

LCQ17: Subsidies for mutual aid committees in public housing estates

Following is a question by the Hon Lau Kong-wah and a reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (November 28):

Question:

Regarding the annual provision of subsidies for mutual aid committees ("MACs") of public housing estates under the management of the Hong Kong Housing Authority, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the authorities' objectives of providing the above subsidies to MACs, and the major expenditure items funded by such subsidies in the past three years;

(b) for how long the authorities have not made an adjustment to the current rate of such subsidies; and

(c) given that currently, the community in general desires that the spirit of good neighbourhood and mutual support and assistance be lifted, whether the authorities will consider increasing the rate of such subsidies to facilitate MACs in performing their functions (such as attending to the needs of households regularly through the introduction of floor wardens and block wardens, or even organising recreational activities for households); if not, of the reasons for that; and whether the authorities will adjust the rate of such subsidies having regard to the factor of inflation?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) The Government encourages residents of buildings to form mutual aid committees (MACs) with the objectives of enhancing the spirit of mutual assistance in the neighbourhood and fostering a sense of belonging to the community. The Home Affairs Department (HAD) provides an accountable subsidy each quarter for MACs to meet basic daily expenses. Over the past three years, the major expenditure items funded by the subsidy include electricity charges, telephone bills, office equipment and stationery. The current limit of the

quarterly subsidy is \$1,000. HAD also provides new MACs with an additional allowance up to \$1,000 for setting up offices.

(b) HAD regularly reviews the limit of the quarterly subsidy provided to MACs having regard to the relevant consumer price index to ensure that the purchasing power of the subsidy will not diminish as a result of inflation. The limit of the subsidy was last adjusted upwards to \$1,000 in 1997 based on inflation. Despite the occurrence of deflation during the period, there has not been downward adjustment of the subsidy. According to the outcome of the latest review this year, the current limit has already reflected inflation changes since 1997.

(c) The subsidy is only one of the various forms of financial assistance provided by the Government to MACs. Other forms of assistance include concessionary or nominal rent for MACs to hire office premises in public housing estates. Moreover, MACs may apply for District Council funds to organise community building and cultural and recreational activities. Starting from 2008, the Government will enhance the functions of District Councils, including the initiative to provide more resources to the 18 District Councils in Hong Kong. District organisations, including MACs, can apply for these additional resources to organise more community building and recreational activities conducive to the enhancement of the spirit of good neighbourhood.

As mentioned in part (b) of the reply, HAD will regularly review the limit of the subsidy for MACs having regard to the relevant consumer price index so as to ensure that the purchasing power of the subsidy will not diminish as a result of inflation.

End/Wednesday, November 28, 2007