

Report Title:	The acceptance and deployment of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) funding		
Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	11 th February 2026
Report of:	Director of Resources	Cabinet Portfolio:	Resources
Cabinet Lead Member:	Councillor Walmsley	Wards Affected:	All
Key Decision:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> General Exception	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Special Urgency
Integrated Impact Assessment:		Required: No	Attached: No
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Valley Plan Priorities	Thriving Local Economy: This involves securing new inward investment, creating a sustainable economy, matching local skills with future job opportunities, and supporting town centres as unique destinations.	
	High Quality Environment: This includes having a "clean and green" local environment, reducing the borough's carbon footprint, improving waste and recycling rates, and delivering new homes with a good mix of housing tenures.	
	Healthy & Proud Communities: This priority focuses on improving the health and physical/mental wellbeing of residents, reducing health inequalities, ensuring access to better leisure facilities and health services, and fostering a sense of pride in the community.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Effective & Efficient Council: The aim is to provide good quality and responsive services, embrace new technology, be a financially sustainable council with a commercial outlook, and ensure sound governance.	

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is intended to inform the decision to accept and deploy the Holiday Activities and Food Programme funding, expected to be in the region of £230,000 which provides support to children in receipt of free school meals through holiday periods.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 **Accepts the grant of c.£230,000 for the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme 2026/27.**
- 2.2 **Approves the Director of Resources in Consultation with the Lead member for Resources to commission Rossendale Leisure Trust under existing arrangements to enable them to support the children in the borough who are in receipt of free school meals.**

3. BACKGROUND AND REASON FOR THE DECISION

- 3.1 Since 2018, the Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) has provided support to children in receipt of free school meals through holiday periods. Following successful pilots, the programme was rolled out to all upper tier local authorities from 2021 and has been awarded on an annual basis ever since but with no long-term commitment. The Government have now confirmed there will be another year of HAF funding for 2026-27.

- 3.2 The programme has been delivered on behalf of Rossendale Borough Council by Rossendale Leisure Trust (RLT) since the programme roll. RLT have employed a part time coordinator to plan and deliver the programme. The coordinator has built up a comprehensive list of local delivery organisations that provide a wide range of activities across the borough, and has established an excellent relationship with local VCFS groups that are able to provide the meals for the programme.
- 3.3 The HAF programme in Rossendale is steered by a local steering group, of which RBC is a member. Funding for the programme is routed to Lancashire County Council (LCC) from the Department for Education and is devolved to district councils for delivery either directly or through third party organisations. Most districts commission their leisure trusts to deliver the programme.
- 3.4 As Easter in 2026 is in early April, delivery partners have been asked to submit their Easter programme to LCC by 16th February 2026. However, LCC have not yet been notified of the exact funding available, we are expecting this to be a similar sum to last year in the region of £230,000
- 3.5 RLT are currently developing an Easter holiday activity programme at risk on our behalf, it is not appropriate or practicable to go out to tender given the timing of this funding stream allied with the fact that the trust has successfully built up the local networks needed to deliver a successful programme, and a new organisation would not have the time to develop new networks and working arrangement with local venues, delivery agents and VCFS groups in time to deliver a successful programme.

4. RISK

- 4.1 While there has been communication that HAF funding will be deployed, should the level not be as in previous years there is a risk that there may be a shortfall in delivering all that the Council would wish and has delivered over prior years. Should this be the case the Council has the ability to utilise funding from the Crisis and Resilience Fund to mitigate and shortfall.
- 4.2 If the council fails to secure a delivery partner there is a risk that the programme will not be delivered as required and disadvantaged children will miss out on meals and activities. We have engaged with RLT early to minimise this risk
- 4.3 The single year announcement of funding makes meaningful tender processes challenging especially with an incumbent provider who has developed knowledge and contacts in the programme delivery. Should multi-year funding not be forthcoming there is a risk that appropriate value for money assessments by way of tendering are undeliverable. The Council has to accept this risk as it stands to ensure that disadvantaged children are able to benefit from meals and activities in holiday periods.
- 4.4 The Council relies on an individual coordinator, employed via RLT, should this individual be unavailable then the delivery of the Easter programme will not take place and the summer programme may be a reduced programme. This could lead to reputational damage to the Council. To mitigate this risk the Council has engaged with trust as soon as it was made aware that the funding stream was available to support it.

5. SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTS (FINANCE)

5.1 All financial considerations are included within the body of the report.

6. MONITORING OFFICER COMMENTS (LEGAL)

6.1 Due to the value of the funding, Cabinet is required to approve acceptance with delegations to officers to sign all relevant funding agreements in line with the Council's Constitution.

6.2 There are no other legal implications arising directly from this report but further reports will be presented as and when required to seek the necessary authorisations.

7. INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The proposal to extend the Holiday and Activity Fund Programme is strongly aligned with the Council's adopted Valley Plan priorities, particularly in supporting disadvantaged children, thereby improving resident wellbeing, and helping to deliver the healthy and proud communities priority.

8. POLICY/STRATEGY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None.

9. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None.