

Luton holiday activities and food (HAF) programme

HAF 2025 to 2026 local authority annual report

Author: Public Health team

Contact: public.health@luton.gov.uk

Version: 1.0 (published)

Last updated: August 2026



Contents

Overview and highlights	2
Community wellbeing and support	3
Governance and strategic oversight	3
Children and families' feedback	4
Case studies	5
Food and nutrition	7
Enriching activities	9
Independence, inclusion and life skills	10
Physical activities	11
Nutritional education and the promotion of healthy living and lifestyles	13
Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)	15
Key challenges	17
Marketing and communication	18
Additional resources	18
Any other information	19

Overview and highlights

Luton Council received £1,060,490 in funding to deliver holiday activities and food (HAF)-funded activities across the easter, summer and winter holidays, reaching approximately 10,000 eligible children (reception to year 11) in receipt of benefits-related free school meals (FSM).

Funding breakdown

- £816,539: mainstream club provision, including £37,000 for pilot provision during February 2026 half term
- Delivered: 140 individual camps throughout the year
- £75,125: dedicated funding for SEND specialist partners
- £18,903: capital expenditure
- £15,711: advertising and publicity
- £15,290: booking system costs
- £118,922: management and administration

Total expenditure: £1,060,490

Programme reach and delivery

- 7208 children attended Energise camp
- 4998 children were primary age and 1196 were secondary age.
- We delivered an additional HAF provision over February half term with an accrued underspend.
- Worked with 50 external providers to offer a wide range of activities.
- Camps were delivered at eight Active Luton sites, plus The Giggles and Central Library for context-specific programmes (e.g. children's soft play, storytelling and movement activities).
- Engagement extended across schools, mosques, community centres, leisure facilities and charitable enterprises, ensuring inclusive access for all children.

Recognition

UK Active Awards – HAF were finalists in the equality, diversity and inclusion award!

Attendance and engagement

- Average attendance rate: 86% across the three holiday periods
- 92% of attendees were eligible for Free School Meals, confirming the programme's success in reaching target families
- New strategies introduced to improve attendance:
 - centralised booking system
 - overbooking and managed waiting lists
 - how to manage no shows

SEND provision

- Over 55% of camps supported children with mild to moderate SEND needs
- Specialist partners supported those with complex needs
- 1,011 children with SEND accessed Energise activities, supported by expert partner organisations

Community wellbeing and support

Through strong partnerships, particularly with Public Health, the HAF programme contributed to broader family wellbeing:

- 3,053 hygiene packs distributed in partnership with The Hygiene Bank, an increase of 779 packs from last year
- Luton Foodbank:
 - attended camps across all delivery periods
 - advising parents and encouraging new referrals
 - distributed 1500 food parcels over summer with receipt cards for families to cook at home
 - distributed 1,000 food parcels during the winter period as part of the remote offer
- Dental Wellness Trust visited four camps, teaching 102 children about oral hygiene

Governance and strategic oversight

The HAF Strategic Partnership Board oversees programme delivery, ensuring:

- compliance with Department for Education (DfE) standards
- regular reporting to the Children's Trust Board and DfE

Core responsibilities

- Set priorities and strategic direction
- Manage risks and resolve issues
- Ensure high-quality, coordinated provision with safeguarding at its core
- Monitor performance against national targets
- Support development of enrichment activities and share best practice

Board meetings

Held three times annually (post-Easter, Summer, and Christmas provisions) with additional meetings as required. Decisions are made by consensus, ensuring transparency and accountability.

Attendance

Attendance was supported by representatives from:

- Active Luton Chief Executive
- Luton Council Public Health Principal – Children and Families, HAF Programme
- Manager Active Luton HAF/Energise Luton Coordinator
- Luton Council Head of Improvement in Early Years and Safeguarding in
- Education Luton Council Programme Coordinator - Luton Supporting You
- Luton Council Public Health Manager – Physical Activity Luton Council Public
- Health Principal – Physical Activity Tokko Youth Hub CEO

Children and families' feedback

Overview

We are proud to share the voices of parents, carers, and children who took part in the 2025 to 26 holiday activities and food (HAF) programme.

Feedback highlights the positive impact of the Energise and partner camps across Luton, from increased confidence and social connections to improved wellbeing and family support.

Parents' voices

"As a mother of a child with multiple disabilities and deformities, I have always carried a heavy weight of worry about whether she would ever be able to take part in the same opportunities as other children her age.

"Y has such a warm and kind personality, she has always found it very difficult to socialise with other children. She uses both a wheelchair and a stroller which can make even the simplest outings challenging. Every possible adjustment was made without us even having to ask.

"The sessions were all moved to the ground floor so that Y could take part in everything. Staff were attentive and always went out of their way to make sure she was comfortable and fully included. The transformation I saw in Y over the course of the camp was extraordinary. Each day she came home smiling brighter than I had seen in a long time. She was full of excitement telling me about the activities she had joined in with and the friends she had made.

"For a child who often feels isolated and different this was something truly special. She felt like she belonged. She felt included and she was proud of herself. For once her disabilities did not define her experience."

"Z said 'it's brilliant I love the games and the coaches. I've made friends that I wouldn't have ever met. Basketball football dodgeball and cricket is all my favourite :)"

“My daughter was nervous to start at this camp, she did not know anyone. But the staff paired her up with a buddy and this really helped my daughter settle and enjoy herself. She woke up eager to attend and when we collected her, she was all smiles.

“Hot different meal each day & excellent venue, trips and various activities each day.”

“They loved all the activities and food especially when animals came to the venue.”

“They loved when they go to trips. One of the sessions they got gift bag and my child loved it. My son loves art craft, and he was happy he made an aeroplane with the recycled material.”

“Loved the swimming as does not get to participate in this area often.”

“As my child was special needs, she felt welcomed and got proper support.”

“They were happy especially with the trips and daily activities, my son made lots of new friends.

Children’s voices

“We had a really good time and can’t wait for next time!”

“It was really good; there were loads of fun activities and the trips were the best.”

Case studies

Discovering nature – a transformative urban excursion for children in an area of deprivation

Located in the Northwell ward of Luton, Marsh Farm is a Lower Layer Super Output Area identified as in the top 10% most deprived areas in the country based on the 2015 Indices of Multiple Deprivation. According to the 2021 Census, 65.3% of households in Marsh Farm were classified as deprived in at least one dimension, including employment, education, health, and housing.

Despite these challenges, Marsh Farm is home to a resilient and active community, with Active Luton supporting regeneration efforts to support the health and wellbeing of local residents through the Recreation Centre.

Within this context, the Lea Manor Recreation Centre HAF Camp provided children from socially and economically vulnerable children with a meaningful opportunity to connect with nature, an experience that supported their wellbeing, curiosity, and personal growth.

A highlight of the summer programme was an off-site excursion into nearby woodlands, designed to foster wellbeing, curiosity, and personal growth through immersive outdoor experiences.

Exploring nature: the woodland excursion

The excursion took children out of their familiar urban environment and into a natural setting where they could explore, learn, and play. Under adult supervision, children participated in a guided walk through the woods, engaging in a scavenger hunt that encouraged them to observe and identify elements of the natural world including leaves, insects, feathers, and more.

One of the most memorable moments came during the 'bug hotel' building activity. Using twigs, leaves, bark, and other natural materials, children worked in small teams to construct miniature habitats for insects. As they carefully placed their creations in quiet corners of the woodland, a moment of pure joy erupted when a ladybird crawled into one of the bug hotels.

The children were thrilled, gathering around in awe and excitement. For many, it was the first time they had experienced the direct impact of something they had built being used by wildlife.

This moment became a powerful teaching opportunity. Camp leaders encouraged the children to reflect on what it means to care for living things, no matter how small. The activity helped instil a sense of stewardship and empathy, showing that even small actions, like building a shelter for insects, can make a difference in the natural world.

Exploring nature: the woodland excursion

The excursion took children out of their familiar urban environment and into a natural setting where they could explore, learn, and play. Under adult supervision, children participated in a guided walk through the woods, engaging in a scavenger hunt that encouraged them to observe and identify elements of the natural world including leaves, insects, feathers, and more.

One of the most memorable moments came during the 'bug hotel' building activity. Using twigs, leaves, bark, and other natural materials, children worked in small teams to construct miniature habitats for insects. As they carefully placed their creations in quiet corners of the woodland, a moment of pure joy erupted when a ladybird crawled into one of the bug hotels.

The children were thrilled, gathering around in awe and excitement. For many, it was the first time they had experienced the direct impact of something they had built being used by wildlife.

This moment became a powerful teaching opportunity. Camp leaders encouraged the children to reflect on what it means to care for living things, no matter how small. The activity helped instil a sense of stewardship and empathy, showing that even small actions, like building a shelter for insects, can make a difference in the natural world.

Wellbeing through nature

The woodland excursion was designed to support the mental and emotional wellbeing of children who may face daily challenges due to social and economic deprivation. Being in nature provided a calming, restorative environment where children could:

- relax and de-stress away from community pressures
- build confidence through new experiences and accomplishments
- feel valued and included in a safe, nurturing setting
- develop empathy by learning to care for plants and animals

Conclusion

This nature-focused excursion demonstrated the profound impact that outdoor experiences can have on children from deprived urban areas. By stepping into nature, they discovered not only the world around them but also new aspects of themselves: curiosity, resilience, and joy.

The excitement of a ladybird 'moving in' to their bug hotel became a symbol of connection, care, and the magic of the natural world. The camp's approach highlights the importance of integrating nature into community engagement strategies to support holistic child development



References: [Indices of deprivation \(IoD\) 2025](#)

Food and nutrition

Overview

A network of local caterers supports the delivery of nutritious meals for Luton's HAF programme.

We are committed to ensuring that every meal served meets high standards of quality, nutrition, and safety, in line with government school food standards.

Quality assurance

- All caterers are registered food businesses with a minimum food hygiene rating of 4 or above.
- Menus are reviewed against the school dinner criteria detailed on the Government website.
- The HAF management team conducts quality assurance visits during delivery periods, paying particular attention to food provision and hygiene.
- Providers are encouraged to offer healthy, balanced meals, with many sports camps also incorporating nutritional education into daily activities.

This focus aligns with the [Luton 2040 vision](#), prioritising the reduction of obesity and the promotion of healthier lifestyles across the borough.

Nutrition session delivered in partnership with Luton Foodbank

The main aim of the session was to increase awareness about food insecurity, the importance of community support, and the impact of donations on families in need.

The children did an activity with a set budget and a list of food items with varying prices. The children had to make choices on what food items to purchase within their budget, highlighting the challenges faced by families relying on food banks. They had pictures to colour and then allocate them, by the end of the session there was a greater understanding on how to maximise food costs.

Summer, winter food and activity parcels

Because of the way Christmas and school holidays fell, we delivered three days of in-person camps and one remote day.

In partnership with The Hygiene Bank and Luton Foodbank we distributed 1,500 food and activity parcels for use at home.

Each parcel included:

- ingredients to make a vegetable curry and rice
- an easy-to-follow recipe card, encouraging families to cook together
- 1000 parcels also included a hygiene pack

“Receiving the parcel was a wonderful surprise for our family. The recipe was easy to follow, and it was great to cook together with the kids. We’re so grateful for the!”

Family feedback to Luton Foodbank

Feedback and impact

Feedback is collected after every delivery period from caterers, providers, and families. The following are comments we received.

“Many options for the children – very happy with the catering.”

“Impressed with the quantity and quality. Excellent food management.”

“Great feedback from the children on the chicken pie!”

One of our regular caterers, who also works in a local school, shared the following quote.

“I recognise many of the children from school. Without the HAF programme, too many of them would go hungry. That’s why I choose to keep working during the holidays.”

Minimising food waste

We work closely with providers to ensure accurate meal numbers and minimise food waste. Where safe and practical, children are encouraged to take extra portions home, a gesture always met with smiles!

“The kids loved the meals, some even asked for second or third helpings!”

Example menu

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Upon arrival	Milk and biscuit	Milk and biscuit	Milk and biscuit	Milk and biscuit
Fruit	Apple	Satsuma	Banana	Pear
Lunch	Grilled chicken wrap	Spaghetti bolognese	Chicken nuggets and potato wedges	Fish fingers and potato waffles
Vegetarian/GF alternative	Quorn chicken with GF wrap	Quorn bolognese (GF pasta available)	Veg nuggets / GF chicken nuggets	Veg fingers / GF fish fingers
Side	Vegetable rice	Garlic bread (GF option)	Cucumber and carrot batons	Baked beans
Dessert	Iced fairy cake	Chocolate muffin	Fruit yogurt	Cupcake

Enriching activities

Overview

The Energise camps delivered a broad and engaging enrichment programme, offering children a wide range of exciting, hands-on experiences designed to build confidence, spark curiosity, and promote life skills. This year's provision placed a stronger emphasis on immersive and experiential activities, alongside opportunities to develop independence, communication skills, and confidence in new environments.

The varied and inclusive offer ensured children of all interests and abilities, including those with SEND, could participate meaningfully. Activities were designed to support children's physical, social, emotional, and creative development, while also encouraging them to try new experiences and build essential life skills.

Creative expression

Creative enrichment remained a key feature of the programme, with opportunities for children to explore their individuality and express themselves in both traditional and contemporary ways.

Activities included:

- t-shirt design and customisation
- creating and filming music videos
- fashion shows and group performances

Active and experiential activities

This year's programme introduced a strong focus on high-energy and immersive experiences, helping to engage children in new and exciting ways.

Activities included:

- roller skating, biking and skateboarding sessions
- laser tag experiences
- virtual reality activities

These activities supported physical development, coordination, and confidence, while also encouraging children to take positive risks and try new things. Providers reported that these sessions were particularly effective in engaging children who may not typically participate in more traditional sports or structured activities.

Learning through experience

Camps provided a range of interactive experiences designed to broaden children's understanding of the world around them and offer opportunities for hands-on learning. These included:

- animal encounters, including exotic animal experiences and farm visits
- visits from the fire brigade, including exploration of a fire engine and meeting staff

These experiences sparked curiosity and encouraged children to ask questions, engage in discussion, and learn through direct interaction. For many children, these were new and memorable experiences that supported both learning and aspiration.

Independence, inclusion and life skills

A key strength of this year's programme was the intentional focus on supporting independence, communication, and social development, particularly for children with SEND.

Opportunities such as visits to local restaurants enabled children to practise real-life skills, including:

- making choices about food
- turn-taking and waiting appropriately
- communicating preferences and needs
- trying new foods and experiences

These activities were carefully supported by staff to ensure all children could participate confidently. They provided valuable opportunities for children to build independence, develop social communication skills, and gain confidence in unfamiliar environments.

Across camps, providers made adaptations to ensure children with SEND could access enrichment activities, creating inclusive environments where all children felt supported to engage, try new things, and succeed.

Impact and engagement

The expanded and enriched programme was well received by children and families, with providers reporting high levels of engagement across activities. The introduction of more experiential and aspirational opportunities, such as virtual reality, laser tag, and animal encounters, supported strong attendance and sustained engagement.

Children responded positively to opportunities to try new experiences, with many demonstrating increased confidence, improved communication skills, and greater willingness to participate over time. The inclusion of activities focused on independence and life skills further enhanced the impact of the programme, particularly for children with SEND.

Physical activities

At Energise Luton, we place a strong emphasis on physical activity and adventurous play. There's something for everyone, including:

- bouncy castles
- golf
- mini tennis
- roller-skating
- outdoor adventures
- swimming
- dancing
- soft play

Physical activity, skills development and wellbeing

These activities not only support children's physical health and wellbeing but also help to develop essential life skills such as teamwork, resilience, perseverance and risk awareness, all within a safe, inclusive and supportive environment.

Swimming

Swimming continues to be a key component of our Energise Luton programme, with three camps offering daily swimming sessions.

All children attending these camps have the opportunity to participate, supported by trained staff who work closely with less confident swimmers. Through guided support in basic water movement and water safety, children are able to build confidence at their own pace and participate alongside their peers.

As a result, many children leave camp feeling more confident and capable in the water, supporting their ability to engage in future physical activity, including family leisure swimming.

Community sports partnerships

We are proud to work in partnership with a range of local, sport-specific community trusts that deliver high-quality sessions throughout the holiday periods.

Reflecting Luton's diverse community, cricket remains one of the most popular activities. Demand for cricket-focused provision continues to grow, with qualified coaches delivering inclusive, skills-based sessions for all ability levels, alongside clear pathways into local clubs.

Our strong partnership with Luton Town Community Trust, the charitable arm of Luton Town Football Club, enables us to provide football provision during every school holiday. These sessions offer children who may not currently participate in organised club football the opportunity to develop their skills, build confidence and enjoy the game in a fun, structured and inclusive environment.

Multi-sport and performance activities

Active Luton, as the operator of the town's leisure facilities, delivers a wide range of multi-sport opportunities across the programme, including basketball, dodgeball, badminton, table tennis and soft play.

In addition, seasonal activities such as golf and athletics are delivered during the Easter and Summer programmes, both of which consistently achieve high levels of demand and attendance.

We also provide performance-based activities, including dance, designed to engage children of all abilities through energetic routines that combine movement, music and creativity. These sessions support not only physical development but also self-expression, confidence and enjoyment.

Case study

Background

A young boy with ADHD and autism expressed interest in attending our summer camp. However, he lacked the confidence to engage and had not previously been able to access suitable provision.

His parents had experienced difficulty finding an environment that could appropriately meet his needs, particularly given his age and additional requirements.

Initial engagement with the participant highlighted his uncertainty about attending and he suggested that staff speak directly with his mother. During this conversation, it was confirmed that he was eligible for free school meals (FSM), but his mother voiced concerns that her son's needs might present challenges for staff and disrupt the programme.

Approach

Our team took a proactive and supportive approach to ensure the family felt confident and reassured. Staff engaged directly with the parent, addressing her concerns and emphasising our:

- inclusive practices
- experienced workforce
- ability to support children with additional needs

We provided practical support through the registration process and made the decision to prioritise inclusion by securing a place for the participant, despite the camp already reaching full capacity.

This demonstrated our commitment to equitable access and removing barriers for vulnerable children. Once enrolled, staff ensured the participant felt welcomed, supported, and integrated into activities at a pace that suited him, with ongoing encouragement and positive reinforcement.

Outcome

The impact of this intervention was significant and transformational. The participant attended every day of the programme and demonstrated notable improvements in confidence, social interaction, and independence.

He developed friendships with peers and became actively engaged in activities, particularly football, where he showed both enthusiasm and natural ability. Recognising this talent, the team signposted the family to a local football pathway at Luton Allstars FC.

As a result, the participant has successfully joined a team within his age group and now participates in regular training sessions and weekend matches. His progression has been rapid, with coaches already considering him for a team captain role.

Feedback from an opposition coach described him as 'very, very eye-catching' in his performance. His mother has reported a substantial positive change in her son's wellbeing, confidence, and sense of belonging, expressing relief at finding a safe and supportive environment where he feels accepted and valued.

This case exemplifies the wider impact of the programme in breaking down barriers to participation, supporting children with additional needs, and creating pathways into sustained activity and community engagement.

Nutritional education and the promotion of healthy living and lifestyles

Overview

Although the focus on nutritional education has been reduced within recent HAF guidance, this theme continues to be embedded across all camp delivery.

Programmes have aimed to educate children, young people, and families about healthy eating, food budgeting, and lifestyle choices through a range of engaging and practical activities.

Nutrition-focused activities

Camps delivered a series of interactive activities designed to improve understanding of nutrition and healthy eating.

Examples include:

- 'guess the exotic fruit' tasting sessions, encouraging children to explore and discuss new foods
- healthy lunch preparation, where children helped to prepare and enjoy nutritious meals together

These activities promoted awareness of balanced diets and encouraged children to make positive food choices both during and beyond camp attendance.

Partnership work and family engagement

Extended partnerships within the council have supported continued work with families in this area.

The pilot of recipe card and food parcels for families was hugely successful and continued to be part of our offer throughout 2025.

Example of a recipe card: vegetable curry and rice ingredients

Ingredients:

- 1 jar of curry sauce
- 2 tins of mixed vegetables (drained)
- 500g rice
- 1 large onion
- salt and pepper to taste

Method - to cook the rice

1. Rinse the rice under cold water.
2. In a saucepan, combine one part rice with two parts water (for 500g of rice, this would be 1000 of water).
3. Bring the water to a rolling boil.
4. Immediately reduce the heat to low, cover the pan with a tight-fitting lid, and simmer for 18 minutes.
5. Remove the pan from the heat and let the rice rest, covered, for 5 to 10 minutes. Do not lift the lid.
6. Finally, fluff the rice with a fork before serving.

Method - to make the vegetable curry

1. Chop the onion into small pieces.
2. Open the tins of vegetables and drain them.
3. Place the chopped onion and the drained vegetables into a saucepan over medium heat. Sauté them for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Open the jar of curry sauce and pour it over the vegetables and onions.
5. Stir well to combine, and simmer for 10 minutes to ensure the vegetables are heated through and the flavours have melded.
6. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Feedback

Feedback from both parents and camp providers was highly positive, with requests for additional cards to be made available in future programmes.

Community collaboration: Luton Food Bank

Our partnership with Luton Food Bank further enhanced the delivery of nutritional education. Their team led sessions to raise awareness of:

- food insecurity and its impact on families
- the importance of community support and donations
- the role of local services in promoting food sustainability

Children also participated in a budgeting activity, where they were given a fixed budget and a selection of food items at different prices.

They were asked to plan a shopping list within budget, helping them understand the real-life challenges faced by families who rely on food banks.

Healthy lifestyles and physical activity

Healthy living and exercise continue to be integral across all Active Luton camps delivered within our leisure facilities.

Hire of the leisure facilities for our external partners also increased physical activity during 2025.

Case study – individual impact

Context

Child A is a 5-year-old boy who attended my summer HAF camp at Active Luton Lewsey Sports Park. Before the start of each day his dad would drop him off and mention he's got his swimming kit and that it's important his child swims.

However, child A often expressed a strong fear of water and was particularly anxious about water slides. We would find him being the last to get change for swimming and often make excuses to avoid entering the pool.

Despite an excited urge to want to play with his peers in the pool, child A would only dip his feet in before wanting to exit the pool and sit on the side. Even with the use of arm bands and a floating belt he just couldn't seem to overcome his fear of drowning and not being in control.

Mental blocks/becoming water confident

It was evident child A had a lack of trust in his own ability to swim and had negative past experiences where he felt overwhelmed and scared of water activities, these sort of mental blocks

limited his water confidence and overall enjoyment of swimming and built up a sense of frustration for child A, especially as he watched his peers having fun in the water and on the slide.

To support child A my staff helped him gradually become more familiar with the water touching his body and understanding it's safe to get in, this process enabled him to build a trust reinforced by positive feedback from my staff.

Each day we swam my staff and lifeguards focused on his skill development and technique to help boost his confidence, day by day he began to immerse his body in the water moving around more freely and started to interact with his peers using the hand railings and floats.

Conclusion

Child's A confidence had significantly improved; he was no longer anxious for swimming activities and was eager to participate. His newfound confidence not only made swimming more enjoyable for him but he also felt empowered to face other fears with a positive attitude.

Towards the last week of camp, he felt strongly motivated and overjoyed to be in the water. Seeing his peers have fun on the water slide gave him a sense of courage and a willingness to persevere. With a little bit of positive encouragement, he tackled the water slide with ease and eagerly went to have a second and third go.

He says he will continue to swim for fun after this!

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Overview

Our mainstream providers aim to create inclusive and supportive environments that integrate children with SEND wherever appropriate. Each camp is encouraged to adapt activities and provide additional support to ensure that every child can participate meaningfully and safely.

Quality assurance and provider assessment

To ensure consistency and quality across delivery, our management team undertakes quality assurance (QA) visits, during which providers are rated as follows:

1. no SEND support
2. some SEND support/experience
3. trained SEND support/experience with additional staff

This system enables us to direct children and families to the most suitable camps based on the level of support available, while ensuring detailed information about each child's background and needs is recorded in our booking system. This allows delivery teams to:

- identify children requiring additional support
- where necessary, contact parents or carers in advance to ensure each child can be accommodated safely and effectively

Specialist SEND provision

Alongside inclusive mainstream provision, we work closely with a number of trusted SEND specialist providers to deliver tailored support for children and young people with complex needs.

Families United Network

HAF main themes: activities, confidence building

families United Network summary

Families United Network partnered with Energise Luton to deliver a wide range of inclusive holiday activities for children and young people with additional needs and disabilities aged 4 to 18. The aim was to provide opportunities during the school break that:

- are safe, engaging and enjoyable
- support social interaction, learning and personal development

Sessions were designed to be varied so that every young person, regardless of their interests or abilities, could find something to enjoy and take part in.

One young participant, S.R., initially found it difficult to settle as her usual friends were not attending the programme, which left her unsure of who to play with and hesitant to join in. At first, she preferred to stay on the edge of activities, observing rather than participating.

However, with encouragement from staff and the chance to try different activities at her own pace, S.R. gradually grew in confidence. By the end of the programme, she was:

- actively engaging in group games
- making new friends
- proudly showcasing her achievements to staff

Staff noticed a clear increase in her independence, willingness to take part and ability to form new friendships.

The summer holiday club also featured special events to create memorable experiences. A highlight for many was the visit from an external reptile roadshow, which gave children and young people the opportunity to get close to snakes, lizards, and other animals. This hands-on experience was both educational and exciting, sparking curiosity while also helping some children overcome initial fears in a supportive environment.

For many, it was their first time seeing these animals up close, and the sense of achievement and pride in holding or touching them was evident.

To celebrate the conclusion of the holiday club, the centre was transformed for an indoor beach day. Children and young people took part in:

- sand play
- themed games
- seaside-style activities that created a fun and festive atmosphere

To make the day extra special, they were treated to a range of 'yummy surprises', including a chocolate fountain with strawberries, marshmallows, candy floss and ice cream. The celebration:

- brought the group together
- strengthened new friendships
- left participants with lasting positive memories of their time at the holiday club

Overall, the holiday activities provided by Families United Network with support from Energise Luton gave young people a safe and welcoming space to learn, play, and grow. The varied programme not only kept children active and engaged but also helped them build confidence, develop social skills, and experience new opportunities they might not otherwise have had.

CYCD Disability

CYCD Disability is another valued community organisation that works with young people with complex disabilities, providing specialised activities and support that align with the inclusive aims of the HAF programme.

Key challenges

Overview

There were several key challenges throughout the 2025–2026 delivery period. These are detailed below,

Cultural and religious observance

Luton is a diverse town with a high percentage of British Muslims. Over the past two years, Ramadan and Eid celebrations have fallen either before or during the Easter period, without affecting delivery.

However, this year Eid coincided with our Easter holiday delivery period, resulting in a temporary reduction in attendance, as some children participated in family and community celebrations.

Community safety and external events

Unfortunately, an isolated shooting incident took place prior to our winter delivery within the immediate vicinity of a number of camps. This resulted in parents not attending these particular camps due to worry of their child's safety. This directly result in lower attendance for our winter provision.

SEND provision and staffing

We are extremely proud of our SEND provision. Yet, we recognise that supporting children with additional needs can be challenging for non-specialist providers.

In several cases, unplanned additional staffing was required to ensure all needs were met. This created added pressure on resources and budgets.

Building new providers

Providers from outside the area often struggle to connect effectively with Luton communities, as their work is not rooted in established local relationships. This can make it more difficult to build trust and meaningful engagement with children, families, and community groups.

As a result, their delivery may lack the depth of understanding and responsiveness that relationship-based, locally embedded providers are able to achieve.

Booking system

One of our ongoing challenges, and a key focus for 2026, is to ensure that we are reaching the targeted FSM children and families.

The existing booking system. Coordinate Sport. has been used as a HAF booking system since inception. However, it has been described as a barrier by parents and providers alike due to:

- its lack of accessible functionality
- lack of ability to automatically check eligibility within our FSM list

To address this, we have implemented a new bookings system for 2026 Eequ, which:

- is the market leader for a bespoke HAF council bookings system
- work with over 80 other local authorities
- includes functionalities such as:
 - automatic eligibility checking for the targeted FSM children
 - multilingual for parents to access, particularly with our diverse community across Luton

The new system has already shown positive results in our summer booking period 2026, helping to maximise participation and resource use.

Marketing and communication

Overview

We have a robust marketing and communications plan aimed at effectively reaching both schools and parents. This approach enables children eligible for free school meals (FSM) to be targeted through their schools, while maintaining a consistent and timely marketing schedule.

Marketing timeline

The table below outlines our planned marketing activities for each holiday period in 2025.

Energise marketing activity	Deadline	Go live
Social media teaser messaging	Holiday periods 2025	2 weeks before
In-centre posters (bookings open 6 Mar)	Holiday periods 2025	2 weeks before
Emails to schools: 'booking now open' digital tiles	Holiday periods 2025	1 week before bookings open
Website homepage amends (tile)	Holiday periods 2025	1 week before bookings open
Internal camp list shared with marketing	Holiday periods 2025	1 week before bookings open
Photos uploaded to website	Holiday periods 2025	1 week before bookings open
Website copy amends	Holiday periods 2025	1 week before bookings open

Engagement and reach

We ran a social media marketing campaign in collaboration with our providers to:

- maximise reach
- ensure that as many families as possible were aware of
 - booking opportunities
 - camp availability during each delivery period

Additional resources

Overview

We received additional match funding and in-kind support from a range of partners, including contributions of food, resources, and staffing.

This collaborative approach strengthened the delivery of our HAF programme and ensured alignment with wider local initiatives. By working closely with other services and organisations, we maximised impact and created a more joined-up offer for children and families.

Partnerships, support and programme alignment

Hygiene Bank Luton

We continue to work in partnership with the Hygiene Bank Luton, who provided toiletry packs across all camps at easter, summer and winter.

HAF and Best Start Family Hubs

We have aligned HAF with Best Start Luton Family Hubs and Energise Luton forms part of the Luton Best Start Family Hub network.

Families can access information about HAF through the [Luton Family Hubs website and app](#), improving access and connection to services and information.

Oral health improvement

We have a strong oral health improvement programme in Luton. With our partner, [Dental Wellness Trust](#), we have delivered enrichment sessions on oral health at many of our camps. These have been well received.

Children have learnt about:

- healthy eating
- the damage sugary foods and drinks can do to their teeth
- the importance of good oral hygiene

They also received water bottles and toothbrush packs donated by Public Health and Family Hubs.

Any other information

Overview

Due to efficiency savings made on funding during 2025 to 2026, we were able to support additional delivery again for February half term.

Summary of delivery:

- total camps: 15
- funded spaces: 1,440
- overall attendance rate: 92%
- unique children attending: 419
- age breakdown:
 - 62% primary
 - 38% secondary
- SEND inclusion: 54 children incorporated into mainstream camps
- children on free school meals: 99%



© Crown copyright 2026, image showing logos for Luton Energise Holiday Camps, Department for Education and Luton Council.