

HAF 2025-26 Southend Local Authority Annual Report

An introduction to HAF

Funded by the Department for Education, the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme has been delivered in Southend-on-Sea since 2022.

During the Easter, summer and Christmas school holidays, HAF provides free enriching activities and nutritious meals for children and young people from Reception to Year 11 who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals. In February half term we delivered the HAF programme for 4 days as we had grant funding available. In Southend, we work closely with a wide range of providers, including schools, community organisations, sports clubs, youth services and voluntary sector partners, to ensure children and young people can access a diverse programme of activities that reflects different interests, abilities and needs.

Activities have included sports, arts and crafts, outdoor learning, cooking, music, and opportunities to develop life skills and build confidence. We carefully commission provision across the city to ensure activities are available in areas of highest deprivation and greatest eligibility for free school meals, helping to target support where it is needed most. Consideration is also given to local transport links and accessibility to reduce barriers to participation, enabling more families to access enriching holiday experiences within their local communities. Through this approach, HAF supports children and young people to stay active, socialise with peers, learn new skills and enjoy positive experiences during the school holidays while helping families manage the additional pressures that holidays can bring.

Aims of the Programme

There are many benefits for pupils who attend the programme, they include:

- receive healthy and nutritious meals
- maintain a healthy level of physical activity
- have fun, meet new friends, be happy
- develop a greater understanding of what foods are healthy and the benefits of eating a balanced healthy diet
- 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 confident, engaged and ready to learn.
- families also benefit when HAF providers involve them in the programme through:
 - family events that include the whole family
 - supports families to continue to work through the holiday periods

Approved HAF Providers

Twenty providers delivered over four programmes in 2025-26; this included seven Ofsted registered providers and three schools.

We would like to thank them for the great HAF programme they delivered for eligible families across Southend.

Ofsted Registered Clubs

Active Academy
Camp4Champs
Intrepid Ventures
Kidz Camp Essex
Kids Kingdom
Super Star Sport Essex
Mega Camps

Schools

The St Christophers School
Shoeburyness High School
Lancaster School
Other
Achieve Thrive Flourish
Get the Kids Out
Mini Champs Academy
Targeted Youth Services Southend Council
Southend Association of Voluntary Services (SAVS)
The Future of Sport CIC
South Essex Community Hub (SECH)
Silverbirch Farm
Southend Boys & Girls Choir
Southend Best Start Family Hubs

Southend on Sea HAF Financial Overview

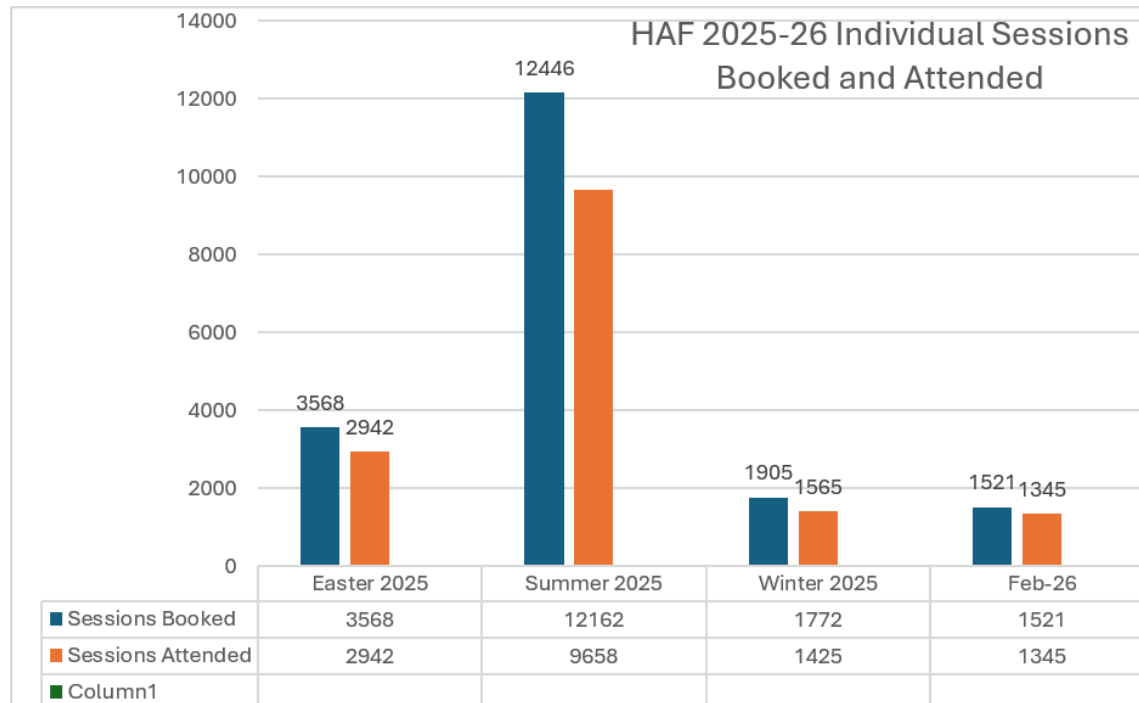
Total HAF Grant Allocation	2025-2026	£719,720.00
Total HAF Expenditure	2025-2026	£609,408.00
Administrative Expenditure		£70,831.00
Programme Expenditure		£523,526.00
Capital Expenditure		£814.00
Publicity & Marketing		£10,035.00
EEQU Booking System		£13,152.00

Southend HAF 2025-26 Programme in Numbers

Number of HAF providers delivering the programme	20
Number of HAF places delivered (sessions)	3908
Percentage of primary aged HAF participants	88%
Percentage of secondary aged HAF participants	12%

Unique Pupils Reached

HAF Delivery Period	Unique Pupils booked	Unique Pupils Attended	Unique pupils with SEN (attended)
Easter 2025	1015	937	184
Summer 2025	1374	1312	435
Winter 2025	751	1174	442
February 2026	713	485	65
Total	3853	3908	1126



Children and Families Feedback

We survey families after each holiday period with an online form. In total we had 300 responses to the survey.

Testimonials

'Going to the panto as a family was the highlight of the year for us, something we would never have experienced.'

'Relaxed panto performance, I never knew this existed until I received the email, I was unsure how my child would react, but he loved it. You have given me courage to try other experiences for my child'.

'We love ATF at Prince Avenue; they welcome us back each holiday and remember my children's names! They have a lot of fun.'

'The HAF clubs are a lifeline for me as a single parent. I can continue to work knowing my children are having a great time.'

'My child struggles at school, attending Silverbirch Farm he transforms into a different child, asking "when can I go back again to see my other friends"'.

'The family Sealife ticket has been fantastic for us to get out and enjoy the Sealife Centre as a family. My children are excited to explore the beaches nearby. We are getting more exercise as a family! Parent SEND children.

'Never used HAF as I was not confident that my child would be supported, the Sealife tickets have been a lifeline for us to get out of the house and be active for a year Thank you!'

'February half term has been great for us; I have been able to work extra shifts when my children were at the HAF club.'

Partner Organisations

The HAF programme was supported through strong partnership working across a range of local organisations and services. Key partners included Southend Association of Voluntary Services (SAVS), Southend City Council Public Health colleagues, Southend Best Start Family Hubs, the Family, Early Years and Childcare Service, Adults and Communities Team, Communications Team, Data Team, Targeted Youth Services, Essex Police and the Southend Safeguarding Partnership.

These partners played an important role in supporting programme planning, promotion, safeguarding, community engagement, performance monitoring and the identification of children and families who would benefit most from the programme. Their collective expertise and collaboration helped to maximise participation, strengthen local delivery and ensure that activities remained responsive to the needs of Southend's children, young people and families.

Highlights

Working closely with the Youth Council, colleagues co-produced and delivered four days of HAF provision designed around the interests and priorities identified by young people themselves. This approach ensured that activities were relevant, engaging and responsive to what young people wanted from their holiday experiences. By listening to and acting upon the voices of young people, we increased awareness and ownership of the programme amongst secondary-aged pupils. As a result, participation grew significantly, with 81 more secondary-aged young people engaging in the summer programme compared with the previous year. The work demonstrated the value of involving

young people in decision-making and helped create activities that supported social development, confidence building, physical wellbeing and positive peer relationships.

In Summer 2025, we invested in EEQU, a new booking and management platform for the HAF programme. Alongside implementation of the system, officers worked closely with internal data colleagues to improve the identification and verification of eligible children and young people. The new platform has delivered a more accurate and efficient booking process, reducing administrative burdens for providers and improving the experience for families. EEQU provides greater flexibility, enabling parents and carers to manage and cancel bookings independently, helping to maximise attendance and make spaces available to other families where needed. The platform also offers translation into multiple languages, improving accessibility and supporting greater engagement from families for whom English is not their first language. These improvements have strengthened our ability to reach eligible families and ensure support is targeted effectively.

Skateboarding Day

We delivered a Skateboarding Day at Warrior Square in partnership with the YMCA and Rubicon Skateboarding. The event provided children and young people with access to a free sporting activity in a safe and supportive environment. Participants received professional coaching, enabling them to build new skills, improve confidence and challenge themselves physically. All equipment, including skateboards and helmets, was provided, ensuring there were no financial barriers to participation, and a packed lunch was available for attendees. The event encouraged healthy lifestyles, positive social interaction and outdoor physical activity during the school holidays. Feedback from residents was overwhelmingly positive, with many commenting on the value of seeing families and young people engaged in a positive community activity within one of Southend's public green spaces. The event also showcased how HAF can bring together partners to create accessible opportunities that benefit both young people and the wider community.

Southend Best Start Family Hub Fun Days

We delivered two Family Fun days in areas of high deprivation, providing free, inclusive events for children and families during the school holidays. The events offered a range of enjoyable activities alongside healthy food provision for children and created opportunities for families to spend quality time together. They also provided an important engagement opportunity, enabling professionals to speak directly with families about the HAF programme and other available support services.

Families were able to access advice and guidance from SEND colleagues and the School Transitions Team, offering practical support to children preparing to start or move schools. The days helped strengthen community connections, reduce isolation and improve awareness of services available to support family wellbeing. The events were held in our Best Start Family Hubs and supported the development of Southend's Best Start in Life agenda by bringing services together in community settings, improving access to information, advice and support, and helping families build relationships with local professionals. This approach promotes early intervention, strengthens family resilience and encourages families to access wider support networks and find out about services in their local Best Start Family Hub.

Summer Reading Challenge

At Achieve Thrive Flourish's Prince Avenue HAF Club, 27 children successfully completed the Summer Reading Challenge, with more than 50 children participating in reading activities throughout the programme. The challenge encouraged children to maintain reading habits over the summer break, supporting literacy development and helping to reduce the risk of learning loss outside of term time. The 2025 theme, Marvellous Makers, inspired creativity and exploration across a wide range of reading materials, from fiction and poetry to graphic novels and non-fiction texts.

Feedback from participants demonstrated high levels of engagement, with children reporting enjoyment in discovering new stories, solving mysteries and learning about different creatures and their habitats. The programme successfully promoted a love of reading, stimulated imagination and provided enriching educational experiences during the holiday period.

'I really enjoyed completing the Summer Reading 2025 Challenge with my friends. I couldn't wait to tell my family about the stickers & bookmark I received'. Ella - Age 5.

Christmas Food Support

At Christmas, we are strengthening our support for families experiencing financial pressures by working with local food support organisations to co-ordinate the provision of food parcels and seasonal assistance. Partners include Southend Foodbank, St Vincent de Paul Centre, One Love Project, South Essex Community Hub and Storehouse. Through this collaborative approach, families will receive practical support during a period when household costs are often at their highest. We are also working closely with the Tackling Poverty Group to ensure that efforts are co-ordinated across the city, reducing duplication and maximising the impact of available resources. This partnership approach helps ensure that vulnerable families can access food and essential support while also being connected to wider services that may benefit them in the longer term.

Enriching Activities

The HAF programme provides children and young people with access to a wide range of enriching activities that they may not otherwise experience. Alongside sports, outdoor activities, creative arts and community-based events, we have worked with local partners to offer family experiences that promote social connection, cultural enrichment and positive memories.

During 2025, families were able to attend Christmas pantomimes, providing an opportunity to spend quality time together during the school holidays at no cost. For many families, financial pressures can make visits to theatres and cultural venues inaccessible, and the HAF programme has helped remove these barriers.

Attending live theatre exposes children to storytelling, music, performance and the arts, helping to develop imagination, creativity, communication skills and confidence. These experiences also encourage children to engage with new environments and broaden their horizons, whilst providing opportunities for families to interact and enjoy shared experiences away from everyday pressures.

A particular highlight was the relaxed performance at the Cliffs Pavilion, where the theatre team went above and beyond to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for children and young people with SEND. Adaptations included adjusted lighting and sound levels, flexible seating arrangements, reduced audience expectations, quiet and sensory spaces, and trained staff who understood the

needs of children requiring additional support. These measures helped families feel confident and comfortable attending an event that they may previously have considered inaccessible.

'We have never taken our son to the theatre before because we worried about how he would react and whether we would have to leave. The relaxed performance was amazing. The staff were welcoming from the moment we arrived and there was no judgement. He was completely mesmerised by the show and engaged throughout. Seeing him smile, laugh and enjoy something new was incredible. As a family, we were able to spend quality time together and create memories we never thought possible. We can't thank everyone enough.'

This feedback demonstrates the wider impact of HAF activities, not only providing enriching experiences for children, but also reducing isolation, building confidence and creating meaningful opportunities for families to connect, participate and feel included within their community.

Alongside theatre visits, the HAF programme provided a wide range of enriching activities and family experiences designed to give children and young people opportunities to try new things, build confidence and spend quality time with their families. Activities included sports, skateboarding, arts and crafts, outdoor play and wellbeing activities, delivered by a range of local providers across the city.

Family-focused experiences included ice skating sessions, Sea Life Adventure passes, family events and Family Fun Days delivered through our Best Start Family Hubs. These activities enabled families to enjoy affordable days out together, many of which would otherwise have been inaccessible due to financial pressures. Family Fun Days also provided opportunities for parents and carers to connect with local services and support networks while children participated in a range of engaging activities.

These experiences helped reduce social isolation, encouraged children to develop new interests and skills and supported positive family relationships. By offering a diverse programme of activities, HAF has enabled children and families to create lasting memories, strengthen social connections and enjoy enriching experiences within their local community.

Nutritional Education and the Promotion of Healthy Living/Lifestyles

In partnership with Health4Life colleagues, a range of evidence-based resources were shared with families of children aged 5 to 16 years to increase knowledge and confidence around healthy lifestyle choices. Resources covered portion sizes, sugar consumption, understanding food labels, the relationship between diet and oral health, supporting children with fussy eating, preparing healthy packed lunches and accessing specialist eating support where required.

Health and wellbeing messaging was reinforced through HAF provision, with families and providers signposted to practical resources on healthy food swaps, achieving 5-a-day recommendations and understanding sugar content through interactive tools such as sugar calculators.

Physical activity was promoted through the Daily Mile initiative across clubs, encouraging children to engage in regular exercise and providing a sustainable activity that families can continue together beyond the programme. This approach supported the development of healthy habits, increased awareness of nutrition and physical activity and helped families access information and tools to make informed lifestyle choices.

Food Offer

All HAF clubs provided at least one nutritious meal each day, helping to ensure children had access to healthy food during programme attendance. Several providers also offered a breakfast snack on arrival to support children who may have started the day without eating and the majority provided an additional healthy snack to promote regular, balanced nutrition throughout the day.

Food provision was sourced independently by providers, enabling menus to reflect local needs and available partnerships. In one secondary-age provision, pupils prepared and cooked their own lunches using the school's catering facilities. This practical food education approach supported the development of cooking skills, increased confidence in food preparation and encouraged greater engagement with healthy eating.

Parent feedback indicated that participation in cooking activities had a positive impact beyond the programme, with young people showing increased confidence in the kitchen, a greater willingness to try new foods and a stronger interest in preparing meals at home. These experiences helped to build life skills, support independence and promote healthier food choices for the future.

Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)

In Easter and Summer 2025 our specialist school The St Christopher's School delivered the HAF programme for their eligible children. This provision was particularly valuable for families of children and young people with complex special needs, as they were able to access activities in a familiar environment alongside their friends and peers. Being supported by adults they already knew and trusted helped reduce anxiety and enabled children to engage confidently in a range of enriching activities. Families reported that the programme provided much-needed respite during the school holidays and helped children maintain social connections, develop independence and continue building important life and communication skills.

Key Challenges

A key challenge throughout 2025 was increasing participation amongst families who were eligible for HAF but had not previously accessed a funded place. While engagement continued to grow, some families continued to face barriers to participation, including limited awareness of the programme, lack of confidence in accessing services and practical challenges relating to booking and attendance.

Engaging secondary school-aged young people also remained a challenge. Feedback from providers highlighted the need for activities and provision that better reflect the interests, aspirations and increasing independence of older children and young people. Ensuring that programmes remain attractive, relevant and age-appropriate for this cohort is essential to improving participation and retention.

In addition, strengthening the marketing and promotion of HAF remains a priority. Although a range of communication channels were utilised, there is a need to further develop targeted marketing approaches to increase awareness amongst eligible families, schools and community partners, ensuring information reaches those who would benefit most from the programme.

Moving Forward

To address these challenges, the focus for the coming year will be to work more closely with EEQU, schools and HAF providers to strengthen outreach, improve the visibility of available opportunities and develop provision that better meets the needs and interests of secondary-aged young people. This approach aims to increase participation amongst underrepresented groups and ensure that more eligible children and families can access and benefit from the programme.

Building on the success of the February half-term programme, partnerships will be strengthened with colleagues across Free School Meals, Data, Short Breaks and Alternative Provision services to improve the identification, engagement and support of eligible children and families. Collaboration with local food organisations will support the delivery of family cooking sessions within targeted Best Start Family Hubs, helping to increase families' confidence and skills in preparing healthy, affordable meals.

Additional partnerships with local gyms and swimming providers will be explored to increase opportunities for older children and young people to participate in physical activity, supporting healthy lifestyles and encouraging sustained engagement beyond the HAF programme.

These actions aim to increase participation, improve accessibility, enhance the reach of support services and strengthen outcomes for children, young people and families across Southend.

Questions regarding the Southend on Sea HAF programme should be emailed to HAF@Southend.gov.uk.