

LCQ12: District Council members' remuneration package

Following is a question by the Hon Lau Wong-fat and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (February 20):

Question:

Some members of the public have pointed out to me that, although the Government considers District Council (DC) membership as a form of public service, it is indeed necessary for DC members to devote much time, attention and efforts to council work. With the enhancement of the functions of DCs and the increasing aspirations of members of the public, DC membership is actually not different from a full-time job, but DC members do not have medical benefits, employees' compensation insurance cover or retirement protection. On the other hand, with effect from the Fourth Legislative Council (LegCo), the Government will provide LegCo Members with end-of-service gratuities as a form of protection to help them tide over a period of time should they decide not to seek re-election or fail to be re-elected. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether it will:

(a) consider, with reference to the gratuity package for LegCo Members, offering end-of-service gratuities to DC members, so that they need not worry about their future and can fully dedicate themselves to the work of DCs; and

(b) provide DC members with medical benefits which are on par with those for civil servants?

Reply:

Madam President,

District Councils (DCs) are district organisations established in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in accordance with the Basic Law. They are important consultative bodies on issues of district and territory-wide interests. Apart from reflecting public opinion and promoting community building programmes in the district, DCs play an active role in monitoring the delivery of public services at district level and promoting government

initiatives. Over the years, DC members have devoted time and effort in the discharge of their duties.

With the enhancement of their role in the new term DCs, DC members are expected to be involved, and assume greater responsibilities, in the management of district facilities. As such, we have invited the Independent Commission on Remuneration for Members of the DCs of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (the Independent Commission) to advise on how the remuneration package of DC members could be improved in the new term (from 2008 to 2011) as we examined the scope for strengthening the functions of DCs. The recommendations of the Independent Commission were approved by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council. The package of improvement measures include a ten percent increase in the honorarium of DC members, introduction of a new miscellaneous expenses allowance (MEA) (\$48,000 per annum), introduction of a setting-up allowance (\$100,000 per term) and a winding-up allowance (\$72,000 per term).

The MEA of \$48,000 per annum is a non-accountable allowance which may be used to cover expenses incurred by DC members, including the arrangement of medical or any other personal protection services.

We will continue to regularly review the remuneration package for DC members and ensure that the arrangements will meet the needs of changing circumstances.

Ends/Wednesday, February 20, 2008