

Summary of Minutes of the 13th Meeting of Tuen Mun District Council
(2012-2015)

Meeting

The Tuen Mun District Council (“TMDC”) held its 13th meeting on 5 November 2013.

Poverty Line and Strategy for Poverty Alleviation

2. Mr Patrick NIP, Director (Special Duties), Chief Secretary for Administration’s Private Office, briefed Members on the Poverty Line (“PL”) and Strategy for Poverty Alleviation with highlights on: (a) the vision on poverty alleviation set out in Chief Executive’s Election Manifesto; (b) the composition and structure of the Commission on Poverty and the progress of its work; (c) the background of setting the PL and its functions, the five guiding principles on setting the PL as well as its limitations; (d) the PL by household size for 2009-2012; (e) the estimation of poor population; (f) the change in pre-and post-intervention poor population; (g) the poverty alleviation impact of non-recurrent cash (one-off) relief measures and non-cash benefits (mainly public rental housing (PRH)); (h) the poor households and population in Hong Kong 2012, the 2012 poor population by district council district, the poverty situation of Tuen Mun District in 2012 and the 2012 poor population statistics; (i) the key analysis and observations; and (j) the direction and strategy for poverty alleviation for consideration.

3. A number of Members put forward their views and questions on the following areas: (a) the concept of the PL and its limitations; (b) assistance for the needy above the PL; (c) shortage of PRH; (d) the continuous price and rental rises; (e) assistance for low-income earners; (f) the N have-nots; (g) the female labour force; (h) support for children and elderly living in poverty; (i) retirement protection schemes; (j) the Statutory Minimum Wage; (k) alleviating the disparity between the rich and the poor; and (l) consolidating and simplifying various existing social security and social welfare services. Mr NIP responded accordingly.

Public Engagement Exercise on Population Policy

4. Mr Patrick NIP, Director (Special Duties), Chief Secretary for Administration’s Private Office, briefed Members on the Public Engagement Exercise on Population

Policy (“the Exercise”) which included: (a) reasons for carrying out the Exercise; (b) members of the Steering Committee on Population Policy; (c) objectives of the population policy; (d) demographic challenges; (e) challenges and opportunities; (f) five policy strategies to manage challenges; (g) quality of our home-grown talent; (h) new sources of manpower from outside; and (i) three issues of public concern (namely, a population cap was undesirable, the One-way Permit Scheme should be preserved and Type II children were not a solution to the demographic challenges).

5. A number of Members put forward their views and questions on the following areas: (a) fostering a supportive environment for young couples to raise children; (b) attracting overseas talents to return to Hong Kong (c) importing foreign labour; (d) ageing population; and (e) the new arrivals. Mr NIP responded accordingly.

Briefing on Long Term Housing Strategy Consultation Document

6. Mr YAU Shing-mu, Under Secretary for Transport and Housing said that the Long Term Housing Strategy Consultation Document had been completed and released by the Long Term Housing Strategy Steering Committee for three month’s public consultation.

7. A number of Members put forward their views and questions on the following areas: (a) PRH; (b) subdivided units; (c) military sites and “brownfield sites”; (d) small houses and small house concessionary rights; (e) Hung Shui Kiu New Development Area; (f) development of the existing new towns; (g) government land; and (h) country parks. USTH thanked Members for their views and suggestions and gave a consolidated reply.

Consultation of Draft Tin Fu Tsai Outline Zoning Plan No. S/TM-TFT/B

8. Representatives of the Planning Department (PlanD), Water Supplies Department and Environmental Protection Department attended the meeting to brief Members on the paper which included: (a) location of Tin Fu Tsai (“TFS”); (b) site plan of TFT; (c) an outdoor training centre, war game areas, village type houses/domestic buildings and an ancestral hall located at TFT; (d) planning considerations for land use, including a water gathering ground, a vehicular access to TFT, a wooded area with higher conservation value and infrastructure; (e) general planning intention; and (f) land use zonings, including the “Conservation Area” and “Green Belt”. The representative of PlanD emphasised that although there was no “Village Type

Development” zone on the draft Plan, according to the covering Notes of the draft Plan, rebuilding of New Territories Exempted House (including Small House) and replacement of existing domestic building by New Territories Exempted House (including Small House) within the “Green Belt” zone were always permitted.

9. A Member said that although many villagers of Tin Fu Tsai Village (“TFTV”) had moved to the urban areas, the Village Representative (“VR”) of TFTV still hoped that the Administration could zone some land within TFTV for “Village Type Development”. The VR of TFTV also expressed concerns over the water quality of the village and asked the Administration to make removal and rehousing arrangements for it. A Member shared the above views and suggested that the Government should officially resume the land owned by the villagers for the development of nature education and offer compensation to them. The Member of the constituency of TFTV said that though there were only about 20 households in TFTV, the Government should protect the water source and preserve its culture. It should also give consideration to the removal arrangements for the village.

10. The representative of PlanD responded that PlanD had noted the views of Members and would convey their views to the bureaus and departments concerned for considering the arrangement of the next step. Regarding the aspiration of the VR of TFTV to zone some land within the village for “Village Type Development”, he said that PlanD would closely examine the issue with the departments concerned and would address the requests of the VR and Members as soon as possible.

Matters Related to the Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal

11. The Chairman of the Traffic and Transport Committee (“TTC”) said that TTC had, earlier this year, written to the Chief Secretary for Administration (“CS”) to express its objection to the leasing out of the Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal (“TMFT”) for commercial use and urge the Government to resume the ferry route between Tuen Mun and Macao and to review the existing policy on the operation of TMFT. Later, the Working Group on Tuen Mun External Traffic under TTC had discussed the issue in October this year and was dissatisfied with the replies of the CS's Office and the Transport and Housing Bureau (“THB”). TTC had therefore, through TMDC, asked the bureaus and departments concerned to follow up the issue. In this regard, he proposed again that the Government should, based on the population proportion of New Territories West, consider operating TMFT as a public pier and leasing out TMFT to interested operators free-of-charge (i.e. the conditions should be in line with

those offered to the existing ferry service operators of the Hong Kong-Macau Ferry Terminal (“HKMFT”). A number of Members agreed to the suggestion. A Member opined that coordination was needed from the Marine Department (“MD”) to provide an en-route stop at Tuen Mun for some of the ferry services between Macau to HKMFT and Hong Kong-China Ferry Terminal (“HKCFT”). A number of Members shared the view.

12. The representative of THB remarked that since the cessation of the ferry service provided by the Hong Kong North West Express Limited (“North West Express”), the Government had been following up the issue and had commenced tender procedures for TMFT. After the completion of the preparation work for the tender exercise, THB would brief Members on the details before conducting an open tender exercise. Besides, the Government had no plan to construct the third cross-boundary ferry terminal under its management because of the following reasons: the current capacity of HKMFT and HKCFT managed by the Government could meet the expected demand on the cross-boundary ferry services; the ferry passenger throughput had not reached the maximum level; and the new ferry service operators could still apply for the use of the two terminals in the future. Regarding the proposed provision of an en-route stop at Tuen Mun, she pointed out that if entry and departure of passengers into and from Hong Kong were involved, the public service facilities required for a cross-boundary ferry terminal had to be provided even the terminal concerned was just an en-route stop. Therefore, the Government was of the view that the cost of providing an en-route stop at Tuen Mun should be as same as that of the ferry services between Tuen Mun to Macau provided in the past.

13. The representative of MD pointed out that regarding the arrangement of the ferry routes, operators of the cross-boundary ferry services had to, on their own, liaise with the ferry terminals of the destinations or the government departments and agencies of the destinations for approval. Since the North West Express had ceased operation due to insufficient passenger throughput, MD would consider providing support for future operators as appropriate.

14. After discussion, TMDC resolved to write to CS, expressing its discontent and requesting for a meeting with her.

Request for Discussion on the Revised Option of Tuen Mun Western Bypass

15. The Member who submitted the paper said that the Highways Department

(“HyD”) had written to TMDC in September this year, indicating that HyD would review the implementation schedule of the Tuen Mun Western Bypass (“TMWB”) and had decided to further study whether there was any room for amending TMWB’s alignment as some of the members of the local community had expressed concerns over the impact of the access points of the northern viaduct section and the southern tunnel section of TMWB at Tsing Tin Interchange on residents in the vicinity and had raised objection to the project. In this regard, he opined that HyD should take the opportunity to consult TMDC and brief Members on the revised plan to avoid acting behind closed doors. Moreover, since the Tuen Mun – Chek Lap Kok Link (“TM-CLKL”) was expected to be completed in 2016-17, there might be serious congestion at Tuen Mun Road and Wong Chu Road and even residents of Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai might be affected if TMWB could not be completed to connect TM-CLKL in time. He therefore condemned HyD for dereliction of duty regarding the follow-up of TMWB.

16. A number of Members put forward their views and suggestions on the issue which included: (a) regarding the design of TMWB, it was requested that the Administration should take into account the interests of Tuen Mun residents and reconsider adopting the option introduced in 2009 under which three main access points would be provided; (b) it was suggested that the Administration should not just look at the cost-effectiveness, and that a new design option to link up with the area between the Castle Peak Interchange and Lam Tei via a tunnel section at Yuen Tau Shan and Ha Tsuen Roundabout should be considered; and (c) it was urged that HyD should carry out consultation on the revised design option of TMWB as soon as possible and speed up the progress of works of TMWB with a view to complement TM-CLKL and Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge which would be completed soon.

17. After discussion, TMDC resolved to write to HyD, expressing its discontent and inviting representatives of HyD to attend the next meeting to further discuss the issue.

Regret at Government’s Decision to Grant Free TV Licences to Two out of Three Applicants

Request for Disclosure of the Assessment Criteria

18. The Member who submitted the paper pointed out that TMDC was concerned about the domestic free television programme service licence applications and expressed regret over the failure of the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (“CEDB”) to send representatives to the meeting. She hoped that the

Government would disclose the licensing criteria, based on the principles of openness, impartiality and fairness, and explain publicly the reasons for granting domestic free television programme service licences to two out of three applicants. A Member said that members of the public were mainly concerned about the reasons for the Government not granting three licences and were dissatisfied about its failure to explain clearly the details of the incident. He pointed out that some members of the Legislative Council had provided brief explanations and little information on the incident after the meeting but the authenticity of such information was questionable. He opined that as the incident involved the governance crisis and integrity of the Chief Executive (“CE”) and the Executive Council (“ExCo”), he suggested that TMDC should write to the CE and the ExCo, asking them to provide a full explanation to the public without violating the confidentiality mechanism and without disclosing the proceedings. After discussion, TMDC resolved to write to CEDB to convey its views.

School Places Allocation and Admission Procedures of Pre-primary Education in Tuen Mun District

19. The representative of the Education Bureau (“EDB”) briefed Members on the key points of EDB’s reply which included: (a) the number of school places for 2012-13 was 12 637 (the figure did not include vacant classrooms and vacant parts of child care centres); (b) according to the projection of EDB, there would be 4 030 school places in Tuen Mun for 2014-15 and the number of nursery class (“K1”) students in the district was 4 400 (including cross-boundary students). Therefore, the number of K1 places in Tuen Mun could meet the demand; (c) the number of places in vacant classrooms in Tuen Mun for 2012-13 was 1 680, EDB would encourage the optimal use of vacant classrooms and flexible provision of places for different classes by kindergartens; and (d) EDB had met with the Members of the Executive Committee of Tuen Mun District Kindergarten Heads Association (“TMDKHA”) in October this year and some arrangements had been proposed for the consideration of the kindergartens: (i) to provide online distribution of application forms to save parents the trouble of obtaining the forms in person; (ii) to adopt the principle of vicinity in admission of students; (iii) to arrange interviews for all applicants; and (iv) to post the admission procedures at the webpages or main entrances of the schools. TMDKHA had continued to discuss the above issue in October this year. Consensus among heads of kindergartens in Tuen Mun District had not been reached due to the complexity in implementing the six measures, particularly the measure of “one place per child”.

20. A number of Members put forward their views and suggestions which included: (a) it was suggested that the six measures (particularly the measure of “one place per child”) currently implemented in the North and Tai Po Districts should be extended to cover Tuen Mun District, and that central allocation system should be adopted for the admission of kindergarten students; (b) due to the differences in cultural background between cross-boundary students and local students, two groups might be formed among students. Therefore, it was suggested that the Administration should provide additional resources and develop measures to alleviate the situation; (c) it was requested that the Government should cooperate with the mainland authorities concerned in the registration of students intending to cross the boundary to attend kindergartens in Hong Kong to facilitate the kindergartens in planning the number of classes; (d) it was urged that the Administration should discuss with TMDKHA the feasibility of centralized distribution of application forms and interviews for students; (e) it was suggested that the Government should allow parents to pay the fees with the pre-primary education vouchers during enrolment; and (f) it was suggested that the Administration should adopt a high profile approach to invite the Independent Commission Against Corruption for investigation as some intermediaries had charged parents fees for securing places in kindergartens for their children. The representative of EDB responded accordingly.

21. After discussion, TMDC resolved that the issue should be followed up by the Social Services Committee (“SSC”). A Member, who was also the Chairlady of SSC, agreed to the arrangement. She hoped that EDB could reach a consensus with TMDKHA as soon as possible and bring good news to SSC.

Secretariat, Tuen Mun District Council

6 December 2013