

Extract from minutes of –

DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

16th SEPTEMBER, 2009

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**“Community Centres – Conditions of Hire**

The Committee noted that the current conditions of hire in respect of directly-managed Community Centres stated that ‘the facility will only be used for the purposes stated in the application and shall not be used for party political or religious activities’ and that this clause appeared to have been based on the prevailing practice in the Leisure Services Department in the mid-1980s. Following a request from an Elected Member as to whether the ban on religious activity use could be removed from the conditions, advice had been sought from Legal Services. Essentially this advice indicated that there was nothing within current legislation to prevent the use of Council property for religious activity, so long as there was no breach of Section 76 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. It was pointed out that, if this condition in connection with the hiring of Community Centres were to be removed there might be implications for other Council assets.

The Director informed the Committee that, subsequent to the papers for the meeting having been distributed, the matter had been discussed by the Chief Officers’ Management Team where it had been ascertained that there were inconsistencies across the Council regarding conditions of hire. Accordingly, the Team had agreed that officers from the Development, Parks and Leisure and Legal Services Departments meet as a matter of urgency to discuss the situation and submit a report to a meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. She requested therefore that the Committee defer consideration of the report to enable the group appointed by the Management Team to investigate conditions of hire across the Council and to submit its report to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

During discussion in the matter, several Members pointed out that the legal advice indicated clearly that Community Centres could be used for religious purposes and that, therefore, the Committee should agree to amend the conditions of hire for such buildings.

Following further discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Rodgers,  
Seconded by Councillor McCausland,

That, in view of the advice provided by Legal Services, the Committee agrees to amend the conditions of hire for Community Centres to enable religious groups to use such premises, on the understanding that there would be no breach of Section 76 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

On a vote by show of hands six Members voted in favour of the proposal and one against and it was accordingly declared carried.”

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