

EAC publishes independent investigation report on REO's loss of Final Register of Electors

The following is issued on behalf of the Electoral Affairs Commission:

The Electoral Affairs Commission (EAC) today (July 24) published a report of an independent investigation into the loss of the Final Register of Electors (FR) of a polling station located at SKH Tsing Yi Estate Ho Chak Wan Primary School in Kwai Tsing by the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) in the 2016 Legislative Council General Election.

"The EAC conducted an independent investigation into the incident to find out the underlying facts and identify the problems relating to the electoral arrangements as well as overall management of the REO with a view to recommending improvement measures. The investigation has been completed. Due to the lapse of time and lack of direct evidence, it is not possible to ascertain precisely when and how the marked FR was lost," a spokesman for the EAC said.

"However, the EAC's investigation reveals shortcomings of the REO in the handling of electoral documents after the 2016 Legislative Council General Election, including the packing, checking, collection, delivery, storage and retrieval of electoral documents. The EAC believes that the long working hours of polling staff, as well as the unsatisfactory store arrangement and management, may have led to the abovementioned problems.

"The EAC noted that, after the 2016 Legislative Council General Election, the REO has introduced a number of improvement measures to better handle relevant electoral documents. The investigation report has made a number of recommendations to further improve the procedures for the handling of electoral documents and materials. Such recommendations include shortening the working hours of polling staff to enhance their efficiency in packing and returning electoral documents; providing clearer and streamlined procedural guidelines for handling of electoral documents; proactively exploring and introducing more modern and effective technologies to help maintain proper and up-to-date store management; and concrete improvements to the store management system to facilitate stock-taking and retrieval of electoral items. As a matter of priority, the REO should explore ways to consolidate its scattered stores and offices in order to enhance its operational efficiency. Consideration should also be given by the Government to strengthening the top tier and senior management of the REO in order to meet the growing complexities and challenges of elections.

"The report details the searching efforts made by the REO after discovering that the FR could not be located in October 2016. The EAC notes that relevant REO staff (especially the middle ranking ones) had already made very strenuous efforts in locating the marked FR in question. However, the

ex-members of the senior management of the REO had not accorded sufficient priority or an appropriate degree of urgency to the matter. They should have instructed their staff to complete their searches as early as possible, or consider filing with the relevant authorities the possible loss of the FR." The REO is therefore advised to put in place an effective reporting mechanism within the department to timely follow up such matters.

"During the investigation, the EAC further notes that in early January 2018, the ex-Chief Electoral Officer had already been aware of the issue that the FR in question had not yet been located. The investigation also reveals that the ex-top management of the REO lacked the sensitivity in dealing with the loss of the FR. Neither had they discussed the matter in detail nor had they given any steer to relevant REO staff what follow-up actions should be taken."

The EAC believes that the Government and the REO will carefully consider the recommendations in the report, explore how they should be implemented, continue to improve the procedures for the handling of electoral documents, and prevent the recurrence of similar incidents. The EAC will continue to oversee the work of the REO and ensure that the elections in Hong Kong can be conducted in an open, fair, and honest manner.

The EAC has uploaded the full investigation report to the EAC website ([www.eac.hk/pdf/loss_register_electors/report\(Eng\).pdf](http://www.eac.hk/pdf/loss_register_electors/report(Eng).pdf)) for public information.