

**Extract of minutes of LegCo Members' meeting with
Southern District Council members on 3 May 2001**

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IV. Role of District Councils and support from the Government

26. SDC Chairman commented that there had not been significant enhancement in the role of District Councils (DCs) and support from the Government following the dissolution of the Municipal Councils (MCs). He was of the view that DCs should not remain as an advisory body, but should be given more decision-making powers in managing cultural, recreational and other community facilities in their respective districts. He appreciated the sincere effort made by the Administration in convening monthly meetings with DCs as this could provide a useful forum for exchange of views. However, DC members sometimes felt that some Government officials attending DC meetings did not give due regard to their views.

27. Mr WONG King-cheung shared SDC Chairman's views and added that it would served no meaningful purpose for the Administration to consult DCs on matters which had already been discussed and agreed with LegCo Members. He was also of the view that DC meetings often became forums for empty talks and DCs were unable to play an active role in district administration.

28. Mr MIU Wah-chang considered that the Government should consult DC members when planning for the scope, design and construction programme of projects to be implemented in their respective districts, as well as policies affecting people's livelihood prior to the submission of these projects and policies to LegCo for approval.

29. Mr KO Tam-kam referred to a case of the Administration not having invited SDC members to the opening ceremony of a public school. Mr KO stressed that as far as this school was concerned, SDC members had made strenuous effort to strive for the reservation of the site for the school project in South Horizons. He considered that as reflected in this incident, the Government did not even respect the social status of DC members.

30. Mr CHU Ching-hong said that he had recently raised objection to the proposed transfer of the Music Office to the Hong Kong Academy for Performance Arts. He was of the view that the former aimed to promote general music education amongst the public through the provision of music

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training and music promotion activities in districts, whereas the latter offered professional training up to degree level in performing arts. As DC members were most familiar with district affairs, DCs should be given a greater say in the above matter.

31. On the remuneration for DC members, SDC Chairman did not agree with the revision mechanism of using the Consumer Price Index (A) as the basis for the annual adjustment of the honorarium and accountable allowance for DC members. He opined that the revision mechanism for DC members might not necessarily follow that adopted for LegCo Members and the matter should be further studied by the Administration.

32. With regard to the current rate of monthly accountable allowance for DC members, Mr LAM Kai-fai said that the allowance was insufficient to cover rental and the salary for a competent full-time assistant. Therefore, most members, particularly full-time members, had to shoulder the rest of the overheads all by themselves. The quality of services provided by DC members for the public would be seriously affected if they were only provided with such limited resources. In addition, the expenses incurred in the operation of their offices had indeed added to their financial burden. SDC members in general considered that it would be necessary to increase the level of accountable allowance so to provide adequate support for DC members to deal with district affairs in a more efficient manner.

33. The Convenor suggested that SDC members should take the initiative to meet with the Administration regularly to discuss matters of concern to SDC such as the implementation of community building programmes. She supplemented that starting from 2001-02, the Administration would transfer the funds for organising district-based cultural and recreational activities to the Home Affairs Department for disbursement to DCs.

34. In response, Mr SO Bay-hung pointed out that DCs could only use the money in accordance with the approved schedule; re-allocation of the funding to new programmes proposed by DC members would be difficult. Meanwhile, he urged the Government to study the possibility of entrusting to DCs the functions of MCs in respect of district management. This could encourage greater DC members' participation in district affairs and strengthen their sense of commitment.

35. The Convenor shared SDC members' views and advised that a comprehensive review to further enhance the role and functions of DCs was being undertaken by the Home Affairs Bureau. The LegCo Panels on Home Affairs and Constitutional Affairs would follow up on the outcome upon completion of the review by 2001. She also informed SDC members of the Financial Secretary's announcement of inclusion of an additional \$100 million in the 2001-02 Estimates to allow an early start in implementing the

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recommendations of the review on the role and functions of DCs conducted by the Home Affairs Bureau. The Convenor further said that there would be stronger justification for a higher level of remuneration for DC members if the roles and functions of DCs were to be enhanced.

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36. Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan advised SDC members to conduct a formal meeting with the Director of Home Affairs to discuss the role and functions of DCs in detail. Their views could be recorded in the form of minutes and a copy could be forwarded to LegCo Members so to facilitate their discussion with the Administration in the future. SDC Chairman responded that a meeting between SDC members and the Director of Home Affairs had already been held recently. SDC members attending the meeting had reflected the same views to the Administration for consideration. He also asked LegCo Members to support their views and follow up the issue as appropriate.

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