

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE	
Award of grant for delivery of the Camden Holiday Activities and Food Programme 2026-2029 (AH/2026/01)	
REPORT OF	
Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Cabinet	Date 14 January 2026
STRATEGIC CONTEXT	
<p>The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme is a Department for Education (DfE) funded national initiative that provides free enriching activities and a nutritious meal during Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays to children and young people aged 4-16 who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals or otherwise vulnerable. The programme supports the We Make Camden Food Mission, by supporting children in the borough to eat well every day with nutritious, affordable, and sustainable food. Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision offered through the HAF programme also contributes to the Local Area SEND Strategy.</p>	
SUMMARY OF REPORT	
<p>The report provides an overview of Camden's HAF programme, delivered by local providers, sports clubs, and voluntary sector organisations, the programme addresses holiday hunger, supports physical and mental well-being, and mitigates learning loss during school holiday periods. It flags confirmation from the Department for Education (DfE) that the previously annual national funding will be continued for three years from April 2026 at a level consistent to 2025/26 (£200m per annum).</p>	
<p>The report proposes that carrying on from previous years, the funding from the DfE is passed to the Young Camden Foundation (YCF) for them to distribute on our behalf. As the report also suggests that this arrangement continues for three years, it also recommends that we enter into a detailed grant agreement with YCF.</p>	
<p>Finally the report proposes that authority is delegated to the Director of Health and Wellbeing in consultation with the Cabinet member to release the grant annually to YCF, subject to performance.</p>	
<p>Camden grant funding for 2025/26 is £814,000. The Camden HAF delivery and administration allocation for 2026/27 is £788,240, a reduction of £25,370. Provisional grant allocations for 2027-2029 indicate that funding will continue to be at this reduced level.</p>	
<p>The report is being submitted to Cabinet because the total value of the proposed grant agreement exceeds £100,000 per annum and therefore requires a Cabinet decision on how this additional funding can be awarded.</p>	

Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information

No documents used to prepare this report are required to be listed

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RECOMMENDATIONS**That Cabinet**

- i. Approves the proposal to continue delivery of the Camden Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme and the related award of a grant over 3 years to the Young Camden Foundation (YCF) to be the HAF coordination and quality assurance partner for the project.
- ii. Delegates authority to the Director of Health and Wellbeing, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families, to release the grant to YCF annually until 2028/2029, in line with Department for Education allocation levels and subject to performance.

Signed:



Tim Aldridge, Executive Director, Children and Learning

Date: 24th December 2025

1. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report outlines the proposed delivery plan for the Camden Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme for 2026-2029 and seeks approval from Cabinet for a grant agreement with the Young Camden Foundation, passing through DfE funding received.
- 1.2 The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme is a Department for Education (DfE) funded national initiative that provides free enriching activities and food during Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays to children and young people aged 4-16, who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals or otherwise vulnerable.
- 1.3 Since 2021, the Camden HAF programme has successfully delivered 22,156 places for vulnerable children and young people. Camden has worked in partnership with the Young Camden Foundation as lead delivery partner since programme inception, with YCF responsible for programme administration, allocation of funding to local providers (including due diligence), quality assurance and training.
- 1.4 The Department for Education (DfE) has confirmed that the HAF programme will be extended for another three financial years from April 2026, at a similar level nationally to 2025/26 funding (£200m). Camden's DfE funding allocation in 2025/26 is £814,000. The Camden HAF delivery and administration allocation for 2026/27 is £788,240, a reduction of £25,370. Provisional grant allocations for 2027-2029 indicate that funding will continue to be at this reduced level.
- 1.5 The amounts allocated to Camden have reduced year-on-year and are insufficient to meet the needs of all Free School Meals (FSM) eligible children, particularly since the provider funding rate has been increased to mitigate inflationary cost pressures. Additionally, the programme has been extended to support children and young people (CYP) with SEND during school holidays.
- 1.6 This report presents the proposed governance structure, funding distribution model, benefits and key delivery mechanisms for the Camden HAF programme for 2026-2029. It also recommends award of a grant agreement with the Young Camden Foundation (YCF) to fulfil the role of lead delivery partner, administering the programme and allocating funding to delivery partners, for which YCF receive an administration fee of £80,088 (£59,118 DfE funding and £20,970 Camden funding). As the annual allocation of DfE funding may vary from the provisional grant allocations, it is recommended that the Director of Health and Wellbeing be granted delegated authority to approve the annual amount of grant funding to be passed through and the value of the associated administration fee awarded to YCF once confirmed annually by the DfE.
- 1.7 The report is presented to Cabinet because the value of the grant exceeds £100,000 per annum, the maximum amount the relevant Executive Director or Director of Health and Wellbeing following consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member is permitted to authorise under the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

2. PROPOSAL AND REASONS

- 2.1. As of January 2025, 9,223 children in Camden are eligible for free school meals, which represents 44.8% of all pupils.
- 2.2. This report proposes to continue delivery of the Camden HAF programme in 2026-2029, to support children and young people in receipt of benefits-related FSM or otherwise vulnerable. The programme will run during Easter, Summer, and Christmas school holidays each year.
- 2.3. The HAF programme offers a diverse and inclusive range of provision as part of Camden's strategy to tackle family poverty. The HAF programme helps to reduce holiday hunger and food insecurity among children from low-income families, provides engaging and educational holiday activities that support children's well-being and learning, increases fair access to activities for children with SEND and strengthens partnerships with local community organisations.
- 2.4. The DfE provides an annual funding allocation to Camden based on comparative need nationally. This funding is passed through to the Young Camden Foundation, who make recommendations on funding allocations to HAF providers based on an annual application process. Decisions are confirmed by Children's Commissioning, and YCF complete due diligence and put contracts in place with the agreed providers.
- 2.5. YCF are also responsible for programme administration, monitoring provider performance, fulfilling DfE reporting requirements and booking platform management, for which YCF will receive an administration fee of £80,088 in 2026/27, which is consistent with the administration fee paid in 2025/26.
- 2.6. Programme reach is maximised through partnerships with schools, family hubs, food banks and community partners, as well as promotion of the programme through Camden and YCF platforms, Council networks, social media, school bulletins, and the Camden Magazine. HAF will continue to be part of a broader holiday offer, including integration with the Summer in Camden website to promote programme activities. Plinth, the HAF booking software (hosted on YCF's website) allows parents to select local activities, prevents double-booking and collects monitoring data for reporting purposes.
- 2.7. The programme has supported the rising demand for SEND activities during school holidays by creating SEND-specific provision and allocating funding for additional staffing support at inclusive provision.
- 2.8. The HAF programme incorporates activities designed to provide nutritional education and promote healthy behaviours. A nutritious meal is provided to maintain children's access to healthy food during school holidays. The Public Health team offer tailored support to providers to enhance their capacity to deliver these aspects of the programme.

- 2.9. The HAF programme has strengthened collaboration with local partners, enhancing sustainability and continuous improvement within the VCS. The programme has enabled local providers to leverage external funding to expand the offer, including offering longer sessions to support working parents and extending the duration of the programme. In the Summer 2025 scheme, providers brought in over £52,000 of external funding.
- 2.10. YCF have also established corporate partnerships (including Sainsburys and Amazon Fresh) to provide donations of equipment and provisions to providers and families. Local providers have established partnerships with sports, arts and cultural organisations to enhance the activities available for participants (e.g. ZSL London Zoo, Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), museums and galleries).
- 2.11. Governance of the programme is overseen by the HAF Steering Group consisting of YCF and Children's Commissioning representatives including the YCF CEO and Head of Children's Commissioning & Health Partnerships.
- 2.12. New HAF guidance was published at the end of December, this clarifies HAF eligibility criteria in respect to forthcoming changes to FSM eligibility, expands local flexibility on delivery periods, revises administration funding allocations, and strategically aligns HAF more closely with school-aged childcare initiatives. From 2026/27, ringfenced HAF funding will be consolidated in the Children's, Youth and Families Grant and include capacity funding for Local Authority support for the school-aged childcare market more broadly (£39,450 in 2026/27).
- 2.13. To ensure the implementation of the Camden HAF programme is delivered as efficiently and effectively as possible, it is requested that the Council enters into a partnership agreement with the Young Camden Foundation as its HAF coordination and quality assurance partner for the project.
- 2.14. The HAF coordination and quality assurance partner will continue to develop partnerships with providers, carrying out due-diligence and quality assurance, allocating funding to provider organisations, ensure compliance with DfE HAF framework standards, and manage performance issues, incidents and complaints. These responsibilities will be set out in the partnership agreement.
- 2.15. As a trusted strategic partner and the main membership organisation for organisations supporting children and young people in Camden, YCF are ideally placed to act as the HAF coordination and quality assurance partner and have successfully administered the programme to a high standard since 2021. By continuing our successful collaboration with YCF, we can ensure that HAF funding is efficiently allocated, that activities remain high quality and inclusive, and that the programme reaches those who need it most.
- 2.16. It is also requested that Cabinet delegates authority to the Director of Health and Wellbeing, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families, to release the grant annually until 2029/2030, subject to the HAF coordination and quality assurance partner meeting the requirements and expectations set out in the partnership agreement as described in point 2.11.

3. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

3.1. Option 1: Do not have a HAF coordination and quality assurance partner and administrate the programme in-house

3.1.1. If it is decided that we should not appoint a HAF coordination and quality assurance partner, it would result in the Council having to commit significant internal resource to deliver the programme, which is likely to be more expensive. New systems and processes would need to be established within the Council and staff appointed to administrate the programme, causing delays to delivery.

3.2. Option 2: Undertake a competitive process to appoint a HAF coordination and quality assurance partner

3.2.1. The HAF programme has been delivered in partnership with the Young Camden Foundation since 2021. They have experience in successfully implementing the programme supported by established relationships with providers. While it is theoretically possible that other organisations would take part in a process to be the HAF coordination and quality assurance partner, it is highly likely that the quality of submissions and depth of understanding is going to be limited in comparison.

3.2.2. A competitive process would provide the Council with the ability to set a specific financial envelope and assess suppliers' responses on how they would deliver the programme to the required standards.

3.2.3. The primary risk of conducting a competitive process is that the time and resource required will lead to delays in the implementation of the 2026 HAF programme.

3.2.4. There is also a high chance that only one submission would be received, from the Young Camden Foundation, and should other submissions be received (albeit unlikely), the nature of the requirements needed from the delivery partner would mean it is likely that the grant would be awarded to the Young Camden Foundation, therefore not a good use of Camden resources.

3.3. Option 3: Direct appointment of a HAF coordination and quality assurance partner – Recommended option

3.3.1. The Young Camden Foundation have successfully administrated the Camden HAF programme since 2021. Their experience of implementing the programme puts them in a strong position to continue to deliver the programme efficiently and effectively from 2026-2029.

3.3.2. YCF is a key strategic partner for the Council acting as the main membership organisation for VCS partners supporting children and young people in Camden. YCF has over 200 members and partners and has distributed £4.5m through funding programmes to member organisations.

3.3.3. To support the Food Mission goal by 2030, working with YCF to deliver the HAF programme will enable the delivery of an effective and efficient programme within the timeline of the Mission without avoidable delays.

4. WHAT ARE THE KEY IMPACTS / RISKS? HOW WILL THEY BE ADDRESSED?

- 4.1. A grant agreement is not a contract for service delivery, but a negotiated agreement between two partners, in this case to provide administration of the HAF programme. Therefore, there is a risk related to the Council's ability to address issues with the HAF coordination and quality assurance partner's performance without the contracting mechanisms which would be in place with a procurement.
- 4.2. The risk of difficulty managing performance could be mitigated by a mutually agreed partner agreement which includes the roles, responsibilities and expectations of the Council and HAF coordination and quality assurance partner; a set of inputs, outputs and deadlines, alongside strong conditions (drafted by the Council's legal department). In addition, Cabinet can delegate authority to the Director of Health and Wellbeing to enter into annual agreements with the HAF coordination and quality assurance partner, subject to their performance and the project's needs.

5. CONSULTATION/ENGAGEMENT

- 8.1. Whilst there is no requirement to carry out a consultation exercise, feedback has been collected during each HAF programme to date from children, parents/carers and providers which has been overwhelmingly positive. Learning points from user feedback is incorporated into programme design and commissioning decisions.
- 5.1. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) for the HAF programme identified the provision advances equality of opportunity for vulnerable cohorts including Children and Young People (CYP) who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals, those with SEND, and CYP who are otherwise vulnerable, including children with a social worker, young carers, refugee/asylum seeker etc.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The report recommends the continuation of the Camden HAF programme and the related award of a grant over 3 years to the Young Camden Foundation to be the HAF coordination and quality assurance partner for the project. The grant would be paid as an annual grant with amounts determined by annual DfE funding allocations for Camden (which will be passed through to YCF in full). Payment will be subject to the HAF coordination and quality assurance partner meeting the requirements and expectations set out in the partnership agreement as described in point 2.11. The report is presented to Cabinet as a Cabinet decision is needed over how this additional funding can be awarded. because the value of the grant exceeds £100,000 per annum, the maximum amount the relevant Executive Director or Director of Health and Wellbeing

following consultation with the relevant Cabinet member is permitted to authorise under the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

6.2 The Council must be mindful that it must comply with the public sector equality duty and the requirements of Section 149 (1) of the Equality Act 2010. This means that they must have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct and advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those that do not share it.

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The Camden Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme is funded through the Department of Education (DfE), with the 2025/26 allocation confirmed at £814,000.

7.2 The DfE has confirmed that the HAF programme will be extended for another three financial years from April 2026, at a similar level nationally to 2025/26 funding.

7.3 The proposed grant will be passed through in full to the Young Camden Foundation (YCF), the recommended delivery partner. The exact grant amount will vary year-on-year in line with DfE allocations.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The proposals have no environmental impacts.

9. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Key activity date	Key tasks
30/01/2026	Grant award notification to HAF coordination and quality assurance partner
01/02/2026	Commissioning of HAF providers by HAF coordination and quality assurance partner
30/03/2026	Commencement of Easter HAF scheme
01/04/2026	Commencement of grant, monitored termly
01/04/2027	Renewal of grant (subject to satisfactory performance), monitored termly
01/04/2028	Renewal of grant (subject to satisfactory performance), monitored termly

10. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Equalities Impact Assessment

Appendix 2: Data Protection Impact Assessment

REPORT ENDS