

TITLE	Holiday Activities & Food Programme
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 September 2023
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Holiday Activities and Food Programme is a DfE funded initiative which offers free enriching, fun activities and healthy meals to children and young people in receipt of benefits-related free school meals, and those on the edge of eligibility, during school holiday periods. It helps to address child food poverty, isolation and unhealthy behaviours, contributing to community wellbeing, cohesion and equality of opportunity.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Committee notes the purpose of the DfE Holiday Activities and Food Programme, the local delivery strategy, and programme take-up to date.
2. That the Committee notes future plans to expand the programme's reach and impact, and its synergy and links with other work in the Council.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report provides an update on local delivery of the DfE grant-funded Holiday Activities and Food Programme, which has been offering free enriching activities and healthy meals to eligible children and young people in Wokingham during the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays since Easter 2021 and has just completed its third summer of provision.

The programme was conceived in response to research which shows that the school holidays present significant challenges for some families and can lead to a holiday experience gap, with children from low-income households likely to miss out on activities their peers enjoy, face social isolation, and experience "unhealthy holidays" in terms of nutrition and physical health. Since 2021, the DfE has devolved responsibility for delivery of the programme to local authorities.

The programme is primarily for school aged children from reception to year 11 (inclusive) who receive benefits-related free school meals. In addition, Local Authorities have discretion to use up to 15% of their funding to provide free or subsidised holiday club places for children who are not in receipt of benefits-related free school meals but who the local authority believes could benefit from HAF provision.

For 23/24, WBC received £306,370 in grant funding to arrange Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) provision. All children in receipt of FSM are eligible to attend, but the provision is voluntary, and not all families take up the offer.

In Wokingham Borough, a growing number of children are receiving benefits-related FSM, 2849 in Jan 2023 (up from 2525 in Jan 2021, and 2781 in Jan 2022).

The number of children and young people accessing provision is also growing – up from 620 in the Summer of 2021 to 800 in Summer 2022 to 1200-1400 this Summer (exact number to be confirmed).

This report describes the activities and food the programme offers, how it has developed since inception in 2021, discusses plans to develop the programme and its reach in the future, and reflects on the synergies this programme has to others in the council.

Background

History of the Programme

The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme has been in existence since 2018, initially launched as a pilot project by the Department for Education (DfE) designed to support disadvantaged families during the school holidays by providing healthy meals and enriching activities to children and young people.

In 2019, the DfE expanded the programme across nine local authorities, and by 2020, the HAF programme rolled out £9 million funding across 17 local authority areas.

Following the success of the pilot and expanded programme, in 2021 £220 million was made available to all 151 local authorities in England to run clubs in the spring, summer and winter holidays.

The programme has four main aims:

1. To improve the nutrition of children who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals in the holidays;
2. To increase healthy behaviours (e.g. participation in physical and enriching activities) amongst eligible children during the holidays;
3. To improve school readiness (including behaviour, confidence, and socialisation) amongst children who are eligible for benefits-related FSM; and
4. To improve parents' confidence and behaviour around purchasing and preparing healthy meals on a sustainable basis.

An evaluation of the 2021 HAF showed high demand – almost three quarters of a million children accessed the programme, reaching 29% of all children eligible for FSM.

In recognition of there being families who are struggling but who may not meet the criteria for FSM, the programme allows up to 15% of the budget to be used to support access for children and young people not in receipt of FSM.

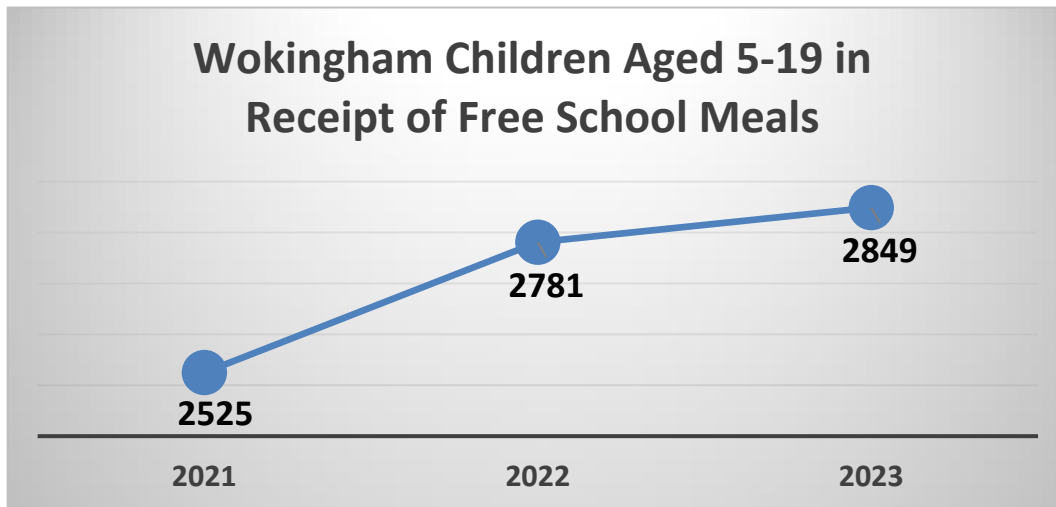
In their Autumn Budget Statement in 2021, the Government announced that funding of HAF would continue for a further three years, with funding over £200 million per year made available (HM Treasury, 2021).

The Programme in Wokingham

Children in Receipt of FSM

The number of children in receipt of Free School Meals in Wokingham is growing, increasing by 12% between 2021 and 2023. The HAF programme requires that provision is made available for all those in receipt of FSM, but acknowledges that

attendance is voluntary. Our aim in Wokingham has been to reach as many children as possible, whilst taking time to grow the programme steadily, increasing our understanding of need and barriers to participation.



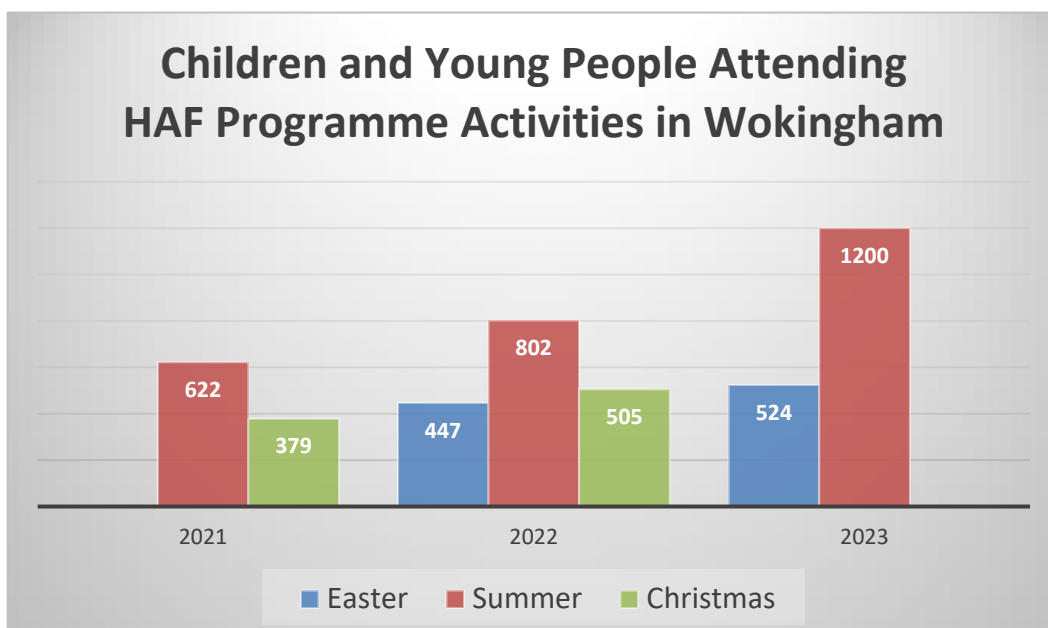
Programme Reach Since Inception

The government’s announcement of expansion of the programme in 2021 came at a time when the effects of the Covid Pandemic were still being felt, and in Wokingham and other local authorities the decision was made to offer activity packs to families in lieu of face to face activities.

The first face to face activities and healthy meals were offered in the Summer of 2021 and were accessed by 622 individual children and young people.

The Christmas 2021 and Easter 2022 provisions were less well attended than Summer 2021 but each subsequent offer has seen increased attendance compared to the previous year.

Summer 2022 was attended by 802 children and young people, and Summer 2023 is likely to see a significant increase on this when the final figures are available.



Programme Delivery

A small team manages the programme in Wokingham comprising a Manager, a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities specialist, and a Project Support Officer. They are supported by a number of seasonal workers who help deliver activities. All posts are funded through the HAF Grant, which in 2023/24 is £306,370.

Wokingham offers a mix of activities: some commissioned from existing local holiday activity providers; and others designed and delivered by local authority officers.

This Summer we have offered:

- Provision for primary aged children in 30 locations across the Borough, working with 8 holiday activity providers.
- Provision for up to 50 secondary-aged young people with morning off site activities including paddleboarding, swimming, tennis, football, archery and art with “masterchef” and game zone activities in the afternoon. The Masterchef activity offers young people the opportunity to plan, prepare, cook and eat their meals together.
- Specialist activities for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) including stay and play sessions and trips to Camp Mohawk and Forestry activities.
- Four 3-hour Community HAF Events, working with the voluntary sector to deliver these in locations across the borough for the whole family to enjoy.

Beyond HAF

Over the time the programme has developed in Wokingham, it has become clear that the relationships forged with children, young people, families and internal and external delivery partners have the potential to deliver outcomes beyond the original remit of the programme where there is synergy with the shared vision to improve opportunities for and the lives of children, young people and families:

1. Additional funding has been secured by the team to deliver a number of services:
 - £87,000 from the Ukraine Response Fund to offer children and young people with activities through the school holidays, and to lead a Ukraine family drop-in providing a safe space for families to meet, make friends, chat, and receive English Language tuition and conversation.
 - £10,000 from the Change to Thrive Fund offering young Ukrainian residents the opportunity to access activities outside school including a Windsor day trip, photography sessions, art sessions, bowling and laserquest.
 - £30,000 from the Tackling Poverty Fund to offer SEND after school provision, building relationships and trust with children who would benefit from accessing the HAF Programme but who struggle to access activities due to their additional needs and anxieties.
2. The HAF Team has worked with Sport and Leisure colleagues to issue free swim vouchers to children who access the HAF programme.
3. Early Help and Prevention (including Short Breaks for Children with Disabilities): initial work is underway to scope and understand the potential contribution of the HAF programme to prevention of escalation of issues for those families who are known to statutory social care and/or SEND services, or who are at risk of needing statutory support.

Future Developments/Next Steps

Current development activity is focussed on:

1. Expansion of the programme to meet increasing demand, including introduction of a second base in Woodley for secondary provision.
2. Increasing SEND provision, including during the school holidays, and after school club expansion/Ofsted registration.
3. Continuing to explore ways to engage harder to reach children and young people in attending activities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
N/A

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)
The HAF Programme has potential synergies with other activity across the Council e.g. Early Help and Prevention and the Tackling Poverty Programme with potential to realise efficiencies through joint working.

Public Sector Equality Duty
Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.
The HAF Programme is accessible to all children and young people in receipt of FSM, regardless of background or ability. There is particular focus on ensuring equality of opportunity through provision of specialist activities for those unable to access mainstream provision. For those needing additional help to access mainstream provision, 1:1 support is available. Transport to activities is provided for those where this is not available.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

Please state clearly what the impact of the decision being made would be on the Council's carbon neutral objective. N/A

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

List of Background Papers

None

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