

Summit strengthens interaction between Government and District Councils

The Summit on District Administration was held today (May 10) at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre for government officials and District Council (DC) members to discuss various livelihood issues. The Chief Executive, Mr Donald Tsang, delivered a keynote speech entitled “Let’s partner together, Make life better”.

The meeting provides a good opportunity for the senior echelon of the government, including six Directors of Bureaux, to exchange views with DC members and district personalities on issues of most concern to the people.

The 18 DC Chairmen were invited to conduct six break-out group discussions on the following topics: “Harmonious community and cultural and sports activities”, “Social welfare”, “Environmental and district hygiene”, “Transport and housing”, “Development and heritage conservation” and “Environmental protection”. Secretary for Home Affairs Mr Tsang Tak-sing, Secretary for Labour and Welfare Mr Matthew Cheung, Secretary for Food and Health Dr York Chow, Secretary for Transport and Housing Ms Eva Cheng, Secretary for Development Mrs Carrie Lam, and Secretary for the Environment Mr Edward Yau also joined the discussion.

In his keynote speech, the Chief Executive, Mr Donald Tsang said that the successful promotion of district administration and community development hinged on three key components : District Councils, district organizations and District Officers plus civil servants of the implementation departments concerned. They were inter-dependent and not a single component is dispensable.

He added that the review on the District Administration Scheme in 2006 focused on two major areas: to enhance the functions of DCs and to strengthen the role of District Officers (DOs) in district management. He stressed that DOs nowadays were representing the Chief Executive at the district level. They should proactively promote community building, assist in the effective implementation of government policies, reach out to the community and perform the role as a political leader at districts, which was the mission of the DOs in the new era.

The Chief Executive also announced that the Government had decided to extend the opening hours of 33 major and district libraries under the Leisure and

Cultural Services Department and would provide the necessary additional manpower and financial resources.

All major and district libraries in the New Territories will be open from “six days a week” to “seven days a week”, in line with the present arrangement of major and district libraries in the urban area. The opening hours of the 33 major and district libraries will be extended from 61 - 62 hours to about 70 hours a week.

In addition, the government will further encourage more schools to open up their facilities, including sports facilities and school halls, for community use.

In his welcoming remarks, the Secretary of Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing said, “It is essential that public policies are effectively implemented at the district level. DCs have all along been the key partners of the government on district affairs.”

He noted that since the commencement of the new DC term, a number of Secretaries and Directors of Bureaux had visited DCs to consult them on issues under different policy areas. Government departments had also maintained close communication with DCs on various measures.

“The Home Affairs Bureau will continue to enhance co-operation with DCs, with a view to resolving district issues promptly and effectively, fostering a harmonious society and improving people’s livelihood,” said Mr Tsang Tak-sing.

Taking into account the views and suggestions put forward by participants at the break-out sessions, the six Directors of Bureaux proposed more than 10 follow-up measures. These measures fall under three main areas :

- * Building a caring society;
- * Promoting quality and healthy lifestyle;
- * Furthering sustainable and balanced development.

First, in building a caring society, the government will:

- (i) launch the “Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project” to provide more flexible services to parents in need; encourage Mutual Aid Committees, Owners’ Corporations and women

- associations to provide child care and occasional care services, and recruit volunteers to augment these services;
- (ii) proactively reach out to hidden families and elders through district networks to help them reconnect with the community;
 - (iii) provide grants to district organisations to organise activities that promote neighborliness, mutual help, and consider increasing the subsidy for Mutual Aid Committees; and
 - (iv) leverage the resources of the business sector, district organisations and non-governmental organisations to implement the Social Enterprises Partnership Programme.

On promoting quality and healthy lifestyle, the government will -

- (i) promote a healthy eating habit in collaboration with DCs, district organisations and schools, through projects such as the “EatSmart @restaurant.hk”, “EatSmart @school.hk” and train-the-trainer programme;
- (ii) strengthen DC’s role in hawker management and rodent control and to make joint efforts in improving environmental hygiene;
- (iii) organise in collaboration with DCs various kinds of arts and cultural activities in districts and cultivate the development of local arts organisations; set up more community libraries through partnership with local organisations to promote reading, and upgrade the facilities in community halls for performance; and
- (iv) organise more sports activities with district characteristics with DCs and promote public support and involvement in sports events.

The government will also adopt a series of new measures to further sustained and balanced development of society, namely to :

- (i) develop and revitalise old districts and historic buildings to achieve the aim of integration of old and new, balanced development and sustained conservation, through the district-based principle and enhanced public participation;
- (ii) implement "district greening plans" and further promote the separation of waste at source.
- (iii) provide territory-wide on-the-road real-time travel information to

- increase the efficiency of traffic management; and
- (iv) hold seminars to collect local views on community and infrastructure facilities of large-scale public housing projects to ensure better living environment.

In his concluding remarks, the Acting Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Stephen Lam said: “The various issues under discussion between participants and the six Directors of Bureaux today are matters of mutual interest and concern.

“We shall prepare a report on the views collected today and the various concrete follow-up measures. The report will be sent to the 18 DCs and the relevant Bureaux for follow up. We aim to let DCs have a progress report by end of this year.”

More than 800 participants from DCs, district organisations and government representatives attended the meeting today.

Ends/Saturday, May 10, 2008