

CASTLEREAGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of the proceedings of the Special Central Services Committee meeting held, in committee, in the Members' Committee Room, Civic & Administrative Offices, Bradford Court, Upper Galwally, Castlereagh, BT8 6RB on Tuesday, 19th September 2006 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT:- Councillor Mrs M Chambers (in the chair)
Alderman J Norris MBE
Councillor C Hall
Councillor Miss R Hughes MBE
Councillor G Robinson (from 2.18 p.m.)
Councillor J Spratt

IN ATTENDANCE:- Director of Administration & Community Services,
Community Development Worker for Moneyreagh,
Tullycarnet & Ballybeen and Assistant Members'
Services Officer

APOLOGIES:- Apologies were recorded on behalf of Councillors
Long and Beattie.

CS/2006/254 : MONEYREAGH BIG LOTTERY FUNDING APPLICATION / USAGE BY PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The Chairman outlined her concerns with regard to a letter, which had been received from the South Eastern Education & Library Board in response to Council correspondence permitting free unlimited usage of the Moneyreagh Community Centre to Moneyreagh and Ballycloghan Primary Schools. She stated that the letter had been sent by the former Community Services Manager and signed by the Chief Executive and there had been no minute covering this decision. Furthermore, she advised that Ballycloghan Primary School was not within the Castlereagh Borough.

The Director of Administration & Community Services advised Members that this matter placed her in a very difficult position, as the Board's Solicitors were trying to tie in the Council's requirement to use their land as access, with their request for free unlimited usage for both primary schools.

She referred to initial discussions relating to Moneyreagh Community Centre from meetings, which had taken place in 1999, and clarified that the previous Director of Community Services had categorically stated that free usage of the facility would not be permitted and this had been clearly minuted at that time.

She added that the Big Lottery funding application submitted by the Council, had stated that free usage of the facility would be negotiable.

Councillor Spratt referred to previous discussion in relation to this matter, which had taken place at the Central Services Committee meeting on the 11th September and the resolutions that Members had subsequently agreed. He felt that the best solution was for a Council delegation to meet with the Headmaster of Moneyreagh Primary School to negotiate an amiable agreement in the best interests of both parties. He referred to Ballycloghan Primary School, which was earmarked for closure, and stated that it was his understanding, that they did not have transport provision to take pupils to and from Moneyreagh Community Centre, therefore they would be unable to use the premises.

He referred to the original letter that had been sent by the former Community Services Manager, and felt that the Chief Executive had signed it in good faith, as, it had been personally presented to him by a Senior Officer. However, in light of the urgent need to progress this matter to ascertain funding, he felt that every attempt should be made to negotiate a suitable arrangement as soon as possible.

Councillor Chambers expressed her fear that this situation would set a precedent, and referred to the arrangements made with Cregagh Primary School, who had not been permitted any provision for free usage.

The Director advised Members that the amount of funding originally offered by the Big Lottery Fund had reduced from £400k to £90k. She advised Members that she had considered the ramifications if the Council had dropped the Big Lottery funding but indicated that the Board had now tied the Council into the arrangement.

At this point in the proceedings, Councillor Robinson entered the meeting at 2.18 p.m.

The Director continued that, under Health & Safety legislation, there was a requirement, especially in the early months of operation, the Community Centre would have to be manned by 2 members of staff, at an approximate cost of £25 to the Council. She felt that, although this cost was merited whilst other community groups were utilising the facility, it was expensive if the Community Centre had to be opened when the school were solely using the premises and she raised concerns that this would subsequently impact on her income targets.

Councillor Spratt, however, reiterated that unless the Council proceeded with the project, there would be no community centre built and the residents of Moneyreagh would suffer as a result.

The Director of Administration & Community Services advised that, at the first Big Lottery funding meeting, she had confirmed that Officers did not have the authority to discuss free use of the premises without a Council decision, and the former Community Services Officer had been privy to this discussion. Indeed, she confirmed that the Big Lottery funding application had advised that there would be no free use and any usage would be charged at the normal community rates.

However, the Big Lottery Fund subsequently wrote back to the former Community Services Manager requesting free use of the premises by Moneyreagh and Ballycloghan Primary Schools. She was angry that he had subsequently written back in response, without her knowledge, or any consultation or discussion with Members, and agreed the terms stipulated by the Big Lottery Fund.

At this point in the proceedings the Members agreed to discuss this matter “Staff-in-Committee” and following lengthy discussion, it was

RESOLVED:- That,

- (a) The Mayor, Chairperson of the Central Services Committee and Director of Administration & Community Services meet with the Principals of both (?) Primary Schools to reach an agreement in the best interests of both parties, but which would provide the most favourable terms for the Council.
- (b) That the agreement ties down specific times and number of hours when Council staff are on the premises, during off-peak periods.
- (c) That, the Director of Administration & Community Services be instructed to notify the South Eastern Education & Library Board when agreement has been reached and outline the terms and conditions of that said agreement.
- (d) The Chairperson of the Central Services Committee be granted approval to meet with the Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education & Library Board to discuss the circumstances, which gave rise to the letter, being sent initially.

As there was no further business, the meeting concluded at 2.55 p.m.