

Progress Report of the 19th Meeting of the Kowloon City District Council

Purpose

This paper aims to report on the major issues discussed at the 19th meeting of the Kowloon City District Council (KCDC) on 16 November 2006.

Kai Tak Planning Review – Revised Preliminary Outline Development Plan

2. Members noted the Revised Preliminary Outline Development Plan prepared by the Planning Department (PlanD) and generally welcomed the proposals to build a multi-purpose stadium complex, a cruise terminal and a metro park in the Kai Tak area. Moreover, Members were pleased to learn that the PlanD had taken the advice and looked for another site for the construction of the Shatin to Central Link (SCL) Depot, so that it would not become a barrier that might hinder the free flow of air in the old district and the integration of the new and old districts. While Members supported the building of an underground shopping street to revitalise the surrounding old districts, they hoped the PlanD would continue to explore other options, such as the construction of the SCL station in Kowloon City, to stimulate the development of the district by boosting pedestrian flow. Meanwhile, Members were concerned that the building of an at-grade cross-boundary heliport at the corner of the runway end would again cause noise nuisance to residents in the Kowloon City and To Kwa Wan areas with the taking off and landing of helicopters.

Goods and Services Tax

3. The Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury explained to Members that due to the narrow tax base of Hong Kong, government revenues were very vulnerable to the changing of economic factors. However, to maintain the existing public services, the Government had to increase its recurrent expenditure steadily. With a view to redressing the imbalance between public expenditure and revenues, the Government should explore various options, including the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST) to broaden the tax base. While most Members were opposed to the GST on the grounds that it might adversely affect Hong Kong's economy and add to the financial burden of low-income families, some supported the Government's proposal to continue with the study on broadening the tax base as Hong Kong people were bound to face the fundamental problem of narrow tax base sooner or later.

Addressing the Problem of Pregnant Women from the Mainland Streaming to Hong Kong for Delivery

4. Members expressed concern over the overcrowding problem of public hospital maternity wards caused by a large number of pregnant women from the mainland streaming to Hong Kong for delivery. The situation was so serious that local pregnant women were even deprived of proper medical care. In addition, Members were concerned that some parents both of whom had no Hong Kong resident status or did not reside in Hong Kong would abandon their children here. This would not only have a negative impact on the growth of these children, but also stretch our social welfare resources. The Hospital Authority (HA) said that new measures were put in place in September 2005 which required that every non-Hong Kong resident pay a deposit of HK\$ 33,000 upon admission to public hospitals under normal circumstances. Since then, the number of non-Hong Kong residents admitted to public hospitals had dropped substantially. While the deposit system did not apply to pregnant women admitted to hospitals for delivery with acute conditions, the accounts department of the HA would issue bills to remind them of the outstanding amount. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) added that in cases where both the father and mother were non-local residents, it would exhort them to send their babies back to their places of origin for caring. As regards children who had not yet been sent back and had no other relatives in Hong Kong to look after them, the SWD would, depending on the circumstances of individual cases, consider applying to the court for the Director of Social Welfare to act as the children's guardian.

Ways to Help the Elderly Apply for Smart Identity Cards

5. Members were concerned that some elderly people aged above 70 might not know how to apply for smart identity (ID) cards by mid-November 2007, while other elderly people with physical disabilities who lived in homes for the aged were compelled to pay an extra sum for the staff there to accompany them to go to the Smart Identity Card Centres to go through the ID card replacement procedure. Members suggested that the Immigration Department (ImmD) should not require these kinds of elderly people to replace their identity cards or should waive the fines for them for failing to meet the deadlines for applying for smart ID cards. The ImmD explained that arrangements were made for Hong Kong residents to replace their ID cards in accordance with the Registration of Persons Ordinance. Under the Ordinance, any person who without reasonable excuse failed to make ID applications as scheduled was

liable to a fine of HK\$5,000. The ImmD, however, would take into account the reasons for non-compliance in every individual case before initiating prosecution. Elderly people who found it inconvenient to visit the Smart Identity Card Centres personally to replace their ID cards might apply in writing to the Commissioner of Registration for a Certificate of Exemption. The SWD added that the three District Elderly Community Centres (DECCs) in the Kowloon City District had made arrangements for the elderly to go to the Smart Identity Card Centres of the ImmD in batches to go through the ID card replacement procedure. Therefore, elderly people who were not familiar with the procedure could seek assistance from the three DECCs.

Reviewing the Education Voucher System for Early Childhood Education

6. Members noted that in light of the views of the industry and the parent, the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) had allowed all kindergartens which had registered with it, whether subsidised or private, to be included in the Education Voucher System in 2007/08. A member expressed the view that although the move to introduce a three year transitional period during which profit-making nurseries could participate in the programme was an acceptable expedient measure, in the long term, the EMB should not intervene in the pre-primary education market through resource allocation, but by monitoring their operations, to ensure that they met their requirements.

Concern over the Operation of 24-hour Internet Bars in Residential Buildings

7. Members were concerned that the operation of 24-hour Internet bars in residential buildings in Hung Hom, which led to the gathering of youngsters in the places, might cause noise nuisance to residents. In addition, the residents were worried that security would deteriorate with the gathering of crowds in their buildings. In response to Members' suggestion that legislation should be enacted to regulate the operation of Internet bars, the Home Affairs Bureau said that at present no special licence was required to operate an establishment that only provided computers and other peripheral equipment for users to gain access to the Internet. The Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) added that Internet bars had grown in popularity among youngsters in recent years. To prevent possible illegal activities in Internet bars, the HKPF would send police officers to inspect the places from time to time.

Problem of Foreign Domestic Helpers Heavily in Debt

8. Members reflected that foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) who were in debt were unwilling to seek help from the police and very often involved their employers in the trouble when the money lender harassed their household. The HKPF said that it was its duty to deal with loan-sharking practices and other reported debt-related cases. If FDHs faced undue measures taken by money lenders to recover debts from them, they should come forward and report the case to the police for early intervention and assistance. If the HKPF found that the money lender in question was a finance company operating with a licence, they would advise the company to refrain from harassing the debtor's employer. For those finance companies who repeatedly ignored their advice, the HKPF would refer their cases to the Hong Kong Monetary Authority for it to decide whether their business practices had contravened the relevant licensing conditions.

Visiting Doctor Service Available to Homes for the Aged

9. Members noted that currently the Government no longer devoted additional resources to subsidise the Visiting Doctor Service of the HA. Since the service was now maintained by the Central Kowloon Hospital Cluster of the HA using its own resources, it could not meet the demand of all the homes for the aged in the district. Members urged the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau to study the current situation and allocate more resources to the HA to extend the service.

Kowloon City District Office
January 2007