

Education, Children and Families Committee

10.00, Tuesday, 11 December 2018

Primary and Special Schools Letting Update

Item number 7.10
Report number
Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments [35](#)

Executive Summary

The administration of Primary and Special School lets has faced some challenges this year, and some of these challenges have resulted in some reduction in the quality of service given to those requesting a booking.

This report is following on from a question by Councillor McLellan for answer by the Convener of the Education, Children and Families Committee at a meeting of the Council on 20 September 2018 and highlights the key challenges and the developments undertaken by The School Lets Team to improve the service on offer.

Primary and Special Schools Letting Update

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 The Education, Children and Families Committee is asked to:
 - 1.1.1 Note the challenges faced by the School Lets Team.
 - 1.1.2 Note the actions taken to address these challenges and improve the service provided by The School Lets Team.
 - 1.1.3 Note that Council officers from across several service areas are working together to support community access to primary and special schools.

2. Background

- 2.1 The School Lets Team provide the administration for booking accommodation in over 100 Primary and Special Schools. This service supports anyone wishing to book a facilities including schools, Parent Councils, Parent Teacher Associations, After School Care Providers, Active Schools and a variety of community and business bookings.
- 2.2 The administrative support for Primary and Special School Lets is currently part of Business Support Services within Customer and Digital Services. To ensure more effective end to end processing of schools lets and to ensure that the administration tasks are managed by the accountable officers within Communities Families, this function is proposed to be transferred back to Communities and Families from the Resources Directorate. Discussions in respect of this transfer are continuing between the Head of Schools and Lifelong Learning and the Head of Customer and Digital Services. In the interim, Business Support has been developing a detailed service level agreement (SLA) for all its activities across a number of areas, including Schools and Lifelong Learning. Until the transfer of the staff back to Communities and Families has taken place, the SLA will ensure respective responsibilities and performance requirements can be managed effectively.
- 2.3 Primary and Special Schools are closed in the evenings and weekends with few exceptions. Schools must be specially opened to allow a booking request to go ahead. This is done by offering optional overtime hours to Facilities Technician (janitorial) staff. This way of working has not changed in over ten years.
- 2.4 The summer of 2018 saw the start of a significant increase to the Council's annual Asset Management Works (AMW) programme, following a doubling of AMW

budgets in the Council's budget set in February 2018. Budgets were increased to £18m for this year and £30m next year across the estate, with schools being the first beneficiaries of this uplift. As part of this overall programme, projects at 28 primary schools commenced this year, many of which will take two years to complete. Next year, work will commence on a further 29 schools. Evenings, weekends, and school holidays are key opportunities to allow work to go ahead which can lead to schools being unavailable for bookings. It is a new key task of the School Lets Team to arrange and communicate alternative arrangements to affected customers.

- 2.5 At the start of the summer holidays, the software used by the School Lets Team failed. A very basic system was created to replace it but that required the re-inputting of all customer details including their bookings which amounted to over 1200 lines of information. This resulted in some delays and communication issues with customers.

3. Main report

- 3.1 It was recognised that a range of solutions were required to minimise the impact on booking requests by the events described in 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 above. A full-time member of staff from the those seeking redeployment was sourced to help design and implement these solutions by working across Council departments, especially Business Support Services and Facilities Management
- 3.2 Fortnightly meetings are held with Asset Management Works project team to share details of the school improvement programme. The aim of this is to give as much notice to the School Lets Team about which buildings are available / not available. The result is customers will also have improved notice of any changes and the solutions being offered by the School Lets Team.
- 3.3 Weekly meetings are held with senior Facilities Management and Business Support colleagues to ensure the respective teams work collaboratively and maximise the opportunities that may arise from joint working.
- 3.4 Business Support Services, Facilities Management, and our ICT Department are working together to look at using available technology to create online applications and new booking software. This joint working will develop a much quicker application and confirmation system for customers and replace the lost software for the School Lets Team.
- 3.5 Business Support Services have deployed extra staff temporarily to support the School Lets Team with responding to the challenges faced this academic year.

4. Measures of success

- 4.1 E-mails and phone calls are responded to within 48 hours.

- 4.2 Booking requests are being resolved within the target turnaround period of two weeks.
- 4.3 All complaints are responded to within the City of Edinburgh Council Complaints procedure targets.
- 4.4 All activities requiring a let have sent an application to School Lets.
- 4.5 A school lets handbook has been issued to all let holders providing comprehensive information about applying for and using schools.
- 4.6 The second wave of schools are about to be confirmed and affected customers will be given at as much notice as possible to discuss alternative accommodation.
- 4.7 Where school works are close to completing, previous let holders advised they can start using the schools again.

5. Financial impact

- 5.1 There will be costs for developing the technology to support the letting system. These costs have still to be quantified.

6. Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 The work outlined will reduce reputational risk to the Council by improved customer service. There will be improved governance around all aspects of Primary and Special School Bookings.

7. Equalities impact

- 7.1 No impact

8. Sustainability impact

- 8.1 No impact

9. Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 Facilities Management, Asset Management Works, Business Support Services, Early Years, Communities and Families.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 Not applicable

Alistair Gaw

Executive Director Communities and Families

Contact: David Bruce, Senior Education Manager (Community Services)

E-mail: david.bruce2@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 469 3795

11. Appendices

None.