

## Government's review supported by District Councils

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District councillors in all 18 districts generally agreed that proposals set out in the consultation document on the review on the role, functions and composition of District Councils, were a move in the right direction to increase their role, the Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, said today (June 29).

Concluding views sought in the last two months, Dr Ho said, "I have attended council meetings in all 18 districts with colleagues in Home Affairs Bureau and Constitutional Affairs Bureau since the release of the "District Councils Review" consultation document at the end of April. We are glad that motions to support the direction and proposals put forward in the review document were passed in all 18 District Councils."

"On the whole, councillors gave their views or raised concerns about the following five areas: mode of operation and management of district facilities, funding mechanism, members' honorarium and status, role of District Officers and the overall constitutional development. Councillors also support heads of departments having more direct contact with the public in the district visits."

As for the request for a higher increase in members' honorariums and the setting up of retirement and medical protection schemes, Dr Ho said he believed the introduction of the new non-accountable monthly expenses allowance of \$4,000 could fulfil the needs of the members. "We will also review the facilities required in each district and increase the flexibility of funding arrangements to promptly meet the district needs."

Regarding constitutional development, Dr Ho said it would be implemented step by step.

"I hope members have faith in the Government's sincerity in putting forward this review and together we can work for the betterment of the districts. We will carefully consider every single view given in the District Council meetings. We have also started the preparation work for the pilot scheme starting next January," Dr Ho said.

The purpose of the review is to enhance district works and strengthen the role of the District Councils. The review sets out proposals to enhance the role of councils through their involvement in the management of district facilities; to ensure the public governance can better meet community aspirations; and to further establish a closer

partnership with the district councils.

Other proposals set out in the consultation document included creating a dedicated capital works fund with an annual provision of \$300 million, to increase District Council funds to an annual provision of \$300 million, to set up a Steering Committee on District Administration, to hold an annual District Administration Summit attended by the Chief Executive, and introduce a financial assistance scheme for District Council election candidates.

Dr Ho invited people to express their views by the end of the public consultation period. "To better response to the aspirations of the people at large, we first need to get public opinion. I hope people will not give up their right and send us their views via mails, fax and emails before the July 31 deadline.

"Let us work together for the enhancement of district work and the strengthening role of the District Councils."

The Home Affairs Department had organised two public forums on District Councils Review in the urban area. People are invited to the final public forum on July 11 at the Heritage Museum in Sha Tin.

Ends/Thursday, June 29, 2006