



# Scrutiny Review of Holidays are Fun

Children and Young People Select Committee, April 2025



# Contents

<b>Select Committee – Membership</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Cllr Carol Clark, Chair</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Original Brief</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>1.0 Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Key Findings.....	8
Recommendations.....	10
<b>2.0 Introduction</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>3.0 Background</b> .....	<b>11</b>
What is the Programme?.....	11
Who is eligible? .....	12
<b>4.0 Evidence</b> .....	<b>12</b>
HAF delivery and organisation .....	12
Expenditure .....	13
Spaces available .....	14
How do we promote the programme?.....	14
Promoting HAF through the Corporate Facebook Account.....	15
Who is participating and how can we maximise attendance by these groups? .....	16
Target Groups .....	16
Barriers .....	16
Early Years and Education Settings.....	17
Booking System.....	17
Providers .....	18
Activities and Food .....	20
Wider Benefits - Links with the Council Plan.....	21
Wider Benefits - Creating Opportunities for our Future Workforce. ....	21
Wider Benefits - Support Outside of Holidays.....	21
Feedback.....	22
Provider Survey.....	22
Feedback from Stockton Parent Carer Forum .....	25
Feedback from Northshore Careers Fair.....	25
Feedback from February 2025 Half Term Provision. ....	26
<b>5.0 Key Findings and Recommendations</b> .....	<b>26</b>
Key Findings.....	27
Recommendations.....	28
<b>Appendix 1</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>Glossary of Terms</b> .....	<b>31</b>



# Select Committee – Membership

**Councillor Carol Clark (Chair)**

**Councillor Barbara Inman (Vice-Chair)**

**Councillor Ray Godwin**

**Councillor David Reynard**

**Councillor Stephen Richardson**

**Councillor Paul Rowling**

**Councillor Emily Tate**

**Councillor Sally Ann Watson**

**Councillor Katie Weston**

## Acknowledgements

The Select Committee thank the following contributors to this review:

- **Mandie Rowlands, Service Lead – School Support and Sufficiency**
- **Jane Williams – Team Manager, School Support**
- **Katie Newton – HAF Co-ordinator**
- **Lucy Owens – Catalyst**
- **Clare Besford - Catalyst**
- **HAF Providers**

Contact Officer

NAME: Judy Trainer, Democratic Services Manager

Tel: 01642 528158

Email: [judy.trainer@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:judy.trainer@stockton.gov.uk)

# Foreword

[Add in]

Cllr Carol Clark, Chair



**Councillor  
Carol Clark**  
  
**Chair –  
Children and  
Young People  
Select  
Committee**



**Councillor  
Barbara Inman**  
  
**Vice-Chair –  
Children and  
Young People  
Select  
Committee**

# Original Brief

## Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

Supporting 'our people' to live healthier lives:

- Raising aspirations of our children and young people to achieve economic wellbeing
- Supporting the local economy using local providers to deliver.
- Supporting schools to work during holiday periods, supporting their local communities offering healthy meals and activities to children and young people
- Offer specific and focused provision for children and young people with special educational needs.
- Supporting vulnerable groups such as, children in our care, children in need of help and support, children with additional needs and young carers.

## What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

HAF is a DfE funded programme that provides activities and healthy meals to children and young people during holiday periods, predominantly for those on benefit related free school meals. It is delivered in partnership through SBC and Catalyst. It involves a range of providers, including schools, delivering a variety of activities.

The programme is aimed at those most in need. Holiday times can be difficult for families especially under the current cost of living crisis. Offering a safe place to go, with fun activities alongside a healthy nutritious meal will help families during long and difficult times of the year. Therefore, it essential that the funding allocated is maximised and provides value for money. The programme is delivered alongside longer term, appropriate support for families.

The money is allocated as a grant for a specific purpose and spend is monitored by the DfE. The programme should offer the opportunity to help more families at an early stage offering help and support beyond the holiday periods leading to short- and longer-term savings. Having a safe place for children to go during holiday periods helps parents who are working to reduce childcare costs, and it also offers the opportunity to work with families who need support to return to work. The Scrutiny Committee could consider if HAF is inclusive of and attended by those families who most need it and the impact that the programme has had on family health and social and economic wellbeing. Other considerations could include:

- How the programme can maximise the involvement of schools and education providers
  - How elected members can promote and encourage eligible members of their communities to engage with the programme
- If the programme is offering value for money as it moves into its final year of national funding

## The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

1. What target groups is the HAF Programme aimed at reaching? Who is participating and how can we maximise attendance by these groups? How can we ensure that the programme is inclusive and maximise impact for children that need it most?
2. What are the barriers to the children with the most need attending?
3. Are we achieving Borough-wide reach? Do we have the right provision in the right area? What is the geographic breakdown of eligible take up and discretionary take up?
4. How can the programme maximise the involvement of schools and education providers?
5. How can elected Members promote and encourage engagement with the programme?

6. What impact has the programme had? What does feedback from families tell us?
7. How are providers chosen? Do we have the right providers and how is this assessed?
8. What feedback has been received from providers, families and children?
9. Do contract management arrangements provide value for money? Could the contract be managed differently?
10. What, if any, improvements should be made to the booking system?
11. How is the programme funded and what are the options for future delivery should central government funding cease?
12. Can the programme support other Council objectives, for example, the promotion of lifelong learning, career aspirations, links to future employment and making sure our young people are work ready?
13. Can our young people, including children in care and care leavers be involved in delivery?
14. Are agencies working together to provide help and support for families who access HAF outside of holidays?
15. Are paid for places making the scheme sustainable and are charges appropriate? Could the programme be extended to those not currently eligible?

**Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:**

- To increase the number of individual children and young people on the uptake of HAF
- To improve offer of the HAF programme ensuring that eligible young people are enabled to attend and are offered fun and appropriate activities, along with a balanced nutritious meal
- To maximise the role of schools and education settings in the planning and delivery of the HAF programme
- To ensure the project is value for money and develop a plan for sustainability beyond current funding
- To ensure provision covers the whole borough and offer is accessible by children in rural areas
- To increase provision for eligible children with additional needs
- To improve provision for eligible young people aged 13 years and over
- To understand how agencies are working together to provide help and support for families who are eligible and accessing HAF, beyond the holiday periods

# 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme is funded by the Department for Education and the Holiday Enrichment Programme (HEP) is funded by Public Health. The Stockton-on-Tees HAF team held a competition to rename the programme and selected “Holidays Are Fun” to remove some of the stigma some parents associated with holiday hunger.
- 1.2. HAF is offered free to school aged children from reception to year 11 who are in receipt of benefit related free school meals.
- 1.3. The two programmes cover the following holiday periods:

Holiday Activities and Food – DfE funded – covers Easter, Summer and Christmas and the provision must be 4 hours a day for at least 4 days a week

Holiday Enrichment Programme – Public Health funded – covers May, October and February and the provision must be 2 hours a day for at least 4 days

## Key Findings

- There are strict criteria from the DfE that 85% of places have to go to those children and young people in receipt of free school meals, and that the prime objective is to ensure that they receive a meal each day during school holidays.
- Criteria from DfE stipulates that the offer is available for all children in receipt of benefits related free school meals. This does not mean all are expected to attend, as the provision is voluntary; the Council therefore has up to 15% of the funding available to offer other vulnerable children a place.
- Funding from public health stipulates that there should be a focus on providing places for those in the top 10 most deprived wards.
- Catalyst had a three-year contract with the Council (which ended on 28 February 2025) to manage providers of the programme. This element of the work has now been brought in house, and it is anticipated that this will generate savings which can be utilised to support additional provision.
- Over 40 local providers have been contracted to provide a variety of activities; some providers have been able to offer multiple provisions meaning there are often over 50 different activities on offer.
- Marketing and engagement activities are carried out by the Council’s Communications Team. Providers, including Roseberry Community Consortium and the Globe also make their own videos and use these to promote their activities.
- The inhouse booking system is not fit for purpose. Through feedback we know:
  - Parents/carers cannot book multiple activities at once. This is time consuming, and frustrating for those with multiple children booking multiple activities.
  - The layout of the booking system is not user friendly, and parents cannot see a list of providers easily, functionality is limited.
  - Parents/carers cannot make ‘accounts’ and receive multiple emails rather than within one place. This is a problem for parents/carers who have booked multiple provisions for different children.
  - Parents/carers and support workers would benefit from making family group booking for providers who are closed provisions – e.g. Harbour

- Take up amongst secondary age children and SEND is low nationally and locally. To work towards addressing this in the Borough, the Council has sought to identify provision for the older age range and introduced SEND only sessions.
- The roll out of auto-enrolment of free school meal programme will help to identify eligible children. There are an additional 340 eligible children to date following implementation of auto enrolment.
- Barriers to participation include:
  - Awareness of programme: professionals and residents still don't know about it, people unaware of eligibility
  - Providers marketing: not tailoring it to align with their own branding and targeting it at their families.
  - Booking system – the booking system does require some basic IT skills and whilst it is simple to use, feedback tells us it is time consuming and not user friendly
  - Household vulnerabilities – households can be chaotic, and parents forget they have booked or do not bring the child
  - Pride/sense of shame accessing the program - some families don't want others to know they receive FSM/benefits/are struggling
  - Physical/logistical barriers – transport, location of activity, choice of activities for whole family
  - Practicalities - e.g. duration of activities. 2- 4 hours might not fit with parent's work/life balance and collecting midway through day could be difficult
  - School attendance and emotional wellbeing – post covid some children have social emotional mental health concerns and not attending school refusers which also prevent them attending HAF
- The team continue to remove barriers for schools being primary delivery partners in HAF, although the practical and logistical challenges of opening during holidays are recognised. One suggestion made by a school was through the programme employ a key holder to take responsibility for the premises, and some staff may choose to take extra hours to support the programme on their premises.
- Partnership working between providers has proved successful to promote lifelong learning
- Some providers have identified ways of extending support outside for the school holidays. For example, Eastern Ravens Trust linked with Roseworth Big Local were able to fund a Family Link Worker position, Iron Guidance continue to provide hampers outside of the holiday period and Billingham Boxing Academy and Budo for Change offer free memberships to talented individuals who would not otherwise be able to take part.
- Providers suggested the following key improvements:
  - Improvements to the Booking System
  - Ensuring that the programme is meeting the children in most need
  - Reviewing costs per head for example with a tiered system better reflecting levels of need
  - Reducing the number of non-attendees
- Other provider feedback included:
  - Funding for children who are not eligible
  - Identify opportunities to promote best practice
  - Introduce one grant application form for all holiday periods
  - Improve communication around SEND children
  - Increase attendance
- Stockton Parent Carer Forum have made suggestions for improving the SEND offer, including the use of specialist schools, shorter sessions and SEND only provision

## Recommendations

1. That the Council continues to develop and promote the HAF programme to the residents of the Borough to ensure that the programme is meeting the needs of children in most need.
2. That the offer for SEND and secondary school children is further developed and promotional materials refreshed to target these children.
3. That the Council works with providers to increase up take in all wards and decrease non-attendance.
4. That consideration be given to how paid for places could be introduced to help make the programme sustainable.
5. That the Council works with schools to remove the barriers to them being primary delivery partners (for example, through the employment of a key holder to take responsibility for the premises, and staff choosing to take extra hours to support the programme on their premises).
6. That the in-house booking system is replaced with a bespoke fit for purpose booking system with functionality to capture appropriate demographic information, including which school the child attends and that this information is used to identify gaps in provision, analyse take up and inform future targeting of promotional activities.
7. That one grant application form be introduced for providers for all holiday periods.
8. That opportunities to link the programme to the curriculum and promote lifelong learning for all the family are enhanced.
9. That a summer school programme is developed with the Careers Team, to create opportunities for young people aged 13 plus to participate in paid employment (within the law).
10. That opportunities are created for post 16 young people to take an active leadership role in the programme, linking in with local colleges who are delivering T levels thereby making the programme more sustainable.
11. That the Council works with providers to extend whole family support outside of the school holidays.
12. That the Council considers how best to collect information around SEND children attending activities to ensure that providers are properly prepared, and children's needs are met when attending sessions.
13. That a mapping exercise is undertaken to ensure that provision is represented across all wards across the whole borough, especially those rural areas.
14. That the potential to explore utilising in house community transport during the school holidays be explored.
15. That the possibility of creating a 'free holiday meals' element of the programme in line with the DfE guidance, utilising our own facilities that are in place during term time be explored along with the opportunity of creating our own 'student' kitchen to provide the meals.

## 2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 This scrutiny topic was proposed by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and was added to the work programme by Executive Scrutiny Committee in March 2024.
- 2.2 The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme is funded by the Department for Education and the Holiday Enrichment Programme (HEP) is funded by Public Health. The Stockton-on-Tees HAF team held a competition to rename the programme and selected “Holidays Are Fun” to remove some of the stigma some parents associated with holiday hunger.
- 2.3 HAF is offered free to school aged children from reception to year 11 who are in receipt of benefit related free school meals.
- 2.4 In Stockton-on-Tees there are two programmes:
- Holiday Activities and Food – DfE funded – covers Easter, Summer and Christmas and the provision must be 4 hours a day for at least 4 days a week
  - Holiday Enrichment Programme – Public Health funded – covers May, October and February and the provision must be 2 hours a day for at least 4 days

Both are known locally as the Holidays Are Fun Programme.

- 2.5 The programme is now in its fifth year with funding of £883,540 plus £73,000 from Public Health being confirmed for 2025.

## 3.0 Background

### What is the Programme?

- 3.1 The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme is funded by the Department for Education. The Stockton-on-Tees HAF team held a competition to rename the programme and selected “Holidays Are Fun” to remove some of the stigma some parents associated with holiday hunger.
- 3.2 HAF is offered free to school aged children from reception to year 11 who are in receipt of benefit related free school meals. Recognising that families are struggling in the current cost of living crisis, the HAF offer was expanded in Stockton-on-Tees to also include families in receipt of universal credit or in financial difficulty. In addition, vulnerable families open to Children’s Services HAF have been offered places if referred by their support worker. This allows vulnerable children the opportunity to experience enriching activities in holiday periods, whilst also ensuring they are not hungry when they are not able to access a school meal.
- 3.3 There are strict criteria from the DfE that 85% of places have to go to those children and young people in receipt of free school meals, and that the prime objective is to ensure that they receive a meal each day during school holidays.

3.4 The funding from public health stipulates that there should be a focus on providing places for those in the top 10 most deprived wards.

3.5 The aims of the Programme are to:

- receive 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
- feeling safe and secure
- getting access to the right support services
- returning to school feeling engaged and ready to learn

3.6 HAF is delivered through the main school holidays and offers six weeks of provision with the equivalent of at least four hours a day, four days a week:

- Easter – one week, face to face, minimum of four days
- Summer - at least four weeks, face to face, minimum of 16 days
- Christmas – one week, face to face, minimum of four days

### Who is eligible?

3.7 Although criteria from DfE stipulates that the offer is available for all children in receipt of benefits related free school meals. This does not mean all are expected to attend, as the provision is voluntary; the Council therefore has up to 15% of the funding available to offer other vulnerable children a place.

3.8 The target groups for the programme to reach in Stockton-on-Tees are:

- Children who are in Reception to Year 11 in school, and reside in Stockton-on-Tees
- Children eligible for benefit-related free school meals
- Children who live in our top 10 deprived wards
- Children whose parents/carers are working and in receipt of universal credit or in financial difficulty
- Children who are open to Children Services and vulnerable

## 4.0 Evidence

### HAF delivery and organisation

4.1 In Stockton-on-Tees there is a well-established HAF Steering Group with representation from the Council's Children's Services, Finance, Public Health, Community Engagement, Communications and Marketing, Information Governance.

4.2 The team is structured as follows:

#### **Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council:**

Team Manager – School Support

HAF Programme Co-ordinator

HAF Support Worker  
Admin Support

**Catalyst (up to February 2025):**

Community Projects Manager  
HAF Projects Co-ordinator

4.3 Catalyst had a three-year contract with the Council (which ended on 28 February 2025) to manage providers of the programme. The work with providers is now managed by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.

4.4 The HAF Team also work with schools and early years providers.

**Expenditure**

Stockton-on-Tees were granted £916,790 to deliver HAF in 2023-2024. The table below details the breakdown of the actual spend of the funding.

Administrative Expenditure	£88,374
Capital Expenditure	Nil
Programme Expenditure	£788,904
Other Expenditure	£32,408
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b> <b>(For 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024)</b>	<b>£909,686</b>

**Grant funding for 2024/25 = £902,890**

**Grant funding for 2025/26 = £883,540**

## Spaces available

Holiday Period	Spaces	No of CYP
Easter 2024	6000	1580
May 2024	700	360
Summer 2024	11000	1700
October 2024	1000	420
Christmas 2024	2500*	680

\* At Christmas pantomime tickets are offered as one day of provision

## How do we promote the programme?

- 4.5 Communications material in 2023 to 2024 included a school communications toolkit, news releases, social media posts, adverts in a local “positive news” newspaper, targeted emails to parents who have previously booked HAF, direct emails to staff working with children and families, printed leaflets, posters and pull up banners displayed in community venues, and adverts on digital screens in Stockton high street and Tees Active leisure venues.
- 4.6 The programme has also been promoted on the Council’s website, in the Keeping You in Touch weekly staff newsletter, and through regular stakeholder communications to town and parish councils. The HAF programme is also highlighted on the Councils cost-of-living advice webpage.
- 4.7 In 2023 the Council commissioned a HAF promotional video, and this has been used extensively to promote the programme since Summer 2023. The video features a range of activities and can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/842802441>
- 4.8 Providers, including Roseberry Community Consortium and the Globe make their own videos and use these to promote their activities.
- 4.9 The programme is promoted through:
- Schools and Early Years (wraparound) settings
  - Attendance at events
  - Family HUBS
  - Providers
  - Social Media
  - Leaflets and posters



## Promoting HAF through the Corporate Facebook Account

4.10 The Council’s Corporate Facebook account has 35,000 followers which have been built up over the last 10 years. A review of data/insights of previous HAF posts demonstrates the posts are getting up to 20,000 reach (this is how many unique users saw the post). Although all these followers won’t be the target audience for HAF, many of them will have family and friends who are interested. Followers regularly tag other people in the comments section of the posts. This means the content is getting shared far and wide, further than the Council’s 35,000 followers.

4.11 Data accessed shows the follower v non follower interaction and up to 60 per cent of interaction on HAF posts is by people who do not follow the SBC Facebook Account. This is because the Council has so many followers who don’t just scroll though, they are actively engaging with the channel and sharing posts with family and friends who aren’t followers.

4.12 A dedicated HAF Facebook account was not recommended because:

- It takes many years to build up a Facebook following
- Regular year around content is needed to keep followers engaged and Facebook’s algorithms favour pages that post regularly
- A dedicated account would only be followed by people who are already interested and engaged with HAF. It wouldn’t effectively reach wider audiences
- If a dedicated account were to be established, it would need to be resourced effectively to ensure comments were responded to in a timely manner and this would be a significant time commitment from the HAF team particularly when bookings were live and the team would be needed operationally

## Who is participating and how can we maximise attendance by these groups?

	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
	<i>EASTER 2023</i>		<i>SUMMER 2023</i>		<i>CHRISTMAS 2023</i>	
FSM-eligible / Non-SEND	771	136	1248	276	523	133
FSM-eligible / SEND	148	32	239	43	129	20
Non-FSM-eligible / Non-SEND	69	29	191	91	99	14
Non-FSM-eligible / SEND	20	0	54	22	25	12
<b>TOTAL HAF funded attendees</b>	<b>1008</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>1732</b>	<b>432</b>	<b>776</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>TOTAL HAF funded as a %</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>TOTAL SEND attendees as a %</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>18%</b>

- 4.13 Secondary aged young people take up was low both nationally and locally - using this information partners had been asked to identify provision that could provide activities for the older age range only (e.g. Billingham Boxing & Tees Active).
- 4.14 Children and young people with SEND is another area with low take up and working with local providers Daisy Chain and Five Lamps, SEND only sessions were introduced. This had more than doubled the offer for SEND children. Training sessions and online awareness for SEND had been offered to all providers and the Stockton Parent Carer Forum had helped to educate on inclusivity. An additional one to one support fund had also been made available for all providers to support children with complex needs

### Target Groups

- 4.15 The programme is free to all eligible children, and the Council continue to identify children who would benefit from the funded places. This will be further supported by the roll out of auto-enrolment of free school meal programme. There are an additional 441 eligible children to date following implementation of auto enrolment.
- 4.16 As further funding is confirmed by the Department of Education the eligibility criteria may be changed, and the Council would need to adapt the programme accordingly.
- 4.17 Consideration could made for paid places to make the programme sustainable and enable parents to move towards being work ready.

### Barriers

- 4.18 Identified barriers to participation included:
- **Awareness of programme:** professionals and residents still don't know about it, people unaware of eligibility
  - **Providers marketing:** not tailoring it to align with their own branding and targeting it at their families

- **Booking system** – the booking system does require some basic IT skills and whilst it is simple to use, feedback tells us it is time consuming and not user friendly
- **Household vulnerabilities** – households can be chaotic, and parents forget they have booked or do not bring the child
- **Pride/sense of shame accessing the programme** - some families don't want others to know they receive FSM/benefits/are struggling
- **Physical/logistical barriers** – transport, location of activity, choice of activities for whole family
- **Practicalities** - e.g. duration of activities. 2- 4 hours might not fit with parent's work/life balance and collecting midway through day could be difficult
- **School attendance and emotional wellbeing** – post covid some children have social emotional mental health concerns and not attending school refusers which also prevent them attending HAF

## Early Years and Education Settings

4.19 The Council's HAF Team sits within the School Support Team, which means that the two teams work together to promote HAF within schools. The team continue to remove barriers for schools being primary delivery partners in HAF, although the practical and logistical challenges of opening during holidays are recognised. The team are working to build relationships with key staff members, and this remains a high priority. In the main summer holiday period schools often have maintenance or building work undertaken, plus staff are employed term time only. One suggestion made by a school was employ a key holder through the programme to take responsibility for the premises, with some staff choosing to take extra hours to support the programme on their premises.

## Booking System

4.20 There is currently a digital in-house solution, with a call back service. The HAF team also attend events to book children onto the activities. Bookings open approx. four weeks before the holiday period and all bookings are verified using the eligibility criteria.

4.21 It is recognised that the booking system is not fit for purpose, and the Council have started the market engagement process. The Council continuously review and revise the customer journey, and a recent example was the wording around SEND and eligibility, including a dedicated space for SEND activities. Through feedback we know:

- Parents/carers cannot book multiple activities at once. This is time consuming, and frustrating for those with multiple children booking multiple activities.
- The layout of the booking system is not user friendly, and parents cannot see a list of providers easily, functionality is limited.
- Parents/carers cannot make 'accounts' and receive multiple emails rather than within one place. This is a problem for parents/carers who have booked multiple provisions for different children.
- Parents/carers and support workers would benefit from making family group booking for providers who are closed provisions – e.g. Harbour

4.22 Some feedback from parents has been actioned and search features have been added such as filter by age, nature of activity, provider name, location and date. This is working well and helps the families find the right activity for their child.

## Providers

- 4.23 The Council previously worked with Catalyst to identify potential providers and contracted with over 40 local providers who offer a variety of activities, some providers were able to offer multiple provisions, meaning there was often over 50 different activities to offer.
- 4.24 Applications are made through an online process and a panel agree or decline the application based on the criteria. All providers have quality assurance visits throughout the holiday periods.
- 4.25 These providers include schools, family hubs, charities, childcare providers, and private companies.
- 4.26 The HAF providers worked hard providing engaging, enriching activities in safe, welcoming environments where children had fun and could make new friends.
- 4.27 Community groups who run well attended activities are actively identified within deprived areas/groups. Upon receipt of applications from providers, a panel is held where the location and type of activity is considered.
- 4.28 Provision is assessed based upon previous quality assurance visits and utilisation of places. Provider forums are held after each holiday where the opportunity is given to those involved to identify not only gaps in their offer, but the programme itself. Monitoring arrangements also seek feedback from families and young people to understand what they would like to see offered.
- 4.29 There was a wide range of activities on offer for children and young people in Stockon-on-Tees, including:
- Horse riding
  - Martial arts and boxing
  - Swimming
  - Arts and crafts
  - Dance
  - Football
  - Ice skating
  - Go Climb
  - Bushcraft
  - Paddleboarding
  - Film making and podcasts
  - Music
  - Cinema club
  - Sports



Horse Riding at Stainsby Stud

Archery at School Our Sport In



Arts and Crafts at Hardwick In Partnership

Cooking at Outdoor Ambition

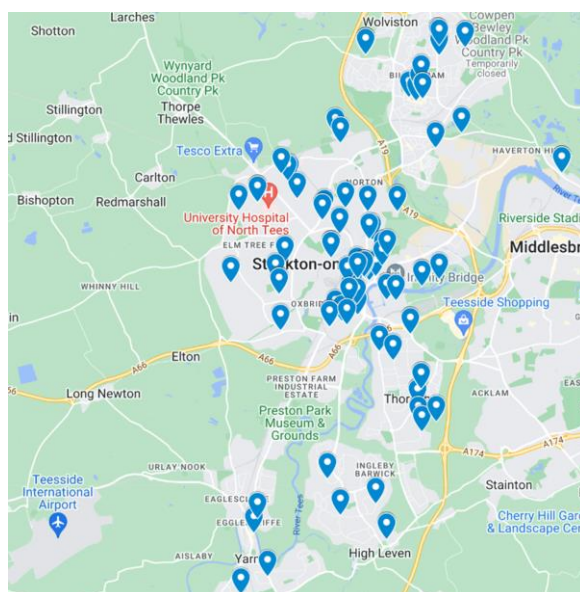


4.30 Warburtons have donated thousands of bread products and The Globe offer young people in year 9 and up a unique and hands-on experience in the world of theatre.

4.31 Providers in 2023/34 are set out below:

ARC Stockton	Outdoor Ambition
BCT Aspire	ReGenerate - Hope for Autism CIC
Billingham Boxing Academy	Roseberry Community Consortium
Budo For Change	Purple Door Studio
Cornerhouse	School's Out Sport's In
Daisy Chain	School's Out Sport's In Shine
Eastern Ravens Trust	Simon Carson Sports School
Family Action	Sporting Chance
Family Hubs	Stainsby Gymnastics
Five Lamps	Stainsby Stud Riding School
Football Fun Factory	Tees Active
Groundwork NE and Cumbria	Rosedene Nurseries
Harbour Support Services	Mill Lane Primary
Hardwick In Partnership	Tilery Primary School
Iron Guidance	High Clarence Primary School
Lisa McGee Education Ltd	Bowesfield Primary School
Live It and Get Active	Layfield Primary School

4.32 The following map illustrates the spread of provision across the Borough:



## Activities and Food

- 4.33 All providers involved in the HAF programme were asked to offer enriching activities, a minimum of 60 minutes physical activity per session and a hot (where possible) nutritious meal that met the school food standards. In addition, providers were asked to deliver education around healthy lifestyle and food choices. Providers met these requirements, and some went over and above, delivering cookery sessions or food workshops or sending home simple recipe cards or meal ideas for children and young people to follow with parents. During the summer HAF provision, children also received a PotGang home growing kit to take home and grow their own vegetables.
- 4.34 Stockton-on-Tees were fortunate to be supported generously by Warburtons during 2023-2024 which allowed providers to offer an extra meal or snack and carry out a food education activity with children such as making pizzas and sandwiches. Providers also accessed donations and support from other organisations including major supermarket chains and local food providers.
- 4.35 All providers who helped deliver HAF during 2023-2024 ensured signposting and referrals were made for families and their children and young people where applicable. Providers displayed information, had leaflets or flyers for distribution and some made folders of information about local services.
- 4.36 To ensure all providers met the requirements of the programme they were visited by both Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and Catalyst during each holiday period, with quality assurance checks carried out to ensure all guidelines were being adhered to. If there were areas for improvement these were noted and fed back to providers.

## Wider Benefits - Links with the Council Plan

4.37 Partnership working between providers has proved successful to promote lifelong learning with subjects such as money management, cooking, costume design, first aid, managing mental health and many more. Great examples of this are:

- [Groundwork Moneywise partnership](#)
- [Family Action link with Barclays Life Skills programme](#)
- [Simon Carson Sports Schools Game of Actual Life \(GOAL\) programme](#)
- [HIP slow cooking courses](#)
- [Emily Wratten Dance costume and set design](#)

4.38 There are plans to develop a work experience programme within the Careers Team, to create opportunities for young people aged 13 plus to participate in paid employment (within the law).

## Wider Benefits - Creating Opportunities for our Future Workforce.

4.39 Schools Out Sports In (SOSI) run a Young Leaders programme with past attendees who have aged out of the activity offer who have expressed an interest in being involved with a level of responsibility.

"We have really enjoyed being sports leaders again this summer, I like helping all the coaches set up new activities and joining in with all the other children in all the games. I enjoy helping the young children play games on a breaktimes and over lunch"

"Beatrice has come home full of confidence every day. Thank you for supporting her this summer, the change in her has been incredible."

## Wider Benefits - Support Outside of Holidays

4.40 Eastern Ravens Trust through their work during HAF recognised a significant need to extend their work with families in Roseworth outside of the holidays. Catalyst linked them in with Roseworth Big Local who were able to fund a Family Link Worker position.

4.41 Iron Guidance have continuously provided hampers to support families beyond the holidays with items such as winter warmers, food and household items. By working alongside Billingham Town Council they have identified families most in need and have been able to continue a strong relationship with them.

4.42 Billingham Boxing Academy and Budo for Change are organisations who have recognised talented individuals both inside and outside their facility that wouldn't be able to normally afford sport and have offered reduced and free memberships to them.

4.43 Our providers understand the importance of linking and referring families into other agencies for support outside of HAF where necessary. The Providers Forums are utilised to provide regular

updates and information regarding services available in the area and providers are encouraged to share with parents where appropriate.

- 4.44 It is important that the Council continues to respond to the needs of the families as circumstances change.

## Feedback

- 4.45 As part of the review, feedback was sought from children and families as well as providers. The Stockton Parent Carer Forum was also asked for their views. Details are set out below. In addition, comments from children and families collated are set out at Appendix 1.

## Provider Survey

- 4.46 A Provider Survey was sent to 43 providers past and present. The Consultation ran November 2024 to 31 January 2025

- 4.47 31 responses received, of which:

- 0 had delivered Holiday Enrichment Programme (HEP) (Public Health funded) only
- 14 had delivered Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) (DfE funded) only
- 17 had delivered HAF and HEP

- 4.48 Of the 14 providers who had delivered HAF only, five had delivered 8 or more holiday provisions (from 2021). Of the 17 providers who had delivered HAF and HEP, eleven had delivered 8 or more holiday provisions (from 2021). 8 providers have delivered 4 or less HAF and HEP holiday provisions

- 4.50 The survey questions were:

- Who did you liaise with regarding the Holidays Are Fun Programme?
- Rate your satisfaction for communication and relationship?
- What organisation type are you?
- Have you worked with other LA's?
- What worked well in other LA's?
- What works well in Stockton-on-Tees?
- Could we improve the service in Stockton-on-Tees – 18 options including other?
- Do you plan to apply for future funding?
- Provide additional feedback
- Can we contact you – if so, how?

- 4.51 Of the 31 providers, 27 had worked with Catalyst and further analysis shows:

Relationship with Catalyst

22 – Very satisfied

2 – Fairly satisfied

1 – Neither satisfied or dissatisfied

1 – Fairly dissatisfied

1 – Very dissatisfied

Communication with Catalyst

22 – Very satisfied

2 – Fairly satisfied

2 – Fairly dissatisfied

1 – Very dissatisfied

4.52 Of the 31 providers, 4 had worked with Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and further analysis shows:

Relationship with Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

4 – Very satisfied

Communication with Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

4 – Very satisfied



4.53 11 providers had worked across the Tees Valley with 6 working across all 5 Local Authorities. Feedback about what is working well in other Local Authorities included:

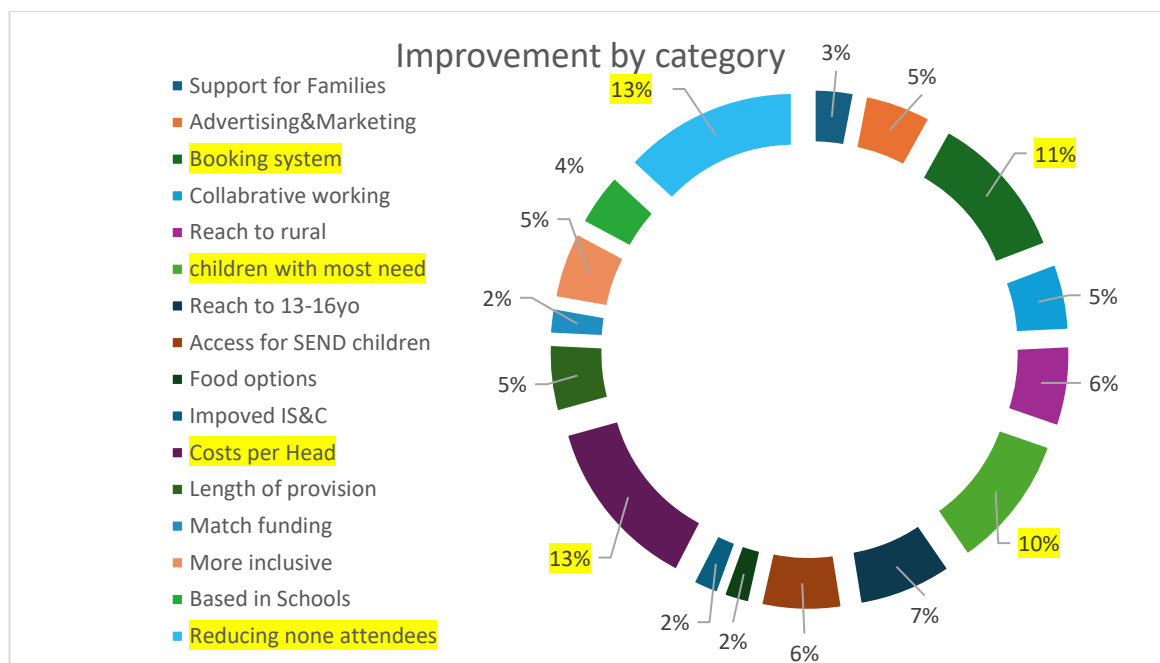
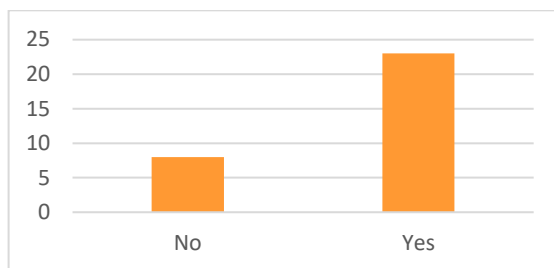
- [Communication](#)
- [Booking system](#)
- [Grant allocations](#)

4.54 The following was working well:

- [Making a difference to children and young people who need the provision](#)
- [Working in partnership with other providers](#)
- [Networking meetings to share ideas](#)
- [We have a great variety of providers – which we can build on](#)
- [Knowing I can pick the phone up and speak to a member of the HAF Team](#)
- [High quality providers](#)

- Fantastic opportunities for families
- Warburtons donations
- Being able to move the provision to where the demand is
- Enriching activities that would not ordinarily be available to all children

4.55 Could we improve the programme?



4.56 Other feedback included:

- Funding for children who are not eligible
- Opportunity to promote best practice
- One grant application form for all holiday periods
- Improved communication around SEND children
- How can we increase attendance

4.57 Of the 31 provider responses, 26 said they will apply for future funding for either HAF or Both programmes. We need to improve our provider reach taking into consideration the feedback.

## Feedback from Stockton Parent Carer Forum

4.58 The Parent Carer Forum commented that access to SEN specific activities appeared to be targeted at the same parents / children who attend, which is an issue for parents whose children cannot access the closed booking system. They also suggested approaching specialist schools to run a HAF programme or work in partnership with an outside provider. Other suggestions included:

- Swimming pool SEND sessions only
- Gymnastics – SEND sessions only
- SEND only sessions available for booking
- Velocity – Billingham
- Soft play – anywhere specific SEND sessions
- Two-hour sessions support more children attending and be more accessible to more children
- The ability to book paid places would be appreciated
- Booking system needs to be more accessible to look for activities by area

4.59 As a result of feedback, discussions took place in March 2025 with Tees Active. Following these discussions, Tees Active will offer:

- Quiet Swim session
- Quiet bio bounce
- Quiet climb
- Calm paddle board

4.60 The Council is also in discussion with Stainsby Gymnastics regarding summer provision.

## Feedback from Northshore Careers Fair

4.61 The opportunity is taken to seek feedback from children and young people at other events. For example, at the Northshore Careers Fair in February 2025, the following activities were suggested for future HAF programmes:

- Arts and crafts
- Netball
- Law session
- ICT
- Basketball
- Rugby
- Football
- Table Tennis
- Badminton
- Charity football tournament
- Pool
- Darts
- Rowing
- Baking
- Cookery
- Concert
- Go carting
- Jump 360
- Ninja Warrior
- Indoor skiing Indoor ski diving

- Hair and makeup
- Paddleboarding

### Feedback from February 2025 Half Term Provision.

4.62 In February half term, the team engaged with 143 children and young people: age range 6-16 years. Headline feedback revealed for following:

How do you like to spend your time in the school holidays?

- 32% Sports
- 28% Socialising
- 14% Relaxing

Are there any activities you can't usually access that you would like to do in the school holidays?

- 27% Gym
- 17% Football/Sports
- 10% Makeup/Hair styling

How do you get to the HAF programme?

- 38% Walk
- 30% Get dropped off
- 13% Public transport

Are there any holiday activities you would like to attend that you think would help with employment in the future?

- 31% Volunteering
- 23% Sports Leader
- 10% Customer Service/Hospitality

## 5.0 Key Findings and Recommendations

- 5.1. The HAF programme provides much needed support to children and families in need over holiday periods and feedback illustrates that the programme is highly valued. Work continues to ensure that the programme is meeting the needs of children in most need and it is encouraging that auto-enrolment of free school meals is helping to identify eligible children. Providers have a good working relationship with the Council and children benefit from taking part in a wide variety of activities, many of which they would otherwise be unable to due to cost. In addition, the programme offers the opportunities for lifelong learning and has been a vehicle for providing support outside of holiday periods.
- 5.2. The Select Committee acknowledges the contribution from Public Health which enables the programme to also operate during half term periods. The Select Committee are also mindful that ongoing Government funding is uncertain and consideration needs to be given making the programme sustainable in the longer term, for example, through the introduction of some paid for places.

## Key Findings

- There are strict criteria from the DfE that 85% of places have to go to those children and young people in receipt of free school meals, and that the prime objective is to ensure that they receive a meal each day during school holidays.
- Criteria from DfE stipulates that the offer is available for all children in receipt of benefits related free school meals. This does not mean all are expected to attend, as the provision is voluntary; the Council therefore has up to 15% of the funding available to offer other vulnerable children a place.
- Funding from public health stipulates that there should be a focus on providing places for those in the top 10 most deprived wards.
- Catalyst had a three-year contract with the Council (which ended on 28 February 2025) to manage providers of the programme. This element of the work has now been brought in house, and it is anticipated that this will generate savings which can be utilised to support additional provision.
- Over 40 local providers have been contracted to provide a variety of activities; some providers have been able to offer multiple provisions meaning there are often over 50 different activities on offer.
- Marketing and engagement activities are carried out by the Council's Communications Team. Providers, including Roseberry Community Consortium and the Globe also make their own videos and use these to promote their activities.
- The inhouse booking system is not fit for purpose. Through feedback we know:
  - Parents/carers cannot book multiple activities at once. This is time consuming, and frustrating for those with multiple children booking multiple activities.
  - The layout of the booking system is not user friendly, and parents cannot see a list of providers easily, functionality is limited.
  - Parents/carers cannot make 'accounts' and receive multiple emails rather than within one place. This is a problem for parents/carers who have booked multiple provisions for different children.
  - Parents/carers and support workers would benefit from making family group booking for providers who are closed provisions – e.g. Harbour
- Take up amongst secondary age children and SEND is low nationally and locally. To work towards addressing this in the Borough, the Council has sought to identify provision for the older age range and introduced SEND only sessions.
- The roll out of auto-enrolment of free school meal programme will help to identify eligible children. There are an additional 340 eligible children to date following implementation of auto enrolment.
- Barriers to participation include:
  - Awareness of programme: professionals and residents still don't know about it, people unaware of eligibility
  - Providers marketing: not tailoring it to align with their own branding and targeting it at their families.
  - Booking system – the booking system does require some basic IT skills and whilst it is simple to use, feedback tells us it is time consuming and not user friendly
  - Household vulnerabilities – households can be chaotic, and parents forget they have booked or do not bring the child
  - Pride/sense of shame accessing the program - some families don't want others to know they receive FSM/benefits/are struggling
  - Physical/logistical barriers – transport, location of activity, choice of activities for whole family
  - Practicalities - e.g. duration of activities. 2- 4 hours might not fit with parent's work/life balance and collecting midway through day could be difficult
  - School attendance and emotional wellbeing – post covid some children have social emotional mental health concerns and not attending school refusers which also prevent them attending HAF
- The team continue to remove barriers for schools being primary delivery partners in HAF, although the practical and logistical challenges of opening during holidays are recognised. One suggestion made by a school was through the programme employ a key holder to take responsibility for the

premises, and some staff may choose to take extra hours to support the programme on their premises.

- Partnership working between providers has proved successful to promote lifelong learning
- Some providers have identified ways of extending support outside for the school holidays. For example, Eastern Ravens Trust linked with Roseworth Big Local were able to fund a Family Link Worker position, Iron Guidance continue to provide hampers outside of the holiday period and Billingham Boxing Academy and Budo for Change offer free memberships to talented individuals who would not otherwise be able to take part.
- Providers suggested the following key improvements:
  - Improvements to the Booking System
  - Ensuring that the programme is meeting the children in most need
  - Reviewing costs per head for example with a tiered system better reflecting levels of need
  - Reducing the number of non-attendees
- Other provider feedback included:
  - Funding for children who are not eligible
  - Identify opportunities to promote best practice
  - Introduce one grant application form for all holiday periods
  - Improve communication around SEND children
  - Increase attendance
- Stockton Parent Carer Forum have made suggestions for improving the SEND offer, including the use of specialist schools, shorter sessions and SEND only provision

## Recommendations

1. That the Council continues to develop and promote the HAF programme to the residents of the Borough to ensure that the programme is meeting the needs of children in most need.
2. That the offer for SEND and secondary school children is further developed and promotional materials refreshed to target these children.
3. That the Council works with providers to increase up take in all wards and decrease non-attendance.
4. That consideration be given to how paid for places could be introduced to help make the programme sustainable.
5. That the Council works with schools to remove the barriers to them being primary delivery partners (for example, through the employment of a key holder to take responsibility for the premises, and staff choosing to take extra hours to support the programme on their premises).
6. That the in-house booking system is replaced with a bespoke fit for purpose booking system with functionality to capture appropriate demographic information, including which school the child attends and that this information is used to identify gaps in provision, analyse take up and inform future targeting of promotional activities.
7. That one grant application form be introduced for providers for all holiday periods.
8. That opportunities to link the programme to the curriculum and promote lifelong learning for all the family are enhanced.
9. That a summer school programme is developed with the Careers Team, to create opportunities for young people aged 13 plus to participate in paid employment (within the law).
10. That opportunities are created for post 16 young people to take an active leadership role in the programme, linking in with local colleges who are delivering T levels thereby making the programme more sustainable.
11. That the Council works with providers to extend whole family support outside of the school holidays.

12. That the Council considers how best to collect information around SEND children attending activities to ensure that providers are properly prepared, and children's needs are met when attending sessions.
13. That a mapping exercise is undertaken to ensure that provision is represented across all wards across the whole borough, especially those rural areas.
14. That the potential to explore utilising in house community transport during the school holidays be explored.
15. That the possibility of creating a 'free holiday meals' element of the programme in line with the DfE guidance, utilising our own facilities that are in place during term time be explored along with the opportunity of creating our own 'student' kitchen to provide the meals.

# Appendix 1

## What children have said:

"I love coming here because it's like a family and I even have a NEW best friend here!" – age 8

"I love it that there's other teenagers here and we can do classes that are for our age group. I have learned lots and I'm definitely fitter and stronger now, I think it's been really good because normally I would be bored or sitting at home and this summer I have kept really fit and made new mates at camp" – age 14

"I love it that we get to help make the food because I learned how to make lots of new healthy meals and snacks! The training and all of the activities are really fun!" – age 12

"I didn't think I could get a job that I liked when I'm older really. But I think if I do something like designing phones I might actually like working. Don't want to just do something boring. But it's good to know that like, I can be able to do something bigger!"

'I have LOVED every day of this week! I loved our movie, and I do hope that this continues. Thanks everyone! 'This HAF project is amazing! Usually experiences like this are rare and unaffordable so please continue to fund HAF!'

## What parents have said:

"It's lovely to see activities that older children and teenagers can enjoy. There's not usually much for them. They always come out looking happy and sweating! "

"I haven't seen my daughter this happy in a long time. It's been so good for her mental health"

"Just to say thanks to you and others involved in organising the summer holiday programme - my son attended various different activities and thoroughly enjoyed the experience"

"I have noticed a visible improvement in my teenager's mental health, keeping active and being around other kids, their own age is so important. They had so much fun and would love to come back!"

"Holidays can be a struggle financially and mentally. It's hard to keep them entertained because everything costs money, especially when you have more than one child. It was so nice to know the kids were having fun with their friends, keeping fit and learning new skills, having a good meal and just enjoying their holidays. It was a huge weight off my shoulder. The provider made the whole family feel very welcome."

## Glossary of Terms

<b>DfE</b>	<b>Department for Education</b>
<b>HAF</b>	<b>Holiday, Activities and Food Holidays are Fun</b>
<b>HEP</b>	<b>Holiday Enrichment Programme</b>
<b>SBC</b>	<b>Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council</b>
<b>SEND</b>	<b>Special Educational Needs and Disability</b>

