

Meeting:	Overview and Scrutiny
Date:	28 July 2009
Subject:	Community Lettings
Responsible Officer:	Brendon Hills, Corporate Director (Community & Environment)
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Chris Mote, Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Appendix 1: List of schools and youth and community centres Appendix 2: List of organisations and types of activities Appendix 3: Comparing community lettings with the schools private hire rates

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report is presented in response to the Scrutiny Review on ‘Delivering a strengthened community and voluntary sector for Harrow’ (Nov 2008) – recommendation 19:

“To ask the relevant Council directorate(s) (concerned with community lettings especially schools) to assess the current issues around community lettings (of schools and Council buildings such as the Teachers’ Centre and community centres) and offer possible solutions to these”.

Recommendations:

There are no recommendations attached to this report as this is being presented as a discussion paper only.

Section 2 – Report

Background

- 2.3.1 In October 2002 Cabinet decided that Community Lettings would be transferred to the Grants Advisory Panel as of 1st April 2004. The intention was to abolish the community lettings system and bring the support to the voluntary sector provided through this route into the main grants system.
- 2.3.2 Under the current lettings system voluntary organisations apply to use a room in a school or council-owned youth and community centre (list of schools and centres involved in the scheme attached at Appendix 1). The Council liaises with the school or centre to make the necessary arrangements and enters into a hire agreement with the organisation. The council applies a 50% subsidy on the published hire rates for community lettings and invoices the organisation for payment. The council pays a fixed rate reimbursement fee to the school to cover costs such as electricity and pays for the caretaker's overtime.
- 2.3.3 On the 14th October 2004 Cabinet approved the move to a grants based system whereby groups would apply for a grant towards the cost of hiring premises from the council and then deal directly with schools or other premises provider.
- 2.3.4 The implementation of this new system encountered a number of difficulties such as schools delaying setting their charges, charges being set too high for community groups and the application process perceived as being too complex. This led to several delays to its implementation:
- On 22 November 2004 the Grants Advisory Panel agreed to defer the implementation of the new policy on lettings until 1st September 2005.
 - On 28 May 2005 the Grants Advisory Panel agreed to defer the implementation of the new policy on lettings until 1st September 2006.
 - On 8 March 2006 the Grants Advisory Panel agreed to defer Community Lettings Grant applications received to the meeting to be held on 6 July 2006.
 - On 6 July 2006 the Grants Advisory Panel received an update report on implementation of the policy.
 - On 7th September 2007 the Grants Advisory Panel received a further update report that proposed implementation of the system by March 2008.
 - On the 9th April 2008 the decision to implement was again deferred pending the outcome of the Overview and Scrutiny committee review of Council support to the voluntary sector.
 - Despite the delays to its implementation schools and voluntary organisations were expecting the new system to be implemented by

September 2008.

- 2.3.5 The delays to the implementation of this policy were aimed at helping to ease the transition of community lettings to schools. This included a phased reduction of concessionary rates that have been reducing each year from 85% to 70% in September 2006, to 70% to 60% in September 2007 and from 60% to 50% effective from September 2008. The current concessionary rate is 50%.

Current situation

- 2.4.1 The Overview and Scrutiny committee completed its review of council support to the voluntary sector in December 2008. The committee concluded in its report to Cabinet that “the council’s policy on community lettings has been in hiatus since 2004”.

- 2.4.2 Scrutiny recommended:

“To ask the relevant Council directorate(s) (concerned with community lettings especially schools) to assess the current issues around community lettings (of schools and Council buildings such as the Teachers’ Centre and community centres) and offer possible solutions to these. To articulate this assessment and present possible solutions to a scrutiny committee and concurrently feed into scrutiny’s review of extended schools.” (Recommendation 19)

2.4.3 Assessment of current issues:

2.4.3.1 Community’s perspective

Cost: The cost of hiring venues is the main issue confronting community organisations: The cost of hiring a venue through community lettings is considerably lower than going directly to a school. For example, the cost of booking a school hall through community lettings would be £33 an hour, whereas the private hire rate through a high school in Harrow would be £100 an hour. (See appendix 3 for details). The concessionary charge has increased over the last few years due to budgetary pressures however, despite the relatively low community lettings charge, some organisations continue to struggle to pay their fees. It is difficult for schools to apply a subsidy to their hire charges as there are statutory restrictions on the use of school funding.

Lack of transparency: There is a lack of transparency in the current system. Community Lettings are not widely publicised therefore only those organizations currently booking continue to benefit from the subsidized rate and other organizations are not made aware of the support available.

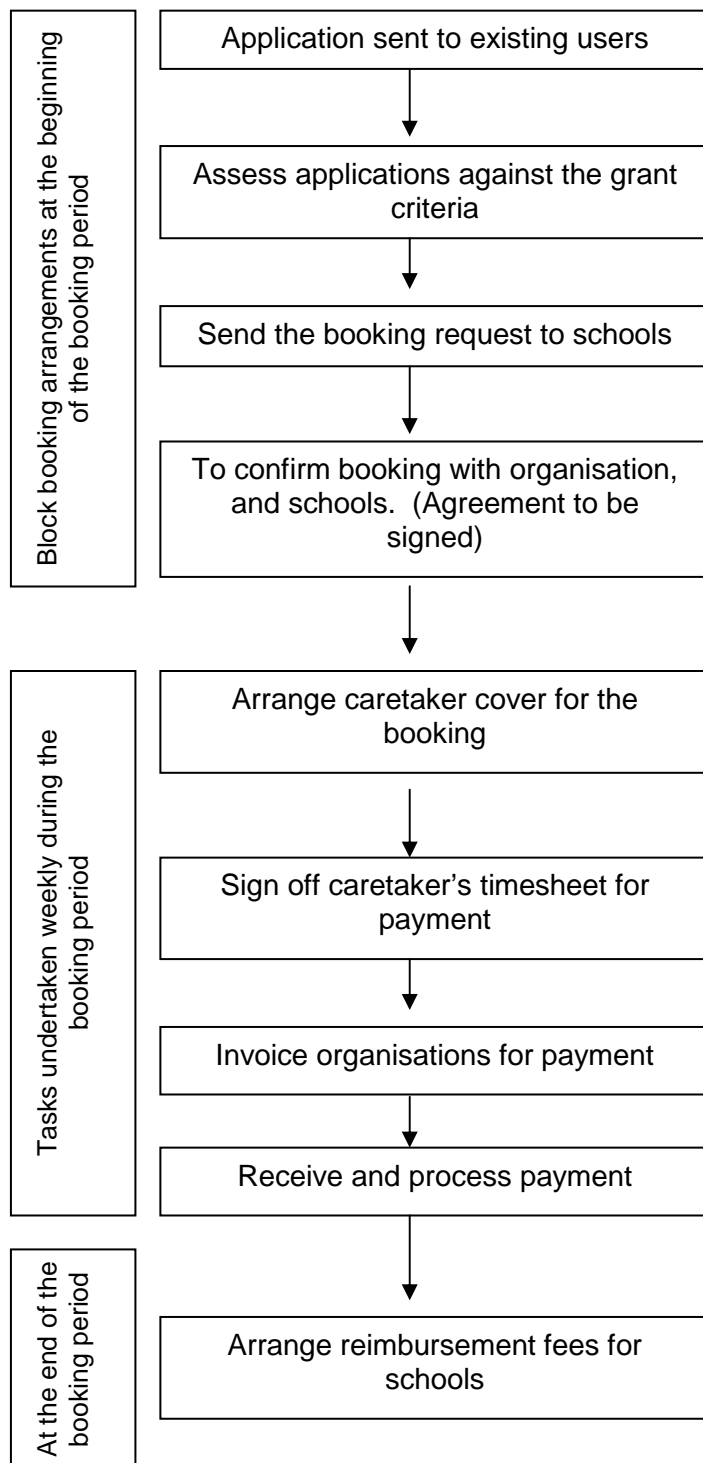
2.4.3.2 School’s perspective

Schools engagement: There appears to be some reluctance across schools to accommodate community lettings. There could be a number of reasons for this: with the current system some schools feel that the reimbursement fees (which were recently increased) do not cover their overhead costs for opening school premises outside of school hours. There is also a view that community organisations use of school premises can be disruptive to the general running of the school, sometimes incurring additional cleaning or security costs.

2.4.3.3 Council's perspective

The process: The current booking system is very cumbersome. The flowchart below details the tasks that are undertaken during the booking process. There are two booking periods a year: (1) from April – August and (2) from September – March. Although ad-hoc booking can be made, very few are received.

Community lettings booking process



The current system has had a number of inherent flaws, which have been addressed over the last few years, however there is room for further improvement. For example, currently no monitoring is undertaken of groups accessing the community lettings process. This means that we have no way of knowing whether the activity being

undertaken is in line with that applied for. There are also increasing concerns about the use of council premises by 'extremist' groups. As the council's booking system is removed from the actual activity we have no way of knowing what activity is actually taking place.

It was agreed in 2006 that schools could claim a reimbursement fee and submit caretaker's overtime claim forms for a community letting when a private booking has taken place at the same time, even if no additional costs have been incurred. This arrangement has put an additional burden on the community lettings budget.

2.4.3.4 General issues

There has been a decline in the number of bookings over the last 12 months, as seen below.

Booking period	Bookings received
April 08 – August 2008	62
September 08 – March 09	43
April 09 – August 09	42

This may be due to the following:

- The reduction of the concessionary rate from 60% - 50%, which was introduced in September 2008
- The application of the grants criteria to community lettings has meant that some organisations, that previously benefited, are no longer eligible for the concession and as a consequent are either booking the same facilities directly through the school at the commercial rate or have found alternative venues in the borough.

Possible solutions

2.4.3.5 The issues to be addressed:

- **Cost:** The current subsidy available to community organisations helps support a number of organisations deliver valuable community activities through the use of school and community premises. Despite this some organisations continue to struggle to meet the hire costs for school premises. Despite the pressures on the Council's budget, it continues to subsidise lettings by 50%, even though many other local authorities stopped providing this support several years ago. From our knowledge of neighbouring authorities we are not aware of any other council that operates a similar scheme. Schools are subject to strict financial controls that prevent them subsidising community activities through the schools budget. To support community organisations address the issue of funding a number of measures already been put in place including the appointment of a Children's Services Liaison Officer based at HAVS. The worker provides support to VCS organisations to help them engage with the extended schools and children's centre agenda and access the support they need to help them do this. In addition, the Council is part-funding a Funding Officer who will be based at HAVS who will also have a remit to help local groups with

their fundraising efforts.

- **Lack of transparency:** This could be addressed by improving the publicity of Community Lettings - in order to raise awareness and ensure that all voluntary and community groups are aware of and can access support available through the council. The application of the current grants criteria has also helped to bring the community lettings process in line with other support provided by the council, although the exception for religious groups remains.
- **Schools engagement with community lettings:** This could be addressed by actively encouraging schools to work more closely with community organisations. As part of the Extended Schools Core Offer, schools are required to make their facilities available to the local community. An analysis of bookings received during April – August shows that many of these organisations are offering activities that benefited children and families. By working more closely with schools community lettings could assist schools in meeting this requirement. (See appendix 2 for details.) Initial discussions between Children’s Services and Community Development have begun and will continue to explore how this relationship can be further developed.
- **Improvements to current process.** There are a number of improvements that could be made to the current process:

Monitoring: To introduce a process of monitoring so that (1) we are able to monitor which activities are being provided through community lettings and (2) to help us gain some robust data on which groups are benefiting from this support.

Exception for religious groups: The Grants Advisory Panel agreed in January 2008 to apply the current grants criteria to community lettings, however retained the exception for religious groups. This creates an inconsistency in the criteria applied to council support provided to the VCS. This could be addressed by removing this exception and directing religious groups to book directly with schools.

The Council is currently exploring the use of a corporate booking system, which may be able to include the community lettings process. As this is in its early stages of development, community development will explore the potential for linking in to this system when it is available.

Section 3 - Implications of the Recommendation

As this is a discussion paper there are not risk or implications for the council.

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Audrey Salmon, Interim Service Manager, Community Resources and Projects

Kashmir Takhar, Interim Head of Service, Community Development

Background Papers:

Appendix 1: List of schools and youth and community centres

Appendix 2: List of organisations and types of activities

Appendix 3: Comparing community lettings with the schools private hire rates

Appendix 1: List of schools and youth and community centres

HIGH SCHOOLS

CANONS HIGH SCHOOL
Shaldon Road, Edgware, HA8 6AN
MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS

HARROW HIGH SCHOOL
Gayton Road, Harrow, HA1 2JG
MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS

HATCH END HIGH SCHOOL
Headstone Lane, Harrow, HA3 6NR
MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS

NOWER HILL HIGH SCHOOL
George V Ave, Pinner, HA5 5RP
MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS

ROOKS HEATH HIGH SCHOOL
Eastcote Lane, S.Harrow, HA2 9AJ
MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS EXCEPT HALL

WHITMORE HIGH SCHOOL
Porlock Avenue, Harrow, HA2 0AD
MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS

HARROW TEACHERS' CENTRE
Tudor Road, Wealdstone, HA3 5QD
MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

BELMONT FIRST SCHOOL
Hibbert Road, Harrow Weald, HA3 7JT
ACCOMODATES COMMUNITY LETS
BELMONT MIDDLE SCHOOL
Hibbert Road, Harrow Weald, HA3 7JT

CANNON LANE FIRST SCHOOL
Cannonbury Avenue, Pinner, HA5 1TS
MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS
CANNON LANE MIDDLE SCHOOL
Cannonbury Avenue, Pinner, HA5 1TS
MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS

GRIMSDYKE FIRST & MIDDLE SCHOOL
Sylvia Avenue, Hatch End, HA5 4QE
ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS

KENMORE PARK FIRST SCHOOL
Moorhouse Road, Kenton, HA3 9JA
MANAGES COMMUNITY LETS
KENMORE PARK MIDDLE SCHOOL
Moorhouse Road, Kenton, HA3 9JA
MANAGES COMMUNITY LETS

LONGFIELD FIRST SCHOOL
Duke's Avenue, N.Harrow, HA2 7NZ
[ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS](#)
LONGFIELD MIDDLE SCHOOL
Duke's Avenue, N.Harrow, HA2 7NZ
[ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS](#)

NEWTON FARM F & M SCHOOL
Ravenswood Crescent, South Harrow
[MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS](#)

PINNER PARK FIRST SCHOOL
Melbourne Avenue, Pinner, HA5 5TL
[MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS](#)

PINNER PARK MIDDLE SCHOOL
Melbourne Avenue, Pinner, HA5 5TL
[MANAGES COMMUNITY LETS](#)

PINNER WOOD FIRST SCHOOL
Latimer Gardens, Pinner, HA5 3RA
[MANAGES COMMUNITY LETS](#)

PINNER WOOD MIDDLE SCHOOL
Latimer Gardens, Pinner, HA5 3RA
[MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS](#)

PRIESTMEAD FIRST SCHOOL
Hartford Avenue, Kenton, HA3 8SZ
[MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS](#)
PRIESTMEAD MIDDLE SCHOOL
Hartford Avenue, Kenton, HA3 8SZ
[MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS](#)

ROXBOURNE FIRST SCHOOL
Torbay Road, Harrow, HA2 9QF
[MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS](#)
ROXBOURNE MIDDLE SCHOOL
Torbay Road, Harrow, HA2 9QF

STAG LANE FIRST SCHOOL
Collier Drive, Edgware, HA8 5RU
[ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS](#)
STAG LANE MIDDLE SCHOOL
Collier Drive, Edgware, HA8 5RU
[ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS](#)

STANBURN FIRST SCHOOL
Abercorn Road, Stanmore, HA7 2PJ
[MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS](#)
STANBURN MIDDLE SCHOOL
Abercorn Road, Stanmore, HA7 2PJ
[MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS](#)

VAUGHAN F& M SCHOOL
Vaughan Road, West Harrow, HA1 4EL
[MANAGES COMMUNITY LETS](#)

WELLDON PARK MIDDLE SCHOOL
Wyvenhoe Road, S.Harrow, HA2 8LS
MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS

SHAFTESBURY HIGH SCHOOL
Headstone Lane, Harrow, HA3 6LE
MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS

YOUTH & COMMUNITY CENTRES

CEDARS YOUTH CENTRE
Chicheley Gardens, Harrow Weald,
HA3 6QH
MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS

WEALDSTONE YOUTH CENTRE
Grant Road, Wealdstone, Harrow,
HA3 7SB
MANAGES OWN LETS & ACCOMMODATES COMMUNITY LETS

Appendix 2: List of organisations and types of activities

April 09 - August 09 - Current Bookings				
Organisation Name	School Name	Type of Activity	Adults	Children
Harrow Folk Dance Club	Belmont First	Music & Dance Workshop	Yes	0
Rachana	Belmont First	Mother Tongue, Dance & Music	Yes	Yes
Harrow Iranian Community Association	Belmont Middle	Mother Tongue, Football Lessons	Yes	Yes
Association of Tamil School Hendon	Canons High	Language, sports and culture teaching	Yes	Yes
Canons Gujarati School	Canons High	Mother Tongue Classes	Yes	Yes
Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (UK)	Canons High	Youth & Culture Activities	Yes	Yes
Young Jains	Canons High	Promote Jain Dharma in Western World; Yoga, Meditation, Drama Classes	Yes	0
Hatch End Horticultural Society	Grimsdyke	Horticultural	Yes	0
Kol Chai Hatch End Jewish Community	Grimsdyke	Religious Education	Yes	Yes
Harrow Bengalee Association				
	Harrow High	Mother Tongue, Culture & Music Classes	Yes	Yes
Islamic & Cultural Society of Harrow	Harrow High	Mother Tongue Classes	Yes	Yes
Middlesex Tamil Academy	Harrow High	Mother Tongue, Football Lessons	Yes	0
Universal Pentecostal Church	Kenmore Park First	Religious Teachings	Yes	Yes
Dar Al Salam School	Kenmore Park Middle	Mother Tongue Classes	Yes	Yes
KPS Gujarat School LTD	Kenmore Park Middle	Mother Tongue Classes	Yes	Yes
The Furqan Academy	Kenmore Park Middle	Various education on Religion, Languages,	Yes	Yes
Middlesex Tamil Academy	Longfield	Football Training	Yes	Yes
Middlesex Tamil Academy	Longfield (Netball)	Netball Practise	Yes	Yes
Harrow Speld	Longfield First	Education for Dyslexia Persons	Yes	0
Academy of Punjabi Heritage	Longfield Middle	Mother Tongue Classes	Yes	Yes
North Harrow (evening) Townswomen's Guild	Longfield Middle	Social Education for Women	Yes	0
Newton Park Horticultural Society	Newton Farm Sch	Horticultural	Yes	0

April 09 - August 09 - Current Bookings				
Organisation Name	School Name	Type of Activity	Adults	Children
Harrow Islamic Society	Nower Hill	Mother Tongue Classes	Yes	Yes
7th Stanmore Brownies Guides	Park High	Guide Association	Yes	Yes
9th Kenton Scout Group	Priestmead First	Scout Association	Yes	Yes
Triveni Sangam Yoga For Health	Priestmead First	Yoga Classes	Yes	0
Newton Park Horticultural Society	Rooks Heath	Horticultural	Yes	0
Roxbourne Evening Towsomens Guild	Roxbourne	Talks, Events	Yes	0
Kids Can Achieve	Shaftesbury	Education for Special Needs Children	Yes	Yes
Lawrence Tae Kwon Do	Stag Lane Middle	Tae Kwon Do Classes	Yes	Yes
Harrow Tae Kwon Do	Stanburn First	Tae Kwon Do Classes	Yes	Yes
Sai School	Stanburn First	Supplementary School, Multifaith teachings	Yes	Yes
North London Revival Fellowship	Stanburn Middle	Religious Teachings	Yes	Yes
Pakistan Society of Harrow	Teachers Centre	Religious and cultural activities	Yes	Yes
El-Iman Arabic School	Welldon Park Middle	Mother Tongue Classes	Yes	Yes
Tamil Kalvi Koodam	Welldon Park Middle	Culture Classes	Yes	Yes
Harrow Chinese School	Whitmore	Mother Tongue Classes	Yes	Yes
Harrow Tamil School Association	Whitmore	Mother Tongue Classes	Yes	Yes
Qing Hua Chinese School	Whitmore	Mother Tongue Classes	Yes	Yes
West Harrow Gujarati School	Whitmore	Mother Tongue Classes	Yes	Yes
Islamic & Cultural Society of Harrow	Teachers Centre	Cultural Event	Yes	Yes
42 Bookings				

Appendix 3: Comparing community lettings with the schools private hire rates

Facility	Community lettings rate (per hour)	Private hire rate of a High School (per hour)
School Hall	£33.00	£100
Classroom	£6.00	£12.00
Outdoor space (ie playground, playing field, all weather pitch)	£6.00	£30.00
Drama studio	£15.00	£20.00