

Progress Report of the 10th Meeting of the Kowloon City District Council

Purpose

This paper aims to report on the major issues discussed at the 10th meeting of the Kowloon City District Council (KCDC) on 12 May 2005.

Reviewing the School Closure Policy

2. Members were concerned that the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) had allocated funds to a school sponsoring body for the redevelopment of a former secondary school site in the district into a primary school in the coming academic year while ordering three primary schools in Primary One Admission (POA) School Net No. 36 to stop operating Primary One classes. Members said that since there were insufficient school-age children in the district, public funds should not be wasted on an additional school, which might intensify competition among the primary schools in the district.

3. The EMB explained that under the POA System, the number of students allotted to each primary school was determined by a computer system according to objective criteria including the number of schools in the school net concerned, the district in which a student lived, parents' preferences and the random numbers generated by the computer. Under this open and effective mechanism, the three primary schools in question in School Net No. 36 could not meet the minimum requirement of 23 Primary One admissions required by the current policy and were not allowed to operate Primary One classes in the coming academic year. The proposed new primary school was actually a branch of a bisessional school converting to whole-day schooling. Since it was the government's policy to implement whole-day primary schooling, the EMB should not stop granting new school premises to bisessional schools converting to whole-day schooling solely because of a substantial decrease in the number of primary students. Otherwise, the competitiveness of such schools would be undermined. Due to numerous external factors, the new school premises granted might not necessarily be in the same district as the original school or in a district where demand was heavy.

Foreign Domestic Helpers

4. Members expressed concern over various issues relating to the employment

of foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) and proposed the following measures for the Government's consideration:

- (1) to leave it to the FDHs and their employers to decide the need of a probation period;
- (2) to study the feasibility of allowing Hong Kong people to employ domestic helpers from the mainland;
- (3) to regulate FDH agencies and set up a mechanism to punish unscrupulous agencies.

5. The KCDC Secretariat had submitted Members' views on this item to the Labour Department for consideration.

Ways to Prevent the Overcharging of Water Fees

6. Members pointed out that after the Water Supplies Department (WSD) had replaced the water meters of the Shung "Tze" Houses, the water charges of some 60 households had soared sharply. They suspected that this was due to inaccuracies in the readings of the new meters. The WSD confirmed that all new meters had been triple-tested before installation. In addition, the installation works had been carried out by the technicians or contractors of the WSD to ensure good quality. As such, it was unlikely that inaccurate meters or improper installation was the cause of high water charges.

7. The WSD explained that the original water meters had been installed some 30 years before and, owing to their design, might have given readings that were lower than the actual usage after so many years of use. When they had finally been replaced with new meters that gave accurate readings, water charges had naturally increased. The WSD provided an analysis of the old and new readings to substantiate its findings.

Problems Arising from Metal Receptacles for Old Clothes Recycling

8. Members reflected that a growing number of organisations had applied for permission to place metal receptacles for old clothes recycling on the streets. Since the receptacles were often left unattended and not regularly cleaned, the piling up of

old clothes in such receptacles for a long period of time had given rise to environmental hygiene problems. Worse still, some private companies had recently passed themselves off as non-profit organisations and collected donated clothes for profit on government land without permission. In view of this, Members suggested that the Lands Department (LandsD) should (1) review the current arrangements so as to shorten the time allowed for the placement of metal receptacles and to require the applicants to have the receptacles properly attended to; (2) consider removing metal receptacles illegally placed on the streets without giving a 24-hour grace period; and (3) seek the cooperation of other government departments, such as the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department in stepping up patrol and enforcement actions.

9. The LandsD said in response that they only accepted applications from charitable and social service organisations and would approve them only with the consent of all departments concerned. Applicants should fully comply with the conditions attached to the permits issued by the LandsD, otherwise the activities in question could be suspended immediately. If LandsD officers found any unauthorised metal receptacles on government land during their inspections, they would post warning notices on the receptacles and remove such receptacles 24 hours later in accordance with the Land (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance. The LandsD undertook to consider Members' proposals for improving the existing arrangements.

2005-06 Work Plan of the Regional Office (Kowloon Central), Community Relations Department, Independent Commission Against Corruption

10. The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) briefed Members on the 2005-06 Work Plan of the Regional Office (Kowloon Central). The long-term strategy of the ICAC was to promote continuously the culture of integrity and consolidate the success of their work against corruption. The overall plan of the Regional Office (Kowloon Central) for the coming year included some 700 visits and seminars and 34 district anti-corruption activities.

11. The ICAC also briefed Members on their Efficiency Savings Exercise, in

which the ICAC regional offices in Kowloon would be reorganised in the latter half of 2005-06, with the number of offices reduced from the original three to two. After the reorganisation, the Regional Office (Kowloon West) on Nathan Road, Yau Ma Tei, would serve Yau Tsim Mong, Sham Shui Po and Kowloon City districts, while the Regional Office (Kowloon East and Sai Kung) would serve Kwun Tong, Sai Kung and Wong Tai Sin. The ICAC assured Members that the quality of service would not be compromised.

Constructing a Chinese Medicine Hospital and Clinic in Kowloon City District

12. Members were concerned over the Government's inability to deliver on its promise in the 2001 Policy Address to provide Chinese medicine out-patient services in 18 government clinics by 2005. They urged the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB) to take immediate steps to fulfill its pledge and consider constructing a Chinese medicine hospital on the former site of the Kai Tak Airport. In addition, Members suggested that the Government should consider granting land to charitable organisations for the establishment of Chinese medicine clinics on their own in a bid to promote Chinese medicine clinical services.

13. The KCDC Secretariat had submitted Members' views on this item to the HWFB for consideration.

Monitoring Homes for the Elderly in Kowloon City District

14. Members expressed concern over the growing number of private homes for the elderly, many of which were located in old buildings. They doubted as to whether the operation of those private homes was in full compliance with government regulations.

15. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) said in response that all operators of homes for the elderly were required to obtain a licence from the department before their institutions could commence operation. In addition, the inspection team of the SWD Licensing Office (covering four areas, namely, building safety, fire safety,

social work and health care) regularly inspected the facilities of every institution. To further improve the quality of those institutions, the Licensing Office had drafted amendments to the Code of Practice for Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons). Having consulted the Department of Health, Hospital Authority, Fire Services Department and Buildings Department, the SWD had updated and expanded the Code of Practice to cover fire and building safety requirements, measures to prevent infectious diseases and quality standards of health care services for the infirm elderly people. The amended Code of Practice would come into effect within 2005 subject to the endorsement of the Department of Justice.

Strictly Controlling Applications for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) and Allowing Elderly People Living within a Family Unit to Apply for CSSA Independently

16. Members noted that CSSA fraud cases were on the increase and urged the SWD to closely examine the eligibility of applicants and severely punish those who obtained CSSA by fraud. Furthermore, Members pointed out that after the SWD had strictly required that CSSA applicants who lived with income-earning family members should apply as a family unit, some elderly people living with their family members but not receiving proper care had moved out before applying for CSSA so as to conform to the existing CSSA policy. This indirectly aggravated the problem of elderly people living alone.

17. The SWD replied that with a view to enhancing the examination of the eligibility of CSSA applicants, a superintendent had been seconded from the Hong Kong Police Force to the SWD to give professional advice on ways to improve the social security system. It was hoped that the current mechanism could be reinforced to clamp down on CSSA fraud and abuse cases. Moreover, the SWD carried out data verification with nine government departments (including the Immigration Department, Land Registry and Transport Department) on a regular basis to cross-check the information submitted by the applicants and follow up suspicious cases. To make CSSA applicants aware of the criminal liability of committing fraud,

the SWD had posted press articles on convicted cases at the Social Security Field Units. Under the existing CSSA mechanism, the SWD could use discretion when handling applications from elderly people who lived with family members but had financial difficulties. In the previous year, the SWD had exercised the discretion in approving 130 such applications in Kowloon City District. The SWD encouraged Members to refer similar cases to them for follow up action.

Plan for Consolidating the Yau Tsim Mong District and Kowloon City District Social Welfare Offices

18. The SWD told the meeting that the reorganisation of the department since 2001 had streamlined the three-tiered headquarters, regional and district structure into a two-tiered one and redefined the roles of the SWD, placing new focus on planning and quality monitoring functions. Front-line services provided by the SWD would be restricted to core services, while non-core services would be delivered by non-government organisations. With these changes, the numbers of staff and service units in Yau Tsim Mong and Kowloon City districts had been reduced accordingly. To make better use of resources, the SWD planned to consolidate the neighbouring Yau Tsim Mong and Kowloon City District Social Welfare Offices to give the management greater flexibility in the deployment of front-line staff. Generally speaking, the consolidation plan was primarily about the reorganisation of the management structure, without any impact on the front-line service units. As long as front-line services would not be affected, Members welcomed the government's efforts in achieving savings by streamlining the structure of the SWD.

Kowloon City District Office

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