

## LCQ17: Commissioning of opinion surveys by Government

\*\*\*\*\*

Following is a question by the Hon Lee Wing-tat and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (January 16):

Question:

Recently, the Public Policy Research Institute ("the Institute") of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University commissioned by the Home Affairs Bureau to conduct a telephone poll on West Kowloon Cultural District was alleged to have deviated from the professional guidelines when conducting the poll. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) of the number of opinion surveys, commissioned by the Home Affairs Bureau in the past two years, for carrying out by civil organisations, together with a breakdown by the organisations commissioned;
- (b) whether another organisation will be commissioned to conduct the above poll afresh; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (c) whether it will suspend commissioning the Institute to conduct other opinion surveys; if so, when the suspension will end; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (d) whether the chance for the Institute to be awarded government contracts to conduct opinion surveys in the future will be affected when it is proved that the Institute has deviated from the professional guidelines; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) The number of opinion surveys commissioned by the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) to be carried out by civil organisations in the past two years are as follows:

Name of civil organisation commissioned	Number of times commissioned
-----	-----
Centre for Civil Society and Governance and Policy 21 Limited, University of Hong Kong	3

MVA Hong Kong Limited	1
Centre for Communication Research, Chinese University of Hong Kong	1
Policy 21 Limited, University of Hong Kong	1
Public Policy Research Institute, Hong Kong Polytechnic University	1
Total	7

(b) The HAB commissioned the Hong Kong Polytechnic University Public Policy Research Institute (the Institute) as an independent consultant to triangulate and analyse public views collected from different channels during the Public Engagement (PE) exercise of the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) from September 12 to December 12, 2007. Upon receiving the complaint that the Institute had allegedly deviated from the professional guidelines when conducting the telephone poll on the WKCD, the HAB immediately demanded the Institute to provide a detailed investigation report and give us an explanation. It was learnt that some telephone interviewers had not followed the required procedures when conducting the second telephone poll on the WKCD. After the problem had come to light, all the data collected through the telephone poll in question had been instantly voided, and a fresh telephone poll had been conducted.

The fresh telephone poll was conducted under the tight supervision of the senior management of the Institute. The questionnaires completed by each telephone interviewer were checked randomly by his/her supervisor by calling the interviewees again for re-verification. The percentage of random checks was raised from the original 15% to 20% for higher quality assurance. At the same time, professional statistical staff of the HAB also conducted on-site monitoring of the process to ensure that the interviews were carried out in accordance with the required procedures.

We express regret that the Institute had deviated from the professional guidelines when conducting the telephone phone. However, since the Institute has taken immediate steps to rectify the problem, the fresh telephone poll had been conducted in a scientific and professional manner according to the required guidelines and the Institute had openly admitted their negligence and taken internal disciplinary action, we do not consider it necessary to commission

another academic institution to take over the opinion survey.

Moreover, we must emphasise that telephone poll is only one of the many channels to solicit public opinion on the WKCD project. The public engagement work has been carried out extensively, both in terms of the number of people and variety of sectors involved. Members of the public could express their views by joining the on-line discussion forums, completing the WKCD wish cards available on-line or at the venues of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, community halls, the lobbies of Government Offices and other venues. They could also attend public forums or sector-specific briefings for different sectors, professional bodies, arts practitioners and administrators. The Institute will include in its report the relevant discussions of the Legislative Council and the views collected at the activities held by civil organisations. We believe that the Institute will triangulate and analyse the diversified views collected during the PE exercise and will be able to provide an independent and professional consultancy report.

(c) Apart from the telephone poll on the WKCD, the HAB at present has not commissioned the Institute to conduct other opinion surveys. We have no plan to cease inviting the Institute to bid for opinion surveys commissioned by the HAB. Nevertheless, we will consider carefully the relevant experience, track record and ability of bidders in every tendering exercise to ensure that the most suitable organisation would be chosen for the job.

(d) Generally speaking, government departments will closely monitor the performance of consulting firms/organisations to ensure that their services are in compliance with the requirements as stipulated in the consultancy briefs and the consultancy contracts. In case of unsatisfactory performance of a consulting firm/organisation for various reasons, the department concerned will consider taking action, including the issuance of warning letters, termination of the consultancy and suspending the acceptance of any bid for new consultancy for the Government from the concerned firm/organisation etc.

Ends/Wednesday, January 16, 2008