



Community Services: Education

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To: Heads of all Educational Establishments

Dear Colleague

Voluntary keyholding by voluntary sector organisations in education service premises

A revised scheme of letting of education service premises was adopted by the Education Committee in August 1997. It is intended that the revised scheme will maintain voluntary sector access to comfortable, affordable accommodation within local communities.

Background

One feature of the previous scheme of letting was informal keyholding by lessees during authorised lets in small rural and island primary schools. Keyholding evolved and operated without incident over a number of years. Lessees were usually resident within the neighbouring community and were known to the janitor or head teacher. Prior to the let the keyholder was made familiar with the school. Similarly to minimise the impact on the normal running of the school the keyholder's responsibilities in relation to cleaning and supervision were stated. The keyholder would collect a key on the day of the let and afterwards drop the key through the letterbox.

The introduction of the revised scheme together with increasing concern over the safety of young people in education premises will now require voluntary keyholding procedures to be regulated formally with clear guidelines outlining the responsibility of Council staff, keyholder and lessee.

Guidelines for voluntary keyholding lets

1 Assessment and authorisation

1.1 Authorisation of voluntary keyholding

The letting of education premises is only authorised when criteria related to safety, security and supervision are met. Applications from voluntary organisations for lets

supervised on a keyholding basis are subject to the same scrutiny and assessment criteria. Head Teachers will be consulted during the assessment phase and a decision reached on acceptability. Where an application fails to meet the assessment criteria and is refused the reason will be conveyed to the applicant. Where a let can be authorised subject to specified constraints or conditions being applied the applicant will be notified formally.

1.2 Appointment of keyholder

Voluntary keyholders must be full-time or part-time employees of Argyll and Bute Council. The organisation seeking the let is responsible for recruiting a Council employee to undertake keyholding duties.

1.3 Keyholders' delegated responsibilities

A keyholder's prime responsibility is the security of education premises and property. The keyholder cannot act in a dual capacity, ie being a tutor or acting in a leadership or coaching role in a youth club whilst simultaneously supervising the let as a keyholder.

Prior to the commencement of an authorised let the keyholder will be made familiar with the school, particularly the operation of heating and alarm systems. It is also vital that the keyholder is familiar with the location of a phone for emergency use, the location of fire exits, procedures for security checking when closing up and is made aware of the quality standards expected for cleanliness and tidiness. The keyholder must also be made aware and accept that he/she is responsible for leaving the school secure.

1.4 Provision of key to keyholders

In line with Council policy, the head teacher should copy and make available to the designated Council employee, acting in an authorised keyholding capacity, one set of keys. The keys provided should allow access to the let area and, in an emergency, access to a telephone.

To maintain security it is recommended that only one set of keys is used for keyholding lets. Keys should be collected by the keyholder, by arrangement, as near to the let commencement time as practicable. Upon completion of the let the external door will be locked and the keys returned to the school, either through the letterbox or next day by arrangement. Where consecutive keyholding lets operate, then the spare set of keys would be passed, again by arrangement from one authorised keyholder to another.

2 Roles: area community education officers, head teachers, janitors, lessees

2.1 Area community education officers (ACEOs) have the responsibility for the area management of the Council's Scheme of Letting of Education Premises. Area

officers upon receipt of a let application which falls outwith the school's letting patterns and which could only be authorised on a keyholding basis, will consult the head teacher and determine if the nature of the letting activity and the quality of supervision is suitable for a keyholding let within the school. Where the outcome of the assessment is that constraints or improvements in supervision are necessary before the organisation can be granted access to education premises, then ACEOs will inform the organisation.

- 2.2 **Head teacher** co-operation is vital; without it voluntary keyholding cannot operate successfully. In remote rural and island primary schools head teachers may be the only locally contact available for keyholders. Keyholders are therefore dependent upon head teachers for the provision of keys and for familiarisation with school premises. Head teachers will have knowledge of the local voluntary organisation and the people involved and again they are ideally placed to help assess security and safety risks.
- 2.3 **Janitors'/cleaners'** co-operation is also essential for the smooth operation of a voluntary keyholding scheme. All letting activity impacts on the domestic arrangements within a school. This is usually minimal as organisations clean up afterwards and reposition any furniture they have moved. The keyholder responsible for locking up the school at the end of a let is accountable for any failure of security. Janitor's/cleaner's responsibilities are not changed in any way by voluntary keyholding arrangements. A janitor's/cleaner's status as number one keyholder remains unchanged. The janitor/cleaner will be the Council employee first contacted by police should the school be left insecure or lighting left on. Similarly, the janitor's/cleaner's role in relation to the cleanliness of the school is not affected by keyholding lets. It remains the janitor's/cleaner's responsibility to ensure that the school is presentable at the start of each school day. Should any failure on the part of the lessee occur this should be reported by the janitor/cleaner to the head teacher.
- 2.4 **Lessees'** responsibilities do not change when their organisation's let in education premises is supervised by a voluntary keyholder. The lessee is the named individual with overall responsibility for the conduct of young people or adults in the property at the let period.

3 Monitoring voluntary keyholding

- 3.1 Monitoring the impact of voluntary keyholding on the operation of each school must be thorough and effective. In practice, the rigorous initial assessment with its focus on security and supervision, along with high level co-operation from school staff has provided both a safeguard and a support for keyholding to operate without incident.
- 3.2 Reporting incidents of damage or loss to ACEOs is an important feature of a Scheme of Letting of Education Premises. Intervention to prevent a recurrence or secure reimbursement for loss or damage is most effective when conducted immediately

after the event. Head teachers should report incidents at the earliest opportunity. The ACEO upon receiving a complaint will consult with both the head teacher and the organisation and determine the appropriate action.

4 Co-operation and support for voluntary keyholding

The implementation of this Council policy will require the co-operation and support of all staff. Staff who require clarification on any aspect of this policy should contact the local area community education officer in the first instance.

Yours sincerely

Executive Director of Community Services

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