

Summary of Minutes of Meeting of Islands District Council

Date : 2 September 2013 (Monday)
Time : 2:00 p.m.
Venue : Conference Room, Islands District Council, 14/F., Harbour Building,
38 Pier Road, Central, Hong Kong.

- I. Visit of Permanent Secretary for Education to Islands District Council
- II. Question on Discovery College

The Permanent Secretary for Education gave a brief introduction of post-secondary, secondary, primary and kindergarten education, and relevant policies in Hong Kong.

A member introduced the enquiry on Discovery College.

A member enquired about the progress of the establishment of a special school in Tung Chung. He also asked whether the income limit of the Textbook and Stationery Grants Scheme and that of a one-off grant of \$1,000 to meet expenses on commencement of school term would be relaxed, so that more families could be benefited.

A member was concerned about the support given to non-Chinese students. Students of South Asian origins often experienced great difficulties in main stream schools in which Chinese was the medium of instruction, and admission to schools using English as the medium of instruction was also difficult. The member hoped that the Bureau would provide more schools using English as the medium of instruction for non-Chinese students, and support their learning of the Chinese Language.

A member said that SKH Wei Lun Primary School in Discovery Bay belonged to Central and Western District (HK1) school net, whereas schools on Peng Chau, Cheung Chau and Lamma Island were allocated to the Islands District school net (NT9). The arrangement would cause dissent among residents of Islands District and the issue had remained unresolved for a long time. He was also concerned about

the support in learning the Chinese language, and subsidy in applying for public examinations given to non-Chinese students.

A member raised the enquiry of the school net system of Peng Chau. A reply given to the Ombudsman stated that Discovery Bay was incorporated to Central and Western District school net because there was strict road traffic control to Discovery Bay. The member queried that Peng Chau students travelling to schools in Tung Chung would experience more traffic restrictions and thus should belong to Central and Western District school net as well. He queried about the composition of the Working Group on Review of School Nets and that of the Secondary School Places Allocation Committee, and whether their members understood the geographic and transportation problems of Peng Chau.

The Vice-chairlady urged the Government to implement 15-year free education sooner, so as to lighten the burden of the grassroots. She proposed the establishment of post-secondary college(s) in Tung Chung and strengthening of support for students of minority ethnic groups. She said that expenses at the commencement of the school year were indeed high, and thus proposed raising child allowance in income tax. She also urged for enhanced supervision of frequent issue of textbook editions.

A member urged for a fair solution of issues concerning school net system of Islands District. Many kindergartens could not join the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme ("Voucher Scheme") because rents were high. He thus proposed the provision of assistance to kindergartens to relieve the burden of high rents. For primary one admission, he proposed that the allocation of school places for cross-boundary students based on the distance between the boundary facility and the school. On behalf of the Association of School Heads of Islands District ("the Association"), he raised the following points. There were surplus school places in Tung Chung currently, thus existing school places should be made use of before the establishment of new schools in the area should be considered. The Textbook and Stationery Grants Scheme should be combined with the assistance scheme provided by the Community Care Fund Assistance Programme, so as to simplify administrative work of schools. As Islands District was remote, and transportation costs made purchase of materials for schools more expensive compared with urban areas, the Association thus requested the Education Bureau to provide extra transportation subsidy for schools in the District in purchase of materials. The issue of conduct of teachers should be dealt with by the Council on Professional Conduct in Education.

A member said that SKH Wei Lun Primary School was a successful school and its success had attracted students from other areas. As a result, some students in Discovery Bay had to attend schools elsewhere and traveling between islands was not easy. She said that there was planning in as early as 2002 to establish a school in Discovery Bay but it had yet been materialized, and she was disappointed. She expressed her regret at Discovery College's repeated failure to attend the meeting, and she reiterated that the tuition fee increase being proposed was unfair.

A member said that the "Voucher Scheme" had deprived the middle class of choices, as they were forced to choose schools which had joined the scheme. He hoped that the policy would be changed. He also proposed enhanced support for cross-boundary students, and the establishment of proper international school(s) and vocational school(s) in Tung Chung.

A representative of the Education Bureau responded to three questions as follows:

- (a) The Education Bureau had a strict mechanism in handling applications for tuition fee increase, and various factors would be taken into account in considering applications. The Bureau was aware of the concern of parents and members in the case of Discovery College, which was being asked to submit more information.
- (b) Under the New Academic Structure, the two Direct Subsidy Scheme schools in Tung Chung had to make changes. One had been approved to open courses for examinations of the United Kingdom, and the Bureau would maintain close contact with the other to assist in its necessary transformation.
- (c) Under the existing Textbook and Stationery Grants Scheme, a primary school student would at most get more than \$2,000 and a secondary school student \$2,600. An additional \$1,000 would also be approved for each eligible student to meet expenses for the commencement of each school year. An enhanced Textbook and Stationery Grants Scheme had been rolled out in the current year.

The Permanent Secretary for Education responded to other enquiries as follows:

- (a) The demarcation of school nets had some of its roots in history. Half of primary one school places were discretionary and were open to applications from all districts in Hong Kong. Thus the planning of school places was subject to a variation of many factors. Parents would have many considerations in their choices of schools, such as their location, ideals and management styles, etc. The Bureau had held a meeting with representatives of parents, schools and local people of Islands District to discuss the matter of school net, but failed to reach a consensus. The Bureau would continue to monitor the changes in population and the supply and demand of school places.
- (b) The Bureau placed great emphasis on special education. The proposal to establish a special school in Area 27 of Tung Chung was opposed by local residents. The Bureau thus proposed another site in Area 108 of Tung Chung and feasibility study was being conducted.
- (c) Non-Chinese students could apply for subsidies for various examinations in the Chinese Language. Local universities had adopted flexible arrangements to recognize qualifications in the Chinese Language in enrolling non-Chinese students. Training was provided to teachers to teach non-Chinese students. The Vocational Training Council had also provided training courses for non-Chinese students to enhance their competitiveness in the job market.
- (d) Kindergarten education was not compulsory. The implementation of 15 years of free education faced some difficulties, as the size of kindergartens and the school fees they charged could vary considerably. The formulation of across-the-board criteria for provision of subsidy in such circumstances, therefore, would not be easy.
- (e) Cross-boundary students could apply for student travel subsidy as long as they were permanent residents of Hong Kong and passed the means test.

- (f) Both the Council on Professional Conduct in Education and the Education Bureau had established mechanisms to handle cases of teachers' conduct.
- (g) The Bureau would collect more information on the issue of transportation fee pushing up the cost of purchasing materials for Island District schools.

A member said that Holy Family School on Peng Chau was a brilliant school. Unfortunately, its number of students had been on the decline because of its unfavourable school net and he requested changes to be made.

Another member also raised the issue of the fairness of existing school net system and urged the Bureau to act accordingly.

The Permanent Secretary for Education reiterated that the Bureau was aware of members' concern of the school net system. She stressed that the Bureau would adopt the same principles in handling the issue in order to achieve an overall balance of supply and demand of school places. The problems related to cross-boundary students were temporary, as the issue of expectant Mainland mothers had been resolved through administrative measures. The Bureau would not resort to building new schools only because there was a temporary demand for school places.

III. Progress Report on North Lantau Hospital

A member was appreciative of the pro-active communication work of the Hospital in connecting with the local organizations and the local people. He enquired whether the quota of the out-patient clinic would increase after moving into the North Lantau Hospital as it would become bigger in size. The existing night clinic provided service from 10pm to 11:45pm. He enquired whether the night service would be terminated after the 16-hour accident and emergency service of the North Lantau Hospital was implemented. Some ethnic minorities reflected to him that there was inadequate publicity in English of information of the North Lantau Hospital, and he was concerned of communication with ethnic minorities in the future. He also enquired about the effective triage of patients in event of serious incidents.

The Vice-chairlady was also appreciative of the work of the Hospital in connecting with the local community. She hoped the North Lantau Hospital would be well prepared for implementation of service. She was concerned of a recent media report revealing that only six ambulances were available for Lantau Island as a whole. She also hoped that minibus services would be introduced as early as possible. She advised the North Lantau Hospital to liaise with the Social Welfare Department (SWD) to provide assistance to inmates of the two nearby elderly homes to attend consultation appointments.

The representative of the Hospital Authority responded as follows:

- (a) The quota of the out-patient clinic would remain the same in 2013/14. The facilities of the clinic would indeed be improved after moving into the North Lantau Hospital. Services would be enhanced if more resources would become available.
- (b) The existing night clinic service from 10pm to 11:45pm would remain in place until the implementation of 16-hour accident and emergency service of the North Lantau Hospital.
- (c) The North Lantau Hospital was well aware of the demand for interpretation services. The Hospital Authority would provide interpretation of various languages and some local organizations had pledged to provide assistance as well.
- (d) There was a mechanism in place for triage of patients and ambulances. The North Lantau Hospital would liaise closely with the Fire services Department in related arrangements.
- (e) Due to limitation of scale and manpower, the North Lantau Hospital would implement services in stages. The travelling time to the out-patient clinic might be longer after its relocation into the North Lantau Hospital, but residents welcomed the new arrangements in general. The appointments of inmates of nearby elderly homes would be arranged in such a way that their transportation could be carried out together as far as possible.

- (f) The North Lantau Hospital would be pleased to discuss transportation matters with the Transport Department and District Council members.

The representative of the SWD said that elderly homes had vehicles of their own and if appointment times were close enough, they would find it easier to deploy staff.

IV. Question on improving Pui O Bus Stop and Pavement on Lantau Island

The representative of the Transport Department said that the Department intended to re-plan the bus stop at Pui O Lo Wai Tsuen so that there would be two exits instead of one as existed. The alteration would allow buses to pass through even when cars were parked. The Department would increase the number of parking spaces in Pui O from nine to eighteen, and works would start in November of the current year and finish in February of 2014.

A member clarified the location he referred to in his enquiry, which was the bus stop outside a café. He hoped that the Transport Department would conduct a site visit to have a better understanding of the issue. He proposed to adopt the approach used at Pat Heung bus stop in Yuen Long, which prohibited parking of private cars around the clock.

The representative of the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) said that the police had been monitoring the parking situation in Pui O. As there were insufficient parking spaces, the Police would normally issued verbal warnings or left warning notes on windscreens, unless serious traffic blockage or danger had been caused or posed. However, the Police would proceed to issue penalty tickets if illegal parking would cause inconvenience to bus passengers from boarding or alighting or posing risks.

V. Question on improving facilities of St John Hospital

The representative of the Hospital Authority responded to the enquiry as follows:

- (a) St John Hospital was a relatively old building complex. The main block

was equipped with an elevator(s) and there was a lifting platform connecting the ground floor and the out-patient department. Hospital staff would provide assistance to those who would need to use the lifting platform. The Hospital believed that the above measure would meet wheelchair users' need for the meantime. Fund had been approved for the installation of an elevator for the out-patient department, and the Hospital hoped that the technical problem related to the installation would be resolved in 2014.

- (b) The Department of Health had provided a written reply on appointment and referral services. The Hospital had all along co-operated smoothly with the Department of Health. The benefit of making appointments in person was flexible arrangement of time. St John Hospital would arrange referrals should the patient so desire.
- (c) All departments and parties involved in transportation of patients had agreed to adopt a mechanism. For Case No.3 mentioned in the enquiry, the patient was in critical conditions and transportation to a major hospital nearby was essential. Thus the doctor made a professional decision to transport him to Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital. For non-critical cases, request to transport patients to hospital of family's choice might be entertained.

The representative of the Department of Health said that co-operation between the Department and the Hospital Authority had been smooth all along. The Department encouraged making appointments with its dermatological clinics in person or by mail. Inter-clinic referrals could be made by facsimile. St John Hospital had been re-affirmed that inter-clinic appointments could be made through facsimile.

A member welcomed the installation of an elevator(s) in St John Hospital. He said that Case No.1 and 2 mentioned in the enquiry were minor incidents, and misunderstanding could be avoided through better communications. For Case No.3, he hoped that due consideration could be given to information supplied by family members of the patient.

Another member hoped that St John Hospital could be more flexible in future transfer of patients.

A member enquired whether a report would be submitted in respect of Case No.3. He also requested St John Hospital to provide information about its transfer of urgent patients.

The representative of the Hospital Authority explained in detail the rationale of the arrangements of Case No.3, and that the Hospital would be pleased to meet the patient's family and gave explanations for the arrangements made in the incident.

A member requested for the provision of a regular dermatology clinic on Cheung Chau.

VI. Question on broadband Internet service in Islands District

The Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) was unable to attend the meeting but had provided a written reply.

A member was disappointed with the absence of the OFCA from the meeting. He said that PCCW Limited (PCCW) levied the same amount of monthly rent for Peng Chau and urban users on network service, but the connection speed was much slower for the former. He said that the existing license mechanism was faulty.

A member disagreed with the reply given by the OFCA that the issue did not involve anti-competition conduct. He cited the Telecommunications Ordinance and the charges levied by PCCW to illustrate his point.

Another member said that it was incumbent upon members to strive for a reasonable living quality for residents and the existing internet services at issue were inadequate. He said that even services of St John Hospital were affected by the slow connection speed.

VII. Question on two traffic accidents at Cheung Tung Road

The representative of the HKPF gave an account of accidents occurred at Cheung Tung Road in the past, actions taken by the Police and its policies.

The representative of the Transport Department explained the design of

Cheung Tung Road and said that it was safe. He further briefed the meeting of improvement measures taken by the Department. The Department would work with the HKPF on the base of investigations conducted on road accidents to enhance safety.

A member disagreed with the view that Cheung Tung Road was safe and she cited past accidents to illustrate her point. She urged the Transport Department to follow up on the information she had provided and bring about improvements.

A member said that a majority of accidents occurred at Cheung Tung Road involved cyclists, which was a result of the road being often used for cycling competitions. He proposed less competitions to be held along the road in order to reduce the number of accidents.

A member proposed the installation of more traffic signs and the construction of proper cycling tracks to resolve the issue.

A member raised the issue of whether the Council should support the holding of cycling competitions along Cheung Tung Road. He also asked the Transport Department whether it would make use of the construction of Tuen Mun-Chek Lap Kok Link to resolve the issue.

The representative of the Transport Department said that he would study improvement measures with departmental colleagues of Tsuen Wan District as Cheung Tung Road was also part of that district. He also agreed that less cycling competitions along the road would help alleviate the problem. The proposal of cycling track was being studied in the Tung Chung New Town Extension Study.

The Vice-chairlady agreed that Cheung Tung Road should not be used as a practice ground for cycling competitions, and that less competitions being held there would reduce accidents. The idea should also be relayed to parties concerned. She proposed the interlinking of existing cycling tracks as an expedient measure before the completion of Tung Chung New Town Extension Study.

A member said that apart from bicycles, other vehicles had also been involved in Cheung Tung Road accidents. She proposed that the Transport Department should pay attention to the amount of vehicular flow and problems caused by heavy vehicles.

VIII. Question on maintenance of trees on Cheung Chau

The representative of the Lands Department said that in the case of the banyan tree on Cheung Chau, arrangement had been made to trim the tree in July. Unfortunately, some branches fell off because of the prevailing weather conditions before work could be done. The contractor was thus urged to take quick action and trimming was completed in late August. He said that under current arrangements, many departments were responsible for management of trees, depending on the location. For urgent cases, the Fire Services Department, the HKPF or the Highways Department would respond.

A member said that she reported the case in June and action was taken only in August, and thus the intervening period was too long.

A member said that the banyan tree still had risk of falling. He urged for further inspection of the tree and for another so-called “magic tree” nearby.

The representative of the Lands Department said that there was an overload of work to be followed up on. The banyan tree at issue would be inspected in another three to six months’ time, or even earlier if there was such a need. Trimming work had been done on the “magic tree”. If major work would be needed, consultation had to be carried out with local residents and members of the District Council.

IX. Question on delays affecting normal Peng Chau ferry services

The representative of the Transport Department responded to the enquiry as follows:

- (a) The original service provider of Peng Chau-Hei Ling Chau ferry service decided to terminate its service on grounds of long term loss. When asked for their intention to provide service, no ferry service providers had responded. Hong Kong & Kowloon Ferry Ltd. was thus asked to consider the request.
- (b) Most of the facilities on Hei Ling Chau belonged to the Correctional Services Department (CSD), and the ferry route mainly served its staff and visitors. If no service was provided, it would cause inconvenience

to the public. Hong Kong & Kowloon Ferry Ltd. responded that it was unable to provide service during peak hours, but special services would be possible in non-peak hours. From Mondays through Saturdays, there would be nine trips, and eleven on Sundays and public holidays between Peng Chau and Hei Ling Chau. The pre-requisite for provision of service was that normal ferry services between Central and Peng Chau would not be affected, including time, frequencies and fares of services.

- (c) On 16 August of the current year when the new special service began, there were delays because of technical difficulties. The delays of Peng Chau and Hei Ling Chau services had knock-on effects on Central and Peng Chau services, resulting in ten to fifteen minutes of delay in most of the latter.
- (d) Corrections were urgently made and presently both ferry routes were functioning normally.
- (e) The number of passengers taking the 9:45 pm and 9:50 pm trips between Peng Chau and Hei Ling Chau was very low, and discussion was being conducted with the CSD to cancel or adjust the time of the two trips.
- (f) Hong Kong & Kowloon Ferry Ltd. said that the proposal of having standby vessel(s) berthed at Central Pier during major festivals was feasible.

A member said that both residents and he himself were satisfied with existing services. However, the Cheung Chau-Mui Wo-Peng Chau Inter-Islands ferry and the Central to Peng Chau ferry arrived at Peng Chau almost at the same time (around 9:50pm) each day under existing schedule, he thus proposed adjustment of schedule to avoid unnecessary delay.

Another member said that there were only a few passengers on the 9:50pm ferry from Hei Ling Chau to Peng Chau. It would not be acceptable if that ferry would affect the service between Central and Peng Chau. He also said that the speed of the 9:50pm ferry from Hei Ling Chau to Peng Chau was fast and sometimes affected marine safety.

A member said that ferry services for outlying islands were not satisfactory. There were situations of “passengers with no ferries” and “ferries with no passengers”, which were a result of lack of comprehensive review of ferry policies. Cheung Chau residents and tourists were not satisfied with the existing situation and he proposed to invite the Secretary for Transport and Housing to the District Council to discuss the issue.

X. Question on requesting The Link to make good use of vacant spaces in Yat Tung Estate Car Park

The Link was unable to attend the meeting but had provided a written reply.

A member said that he was informed by rehabilitation organizations subsidized by the Government that there was no support centre for disabled persons on Lantau or in Tung Chung. These rehabilitation organizations approached the Link and requested to use vacant kindergarten(s) in Fu Tung Estate and Yat Tung Estate for educational and social welfare purposes. The Link replied that there was no suitable space, and that it was discussing the issue with some other non-governmental organizations. The member opined that non-profit-making organizations supported by the Government should be given priorities in provision of essential services. He was concerned of the Link ignoring the voice of disabled persons, instead renting the space to some other organizations.

A member urged the Link to move the Off-course Betting Centre to other suitable locations.

Islands District Council Secretariat
October 2013