

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Educational Services

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee: 14 March 2012

Subject: Outdoor Education Service

1. Purpose

- 1.1** This report provides members of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee with further information relating to plans to support the Outdoor Education Service going forward.
- 1.2** A revised action plan for support to the Outdoor Education Service is at Appendix 1.

2. Background

- 2.1** In January 2012, members received a report on the Outdoor Education Service which included a draft action plan with the intention of supporting the Outdoor Education Service to secure sustainable improvement.
- 2.2** At the meeting of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee of January 2012, members asked that a further report be tabled for the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee of March 2012.
- 2.3** Members required further detail on specific issues relating to the draft plan. These issues are explained in Section 3 of the Report. However, the Action Plan itself, which is attached as Appendix 1, covers a wider range of issues.

3. Main Issues

3.1 Consultation and Engagement

The development of the new outdoor centre emphasises the need for active consultation to ensure that customer insight can strengthen the way in which the reorganised service is delivered; in particular the way in which the service responds to the demands brought in through 'Curriculum for Excellence'.

Consultation and engagement was seen as the most effective way of promoting the service to its core customer group and capturing information to inform service development. From this it is envisaged that a formal marketing plan will be developed.

It was felt that any rush to produce a 'marketing plan' ahead of any consultation would lead to an approach which was out of step with customer requirements and would require significant re-working later to put right. Consultation will also be carried out with schools outwith the authority who have previously used the service.

3.2 Cost Reduction

Although the numbers of pupils using the centre has increased in the current year, this has had little impact on the current budget overspend. To address this, the service must reduce its operating costs wherever possible. All possible options to reduce the operating costs are being investigated to help the service's overall financial position. The annual rent on the property represents a challenge in terms of working within budget which makes issues such as maximising the number of pupils vitally important.

3.3 Business Planning & Priorities

The OES currently operates a 4-year diary for course bookings. While it may be encouraging for OES staff to view anticipated business over the extended period there is little practical benefit to this practice. It is also significant that no priority is given to WDC schools in these planning arrangements; accordingly, many schools from outwith the authority take advantage of booking in years 3 and 4 at the expense of WDC schools. This issue is compounded by the lack of consultation which means that OES is unaware of what schools within WDC are able and prepared to book so far ahead, if indeed they would find it advantageous. This lack of internal priority contradicts Educational Services' directive that its own schools are viewed as core customers and should be afforded precedence in any booking arrangements.

The use of a 4-year diary also appears to have diverted attention from the priorities which the service needs to address in years 1 and 2. Examination of the existing diary shows that capacity figures in years 1 and 2 are not being met and that 'gaps' exist in the diary where little or no activity is taking place. Delivering courses with the maximum number of pupils must be a priority for the service. From this, income levels will increase which will help address any current budget overspend.

3.4 Promotion and Marketing

As described at 3.1 it is anticipated that the process of consultation will provide a platform on which to build better working relationships with all schools across the authority. It is essential that the OES develops a much better understanding of stakeholder's requirements of the service. Once this information has been gathered more detailed plans can be developed to allow the service to support Curriculum for Excellence and fully respond to customer needs and requirements.

4. People Implications

- 4.1** The support work undertaken to date indicates that it would be prudent to review the staff structure of the Outdoor Education Service.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** The costs of the Assistance Programme can be met within existing budgets.
- 5.2** The Outdoor Education Service is anticipated to outturn at approximately £167,000 over the original budget.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** There is a significant financial and reputational risk to the Council if action is not taken to address the overspend and associated issues within the Outdoor Education Service.

7. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 7.1** There is no equalities impact associated with this report.

8. Strategic Assessment

- 8.1** The Council has identified four main strategic priorities for 2011/2012, namely Social and Economic Regeneration, Financial Strategy, Asset Management Strategy and Fit for Purpose services.
- 8.2** This report is particularly concerned with the Financial Strategy, Asset Management Strategy and Fit for Purpose Services.
- 8.3** Both the improvement plan and the Assistance Programme reflect the strategic priorities of the Council.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 9.1** The Education and Lifelong Learning Committee is recommended to
- a) agree the plan to support the Outdoor Education Service going forward, and
 - b) request further progress reports during school session 2012/13.

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Appendices: Appendix 1 – Revised Action Plan

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All wards