

For discussion on
19 June 2000

Paper for the Legislative Council Panel on Constitutional Affairs Counting Arrangements for the 2000 Legislative Council Elections

Purpose

This paper sets out the broad counting arrangements for the 2000 Legislative Council (LegCo) general election and the Election Committee subsector elections.

Background

2. On 15 May, Members were informed of the thinking of the Electoral Affairs Commission at that time on the broad counting arrangements for the 2000 LegCo elections (a copy of the paper at the Annex). In the paper, we informed Members that the Registration and Electoral Office intended to conduct a mock counting session to test the proposed arrangements.

3. Having conducted a mock counting session in early June, we are now in a position to provide more information to Members on the counting arrangements for the LegCo elections.

Subsector Elections

4. Each registered subsector voter (and authorized representative) will be assigned to a designated polling station on the basis of his registered residential address. In other words, subject to the geographical distribution of registered voters, each polling station may serve more than one subsector for which elections are necessary. Therefore, each ballot box will have ballot papers of different subsectors. This arrangement is different from that adopted in the 1998 subsector elections, where a small number of polling stations were designated for each subsector and hence each ballot box contained ballot papers of one

subsector only. Under this new polling arrangement, we need to deal with an additional task of sorting ballot papers from each polling station by subsectors, and then verifying the respective ballot paper accounts, before the ballot papers are counted.

5. We have worked out administrative measures to ensure that after the ballot boxes arrive at the Central Counting Station, ballot papers for a particular subsector from each relevant polling station will be expeditiously sorted and delivered to the relevant subsector counting zones. Ballot papers will then be mixed before they are put into optical mark readers for counting.

6. We hope that we will be able to complete the count for the subsector elections by about 9 a.m. on the day following the polling day.

General Election

7. As pointed out in paragraph 10 of the paper at the Annex, with the use of five regional counting stations for the geographical constituencies, one additional task this year is to handle misplaced ballot papers. We will deploy an Assistant Returning Officer to carry misplaced ballot papers from each regional counting station to the Central Counting Station, and another from the opposite direction. We believe that the counts for either the geographical constituencies or the functional constituencies will not be held up by the transfer of misplaced ballot papers.

8. We intend to ask Returning Officers to determine the validity of questionable ballot papers as soon as the latter are brought to their attention. We plan to use counting machines in both the verification of ballot paper accounts and the counting of votes for candidates, and we are examining the detailed arrangements. We have in mind the aim to enhance throughput and efficiency, and to shorten counting time, when we design the counting processes.

9. We hope that we will be able to complete the count for the general election by about 11 a.m. on the day following the polling day.

Conclusion

10. Members are invited to note the counting arrangements for the 2000 LegCo elections.

Registration and Electoral Office
Constitutional Affairs Bureau
June 2000

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Paper for the Panel on Constitutional Affairs

Counting Arrangements for the 2000 Legislative Council Elections

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the present thinking of the Electoral Affairs Commission (EAC) on the broad counting arrangements, and a range of initiatives that it intends to adopt in the bid to speed up the counting process, for the 2000 Legislative Council (LegCo) elections.

Background

2. The second-term LegCo general election and the Election Committee subsector elections will be held on 10 September and 9 July 2000 respectively.

3. Following a public consultation in early 2000, the EAC has decided, for the general election, to set up one regional counting station for each of the 5 geographical constituencies (GCs) to count GC ballot papers, and one central counting station to count functional constituencies (FCs) and Election Committee (EC) ballot papers. For the subsector elections, one central counting station will be set up.

4. To give effect to these arrangements, the EAC has made the Electoral Affairs Commission (Electoral Procedures) (Legislative Council) (Amendment) Regulation 2000 (L.N. 65 of 2000). After examining these amendments, the Subcommittee on Subsidiary Legislation relating to the 2000 LegCo Election indicated general support.

5. In the course of examination, Members of the Subcommittee requested the Administration and the EAC to consider how to speed up the count as much as practicable. Members of the Subcommittee also requested for an estimation on the time required to complete the count. This paper responds to such requests.

Counting Stations

6. The EAC intends to designate the venues set out at the Annex as the regional counting stations for the GCs. For the FCs and the EC, the EAC intends to designate the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre as the central counting station.

7. Members may note that the proposed regional counting stations for the New Territories East and New Territories West GCs are located outside their respective boundaries. The EAC's priority consideration is to provide candidates and their agents with as much convenience as possible. Using this yardstick, the EAC has considered using the Yuen Wo Road Indoor Recreation Centre and the Tin Shui Wai Indoor Recreation Centre for the New Territories East and New Territories West GCs respectively. However, with an approximate floor area of only 1,400 m², the Yuen Wo Road Indoor Recreation Centre can hardly handle ballot boxes from 126 polling stations efficiently. Similarly, only about 1,600 m² floor area is available in the Tin Shui Wai Indoor Recreation Centre and is considered insufficient for 144 polling stations. In the absence of suitable venues in the localities concerned, the EAC has to have recourse to venues outside them. The venues presently proposed, namely Hall C of the Hong Kong International Trade and Exhibition Centre (2,500m²) and the Shek Kip Mei Park Indoor Games Hall (2,520m²), are more spacious. Each of the stations can accommodate more counting staff, and provide enough space for candidates, their agents, the public and the media to observe the count.

8. As Members of the Subcommittee have acknowledged, it is necessary for staff of the polling stations to first deliver the GC ballot boxes to the regional counting stations and then the ordinary FC ballot boxes to the central counting station. The present option has an additional merit in that the routes of transportation of ballot boxes will be more direct and hence more efficient.

Reception of Ballot Boxes

9. All the proposed regional counting stations have sufficiently large loading/unloading bays. We will set up more reception counters to receive ballot boxes delivered from polling stations.

Misplaced Papers

10. Compared with the arrangements in the 1998 LegCo elections, one additional task this year is to work out appropriate measures to handle misplaced papers (both ordinary FC papers misplaced in GC ballot boxes and vice versa) without holding up the count for either the GCs or the FCs.

11. The present arrangement is to open *all* ballot boxes as soon as they arrive at the counting stations. Once all the boxes are opened and all misplaced papers taken out, the ROs for the five GCs will each arrange for an Assistant Returning Officer (ARO) to carry the misplaced FC papers to the FC central counting station in the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, in

the company of relevant candidates and/or their agents if requested. The RO will telephone the FC central counting station in advance, informing it of the number of misplaced papers for respective FCs. Similarly, once all the FC and EC ballot boxes are opened and all misplaced GC papers removed, an ARO will carry the misplaced papers to the relevant GC counting stations, and the relevant ROs will be informed by telephone in advance.

Questionable Ballot Papers

12. An RO for a GC will determine questionable ballot papers *in batches as soon as they are brought to his attention*. This arrangement will be more efficient than determining *all* questionable papers at the end. With the use of the chop, the risk of inconsistency in determination will be reduced to a minimum. The number of questionable papers is also expected to be significantly reduced.

FC Counting Process

13. The process for counting FC ballot papers will be broadly the same as in 1998. All FC ROs will be involved in the opening of FC ballot boxes. After taking out misplaced GC ballot papers, each FC RO will ask the counting staff to sort the papers by FCs, verify individual ballot paper accounts, and retain the FC ballot papers for which he is responsible, while transferring the others to his counterparts. After mixing the ballot papers from no less than two polling stations, he will sort the papers with reference to the candidates for whom the votes are cast, and count the votes.

14. The ROs will also have to count all misplaced papers that may be delivered from the GC, EC and special FC counting stations/zones. The ROs will be reminded that they should declare election results only after confirming with a designated counting supervisor that all misplaced papers, if any, have been counted.

15. Registered electors for the four special FCs will cast their votes at any one of the four polling stations designated for the EC. Each RO for the special FCs will handle the FC ballot boxes from one EC polling station. The RO will open the boxes immediately to take out any misplaced EC and GC papers and arrange them to be delivered to the appropriate counting stations/zones by AROs. The RO will then sort the FC ballot papers by FCs, verify individual ballot paper accounts and retain the special FC ballot papers for which he is responsible, before delivering the other sorted papers to the responsible ROs.

EC Counting Process

16. The counting process for the EC election will be more or less the same as in 1998. The EC and GC ballot boxes from all four EC polling stations will be handed to the RO for the EC. He will open the boxes to see whether there are any misplaced papers. He will verify the number of GC ballot papers and arrange for them to be passed (together with any which may be misplaced in the EC ballot boxes) to the respective GC counting stations. Any misplaced FC ballot papers will also be passed to the appropriate RO.

17. EC ballot papers will be counted by optical mark readers and results will be displayed at the counting station.

EC Subsector Counting Process

18. The process for the EC subsectors is a combination of the EC and FC ones. All ballot papers will be given into the charge of individual ROs for the subsectors, sorted, verified, passed to the responsible ROs, and counted by optical mark readers.

Way Forward

19. The Registration and Electoral Office is working on the details of each of the steps involved in the count. In order to ensure that the arrangements work well and to obtain a more accurate estimation of the time required to complete the count, the Office intends to carry out a mock counting in early June. Members of the Panel will be briefed on the results of the mock counting session as appropriate.

Registration and Electoral Office
Constitutional Affairs Bureau
May 2000

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Proposed Locations of Regional Counting Stations

GC	Tentative number of polling stations to be designated	Proposed regional counting stations	Approximate floor area (m²)
Hong Kong Island	87	Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre	1,900
Kowloon East	76	Ground Floor Plaza, Hong Kong International Trade and Exhibition Centre, Kowloon Bay	2,000
Kowloon West	68	Kowloon Park Indoor Games Hall	1,500
New Territories East	126	Hall C, Hong Kong International Trade and Exhibition Centre, Kowloon Bay	2,500
New Territories West	144	Shek Kip Mei Park Indoor Games Hall	2,520