

## COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES AND FOOD (HAF) PROGRAMME

### COMMENTS FROM THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At its meeting on 22 April 2022, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee considered the report and unanimously agreed to support the recommendations to the Executive.

In response to questions raised by the Committee, the following points were confirmed:

- The HAF programme had to be delivered in line with strict guidance from the Department for Education which meant it had to be focused on children entitled to benefits related free school meals. The Council would not be able to prioritise a provider for a grant because they offered to provide sessions for all children due to the strict guidance and the eligibility criteria. However, it was recognised that for some providers who offer chargeable services, this might restrict their ability to become involved in the HAF programme and the Council was keen to ensure a wide range of providers were taking part. As a result, these providers were being approached to highlight how they could still deliver their sessions but offer a number of free places to children who would be eligible for the HAF programme.
- By holding the HAF sessions in schools, the overheads would be less than some of the private venues, which was an important consideration when there was a limit on the level of funding for each place in order to make the programme viable. In addition, schools were considered a good venue as a lot of families like to go to their local school as it was a familiar environment. When sessions for the Christmas and Easter programmes had been hosted at a school, trips had been arranged to take children for days out to different places to enrich their experiences.
- The grant funding given to the Council was based on the number of eligible children entitled to free school meals and would be available to those children who attended a school in Lincolnshire.
- The Council was required to collect monitoring information and provide this back to the Department for Education. In addition, the Council had its own monitoring process which was established through the pilot programme and was being refined and expanded as the number of providers increased. Spot checks were being undertaken of providers to check the quality of the food and activities being undertaken, check the safeguarding policies and procedures in place, and that food allergies and cultural needs were being catered for. The assessment of the Easter HAF programme would be shared with the Committee. An invitation was extended

to members of the Committee to join officers on monitoring visits to see what HAF provision was being provided in their local communities.

- Hard to reach communities could be targeted due to the range of provision offered all over the County which meant that some provision could be offered really close to where they live. The open select list approach enabled the Council to bring in new providers each time it ran the HAF programme so it would be able to look at where there was a need to increase provision in a particular area. Schools were being informed of any planned HAF provision in the area for passing onto eligible families to encourage attendance and highlight the benefits of their child attending. Children's social care staff were also being informed of the HAF programme so that they could promote it to any eligible families they worked with.
- Not many schools were delivering HAF provision themselves, but some were allowing providers to use their premises. Work was being undertaken to get more schools on board and ensure providers were covering more schools.
- There was no specific target set by the Department for Education in terms of the percentage of eligible children reached. The £2.6m grant funding would not be enough to reach all of the nearly 30,000 eligible children. It was expected that between 10,000 and 15,000 children of the eligible cohort would be reached. However, not all eligible children were expected to take up the offer. As the HAF programme was operated during the school holidays, some families did not put their children into HAF sessions during the shorter Christmas and Easter breaks as they wanted to spend the time with their children. It was anticipated that the summer programme would be more popular due to the longer break. The Council reported to the Department for Education on the number of children who were involved in the HAF programme.
- Some of the funding could be used to cover transport costs to enable access to the HAF provision if it was not within walking or travelling distance.
- Alongside district councils, the Voluntary and Community Sector was fundamental for expanding the programme and providers were being made aware of the opportunity to take part through the Voluntary Sector Forum. In addition, the application process was being simplified to encourage more applications and longer-term funding was being offered so that providers could employ staff to deliver the provision.
- Any unspent grant funding would have to be returned to the Department for Education. The underspend in 2021 was due to the very short notice received to deliver the pilot and put arrangements in place. In addition, there was only around 5,000 places available for the Christmas programme due to a lack of providers offering to deliver the provision. Lessons had been learnt from the pilot and a mixed model approach of planning for targeted provision and allowing providers to spontaneously come forward was being pursued.
- There was a need to ensure that the provision was spread across the County and focused in the areas where it was needed the most. For the Easter HAF programme,

some bids were not accepted as there was already provision being offered in that area, whereas bids were accepted in areas of priority which were not already covered. The Easter HAF programme had been a hybrid model with some provision being delivered by providers, while some was delivered by Council staff, such as the Music Service and youth teams.

Members of the Committee agreed that all councillors needed a briefing on HAF provision in their areas so that they could better support residents and promote the service, which was felt to be underutilised. It was agreed that a briefing would be circulated to all councillors setting out what HAF provision would be offered in their local communities.

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