

Shropshire Holiday Activities  
& Food Programme

# Annual Report

APR 2025 - MAR 2026



*“HAF provides a fantastic opportunity for eligible children and young people to engage in exciting activities during the school holidays. The programme allows participants to socialise, learn new skills, eat delicious food, take part in physical activity, and have fun in their local community.”*



*Cllr Andy Hall, Portfolio Holder Children & Education, Shropshire Council*



*“I loved the bouncy castle and making new friends. I wish we could come every day.”*

*Parent*

*“My child came home singing every day, I’ve never seen them so excited to talk about what they’ve done”.*

*Parent*



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## Introduction

Funded by the Department for Education (DfE), HAF - The Holiday Activities and Food programme provides eligible children and young people free access to holiday activity during the three main school holidays.

The programme is aimed primarily at children and young people aged 4 to 16, in receipt of benefits related free school meals (FSM). Children meeting wider eligibility criteria can also access the programme.

Research shows that school holidays can be difficult for some low-income families. These children and young people are more likely to experience 'unhealthy holidays' in terms of nutrition and physical health and more likely to experience social isolation.

During 2025, over 7,000 school aged children and young people in Shropshire were eligible for benefits related FSM, a number which continues to grow, as families face increasing financial challenges. Demand for places on the Shropshire HAF programme from children and young people who meet the core and wider eligibility criteria reflects this growth.

Since 2021, Shropshire Council has successfully worked in partnership with organisations from across the county in the private, voluntary, and public sectors to deliver Shropshire HAF.

Our HAF programme has huge benefits for eligible children and young people, including healthier eating and reduced food insecurity; increased physical activity; participation in enriching activities and linking families to local services. It continues to be an important, high profile, and much needed programme for our communities.

This report provides an overview and highlights the achievements of Shropshire HAF during 2025/26. For more information please visit <https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/holiday-activities-and-food-programme-haf/>

Shropshire HAF,  
Shropshire Council



Watch our latest HAF celebration film to see the clubs in action and hear from participating children and staff.



<https://youtu.be/Cq8cVOjAwWg>

## Grant funding process

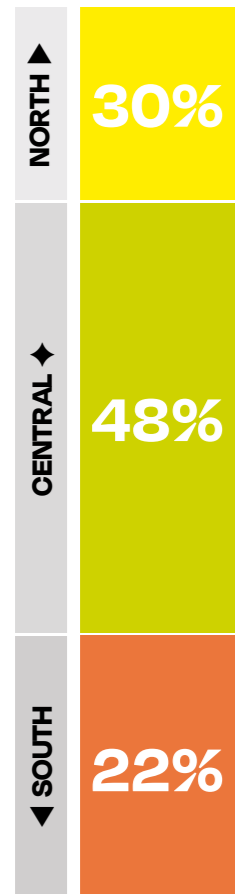
Twenty specialist, trusted, and committed organisations, were invited to reapply for funding to run their existing clubs in 2025.

New HAF clubs in three identified areas of the county were widely advertised as part of an open grant application process.

Applications were assessed against the DfE HAF framework standards. Final decisions on the funding awarded was made by the Shropshire HAF Steering Group.

## Mapping demand and provision

Distribution of FSM attendance across Shropshire



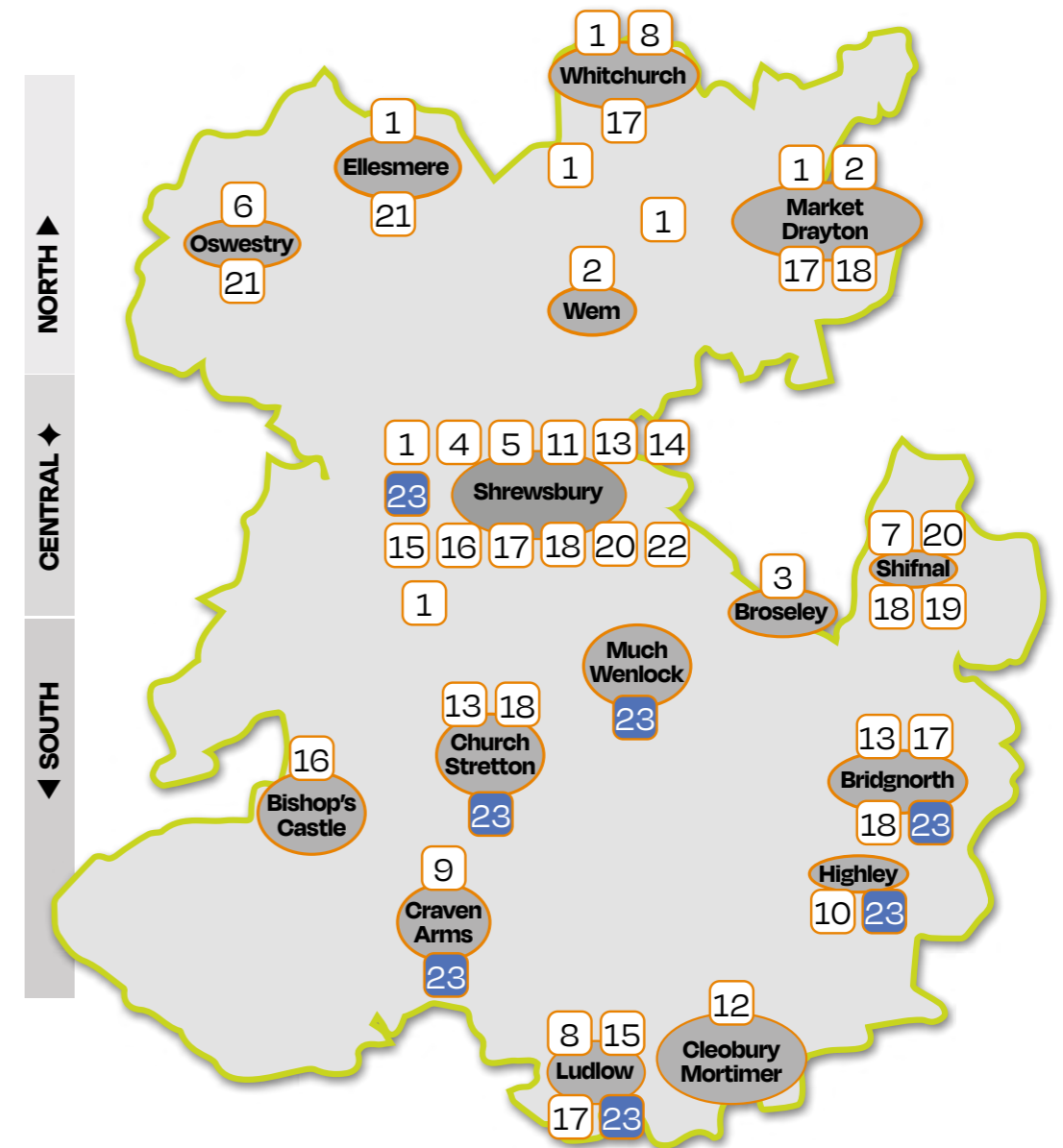
30% of FSM eligible children and young people attend school in the north, 48% in the central area, and 22% in the south of the county.

Our 2025 HAF programme included sports, arts, cooking, forest schools, and other exciting opportunities. Clubs were based across the county, taking place in over 20 towns, as well as more rural areas.

When planning our programme, clubs are assessed by location, numbers of eligible children and young people in the area, value for money, age range, type of activity, accessibility, SEND places, DfE HAF framework standards, relationship of organisation with area/host school, and what other provision is available locally. This approach helps ensure a good spread of clubs across the county, providing the opportunity for as many eligible children and young people as possible to participate.

## Location of holiday activity provision

This map illustrates the location of the main HAF holiday clubs in 2025, which reflect FSM hot spots in the county.



*“As a parent, I feel happy and reassured knowing the kids are having fun in a safe environment. I recommend it to everyone.”* Parent

## Programme Highlights

Some of the top highlights from the programme, for children and young people, core providers, parents, and carers were:



**It's free** - For many children and young people, it's the only time they had ever attended a holiday club. For **80%** of parents / carers surveyed at summer being free was the main reason for booking onto a club.



**Activities** – Fantastic range of activities for different ages and abilities, which children and young people have fully engaged in. Core providers reported seeing the satisfaction, excitement, and sense of achievement young people experienced at trying something new and completing an activity. Across all holidays **100%** of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed the activities. **100%** of participants at spring and **80%** at summer had tried something new.

**Food** – Over the course of the programme children and young people tried new foods. Many learnt the basics of cooking and food hygiene as well as how to find out the nutritional value of the foods they eat. **80%** of participants during summer reported they had learnt more about eating a balanced diet and taking care of themselves. **75%** of parents agreed or strongly agreed that the food provided at the clubs over the summer was good.



## Building confidence and learning new skills

Core provider staff and parents/carers reported seeing an increase in confidence in children and young people.

During the summer **54%** parents/carers reported an improvement in their child's confidence. **78%** participants in summer reported learning new skills.



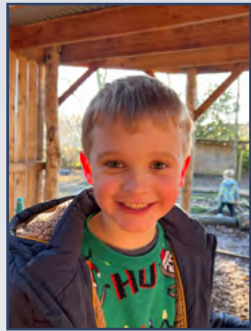
**Fun** – Children and young people had fun and enjoyed attending HAF, with participants reporting they had lots of fun taking part in activities and **100%** agreeing across all holidays that the club was very good or good.

**Friends** – Children and young people who attended clubs became more socially connected, with participants saying they enjoyed spending time with friends and **81%** reporting making new friends during the summer holidays.



## Headline Achievements

Top highlights from the programme, for children and young people, core providers, parents, and carers:



Over **2,600**

unique HAF eligible children and young people attended clubs in 2025

Number of Holiday Clubs

Spring / Easter

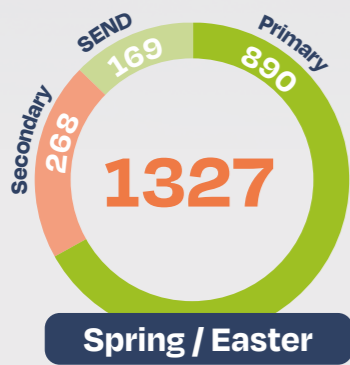
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Summer

64

Winter

47



Breakdown of HAF eligible children and young people attending each holiday

**22,048** places were available, with **18,697 (85%)** of these booked.



Spring / Easter



Summer



Winter

% of all registered eligible FSM children and young people participated in HAF.



Over **18,000**

**MEALS** were provided. Most were **hot**, with many being cooked by the children and young people themselves

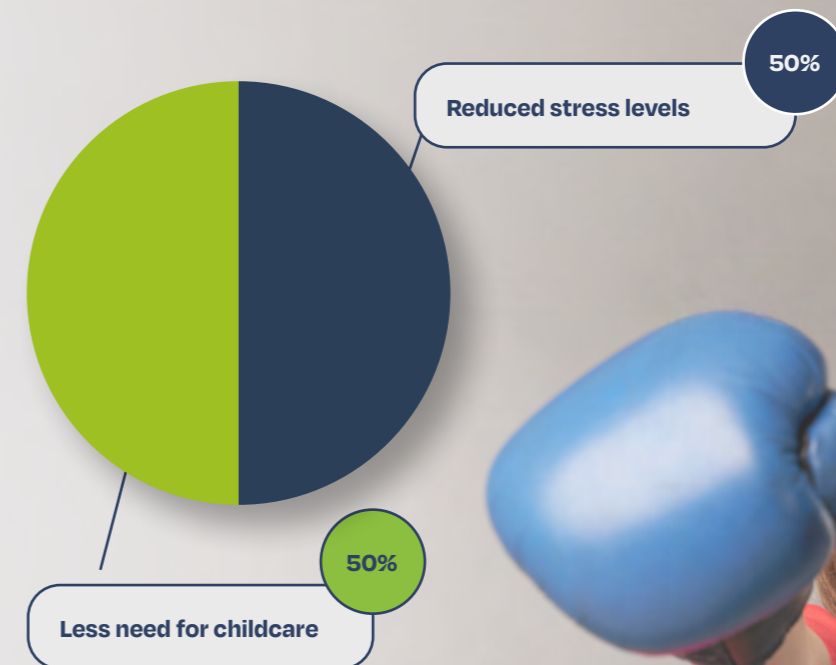


Children and young people were asked what words best described their experience of the club.



Parents and carers were asked what their children and young people got out of attending a club.

Parents and carers were asked what they and the wider family had gained from HAF. The biggest benefits reported were reduced stress levels and less need for childcare.



## Wider eligibility

The DfE allows for up to 15% of funding to be used for children and young people who do not meet the eligibility criteria of benefit related free school meals entitlement.

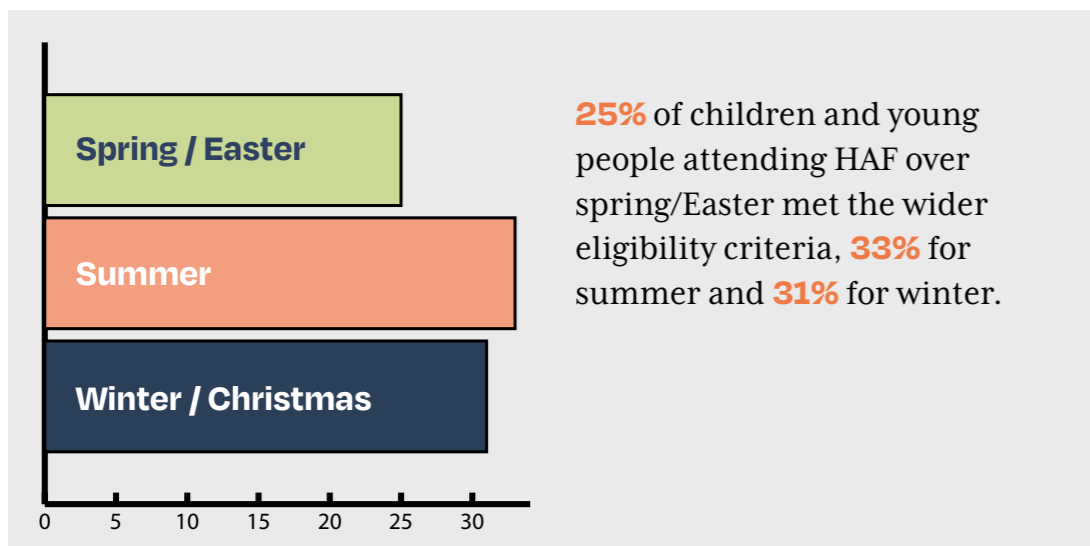
In Shropshire, these places were allocated to children and young people from low-income households and / or living in areas of high deprivation (tiers 1 to 5) who are not in receipt of benefits related free school meals, through a referral process.

Although the number of children and young people eligible for free school meals has increased, a significant group still lives in poverty, with households lacking sufficient income to cover food and other essential costs. Many continue to miss out on support. Our wider eligibility criteria are intended to address this gap.



*“The mix of sports, creative projects and food sessions kept the children engaged and happy.”*

Staff.



**25%** of children and young people attending HAF over spring/Easter met the wider eligibility criteria, **33%** for summer and **31%** for winter.

# Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)



**100%** of the organisations commissioned to run HAF holiday clubs offer places for children and young people with SEND.

All these organisations, bar one specialist programme, run clubs at mainstream settings offering activities for a range of children and young people.

During 2025, **169** individual SEND HAF eligible children and young people participated in HAF during Spring/Easter, **270**

during summer and **111** at Christmas/winter. This is similar to previous years.

With support from Shropshire Council through training and one-to-one discussions, organisations have made reasonable adjustments to make their clubs as inclusive as possible. These include:

- Adding key messages to all marketing and publicity materials
- Building trust with families
- Encouraging parents and carers to discuss their child's needs
- Offering short visits and tasters to clubs
- Providing families with information about the SEND Local Offer
- Introducing a range of supportive tools to the setting
- Helping families access 1:1 support and funding



*"We are very appreciative of the help at Severndale, this is the only familiar place my daughter will go to, so is the only respite option I have."*

Parent

*"I just wanted to express my gratitude. My son has SEND and holidays can be incredibly hard work. Not only has he more free time, but he is out of routine, and this can lead him to become dysregulated a lot more. My son seemed to have the best time and really engaged with staff having lots of fun."*

Parent

*"My daughter had a brilliant time at club. She loved the food the activities and it was so much easier as it was at school with people she knew."*

Parent

*"It's very hard to find places available for SEND children in the summer holidays, I really hope that funding can carry on."*

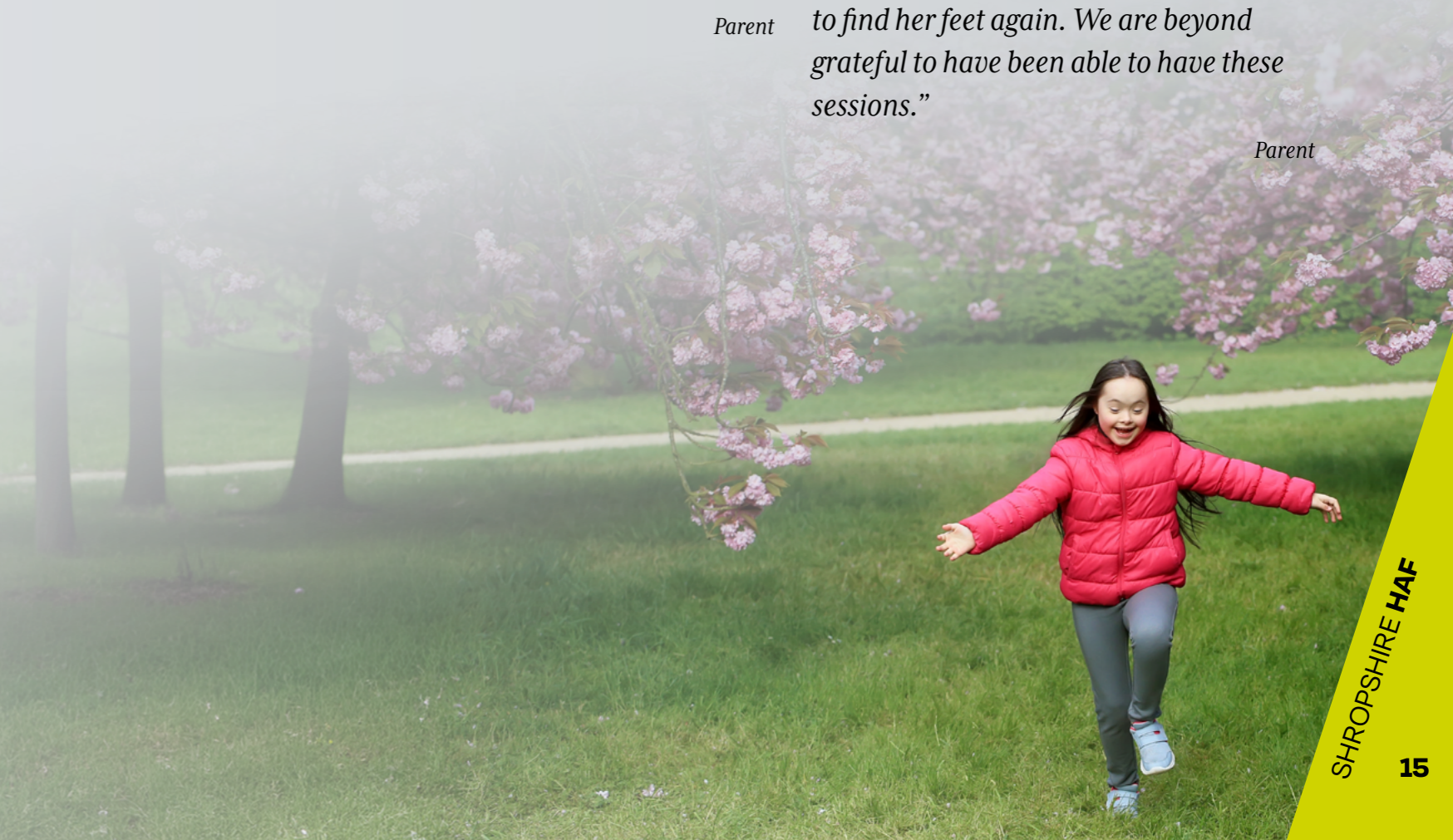
Parent

*"A huge thank you. My grandchildren have had an amazing Summer. It makes me so happy that they're well looked after and fully entertained throughout the day, especially when you have a child with extra needs. My granddaughter has loved making new friends and is full of it when she comes home. My grandson loves the Bingo. Nanny was dreading the holidays, but you have made it a great one."*

Grandparent

*"Thank you for making us feel welcome, for giving my son the best day and for allowing a tired mum to have a few hours to find her feet again. We are beyond grateful to have been able to have these sessions."*

Parent



## Activity providers and partnerships

Partnerships are key to the successful delivery of HAF in Shropshire.

During 2025 Shropshire Council worked in partnership with 22 organisations to deliver the core HAF programme. All but one of these organisations are Shropshire based. They have good links to the local community through their day-to-day work and understand the needs of the families attending the clubs.

Many regularly work with town and parish councils in the area, as well as housing associations and other local services, who in some cases provide clubs with additional funding and resources.

*“It was fantastic to see the children working together during the mini-Olympics and STEM activities they really supported each other. The cooking sessions, especially the meringue and fruit sculptures, really engaged the children and helped them develop practical skills.”*

*Staff*

Food Hubs, community fridges, supermarkets and local businesses have donated food to HAF clubs, which was used to supplement the meals on offer at clubs and shared between families to take home. This helped to extend the HAF offer and to support families beyond the face-to-face provision.

Local organisations supported the delivery of enrichment activities such as The Hive, who ran creative workshops. Shropshire Wildlife Trust gave talks and workshops focusing on the environment and Arts Alive, Shropshire’s rural touring scheme, provided live performances.

There is positive evidence that HAF provision in the county has helped boost the local economy, through the creation of jobs and direct investment into local businesses. Businesses provided services such as food, venue hire, marketing and publicity, resources, and staff.

A full list of organisations delivering HAF clubs and activities is available on the Shropshire HAF website.



## Governance

The programme has a structured governance arrangement through the Shropshire HAF Steering Group and Shropshire HAF Stakeholder Group.

### Programme management

The programme is delivered by two part time members of staff, a HAF Programme Manager and HAF Co-ordinator, who sit within Communities and Customer, building on the good work of the department in delivering services for children and young people.

### Steering Group

The steering group is an integral aspect of Shropshire HAF and includes representatives from Communities and Customer, Targeted Early Help, Detached Youth Team, Supporting Families, Family Information Service and Learning and Skills.

Current members meet every six weeks for updates and act as the strategic decision-making body. The group provides strategic guidance and direction, champions the programme at a senior level, makes decisions on the allocation of funding, and considers priorities. Individual members of the steering group also support with smaller more specific tasks.

### Stakeholder Group

The stakeholder group is made up of representatives from external agencies including sports, arts, culture, citizens advice, and Shropshire food poverty alliance.

Meeting three times a year, members provide guidance, share best practice, work collaboratively to deliver Shropshire HAF, identify funding opportunities, and champion the programme within their sectors.

## Marketing and communications

A strong brand has been created for the Shropshire HAF programme, making the programme easily recognisable and helping create a high profile.

Marketing and communication activity continues to be extensive. In 2025 this included school communications, electronic what's on guide for each holiday period, electronic and printed information leaflet, flyer with code for schools, online holiday club listing, new web pages, promotional and celebration films, news articles appearing across local media, radio interviews, HAF e-newsletter to over 1,000 families and professionals, partner e-newsletters, partner email updates, core providers materials, and social media campaigns.

Films were commissioned, including interviews with children and young people, staff and parents / carers. These are available here <https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/holiday-activities-and-food-programme-haf/shropshire-haf-celebration-and-feedback/>

From surveys asking how parents and carers heard about HAF, the majority, 60%, heard via school, followed by organisation running the club, word of mouth and social media.



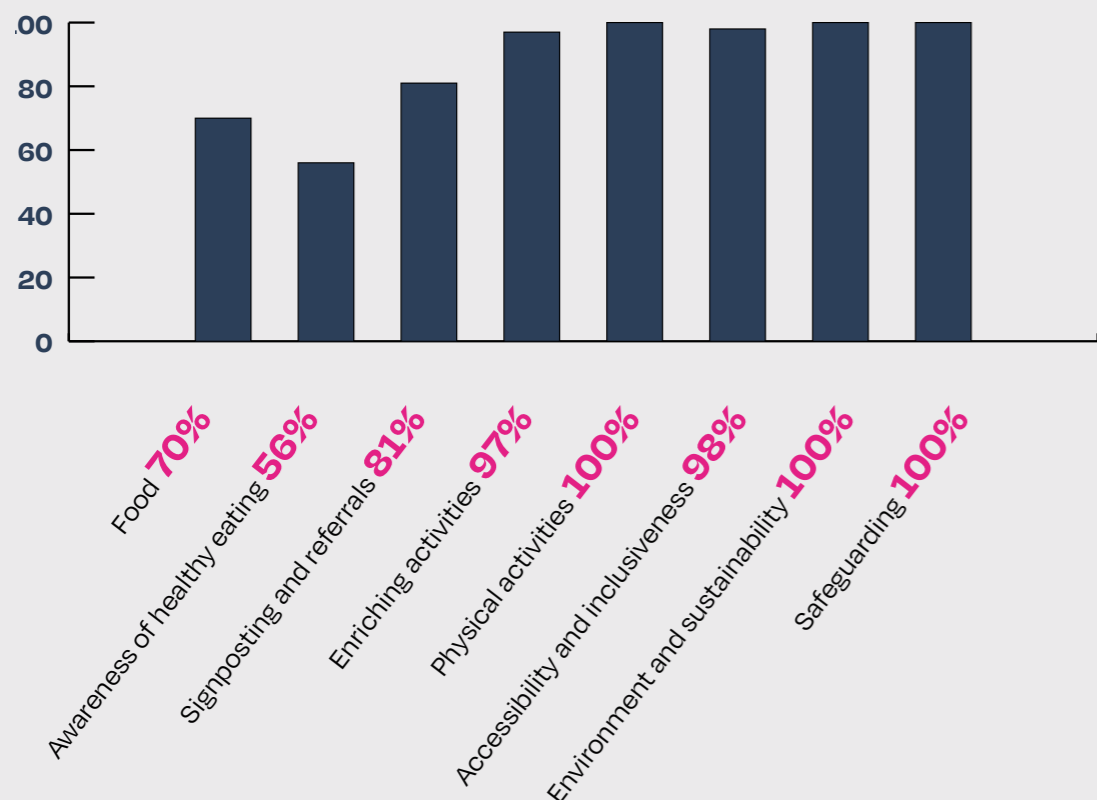
# Delivering the HAF framework standards

## Quality Assurance

Each holiday, the HAF team at Shropshire Council carries out quality assurance checks, ensuring provision at the clubs meets high standards.

A robust monitoring framework is used, which allows us to ensure minimum standards are met and identify strengths and areas for development. The framework contains eight sections, each focusing on a HAF standard as defined by the DfE: food; awareness and understanding of healthy eating; signposting and referrals; enriching activities; physical activities; safeguarding; accessibility and inclusiveness; and environment and sustainability. The framework also contains five levels of provider performance, ranging from very poor to excellent.

The following % of providers were rated as good or excellent against the following HAF standards during the summer.



## Food

Each holiday clubs provide participants with free food, usually a hot meal, as well as snacks and drinks. Over the course of the year children and young people tried new foods. 35% of parents and carers reported their children or young people tried new foods.

Many learnt the basics of cooking and food hygiene as well as how to find out the nutritional value of the foods they eat.

Many meals were cooked by the children and young people themselves using onsite kitchens and campfires. Some children and young people also grew their own food.

*“I loved making my own smoothies, I used fruit that I haven’t tasted before”.* Participant

Organisations running the holiday clubs worked in partnership with local delis, cafes, supermarkets, and food banks and hubs to provide food. Organisations were responsible for providing their own food, with support from Shropshire Council, ensuring the food met School Food Standards and taking into consideration dietary requirements.



**35%** of parents and carers at spring reported their children or young people tried new foods.

**88%** of children and young people at summer agreed or strongly agreed that the food was good.

**31%** (spring) and **20%** (summer) of parents and carers said they didn’t need to worry about giving food on the days their children or young people had attended a club.



*“The staff were so friendly and welcoming, it really put me at ease leaving my child there. The food was great and my*

*son came home telling me all about the meals, he even asked me to make cottage pie. I noticed my son eating more fruit after the club, which was a nice surprise.”*

Parent



### Nutritional education and the promotion of healthy living / lifestyles

All clubs delivered activity to educate participants about healthy living and lifestyles.

- **Cooking and food** preparation such as fruit cocktails, kebab making, morning oats, baking healthy cakes, pizzas, soups, and smoothies.
- Children and young people made **meals** for their families to take home.
- Children and young people designed their **own menus** and shopped for food.
- Clubs provided **healthy snacks**, such as fruit and salad carts which included new foods each day aimed at encouraging participants to try something new.
- **Games and workshops** designed to encourage children and young people to make positive healthy choices.
- Clubs grew **fruit and vegetables**, picked them, and made meals.
- Utilised initiatives designed to reduce **food waste**.
- Qualified teachers and **nutritionists** supported this area of work.
- Varied menus to meet **dietary and cultural requirements**.
- Food **budgeting** and food swaps. Every child was given a '**budget bites**' recipe book.
- Clubs use their own **nutritional education** programmes, adapted or specifically designed for HAF.
- Resources provided by the council HAF team using HAF Padlet, including access to **PhunkyFoods** education and Vegemi resources. Junior oral health packs were given out to every participating child.

### Case Study: EKO HAF Programme at Weston Park – Working with 12-16 year olds

*“Educating Kids Outdoors is an outdoor learning charity working with schools and families across the West Midlands.*

*Secondary school children who aren't interested in sport, drama or art, or who have SEN needs that make it more difficult for them to socially interact with peers, often struggle to find holiday clubs that they enjoy. EKO offers a space of child-led play, interaction and creativity in the outdoors.*

*One of the main challenges was ensuring that the older children did not bring in and/or use their phones during the session. After the first week decision was made to ban mobile phones from the setting.*

*The impact has been that a safe space has been created for positive social interaction amongst teenagers and the feedback from the children and their adults was resoundingly positive. We will be continuing to offer an older group going forward and would encourage other providers to do the same. Teenagers just want to gather, chat, eat and have the resources to play together.*

*EKO offers work experience (year 10 upwards) and student leader (aged 16yrs upwards) opportunities. These young adults are excellent role models to our holiday club children, as well as developing important life and work skills themselves. Many of our holiday club children tell us that they aspire to support EKO when they are old enough.*

*“This programme has been a huge help during the holidays; my child comes home smiling every day”.*

*Parent*

*One year 7 girl told us that if she wasn't at HAF she would be sitting at the train station with her friends all day as there was shelter and a place to sit where they wouldn't be bothered.*

*One year 8 boy told us that if he wasn't at HAF he would be at home on his play station all day as that was all he did usually.” Natasha Branston, EKO Club Lead*

*Natasha Branston, EKO Club Lead*



## Enriching Activities

Children and young people had the opportunity to take part in a huge range of enriching activities. These activities were designed to engage children and young people with a broad range of interests and abilities. The activities provided opportunities for children and young people to learn new skills, try out different activities, have fun, and socialise.



Activities included: sports, music, arts, cooking, gardening, forest schools, child led play, performances, arts workshops, and trips to venues.

Alongside the core enrichment activity offered as part of the HAF programme, children and young people also took part in a huge range of external workshops, some organised through Shropshire Council and others by the organisations themselves. These included arts workshops delivered by the Hive, environmental

*“Thank you so very much for the most amazing summer of fun at HAF and for the fab beach trip to Llandudno, it is so very appreciated. You put so much love, care, planning, time and dedication into making our time with you amazing and we truly appreciate it.”*

Participant

workshops delivered by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, and live professional performances through Arts Alive.

*“I loved the trips. I’d never been to the monkey forest before and loved seeing the monkeys and having this experience with my friends.”*

Parent

The core providers reported that it was fantastic seeing children and young people take part and fully engage in activities, particularly those they hadn’t tried before, and seeing the satisfaction, excitement and sense of achievement they experienced at having completed an activity.

Over the summer **92%** of parents / carers booked their children or young person onto a club because it offered a range of activities and **80%** because it was something positive for their children to do.

## Physical Activities

All organisations met the DfE HAF framework standards of including at least 60 minutes of physical activity at each session.

Children and young people took part in a huge variety of different types and intensities of physical activities, engaging different interests and abilities.

Physical activities included traditional sports and games as well as yoga, dance, free play, orienteering, den building, gymnastics, street games, team games, swimming and trampolining. Learn Cyle offered a mixture of sessions at clubs including Learn to Ride and Bikeability Level 1 to 2. Over 300 children took part in sessions, with 40 learning to ride.

Leisure centres in the south of the county offered gym and swim sessions, with food vouchers.

Most of the staff involved in delivering the holiday clubs are professional sports coaches and teachers, experienced in delivering physical activity.

Findings from our surveys with children and young people show that attending the HAF programme increases their level of physical activity during the holidays.

**69%** of parents at summer and **60%** at spring reported that their child/ren had more exercise. With **92%** of children from reporting they enjoyed playing sports and the physical activity. Particularly football and dodgeball.

*“The pool sessions made me feel braver in the water.”*

Participant



## Budget and expenditure

### Shropshire Council received

**£729,050** from the Department for Education (DfE) to deliver the HAF programme in Shropshire during 2025/26.

This funding is calculated based on the numbers of children eligible for and in receipt of benefits-related free school meals in Shropshire and nationally.

### Expenditure breakdown

- Face to face holiday club provision **£637,183**
- Publicising the scheme to eligible families and other communications, translations and provider staff training **£28,468**
- Management and administration of the programme by the local authority **£63,399**

### Match Funding

Funding raised by core providers from paid places, town and parish councils, grants and own organisation funds to use against face-to-face provision **£63,397**

NHSE oral health funding allocation for junior oral health packs **£1,215**

## Challenges

Some of this year's key challenges were:

- High numbers of no-shows for some core providers
- Lack of uptake for HAF clubs in rural areas.
- Adequate SEND provision particularly for children and young people with complex needs and who require one-to-one support.
- Engaging young people aged 12+.
- Increase in challenging behaviour, particularly social and emotional needs.

## Looking forward to 2026 delivery

- Commissioning new types of provision which aren't currently being offered.
- Increasing places available at Severndale Specialist School to support more children with complex needs.
- Management of HAF programme to be moved from Communities and Customer into Early Help at Shropshire Council.
- Joint working with Learning and Skills to deliver sustainable childcare sufficiency offer.



# ***Shropshire HAF***

Thank you to everyone who was involved in delivering another successful HAF programme in Shropshire, we look forward to continuing to work with you next year.

## **Contact us:**

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