

**Extract from draft minutes of meeting on
Panel on Home Affairs on 13 April 2007**

X X X X X X X X X X

Action

V. Policy on long-term sports development
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1493/06-07(01) to (04)]

Briefing by the Administration

21. Permanent Secretary for Home Affairs (PSHA) briefed members on the salient points of the Administration's papers on "Sports development in Hong Kong" and the "Redevelopment of the Hong Kong Sports Institute (HKSI)". PSHA said that the Administration planned to submit the funding application for the preparatory works and tender documentation of the HKSI redevelopment proposal (the Project) at an estimated cost of around \$50 million to the Public Works Subcommittee (PWSC) for consideration at its meeting on 23 May 2007.

Sports development in Hong Kong
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1493/06-07(01)]

Direct financial support to athletes

22. Members in general expressed support for the proposed key initiatives, including the provision of additional funding of \$40 million annually from 2007-2008 onwards to enhance the support to elite athletes. Mr James TIEN further indicated the support of the Liberal Party for these proposed key initiatives.

23. Referring to paragraph 10 of the Administration's paper, Dr Fernando CHEUNG requested the Administration to account for the big difference between the maximum amount (\$21,250 - \$32,500) and the average amount (\$5,400) of monthly subsidy provided to Elite A athletes and to disabled Elite A athletes respectively under the proposed Elite Athletes Grants. He considered that the Administration should take into account the difficulties that had to be overcome by disabled athletes and improve the financial support for them. Referring to recent media reports that Mr YIP Siu-hong, an outstanding disabled athlete, had to pay personally for all the expenses to participate in international competitions and that another outstanding disabled athlete was relying on CSSA for a living, Dr CHEUNG criticised the Administration for failing to provide adequate financial support to outstanding disabled athletes.

Action

24. PSHA stated that able-bodied athletes might need to make more sacrifices, such as giving up opportunities for career development, in order to concentrate on sports training. This had to be taken into account in the provision of financial support. She added that the Hong Kong Paralympians Fund, a separate fund in the amount of \$50 million was providing financial support to cover the basic living expenses of disabled athletes and to support them upon their retirement.

25. Referring to Annexes A and B to the Administration's paper, Miss TAM Heung-man and Dr Fernando CHEUNG were of the view that financial support should also be provided to potential athletes. PSHA explained that as potential athletes were not full-time athletes, and many of them were pursuing their studies with family support or had a job, their need for subsidies to cover living expenses was smaller.

26. Mr CHEUNG Hok-ming asked whether the Administration had compared the amounts of monthly stipends for Hong Kong's elite athletes with those in Asian countries or neighbouring places, and whether the criteria for qualifying to be an elite athlete in Hong Kong were too stringent.

27. PSHA responded that it was difficult for her to comment whether the criteria for qualifying to be an elite athlete in Hong Kong as adopted by HKSI were stringent or not. She said that an athlete ranked the fourth to the eighth at Asian Games or world championships of individual sports, not necessarily winning gold, silver or bronze medals at these major games, would be qualified as an Elite B athlete. In other words, the criteria had allowed flexibility taking into account the fact that Hong Kong's athletes would not always be able to attain the highest level of excellence at international competitions. PSHA further pointed out that it was also difficult to compare the amounts of monthly stipends for Hong Kong's elite athletes with those in neighbouring places, such as the Mainland, because of the differences in the circumstances and systems of elite training. She further invited members to note that the current proposal on the direct financial support to elite athletes had the support of key stakeholders in the sports community including the Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China (SF&OC) and Hong Kong Elite Athletes Association as shown in their support letters sent to the Panel.

Education opportunities and career development

28. Dr Fernando CHEUNG and Miss CHAN Yuen-han urged the Administration to work out details of the retirement package for elite athletes as soon as possible. Miss CHAN considered that the Administration should seek to provide athletes with a financially stable environment to undergo training and compete in major games.

29. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that the Administration should also assist elite athletes in the pursuit of a decent living when they retired from

Action

their careers in sports. Referring to paragraphs 12 to 13 of the Administration's paper, Mr CHEUNG said that the Administration failed to address the major concern of junior athletes about their studies being adversely affected by the demanding sports training which they had to undergo in order to be local top athletes. Mr CHEUNG suggested that the Administration should consider providing university places for elite athletes to pursue further studies through commercial sponsorship or public funding.

Admin

30. In response, PSHA explained that the Administration was working out a comprehensive athlete retirement scheme in collaboration with SF&OC, and following up with the eight University Grants Committee-funded institutions on measures to facilitate retired athletes to pursue higher education in Hong Kong. Details of the retirement package would be submitted to the Panel for discussion when available. She also informed members that some corporations had expressed willingness to support retired athletes who wished to pursue a working career after retirement, by way of providing scholarship or on-the-job training. The Administration would draw up an appropriate scheme for the participation of these corporations.

31. PSHA further said that HKSI had made available education support service to athletes who were students. However, as pointed out by some head coaches, the intense competition in sports had made it difficult for elite athletes to pursue regular studies and sports training at the same time, and it was necessary for elite athletes to give up their regular studies in order to achieve outstanding performance. The Administration considered it more important to put in place a comprehensive retirement scheme to enhance the well being of elite athletes and was planning to deploy about \$7 million to support such a scheme.

32. Mr Albert CHAN suggested that the Administration should learn from overseas experience in building up a strong sporting culture and support for athletes. For example, some overseas universities would have the practice of giving favourable treatment to outstanding athletes in admission. He further suggested that the Administration should invite corporations to take part in providing professional training to potential junior athletes, which would be useful to these athletes when looking for employment upon retirement from their career in sports.

33. Chairman of HKSI said that renowned athletes in some overseas countries did have very high publicity value and such business opportunities could also be explored for local top athletes. He pointed out that some corporations in Hong Kong had also shown enthusiastic support to sports development by way of sponsorship and donations, e.g. the first Table Tennis Academy sponsored by Hang Seng Bank to be set up soon. Some more similar projects were also being explored. Mr Albert CHAN reiterated that corporations should also show support by way of offering employment opportunities to elite athletes when they retired from their career in sports.

Action

Award scheme for elite athletes

34. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that corporations usually only sponsored popular sports and other sports such as windsurfing had not attracted much commercial sponsorship. He suggested that a trust fund should be set up to provide grants to elite athletes who had achieved excellent results in international competitions (e.g. the Asian Games) in recognition of their efforts and achievements.

35. Chief Executive of HKSI (CE/HKSI) said that HKSI had put in place award schemes for elite athletes, e.g. an elite athlete who won a gold medal in the Asian Games would be awarded \$250,000 and those who won silver or bronze medals would also be awarded. Mr CHEUNG considered that the said amount was too little. PSHA explained that it was not desirable from the point of view of public finance management to use public money to provide monetary prizes. Mr CHEUNG, however, said that he did not see anything wrong in doing so. PSHA noted Mr CHEUNG's views and agreed to explore other sources to provide such grants.

Admin

Management and operation of Nationals Sports Associations (NSAs)

36. Mr Albert CHAN said that despite the availability of many high standard sports venues, the sports development in Hong Kong had been hindered by the various malpractices in the management and operation of NSAs. While indicating support for enhancing funding allocation to support elite athletes, Mr CHAN expressed worry that it would benefit the senior management personnel of NSAs, instead of elite athletes. He criticised that the remuneration rate of senior management personnel of some major NSAs was unreasonably high, and there was a lack of transparency and accountability in the management and operation of NSAs, including the selection of athletes for participation in international sports competitions. He considered that the Administration should reform the management and operation of NSAs.

Promoting sports for all

37. Miss CHAN Yuen-han said that there were general complaints about inadequate supply of community sports venues during high-demand periods. She considered that the Administration should resolve the problem in order to promote interest of the public in participation in sports.

38. PSHA responded that to meet the community's needs for recreation facilities, the Administration had taken measures to expedite the delivery of leisure and cultural services projects, and had been updating the Subcommittee to Follow up the Outstanding Leisure and Cultural Services Projects of the Former Municipal Councils on the progress of these works projects. Ms Emily LAU was of the view that the Administration should also take active measures

Action

to cultivate the younger generation's interest in sport particularly students in primary and secondary schools, and to facilitate schools in utilising sports facilities of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) during non-busy hours.

Redevelopment of HKSI

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1493/06-07(02)]

39. In response to Dr Fernando CHEUNG's enquiry, PSHA assured members that all the sports and supporting facilities at the redeveloped HKSI would comply with the latest requirements of the draft revised Design Manual: Barrier Free Access 1997. She further invited members to note that Hong Kong Paralympic Committee and Sports Association for the Physically Disabled and Hong Kong Sports Association for the Mentally Handicapped had sent letters to the Panel expressing support for the Project respectively. Professor Patrick LAU suggested that an architectural design open competition could be organised for the Project.

40. Miss TAM Heung-man said that she supported the Project in principle. Referring to Annex I to the Administration's paper, Miss TAM asked why only four of the 15 hard ground courts would be refurbished and whether the remaining 11 courts would be retained. CE/HKSI responded that a project was under way to invite non-profit making sports organisations to operate a tennis training base at the existing Kowloon Tsai Park Tennis Courts. Fewer tennis courts were therefore planned for at the redeveloped HKSI. However, the provision of six outdoor courts (consisting of four hard surface and two new clay courts) and an indoor court would be able to meet adequately the athletes' training needs.

41. Miss TAM further asked what would be done to meet the training needs of elite athletes during the redevelopment of HKSI until the completion of the Project in the third quarter of 2011. PSHA responded that since January 2007, HKSI had been temporarily relocated to YMCA's Wu Kwai Sha Youth Village (WKSJV). According to the preferred development option, HKSI would remain in its current temporary main base in WKSJV and continue using the venues of LCSD for elite training until completion of phase one works, estimated to be the third quarter of 2009. HKSI would then move back to Fo Tan venue for the resumption of normal operation. Phase two works would proceed in parallel with the normal operation of HKSI, and elite training facilities would by and large remain intact. PSHA added that new and upgraded facilities including a new 50-metre swimming pool of international standard and bowling facilities would be provided at the redeveloped HKSI.

Subsidence problems in the main stable compound of the Sha Tin Racecourse

42. Mr James TIEN and Mr Tommy CHEUNG declared interests as the Voting Members of the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC). The Chairman declared interests as a Member of HKJC.

Action

43. Chairman/HKSI declared that he was also the Voting Member of HKJC. Ms Emily LAU expressed concern whether there might be a conflict of interest, given that Chairman/HKSI, being the Voting Member of HKJC, was chairing the HKSI Redevelopment Project Steering Committee responsible for taking forward the planning of the Project. She expected that the Committee would need to discuss issues arising from the subsidence problems in the main stable compound of the Sha Tin Racecourse and consider the possibility of allowing HKJC to retain the new stables and training arenas after the Equestrian Events. She said that she would raise the issue with the Administration after the meeting.

44. Ms Emily LAU also expressed concern about whether the subsidence problems had implications on the timetable for the redevelopment of HKSI. PSHA clarified that the subsidence problems had only prompted HKJC to request for retaining the use of the Olympic stables for decanting horses during replacement of the stable blocks. She said that the subsidence problems had no implications on the timetable for the redevelopment of HKSI because, as shown in the master layout plan, the scope of the Project did not include the site on which the Olympic stables were built. She added that it had been concluded that, with the proposed new and additional facilities provided at the redeveloped HKSI, it would be possible to meet the needs of HKSI in full in the foreseeable future without recovering the site in question.

45. On the redevelopment timetable, Chairman of HKSI said that the original plan was that the HKJC's reinstatement works at the site in question would be completed by December 2008 and HKSI could then move back to its Fo Tan site. Subsequent to discussions between the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) and HKSI, it was agreed to make full use of the intervening period (i.e. between the present and end 2008) to undertake all pre-construction preparatory work in order to lose no time in providing new or additional training facilities for elite athletes. Under the revised plan, on site construction (i.e. phase I works) might commence immediately upon completion of the Equestrian Events. HKSI would move back to Fo Tan venue and resume normal operation after the completion of phase one works in the third quarter of 2009. Phase two works would proceed in parallel with the normal HKSI operations so that elite training facilities would by and large remain intact. He further informed members that the new 11-storey multi-purpose building would be located at the site of the existing cycle velodrome of HKSI, which would be demolished as a new indoor all-weather velodrome would be built in Tseung Kwan O. Thus, the construction of the new 11-storey building would not involve the use of any other site.

46. PSHA supplemented that as the existing outdoor velodrome in HKSI could not meet the requirements for elite training, the Administration supported the provision of an indoor all-weather velodrome of international standard for the purpose of training and competitions. The Administration had identified a suitable site in Tseung Kwan O for developing an indoor velodrome adjacent to

Action

a town park, and this had the full support of the Hong Kong Cycling Association and Sai Kung District Council.

47. In response to Professor Patrick LAU's enquiry, PSHA said that HKJC had initially estimated that it would take about seven to 10 years for replacing all stable blocks in the Sha Tin Racecourse. Professor LAU considered that if HKJC was allowed to use the site for such a long period of time, HKJC should be requested to provide scholarships to support elite athletes' studies. PSHA said that HKJC was amongst the corporations which had expressed willingness to support retired athletes by way of providing scholarship or on-the-job training. In addition, HKJC Charities Trust made considerable contributions to sports development each year, e.g. \$100 million had been donated by HKJC for the construction of the Football Academy in Tseung Kwan O.

48. Mr James TIEN agreed that the Administration could explore the possibility of retaining the new stables and training arenas by HKJC after the Equestrian Events in order to avoid wastage and address the subsidence problems. He, however, considered that the Administration should clarify with HKJC the longest possible period of time it might take to resolve the subsidence problems and finish replacing all stable blocks in the Sha Tin Racecourse. If it was estimated to be over 10 years, he considered that the Administration should assess whether this would have any adverse impact on sports development. He said that to facilitate members' deliberation, a concrete timetable on the replacement works should be provided to members. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed concurrence with Mr TIEN's views.

49. PSHA said that as HKJC was still in the course of conducting study on the subsidence problems, it had yet to provide a concrete timetable in this regard. She reiterated that the Administration and HKSI considered that, with the proposed new and additional facilities provided at the redeveloped HKSI, it would be possible to meet in full the needs of HKSI and elite sports training in the foreseeable future, and there was no urgent need to recover the site in question for development.

Submission of the Project to PWSC

50. The Chairman sought members' views on whether they supported the submission of the funding application for the preparatory works of the Project to PWSC for consideration at its meeting on 23 May 2007. Dr Fernando CHEUNG and Ms Emily LAU said that the Panel should receive views from the public on the proposed key initiatives on promoting sports development and the redevelopment of HKSI before further consideration of the issue. After discussion, members agreed that the Panel should receive views from the public at its next regular meeting scheduled for 11 May 2007. Members further agreed that the item on the Administration's follow-up action on the recommendations in paragraphs 9, 13, 15, and 18 of the concluding observations on the Second Report of HKSAR in the light of ICCPR originally

Action

included for discussion at the meeting on 11 May 2007 would be deferred.

Clerk

51. Dr Fernando CHEUNG further suggested that representatives from EOC should be invited to the meeting on 11 May 2007 to give views on whether the proposed Elite Athletes Grants would be in compliance with provisions of the Disability Discrimination Ordinance. The Clerk was requested to follow up.

X X X X X X X X X X