

Legislative Council Panel on Constitutional Affairs

Voter Registration in 2013

INTRODUCTION

This paper briefs Members on the work being undertaken by the Registration and Electoral Office (“REO”) for voter registration (“VR”) in the 2013 registration cycle and the related publicity work.

BACKGROUND

2. Following the 2011 District Council (“DC”) election, there were complaints and media reports about suspected false registered addresses of electors. Having consulted the views of the Legislative Council (“LegCo”) and various sectors of the community, a number of enhanced checking measures were implemented following a review and public consultation on the VR system to maintain the integrity of the system as well as to enhance the accuracy of registered particulars. Details are set out in the papers for the LegCo Panel on Constitutional Affairs issued on 20 March and 16 April 2012 (LC Paper No. CB(2)1453/11-12(01) and CB(2)1722/11-12(01)). As a result of these measures, the REO issued inquiry letters to about 296 000 electors during the 2012 VR cycle, and about 217 000 electors were eventually removed from the Final Register (“FR”) after completion of the statutory procedures of inquiry. In addition, the REO has referred all the complaints received where there is a prima facie case of suspected false registered addresses to relevant law enforcement agencies (i.e. the Police and the Independent Commission Against Corruption (“ICAC”)) for investigation.

3. There were isolated reports at the time of the 2012 LegCo election that individual electors did not realise that they had been removed from the FR because they failed to reply to the REO’s inquiry letters in time. Questions were raised as to whether the enhanced checking measures adopted in 2012 might have been too stringent, and their impact on VR.

4. Also around the time of the 2012 LegCo election, apart from the concerns about the VR of geographical constituency (“GC”) electors, there were isolated concerns raised about the membership records of some specified bodies in certain functional constituencies (“FCs”) which might affect individual elector’s registration status and hence eligibility to vote in those FCs, and whether the REO should conduct regular checks on the concerned specified bodies.

5. By early 2013, the law enforcement agencies have largely completed their investigations into the cases relating to the 2011 DC election. The investigation results reveal that in most of the cases, there is no evidence of so-called “vote-rigging”; rather, in most cases, the registered addresses are the old residential addresses where the electors have previously resided but have since moved away and have not updated their particulars with the REO.

2013 VR CYCLE

6. In the light of the background above, the REO has reviewed the various checking and publicity measures implemented in the 2012 VR cycle, and fine-tuned the strategy to be adopted in the 2013 VR cycle. Details are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

Publicity on VR and change of particulars

7. To address the phenomenon that registered electors often fail to update their particulars after moving their residence, in the 2013 VR exercise, apart from encouraging eligible persons to register as electors, emphasis will be put on reminding registered electors of their civic responsibility to update their registration particulars, especially the need to update their residential address in a timely manner after moving away from their previously registered residential address. The publicity efforts will include –

- (a) issuing leaflets, riding on the water bills sent to around 2.7 million households, to appeal to eligible persons to register as electors, and registered electors who have moved away from previously registered residential addresses to update their residential addresses;
- (b) broadcasting a five television one-minuters to promote VR and emphasize the civic responsibility for registered electors to update their residential addresses;

- (c) broadcasting a new series of Announcements in the Public Interests (“APIs”) on television and radio appealing for new registrations and reminding registered electors to notify the REO of change of residential addresses;
- (d) placing advertisements in newspapers and popular websites and displaying posters to encourage new registrations and timely updating of registered particulars;
- (e) setting up registration counters at the five Registration of Persons Offices of the Immigration Department to facilitate and encourage young people applying for or collecting adult identity cards at those Offices, to register as an elector; and
- (f) issuing appeal letters to households which have moved into newly developed private residential buildings to remind them to report changes of address or apply for registration as appropriate.

8. In addition, the REO will continue to encourage electors to provide email addresses for receiving electoral messages to help reduce paper consumption. There is currently an Internet platform at the GovHK website to facilitate registered electors to provide or update their email addresses. Electors may also submit or update their email addresses through a dedicated email account <emailprovision@reo.gov.hk>. Furthermore, the VR Assistants stationed at the Registration of Persons Offices will encourage registered electors and persons who wish to register as electors to provide their email addresses. The message on provision of email addresses will also be disseminated through the APIs.

9. The REO has earmarked \$6.7 million for these measures in the 2013 VR cycle. This amount is about three times of that typically earmarked for the VR drive in a non-election year.

Checking measures

10. Apart from appealing to the general public through publicity efforts to provide updated and accurate particulars in their VR, the REO will continue to implement the checking measures which were adopted in the 2012 VR cycle, with suitable modifications in the light of experience gained, to ensure the accuracy of the registered particulars of electors as far as practicable. For the 2013 VR cycle, the REO will implement the following measures.

Geographical constituencies (GCs)

11. The checking measures adopted in the 2012 VR cycle have proven to be effective. The REO will continue to implement the following checking measures on registered GC electors in the 2013 VR cycle, with modifications aimed at improving the efficiency of the checking measures –

- (a) follow-up inquiries on undelivered poll cards arising from the 2012 LegCo election;
- (b) verification checks on electors' registered residential addresses through cross-matching of data with the Housing Department and the Home Affairs Department;
- (c) checks on multiple electors or multiple surnames of electors registered with the same residential address;
- (d) random sample checks on existing electors;
- (e) checks on addresses with incomplete information, commercial addresses or suspected non-residential addresses;
- (f) checks on addresses in buildings already demolished or to be demolished; and
- (g) checks on new VR applications with multiple applicants using the same address for registration.

Functional constituencies (FCs)

12. For FCs, in some cases the eligibility of registration is tied to membership in bodies specified under the LegCo Ordinance (Cap. 542) ("LCO"). In these cases, for the purposes of verifying the eligibility of a VR application, the REO will seek information from the concerned specified bodies¹. From past experience, for some of these specified bodies, there is room for improvement for their membership administration process, to enable them to provide up-to-date and accurate membership information to the REO in a timely manner.

¹ Section 9 and section 42 of Electoral Affairs Commission (Registration) (Electors for Legislative Council Functional Constituencies) (Voters for Election Committee Subsectors) (Members of Election Committee) Regulation (Cap. 541B).

13. The REO has reviewed the situation in consultation with the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau and the Corruption Prevention Department of the ICAC, and agreed that efforts should be made to remind the concerned specified bodies of the importance of good governance, including adopting proper procedures to ensure propriety and transparency in membership administration. After discussions with the ICAC, the REO has started from the 2012 cycle writing to all the concerned specified bodies to appeal for their support in maintaining a proper and transparent membership administration system.

14. To sustain these efforts, the ICAC has agreed to initiate a new and targeted visit-cum-advisory service programme starting from the 2013 registration cycle to further drive home the message of good corporate governance and transparent membership administration. Under the programme, the ICAC will proactively offer advisory service to individual specified bodies to help review and enhance their membership administration, ensure procedural compliance and enhance transparency.

WAY FORWARD

15. The REO will continue to work closely with relevant government departments to verify the accuracy of VR records and strengthen publicity efforts to encourage VR and timely updating of registered particulars. The REO will also continue to implement the statutory inquiry procedures and refer cases of suspected false addresses to law enforcement agents for investigation, as appropriate. The Administration will keep the checking measures and publicity work under constant review and adjust the efforts in the light of outcome and public feedback.

**Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau
Registration and Electoral Office
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