

SECURITY IN SCHOOLS

Report By: HEAD OF POLICY AND RESOURCES

Wards Affected

Countywide

Purpose

1. To inform the Committee of the approach to security in schools.

Financial Implications

2. All relevant costs would be contained within the approved budget within education, both centrally and in schools.

Report

3. The Council has a duty to ensure the safety and welfare of both pupils and staff on school premises, and as part of its asset management, it is also responsible for protecting its sites, buildings and contents. At the same time schools must be welcoming and stimulating places to enhance teaching and learning.
4. In the main risks to people and buildings arise from:
 - o poor design/sub-standard specification
 - o fire
 - o theft
 - o vandalism
 - o unauthorised visitors
5. The individual risks are managed in various ways to minimise the chance of any event occurring, and its impact if it does occur.

Building Design

All school buildings must comply with building regulations, DfES regulations and fire regulations. Such issues need to be addressed at the time when existing buildings are extended or refurbished, and when totally new buildings are required. There is also a need to ensure that existing buildings are maintained to current standards which do change over time.

Fire

All school buildings must comply with certain minimum standards which are aimed to reducing the possibilities of fires starting and spreading, and which allow easy and safe exit by occupants.

6. The Council is also required, in association with school Governors to undertake fire risk assessments given that annual inspection by the Fire Service no longer takes place.
7. There has been one fire in the County that has necessitated an insurance claim, another incident involving a pupil during a lesson, and several other incidents including fires deliberately started out of school hours in waste bins or wooden external stores that through a combination of ineptitude or lack of serious intent by the perpetrators, vigilance by neighbours, and use of fire resistant materials/fire alarms has resulted in minor damage only.
8. The issue facing the Council now concerns the installation of sprinklers in schools as advocated as part of a national initiative by the Fire service. The Property Services Officer estimates that it would cost up to £20 million to install such systems in all schools. Insurance premiums may reduce, but purely in financial terms such levels of expenditure are difficult to justify, especially when such expenditure may have to be diverted from essential maintenance including fire alarms. Discussions are continuing with the fire authority. The installation of sprinklers in high-risk buildings and in new schools as they are under construction might provide the most practical way forward.

Theft

9. All school buildings are alarmed, some of which have a direct connection with police stations. Schools are advised to lock away valuables equipment and also to place security identifying marks on such equipment.
10. Further deterrence is in some cases provided by the installation of CCTV. The Property Services Officer in conjunction with the Police authority manages 3 sets of mobile CCTV cameras which can be located according to need. The Education Directorate has approved some funding to upgrade the existing equipment and to acquire two additional sets.
11. The action described above applies largely to out of school hours. There is also risk of theft during school hours, which is largely dealt with through systems of visitor controls, i.e. signing in and issue of badges to identify authorised strangers.

Vandalism

12. Vandalism is minimised through a combination of good design to provide few places where acts of vandalism can be undertaken without risk of detection, the use of materials that cannot be easily damaged. Good management can also have beneficial effects. CCTV cameras do play a useful part, but general experience in schools is that the provision and maintenance of a high quality environment is the greatest deterrence to acts of vandalism.

Unauthorised Visitors

13. Since the early 1990s, action nationally and locally has focused on minimising risks from people who have no legitimate business within schools. The policy in Herefordshire is to ensure that buildings are secure and that there is one main controlled entrance to schools. This has been achieved to a large extent.
14. There are some sites on which such control is difficult to achieve without major rebuilding of the school. Initially funding was provided by a ring-fenced budget allocated from the DfES for such work. In the last few years the DfES have switched this funding into the Schools Devolved Capital Allocations, and the expectation now is that schools will invest in security from their devolved capital grant in light of the risk assessments that they undertake.
15. There are 284 separate buildings on the 105 school premises. It has not yet been possible to ensure that everyone of these buildings has a controlled entrance
16. In normal circumstances, there has been no attempt to erect security fencing around the boundary of all school sites. This reflects assessments of risk, the cost of such provision, the visual and psychological impact on the schools, and the fact no absolute guarantee is provided if an outsider would wish to penetrate such barriers. It is an area that should be kept under review.
17. There are also associated issues of unauthorised contact with children, and the need to prevent children absconding from school at times when the school is acting in 'loco parentis'. Physical measures can help minimise such problems. However, good management practice on the handover of children to parents/guardians and the management of children/students within the school day are more important factors.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee note the approach taken on these various security issues.

Background Papers

- None identified.