

Meeting:	Overview and Scrutiny Review
Date:	12 October 2009
Subject:	Community Lettings Action Plan
Responsible Officer:	Brendon Hills – Corporate Director (Community & Environment)
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Jean Lammiman, Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Appendix 1: Community Lettings Action Plan 2009 – 2010 Appendix 2: Action Plan Flow Diagram

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the response to the request made by the Overview and Scrutiny committee at its meeting on 28 July 2009, for the Corporate Director for Community and Environment “to formulate an action plan with a view to improving the Council’s community lettings system”.

Recommendations:

The Overview and Scrutiny committee is requested to consider and comment on the proposed community lettings action plan set out in Appendix 1.

Reason: (For recommendation)

To implement an action plan that delivers improvements to the community lettings process.

Section 2 – Report

2. Current situation

- 2.1 The community lettings functions contributes to the delivery of two of the Council's three corporate objectives:

Build Stronger Communities: The provision of community lettings supports community organisations deliver their activities in local venues.

Improve support for vulnerable people: Some of the activities supported by this resource assist vulnerable people.

- 2.1 Under the current community lettings system, voluntary and community organisations apply to use a room in a participating school or council-owned youth and community centre. The Council then 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.
- 2.2 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”.
- 2.3 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)

3. Main options

A discussion paper was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny committee on 28th July 2009 setting out an assessment of the current issues, these were:

Cost and transparency

Schools engagement with the current process

Policy directives such as extended schools and promoting community cohesion

The administrative process.

Appendix 1 sets out the proposed action plan that addresses these issues with the aim of improving the system to achieve greater clarity for all parties.

3.1 Community Lettings action plan:

The overall aim of the action plan is to deliver improvements to the council-managed lettings process to improve transparency and achieve consistency with other forms of support. The expected outcome is increased resident

satisfaction with the council.

3.1.1 Strand 1: Review and improve current process includes the following actions;

Mapping facilities: To help us achieve a clearer picture of current facilities and groups supported through community lettings we will undertake a mapping exercise to map the location of facilities available under the current scheme, and assess the profile of the main beneficiary groups and type of activities supported through this resource.

Review hire costs and subsidy: The application of the council subsidy has been set against the published hire rates, however these do not relate to the school's published private hire rates, which in some cases are five times more. To ascertain the true value of the subsidy, work will be undertaken to compare the subsidised rate against the private hire rates.

Align eligibility criteria and funding priorities: On the 9th April 2008 the Grants Advisory Panel agreed to apply the current grant qualifying conditions to community lettings applications however, the panel decided to retain the exception for religious groups. The current grant qualifying criteria precludes support for religious activity therefore to ensure consistency a recommendation will be made to the Grants Advisory Panel that this decision is reviewed in line with the new criteria.

The Grants Advisory panel at its meeting on the 2nd July 2009 agreed the adoption of new funding priorities in line with the new Local Area Agreement indicators. The aim is to ensure that council resources are used to support the delivery of partnership priorities. To see how this approach could be applied to community lettings an exercise will be undertaken to map activities against these priorities. The long-term aim would be to work towards aligning all supported activities to these priorities.

Implement a monitoring process: Currently no monitoring is undertaken of activity supported by community lettings. This means there is no mechanism in place for monitoring activity undertaken and there is no obligation on groups to provide feedback on how this resource is being used. A simple, self-assessment tool will be developed so that this information can be collected and reported on.

Review hire agreements: Community lettings hire agreements were last updated in 2007. Hire agreements will be reviewed in light of the planned changes to criteria, funding priorities and monitoring requirements. This will also give us the opportunity to include clauses that ensure groups booking council premises are committed to upholding shared values.

Explore opportunities for linking with proposed corporate booking system: Work is underway within the council to develop a corporate booking system to handle a range of booking functions eg. Arts Centre bookings, room bookings at the Teachers' Centre etc. As this work progresses officers will explore the potential to include community lettings within the scope of this project.

3.1.5 Strand 2: Consultation and engagement

Schools: Schools are a key stakeholder group in the community lettings process. It is important that schools are consulted on any changes that are

made to the process as described above. A consultation and engagement plan will be agreed with colleagues in the Integrated Early Years and Community Services department who have responsibility for the development of extended schools provision.

Within this plan a key messages approach will be developed to engage and encourage schools to view community lettings as part of their delivery of extended schools and duty to promote community cohesion.

Voluntary and community organisations: As the main beneficiaries of the community lettings system voluntary and community organisations will be consulted on any changes made to the community lettings system. This will include completion of an equalities impact assessment on any proposed changes.

3.1.6 Strand 3: Communication

Approximately 60 organisations currently benefit from the community lettings system. Many of these organisations rely on this resource to deliver their activities to the community. The action plan will address the need to provide clear and timely communication on any proposed changes.

The action plan will also address the need to promote the availability of this resource more widely so that all groups can access the support available.

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

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Background Papers:

Appendix 1: Community Lettings Action Plan 2009 – 2010

Appendix 2: Action Plan flow diagram

If appropriate, does the report include the following considerations?

1.	Consultation	YES
2.	Corporate Priorities	YES