

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

26 November 1996

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Report No 999/96

USE OF SCHOOL GROUNDS BY OUTSIDE BODIES

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Education Committee instructs me to ensure that all requests from outside organisations for the use of school premises (including school grounds) are formally lodged, and if appropriate, approved in terms of the Council's policies.

BACKGROUND

At present, any organisation seeking the use of school premises outwith normal school hours is required to make formal application to the Council. Requests are then processed in accordance with agreed Council policies and procedures, and lets are granted subject to certain conditions.

The same general arrangements should apply to school grounds and to school buildings. However, one recent event has shown that there can be occasions when organisations approach head teachers directly and informally with requests for use only of school grounds and not for access to buildings. These requests appear to have occurred very infrequently and only in a limited number of schools. Head teachers who have tried to accede to them have done so with good intentions and within a genuine spirit of community co-operation. The particular incident which has been drawn to my attention, however, has highlighted the difficulties which can occur when formal procedures are not observed. The incident in question related to the use of the playground of Timmergreens Primary School by the Army Cadet Force. An informal agreement had been reached - outwith normal Council procedures - which enabled the ACF to use this playground very occasionally for drill purposes. In fact it was used on a recent occasion for weapon practice, and although assurances have been given that the weapons used were not loaded, their deployment was observed by the local community, some of whom raised concerns about the appropriateness of these activities in a school playground. Had the use of the school playground been part of a formal agreement with the Council the chances of this or a similar situation arising would have been lessened significantly. Subsequent enquiries have resulted in only one similar informal arrangement being identified, and that one example is of the use of the school playground for a Remembrance Day parade. This arrangement has since been formalised.

In all the circumstances, I have advised head teachers to ensure that no informal agreements for school premises to be used by outside bodies should be sanctioned,

but that all requests should be formally processed in accordance with Council policies.

The Committee's endorsement of this approach is sought, on the understanding that the formal processing of all requests will be undertaken speedily and as sympathetically as possible.

JIM ANDERSON

DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

JAA/RB