



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Conditions of Hire (Council Facilities)
Date:	23 October 2009
Reporting Officer:	Ciaran Quigley, Director of Legal Services (Ext 6038)
Contact Officer:	Dominica Thornton, Principal Solicitor (Ext 6040)

Purpose of the Report

To bring to the attention of the Committee a proposed review of the Conditions of Hire which are applied in relation to the use of facilities of the Council.

Relevant Background Information

Issues in relation to the conditions of hire applied by the Council in relation to the hire of community and leisure facilities were discussed by the Parks & Leisure Committee at its meeting of 10 September 2009, and by the Development Committee at its meeting of 16 September 2009.

The issue raised in the Parks & Leisure Committee concerned the use of Whiterock Leisure Centre for a Hunger Strike commemoration event. There was a discussion by the Committee in relation to this event, with particular reference to its political nature, in the course of which the Director of Parks & Leisure indicated that there was the need to review the conditions of hire for Council premises in order to ensure a consistent approach and to ensure that the Council complied with its legal obligations. The Parks & Leisure Committee accordingly agreed that a review be undertaken corporately and confirmed its decision at its meeting of 15 October.

At the Development Committee meeting on 16 September 2009, there was a discussion in relation to the current conditions of hire for community centres which include a clause that the facility should not be used for party political or religious activities. After discussion, the Committee agreed to amend the conditions of hire for community centres to enable religious groups to use such premises. The decision of the Development Committee was taken back at Council on 2 October 2009. The matter was reconsidered and re-affirmed by the Committee at its meeting of 14 October.

Current Position

Following a review of the above decisions by the relevant Chief Officers, it was agreed to establish a Working Group of officers from Legal Services, Development and Parks & Leisure for the purpose of reviewing the conditions of hire which the Council applies in relation to the use of community and leisure facilities, but also including park pavilion facilities and similar premises, as well as the facilities provided by the Council at Belfast

Castle, Malone House, the Waterfront Hall and Ulster Hall, and Belfast Zoo. The intention of the Working Group is to ensure that a consistent approach is adopted by the Council in relation to the hire of those facilities and work is now on-going in that respect.

Given the corporate nature of the issue, it is considered appropriate to report the matter to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee, and a further report will be brought to that Committee by the Director of Legal Services in due course.

Key Issues

- The need to ensure a consistent approach by the Council in regulating the hire of its facilities by way of a predetermined Events Policy, Criteria and Relevant Conditions of Hire for each type of facility as stipulated above.
- Relevant conditions of hire for each of the four categories detailed above need to be produced with a detailed Application aligned to each set of conditions.
- A further report will be brought by the Director of Legal Services in due course to update Members as to progress made in this regard.

Resource Implications

Financial – None

Human Resources – None

Asset and Other Implications – None

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the content of this report.

Decision Tracking

Ciaran Quigley, Director of Legal Services

Key to Abbreviations

n/a

Documents Attached

n/a