



# Sefton HAF Annual Report 2025/2026



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## Introduction.

The Holiday Activity, and Food Programme (HAF), funded by the Department for Education (DfE). Operates during the Easter, Summer, and Christmas Holidays. It's a vital initiative funded by the DfE whose mission was to support children during school holiday periods by providing enriching activities and nutritious meals and to support and prevent children going hungry during the school holidays.

### Background

Since 2018, the HAF programme has provided support to children in receipt of benefit related free school meals through holiday periods. Following successful pilots between 2018 and 2020, the programme was rolled out to all upper tier local authorities in 2021

Since 2021, the HAF programme has enabled hundreds of thousands of children and their families to access the programme throughout the Easter, summer, and Christmas school holidays.

The HAF programme primarily targets school-aged children from reception to year 11 who are in receipt of benefits related free school meals. Local authorities coordinate this service, ensuring that children have access to both healthy food and engaging activities. Some of the providers work directly with schools to ensure the HAF Programme is offered directly to all Free School Meal children.

The 2025/2026 programme has been delivered during a period of significant transformation, driven by the implementation of a HAF Improvement Plan. This has supported a shift towards a more strategic, data-led, and quality-focused model of delivery across the borough.

## Budget vs Spend.

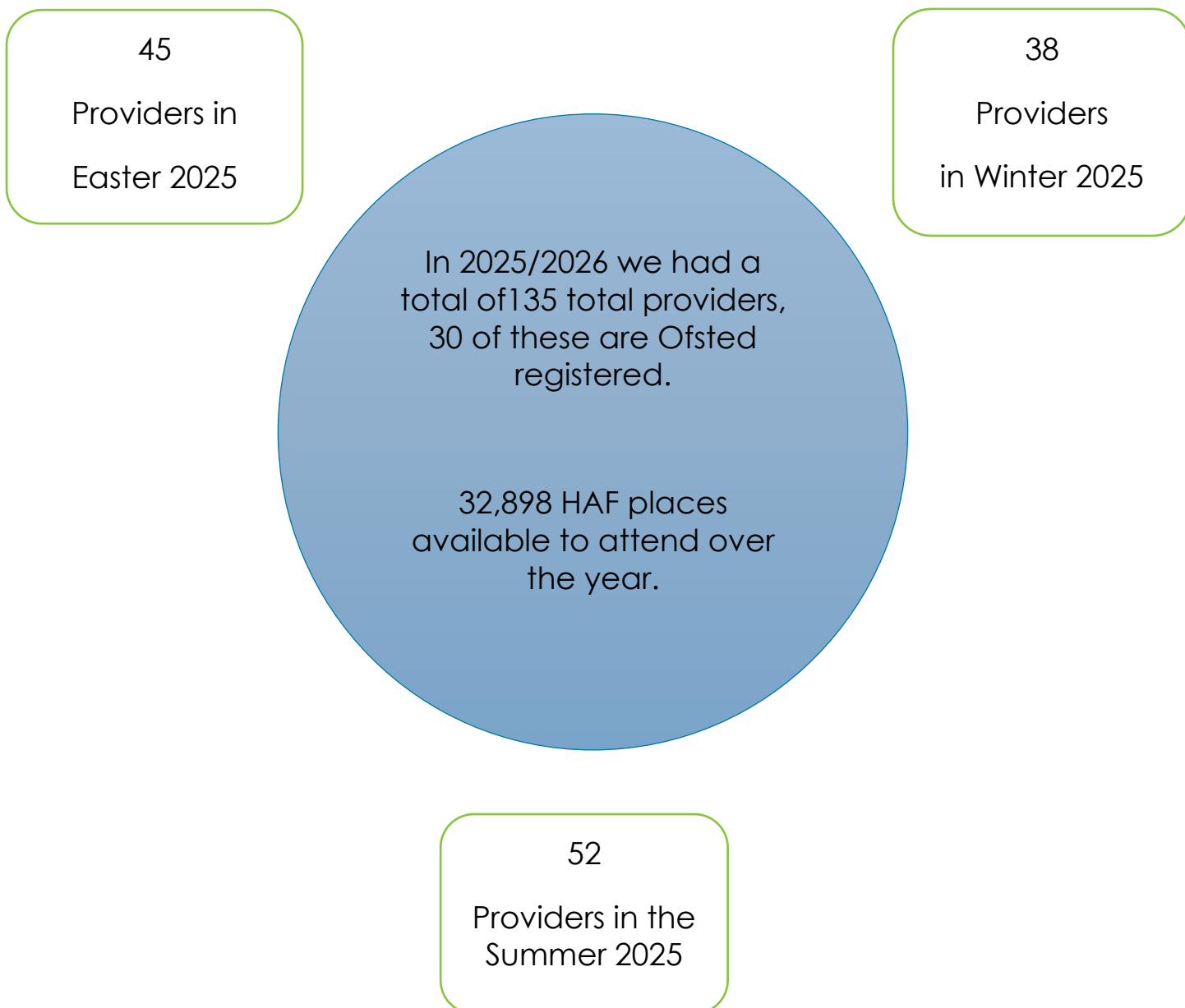
Sefton MBC received a grant allocation of £1,033,150 for Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) program during the financial year 2025-2026. The LA commissioned **135 organisations borough-wide** to deliver the HAF Programme. Over the course of the year, **resulting in over 7,800 attendances by children and young people across the year, including approximately 6,200 FSM-eligible participants.**

In total, providers delivered **over 11,800 sessions**, each including a healthy meal, ensuring consistent access to nutritious food and enriching activities across all holiday periods.

	Item	Budget Allocation	Spend
	Project delivery costs		£1,173,114.18
	Easter 2024		£226,783.86
	Summer 2024		£780,053.70
	Christmas/Winter 2024		£163,877.22

## Providers.

- We have providers who regularly offer HAF for every delivery period, and some who may only do one period.
- We have some providers who are more sports orientated, but we do also have providers who offer a more holistic mainstream offer like Dance and Drama.
- Providers are invited to complete and Application Form completing all the details of their planned delivery including activities and trips. We do also welcome new providers to apply.



## Feedback

Feedback from 2025/2026:

The children and young people shared some of their experiences below:

*Parent- "Please let me know if you have funding for Summer, I'd like to secure a place for my little one" -*

*Young Person -"I'm glad we're here and not on the park, it's freezing"*

*Parent - "It's been amazing to see my child trying new foods. I was shocked when they asked for fruit at home after refusing it for years!"*

*One Parent of 4 children  
"the gifts and activities  
have helped me so  
much during the  
holidays, I just don't have  
much money to spend  
on them".*

*"If I wasn't at Youthy,  
I don't know what I  
would be doing" – F  
15*

*"Its good to have a  
place I can be  
myself" – F 16*

## Delivery Periods

### Spring

- 45 providers delivered the programme, 11 of these were Ofsted registered
- Provider capacity totalled 2,447 places, including 384 SEND-specific places
- 2,447 sessions were attended

Individual young people supported (FSM):

- 1,757 FSM primary-aged children (including SEND)
- 306 FSM secondary-aged young people

Sessions attended:

- 2,141 primary-aged
- 306 secondary-aged

Additional reach beyond HAF-funded places:

- No additional 'Other-Free' or paid-for places were recorded during this period
- 2,447 healthy, nutritious meals were provided to children and young people
- 80% of providers delivered 4 days of provision over Easter
- 20% of providers delivered more than 4 days of provision over Easter

### Summer

- 52 Providers delivered HAF 14 of these were Ofsted registered.
- Provider capacity totalled 22,252 places, including 14 SEND-specific places
- 3,951 sessions were attended

Individual young people supported (FSM):

- 2,441 FSM primary-aged children (including SEND)
- 908 FSM secondary-aged young people (including SEND)

Sessions attended:

- 3,184 primary-aged
- 767 secondary-aged

Additional reach beyond HAF-funded places:

- 302 children accessed discretionary 'Other-Free' places
- 841 children accessed paid-for provision

3,951 Healthy nutritious meals provided to children and young people.

100% of providers delivered 16+ days of activity over the Summer period.

## Christmas/Winter

- 38 providers delivered the programme, 5 of these were Ofsted Registered.
- Provider capacity totalled 8,199 places, including 60 SEND-specific places
- 5,500 sessions were attended
  
- Individual young people supported (FSM):
  - 624 FSM primary-aged children (including SEND)
  - 248 FSM secondary-aged young people (including SEND)
- Sessions attended:
  - 744 primary-aged
  - 300 secondary-aged

*(plus additional mixed/combined provision contributing to total attendance)*
  
- Additional reach beyond HAF-funded places:
  - 156 children accessed discretionary 'Other-Free' places
  - 164 children accessed paid-for provision
  
- 5,500 healthy, nutritious meals were provided to children and young people
  - 63% of providers delivered a 4-day programme (4 hours per day)
  - 32% of providers delivered more than 4 days of provision
  - 5% contributed through shorter offers such as trips, family events, or 1–3 day activities

Higher levels of non-attendance were observed during the Winter period, likely influenced by seasonal factors such as family commitments, illness, and proximity to the Christmas holiday

## Provision & Delivery

Over the 2025/2026 reporting period, Sefton HAF providers delivered a significant number of healthy, nutritious meals to children and young people across three key holiday periods.

Based on HAF-funded attendance data:

- **Spring/Easter:** 2,447 meals provided
- **Summer:** 3,951 meals provided

For the Winter period, provider monitoring data indicates:

- **Christmas/Winter:** 5,500 sessions attended across all provision (including HAF-funded, discretionary free, and paid-for places)

The Summer programme delivered the highest volume of HAF-funded meals, reflecting the longer holiday period and increased delivery capacity. Winter delivery remained substantial; however, figures include a broader range of provision types and are therefore not directly comparable to HAF-funded attendance totals.

This reflects a broader strategic shift within the programme towards targeted delivery, ensuring provision is aligned with identified need rather than overall volume.

The meals provided during the year, always gets rave reviews from the young people. Some of the favourite meals which have been highlighted are Chicken Curry, Sweet and Sour Chicken, Toad in The Hole, and a full sit down Christmas Dinner with all the trimmings.

Providers provide nutritional food education, during the sessions, with activities such as the food plate, spin the food meal, which allows children to try samples of food that they may never have tasted before.

Some providers encourage children and young people to help design the food menus, prepare and cook the meals, which allows children and young people the opportunity to learn about food hygiene, food preparation, where food can come from, different cultures of food and be involved in some of the key decision making processes.

## Annual Impact

Across the 2025/2026 reporting period, the Sefton HAF programme delivered a significant level of support to children and young people through a combination of nutritious meals and enriching activities.

This reflects the programme's transition towards a more data-led and impact-focused model, prioritising engagement with children and families most in need.

Based on confirmed attendance data, the programme provided **6,398 HAF-funded meals** across the Spring/Easter and Summer periods, with a further **5,500 sessions attended during Winter** through a combination of HAF-funded, discretionary free, and paid-for provision.

The programme demonstrated strong reach among **FSM-eligible children**, alongside inclusive provision for children with SEND and those accessing discretionary 'Other-Free' places. Paid-for provision also enabled providers to extend their reach and engage a wider cohort of families.

Delivery was highest during the Summer period, reflecting the longer holiday and expanded programme capacity. Easter delivery showed high levels of engagement and full uptake of provision, while Winter attendance was more variable, likely influenced by seasonal factors.

Overall, the programme successfully delivered **consistent support across all holiday periods**, combining food provision, enrichment, and inclusive access for children and young people across Sefton.

### Enriching

During the year, the enriching activities provided by providers has ranged from Mindfulness activities which can help to build resilience in children and young people, to arts and crafts allowing the children and young people to be creative and expressive.

Children and young people have also been given the opportunities to learn new skills or try different activities such as dance and drama, and at the end of the HAF period have been able to perform in an end of project show.

During 2025/26 young people have accessed a wide range of activities including a trips for example taking a group of young people to Go Karting, many never experienced these activities before, but with the HAF funding it allowed children the opportunity to experience.

In many sessions, teamwork and communication play a key role in some of the activities that are on offer, allowing young people to develop these key life skills, and build new relationships with peers.

Across Sefton we have commissioned several providers who are sports based, so physical activities are offered far and wide across the Borough, children and young people are able to access a lot of different sports for example, football, American football, Archery, Cricket. There is also mainstream provision that offer physical activities such as dance, or play team games during the sessions such as Dodgeball, which we know is a game a lot of young people really enjoy.

### Nutritional Education and Promotion

Providers provide nutritional food education, during the sessions, with activities such as the food plate, spin the food meal, which allows children to try samples of food that they may never have tasted before.

Some providers encourage children and young people to help design the food menus, prepare and cook the meals, which allows children and young people the opportunity to

learn about food hygiene, food preparation, where food can come from, different cultures of food and be involved in some of the key decision-making processes.

## **Inclusion and SEND**

Our providers are inclusive of all young people attending their sessions and will ensure that the young people can be supported. If there are times where a child or young person's needs cannot be met, the providers will signpost parents/carers to other opportunities that may be available.

## **Marketing**

Providers advertise what they have on offer for their individual HAF Programmes via their own websites and social media.

As the Local Authority, we collate all the provider information and share internally with departments, as well as on a public Padlet website which members of the public can access, within the Padlet there is also a map of the Sefton Borough which has all HAF Provider locations pinned and the information is also shared on the Sefton website on the dedicated HAF page. There are also daily posts on Sefton Youth's Instagram page to share 'what's on' daily.

## **Summary/Conclusion**

The 2025/2026 HAF programme has been a year of development and transition. The team has increasingly focused on strengthening relationships with providers, with a particular emphasis on supporting them to increase the engagement of HAF-eligible children and young people. While changes to delivery approaches can have short-term impacts on outcomes, it is anticipated that these developments will lead to more sustainable and improved outcomes in the longer term.

During this period, programme delivery was also influenced by changes in staffing capacity. Following the loss of a full-time HAF lead at the end of 2024, the Youth Team assumed responsibility for coordinating and delivering the programme. As a result, this year represented a period of transition, with systems, processes, and provider engagement approaches needing to be re-established. By the Winter delivery period, the team had developed a stronger operational understanding of the programme, resulting in improved oversight, monitoring, and programme structure.

This transition has taken place alongside the implementation of a comprehensive Improvement Plan, which has reshaped the programme's delivery model. As part of this, there has been a deliberate shift away from a volume-based model towards a more targeted, impact-focused approach.

Engaging older young people, particularly teenagers, continues to present a challenge. We recognise that this cohort can be harder to reach and retain within provision. As a result, we are working collaboratively with both providers and young people across Sefton to better understand barriers to engagement and to co-develop approaches that will make the programme more appealing and accessible to this age group. We are confident that this work, alongside provider commitment, will lead to improved participation over time.

During this year, we have strengthened our quality assurance processes. This includes more robust monitoring visits, enhanced questioning of provision delivery, and improved scrutiny of data submissions. In addition, we have implemented a more rigorous approach to funding allocation and due diligence when assessing both new and existing providers. These measures are intended to ensure that public funds are used effectively, delivering high-quality experiences and positive outcomes for children and families. We have also reintroduced in-person provider forums, providing opportunities to communicate policy updates, share expectations, and gather feedback. These sessions will continue moving forward, alongside closer collaboration with Early Years and Wraparound colleagues. Provider feedback has also been actively sought through recent surveys, which will inform future development of the programme.

However, it is important to acknowledge the ongoing financial pressures impacting delivery. The continued cost of living challenges have had a significant effect on providers' ability to deliver provision within the allocated funding. Rising costs associated with staffing, utilities, venue hire, resources, and particularly the provision of high-quality, nutritious food, have placed considerable strain on delivery.

While this has contributed to a reduction in the overall number of providers and places compared to previous years, this change reflects a planned and strategic approach to commissioning. The focus has been on ensuring higher quality provision, improved targeting of need, and more sustainable delivery across the programme.

While we remain committed to supporting providers and ensuring the programme continues to offer positive, enriching experiences for children and young people, these financial pressures have inevitably influenced the overall scale of delivery. This includes limitations on the number of providers that can be funded and, consequently, the number of places available.

Despite these challenges, the HAF programme in Sefton remains a vital support for families, and we will continue to review and adapt our approach to maximise impact, ensure value for money, and respond to the evolving needs of our communities.

