

LCQ9: Law enforcement actions against unlawful government land occupation

Following is a question by the Hon Andrew Lam and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, in the Legislative Council today (January 10):

Question:

The Lands Department established a Special Duties Task Force (Task Force) in 2019 to focus on handling the more serious government land occupation cases and assist District Lands Offices in the New Territories in handling the more serious cases of land irregularities and other backlog cases. As at March 2021, the Task Force completed handling a cumulative total of over 800 cases with offenders in five of them being convicted and fined. Some members of the public have criticised that the conviction threshold for the relevant offences is too high and the fines are too low, with some convicted persons being fined only \$1,000. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the (i) number of unlawful government land occupation cases received by the Government, (ii) number of land control cases still being processed by it at the end of the year, (iii) number of cases in which it completed investigations and made referrals to law enforcement agencies, and (iv) number of cases in which it instituted prosecutions with the unlawful occupiers being convicted and fined, as well as the amounts of fines imposed, in each of the past three years; and

(2) whether it will review the penalties for unlawful government land occupation to enhance the deterrent effect; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Lands Department (LandsD) takes enforcement actions against unlawful occupation of government land pursuant to the Land (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance and handles more than 10 000 cases a year. The number of cases is substantial and their form and nature vary significantly (ranging from illegal bicycle parking on streets, abandoned vehicles, addition of shopfront platforms, dumping of wastes/construction wastes, depositing ties of bamboo scaffolds/skids, to the more serious cases of unlawful occupation of a large area of government land for brownfield operations or domestic structures). In view of limited manpower resources, the LandsD has to adopt a pragmatic "risk-based" approach to prioritise its enforcement actions, with priority given to cases of larger scale, more serious contraventions, or cases involving safety or environmental hygiene risks.

When taking land enforcement actions, the LandsD will post a statutory notice in accordance with the law requiring the occupier to cease occupation before a specified deadline. If the situation does not improve upon expiry of the deadline, the LandsD will take further actions, including taking possession of and clearing the property or structures remaining on the land, as well as considering instituting prosecutions against the occupier (if the identity of the occupier can be ascertained with evidence).

To enhance the enforcement efficiency under the "risk-based" approach, the LandsD set up the Special Duties Task Force (Task Force) in mid-2019 to step up targeted enforcement against cases with unlawful occupation of large areas of government land or serious lease breaches involving private agricultural land. As at the end of November 2023, the Task Force completed a cumulative total of over 1 500 cases, with the clearance of more than 44 hectares of unlawfully occupied government land and demolition of over 2 400 unlawful or lease-breaching structures in total. These cases include blackspots targeted by the Task Force and the backlog cases of District Lands Offices (DLOs).

Besides, the LandsD has implemented a number of measures to enhance enforcement work, including: tightening the regularisation application arrangements for unlawful occupation of government land since March 2017, meaning that the department no longer accepts regularisation applications for cases of unlawful occupation of government land commencing on or after March 28, 2017 and the occupiers can no longer avoid ceasing occupation of the land pursuant to the statutory notice through regularisation application; consolidating the enforcement manpower at various DLOs from April 2023 onwards, such that cases of land irregularities in the same district are handled by one single team in an integrated manner; use of drones and mobile devices to enhance the effectiveness of inspections and the overall efficiency of regular land enforcement work.

Our reply to the various parts of the Hon Andrew Lam's question is as follows:

(1) The relevant figures on enforcement against unlawful occupation of government land for the past three years (i.e. from 2021 to 2023) are set out in the Annex.

(2) To enhance the deterrent effect against unlawful occupation of government land, the Government amended the Land (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance in 2015 to significantly increase the penalties and introduce a progressive system of maximum fines for repeated offender as well as a system of daily fine for stronger deterrent effect against such unlawful act. Upon conviction, an offender is liable to a maximum penalty of a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for six months on the first occasion (the maximum penalty was a fine of \$10,000 and imprisonment for six months before the amendment), and to a further daily fine of \$50,000 for non-compliance with a statutory notice (new penalty). The offender, if convicted on each subsequent occasion, is liable to a fine of up to \$1,000,000 (new penalty) and imprisonment for six months (new penalty), and to a further daily fine of \$100,000 for non-compliance with the statutory notice (new penalty).

After the amendment came into effect in 2015, the penalties imposed by the court increased accordingly. From the figures collected in the past three years, only five out of the 54 convicted cases were fined \$1,000 (one case involved a small area occupied by an abandoned vehicle; four cases involved various persons in charge of an organisation related to a religious temple which occupied government land), while 23 cases were fined over \$10,000 (the highest being \$137,000). Another three cases was sentenced to imprisonment but the sentences were suspended. As the maximum fines that can be imposed by the court under the law is already significantly higher than the fines actually imposed by the court in recent years, further increasing the penalties allowable under the law at this stage may not be an effective way to enhance deterrence.

Under the existing framework of the Land (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance, it gives allowance for the occupiers to first cease the unlawful occupation of government land themselves (and thus bear the responsibility and expenses of the demolition and clearance work). Prosecution will only be invoked if the occupiers did not cease the occupation before the expiry date stipulated in the Government's statutory notice. It is believed that this "self-rectification" arrangement is one of the reasons accounting for the small number of prosecution cases. Other reasons include that the LandsD has focused its resources on putting an end to such land occupation to clear up the cases and hence less focused on adopting the prosecution strategy, and that gathering of evidence is not successful or the evidence is inadequate to ascertain the identity of the occupier for instituting prosecution.

We understand the public's expectation for proper management of public properties. Despite limited enforcement manpower and difficulties in the collection of evidence to meet the prosecution threshold, the LandsD will review how best to utilise its powers under the existing legislative framework and its manpower to step up enforcement and prosecution work, including the use of technologies (e.g. drones) to enhance its enforcement efficiency, and deploy resources to focus on prosecution of serious cases (such as cases with large area of occupation or those profiteering from use of government land) for stronger deterrence effect.

The Development Bureau and the LandsD will continue to monitor the implementation situation of the Ordinance and whether unlawful occupation of government land has deteriorated. Depending on the effectiveness of the work above, we may consider ways to enhance deterrence where necessary, including streamlining the process of prosecution (e.g. by introducing other easier means for prosecution of such offences).

Music Office's Outreach Music Interest

Courses open for applications

The Outreach Music Interest Courses (OMIC) organised by the Music Office of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) are now open for applications. Members of the public are welcome to apply for an array of courses, ranging from Chinese and Western musical instrument foundation classes to music workshops, which will be held from March to August.

The OMIC will launch a new workshop "Introduction to AI Music Creation". Participants will learn how to use artificial intelligence music creation tools such as AIVA and Tone Transfer, and related music copyright concepts. The course, at a fee of \$360, welcomes adults and does not require any musical qualifications or performance experience.

In addition, the Music Office will offer introductory courses on little harp, keyboard, classical guitar and ukulele; instrumental enrichment courses of erhu, yangqin, zheng, violin and cello; ensemble training of Chinese and Western music; music theory (Grades 1 and 2); aural training; and the online course "ABCs of Musicianship", which is designed for adult beginners. The course fees range from \$260 to \$1,070.

Other Chinese and Western musical instrument foundation classes will cover erhu, pipa, zhongruan, yangqin, zheng, dizi, xiao, violin, viola, cello, flute, clarinet, saxophone and percussion (glockenspiel and practice pad). The course fee is \$1,140 each.

All OMIC are conducted in Cantonese. The courses will be held at different venues across the territory, namely Hong Kong Cultural Centre, Sha Tin Town Hall, Tuen Mun Town Hall, North District Town Hall, Sheung Wan Civic Centre, Ngau Chi Wan Civic Centre, Kwai Tsing Theatre, Ko Shan Theatre, Hong Kong Central Library and the Music Office's music centres in Wan Chai, Mong Kok, Kwun Tong, Sha Tin and Tsuen Wan. Participants of the online course "ABCs of Musicianship" are required to prepare their own electronic device equipped with a wireless or broadband data connection, a webcam and Zoom software in advance.

Online applications are now available on the Music Office website (www.lcsd.gov.hk/musicoffice). Course prospectuses and application forms are also available at various performance venues of the LCSD and music centres of the Music Office. The deadline for applications is January 30. Oversubscribed courses will be processed by ballot. For courses not fully taken up after the first round of application, places will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis from February 28 onwards.

For enquiries, please call 3842 7773, 2598 0801 or 2598 8335 or email to outreachmusic@lcsd.gov.hk.

LCQ3: Convention and exhibition facilities

Following is a question by the Hon Tony Tse and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Dr Bernard Chan, in the Legislative Council today (January 10):

According to the consultancy study report on the Demand Study for New Convention and Exhibition Facilities in Hong Kong published in 2015, 84 400 and 132 500 square metres of additional convention and exhibition (C&E) space would be needed in Hong Kong by 2023 and 2028 respectively. However, the Government has subsequently abandoned its plan to develop a new convention centre above the MTR Exhibition Centre Station, and no definite date has been set for the plans to expand the AsiaWorld-Expo (AWE) and redevelop the site of the three government towers in Wan Chai North into C&E facilities. Some members of the industry have relayed that the supply of large-scale and high-end C&E venues in Hong Kong still falls short of the demand, which has affected the competitiveness of the C&E industry and Hong Kong as a whole. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) given that the 2023 Policy Address has proposed to expand C&E facilities, including AWE, and construct new C&E facilities in Wan Chai North, of the specific implementation timetable for these two plans; whether it has assessed if the progress of the expansion of AWE will be affected by the relevant community treatment facilities;
- (2) apart from the aforesaid two plans, whether the Government will plan to construct large-scale C&E facilities in other districts, such as the Northern Metropolis and the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands; and
- (3) whether it will commence a new demand study for C&E facilities; if so, of the timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the questions raised by the Hon Tony Tse is as follows:

The convention and exhibition (C&E) industry is crucial to Hong Kong as an international trade centre.

According to a study conducted by the industry, in 2018, the exhibition industry contributed a total of \$58.6 billion to Hong Kong's economy, which was equivalent to 2.1 per cent of the gross domestic product, and created

some 77 000 full-time employment opportunities.

According to the figures of the Hong Kong Tourism Board, in 2019, Hong Kong attracted 1.69 million overnight MICE (meeting, incentives, conventions and exhibitions) visitors, with a per capita consumption of some \$7,200 (i.e. a total of \$12.2 billion), which was 23 per cent higher than that of the overall overnight visitors.

Hong Kong hosts many large-scale international C&Es every year. Before the pandemic, Hong Kong hosted over 160 large-scale international exhibitions annually, of which over 10 were the largest Asian or even global sourcing platforms for the trades concerned, including electronics, jewellery, gifts, watches and clocks, lighting; and around 250 large-scale international conventions, including the Asian Financial Forum, the Asian Logistics, Maritime and Aviation Conference, the Belt and Road Summit, the Business of Design Week, in the two dedicated venues for mega C&E events every year, namely the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre and the AsiaWorld-Expo. These large-scale C&Es reflect our role as an international trade centre and a connecting platform between the Mainland and the rest of the world, as well as our strengths as a super connector and super value-adder.

To consolidate and enhance the pre-eminent position of Hong Kong as a hub for international C&E events, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has actively taken forward the expansion of our C&E facilities. When expanding our C&E facilities, we have considered multiple factors including, inter alia, the expectations of the industry, whether there are adequate supporting facilities such as transport, accommodation, dining and entertainment facilities nearby, the synergy between new and existing facilities and the cost-effectiveness. The Government has been studying different options for expanding C&E facilities, and after taking into account the above factors, it is our priority to pursue the expansion of C&E facilities in proximity to the existing Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wan Chai North and the AsiaWorld-Expo. The two expansion projects will increase the large-scale C&E space of Hong Kong by more than 40 per cent, from the existing 158 000 square metres to over 220 000 sq m.

In Wan Chai North, the Government will redevelop the sites of the Wan Chai Government Offices Compound, Gloucester Road Garden and the Kong Wan Fire Station into C&E facilities, hotel and Grade A offices. After the redevelopment, there will be an additional 30 000 sq m of rentable C&E spaces connecting seamlessly with the existing Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, and a hotel with some 500 rooms to accommodate visitors during mega C&E events after the expansion of C&E facilities.

The Government is relocating the government departments and law courts in the Wan Chai Government Offices Compound to nine new government building projects as scheduled. Among them, five projects, namely the West Kowloon Government Offices, Government Data Centre Complex, Treasury Building, Inland Revenue Centre and Immigration Headquarters have been completed and respectively commissioned. The Government expects to complete the remaining four building projects of Tseung Kwan O Government Offices, Water Supplies

Department Building and Correctional Services Headquarters Building, Drainage Services Tower, and the District Court at Caroline Hill Road in or before 2026.

Meanwhile, after obtaining the funding approval of the Legislative Council's Finance Committee in November last year, the Government has already commenced the reprovisioning of the Kong Wan Fire Station. To pave way for the Wan Chai North Redevelopment project, the Kong Wan Fire Station will be reprovisioned at the site adjoining Fenwick Pier Street and Lung Hop Street. The Government expects that the reprovisioning of the Kong Wan Fire Station will be completed by 2027 and the Wan Chai Government Offices Compound will be vacated by the end of 2027.

As the Wan Chai North Redevelopment project involves the demolition of three existing multi-storey buildings, deep excavation and construction of large-scale excavation and lateral support, as well as the construction of a multi-storey building, all the demolition and construction works will take at least seven years to be completed. As such, the Government estimates that the Wan Chai North Redevelopment project will be completed in 2034 at the earliest.

On the other hand, the Airport Authority Hong Kong (AA) has conducted a consultancy study on the AsiaWorld-Expo phase 2 expansion, and will invest in the expansion project. Currently, the Government is reviewing the operational needs of the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre. Once the infection control centre ceases operation and is vacated, the AA will commence the expansion works.

According to the preliminary design, the phase 2 expansion of AsiaWorld-Expo will provide an additional 33 600 sq m of rentable C&E spaces, and a multi-purpose indoor arena with a seating capacity of over 20 000 people, providing a venue for large-scale international C&E, entertainment and sports events. The construction of SKYCITY next to the AsiaWorld-Expo is being completed in phases. The AsiaWorld-Expo will synergise with the accommodation, shopping, dining and entertainment facilities in the SKYCITY, facilitating the development of Hong Kong International Airport into an airport city, connecting the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the world.

As the pandemic eases, we are pleased to see that the recovery progress of the C&E industry is better than expected, and the industry assesses it is returning to 70 to 80 per cent of pre-pandemic levels. At this stage, we do not have sufficient data to accurately assess the exact demand for future C&E facilities, but in the longer term, there will still be a substantial demand for C&E facilities. We will continue to proactively expand C&E space in Wan Chai North and the Airport Island, and maintain close communication with the C&E industry, to grasp the latest development in the industry and explore the possibility of further expanding our C&E facilities.

LCQ21: Employment of persons with disabilities

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Ngan Man-yu and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (January 10):

Question:

Under the Minimum Wage Ordinance (Cap. 608), the Statutory Minimum Wage (SMW) applies to employees with disabilities as it applies to able-bodied employees. Cap. 608 also provides for a special arrangement under which employees with disabilities whose productivity may be impaired by their disabilities have the right to choose to undergo a productivity assessment, so as to determine whether they should be remunerated at a level not lower than the SMW or at a rate commensurate with their assessed productivity. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following statistics related to the employment of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in each of the past three years: the number of persons of working age (i.e. 15 to 64 years old), the number of persons who took up paid employment or were economically active (broken down by the industry in which they were engaged and their salary group), the unemployment rate and the poverty rate;

(2) of the numbers of employees and employers who participated in the productivity assessment for employees with disabilities and the assessment results (including the percentage of employees with disabilities who, as assessed, should be remunerated at a level not lower than SMW), in each of the past three years;

(3) of the measures in place to encourage enterprises and public organisations to hire PWDs; and

(4) of the measures in place to encourage PWDs to participate in employment or vocational skills training?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), the Labour Department (LD) and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) on the Member's question, I set out below a consolidated reply:

(1) According to a territory-wide survey conducted by C&SD on persons with disabilities and chronic diseases from 2019 to 2020, it was estimated that

there were 215 300 persons aged 15 to 64 with disabilities in 2020, of whom some 91 500 persons were economically active. Among those 91 500 persons, some 81 400 persons were employed at the time of enumeration (with breakdowns by industry and by monthly employment earnings set out in Annex) while the remaining were unemployed persons. The unemployment rate of persons aged 15 to 64 with disabilities was about 11 per cent. As for the poverty rate of persons with disabilities, such figures are not available for the past three years.

As the prevalence rate of persons with disabilities will not change drastically over a short period of time, there is currently no plan to conduct annually the related survey. The C&SD will conduct the survey on persons with disabilities in a timely manner as and when necessary to update the figures.

(2) According to the Minimum Wage Ordinance (MWO), employees with disabilities are entitled to the same protection of Statutory Minimum Wage (SMW) as able-bodied employees. At the same time, the MWO provides a special arrangement for employees with disabilities to opt to undergo productivity assessment to determine their wages commensurate with their productivity assessed. Employees with disabilities who do not opt to undergo productivity assessment shall be remunerated at no less than SMW.

The number of employees with disabilities who completed productivity assessment under the SMW regime and employers involved, as well as the number of assessments conducted in the past three years (i.e. from 2021 to 2023) are provided as follows:

	2021	2022	2023
Number of employees with disabilities	20	9	2
Number of employers*	4	4	2
Number of assessments	20	9	2

* Some employers were involved in more than one assessment.

A breakdown of the above number of assessments by degree of productivity in the assessment results is provided as follows:

Degree of productivity	Number of assessments		
	2021	2022	2023
50% or below	–	6	1
Above 50% – 60%	1	–	–
Above 60% – 70%	3	–	–
Above 70% – 80%	5	1	–
Above 80% – 90%	6	–	1

Above 90% – 100% (Note)	5	2	–
Total	20	9	2

Note: In the past three years, no employee with disabilities had a degree of productivity assessed to be 100 per cent. The rate derived by the assessed degree of productivity provides a wage floor for the employee with disabilities. Employers may pay a higher wage to the employees with disabilities.

(3) The Selective Placement Division of the LD implements the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme (WOPS) to encourage employers to hire persons with disabilities. Under the WOPS, eligible employers will be granted an allowance at a maximum of \$60,000 for engaging each person with disabilities during the nine-month subsidy period. At the same time, the LD has been promoting the employment of persons with disabilities to enhance the public's acceptance and support to them. The LD also actively liaises with employers of different sectors to enhance their understanding of the work capabilities of persons with disabilities and encourages them to provide more job vacancies for persons with disabilities.

Moreover, the SWD has been providing financial support to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) under the Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise Project (the Project) to establish small enterprises/businesses to engage employees with disabilities, with a view to creating employment and on-the-job training opportunities for persons with disabilities. Under the Project, funding support is given in the form of a one-off grant to assist the grantee to pay the necessary set-up costs such as equipment and fitting-out works and/or the anticipated operating loss for the initial period up to three years. The maximum amount of the grant is \$3 million.

The SWD has also launched the Support Programme for Employees with Disabilities (SPED) to support persons with disabilities to take up employment. Through the SPED, employers can apply for a one-off subsidy, up to \$40,000 per employee with disabilities, for procurement of assistive devices and/or workplace modifications, to assist employees with disabilities in discharging their duties in the workplace and enhance their work efficiency.

(4) The Labour and Welfare Bureau subsidises the Shine Skills Centres under the Vocational Training Council to offer a range of vocational training programmes and ancillary services to persons with disabilities aged 15 or above who are being assessed as having potential for open employment.

The LD also provides personalised employment services to job seekers with disabilities who are fit for open employment, including employment counselling, job matching and post-placement follow-up service.

For persons with disabilities not yet able to take up open employment, the SWD subsidises NGOs to provide persons with disabilities with vocational rehabilitation and training services, including Sheltered Workshops (SWs),

Supported Employment (SE), Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centres (IVRSCs), Integrated Vocational Training Centres, so as to cater for persons with different levels of disabilities and needs to receive appropriate vocational rehabilitation services in a specially designed training environment, with a view to learning to meet basic job requirements.

The SWD has also implemented the On the Job Training Programme for People with Disabilities (OJT) and Sunnyway – On the Job Training Programme for Young People with Disabilities to provide related training and counselling services to address participants' employment needs and assist participants to find suitable jobs after completing the job attachments.

Besides, the SWD implemented a pilot project on Enhancing Vocational Rehabilitation Services in July 2023 to provide trainees of SWs/IVRSCs with diversified training modules according to their abilities and talents so as to increase their employment opportunities, including SE, OJT, social enterprises and even open employment.

In October 2023, the Government has put in place a new measure as announced in the 2022 Policy Address to regularise the Pilot Scheme on Providing Subsidy for Higher Disability Allowance Recipients in Paid Employment to Hire Carers under the Community Care Fund. A monthly allowance of \$5,000 is provided for eligible persons with disabilities to hire carers, with a view to encouraging them to sustain employment.

The Chief Executive announced in the 2023 Policy Address that the Government would implement a three-year pilot scheme from the third quarter of 2024 to provide an additional subsidy of \$500 per month to employed disabled recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance. This will benefit some 6 800 persons.

LCQ2: Ensuring proper performance of functions by new-term District Councils

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Tik Chi-yuen and a reply by the Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs, Miss Alice Mak, in the Legislative Council today (January 10):

Question:

The Government has indicated that the 2023 District Council (DC) Ordinary Election (the Election) held last month was a high-quality election. However, it has been reported that the DC geographical constituency election

voter turnout rate of the Election was 27.54 per cent, which has been the lowest voter turnout rate since the first DC Election, and was a drop of 43.69 percentage points compared with the voter turnout rate of 71.23 per cent of the last DC Election, and that young people and middle-class people were lukewarm towards the Election. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as there are views that DCs are local councils which have all along been playing an important role in district administration, including assuming the responsibilities of collecting and reflecting public opinions, monitoring the Government's policy implementation, facilitating communication between the Government and the public, mobilising community participation and promoting social reforms, how the new-term DCs continue to perform such functions, with the voter turnout rate of the Election being lower than those of the previous elections;

(2) given that under the new term of DCs, the DC Chairmen of the various Districts are the District Officers of the respective Districts, how DCs account for their work to members of the public and are monitored by members of the public; how the Government or DCs facilitate the latter to account for their work to members of the public and enhance DCs' communication with members of the public; and

(3) how it ensures that the new-term DCs can still accommodate the views and voices of people with different political stances?

Reply:

President,

The District Councils (DCs) have all along been a communication link between the Government and the people. Members of the DCs are expected to uphold the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (Basic Law) and bear allegiance to the Hong Kong Special Administration Region in carrying out DCs' duties and in serving the people.

The 2023 DC Ordinary Election held on December 10, 2023, was the first large-scale territory-wide election under the improved district governance and the reformed DCs. The election is of great significance as it enables the DCs to return to the positioning under Article 97 of the Basic Law as advisory and service bodies which are not organs of political power and fully implement the principle of "patriots administering Hong Kong". As the Chief Executive had said, this was a high-quality election that was conducted in a fair, just, clean, safe and orderly manner, fully demonstrating an election culture of excellence and the superiority of the reformed DCs.

For the three parts of the question, having consulted the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, our consolidated reply is as follows:

(1) and (3) As we have emphasised once and again, voter turnout is affected by a range of factors, and may not shed particular light on how well the new

DCs perform their enhanced advisory and service functions. With our frequent reach-out to the community on the benefits of the improved district governance and the reformed DCs in the past few months, the people expressed general support, and hoped the new term of DCs could actually provide good services in the districts for the people, and reflect their opinions and requests to the Government, so to enhance the efficacy of district governance, and allow people to live and work in contentment.

The positioning of the DCs has been clearly stipulated under Article 97 of the Basic Law: that they are district organisations which are not organs of political power. As they are not executive authorities, they cannot exercise the powers assigned to the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the Government. Aside from that, district organisations are advisory and service bodies, and could be consulted by the Government on issues in specific scope, or assist the Government in providing services in fields such as culture, recreation and environmental sanitation.

Section 4A of the amended District Councils Ordinance stipulates the statutory functions of the DCs, which have been increased from the original two to nine provisions. These enhanced advisory and service functions of the DCs have on one hand retained the original functions of the DCs to be consulted by the Government on district affairs, to apply for funding for projects and activities to improve district environment, promote district sports, culture and arts, district major events. On the other hand, DCs' functions to collect and reflect the people's views have been enhanced, including clearly highlighting that DC members have to establish a regular communication channel with the people, to meet with them and listen to their views regularly, and to proactively collect the views of the people in respect of issues specified by the DC Chairmen, and submit to the Government summaries of the views collected and propose corresponding measures.

The reformed DCs are composed of appointed, District Committees Constituencies (DCC), District Council Geographical Constituencies (DCGC) and ex-officio members, so there will be multiple channels for persons who love the country and Hong Kong and are committed to serving the community to participate in the work of the DCs. The 179 appointed members represent different social sectors, e.g. industrial and commercial, professional, grassroots and labour sectors, district organisations, etc. In districts where there are bigger ethnic-minority communities, representatives of ethnic minorities are appointed as DC members. For the DCC and DCGC, 264 elected members have diverse backgrounds, including those experienced in district work, young people committed to serving the community, as well as professionals from different fields and sectors, etc. Alongside the 27 ex-officio members, the new DCs are composed of representatives from different sectors, with various expertise and district experiences, and are broadly representative, incorporating various professionals, experienced and capable persons to participate in district administration, which are conducive to reflecting the overall interest of each district.

The Chief Executive, at the oath-taking ceremony for members of the seventh term DCs, clearly requested that DC members should ensure effective communication between the Government and the people by serving as a

connection between the two. He also urged all DC members to address people's most imminent concerns in the community, and make every effort to tackle their problems by noticeable and substantive actions in honour of people's trust and support.

All in all, the seventh term DCs will focus on serving the people, and working with the Government to serve the community. The DCs should deliver benefits and satisfactions to the people, so as to achieve good governance.

In order to begin district work in an expedient manner, the 18 DCs have held the first DC meeting in the first week of January 2024. The meetings appointed the committees and working groups under the DCs and their respective Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen, confirmed the DCs' meeting timetable, formulated the arrangements of the "Meet-the-Public Scheme", and determined the issues of concern in the district that required further study for DC members to collect views from the people. DCs have also formulated a series of action plans, including to launch caring and district clean-up campaigns before the Chinese New Year, organise activities that promote the local economy, as well as set up photo-taking spots with district characteristics, so to serve the people in a practical way for the benefits of the community, and continue to enhance the people's sense of achievement and satisfaction.

(2) The work of the DCs has all along been open and transparent. Minutes of meetings are uploaded to the website of DC to facilitate the public in understanding its work and content of discussion. Meetings of DCs are also open to the public including media representatives.

â€‹ DC Chairmen will lead DC members of respective DCs in fully implementing their work plans. The Government has also promulgated the Performance Monitoring Guidelines for Members of the District Councils to further strengthen the accountability of DC members and increase transparency of their work. The Guidelines set out the standard of performance required of DC members, including implementing the tasks and adhering to the work indicators assigned by the DC Chairman, setting up offices, meeting members of the public, so that the DCs can best undertake their advisory and service functions. The Guidelines also set out a list of negative behaviours, including obstructing DC members in conducting meetings, insulting other DC members and public officials, preventing others from leaving or attending meetings, failing to declare interests. The Guidelines set out in detail the investigation procedures, appeals mechanism and relevant sanctions for DC members that have performed poorly or committed prohibited acts, to ensure every DC member upholds their duty faithfully and serves the people.

The seventh term DCs shall work hand-in-hand with the Government in promoting district governance work, enhance people's sense of achievement and satisfaction, and build a better and more harmonious community.