

Chapter XV : Home Affairs

15.1 At the invitation of the Chairman, the Secretary for Home Affairs (SHA), Mr LAM Woon-kwong, highlighted the key programme areas under his purview for which provisions were being sought (Appendix V-14).

Rights of the individual

15.2 On the promotion of equal opportunities on grounds of race and sexual orientation, Miss Emily LAU questioned the Administration's stance on introducing anti-discrimination legislation and whether resources had been allocated in 2001-02 for conducting public consultation for the purpose. In response, SHA advised that all along, the Administration was of the view that education and publicity was a more effective approach to deal with discrimination on the grounds of race and sexual orientation. Nevertheless, the Administration was prepared to listen to views of the community and had not ruled out the possibility of the legislative approach.

15.3 As regards consultation, SHA clarified that at this stage, there were no concrete plans to consult the business sector on legislating against racial discrimination. No separate provision had been earmarked for public consultation and related work on racial discrimination and sexual orientation as such expenses were absorbed in the Bureau's overall budget for promotion and publicity. Nevertheless, where necessary, he would consider re-deploying resources under his purview for such purposes.

15.4 Mr Andrew CHENG considered that the estimated expenditure allocated in 2001-02 for the protection of individual rights might be futile as some high-level government officials had openly stated that the activities of the Falungong should be closely monitored and such comments had cast uncertainty on the freedom of religious belief in Hong Kong. Mr James TO also expressed concern about media reports that amenities staff of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) had kept a close watch on Falungong members practising in the parks.

15.5 SHA responded that there was no conflict between the proposed allocation of resources and the Administration's view on the activities of the Falungong. He reiterated that the rule of law prevailed in Hong Kong and the Government was acting in accordance with the law in all its courses of action. The Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (DLCS) pointed out that amenities staff would not keep a close watch on specific groups using facilities in public

Chapter XV : Home Affairs

parks but on one occasion, the amenities staff had intervened upon complaints from other users of the park that members of the Falungong were distributing handbills in the park.

15.6 On the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB)'s work on overseeing compliance with United Nations (UN) human rights treaties which applied to Hong Kong, Miss Cyd HO enquired about the mechanism on following up the concluding observations given by the relevant human rights monitoring bodies. In response, SHA advised that HAB played a co-ordinating role and would report UN's recommendations to the Executive Council. Meanwhile, individual policy bureaux also took the initiative to follow up recommendations under their respective purviews.

15.7 On the Government's contribution of \$10 million to the Dragon Foundation in 1999-2000, Mr Albert HO queried the appropriateness of making government contributions to the Foundation which singled out "ethnic Chinese youth" as its service target as such benchmark might be considered a form of racial discrimination.

15.8 The Director of Home Affairs (DHA) declared that she was one of the trustees of the Foundation which was set up in collaboration with the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups. She said that the Foundation aimed at fostering exchanges and development among Chinese youth worldwide rather than promoting patriotism or nationalism. As to whether the Government should continue to make contribution, SHA pointed out that the key consideration was whether the foundation in question would enhance the general well-being of the community and in this respect, the Dragon Foundation was serving a worthwhile purpose. He added that the Government had also helped funding of projects for ethnic minority groups.

District Councils

15.9 Miss CHOY So-yuk declared her interest as a member of the Eastern District Council. Noting that \$100 million had been earmarked for implementing the recommendations arising from the review on the roles and functions of District Councils (DCs), Miss CHOY and Mr IP Kwok-him questioned the adequacy of the proposed provision and urged that further assistance should be provided. Mr Frederick FUNG questioned the basis for setting aside the proposed amount pending completion of the review and

Chapter XV : Home Affairs

considered that apart from funding, greater powers should be conferred on DCs.

15.10 In response, SHA and DHA advised that with the earmarked provision, the estimated provision for district administration in 2001-02 had been increased by nearly 30% and this had been welcomed by DC members as a good start. They also explained that the amount had been allocated prior to completion of the overall review in recognition of DCs' urgent need for additional resources. Depending on the outcome of the review on DCs' roles and functions, HAB might bid for additional funding to cater for increased needs, including possible adjustments to DC members' remuneration.

15.11 On DCs' authority in the use of funds, DHA pointed out that while the usual procedures in the use of public funds had to be followed, the Administration was prepared to consider providing greater flexibility to DCs if pursuant to the review, their roles and functions were to be strengthened. DLCS supplemented that with effect from 1 April 2001, DCs would be given full discretion in the use of funds totalling \$25.4 million allocated for district recreational and cultural events.

15.12 As a former member of the Urban Council, Mr Fred LI opined that more powers should be conferred on DCs following the dissolution of the two municipal councils. He considered that the Administration should first complete the review on the roles and functions of DCs before drawing up its funding requirement as under the present arrangement, the review would seem to be subject to the allocated funding of \$100 million.

15.13 DHA re-affirmed that in earmarking \$100 million prior to completion of the review, the Administration had demonstrated its support and concern for timely assistance to DCs. In this connection, the Deputy Secretary for the Treasury remarked that similar arrangements had been made for implementing the various education reforms in the 2000-01 Budget. By setting aside provisions in the 2001-02 Estimates, the recommendations arising from the DC review could be taken forward in a timely manner. He pointed out that the creation of new commitments using the \$100 million would still require the approval of the Finance Committee.

15.14 As to whether greater powers could be conferred on DCs without increasing resources, DHA said that there had been occasions on which DCs were involved in committees set up in various districts in support of the Clean Hong

Kong Campaign and other projects. As the representative of the DC functional constituency in the Legislative Council, Mr IP Kwok-him pointed out that in general, DC members would look forward to both a higher level of responsibility and additional resources.

15.15 On the resources earmarked for implementing outstanding projects of the two former municipal councils, DLCS advised that works on seven of the projects upgraded to Category A of the Public Works Programme had commenced. Several projects were temporarily withheld due to some technical problems. The Administration was currently consulting DCs on the priority of the other projects and would bid for the necessary resources in the context of the annual resource allocation exercise.

Building management

15.16 Given the increasingly complex problems often faced by owners' corporations (OCs), Mr Albert CHAN commented that the Government had not allocated sufficient resources to support the work of OCs and enquired about the concrete assistance which the Home Affairs Department (HAD) would offer.

15.17 In response, DHA advised that HAD would be allocated an additional \$22.5 million in 2001-02 to strengthen its services on building management. New posts would be created in stages and a new division responsible for the provision of legal, technical and other expert support would be established in HAD to plan and co-ordinate building management matters. She also highlighted the assistance provided by the two existing Building Management Resource Centres (BMRCs) and reported that the third BMRC would be set up in Tsuen Wan in May 2001. DHA nevertheless pointed out that building management was primarily a matter for the owners and HAD could not substitute OCs in managing their buildings.

15.18 Mr IP Kwok-him questioned whether the additional 78 posts of full-time and trained liaison and building management staff would be sufficient for assisting owners to set up OCs and he considered the HAD's target of setting up 300 OCs each year too low.

15.19 DHA assured members that the additional 78 staff would not be solely responsible for assisting owners as HAD also organized seminars and related activities on building management each year. Furthermore, owners also

Chapter XV : Home Affairs

received assistance from certain building management companies and political parties. She confirmed that in recognition of the importance of building management, HAD had allocated about one-third of its resources to building management matters.

Assistance to new arrivals

15.20 On the \$2.12 million earmarked for the "publicity and community education programme to promote community acceptance of new arrivals" to be launched in 2001-02, DHA undertook to provide a more detailed breakdown on the allocation of the said publicity provision at the district level. SHA added that the total Government recurrent expenditure on assisting new arrivals to integrate into the local community amounted to some \$500 million each year.

15.21 Miss Emily LAU sought confirmation on whether the Administration had conducted any survey on the problems faced by new arrivals and whether any existing government policy was discriminatory against newly arrived persons. In reply, DHA advised that HAD had been gauging the needs of and problems faced by new arrivals through regular bi-monthly meetings with 25 non-government organizations from 18 districts and relevant departments including the Education Department, Social Welfare Department (SWD) and Housing Department. The findings were forwarded to the HAB on a half-yearly basis for onward consideration by various policy bureaux in determining their policies and resource requirements.

15.22 On Miss CHOY So-yuk's suggestion to set up service centres in other Mainland provinces such as Fukien to provide assistance to the new arrivals before their entry into Hong Kong, DHA advised that SWD was currently working closely with the International Social Services (ISS) with a view to strengthening the services available in Guangdong and other provinces. In 2001-02, SWD had been allocated resources to set up four more service centres in Guangdong Province. HAD would also work closely with ISS in disseminating the necessary information on Hong Kong to prospective arrivals.

Policy on Gambling

15.23 Mr Andrew CHENG expressed concern about the apparent lack of resources earmarked in 2001-02 for necessary work in developing a policy on gambling. In response, SHA advised that the Administration would issue a

Chapter XV : Home Affairs

consultation paper in mid 2001 to solicit views on soccer betting. The consultation and review on gambling policy would be undertaken within existing resources of HAB.

Performing arts

15.24 In reply to Mr LAU Chin-shek about the Government's policy objective and the resources allocated for promoting Cantonese operas, DLCS stressed that the Administration attached great importance to this area of work. In 2000-01, the department spent over \$10 million in sponsoring over 200 performances and the number of upcoming performing groups presented under the District Cantonese Opera Parade had increased from 14 last year to 16 this year. The Administration would continue to encourage revivals of existing titles or creation of new ones. On the availability of venues for staging Cantonese operas, DLCS appreciated that some popular venues were very much sought after while some were less in demand. He said that the department would look into the matter.

Recreation and sports

15.25 Mr Timothy FOK expressed concern about funding for cultural, recreational and sports activities following the amendments introduced to the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance in 1997 which prohibited tobacco companies from sponsoring recreational events. He asked whether part of the estimated income from increased tobacco duty in 2001-02 could be used to finance such activities. In response, SHA said that apart from government subsidies, recreational and sports bodies could also avail themselves of the assistance under various funds. Nevertheless, the Administration would seriously look into the issue of providing a more stable source of funding for recreational and sports activities.

Public libraries

15.26 Mr Henry WU was concerned about recent media reports about insufficient non-fiction library materials at public libraries and enquired about the expenditure on acquiring books since 1999-2000.

15.27 In response, DLCS explained that LCSD was committed to providing a well balanced stock of library materials accessible free of charge. Its

acquisition policy was guided by the principles stated in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Public Library Manifesto. At present, non-fiction materials accounted for about 75% of the total library stock. Of the 34 million items of library materials borrowed each year, only some 42% was fiction material and such percentage was in line with the international pattern. In acquiring library materials, the committee headed by the Chief Librarian would also take into account the suggestions of the public. On the information and self-learning roles of library service, DLCS referred to the availability of programme materials for the Open University of Hong Kong and Project Springboard at public libraries, the extension of opening hours of the study rooms and the commissioning of the Hong Kong Central Library in May 2001. DCLS added that he would be pleased to provide further details after the meeting if members so wished.

15.28 DLCS further confirmed that the bulk of the annual expenditure on “library materials and multi-media services” was for purchasing books. Of the 750 000 items of materials to be acquired in 2001-02, some 100 000 were non-fiction materials. DLCS clarified that although only some 30% of the materials to be purchased were to cater specifically for young persons, young readers could also have access to materials for adults readers.