

LCQ16: Operation and development of RTHK

Following is a question by the Hon Charles Mok and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (June 17):

Question:

The Government announced last month the establishment of a dedicated team (the team) to review the governance and management of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK). The team will carry out its work from the middle to the end of this year and then submit a report to the Government. Given that the composition of the team does not include the Director of Broadcasting nor any staff representatives of RTHK and that the review lacks public participation, some members of the public are worried that the team will make a cart behind closed doors and put forward recommendations which are detrimental to the operation and editorial independence of RTHK. Regarding the operation and development of RTHK, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the team will review (a) RTHK's progress of establishing a mechanism for setting performance targets and benchmarks, and (b) RTHK's overall management systems, work processes and practices, whether the Government will request the team to concurrently review (i) if such mechanism, systems and processes have stifled RTHK's abilities to remain flexible and responsive in a fast-changing media ecosystem and (ii) how to ensure that the performance targets and benchmarks set under the said mechanism are consistent with the principles of fairness and transparency (including whether the team will suggest RTHK to consult the public when setting such targets and benchmarks); if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will request the team, when reviewing RTHK's financial control, to concurrently review if the annual funding allocation for RTHK is sufficient to support RTHK's long-term development (e.g. launching new services); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) of the measures in place to ensure that the recommendations on human resources management put forward by the team will not undermine the editorial independence of RTHK and the freedom of creation for its programme producers;

(4) whether it will request the team to (i) allow RTHK's staff representatives and members of the public to participate in the review work through open and formal channels, and (ii) seek the views of the Radio Television Hong Kong Board of Advisors; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(5) as the Government is taking forward the project of construction of the

New Broadcasting House on the basis of a joint-user building, whether the Government will (i) review if the option of constructing a new joint-user building can meet the current and future operational needs of RTHK and (ii) expedite the progress of the works project; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(6) whether the Government will study allowing RTHK to transform from a government department into an independent statutory public broadcaster and provide RTHK with a stable and predictable financial resources, to enable RTHK to continue to provide credible and diversified public broadcasting services?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1), (3) and (4) The Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB) announced on May 28, 2020 the establishment of a dedicated team to review the governance and management of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK).

The scope of the review is as follows:

(1) to review RTHK's administration, including financial control, human resources management and procurement matters to ensure that its manpower and resource deployment complies with all applicable Government rules and regulations, and that such deployment is made for the effective delivery of services under programme areas as set out in paragraphs 17 to 20 of the Charter of RTHK (Charter), and where necessary, to identify scope for improvement;

(2) to review RTHK's progress of implementing the recommendations of the Report No. 71 of the Director of Audit, including the need for a transparent and objective system for setting performance targets and benchmarks for measuring results; and

(3) to review RTHK's overall management systems, processes and practices, making reference to best practices of other public service broadcasters, to ensure full compliance with the Charter and the codes of practice on programming standards issued by the Communications Authority.

In the course of the review, the dedicated team will take into account the operational needs of RTHK and views of different stakeholders. The CEDB has clearly indicated that members of the review team will not take part in any programme production or editorial decisions of RTHK. RTHK has indicated that it would provide full support to the exercise.

(2) and (6) As regards resources, RTHK has all along been allocated sufficient resources under the established mechanism for providing services. The Government has no plan at this stage to change RTHK's identity as a

government department nor the existing funding mechanism.

(5) As for the New Broadcasting House (New BH), having regard to the views of the Legislative Council, the operational needs of RTHK and the need to ensure that the reserved site would have better economic benefits, the Government has been proactively taking forward the New BH project on the basis of a joint-user building. With the assistance of the Architectural Services Department, RTHK is discussing with departments which are interested in the joint-user building on their respective requirements, as well as project design and planning. RTHK will continue to take forward the New BH project in accordance with the established mechanism.