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Ms Joanne MAK
Clerk to Panel on Constitutional Affairs,
Legislative Council Complex,
1 Legislative Council Road,
Central,
Hong Kong.

27 May 2015

Dear Ms MAK,

**Legislative Council Panel on Constitutional Affairs
Supplementary Information on
Checking Measures in the 2015 Voter Registration Cycle**

During the discussion on the “Proposed Guidelines on Election-related Activities in respect of District Council Election” issued by the Electoral Affairs Commission at the meeting of the Panel on Constitutional Affairs held on 18 May 2015, some Members enquired about the progress of the checking measures implemented by the Registration and Electoral Office during the 2015 Voter Registration cycle.

To address public concerns about the accuracy of electors’ registered addresses, since early 2012 the Registration and Electoral Office has been implementing a series of checking measures to enhance the accuracy and completeness of the particulars contained in the registers of electors. The background of the enhanced checking mechanism and the latest progress of implementing the checking measures by the Registration and Electoral Office in the current cycle are set out at Annex for Members’ information.

Yours sincerely,



(SHUM Nam-lung)
for Chief Electoral Officer

Checking Measures of the 2015 Voter Registration Cycle

This paper briefs Members of the Legislative Council (“LegCo”) Panel on Constitutional Affairs (“Panel”) on the progress of checking measures and related work undertaken by the Registration and Electoral Office (“REO”) in the 2015 Voter Registration (“VR”) cycle.

Background

2. After the 2011 District Council Election, there were complaints and media reports on suspected cases of electors using false addresses for VR. To address public concerns about the accuracy of electors’ registered addresses, the Government conducted a review on the VR system in late 2011 and proposed a series of measures to improve the checking mechanism. The Government consulted LegCo Members on the proposed improvement measures; the matter was discussed at the Panel on 19 December 2011 and during a LegCo motion debate on 21 December 2011 respectively. Members in general supported the implementation of measures to improve the accuracy of registered addresses contained in the registers of electors. Having considered Members’ views, the REO started implementing the enhanced measures¹ from early 2012 onwards so as to maintain the integrity of the VR system and enhance the accuracy of the particulars contained in the registers of electors.

3. At the same time, the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (“CMAB”) conducted a public consultation on other proposed further improvement measures² from 16 January to 3 March 2012. In light of the views received during the public consultation period and expressed by LegCo Members, the Government decided not to pursue some of the proposed measures including the proposed requirement for address proof and the proposed penalty concerning address updating. The relevant

¹ The enhanced measures for VR included:

- (a) enhanced checking performed by the REO;
- (b) strengthening of publicity measures;
- (c) additional checks on lists of buildings already or to be demolished; and
- (d) enhanced cross-matching with other government departments on the registered addresses of electors.

² The CMAB published the “Consultation Paper on Improvement Measures of the Voter Registration System” on 16 January 2012 to seek public views on a number of further improvement measures.

decision had strived a balance between the need for maintaining the accuracy of the registers of electors and avoiding causing too much inconvenience to the electors. The proposal of setting out electors in the registers according to their principal residential addresses was implemented in 2012. The proposed amendment of statutory deadlines for VR and making offences of providing false information on VR as indictable offences were implemented upon the passage of the Electoral Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2014 by the LegCo on 10 July 2014.

Checking Measures in the 2015 Cycle

4. Following the checking measures implemented in the 2012 VR cycle and with reference to the experience gained, the REO continues to implement the checking measures and inquiry process in the 2015 VR cycle which have been discussed in public and at the LegCo as mentioned above. The intensity of the checking measures and the coverage of electors in this cycle are similar to that of the 2012 VR cycle.

5. Based on the checking results and in accordance with the relevant electoral laws, the REO initiated the inquiry process for about 80,000 electors because the REO has reasonable grounds to believe that their registered addresses are no longer their only or principal residence in Hong Kong. The REO expects that 82,703 inquiry letters³ would be issued by registered mail⁴ from end April to end May 2015, requesting the electors concerned to complete and return the reply slip attached so as to confirm or update their registered addresses **on or before the statutory deadline of 2 July 2015**. The relevant breakdown is set out below:

³ In the 2012, 2013 and 2014 VR cycle, the REO issued 296,590, 35,335 and 24,242 inquiry letters respectively.

⁴ According to the electoral laws, an inquiry must be sent by registered post addressed to the elector from whom the inquiry is made.

Checking measures	Expected number of inquiry letters to be issued (as at 26 May)
(a) Follow-up inquiries on undelivered poll cards of the 2014 District Council By-Elections and other electoral documents	6,897
(b) Cases requiring further checking of electors' registered addresses after cross-matching of data with Housing Department, Hong Kong Housing Society and Home Affairs Department	41,720
(c) Checks on multiple electors or multiple surnames of electors registered with the same residential address	6,535
(d) Cases requiring further checking after conducting random sampling checks	24,175
(e) Checks on incomplete, commercial or non-residential registered addresses	2,479
(f) Checks on cases of buildings already demolished or vacant buildings pending demolition	897
Total	82,703

Response Required from Electors

6. To remind electors under the inquiry process to respond to the REO in a timely manner, all envelopes of the inquiry letters are stamped with a prominent reminder: "Important Document Please Reply Promptly" (See sample in Figure 1). If an elector has received a mail delivery notification card from the Hong Kong Post, he/she should collect the letter as soon as possible, otherwise he/she may not be able to pick up the letter after the collection period⁵ has expired. The elector just needs to simply confirm or update his/her registered addresses by completing and returning the reply slip enclosed on or before the statutory deadline of 2 July 2015.

⁵ Generally speaking, according to the rules of the Hong Kong Post, members of the public have to collect the registered mails from the post office within two weeks upon receipt of mail delivery notification cards. The registered mails will be returned by the Hong Kong Post to the REO after the collection period has expired.

7. About 40,000 out of the around 80,000 inquiry letters issued require the electors concerned to simply confirm or update their registered addresses by completing the reply slips.
8. For the remaining 40,000 inquiry letters, the REO, according to the objective information available, believes that the electors concerned have already moved out of their registered addresses or the relevant addresses are not for residential use. The electors are therefore required to confirm whether they are still residing in their registered addresses and provide address proofs⁶ at the same time. If the electors have already moved out of their registered addresses, they are only required to report their latest residential addresses to the REO by responding to the inquiry letters or submitting application forms for VR/change of particulars.
9. If electors have questions about the contents of the inquiry letters or the inquiry process, they may call the REO hotline at 2891 1001. Staff of the REO will provide assistance to the electors and explain the respective procedures. After receipt of replies from electors subject to the inquiry process, the REO will update their registration particulars as soon as possible. As at 26 May 2015, the REO has already received replies from about 10,000 electors under inquiry.
10. In carrying out the checking process, the REO will also contact the electors concerned by phone, email or fax according to the communication means they have provided, so as to remind them to confirm or update their registration particulars before the statutory deadline. Separately, the REO has launched various publicity measures (e.g., advertisements and broadcasting of publicity message) to remind the electors under inquiry to reply to the REO by the statutory deadline.
11. The REO has also reminded the electors concerned in the inquiry letters that if they fail to reply on or before the statutory deadline (i.e., 2 July 2015), their names will be included in the Omissions List to be published on or before 1 August 2015. The REO will issue reminder

⁶ Electors are required to provide documents as address proofs, such as rates/water/electricity/gas bills bearing their names; or address proof of another person who resides with the elector concerned at the registered addresses, together with a declaration made by the elector; or statutory declaration made through the District Offices. Free statutory declaration services are provided by the District Offices. Templates of the declaration made by an elector for the address proof of a person residing with the elector and statutory declaration can be downloaded at REO's website (<http://www.reo.gov.hk/en/voter/dra.htm>).

letters by surface mails to the electors whose names are included in the Omissions List before the end of July 2015 to remind them to take appropriate remedial action on or before the statutory deadline of 25 August 2015 in order to reinstate their registration status. The relevant electors should submit their claims or update their registered addresses if they wish to keep their registration status. If their claims are approved by the Revising Officer, their names will be included in the final registers of electors to be published in September 2015.

Way Forward

12. The existing VR system is based on the principle of honest reporting and facilitation for electors. It is essential for the public to fulfil their civic responsibilities in providing true and accurate residential addresses for VR. In implementing the checking measures, the REO will strive to facilitate the electors but also calls on the public to cooperate. The Government will continue to improve and suitably adjust the checking measures having regard to the effectiveness of the measures and needs.

Registration and Electoral Office
May 2015

Sample Envelope of Inquiry Letter

