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SPTC Newsletter

Scottish Parent Teacher Council, the independent voice for parents, is a national organisation. It has been serving parents' groups in schools for 60 years.

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Money Matters

Whenever we run an open meeting to explain the SPTC membership insurance scheme, we always get a laugh when we reach the section on “fidelity guarantee” and say, “this offers protection in case the Treasurer does a bunk with the money!” The laugh disappears when we add that this is the most common problem we deal with. However, this is not the only money problem that people have and, though most Treasurers do a really good job handling funds, we thought it would be helpful, before all the summer-term fundraising activities, to outline what can go wrong and offer some hints on avoiding problems.

“Disappearing” money

In general there are two ways in which money “disappears”.

- The first is when someone – usually the Treasurer or an office bearer – deliberately takes money from the PTA/PC funds for their own use. The worst case we came across was when a Treasurer took £4,000 and used it to buy a car.
- In the second situation, the taking of money starts with the Treasurer just “borrowing” a bit of cash after a fundraising event – maybe as change for a bus fare or school lunch. However, borrowing becomes too easy and, before long, it is a habit with the Treasurer confident that “no one will notice”. After a while, quite large sums of money have gone missing.

The way to avoid such problems is to remember that the money raised is not your money or even the PTA’s/Parent Council’s money; you are looking after it for all the parents at the school and so you need to have really careful money-handling processes that you **always** follow.

These start at the actual fundraising event when you may collect a lot of cash, including a lot of coins. It is important to have two named people, who are not related to each other, responsible for the cash. If you’re running a big summer fair, then you can set up a “treasury” and have people from the different stalls bring money to it during the event. The cash can then be counted and logged against each activity. If someone needs to come and collect change, the money handed out should always match the cash handed in, with a record kept of the transaction. At the end of any fundraising event, the cash should be counted by at least two people and the total recorded.

Holding Cash

It is usually not possible to get cash to the bank immediately after an event and again the SPTC membership insurance scheme offers you some cover for cash. If the money is kept in a locked safe in an alarmed area, you can keep up to £10,000; but if it is just in a private house, then you can only keep £500 whether the house is occupied or not. If there is more than £500 and the cash has to be taken home, the sensible thing is for a number of people to take up to the £500 limit, but with a very careful record kept of who has what.

We recently had a Parent Council phone us up because the Treasurer's house had been burgled and the cash held for the Parent Council had been stolen. However, this amounted to £2,000 and some of it had been held in the house since August 2008! No one should hold anything like that amount of cash for that length of time.

Good Money Handling

Looking after the PTA/Parent Council funds is not just the responsibility of the Treasurer; it is the responsibility of the whole committee and everyone should understand and agree what is done.

- We have already mentioned that money should be counted by two people who are not related. Similarly, all withdrawals of cash should require two signatures from people who are not related. The sensible thing is to have at least three people able to sign in case someone is away when a withdrawal has to be made, and then there will always be two people around to sign the cheque or withdrawal slip. It is helpful if a teacher at the school is willing to be a signatory. **Never, ever get one of the signatories to sign a blank cheque** "just in case" before they go away.
- At each committee meeting the Treasurer should give a report detailing how much has been raised since the last meeting, how much spent, the balance in the bank and any cash that is being held. (It's a good idea to keep some petty cash to pay for small items like stamps etc.) However, what is equally important is that the rest of the committee listen to the report and ask any questions they may have about it.
- At the end of the year the accounts should be checked by someone who is used to handling money and who is not related to anyone on the committee (it does not have to be a qualified accountant). The person who checks the accounts should be publicly appointed – usually at the previous AGM. Quite often when people phone up to tell us that money has gone missing, they usually add that the Treasurer will not hand over the books or that no one knows who has checked the accounts. It is the committee's responsibility to make sure that this annual check happens properly.

Spending Money

However, money problems are not all to do with raising funds or keeping them safe; sometimes we hear of major disputes over how to spend the money or even of Treasurers who are so good at looking after the cash, they are reluctant to let anyone have any! But, the money has been raised to use, not to pile up in the bank. The PTA/Parent Council is not a business, required to make a profit or pay a dividend to shareholders! Again, it is sensible to have very clear procedures about how decisions on spending are made. This is particularly important when the fundraising group is a sub-committee of the Parent Council. Does the decision lie with the fundraising group or is it a matter for the Parent Council?

Expenses are one item that should always be paid promptly. No one should be out-of-pocket because they are on the committee, so if someone volunteers to buy stamps, tea/coffee etc. it's important to reimburse them quickly - but remember to ask them to get, and then give you, receipts.

When it comes to buying things for the school/ children, there are a range of options. One school recently said that they wanted to pay for an all-weather pitch. That is a major item and it will take a number of fundraising events across more than one year to get the necessary cash. The advantage of setting a target like that in advance is that everyone knows what they are contributing to when they buy raffle tickets or cakes from the home-baking stall etc. The youngsters tend to be quite enthusiastic and will help with their own activities or, at the very least, nag their parents to contribute.

With rural schools, a lot of money is spent on transport to take the children to activities that they wouldn't otherwise enjoy – a trip to a sports centre, the pantomime etc. – or alternatively to bringing activities into the school. "Townies" are lucky that they don't **have** to spend money on these things, but children still enjoy outings. However, the purchase of the moment seems to be smart boards although make sure that the school really wants what you intend to buy. We advise people not to buy things that are supplied by the local authority and instead to focus on "extras" which the children really appreciate. Whatever you do buy, remember to tell the other parents what you have spent "their" money on!

More Information

For more information on handling money, see our leaflet *A simple guide to money matters* whilst you can find fundraising ideas in the leaflet of that title or in the info shop on our website www.sptc.info

This and That

The Importance of 16th Birthdays

Last time we reported a case where a school guidance teacher (school unknown) refused to talk to the parents of a 16 year-old pupil because he was now legally responsible for his own decisions. However, other guidance teachers at the same school still dealt directly with the parents of 16+ years pupils. The parent of the first boy was going to raise the matter with the Parent Council to see if the school had a policy on this and, if so, what it was. Always happy to report on a follow-up to our items, particularly when it's an example of good practice, we came across the following policy statement on the website of Peebles High School (not the original school).

The school will communicate with the parents/carers of all students who are over the age of 16 on any matter which is relevant to the education and welfare of the student - unless the student specifically asks for the school not to communicate with their parents/carers.

Well done that school in developing such a clear, unambiguous and sensible policy.

Glow – a universal communication system or a club for the few?



We have heard a lot about “Glow” recently as in “parents will be able to link up through Glow” or “teaching material for Curriculum for Excellence will be available on Glow” but we had only a hazy understanding of what exactly Glow is and who runs it, so recently we asked for – and were given – our own personal seminar. We now report to you.

Glow has been set up and is run by Learning and Teaching Scotland; it is an “intranet” which means that it is a bit like an internet site that’s only available to people who have signed up for it.

To get access you will need a password and user name and you will get these via your local authority once it has checked your legitimacy to access Glow i.e. that you are a bona fide parent/carer of a child in one of their schools. (Your access will be cancelled when your child leaves school.) However, local authorities themselves currently have different levels of involvement with Glow and different policies on whom they will allow to access the site. Some have not really opened it up to parents whilst others are slowly training Parent Council Chairpersons (but only chairpersons) in the use of Glow, so a universal parent-to-parent communication system is still some way off.

Glow has lots of different areas and not all the areas will be open to all users. If you are lucky enough to get the required authorisation, your access areas will be determined by the fact that you are a parent at a particular school. Each school that is registered with Glow will have its own pages giving information about that school and what children are learning. As a parent, you will have access to your school’s pages and you may have access to your own child’s record. However, you will not be able to access the records of other children or the school pages of a different school. Your local authority may allow you to access some authority-wide pages (although you may not be able to access the pages of another authority). Finally, everyone who has access to Glow will be able to access the national pages.

Pupils and teachers will be able to sign up for a Glow account and pupils will be able to build their own personal records of what they have done and need to do. There’s also an opportunity for them to personalise their pages and perhaps record their favourite teacher, football team or band. No one else will have access to these personal pages unless pupils choose to pass on their access details. For teachers, the great benefit is that they will be able to swap teaching and lesson ideas. However, whilst a check will be made to ensure that nothing offensive is posted on the site, there will be no check on potential copyright infringements and no quality control, so no guarantee that a lesson idea is a good one.

This is only a very brief outline of a very complex project and to find out more go to

www.ltscotland.org.uk/glowscotland

Your Questions Answered

Parents have asked us to have first-aiders at our events, but none of us has any qualification or training. Can you suggest what we could do?

We get quite a lot of Parent Councils/PTAs asking if they need to have a qualified first-aider at events. It's not a condition of the public liability insurance scheme, which is part of your SPTC membership and, whilst it is good to have some knowledge of what to do in an emergency, it is important not to go beyond your expertise. (You might make things worse rather than better.) However, we recently came across **Bagstraining** who could offer one answer to your problem. They run first-aid courses that cover everything from bleeding to burns and from poisoning to choking; they will travel to a location of your choice (travel expenses will be charged outwith the central belt) and will present a four-hour emergency First Aid course for up to a maximum of 12 participants. You could organise a course for all your Parent Council members and helpers or get together with other Parent Councils in your area. This course costs £200 for twelve people – that's less than £17 per person. For more information; phone 0131 333 4597, email bags@btconnect.com or have a look at the website www.bagstraining.co.uk



We thought we'd celebrate the end of a successful year with a beach barbecue but someone said that our insurance only covered us for events held in the school. Is this the case?

Your insurance covers the PTA/Parent Council for events wherever they are held – the school, village hall or even the beach – so go ahead with your planning and I hope the weather is kind to you! However, do remember to plan the event carefully so that there are no accidents. Make sure that food is properly cooked and that children (and adults) are kept away from the hot barbecue. For more advice see our leaflet **SAFETY AT FUNDRAISING EVENTS** which is available on our website www.sptc.info and free of charge from the office.

Stop Press - new national body?

The Government has now published Carole Millar's report on her survey of Parent Councils about the need for and scope of a new National Body. The report will appear on the government website shortly, and in the next couple of weeks the Government will be writing out to all Parent Councils with a summary of the key findings. There are plans for a **national conference for Parent Councils at Hampden Stadium in Glasgow on 13th June** where delegates will have an opportunity to discuss the implications of the report. If you want to be part of the discussion, put the date in your diary now.

IMPORTANT -Have we got your contact details right?

The address on the envelope is the contact name and address we hold for your PTA/Parent Council. If this is no longer right, please let us know of any necessary changes.

And finally - SPTC Conference comes to Glasgow!

Date:	7th November 2009	Venue:	Glasgow Royal Concert Hall
Time:	10.00 am to 2.30 pm	Cost:	£7.50 for members (to cover coffee and lunch)

This November SPTC will hold its annual conference and AGM in Glasgow! The theme will be **Schools and Parents**, and will look at what is really happening in schools rather than at Government policy.

The Conference will be an open discussion, run very much like our regional meetings. The focus will be on what you want to say about what has been happening in your school, whether this is fundraising, sending out a newsletter or discussing a school policy. There will also be a chance to hear what has been happening in other schools. We want to hear about good practice and, even if you won't be able to come to the conference, we'd still like you to contribute by sending us information about what you have been doing and, sending copies of any newsletters.

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