

LCQ7: Leisure and cultural services facilities in rural areas

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Following is a question by the Hon Daniel Lam and a written reply by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Miss Denise Yue, on behalf of the Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, in the Legislative Council today (November 29):

Question:

It is learnt that many villages in the New Territories ("NT") are not provided with proper leisure and cultural services ("LCS") facilities. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) in each of the past four years, of the budget for and the actual expenditure on implementing LCS projects for residents in the rural areas, the number of LCS projects initiated and implemented by government departments for the villages in NT, the costs involved and the present status of these projects, and the number of applications received from residents in rural areas for the implementation of LCS projects, the respective numbers of such applications approved and rejected as well as the reasons for rejecting the applications;

(b) of the current number of approved rural LCS projects which have not yet commenced (please provide a breakdown by the waiting time for the commencement of the projects), the reasons for the difference in the waiting time, as well as the total number and proportion of those LCS projects which have been given approval for more than four years but have not yet commenced, together with the reasons for the delay in their commencement, and whether there are approved projects which have been cancelled due to excessive waiting time for commencement;

(c) whether it will consider implementing special measures to shorten rural LCS projects' waiting time for commencement; and

(d) whether it will, for the purpose of taking care of the needs of the disadvantaged and people in remote areas, earmark provisions to expedite those LCS projects which are small in scale but urgently needed by residents in the rural areas?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) Both the Home Affairs Department (HAD) and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) under the Home Affairs Bureau are engaged in the provision of leisure and cultural services (LCS) facilities in rural areas.

To improve the infrastructure and living environment of rural areas in the New Territories, the HAD introduced the Rural Public Works (RPW) Programme in 1999 for implementation of minor projects which individually costs not more than \$15 million with a view to improving the local environment and living conditions in rural areas expeditiously and flexibly to meet the needs of the local community. Under this Programme, the local community, village representatives and members of the District Councils (DCs) can put forward proposals to the District Office (DO) of their respective district on the implementation of various rural public works which include the development of additional leisure facilities and improvement to existing ones. In the past four years, the HAD has completed 29 leisure services projects under the RPW Programme at a total cost of about \$26 million, averaging \$6.5 million per year in leisure services rural minor works. The types of works include the construction of or improvement to sitting-out areas, playgrounds, soccer pitches and basketball courts.

After resolving all technical problems arising from the projects, including land ownership issues and objection raised by the local community, and obtaining support from the District Working Group under the RPW Programme, the DOs will make arrangements to commence the works. Under normal circumstances, after all technical problems have been resolved, rural minor works can be completed within one to two years after commencement. In the past four years, the HAD has not rejected any proposal of the District Working Group on the implementation of rural minor works due to resource constraints.

In the past four years, the LCSD, after consultation with the DCs, has completed 14 LCS projects in rural areas, including capital works (over \$15 million) and minor works (not more than \$15 million). The total project cost is about \$76 million, averaging \$19 million per year. The works mainly involve the provision of open space and upgrading of the existing leisure facilities.

In the past four years, the LCSD has received 53 proposals in total from residents in respect of the provision of LCS facilities in rural areas. Among the proposals, 14 projects have been completed as mentioned above, six are under active planning, 18 are being

processed or reviewed, and the remaining 15 have not been accepted. Generally speaking, proposals are not accepted because the LCSD or HAD has already provided LCS facilities in the vicinity of the sites proposed, or the sites proposed have not been planned for the provision of LCS facilities. The LCSD would annually review the proposals on LCS facilities in each district, including rural areas, and after consultation with the DC, commence planning work for the priority projects. Generally speaking, minor works (not more than \$15 million) of LCSD can be completed within one to two years after commencement.

(b) The rural minor works of the LCSD and HAD with funding approval would start construction works within about six months. Our records show that there are no LCS facilities which have not started construction works with funding approval granted for more than four years, or have been cancelled after funding approval is granted.

(c) & (d) As proposed in the review on the role, functions and composition of DCs, the Government will soon create a "dedicated" capital works block vote with an annual provision of \$300 million for DCs to expedite the implementation of the district minor works improvement projects so as to meet the aspiration of the local residents. The proposal, which will be implemented on a pilot basis in four selected districts from January 2007, will be implemented throughout the 18 districts in 2008. The respective DCs could decide the use of the block vote for expediting the provision of the LCS facilities in the rural areas in New Territories districts.

Under this arrangement, the LCSD and HAD would continue to work closely with the village representatives and members of the DCs for the early provision of LCS facilities in the rural areas.

Ends/Wednesday, November 29, 2006

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