

**Meeting date:** 28 May 2026

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Report title:** Eligibility for Solihull's Holiday Activity and Food Programme

**Report from:** Director of Economy and Infrastructure

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**Wards affected:**

- All Wards |  Bickenhill |  Blythe |  Castle Bromwich |  Chelmsley Wood |  
 Dorridge/Hockley Heath |  Elmdon |  Kingshurst/Fordbridge |  Knowle |  
 Lyndon |  Meriden |  Olton |  Shirley East |  Shirley South |  
 Shirley West |  Silhill |  Smith's Wood |  St Alphege

**Public/private report:** Public

**Exempt by virtue of paragraph:** N/A

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to change the eligibility criteria that determines which children will be entitled places in the Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAFP). This is in addition to those children and young people who are already eligible for the HAFP based on their receipt of benefits-related free school meals.
- 1.2 The proposed changes are to ensure that the Council's delivery of the HAFP remains compliant with the UK government's grant conditions and programme requirements. It is also to ensure that HAFP places are reserved and can be prioritised for only those children and young people living in low-income households and/or considered vulnerable.
- 1.3 If the change in policy is approved it will be implemented with immediate effect and in time for the summer holidays, during July and August.

## 2. Decision(s) Recommended

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the eligibility criteria for children and young people to be offered places in the Solihull HAFP as set out in 5.2.1 and 5.2.2.

### 3. Matters for Consideration

3.1 The Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAFP) is a UK government-funded scheme that provides free-to-access holiday activities, meals and childcare places for children and young people from low-income families. It was rolled out across the UK in 2021, in recognition of the pressures that low-income families can experience during the school holidays, and the adverse impact that extended periods away from school can have on children and young people. In response to these issues, HAFP aims to ensure that during the school holidays, eligible children and young people can benefit from:

- healthy and nutritious meals
- a healthy level of physical activity
- being happy, having fun and meeting new friends
- developing a greater understanding of food, nutrition and other health related issues
- taking part in fun and engaging activities that support their development and well-being
- feeling safe and secure
- getting access to the right support services
- returning to school feeling engaged and ready to learn

3.2 To be eligible for a place in the HAFP, children and young people must be aged 4-16yrs and be in receipt of benefits-related free school meals (FSM). However, the UK government also encourages local authorities to use up to 15% of funding to provide places to other children and young people that might benefit from participation in the HAFP.

3.3 In Solihull there are over 10,000 children and young people who are eligible for HAFP because of their FSM status. This number has been gradually increasing since 2021, with an increase of 1.4% from 2024 to 2025, for instance. Approximately 44% of eligible children live in the B36 and B37 postcodes in north Solihull, with the B90 (13%) and B92 (10%) areas in the south of the borough also featuring significantly. These areas also reflect the distribution of HAFP delivery in the borough.

3.4 Each year approximately 4,000 children and young people participate in the Solihull HAFP, with over 2,500 participating during the summer holidays. The profile of participation during the summer of 2025 included:

3.4.1 A total of 2547 children, of which 2,073 were in receipt of FSM (81%) and 474 were not in receipt of FSM (19%).

3.4.2 973 children (38%) with SEND, which compares to children and young people with SEND making up 32% of the total population in receipt of FSM.

3.4.3 1,870 children (73%) were primary school aged, compared to 49% of the total school population. 677 (27%) were secondary aged, compared to 51% of the total school population.

3.4.4 90 children (4%) lived in the borough but attended school in a neighbouring local authority area. This compares to children and young people living outside of the

borough making up 22% of the FSM population in Solihull's schools.

## **Challenges, risks and issues**

- 3.5 Whilst the UK government's decision to extend the HAFP for a further three years until 2028/29 is welcome, there are several challenges and issues that the Council needs to respond to and manage. The first of these is that the amount of funding the Council receives to deliver HAFP each year is reducing from £962,410 to £925,760 and is fixed at this amount for the next three years. This is set against rising eligibility and demand for places, alongside increasing delivery costs.
  - 3.6 Another key issue is that the Council needs to ensure it spends a maximum of 15% of funding on providing places for children who aren't in receipt of FSM. Last summer 19% of all participation in the Solihull HAFP was from this group. This position will continue until there is a change in the eligibility criteria for HAFP.
  - 3.7 In addition to these issues, there is a need to continue to grow the reach of HAFP. Whilst Solihull compares well to other local authorities in this regard, with over 30% of eligible children and young people participating each year, there are up to 6,000 who don't. There is also a need to grow the participation of young people aged 11-16yrs in the HAFP. Whilst this tripled from 9% in 2024 to 27% in 2025 (summer holidays), approximately half of all participation should be by this group.
4. **What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?**
    - 4.1 There is an option to do nothing and to continue to deliver the programme as it has been since 2021. This risks the Council breaching the UK government's grant conditions for HAFP, as well as reducing the potential participation of children and young people who HAFP is intended for, i.e. from families on low incomes and/or considered vulnerable.
    - 4.2 Another option is to further supplement the HAFP budget via the UK government's new Crisis and Resilience Fund. This programme is in place until 2029/30 and the UK government is allowing local authorities to use it to support the delivery of HAFP due to the benefits to the financial resilience of low-income families. It has previously been agreed that in Solihull, approximately £250,000 will be allocated for this purpose, which will help to increase the number of HAFP places, length and duration of provision, ensure that there can also be delivery during at least one half-term period, as well as create some flexibility in how activities are delivered.
    - 4.3 There is an option to change the eligibility criteria for children and young people being offered places for HAFP. One of the first steps already being taken is to only provide places for children and young people either living in or attending school in Solihull. Last summer over 15% of all participation was by children and young people who neither live in nor attend school in Solihull, which was the result of children and young people using HAFP codes issued by neighbouring authorities but choosing to attend activities in Solihull. This will now stop, to ensure that only children and young people living in or attending school in the area can benefit from the Solihull HAFP.
    - 4.4 There is an option to more clearly define and determine which children and young people not in receipt of FSM can be included within HAFP. Up until now, any professional has been able to refer children and young people they think will benefit from HAFP. This trusts that they are the best placed people to identify which children and young people might be vulnerable and benefit from positive activities and contact during the holiday periods. Last summer over 70% of referrals were made by schools,

with the top reasons for referrals being in relation to the following:

- SEND – 39%
- Mental health – 15%
- Looked after child – 13%
- Concerns about the parent or carer – 6%
- Young Carer – 5%
- Child In Need – 5%

4.5 Following some investigation by officers there are two reasons why there is such a high proportion of children with SEND referred by professionals. These are:

4.5.1 The lack of a suitable holiday offer that is otherwise available for children and young people with SEND.

4.5.2 Some referrals being “parent-led” whereby a parent contacts professionals to complete a referral for their child. This is proportionately higher for school referrals and for children with SEND.

## **5. Reasons for recommending preferred option**

5.1 The preferred option is to change the criteria for professional referrals to HAFP to ensure that only children and young people who are vulnerable, or from families on low incomes, are included in HAFP. This will also help ensure that the Council remains compliant with the UK government’s funding rules, whilst also continuing to trust that professionals in regular contact with children and families are best placed to understand who can most benefit from participation in HAFP.

5.2 Following extensive consultation, a multi-agency task and finish group has recommended a definition of “vulnerability” that should be applied to HAFP and the referrals made by professionals:

5.2.1 In all circumstances the following children and young people should be considered as “vulnerable”:

5.2.1.1 Children on a Child Protection Plan (CPP)

5.2.1.2 Children in Need (CIN)

5.2.1.3 Children on a targeted help plan

5.2.2 The following cohorts have been identified as vulnerable where financial hardship significantly increases the level of need. For these groups, vulnerability is not assumed and must therefore be supported by evidence of low household income, via receipt of Universal Credit:

5.2.2.1 Children with SEND, as evidenced through inclusion on a school SEN register or being in receipt of an EHCP.

5.2.2.2 Young Carers who are identified as having caring responsibilities that impact on their

wellbeing or access to enrichment.

#### 5.2.2.3 Home Educated Children.

#### 5.2.2.4 Children Looked After (CLA), excluding residential care arrangements.

5.3 From the available data, there are a total of 4,950 families in receipt of Universal Credit, of which 4,156 are already eligible for HAFP due to meeting the income related threshold for free school meals. Applying the new low-income threshold will bring a further 794 families into potential eligibility for HAFP places, depending on the presence of other factors. The numbers of children and young people with SEND, young carers, home educated children and looked after children within the 794 families that would now be in scope for HAFP places is likely to be a much smaller proportion.

5.4 In applying this new definition and approach, children and young people with SEND but whose families aren't on low incomes will no longer be eligible for HAFP places unless another qualifying factor is present. To mitigate this impact, Children's Services has now launched a new holiday offer as part of the new Short Breaks programme. This programme is specifically for children and young people with SEND, offering both free places (funded through HAFP) and places that parents can pay for (often at a reduced/subsidised cost). This came into effect during the recent Easter holidays.

## 6. Implications and Considerations

6.1 State how the proposals in this report contribute to the ambitions in the [Council Plan](#):

Ambition:	Contribution:
1. The right conditions for everyone to thrive.	A key aspect of HAFP is ensuring that every child and young person can access activities, services, opportunities and safe spaces in every neighbourhood
2. Services that people need in the right time at the right place.	
3. Children and young people have the best possible outcomes.	The main outcomes associated with HAFP, are concerned with the personal, social and emotional development of children and young people, promoting health and wellbeing, school attendance and attainment.
4. Adults are supported to maximise wellbeing and independence.	
5. A vibrant economy with increased access to opportunities.	
6. Opportunities and fairer outcomes by acting on climate change.	
7. An attractive and aspirational place.	

## 6.2 Consultation and Scrutiny:

6.2.1 There has been extensive consultation and engagement with stakeholders to develop the proposals set out in this report. This has taken place from January to May, including the Joint Additional Needs Delivery Group (responsible for the delivery of the local SEND strategy), as well as the Children's and Youth Offer Steering Group (which fulfils the UK government's requirements for a local multi-agency HAFP steering group). A task and finish group was also commissioned to review how professional referrals are made to HAFP.

6.2.2 Through this process representatives from the following services and organisations have contributed to the development of the recommendations to Cabinet:

6.2.2.1 SMBC – Education, Children's Services, Public Health, Stronger Communities

6.2.2.2 Public sector – NHS Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust, NHS Learning Disability and Autism Provider Collaborative, NHS Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board, West Midlands Police

6.2.2.3 Voluntary and community sector – Solihull Parent Carer Voice, YO Solihull, MAPA, Midland Mencap, Autism West Midlands, Ordinary Magic, Think Active

## 6.3 Corporate Parenting Implications

6.3.1 Children who are in the local authority's care will continue to be in the scope of HAFP.

## 6.4 Financial implications:

6.4.1 During 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29 the Council will be receiving £925,760 per year to deliver and administer HAFP in Solihull. A further £250,000 will be used from the Crisis and Resilience Fund to supplement the HAFP budget.

6.4.2 The main financial implication from the recommendations of this report will be to ensure that a maximum of 15% of the HAFP funding received from the UK government is spent on children and young people not in receipt of FSM. This will ensure the Council remains compliant with the grant conditions.

## 6.5 Legal implications:

6.5.1 There are no legal implications from the recommendations in this report.

## 6.6 Risk implications, including Risk Appetite:

6.6.1 The risks that are within the scope of this report are financial and reputational. The financial risks have been set out in the report and relate to a potential breach of government grant conditions, as well as the challenges delivering the programme in an environment of increasing demands and reducing budgets (when adjusting for inflation). The recommendations aim to mitigate these risks.

6.6.2 The reputational risks concern the reduced access to HAFP for children and young people with SEND. Whilst access will be continued for those children from families with low-incomes, there will be some children and young people who will no longer be able to access HAFP and whose parents will need to pay for their children to access other holiday activities and clubs. This may result in some concerns being raised by these families with the Council.

6.6.3 This risk is being mitigated through the launch of a new holiday offer for Short Breaks

to ensure there is suitable provision in place for children and young people with SEND, regardless of their family's income. Additionally, the extensive consultation that has taken place, including with the input of Solihull Parent Carer Voice will help ensure that there is a good understanding of the challenges the Council is facing and the reasons the changes are being made.

## 6.7 Equality implications:

6.7.1 The recommendations from this report are likely to benefit the following groups, either because their eligibility for HAFP is being maintained or because they will be more explicitly referenced and encouraged to be included:

6.7.1.1 Children and young people from families with low incomes, increasing the total proportion participating in HAFP.

6.7.1.2 Young carers, who will continue to be eligible HAFP, where their family has a low income.

6.7.1.3 Children and young people who are being supported by Children's Services, with those on Child Protection Plans, targeted help plans or assessed as a Child In Need being eligible for HAFP, regardless of their family's income.

6.7.2 The recommendations are likely to have an adverse impact on some children and young people with SEND, who wouldn't otherwise qualify for HAFP because of their family's income or the other proposed criteria. Families with children and young people within this group will need to pay for holiday clubs and provision.

6.7.3 The Fair Treatment Assessment for the Solihull HAFP is attached as Appendix 1.

6.8 Linkages to our work with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and / or the Birmingham & Solihull Integrated Care System (ICS):

6.8.1 None

## 7. List of appendices referred to

7.1 Appendix 1 – HAFP Fair Treatment Assessment

## 8. Background papers used to compile this report

8.1 [Holiday activities and food programme 2025 to 2026 financial year - GOV.UK.](#)

## 9. List of Other Relevant Documents

9.1 None