

Audit Committee
21st April 2022

Item 4: To receive any items of business which the Chairman decides should be considered as a matter of urgency

Question from Cllr Emma Corlett

Most children in Town Close who are eligible for free school meals were not able to access the Big Holiday Fun Scheme over the Easter Holidays. I have heard from other families who did attend that not all places were taken up and attendance was poor. Will Audit Committee investigate the cost, take-up, impact and value for money of this scheme, for each holiday period that it has run, to properly evaluate whether this is the most effective or appropriate use of public money

Response:

The Big Norfolk Holiday Fun, a programme of activities for 5-16 year olds across Norfolk ran in 2021. The Council's website reports that, 'After a successful Easter programme the Big Norfolk Holiday Fun is back for summer, for children eligible for means-tested free school meals. There's a fantastic range of free activities for 5-16 year olds taking place during the holidays, with events across the county available to book online. The sessions will include a variety of fun activities, including sports, music, arts and other exciting opportunities to learn and develop skills, alongside a free nutritious meal each day. Booking is on a first-come-first-serve basis, with limited spaces for many activities, so families should book soon to avoid disappointment.' (13 July 2021)

On 27 October 2021 the government announced a further investment of over £200 million per year over the next 3 financial years for the holiday activities and food programme (HAF), which follows the successful roll out of the programme across England in 2021. Norfolk's first funding was in 2021 as part of the national rollout and 2021 was therefore our first year of operating HAF, albeit in very challenging circumstances.

This funding is for the 152 upper tier local authorities to coordinate and provide free holiday provision including healthy food and enriching activities. The programme will again be available to children in every local authority in England. The holiday periods that they expect local authorities to cover are set out in the Core offer section of the Government's website. The Government encourage local authorities to make the holiday clubs available to any children not receiving free school meals who can pay to attend. The schemes are not obligatory for children to attend. In 2022 Norfolk has offered the 'Big Holiday Fun Scheme', in partnership with Active Norfolk.

The Council submitted a report to the Department for Education setting out:

- how the Authority's 2022/2023 programme will work
- how many children the Authority expects to work with in 2022/23

The Council secured £2,692,990 of funding for 2022-23.

The Government's Grant Determination Letter (31/5854) sets out the standards for the funding. By 15th February 2023 the Council is required to submit a report setting out the actual number of children the Authority worked with during delivery of the programme at Easter, summer and Christmas in 2022. That report will also include:

- The overall number of unique children who participated in the Authority's programme
- The overall number of unique children in receipt of FSM who participated in the Authority's programme
- The number and proportion of children who are in the: primary school age range; the secondary school age range; and any children outside of those age ranges who attended the Authority's programme.
- The proportion of primary age and secondary age children who have participated in the Authority's programme.
- The number of children with SEND or additional needs who have participated in the Authority's programme.
- The average number of days attended per child.

The Authority must provide an annual report on their HAF programme to the Department by 30 June 2023. The report will cover a number of different areas, as set out in the "Annual Report" section of the programme guidance.

The letter also requires that the Authority's nominated responsible officer must confirm, through the submission of an annual Certificate of Expenditure, at the end of each financial year that the funding has been properly expended. The Authority must maintain a sound system of internal financial controls.

The 2022-23 Internal Audit Plan, approved by the Audit Committee on 3rd February 2022, includes an audit of the Holiday & Activity Food Programme (HAFP) for Children's Services, at page 153 of that agenda, which is published on the Council's website. The audit was planned for the fourth quarter of the audit year (Spring 2023) to enable data to be collected from the 2022 Easter and Summer schemes.

In consideration of the comprehensive governance arrangements and assurance required through the Government's funding requirements the next steps proposed are that:

The planned audit will take place in Spring 2023, as described above. The scope of the audit will include the 2022 Easter, Summer and Christmas schemes, including a sample of on-site visits. Active Norfolk will be asked to report to the Council on any complaints that may have been received regarding the 2022 Easter scheme.