

Finance Urgent Key Decision



Decision of: Section 151 Officer

With advice from:

Directorate: Children and Education

Decision no: 041

Subject: Acceptance of up to £1,824,800 Grant Funding from DfE to deliver free places and food at holiday clubs to school aged children on benefits related free school meals in the Easter, summer and Christmas school holidays. This is an extension to the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme for 2025/6 (Year 4)

Key decision: Yes

Reason Acceptance of funds over £500,000

Background

The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme is a government-funded initiative overseen by the Department for Education (DfE) to support children and young people eligible for benefits-related free school meals (FSM). Since its national rollout in 2021, HAF funding has provided enriching holiday activities, healthy meals, and nutritional education during the three main school holidays (Easter, Summer, Christmas). The programme aims to improve the well-being, social engagement, and health outcomes of children from low-income families while reducing food insecurity and holiday learning loss.

Bristol City Council has been delivering the HAF programme under the branding of 'Your Holiday Hub (YHH),' building upon the existing Healthy Holidays model. YHH has successfully brought together schools, community organisations, voluntary sector groups, and other partners to ensure high-quality holiday provision for children and young people across the city. The programme aligns with the wider strategic priorities of Bristol, including the One City Food Equality and Belonging strategies, to create long-term, sustainable support for children and families facing economic hardship.

HAF delivery in Bristol has grown significantly each year. In 2024, over 37,000 spaces were attended by eligible children. The programme is delivered in partnership with key organisations, including Bristol Play and Youth Alliance, Bristol Association for Neighbourhood Daycare (BAND), and Feeding Bristol, each receiving annual funding to support planning, communication, evaluation, and monitoring efforts. The provision extends beyond traditional activity sessions to include training opportunities for community chefs, increased local food sourcing, and improvements in safeguarding practices.

The success of the programme has been underpinned by a collaborative approach that strengthens the local voluntary and community sector. HAF-funded groups are provided with free training, capital investment opportunities, centralised support, and networking events, ensuring sustainability beyond the duration of the funding. Additionally, the recent introduction of an online booking portal has streamlined the process for families, schools, and BCC services, improving accessibility, engagement, eligibility checking and data reporting to the DfE.

With funding now confirmed for 2025/26, Bristol City Council is seeking approval to accept and allocate the grant funding of approximately £1.8 million per annum in line with DfE guidance. This will enable

continued support for vulnerable children during the school holidays and ensure the effective delivery of the programme across the city.

Decision

Agreement to accept and spend up to £1,824,800 on Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme's funding allocation for 2025/26.

Financial implications

Grant award of £1,824,800 for 2025/26 to embed and expand the existing programme and enhance Bristol's holiday programme offer for children, young people and families. The aim is to create long term legacy and sustainability of the sector whilst delivering positive outcomes for families.

Legal powers and implications

None anticipated.

Climate change and environmental implications

By prioritising grants to local providers, the HAF programme reduces travel distances for attendees, encouraging sustainable and accessible activity venues within walking distance. Many providers operate 'walking buses' or encourage cycling to local activities, significantly lowering carbon emissions and minimising the need for families to travel to distant settings.

Transport arrangements also consider environmental impact, with trips conducted via coach to reduce the number of individual car journeys. Activities will be selected within a one-hour drive of Bristol to prevent excessive travel and minimise pollution, with additional guidance and support provided to align with sustainability goals.

The programme partners with organisations such as FareShare SW to reduce food waste and promotes environmentally conscious practices. Many providers incorporate green spaces into their activities, offering nature-based experiences. Simerly the programme delivers forest school training to providers to further embed nature based learning beyond these delivery periods.

Efforts to minimise waste include promoting recycling and upcycling activities and sourcing sustainable materials for arts and crafts, in collaboration with partners like the Children's Scrapstore. Additionally, venues and structures used in the programme are selected to withstand extreme weather conditions, such as portable gazebos for shade.

To further support providers, grant funding is available to help address additional requirements arising from extreme weather conditions. Emergency response plans for extreme weather scenarios are a mandatory part of programme requirements to ensure the safety and well-being of participants.

Consultation

The programme was developed through a city-wide partnership approach. The 2025 extension will continue to engage families, communities, and key partners in education,

health, and the voluntary and community sector to scale up provision and target support to the areas of the city with the highest levels need.

Risk management

Additional recruitment or extension of roles, funded through the programme, are done on a fixed-term or secondment basis.

All commissioning and purchase of programmes and materials, have and will continue to be fully compliant with Public Contract Regulations.

Equality implications

Yes, an EQiA was undertaken at the start of the programme. This has been reviewed for 2025/26.

Corporate implications

This programme aims to support the BCC Children and Education Plan 2025-30 and the SEND and Alternative Provision Development Plan.

Signatories

Decision maker **Hannah Woodhouse – Director of Children Services**



Signed:

Note: if an electronic signature is used, an email from the Director confirming a decision and allowing the use of an electronic signature must be attached

S151 Officer

Title: **Director of Finance/S151 Officer**

Signed:



Date: 21/02/2025

Consultees

Title:

Signed:

Date: