

Exco endorses implementation of DC review recommendations

Following the public consultation on the review on the role, functions and composition of District Councils, the Executive Council has endorsed recommendations on the implementation plan.

The Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, said today (September 28) that the recommendations included a pilot scheme in four selected districts for District Councils (DCs) to participate in the management of facilities.

"We propose that starting from the new DC term in January 2008, all 18 District Councils will participate in the management of some district facilities, such as libraries, community halls, leisure grounds, sports venues and swimming pools (including beaches), to strengthen their role in district administration and ensure that district needs are better met," Dr Ho said.

"We have decided to adopt a more prudent approach and launch a pilot scheme in January 2007, in four selected districts, one on Hong Kong Island, and one each in Kowloon, New Territories East and New Territories West regions, namely Wan Chai, Wong Tai Sin, Tuen Mun and Sai Kung. The scheme will provide operational experience to help pave the way for a smooth and effective roll-out of the implementation plan to all 18 districts from the next DC term in January, 2008."

Additional resources will be provided to the pilot districts to initiate community involvement projects and district minor works under the new model. Upon full implementation in all 18 districts in January 2008, DC funds will be increased to an annual \$300 million to enhance collaboration between DCs and the community organisations in carrying out district-based projects; the new dedicated capital works fund will have an annual provision of \$300 million to support greater involvement of DCs in implementing minor works in the districts.

The Government will set up a Steering Committee on District Administration in January 2007, chaired by the Secretary for Home Affairs or the Permanent Secretary for Home Affairs. The committee will have regular discussions with relevant Heads of Departments to resolve district management problems requiring inter-departmental collaboration, and to provide a more systematic support to District Officers in discharging their role as overall co-ordinator and the leading government representative at district level.

"Heads of departments with a direct interface with the public will attend DC meetings on a regular basis starting from next year to strengthen communication between the Administration and the DCs so that services delivered by government departments can better meet community aspirations and needs," Dr Ho said. "We also propose to hold the first annual Chief Executive Summit on District Administration in early 2008 upon the full implementation of the DC Review proposals in all 18 districts and look forward to further improvement of the proposals."

Regarding remuneration for DC Members, a new package with an increase in both DC Members' honoraria and the Operating Expenses Allowance will also be implemented to enable members to discharge their duties more effectively. Taking into account the views expressed by DC Members, the Government plans to advance the implementation of two accountable allowances, namely the 10% increase in the Operating Expenses Allowance for DC Members and the new Winding-up Allowance, to start from January, 2007. The proposal will be submitted to the Legco Finance Committee as soon as possible.

Having regard to the contribution made by appointed and ex-officio members to the work of DCs, and in order to ensure the continuation of smooth delivery of district services while implementing the new measures, the Government considers it prudent not to make major changes to the composition of the DC in the next term from 2008. There will be five additional elected seats for the Sai Kung and Islands DCs. The number of DCs, the population quota, the number of appointed and ex-officio seats and the number of elected seats in the other 16 districts will remain unchanged in the next term. To encourage greater participation in the DC elections, the financial assistance scheme will be implemented starting from the 2007 DC election, subject to the passage of the necessary amendment legislation. Further, having considered the views received during the consultation, the Government proposes to continue to hold the polling day in November.

"The new arrangements will further enhance the involvement of DCs in district management and strengthen the role of Government in district administration. I believe we can better meet community needs and respond more promptly to various district issues in the future and ensure the Government's work can achieve the 'people-based' objective," Dr Ho said.

The Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) and the Constitutional Affairs Bureau (CAB)

jointly issued a consultation document, "Review on the Role, Functions and Composition of District Councils", containing proposals on the enhancement of the role of DCs in district management, composition of DCs and other DC Election related matters on April 27. More than 160 written submissions were received during the three-month consultation period, which ended on July 31.

Senior officials from HAB and CAB attended meetings in 18 DCs and three regional public forums during the consultation period. All the 18 DCs passed positive motions in support of the broad directions of the recommendations in the DC Review.

Report on the DC Review Public Consultation and full text of the submissions has been uploaded to the DC Review dedicated website at www.dc-review.gov.hk for public viewing.

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