

URGENT REPORT TO LEADER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

18 FEBRUARY 2021

HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES AND FOOD PROGRAMME

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Alan Jarrett, Leader of the Council
Councillor David Brake, Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services

Report from: James Williams, Director of Public Health

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Summary

This report sets out the proposals for the allocated 'The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme' which is funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and aims to provide Free School Meal (FSM) eligible children with food and activities over the 2021 Spring, Summer, and Winter holidays.

1. Budget and policy framework
 - 1.1. Matters relating to activities to support Medway's population are a matter for Cabinet. The Leader has urgency powers to make decisions which would ordinarily be made by the Cabinet. These provisions are set out in the Constitution (paragraph 3.2 of Part 3 (Responsibility for Cabinet functions) of Chapter 3 (Responsibility for Functions) of the Constitution).
 - 1.2. The Chairman of the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed that the taking of these decisions are urgent and cannot be reasonably deferred until the next Cabinet meeting on 2 March 2021, in accordance with Section 11 (Cases of special urgency) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012 and Rule 17 (Special Urgency) of the Access to Information Rules (Part 2 of Chapter 4 in the Constitution). This is because it is imperative that the Council takes urgent action to support individuals and families in Medway in line with the Government's announcement to implement 'The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme' by 1 of April 2021 in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. A number of actions must take place ahead of 1 April 2021 for this service to be

in place by the deadline, including fully developing the local response, recruitment, procurement and engagement [detailed in paragraph 3.1 of the report]. This must commence before the next scheduled Cabinet meeting.

- 1.3. Additionally, and in line with rule 15.11 of Chapter 4, Part 5 of the Constitution, call-in can be waived where any delay likely to be caused by the call-in process would seriously prejudice the Council's or the Public's interests. The Chairman of the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed that the decisions proposed are reasonable in all the circumstances and to them being treated as a matter of urgency and to waive call-in.
- 1.4. It is the responsibility of Cabinet to ensure that expenditure remains within the budgets approved by the Council, but it remains the responsibility of Council to approve additions to the Revenue Budget. Therefore, it is proposed that the Chief Executive uses the urgency provisions as set out in paragraph 4.1 of the Employee Delegation Scheme (including consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Labour and Co-operative Group) to agree the addition of the Holiday Activities Funding to the 2020/21 revenue budget funded from grant allocation from Central Government as set out in section 2.8 of this report. Funding for 2021/21 will be added to the Council's budget through the normal budget setting process. The use of these urgency provisions will be reported to Full Council on 22 April 2021 for information.

2. Background

- 2.1. On the 8 November 2020, the Government announced that the Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) will be expanded across the whole of England in 2021. This funding is up to the end of 2021-22 and supports the government's commitment to establish a flexible childcare fund to increase the availability of high quality and affordable holiday childcare.
- 2.2. £220million has been made available to local authorities to coordinate free holiday provision, including healthy food, physical activity and enrichment activities. The programme will be available to children in every local authority in England. The programme will cover 6 weeks of provision over the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays in 2021.
- 2.3. Medway Council has been allocated a total of £1,115,130 to support this programme to the end of March 2022. The Council's allocation for 2020/21 is £112,140 while the allocation for 2021/22 is £1,002,990.
- 2.4. Funding of this programme is separate from the COVID Winter Grant Scheme, or the money that schools can draw on to provide food parcels or supermarket vouchers for FSM children during national lockdown. Decisions around free school meal vouchers provision for the Easter holidays has not yet been clarified by the DfE at this stage.

- 2.5. The funding is ring-fenced and covers the period to the end of March 2022 and has been allocated to ensure that that more children from disadvantaged families benefit from enrichment activities and healthy meals during the school holidays.
- 2.6. Building on what has been learned and implemented across 17 local authority areas in the 2018 and 2019 programmes, Medway is proposing the same bespoke programmes that will meet the needs of our local children and families.
- 2.7. Funding can be used for the following: provision of food and activities, purchasing equipment for the programme, for example to improve the catering or sports equipment at an individual club, website and booking systems and recruitment/payments for additional staff. Over the course of the life of the project, Medway proposes to spend £1,002,630, (90% of the funding on the project), £75,000 (7% on staffing) and £37,500, (3% on promoting and advertising the HAF provision via a website and marketing).
- 2.8. The Chief Executive is requested to approve the addition of the current financial year allocation of £112,140 to the Council's revenue budget for 2020/21 in respect of the HAF Scheme. Funding for 2021/21 will be added to the Council's budget through the normal budget setting process.

3. Proposed Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF)

3.1. Proposal plan

A - Assess Need and Develop a local plan

Assessing Need

Target: Work with key local authority partners and schools to identify the increasing needs of children and families receiving free school meals.

Budget: Use existing workforce

Intervention:

- Identify and map existing provision in the area.
- Identify neighbourhoods where there is a large percentage of children on FSM and areas where provision would make the most impact to the most vulnerable families. For example, Council priority areas, families living in poverty, areas with low internet access.
- Identify schools, groups, community organisations, sports clubs and independent providers that will have the capacity or potential to deliver across our priority areas.

Stakeholders: Local authority partners, Schools Services and Education team, Public Health, Benefits team, community groups, schools etc.

Developing a local plan

Target: In line with HAF Grant Proposal

- Ensuring that sufficient, adequate provision is available across your area for children with SEND/additional needs.

Intervention: Create a plan that is based on our local supply and demand and fit for purpose

Stakeholders: Education, Parents, Children, Medway Commercial Group (MCG), local public health staff, housing, benefits/council tax teams, libraries, museums and cultural services, police, school leaders, environmental health, adult education, youth services, social care and early help services, charities and the voluntary sector.

B - Recruitment of staff

Target: Recruitment of workforce to support the project

Budget: £75,000 (1 x Range 5 Project Manager 0.8 FTE, 1 x Range 4 Project Officer 0.8 FTE, 1 Range 3 Project Support Coordinator 0.6 x FTE) 12-month fixed term contract

Intervention:

- Recruitment of a HAF Project Manager, HAF Project Officer, and a Project Support Coordinator. Roles will include supporting all providers to have a strategic oversight and to meet our minimum standards framework, (including safeguarding requirements and meals that meet school food standards) to improve the quality of their provision.
- To implement project in a way that could be sustainable past 2021 to support vulnerable communities in Medway.

Stakeholders: Public Health Managers, Human Resources and Schools Services and Education Team, service users, existing providers.

C - Establishing a steering group

Target: Create a series of stakeholder meetings

Intervention:

- To support with scoping, implementation and delivery of the project and will include representatives from a wide range of local bodies
- Work with other local services or agencies to support a joined-up and efficient approach (e.g., signposting, sharing resources) working on

existing and building new local partnerships to share learning and good practice among local partners

- Engage families and children in a range of ways to gain feedback for evaluation purposes
- Develop sustainable plans for future activities on holiday hunger.

Stakeholders: Education, Parents, Children, Medway Commercial Group (MCG), local public health staff, housing, benefits/council tax teams, libraries, museums and cultural services, police, school leaders, environmental health, adult education, youth services, social care and early help services, charities and the voluntary sector.

D - Drawing in wider support to enhance the local programme

Target: Explore opportunities for bringing in funding from other sources to support sustainability

Intervention:

- Scoping and sourcing funding and opportunities for the project to become sustainable past 2021

Stakeholders: Local sponsors, supermarkets, local businesses, Medway Food Partnership, Medway Physical Activity Alliance, local food providers, national food alliances and campaigns.

E - Developing a local action plan for provision in our area

Target: In line with HAF Grant Proposal

- Ensuring that sufficient, adequate provision is available across your area for children with SEND/additional needs.

Budget: No cost, existing public health staff and new personnel

Intervention: Create an action plan that is based on our local supply and demand and fit for purpose

Stakeholders: Education, Parents, Children, Medway Commercial Group (MCG), local public health staff, housing, benefits/council tax teams, libraries, museums and cultural services, police, school leaders, environmental health, adult education, youth services, social care and early help services, charities and the voluntary sector.

F - Commissioning and implementation of a single point of access website-based booking and reporting system for current and future HAF activities

Target: Procurement and development of a Website for April 2021 launch. Evidence and feedback from parents in other areas suggest that having a

local website promoting this supported the safety and credibility of the holiday providers.

Budget: £37,500 (Website design development, branding, support, hosting, promotional material, online booking system)

Intervention:

- Procurement and design of a website-based booking system
- Development of branding
- Website support
- Hosting arrangements
- Development of advertising materials
- Support with ongoing engagement for communities and families

Stakeholders: Local authority procurement and comms teams

G - Awarding of funding to holiday club providers

Target: Ensure that there is adequate provision across the area

- Competitive tendering process

Budget: £1.0m (9,430 FSM eligible children, £106.46 per child. 6 weeks provision, 24 sessions per child. £4.40 per child)

Intervention:

- Procuring a range of providers to deliver and promote holiday clubs reaching approximately 9,400 children and their families across targeted areas in Medway
- There is an awareness that a 100% attendance may not be realistic, anything less than this will require organisations to investing the additional funding in to improving their offer for those children eligible or to support those who did not attend but are eligible for FSM.

Stakeholders: Schools, Voluntary Sector, Charities, various clubs, organisations and groups

Timescales

Action	Date
Gather numbers eligible for free school meals	5 February 2021
Identify/map holiday provision in the area	10 February 2021
Engage stakeholder group	15 February 2021
Urgent report to Leader and Chief Executive for decision making	18 February 2021
Develop a detailed action plan for HAF scheme	18 February 2021
Seek approval for recruitment of roles and website tender following applicable HR and Category Managements procedures	19 February 2021
Once approved locally, complete DfE, HAF application	26 February 2021

4. Evaluation and Reporting

- 4.1. Where grant funding is distributed by Medway Council services, the Public Health team will ensure that all grant conditions are met including reporting nationally to the DfE.
- 4.2. The officer steering group will ensure that learning from initial programmes is reflected and built into subsequent holiday programmes.
- 4.3. Monitoring and reporting processes/systems will be developed for all commissioned organisations.

5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Grant is not used in full to support the project	Grant is not maximised to meet the needs of our most vulnerable families.	The proposal spreads the grant across a range of new and existing organisations to maximise the reach of this support. Increase support with other local services and agencies to ensure a joined-up approach	CIII
Increasing need and demand as the number of FSM eligible children increases	There has been a significant increase in families eligible for FSM this year compared to last – with ongoing pandemic there is a risk that the demand outstrips the resource	Collate and provide evidence of increase in demand to provide a case to the DfE for additional funding	CII
Expenditure is not recovered through the Grant claim process	Expenditure made may be on activities that are not within the grant conditions, and therefore the Government does not fund these through the second and third payments.	The proposal to the DfE will be submitted and designed to enable the council to fully re-claim the funding from the DfE to ensure expenditure is fully re-claimable. Arrangements will be in place to record and monitor expenditure and submit claims in due course.	DII

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Food support for FSM eligible families for weeks not covered during weeks of activities	Central government are yet to announce what provision may be available to support FSM eligible families with hampers or vouchers to cover the additional 4 weeks of holidays in 2021 and for those families that choose not to send their children to an activity club	Clear communication to all stakeholders that Medway Council are working to the conditions dictated in the HAF programme and national government will provide a fuller updates any further measures	BII
Social distancing restrictions still in place in April	There is no certainty on what the social distancing likely to be for the Easter and other holiday periods, so the service will need to be flexible	Activity clubs may need to be adaptable with their choice of activities, set up and venues used to ensure COVID safety levels are maintained in line with school standards	CIII

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. The scheme and activity outlined is fully funded by the government, with Medway's allocation for 2020/21 of £112,140, and for 2021/22 of £1,002,990 confirmed to support this programme for 6 weeks across the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1. The Covid-19 pandemic is an unprecedented national and global event requiring urgent intervention by State and Local Authorities. The use of urgency powers will enable a fast and effective response by the Council and is in entirely line with the Constitutional provisions for urgent decision making.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1. The Leader is asked, using urgency powers, to agree the proposals set out in section 3 and Appendix 1 to this report as the Council's approach to delivering the HAF funding and to delegate authority to the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services, to finalise and implement these proposals.
- 8.2. The Leader is asked, using urgency powers, to agree to delegate authority to the Director of Public Health in consultation with the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services, to make minor amendments to the proposals to enable them to continue to support vulnerable children and their families in Medway, including where further Government advice is provided.

- 8.3. The Leader is asked to agree that recommendations 8.1 and 8.2 are considered urgent and therefore should not be subject to call in.
- 8.4. The Chief Executive is asked to agree, using urgency powers, to add £112,140 to the Council's revenue budget for 2020/21 to fund the Holiday Activities and Food Programme as set out in section 3 of the report.

9. Suggested reasons for decisions

- 9.1. Given the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of cost to the local taxpayer it is appropriate for the Council to introduce these measures.

Lead officer contact

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Outline of proposed Medway Council Holiday and Food Activities programme grant scheme

Background Papers

None

.....(signed) ... February 2021...(date)

Councillor Alan Jarrett, Leader of the Council

.....(signed) ... February 2021...(date)

Neil Davies, Chief Executive

Appendix 1

Outline of proposed Medway Council Holiday and Food Activities programme grant scheme

Purpose of the scheme

To provide Free School Meal (FSM) eligible children with food and activities over the 2021 Spring, Summer, and Winter holidays. The grant will create an opportunity to draw down the full funding to: reduce holiday hunger, food security and poverty, support young people to be more active, eat healthily, be safe and not isolated. The scheme will align, and compliment similar activities delivered previously in 17 neighbouring local authorities.

Conditions – families with children eligible for Free School Meals

Families have to certify on the booking system that:

- they are registered with a Medway School
- they are eligible for free school meals
- those children are aged 5-16 (Discretion to be used for families with siblings under 5)
- children have no recourse to public funds (NRPF)

Families/carers are encouraged to attend the sessions where appropriate as this has worked well in previous years.

Conditions – families with children not eligible for Free School Meals

There will be flexibility for clubs to offer free and paid places to non-eligible children.

- other disadvantaged children who would benefit from places where funding is available
- children of families who would benefit from the activities

Provision requirements

Due to the short timescales, the DfE do not expect the Easter activities to be fully operational and that local authorities target the provision accordingly. There is no expectation that Medway reach 100% of those eligible and that the funding allows for flexibility to build high-quality programmes that reach as many people as they are able to.

Whilst the sessions are set at 4 hours per day, 4 days per week and for 4 weeks the model can be flexible to deliver what is needed in the local area. Parameters can be

adapted for low-income parents to rely on the provision to meet their requirements for childcare.