

Public engagement exercise on WKCD closes

The three-month public engagement (PE) exercise on the recommendations of the Consultative Committee (CC) on the Core Arts and Cultural Facilities of the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) will come to a close today (December 12).

The exercise was launched in mid-September to explain the recommendations and to solicit views and support from the public.

The Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, noted that initial findings of the PE exercise indicated that the stakeholders and the community were generally supportive of the recommendations of the CC, and would like to see the early implementation of the WKCD project.

Speaking on the way forward, Mr Tsang said, "Taking into account the results of the PE exercise, the Government will proceed with drawing up the legislation for establishing a statutory body to take forward the project as quickly as possible. We are planning to introduce a bill on the establishment of the WKCD Authority into the Legislative Council (LegCo) in February 2008. If the bill is passed by mid-2008, the authority would be set up later in the year."

In line with the financing approach recommended by the CC, the Government is planning to seek LegCo's approval in mid-2008 for an upfront endowment of \$21.6 billion for the WKCD Authority upon its establishment to finance the capital costs of the WKCD project.

"This one-off upfront endowment signifies the Government's clear commitment to the long-term development of culture and the arts for the future of Hong Kong," Mr Tsang said, adding that funding certainty would be crucial in enabling the WKCD Authority to proceed with the formulation of the master plan, as well as the planning, design and content development of the various integrated clusters of facilities within WKCD.

During the past three months, the Home Affairs Bureau had organised three public forums, a series of roving exhibitions held at 28 venues, and 35 sector-specific briefings for, inter alia, LegCo, arts practitioners and administrators, the education sector, children and youth groups, public policy think tanks, professional bodies, relevant district councils, chambers of commerce, as well as consuls general and

international cultural organisations.

An online discussion board was launched as a platform for the public to express views on various aspects of the CC's recommendations. Members of the public were also encouraged to forward their views in writing or by completing the WKCD wish cards.

As for the alleged professional misconduct in the telephone polls conducted by an independent consultant, Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI) of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the Home Affairs Bureau clarified that the telephone poll was only one of the many channels to solicit public opinion on the WKCD project. The deficiency in the exercise was regretted. However, the bureau had just been informed that PPRI had in fact taken immediate steps to rectify the problem in the first week of December. All the data collected through the telephone poll in question had been voided, and a fresh telephone poll had been conducted in the past few days to collect public views in a scientific and professional manner according to the established guidelines.

As the irregularities had been rectified and there were other ways to obtain views on the project, the Administration believes that the incident will not make a significant impact on the PE exercise as a whole.

Ends/Wednesday, December 12, 2007