

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
ADULT & CHILDREN SERVICES COMMITTEE

22 MAY 2013

Agenda Item	14.
Report No	ACS/53/13

School Lets – Proposed Pilot Project

Report by Director of Education, Culture and Sport Service

SUMMARY

The report proposes changes to the current operating model for school lets and that a centralised management and administrative system is introduced on a pilot basis from August 2013 to:-

- Provide improved management and financial information to better inform future policy discussion and decision-making
- Streamline business processes
- Implement a consistent operating model
- Improve cost management and potentially improve income generation
- Provide an opportunity to pro-actively manage lets
- Reduce/remove an administrative burden from schools

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council's programme "Working Together for the Highlands" highlights the central role that schools play in their communities in helping to deliver activities and services for pupils beyond the traditional school day. The Council is also committed to ensuring that all new school buildings act as a community hub and that new and innovative ways to deliver more community access to existing buildings are explored.
- 1.2 In this context the Council needs to consider how community access can be balanced within existing and reducing budgets.
- 1.3 As part of the budget setting process, it was agreed that efficiency savings should be made in relation to school lets both in 2013/14 and in future financial years. The achievement of these savings will require changing the current operating model, reducing costs and exploring options to increase income.

2. CURRENT POSITION

- 2.1 At its meeting on 12th March 2009, the Education, Culture & Sport Committee agreed to harmonise the scales of charges for the public use of Council's community facilities as well as facilities in schools and leisure and community centres. Following the establishment of High Life Highland (HLH) in October 2011, the responsibility for managing the community use of a small number of joint school/community facilities passed to that organisation. The majority of lets of

school premises, however, are still dealt with directly by the Education, Culture & Sport Service and this report focuses on that provision.

- 2.2 There is some evidence that the policy is not being applied consistently and that practice varies across Highland in regard to school lets. This is partly because the current management and administration of lets is fragmented and bureaucratic involving a range of people and processes – from Head Teachers and school support staff to area based management and administrative staff. The fragmentation has allowed some local historical arrangements to continue and resulted in different interpretations of policy in different parts of Highland. It is possible that this inconsistent approach is having an effect on income levels.
- 2.3 The current system is supported by outdated IT which does not provide sufficiently detailed financial and management information. The availability of partial financial information, for example, means that it is not currently possible to quantify fully the cost of providing the service. An analysis of lets income and janitorial overtime (one of the major costs associated with lets) indicates that it is a highly subsidised service which costs the Council approximately £0.250M per annum to provide. However, the overall cost of service provision would increase if other factors such as heat and lighting and management and administration were included. It is also anticipated that the cost of providing the service will increase over time as costs such as energy and staffing increase.
- 2.4 The current management information system does not provide a clear overview of the pattern of lets and user groups. However, an analysis of a sample of current lets would suggest that:-
- The majority are free or at heavily discounted rates with only a minority covering their costs
 - Many premises are open only for a single let
 - Many lets run sequentially rather than concurrently
 - Previous attempts to consolidate lets within specific schools seems to have been only partially successful
 - There are only a handful of semi-commercial and no commercial lets
- 2.5 Recent structural changes such as the implementation of Shared Business Support Services (SBS) and the roll-out of the Facilities Management (FM) in primary schools and the need to make budget savings relating to school lets suggests this in an opportune time to consider changing the current operating model for school lets in order to:-
- Provide improved management and financial information
 - Streamline business processes
 - Implement a consistent operating model
 - Improve cost management
 - Provide an opportunity to pro-actively manage lets
 - Reduce/remove an administrative burden from schools
- 2.6 It is particularly important to establish the cost of providing the school lets service and the pattern of usage in order to inform future discussion and decision making, for example, to:-
- Agree the level of subsidy the Council wishes to provide or can afford

- Inform policy debate
- Assess benefits of the service and potential impact that changes may have on user groups
- Consider options to reduce expenditure and increase income

3. PROPOSAL

3.1 It is proposed to change the current operating model for school lets as follows:-

- The ECS Service Information and Support team will assume responsibility for the management and administration of all school lets in partnership with schools and SBS.
- A centralised management and administration system is set up and tested prior to implementation on a pilot basis from the new school year in August 2013. The pilot will be reviewed after the first year.
- Over time, all janitorial posts will be deleted and be replaced by Facilities Management Assistants. In addition, where appropriate, Caretaker Stewards will have contracts designed to reflect the support needs of individual schools including arrangements for servicing lets.
- All income generated from school lets to be accounted for within one of the ECS Resources specialist support team budget headings

3.2 During the course of academic year 2013-14 as improved management information re the pattern and nature of school lets becomes available further proposals will be developed re the school lets system with an effective implementation date of August 2014. The revised operating model will be devised to ensure that the community use of schools is delivered in the most effective and efficient manner possible. In advance of any changes to the existing operating model there will be extensive consultation with community representatives and Elected Members.

4. Implications

4.1 There are no Resource, Legal, Equalities, Climate Change or Risk implications arising from the content of this report.

Recommendations

5.1 Members are asked to agree proposals to change the current operating model for school lets to:-

- From August 2013, provide improved management and financial information to better inform future policy discussion and decision-making by implementing an improved management information system, and;
- From August 2014, informed by improved management information and following extensive local consultation, introduce:
 - Streamline business processes
 - Implement a consistent operating model
 - Improve cost management and potentially improve income generation
 - Provide an opportunity to pro-actively manage lets
 - Reduce/remove an administrative burden from schools

Designation: Director of Education, Culture and Sport

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