

LCSD's response on outsourced sports centre contractor organising fee-charging programmes

In response to media enquiries regarding the booking arrangements for an outsourced contractor of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), Spotlight Enterprises Limited (Spotlight), which organises fee-charging programmes in the sports centres under its management, a spokesman for the LCSD today (August 7) reiterated that the department handled all hiring applications for facilities in sports centres in an impartial manner while the outsourced contractor must, in addition, comply with the restrictive provisions specified in the contracts. The spokesman assured that no privilege or preferential treatment has ever been given to the contractor.

All hiring applications for LCSD sports centre facilities (including those submitted by the outsourced contractors) must be handled in accordance with the "Booking Procedure for Use of Fee Charging Recreation and Sports Facilities" under which the priorities and application arrangements have been clearly set out. Spotlight belongs to the category with the lowest priority (i.e. bona fide associations and corporations) and can reserve recreation and sports facilities three months in advance. If hiring applications from other organisations with the same priority as Spotlight are received for the same session, the allocation will be determined by balloting so as to ensure that applications from all eligible organisations are handled impartially.

As an outsourced contractor, Spotlight must also comply with relevant requirements specified under the contract with LCSD, which only allow it to hire no more than 100 hours in a month and no more than 20 hours of which shall fall in peak periods for the facilities in the sports centres under its management. The outsourced contractor is also required to submit a detailed proposal on its programmes two months in advance for LCSD's approval to ensure that the programmes being organised are in line with the LCSD's mission of promoting sport for all. Other organisations are not bound by these contract restrictions. In other words, the outsourced contractor is additionally regulated by the contract requirements and therefore there is no question of granting privilege or preferential treatment to the contractor.

Records show that Spotlight has organised programmes at venues and facilities with comparatively lower usage rates including squash courts, activity rooms and dance rooms in 10 of the 14 outsourced sports centres during the current contract period. The average usage rate of these facilities during peak and non-peak hours (including the sessions hired by Spotlight) are between 72% and 76%. On the other hand, Spotlight normally would not apply for those popular facilities with higher public demand, such as the multi-purpose arena for ball games at sports centres.

Although in principle the LCSD can exercise its discretion under the

contract to allow the contractor to hire the facilities to organise programmes for more than the above-mentioned hours, the department has only done so for programmes held at two sports centres. In making the decisions, the department mainly considered that no other organisation had applied for the same sessions whilst the contractor's proposed programmes would help further promote the facilities of the sports centres as well as provide diversified activities for public participation.

According to the LCSD's "Booking Procedure for Recreation and Sports Facilities", all block bookings (including activities organised by the Home Affairs Bureau or the LCSD, and those subvented by the LCSD) during peak hours should not exceed half of the total available hours of the month, so as to ensure that adequate peak hour sessions will be available for public use to meet the needs of different venue users.

The LCSD has all along been actively promoting "Sport for All". Apart from providing various recreation and sports facilities and programmes for use and participation by the public, the department also encourages both organisations and individual members of the public to hire LCSD's venues for organising programmes, training courses or competitions. With an aim to promoting sports, the department allows these kinds of activities, regardless of whether it is fee-charging or not, to be held in its leisure venues. Programmes organised by venue hirers (including Spotlight) are generally self-financed and participants may be charged an enrollment fee in order to cover the administrative or activity-related expenses. As to recreations and sports programmes organised by the LCSD, they are aimed to promote "Sport for All" and are highly subsidised by the Government, making it inappropriate to directly compare with the fees charged for programmes held by Spotlight.

In conclusion, Spotlight has organised recreation and sports programmes in sports centres under its management in accordance with the LCSD's "Booking Procedure for Recreation and Sports Facilities" and relevant requirements and terms as specified in the contracts. No privilege or preferential treatment has ever been given to the contractor. These recreation and sports programmes also help promote the facilities of the sports centres and provide diversified activities for the public.

The LCSD will continue to closely monitor the usage of the outsourced sports centres and the performance of contractors to ensure the service quality of these sports centres.