

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON HOME AFFAIRS

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PILOT SCHEME

TO FURTHER IMPROVE DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the progress of the implementation of a pilot scheme to involve District Councils (DCs) in the management of district facilities in four selected districts.

Background

2. We informed Members in September 2006 the Administration's plan to implement the pilot scheme in Wan Chai, Wong Tai Sin, Sai Kung and Tuen Mun from January 2007. The purpose of the pilot scheme is to try out the guidelines to facilitate the involvement of DCs in the management of district facilities relating to capital works and programmes, as well as the protocols and working relationship among the various stakeholders. The ultimate goal is to pave the way for a smooth and effective roll-out of the new arrangements to all 18 districts for the new DC term commencing January 2008.

3. To support the pilot DCs, an additional \$3 million was allocated to the DC Funds provision for each pilot DC for organizing community involvement (CI) programmes; and an additional \$5 million to each pilot DC to undertake district minor works projects for the improvement of district environment. Additional manpower support was also given to the DCs concerned to discharge the various duties arising from the pilot scheme.

4. We have engaged the University of Hong Kong (HKU) to conduct a study to track the progress of the pilot scheme and evaluate its effectiveness.

Progress of Implementation Plan

Management of district facilities

5. From January 2007 onwards, the DCs of the four pilot districts have participated in the management of some district facilities (i.e. district libraries, community halls, sports venues, local open space and sitting-out areas, swimming pools and beaches). A new District Facilities Management Committee was formed under each of the pilot DC to steer and oversee the management, improvement and upgrading works of these facilities. An improved mechanism to ensure prompt and proper use of the additional DC Funds was also introduced.

District minor works

6. To provide a greater variety of design and to better respond to aspirations of the DCs, the Administration has tried out a term consultancy approach¹ for launching district minor works or facility improvement projects. Over 60 such projects have been undertaken in the four pilot districts in the past few months. These include beautification and greening projects, development of public open space and other improvement works to the district facilities under the management of the DCs. Of these minor works projects, 14 were implemented by term consultants.

Enhancing district partnership

7. With the increase in the DC Funds for CI projects and greater involvement of the DCs in the management of district facilities, the four DCs have organized some 65 major district partnership programmes as well as recreational and cultural activities during the pilot period.

Enhancing communication with DCs

8. Since January 2007, 22 Heads of Departments (HoDs) have attended meetings of the 18 DCs on a regular basis to strengthen the

¹ A term consultant means that the consultant is engaged by the Government within a specified period of time to implement works projects, instead of on a project basis.

communication between the Government and the DCs on issues affecting the livelihood of residents and development in districts. As at end September 2007, the HoDs have attended a total of 74 DC meetings. This arrangement will continue throughout the next DC term.

Observations

9. The four DCs have made good progress in implementing a variety of projects under the pilot scheme. Members of the DCs concerned regard it as a positive move to better meet district needs and to give DC Members greater responsibility of participating in the management of district facilities. In the past year or so, the HKU research team has gauged the views of DC members, staff of relevant government departments and other stakeholders on the pilot. Some key observations of the research team are set out in the following paragraphs.

Promoting district partnership and cross-sectoral collaboration

10. With the increase in funding for the pilot DCs to carry out CI programmes, they have been working proactively with different sectors to organise a greater variety of programmes for the community. These include the following major projects in the relevant districts :

- (a) a participatory greening project of park facilities management in Wan Chai;
- (b) a community-wide promotion of reading programme in Tuen Mun;
- (c) a community-wide martial arts promotion programme in Wong Tai Sin; and
- (d) a community libraries partnership programme in Sai Kung.

11. These projects have taken into account the district characteristics and community needs and were well received by local residents. The smooth implementation of these programmes involving various local organisations and departments is testimony to the effectiveness of DCs forging close district partnership.

Setting clear goals for community development

12. Members of the four DCs, irrespective of their political affiliations, have reached consensus in identifying clear objectives, prioritising community needs and channelling the available resources to meet district needs and aspirations. A number of projects under the pilot scheme have been launched with clear objectives and strategy. An example is the “community-wide promotion of reading programme” in Tuen Mun. With the clear and meaningful goal of promoting reading with a view to upgrading life quality, Tuen Mun DC has been able to successfully implement the project which involves a large number of district organizations and government departments in publicizing the project and supplementing the public library services in the district.

Improving district environment with public participation

13. A number of proposals on district minor works were initiated under the pilot scheme to improve the environment in the districts concerned. For instance, a major project was launched in Wong Tai Sin to convert a former bazaar site to a local open space. The open space will relieve the congestion of pedestrian flow in the nearby Lung Cheung Road. It will also be linked to the Temple Court nearby to create a district-wide recreational area which addresses the residents’ needs for improving the local environment.

14. About a quarter of the 60 projects launched were carried out under the term consultancy approach. Term consultants allow a higher degree of public participation in the design process so that the works projects carried out under this approach could better meet the district needs and improve the living environment of residents. For example, Sai Kung DC has successfully engaged the public in the design and development of a temporary open space in Tsueng Kwan O to address the community needs for more local open space facilities. In the process, the term consultant has modified the project design in a flexible manner to accommodate the views of residents. The pilot scheme reveals that the project delivery capacity can be enhanced and implementation expedited through commissioning the term consultants to undertake project preparation and planning work (e.g. technical feasibility study, project cost estimate and formulation of design options).

Responding to district needs in facilities management

15. Under the pilot scheme, the four DCs have provided useful advice and creative ideas to the government departments concerned to improve the management of existing district facilities, having regard to specific district needs. For example, on the advice of Wan Chai DC, the government departments concerned have put in place a set of innovative management practices for Wan Chai Waterfront Promenade, namely : pets are allowed entry, 24-hour opening and signage with suggestions (rather than instructions). The popularity of the project demonstrates positive changes to the existing management practice of district facilities under the pilot scheme.

Way Forward

16. To pave way for a smooth and effective roll-out of the new arrangements to all districts from January 2008, the Administration will take into account the experience gained from the pilot scheme and undertake necessary preparatory work before commencement of the new DC term.

Experience sharing among DC members

17. We shall arrange briefing sessions to familiarize DC Members with the new measures in relation to district facilities management, implementation of district minor works projects and promotion of district partnership and community building. These sessions will also provide a good opportunity for the pilot districts to share their experience and best practices with other districts.

Enhancing delivery of district minor works projects

18. In light of the experience of implementing district minor works projects during the pilot stage, the Administration will take forward proposals accorded priority by DCs and expedite their implementation by commissioning the term consultants to undertake the preparatory and planning work for these projects. We will also encourage DCs to make full use of term consultancy to enhance the capacity of the district minor works programme.

Briefings for supporting staff

19. The Administration has prepared new manuals on the “Use of DC Funds” and “Implementing District Minor Works Projects” for the new DC term, and already started to roll out briefing sessions for supporting staff on the new manuals and guidelines to enable them to provide better support and services to DCs in carrying out the enhanced functions.

Home Affairs Department
December 2007