

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**  
**ADULT & CHILDREN SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
**19 FEBRUARY 2014**

Agenda Item	16.
Report No	ACS/30/14

**School Lets Pilot Project – Progress Report**

**Report by Director of Education, Culture and Sport Service**

**SUMMARY**

This report provides an update on progress on the pilot school lets project and asks Members to agree a number of key principles and immediate actions in relation to school letting activity.

**1. BACKGROUND**

1.1 The Adult & Children's Services Committee (ACS) on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2013 agreed proposals to change the operating model for school lets. The first stage was to set up a pilot project from August 2013 to provide improved management and financial information that would better inform future policy and decision. The second stage was to implement a consistent standard operating model from August 2014 that would:-

- Streamline business processes
- Improve cost management and potentially improve income generation
- Provide an opportunity to pro-actively manage lets
- Reduce/remove an administrative burden from schools

1.2 The management information system that has been in place since August 2013 has allowed for more detailed analysis of school lets than previously possible. Although there are still significant gaps in the information, the process has identified a number of issues including, for example:-

- The current School Lets policy which was agreed in 2009 is not being implemented consistently across Highland;
- There is significant confusion about charging policy and subjective judgements are being made at all levels. For example, many examples have been found of occasions when third parties (defined as both individuals and groups) which, under agreed Council policy, should have been charged for using school premises but have not been. In addition, a large number of local and historical arrangements exist both in relation to free use of schools and the level of charges being applied;
- The current pricing structure is not fully comprehensive. For example, there is no clear guidance on either the organisations, the circumstances or the times when free lets of schools should or could be granted;
- There is evidence that not all school letting activity is being formally recorded. For example, no letting activity has been reported in 60% of primary schools although it is known that, at least, some are being used on

a regular basis by third parties. As a result, there is no complete record of how, when and the purposes for which schools are being used outwith curriculum delivery;

- Inconsistent practice around the booking and recording of letting activity means that it is often unclear whether a school or a third party has responsibility/liability for issues such as protection of children and vulnerable groups, insurance, health and safety etc. The lack of clarity means that significant risk exists in relation to these areas;
- There is evidence of keys for school premises being made available on an “ad hoc” basis;
- There is a lack of clarity about process ownership;
- Without accurate recording of letting activity it is not possible to determine the actual net cost to the Council of providing the school lets service;
- There is evidence that previous arrangements to consolidate lets in specific schools within an Associated School Grouping are not being applied.

## **2. KEY PRINCIPLES**

2.1 Work is currently underway to address the identified gaps in the management information. However, going forwards it is important that the Council establishes key principles in relation to school letting activity.

2.2 Members are asked to agree that the key principles should include the following:-

- That schools should be widely available to communities within the limitations of finite Council budgets and resources and consideration of the effects such provision may have on the viability of other local community facilities;
- That school lets should, where possible, be consolidated in specified school premises within an Associated School Grouping in order to contain operating costs within available resources and budgets. Wherever possible, this should be the local secondary school;
- That (and except in circumstances where responsibility has been delegated to High Life Highland or a local management committee) the school lets process should be the responsibility of the Head Teacher. For example, he/she should be responsible for determining availability, vetting the applicant and advising the customer of the charges that apply within an agreed tariff structure;
- That, within the primary school sector, the Facilities Management (FM) team will support the Head Teacher and assume responsibility for setting up and servicing the let, compliance with health and safety, security etc. Within the secondary school sector this responsibility will reside with the Head Janitor;
- That Shared Business Support Service (SBS) will assume responsibility for processing all applications and providing periodic management reports on all letting activity;
- That all school letting activity must be recorded to determine the use that is being made of school premises as well as for the protection of children and vulnerable groups and for security and insurance reasons.

- That the use of schools by third parties should normally be subject to charge but with concessions available for identified groups and activities as specified within a standard charging policy;
- That a standardised charging policy and tariff structure should be applied consistently across Highland. (It should be noted that technically this is already in place as the 2009 approved policy sought to standardise charges for all Education, Culture & Sport facilities including PPP and non-PPP schools and the facilities that are now operated by HLH);
- When comprehensive management information is available on letting activity in all schools, that the current charging policy and tariff structure should be updated to address identified gaps and inconsistencies;
- That, following Committee approval, any subsequent variations to an updated charging policy and tariff structure can only be approved by the Director of Education, Culture & Sport;
- That a more uniform approach to use of school premises for community purposes should be explored and developed for each school sector. For example, developing a standard operating model in secondary schools whereby HLH manages community access to facilities.

2.3 If Members agree that the key principles detailed in paragraph 2.2 should underpin school letting policy, it is further recommended that a number of immediate actions be implemented. As more comprehensive management information becomes available, further proposals on school letting activity will be presented to Committee for discussion and decision.

### **3. IMMEDIATE ACTIONS**

3.1 The following immediate actions are recommended:-

- That the 2009 policy which agreed standard charging bands and charges for all ECS facilities be implemented consistently across Highland from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014.
- However, where the implementation of agreed policy has an adverse impact on a community user group, any charges will be phased in over three financial years.

3.2 Since the original policy was agreed, HLH has been working towards standardising charges across the facilities that it operates on a phased basis. This process will be completed by 2015/16. Most charges currently being applied in schools and HLH facilities are on a par but a few anomalies exist.

3.3 Discussions will take place with HLH to ensure that moving forwards similar levels of charging will apply in schools (both PPP and non PPP) and the facilities operated by HLH.

### **4. IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 **Resources** – this project will result in a number of significant improvements including:

- The availability of a comprehensive database relating to current letting activity;

- This in turn will allow a review of current activity and therefore enable a more efficient configuration of letting activity to be established. For example, location and timing;
- In addition, the consistent application of the charging policy approved by Committee in 2009 should result in increased income

In summary, therefore, there ought to be some financial benefits arising from this project. At this stage it is not possible to quantify these benefits.

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

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1 It is recommended that Members agree the key principles relating to school letting activity as detailed in paragraph 2.2.
- 5.2 It is further recommended that Members agree the implementation of the actions detailed in 3.1

Designation: Director of Education, Culture and Sport

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