

LCQ1: The seventh District Council Ordinary Election

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Yung and a reply by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Erick Tsang Kwok-wai, in the Legislative Council today (November 1):

Question:

The seventh District Council (DC) Ordinary Election (the Election) will be held on December 10 this year. There are views that the Election represents a new stage in district governance and holds great significance as it is the first DC election after the improvement of the electoral system. As such, the preparation work for the Election is crucial to ensuring its smooth conduct. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) how it enhances the atmosphere of the Election and encourages electors to vote actively;

(2) as there are views that quite a number of changes have been made to the arrangements for the new DC election, including the expanded size of the District Council geographical constituencies (DCGCs) following their re-delineation, as well as the return of District Committees constituency (DCC) seats by indirect election, and that these arrangements are relatively new to electors, of the authorities' specific plans in place to enhance DCGC electors' knowledge of their respective constituencies and DCC electors' understanding of the polling arrangements; and

(3) how it makes proper arrangements for the election day, including ensuring adequate power supply and stable network connection for polling stations to enable the smooth operation of the Electronic Poll Register System, facilitating electoral staff to go to the polling stations in their respective constituencies to cast their votes, providing timely responses to enquiries from candidates and the media on election-related matters, and promptly clarifying false or inaccurate information about the election?

Reply:

President,

The 2023 District Council Ordinary Election (DCOE) will be held on December 10 this year. This election is the first large-scale territory-wide election being held after the reform of the District Councils (DCs) and improving the district governance system, and is of particular significance. Improving district governance on one hand aims to revert the DCs to their original positioning under the Basic Law, viz. while providing consultation services to the Government on district management, district organisations are not organs of political power; on the other hand, it also marks the final mile for the full implementation of the principle of "patriots administering

Hong Kong" in the district governance structure.

The new term DCs will be formed through various channels and methods, selecting the best amongst all, gathering patriots with different backgrounds and professions to contribute to district administration. The new district governance structure and DCs relate to good governance as well as stability to prosperity, they also relate to the contentment and happiness as well as well-being of every citizen. All sectors of the community care a lot about this DC election. Political parties as well as patriots who are dedicated in serving the community have demonstrated their enthusiasm by running for the election. In order to promote the new district governance structure and DCs, the Government has launched the publicity efforts earlier and stepped up its scale. Through a series of promotional activities, the Government hopes the public would better grasp the importance of the new DCs and district governance structure, while at the same time foster their understanding of the new electoral system as well as the new constituencies, and in turn encourage electors to vote for their preferred candidate on the polling day.

In response to the Hon Chan Yung's question, our reply is as follows.

(1) The Government is making every effort in taking forward various election promotional activities. Besides traditional publicity methods, such as posters, banners, buntings, advertisements, TV APIs, TV programmes, the Government has also adopted novel and down-to-earth methods, such as hosting "Night Vibes DC Election", "DC Election at Halloween" and over 100 "DC Election into the Community" events, proactively going into the community and engaging in communication with the public in a zero-distance manner, as well as setting up exhibitions, game booths, "check-in" spots, parent-child interactive workshops. We have also leveraged on social media platforms popular with the younger generation in disseminating election information. Also, we are producing different TV series of TV programmes, including "Improving District Governance under Different Perspectives", "Fun Facts about DC election", "Election in Every District". These programmes aim to introduce the improved district governance system, composition of the new DCs, electoral arrangements and other election-related facts etc in an easily understandable manner. We have also invited social elites to film the call for action clips, with a view to encourage voter turnout. At the same time, we will also organise a number of election forums for candidates from late November to early December, so that the public can understand candidates' agendas, their determination and ability.

(2) The Registration and Electoral Office (REO) has organised seminars for each of the 18 districts in Hong Kong, with the seminar content and info-packs prepared in accordance with the district's situation. REO has also explained the nomination mechanism and polling arrangements of the election to members of the District Committees in detail, as well as promptly addressed the questions raised at the seminars.

With regards to the District Council Geographical Constituencies (DCGCs), the REO has issued letters to all electors notifying them of their newly assigned DCGC, and has published on social media info-packs containing infographics comparing the new DCGCs with the old constituencies. At the same

time, we have designed some dedicated games, flyers and exhibition panels, as well as arranged dedicated staff to explain to the public at the "DC Election into the Community" events, with a view to enable their understanding of the delineation of the new DCGCs. To facilitate the public to check their new DCGCs, we will upload a simplified district boundary map onto the dedicated election website for the purpose.

We will also publicise the formation and composition of the DCs on different TV programmes as well as TV and radio APIs, in addition to reminding electors of points-to-note with regards to the polling arrangements. The relevant videos and soundtracks will also be uploaded to the dedicated election website and social media platform for the public to review at any time.

(3) The Electronic Poll Register (EPR) System will be used for issuing ballot papers at most of the polling stations for the 2023 DCOE. The REO has entrusted the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department to engage contractors to inspect all polling stations and ensure that there is adequate power supply. As for network connections, the REO will arrange dual Internet network services (i.e. broadband plus fifth-generation mobile communication technology (5G)) to ensure stable network connectivity. At the same time, the EPR System at the polling stations will be connected to the Government Cloud Infrastructure Services to ensure safe and secure data storage. The REO will also arrange technical personnel to carry out installation and testing work in the polling stations in advance. That said, to ensure the smooth conduct of the election, the REO will co-ordinate with relevant departments to fully prepare for the contingency plans and arrangements.

Regarding the measures to facilitate electoral staff to cast their votes, we will assign electoral staff to work in polling stations located close to their residence as far as possible. Presiding Officers will also arrange electoral staff to take turns as far as possible to cast their votes having regard to the actual manpower and operational needs at the polling station on the polling day. If there is a long queue for voting at the allocated polling station, the electoral staff can use the special queue to collect ballot papers upon presentation of their electoral staff identification, so that they can resume their duties as soon as possible.

For election-related enquiries raised by candidates on the election day, apart from calling REO's enquiry hotline at 2891 1001, they can make an enquiry to the Returning Officers of their respective constituencies, or approach the Presiding Officers directly to enquire about arrangements related to the polling stations.

For the media, REO will set up a hotline which specifically handles media enquiries. Moreover, REO will set up a dedicated team to monitor the related reports by various media as well as other news related to the election throughout the day. If any erroneous information or untruthful report is found, the Government and the Electoral Affairs Commission will make clarifications as soon as possible through press releases, media stand-ups, or social media, etc to set the record straight.