

REPORT TO: Safer Halton Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 19 September 2006

REPORTING OFFICER: Resources, Planning and Communication Manager

SUBJECT: Vandalism in Schools

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide details of the impact of vandalism on schools and a summary of both the schools and council's responsibility in relation to responding to incidents of vandalism.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That schools be encouraged to allow their Site Manager/Caretaker to attend seminars on school security and fire precautions.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The responsibility for responding to acts of vandalism on school sites is that of the school e.g. where a school suffers a broken window the expectation is that the school key holder, generally the Caretaker, Maintenance Officer or Site Manager will arrange the boarding up, repair and reporting of the incident. All vandalism should be reported to the local police by the school. A form for reporting all incidents of vandalism was produced by Risk Management several years ago. Schools should complete this form and return it to Risk Management so that the incidents of vandalism can be mapped and the information passed on to police and fire brigade colleagues. There needs to be better recording compliance.

3.2 Schools are responsible for the costs of any repairs required as a result of vandalism and as these costs are generally not covered through HBC Insurance they are encouraged to purchase All Risk Cover. Although schools have a code they can record the costs of vandalism better use of this code will be encouraged. In 2004/2005 the total spend recorded by schools on the vandalism budget was £75,360. The figure for 2005/2006 has increased to £79,489.

3.3 In the event of a fire or other major property related incident e.g. flood or where the level of vandalism is so severe the school will be unable to function, it is the Local Authorities (and Dioceses responsibility in the case of an aided school) to support the school and minimise the disruption to pupils' education. In these circumstances the Critical Incident Team can be contacted. This team will then determine the level of other support

- required from the Authority in accordance with the policy and through the published contact list. As most major property related incidents occur out of school hours the team tend to be contacted direct by either the police or fire brigade. The Critical Incident Team comprises three full time staff whose primary role is delivering the Technical Support and Caretaking Management Service Level Agreement to schools. Only 20% of the Principal Officers time is core funded. Unfortunately over the past few years the practice has developed whereby the schools, police and the fire brigade will contact the Critical Incident team following a minor incident of vandalism, however, without additional capacity the team cannot respond.
- 3.4 The costs of responding to any major property related incident such as a fire and flood for community and voluntary controlled schools insured with the local authority must either be met by the HBC insurance policy or from the Council fund for the excess element. As voluntary aided schools are owned by their Trustees and not the Local Authority, the cost incurred following any major incident must be found from one of the following sources; the schools devolved or revenue budget, the LCVAP budget (this is the budget available for capital schemes in voluntary aided schools which tends to be committed before the start of the financial year), the school's insurance which can only cover 10% of building costs, or finally from the DfES if they have funding available.
- 3.5 In an attempt to reduce the level of vandalism taking place at schools and in particular to reduce the risks of the loss of school buildings through a major fire e.g. as in the case of Halton Lodge, on an annual basis schools and other Council buildings are able to bid for Risk Management Funding. Schools must identify the project and their contribution. In determining which school bids to approve the Local Authority will also consider the level of vandalism the school has suffered. Appendix 1 identifies the full list of bids submitted for 2006/2007 and shows the approved projects.
- 3.6 In 2004/2005 an Arson Task Group was established with the aim of reducing the incidents of arson in Halton and improve awareness of arson vulnerability to public buildings, vehicles and open spaces amongst the community. The group is intended to have a membership, which includes HBC staff from Property Services, the Education Service, Environmental Services and Risk Management along with the Crime Reduction Adviser, the Community Fire Safety Officers and representatives from the Police. There is an agenda item on each meeting related to school incidents.
- 3.7 In February 2006, Risk Management convened a meeting with school some school representatives, police, fire and local authority officers to discuss options for reducing vandalism to school property. A range of issues were discussed including how incidents are reported and how they are responded to, whether all schools should have common gates and

locks, costs of vandalism, feasibility of the development of a security patrol Service Level Agreement for schools and the need for extended use of school premises.

- 3.8 As schools are at their most vulnerable during the summer break two seminars were arranged for School Caretaking/maintenance or Site Managers. These were jointly run by the Local Authority, Fire and Police and took place on 11th and 12th July at Fairfield High and The Grange Comprehensive. The aim of the meetings was to provide advice and guidance on school security and fire prevention. Work is needed to ensure that attendance is improved at further seminars.
- 3.9 In addition, due to the levels of vandalism in Halton schools and the potential threat of arson the Fire Brigade have now committed to visit all schools in Halton before the end of the calendar year to try and discourage pupils from arson, to highlight the implications of arson on schools and provide advice and guidance in fire prevention.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The costs of vandalism to Halton schools appear to have increased between 2004/2005. The true costs identified for vandalism is likely to be much higher than the figures shown in school accounts as many schools do not separately identify vandalism costs from their day to day tenants maintenance costs. In addition, the total costs of school vandalism do not include the costs of any insurance claims made through either HBC or any other insurance company.
- 4.2 In addition to the costs incurred considerable local authority and school time is lost responding to acts of vandalism.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.2 When designing or remodelling school premises consideration needs to be given to improving the school's security. New buildings should be secure by design.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 6.1 It is essential those persistent acts of vandalism are identified and quickly addressed and that these are reported to the police, fire brigade and local authority as they may result in a serious arson attack and the loss of school premises.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 This is an issue which may affect all schools at any time.