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Replies to written questions raised by Legislative Council Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2023-24

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Constitutional & Mainland Affairs

Session No. : 7

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CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB089

(Question Serial No. 0291)

Head: (163) Registration and Electoral Office

Subhead (No. & title):

Programme: Electoral Services

Controlling Officer: Chief Electoral Officer (WANG Man-chiu, Raymond)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs

Question:

1) Please provide the expenditure of the Registration and Electoral Office on publicising the Voter Registration Campaign in the past 5 years:

Year	Newspapers and magazines	Radio and television broadcast	Outdoor media	Online platforms and new media	Total
2017-2018					
2018-2019					
2019-2020					
2020-2021					
2021-2022					

2) Regarding the 69.0% increase in the estimate for 2023-24 mainly due to increased election expenses, please set out the specific items involved.

3) Is the increase in election expenses mentioned above related to any additional expenses arising from the delay in network installation by the network service contractor on the polling day of the 2021 Legislative Council General Election?

4) In the 2023-24 estimate, what are the resources allocated for further enhancing the use of information technology?

Asked by: Hon CHAN Yung (LegCo internal reference no.: 18)

Reply:

The publicity expenses of the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) for the Voter Registration (VR) Campaign from 2018 to 2021 are tabulated below.

Expenditure Item	Newspapers, printed materials and magazines (\$'000)	Publicity on television and radio (\$'000)	Online platforms and new media (\$'000)	Public transport system, community promotion and miscellaneous (\$'000)	Total (\$'000)
Year					
2018	800	1,170	820	4,330	7,120
2019	310	2,800	790	11,800	15,690
2020	260	3,420	1,030	8,790	13,490
2021	360	2,640	1,780	9,560	14,340

Note: Figures may not add up to total due to rounding.

With the prevalence of cross-platform publicity services provided by publicity platform operators in recent years, the above categorisation of publicity expenses could no longer be relied on from 2022 onwards. In 2022, the total publicity expenses of the REO for the VR Campaign amounted to \$5.16 million.

2. The provision for the REO in 2023-24 is higher than that in 2022-23. This is mainly due to the provision reserved for the conduct of the possible 2023 District Council Ordinary Election and Legislative Council (LegCo) by-election.

3. The higher provision for 2023-24 is not related to the delay in the installation of network services at polling stations for the 2021 LegCo General Election. The incident did not incur any additional expenditure ultimately. Since the service provider concerned failed to provide the required service under the terms of the contract, the REO has deducted the relevant fees payable to the service provider pursuant to the contract.

4. To enhance the use of information technology, the REO has earmarked some \$3.35 million to take forward the use of “iAM Smart” in applications for geographical constituency VR and to enhance the Central Platform for Election Advertisements. Besides, the resources required for some projects (e.g. improvement of the Electronic Poll Register system) are included in the recurrent expenditure of the REO and cannot be itemised separately. The REO will, having regard to the actual circumstances and need, apply for additional funding in accordance with the established procedures and mechanism.

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CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB090

(Question Serial No. 1332)

Head: (163) Registration and Electoral Office

Subhead (No. & title):

Programme: Electoral Services

Controlling Officer: Chief Electoral Officer (WANG Man-chiu, Raymond)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs

Question:

Regarding “the conduct of checks on electors in the current register in respect of their registered addresses/registration eligibilities”, what are the estimated manpower and expenditure involved? Also, what were the respective manpower and expenditures in each of the past 3 years?

Asked by: Hon CHAN Yung (LegCo internal reference no.: 36)

Reply:

In the past 3 years, the establishment and expenditure of the Voter Registration Division responsible for voter registration matters under the Registration and Electoral Office are tabulated below:

Year	Establishment*	Expenditure#
2020-21	127	\$184 million
2021-22	131	\$168 million
2022-23 (Revised estimate)	128	\$125 million

* Inclusive of time-limited civil service posts

Inclusive of staff remuneration and operational expenses

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

(Question Serial No. 2110)

Head: (163) Registration and Electoral Office

Subhead (No. & title):

Programme: Electoral Services

Controlling Officer: Chief Electoral Officer (WANG Man-chiu, Raymond)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs

Question:

The manual mode of vote counting after polling has long been considered as out of date by the public. Apart from raising a lot of queries about the count of votes, it also involves enormous manpower resources and the protracted process is among the issues of much concern. The Government has mentioned in the Estimates that it will review the electoral arrangements with a view to further enhancing the use of information technology and introducing more efficient and user-friendly measures in various stages of future elections. In this regard, please advise this Committee of the following: the reasons for not having fully implemented electronic voting so far; the difficulties in implementing electronic voting; and the savings in resources that the Government expects to achieve after the implementation of electronic voting, such as the overtime expenditure on employing staff to count ballot papers.

Asked by: Hon CHU Kwok-keung (LegCo internal reference no.: 26)

Reply:

The Government has examined the wider application of information technology at various workflows and processes of a public election, such as at voter registration, polling and counting in the past. In fact, a number of information technology initiatives were introduced in the 4 elections conducted after improving the electoral system in 2021 (including the 2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections, 2021 Legislative Council General Election, 2022 Chief Executive Election and 2022 Legislative Council Election Committee Constituency By-election), involving the extensive application of the electronic poll register system for issuing ballot papers, the use of an optical mark recognition system to facilitate vote counting, etc.

2. In respect of electronic voting, although electronic voting can, in theory, enhance efficiency, reduce the manpower required and mitigate the risk of human error, a lot of complicated issues are also involved at the same time, such as how to effectively verify electors' identity, monitor the autonomy and secrecy of voting, and ensure system security and stability, etc. To ensure that public elections are conducted safely and efficiently in a

fair, just and open manner, the Government will continue examining various proposals, so as to improve electoral related arrangements constantly.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB092

(Question Serial No. 1517)

Head: (163) Registration and Electoral Office

Subhead (No. & title):

Programme: Electoral Services

Controlling Officer: Chief Electoral Officer (WANG Man-chiu, Raymond)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs

Question:

Regarding the 2022 Legislative Council Election Committee Constituency By-election (the By-election) held last year, will the Government inform this Committee of the estimated expenditure and its breakdown for the preparation and conduct of the By-election?

Asked by: Hon LAI Tung-kwok (LegCo internal reference no.: 25)

Reply:

The 2022 Legislative Council (LegCo) Election Committee Constituency By-election was conducted smoothly on 18 December 2022 and the related expenses would be paid in 2022-23 and 2023-24. The revised estimate for 2022-23 and the provision for 2023-24 under the Registration and Electoral Office for the preparation and conduct of the relevant election are about \$85 million and \$5 million respectively, with breakdown as follows:

	Estimated expenditure on the preparation and conduct of the 2022 LegCo By-election	2022-23 (Revised estimate) \$ million	2023-24 (Provision) \$ million
(1)	Staff cost	32	4
(2)	Publicity	1	0
(3)	Other expenses (including the costs of hiring venues, manning polling and counting stations, financial assistance scheme, transportation, postage, free mailing, and printing, etc.)	52	1
	Total	85	5

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CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

(Question Serial No. 1011)

Head: (163) Registration and Electoral Office

Subhead (No. & title):

Programme: Electoral Services

Controlling Officer: Chief Electoral Officer (WANG Man-chiu, Raymond)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs

Question:

Provision for the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) for 2023-24 is \$577.7 million (69%) higher than the revised estimate for 2022-23, mainly due to the increased requirements for election expenses. The REO has budgeted an overall expenditure of about \$1,410 million, of which about \$1,150 million is for election expenses. Besides, there will be a net decrease of 6 posts in 2023-24.

In this connection, please inform this Committee of the following:

1. Details of the 6 deducted posts and the estimated savings in expenditure.
2. The REO assisted the Electoral Affairs Commission in carrying out a number of important tasks in 2022-23, including those for the implementation of “patriots administering Hong Kong”. However, the revised estimate for 2022-23 is reduced by \$367.5 million (30.5%). What are the reasons for the successful savings?
3. The REO has stated that whether the District Council (DC) Ordinary Election will be held in 2023-24 is “subject to the outcome of the review on district administration”, yet it has also budgeted that both the overall expenditure and election expenses will be higher than the respective figures in the financial year in which the 2019 DC Election was held (about \$800 million in overall expenditure and about \$600 million in election expenses). What are the reasons? If the DC Ordinary Election is to be held, what is the estimated manpower?

Asked by: Hon LIAO Cheung-kong, Martin (LegCo internal reference no.: 15)

Reply:

The revised estimate for 2022-23 of the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) is about \$368 million (30.5%) less than its original estimate. The main reasons are that the expenses earmarked for the possible multiple rounds of voting in the 2022 Chief Executive (CE) Election as well as for the preparation and conduct of possible by-elections for the year are lower than the budgeted provision.

2. The provision for the REO in 2023-24 is higher than that in 2022-23. This is mainly due to the provision reserved for the conduct of the possible 2023 District Council (DC) Ordinary Election and Legislative Council (LegCo) by-election. Although the review on district administration is still in progress, the REO has earmarked funding in 2023-24 to ensure that sufficient resources will be available for taking forward the work relating to the DC Ordinary Election should the election be held in that financial year. The REO has made reference to the arrangements for the 2019 DC Ordinary Election and the enhancement measures implemented for the 4 elections held after improving the electoral system in 2021 (i.e. the 2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections, 2021 LegCo General Election, 2022 CE Election and 2022 LegCo Election Committee Constituency By-election) when preparing the above estimates, including the application of the Electronic Poll Register system for issuing ballot papers, etc.

3. Regarding the establishment in 2023-24, the REO plans to create 22 additional civil service posts (including 1 Principal Executive Officer, 3 Senior Executive Officer, 6 Executive Officer I, 2 Executive Officer II, 1 Chief Systems Manager, 1 Senior Systems Manager, 1 Analyst/Programmer I, 1 Analyst/Programmer II, 4 Assistant Clerical Officer and 2 Personal Secretary II posts). After discounting 28 posts to be deleted in 2023-24 (including 4 Senior Executive Officer, 1 Senior Information Officer, 9 Executive Officer I, 3 Executive Officer II and 11 Assistant Clerical Officer posts), the net reduction of posts in the REO in 2023-24 is 6. After the change in the number of posts, there will be a net increase of \$197,520 in the notional annual mid-point salary value.

4. In addition to the staff in its establishment, the REO will also employ about 1 000 non-civil service contract staff (the highest number of contract staff to be employed during the peak period) to meet the needs arising from elections. The manpower required for the work relating to the DC Ordinary Election has been absorbed in the above establishment.

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CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB094

(Question Serial No. 1012)

Head: (163) Registration and Electoral Office

Subhead (No. & title):

Programme: Electoral Services

Controlling Officer: Chief Electoral Officer (WANG Man-chiu, Raymond)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs

Question:

In respect of electoral services, one of the matters requiring special attention in 2023-2024 is to review electoral arrangements with a view to further enhancing the use of information technology and introducing more efficient and user-friendly measures in various stages of future elections. Meanwhile, the Subcommittee on Improving the Practical Arrangements for Elections was established by the Legislative Council in February to improve the electoral system in a dynamic manner after the full implementation of “patriots administering Hong Kong”.

In this connection, please inform this Committee of the following:

1. What are the details of the manpower and expenditure for the review of electoral arrangements?
2. What are the details and timetable for enhancing the use of technology and introducing more efficient and user-friendly measures?
3. Will the Government put in place any measures to further facilitate voting by Hong Kong electors in the Mainland and improve the arrangements for appointing election agents and their functions? If yes, what are the details and implementation timetable?

Asked by: Hon LIAO Cheung-kong, Martin (LegCo internal reference no.: 16)

Reply:

The resources and manpower required for the work relating to the review of electoral arrangements are absorbed in the recurrent expenditure and establishment of the Registration and Electoral Office (REO); a separate breakdown of expenditure and manpower is not available.

2. In the 4 elections conducted after improving the electoral system in 2021 (including the 2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections, 2021 Legislative Council (LegCo) General Election, 2022 Chief Executive (CE) Election and 2022 LegCo Election

Committee Constituency By-election), a series of enhancement measures were implemented to enhance the application of information technology and put in place more efficient and user-friendly electoral arrangements whilst ensuring a fair, open and honest election. The enhancement measures include: (a) adopting the Electronic Poll Register (EPR) system in ballot paper issuance to enable a smooth, flexible and accurate ballot paper issuance process; (b) arranging a special queue for electors with special needs (including persons aged 70 or above, pregnant women and persons who are unable to stand or queue for a long time due to illness, injury, disability or dependence on mobility aids); (c) increasing the number of ballot paper issuing desks to reduce the waiting time for electors casting votes; (d) making use of an Optical Mark Recognition system (except for the 2022 CE Election) to assist in vote counting with a view to completing the count as soon as practicable; (e) enhancing the training for polling and counting staff to ensure they have a thorough understanding of their duties assigned; and (f) setting up a polling station at the Penny's Bay isolation/quarantine facility during the epidemic to facilitate affected electors to exercise their right to vote, etc.

3. To further enhance the application of information technology in future elections, the REO will implement the following initiatives in 2023-24:

- (a) **Enhancing the EPR system:** This includes upgrading the system's statistical functions so that polling staff could use these functions to retrieve the data collected for compilation of different electoral forms after the close of poll, thus replacing some of the electoral forms which are still being filled in by polling staff manually, so as to streamline procedures and avoid mistakes associated with filling in the forms manually; and improving the user interface to make the system easier to use and operate;
- (b) **Enhancing the Central Platform for Election Advertisements:** This includes updating the software and upgrading the hardware of the Central Platform to ensure its operational stability; and improving the user interface and functions, introducing webpage design that is compatible for use on various mobile devices (i.e. automatic adjustment of webpage layout), so that the users concerned could submit or check election advertisements on the Central Platform using mobile phones. Besides, we will continue enhancing the design of the webpage for candidates' submission of election advertisements to remind the candidates to observe relevant requirements on publishing election advertisements;
- (c) **Enhancing the Mobile Input System for Electoral Statistics:** This enables polling staff to input, record and upload various electoral data to the Statistical Information Centre of the REO through tablet computers, thus replacing the previous work procedures involving fax transmission and inputting data manually, so as to make the data collection process more efficient and accurate; and
- (d) **Using "iAM Smart" for new registration by geographical constituency electors:** With the assistance of the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer, the REO is actively extending the use of "iAM Smart" to the voter registration (VR) service, i.e. enabling "iAM Smart" users to use the authentication, "e-Me" form filling and digital signing functions to submit online applications for new registration/report on change of particulars by an elector in a geographical constituency, so as to offer greater convenience to the public.

Subject to the progress in system development , the REO plans to conduct a trial at some of the VR counters/roving registration counters during this year's VR campaign to gain operational experience for improving the system and processes, with a view to formally launching the service in the VR campaign in the following year.

4. The Government will proactively study the wider application of information technology with a view to improving election procedures and work efficiency, and facilitating various stakeholders. Before introducing any specific arrangements, we will strike a proper balance among the application of information technology, efficiency enhancement, security risks, privacy protection and public trust, etc. We will consult the LegCo on any specific proposals and implementation timeframe at an appropriate juncture.

5. Some suggest that polling stations should be set up in the Mainland to facilitate voting by Hong Kong electors in the Mainland. As the Government has reiterated, it involves complex legal and actual operational issues. The Government needs to consider various relevant factors holistically, including whether there is a need and how to make pre-registration arrangements for voting outside Hong Kong, how to effectively and safely transport ballot papers and ballot boxes to and from polling stations outside Hong Kong, arrangements during the poll and count, how to apply the relevant electoral legislation and regulations of Hong Kong when arranging poll and count outside Hong Kong, the risks involved in the process and how to handle unexpected situations at polling stations outside Hong Kong, how to effectively maintain order at polling stations outside Hong Kong and how to enforce the relevant electoral legislation, how to devise an appropriate monitoring mechanism to ensure that the credibility of the election will not be undermined as a result, etc. Before final consideration, the Government has to study in great detail from the policy, legal and actual operational perspectives, and there should be thorough discussion in society. Therefore, the Government has no plan to set up polling stations in the Mainland for the time being.

6. In respect of improving election agents' appointment arrangements and their functions, the subsisting electoral legislation has provided for flexibility in the appointment of election agents. A candidate may appoint an election agent to assist him/her in the election by submitting a completed "Notice of Appointment of Election Agent" to the relevant Returning Officer at any time after he/she has submitted his/her nomination form. Regarding election agents' functions, notwithstanding the acts specified by the law which an election agent is not allowed to perform for a candidate, such as withdrawing the candidate's candidature or authorising any person to incur election expenses, election agents are already conferred with a rather extensive scope of functions. The Government has no plan to change the appointment arrangements and functions of election agents.

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CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB095

(Question Serial No. 0942)

Head: (163) Registration and Electoral Office

Subhead (No. & title):

Programme: Electoral Services

Controlling Officer: Chief Electoral Officer (WANG Man-chiu, Raymond)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs

Question:

As mentioned in the Programme, the expenditure of the Registration and Electoral Office will amount to \$1,415 million in the new financial year, which is \$578 million more than that of the previous financial year. Please inform this Committee of the following:

- (1) There are media reports that the format of the District Council (DC) Ordinary Election at the end of the year will be changed, probably with the number of directly elected seats substantially cut to one-third and the election expenses scaled down. Are the media reports true? If yes, as the reduced number of directly elected seats should incur less election expenses, what are the reasons behind the Government's estimation that election expenses would increase rather than decrease?
- (2) What are the detailed uses of the additional expenditure of \$578 million?
- (3) What is the staffing earmarked for matters relating to the DC Election?

Asked by: Hon TSE Wai-chun, Paul (LegCo internal reference no.: 19)

Reply:

The Home and Youth Affairs Bureau and the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau are conducting a review on district administration to ensure that future arrangements will be in conformity with the Basic Law, in adherence to the principle of "patriots administering Hong Kong", and conducive to enhancing governance efficacy at the district level. The review covers functions, composition, method of formation, electoral arrangements, etc. of the future district organisation which is not an organ of political power. The review is being actively undertaken, with details of the proposal to be further ironed out and hence not yet ready for public announcement. The Government will strive to complete the review as soon as possible and announce the details at a suitable juncture.

2. Although the review on district administration is still in progress, the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) has earmarked provision in 2023-24 to ensure that sufficient resources

will be available for taking forward the work relating to the District Council (DC) Ordinary Election should the election be held in that financial year. The REO has made reference to the arrangements for the 2019 DC Ordinary Election and the enhancement measures implemented for the 4 elections held after improving the electoral system in 2021 (i.e. the 2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections, 2021 Legislative Council (LegCo) General Election, 2022 Chief Executive Election and 2022 LegCo Election Committee Constituency By-election) when preparing the above estimates, including the application of the Electronic Poll Register system to issue ballot papers, etc.

3. The increase in the provision for the REO in 2023-24 as compared to 2022-23 is mainly due to the need to earmark provision to conduct the possible 2023 DC Ordinary Election and LegCo by-election.

4. As at 31 March 2023, the REO's establishment consists of 310 posts and is expected to decrease gradually to 304 posts in 2023-24. The REO will also employ about 1 000 non-civil service contract staff (the number of contract staff to be employed during the peak period) to cope with the needs arising from elections. The manpower required for the work relating to the DC Ordinary Election has been included in the above establishment.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

(Question Serial No. 0943)

Head: (163) Registration and Electoral Office

Subhead (No. & title):

Programme: Electoral Services

Controlling Officer: Chief Electoral Officer (WANG Man-chiu, Raymond)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs

Question:

In the new financial year, the budgeted provision of the Registration and Electoral Office for election expenses is \$1.15 billion. Given that there are almost 400 000 Hong Kong residents living in the Mainland, will the Government consider setting up polling stations in the Mainland again for the poll of the District Council Ordinary Election in late 2023? If yes, what are the details and the manpower and expenditure involved? If no, what are the reasons?

Asked by: Hon TSE Wai-chun, Paul (LegCo internal reference no.: 20)

Reply:

The Home and Youth Affairs Bureau and the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau are conducting a review on district administration to ensure that future arrangements will be in conformity with the Basic Law, in adherence to the principle of “patriots administering Hong Kong”, and conducive to enhancing governance efficacy at the district level. The review covers functions, composition, method of formation, electoral arrangements, etc., of the future district organisation which is not an organ of political power. The review is being actively undertaken, with details of the proposal to be further ironed out and hence not yet ready for public announcement. The Government will strive to complete the review as soon as possible and announce the details at a suitable juncture.

2. During the epidemic, many electors who were in the Mainland were unable to return to Hong Kong in time to cast their votes due to the relevant preventive and anti-epidemic measures. Therefore, the Government adopted a special one-off arrangement for the 2021 Legislative Council General Election to allow electors to cast their votes at the polling stations set up at the designated boundary control points on the Hong Kong side. However, with the full resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland, the Government currently has no plan to continue to adopt the above special arrangement in future public elections.

3. With regard to the suggestion of setting up polling stations in the Mainland, as the Government has reiterated, it involves complex legal and actual operational issues. The

Government needs to consider various relevant factors holistically, including whether there is a need and how to make pre-registration arrangements for voting outside Hong Kong, how to effectively and safely transport ballot papers and ballot boxes to and from polling stations outside Hong Kong, arrangements during the poll and count, how to apply the relevant electoral legislation and regulations of Hong Kong when arranging poll and count outside Hong Kong, the risks involved in the process and how to handle unexpected situations at polling stations outside Hong Kong, how to effectively maintain order at polling stations outside Hong Kong and how to enforce the relevant electoral legislation, how to devise an appropriate monitoring mechanism to ensure that the credibility of the election will not be undermined as a result, etc. Before final consideration, the Government has to study in great detail from the policy, legal and actual operational perspectives, and there should be thorough discussion in society. Therefore, the Government has no plan to set up polling stations in the Mainland for the time being.

- End -