

Divisions Affected – All

EDUCATION & YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE November 2024

Holiday activities and Food Report

Report by the Director of Children's Services

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. Education & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to**

Note the Holiday Activities and Food offer and the efforts being made to extend the reach in future delivery periods.

Executive Summary

2. Oxfordshire County Council has been delivering the Holiday Activities and Food programme across the County since 2020 and has received an annual grant to provide opportunities to children eligible for free school meals at Easter, summer and Christmas school holidays.
3. The past three years shows a mixed picture in terms of attendance patterns and uptake of different groups of young people.
4. There has been a focus over the past year to increase uptake of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), although the actual number accessing is still very low. We have also seen a low uptake in children from more vulnerable groups this summer although have seen an increase in adolescents attending provision which was an area for development previously.
5. A number of steps are being taken to explore uptake and expand reach further with a focused campaign of work taking place in advance of Christmas holiday delivery this year including additional time offered to schools and internal council services to ensure children who are eligible are identified and understand how to access the offer.

Background

6. Oxfordshire County Council has been delivering Holiday Activity and Food programmes (HAF) since 2020 and receives a grant from DfE annually to meet a specific set of criteria. The allocation to the County Council for the period 2024-25 is £1,546,630. A staff team of two co-ordinate and manage the programme with oversight from our Partnership Youth Development Manager within Children's Social Care.
7. The programme provides benefits-related free school meal eligible (reception – Yr 11) children and young people with free holiday activities and food during Easter, Summer and Christmas school holidays. Eligible children are entitled to 4 activity sessions at Easter and Winter and 16 activity sessions over the summer school holiday. There are currently 16,419 FSM eligible children across Oxfordshire. This Summer, there were 28 providers delivering across 59 sites throughout Oxfordshire offering 23,587 places with 20,246 being booked.

The aims of the programme:

8. For children

- a. Eat healthily over the school holidays
- b. Be active during the school holidays
- c. Take part in engaging and enriching activities which support the development of Build resilience, character and wellbeing along with their wider educational attainment
- d. Be safe and not to be socially isolated
- e. Have a greater knowledge of health and nutrition
- f. Be more engaged with school and other local services

9. For families

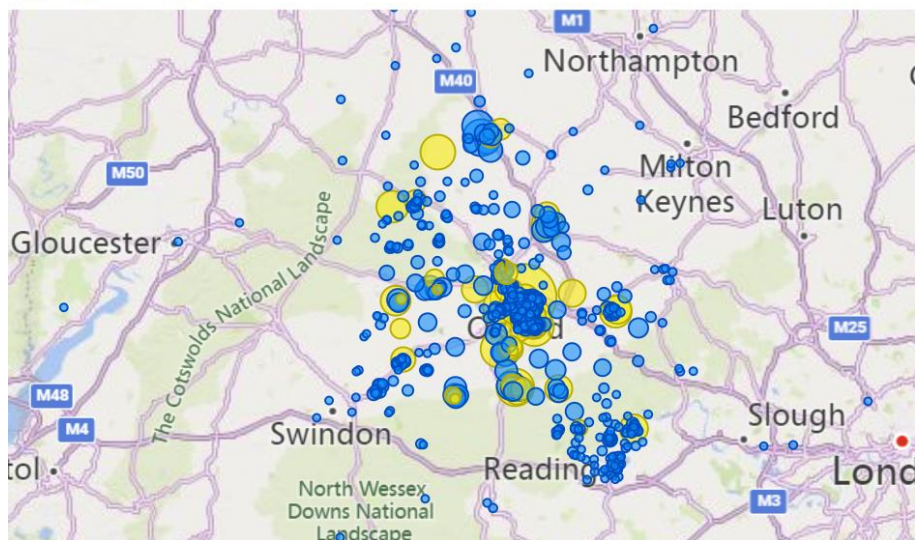
- a. To develop their understanding of nutrition and food budgeting
- b. To signpost towards other relevant information and support, for example, health, employment, and education, financial support

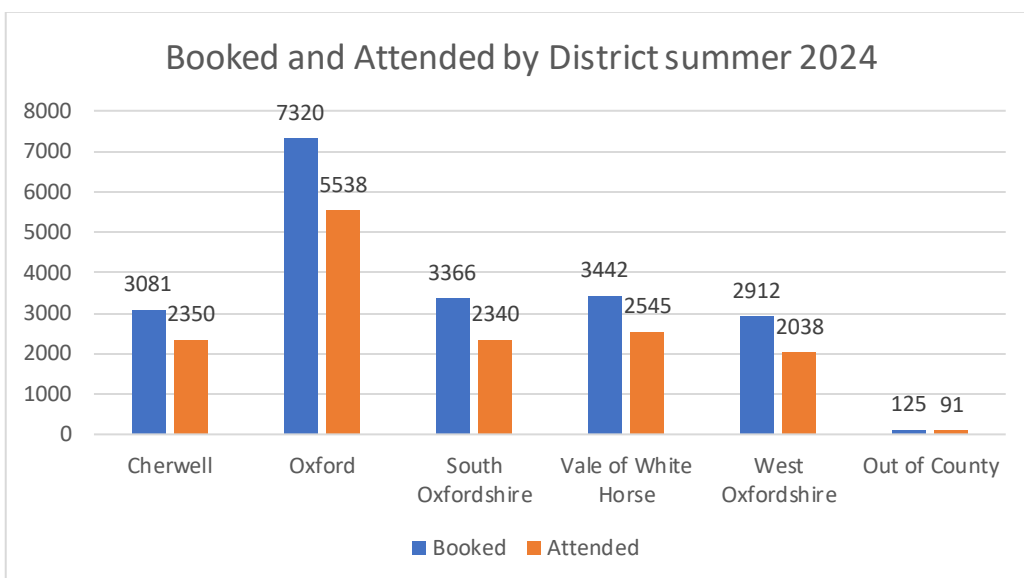
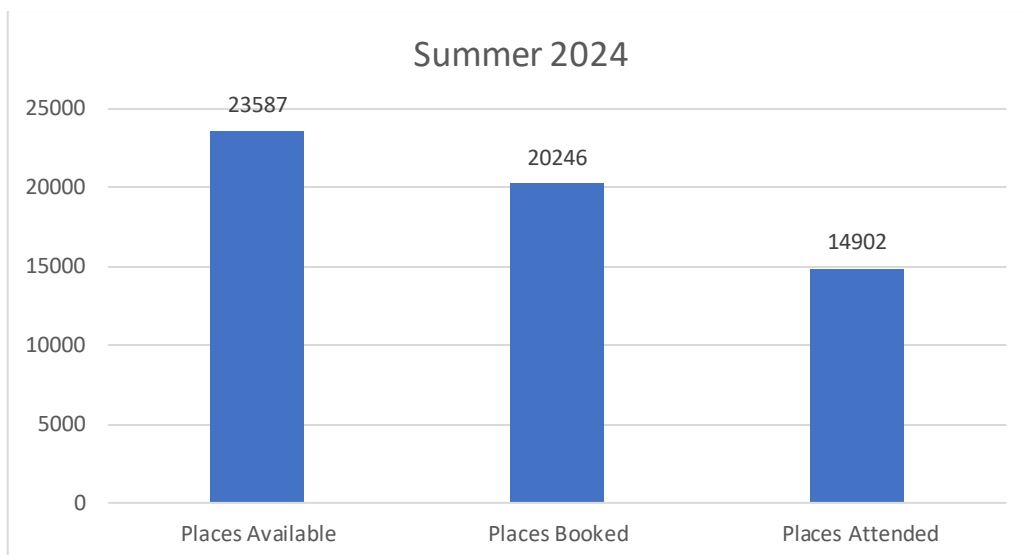
10. Activities must last a minimum of 4 hours, include nutritious food, a minimum of hour of physical activity, enriching activities and nutritional education.
11. Our provision is largely multi-activity, including free play, educational input such as GCSE revision sessions, life skills such as cooking and nutritional education. Providers include local football, boxing and Rugby clubs. However, we also have STEM-specific camps in addition to unique provision within a local Theatre where children are able to take on roles in productions and in Museums where new cultural learning experiences can take place. There are young leadership opportunities and dance, Bike ability (teaching children how to cycle), 'Grow your own' sessions including seed kits and vegetable gardens, 'bug gardens' – incorporating environment and sustainability, archery, lacrosse, camping, foraging and bushcraft, as well as specialist SEN facilities including sensory rooms, simulation rooms, interactive outdoor activities and camping pods.



12. Summer 2024

Type ● Child ● Provider





	YP	Sessions Booked	Sessions Attended
Looked After	11	95	78
Child Protection Plan	7	110	51
SEND	272	2369	1702

13. Children Attending - Comparisons

		FSM non-SEND	FSM SEND	Non-FSM Non-Send	Non FSM/SEND	Total
Summer 2024	Primary	1144	136	143	16	2,307
	Secondary	632	95	116	25	
Summer 2023	Primary	1102	772	110	57	2,489
	Secondary	206	176	44	22	

Summer 2022	Primary	1562	230	234	57	2,361
	Secondary	194	54	14	16	
Easter 2024	Primary	1052	196	104	10	1,761
	Secondary	313	61	22	3	
Easter 2023	Primary	1087	393	110	39	1,964
	Secondary	170	96	50	19	
Easter 2022	Primary	1281	132	256	14	2,019
	Secondary	260	31	42	3	
Winter 2023	Primary	1127	340	52	14	2,203
	Secondary	512	110	40	8	
Winter 2022	Primary	970	125	44	9	1,470
	Secondary	243	55	20	4	

*Categories as recorded by DfE

14. The past three years shows a mixed picture in terms of attendance patterns.
15. Although there has been a focus over the past year to increase uptake for children with SEND, the actual number accessing is still very low. There has been a large drop in attendance of primary aged children with SEND who are FSM this summer compared to the previous year.
16. Summer 2024 data shows that although 20,246 sessions were booked, 5,344 sessions were not then attended.
17. In terms of places being available, there is sufficient capacity in place across the County, but we need to focus on increasing the uptake.
18. Summer 2024 sees an increase in adolescents attending HAF provision which was an area for development previously, but overall is still relatively low.
19. We know that those who attend continue to attend, the gap is in increasing new uptake and reach.
20. We have had a very low uptake of children on Child Protection Plans as well as those who are looked after currently this summer.
21. Although Local Authorities are required to produce an annual report each year, there are huge differences in the levels of content shared and it is therefore difficult to draw benchmarked comparisons. However, when looking at comparative neighbours, Oxfordshire is in line with others.
22. **Quality Assurance**

To become a HAF provider, organisations must apply to the Council's Approved Provider List. Applications undergo an evaluation process, ensuring the highest quality providers and most effective use of resources. A range of organisations

have successfully applied, allowing a rich and diverse offer of HAF opportunities for children in receipt of free school meals.

23. In order to offer the highest quality provision to children, the offer may change over time dependant on our scoring system. All providers are expected to attend mandatory training around safeguarding processes, inclusion, Natasha's Law and we also work with them to be responsive to need by offering a wider range of training as appropriate. We work closely with networks of other Local Authorities to share practice, learning and opportunities.
24. To ensure providers are operating according to DfE quality standards, a quality visit is conducted at each site during each delivery window. The HAF team utilise a comprehensive assessment form which assesses quality across 7 domains (Food quality, nutrition education, enriching activities, physical activity, accessibility and inclusiveness, signposting and referrals, environment and sustainability). Should a provider score low on a particular domain, the HAF Team follow this up with the provider. We also collect qualitative data with the view of demonstrating impact. Anecdotal reports from camp staff and HAF children highlight the impact of the programme; from trying new food and activities, making new friends and reducing isolation over the holiday periods.

Challenges and responses

25. Parental feedback has informed us that there has been some difficulty navigating the booking process for their children. There has also been an increase in incidences this year where adults have booked more than their allocated spaces which means that they are blocking others from booking on. We have had issues where places have been booked by people who are not eligible to access the programme who are then turned away, but the space is then wasted. The current online booking system has been unable to provide high quality data which had led to the need for manual processing and a huge time commitment from the team. We have therefore reviewed this system and have commissioned a more advanced booking system for this Christmas delivery. The benefits of this are that we will be able to run in depth data reporting requirements without huge time commitment, as well as providing restrictions from over booking and ineligible bookings.
26. This summer there were 5344 places booked but not used. To mitigate this where possible in the future we will be introducing a 'No show' policy to increase the value of the free places and ensure that blocks to attending are removed from those who wish to attend and would otherwise be held on a waiting list. We have done some work to explore what is behind this and understand that although we 'went live' with the offer and shared information with schools at the same time, some schools shared at a different rate to others which has led to some families being unable to book their preferred camps due to places already being filled. Parental feedback has told us that some parents have therefore booked places even if they were not sure whether they would use, to enable them to have an option rather than not. In order to prevent this at our winter programme, we will be work with providers to encourage courtesy calls as well

as closely monitoring uptake on the new booking system and following up contact with families in a timely manner to understand barriers to attendance.

27. Through detailed mapping, we aim to ensure that provision is available as close to eligible families as possible. However, due to the number of eligible children, the price of provision and delivery premises available, not all families will have an offer within close walking distance. We are exploring options around transport to improve accessibility as well as considering how we can use school sites to deliver, as these provide familiar environments which children are usually able to get to and this may help increase uptake. We are aware that rurality also continues to be a barrier to accessibility. We will continue to explore ways to support uptake in this area including consideration of providers providing transport. We will continue to gather feedback from parents/carers to guide our programme planning, encourage consistent participation and help ensure that all children have access to the full benefits of these sessions.
28. We have seen a lower number of providers offering to deliver to adolescents, particularly post 13 years as well as a lower number attending what is available. As a response to this our inhouse Targeted Youth Support Service has delivered its own HAF programmes this summer, where we have seen attendance of 114 young people attending across the County. Going forwards, we aim to further target specific groups of young people such as those looked after, those on child protection plans, youth justice and others supported by social workers to increase reach and uptake through this offer. We are also approaching community youth providers to encourage their sign up to our Approved Provider List enabling them to deliver programmes as well as receive funding for doing so.
29. Increasing access to HAF provision for SEND children is a key priority and we currently have two SEND-specific providers who accommodate a range of needs. Our mainstream providers can apply for funding to cover additional costs, including SEND support, such as additional staffing and resources which has improved overall accessibility. We also commission SEND training for our providers, and we look to further develop this in the coming months. We have begun to work more closely with colleagues in the Short Breaks team to offer specific training to all providers enabling a more inclusive approach, as well as using disability bursaries to enable children with more complex SEND needs to access HAF provision in the future whether funding transport, additional staffing or equipment as well as improving the overall reach in this area.
30. The DfE permits Local Authorities to utilise 15% of the overall funding for discretionary places for 'vulnerable' children not in receipt in benefit-related free school meals. A professional may refer a vulnerable child to the HAF programme utilising an online form. Referrals are assessed using set criteria which includes refugee status, children with an EHCP, looked after children, those considered at risk, children who have low attendance rates at school or who are at risk of exclusion and children living in areas of high deprivation or from low-income households who are not in receipt of free school meals. We continue to increase engagement with schools and attended school forum events to raise the profile of the discretionary places.

31. We are working hard to explore why there was low take up from children receiving support from Children's Social Care. This may be because there were other services provided over the summer especially for Children We Care For.
32. Promotion for the programme takes place via schools and social care. We currently contact all social work teams who have an eligible child within their service as well as sending direct information to all eligible families across the County. There is currently an inconsistent response from schools in terms of sharing information with families as well as the timing of this. To improve this, we have recently requested all schools have a HAF link member of staff to provide more efficient channels of communication and more consistent approach. We also have a campaign ready to recruit young HAF Ambassadors who can promote information within their school settings and have a feedback role to us to improve the HAF offer in the future. We advertise our programmes through the council's Family Information Service and will begin a focused campaign immediately to raise the profile through our internal teams, particularly for children supported by our social work colleagues as we know the importance of being in touch with these children, particularly during school holidays. We will also increase efforts when working with schools to ensure that all children eligible for Free School Meals's are identified and offered the opportunities available fairly.
 - a. We will continue to use a platform called Wonde to send emails and texts with HAF information to eligible families attending schools. A booking link is included [HAF Activity Providers | Oxfordshire County Council](#)
 - b. Information can also be found on the Oxfordshire County Council website [Family Information Service | Holiday Activities and Food Programme \(HAF\): Information for Families](#)
 - c. A referral form for children who aren't on FSM but meet **vulnerability criteria** and would benefit from the programme is shared across professional networks including schools and community organisations <https://intranet.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/haf-referral-form-professionals>
 - d. Information is also shared on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, OXME [Holiday Activities and Food Programme | OXME.INFO](#)
33. This winter we are aiming to increase reach through the programme via the Household Support Fund grant. We are currently exploring the option of offering fuel vouchers to all households with children attending HAF to prevent pressures on households and improve accessibility further.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

34. This programme of work aligns with the current Council's Corporate plan in relation to tackling inequalities as well as connecting to The Oxfordshire Way

which seeks to provide preventative solutions and increase the independence of residents.

Financial Implications

35. Our allocation this year is £1,546,630. Continuation of the grant post March 2025 is anticipated to be confirmed either way by end November 2024. If the HAF programme is agreed post March 2025, exploration of further staffing allocation will be considered to increase focus and drive of the programme.

Checked by: Jane Billington, Strategic Finance Business Partner

Legal Implications

36. There are no current legal considerations to take account of in relation to this area of work.

Checked by Craig Cochrane, Head of Law and Legal Business Partner, Children and Families

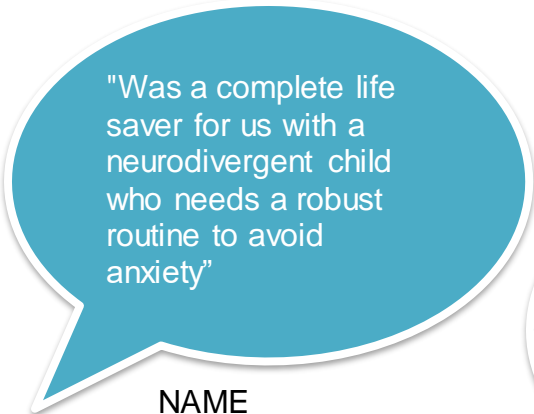
Staff Implications

37. Staffing for this programme is on a fixed term contract basis which currently ends end of March 2025 and is funded from the DfE HAF Grant. These contracts can be extended in line with any future DfE grant.
38. If we are awarded future a further HAF grant following March 2025, consideration will be given to increasing the staffing capacity from the eligible element of the grant award as stated above.
39. A focus on further connecting staff from the Short Breaks programmes and HAF team will be implemented to increase awareness, reach, accessibility and consistent communications.

Risk Management


40. If the Council does not receive a further grant award following March 2025, it is highly likely that there will be a number of families now reliant on this holiday provision. We will therefore raise issues for consideration in the future if this situation arises

41. Examples of feedback from parents



"Was a complete life saver for us with a neurodivergent child who needs a robust routine to avoid anxiety"


NAME
Lisa Lyons



"My children love it & gives me a break & reduces my worry surrounding food over the school breaks"

Annex:

Nil



"Please please keep this one running! Honestly I cannot express how this club has helped my son."

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November 2024