

LCQ20: Making inquiries to registered voters

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Erick Tsang Kwok-wai, in the Legislative Council today (March 24):

Question:

The Electoral Affairs Commission (Registration of Electors) (Legislative Council Geographical Constituencies) (District Council Constituencies) Regulation (Cap. 541A) provides that the Electoral Registration Officer may issue inquiry letters to persons registered in an existing final register of electors (register), and remove from the new register the voter registration (VR) of persons who have failed to make a valid reply by a specified deadline. It is learnt that a new VR cycle has commenced. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the total number of registered voters, in the last VR cycle and since the commencement of the current VR cycle, who failed to reply to the inquiry letters by the specified deadline; whether the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) knows the reasons concerned;

(2) whether REO has, apart from issuing inquiry letters, confirmed the registered particulars, such as the principal residential addresses, of registered voters by means of making telephone calls, sending emails and paying home visits, etc. during the last VR cycle and since the commencement of the current VR cycle; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether measures are in place to ensure that the VR of registered voters, who are absent from Hong Kong for reasons such as the epidemic, will not be removed due to their failure to reply to the inquiry letters in time; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

To ensure the accuracy and completeness of the voter registration (VR) particulars, the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) implements a series of checking measures in each VR cycle, including follow-up inquiries on undelivered poll cards arising from elections; cross-matching of the residential addresses of electors with the Housing Department, the Hong Kong Housing Society, the Home Affairs Department and the Immigration Department; checks on residential addresses with multiple electors or multiple surnames of electors; random sample checks on registered and newly registered electors; checks on addresses with incomplete information or suspected non-

residential addresses; and checks on addresses situated at buildings already demolished or vacant buildings to be demolished. After implementing or following up with the checking measures, if the REO has reasonable grounds to suspect that the registered residential addresses might not be the only or principal residence of certain electors, it will issue inquiry letters to the electors concerned, requesting them to confirm or update their registered addresses. If the electors concerned fail to reply or provide the necessary information by the deadline, the REO will, in accordance with the relevant statutory procedures, enter the said electors into the omissions list.

With regard to the Hon Chan Han-pan's question, our reply is as follows:

(1) In the 2020 VR cycle, the number of electors who were omitted from the 2020 final register due to failure to respond to inquiry letters by the statutory deadline was 47 084. In fact, in the 2020 VR cycle, the response rate of electors to inquiry letters was around 51 per cent, similar to that in 2019 (which was 50 per cent), suggesting that no irregularities occurred in the response rate towards inquiry letters in the 2020 VR cycle. As for the 2021 VR cycle which is still ongoing, REO is issuing inquiry letters progressively, with the statutory deadline for electors to respond to such inquiry letters on May 2, 2021. As such, the relevant response rates are not yet available.

REO issues inquiry letters to the electors when REO has reasonable doubts having regard to the results from implementing or following up with the checking measures. The outcome of the checking exercise shows that the inaccuracies detected in respect of registered residential addresses are mostly because of the failure on the part of electors to update their registered residential addresses with the REO in a timely manner after moving home, which has led to such electors not responding to the inquiry letters issued to them.

(2) and (3) We have all along adopted various means to remind and facilitate electors included in the inquiry process to respond to the inquiry letters in a timely manner. This includes featuring the relevant messages in the VR Campaigns and disseminating them through different channels, such as broadcasting Announcements in the Public Interest on television and radio, placing online advertisements on websites, online newspapers and mobile applications, as well as displaying posters, banners, lamppost buntings and advertisements at public transport.

Moreover, after issuing the inquiry letters, REO will actively contact the electors who have been included in the inquiry process via all of the available contact methods (e.g. telephone, SMS, email and fax) as provided by the electors during their registration, so as to remind them to respond to the inquiry letters by the statutory deadline. If REO becomes aware that an elector affected by the epidemic and relevant matters is unable to return to Hong Kong in time to handle his VR matters, the REO would, as far as practicable, make suitable arrangements to bring the inquiry letters to his attention and to facilitate his reply, such as by sending an electronic copy of the said inquiry letter to the elector concerned via email. Electors

included in the inquiry process may respond to the REO by post, email or fax.

If an elector has been entered into the omissions list due to failure to respond to the inquiry letters by the statutory deadline, REO will separately issue reminder letters stamped with the message "Immediate action required. Your voting right is at stake." to such electors. REO will also attempt to contact these electors as far as practicable according to the contact information available, so as to remind them to respond or to lodge a claim by the statutory deadline, for the consideration and approval of the Revising Officer to maintain their voter registration.

During both the 2020 and 2021 VR cycles, we have, in the manner described above, publicised the VR Campaign and put in place arrangements to facilitate electors in responding to inquiry letters.