

LCQ10: District administration

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Tik Chi-yuen and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Jack Chan, in the Legislative Council today (January 26):

Question:

In 1982, the British Hong Kong Government implemented the District Administration Scheme, aiming to strengthen ties with local communities and enable the Government to better understand real public views. In addition, the then Chief Executive announced in his Policy Address delivered in 2007 that the Government would enhance the roles of District Councils (DCs) and the District Officers, with a view to improving work at the district level and further developing district administration. However, following an upsurge of resignation of DC members and oaths of a number of DC members being ruled invalid in 2021, more than 300 of the 479 seats in the current DC term are vacant. With only a few DC members left, many DCs are unable to maintain normal operation. It has been reported that the Government even decided to terminate the Mutual Aid Committees (MACs) this month. There are comments that the district administration system in Hong Kong is on the verge of existing in name only. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will conduct a review on how to continue to implement district administration effectively; if so, of the details and the timetable;

(2) of the factors taken into consideration in terminating MACs, and whether it conducted any consultation and considered any alternatives before making such a decision;

(3) whether it will consider afresh conducting by-elections for the vacancies in DCs; and

(4) as there are currently a large number of vacancies in DCs, of the differences in the Government's workflow of conducting district consultation in comparison with that in the past, and how it can ensure that the views obtained through consultation truly reflect public opinions?

Reply:

President,

After consulting the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, my consolidated reply to the question raised by Dr the Hon Tik Chi-yuen is as follows:

(1) and (3) The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government is actively preparing for the Chief Executive Election to be held in March this

year. At this stage, there is no plan to arrange for a by-election for the vacant memberships of the District Councils (DCs). As the Chief Executive responded publicly earlier, the current-term Government does not have the capacity to hold a large scale DC by-election within the remainder of its term i.e. from now until June 30. The next-term Government will conduct a comprehensive review on district administration and the way forward of DCs.

(2) The Mutual Aid Committee (MAC) Scheme was launched in the 1970s with a view to promoting neighbourliness and improving living environment, as well as providing a communication channel between the Government and the residents. However, neighbourhood network and modes of building management have evolved in tandem with societal development and changes over the past few decades. For instance, many buildings have already engaged property management companies to take charge of their management or have formed other residents' organisations. In addition, with the development of information technology, there have been more direct communication channels between the Government and the residents.

In fact, the number of MACs was on a continuous decline, down by nearly half to around 1 600 over the past 15 years or so. On the other hand, MAC formation remained at a low level, with an average of less than 30 MACs formed annually in recent years.

Some in the community consider that MACs are playing a diminishing role in the relevant areas. After careful consideration, the Home Affairs Bureau has decided to terminate the MAC Scheme by phases.

That said, the Government will continue to enhance communication at the local level by, for example, strengthening ties with the community through different district committees, including Area Committees, District Fight Crime Committees and District Fire Safety Committees. For private buildings that have not engaged property management companies or formed any residents' organisations, the District Building Management Liaison Teams of the District Offices will assist relevant owners in forming residents' organisations such as owners' corporations.

(4) As regards local consultation, the Government will generally seek the advice of the DCs on district administration affairs and community, recreational and cultural activities, environmental improvement projects and transport issues within the districts as necessary. However, consultation with DCs is only one of the means to collect local views. As mentioned above, in order to ensure that local views are reflected effectively, bureaux and departments will also consult different district organisations as necessary, such as Area Committees, District Fight Crime Committees, District Fire Safety Committees, etc. so that local needs will be suitably addressed.

In addition, a District Management Committee (DMC) chaired by the District Officer is set up in each district, comprising representatives of departments providing essential services in the district. The DMC serves as a forum for inter-departmental discussions on district matters and co-ordinates the management of public services and facilities in the districts to meet the

needs of the local community.