

INFORMATION NOTE

Voter Turnout Publicity Campaign for the 2012 Legislative Council election

1. Background

1.1 The 2012 Legislative Council ("LegCo") election will be held on 9 September 2012. In line with past practice during LegCo election years, the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau will organize and run the Voter Turnout Publicity ("VTP") Campaign for eight weeks, from mid-July to the polling day on 9 September 2012, to call on all registered electors to cast their votes in the election. The Panel on Constitutional Affairs ("the Panel") will discuss the VTP Campaign for the 2012 LegCo election on 21 May 2012. To facilitate members' deliberations, this information note provides background information on the VTP Campaign for the LegCo elections held after the handover and summarizes the past deliberations on the issue at LegCo.

2. Voter Turnout Publicity Campaign

2.1 In each LegCo election year in the past, an inter-departmental working group was formed under the coordination of the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (or the then Constitutional Affairs Bureau before the 2008 LegCo election) to formulate publicity strategy and work out the programmes of the VTP campaign. The working group also included representatives from the Home Affairs Department, the Registration and Electoral Office, the Information Services Department, the Independent Commission Against Corruption and the Radio Television Hong Kong.

Objectives

2.2 According to the Administration, the main objective of the past VTP Campaigns was to encourage voter participation in the LegCo election through measures such as (a) providing voters with information on the candidates and voting procedures and (b) organizing publicity programmes to encourage registered voters to vote on the polling day. Specific campaign objectives were also set out in each of the LegCo elections. For example, the specific campaign objective of the 1998 LegCo election was to educate the public on the functions and composition of LegCo, as well as the general features of the election. For the 2000, 2004 and 2008 LegCo elections, the specific campaign objectives included promoting the importance of clean and fair elections.

Timing

2.3 Similar to the 2004 VTP Campaign, the 2008 VTP Campaign lasted for about eight weeks, running from around mid-July to the polling day in September. The timing was different from those of the 1998 and 2000 VTP Campaigns. The former commenced in early February and continued until the polling day in May, whereas the latter was launched between May and September¹.

Activities

2.4 The past VTP Campaigns adopted a multi-pronged approach under which a variety of activities had been organized to promote the general awareness of the forthcoming LegCo election and call upon registered electors to vote. These activities were supported by a range of key publicity programmes including:

- (a) launching ceremony to kick-off the VTP Campaign;
- (b) broadcasting announcements of public interest on television and radio;

¹ The 1998 and 2000 VTP Campaigns both covered the publicity work for the Election Committee subsector elections and the LegCo election, since the First and the Second LegCos consisted of Members returned from Election Committee.

- (c) producing special television and radio programmes;
- (d) placing advertisements in newspapers, MTR stations, trains, buses, trams and taxi bodies;
- (e) displaying posters, banners and lamppost buntings in all districts, and giant wall banners and billboards at vantage points;
- (f) staging a series of roving exhibitions in major shopping centres and areas with high pedestrian flow covering the main features of LegCo elections;
- (g) organizing bus and van parades to create an election atmosphere throughout the territory;
- (h) organizing election forums for both the Geographical Constituency ("GC") and Functional Constituency ("FC") elections; and
- (i) creating dedicated websites on the LegCo election and hyperlinks to the website.

Budget

2.5 The amount earmarked for the 1998 and 2000 VTP Campaigns totalled HK\$40 million and HK\$50 million respectively, covering the publicity work for both the Election Committee subsector elections and the LegCo election. The budgets for the 2004 and 2008 VTP Campaigns both amounted to HK\$30 million, which only covered the publicity work for the LegCo election.

Voter turnout rate

2.6 As shown in the table below, the total number of electors for GCs increased steadily between 1998 and 2008. The total number of electors for FCs also exhibited a similar increasing trend. However, there was no clear trend in the voter turnout rates for both the GCs and FCs. For example, for the Geographical Constituencies, the voter turnout rates were 53.29% in 1998 and 43.57% in 2000, compared with 55.64% in 2004 and 45.20% in 2008.

Table - Voter turnout of the past Legislative Council elections

	1998	2000	2004	2008
Geographical constituencies				
Voter turnout rate	53.29%	43.57%	55.64%	45.20%
Total number of electors	2 795 371	3 055 378	3 207 227	3 372 007
Functional constituencies				
Voter turnout rate	63.50%	56.50%	70.10 %	59.76%
Total number of electors	122 537	163 026	192 374	212 227

Sources: Electoral Affairs Commission (1998), Electoral Affairs Commission (2000), Electoral Affairs Commission (2004) and Electoral Affairs Commission (2008).

3. Deliberations at the Legislative Council

3.1 Issues relating to the VTP Campaign for LegCo elections had been discussed by the Panel, and the Finance Committee during its examination of the Estimates of Expenditure. Some Members have also raised questions on the VTC Campaign at the Council meetings. Members' views and concerns are highlighted in the ensuing paragraphs.

Awareness of Legislative Council elections

3.2 A Panel member was concerned that the experience of the 1998 LegCo election had shown that television and radio airtime for activities such as election forums was inadequate to achieve an effective impact on the election. He considered that the time for such publicity programmes should be extended, particularly in view of the increasing number of candidates who would be contesting in the GCs in the 2000 election. He also suggested that the Administration should consider the possibility of launching on-line discussion forums on the Internet to encourage public participation in election.

3.3 The Administration advised that the Radio Television Hong Kong was responsible for organizing activities on the electronic media to promote public accessibility to information about candidates at elections, such as debate forums and television/radio airtime, for candidates to introduce their platforms and make appeals to voters etc. All these programmes would be uploaded to the Internet to further convey the message and information to the public at large. In addition, voters could gain on-line access to candidates' platforms through the Election Homepage specially set up for the 2000 LegCo election by the Registration and Electoral Office.

Methods for boosting the turnout rate

3.4 Some Members enquired if the Administration had considered enforcing mandatory voting. Although the Administration noticed that a few countries had adopted measures for mandatory voting, it found that those measures would be difficult to be implemented for LegCo election in the short run. The Administration promised to consider if the method was feasible and effective in future.

3.5 There was also a Member who raised concern on whether the Administration had thought about implementing overseas voting, or allowing the people who had sufficient reasons to leave Hong Kong on the election day to vote one day ahead under confidential covers. The Administration had considered doing so but it would not make such arrangements for the time being.

3.6 In addition, some Members questioned whether the Administration had conducted any research on reasons for non-voting behaviour. They considered that if the Administration knew why a person had chosen not to vote, the information would be useful in devising effective publicity strategy. The Administration responded that it had taken into account the analysis in formulating the publicity strategy.

3.7 Furthermore, a Panel member asked whether the Administration would distribute souvenirs on the polling day to promote voter participation. The Administration replied that souvenirs would be distributed throughout the campaign period to promote general awareness of the election and encourage voter turnout.

3.8 There was also a Member who asked whether the Administration would allow the voters to keep the ballot papers just like first-day postal covers to boost up the voting rate. In response, the Administration would make door-to-door visits and leave voters with a lot of materials to enable them to acquire an in-depth understanding of the details of the elections in the hope of arousing their interest to vote.

Alleged use of duress

3.9 Panel members expressed concern about some media reports on the alleged use of duress against electors with a view to influencing their voting behaviour. It was suggested that publicity measures should be stepped up to promote public awareness of arrangements and legislative provisions which protect the secrecy of votes. The Administration undertook to follow up the issue and protect freedom of speech when it worked out the publicity programme for the LegCo election.

Prepared by Lisanne KO
18 May 2012
Tel: 3919 3635

Information notes are compiled for Members and Committees of the Legislative Council. They are not legal or other professional advice and shall not be relied on as such. Information notes are subject to copyright owned by the Legislative Council Commission (the Commission). The Commission permits accurate reproduction of information notes for non-commercial use in a manner not adversely affecting the Legislative Council, provided that acknowledgement is made stating the Research Division of the Legislative Council Secretariat as the source and one copy of the reproduction is sent to the Legislative Council Library.

References

1. Constitutional Affairs Bureau. (1998) *Publicity Strategy to Promote the 1998 Legislative Council Elections*. Paper submitted to the Panel on Constitutional Affairs of the Provisional Legislative Council for discussion on 6 February 1998.
2. Constitutional Affairs Bureau. (1999) *Administration's Response to Points raised on 12 March 1999 by Members of the Bill Committee on Legislative Council (Amendment) Bill 1999*. Paper submitted to the Panel on Constitutional Affairs of the Legislative Council for information. LC Paper No. CB(2)1658/98-99(02).
3. Constitutional Affairs Bureau. (2000) *Publicity Programme for the 2000 Legislative Council Elections*. Paper submitted to the Panel on Constitutional Affairs of the Legislative Council for information. LC Paper No. CB(2)1680/99-00(05).
4. Constitutional Affairs Bureau. (2004) *Publicity for the 2004 Legislative Council Election*. Paper submitted to the Panel on Constitutional Affairs of the Legislative Council for information. LC Paper No. CB(2)2857/03-04(03).
5. Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau. (2008a) *Administration's paper concerning "Voter Turnout Publicity Campaign for the 2008 Legislative Council Election" and "Further development of the Political Appointment System"*. Paper submitted to the Panel on Constitutional Affairs of the Legislative Council for follow-up to Meeting of 19 May 2008 and Meeting on 16 June 2008. LC Paper No. CB(2)2299/07-08(01).
6. Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau. (2008b) *Voter Turnout Publicity Campaign for the 2008 Legislative Council Election*. Paper submitted to the Panel on Constitutional Affairs of the Legislative Council for information. LC Paper No. CB(2)1910/07-08(03).
7. Electoral Affairs Commission. (1998) *Report on the 1998 Legislative Council Elections*. Available from: <http://www.info.gov.hk/chinfo/eac98-e.pdf> [Accessed May 2012].

-
8. Electoral Affairs Commission. (2000) *Report on the 2000 Legislative Council Elections*. Available from: http://www.eac.gov.hk/en/legco/2000_report.htm [Accessed May 2012].
 9. Electoral Affairs Commission. (2004) *Report on the 2004 Legislative Council Elections*. Available from: http://www.eac.gov.hk/en/legco/2004_report1.htm [Accessed May 2012].
 10. Electoral Affairs Commission. (2008) *Report on the 2008 Legislative Council Elections*. Available from: http://www.eac.gov.hk/en/legco/2008lce_report1.htm [Accessed May 2012].
 11. Legislative Council Secretariat. (2008) *Administration's paper concerning "Voter Turnout Publicity Campaign for the 2008 Legislative Council Election" and "Further development of the Political Appointment System"* on 13 June 2008 LC Paper No. CB(2)2299/07-08(01).
 12. Legislative Council Secretariat. (2009) *Finance Committee – Replies to Initial Written Questions raised by Finance Committee Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2008-09*. Available from: http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/fc/fc/w_q/cmab-e.pdf [Accessed May 2012].
 13. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Bills Committee on Legislative Council (Amendment) Bill 1999*. (1999) 12 March. LC Paper No. CB(2)2477/98-99.
 14. *Minutes of Meeting of the Panel on Constitutional Affairs of the Provisional Legislative Council*. (1998) 6 February. PLC Paper No. CB(2)1168.
 15. *Minutes of Meeting of the Panel on Constitutional Affairs of the Legislative Council*. (2000) 17 April. LC Paper No. CB(2)2484/99-00.
 16. *Minutes of Meeting of the Panel on Constitutional Affairs of the Legislative Council*. (2004) 17 May. LC Paper No. CB(2)2846/03-04.
 17. *Minutes of Meeting of the Panel on Constitutional Affairs of the Legislative Council*. (2004) 21 June. LC Paper No. CB(2)3310/03-04.
-

-
18. *Minutes of Meeting of the Panel on Constitutional Affairs of the Legislative Council.* (2008) 19 May. LC Paper No. CB(2)2841/07-08.
 19. *Official Record of Proceedings of the Legislative Council.* (1997) 10 September.
 20. *Official Record of Proceedings of the Legislative Council.* (1999) 10 March.
 21. *Official Record of Proceedings of the Legislative Council.* (2004) 16 June.
 22. *Official Record of Proceedings of the Legislative Council.* (2004) 27 October.
 23. *Replies to initial written questions raised by Finance Committee Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2010-11 of Special Meeting of the Finance Committee on 22 March 2010: Session No. 1. Reply Serial No. CMAB135.* Available from: http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/fc/fc/w_q/cmab-e.pdf [Accessed May 2012].