

## **Chapter XVII : Home Affairs**

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17.1 At the invitation of the Chairman, the Secretary for Home Affairs (SHA), Dr Patrick C P HO, highlighted the priority areas of the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) in 2003-04 (Appendix V-15). SHA also invited the relevant Heads of Department under his charge to brief members on measures to contain the spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

### **Measures to contain the spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome**

17.2 The Acting Director of Home Affairs (DHA(Atg)) advised that the Home Affairs Department (HAD) had issued guidelines to all its District Offices to strengthen cleansing of public places, in particular the Public Enquiry Services Centres and Building Management Resources Centres frequently visited by members of the public. Moreover, HAD also issued guidelines on cleansing and disinfection to licensees of hotels, guesthouses, clubs and bedspace apartments. Starting from 26 March 2003, HAD would organize health talks on SARS jointly with the Department of Health and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department in various districts. The department would also assist in the promotion of public health education by displaying/distributing posters and leaflets on SARS at its Public Enquiry Services Centres, Building Management Resources Centres as well as through its community network, such as Owners Corporations (OCs) and Mutual Aid Committees.

17.3 The Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (DLCS) reported that circulars had been issued to staff in the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) to remind them of the importance of personal hygiene and early treatment of respiratory infection. In addition to stepping up cleansing of all LCSD venues, she also highlighted the following preventive measures taken by LCSD:

- (a) To provide face masks and gloves to frontline staff;
- (b) To strengthen cleaning and maintenance of the air-conditioning systems for all LCSD facilities;
- (c) To display posters at prominent locations of LCSD facilities and remind visitors to wear face masks and refrain from using the facilities if they had symptoms of respiratory infections;
- (d) To close temporarily until further notice LCSD facilities designed for children such as the Toy Library in the Central

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Library and the Children's Discovery Gallery and the Hong Kong Toy Story Exhibition in the Hong Kong Cultural Museum;

- (e) To suspend all training programmes run by the Music Office until further notice; and
- (f) To close all the indoor swimming pools managed by LCSD for cleansing and disinfection from 28 March 2003 until further notice.

17.4 Mr Albert HO supported the Administration's various measures to strengthen infection control. Mr Andrew CHENG enquired whether HAB had been provided with additional resources to purchase face masks for distribution to audience for performance programmes at LCSD facilities. In response, DLCS advised that visitors would be encouraged to wear face masks and where necessary, masks would be provided to them. However, in view of resources constraints, it would not be feasible for LCSD to provide masks to all users.

17.5 Noting that LCSD would close some of its facilities temporarily, Mr Henry WU sought information on the estimated loss of revenue during the period of closure. Mr WU also expressed concern about the cleansing measures taken in respect of facilities such as indoor squash and table tennis courts, which were usually used in sequential time-slots by different users.

17.6 In response, DLCS pointed out that as the closure arrangement would be temporary and the number of fee-charging facilities involved were limited, LCSD had not made any estimation on the income foregone as a result of the closure. As for the cleansing of sports facilities between time-slots, the Acting Deputy Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Leisure Services) (DDLCS(Leisure Services)) explained that it might not be practicable to arrange cleansing between successive time-slots as there was no real break between them, particularly when the facilities concerned were fully booked during peak seasons. However, users of LCSD sports facilities would be exposed to relatively low risks as the facilities were generally spacious with good ventilation. LCSD had requested the cleansing service providers to strengthen cleansing and disinfection of the premises. DDLCS(Leisure Services) also informed members that notices had been posted at prominent locations of LCSD facilities to remind users to pay special attention to personal hygiene.

### **Outsourcing of leisure services**

17.7 Noting that the estimated total expenditure on outsourced leisure services in 2003-04 was about \$502 million, Mr IP Kwok-him sought information on the cost comparison for the provision of leisure services before and after outsourcing. He was given to understand that contractors undertaking the leisure services paid low wages to their staff, and he was concerned whether this would affect the quality of service provided. In response, DLCS explained that the total expenditure on outsourced leisure services in 2003-04 covered different types of service such as cleansing and supporting services; horticultural maintenance and landscaping work; security guard services and management services of sports centres. The department had followed the existing tendering procedures to select the service provider for each type of service to be outsourced. She remarked that while it would not be practicable to compare the cost of providing all types of leisure services before and after outsourcing, it should be noted that notwithstanding a 14% increase in the number of facilities managed by LCSD since 2000, there was only a very small increase in the total provision sought. Hence, the outsourcing arrangements was considered cost-effective. DLCS also assured members that the Administration would monitor the performance of contractors. Those who fell short of the required standard would not be eligible for future tendering.

17.8 In response to Mr IP Kwok-him's further enquiry on the estimated expenditure of \$28 million in 2003-04 for outsourced management service of sports centres and whether there might be any abuse by the contractors, DLCS undertook to provide information in respect of the number of sports centres to be serviced, the number of staff, as well as the salary and duties of the staff involved. She also said that contractors were required to state the level of wages payable to their workers in their bids submitted to LCSD for consideration.

### **Building management**

17.9 Mr Albert HO noted with regret that the arrangement of seconding a lawyer to HAD to advise on building management matters had ceased and instead, a Senior Government Counsel (SGC) post was created in the Department of Justice (DoJ) to advised HAD on building management matters. He expressed concern about the lack of the necessary expertise in HAD to provide dedicated support to OCs, particularly in dealing with legal problems arising from building management. Mr HO considered that the SGC post should have been created in

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HAD to facilitate the provision of advice and training to staff of HAD. With the large number of OCs in the territory and the increasing demand for legal advice on building management, the direct and dedicated support of in-house legal professional was necessary.

17.10 In reply, the Deputy Director of Home Affairs (2) (DDHA(2)) advised that the SGC post had previously been created in HAD to deal with building management matters. After consultation with DoJ, it was agreed that it would be more appropriate to create the post in DoJ instead. This would ensure better support and back up service for and supervision of the SGC. In addition to benefiting from the dedicated service of the SGC, HAD would benefit from the services of other DoJ counsel. She assured members that although the SGC would be based in DoJ, he would continue to be the designated officer for legal matters relating to building management.

17.11 In response to Mr Albert HO's concern about the training support provided to HAD frontline staff after the return of the SGC to DoJ, SHA explained that when the Building Management Amendment Ordinance (BMO) was first enacted two years ago, the availability of in-house legal support was important, both for the interpretation of the statutory provisions and for providing the necessary training to HAD frontline staff. As more operational experience was gained, frontline staff had become more familiar with the BMO. DDHA(2) supplemented that apart from the SGC, the Senior Liaison Officers and Chief Liaison Officers of HAD were also actively involved in the training of Liaison Officers on building management matters. Nevertheless, SHA and the Permanent Secretary for Home Affairs (PSHA) agreed to further consider Mr Albert HO's suggestion of redeploying the SGC post from DoJ to HAD to provide dedicated support on building management matters.

### **Publicity matters**

17.12 Noting that the Information Services Department (ISD) provided strategic advice and technical support to bureaux/departments in publicity campaigns to enhance public awareness of civic responsibility, Ms Cyd HO enquired about the criteria and mechanism in according priorities to different publicity campaigns and in deciding the amount of air-time allocated for Announcements in the Public Interest (APIs). In reply, the Deputy Director of Information Services (2) (DDIS(2)) advised that in accordance with statutory requirements, one minute of air-time per every broadcasting hour would be

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allocated for APIs. ISD would assist bureaux/departments in the production of publicity programmes in response to their requests and with regard to the importance as well as public concern over the issues.

17.13 Responding to Ms Cyd HO's enquiry on whether ISD was responsible for making decisions on the priority of different campaigns proposed by bureaux/departments, DDIS(2) explained that depending on new policies/programmes implemented during different periods, ISD would arrange publicity campaigns for relevant bureaux/departments. ISD had worked out an internal schedule for regular broadcasting of APIs taking into consideration some seasonal factors, such as the need to strengthen fire protection during the Ching Ming Festival. Nevertheless, there was flexibility in adjusting the schedule to cope with urgent demand for publicity on issues of wide public concern, such as the recent publicity on precautionary measures against SARS.

17.14 Ms Cyd HO referred to ISD's target of producing APIs and posters within two months upon request under the programme area of "Civic responsibility" and enquired whether ISD could shorten the production time under urgent circumstances such as the recent outbreak of SARS. She was concerned about the effectiveness of the APIs in appealing to the interest of different age groups, such as ensuring that even young children could understand the important message on SARS.

17.15 DDIS(2) pointed out that the production time for APIs varied according to the content and presentation of the programmes. Owing to the urgency of public health, ISD had produced APIs on SARS within a short span of time using simple and direct presentation so that the APIs could be broadcast at the earliest opportunity. Referring to the API on health advice presented by the Director of Health, DDIS(2) informed members that the production and the broadcasting of the API was completed within the same day. She also informed members that two new APIs on SARS had been produced for different target groups, one for the general public and the other targeted at housewives, providing information on the correct way of wearing a mask and on household cleaning. Regarding the resources for the campaign on SARS, DDIS(2) advised that in accordance with existing arrangements, the necessary expenses would be met by the relevant bureau, i.e. the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau.

### **Promotion of sports**

17.16 Noting that LCSD had selected 10 pilot projects with an estimated total construction cost of about \$2.5 billion for which private sector participation in construction and management would be invited, Mr Andrew CHENG sought further information on the selected projects and enquired whether any of them were outstanding capital works projects of the former municipal councils. In response, DLCS said that the Private Sector Involvement approach was proposed with a view to promoting business through new opportunities for the private sector, and also reducing the costs of design, construction and operation of the leisure and cultural facilities. As regards further information on the 10 pilot projects, DLCS said that the Administration would report to the Panel on Home Affairs in due course.

17.17 Mr Andrew CHENG expressed concern about the availability of resources for promotion of sports under the present stringent financial position. He opined that instead of investing considerable resources in building sports facilities, it would be more cost-effective to promote the importance of regular exercise and sports activities among the community, in particular school children. In this regard, DLCS informed members that LCSD had implemented the Free Use Scheme to allow schools, sports associations and subvented non-governmental organizations to use selected sports facilities free of charge during non-peak hours. She undertook to provide further information on the Scheme after the meeting.

### **Local community economy**

17.18 Noting that \$2 million had been earmarked under the provision of HAD for implementing a series of territory-wide marketing campaign for promoting the development of the local community economy (LCE), Mr WONG Yung-kan commented that the resources allocated was inadequate and urged for additional provision. Mr WONG pointed out that many District Councils (DCs) had set up special working groups for the promotion of LCE. He considered that resources could be better deployed to promote LCE at the district level through the involvement of DCs.

17.19 In response, DHA(Atg) said that HAD would assume the role of a facilitator in promoting the development of LCE and the resources incurred would not be high. Market participation would be necessary in business investment for

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LCE initiatives. HAD would liaise with relevant government departments with a view to streamlining necessary procedures and obtaining approval for the temporary use of vacant government sites. She advised that HAD would utilize its existing resources in assisting the launch of new LCE initiatives and the earmarked provision of \$2 million would only be for publicity purpose. As to the involvement of DCs, DHA(Atg) pointed out that DCs had been making good use of their community building funds for the promotion of LCE at the district level. Quoting the example of the recent computer festival organized by the Sham Shui Po District Council (SSPDC), DHA(Atg) said that with the participation of the industry and computer associations, the business turnover during the three-day festival amounted to some \$100 million, with only limited resources input by SSPDC.

### **Resources allocated to District Councils**

17.20 Miss CHOY So-yuk declared interest as a member of the Eastern District Council (EDC). Having regard to the size of different districts, she expressed concern about the allocation of resources among the 18 DCs. In reply, DDHA(2) explained that in allocating resources to the 18 DCs, the population size in each of the districts, as well as the minimum resources requirement for basic operational needs would be taken into consideration. On the creation of four additional posts in 2003-04 to strengthen support to DCs, DDHA(2) said that the resources for these posts had been made available since 2002-03 arising from the DC Review. Pending the availability of permanent staff, non-civil service contract staff had been engaged to undertake the duties of the four posts. Now that permanent Executive Officers II were available to take up the posts, HAD would include the posts into its establishment. Hence, the creation of the posts in 2003-04 was to formalize an existing arrangement.

17.21 Pointing out that the Culture and Heritage Commission would submit a report to the Chief Executive shortly, Mr MA Fung-kwok asked whether funds had been earmarked in the 2003-04 Estimates for implementing the recommendations in the report. The Deputy Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Culture) (DDLCS(Culture)) responded that the report of the Culture and Heritage Commission would be submitted to the Chief Executive in early April 2003. It would take some time to examine in detail the recommendations in the report in the light of public views expressed during the public consultation carried out by the Commission, and then to consider the priority of the recommendations and implementation schedule. Therefore, it was expected that the resources

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required for implementing the recommendations during 2003-04 would not be great and could be met within the provision of LCSD. Further provision for implementing the recommendations would be included in the 2004-05 Estimates. SHA supplemented that under the present "envelope" approach for resources allocation, controlling officers could exercise flexibility in the re-deployment of resources within their own purview where necessary.

### **Licensing of establishments providing karaoke entertainment**

17.22 Mr Tommy CHEUNG enquired about HAD's plan for staff re-deployment to cope with the increase in the number of licensing applications following the commencement of the Karaoke Establishments Ordinance (Cap.573) (KEO) in January 2003, especially towards the end of the 12-month transitional period provided under Cap.573. Mr CHEUNG was concerned that as it was necessary to enlist the assistance of professionals from the Buildings Department (BD) and the Fire Services Department (FSD), early arrangements for staff deployment should be made to ensure the effective processing of the influx of applications in late 2003, towards the expiry of the 12-month transitional period.

17.23 In reply, DDHA(2) advised that the relevant professional staff deployed from BD and FSD through secondment had been included in the establishment of HAD. Thus, HAD could exercise flexibility in reshuffling duties among its staff to cope with the increase in licensing applications. She informed members that so far, only three applications for permit had been received. However, she shared Mr Tommy CHEUNG's view that the number of applications would likely rise towards the end of the transitional period. She assured members that HAD would closely monitor the situation and make necessary arrangements to handle the applications. PSHA added that HAD would work closely with other policy bureaux to ensure the proper deployment of resources to meet seasonal fluctuations in operational needs.

### **Horticulture and Amenities**

17.24 Miss CHOY So-yuk expressed concern about the choice of suitable tree species by LCSD in parks and along roadsides. Referring to specialist advice that certain exotic species would have low viability rate if planted in Hong Kong, Miss CHOY doubted the propriety and cost-effectiveness of introducing exotic species instead of planting native ones. In response, DDLCS(Leisure Services) advised that LCSD had consulted specialists on the suitable exotic



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species to be introduced and in deciding on the tree species, the viability of the species in Hong Kong was taken into consideration.

17.25 Miss CHOY So-yuk remained concerned about the selection of suitable tree species and urged the Administration to take active steps to ensure that the selected species would be suitable for planting in Hong Kong. She also enquired about the Administration's plan, if any, for introducing theme planting in Hong Kong. PSHA noted Miss CHOY's concern and responded that a meeting on theme planting in Hong Kong would be convened by SHA on 26 April 2003.

17.26 Noting the proposed vacant government sites at which LCSD would arrange greening work pending the development of the sites, Mr MA Fung-kuo questioned why a few sites with development plans to commence in 2003 were also included in the list for greening. He considered that if the sites would be developed within a few months, it would not be cost-effective to provide greening during the interim period. In response, DDLCS(Leisure Services) assured members that LCSD would update the proposed sites for greening work in consultation with the Lands Department to ensure that only vacant government sites with no development plans in the coming three to five years would be included in the list for greening.

### **Consultancy study**

17.27 Referring to the \$0.9 million provision for HAB to conduct ad hoc opinion surveys in 2003-04, Ms Cyd HO enquired about the reasons for the reduction in consultancy studies commissioned by the bureau since 2001-02. She also expressed concern about the criteria for deciding whether the service of in-house staff or consultants would be used, the level of expertise possessed by in-house staff, as well as the role of HAB in co-ordinating consultancy studies.

17.28 In response, the Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs (2) (DS(HA)2) advised that he himself, together with a Principal Assistant Secretary in his team, co-ordinated studies commissioned by HAB. A specialist team with three departmental staff deployed from the Census and Statistics Department had been set up in HAB to conduct studies and oversee the studies commissioned by HAB. Over the years, the team had gained experience in opinion polls and other types of studies, and built up connections with research experts in universities. Thus, HAB was able to conduct opinion polls and studies with its in-house resources and at times, might assist other bureaux/departments in conducting similar studies.

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As regards the reduction in consultancy studies conducted, DS(HA)2 advised that as more non-government organizations conducted regular opinion polls on issues of concern, such as the general public's satisfaction with the Government, there was less need for the Government to conduct polls of a similar nature. However, he pointed out that the number of studies commissioned by HAB on specific topics had been on the increase and HAB had engaged consultants to study controversial subjects such as soccer betting.

17.29 On whether resources were provided by the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau for HAB and other bureaux to commission consultancy studies, the Deputy Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (Treasury) explained that as a general arrangement, individual bureaux could make use of their own provisions for engaging the service of consultants. However, under Head 106 - Miscellaneous Services *Subhead 182 Expenses for the appointment of financial and management consultants*, funds were available for the appointment of financial and management consultants to carry out financial appraisals and studies associated with departmental business reviews and public sector reform initiatives.

