

Planning and Provision of Community Facilities

Introduction

This paper briefly outlines current practice and procedures with regard to the planning and provision of community facilities for culture and recreation, including community halls.

Background

2. Following the dissolution of the former Municipal Councils (MC's), from 1 January 2000 the Leisure and Cultural Services Department has taken over the role of planning the provision of community cultural and recreational facilities. The Home Affairs Department is responsible for the provision and management of community halls. Overall responsibility for the relevant major policy issues rests with the Home Affairs Bureau.

Current Arrangements for Cultural and Recreational Facilities

3. Upon the dissolution of the former MC's, the Councils had a combined total of 160 cultural or recreational projects under various stages of planning. Of these projects, 10 were complexes planned to include environmental hygiene facilities as well as cultural and recreational facilities.

4. Of the 160 projects under planning by the former MC's, 11 had been given funding approval in principle by the Councils. We agreed that these 11 projects should be injected directly into category A of the Public Works Programme (PWP), subject to approval by the Finance Committee (FC). Construction has already started on eight of these projects.

5. For the remaining 149 cultural and recreational projects, the great majority were at a very preliminary planning stage, with no firm target dates set for implementation. Having reviewed these projects, we have proposed that 16 items should be given priority in terms of inclusion in the PWP. The Legislative Council Sub-committee To Follow Up on the Outstanding Capital Works Projects of the Two Provisional Municipal Councils (the Project Sub-Committee) is monitoring further progress with the implementation of these projects.

Community Halls

6. Community halls (CH's) provide venues and focal points for a range of community activities including meetings of local organizations; civic education activities; training courses; celebrations and recreational and cultural activities at the district level. They also provide temporary shelter for people in need during natural disasters, emergency situations and inclement weather.

7. CH's are provided on the basis of need, as assessed and advised by the Director of Home Affairs who will take into account views of the local community. To facilitate utilization, CH's are normally centrally located and easily accessible to the population they intend to serve. The design of a CH is determined on the basis of community aspirations and other relevant factors such as architectural constraints. Normally, a CH includes a multi-purpose hall with a stage, a conference room, a management office, dressing rooms and storerooms.

8. The Home Affairs Department (HAD) is actively planning 13 community hall projects in conjunction with the departments concerned. We will seek the Legislative Council's funding approval for five of the projects shortly.

Planning and Implementation Principles

Planning Standards

9. General guidelines for the planning of community facilities are set out in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines (PSG), published by the Planning Department. We have previously briefed the Project Sub-committee in June 2000 on the detailed standards for individual districts in terms of cultural and recreational facilities. We have also outlined where there are shortfalls or surpluses in current provision, and have advised the sub-committee on aspects of the planning process which we intend to review.

10. The general principles governing the provision of CH's are set out in the revised PSG which were promulgated in 1999, according to which the provision of CH's will be judged on a "need basis" on individual merits, taking into account the following factors –

- population size
- area characteristics and community aspirations
- location of the area concerned
- availability of existing CH's or similar facilities nearby
- the usage rates of nearby CH's
- accessibility of nearby CH's to the subject area
- availability of alternate accommodation for community activities and their ease of access.

Under the revised PSG, CH's will usually form part of an integrated development, instead of being stand-alone developments. In addition, it is no longer necessary for a CH to be co-located with a welfare block (as in existing "community centres"), although welfare services and facilities would often be one of the joint users in an integrated development. In developing a joint-user complex, HAD will need to identify suitable joint users and to achieve a plot ratio to the satisfaction of the Government Property Agency.

Implementation

11. The implementation of planned community facilities for cultural and recreational activities is co-ordinated initially by LCSD, under the policy supervision of HAB. A number of factors affect the timetable for implementation of individual projects, for example –

- the availability of the site ear-marked for the facilities in question
- the level of demand for new facilities at district level, which can in part be assessed by looking at usage patterns for existing facilities
- the necessity for complying with requirements related to the environment, effective use of the site, safety concerns, etc.
- the availability of resources to implement projects.

12. As the bureau overseeing both community building and cultural and recreational policies, HAB is considering adopting a more coordinated and integrated approach to the provision of district-based facilities serving sports, recreation and community building purposes to ensure that they meet the needs of the community and are provided in a cost-effective manner. In this connection, we are exploring with the departments concerned the desirability and feasibility of two proposed arrangements for providing CH's and indoor games halls (IGH's). First, we are considering whether a new type of multi-purpose venue could be constructed to serve both community building and cultural and recreational purposes, where there is a need to provide both types of facilities in a particular area. Second, we are ascertaining whether some existing IGH's, when suitably equipped, can be used to serve CH purposes to cater for local demand. We believe that an integrated and coordinated approach would enable the best possible use of the sites and resources available and ensure that the facilities provided in the venue meet the needs of the local community. We will carry out pilot schemes to test the practicability of these proposed arrangements.

Way Forward

13. We hope to make good progress with the further planning and implementation of community projects. In doing so we will take account of the need to provide facilities which –

- meet the real needs of the community
- can be built and operated in a cost effective manner
- contribute in general terms to improving the quality of life for local residents.

14. On the district level we shall maintain close liaison with the District Councils to understand the priorities and concerns of the community with regard to the implementation of projects. We shall continue to report to the Project Sub-committee on detailed progress with the planning and execution of recreational and cultural projects under the PWP.

Home Affairs Bureau

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