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Panel on Home Affairs

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 9 April 2010**

Support to Mutual Aid Committees

Purpose

This paper gives an account of discussions held by Legislative Council (LegCo) Members on support to Mutual Aid Committees (MACs).

Background

2. MACs are voluntary bodies formed by the residents of a building. These committees were promoted initially in private multi-storey buildings, and extended to public housing estates, industrial buildings, temporary housing and squatter areas. By 31 December 2009, there were 2 714 MACs throughout the territory.

3. The primary aims of a MAC are to advocate a sense of friendliness, mutual help and responsibility among members, and to promote better security, a better environment and, generally, more effective management within a building. These committees also provide a channel for two-way communication between the Government and the residents on matters affecting the well-being of individuals and the community. They also serve as a focal point for residents to participate in community activities.

Support to MACs

4. As an integral part of the Administration's effort to promote public participation in community affairs, the Home Affairs Department (HAD) has been encouraging residents of buildings to form MACs with the objectives of enhancing the spirit of mutual assistance in the neighbourhood and fostering a sense of belonging to the community.

5. To facilitate the operation of MACs, HAD has issued two sets of Model Rules (viz. one for MAC in a Public Housing Estate and the other for MAC in a Private Building) to give general guidance to MACs in conducting their business. Liaison Officers and Community Organisers of District Offices (DOs) will visit MACs, attend their meetings, and render advice on MAC affairs where necessary. HAD also provides an accountable subsidy each quarter for MACs to meet basic daily expenses for their operation. The major expenditure items funded by the subsidy include electricity charges, telephone bills, office equipment and stationery. The current limit of the quarterly subsidy is \$1,000. To encourage the formation of MACs, an additional allowance up to \$1,000 is provided to new MACs for setting up offices.

Deliberations of LegCo Members

Home Affairs Panel

6. During the deliberation on the Administration's proposal for the provision of an honorarium to village representatives (VRs) at the meeting of the Panel on 11 December 2009, some members considered that the functions of MACs in promoting management of private buildings/public housing estates, as well as facilitating the communication between the Government and residents on matters affecting the well-being of individuals and the community, were akin to those of VRs. These members suggested that the Administration should extend the arrangement for VRs to the Chairmen of MACs, so as to give proper recognition to their contribution. A member expressed concern that the current level of subsidy was grossly inadequate, and urged the Administration to enhance support for MACs.

7. The Administration explained that VR elections were conducted by the Government under the supervision of the Electoral Affairs Commission according to the Village Representative Election Ordinance (Cap.576), and should be distinct from the arrangements of forming MAC. Moreover, in representing their constituencies, VRs often needed to liaise with different parties on matters affecting the villages and well being of their villages. They also served as critical points for the whole village in times of natural disasters and other emergencies. Given the different electoral basis, the method of elections, the nature/scope of their duties, issues relating to enhancement of support to MACs and their role in the promotion of social harmony should be considered separately.

Council meetings

8. At the Council meetings on 28 November 2007 and 5 December 2007, Members raised questions on the operation of and subsidies for MACs, including measures taken by HAD to ensure MACs' compliance with the guidelines in the Model Rules and to rectify operational problems encountered by MACs, assistance provided to MACs, and the mechanism for adjusting the rate of subsidy to MACs.

9. On the operation of MACs, the Administration advised that DOs would visit MACs in their respective districts and attend their meetings to maintain a close contact so as to facilitate their smooth operation and enhance community participation. If DOs came across cases in which an MAC was unable to comply fully with the Model Rules in its operation, the DO concerned would take the initiative to liaise with the MAC to understand the problem it faced and offer advice and assistance. If it came to their notice that an MAC had not convened meetings for a prolonged period of time, they would discuss with the chairman and members of the MAC concerned to find out the reasons behind, and proactively offer assistance to the MAC in convening meetings as soon as possible. If an MAC encountered problems or difficulties in its operation, the DO concerned would offer appropriate assistance having regard to the circumstances of individual cases.

10. As regards the adjustment mechanism on the quarterly subsidy provided to MACs, the Administration explained that HAD would review regularly the limit of the subsidy having regard to the relevant consumer price index to ensure that its purchasing power would not diminish as a result of inflation. Apart from the subsidy, other forms of assistance, such as concessionary or nominal rent for MACs to hire office premises in public housing estates, were available. Moreover, starting from 2008, the Government had enhanced the functions of District Councils, including the initiative to provide more resources to the 18 District Councils. District organisations, including MACs, could apply for these additional resources to organise community building and recreational activities for enhancing the spirit of good neighbourhood.

11. At the Council meeting on 30 May 2001, Members passed a motion moved by Hon TAM Yiu-chung on "Assisting owners' corporations and MACs to operate". The motion urged the Government to implement the following measures with a view to improving building management and enabling the public to live and work in contentment -

- (a) strengthen the support services for owners' corporations (OCs) and MACs;
- (b) provide more professional training to members of OCs and MACs;
- (c) examine the provision of more protection for such members, so as to enhance more active participation by residents in building management; and
- (d) increase the overall manpower of the District Building Management Liaison Teams in various districts and upgrade their professional standard, so that the teams could actively participate in solving the problems faced by OCs and MACs.

Latest development

12. The Administration will brief the Panel on the latest measures for enhancing the support to MACs at the meeting on 9 April 2010.

Relevant papers

13. A list of relevant papers with their hyperlinks at the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
31 March 2010

Panel on Home Affairs

Relevant documents on Support to Mutual Aid Committees

Committee	Date of Meeting	Minutes/Paper/ Council question	LC Paper No.
Council meeting	30.5.2001	Progress report provided by the Administration arising from the motion debate on "Assisting owners' corporations and mutual aid committees to operate" at the Council meeting on 30 May 2001	CB(3)924/00-01
	28.11.2007	Written question raised by Hon LAU Kong-wah on subsidies for mutual aid committees in public housing estates	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/coinmtg/hansard/cm1128-translate-e.pdf (page 120)
	5.12.2007	Written question raised by Hon LEE Wing-tat on operation of mutual aid committees	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/coinmtg/hansard/cm1205-translate-e.pdf (page 78)
Panel on Home Affairs	11.12.2009	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)859/09-10 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ha/minutes/ha20091211.pdf

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