

***Excerpt from the Minutes of Meeting of the
Education and Lifelong Learning Committee
held on 11 November 2009***

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RESIDENTIAL OUTDOOR EDUCATION PROVISION

A report was submitted by the Executive Director of Educational Services seeking approval to pursue the lease of private property to offer residential outdoor provision to pupils, at existing charges.

After hearing the Executive Director of Educational Services the Committee noted that the incorrect version of the report had been submitted for the Committee's consideration.

After discussion and having heard Members, the Committee agreed:-

- (1) that an amended report should be submitted to the next meeting of West Dunbartonshire Council to be held on 25 November 2009;
- (2) that a copy of the report should be provided to the non elected members of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee; and
- (3) that the non elected members of the Committee would contact the Executive Director of Educational Services with any comments or questions which they may have on the aforementioned report.

West Dunbartonshire Council

Report by the Executive Director of Educational Services

Council: 25 November 2009

Subject: Residential Outdoor Education Provision

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To seek approval from members to pursue the lease of private property to offer residential outdoor provision to pupils at existing charges.

2. Background

- 2.1** At a meeting of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee on 9 September 2009, consideration was given to a proposal to relocate the Residential Outdoor Education Provision from the current base in Gartmore House to a possible new base at McGregors Landing, Ardlui. Having considered the issues outlined in the officers' report, Committee agreed:-

“That the matter be remitted to Council at the earliest opportunity for discussion. However, in the event of the missives being completed by the present purchaser the proposal to lease the property, with costings, should be submitted to a special meeting of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, to be held as soon as possible.”

- 2.2** Since Committee on 9th September 2009 it has been clarified that a third party, Freeland Developments (Scotland) Ltd.) has purchased the property (missives have been concluded) and the property is no longer on the market. However, the purchaser has indicated a willingness to lease the property to West Dunbartonshire Council for use as an outdoor education centre.
- 2.3** Due to time constraints it was not possible to present this report to a Special Meeting.
- 2.4** At the meeting of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee on 11 November 2009, it was agreed that the report should be remitted to Council on 25 November 2009 for consideration. It is now a matter of some urgency that this matter is resolved.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** West Dunbartonshire Council's Outdoor Education Service (OES) has been recognised as a model of good practice by other local authorities and by external bodies such as Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). Earlier this year, the OES achieved a COSLA

award for its innovative More Choices More Chances (MCMC) programme. The service has also been praised in debate in the Scottish Parliament.

- 3.2 The securing of a long term lease of a property suitable for use as a residential outdoor education centre would allow the service to expand, to develop and to build on its recent successes.
- 3.3 The location of McGregor's landing, just 42 miles from Glasgow and 53 miles from Stirling. makes it ideal for access from four of our neighbouring local authorities, i.e. Argyll and Bute, East Dunbartonshire, Stirling and Renfrewshire Councils. None of these authorities has its own outdoor education provision and all currently seek provision from commercial providers.
- 3.4 The Outdoor Education Service's clients can be broadly divided into the following groups:
 - **Non-residential** – The OES delivers outdoor learning from nursery to S6 and beyond. These days/ courses are predominantly delivered within Balloch Park and the extended area of Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. The client groups come from WDC Social Work, Community Learning and Development and all primary and secondary schools.
 - **Residential Groups** – All of our 34 Primary schools attend residential Outdoor Learning Courses with us throughout the academic year. We have long established service provision with nine Midlothian and four East Dunbartonshire schools. The predominant clients within this group are P7 pupils. However pupils as young as P5 and P6 also attend courses as do pupils from S1 to S6. Furthermore external clients such as North Glasgow College, Drumchapel Adventure Group and Glasgow University have also shared residential provision with us. Further to discussions it appears possible that these aforementioned clients would look favourably upon the use of our new residential centre. Therefore these new client groups along with WDC Social Work and Community Learning & Development (CLD) could all be potential residential users.
- 3.5 If successful in acquiring the lease of McGregor's Landing, the OES would for the first time aggressively market to both winter and summer clients. The residential courses would continue to be offered year round. Within the immediate vicinity there are only four residential providers, two of whom do not offer activities and one of which is at full capacity and struggles to meet the needs of its own local authority.
- 3.6 The OES can build upon its existing four year advance booking system which would ensure that West Dunbartonshire schools would always have first priority for the premises. It should be noted that currently the Scottish Government is seeking advice from the Outdoor Learning Strategic Advisory Group which specifically focuses on an "Outdoor Learning Framework". This document will give local authorities guidance on the quality of experience and the curricular links which will be aspired to within the delivery of residential outdoor education.

3.7 Whilst the Outdoor Education Service already has a strong record of inclusion in policy and practice, the new facility at McGregor's Landing would be even more appropriate for any young people with disabilities, especially those who are wheelchair-bound. Whilst Gartmore House can facilitate wheelchair access to the dining room, this is located in a separate building from the accommodation. At McGregor's Landing the accommodation, dining room, toilets and showers are all on the ground floor of one building.

3.8 There would be certain legal issues to be resolved, including the impact of occupancy and disposal conditions which were placed on the development by the then local authority, Dumbarton District Council, and which now vest in either the Loch Lomond and Trossachs Park Authority or Argyll and Bute Council.

4. Personnel Issues

4.1 There would be a requirement for caretaker provision which would be charged against income generated from external users.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 The proposed lease cost for McGregor's Landing is £65,000 per annum. The proposed lease term is for 20 to 25 years. The lease costs would be reviewed every 5 years.

5.2 The lease would be an operating (revenue lease) and the Council would not be responsible for capital costs. Replacement furniture and equipment in future years will be managed through a replacement equipment line set up within the existing OES budget and managed through additional income generation.

5.3 The costs associated with the lease of the new property have been checked with the Estates Section and are as follows:

Lease per annum:	£65,000.00
Caretaker/Storeman	£25,000.00 (this includes on-costs)
Catering per annum	£35,000.00
Running costs for building	£30,800.00 (including utilities)
Total	£155,800.00

5.4 The overall anticipated cost for current provision including the employment of a caretaker would be £155,800.00 against the existing cost of £104,049.33 paid externally to Gartmore.

It is important to note that the cost figure of £104,049.33 is paid for a maximum of 33 – 35 weeks per year for use of Gartmore as this is the maximum amount of weeks available due to bookings from other clients. The availability at McGregor's Landing would be for a maximum of 52 weeks per annum.

5.5 The overall anticipated income generated from the building including the additional usage in the first year would be approximately £212,549.33. Details are

provided in Appendix 1: Supplementary Financial Paper, although these figures are based on the assumption of a continued and continuing demand.

5.6 The Outdoor Education Service has already been approached by three neighbouring authorities expressing interest in utilising McGregor's Landing, This interest has been generated without any marketing of the facility. Should the OES acquire the lease, a full marketing strategy would be put in place and the OES is confident that a high level of usage during school terms, holiday periods and weekends would be generated.

5.7 It is important to note that, because of the cost increases for accommodation imposed by all our previous residential providers, it has not been possible to increase the cost of the actual outdoor activities, as parents would struggle to meet the increases from both areas. Therefore, by acquiring the lease of the building and "freezing" the residential costs for as long as possible, the OES would have the opportunity to use the additional income to support the outdoor education service budget which has subsidised the activity costs.

6. Risk Analysis

6.1 Should the lease be secured, the following factors will minimise the risk of financial loss and make it highly likely that McGregor's Landing will both generate income for WDC and will further enhance its reputation as a provider of high quality outdoor education:

- the ideal location of McGregor's Landing, both in terms of its accessibility to loch and countryside and in terms of its proximity to neighbouring Council areas;
- the quality and suitability of the accommodation;
- the capacity of the accommodation to allow for the expansion of the service provided to WDC's schools and to others;
- the availability of the Centre for use at weekends and during school holidays;
- the fact that other Councils already purchase the services of our OES and evaluate it very positively;
- the strong track record of the OES in providing a high quality service and in generating income and funding;
- the increasing emphasis by the Scottish Government on the importance of providing all young people with high quality residential outdoor education experiences as part of their school education.

6.2 While a long-term lease holds certain attractions and has advantages for the Council in terms of security for the OES, there are also risks involved, including:

- the difficulty of predicting long-term demand;
- potential budgetary pressures on the Council and on other parties;
- possible unpredictability of furniture and equipment replacement costs.(although these would be offset against additional income generated).

- 6.3 There is a risk that failure to obtain the agreement of the relevant authority planning or local authority to the proposed use could result in a legal challenge.
- 6.4 Failure to pursue this lease as a matter of urgency could result in the facility being leased to another party.
- 6.5 Heads of terms will be negotiated with the owners as the lease is pursued.
- 6.6 Legal and planning issues surrounding the permitted use of the building will be addressed during negotiations.

7. Conclusions and Officers' Recommendations

- 7.1 The rise in charges for the use of Gartmore House is highly likely to reduce the uptake of places for residential Outdoor Education visits by West Dunbartonshire pupils, depriving many of a valuable educational experience.
- 7.2 The leasing of McGregor's Landing could allow significant improvement in the provision of Outdoor Education in West Dunbartonshire.
- 7.3 Leasing the property could also allow the Outdoor Education Service to generate significant additional income through weekend and school holiday use of the facility without raising the charges to the families within our authority.
- 7.4 Members are requested to approve the pursuit of the lease of McGregor's Landing on terms and conditions suitable to the Executive Director of Educational Services, in consultation with the Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development and the Head of Legal, Administrative and Regulatory Services.

Terry Lanagan
Executive Director of Educational Services

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Appendices: **Appendix 1: Supplementary Financial Paper**

Background Papers: **Report to Education and Lifelong Learning Committee of
9 September 2009 on “Residential Outdoor Education
Provision”**

Wards Affected: **All wards**

**West Dunbartonshire Council
Education & Lifelong Learning Committee – 11 November 2009**

Supplementary Financial Paper

The additional income which could be generated to support the lease costs at McGregor's Landing are detailed below. Figures are conservative estimates of the extra numbers of places to provide a realistic starting point. Promotion of the facility will enable the client base to grow annually.

Please note: Comparisons are made on accommodation and catering costs. Activity charges are not included because they are offset against charges for instructors.

1. Weekends

Occupancy of only 20 weekends from a potential 52 weekends with an average of 40 clients participating each weekend would generate income as follows: The charges for external clients are higher than those for WDC clients.

20 weekends x 40 (external) clients x £35.00 per night based on two nights =
£56,000.00

2. Concurrent Courses

The new facility would allow OES to deliver two courses on the same week in the same building due to its increased bed space. An average occupancy for school groups is currently 35 and concurrent courses would allow an additional 35 pupils spaces or more each week. Three nights is an average course length. Concurrent courses in only 20 weeks of the current 30-35 week usage would generate income as follows:

20 weeks of an additional 35 pupils x £25.00 per night based on three nights =
£52,500.00

3. Existing Client Base

Based on the figures presented for the past three years, the current charges to users for accommodation/catering is £104,049.33

4. Additional Income

The conservative additional income noted above from weekends and concurrent courses for charges to users for accommodation/catering is £108,500

The overall anticipated income generated from the use of the building and catering, including the additional usage in the first year would be = £212,549.33

It should be noted that in this paper we have not calculated the potential for income during summer and Easter holidays. It is envisaged that holiday courses could be marketed to clients within Scotland and further afield given the outstanding venue.

Any income from holiday courses would be additional to the figure above.

Weekend and concurrent courses have greater potential for increasing numbers of pupils and external groups using the facility. The conservative numbers noted above are to enable the provision to grow annually as it advertises and markets its potential.

5. Pattern of Accommodation Charges

Please note the breakdown figures do not detail the number of bed nights per week because this varies. They show the actual number of bed nights over the year.

Year	Accommodation/Catering Cost	Activity Cost
2006-2007	£93,365.08	£62,721.73
Per pupil	£76.65	£51.50
Total cost per pupil	£128.15	
(Figures are based on 1,218 bed nights)		

Year	Accommodation/Catering Cost	Activity Cost
2007-2008	£97,763.19	£61,416.80
Per pupil	£74.12	£46.56
Total cost per pupil	£120.68	
(Figures are based on 1,319 bed nights)		

Year	Accommodation/Catering Cost	Activity Cost
2008-2009	£104,049.33	£59,122.30
Per pupil	£80.22	£45.58
Total cost per pupil	£125.81	
(Figures are based on 1,297 bed nights)		