

For discussion on 11 December 2009

Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs

Honorarium for Village Representatives

Purpose

This paper seeks Members' comments on the proposal to grant an honorarium to Village Representatives (VRs) in recognition of their services to the rural community.

Background

2. The Village Representative Election Ordinance (Cap. 576) (VREO), enacted in 2003, provides for the election of Indigenous Inhabitant Representatives (IIRs) for Indigenous Villages¹ and Composite Indigenous Villages² and Resident Representatives (RRs) for Existing Villages³. The IIR is to reflect views on the affairs of the village on behalf of the indigenous inhabitants of the village, and to deal with all affairs relating to the lawful traditional rights and interests, and the traditional way of life, of those indigenous inhabitants. The RR is to reflect views on the affairs of the village on behalf of the residents of the village. An RR shall not deal with any affair relating to the lawful traditional rights and interests of indigenous inhabitants.

3. All VRs are returned by public elections, and VR elections are governed by the VREO under the supervision of the Electoral Affairs Commission. The first village ordinary election under the VREO was held in 2003. The next one will be held in 2011. At present, there are

¹ Indigenous Villages are those already in existence in 1898. They are listed in Schedule 2 to the VREO. There are 586 Indigenous Villages. The number of IIRs of each of the Indigenous Villages (which ranges from one to five) is stipulated in the VREO.

² Composite Indigenous Villages are listed in Schedule 3 to the VREO. These villages, which are also Indigenous Villages, are called Composite Indigenous Villages because their indigenous inhabitants jointly elect their IIRs. There are 15 Composite Indigenous Villages and each may elect one IIR.

³ Existing Villages are listed in Schedule 1 to the VREO. They are villages that physically exist in the New Territories. An Existing Village may be an indigenous village or a non-indigenous village. There are 693 Existing Villages and each may elect one RR.

1 480 VR seats including 787 IIRs and 693 RRs. Two additional IIR and RR seats each will be established in 2011. Registered electors for IIR election and RR election are some 85 900 and 84 600 respectively.

The Proposal

4. Carrying out VR duties demands time and effort. The VRs represent their constituencies, and often need to liaise with different parties on matters affecting the villages and the well being of their villagers. To discharge their duties effectively, VRs have to attend meetings with various parties (including the relevant government bureaux and departments), and maintain close liaison with and organise activities for the villagers. They also serve as critical contact points for the whole village in time of natural disasters (such as flooding) and other emergencies. Though the people VRs represent are fewer in number and the issues tend to be more local, the nature of the work of VRs is not much different from that of District Council (DC) Members.

5. We propose to grant an honorarium of \$2,000 per quarter to each VR. As a form of support for VRs, and considering the size of their constituencies, the scope of work, and their workload, we believe that the proposed amount is at the right level.

6. The proposed honorarium is not an allowance for reimbursing the expenses incurred when discharging the duties of a VR. It is intended to be a form of recognition. Given its nature, it should be granted on a non-accountable basis to the VRs. This will also save administrative costs of processing claims. The proposed amount of \$2,000 per quarter does not justify an elaborate claim procedure.

7. All VRs returned from the village ordinary election will be entitled to the honorarium from the first day of their four-year term so long as they are holding their offices. For VRs elected in village by-elections, they will start their entitlement from the beginning of the next quarter after the date on which the result of the by-election is declared. We will make payment direct to the VRs on the last working day of the quarters ending 30 June, 30 September, 31 December and 31 March. We have consulted the Heung Yee Kuk (HYK) on the proposed amount of the honorarium and HYK is agreeable.

8. The current arrangement is that DC members with concurrent membership in the Executive Council and/or LegCo would be eligible for only two-thirds of the amount of honorarium and miscellaneous expenses

allowance for DC members. Given its nature and the small amount of the proposed honorarium for VRs, we propose that VRs with concurrent membership in the Executive Council, LegCo and/or DC would be eligible for the full amount of the VR honorarium.

9. Given its small amount, we propose that the honorarium should be adjusted only once every four years after each village ordinary election, by drawing reference to the movement of Consumer Price Index (A). The first review will take place in 2015 and the adjusted rate will be payable as from the second quarter of 2015.

Way Forward

10. Implementation of the proposal will incur a recurrent cost of \$11.872 million per annum from 2010-11 onwards. Subject to Members' views, we plan to seek the approval of Finance Committee for the proposal in early 2010.

Advice Sought

11. Members are invited to comment on the above proposal.

Home Affairs Department
December 2009