

For Information
13 February 2009

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON HOME AFFAIRS

**IMPLEMENTATION OF MEASURES TO
ENHANCE THE ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF
DISTRICT COUNCILS AND TO IMPROVE DISTRICT WORK**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the progress of the implementation of various measures to enhance the role and functions of the District Councils and to improve district work.

Background

2. In his Policy Address of 2005-06, the Chief Executive announced the initiative to allow District Councils (DCs) to participate in the management of some district facilities, to strengthen the role of District Officers in district administration and to ensure that district needs are promptly met.

3. The Administration briefed Members of this Panel in November 2006 on the arrangements for implementing the measures to enhance the district administration and again in December 2007 on the progress of the implementation of the pilot scheme in four selected districts, before full implementation of measures to enhance the role of DCs in 18 districts starting from January 2008.

Present Position

Management of District Facilities

4. Starting from January 2008, all DCs have commenced participating in managing some 2 000 district facilities, including

community halls, public libraries, leisure grounds, sports venues, public swimming pools and beaches.

Provision of additional resources for District Councils and District Offices

5. Starting from 2008-09, we have provided additional resources to DCs for carrying out community involvement (CI) programmes and district minor works (DMW) projects to help achieve various social objectives. The annual provision for CI activities was increased to \$300 million while a dedicated capital works block vote of \$300 million was set up to enable DCs to implement DMW projects with a view to improving the environment in the district. We have also developed updated funding guidelines for the CI programmes and DMW projects in the new term DC to enable DCs to use the resources with greater flexibility.

6. We have strengthened manpower resources for District Offices to support their role in promoting district administration. Each District Office has been provided with one additional Liaison Officer, one Executive Officer and one Assistant Clerical Officer. Another six posts of Liaison Officer have been provided for districts with larger population. We have also improved the mechanism for resolving district issues. District problems requiring inter-departmental collaboration that cannot be resolved by the relevant departments and bureaux may, where circumstances so warrant, be drawn to the attention of the Chief Secretary to enable the problems to be resolved in a timely and coordinated manner.

Observations

7. District Officers have played a pivotal role in facilitating the effective coordination and implementation of government policies at district level, including the resolution of district issues, such as nuisance caused by illegal hawking activities and shopfront extensions at the flower markets before the Chinese New Year as well as management and maintenance responsibilities of footbridges and access paths.

8. DCs have made good progress in participating in the management of district facilities in the first year of the new DC term. Members of the DCs are in general able to reach consensus in identifying clear objectives, prioritising community needs, establishing partnership with district groups and channeling the resources available to meet the

community needs.

Overseeing utilization of local resources in district management

9. DCs have been actively involved in initiating various proposals to relevant government departments on improving facilities management. In library services, for example, some DCs have implemented trial schemes to extend the opening hours of district libraries by six hours per week. Mobile library service in some densely-populated areas was strengthened by adding new mobile library stops at different public rental housing estates. With the support of DCs, the Leisure and Culture Services Department (LCSD) will, from April 2009, extend the operating hours of 33 major and district libraries by nine to ten hours each week to better meet the needs of the public.

10. A number of DCs have also implemented measures to enhance the service of community halls and sport venues to respond to local needs. These include review of the booking guidelines of these facilities to better meet local needs; introduction of trial schemes to extend opening hours; and improving the facilities of the community halls and sports venues, such as installation of LCD TVs, enhancement of audio-visual systems of the community halls, as well as replacing the heating system and upgrading the hygiene condition of swimming pools.

Promoting district partnership and cross-sectoral collaboration

11. DCs have been actively collaborating with various sectors in the community to initiate projects to help build a more caring community and meet the special needs of the respective districts. With the increase in DC funds for community involvement (CI) projects, more than 33 000 CI projects have been sponsored by DCs in 2008. Major examples of these projects include –

- (a) *supporting sports initiatives* - the Beijing Olympic Games were held in 2008 and Hong Kong was the host city for the Olympic and Paralympic Equestrian Events. In the year, DCs maintained close collaboration with different district groups to promote the spirit of Olympism, resulting in a warm-welcoming atmosphere for the sports events whilst fostering people's sense of belonging to the

districts;

- (b) *servicing disadvantaged groups* – these include projects which seek to provide school-based after-school tuition service to children from disadvantaged families whose parents may have difficulty in taking proper care of them; to relieve the pressure of low-income families through arranging bulk purchase of daily necessities; and to organize a range of activities for the disabled such as visits to theme parks and engaging the disabled in performing in variety shows to encourage their participation in community activities;
- (c) *promoting reading habits* – these projects not only develop good reading habits amongst the youth population in partnership with LCSD and various non-government organisations, but also complement the public library services and help forge a close working tie with the district organisations to create a supportive social network;
- (d) *promoting cultural and natural heritage* – these projects include publicising suggested recreation routes and providing free bus tours and guided tours to help promote the different cultural and natural heritage of the districts concerned to enable the public, including tourists, to better understand and appreciate the unique heritage characteristics of individual districts in Hong Kong; and
- (e) *fostering inter-cultural understanding* – these projects seek to help ethnic minorities to build up better social network and to integrate into the community through engaging them in performing in variety shows and organising sharing sessions with them on adapting to the local community.

Enhancing delivery of DMW projects

12. To enhance our project delivery capacity and capability to implement projects of larger scale or greater complexity, we have adopted the term consultancy approach for implementing DMW projects. We appointed four term consultants for a term of two years to assist in the implementation of DMW projects, each working respectively for the DCs of the Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, New Territories East and New

Territories West. The term consultants are architect-led teams which comprise professionals of various disciplines, and they undertake technical feasibility studies, design work, tender exercises for the DMW projects as well as works supervision of larger scale or greater complexity which require architectural, engineering and/or building services input. The other projects are handled in-house by Home Affairs Department's Works Section, the Architectural Services Department or other works agent.

13. Since the roll-out of the DMW programme, DC members have been very active in identifying and initiating new projects to provide or improve local facilities. Examples include the development of a cycling park, children playgrounds, as well as greening and beautification projects. As at end-December 2008, funding approval has been given to more than 800 DMW projects endorsed for implementation by DCs. The number of approved projects and estimated total expenditure by district and the types of projects approved are set out at **Annexes A** and **B** respectively. The estimated total project costs of these projects amount to about \$492 million. We are now working closely with the works agents for the approved projects on their implementation so that the \$300 million DMW provision this financial year can be spent to the fullest extent possible.

A & B

14. Apart from these projects, the DCs have agreed in principle to carry out further studies for about 320 proposed projects so as to define the project scope, prepare estimates of expenditure, and conduct feasibility studies and relevant consultations. The DCs will also continue to identify other new projects having regard to local aspirations and promptly respond to district needs.

15. The District Offices have also worked together with DCs on measures to expedite implementation of DMW projects. DCs have formed dedicated working groups for individual projects to follow up on the planning and detailed design, including conducting site inspections with the assistance of District Offices, so that issues and problems may be resolved as they emerge as quickly as practicable without resorting to regular DC meetings. DCs have also endorsed projects by way of circulation of papers instead of waiting for deliberation at the bimonthly meetings of the relevant DC Committees. As regards projects requiring consultation with other departments, the departments concerned have undertaken to respond expeditiously and to escalate complex issues to higher levels without delay as and when necessary. District Offices also

assume a more proactive role in following up on the progress of the projects generally.

16. In the light of the feedback from some DC members on the performance of the term consultants, we have reminded the term consultants to have due regard to the expectations of DCs in preparing designs and budgets, so that the designs can better meet the requirements of DCs, thus minimizing the amendments needed and the implementation time. We have also reminded the term consultants to prepare user-friendly materials for making presentations to DCs and deploy sufficient staff for handling DMW projects.

Enhancing communication between DCs and the Administration

17. Communication between senior Government officials and DCs has been enhanced in the new DC term through the following arrangements –

- (a) To provide a regular dialogue between Government officials and DCs, we have arranged for HoDs with direct interface with the public to attend DC meetings. In 2008, the HoDs concerned have attended a total of 69 DC meetings;
- (b) To facilitate focused discussion between HoDs and DC members on territory-wide issues of mutual concern, we have organized briefings made personally by HoDs. Four briefing sessions were organized in 2008. These include sessions on evaluation of the pilot scheme in four selected districts by Director of Home Affairs; briefings on the strategic issues of planning and transport development in Hong Kong by Commissioner for Transport and by Director of Planning; and the strategic development of railways and highways by Director of Highways.

- (c) To provide a platform for the senior echelons to exchange views with DC members and district personalities on issues of greatest concern to the people, the Chief Executive hosted the first Summit on District Administration in May 2008. More than 800 participants from DCs, district organizations, and government departments attended the Summit. Six break-out group discussion sessions on topics closely linked to the livelihood concerns of the local community¹ were held. The Principal Officials undertook to implement various initiatives under their purview arising from the discussion sessions. A progress report on the implementation of these policy initiatives was issued to DC members in January 2009.

Way forward

18. Building on the experience of fully implementing measures to improve district administration since the commencement of the new DC term in 2008, we will continue to take action to further strengthen district work in the following areas –

- (a) we will continue to enhance communication between the senior echelons of the Government with the DC members and district personalities;
- (b) we will continue to seek DC's advice on ways to improve the utilisation and conditions of district facilities;
- (c) we will work closely with DCs to assist them in drawing up plans for collaboration with district groups in implementing CI programmes that can address district concerns and meet the needs of local residents;
- (d) we will keep the implementation of the DMW programme under review with a view to making improvements. In particular, we will review the term consultancy approach for implementing DMW projects, engaging DCs in the process; and

¹ The topics of six break-out group discussions include "Harmonious community and cultural and sports activities", "Social welfare", "Environmental and district hygiene", "Transport and housing", "Development and heritage conservation" and "Environmental protection".

- (e) we will review the current set of guidelines for carrying out CI projects, taking into account the operational experience in the past year to enhance flexibility in the use of resources.

Home Affairs Department
February 2009

Funding for District Minor Works Projects
(As at 31 December 2008)

District Council	No. of Projects	Estimated Total Project Expenditure (\$ million)
Islands	52	32.362
Kwai Tsing	55	18.247
North	34	29.124
Sai Kung	28	28.003
Sha Tin	36	17.906
Tai Po	34	25.959
Tsuen Wan	46	25.747
Tuen Mun	29	23.906
Yuen Long	7	20.030
Central & Western	60	13.471
Eastern	55	24.388
Kowloon City	55	18.609
Kwun Tong	47	34.361
Southern	92	34.879
Sham Shui Po	106	42.830
Wan Chai	45	21.800
Wong Tai Sin	37	48.395
Yau Tsim Mong	45	28.308
Headquarters	4	4.259
Total	867	492.584

Types of District Minor Works Projects
(as at 31 December 2008)

Types of projects	Percentage	No.
Parks / Sitting-out-areas / Rain shelters / Pavilions	25%	215
Leisure and cultural venues, such as sports venues, district libraries and swimming pools	22%	194
Beautification and greening works	13%	112
Footpaths / Footbridges / Walking trails / Access roads	6%	49
Community halls / Community centres	5%	44
Drainage facilities	2%	17
Others (Provision of notice boards, erection of sculptures, desilting programmes)	27%	236
Total	100%	867