of £0.9m. A supplementary revenue estimate will request approval in line with the constitution limits for the £8,330 not included in the MTFS estimate. The duration of the scheme is from 01 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.
- 24 The expectation is that 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. It is not yet known if any funding will be provided after 2025/26 to continue this scheme.
- 25 The council will be required to provide a return outlining their grant spend and data on attendance following each holiday period. An annual report is also required to be submitted by 30 June 2025.

- 26 The timing of grant payments is still to be confirmed. Any unused grant at the end of the year will be returned.
- 27 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.
- 28 The HSF grants are part of the government's package of support, targeted at those vulnerable families and adults who are most in need, to help them to cope with the cost of essentials.

#### *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

- 29 An EIA has been completed for the HAF programme and it can be found here: [EIA template](#)

#### *Human Resources*

- 30 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*

- 31 When delivering a programme like HAF, there are many risks around the safeguarding of a child, allergies and food safety and facility risk assessments.
- 32 These risks are reviewed at our monthly steering group, as well as HAF monitoring visits and assurances in the provider contracts (insurances, health and safety policies, safeguarding policies, food safety, risk assessment, etc).

#### *Rural Communities*

- 33 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.
- 34 The HAF programme has been mapped across Cheshire East using LSOA data, meaning the support is targeted to the areas of highest deprivation. The HAF programme is available in all areas of Cheshire East.

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

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

## *Public Health*

- 36 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.
- 37 The HAF programme will also promote healthier eating and lifestyles for this group, alongside signposting to other support networks.

## *Climate Change*

- 38 The Holiday Activity and Food Programme asks providers not use single use plastics where possible, and to ensure recycling is implemented by the clubs.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Douglas Hubbert, Business Development Manager <a href="mailto:Douglas.hubbert@cheshireeast.gov.uk">Douglas.hubbert@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a>
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – 2024/25 HAF evaluation Appendix 2 - HAF 2025/26 Funding Proposal
Background Papers:	HAF 2022 paper - <a href="#">Holiday Activity Fund Grant Open Procurement 2022-2025.pdf</a>

### HAF Evaluation

- 39 *Table 1* sets out a summary of performance during 2024/25. This shows that the HAF programme had a total of 2,384 unique learners, which constitutes 26% of our FSM population. This has equated to over 20,964 sessions booked, equating to more than 83,000 hours of support provided, or 35 hours per attendee.
- 40 Further analysis of the performance can be found in *Table 2*, which shows the performance split between the different holiday periods and by eligibility criteria. From this data, we can see 75% of learners were primary aged and 25% were secondary aged.
- 41 Additionally, we can see that:
- (a) 60% of the programme were mainstream FSM
  - (b) 25% were SEND and FSM
  - (c) 7% were SEND non-FSM; and
  - (d) 8% 'other', which includes a wider range of eligibility, including individuals vulnerable to exploitation and asylum seekers.
- 42 As HAF is free to access, there is a national challenge around attendance and 'no shows.' Our data shows that an average of 83% of places were attended, with summer achieving 87% of attendance. This is a challenge that is ongoing in both Cheshire East, and other areas. We address this predominantly by using a system of reminders and waiting lists, however it is something we are yet to fully resolve.
- 43 According to LSOA mapping data, provided by the Cheshire East Public Health team, the programme is appropriately distributed across the geographical area. *Table 3* shows that we have targeted clubs to areas with large FSM populations alongside other key inequality factors.
- 44 In summary, the main areas for improvement for the HAF programme is around non-attendance of HAF places, and increasing the specialist teen provision that we offer, to provide a more equal distribution of places across primary and secondary ages. We have also highlighted an opportunity to enhance our SEND provision, by aligning HAF with our short breaks offer.
- 45 Our feedback survey of HAF recipients showed the majority of attendees had healthy meals, in safe environments, with over 85% learned new things, 73% made new friends, and 94.5% having a good time and enjoying themselves. Further detail can be found in *table 4*.

- 46 In addition to the survey details, we also provide parents/guardians the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience. Overall, the feedback is positive, with the comments generally acknowledging the programme is well distributed, easy to access, has fun activities and also healthy food. Please see table 5 for a collection of statements.
- 47 In addition to the main programme, HAF also provided 2,538 hampers over the Winter period to FSM young people in our most deprived areas. These hampers contained healthy food, to support the families through the challenging and often expensive Christmas period, as well as an activity which could have included items such as a gym pass or a home learning activity.
- 48 This was supported by those who received and regarded as a success by the schools.

*Table 1 – Overview of performance*

Programme performance overview

Filter for the dates of the delivery to see historic data. Check your Provider page to see if any Providers need reminding to take their registers.

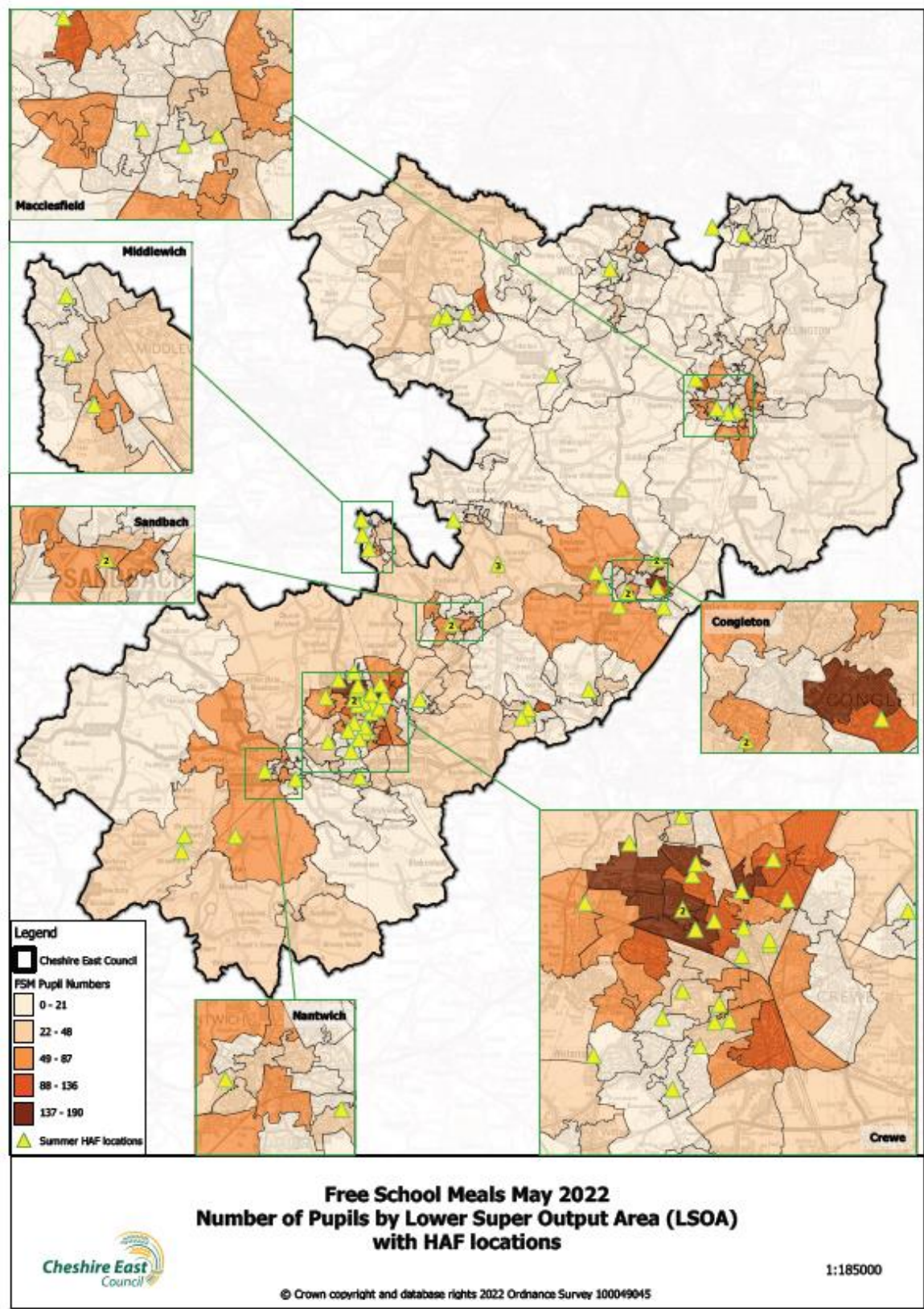
<p><b>ELIGIBLE</b></p> <p><b>APPROVED</b></p> <p>Total approved sessions in period</p> <p><b>20964</b></p>	<p><b>Average sessions attended</b></p> <p><b>6.4</b></p>	<p><b>Unique attending learners</b></p> <p><b>2384</b></p>
<p><b>FREE</b></p> <p>Free sessions attended</p> <p><b>15319</b></p>	<p><b>PAID</b></p> <p>Paid sessions attended</p> <p><b>471</b></p>	
<p><b>CANCELLED</b></p> <p>Total sessions cancelled by Provider</p> <p><b>739</b></p>	<p><b>CANCELLED</b></p> <p>Total sessions cancelled by booker</p> <p><b>3031</b></p>	<p><b>DECLINED</b></p> <p>Total sessions declined</p> <p><b>2815</b></p>



Table 2 – HAF performance by holiday period

	HAF Data Split by Holiday	
Easter	Primary	Secondary
FSM	448	99
FSM SEND	156	62
Non-FSM SEND	25	20
Other	61	24
total	690	205
Summer	Primary	Secondary
FSM	718	189
FSM SEND	263	113
Non-FSM SEND	55	49
Other	61	42
total	1097	393
Winter	Primary	Secondary
FSM	280	65
FSM SEND	97	36
Non-FSM SEND	24	24
Other	26	28
total	427	153
Annual	Primary	Secondary
FSM	1446	353
FSM SEND	516	211
Non-FSM SEND	104	93
Other	148	94
total	2214	751

Table 3 – HAF LSOA Mapping



**HAF 2025/26 Funding Proposal**

HAF Costing Proposal (2025/26)			
	Mainstream FSM	SEND	Total
Easter	£ 77,000.00	£ 23,000.00	£ 100,000.00
Summer	£ 300,000.00	£ 100,000.00	£ 400,000.00
Winter	£ 77,000.00	£ 23,000.00	£ 100,000.00
October	£ 77,000.00	£ 23,000.00	£ 100,000.00
February	£ 77,000.00	£ 23,000.00	£ 100,000.00
Hampers	£ 11,898.81	£ 5,831.19	£ 17,730.00
Admin	£ 60,600.00	£ 30,000.00	£ 90,600.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>£ 680,498.81</b>	<b>£ 227,831.19</b>	<b>£ 908,330.00</b>

Table 4 – Survey feedback from HAF recipients

Answer Choices	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure / don't know
They learnt/tried new things	48.21%	41.07%	5.36%	1.79%	0.00%	3.57%
They made new friends	32.14%	41.07%	14.29%	5.36%	0.00%	7.14%
They enjoyed the meals provided	30.36%	37.50%	12.50%	1.79%	1.79%	16.07%
They were in a safe environment	58.93%	33.93	1.79%	0.00%	0.00%	5.36%
They had a good time and enjoyed themselves	67.86%	26.79	1.79%	0.00%	0.00%	3.57%
They found out more about healthy foods, nutrition, or meal preparation	14.29%	17.86	41.07%	8.93%	1.79%	16.07%

Table 5 – HAF Feedback statements

Statement 1	HAF is a really wonderful scheme. My daughter X has had a very difficult start in life, we are her 5th home, although she really struggles with friendships, she struggles more when she is out of routine and especially during school holidays. She is on the Autistic/ADHA pathway and needs a good range of activities to engage in but also activities which encourage her confidence, self-esteem and her independence.
Statement 2	The HAF holiday club is brilliant my daughter loves going there she has met new friends plus it's good because if the parent/s had to work or had an appointment it's great for them reasons
Statement 3	The kids loved the provision from Cheshire East Youth Service - they attended sessions they would have never been able to with us - we could not have financially funded them. They spent time with other children & made friends (as they are not in or attending schools - opportunities to be with / around other children is limited). They had a brilliant 3 days out over xmas, which took pressure from us being able to afford days out for them & they eat a good hot meal (2 out of the 3 days).
Statement 4	My foster child attended the summer 2024 HAF sports camp and it supported us as a family stopping the child from getting bored as it kept him occupied and happy though out the summer holidays
Statement 5	Unfortunately, I work full time and my husband too who works away a lot. Knowing I can work at home and L can go and meet new friends and enjoy himself is a massive relief for me. I would get anxious thinking I have to work when school is out and my son will want my constant attention and constantly say he is bored which puts stress on me. Having the HAF club in Holmes Chapel is amazing and the best thing is that L who normally super sensitive and anxious really enjoys going