

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: Education Resources Sub-Committee	Subject: Fire-related Policies and Procedures
From: Director of Education	
Date: 14 August 1996	
Ref: MM/LA	

Summary

This report outlines the fire-related policies and procedures in operation in educational establishments and responds to issues raised at the last sub-committee meeting.

Recommendation

The sub-committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

Members wishing further information about this paper should contact:

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MM/LA
14 August 1996

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL : DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Fire-related Policies and Procedures

Report by the Director

1 BACKGROUND:

- 1.1 At the meeting of the resources sub-committee on 11 July 1996, questions were raised about fire-related policies and procedures. This paper covers the main points raised by members and outlines the instructions and guidelines which have been issued to establishments.

2 FIRE-RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:

- 2.1 The relevant policies and procedures developed by the previous authority have been adopted by North Lanarkshire. These are available in all establishments as part of the master safety file. The key issues in these guidelines are described in the following paragraphs.

2.2 Fire Precautions : Master Safety File 9b/Standard Circular 24:

In terms of standard circular 24 all establishments are required to have a written scheme for evacuating the building in the event of fire. The scheme must take account of the following advice:

- 1 In schools the safety of pupils must at all times be the first concern of the teacher.
- 2 There must be a fire-warning system and a fire drill which are known to all persons who are normally on the premises.
- 3 Where smoke stop doors are provided in corridor or stair enclosures these should be kept closed at all times.
- 4 In schools each class teacher must verify, in accordance with the school's registration procedures that all members of the class attending that day have reached the assembly point.
- 5 Exit routes should be kept clear at all times. Under no circumstances should milk crates, desks or other equipment be stored in corridors or stair enclosures. In particular external fire exit doors must not be obstructed nor locked when the establishment is occupied. They must be kept in good repair, be easily openable from the inside and be available at all times for the purpose for which they were designed.

- 6 The fire drill must be practised regularly in all establishments, at least three times per annum. The frequency will take account of the age of the occupants and the composition of the client group, and the timing should be varied to cover the full range of circumstances in which the establishment operates. The fact that it has been carried out and the time taken to complete the operation must be recorded in the fire register.
- 7 Copies of this standard circular should be provided for all members of staff at the commencement of every school session.
- 8 Advice on general fire precautions, specific information regarding individual establishments, use of fire equipment or publicity materials can be obtained from fire prevention officers.
- 9 Notices should be displayed throughout the establishment indicating the action to be taken if a fire is discovered or the fire alarm sounds.

2.3 General Instructions on Fire Precautions : Master Safety File 9d/Standard Circular 24(a):

This additional advice was issued following a very serious fire at a large secondary school and after detailed investigation of the circumstances. It includes the following instructions:

- 1 Fire drill procedures must be carefully observed at all times.
- 2 Alterations and additions to property or changes of use of property must not be carried out without the prior approval of the education department.
- 3 Storage of inflammable waste material within regional properties is prohibited.
- 4 Furniture and other materials which are no longer in use in an establishment should not be stored other than in accommodation specifically approved for that purpose.
- 5 Fire alarm systems should be tested weekly. In the case of schools this should be carried out by the janitor on the instructions of the head at a time outwith the normal school day for pupils. This arrangement should also apply throughout the holiday periods.
- 6 An adequate number of staff, allowing cover for absence, should be given responsibility for checking in the event of the fire that a given section of the building has been evacuated. Ancillary accommodation including toilets, cloakroom and stores, should be checked as well as classrooms in the case of schools.

The staff concerned should then report on their section to a nominated senior member of staff who should in turn report to the fire brigade on their arrival.

- 7 The importance of pursuing and reporting to the police all incidents involving fire raising is stressed.
- 8 In the interests of the safety of staff and pupils, heads should be required to make an annual return giving full details of every fire drill practised.

Although ultimate responsibility must rest with the head, day to day responsibility for fire drills could be delegated to a deputy head or an assistant head or an appropriate member of staff, who should be constantly re-appraising procedures in the light of ever changing circumstances.

- 9 Records should be kept in the fire register of all tests on the fire alarm system, of checks on fire fighting equipment, of instructions issued to staff and of fire drill practices.
- 2.4 Recent correspondence with the fire master has emphasised some of the existing advice. In particular, he confirmed that fire exit doors should be secured only by a single push mechanism from the inside and that additional fastenings, for example slip bolts or swipe cards, should be avoided. He also indicated that in his knowledge polycarbonate glazing is not significantly more hazardous than other plastics used in schools when ignited but noted that evacuation routes should be suitably protected to avoid risk from the products of combustion.

3 **NEED FOR CONTINUED UPGRADING:**

- 3.1 Both the removal of risk and responding to new legislation have emphasised the need for a continued fire upgrading programme. For example, a risk assessment initiative has identified schools at most risk from arson attacks and various improvement works have been costed. In addition, upgrading is required both to meet current fire regulations and the likely implementation of the Workplace (Fire Precautions) Regulations which have been issued for comment.
- 3.2 The involvement of the fire master in educational establishments is currently on an invitation basis. For example, the education department can arrange a visit to give additional advice on fire precautions and evacuation procedures. Schools are not required to have a fire certificate but this may change as a result of the consultative fire precautions regulations.

4 **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 4.1 The sub-committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

Murdo Maciver
14 August 1996