



Scrutiny and Overview Committee

Report from the Director of Children & Families

For Information

Wards Affected:

ALL

Community Access to School Facilities

1.0 Summary

This paper outlines the legislative background for opening school premises for community use, the initial response from Brent schools regarding increasing access to school facilities including the associated challenges and a number of suggested options for the way forward.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to consider options for a way forward.

3.0 Details

3.1 Legislative background

Section 42 of the Education (no 2) Act 1986 states that use of school premises outside school hours is under the control of the School's Governing Body, subject to any directions issued by a Local Authority (LA). The directions given by the LA must not be such as to effectively remove the Governing Body's control over the use of the premises. In exercising their responsibilities under Section 42 Governing Bodies are obliged to have regard to the desirability of school premises being available for community use when the premises are not required by the school. They are, however, obliged to recover the costs of opening their buildings.

3.2 The Education Act 2002 gives Governing Bodies of all maintained schools the enabling power to provide, or enter into contracts to provide, facilities and services that 'further any charitable purpose for the benefit of pupils at the school or their families, or people who live or work in the locality in which the school is located'. The Department for Children, Schools and Families expectation, based on the Education Act 2002, is that, where appropriate, schools will provide access to a range of extended services which include:

- Menu of activities, including childcare for primary schools
- Parenting support
- Swift and easy referral to specialist services
- Community access

Services must only be offered where there is a need, based on consultation, and services do not need to take place on school site, instead schools can 'signpost' families and community groups to other local providers.

3.3 Community Access Proposal

There has been a view that high hiring costs were deterring local community groups accessing school facilities. Therefore early thoughts on a subsidy scheme were discussed with schools. The proposal was for one school in each of the 21 wards to increase opening their facilities to support shared community use. The council proposed to pay caretaker costs for 3 hours of weekday sessions enabling schools to hire out other facilities on the same evening for a subsidised rate. The total 'ball-park' figure of costs to support this scheme was £63,000.

3.4 This proposal was shared with schools in June 2006 and of the 85 schools in the borough 20 schools responded, keen to participate in a subsidy scheme. These 20 schools are located in or near the border of 16 different wards.

3.5 Concerns and challenges

However, further discussions with schools and community groups have highlighted a number of issues and challenges. Some are listed below:

1. A number of community groups currently hire school facilities, therefore they could potentially be eligible to apply for a subsidy which might result in only a limited number of new community groups benefiting.
2. The schools interested in participating in the scheme already open their school facilities to local community groups because they have appropriate facilities, therefore there will be limited additional space within schools for further community groups to hire.
3. School design and available facilities often limits the number of community groups able to share the school building at any one time. This may be due to children's work, resources and equipment being left out in classrooms or where a school has hired out its hall already to a group but access to the classrooms is only through that one hall.
4. Older school buildings and design often result in high utility bills as it is not possible to heat only one part of the building. Utilities bills can be higher than the caretaking costs.
5. If this subsidy scheme went ahead what if more than one organisation wished to hire that school, who should have priority?
6. Each school has different quality and quantity of facilities therefore the subsidy would need to be a percentage rather than a fixed amount to recognise the range of facilities on offer.

3.6

Suggested Options

1. A subsidy scheme is established for community groups who are committed to promoting the objectives of the Children and Young People Plan and who have not been able to provide extended services to children and young people over the previous twelve months. The seed funding could support 50% of hiring costs for 3 hours per week during term time for one year, to be reviewed annually.
2. The scheme only supports community groups that provide Youth Activities and activities for disabled young people as these are identified gaps in provision, as well as adult groups that have found it difficult to secure premises.

Contact Officer

Susan Mackenzie – Head of Children’s Partnerships
susan.mackenzie@brent.gov.uk or 020 8937 3382

Director of Children & Families - John Christie