

Progress Report of the 6th Meeting of the Kowloon City District Council

Purpose

This paper aims to report on the major issues discussed at the 6th meeting of the Kowloon City District Council (KCDC) on 18 September 2008.

Meeting with the Commissioner for Labour

2. The Commissioner for Labour introduced to Members the current work of the Labour Department (LD) in relation to various issues of social concern when attending the meeting:

- (i) Wage Protection Movement – despite the fact that the result of the movement was less satisfactory than expected, it aroused the awareness of many employers about how a reasonable pay level could help improve their relationship with employees and thus, successfully brought about a change in the culture of management.
- (ii) A minimum wage – the Government should exercise discreet judgment in defining the ambit and details of legislation so as to ensure genuine protection of employees by introducing the concept of a minimum wage. If the policy was implemented across the board, some of the people in need in society would be deprived of opportunities of employment and job-related training. Meanwhile, the LD conducted a study on five scopes of work to facilitate the commencement of the drafting of legislation upon the decision of the Government to set a statutory minimum wage:
 - (a) How to determine the coverage of the statutory minimum wage policy;
 - (b) What special measures should be devised for the sake of the disadvantaged (e.g. the disabled) being affected such as defining the term “disabled” in the relevant legislation;
 - (c) What is the definition of minimum wage;
 - (d) How to set an optimal minimum wage level and establish a review mechanism; and
 - (e) How to enforce the legislation and prescribe corresponding penalties.

- (iii) Wages in arrears – the Government had strengthened enforcement actions in cases involving default in payment of wages. In view of the numerous incidents of sudden closure of restaurants and intentional wage default by restaurant owners in early 2008, the Government took specific actions to enforce the law and stepped up the work of gathering evidence against the persons responsible for the restaurants.

In answer to the questions of Members, the Commissioner for Labour also provided information about the assistance offered to young jobseekers, employment of overseas maids, industrial accidents and feasibility of providing paternity leave for male employees etc.

Construction Works of the Submarine Pipeline and Related Facilities from To Kwa Wan to North Point

3. As explained by the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB), the construction of the cruise terminal at Kai Tak Airport and Central Kowloon Route would have an impact on the existing submarine pipeline and the related facilities for transmission of gas to Hong Kong Island district. To ensure a steady supply of gas to the district, the Government demanded Towngas to relay the submarine pipeline. In addition, two new gas pigging stations would be built at the seaside of To Kwa Wan in Kowloon district and North Point on Hong Kong Island respectively. When identifying the locations of connection points to the gas pipeline, the CEDB invited various government departments including the Drainage Services Department, the Environmental Protection Department and the Marine Department (MD) to discuss with Towngas in the site selection process. However, all potential sites had inadequacies upon assessment and finally, it was unanimously agreed by the study team members that the most appropriate site for constructing the facility was the area adjacent to To Kwa Wan Sewage Treatment Plant.

4. Towngas clarified that the pigging station to be built in To Kwa Wan was neither a gasholder nor a gas storage installation. The company had reserved a 10-meter wide site for the extension of Hoi Sham Park. Besides, the seaside area was going to be developed into a promenade. The design of the station would be in concordance with the greening plan involving the adjoining park. The residents in the district needed not worry about any possible impact of the station on the design of the seaside corridor.

5. A Member raised objections to the plan of building a gas pigging station on the space beside To Kwa Wan Sewage Treatment Plant. They opined that with a mild adjustment to the proposed route of the submarine pipeline, the existing facilities on land would remain useful and the construction of the new facility could therefore be avoided. In explanation, Towngas said that the suggested plan was unfeasible for the reason that the proposed route would run across the quarantine anchorage of the MD as well as the typhoon shelter and other facilities in the periphery of To Kwa Wan. Upon discussion, Members appreciated the need of Towngas to lay a new submarine pipeline in To Kwa Wan to pave way for the commencement of the long-awaited Kai Tak Cruise Terminal and Central Kowloon Route works. Nevertheless, they requested Towngas to conduct some district consultation work such as organising briefings to elaborate on the function and safety level of the gas pigging station so as to brush aside the worries of residents in the district who knew little about the facility. Members further called for a minor change of the current design where technically feasible. Among the options was a study on the plan of building an underground gas pigging station.

Kai Tak Cruise Terminal

6. Members were concerned about the further delay in the construction of Kai Tak Cruise Terminal due to the tendering exercise. In the light of Hong Kong's urgent need of the facility, they urged the Government to quicken the pace of construction and release information about the project regularly to the District Board so that residents could help monitoring its progress. The CEDB pointed out that as the cruise terminal covered a large piece of land and hence, involved interests of many parties, the Government had to exercise great caution when engineering the project and also, strive to meet the citizens' expectation by upholding fair, open and just principles. Since the tender submissions from the private sector failed to meet the requirements set by the Government, a second round of tender was invited.

7. The Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development revealed in an earlier interview with the media that the Government had prepared another option despite that conditions for the second-round tender were drawn up. Approval for provision of funds from the Legislative Council would be sought to expedite the site formation works and provision of supporting facilities before the commencement of the cruise terminal project. As an alternative, a contingency plan for financing the development of the new cruise terminal was formulated lest the bids failed to meet requirements. The first berth was targeted to be completed as previously in 2013.

Overseeing the Funeral Trade

8. Members expressed that the number of funeral shops operating in Hung Hom had risen to an excessive extent and even worse, some of the shops were located at residential premises and ash urns were kept illegally, making the so-called “Yin” premises and “Yang” premises mixing together, which was a taboo in Chinese society. Thus, the Government should address the problem and examine the appropriateness of allowing endless expansion of the industry in Hung Hom. To reflect the demands of residents, the District Board passed a motion to urge the Government to stop issuing licences for funeral practitioners to conduct business in Hung Hom.

9. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department noted the view of Members and would follow up the issue. The Planning Department stated that any persons who intended to operate funeral halls should obtain prior approval from the Town Planning Board. Otherwise, they would be subject to prosecution by the government departments concerned in accordance with the relevant legal provisions.

Kowloon City District Office

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