

CITY OF PLYMOUTH



Outdoor Activities

February 2005

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Preface



Most educational establishments offer their students the opportunity to take part in outdoor pursuits or residential visits to enhance their learning experiences. It is our duty to see that these are carried out with the minimum of risk and government offers advice and model policies to support us in this. It is right that local advice is regularly reviewed to ensure that the Local Education Authority and individual establishments are complying with, if not exceeding, best practice. It was for this purpose that the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee was asked to carry out a review of local practices and I am pleased to present this document outlining our findings.

I would like to thank the officers for their attendance and for producing documentation that was clear and easily accessible. Their advice was well thought out and unambiguous, with specific ideas on how to ensure consistency within the authority. I have no hesitation in stating that Plymouth City Council advice on the safety of outdoor activity goes further than that offered by government and, if properly adopted by establishments, will ensure that such activities are an essential, enjoyable component of lifelong learning.

I also congratulate my fellow committee members for their efficient use of time and the diligence with which they had absorbed the information offered before our meeting.

Councillor Fletcher
Chair, Outdoor Activities and
Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee

Select Committee Membership

Councillor Michael Fletcher (Lead Member)
Councillor Dr Mahony
Councillor Chris Mavin
Mr Steven Medlin (Co-opted Representative)
Mr Kevin Willis (Co-opted Representative)

Meetings

The Select Committee met and discussed the review in one evidence session during January, 2005.

1.0 SUMMARY

In July 2004, the Cabinet Member for Schools and Colleges asked the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel to consider reviewing the existing Outdoor Education Visits and Offsite Activities Policy.

The Select Committee have completed their enquiry of the Outdoor Education Visits and Offsite Activities Policy. The Select Committee's aim was to examine how the City Council was responding to Government guidance in developing policy and services. We have made recommendations to help monitor the implementation of the policy document.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Local

2.1 **We recommend** that a template is added to the existing Outdoor Education Visits and Offsite Activities Policy document to support the existing PSOE Forms for categories A, B and C.

For the attention of: Cabinet Member for Schools and Colleges

2.2 **We recommend** all schools annually review their Outdoor Education Visits and Offsite Activities Policy document and ensure that the Local Education Authority are made aware of the review.

For the attention of: Cabinet Member for Schools and Colleges

2.3 **We recommend** that Governing Bodies assign outdoor education visits and offsite activities to a responsible person in the school to co-ordinate and implement the Policy.

For the attention of: Cabinet Member for Schools and Colleges

2.4 **We recommend** that an update on progress in implementing the Outdoor Educations Visits and Offsite Activities Policy be provided to the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel after the October 2005 half-term break and thereafter be reviewed by the Panel on an annual basis.'

For the attention of: Overview and Scrutiny Commission

3.0 INTRODUCTION

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed at their meeting on 7th October, 2004 to undertake a review of Outdoor Activities Policy. A Select Committee was comprised of the following Members –

- Councillor Michael Fletcher (Lead Member)
- Councillor Dr Mahony
- Councillor Chris Mavin
- Mr Steve Medlin (Co-opted Representative)
- Mr Kevin Willis (Co-opted Representative)

3.1.2 The Select Committee met on 24th January and 8th February 2005.

3.2 Terms of Reference

3.2.1 It was agreed that the Select Committee had the following aims for the scrutiny review to –

- review City Council policy on outdoor activities;
- examine how the City Council is responding to Government guidance in developing policy and services;
- make recommendations where appropriate that can influence policy development and lead to an improved level of services to the residents of the City.

3.3 Scope of the Inquiry

3.3.1 The key objectives of the review were to -

- review City Council policy on outdoor activities;
- examine whether the City Council is responding to Government guidance in developing policy and services;
- ensure that procedures are in place that make certain all schools –
 - ❖ receive and acknowledge receipt of policy
 - ❖ consider the policy in developing their policy

3.3.2 The scope of the review was to consider –

- analysis of current policy;
- analysis of recent Government guidance regarding policy development of outdoor activities;
- make recommendation, where appropriate, to the relevant Cabinet Member that can influence policy development and improved services in the City.

3.3.3 As part of their review, the Select Committee –

- reviewed various policy documentation;
- held one evidence session;

4.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4.1 The National Context.

4.1.1 In the last eight years there have been further changes in nationally accepted practice with regard to offsite activities, one significant change was the introduction of the Activities Centres (Young Persons Safety) Act 1995. The Department for Education and Employment issued its own revised guidance in 1998, and staff from both Plymouth City Council and Devon County Council contributed to the production of the existing Outdoor Education Visits and Offsite Activities Policy document.

4.1.2 In addition there had been significant national developments in Transport Legislation and Risk Assessment and both of these factors are an accepted feature of the management of Health and Safety.

4.2 The Local Context – Experience in Plymouth

4.2.1 Since the Local Government Reorganisation Plymouth has now become established as an independent authority with responsibilities that include Outdoor Education and management of off-site activities.

4.2.2 At the start of the review Members were informed of the importance of outdoor site visits, which had the potential to enhance the education and development of young people and that the existing Policy document had been designed to ensure that such programmes were safe and well managed, with the key focus on good forward planning.

5.0 FINDINGS

5.1.0 Members noted that all Plymouth City Council employees whose work involved unsupervised access to young people under the age of 18 were screened by the Council against List 99 and other discreditors lists, and in conjunction with police checks. Part of the process includes completion of the green Protection of Children form.

5.1.1 The Select Committee were pleased to note that the current Policy document had encompassed the work of the City Council in all departments who are involved in the provision of off-site activities, which enables the Council to take all reasonable steps to ensure key personnel understand and implement the policy procedures, with the key focus on delivering quality activities with safety in mind.

5.1.2 As stated above not all personnel involved with the planning process of an outdoor activity would necessarily accompany the group on the day, but the Policy ensures that clear guidance had been incorporated into the document for those who take part during any stage of the event. It was evident that the Policy was aimed at both Plymouth City Council staff and volunteers, and as highlighted at 4.1.4 of this report, volunteers including those working on specific projects or providing services for

schools would also be checked against List 99, if they had regular unsupervised contact with pupils, which could also result in a police check.

5.1.3 There were three main categories of activities and associated approval systems had been established as follows –

Category	Examples of Programmes	Approval Procedure
A	Visits, journeys and environmental studies for which the element of risk is similar to that encountered in daily life, e.g. farm visits, visits to sites of historic, commercial or cultural interest, most fieldwork, sports tours and leisure centre visits, local walks, journey to the zoo or theatre.	Head / Service Manager Governors Approval dependent on school procedures e.g. residential programmes.
B	Hazardous outdoor and adventurous activities which take place within the South-West including Devon, Somerset, Cornwall and Dorset, having an element of risk and for which there is a County system of leader registration, except those listed within Category C.	Head, provided group leader is suitable, qualified and PCC registered. Governors approval, dependent on school procedures. Service Manager.
C	All visits abroad. All other hazardous activities and those which take place outside the South-West or which include multi-pitch, rock climbing, caving with pitches over 18m., white water canoeing or kayaking, coastal sailing journeys, sea journeys by canoe or kayak, windsurfing on tidal waters or advanced surfing (kayak). Activities in the air (except commercial flying). Any activity which falls within scope of the Adventure Activity Licensing Authority and the associated PCC Licence. Activities where there is significant concern about health, safety or welfare.	Head / Head of Service Governors approval, dependent on school procedures. Plans should also be endorsed by Principal Officer (Outdoor Education), at the planning stage. Forward form PSOE1 and copy of risk assessment.

5.1.4 The Select Committee were reassured to note that with regard to Category C, which includes those activities that had the potential to be overtly hazardous, the form required authorisation from three different designated sources, which ensured the data was both vigorously and independently checked.

5.1.5 The Policy also clearly highlighted the following basic principles of safe practice for all off-site activities –

- Carry out a pre-visit to the area in which you are likely to work, or gather adequate background information to make management more effective;
- Carry out a risk assessment which considers the health, safety and welfare of all prospective participants;
- Keep parents, young people and other relevant authorities informed about proposed activities and gain their approval where necessary;
- Seek advice from someone with expertise or technical competence where there is uncertainty about safe practice;
- Ensure compliance with any statutory guidance;
- Work within guidance and standards of competence recommended by national governing bodies and other recognised organisations;
- Carry a list of group members, with home contact telephone numbers and consent forms.
- Qualities of leadership, judgement, anticipation and control are essential on the part of staff assistants, particularly the group leader;
- Adequate supervision is needed at all times, but may direct or indirect;
- Good discipline is essential to the success of any visit; codes of conduct in relation to smoking, alcohol and behaviour between the sexes need to be clearly established and understood;
- Prevent access to dangerous situations for those ill-equipped to cope;
- Maintain personal and professional experience related to specific activities and environments;
- Ensure the availability of appropriate personal and group equipment and clothing;
- Know your group and plan accordingly;
- Record and learn from accidents, incidents and near misses;
- Take a responsible attitude toward the environment; it illustrates a responsible attitude towards self and others.

5.1.6 The Select Committee was informed that all schools had different ways of managing their off-site programmes. To ensure common issues had been considered a sample work place statement had been distributed to all schools, which enabled them to overwrite some of the details that would most meet the schools needs. On inspection those schools, which had been found to hold a sparse version of the policy document, were immediately encouraged to adopt a more detailed policy as shown by the exemplar highlighted within the policy document.

- 5.1.7 The Members had been informed of the Workforce Remodelling for Schools and felt that it would be an appropriate time for all schools to consider the Policy document and the feasibility of one key person to have ownership of the co-ordination, collation and maintenance of the Policy document.
- 5.1.8 The Select Committee considered the three categories highlighted at 5.1.3 of this report. Although the Members were pleased with the category breakdown and the detailed checklists encapsulated in forms PSOE1 – PSOE7, which served as a formal record for Head or Governors and could also be used as an aide memoir by the Party Leader, it was felt that a simple check list for each category was required, to assist the officer responsible for completing the forms to ensure all guidance had been followed, It was felt that the policy would benefit from inserting this simple checklist at the start of section 6 of the Policy document.
- 5.1.9 It was apparent that the PSOE1 form was designed to help record the planning process from the very outset, after outline approval had been obtained. All sections of the form should be completed as fully as possible up until the time it is sent, but all schools had the option to send the form in an incomplete state to provide background information on the event being organised, which had been used to assist anyone asked to give help or as an endorsement. Members were informed that the PSOE1 form would be kept as part of the permanent record, which would assist in the case of an incident that may require further action.
- 5.1.10 The Members were informed that all schools had to carry out a risk assessment for each activity, but had the opportunity to utilise existing risk assessment reports on specific building regularly used by the Council, which had been collated onto a database easily accessible to schools.
- 5.1.11 Overall the Members established that there was an abundance of helpful guidance available to all schools on how to create and implement their own policy document and were pleased to note that the guidance available was disseminated via several methods.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Overall Conclusions

6.1.1 The Select Committee were pleased to find that the existing Outdoor Education Visits and Offsite Activities Policy document was more stringent than the Government Guidelines, the Members would like to encourage all schools to take a proactive approach and research additional information as and when required, as it was made clear that it was not feasible to highlight every situation which could occur in the existing policy document.

6.1.2 The policy document would benefit from an annual review to ensure the high standard was maintained.

6.2 Progress on Implementation

6.2.1 The Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel should receive an annual report to ensure schools review their policies on an annual basis.

Appendix 1 – Reference Materials

1. Handbook for group Leaders (LLOSP 140 04/05)
2. Health and safety responsibilities and powers (LOSP 141 04/05)
3. Standards for LEAs in overseeing educational visits (LLOSP 142 04/05)
4. Group Safety at Water Margins (LLOSP 143 04/05)
5. Health and Safety of pupils on Educational Visits (LLOSP 144 04/05)
6. City Council Policy on outdoor education visits & offsite activities (LLOSP 145 04/05)
7. Outdoor Activities Matrix (LLOSP 150 04/05)

Appendix 2 – Contributors

The Panel would like to express their sincere thanks to all those who provided information and advice:

Mr Martin Northcott – Outdoor Education Manager

Mr Dave Roberts – Community Services Manager

Mrs Christina Smale – Business Manager for Lifelong Learning

Councillor Dafydd Williams – Lead Member for Children and Young Peoples Agenda