



LOCAL AUTHORITY LETTING CHARGES FOR OSC SERVICES IN SCOTLAND

April 2021
Highlights Paper

SCOTTISH OUT OF SCHOOL CARE NETWORK

INTRODUCTION

This was a short and rapid turnaround (one week) survey with 142 returns, including communications with local authority development staff for direct information. We used the “Free Online Surveys” platform and asked a total of 12 questions (see appendix 2).

There was information gathered on 28 out of 32 local authorities in Scotland.

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

More than half of all registered OSC services are run on a voluntary sector not-for-profit model; approximately a third are private companies (this percentage increases where a private nursery also provides school age childcare). Less than a fifth overall are directly run by councils. (Care Inspectorate, 2020).

The size of premises used by services varies enormously and dictates the number of places a service can provide. Capacity in services ranges from less than 16 to over 100. Some OSC businesses operate from multiple sites- from 2 to over 10.

Historically free or low-cost access to school or community venues has helped many services across Scotland to run at sustainable and more affordable rates to parents. However, some local authorities have always charged for access to their venues, and others have started to charge for lets, where they did not in the past. Very few services own their premises unless they are an additional service to a (private) nursery, whose main asset might be their building.

Survey Aims: The aims of this survey were to get a general picture across Scotland of where services access free or lower costs school lets, where they pay higher costs, and the extent to which any of them are now in unsustainable debt due to letting charges not being waived with little or no income (apart from government/other grants) during lockdowns.

SUMMARY RESULTS

15 local authorities, from 28 returns, provided free lets.

8 Local Authorities do not charge across all types of sectors.

6 Local Authorities do not charge for public or voluntary sector services but do charge private sector providers.

The return from one LA was from a service run directly by the council, so it is not clear if they charge other services.

13 local authorities do not offer free lets, and charges and conditions range widely, with some councils having different rates for different types of providers, or whether for breakfast club, after school or holiday care.

Across charges set in all 28 returns, 13 provided hourly or daily rates that could be analysed to find the range of costs and the average and median hourly charges.

Across these 13 local authorities the range was between £3 an hour and £24 an hour, and both the average and the median hourly rate was £9 an hour.

Others provided monthly, term or annual costs but they are harder to drill down to any averages. The highest annual cost was £33,500 while the lowest was £1800. The highest monthly cost was £2884 (it was said for 5 sites but not if for each or all), and the lowest £150, while there was one term time cost of £250.

Other costs category includes community venues and church halls, there is less information on them as this survey was aimed at finding out direct local authority charges.

The highest hourly rate for 4 community venues was £18 and the lowest £2.66.

For 3 services in community venues in one local authority the average annual cost was £1900.

One church hall let is £25,000 per annum, and another is over £20,000 per annum and their charges were increased last year, also with added cleaning (£266 monthly and £122 deep cleaning every 8 weeks, and sole use charges during the pandemic).

On cleaning charges, one service employed a cleaner at £8500 p.a., one provider based in a school is charged £664 a month, one paid £150 p.a. for community centre and another £2.95 per hour plus VAT for mornings.

CHARGES DURING LOCKDOWNS

23 local authorities were not charging in general, although two continued to charge private sector providers.

A total of 43 respondents said they would have difficulties in paying outstanding let costs and this is particularly clear where they were still being charged, even when closed.

5 local authorities and 1 leisure trust continued to charge for lets during lockdown, with 8 out of the 10 services responding, stating they would have difficulties in paying outstanding costs.

A quote from Q12, where there is a wealth of additional information and where there was both praise and criticism relating to premises:

“3 years free lets to help get us back on our feet would be a good start, then a national agreement about welcoming us into schools and free lets, as we enhance the school estate, by providing a service for their families.”

COMMENTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

We asked for any additional comments about letting arrangements which provider further details of letting arrangements as well as the mix of negative and positive support experienced by services.

“It won't be viable to operate our After School Club as before if we have let and cleaning costs to pay- the LA will no doubt have plans to start up clubs in schools to accommodate nursery children taking up 1140 hours and requiring after school care when starting primary 1. They will not need private providers as the service will be state operated.”

“We have always been told that as we are an after school club and the council cannot charge us, we have no costs to pay out at all for our premises. During the pandemic they have been extremely accommodating and have not charged us anything extra to use additional rooms whilst the community centre we run from is closed.” (A private provider with free let but possibly chose “private” in error.)

“We were advised last year by the council that they would be “looking into” rents and us having to pay for the use of the area but we've not heard anything about it since. This would be devastating for us financially if we had to pay rent! “

“I will be unable to run Easter Holiday club as the council have let out our rooms without consulting me, even though I have used the rooms every school Holidays for the past 5 years parents have already booked Easter holidays this week I will have to let them down.”

“We rent the facility through the LA leisure Trust.”

“If Out of School Care services have to pay for a let sustainability, it would be extremely difficult especially with the current situation from March last year. Private services do not get to apply for funding under normal conditions.”

“We are up to date with our let costs at this time. The only other thing I would say is that there may not be money in their budgets should we want new flooring or paint or kitchen. We paid £1700 to have new kitchen installed (2 base units 2 sink units) as no money in their budget and all painting carried out by us and grants have been sourced by myself for all new flooring over the years we also pay for the maintenance of our fencing and garden areas ourselves.

“Council have been very fair and supportive with their rent for Council buildings it is most appreciated during this time.”

“Although our out of school service is pretty tight financially, we are lucky that it is part of a larger group that can consume some of these costs.”

“Council are very supportive towards us as a Community Council.”

“We are so lucky to have the free let, the free janitorial services, good links with our host school and also the support of the OOSC Dev Officer.”

“We do a service level agreement every year with the local authority and the Head Teacher of the school we are within. We send lets requests at the start of any academic year for the full year and if there are any last-minute ones we have to confirm with the school/facilities and the local authority that we are requiring an area.”

“Currently in the local authority most Clubs have free lets, however there was discussion with the local authority a few years ago re the council proposing to start charging for OSC lets. Thankfully to date this has not been introduced but I can say without a free let our Club would not be able to manage financially. The only option we would have to sustain the service would be to increase fees for families, this would go against our aim to provide affordable childcare to allow parents to work or study.”

“The Council have been very supportive to OOSC and I very much hope they can continue to allow providers to operate from school premises free of charge.”

“I find it unfair that private OOSC providers are charged a rental fee while other services (voluntary sector) who are providing an identical service enjoy rent free use of school premises.”

“No communication regarding future let costs or if they will eventually hit us with a backdated bill.”

“3 years free lets to help get us back on our feet would be a good start, then a national agreement about welcoming us into schools and free lets as we enhance the school estate by providing a service for their families.”

“We haven’t been able to have correspondence with the local authority re. holiday lets. No one replying to emails and not able to contact by phone (leisure trust)”

“Currently we don't seem to have a Covid cleaner in the building when the school is finished for the purpose of cleaning toilets, handrails. handles etc. I am pursuing this at present with letting to which have sent my queries to the company for action.”

“If I want drinking water I have to pay for a water but, or travel through the school to use the kitchen to fill jugs, not acceptable.”

“I own another out of school care in the local authority and they provided us with free letting all through this and continue to do so. All out PPE was bought and brought in for us to help support us through this with such low numbers.”

“At the moment my local authority is paying my lets. If they weren’t I would not be able to reopen since the pandemic due to losing clients.”

“During the whole of the pandemic we have not been able to use local authority premises even though they are part of our SLA we have had to pay rent in private hire venues. Disappointing when you hear that other local authorities are still accommodating this.”

“During this whole pandemic the Council gave us absolutely nothing to help us with payments of lets. I even had to pay to go in and clean the hall the day before we opened after the first lockdown in September. I had to provide all my own PPE, cleaning essentials out the business’s expenses. We have had no support at all from the local authority. No answers to all the emails sent for help with lets and PPE.

“We will open on the 15/03/2021 to our families but we cannot offer a full week service due to the high lets and not having enough income coming in to cover these costs which results in families not being able to have childcare some days. As we cannot afford to financially run as we would be running at a loss. Such hard times and not once has the Council supported us through it.

“Working together in partnership does not happen with the Council unfortunately. It’s been sad, challenging and we need to save our Out of School Care.”

“The committee running the community centre are taking no responsibility for cleaning or maintenance during the pandemic the out of school care service is having to cover all costs as well as paying the rental fee.”

“I have recently been informed that there will be a rent increase on our return March 15th.”

“If let costs were to increase or if there were to be additional costs added this would have significant impact on the sustainability of our service.”

“There are rumours of introducing hire charges but have received no further information as yet.”

“The amount we pay is £7.75 per hour per room. This is normally for one large space (the dining hall). This is charged for 1.5 hrs during term time - we are only charged from 4.30pm to 6pm under a community let with the leisure trust. 3pm to 4.30pm is an Education Let and is free. We pay for 10 hours during school holidays at the same rate, totalling £77.50 per day.

“During school holidays, we also have an arrangement to use an additional room (the gym hall) when weather is very bad. I record the hours we use this additional room and notify the letting department at the end of the holiday period. We are then charged only for the hours we have used the additional room and not for the whole day.

“We would like to use the gym hall more often and not just in inclement weather but cannot afford it. We are not permitted to have access to any other room or area in the school although it would be great to have a quiet room/area. During school holidays we use a large corridor space outside our main room (the dining hall) for quieter activities. This is not available to use during school term time. The let for my school is £899.51 a month.”

“Our service is based within a school and we offer support to the school and work alongside them as much as possible. We feel that it’s a benefit to have an out of school care within a school and that it benefits the children socially and the families as a whole. It is a high hourly rate for us to have to pay out especially since our sector is has been hit badly by the pandemic and our numbers have dropped at present.”

“We’d like a reduction in rent or rent-free period of 3-6 months to allow us to build our service again. We’ve requested on numerous occasions if rent could be reduced but advised that we are not entitled to a reduction in rent because we are a private limited company. This is very unfair. There should be no differentiation between the third sector and private limited companies. This has a knock-on effect as we cannot be as competitive as the third sector when it comes to paying our staff because we give more to the council for rent! Each year the rent is increased. Local authority buildings would be used more if rent is lowered.”

“We were prevented by our head teacher from starting again in August and had to negotiate with her and the council to start in September. We had to use a different area which isn’t in our rent agreement and still have reduced access against our rent agreement (licence to occupy). The local authority isn’t as supportive as it could be and too much seems to be left to individual head teachers.”

“We are charged £3500 for let but claim that back in a grant from the Local Authority. So it’s not entirely free as such.”

“Yes. Our present H/T seems to be under the impression she can cancel / change our let. Have tried explaining we require our spaces to keep our Care Inspectorate Registration. We have always accommodated any times the school has needed our space for school activities etc without complaint but it is very one sided. Totally prefer the community centres we use for our other 2 clubs.”

NEXT STEPS

A more detailed and confidential version of this report was shared with Scottish Government in March 2021 to enable a better understanding of the diversity of letting charges OSC services face across Scotland.

SOSCN will continue to raise this issue and we encourage services to continue to contact us with issues relating to premises in your area.

The complete list of survey questions can be seen by following this link:

<https://soscn.org/downloads/research/la-letting-charges-2021-survey-questions.pdf>

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