

Progress Report of the 17th Meeting of the Kowloon City District Council

Purpose

This paper aims to report on the major issues discussed at the 17th meeting of the Kowloon City District Council (KCDC) on 15 July 2010.

Meeting with the Director of Drainage Services

2. Members welcomed the Director of Drainage Services to the meeting to elaborate on the drainage facilities and the two main tasks of the department on flood prevention and sewage treatment in Kowloon City district.

3. During the discussion, Members brought up the problem of bad smell emitted from the drainage system in Baker Street. They also raised various proposals on drainage works in Kowloon City district for the Department's consideration:

- (a) Prior to the commencement of projects, inter-departmental co-ordination was required in arranging schedules of digging works with a view to reduce impacts on nearby residents and commercial tenants;
- (b) The sewage treatment works in To Kwa Wan should be an enclosed system and deodorisation facilities should be installed to minimize the possibility of smell emission; and
- (c) To liaise closely with the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) for stepping up prosecution of restaurants disposing of food residuals into roadside gutters so as to prevent drain blockage and formation of bad smell.

Review of Columbarium Policy and Public Consultation

4. Members noted the following main points in the consultation paper as mentioned by the Undersecretary of the Food and Health Bureau in the meeting:

- (a) To increase the supply of ash urns, the Government shortlisted twelve sites in seven districts suitable for columbarium development. The public

works would be carried out according to established procedures;

- (b) Short term measures: to protect the interests of consumers by publishing the information about private niches and to combat the illegal operation of private columbaria. The authority would issue two lists of columbarium niches in two or three months' time. List A would roll out the private columbaria complying with the land lease and the statutory land, town planning and building requirements while List B would detail all the private columbaria not included in List A;
- (c) Medium and long term measures: to enact legislation to regulate private columbarium facilities;
- (d) The Government and the Board of Management of the Chinese Permanent Cemeteries would supply 100,000 new niches in the next two years; and
- (e) To change traditional customs by encouraging people to handle cremains in other ways such as scattering ashes in gardens of remembrance and designated Hong Kong waters.

5. Members made proposals on the columbarium policy of the Government with the highlights stated below:

- (a) To complete as early as possible the consultation on the columbarium policy within the current term of government;
- (b) To separate the resting places of the death with residences of people alive, to draft promptly a new piece of legislation for regulating the illegal operation of private columbaria which should cover retailers of niches and prohibit the operation of columbarium facilities in residential premises;
- (c) To inflate the supply of public columbaria by constructing columbarium facilities at the border, on the mainland or outlying islands;
- (d) To lift the restriction for family niches to allow ashes of married daughters or other close relatives to be deposited together so as to maximise the use of the four urns in a niche;
- (e) To take reference of the registration system adopted by the Housing Authority in allocating niches; and
- (f) To disapprove the introduction of annual management fees for public niches.

6. In response, the Undersecretary of the Food and Health Bureau said that the Government would widely consult opinions of people in all districts on the provision of columbarium facilities and regulation of private columbaria by legislation. With respect to the proposal of constructing columbaria on outlying islands and border area, the technical feasibility would be assessed and consideration would be given to factors like availability and adequacy of infrastructural and transport facilities. The authority was currently studying the possibility and suitability of converting the undeveloped part of Sandy Ridge Cemetery into a columbarium area. Regarding the proposal of building niches on the mainland, he queried about the appropriateness of locating such undesirable facilities in Mainland China. The Government would continue to gauge the public's views so as to foster a consensus in the community and rally public support for policy formulation.

Concern over the Growing Problem of Youth Unemployment

7. According to the recent data released in June, the unemployment rate of youths aged between 15 and 24 climbed to 11%, arousing much concern and anxiety in society. Members hoped that, to prevent the problem from worsening, the authority would take effective measures to assist the unemployed youth. The proposals suggested by Members upon discussion included:

- (a) The authority should take initiatives to contact F.5 and F.7 graduates and introduce to them various plans to assist youths to seek employment;
- (b) To encourage private organisations to employ youths and to provide basic work allowance for the youth on probation so as to enhance their desire to work;
- (c) To streamline as soon as possible the application formalities of the Youth Employment Start; and
- (d) To help youths clearly understand contract terms and conditions by strengthening education about labour rights in schools in hope of reducing unnecessary labour disputes between them and the employers.

Concern over the Numerous Vacant Residential and Shop Premises in the District

Call for Strengthening Patrolling to Prevent Crime

8. As works for Shatin to Central Link would commence soon, acquisition of old buildings along the route grew active. As a result, many buildings were only half occupied. Members were anxious that the vacant premises would become breeding ground for crime and hence urged the police to step up patrolling at these old buildings to maintain social order. In reply, the police representative manifested that much attention was drawn to the order and safety at old buildings in Kowloon City district. The frontline officers had not only carried out routine patrols on streets, but also strengthened patrolling duties in buildings, particularly those without owners' corporations, management offices, security guards, iron gates and closed-circuit television systems.

Concern over the Progress of Implementing Primary Dental Services and Oral Health Promotion Programmes

9. Members pointed out that though some elders living at old districts did not apply for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, they might find the cost of repairing teeth or fixing false teeth too high and thus failed to get treatment at appropriate time. This indirectly affected their normal social life. In view of the budget allocation of \$22,000,000 for implementing the primary dental services and oral health promotion programmes in this financial year, Members hoped that the Government would practically cater to the needs of low-income elderly people on dental services when launching the programmes.

Strong Request for Improving the Management for the Display of Roadside Non-commercial Publicity Materials

10. It was pointed out that non-commercial publicity materials of many Members placed in Tak Man Street in Hung Hom were stolen and the problem was aggravating. By contrast, publicity materials illegally displayed were spotted everywhere. Members urged the departments concerned to take positive action to rectify the situation. The representatives from the FEHD and the Lands Department clearly defined their respective duties on handling the materials posted up by the

public without permission on the street. They also briefly explained the arrangement for joint action on removal work. The police said that though difficulties were met in the investigation and prosecution for the theft of publicity items, the police would assign additional staff to patrol in the street as well as to conduct investigations on the contents of stolen materials and the motive for the theft in a bid to bring offenders to justice.

Kowloon City District Office
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