

Progress Report of the 7th Meeting of the Kowloon City District Council

Purpose

This paper aims to report on the major issues discussed at the 7th meeting of the Kowloon City District Council (KCDC) on 13 November 2008.

Meeting with the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services

2. The Director of Leisure and Cultural Services briefed the Members on the following items when attending the meeting:

- (i) existing major leisure facilities in Kowloon City District;
- (ii) leisure and sports activities held in Kowloon City District in 2008-09;
- (iii) the major tasks of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) in 2008-09 including organising events in support of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, cooperating with non-government bodies to provide more recreational activities for the disadvantaged and making preparations for the 2nd Hong Kong Games;
- (iv) the preparatory work for extending the opening hours of libraries;
- (v) the development plan of the Ko Shan Theatre;
- (vi) the services provided by the Music Office; and
- (vii) the result of the District Council's participation in the management of district facilities of the LCSD.

3. Members pointed out that, with the completion of more and more new buildings in Kowloon City District, the population was on the rise, posing a greater demand for public libraries, study rooms, cultural and leisure facilities. In view of this, Members requested the LCSD to review the need of providing additional facilities in the district regularly. Regarding the problem of inadequate libraries, Members suggested that more mobile libraries should be provided in the district. Besides, the Department should help increase the collection size of school libraries through cooperation with schools. As to the problem of a lack of heated swimming pools in the district, Members said that swimming was not only a leisure activity for the elderly, but also an exercise for them to enhance health. Hence, the provision of heated swimming pools was worthy of the Government's consideration as the

availability of pools would help encourage elders to continue swimming in winter for the benefit of health.

4. The Director of Leisure and Cultural Services said that the LCSD introduced electronic services in libraries in recent years to enable the public to borrow electronic books through the Internet. Furthermore, the Department was willing to collaborate with the District Council to strengthen and upgrade the service of libraries run by district organisations by supplying books and readings. As for the suggestion of transforming an ordinary swimming pool into a heated one, the installation of a cover to maintain the temperature of pool water was essential. Whether the basic structure of the existing swimming pools met the requirements for constructing a cover was subject to investigation. Besides, the residents nearby might raise objections since the view in the area would be affected after works. As a result, a feasibility study was to be carried out prior to the implementation of any alteration works.

Concerns over the Use of Shop Spaces at Hung Hom Ferry Pier

5. Members understood that, under the established government policy, public transport service should be provided by private or public organisations in line with the commercial principle. The Government would not directly finance or subsidize daily operating expenses of service providers. To alleviate the pressure for fare increase, the Government allowed ferry operators to have other sources of income to cover expenses for providing ferry services. On that score, ferry operators could sublet premises at piers for commercial and retail activities to generate non-fare revenue. However, the shop tenants operating a restaurant at Hung Hom Ferry Pier did not only offer catering services but also served as a bar until late at night, consequently causing nuisance to neighbouring residents. Since it was provided in the tenancy agreement that the restaurant could only operate as a snack shop which, according to one's understanding, should not sell beverages, the operation mode of the restaurant seemed to have contravened the requirements set by the Government in approving ferry operators to sublet premises. Members urged the Government to probe into the issue. The Government Property Agency undertook to resolve within the shortest possible time if the practice of selling beverages was in contravention of the use restrictions imposed by the Government in permitting ferry operators to sublease the shop spaces so that the two Members who submit the paper could decide on the next step to be taken.

Consultation Paper Containing Interim Proposals on Sex Offender Register

6. Members agreed that while efforts should be made to prevent children from sexual abuse, privacy of sex offenders should be duly protected, particularly the green youth who committed offences not involving sexual violence, as this would make them more eager to mend their ways when they grew up. Members suggested that the register should only contain records of specific sexual offences and avoid covering offences with ambiguous definitions, or else low-risk offenders would suffer a blow no different from further punishment if all kinds of sexual offences were included. The register should be placed under the custody of law enforcement agencies after preparation and access should be restricted to potential employers offering specific child-related jobs so as to allow them to check out the record of sex abuse crimes committed by prospective employees.

Request for Government Monitoring of the Prices of Basic Necessities to Stop Prices from Rising Quickly but Falling Slowly

7. Members raised concerns over the continuous rise in the price level of various basic necessities including rice, meat, eggs, cooking oil and fuel in recent years. Among these, cooking oil, domestic liquefied petroleum gas and petroleum by-products prices rose quickly but fell slowly. In face of economy slowdown, the public felt extra pressure seeing the prices of essential commodities going up and up. Members therefore called for closer government monitoring on the cost of basic necessities.

The responses from various policy bureaux were stated as follows:

- (i) The Commerce and Economic Development Bureau advised that Hong Kong was a free market economy in which retailers set the price of products on the basis of their marketing strategies. So far from late August, the Consumer Council had launched three initiatives on price surveillance upon retail points of different nature such as supermarkets, pharmacies and groceries. The information about prices of food and daily necessities sold at e-supermarkets and wet markets were also collected. The survey findings helped enhance price transparency and facilitate the flow of market information, thus alerting consumers the possible difference in the

prices of commodities sold at different retail points such that they would make smart shopping choices according to their own needs.

- (ii) The Food and Health Bureau expressed that it was the Government's policy to maintain steady food supply and ensure food safety while food prices should be left to the reign of market forces. What the Government could do was to raise the transparency of market information so as to ensure smoothness of market operation and allow consumers to make wise choices. To further improve the flow of market information, the Bureau had, since mid-January of 2008, arranged to make public on a daily basis the quantity of live pigs sent to slaughterhouses and the auction price as well as the estimated number of live pigs to be sent to slaughterhouses on the next day. The practice enabled live pigs buyers, retailers and citizens to have a clear picture about the supply of live pigs. Starting from late January, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department released figures about fresh and live food items (meat, vegetables, fish, etc.) supplied as well as their average wholesale prices every day for public information; and
- (iii) The Environment Bureau said that the prices of fuel products in Hong Kong were determined by individual company having regard to its own commercial practices and operating costs. Adopting a laissez faire economic policy, the Government did not have the power to control the retail prices of fuel products. However, in consideration of the impact of high oil prices on the daily life of the public, the Government advised local oil companies to increase the transparency of the pricing strategy of petroleum products.

Kowloon City District Office
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