



**BPF Submission to the Panel on Constitutional Affairs
of the Legislative Council
on the Role, Function and Constitution of the District Councils**

1. When the Municipal Councils were abolished, their functions were not devolved to the District Councils nor were they taken over by the Legislative Council. Their powers were mainly taken over by officials. Thus many areas of local governance were removed from participation by elected councillors.
2. District Councils should be an integral and functioning part of our governance. Members of each Council are directly elected in districts, each with a population of several hundred thousand. The Councils talk and advise but have little or no power to decide and to see that their decisions lead to executive action. Council meetings are many weeks apart. Broad and far-reaching policies affecting district affairs are generally decided at the central government level for implementation by government officials at a local level and may not reflect local wishes and aspirations and have little relevance to the situation on the ground.
3. It seems, too, although this may be only partly true, that District Councils do not feel empowered to bring the lack of facilities and shortcomings generally to the attention of the Government at the highest level, e.g. shortfalls in Tin Shui Wai. However, districts have a good range of recreational and cultural facilities but the administration and running of these facilities does not encourage the formation and development of strong locally based organizations. Existing organisations and associations are a kind of alternative social system running parallel to District Administration, subvented sometimes quite generously but not fostered by the local Council.
4. To create a greater sense of belonging and ownership of district facilities, the delegation of management responsibility to District Councils is strongly supported and should be implemented boldly and with determination. If it is done in a half hearted way, the proposals will fail!

[If there is any question of ability to manage, it may be of interest to the Panel that Yuen Long District has had a Town Hall Management Committee for very many years, locally based and operating effectively.]
5. Clean Hong Kong, street sweeping, rubbish collection and its workforce in the field, and community based health services, including promotion of healthy living, should be given direction and guidance from the Councils.



6. The management of sports grounds, swimming pools, concert halls, etc. all should have a direct input from the District Councils on the way they are run for the benefit of the local community. Councils must have power to decide on priorities for usage and the local community must understand that their elected councilors make and have made these decisions.
7. The district concert halls, e.g. Kwai Tsing and Yuen Long, should come under the District Council, leaving the "national" facilities, the Cultural Centre and Town Halls, with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. If the local Council feels that Chinese opera and Canto-pop is what the people most want let them have it.
8. Under Council management, recreational facilities sports grounds and sports halls should foster the growth of local organisations and associations, e.g. swimming, athletics, music, dance and so forth.
9. The District Officer post should be renamed **District Manager** "District Officer" harks back to a colonial era and different responsibilities. The District Manager must be of sufficient seniority, general knowledge, experience and management skills to command respect from the, often, senior officials of departments working in the District and to bring them together as a management team. It is not essential for these District Managers to be members of the AO grade. (In any case there may not be sufficient senior officers [18] **with necessary experience** in the AO grade to become District Managers.) Since society has changed so much in recent years, it may be better to think of the creation of a new special grade and recruitment and appointment of District Managers. These managers would exercise the Council's executive responsibilities and would inspire and invigorate the system and develop the role and authority of the Councils.
10. As a step towards greater democracy, we propose replacement of appointed members by **ex-officio members who would not have voting rights**. These would be the chairpersons of the local Chamber of Commerce, Industrial association, Sports association, Arts committee, Schools liaison committee, etc. The presence of these members would strengthen the work of the Councils, enhance the status of the local organizations and lead to greater cohesiveness in the community.

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