

LCQ10: Support for Rural Committees and village representatives

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Caspar Tsui, in the Legislative Council today (December 2):

Question:

At present, there are over 1 000 village representatives (VRs) in Hong Kong. Not only do they need to frequently liaise with various parties on affairs affecting their villages and the well-being of villagers, they also serve as the main contact point for the whole village in times of natural disasters and other emergency incidents. The Government has indicated that, although the number of people that VRs represent is fewer and the issues they handle are relatively local, the work of VRs is, to a certain extent, of a similar nature to that of District Council (DC) members. On the provision of support for Rural Committees (RCs) and VRs, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective total annual amounts of (i) the funding/allowance allocated to various RCs and (ii) the honorarium granted to VRs, by the Government in each of the past ten years (set out in a table);

(2) of the respective adjustment mechanisms for the funding/allowance/honorarium mentioned in (1), as well as the respective numbers of adjustment in the past ten years and the rate of each adjustment; whether the Government will review the adjustment mechanisms in the coming year; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it has compared if the amounts of allowance allocated to VRs and DC members are comparable; if it has compared and the outcome is in the negative, whether it will adjust upward the amount of allowance for the lower one; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) whether it will enhance the support provided for VRs to encourage young people living in villages to serve their villages; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) whether it will set up an emergency fund to be operated on an accountable basis so that RCs and VRs can have the resources to expeditiously handle the emergency incidents within the village area (such as collapse of trees and drain blockage); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to all parts of Hon Chan Han-pan's question is as follows:

(1) The amounts of honorarium granted to village representatives (VRs) and subvention granted to Rural Committees (RCs), the respective numbers of instalments per annum, and the total annual expenditures over the past ten years are set out in the table below:

	Honorarium granted to VRs (per annum) (Note 1) (\$'000)	Honorarium granted to Kaifong Representatives (Note 2) (per annum) (Note 1) (\$'000)	Total (\$'000)	Subvention granted to RCs (per annum) (Note 3) (\$'000)
2010-11	10,185	–	10,185	3,859
2011-12	10,690	–	10,690	4,275
2012-13	10,692	–	10,692	4,246
2013-14	10,667	–	10,667	4,390
2014-15	10,695	–	10,695	4,439
2015-16	13,117	523	13,640	4,440
2016-17	13,030	523	13,553	4,449
2017-18	13,166	523	13,689	4,530
2018-19	13,074	518	13,592	5,421
2019-20	14,619	544	15,163	13,023 (Note 4)

Note 1: A total of four quarterly instalments per annum

Note 2: Elected in a statutory election since 2015

Note 3: A total of 12 monthly instalments per annum

Note 4: Including a one-off subvention of \$7,560,000 for anti-epidemic purposes

(2) The Village Representative Election Ordinance was enacted in 2003 (amended as the Rural Representative Election Ordinance in 2014) to regulate the election of VRs. The VRs duly elected under the ordinance shall discharge their statutory responsibilities as required under the law. Subsequently and with effect from April 1, 2009, the Government started granting each VR a quarterly honorarium of \$2,000 as a form of support and recognition for their services.

On the proposal to grant an honorarium to VRs, the Government consulted the Panel on Home Affairs of the Legislative Council (LegCo) on December 11, 2009, and the approval of the Finance Committee of the LegCo was secured on January 29, 2010. In addition, the Finance Committee of the LegCo also agreed to the adjustment of VR honorarium once every four years after each village ordinary election with reference to the cumulative movement of Consumer Price Index (A) (CPI(A)), be it inflationary or deflationary, since the last adjustment is made. The amount was adjusted upwards in 2015 and 2019 by 21 per cent and 10.7 per cent respectively. With an established adjustment mechanism in place now, which is proved effective, the Government has no plans to change it.

Separately, the Government has been granting monthly subventions to RCs since the 1960s to cover their daily operating expenses, such as electricity and water charges, stationery, etc. There is no established review mechanism for subventions granted to RCs, but the Government will review the arrangement from time to time and, where necessary, adjustment will be made with reference to changes in the Composite CPI. RC subvention was adjusted upwards in 2011 and 2018 by 10.8 per cent and 24 per cent respectively. We have been discussing with the Heung Yee Kuk the drawing up of a regular review plan for RC subvention.

(3) The Government grants honorarium to VRs mainly for the purpose of giving support and recognition to VRs' work. When the granting of honorarium to VRs was recommended, the number of electors they represent, the size of their constituencies, the scope of work, their workload, etc. were taken into account. The Government has another established mechanism for the remuneration package of District Council (DC) members. It is inappropriate to compare the two.

(4) The District Offices (DOs) in the New Territories maintain close liaison with VRs and RCs on rural affairs. For example, DO staff will attend meetings and events by invitation. On the other hand, various committees under the DOs in the New Territories, such as Area Committees, District Fight Crime Committees and District Fire Safety Committees will adhere to the principle of "meritocracy" in engaging suitable persons who aspire to serve the community via various channels.

In addition, under the district youth networks programme of the Home Affairs Department, the 18 DOs will organise a series of continuous youth activities, actively recruiting young people about the age of 16 to 25 to become core members and maintaining regular liaison with members. In addition to the aims of enhancing the public awareness of young people, strengthening

their sense of belonging to the community and broadening their horizons, more importantly, the programme identifies a group of young people who actively take part in community affairs and offer them more development opportunities. For instance, they may assist in organising district activities and even join the advisory committees of the Government. It is hoped that this will encourage more young people to serve the community in the future.

(5) Generally speaking, in case of an emergency, the respective DOs will coordinate the assistance provided by different departments to affected residents within the village area for protecting their lives and property. As for other issues involving government land, including collapse of trees and drain blockage, DOs will also refer them to relevant departments for follow-up.

In addition, having regard to the conditions and needs of those affected by natural disasters or accidents, DOs will also assist them in seeking emergency support as appropriate from government departments.