

**For information on
20 December 2005**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
PANEL ON PLANNING, LANDS AND WORKS**

**Transfer of Squatter Control Function from Housing Department
to Lands Department and Strengthening of
Land Control and Lease Enforcement Work**

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the Administration's plans to transfer the Squatter Control and Clearance (SC) function of Housing Department (HD) to Lands Department (LandsD), and to strengthen LandsD's capability for land control and lease enforcement work.

Background

2. Historically, HD has been acting as Government's agent for squatter control and squatter clearance functions while LandsD is the land authority responsible for land control for the whole territory. In 2000, the Committee on the Review of Institutional Framework for Public Housing recommended, inter alia, that the squatter control and clearance functions undertaken by HD on behalf of the Government should be transferred to LandsD so that HD could divest its non-core business. By putting squatter control and land control under one authority, it would also simplify the work flow of Government's land control function and enhance overall efficiency. The transfer was to take place in two phases to facilitate a smooth process. Under the first phase, SC work in the urban areas and the Islands District was transferred to LandsD in April 2002. With the experience gained in Phase I, the coordination between the squatter control teams and the District Lands Offices of LandsD has improved. It is therefore proposed that the second and final phase of the transfer should proceed as scheduled on 1 April 2006.

3. As part of the process of reengineering and reorganisation, the Administration has also decided to take the opportunity to strengthen land control and lease enforcement work in LandsD. We have therefore formulated a way forward to streamline and rationalise service delivery and maximise the use of existing resources in implementing the transfer arrangements.

Proposal

4. We propose to use part of the resources transferred from HD to set up a Central Action Team (CAT) in LandsD to take over the SC function and assimilate it into land control work through revamping the existing land control operations. The remaining resources will be deployed to reinforce the manpower of the District Land Offices for lease enforcement work.

Justification

5. We are conscious of the pressing need to step up land control and lease enforcement operations in LandsD, the effectiveness of which has been hitherto affected by shortage in resources. This will entail more frequent inspections throughout the territory to detect cases of irregularities such as illegal use/occupation of government land, unauthorized building works in New Territories Exempted Houses or private agricultural lots and misuse of buildings/leased land which are a labour intensive task. Higher detection rates of breaches will in turn call for greater efforts in enforcement, prosecution or regularization. To meet the expected high volume of workload, LandsD will need more resources to augment its capability in land control and lease enforcement.

6. The proposed transfer of the SC function and resources offers an opportunity for LandsD to rationalize its organizational structure and staff deployment and to focus its attention on areas of high demand. By revamping the existing operation to assimilate SC function into land control activities through the setting up of CAT, the proposed CAT will tackle all work related to land control, including squatter control, of the whole territory. We expect that the effectiveness and efficiency of land control

work would be strengthened in a number of areas, including shorter response time to complaints and referrals by members of the public, a more vigorous patrol programme, more effective actions against illegal use or occupation of government land, etc.

7. Furthermore, by strengthening the manpower provision of the District Land Offices, the Department will be able to better discharge their duties relating to illegal structures on New Territories Exempted House or misuse of buildings/leased land.

Financial Implications

8. The proposal does not involve any extra funding for Government. The proposed changes in organisation and establishment in LandsD will be effected by the transfer of posts from HD and as well as through internal redeployment.

Staff Consultation

9. LandsD and HD are proceeding with consultation with their staff regarding the transfer arrangements in December 2005, and after collecting staff feedback, specific details of the proposal will be fine-tuned as appropriate.

Way Forward

10. The transfer of posts concerned from HD to LandsD and the related financial provision will be reflected in the context of the 2006-07 Estimates of Expenditure. We will review the effectiveness of the new arrangement after implementation.

Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau
Lands Department
December 2005