

HKSAR Government accepts recommendations of consultancy study to promote football development in Hong Kong

The Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, said today (March 11) that the HKSAR Government had accepted in principle the key recommendations of a consultancy study on football development and would allocate more resources to implement the recommendations to promote the development of football in Hong Kong.

The Government commissioned the consultancy study in June 2009 to review the current status of football in Hong Kong and recommend viable options for the development of the sport. In its report submitted to the Government, the consultant put forward a series of recommendations to improve the governance of the sport, elevate the standards of professional and "national" football teams, enhance youth training, upgrade the provision of facilities and establish a football training centre.

Speaking at a press conference to announce the findings of the consultancy study, Mr Tsang said, "After thorough deliberation, we have accepted in principle the key recommendations of the consultancy study. The Government, therefore, would refine our policy to adopt further measures to promote the development of football in Hong Kong."

The consultant recommended the Hong Kong Football Association (HKFA) initiate reform to enhance its governance. The consultant also suggested the association engage an outside party as a "change agent" and recruit experienced personnel to formulate and implement its long-term strategies and development plans.

"We have notified the HKFA of the recommendations of the consultancy study. Their initial response is very positive," Mr Tsang said.

To attract more spectators to football matches, the consultant considered that the HKFA should establish a new professional football league and set appropriate criteria for member clubs. For example, they should provide education programmes for youth players.

The consultant considered that raising the standard of representative teams at various levels would require higher standards of coaching and coach education. The HKFA should appoint full-time team managers and team coaches for representative

teams on terms that would attract experienced personnel, and should organise more international matches for representative teams at various levels.

The consultant also recommended that the HKFA focus on youth development and promote a systematic feeder training programme. Specifically, the consultant suggested that: more funding should be made available for district and representative teams at various levels, including for their coaches and training facilities; regional training centres should be established to train young players with potential; and clubs in the new professional football league should be required to operate academies for players from 9 to 16 years of age who should train regularly.

As regards football facilities, the consultant recommended that the Government draw up a playing pitch strategy with a view to increasing the availability and quality of pitches. Each club in the new professional league should also be allocated a "home" ground to help clubs attract supporters and sponsors.

Noting that the development of a training centre in Tseung Kwan O had been under discussion between the HKFA and the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC), the consultant recommended that the Government invite the HKJC to develop and manage the football training centre. The management of the centre should work in partnership with the HKFA and other stakeholders to train elite players.

Mr Tsang said that the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) would strive to increase the number of third generation or more advanced artificial turf pitches to nearly triple the current number of artificial turf pitches in the next five years.

As regards the recommendation on "home" grounds, the Government has already designated "home" pitches for the 10 First Division teams in the current football season.

The consultant considered that the immediate priority for the HKFA was to design and establish a new governance structure, providing clear responsibilities for its office bearers, and recruiting senior staff to improve the association's management and marketing operations. The HKSAR Government would consider providing funding to help the HKFA begin implementing the study recommendations. It is expected that the HKFA would, in time, be able to derive income from sponsorship, gate receipts and other sources that would help it to achieve a steady development in its

management and financial position.

"To implement the consultant's recommendations systematically, the Home Affairs Bureau will set up a football task force to be chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Home Affairs with participation by the LCSD, HKFA, experts and other relevant parties who will work closely to supervise the implementation of various recommendations," he said.

The report of the consultancy study had been carefully considered by the Steering Group for the Football Consultancy Study in Hong Kong. Members of the steering group include Mr Kwok Ka-ming, Director of International Relations of HKFA, and Prof Lui Tai-lok from the Department of Sociology of the University of Hong Kong.

Also present at today's press conference were the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services, Mrs Betty Fung; Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Jonathan McKinley; Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Benjamin Mok, and Mr Kwok Ka-ming. The HKFA Chairman Mr Brian Leung also attended the press conference.

The English version of the consultancy report on local football development has been uploaded to the website of the Home Affairs Bureau today (www.hab.gov.hk). The Chinese version will be uploaded later (the summary of the report in Chinese is available).

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