



Holiday Activity and Food programme Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) **Updated Winter 2026**

Introduction:

This document provides information for organisations who would like to submit an expression of interest (EOI), to deliver the Holiday Activities and Food programme #HAF2026

Background:

The Council has been awarded grant funding, by the Department for Education (DfE), to coordinate free activities and food, **for children and young people in receipt of benefit related Free School Meals (FSM)**, during the Spring, Summer, and Winter school holidays in 2026.

We hope that by doing this that children and young people across Milton Keynes, will be supported to

- eat more healthily over the school holidays
- be more active during the school holidays
- take part in engaging and enriching activities
- be safe and not to be socially isolated
- have greater knowledge of health and nutrition; and
- be more engaged with school and other local services

The holiday activities and food (HAF) programme provide healthy meals, enriching activities, and free childcare places to children from low-income families who are in receipt of benefit related Free School Meals, benefiting their health, wellbeing and learning.

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:

- less likely to access organised out-of-school activities
- more likely to experience 'unhealthy holidays' in terms of nutrition and physical health
- more likely to experience social isolation

The HAF programme is a response to this issue. Evidence shows that free holiday clubs can have a positive impact on children and young people. They work best when they:

- provide consistent and easily accessible enrichment activities
- cover more than just breakfast or lunch
- involve children and parents in food preparation
- use local partnerships and connections, particularly with the VCSO sector

For further information on please visit: [Holiday activities and food programme 2025 - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/holiday-activities-and-food-programme-2025)

FAQs:

1. Activities

Question	Answer
How long should the sessions last?	For HAF funded session, the minimum session length is 4 hours. • Minimum Duration: Each funded session must be 4 hours long. • Maximum Funding: Funding is only available for 4 hours per day — no additional hours will be funded. • Delivery Format: Provision should be delivered face-to-face. • Delivery Period: Up to 4 days of provision can be funded.
What venues or spaces can be used to deliver provision?	• Flexible Use: There is no strict requirement on the type of venue used. • Suitability: The space must be appropriate for the activity, with: ○ Relevant risk assessments ○ Valid insurance coverage Examples of Suitable Spaces: ○ Schools ○ Places of worship ○ Libraries ○ Community centres ○ Leisure centres ○ Other public or community space • Location Consideration: Providers are encouraged to use the FSM heatmap to ensure activities are delivered in areas where FSM-eligible children and young people live.

Can events focus on a certain age group?	• Target Age Range: Activities must be for school-aged children (4–16 years old), in line with DfE funding requirements. • Age-Specific Projects: You can apply to run different projects for different age groups. This allows for more tailored and engaging activities — for example, what suits a 5-year-old will differ from what engages a 16-year-old.
Are the same children/young people expected to attend for the whole programme or can it be different children/young people attending every day?	• Flexible Attendance: Children do not need to attend every day. Different children can attend on different days, as not all families will require full-time provision. • Online Booking System: ○ Families will book sessions through an online platform. ○ Providers will receive support to use the system. ○ This allows families to choose specific days and sessions that suit their needs.
Can the 4 hours be flexible on start times?	• Flexible Delivery Times: You can deliver sessions at any time of day that suits your programme. • Audience-Centred Planning: Providers are strongly encouraged to consider what times will best suit their target audience — for example: ○ Mornings for younger children ○ Afternoons for teens
Are there any examples of what Enrichment activities are suitable?	The DfE guidance outlined that activities should support the development of resilience, character and wellbeing along with their wider educational attainment. Previous pilot projects from other Local Authority areas have shared some case studies here: HAF 2020 Case Studies
Do you need to have DBS staff and policies in place to deliver sessions?	Yes, if you're delivering sessions for children eligible for Benefit-Related Free School Meals (FSM) in Milton Keynes—especially under the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme—you must have the following in place:

- Staff Requirements
 - Enhanced DBS checks are required for all staff and volunteers working directly with children
 - Safeguarding training is expected to ensure staff can identify and respond to child protection concerns.
 - First Aid training is also recommended, especially if you're running physical or outdoor activities.
- Policy Requirements
 - A Safeguarding Policy that outlines how you protect children from harm.
 - A Health & Safety Policy, including risk assessments for all activities and venues.
 - Public Liability Insurance to cover any incidents during your sessions.
- These requirements are in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children attending the sessions. Providers are also expected to use appropriate venues (e.g. schools, community centres, parks) and ensure they are safe and accessible
- We encourage all providers to apply for the Safe Practice Mark — a local accreditation awarded annually to organisations delivering services in Milton Keynes. This mark ensures that providers meet essential safeguarding and operational standards, giving families and partners confidence in your provision.

Organisations must demonstrate that they have:

- Enhanced DBS checks for all staff and volunteers
- Safeguarding training completed
- A Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)
- Safeguarding, Allegations, Social Media, and Data Protection policies
- Support Provided

Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC) Safeguarding Services offer:

- Guidance on setting up and running provision
- Policy reviews and feedback

	○ Ongoing support for community and voluntary sector organisations • Scoring Advantage: Higher points will be awarded to providers who have been awarded the Safe Practice Mark. Milton Keynes Youth Provision Safe Practice Mark Milton Keynes City Council
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2. Funding

Question	Answer
How much funding can my organisation apply for?	• Costs Will Vary: Each organisation may have different cost structures based on their delivery model, staffing, venue, and resources. • Justification Required: You must provide a clear rationale and supporting evidence for the costs you include in your application. This helps ensure transparency and fairness. • Value for Money Assessment: Milton Keynes City Council will apply a value for money assessment to ensure funding is used efficiently and benefits as many children as possible. • Scoring Advantage: Higher points will be awarded to lower-cost provision, provided it still meets quality and safety standards.
What number of places can I offer?	• Provider-Led: You can propose the number of places you wish to offer based on your capacity and delivery model. • Data-Informed Oversight: Milton Keynes City Council will use local data to ensure the number of places aligns with demand in the delivery area — helping to maximise access for children. • Adjustment Process: If data suggests the proposed number of places is too high for the area, the Council may negotiate a revised number to ensure the provision is realistic and successful.
My costs are based on a price per child per day. What is the expected cost of this?	• No fixed rate is set — costs will vary depending on: ○ The type of session (e.g. sports, arts, educational) ○ The type of meal ○ Staffing, venue, and resource needs • Value for Money: Providers are expected to apply a value for money approach when planning both activities and meals. • Guidance:

	While there's no strict cap, lower-cost provision that meets quality standards may score higher during evaluation. • Scoring Advantage: Higher points will be awarded to lower-cost provision, provided it still meets quality and safety standards.
Do we still get financial support if a child does not turn up?	• Yes, funding is still provided if a child books a place but does not attend. ○ This ensures providers are not financially penalised for occasional absences and can still prepare appropriately. • Follow-Up Expectations ○ If a child does not attend, providers are expected to: ○ Contact the family to check on the child's wellbeing. ○ Identify if the family needs additional support. • Engagement Encouraged ○ Providers are encouraged to: ○ Work closely with schools and local groups to promote attendance. ○ Design engaging sessions that children and young people are excited to attend. • Bookings are required in advance to help providers plan effectively.
How does non-attendance affect future funding requests?	• Attendance data is reviewed from previous programmes to inform future funding decisions. ○ This helps ensure that funding is allocated where it will have the greatest impact for Milton Keynes residents. • Low attendance rates may result in: ○ Lower scores in the application scoring matrix. ○ Reduced funding or adjusted place allocations in future rounds. • To maintain strong funding eligibility, providers are encouraged to: ○ Promote their sessions effectively. ○ Engage with families and schools. ○ Follow up on non-attendance to understand and address barriers.

What organisations can apply for the funding?	• Funding is open to organisations from the: ○ Voluntary sector (e.g. charities, community groups) ○ Public sector (e.g. schools, local authorities) ○ Private sector (e.g. businesses, childcare providers) ○ Faith Groups • Requirements: ○ Must be able to meet the objectives of the HAF programme. ○ Must have the appropriate policies and procedures in place, as outlined in the Expression of Interest (EOI) — including safeguarding, DBS staff and volunteers, insurance, health & safety, and data protection.
Do providers need to be Ofsted registered?	• Not all providers need to be Ofsted registered. ○ Some holiday clubs are exempt from registration. ○ Others must register, depending on the nature and duration of care provided. ○ Both registered and exempt providers can take part in the HAF programme. • Why registration matters: ○ Families using Ofsted-registered settings may be eligible for: ○ Tax-Free Childcare ○ Universal Credit childcare costs (up to 85% of costs reimbursed) • Scoring Advantage: ○ Providers that are Ofsted registered receive additional points in the application scoring matrix. • Guidance on exemptions: ○ You can find official guidance on Ofsted registration exemptions on the UK government website here.

3. Food

Question	Answer
What are the expectations around the food offer?	• Nutritional Standards ○ Meals must meet the school food standards to ensure children receive a healthy, balanced meal. ○ Food must be free at the point of access. • Hot Food Expectation ○ Providers are expected to serve hot meals wherever possible. ○ A variety of healthy options should be available for children to choose from. ○ Cold alternatives are acceptable only on days when hot food is not feasible. • Packed Lunches ○ Only permitted for off-site trips where hot food cannot be arranged. • Food Options ○ Cooking on site ○ Hot food delivery ○ Cook, share, and eat sessions ○ Or a combination of these • Food Safety & Labelling From 1 October 2021, changes to the Food Information Regulations 2014 require clear labelling for pre-packed food for direct sale (PPDS). Providers must ensure: ○ Compliance with food handling regulations ○ Adherence to Food Standards Agency (FSA) guidance Read the FSA guidance here
Can I still apply if I am unable to provide food alongside an activity?	• No — providing a healthy meal is a core requirement of the HAF programme. • Funding will not be awarded to any provision that does not include a meal offer. • The programme is designed to support both enrichment activities and nutritional needs. • What You Can Do Instead: Explore partnerships with: ○ Local food distributors ○ Community kitchens ○ Cafés or restaurants ○ Charities or food banks ○ Ask local businesses — many are open to supporting community initiatives and may

	be willing to donate meals, ingredients, or staff time.
Do we have to use a certain food supplier for the project?	No, you can use your own ways of providing food for the project, but it must meet school food standards. 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). We expect providers to read the guidance on the Food Standards Agency website and ensure that all food provision for the HAF programme meets these requirements.
Do I need to be registered as a Food Provider?	Yes, you must be registered as a food provider if you are handling food as part of your HAF provision. • Food Business Registration – Key Points ○ If you store, prepare, distribute, or serve food from any premises (including community centres, schools, or temporary venues), you are legally required to register as a food business with your local authority. ○ Registration is free and should be completed at least 28 days before you start operating. • Where to Register: ○ You can register your food business with Milton Keynes City Council or find more information on the UK Government website. ○ Further information is available on food business registration.
Will it need to be a hot meal, or would a lunchbox style meal be adequate?	• The primary expectation is to provide a healthy hot meal alongside the activity. • Cold meals (e.g. lunchbox-style) are only acceptable in exceptional circumstances, such as: ○ Off-site trips ○ Situations where hot food preparation or delivery is not feasible • What's Encouraged: Use your expertise and creativity to find the most suitable way to deliver nutritious hot meals. Options may include: ○ On-site cooking

	○ Hot food delivery ○ Cook-and-eat sessions
What times do the meals need to be provided?	• There is no fixed time that meals must be served. ○ The key requirement is that each child receives at least one healthy meal per day that meets the school food standards. • Meal times should be aligned with the session schedule and the needs of the children attending. • Providers are welcome to offer healthy snacks or additional food alongside the main meal, if they wish.

4. Booking and data

Question	Answer
How do children, young people and their family's book onto events?	• Online Booking Platform: Since 2023, Milton Keynes City Council uses a central online booking system for all HAF activities. • Access for Eligible Families • Families in receipt of benefit-related Free School Meals receive a unique code via eVoucher. ○ They use this code to create an account and book sessions online. • Provider Access & Responsibility • Providers are given access to the platform and will: ○ Manage their own listings ○ Handle bookings ○ Maintain attendance registers • Full support is provided, but booking management is the provider's responsibility.
Will I have to keep an attendance log?	• Daily Registers: You must complete daily attendance records using the online booking system provided by Milton Keynes City Council. • Post-Programme Reporting: After the programme ends, you'll also need to submit: ○ An evaluation report ○ A funding report • Why It's Required: These steps are essential to ensure compliance with Department for Education (DfE) funding requirements and to help assess the impact of the programme.

5. Targeting Support

Question	Answer
Is there any additional funding available for supporting children with SEND?	Yes, additional funding is available to support children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). • SEND Support Funding – Key Points ○ The programme recognises that specialist or 1:1 support may be needed for some children. ○ You should include details of these additional costs in your Expression of Interest (EOI). • This may cover: ○ Additional staffing ○ Specialist equipment or resources ○ Adapted activities or environments
As a provider how do we get in touch with children who get free school lunches?	• Build Local Partnerships ○ Engage with local schools: They are key contacts for reaching FSM families. ○ Connect with community groups: Faith groups, youth clubs, and local charities often work closely with eligible families. ○ Collaborate with other HAF providers: Share outreach strategies and referrals. ○ Promote sessions on social media channels. • Council-Led Promotion Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC) promotes the HAF programme through: ○ Its website and social media ○ Direct communications with schools ○ eVoucher distribution to eligible families (includes booking codes) ○ Press release articles • Use the Booking System ○ Families use the online booking platform with their eVoucher code. ○ Once your listing is live, families can see and book your sessions directly
Will there be a focus on primary aged children, or will there be equal consideration for all age groups up to 16?	All children aged 4 to 16 years who are eligible for benefit-related Free School Meals (FSM) are equally included in the HAF programme. • Age Group Focus ○ There is no specific focus solely on primary-aged children.

	○ The programme is designed to support all eligible school-aged children, from Reception through to Year 11. ○ Providers are encouraged to tailor activities to suit different age groups, recognising that: ○ A 5-year-old and a 16-year-old will have different needs and interests. ○ You can apply to run separate sessions or targeted projects for different age ranges.
Where are the highest number of Free School Meal children in Milton Keynes?	The highest concentrations of children eligible for and in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) in Milton Keynes can be found on the official FSM distribution map provided by Milton Keynes City Council. Areas with over 300 FSM-eligible children include parts of Bletchley, Wolverton, and Woughton on the Green. Other high-density areas (201–300 children) include Netherfield, Tinkers Bridge, and Fullers Slade. More suburban or rural areas show significantly lower numbers (under 40 children). • Scoring Advantage: Higher points will be awarded to provision located in areas with higher numbers of children eligible for Benefit-Related Free School Meals (FSM).

Heatmap

The FSM Heatmap is a strategic tool designed to help providers (like schools, community groups, and holiday activity organizers) identify where the highest concentrations of children eligible for Benefit-Related Free School Meals live. This allows them to:

- Target resources more effectively.
- Plan provision (like Holiday Activities and Food programmes) in areas with the greatest need.
- Reduce barriers to access by placing services closer to families who need them most.

If you're a provider or planner, you can use the map to:

- Pinpoint high-need areas (e.g. Bletchley, Netherfield, Fullers Slade).
- Overlay your current provision to identify gaps.
- Coordinate with local schools or community centres in those areas to deliver services.

- **Scoring Advantage:**

Higher points will be awarded to provision located in areas with higher numbers of children eligible for Benefit-Related Free School Meals (FSM).

