NIHR | Public Health Intervention Responsive Studies Teams

Southwark Holiday Activity & Food (HAF) Programme: Evaluability Assessment Report

PHIRST Fusion

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Summary

For many families in England the school holidays are challenging times. Many children are missing out on organised activities, experiencing social isolation, and suffering from holiday hunger. In 2018, the Department for Education (DfE) piloted the Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) to support children and their families during the three main holiday periods and have set a series of objectives that they want to achieve. The London Borough of Southwark Council provides grant funding to HAF club providers to enable them to offer free places to children within the local authority who are eligible for free school meals. This includes specific funding to support those children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The local authority coordinated with a range of organisations to provide a diverse range of enriching activities to children who engage with their HAF. In 2021, Southwark Council approached PHIRST for evaluation support. They wanted to build on the findings of the national HAF evaluation to provide more local and contextual insight in relation to healthy eating, physical activity, and social, emotional and mental wellbeing. This report describes an Evaluability Assessment of HAF conducted between January and May 2022. A theory of change (ToC) for HAF was co-developed with HAF stakeholders and a mixed-methods evaluation was agreed. This report documents the EA process, presents the HAF ToC and describes a list of evaluation design options. Recommendations for the HAF evaluation comprises: 1) Analysis of Administrative Data; 2) Family Survey; 3) Network Analysis; and 4) Qualitative interviews with older children and their parents/carers.

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1 Introduction

This evaluation initiative is funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) and undertaken by the Public Health Intervention Responsive Studies Team (PHIRST) Fusion team. The PHIRST Fusion team's approach to evaluation follows a 5-step process: brokerage, work allocation, research, reporting & knowledge mobilisation, and continuous improvement, which includes evaluability assessment methodology and embedded research with local government practitioners. Southwark Council's summer Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) was allocated to PHIRST Fusion in August 2021. This report describes an Evaluability Assessment of CCC conducted between January and May 2022. Southwark Council submitted their expression of interest for local evaluation of their HAF programme through the PHIRST scheme, as they want to build on the findings of the national evaluation to provide more contextual insight in relation to healthy eating, physical activity, and social, emotional and mental wellbeing.

Programme context

For many families in England the school holidays are challenging time. Many children are missing out on organised activities, experiencing social isolation, and suffering from holiday hunger. An All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger and Food Poverty was first formed in 2014 and called for counteraction to tackle this '*urgent issue*' (All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom 2014). The challenges associated with, and the prevalence of food-related hardship has notably increased in the intervening eight years (Boyle and Power 2021) and exacerbated significantly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Koltai, Toffolutti et al. 2021). This is in addition to the stark inequalities that exist in access to extra-curricular activities (The Sutton Trust 2014).

In 2018, responding to this issue the Department for Education (DfE) first piloted the Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) (Department for Education 2018). It was a scheme that provided funding to a select number of local authorities to coordinate and deliver healthy food and enriching activities to disadvantaged children during the school holidays. In October 2021, following an expanded pilot in 2020, DfE announced that they would be investing £200 million per year for three years into HAF (Department for Education 2022). This funding is to expand the programme to enable all local authorities in England to provide such services to children aged 5 to 16 years old and eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) over the Easter, Summer and Winter holidays. Free school meal entitlement is linked to the receipt of particular benefits defined by the Government (The UK Government 2022).

Through the HAF, the DfE aims to support hundreds of thousands of children and their families during the three main holiday periods and have set a series of objectives that they want to achieve. They want participating children to: eat healthily and be active during the school holidays; participate in engaging and enriching activities that support the development of resilience, character, wellbeing, and education attainment; be safe and not socially isolated; to have improved health and nutritional literacy; and have greater engagement with school and other local services. Furthermore, they want families to:

develop their nutritional knowledge and food budgeting; and improve signposting to support services for health, employment, and education (Department for Education 2022).

The London Borough of Southwark Council provides grant funding to HAF club providers to enable them to offer free places to children within the local authority who are eligible for free school meals. This includes specific funding to support those children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). To date, the local authority has coordinated with a range of organisations to provide a diverse range of enriching activities to children who engage with their HAF. These include: schools, youth organisations, tenants' and residents' associations, faith groups, football clubs, and children's centres.

The DfE details its standards with regards to the expectations of HAF club providers in relation to: food provision; enrichment activities; physical activities; nutritional education; food education for families/carers; signposting and referrals; and safeguarding (Department for Education 2022). In coordinating local action, Southwark Council has the ability to tailor and the responsibility to communicate these standards to those funded HAF club providers. This includes provision of Take and Make recipe boxes (Mayor's Fund for London), a package for all HAF participating children to take home that contains all the ingredients and preparation details required to make a vegetarian meal that serves four at home.

In March 2022, the DfE published a national evaluation of the 2021 HAF programme delivered by the independent research consultancy Ecorys (Cox, Campbell-Jack et al. 2022). They found that the programme reached 29% of eligible children, who attended clubs for an average of around 10 days over the summer. These children were more active, confident, and socially active than those that did not attend. They also engaged in new activities and stated that they had eaten healthier. Their parent/carers had better access to local services and found it easier to maintain work in comparison to the parent/carers of children that did not attend a HAF club (Cox, Campbell-Jack et al. 2022).

2 Rapid Review

We conducted a rapid scoping review of the literature structured around the six prioritised objectives as determined by Southwark Council and its HAF stakeholders as part of the evaluability assessment process (see section 5). Given the prescient timing of the publication of the national evaluation of the 2021 HAF, our review concentrated on the applicable findings and was supplemented with appropriate references as advised by our team's thematic expert, Dr Eilish Crilley. This process provided us with: the most recent and applicable evidence; help to guide our evaluation methods development to ensure that we would not be replicating prior work; and research methods that may potentially generate novel insight of interest to an academic audience. In relation to the six prioritised objectives, the national evaluation provides *good* evidence and insight in relation to HAF acceptability and reach. There is *modest* insight regarding the impact of the HAF on parent/carer mental wellbeing, and there is *limited* insight regarding either the impact of the HAF on household food security or its position within local food networks.

The full review can be seen in Appendix A. Here we provide a summary of the applicable evidence identified by the research team by each prioritised objective.

2.1 Acceptability of the HAF to families and children

Given the wealth of data collected on attendance as part of the national evaluation, this was a priority issue of understanding for the Department for Education. They found that there was a high level of acceptability and enjoyment for primary school-aged children. However, there was a marked drop off in interest and attendance by secondary school-aged children. HAF coordinators hypothesised that this was due to older children wanting, and having the responsibility and ability, to spend time with their friends. Overall, those children who did attend had fun at clubs, ranking the clubs with an average score of 8.5 out of 10 for enjoyment (Cox, Campbell-Jack et al. 2022).

There was limited evidence in relation to parental involvement, as the national evaluation found that the availability of clubs that explicitly engaged with parents as part of the prescribed activities were inconsistently delivered across local authority programmes. Though their qualitative research highlighted the warmth towards whole family events such as barbeques and celebratory events (Cox, Campbell-Jack et al. 2022).

2.2. Reach of HAF to eligible families and children

As with acceptability, there is good evidence from the national evaluation regarding the reach of the HAF to eligible children. Almost three quarters of a million children attended at club in summer 2021. Of these, 616k were funded by the HAF and 498k were eligible for free school meals. On average children attended for just under ten days throughout the summer holidays, with the majority having never previously attended a holiday club. The authors of the national evaluation concluded that the HAF was successful in expanding provision, however, there was a level of unmet demand as evidence by the fact that one in five clubs not being able to accommodate all those that applied (Cox, Campbell-Jack et al. 2022).

The national evaluation provided summary statistics regarding reach in relation to gender, ethnicity, and special education needs or disabilities (SEND). Though, these were not put in

the context of eligibility. Therefore, it is not feasible to draw conclusions as to the relationship between the two.

Prior work by Mann et al. (2018) found that clubs tended to operate in economically deprived areas, but they were more likely to be situated in areas that were disproportionately white and English/British (Mann, Long et al. 2018). As with the national evaluation, independent academic evaluation of the Northampton HAF programme provided summary statistics in relation to school age, gender, ethnicity, and SEND, but again this was not in the context of who was eligible within the authority's jurisdiction (Bayes, Stringer et al. 2021).

2.3. Impact of HAF on mental health of parents/carers

There was some evidence in relation to this issue within the national evaluation drawn from qualitative interviewing. Emergent themes from the qualitative interviews included '*respite*' and '*financial relief*' felt by some parents/carers as a result of their children attending a club over summer (Cox, Campbell-Jack et al. 2022).

Targeted efforts to capture parent/carer mental wellbeing, was carried out by Long et al. in an evaluation of 17 holiday clubs located across the North-East of England in 2017. Using standardised and validated measures, they found that parent/carer mental health improved after their child had attended a holiday club (Long, Stretesky et al. 2021).

2.4. Impact of HAF on food security of families during HAF programme

There is nothing explicitly captured on this specific issue in the national evaluation. The research team did capture children's views on the related issue of food quality. HAF attending children broadly felt that they ate healthier while at a club, however this view conflicted with their parents/carers' perception (Cox, Campbell-Jack et al. 2022).

Crilley et al. used standardised dietary recall methods to assess children's food intake against the UK Eatwell Guide, the policy tool used to measure healthy eating (Public Health England 2018). They found that children's food intake improved on those days that they attended a club versus those days that they did not, leading the authors to associate the importance of HAF programmes to their potential to support increased food security (Crilley, Brownlee et al. 2022).

2.5. Impact of HAF on family connectivity to long-term support

The national evaluation provided some insight regarding the issue of wider family support provided as a result of HAF attendance. Principally this was the increased ability of parents/carers to gain or maintain work. Furthermore, there was evidence that the HAF programme made it easier for families to access affordable childcare. Those parents/carers of HAF-attending children also received more information on healthy food behaviours, personal development opportunities, and childcare services (Cox, Campbell-Jack et al. 2022).

It must be noted that these were short-term opportunities. The authors did not attempt to capture impact with regards to long-term support, nor have we found evidence for such support elsewhere in the literature.

2.6. Impact of HAF on the local food network

The national evaluation provided limited insight into this issue of interest to Southwark Council and its stakeholders. The authors reported that the HAF programme supported capacity building, enabled providers to develop improved policies and procedures. They also reported how the HAF had help coordinators establish new relationships, however the details of these relationships were not evidenced (Cox, Campbell-Jack et al. 2022).

We found limited evidence in the broader literature with regards situating HAF clubs/programmes within food networks, though Stretesky et al. detailed the valuable anti-poverty resources that holiday clubs provide as community organisations in terms of material goods, services, and information.

3 Evaluability Assessment process

We used evaluability assessment (EA) methods (Leviton, Khan et al. 2010, Craig and Campbell 2015) to develop the evaluation design. Evaluability assessment is a rapid, systematic, and collaborative way of deciding whether and how a programme or policy can be evaluated, and at what potential cost. Our approach to evaluability assessment is underpinned by the principle of understanding change from diverse perspectives. This provides opportunities for co-production and knowledge mobilisation, which relate to the NIHR School for Public Health Research knowledge-sharing principles (School for Public Health Research 2018). We conducted three evaluability assessment workshops with stakeholders in the London Borough of Southwark between January and May 2022. Workshop duration was two hours. Participants included Southwark Council staff, local councillors, service providers from Southwark's HAF programme steering group, and a public representative in most if not all workshops.

In the first two evaluability assessment sessions participants co-produced a draft logic model for the HAF programme in Southwark. In the third workshop, participants agreed priority outcomes and identified potential data sources and research methods for each research question. Based on these discussions, several evaluation options were presented to Southwark Council. These are summarised in Table 1 below.

Workshop 1

In the first workshop, the focus was on understanding HAF as a complex intervention using a theory of change approach to co-develop the HAF logic model. The aims were to understand what the aim of HAF was, understand what this programme did (activities), and to understand what the programme's expected outcomes were. A co-production exercise using Participatory System Mapper (PRSM)[1] software resulted in lots of information generated by participants for the theory of change. Participants generated a long list of expected programme outcomes.

Workshop 2

In the second workshop, the focus was on prioritising outcomes so as to complement, not duplicate, national evaluation); to better understand activities so as to produce a draft HAF Theory of Change (Figure 1 below); and the agree on the focus of PHIRST evaluation.

[1] https://prsm.uk

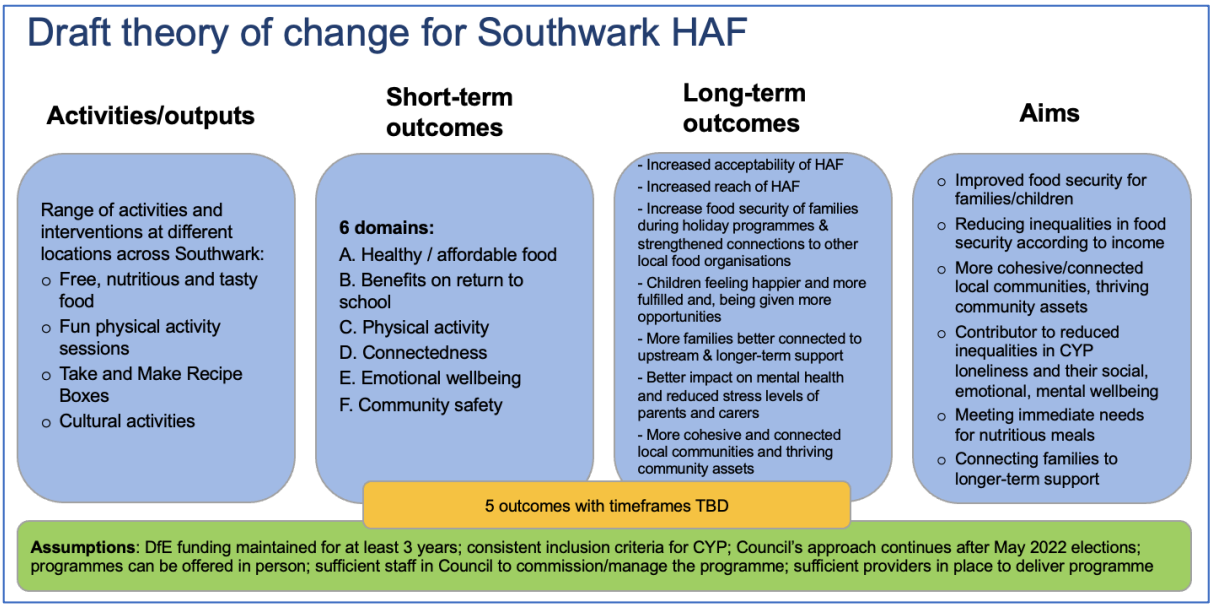

Figure 1 Draft Southwark Council HAF theory of change

During the workshop the following national and local outcomes were ranked using mentimetre.[2]

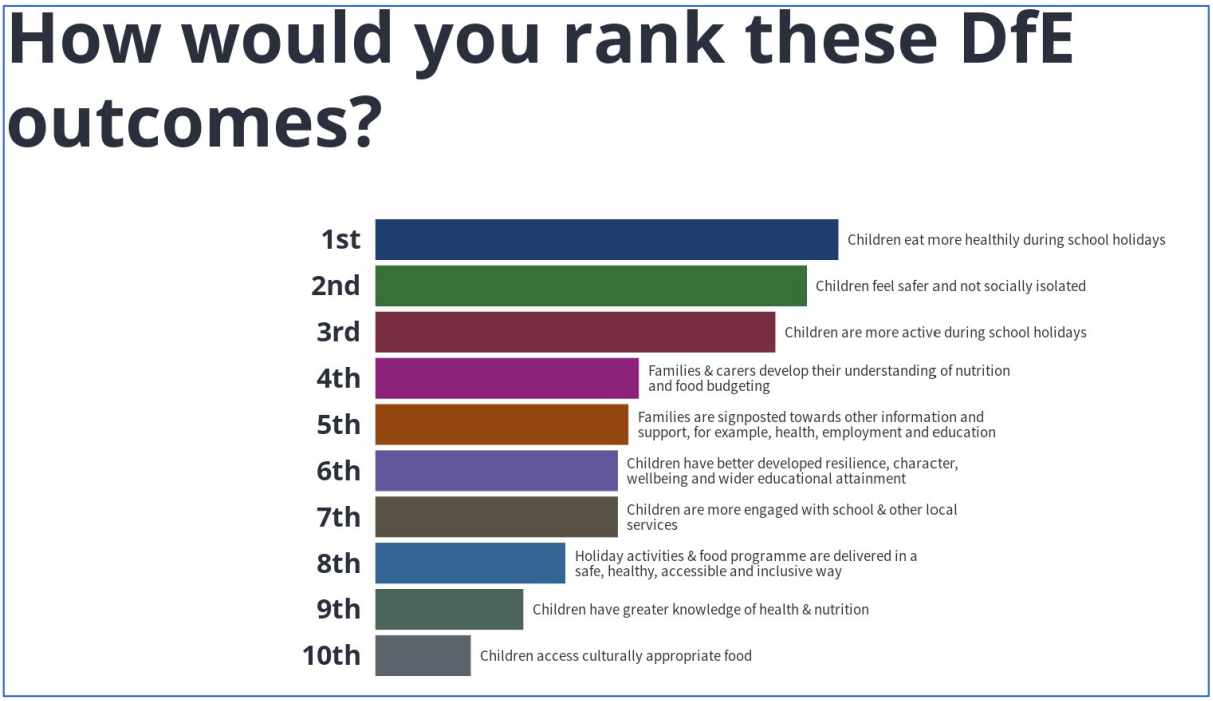

Figure 2 Prioritised DfE Outcomes

[2] https://www.mentimeter.com/

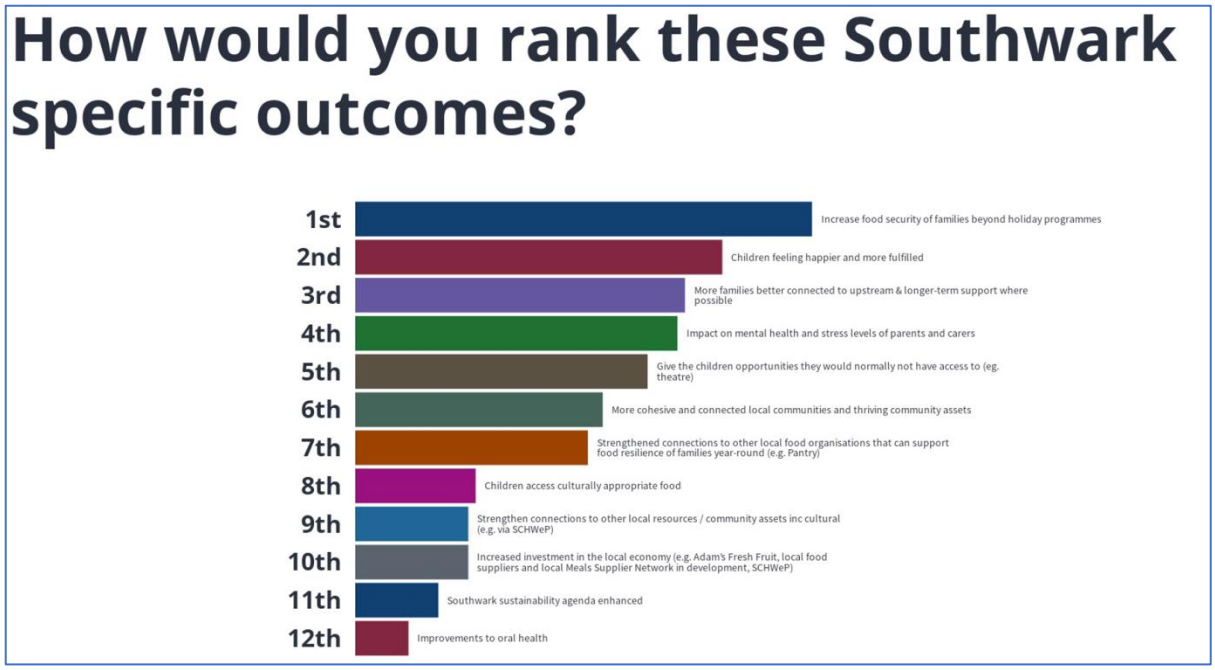

Figure 3 Prioritised local outcomes

During the workshop it emerged that there were many locally-relevant/urgent outcomes which suggested a scoping visit might be beneficial in better understanding HAF in Southwark Council. These were:

1. Increase food security of families beyond holiday programmes
2. Children feeling happier and more fulfilled
3. More families better connected to upstream & longer-term support where possible
4. Impact on mental health and stress levels of parents and carers
5. Give the children opportunities they would normally not have access to (eg. theatre)
6. More cohesive and connected local communities and thriving community assets
7. Strengthened connections to other local food organisations that can support food resilience of families year-round

Familiarisation visit

A visit by members of the PHIRST Fusion team to Southwark Council to HAF took place on 13th April 2023. Team members spoke informally to members of HAF staff as well as family participants to better understand the local context of HAF service use and delivery.

Workshop 3

The purpose of third and final workshop was to: 1) Agree on the evaluation aim; 2) Agree on main & sub- evaluation questions; 3) Understand data requirements; and 4) Explore evaluation design options. The workshop also provided a brief review of the DfE's 2022 Evaluation of the 2021 holiday activities and food programme, as well as a related evaluation by The Food Foundation on a related programme based in Yorkshire. The list of local outcomes prioritised in workshop 2 were reviewed and amended:

1. Increased acceptability of HAF to families and children
2. Increased reach of HAF to eligible families and children
3. Increase food security of families during holiday programmes & strengthened connections to other local food organisations
4. Children feeling happier and more fulfilled and, being given more opportunities they would normally not have access to
5. More families better connected to upstream & longer-term support where possible
6. Better impact on mental health and reduced stress levels of parents and carers
7. Children feeling happier, more fulfilled, and given more opportunities than they normally would
8. More cohesive and connected local communities and thriving community assets

4 Evaluation design considerations

Aim & evaluation questions

The overall aim of the Southwark HAF Evaluation is to assess the impact of HAF 2022 on outcomes prioritised by Southwark stakeholders, and how HAF was implemented in relation to the prioritised outcomes. Although a new set of prioritised outcomes were co-developed with stakeholders (above), the final list of outcomes remained overly ambitious in relation to available PHIRST resources and time. The evaluation team therefore decided to rationalise these constraints with what was felt to be the overall thrust of workshop discussions – a desire to focus more on families/carer and local communities, since the DfE national evaluation was more children-centred and participants had agreed on the desirability of not duplicating what has been done. Therefore, the following list of outcomes are proposed instead:

1. Increased acceptability of HAF to families and children
2. Increased reach of HAF to eligible families and children
3. Better impact on mental health and reduced stress levels of parents and carers
4. Increase food security of families during holiday programmes & strengthened connections to other local food organisations
5. More families better connected to upstream & longer-term support where possible
6. More cohesive and connected local communities and thriving community assets

1 & 2 are families and children's outcomes; 3 is specific to parents and carers alone; 4 & 5 relates to families, food security and support; 6 is specific to local communities and assets. Children-specific outcomes have been removed.

At this point we note an overlap with regards to outcomes 4 and 6. The main interest of outcome 4 is about family food security, but there is an inference that this is linked to an increased connectivity to the wider community. Whereas 6 is about the broader connectivity of the community and organisations. Therefore, we suggest that while connectivity may potentially emerge as a finding, narrowing the outcomes further can help

to focus the evaluation. Thus we propose a emphasis on food security for outcome 4, and then have connectivity as a focus for outcome 6. The finalised list of outcomes are:

1. Increased acceptability of HAF to families and children
2. Increased reach of HAF to eligible families and children
3. Better impact on mental health and reduced stress levels of parents and carers
4. Increase food security of families during holiday programmes
5. More families better connected to upstream & longer-term support where possible
6. Strengthened local food network as a community asset

Based on this finalised list of outcomes the corresponding evaluation questions are:

1. What is the acceptability of HAF to families and children?
2. What is the reach of HAF to eligible families and children?
3. What is the impact of HAF on mental health and reduced stress levels of parents and carers?
4. What is the impact of HAF on food security of families during holiday programmes?
5. What is the impact of HAF on families' connection to upstream & longer-term support?
6. What is the impact of HAF on local food network in terms of community assets?

Data

From the EA workshops we know that local schools collect information about children registered for free school meals.

5 Evaluation options

Four options are presented in this chapter for the Southwark HAF evaluation, starting with the least resource intensive and most basic, and building on additional evaluation activity. See Table 1 for an overview:

- Option 0 involves no change or additional evaluation approach and relies on relevant and existing national (DfE) and local monitoring & evaluation (M&E). We include Option 0 as a reference option. As discussed in the workshops, existing M&E does not address the local priorities of Southwark Borough.
- Option 1 supplements Option 0 with analysis of administrative data, a family survey, and a network analysis.
- Option 2 comprises Option 1 with additional qualitative interviews with older children.
- Option 3 comprises Option 2 with additional qualitative interviews with parents/carers.

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Table 1 Overview of Southwark Holiday Activity & Food Programme evaluation options

Linked Objectives	Evaluation Design	Elaboration & Data Collection Tools	Pros	Cons
NIL	**Option 0 (reference option)** • Existing Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)	• Relies on national (DfE) evaluation (unclear if this continues for 2022/2023) • No locally resourced evaluation	• No additional resources required	• Less opportunities for local learning as national evaluation does not engage directly with Southwark specific outcomes of interest
- Reach of HAF to eligible families and children - Impact on mental health of parents/carers - Impact on food security of families during HAF - Impact on family connectivity to long-term support - Acceptability of HAF to families and children	**Option 1** Analysis of Administrative Data + Family Survey + Network Analysis	• Using Southwark Council routinely collected data and supplemented with additional local level geographical data, e.g. IMD and socio-demographics • Questionnaire to HAF and non-HAF attending (but eligible) families. Survey designed using validated measures to capture both parent/carer mental wellbeing, and household food security. Questions can also ask about connectivity to support services and how booking experience • Develop map(s) of the local food network with stakeholders to illustrate the position and influence of HAF providers in relation to other food organisations within Southwark (and beyond).	• Analysis of administrative data can focus on harder to reach groups like ethnic minorities & communities in higher socioeconomic deprivation • Address food security not covered in national evaluation	• Challenges over identifying the right tool to capture and measure household food security/insecurity • May be difficult to obtain appropriate control group

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- Impact of HAF on the local food network				
As above with increased emphasis on acceptability of HAF to families and children	**Option 2** Option 1 + Qualitative interviews with older children	• Option 1 (as above) plus: • Semi-structure interviews with sample of HAF eligible older (teenage) children. Both with those that attended and those that didn't attend a club over summer	• Findings can be used to make HAF more interesting and engaging to secondary school children	• May be more challenging to recruit • Require substantive qualitative research support & resources
As above with increased emphasis on: - Impact of HAF on family connectivity to long-term support - Acceptability of HAF to families and children - Impact of HAF on mental health of parents/carers - Impact of HAF on food security of families during HAF programme	**Option 3** Option 2 + Qualitative interviews with parents/carers	• Option 2 (as above) plus: • Semi-structure interviews with sample of parents/carers to explore issues related to long-term support as this could encapsulate a number of issues, and also their experience of understanding club provision	• Can address gap in national evaluation & literature on family connectivity to long-term support	• Need more unpacking of 'long-term' & 'connectivity' • Most complicated design hence requiring most resources

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6 Recommendations

PHIRST Fusion recommends Option 3 with the indicative evaluation design and activities described in the table below:

Table 2 Suggested Option 3 research activities

Research activity	Linked objectives	Time delivery
Quantitative data analysis: Using Southwark Council routinely collected data and supplemented with additional local level geographical data, e.g. IMD and socio-demographics	- Reach of HAF to eligible families and children	**Autumn**, post-holiday delivery when routine data is available and also release of CENSUS 2021 data.
Family survey: Deliver a questionnaire to HAF and non-HAF attending (but eligible) families. Quantitative is design using validated measures to capture both parent/carer mental wellbeing, and household food security. We would also ask questions about connectivity to support services and how their booking experience.	- Impact of HAF on mental health of parents/carers - Impact of HAF on food security of families during HAF programme - Impact of HAF on family connectivity to long-term support - Acceptability of HAF to families and children	**During** HAF programme, potentially towards the end of the summer, certainly not during first couple of weeks.
Network analysis: Work with HAF coordinators, club deliverers, and other key stakeholders (though probably not families) to develop map(s) of the local food network that illustrate the position and influence of the HAF in relation to other food organisations within Southwark (and beyond).	- Impact of HAF on the local food network	**Autumn**, post-holiday delivery, to provide time for coordinators and club deliverers to reflect on the impact of the HAF beyond those direct to the children and families attending.
Qualitative interviews with older children: Semi-structure interviews with HAF eligible older (teenage) children. Both with those that attended and those that didn't attend a club over	- Acceptability of HAF to families and children	**Not time dependent**, could be delivered during or in autumn. Driven by availability and accessibility to children. Potentially the council

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summer. Explore their experience of the holidays and reasons for attending/non-attending and what clubs they would like to attend and with whom.		and schools could help facilitate this.
Optional, qualitative interviews with parents/carers: These would be primarily to explore issues related to long-term support as this could encapsulate a number of issues, and also their experience of understanding club provision on offer to them and their booking experience. May touch on food security and mental wellbeing, though given possible time and other resourcing constraints these two objectives are better served though quantitative measures. Though these objectives could also be explored.	- **Impact of HAF on family connectivity to long-term support** - **Acceptability of HAF to families and children** - Impact of HAF on mental health of parents/carers - Impact of HAF on food security of families during HAF programme	**Autumn**, post-holiday delivery, as that link to services from the HAF needs to be established. But fairly soon after the holidays to minimise recall bias.

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