

DELEGATED DECISION BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

15 September 2026

Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) Extension of Open Framework Agreement

Report by Director of Children's Services

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to:

- a. Extend the Holiday Activities and Food Open Framework Agreement to 31 December 2029, using the existing extension option to extend the framework to 31 December 2028 and a variation to add a further 12 months;**
- b. Update the specification and call-off process to reflect the Department for Education grant criteria changes from September 2026.**

Executive Summary

2. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the Council to maintain a compliant, flexible and grant-funded commissioning route for the Holiday Activities and Food programme during the confirmed Department for Education funding period and through the local government reorganisation transition.

3. The report seeks approval for the Council to implement Option 3: to extend the existing framework to 31 December 2029, using the existing extension option to 31 December 2028 and varying the framework agreements to add a further 12 months. The extension will also allow the Council to update the specification and call-off process to reflect Department for Education grant criteria changes from September 2026.

4. Option 3 is recommended because it enables the Council to maintain continuity for children, families, carers and providers during the confirmed grant-funded period and provides flexibility through local government reorganisation. It preserves the existing provider market, commissioning process, booking and attendance data, quality assurance arrangements and a fair and transparent route for allocating funding through competitive call-off rounds.

5. The proposal is affordable within the confirmed Department for Education grant envelope to March 2029. No additional Council core revenue or capital funding is required. The Council controls financial exposure through call-off awards, enabling it to scale, pause or stop future activity if funding, demand, delivery requirements or provider capacity change.

6. The principal risks relate to future funding uncertainty, provider capacity, inclusion and service continuity during local government reorganisation. The Council considers these risks manageable because future commitments remain controlled through the existing call-off process.

Background

7. The Holiday Activities and Food programme supports eligible children and families during school holidays by funding safe, structured activities, nutritious food, enrichment and inclusive provision. The current Open Framework Agreement provides the Council with a compliant route to commission seasonal provision from a mixed provider market, including schools, voluntary and community organisations, leisure providers, cultural organisations, small enterprises and specialist providers.

8. A decision is required because the existing framework expires on 31 December 2026. Extending the arrangement would preserve continuity of delivery, retain provider capacity and allow the Council to implement required Department for Education grant criteria changes from September 2026 without undertaking a full re-procurement during the confirmed funding period.

Main Report

9. The Department for Education funds the Holiday Activities and Food programme, which is primarily intended for school-aged children from Reception to Year 11 who are eligible for benefits-related Free School Meals during school holidays. The Council has delivered the programme since 2020, and the current Open Framework Agreement has been in place since January 2023.

10. HAF provision is commissioned for the Easter, summer and winter school holidays. Delivery includes nutritious food, physical activity, enrichment, opportunities to build confidence and social connection, and safe, inclusive provision that meets relevant safeguarding and food standards.

11. The programme addresses a continuing need for safe, structured and supportive holiday provision for children and families affected by low income, food insecurity, social isolation and limited access to enrichment activities during school holidays. Demand has continued to increase, with the 2025/26 annual report recording 31,473 places booked and 24,388 places attended, compared with 30,447 places booked and 22,194 places attended in 2024/25.

Options considered

12. The Council has considered three options:

- 1) Option 1 is for the Council to allow the existing framework to expire on 31 December 2026 and take no further action. This is not recommended because

it would remove the Council's compliant route to market for HAF provision during the remainder of the confirmed grant-funded period and could disrupt provision for children, families and providers.

- 2) Option 2 is for the Council to extend the existing framework to 31 December 2028. This would maintain continuity through the main confirmed funding period and allow the Council to make required specification changes, but it would provide less flexibility for local government reorganisation and may require recommissioning decisions around vesting day.
- 3) Option 3 is for the Council to extend the framework to 31 December 2029, using the existing extension option to 31 December 2028 and varying the framework agreements to add a further 12 months, and to update the specification and call-off process to reflect the Department for Education grant criteria changes from September 2026.

Preferred option

13. Option 3 is the preferred option because it provides the most effective balance of service continuity, affordability, provider stability, value for money, procurement proportionality and flexibility for local government reorganisation.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

14. The proposal supports the Council's local and national priorities to reduce inequalities, improve children's health and wellbeing, and support families during school holidays. It contributes to Oxfordshire's prevention and early help objectives by enabling children from low-income households to access nutritious food, physical activity, enrichment and safe, inclusive provision at times when disadvantage can become more acute.

Financial Implications

15. The key financial consideration is that no additional Council core revenue or capital funding is required. The preferred option is affordable because HAF is funded through a ring-fenced Department for Education grant, with confirmed funding from April 2026 to March 2029. The grant allocation will meet programme costs, including delivery, administration, quality assurance and staffing.

16. The annual HAF grant awarded to the Council was £1,513,333 per year for 2023–2026 and £1,528,800 per year for 2026–2029. For 2026/27, the amount available for provider awards is estimated at £1,385,497 after deductions for staffing and IT of £143,303. The Council controls financial exposure through seasonal call-off awards, enabling future activity to be scaled, paused or stopped if funding, demand, delivery requirements or provider capacity change.

Comments checked by: **Jane Billington, Strategic Finance Business Partner**
Finance sign-off date: 13 August 2026

Legal Implications

17. The Council has duties and powers under sections 6 and 8 of the Childcare Act 2006 to secure sufficient childcare provision, as far as reasonably practicable, and to

make arrangements for childcare delivery. The proposed HAF framework extension falls within those duties and powers.

18. The original invitation to tender allowed for a framework term of up to six years from January 2023. The proposed extension to 31 December 2029 would exceed the term set out in the original invitation to tender and therefore requires the Council to make a formal contract modification. The Council must document the modification rationale and confirm that any September 2026 changes to the specification and call-off process are within the lawful scope of the framework or are varied appropriately.

Comments checked by: **Jonathan Pool, Solicitor** (Contracts)
Legal sign-off date: 13 August 2026

Staff Implications

19. TUPE may potentially apply to a re-procurement, although this is unlikely. As the services are delivered during three short periods each year, it is unlikely that any individual employee or contractor staff member would be dedicated to delivering the contracted services.

Equality and Inclusion Implications

20. The proposal extends the current commissioning arrangement and does not change the programme's policy intent, delivery model or HAF eligibility criteria. The programme supports children and families who may experience disadvantage during school holidays, including low-income households and children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, through specialist provision and inclusive mainstream settings.

Local Government Reorganisation Implications

21. Extending the framework to 31 December 2029 would provide flexibility through local government reorganisation. Because the Council is not obliged to run competitions or award contracts under the framework, successor authorities would be able to determine whether to use the framework after vesting day, the date on which successor authorities assume responsibility. The Council could also novate the arrangement to one authority as a hosted contract or disaggregate it so each authority controls its local area of provision and associated funding. This would give successor authorities approximately 20 months after vesting day to determine future arrangements.

Sustainability Implications

22. The extension does not itself change the environmental impact of HAF delivery. The Council can continue to encourage proportionate environmental improvements through commissioning, provider guidance and contract-management discussions, including reducing avoidable travel where local provision is available, encouraging efficient venue use, supporting food and activity waste reduction, and encouraging lower-waste or reusable resources where practical.

Risk Management

23. The Council has identified the main risks as future funding, provider capacity, demand management, inclusion and service continuity during local government

reorganisation. The Council can manage these risks proportionately while maintaining a stable commissioning route.

24. The Council will control funding risk through the ring-fenced Department for Education grant and the existing call-off process. The Council will commit funding only through discrete awards and retain the ability to scale, pause or cease future activity if funding is reduced, withdrawn or subject to revised grant conditions.

25. The Council will manage provider capacity and market risks through continued engagement with the existing provider base, competitive call-off rounds, seasonal capacity monitoring and the ability to encourage new providers to join the open framework where appropriate. The Council will focus particularly on geographic coverage, venue availability, workforce capacity, food costs and specialist SEND provision.

26. To address demand management and value for money risks, including non-attendance for booked places, the Council will use booking and attendance data, provider returns, quality assurance activity and seasonal review. The Council will use this evidence to target the allocation of places, monitor uptake more closely and maximise the effective use of the available grant.

27. The Council will mitigate local government reorganisation risk by using the extension as a transitional arrangement. The framework does not require the Council or any successor authority to make future awards, preserving flexibility to novate, host or disaggregate arrangements once successor authority structures, funding routes and commissioning priorities are clearer.

Consultations

28. The Council has not undertaken formal public consultation for this extension proposal, as it concerns continuation of an existing grant-funded commissioning route rather than a change to the programme's policy intent or eligibility criteria. The proposal is informed by programme delivery evidence, provider engagement, seasonal reporting and operational learning from previous HAF delivery cycles. The Council will continue existing provider engagement and contract-management arrangements to support implementation of specification and call-off changes.

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27 August 2026 (Rebecca.Lanchbury@Oxfordshire.gov.uk)

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