



Guidance

Holiday activities and food programme 2026 to 2027

Updated 17 December 2025

Applies to England

Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Changes for 2026 to 2027](#)

[Aims of the programme](#)

[Programme overview](#)

[Eligibility](#)

[The core offer](#)

[Standards for holiday provision](#)

[Safeguarding](#)

[Tailoring local provision](#)

[Local coordination by authorities](#)

[Support for local authorities](#)

[Funding](#)

[Payments and reporting](#)

[Local authority HAF website](#)

Introduction

The holiday activities and food (HAF) programme provides support to children from low-income families during school holiday periods. Research has shown that the school holidays can be pressure points for some families. For some children that can lead to a holiday experience gap. Children from low-income households are more likely to experience food insecurity and social isolation, miss out on physical activity and enriching experiences, and fall behind in development and well-being.

The HAF programme is a direct response to this, providing free nutritious meals, enriching activities, and safe environments for eligible children, benefiting their health, wellbeing and learning.

The programme is aimed at children from the [most disadvantaged backgrounds](#). Although local authorities have discretion to use some funding (we expect up to 15%) to provide free or subsidised holiday club places for any school-age children regardless of their background, but who the local authority believe could benefit from HAF.

On 28 August 2025, the government announced a 3-year funding settlement of over £200 million each year for the HAF programme. The final year of this funding settlement is the fiscal year 2028 to 2029. This funding forms part of the Children, Youth and Families Grant being delivered through the local government finance settlement.

This multi-year funding settlement for the HAF programme provides local authorities with stability and certainty, enabling longer-term planning and investment to drive more effective and efficient delivery. This could include innovative commissioning and procurement, investment in infrastructure, technology, and skilled personnel. It also fosters flexibility for local authorities to adapt delivery based on evaluation and learning.

Local authorities have significant flexibility and autonomy to design and deliver the programme in a way that best meets the specific needs of their local area and residents. This local autonomy is key to enabling local authorities to adapt the programme to their unique community context and ensures the provision is effective and accessible to those who need it most.

Changes for 2026 to 2027

Eligibility

The government has announced that, from September 2026, free school meal (FSM) eligibility will be expanded to all households in receipt of Universal Credit, while existing FSM protections related to Universal Credit rollout will be removed. The eligibility for HAF in 2026 to 2027 continues to be children in receipt of benefits-related FSM up until September 2026. From this point (October 2026 half term, Christmas 2026 holiday, and February 2027 half term), HAF's eligibility will remain at the existing FSM threshold.

This means that HAF's eligibility will not expand to all those on Universal Credit. Further detail is given in the [eligibility](#) section.

Over the longer term, the government is reviewing how it allocates funding for disadvantaged children and young people to ensure it is targeted to those who need it most, whilst maintaining the overall amount we spend on these funding streams. Future eligibility for HAF will be confirmed in the 2026 to 2027 financial year.

Discretion over delivery periods

Whilst the main focus of HAF remains Easter, summer and Christmas school holidays, local authorities have discretion to extend delivery of HAF across half-term holidays within the 2026 to 2027 fiscal year. We expect that spending on half-term provision should not exceed 5% of a local authority's total HAF funding allocation. Local authorities are not required to seek written approval from the Department for Education (DfE) to use HAF funding to deliver during half term holidays. More detail can be found the [core offer](#) section of this guidance.

Local authority capacity support funding

To support the delivery and sustainability of school-age childcare, including the national rollout of free breakfast clubs, DfE is providing £12.9 million in funding to local authorities in the 2026 to 2027 financial year. This funding is intended to strengthen local capacity and expertise to monitor, support, and maximise school-age childcare provision across term-time and holiday periods.

This fund is complementary to the HAF programme. Local authorities are encouraged to align their school-age childcare strategies and resourcing with broader efforts to support families, reduce inequalities, and improve educational outcomes. [Local authority capacity support funding guidance](#) sets out what this allows for and how we expect it to be used, including to support the delivery of sufficient holiday childcare by fostering links between holiday childcare and the HAF programme to maximise opportunities to create efficiencies and deliver a sustainable school-age childcare market.

Admin spend

Alongside the HAF admin allowance, local authorities will also receive new local authority capacity funding of £12.9 million to deliver a sufficient and sustainable school aged childcare system, representing an increase in the overall total of administrative spend for local authorities. In this context, the HAF admin allowance has been revised from 10% to 7.5% of HAF funding. This change also reflects that it is the 6 year of continuous improvement to administrating the HAF programme and the certainty and opportunity for efficiencies from a 3 year funding settlement. This will help ensure that we are maximising the overall proportion of spend on HAF places for children.

We expect local authorities to take a flexible approach to how they use both their HAF administration funding and local authority capacity funding to meet their individual resourcing needs and drive a more strategic, joined up and efficient approach through reflecting cross over in activities from engagement with the provider base to mapping demand. Local authorities should consider the most effective and efficient use of their staff when delegating responsibilities for HAF and school-age childcare and encourage leads to work in collaboration or by using HAF staff to directly support the delivery of wider school-age childcare sufficiency or vice versa.

More information can be found in the [Local authority capacity support funding guidance](#).

DfE recognises that administration costs may represent a higher proportion of expenditure for smaller local authorities and will therefore continue to notify smaller authorities in writing of the maximum they are expected to spend on local administration.

Local Government Finance Settlement (LGFS)

HAF programme funding, including the local authority capacity support funding, is now part of the wider Children's, Youth and Families Grant delivered through the LGFS, in line with the government's commitment to simplify the local government funding landscape. This includes reducing the number of funding streams to local authorities and bringing together existing revenue grants that fund similar services into consolidated grants.

HAF funding is ringfenced to protect programme spend. The 3-year multi-year funding settlement provides greater stability and certainty for local authorities, enabling longer-term planning and investment to drive more effective and efficient delivery.

Payments to local authorities will be made by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), who will also publish the grant determination letter for the Children, Youth and Families Grant at the final LGFS in February 2026. MHCLG has published overall allocations for the Children, Youth and Families Grant, including the specific ringfenced [HAF allocations at the provisional LGFS](#), with DfE providing a [further breakdown of expected allocations](#). Local authority support and reporting requirements are unaffected by this change.

More information can be found in the [Local government finance policy statement 2026-27 to 2028-29](#).

Aims of the programme

The programme aims to help eligible children eat more healthily, be more active, and develop resilience, character, and well-being through enriching activities and to ensure that children are safe, not socially isolated during the holidays, and return to school feeling more engaged and ready to learn.

There are many benefits for children who attend the HAF programme. HAF providers should ensure a high-quality experience that will result in children:

- receiving healthy and nutritious meals
- maintaining a healthy level of physical activity
- being happy, having fun and meeting new friends
- developing a greater understanding of food, nutrition and other health-related issues
- taking part in fun and engaging activities that support their development and well-being
- feeling safe and secure
- getting access to the right support services
- returning to school feeling engaged and ready to learn

HAF also improves accessibility and affordability of childcare during school holidays opening up work opportunities for parents on low incomes to support their families. Adopting mixed models or longer sessions can also help to support families more broadly to work or manage other commitments.

Families can also benefit, when HAF providers include their needs in planning and delivering their programme. This could be through:

- providing opportunities to get involved in sessions, for example cookery classes
- ensuring they are signposted towards other sources of information and support, such as health services or employment and education opportunities

Programme overview

This document provides information for local authorities delivering the holiday activities and food programme for the fiscal year 2026 to 2027. The document should be read alongside the draft conditions for the Children, Families and Youth Grant outlined in the [Explanatory note on funding simplification: consolidated grants and draft conditions](#). These conditions will be confirmed in the grant determination letter published at the final LGFS in February 2026.

Each local authority's funding allocations for the HAF programme over the next 3

years can be found in the [LGFS allocations table](#). A breakdown of local authority allocations can be found in [Holiday activities and food programme: grant-allocations](#).

This funding is for the 153 upper tier local authorities to coordinate and provide free holiday provision, including healthy food and enriching activities. The programme will again be available to children in every local authority in England. The holiday periods that we expect local authorities to cover are set out in the [core offer](#) section of this guidance.

DfE will continue to work with local authorities and stakeholders to further develop the programme during its delivery.

Queries about the programme or this guidance can be sent to haf.programme@education.gov.uk.

Eligibility

For 2026 to 2027, the HAF programme will remain in line with the existing FSM threshold, for the whole of the delivery year.

This means that from September 2026, when the new FSM expansion takes place, HAF will not be expanded to children from households in receipt of Universal Credit for this delivery period.

For further clarification:

- children who become newly eligible for FSM in September 2026 due to the expansion to households on Universal Credit, but are above the existing FSM threshold, do not become eligible for HAF
- children who become newly eligible for FSM under the existing threshold become eligible for HAF

Local authorities are asked to ensure that the offer of free holiday club provision is available for all eligible children in their area.

Further operational support for local authorities will be shared in 2026.

Over the longer term, the government is reviewing how it allocates funding for disadvantaged children and young people to ensure it is targeted to those who need it most, whilst maintaining the overall level of spending in these funding streams. Future eligibility for HAF will be confirmed in the 2026 to 2027 financial year.

Details on FSM expansion

The government has announced that it is introducing a new eligibility threshold for free school meals, ensuring all children from households in receipt of Universal Credit will be eligible from September 2026.

For further information on FSM eligibility, including changes from September 2026, visit [Free school meals: guidance for schools and local authorities](#).

Universal infant free school meals

All children in reception, year 1 and year 2 in England's state-funded schools receive a free meal under the universal infant free school meals (UIFSM) policy.

Infant pupils who receive a free meal under UIFSM must also meet the eligibility set out above to be able to access a place on the HAF programme.

Discretionary use of HAF funding: supporting additional children

The core purpose of the programme is to support disadvantaged children and young people from low-income families who are eligible for free school meals. Local authorities have discretion to use some of their funding (we expect up to 15%) to provide free or subsidised holiday club places for school-age children who do not meet the eligibility criteria but who the local authority believe could benefit from HAF.

It is the local authority's decision whether to use any or all of the 15% flexible funding in this way, and what criteria they place on it, in line with the core purpose of the programme targeted at the most in need. Local authorities are not required to seek written approval from DfE for the use of this flexibility.

In deciding which school-age children should benefit from the 15% flexible funding,

local authorities should ensure that these places are aligned to their local priorities. Local authorities are expected to continue to monitor and report on this element of their expenditure and ensure it remains within the limit.

Checking eligibility

It is expected that all local authorities have a robust system in place to ensure the programme in their area is supporting the children and families that it is intended to support.

Systems may include:

- a booking system that includes an automatic eligibility checking feature that establishes FSM status
- a voucher or code system, whereby eligible children and or their families are issued with a unique code allowing them to book places on the programme
- direct referral of children to the local authority or the direct booking on to the programme by a school
- referral from another trusted public body, agency or from elsewhere within the local authority
- direct cross checking with the Eligibility Checking System (ECS), utilising improvements as they are made

This list is not exhaustive and is not intended to be prescriptive. Local authorities are responsible for ensuring their system is adequate and robust and that HAF funding is expended in accordance with the eligibility requirements and funding conditions of the programme.

Allowing parents and families to ‘self-declare’ their eligibility is not sufficiently robust if the local authority does not also have additional checks in place to ensure that the self-declaration is accurate.

The ECS allows local authorities to check data held by the Department for Work and Pensions, the Home Office and HM Revenue and Customers (HMRC) to establish eligibility for FSM. Improvements to the ECS are planned to be rolled out ahead of September 2026, making the process of checking eligibility simpler for families, schools and local authorities. Updates will be shared with HAF coordinators as this work progresses.

The core offer

Core delivery periods

Easter, summer and Christmas should remain the core delivery periods for the HAF programme.

As a minimum, we expect local authorities should deliver at least the equivalent of 6 weeks' HAF provision across the delivery year (with each week containing a minimum of 4 days, so equating to a minimum of 24 days over the year).

This includes the following minimum expectations during:

- Easter school holidays: face-to-face provision should be available for a minimum of 1 week (4 days)
- summer holidays: face-to-face provision should be available for a minimum of 4 weeks (16 days)
- Christmas holidays: face-to-face provision should be available for a minimum of 1 week (4 days)

We appreciate that different areas have differing lengths of their summer holidays. Therefore, our expectations vary depending on the number of weeks that the school holidays last:

- for local authorities that have a summer holiday that spans 6 full calendar weeks, participating children should be offered face-to-face provision during the summer school holidays, which should be for a minimum of 16 days
- for local authorities that have a summer holiday that is less than 6 full calendar weeks, participating children should be offered face-to-face provision, which should be for a minimum of 12 days
- if only 3 weeks are offered at summer, then these local authorities are expected to offer an additional 4 days during another half-term holiday period (February, May or October)

Local authorities have the freedom to act flexibly to ensure that the high-quality

support and contact provided by the HAF programme is still delivered at Christmas.

We would expect a minimum of 2 days of face-to-face provision, which could be, but is not limited to:

- a model similar to HAF provision delivered at Easter and in the summer
- a Christmas festival or fayre where children and their families attend together to enjoy activities - these events should still include healthy, high-quality food and engaging activities
- day trips or other experiences, providing these include a healthy meal as well as an element of physical activity - for example a walk

In addition to at least 2 days of face-to-face provision, we expect local authorities to complement this with additional HAF support. This could be in the form of, but not limited to the provision of:

- high-quality food hampers
- activity packs

Vouchers or cash payments to children and families using HAF funding is not permitted.

Local authorities are required to decide delivery dates within holiday periods that align with school holidays in their area.

Other delivery periods

Following successful trials in February 2025 half term and approval based on underspends in 2025 to 2026, there continues to be some discretion for local authorities who wish to deliver HAF across half-term holidays within the 2026 to 2027 fiscal year. Local authorities are not required to seek written approval from DfE to use HAF funding to deliver during additional half term holidays.

We do not expect significant reductions in spend or reach during the core periods outlined in the above section. We know that many local authorities have been able to secure funding from other sources to expand HAF throughout the year or have underspends which could be used, and we strongly encourage this to continue.

Where HAF funding is used for additional half-term delivery periods, we expect that

combined expenditure across all such periods does not exceed 5% of total allocated budget, regardless of the number of half term periods delivered.

This 5% funding discretion only applies to local authorities with a 6 week summer holiday. If the summer holiday is less than 6 weeks, and the local authority provides 3 weeks of provision during this time, the 5% limit does not apply to the additional half term support you provide as described in the section above.

We will be monitoring the use of funding and data returns for half-term provision and will keep this flexibility under review. We will continue to work with local authorities for insight, feedback, and case studies.

Session length

In planning their HAF programme, local authorities are expected to make sure that eligible children can access a level of provision that meets their needs. They should bear in mind that the overall HAF offer to the child does not need to be from a single provider but can be delivered through a range of providers with a blend of offers available.

Our expectation is that, in HAF funded holiday weeks, local authorities should endeavour to offer all eligible children the equivalent of at least 4 hours a day, 4 days a week though we recognise that this is not always practical or possible.

We know that local authorities and providers want the flexibility to offer longer or shorter sessions, and this is something we encourage, particularly when considering the needs of:

- older children
- children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or additional needs
- families who need support with childcare

We strongly encourage HAF coordinators to work with their providers and school-age childcare colleagues, where different, to consider opportunities to offer paid for places alongside HAF funded places and ensure the HAF programme, where possible, supports the provision of childcare during the holidays and fulfilment of local authorities' role to secure sufficient school age childcare.

Review [school-age childcare guidance for local authorities](#) for further detail.

Through this collaborative approach, local authorities and providers can be flexible about the length of the sessions that they offer.

In providing this flexibility, we encourage local authorities to consider how the various funding streams can work together. For example, how core HAF funding can be combined with other sources of funding or how HAF funded hours can work with paid for provision beyond the core offer in Ofsted registered provision by promoting the use of Universal Credit and Tax-Free Childcare (TFC) to support eligible parents to reduce the cost of the paid for hours.

Read the [Ofsted registration](#) section for further details.

Standards for holiday provision

Framework of standards

To ensure consistent, high-quality provision across the HAF programme, we have developed a national framework of standards.

It is the local authority's responsibility to:

- support continuous improvement of provision across their local area
- ensure that providers deliver the HAF programme in line with the framework of standards set out in this guidance
- support local providers who do not meet standards, through training, support, and partnerships

Local authorities should make best use of local and national organisations to support them and their providers to meet these standards.

While not every provider is required to deliver all aspects of the programme, local authorities should aim to ensure that where possible, all participating children benefit from every aspect of the programme. This may involve adopting a blended approach, enabling access to different aspects of the programme through a range of providers.

Food provision

All providers must provide at least 1 meal per day (breakfast, lunch or an evening meal) and all food provided at HAF clubs (including snacks) must meet the [School Food Standards](#), which set out foods and drinks that must be provided, and foods that are restricted or prohibited.

Read the [allergy guidance for schools](#) for more information, resources and guidance. Though DfE announced its intent to revise the school food Standards in June 2025, the current Standards remain in place until further notice.

For some children, the opportunity to enjoy a hot meal at a HAF club is important and our aspiration is that providers should, where possible, try to offer hot meals to children attending HAF clubs. However, we recognise this is not always possible and alternatives may sometimes be more practical.

If a provider offers both HAF-funded and non-HAF-funded places, it is vital that all children attending receive the same food offer to ensure all children receive a high-quality, stigma-free experience.

If children in non-HAF-funded places bring a packed lunch, then we expect the local authority and the provider to work together to ensure that HAF-funded children have a similar option. This could be fulfilled through the provider and local authority supplying packed lunches for HAF-funded children. All packed lunches must meet school food standards.

Alternatively, providers who cater on-site could consider making the same healthy food available to all children, but with an additional charge for those in non-HAF funded places.

All food provided as part of the HAF programme must:

- comply with regulations on food preparation
- consider allergies and dietary requirements and comply with food information regulations, read the [allergy guidance for schools](#)
- consider any religious or cultural requirements for food
- comply with the school food standards

There is flexibility with regard to food provision, which should be tailored to meet the

dietary needs of children and families who attend HAF. Food should be appropriate for the nature of the session, such as cold packed lunches for parks or outdoor venues or day trips.

While there can be benefits to using central food services to provide meals to HAF clubs, local authorities should carefully consider whether they provide high quality, appealing and tailored meals for those attending HAF clubs. Preparing food on site may reduce waste, generate less packaging waste and reduce food-miles compared to centralised provision.

Preparing food on site can also create opportunities to engage children and families in food preparation and learning about nutrition. Providers have reported that when children are involved in designing menus and preparing food, they are more engaged and willing to try new and healthier foods. We encourage local authorities to prioritise approaches that involve providers and children in the planning and preparation of food, as this can drive long-term improvements in nutrition and food engagement.

Food providers

Local authorities should ensure that the providers they work with are, where applicable, registered as a food business. This provides reassurance to all of those involved that food safety standards are being met.

A food business is defined as anyone preparing, cooking, storing, handling, distributing, supplying or selling food – we expect that this will apply to the vast majority of HAF providers and local authorities will need to carefully consider any HAF providers who are claiming an exemption to registration as a food business. Further information is available on [food business registration](#).

Local authorities are responsible for enforcing food hygiene laws and can inspect any registered food business at any point in the food production and distribution process. We recommend that HAF coordinators within each local authority are in regular contact with their food safety inspectors to ensure that HAF providers are fully compliant.

Food information regulations - Natasha's Law

The [Food Information Regulations 2014](#) require all food businesses to show allergen ingredients information for the food they serve.

From 1 October 2021, changes to the Food Information Regulations 2014 came into effect, adding new labelling requirements for food that is pre-packed for direct sale (PPDS).

Local authorities should read the [guidance on the Food Standards Agency website](#) and ensure that all food provision for the HAF programme meets these requirements.

Increasing awareness of healthy eating, healthy lifestyles, and positive behaviours

We expect providers to incorporate activities that help children understand the benefits of healthy eating and nutrition within their programme. These do not need to be formal learning activities, and could include:

- getting children involved in food preparation and cooking
- growing fruit and vegetables
- taste tests
- discussing food and healthy eating during mealtimes
- including food and nutrition in other activities

Offering positive learning and development through HAF activities creates stigma-free opportunities to help children and young people learn about healthy lifestyles and exercise. For example, discussions on the risks associated with vapes, cigarettes and drugs, and how behaviours can lead to economic challenges, social issues, personal safety concerns, exploitation and involvement in criminal activity.

Local authorities should be aware of the activities providers have delivered or plan to deliver to meet this requirement.

Physical activities

Holiday clubs must provide activities that meet the [physical activity guidelines](#) daily.

In line with those guidelines, we expect:

- all children and young people participating in the HAF programme should engage in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity for an average of at least 60 minutes per day
- children and young people participating in the HAF programme should engage in a variety of types and intensities of physical activity to develop movement skills, muscular fitness, and bone strength
- children and young people should aim to minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary, and when physically possible should break up long periods of not moving with at least light physical activity

Meeting the physical activity requirement does not have to be in the form of a structured and focussed physical activity session, but might include active travel, free play and sports.

Enrichment activities

All HAF-funded provision must provide enriching activities. Activities should allow children to:

- develop new skills or knowledge
- consolidate existing skills and knowledge
- try out new experiences
- have fun and socialise

This could include but is not limited to:

- sport and physical activities, for example, football, swimming, table tennis, yoga or cricket
- artistic and cultural activities, for example, putting on a play, junk modelling or drumming workshops
- activities to engage children with wider community, for example volunteering, or working together on community improvement projects
- activities to support engagement with nature, the outdoors, and adventure, for example, nature walks, gardening, or adventure courses

- activities to support development of wider life skills, for example, cooking, coding, or group debates
- free play, for example, fun and freedom to relax and enjoy themselves

We expect all HAF providers to provide a balanced programme. For providers whose primary focus is set around a specific activity or sport, we expect them to ensure that children attending their provision benefit from a holistic and varied experience.

Local authorities should ensure there is a varied offer across their area, and that activities are age-appropriate.

Signposting and referrals and supporting families

HAF providers should be able to offer information, signposting or referrals to other services and support that would benefit children and their families. Examples include:

- family hubs
- Citizens Advice
- school nurses, dentists, or other healthcare practitioners
- family support services or children's services
- housing support officers
- Jobcentre Plus
- organisations providing financial education
- early years and childcare, including help to pay for childcare, for example, [Tax-Free Childcare](#)
- Free breakfast clubs

Providers can meet this requirement in various ways, such as having trained and knowledgeable staff available to engage with families during drop-off and pick-up times.

We are aware of HAF providers that have worked to provide weekly training and advice sessions for parents, carers or other family members. We encourage providers who continue offering those sessions.

These sessions could provide advice on how to source, prepare and cook nutritious and low-cost food. This could be combined with the increasing awareness and understanding of healthy eating aspect of the programme, for example, by inviting children and their families to prepare and eat a meal together at a HAF session.

There are alternative ways of delivering this, for example, by providing participating children with ingredients and recipes to take away and try at home with their families.

If HAF providers know that a child's school offers a free breakfast club, they should make sure that families are aware of the offer. In particular, signpost the breakfast club to children who may be vulnerable to food poverty or hunger, or who need additional support with attendance, behaviour, or wellbeing.

Policies and procedures

All organisations involved in delivering the HAF programme, including by not limited to schools, colleges, nurseries, private providers, charities, youth clubs and community groups, must be able to demonstrate to local authorities that they have in place relevant and appropriate policies and procedures for:

- safeguarding, including the recruitment of staff and volunteers
- food safety
- health and safety
- relevant insurance policies
- accessibility and inclusiveness
- record keeping

Quality assurance - ensuring providers meet the programme standards

Local authorities should have a quality assurance process in place to confirm that all HAF-funded providers are meeting the expected standards for the programme and are providing a high-quality, accessible and inclusive experience for children. This process should provide reassurance to families, providers and DfE.

Local authorities are expected to ensure that robust due diligence checks are carried out on each HAF funded provider prior to the provider commencing work.

Our expectation is that local authorities conduct at least one visit to each provider per year to verify compliance with the programme's framework of standards. Areas of

focus for assurance visits include:

- food provision
- awareness and understanding of healthy eating
- signposting and referrals
- physical and enriching activities
- accessibility and inclusiveness
- safeguarding
- policies and procedures

A checklist to support local authorities can be found in [Annex A](#). Local authorities may also carry out their own checks in addition.

Local authorities can tailor their monitoring system to local circumstances. It may not be necessary or proportionate to visit every provider during every holiday period, but regular engagement should be maintained.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility. Every HAF club must provide a safe and welcoming environment for children, and parents and carers should feel confident that their child is well looked after and that robust safeguarding arrangements are in place.

Under the Children Act 1989, local authorities are under a general duty to provide services for children in need for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting their welfare. Local authorities, working with partner organisations and agencies, have specific duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area.

[Working together to safeguard children](#) is the multi-agency statutory guidance for every individual, agency and organisation working with children and their families. It sets out expectations about how everyone should work together to help, support and protect children.

As set out in Working together to safeguard children, safeguarding is defined for the purposes of this guidance as:

- providing help and support to meet the needs of children as soon as problems emerge
- protecting children from maltreatment, whether that is within or outside the home, including online
- preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
- promoting the upbringing of children with their birth parents, or otherwise their family network through a kinship care arrangement, whenever possible and where this is in the best interests of the children
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes in line with the outcomes set out in the Children's social care national framework

Local authorities should:

- work closely with their local safeguarding children partnership to ensure the HAF programme is understood, supported, and that robust safeguarding arrangements are in place.
- ensure those working on the delivery of HAF are familiar with the statutory guidance *Working together to safeguard children*, and know where to access support if required
- ensure everyone delivering HAF in their area has received appropriate and regular safeguarding and child protection training, and have been vetted by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), where appropriate - there are accredited organisations who can provide suitable training courses
- maintain a central register of all HAF-funded providers and have a system for inspecting provision to ensure compliance with the standards set out in this guidance
- check providers have policies in place to ensure safeguarding incidents are dealt with promptly and effectively

All staff employed by HAF-funded holiday club providers should be subject to an enhanced DBS check with barred list information

Part 3 of [keeping children safe in education](#) sets out a clear process for safe recruitment. Local authorities and holiday clubs providers should follow this best practice when recruiting.

Safeguarding incidents

Local authorities must notify the HAF team at DfE immediately if any serious safeguarding incident occurs in connection with HAF-funded provision, by emailing HAF.programme@education.com. This includes any concerns, disclosures, or events that may impact the safety or wellbeing of children and young people attending HAF activities.

Anyone who has concerns about a child's welfare should consider whether a referral needs to be made to local authority children's social care and should do so immediately if there is a concern that the child is suffering significant harm or is likely to do so.

If an organisation or agency removes an individual (paid worker or unpaid volunteer) from work in regulated activity with children (or would have, had the person not left first) because the person poses a risk of harm to children, the organisation or agency should make a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service to consider whether to add the individual to the barred list. In some circumstances, organisations and agencies will be under a legal duty to make a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Holiday clubs in school settings

Schools are generally safe environments with established safeguarding arrangements.

Where activities are provided by the school's governing body or proprietor under the direct supervision or management of their school staff, the school's child protection policy applies.

Where activities are provided by another organisation within the school premises, the governing body or proprietor should seek assurance that the organisation has appropriate safeguarding and child protection policies and procedure in place.

Anyone involved in the delivery of a holiday club in school settings should be familiar with part 1 of [keeping children safe in education](#).

Holiday clubs in out of school settings

Out-of-school settings are organisations or individuals that provide tuition, training, instruction or activities to children in England without their parents' or carers' supervision, but are not:

- schools
- colleges
- education settings providing alternative provision
- 16 to 19 academies
- providers caring for children that are registered with Ofsted or a childminder agency

These settings typically operate outside normal school hours (for example, evenings, weekends, and school holidays), although some are run part-time during school hours to support home educated children.

Providers running out-of-school settings should follow the guidance on [keeping children safe during community activities, after-school clubs, and tuition](#), which sets out what policies and procedures should be in place for:

- health and safety
- safeguarding and child protection
- staff suitability
- governance

Volunteers and DBS checking

Volunteers often play an important role in the delivery of holiday clubs. However, safeguarding must remain a priority.

Under no circumstances should a volunteer without the appropriate checks be left unsupervised or allowed to carry out regulated activity.

For voluntary staff who are regularly involved in the delivery of HAF in holiday clubs, this work is considered regulated activity. This means they will be subject to an enhanced DBS check with barred list information.

There may be volunteers who do not carry out this role regularly, so may not meet the threshold for regulated activity. In these cases, an enhanced DBS check may not be legally required

For further information on definitions of 'regular' or 'regulated activity', refer to guidance on regulated activity in relation to children in [keeping children safe in education](#).

Example

A guest speaker visits a HAF club to deliver a nature talk. They are escorted by DBS-checked staff while on the premises and never left unsupervised with children. In this scenario, a DBS check for the guest would not normally be required.

To provide reassurance to parents and carers, we strongly recommend that all volunteers involved in the delivering HAF-funded holiday clubs have an [enhanced DBS check](#) (which, where applicable, should include children's barred list information).

We do not recommend holiday clubs use volunteers that are not DBS checked. However, if this occurs, it is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that volunteers are never left alone or unsupervised with children.

Ofsted registration

Holiday clubs may need to legally register with Ofsted depending on the provision they offer and the age range of children that they care for. Some may also choose to register with Ofsted on the voluntary register, while others may be [exempt from registration](#). Both providers that require registration with Ofsted, and those that are exempt, can participate in the HAF programme.

It is the responsibility of individual HAF providers to understand whether they are legally required to be Ofsted registered and for reviewing their status whenever the provision they are offering changes.

To support the raising of quality and to strengthen safeguarding, certain providers can opt to [register with Ofsted](#) even if not required. Registration offers benefits to

families, such as eligibility for Tax-Free Childcare or the childcare costs element of Universal Credit. This can allow families to [claim back up to 85% of childcare costs](#) when using Ofsted registered settings.

We expect local authorities to check with all their HAF providers that they are appropriately registered, particularly providers who may have amended their childcare offer during the holidays because of the HAF programme. We also expect local authorities to promote voluntary registration to providers and the potential benefits of this. Local authorities should familiarise themselves with the different Ofsted requirements so they can support providers through the registration process. HAF coordinators should engage with early years and childcare colleagues on this.

Tailoring local provision

Local authorities and their providers have flexibility in how they deliver provision to best serve the needs of children and families in their area. We encourage all local authorities to have a varied mix of provision that caters for different ages and interests.

There should be good geographical spread across the local authority, with increased supply in areas with higher numbers of FSM eligible families to maximise attendance.

As in previous years, we are keen to see innovative approaches taken to deliver the HAF programme in local areas. After successful pilot programmes were undertaken by local authorities with support from DfE, we will be looking to organise similar pilots in the upcoming delivery year. Details will be sent to HAF coordinators in advance of work being undertaken.

Working with children with SEND or additional needs

It is vital that every local authority ensures sufficient, high-quality provision is available across their area for children with SEND or additional needs who are eligible for FSM. Local authorities should clearly highlight where providers have a bespoke offer for children with SEND to allow families to consider whether it can meet a child's needs. Accessibility and inclusiveness are core parts of the HAF

framework of standards, and make up an important area in local authorities assuring good practice.

When assessing the requirements of children with SEND or additional needs, local authorities should ensure that the provision they fund through the HAF programme is fully compliant with the Equality Act 2010. This will include making sure that they, and the providers they work with, put in place any reasonable adjustments needed to enable children with disabilities to access HAF provision and ensure they are not subject to discrimination.

Local authorities should work with providers to plan how they will accommodate children with SEND or additional needs. This may include partnering with special schools or other organisations with relevant expertise, or ensuring participation in mainstream provision.

There is flexibility in how the programme can be delivered to children with SEND or additional needs. Key considerations include:

- identifying the most vulnerable children, young people and families
- making decisions and, where appropriate, delegating responsibility for decision making to different parts of the system to enable responsive support
- engaging regularly with families to understand changing needs
- being flexible in supporting families
- ensuring staff are trained, supported and equipped to provide flexible and responsive care in line with government guidance
- maintaining trust and confidence in staff from a parent perspective
- whether the food offer takes account of specific dietary and sensory needs

Risk assessments are an important part of this provision and should be used as an enabler to provide support rather than a barrier. A good risk assessment should encourage creative solutions and prevent withdrawal of support for children, young people and families who are particularly vulnerable or at high risk.

Some different models might include:

- stay and play sessions, which allow children with SEND to benefit from enriching activities accompanied by a parent or carer
- family day trips
- providing sessions or activities that are shorter than 4 hours

DfE has published a toolkit for creating inclusive provision for providers of wraparound childcare, free breakfast clubs and holiday activities and food programmes, developed in partnership with Mott MacDonald and Nasen. [The Creating Inclusive Provision toolkit](#) is an interactive digital toolkit developed to support schools, providers, and local authorities in creating inclusive provision that is accessible to families of primary aged children with SEND.

Working with the secondary school age range

We appreciate engaging secondary school-age children in the HAF programme can be challenging. Provision for this age group often needs a different approach than that aimed at primary aged children. Local authorities should make specific plans for this.

There is flexibility in how the programme can be delivered to older children. Careful consideration should be given to different models of food and activity provision. This might include:

- **alternative session times:** such as afternoons or evenings
- **different food and activity offer, ensuring it is appealing and age appropriate:** activities may be shorter than 4 hours, for example, cinema or bowling
- **different choice of venue:** school venues may be less popular for older children, whereas pop-up provision in parks or city centres can be more effective - some areas have reported a reduction in anti-social behaviour around areas with a focussed HAF provision
- **travel:** provision should be easily accessible - local authorities may wish to work with local transport providers to offer free or discounted travel to offer greater freedom and mobility during the holidays
- **collaboration with local and national organisations experienced in delivering programmes for secondary aged children:** working through trusted and established organisations can help achieve effective reach and delivery

Local authorities should consider involving older children from their area in shaping the HAF programme for their age range. This could include running focus groups to better understand their preferences and needs.

You might also consider the role that older children can have in supporting, designing and leading sessions for their peers or for younger children. These opportunities can help them build social connections and develop valuable skills, such as leadership, which are particularly important for those in years 9 to 11.

You may also consider activities or events with links to further and higher education, or employers.

We are aware that a number of local authorities are utilising different delivery models for HAF to better suit the needs and interests of teenagers, including use of youth voice to shape provision. These models have been piloted and or implemented across the country. Local authorities are encouraged to explore these models of delivery and share learning with other HAF coordinators to support better engagement of older children in their area. The department will support local authorities to make these connections and find out more about innovative approaches to delivering HAF.

Community cohesion in HAF

Government wants to ensure that all places are supported to build cohesion and resilience, the HAF programme is uniquely placed to drive that work forward.

To do this, HAF projects can encourage specific provisions focused on demographics 'at greater risk' of participation in social unrest, such as secondary school age children.

Activity that focuses on building cohesion and resilience could hold various benefits, including:

- connecting people of different backgrounds and groups through activities that work towards a common goal
- improving tolerance and cultural understanding
- introducing children to different cultural heritage, and breaking down stereotypes
- improving resilience to mis- and disinformation, and hate crime
- building respect and empathy
- helping to integrate new arrivals to communities
- facilitating dialogue, supporting conversations across group divides, and handling

challenging topics sensitively

- providing diversions that reduce the likelihood of involvement in anti-social behaviour

Local communities are best placed to know how to build cohesion and resilience, and HAF providers can consider how to maximise the benefits to participants through their respective activities.

Targeting children with low school attendance rates

A number of local authorities have targeted and supported children who have, or are at risk of having, low school attendance rates. The HAF programme can offer these children stability, structure and support alongside fun, food and physical activity during the longer school holidays and could contribute to them feeling more able to return to school and attend more regularly.

Local coordination by authorities

Local authorities may coordinate the HAF programme themselves, or work with another organisation to coordinate the provision on their behalf.

Local authorities are required to have a HAF coordinator who is responsible for the delivery of the programme, supported by sufficient staff to manage HAF effectively across the year.

The level of resource in each local authority will be determined locally but should be proportionate to the level of funding received.

Local authorities have responsibility for the coordination and implementation of the HAF programme in their area, which involves several important aspects. For all of these aspects, we expect that local authority staff work closely with school age childcare colleagues, where different. For example, early years leads, Job Centres, Family Hubs, Family Information Service).

Data management and information systems

To deliver an effective and impactful HAF programme, local authorities must ensure robust information management practices and systems are in place. These should support:

Eligibility and attendance

- Accurate checks to confirm that children attending are eligible for the programme.
- Systems that make booking and attendance tracking straightforward for families and providers.

Provider efficiency and procurement

- Use of data to inform procurement decisions, ensuring value for money and reducing waste.
- Monitoring provider performance to maintain high standards and improve delivery.

Reporting and compliance

- Ability to provide accurate, timely data to DfE and delivery partners, including pupil level data or building the capacity to do so.
- Clear processes for collecting and validating data on attendance, spend, and outcomes.

Continuous improvement

- Using insights from data to refine the local offer, improve accessibility, and enhance impact.
- Benchmarking against previous delivery periods and sharing best practice.

High standards and system choice

Local authorities are encouraged to set high standards for data management and may choose to procure booking or management systems that support these objectives. Such systems can streamline eligibility checks, improve reporting accuracy, and reduce administrative burden.

Booking systems

We know that most local authorities now have an online system or mechanism in

place that allows parents and families to book places on the HAF programme. There are many organisations who provide bespoke booking systems to local authorities.

This section of the guidance is intended to support local authorities when considering the procurement or development of a booking system.

It is expected that the booking system that a local authority operates should, as a minimum, include the following features:

- a fully accessible format so that users with additional needs or disabilities are able to easily and effectively navigate and use the system
- available in alternative languages so that users whose first language is not English are able to easily and effectively navigate and use the system
- include an offline option so that those who cannot or do not want to use an online booking system are still able to book, for example through a dedicated email or telephone number
- eligibility checking disclaimer so that parents and families can provide their consent for the booking system, the provider or the local authority to conduct eligibility checks to ensure the programme reaches its intended recipients, ensuring that eligibility is checked then or ahead of the booking being made

Features of a booking system may also include:

- a mechanism to prevent ‘double bookings’, multiple or same day bookings, so a single child cannot take up places with different providers on the same day or time
- reminders and prompts so that families receive notifications about their bookings, which can help to minimise non-attendance
- availability as an app
- real-time tracking of bookings, cancellations and waiting lists, allowing the local authority and provider to focus their marketing and promotion, to allow better tracking of attendance, facilitating a report on who has attended and to support providers to maximise attendance

Non attendance

Local authorities should work closely with providers to minimise non-attendance at HAF-funded sessions. While we recognise that absences can sometimes be

unavoidable, reducing missed bookings helps ensure that provision is used effectively and that as many children and young people as possible benefit from the programme.

Local authorities are best placed to determine appropriate solutions within their area.

This may include:

- using waiting lists to fill places when cancellations occur
- sending reminders, for example texts or emails to families before sessions
- implementing flexible booking policies, such as allowing last-minute sign-ups where capacity exists
- monitoring attendance patterns and addressing persistent non-attendance with families

These strategies support better use of public funds and help maximise reach and impact.

Mapping provision, demand, and creating a local plan

We expect each local authority to use local data in planning and delivering a local plan.

The starting point is mapping supply (the holiday provision and other related school age childcare available in an area) and the potential demand for HAF (the number of FSM eligible children in an area). Local deprivation data, schools census as well as historical delivery information are all useful when planning future delivery, identifying gaps and ensuring provision is targeted where it is most needed.

Local authorities should ensure that when mapping provision, they consider different age ranges and types of provision to ensure all needs are met across their area. This mapping will support development of a local plan for holiday provision including any commissioning activity, based on local supply and demand.

Effective commissioning

Local authorities should complete effective mapping, alongside building an understanding of the sorts of enriching activities that children of different ages want to engage in to support an effective commissioning strategy.

We expect local authorities to use historical delivery data including take up and attendance data, non-attendance information and feedback from children, young people and families alongside FSM information (demand data) and provider information (supply data) to support an effective commissioning strategy.

We encourage local authorities to adopt a flexible approach in awarding funding and hold an open call for applications, complying at all times with their legal duties and responsibilities. This will help ensure their programme makes the most of the broad range of organisations available to them, in particular, those smaller community organisations who hold existing relationships with children and families. These may include voluntary and community organisations, schools and multi-academy trusts, private and not-for-profit organisations and sports organisations. We recognise and greatly value the important role that community and voluntary organisations will play in the HAF programme, and we encourage all local authorities to work with a wide range of partners in the delivery of this programme.

Local authorities may find it beneficial to use an online system, such as a Dynamic Purchasing System or framework, to advertise opportunities and manage their application process.

There is no requirement for local authorities to commission providers for individual holiday periods. Many local authorities have successfully adopted a model of recruiting and funding providers for multiple delivery periods. This can offer many benefits, including:

- more strategic, longer term planning
- reduced administrative burden
- continuity for children and families
- certainty for providers, which may support recruitment and enable them to invest in resources or refine their offer.

The announcement of a 3-year funding commitment provides stability which enables better strategic planning, more effective resource allocation, and ultimately, a greater

and more sustainable delivery of HAF's aims.

With assured funding over three years, local authorities can move beyond short-term plans and develop comprehensive, long-term strategies. Infrastructure and technology upgrading is made possible as is the ability to hire and retain skilled personnel.

Local authorities are provided with the flexibility to adapt strategies based on ongoing evaluation and learning, allowing for experimentation with innovative solutions that may require time to demonstrate impact due to the funding being confirmed for 3 years.

Local authorities are now able to maximise the use of funds over an extended period, leading to potential cost savings through better procurement options.

Where local authorities work with community and voluntary organisations whether as a coordinator or as a delivery partner, we expect this to be done on a cost-recovery basis. This is so that these organisations are fully funded for the work they undertake.

Mixed models

Whilst the HAF programme is primarily focussed on providing support to disadvantaged families, there are many benefits to local authorities, providers and communities in expanding their holiday care offer to include paid-for provision alongside HAF funded places.

Adopting a mixed model approach, where HAF-funded places sit alongside paid-for childcare, can help create a more sustainable and inclusive holiday offer. This approach not only maximises the use of existing resources but also supports providers in maintaining viable business models, which in turn strengthens the overall childcare market. Mixed models can also increase flexibility for families, offering choice and convenience while ensuring that disadvantaged children continue to receive targeted support.

Local authorities are bound by the childcare sufficiency duty, with section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006 placing a duty on local authorities in England to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient childcare for working parents in their area and parents making the transition to work, including during school holidays. Encouraging an expanded offer can support local authorities in meeting this duty and securing

sufficient levels of provision for all families throughout holiday periods, as well as positively impacting outcomes of children and young people in the area.

We strongly encourage HAF coordinators and school-age childcare leads (where different) to work with their providers to explore opportunities for mixed models, offering paid-for places alongside HAF-funded provision. This approach helps ensure the HAF programme, where possible, supports the provision of childcare during the holidays and contributes to a more resilient local childcare market. Further details on this can be found in the school-age childcare Local Authority Capacity Funding guidance.

Local authorities should work with providers to encourage them to register with Ofsted and help raise awareness of Tax-Free Childcare and Universal Credit support directly with the families who use their provision. Materials to help providers to raise awareness of support available can be found in the [Best Start in Life Parent Hub](#).

Complementing your programme with other support

Partnership working has far-reaching benefits for HAF providers, ensuring resources go further and best practice is shared. Building and sustaining effective partnerships with a range of local organisations can support areas in successful delivery.

In many areas, local authorities have been successful in drawing in wider support to enhance their local programme. For example, this could be through direct commissioning, or by bringing in funding or support in kind from other sources such as:

- philanthropists
- sponsors
- supermarkets
- sports organisations
- local businesses

We would encourage you to actively consider any partnership arrangements and opportunities and to share case studies of any strong examples of partnership working you have developed for us to further support local authorities in this area.

The government also provides a Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF), replacing the Household Support Fund, incorporating Discretionary Housing Payments and funding councils to support some of the poorest households so that their children do not go hungry outside of term time. This longer-term funding approach enables local authorities to provide preventative support to communities, working with the voluntary and community sector as well as to assist people when faced with a financial crisis. Local authorities can choose to use CRF funding to supplement or expand HAF provision, where it aligns with the fund's outcomes on resilience.

Governance

All local authorities will have established governance in place to support the delivery of the programme and ensure that the right partners continue to be engaged with and supportive of your programme.

We know that the HAF programme works best when it is a cross-cutting and collaborative effort and we recommend that your plans should include engagement with representatives from a wide range of local bodies, including:

- local public health officials
- school leaders
- childcare leads
- youth services and young people
- social services and safeguarding leads
- charities and the voluntary sector
- local police and other uniform services

Environment and sustainability

DfE is committed to sustainable development practices and believes it is important for local authorities to consider these and their impact on the environment. We strongly encourage local authorities to make their own judgements on how sustainable development can be reflected in their ethos, day-to-day operations and throughout the delivery of their HAF programmes.

Some practices that local authorities may wish to consider are:

- minimising the use of single-use plastics
- where possible using locally sourced food and ingredients
- making use of food surplus organisations
- ensuring there is a wide range of recycling and compost facilities for waste
- growing fruit and vegetables and showing how they can be used and cooked
- encouraging uniform banks and exchange schemes

This list is not exhaustive and local authorities are encouraged to reflect on their settings and consider ways that their programmes can be more environmentally friendly and sustainable.

Promoting your programme

Our HAF communications toolkit will be updated and made available to local authorities to help them to:

- focus and target provision towards families who are eligible for free school meals
- prompt parents and carers to explore activities and provisions available for children in their area and book a place for their child
- provide off-the-shelf communication materials (including for social media) that can be easily utilised to effectively promote the scheme, which credit and note DfE's central funding of the programme

Local authorities should ensure that when promoting and advertising their programme, great care is taken to ensure that the children and families who could benefit from the HAF programme do not feel stigmatised and that the language used is celebratory, aspirational and focuses on the positives.

Local authorities must make it clear in their communications that the HAF programme is government funded, and a logo is available and should be used for this purpose.

We will use #HAF2026 and encourage all local authorities and their providers to use this across their social media channels.

Sharing best practice and cross boundary working

We encourage all local authorities to develop strong local partnerships and networks to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practices. Participation in events and platforms at both local and national levels is highly recommended, alongside engaging in the support offer that DfE provides.

Additionally, we advise local authorities to collaborate closely with neighbouring authorities and establish clear cross-border working protocols. This approach will help ensure that children living near boundaries receive appropriate provision and support.

Support for local authorities

Since April 2021 DfE has worked with the organisations Mott MacDonald and Coram Hempsall's, jointly known as Childcare Works, to provide support, advisory and performance monitoring services to assist local authorities with HAF provision.

The DfE team is still in place, working closely with Childcare Works, and will continue to send out regular communications and oversee the funding arrangements.

The DfE team will continue to deal with all local authority enquiries through HAF.programme@education.com.

Alongside the responsibilities set out in the [Local coordination by authorities](#) section of this guidance, we expect each HAF coordinator to engage with the support offer provided by DfE. As a minimum, we expect HAF coordinators to:

- attend the majority of meetings to support knowledge sharing across local authorities
- attend sessions with their appointed delivery adviser as requested
- collaborate with their appointed delivery adviser on developing and implementing improvement plans where required
- cooperate with DfE's management information collection requirements and any requests for involvement in research

All other support is optional but strongly encouraged to drive continuous improvement of this programme nationally and locally.

Funding

Local authorities will receive funding within the Children, Families and Youth Grant that is ringfenced for delivering the HAF programme in their area.

This funding allocation is calculated based on the number of children known to be eligible for free school meals in each area.

We expect cost of provision to vary across local authority areas to reflect the range of needs. For example, provision that includes specialist activities, expert tuition or tailored support for children with SEND may have a higher unit cost.

Local authority capacity support fund

To support the delivery and sustainability of school-age childcare including the national rollout of free breakfast clubs, DfE is providing £12.9 million in additional funding to local authorities in the 2026 to 2027 fiscal year. This funding is intended to strengthen local capacity and expertise to monitor, support, and expand provision across term-time and holiday periods. The funding is also to support links with HAF.

This does not mean that the focus of the HAF programme has changed, only that we expect HAF coordinators and school-age childcare leads to work together to build upon central government funded programmes, such as HAF, to drive a thriving school age childcare market. Whether that be around:

- school engagement
- engagement with providers and related funding decisions to support sustainability, inclusion or quality of childcare, or activity provision
- sharing intelligence about the wider holiday wraparound market, including opportunity for HAF providers to offer paid for places

This funding is included within the HAF 2026 to 2027 funding allocation and there is flexibility for local authorities in how they use both pots of funding to meet their individual resourcing needs (provided the funding is used to maximise delivery against the HAF and local authority capacity support funding conditions), which is why it is referred to here.

Further guidance on the purpose and details of this fund can be found in [Local authority capacity support funding guidance](#).

Administrative costs

Local authorities are expected to use up to 7.5% of their total HAF allocation to cover administration costs. This will help ensure we are maximising overall spend on HAF places. This means that 92.5% of expenditure is expected to be spent on the provision of free holiday club places for eligible children. This funding should be considered alongside the new funding of £12.9 million to support local authority capacity to deliver a sufficient and sustainable school aged childcare system. This funding also reflects that the programme is in the 6 year of delivery, and initial costs associated with setting up and establishing the programme should now be minimal, as well as the opportunity for efficiencies from a 3 year funding settlement, where funding can be planned out for longer time periods.

We expect local authorities to take a flexible approach to how they use both their HAF administration funding and local authority capacity funding to meet their individual resourcing needs and drive a more strategic, joined up and efficient approach through reflecting cross over in activities from engagement with the provider base to mapping demand. Local authorities should consider the most effective and efficient use of their staff when delegating responsibilities for HAF and school-age childcare and encourage leads to work in collaboration or by using HAF staff to directly support the delivery of wider school-age childcare sufficiency or vice versa.

DfE recognises that administration costs may represent a higher proportion of expenditure for smaller local authorities and will therefore notify smaller authorities in writing of the maximum they are expected to spend on local administration costs.

In exceptional cases, further flexibility may be requested. This will only be considered where local authorities have a clear and robust justification that the local authority is unable to deliver the HAF expectations, where the authority is able to demonstrate that delivery of places will be minimally affected by additional administration spend, and where they have firm plans to reduce over the year to within allocations. This should be set out in writing to DfE for consideration, including how the authority is using HAF administration funding in combination with local authority capacity funding to deliver strategically and efficiently, and how the authority will minimise impact on number of HAF places delivered.

Purchasing equipment

Programme funding can also be used to purchase equipment for the programme, for example, to improve the catering or sports equipment at an individual club.

Where this expenditure meets our capital expenditure criteria, we expect that the amount you spend on this should be limited to a maximum of 2% of your overall programme expenditure. Capital expenditure is classed as:

- individual assets worth over £2,500
- grouped assets, that is assets of a similar nature that are purchased at the same time, which cost £2,500 or more overall
- bulked assets, for example, a bulk purchase of equipment where the value of the individual item is below the set value, which cost £2,500 or more overall

Any equipment that does not meet these criteria, will not be classed as capital expenditure or be subject to the 2% cap.

Payments and reporting

Payments

The full 2026 to 2027 allocation will be paid to local authorities from April 2026 via the LGFS. It is the responsibility of the local authority to manage their budget across the full fiscal year.

Recovering unspent funds

Local authorities must submit a completed Certificate of Expenditure and Statement of Funding Usage for the 2026 to 2027 fiscal year. Any unspent funding identified by DfE in these reports may be subject to recovery and must be repaid by the local

authority if requested.

Reporting

Local authorities are responsible for gathering management information from their funded providers and clubs about the children and families they are supporting.

Following each delivery period, local authorities are required to report on their activity, which we will use to monitor performance at a high level. Ahead of each holiday period, we will inform local authorities of the submission deadline and provide a template that sets out the data required.

The data return includes, but is not limited to the:

- overall number of unique children who participated in the programme
- overall number of unique children in receipt of FSM who participated in your programme
- number of children who are in the primary school age range, the secondary school age range,
- number of children with SEND or additional needs who have participated in your programme
- cost of the programme for the financial year to date.

Local authorities can set other performances indicators to measure their own performance or that of partners.

Local authorities should ensure that they and the providers and clubs they work with are able to accurately collect and verify this information.

Where necessary, DfE may also ask local authorities to provide additional information regarding their plans for specific holiday periods.

All the data and information collected by holiday clubs and providers should be collected in strict adherence to the [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#).

Evaluation

The department is committed to evaluating the impact of HAF, in particular building on the [2021 external study of the programme](#) and will be conducting an evaluation. We know that many local authorities and (where applicable) their booking systems hold valuable information about the pupils who book and attend and DfE are exploring ways to increase the accuracy of these data collections and the ease of transfer to enable high quality evaluation. This builds on pupil level data collections the department conducted with samples of local authorities in the summers of 2022, 2023 and 2024.

We will share more information about how your local authorities can support this evaluative activity in early 2026.

Certificate of expenditure

By 1 May 2027, each local authority must provide DfE with a Statement of Expenditure and Certificate of Funding Usage which details the cost of the programme for 2026 to 2027, confirmed by the nominated responsible officer. We will provide you with a template and guidance for this document before the end of the reporting period.

This certificate of expenditure will report on the activities funded by DfE and confirm that the outputs that have been delivered as part of the HAF programme:

- have been delivered to a satisfactory standard
- the expected benefits have accrued or will accrue

These reports will support the regularity assurance statement for the National Audit Office, and your statement will need to be signed off by your chief financial officer or chief internal auditor.

Once the statements have been returned to DfE, we will carry out a sample check of up to 10% of the statements. The local authorities selected will be required to submit additional evidence to demonstrate that the information declared in the statement of expenditure is accurate.

Local authorities selected for this sample check will be notified by 14 May 2027 and will be provided with further instructions on the process.

As part of the statement of expenditure assessment process, local authorities who have an underspend on their programme may be contacted regarding recovery of

unspent funding.

Annual report

In addition to the reporting requirements, we require each local authority to produce an annual report on their HAF programme which should include:

- the overall funding you have spent on the HAF programme
- the proportion of the funding that was spent on administration and a breakdown of how this was spent
- how many unique children you have reached in each holiday period
- the proportion of primary age and secondary age children who have participated in your programme
- the number of children with SEND or additional needs who have participated in your programme
- information on the families and carers they have engaged with through the food education, signposting and referrals aspect of their programme
- which organisations are represented on their steering group
- which organisations you have worked with in delivering the programme

You may also include:

- feedback from participants, their families or carers
- results of any surveys
- case studies or particular highlights
- how you have promoted the programme and celebrated it through the media and social media

The report for the 2026 to 2027 HAF programme should be submitted to DfE by 30 June 2027. We will allow local authorities flexibility in how they format and present their annual report, but we will make a template available to local authorities in early 2027.

The 2026 to 2027 HAF programme report must be placed on the local authority's HAF website.

Local authority HAF website

Local authorities are required to have a HAF website or dedicated pages on their website for their HAF programme. These are a valuable source of information for parents, carers, schools and providers who are interested in the programme.

Your HAF website should include:

- your latest annual report for the HAF programme
- an explanation of who is eligible for a place on the programme
- up-to-date information of HAF provision in your area for each holiday period, including links to booking systems or portals
- information about the standards providers are expected to meet when delivering the programme
- information for parents and carers on other support available, such as Tax-Free Childcare
- information for schools on the programme and how they can get involved

Annex A – checklist for local authority assurance

This checklist outlines key areas for local authorities to review during assurance visits. The list is intended as a guide and is not prescriptive. Local authorities may wish to carry out additional checks.

Food provision

Is the provider registered as a food business? If the provider is claiming an exemption, does that exemption apply?

What plans does the provider have in place to provide high quality and nutritious food?

How will the provider ensure that the food served meets school food standards?

Is the provider adhering to food hygiene requirements?

Has the provider talked to children and families about the food they will serve?

Does the provider have a robust system in place to ensure the food they serve considers dietary, religious or cultural requirements?

Does the provider have a robust system in place to manage allergies?

If the provider is open to both HAF-funded and non-HAF-funded children, how do they ensure that all children get the same experience?

Increasing awareness of healthy eating, healthy lifestyles and positive behaviours

What plans does the provider have to incorporate activities that help children understand the benefits of healthy eating and nutrition?

Does the provider offer activities which support learning about healthy lifestyles and exercise.

Physical activities

What plans does the provider have to incorporate physical activity into HAF sessions?

Are children and young people participating in at least 60 minutes of vigorous activity per day?

Are children and young people engaging in a variety of types and intensities of physical activity?

Are long periods of sedentary time broken up with at least light activity?

Enrichment activities

What enrichment activities are on offer and will be on offer?

Why has the provider chosen particular activities?

Are the activities on offer age appropriate?

Signposting and referrals and supporting families

How does the provider engage or plan to engage with families of children who attend their provision?

What steps does the provider take to advise families and connect them with appropriate support services?

Policies and procedures

What health and safety procedures and policies does the provider have in place?

Does the provider have up to date and appropriate insurance policies in place?

Is appropriate record keeping in place?

Safeguarding

Have all staff received safeguarding training?

Have staff been checked and vetted by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), where appropriate?

What policies does the provider have in place to ensure safeguarding incidents are dealt with robustly and rapidly?

Accessibility and inclusiveness

Does the provider have a bespoke offer for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) that is clearly highlighted?

How does or will the provider ensure that the needs of children with SEND are identified?

How does or will the provider ensure that all staff are appropriately trained to deliver high quality, accessible and inclusive provision?

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