

## **Progress Report of the 2nd Meeting of the Kowloon City District Council**

### **Purpose**

This paper aims to report on the major issues discussed at the 2nd meeting of the Kowloon City District Council (KCDC) on 31 January 2008.

### **Meeting the Secretary for Home Affairs (SHA)**

2. Members expressed their views to the SHA on various issues, including the lack of a community hall in the district, the direction for the promotion of national education and effective ways to raise the cultural level of the district. Several Members gave their opinions on how to improve building management. They suggested that the Government allocate more resources for training members of the owners' corporation to improve their management capability and invite professional bodies to provide free advisory services for the owners' corporations. In addition, the authorities should review the Building Management Ordinance from time to time to ensure that the relevant provisions would enable the owners' corporations to perform their duties without hindrance.

### **A Proposal to Ban Idling Vehicles in Hong Kong**

3. Members supported the proposal to ban idling vehicles in principle. They were, however, worried that while vehicle exhaust emissions would be reduced, the aging of component parts would be accelerated and more fuel used and, more importantly, the prospects of the tourist and public transport industries would be adversely affected. In addition, Members suggested that air temperature should be listed as one of the conditions for exemption. The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) explained that the exemption arrangements set out in the Consultation Paper were proposed in the light of overseas practices and related studies of numerous countries, and had balanced the needs of environmental protection and the operation of the transport industry. According to overseas studies, the moment at which the vehicle engine was switched on, more fuel was consumed and more exhaust emitted than when the vehicle was in a standby state. However, if the engine was switched off for more than 10 seconds, these undesirable effects would be offset. In addition, if drivers left their cars idle with running engines, vehicle engines and other component parts would also subject to natural wear and tear, and the damage to the vehicles would not be much different from that caused by switching on and off the engines intermittently. It was not feasible to list air temperature as one of the conditions for exemption. Since the environment factors of each location varied and,

as a consequence, air temperature differed from one location to another at various times, making law enforcement extremely difficult.

#### **Expectations for the 2008-09 Budget**

4. In view of the Government's enormous budget surplus, Members called for an early implementation of the 10 major infrastructure projects announced by the Chief Executive and the allocation of more resources for training Hong Kong people to raise their competitiveness. As regards initiatives to improve people's livelihood, Members urged the Government to increase Old Age Allowance and the annual amount of medical vouchers for the elderly, waive rates, adjust tax allowances and the tax bands of salaries tax etc. Members considered that the Government should save for a rainy day and exercise prudence in offering the public rebates or concessions that might have far-reaching consequences. Furthermore, public expenditure should be kept within the limit of recurrent public revenue. It was worth considering that part of the budget surplus should be earmarked for setting up a fund so that the accumulated sum would be used to meet long-term medical expenses.

#### **Abolition of Employees Retraining Levy Imposed on Employers of Foreign Domestic Helpers (FDHs)**

5. Members pointed out that FDHs currently recruited from overseas did not compete with local workers for jobs. The actual situation was that Hong Kong people did not want to serve as domestic helpers themselves, making it necessary to import FDHs. This arrangement was not detrimental to the welfare of the labour of Hong Kong, but could instead develop Hong Kong's economy. The Government should not view the recruitment as beneficial to employers of FDHs and thus required them to share unnecessary responsibilities. In addition, just like a company recruited workers to engage in production, it was only through the recruitment of FDHs to attend to household chores that Hong Kong people could take up their own jobs and create wealth for Hong Kong. While wages paid to workers by companies were tax deductible, employers of FDHs not only were not entitled to this tax deduction, they were even charged with an extra levy. The Employees Retraining Levy was, in fact, unreasonable double taxation. Members passed a motion requiring that the Government abolish the Employees Retraining Levy imposed on employers of FDHs immediately.

#### **Strong Request for Returning the land to the people**

6. Members expressed their discontent with the Government's current practice of renting out several pieces of coastal land in To Kwa Wan as car parks and storage

space for industrial materials for a considerable time on short-term tenancy, and considered this a waste of valuable resources. They suggested resuming the land as soon as possible and turning it into “open space” for the enjoyment of the residents. The Planning Department (PlanD) said in response that the sites in question were designated in the Approved Hung Hom Outline Zoning Plan as “open space” and “Government, Institution or Community” for the building of a waterfront park and two secondary schools in future. The Water Supplies Department (WSD) explained to the meeting that owing to the major replacement and rehabilitation works for water mains and the urgent waterworks in Kowloon East undertaken by the WSD presently, it was imperative for the WSD to rent the land for storing materials. The WSD had discussed with the contractor ways to accelerate the progress of works so as to complete the works at an early date and return the land to the Lands Department (LandsD). The WSD would remove the materials for the urgent waterworks out of the current sites immediately once the LandsD provided them with another suitable site.

Kowloon City District Office

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