



Holiday Activities and Food Programme

2026 Service Specification for Prospective Delivery Partners



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Holiday Activities and Food Programme – Overview

Since 2018, the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme has provided support to children in receipt of free school meals through holiday periods. Following successful pilots between 2018 and 2020, the Department for Education (DfE) have committed over £200 million each year since 2021. The HAF Programme has now been extended for three years to cover 2026-2029 with [updated guidance](#).

The funding provided to Croydon Council requires the local authority to coordinate and provide free holiday provision, including healthy food and enriching activities. The Holiday Activities and Food Programme must be delivered during the Easter, Summer and Winter holidays.

The HAF programme funding is primarily for school aged children from reception to year 11 (inclusive) who receive benefits-related free school meals (FSM). Benefits-related free school meals are available to pupils if their parents are in receipt of one of the qualifying benefits and have a claim verified by their school.

Please Note: Since September 2023, all children in London state-funded primary schools now receive a free school meal under the universal infant free school meals (UFSM) policy. Pupils who receive a free meal under UFSM must also be in receipt of benefits-related FSM to be able to access a place on the HAF programme.

All HAF providers should deliver a high-quality experience that will result in children:

- receiving healthy and nutritious meals
- maintaining 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
- feeling safe and secure
- getting access to the right support services
- returning to school feeling engaged and ready to learn

Croydon Council now seek applications for the 2026 delivery year from all relevant parties. Applications submitted must be of the highest standard. Prior experience and suitability to operate a HAF provision must be conveyed within applications, and will not be assumed.

Introduction to the Holiday Activity and Food Programme 2026 - Croydon

The HAF Programme in Croydon provides grant funding to organisations capable of delivering holiday provision to children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals in Croydon.

Since 2019, Croydon Council have been delivering the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme on behalf of the Department for Education. The DfE initially chose Croydon as a pilot LA for the programme, before a national roll out in 2021.

Croydon Council has collaborated with schools, community groups, faith-based organisations, voluntary service entities, and childcare services providers to deliver the HAF programme in previous years. This service specification lays out the requirements for 2026 which a prospective delivery partner for the HAF programme should be aware of. This includes details on how to apply for the programme an outline of the subsequent steps required for participation.

For 2026, Croydon Council seek applications for provision during all delivery periods throughout the year. The deadline for applications is: 23.59 on the 28th January 2026. Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application ahead of Easter and then reviewed throughout the year. Late applications will not be accepted.

Croydon Council seek applications from delivery partners able to offer 'mainstream HAF provision' and/or a SEND specific provision to support children with medium-high additional needs.

Croydon Council want to continue to work with the very best partner organisations in delivering the HAF programme, and welcome applications from both previous delivery partners and those who have not delivered in Croydon before. Details of how organisations will be marked and selected is given in Appendix 1 - Marking Criteria.

Holiday Activities and Food Programme – Croydon Requirements

Dates of Delivery

Easter Dates

For Easter 2026, all providers must deliver 4 days' worth of provision between Monday 30th March 2026 and Friday 10th April 2026. Provision must be for a minimum of four hours a day.

Summer Dates

For Summer 2026, Croydon require all providers to deliver for four consecutive days per week, across a 1, 2, 3 or 4 week programme. If delivering a 2, 3 or 4 week programme, it must be run on consecutive weeks.

Clubs can choose to run from Monday – Thursday or Tuesday – Friday between the Monday 20th July 2026 and Friday 28th of August 2026. Provision must be for a minimum of four hours a day.

Winter Dates

For Winter 2026, all providers must deliver 4 days' worth of provision between Monday 21st December 2026 and Thursday 31st December 2026. Provision must be for a minimum of four hours a day.

Spaces Allocation

All applicants must state the number of holiday club spaces they intend to provide at each delivery period. Applicants will be required to state the number of spaces across their entire delivery period, and a daily breakdown. For applicants intending to deliver at multiple venues, a breakdown of spaces per site, and per day will also be required.

Applicants which are new to delivery in Croydon or have not delivered since Easter 2024 will initially be able to apply for a maximum of 35 daily spaces.

Croydon Council reserves the right to adjust any organisation's requested space allocation if the application reflects unrealistic projections with reference to previous delivery or in relation to any other significant concern.

Programme Standards

All clubs must meet the programme standards outlined below:

1. Healthy Food/Meals



Each Holiday Activity and Food Provider across Croydon must provide at least one main meal which meets the [school food standards](#) during each session. Croydon Council have an expectation that **hot meals** will be provided throughout the programme, with cold food provided only in exceptional circumstances and agreed by the HAF Team.

All food must meet with food preparation regulations, taking into account allergies, dietary requirements, and religious and/or cultural requirements.

Croydon Council welcome organisations who are able to deliver more than one meal per day to children and young people attending HAF provision.

2. Enriching/Physical Activities

Holiday clubs must provide fun, enriching and age-appropriate activities that equip children with opportunities to develop or consolidate skills or knowledge and to try out new experiences. Holiday Clubs are required to deliver the equivalent of at least one hours' worth of Physical Activity per day across their programme, that meet the [Physical Activity Guidelines](#).

3. Nutritional Education and Healthy Lifestyles

Holiday clubs are encouraged to include nutritional education as a key component of their programme and be aimed at improving the knowledge and awareness of healthy eating for children. For example, this can be in the form of workshops, and could include activities such as getting children involved in food preparation and cooking, growing fruit and vegetables, and taste tests. Where appropriate, opportunities to support children and young people in learning about healthy lifestyles could cover, the negative impact of vapes, cigarettes, drugs, etc.

4. Signposting and Referrals

Holiday Activity and Food Providers must provide information, signposting or referrals to other services and support that would benefit the children who attend their provision and their families. Providers must also ensure that children and families are aware of the breadth of other Holiday Activity and Food programmes they could attend within Croydon.

5. Accessibility and Inclusiveness

All holiday club providers must ensure their programmes are inclusive and accessible to children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Providers delivering mainstream provision are expected to cater for children with low to medium level needs and must make reasonable adjustments in their programmes to support their full participation. Providers should make every effort to adapt activities as needed and ensure staff are appropriately trained to support a range of additional needs.

6. Environment and Sustainability

All organisations delivering the programme should consider how their provision can be more environmentally friendly and sustainable. For example, providers may wish to consider:

- minimising the use of single-use plastics
- where possible using locally sourced food and ingredients
- making use of food surplus organisations
- ensuring there is a wide range of recycling and compost facilities for waste
- growing fruit and vegetables and showing how they can be used and cooked
- encouraging uniform banks and exchange schemes

It is recommended that all applicants consult the latest HAF Programme guidance issued by the Department for Education prior to making an application [updated guidance](#).

Programme eligibility for children and young people

The HAF programme offers holiday places primarily for children living or attending a school in Croydon who are in receipt of benefits-related Free School Meals. A small percentage of places may also be made available to children not in receipt of Benefits-related free school meals, and this process is administered by the child's school and through professional referrals.

Additionally, Croydon Council also encourages providers to make holiday provision available to children not eligible for free school meals, who can pay to attend. This might be through operating a HAF club as bespoke provision, or as part of already existing holiday provision in the area, with a likelihood of a mixed arrangement depending on the local supply and demand for provision.

SEN/Additional Needs

Applications from organisations able to deliver specialist/dedicated SEN provision are warmly welcomed.

The Council's expectation is that all applicants will be able to support children with low-medium levels of SEN and/or disability, and children should be considered on a case-by-case basis. It is understood that not all children will be suitable for some programmes, but every effort should be made to be inclusive wherever possible.

Where children require further support on a programme, small, additional SEND payments can be sought from the HAF programme to cover the cost of a 1:1 worker through the Additional Support Fund.

In addition, Croydon Council are seeking specific programmes across the borough who could support children with medium/high levels of Special Educational Needs. The Council recognise there is a greater cost attached with running this type of provision and would expect this to be focused entirely on catering for additional needs, with higher staffing ratios, use of appropriate accessible venues, and a tailored programme to suit those attending.

Booking System

Croydon Council partner with HolidayActivities to manage eligibility, take bookings, and provide attendance data on the programme.

All Croydon schools allocate vouchers to children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals plus 15% of discretionary vouchers. Parents/families of eligible children will receive an email/text with a unique voucher code for their child, giving access to the Booking Platform. Parents can book up to 16 sessions for Summer and up to 4 sessions for Winter.

All providers are required to use HolidayActivities to administer bookings, and on-boarding [support](#) is available as part of this.

Application Process

Eligibility

Grant funding for the Holiday Activities and Food programme is available to community and voluntary organisations, not-for-profit companies, registered charities, constituted organisations, social enterprises, schools, and private companies operating in Croydon.

As part of the application process, and to confirm your eligibility to receive public money, you will be required to submit documentation listed below. Late submissions of documentation after the application deadline of 23.59 on the 28th January 2026 may lead to rejection of your application.

Please note that we expect all documentation to be comprehensive, and where appropriate, accompanying documents should also be sent. For example, if you refer to your safer recruitment policy in either your recruitment policy or safeguarding policy, this should additionally be submitted.

If you have previously delivered, we only require documents where they have recently been updated.

- Copy of Public Liability Insurance documentation (minimum £5 million)
- Copy of Employer Liability Insurance documentation (minimum £1 million)
- Safeguarding Policy

- Recruitment Policy
- Health and Safety Policy including Food Handling Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Privacy Policy/GDPR policy

In addition, all successful applicants must submit the following risk assessments ahead of delivery

- Venue Risk Assessment
- Programme Risk Assessment

Croydon Council expects all provision to be supported by relevant and up to date policies and procedures that are adhered to by all staff who will be involved in the delivery of HAF provision. All submitted policies should be dated and signed within the last 3 years.

Croydon Council expects that all delivery staff are inducted and trained in accordance with the organisation's policies and procedures to ensure the highest of delivery standards, especially for safeguarding, DBS checks, health and safety and equal opportunities.

Applications that do not include the required supporting documents will not be considered. If any documentation submitted is deemed insufficient this may also result in an application not being considered.

Please note: if you are a Croydon maintained school or academy, you only need to submit the following supporting documents from the above checklist along with your application:

- Programme Risk Assessment
- Food Handling Policy (if using alternative caterers to normal school provision)

Applications and any submitted supporting documentation must be the applicant's own work. Content produced using artificial intelligence should not be submitted without proper review. We reserve the right to reject applications that we believe rely on artificial intelligence tools without meaningful human input and oversight.

To receive HAF funding from Croydon Council, a project must:

- Take place mainly within the borough, and benefit children and young people who live or go to school within Croydon.
- Be inclusive and accessible to all children receiving benefits-related FSM and have regard to protected characteristics, including children with SEND.
- Be delivered for the equivalent of at least 4 hours a day for 4 days a week during Easter and Winter, and for 4, 8, 12 or 16 days in the Summer.

HAF grant funding is public money. HAF funding will not support projects or activities that cannot evidence how they will meet the identified needs of the beneficiaries.

Furthermore, funding cannot be used for:

- Projects which are purely research based or not focused on direct delivery.
- Costs of ongoing staff who are not working directly on the project – including salaries of permanent or fixed term staff.
- Costs incurred in putting the application together.
- VAT that you can recover.
- Loans or interest payments.
- Purchase of alcohol or illegal substances.

Funding Available

For 2026, organisations will have the opportunity to apply for a maximum of £7,500 for Easter 2026, £30,000 for Summer 2026, and £7,500 for Winter 2026. **These are the maximum grant amounts available for the total application for each holiday period and cannot be exceeded.**

Funding limits are based on the length of delivery as follows:

- 1 week (4 days): up to £7,500
- 2 weeks (8 days): up to £15,000
- 3 weeks (12 days): up to £22,500
- 4 weeks (16 days): up to £30,000

Organisations can only submit one application per holiday period. The only exception to this will be where an applicant can deliver specific SEND provision on the programme, in addition to a mainstream offer.

How to Apply

To submit an application, all interested organisations must complete the [online application form here](#) and submit the required supporting documentation to:

HAFprogramme@croydon.gov.uk
by
23.59pm on Wednesday 28th January 2026.

During the application process you will be asked to provide the following detail:

- Details about your programme, including venue location/s, chosen dates of delivery and session lengths
- The total number of holiday spaces (no. of days x spaces per day)
- How your programme will meet the HAF Programme Standards
- How your programme will support children with additional needs
- How you will reach eligible children and families on FSM to attend your programme
- Safeguarding arrangements

- The total funding you are requesting, including a budget breakdown
- For applicants new to Croydon HAF Programme references will be required.

Whilst the council encourages providers to work together in the setup of their own programmes, applications from multiple organisations for the delivery of one camp are not currently sought.

Provisional HAF 2026 timeline

Activity	Date
Applications for 2026 open	Wednesday 7 th January
Applicants Engagement Event	Monday 12 th January at 14:00-15:00 via Microsoft Teams. Please apply via this link
Application Deadline	Wednesday 28 th January 2026 23.59
2026 Decision communicated	20 th February 2026
Easter Provision	From 30 th March 2026
Summer Provision	From 20 th July 2026
Winter Provision	From 21 st December 2026

Outcome of your Application

Following a successful grant application, Croydon Council will issue a conditional offer letter and service level grant agreement for prospective providers to sign and return. The latter will set out the terms and conditions of the funding.

Following an unsuccessful application, Croydon Council will inform applicants at the earliest opportunity. Croydon Council anticipates funding many organisations across the borough and, therefore, formal feedback may not be possible for all unsuccessful applications.

There is no appeals process for unsuccessful applications, though you can make a complaint via the council's formal complaints procedure if you believe due practice has not been followed.

Payments / Terms

Grants will be paid based on an 80-20 split per holiday. The grant payment schedule for each successful organisation will be:

Payment One – Up Front Payment

- Payment date: (upon receipt of a signed agreement)
- Value: 80% of the grant total

Payment Two - Post Delivery

- Payment date: (upon satisfactory project completion and timely submission of completed programme monitoring/evaluation report)
- Value: 20% of the grant total

Any unspent funding will have to be returned to Croydon Council. The second payment may be adjusted based on bookings achieved and/or to take into account any underspend. If the underspend exceeds the second grant payment, Croydon Council will require the return of the funds.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Providers will need to complete a programme evaluation which will include confirmation of how grant funds were spent and outcomes achieved. Croydon Council reserve the right to request invoices or receipts to evidence that HAF funding has been spent for the purposes intended. For the same reason, Croydon Council reserve the right to audit project delivery in relation to funds spent.

Information required may include, but is not limited to:

- Outcomes/records of activities (organisations will be asked to evidence how delivery has met the programme standards)
- Participants/parental feedback
- Case studies and photographs of activities (where possible, and relevant approval has been sought)
- Completed HAF Programme Budget Monitoring Spreadsheet
- A breakdown of any unspent grant funding

Croydon Council carry out robust monitoring of provision, with regular visits to providers. All providers must be available for a visit when requested.

All data and information collected by providers should be collected in strict adherence to GDPR.

Appendix 1 - Marking Criteria

All applications will be assessed against the marking criteria set out below. These criteria align with the Department for Education (DfE) expectations for the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme, while reflecting Croydon Council's local priorities.

Applicants must ensure that all questions within the application form are fully completed. Failure to answer all required questions may result in the application not being considered.

Track record and Delivery Capability

Applicants will be assessed on their organisation's track record, delivery capability, and ability to deliver high-quality Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) provision safely, consistently, and at scale.

When evaluating this section, Croydon Council will consider, but not be limited to, the following:

- Evidence of previous delivery of the HAF programme, either within Croydon or for another local authority.
- Performance against previous HAF delivery, including (where applicable):
- ability to meet agreed place numbers and attendance expectations;
- quality of programme delivery;
- venue suitability;
- staffing and operational management;
- responsiveness to monitoring, reporting, and improvement requirements.
- Experience of delivering comparable holiday, childcare, youth, or food-based provision where the organisation has not previously delivered HAF.
- Organisational capacity to deliver the proposed programme, including staffing, management arrangements, and use of appropriate venues.
- Ofsted registration status, where applicable.

Where an organisation has previously delivered the HAF programme in Croydon, the Council will use its own performance information and monitoring records to inform scoring for this section. This may include attendance data, quality assurance findings, and feedback from previous delivery periods.

Where an organisation has delivered the HAF programme for another local authority, Croydon Council may seek confirmation of delivery performance from that authority to inform scoring.

Organisations that have not previously delivered the HAF programme will be required to demonstrate relevant experience through alternative comparable provision and provide two professional references.

- References must relate to the delivery of programmes involving children, young people, food provision, or holiday provision.
- Croydon Council reserves the right to request references at any stage of the evaluation process.
- Where references are requested, applicants must ensure that both references are received by the Council within 72 hours of the request being made.

- Failure to provide satisfactory references within this timeframe may result in the application being rejected or not taken forward for further consideration.

When evaluating references, the Council will consider the organisation's:

- ability to deliver programmes as agreed;
- reliability and organisational governance;
- experience working with children and families;
- suitability to deliver HAF-style provision.

Safeguarding

All organisations delivering HAF programmes must operate in a safe, responsible, and legally compliant manner. This requirement reflects our commitment to protecting children, young people, and vulnerable adults. All organisations will be expected to demonstrate robust safeguarding policies and procedures in their application, including staff training, reporting mechanisms, and ongoing risk management. Organisations must pass the safeguarding questions as part of the evaluation process before their application will be considered to deliver a HAF provision in Croydon.

Price

The cost will be calculated on a 'per child per day' basis by dividing the total grant requested by the total number of places offered by the applicant. While value for money remains an important consideration, it is acknowledged that some providers may incur higher costs in order to deliver high-quality food and activities.

To ensure fairness, the cost element of your bid will be scored based on where it sits compared to all other bids. The 10% of bids with the lowest cost per child per day will automatically receive full marks (25) for value for money. All other bids will receive proportionately fewer marks depending on how their cost per child per day compares, with higher costs receiving lower scores. This method helps us balance affordability with quality while making the process transparent for everyone.

Applications with a cost per child per day that exceeds 40% above the average (mean) of all submissions received will not be considered for funding.

Each applicant will be required to submit a financial breakdown in the form of estimated costs to demonstrate how the grant is to be spent as part of the application process. The cost per child per day figure will account for 25% of the overall score.

Local Impact and Benefit to Croydon

Applicants must demonstrate how their proposed HAF provision will deliver clear benefits to children, young people, families, and communities in Croydon, and how the proposal aligns with Croydon Council's local priorities for the HAF programme.

When assessing this section, the Council will consider, but not be limited to, the following:

- How the proposed provision responds to identified local need within Croydon, including at a local or ward level where appropriate.
- The extent to which the proposal supports strong attendance and seeks to reduce non-attendance among children and young people.
- How the provider will contribute to open access provision, including opportunities for children and young people who are not eligible for the HAF programme to attend holiday provision alongside eligible children, where appropriate.
- How the proposal contributes to increasing additional SEND availability across Croydon, including inclusive approaches and, where applicable, specialist provision.
- The quality and suitability of venues, including how venues provide safe, accessible, and high-quality environments that support a positive experience for all attendees.
- The quality of staff and volunteers, including how staffing arrangements support safe, inclusive, and high-quality delivery across all provision.

In evaluating local impact, Croydon Council will consider how well the proposed provision complements existing HAF delivery across the borough and contributes to a balanced and equitable offer for children and young people during the holiday period.

Food

Croydon continue to seek Hot Food options for all participants on the HAF programme. Consideration should be given to how food will be sourced and meet the culinary requirements of all attendees. Applicants must describe the food offer they will provide and how it will be both nutritious and engaging for children and young people.

Provision must include:

- A daily healthy meal that meets the **School Food Standards**.

In addition, scoring will consider:

- Quality, variety, and source of food.
- Cultural appropriateness and inclusivity.
- Consideration of allergies, dietary requirements, and additional needs.
- Opportunities for food education and engagement (e.g. cooking, food preparation, tasting activities).

Failure to demonstrate compliance with the School Food Standards may result in the application being rejected.

Activity Provision

Applicants must demonstrate that their proposed activity programme is of a high quality and is designed to be fun, engaging, and appropriate for the age range of children and young people attending the provision.

All activity programmes must include a range of enriching activities and daily opportunities for physical activity, in line with the expectations of the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme.

When evaluating this section, Croydon Council will assess the quality of the proposed activity programme, including, but not limited to:

- The range and variety of activities offered and the extent to which these provide children and young people with opportunities to have fun, socialise, and develop new skills.
- How activities are designed to be age-appropriate, with clear consideration given to the needs and interests of the intended age groups.
- The inclusion of physical activity within the daily programme, providing opportunities for children and young people to be active in line with national physical activity guidelines.
- The balance between structured and unstructured activities, and how this supports positive experiences for all attendees.
- How activities are adapted or differentiated to ensure they are accessible and inclusive for children with differing abilities and additional needs.

Applications that fail to demonstrate a clear, coherent, and age-appropriate activity programme may receive a low score for this section or may not be considered suitable for funding.

Attendance and Inclusion

Applicants must demonstrate how they will ensure strong attendance across their programme and provide an inclusive, high-quality experience for all children and young people attending.

Croydon Council expects providers to actively promote attendance to ensure that funded places are used effectively and that public funding delivers maximum benefit to children and families. When evaluating this section, the Council will assess the quality of the applicant's approach, including, but not limited to:

- How the organisation will promote full attendance and minimise non-attendance, including booking processes, communication with families, and follow-up where sessions are missed.
- How attendance data will be monitored and used to manage provision effectively throughout the delivery period.

- How the provider will ensure that places funded through the HAF programme are used efficiently and represent best use of public funds.
- How children with additional needs and SEND will be identified and supported within the programme.
- The practical steps in place to ensure inclusion, including flexibility of delivery, reasonable adjustments, and communication with parents and carers.
- How the overall participant experience will be managed to ensure children feel safe, welcomed, and supported throughout their attendance.

Applications that fail to demonstrate a clear and effective approach to managing attendance or supporting inclusion may receive a low score for this section and may be considered unsuitable for funding.

SEND/Additional Needs

Applicants delivering specialist provision for children with SEND/Additional needs where over 85% of places are for children with medium-high level of need (where children hold an EHC plan) will be grouped separately from mainstream providers based on the higher cost needed to accommodate this cohort (see information below). These applications will be evaluated against one another to encourage good value for money in the service being offered.

All applicants are expected to cater for children with Additional needs.

The Council have ringfenced funding to go towards SEND provision during 2026.

Croydon Council recognise the shortage of providers available to deliver specialist SEND provision, and in this circumstance only, will accept a second application from an applicant who plans to deliver mainstream provision on the HAF scheme at the same time.

Marking Process

Applicants must ensure they answer each question on the application form. Failure to do so will result in the application not being considered.

Applications will be assessed against a fair and transparent scoring procedure by an internal team at Croydon Council (The Evaluation Panel).

The Evaluation Panel will meet to discuss individual bids and make recommendations for award based on the published specification. The Evaluation Panel decisions will be moderated by colleagues within the council, via a randomly selected sample of applications.

Track Record and Delivery Capability	Weighting: 25%
Price	Weighting: 25%
Local impact and benefit to Croydon	Weighting: 12.5%
Food and Nutrition	Weighting: 12.5%
Activity and Enrichment	Weighting: 12.5%
Attendance and Inclusion	Weighting: 12.5%

Questions and method statements will be evaluated as per the following:

Score	Reasoning
5	Excellent
4	Good
3	Acceptable
2	Poor
1	Very Poor
0	No score Possible

Implementation and Approvals

Croydon Council intend to offer funding to give the widest coverage of provision during 2026. Those meeting the minimum quality and price requirements and projects that fall within the funding available will be put forward for recommendation to deliver the programme.

All organisations will be initially assessed on being able to meet the necessary standards for safeguarding in delivering a HAF provision, and applications that fail to meet the required standard will not be considered further. Remaining applicants will then be considered for funding.

There is a limited amount of funding available for each holiday period. Should the bid values exceed the total funding available, providers with the highest scores will be prioritised to ensure the programme remains in budget.

The following five applicants not automatically funded will then be informed of an unsuccessful application but invited to join a waiting list should any provider not be able to deliver the programme at the award stage. All other applicants will be informed of an unsuccessful application.