

## Enhancing work in districts through strengthening District Councils

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The Government today (April 27) launched a three-month consultation seeking public views on proposals to enhance work of the Administration in districts through strengthening District Councils (DCs). The proposals are contained in a consultation document entitled "Review on the Role, Functions and Composition of District Councils".

Announcing the launch of the consultation at a press conference this afternoon, Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, said District Councils played a pivotal role in the District Administration Scheme. They monitored the provision and delivery of district services and advised the Government on community-related issues.

He said that in recent years, DCs had played an enhanced role in the areas of community building, leisure and cultural activities as well as improvement of the local environment.

Also speaking at the press conference, the Secretary for Constitutional Affairs, Mr Stephen Lam, said that the review also set out proposals on some DC election-related matters concerning the addition of elected seats and the provision of financial assistance for the 2007 election. He invited people to give their views on these issues.

Dr Ho said District Council members had close ties with local residents and had a good understanding of their concerns. They were in the best position to offer useful advice to enhance the management of district sports and leisure facilities as well as programme planning and implementation.

"I am confident that the DCs' involvement in the management of district facilities of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and Home Affairs Department will ensure that we can better meet the needs of local residents," he said.

To support DCs' involvement in the management of district-based facilities such as community halls, district libraries, leisure grounds, sports venues, swimming pools and beaches, the Government proposed to create a dedicated capital works vote for minor works with an annual provision of \$300 million, and also increase provision of DC funds to \$300 million per year for organising programmes and community

involvements projects.

The new arrangement would be implemented as early as January, 2007, on a pilot basis in several districts. A District Facilities Management Committee would be set up under each District Council to plan, consider and endorse proposals regarding the management of district facilities.

"To enhance district work, we need to strengthen District Officers' capacity to resolve local issues and enhance communication between the Administration and the DCs at the same time," Dr Ho said.

"We propose to set up a high-level Steering Committee on District Administration, to be chaired by myself or the Permanent Secretary for Home Affairs and attended by relevant Heads of Departments, to provide a forum for top management of different departments to resolve inter-departmental district management issues, to devise strategies to further district administration, and to provide guidance to the District Management Committees chaired by DOs.

"To strengthen interaction between DCs and the Administration, Heads of Departments with more direct interface with the public would take turns to attend DC meetings to hear first-hand DC members' views on issues within their purview.

"We also propose that the Chief Executive host an annual District Administration Summit, to be attended by senior officials in the Government, to discuss issues of interest on the development of district administration from a 'people-based' perspective," Dr Ho added.

Among the proposals were recommendations to improve financial support for DC members.

"We propose to raise DC members' honorariums and operating expenses allowances by 10%. We also suggest introduction of a new non-accountable miscellaneous expenses allowance and two new accountable allowances for the setting-up and winding-up of ward offices."

However, Dr Ho said the proposed changes to the remuneration package of DC members were subject to consideration by the Independent Commission on Remuneration of Members of the District Councils and the Finance Committee of the

Legislative Council.

Mr Lam said it was proposed to introduce a financial assistance scheme for DC election candidates to encourage participation in public elections. This measure was similar to the scheme for Legislative Council election candidates.

Under the proposed scheme, candidates who get elected, or those who received 5% of valid votes or more, will be eligible for financial assistance. "We propose that the subsidy rate be set at \$10 per vote, capped at 50% of the actual election expenses of the candidates," Mr Lam said.

For full details of the consultation document, people are invited to visit any District Offices for a copy of the consultation document or the dedicated website [www.dc-review.gov.hk](http://www.dc-review.gov.hk) on which the document was uploaded.

The consultation period will last for three months until the end of July. People are welcome to send their views to the DC Review Secretariat on or before July 31, 2006.

Ends/Thursday, April 27, 2006