

Booking Procedure of Community Halls/Community Centres and Alleged Unauthorised Sale/Transfer of Sports Facility Permits

This note responds to the concerns raised by Members of the Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting (ITB) at the meeting of 12 January 2004, regarding the booking procedure of community halls/community centres and the alleged unauthorised sale/transfer of sports facility permits.

Booking Procedure of Community Halls/Community Centres

Members' Concern

2. Members expressed concern over the need for members of the public to queue up to book community halls (CHs)/community centres (CCs), despite the availability of an online booking service. The Administration clarified at the meeting that the online booking service was not for booking CHs/CCs, but for booking the sports facilities managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD).

Booking Procedure

3. While the booking of CHs/CCs is under the purview of the Home Affairs Department (HAD), the detailed booking procedure for individual CH/CC is worked out through consulting the respective CH/CC Management Committee, which comprises members from different parties including local personalities and representatives of local organizations in the district. There are different arrangements to cater for the specific needs of different districts. For example, the priority of acceptance of applications may be determined on a first-come-first-served basis, by lots drawing, by queuing or through some other methods.

Considerations of Implementing an Online Booking System

4. First of all, an online booking system that accommodates the diverse booking arrangements of different districts would not be a simple one. Besides, the District Offices have to examine such details of the applications as whether the applications are made by organizations, whether the criteria for exemption of charges are met, etc, before approving the applications. Supporting documents may therefore be required for application submissions. If the submission procedure is to be made available online, applicants would either need to send in their supporting documents in electronic format or provide such documents separately through physical channels. For the former, it would mean a non-user-friendly service from the customer perspective. For the latter, it would mean little efficiency enhancement for the District Offices. HAD considers that these are the issues that would need to be addressed carefully before implementing online booking.

Follow-up Actions

5. The proposal of implementing online booking for CHs/CCs had in fact been discussed on several occasions and was agreed not to pursue further on 27 November 2002 by the Sha Tin CH/CC Management Committee. However, HAD will pass the suggestion to the CH/CC Management Committees of the 16 districts (two districts have no CH) for consideration. Meanwhile, HAD also plan to post the application forms for use of CHs/CCs on HAD's website for efficient downloading by members of the public. HAD shall also consider accepting the application form as an attachment to an email to be sent to the booking office where the booking system allows allocation methods like drawing lots.

Alleged Unauthorised Sale/Transfer of Sports Facility Permits

Members' Concern

6. At the meeting, Members also expressed concern over people re-selling sports facility permits at a higher price and suggested the Administration to consider improvement measures to rectify the problem.

The Booking Arrangement

7. The booking and allocation of sports facilities managed by LCSD are governed by a set of established procedure. Under the existing arrangement, members of the public may make bookings for sports facilities up to 30 days in advance through the computerized “Leisure Link” booking system. The system provides three convenient booking channels for the public, namely, in person at booking counters located in over 140 leisure venues throughout the territory, by telephone and through the Internet. All three channels start accepting bookings of sports facilities at the same time at 7:00 am daily. The system is providing fast, convenient and cost-effective booking service to the public.

The Problem

8. LCSD are aware of the alleged unauthorised sale/transfer of sports facility permits. The permits involved are for the use of natural turf pitches. According to LCSD’s observation, the problem mainly stems from the imbalanced demand and supply of the facility, rather than the computerized booking and allocation system. In fact, since all three booking channels start to operate and accept bookings at the same time, the chance of securing a booking through any one channel should be the same.

Considerations of Switching to Balloting and Introducing a Quota System

9. Members have suggested the making use of balloting arrangement to alleviate the problem. However, after consideration, LCSD found that such measure would not be effective.

10. The allocation method of turf pitches throughout the territory has been aligned since August 2002 and the allocation is now carried out through “Leisure Link” on a first-come-first-served basis. Members of the public have largely adapted to this allocation method.

11. The first-come-first-served method is adopted in view of its obvious advantages over the balloting method. It is a fast and convenient method for the public as bookings can be made through different channels anywhere in the territory and immediate results are known. It is also

transparent as the allocation is done through computer without human error or interference. It is a cost-effective and efficient way to deliver the booking service and is in line with the Government overall direction of automation to improve efficiency.

12. On the contrary, balloting involves a lot of administrative work and time to process. Although balloting may appear to be fair and convenient to some people, it can be more easily abused and interfered by human factors. For example, one may send in a large number of applications using different names and identity numbers to increase the chance of success. The problem of multiple applications will still exist and there could also be unauthorized sale/transfer of permits after balloting.

13. As there are currently three booking channels, this should not create problems for people who do not use computers. It also follows that there is no particular need to set quota to protect the interest of any particular group of users. As there is already a shortage of natural turf pitches, to further split the processing into different booking methods will create public confusion and complicate administrative work.

14. The current problem of unauthorized sale/transfer of permits is fundamentally a problem of insufficient supply. The allocation method is not the crux of the problem. Since the problem cannot be eliminated through a change in allocation method (first-come-first-served, balloting, or setting a quota), there is no sound justification nor benefit to switch to a less cost-effective and more administrative burdensome option. Instead, LCSD have taken a series of action to tackle the problem.

Measures Taken

15. Under the General Conditions of Use of LCSD Recreation and Sports Facilities, the hirer must be one of the players using the facility. He/she is required to produce his/her identification document for verification at the check-in counter before using the facility. If the hirer is not among the players, the use of facility will be denied. LCSD have been enforcing this condition strictly on ground by checking the identities of hirers with a view to eliminating the unauthorised sale/transfer of permits. LCSD have also arranged publicity through the media and put up notices

on ground to remind public that unauthorised sale/transfer of permits is prohibited.

16. LCSD have also sought assistance from the Commissioner of Police. After investigation into the matter, the Police advised that there is insufficient evidence to support a charge against any person in relation to any ticket scalping activity for the use of LCSD turf pitches at this point in time. Despite so, LCSD shall continue to monitor the situation closely and refer suspected case to the Police for further investigation and action.

17. On the other hand, LCSD are working actively on a long term solution to resolve the fundamental problem of inadequate supply of natural turf pitches. LCSD are implementing an improvement programme to convert suitable natural turf pitches into artificial ones. Since the usable sessions provided by an artificial turf pitch is five times that of a natural turf pitch, the supply of turf pitches (in terms of available sessions for use) will be largely increased when the improvement programme is completed. The conversion programme involves 16 natural turf pitches and will be completed in phases by the end of 2005. It is expected that the situation will be much improved when the demand and supply of turf pitches is in equilibrium.

**Home Affairs Department,
Leisure and Cultural Services Department and
Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau
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