

CABINET

DATE	15/02/2023
REPORT OF	Councillor Margaret Cracknell Portfolio Holder Children and Education
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Janice Spencer, Director of Children's Services
SUBJECT	Department for Education's Holiday Activities and Food Grant
STATUS	Open
FORWARD PLAN REF NO.	CB 02/23/07

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

The provision of high-quality holiday activities and healthy food (HAF) clubs in North East Lincolnshire directly supports the Council's aims, Stronger Economy and Stronger Community. These are key to ensure residents, especially children, young people and families in the Borough, experience sustainable communities, whilst enjoying the health and wellbeing benefits, physical activities, food education and signposting to other services that the holiday clubs offer.

The Council has developed an Outcomes Framework which sets out five high level outcomes that the Council and its partners aspire to deliver to ensure prosperity and wellbeing for residents of North East Lincolnshire. The provision of HAF clubs will contribute towards achieving these outcomes, i.e. all people in North East Lincolnshire will:

- fulfil their potential through skills and learning
- benefit from sustainable communities,
- enjoy good health and wellbeing, and
- help to grow our strong economy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report seeks approval and acceptance of the ring-fenced Department for Education (DfE) Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) grant of £795,450 in order for the Council to co-ordinate the delivery of free holiday clubs for children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Authorises the acceptance of the DfE Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) grant of £795,450.

2. Authorises the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education to ensure that all necessary actions are carried out in order to co-ordinate and implement the HAF programme.
3. Authorises the Assistant Director Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) to complete all requisite legal documentation arising.

REASONS FOR DECISION

This decision enables the Council to deliver the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme across the borough and engage with key partners to co-ordinate planning via a steering group.

The decision enables the Council to award funding to eligible organisations in North East Lincolnshire to provide free holiday activities and food clubs for children eligible for, and in receipt of, benefits-related free school meals.

The decision enables the Council to work with Finance colleagues to monitor the indicative budget, and to provide regular updates to the DfE and the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Skills as required.

Without this decision, the Council would not be able to deliver the HAF programme in the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays, and children eligible for free school meals would be likely to have negative holiday experiences. Furthermore, many families in the borough would remain in food poverty.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

- 1.1 On 8 November 2020, the Government announced that the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, which has provided healthy food and enriching activities to a small proportion of disadvantaged children since 2018, will be expanded across the whole of England. The programme will cover the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays in 2023, and Government is making available £220m to local authorities for the programme. HAF will be available to children in every local authority in England.
- 1.2 Grant funding is being provided to local authorities, and on 20th December 2022 the Council received the grant notification letter from the DfE confirming its HAF funding allocation of £795,450.
- 1.3 This funding is provided to co-ordinate free holiday provision, including healthy food, enriching activities, daily physical activities, cookery demonstrations and nutritional education for children who receive benefits-related free school meals. Their families will also be offered food education and benefit from signposting and referrals to other services. It is optional for eligible children to attend this provision. This gives the Council and its partners the opportunity to provide holiday activities at Easter, Summer and Christmas. Offering physical and craft based activities including fresh meals served throughout the day and food education for the children, young people and families of North East Lincolnshire after the challenges they have faced due to Covid-19.

- 1.4 The grant funding is informed by the numbers of children eligible for free school meals in North East Lincolnshire and the overall levels of participation experienced in the DfE's previous programmes from 2018 to 2022. The overall percentage of pupils eligible for a free school meal as of October 2021 was: Secondary 24.7%; Primary 28.5%. The funding covers both the provision of the HAF programme and the costs of co-ordination of the programme locally.
- 1.5 The aim of the programme is to make free places available to children eligible for free school meals for the equivalent of at least four hours a day, four days a week, and for six weeks of the year. This would cover four weeks in the summer and 4 days of provision in the Easter and Christmas holidays.
- 1.6 The DfE has placed each local authority within a regional grouping and North East Lincolnshire is grouped with Humber and South Yorkshire Authorities. The DfE team is holding regular regional meetings and LAs are also supported by Childcare Works, an organisation appointed to oversee the programme for the next three years. These meetings are to facilitate more detailed discussion about the HAF programme, for HAF leads to meet each other, to share any emerging ideas and good practice, and to talk about what progress is being made in the run up to Easter and summer.
- 1.7 North East Lincolnshire Council has a strong history of providing programmes of co-ordinated summer holiday activities across the public and voluntary/ community sector, and the over-arching context of this work has always been about supporting families and enabling children to have fun. School holidays can be particular pressure points for some families because of increased costs (such as food and childcare) and reduced incomes (such as loss of free school meals, reduced working hours etc). There is a growing body of evidence of a holiday experience gap, with children from disadvantaged families less likely to access organised out-of-school activities, more likely to experience unhealthy holidays in terms of nutrition and physical health, and more likely to experience social isolation. The LA ran a successful HAF programme in 2022, with no covid restrictions in place, reaching over 2500 children and families.
- 1.8 The size of NELC's funding allocation for HAF 2023 will require the planning and delivery of 3 holiday programmes at an increased scale to previous years. Further detail relating to the criteria for expenditure has been received with the grant determination letter, and there is more information to come from the DfE's appointed national support partner – Childcare Works. In order to ensure NELC delivers a successful programme, a steering group regularly meets with key partners and services.
- 1.9 Grant payments will be made by the DfE at the following milestones:

A payment of up to 80% of the Authority's total 2023/2024 allocation will be made in April 2023 to the Authority by the Department following satisfactory receipt by 1st March 2023 of a report to the Department setting out: • how the Authority's 2023/2024 programme will work • how many children the Authority expects to work with in 2023/24.

A payment of up to the remaining 20% of the Authority's total 2023/24 allocation will be made in April 2024 to the Authority by the Department following satisfactory submission to the Department by 15 February 2024 of a report setting out: • the actual number of children the Authority worked with during delivery of the programme at Easter, summer and Christmas in 2023.

- 1.10 The primary focus of the DfE HAF programme will be on school-aged children eligible for benefits-related free school meals, LAs must ensure that the offer of free holiday club provision is available for all children eligible for free school meals in their Local Authority area. This does not mean they are all required to attend as the provision is voluntary. There is also some flexibility relating to other children and families with need. NELC's programme is required to demonstrate that we are offering the programme comprehensively across the full geographical area, and fully meeting demand from free school meal eligible children in the authority. If these requirements are in place, the Council can use up to 15% of the programme funding to provide free or subsidised holiday club places for children who are not in receipt of benefits-related free school meals but who are considered by the local authority as vulnerable or in need of this provision. For example, this may include children assessed as being in need, looked-after children, children with an EHC plan, children assessed as otherwise vulnerable, or children living in areas of high deprivation.
- 1.11 In accordance with the programme criteria, a HAF co-ordinator has been appointed. The coordinator is located within Children's Services, and this will ensure strong linkage to wider family support, schools, children's centres, youth services and children's social care, and will enable clear strategic direction from officers who have experience in the delivery of holiday activity programmes.
- 1.12 Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, plans have developed to ensure we have a cohesive network in place via schools and other partner organisations to distribute food hampers and activity packs to targeted children in case further local or national restrictions disrupt the HAF programme during the 2023/24 programme. This will sit alongside any future distribution of Free School Meal vouchers to eligible families that are provided through the Household Support Grant.
- 1.13 Stakeholder engagement events will be arranged when required, we will continue to engage over 80 schools, colleges and other providers across the authority. These briefings will provide an overview of the HAF programme, feedback from providers of the programme in 2022, and particularly focus partners' attention on planning for future holidays.
- 1.14 It is hoped that the 2023/24 programme will continue to be free from Covid restrictions. This will enable the authority-wide network to engage further facilities and deliver events and activities face-to-face with a mix of the following:

- activities provided through our libraries, parks and open spaces, museums, visitor attraction centres, leisure centres and swimming pools;
- clubs strategically placed on school sites could be opened up in partnership with local organisations such as our professional sports clubs to deliver summer camps;
- a strong activity offer across our VCS network and community based facilities will be available;
- all activities will be supported by a quality food offer working in partnership with school meals providers;
- a robust marketing and communication plan to ensure families and young people are fully aware of what is on offer and how to engage; and
- support for organisations to meet the DfE's minimum standards regarding healthy food and physical activities, safeguarding, insurance, and health and safety.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- 2.1 A risk exists in not being able to deliver face-to-face HAF clubs during the Easter, summer and Christmas holiday periods if there are further local or national restrictions/ lockdowns due to Covid-19. The HAF co-ordination team is working with partners to ensure a remote offer is available consisting of a food hamper and activity pack in case of further restrictions.
- 2.2 The Council has been awarded a grant of £795,450 to co-ordinate the delivery of the HAF programme. Should the Council be unable to adhere to all of the conditions as set out in the Grant Determination Letter, the Council risks being required to return the funding to the DfE (in all or in part) resulting in a loss to the Council.
- 2.3 There are significant reputational risks should the Council decide not to accept the DfE HAF funding. Failure to deliver the HAF programme would further exacerbate the problem of food poverty faced by many families and could significantly impact the health and wellbeing of children and young people during holiday periods. The Council also risks further reputational damage with local partners and stakeholders such as schools, academies, sports clubs and other community users and partners, if the HAF programme is not delivered.

3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Do nothing. This option has not been recommended as it would exacerbate food poverty experienced by many families in the authority.

4. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 There are potential positive and negative reputational implications for the Council resulting from the decision to approve and accept the HAF grant and deliver the programme.

4.2 A communications action plan will be developed and agreed with the Council's communication service which will cover the following issues should the approval be given: external stakeholder communications; partner agency/ organisation communications; parent/ carer communications; technical reporting and information requirements. The developed communication action plan will also explain the communications channels to be utilised for each issue.

5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 The costs associated with co-ordination and delivery of the HAF programme will not exceed the total amount awarded to the authority as set out in the Grant Determination Letter. The HAF co-ordinator will work closely with the Council's Finance officers to monitor the grant spend and will produce a statement of expenditure/ statement of grant usage after each phase of the programme's delivery.

5.2 The Council is permitted to utilise up to 10% of the total grant awarded for administration and co-ordination of the HAF programme, this amount being £79,545.

5.3 More detailed costs will be available following the tender processes in March, June and October 2023, when organisations are required to submit their HAF club proposals.

5.4 The HAF grant must be ring-fenced and only used for the purposes as set out in the Grant Determination Letter. Any under-spend of the grant is subject to claw-back by the DfE.

6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

Children and young people across all geographical areas of the local authority who are aged 4 to 16 years and who are in receipt of benefits related free school meals will be eligible to take part in the HAF programme. 15% of the grant funding may be used to provide free or subsidised provision for children not in receipt of free school meals but who are considered as vulnerable, e.g. those with an EHCP, those who have a social worker, and those who are looked after.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no climate change and environmental implications for the grant and deliver the programme. Council resulting from the decision to approve and accept the HAF

8. CONSULTATION WITH SCRUTINY

Consultations took place with scrutiny panels regarding the HAF grant and delivery of the HAF programme on 22nd September 2022.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 On the 20th December 2022 the Council was notified it had been awarded £795,450 by way of the S31 Grant in respect of the Holiday Activities and Food programme. This will be paid in two instalments.
- 9.2 The grant is expected to be used to fund the above programme and will only become payable once certain milestones are met. These milestones are to be measured through a series of monitoring reports which the Council will need to submit to the DfE. Should the grant not be spent on the purposes for which it is awarded or will not be fully spent then the grant conditions allows for it to be clawed back or any underspend to be returned
- 9.3 Under the terms of the grant 10% (£79,545) is permitted to be used to fund the resourcing of the activities. This will allow the Council to fund additional staffing on a fixed term basis to co-ordinate the programme.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Immediate legal implications arising will be around the terms and conditions of the external grant funding and the completion of funding agreements and ancillary documentation. Legal Services will support this process, ensuring the interests of the Council are protected.
- 10.2 As individual projects arise throughout the delivery phase Legal Services will continue to support colleagues.
- 10.3 The delegations sought are appropriate to an exercise of this nature.

11. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct HR implications contained within this report

12. WARD IMPLICATIONS

All wards potentially would be affected by the decision to accept the HAF grant, as children eligible for free school meals reside across the whole geographical area of the authority. More ward-specific implications may come to light once the mapping of demand exercise for the HAF clubs has taken place.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Holiday Activities and Food Programme

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/holiday-activities-and-food-programme/holiday-activities-and-food-programme-2023>

S31 Grant Determination Letter: Holiday Activities and Food Programme 2023
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1126261/Holiday_Activities_and_Food_2023_-_Grant_determination_letter.pdf

14. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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