

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON
CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS**

UPDATE ON REVIEW OF DISTRICT ORGANISATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This is to update Members on the progress of the review of district organisations since the last Panel meeting of 20 July 1998.

BACKGROUND

2. In LC Paper No. CB(2)65/98-99(02), Members were briefed on the progress of the public consultation on the review up to 17 July 1998.

3. The two-month public consultation period ended on 31 July 1998. During the consultation period, we received a total of over 4900 submissions, comprising some 710 written submissions from individuals and organisations, numerous types of submissions which were identical in one way or another (over 2560 copies in total), and some 1660 completed questionnaires.

4. A "Compendium of Public Views" (the Compendium) was published on 8 September 1998. The Compendium consists of two parts. Part I contains copies of all written submissions received together with samples of identical pre-printed submissions and questionnaires. Part II contains relevant extracts of the minutes of meetings of the Legislative Council, Provisional Urban Council, Provisional Regional Council, Provisional District Boards and Area Committees. A set of the Compendium was forwarded to each LegCo Member for reference on 9 September.

PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE COLLECTED VIEWS

5. We have studied all the submissions received during the consultation period and the relevant minutes of meetings of the various representative institutions. Their views are summarized below.

Written Submissions

6. Over 700 written submissions were received from individuals and organisations. Some were written by professionals and experts from the concerned sectors and contained very useful information and suggestions. Many other submissions merely stated their preferred option without giving any explanations. The views of the submissions are briefly summarized as follows-

- (a) over half of the submissions agreed that Government should assume direct responsibility for food safety and environmental hygiene. These included submissions from the medical sector, the business and commercial associations, and the staff unions of the two Municipal Services Departments;
- (b) of those respondents who commented on the Municipal Councils' financing arrangement, there was clear majority support for the proposal to require the Municipal Councils' expenditure to be subject to the LegCo's approval;
- (c) the majority supported retaining the 18 District Boards, expanding their role and increasing the resources available to them;
- (d) views on the future of the Municipal Councils were diverse. Those who supported dissolving the Municipal Councils and transferring their functions to government departments or other agencies, were roughly the same as those who supported the amalgamation of the two Municipal Councils into one. Of the latter group, there were divergent views on the functions of the merged council. Some suggested the merged council should take up all food safety functions in addition to the existing functions of the Municipal Councils, while some suggested that food safety functions should revert to government;
- (e) a small number of submissions preferred gradual change, beginning with a merger of the Municipal Councils into one council, with a view to further streamlining the two tiers of district organisations into one tier in due course;
- (f) only a small proportion of the submissions supported the other two options proposed in the consultation document, i.e. merging the two Municipal Councils and all District Boards into several regional bodies or maintaining the existing structure but improving co-ordination. The Heung Yee Kuk, a number of Rural Committees and village representatives favoured maintaining the status quo, particularly in respect of the two Municipal Councils;
- (g) the arts and sports community in general were discontented about the fragmentation of responsibilities, lack of effective co-ordination in the arts and sports fields, and ineffective distribution of resources. A number of them expressed dissatisfaction over the Municipal Councils' policies on venue management and subventing arts and sports

organisations, etc.; and

- (h) there was no clear indication one way or the other for abolishing or retaining some appointed and ex-officio seats^[1] in district organisations. Views on the appropriate population size of District Board constituencies were also diverse.

Numerous Types of Identical Submissions

7. Of the numerous types of submissions which were identical in one way or another (over 2560 copies in total), a vast majority (over 90%) supported maintaining the status quo. The rest indicated preference for merging the Municipal Councils (7%) or dissolving the two Municipal Councils (2%).

Questionnaires

8. The 1660 completed questionnaires were collected at the seven public forums on the review organised by the Home Affairs Department, or submitted through the District Offices and a few organisations. The majority of the respondents supported the proposal for the Administration to assume direct responsibility for food safety and environmental hygiene, while views on the future structure of district organisations were diverse.

Views of Provisional Municipal Council Members

9. The two Provisional Municipal Councils each passed a motion proposing that there should be one Municipal Council and one Municipal Services Department to provide municipal services in Hong Kong, with food safety and environmental hygiene being monitored by this Municipal Council. Nevertheless, there was a small number of Provisional Municipal Council members who opposed the idea of having one merged municipal council. They suggested that the two tiers of district organisations should be streamlined into one tier.

Views of Provisional District Board Members

10. Over half of the Provisional District Board members who commented on the proposal for the Administration to assume direct responsibility for food safety and environmental hygiene supported the proposal. A small number of the members suggested that government should assume responsibility for food safety while a combined Municipal Council should be responsible for environmental hygiene.

^[1] The Chairmen of the 27 Rural Committees served as “ex-officio members” of the District Boards in the New Territories prior to 1997.

11. The majority supported retaining the 18 District Boards and expanding their role in district affairs.

Consultation Report

12. The views and comments received during the consultation have been useful in assisting the Administration to formulate recommendations for the reform of district organisations and their functions. We are preparing a report on the consultation which will be issued in October.

THE WAY FORWARD

13. The public support for the Administration to assume direct responsibility for food safety and environmental hygiene is confirmed by the results of a number of independent public opinion surveys conducted by the media and universities with an approval rate ranging from some 50% to over 60%^[2]. To take matters forward, we have commissioned a Consultancy Study on Food Safety and Environmental Services, with a view to improving leadership, efficiency, policy formulation and co-ordination in food and environmental hygiene. The consultant has had wide-ranging consultations with relevant government officials, public health experts, academics in community medicine, and the medical sector. He is expected to recommend an organizational structure for delivering these services which will-

- (a) **provide strong and clear leadership** in the co-ordination and direction on food safety and environmental hygiene matters;
- (b) **ensure efficient coordination and prompt response** to food safety crises and other emergency situations; and
- (c) **facilitate overall co-ordination** over waste management and other environmental issues.

14. In view of the concern expressed by the arts and sports community over the problems of fragmentation of responsibilities and resources in these areas, we are formulating proposals to address the problems. Further views from members of the arts and sports community will be sought before the recommendations are finalised.

15. In response to the public support for the District Boards, we are considering a number of proposals to enhance the role, resources and

^[2] See for example Ming Pao (2 June 1998), Apple Daily (2 June 1988), Oriental Daily News (3 June 1998), results of opinion surveys undertaken by the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong reported in Apple Daily (4 June 1998 and 27 June 1998), Public Opinion Programme Express” released by Social Sciences Research Centre, University of Hong Kong (11 August 1998).

composition of the District Boards. The proposals will be announced in the consultation report to be issued in October 1998.

Constitutional Affairs Bureau
17 September 1998

[legco panel]