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Replies to written questions raised by Legislative Council Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2024-25

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Constitutional & Mainland Affairs

Session No. : 15

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CONTROLLING OFFICER’S REPLY

CMAB051

(Question Serial No. 1049)

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 set out in the following table the number of inquiry letters issued in relation to the registered residential addresses or registration eligibilities of electors in the current register and the number of electors removed from the register (by age group) over the past 5 years:

* Please indicate the “number of electors removed from the register (number of inquiry letters)” in the space provided	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Age 18-34					
Age 35-49					
Age 50-66					
Age 65 or above					

2) Please provide details of the current staff establishment for conducting checks on electors in the current register in respect of their registered addresses/registration eligibilities.

Asked by: Hon CHAN Yung (LegCo internal reference no.: 29)

Reply:

In the voter registration cycles over the past 5 years, the number of geographical constituency (“GC”) electors subject to the statutory inquiry process and those included in the omissions lists based on the results of the inquiries are as follows:

Voter registration cycle	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of GC electors subject to the statutory inquiry process *	77 973	96 967	60 202	71 112	99 771

Voter registration cycle	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of GC electors included in the omissions lists based on the results of the inquiries *	49 171	56 456	42 216	59 880	81 169

* Breakdown by age group not available for the figures

2. The current staff establishment of the Voter Registration Division responsible for voter registration matters under the Registration and Electoral Office is 124. The statutory inquiry process constitutes part of the voter registration work and its manpower involved cannot be itemised separately.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB052

(Question Serial No. 1050)

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:

Please provide the total number of applicants who were unable to register as electors or update their residential addresses in the past year, and its percentage against the total number of applications? Please set out the reasons for and the percentage of the rejected applications.

Asked by: Hon CHAN Yung (LegCo internal reference no.: 30)

Reply:

In the 2023 voter registration cycle, the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) received a total of about 51 000 voter registration applications, about 18 600, or 36.4% of which failed to be registered within the cycle. The reasons for unsuccessful registration include the applicants not being permanent residents of Hong Kong at the time of submitting their applications, failure to provide a principal residential address in Hong Kong, or failure to submit proofs for their registered addresses upon application, etc.

2. During the same period, the REO received a total of 671 900 applications for change of particulars, about 8 900, or 1.3% of which could not be completed due to failure to provide address proofs for their updated residential addresses.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB053

(Question Serial No. 1051)

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 number of elector records updated is expected to drop from 671,892 in 2023 to 224,000 in 2024. What are the reasons?

Asked by: Hon CHAN Yung (LegCo internal reference no.: 31)

Reply:

The Registration and Electoral Office (REO) and the Immigration Department (ImmD) have put in place a standing arrangement that members of the public, when replacing their identity cards, may give consent to the ImmD for referring their particulars to the REO for updating their registration particulars at the same time. Given that the Territory-wide Identity Card Replacement Exercise of the ImmD was completed before commencement of the 2024 voter registration cycle, it is expected that requests for change of registration particulars through the channel will greatly reduce. Therefore, the number of elector records updated is also expected to drop substantially.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB054

(Question Serial No. 1052)

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 2024-25, the election expenses are estimated to be \$527.719 million. Please provide details of the specific expenditure items and the relevant amounts.

Asked by: Hon CHAN Yung (LegCo internal reference no.: 32)

Reply:

The provisions reserved for election expenses in 2024-25 by the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) is about \$528 million. The breakdown is as follows:

Breakdown by expenditure items*	Amount of expenditure (\$ million)
(1) Staff cost Preparation and conduct of the 2024 Voter Registration Campaign	57
(2) Preparation of the 2025 Legislative Council General Election [#]	379
(3) Other election-related expenditure [^]	92
Total	528

* The personal emoluments of the civil service posts of the REO are not included.

Including the provision for the preparation and conduct of the 2025 Voter Registration Campaign.

[^] Including the completion of all follow-up work of the 2023 District Council Ordinary Election, and conduct of by-elections as and when necessary and practicable.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB055

(Question Serial No. 1053)

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:

Please provide the details of the expenditures on various publicity items and activities of the 2023 Voter Registration Campaign, including measures such as deploying staff to set up registration counters at the Registration of Persons Offices of the Immigration Department and higher education institutions, reaching out to the community through broadcasting and advertisements, sending letters to remind electors to update their residential addresses, as well as using mobile applications and social media to disseminate the voter registration messages.

Asked by: Hon CHAN Yung (LegCo internal reference no.: 33)

Reply:

The various publicity initiatives and activities of the 2023 Voter Registration Campaign are set out in the paper submitted by the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau to the Panel on Constitutional Affairs on 20 March 2023, which can be found at the following link: <https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr2023/english/panels/ca/papers/ca20230320cb2-205-4-e.pdf>.

2. In view that many promotional materials were shared among publicity and registration activities, and many publicity platform operators have provided cross-platform publicity services in recent years, the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) no longer itemises publicity expenses from 2022 onwards. In 2023, the total publicity expenses of the REO for the Voter Registration Campaign amounted to \$13.6 million.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB056

(Question Serial No. 1054)

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 response to the failure of the Electronic Poll Register (EPR) system in the evening on the polling day of the 2023 District Council Ordinary Election, have any load and stress tests been conducted afresh for the EPR system? What are the estimated provision and relevant expenditure involved? In order to enhance the application of information technology (IT) in electoral arrangements, the Registration and Electoral Office needs to continuously upgrade its IT infrastructure, including the EPR system, what is the estimated expenditure involved?

Asked by: Hon CHAN Yung (LegCo internal reference no.: 35)

Reply:

The Government introduced a new measure in November 2023 requiring departments to subject their large-scale electronic systems to additional load and stress tests to be conducted by an independent third party arranged by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO). In future elections, the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) will, in accordance with the relevant requirement, pass the alterations to the EPR system to an independent third-party contractor arranged by the OGCIO for conducting independent load and stress tests, and examine and follow up on the test results and recommendations confirmed by the OGCIO. The Electoral Affairs Commission (EAC) proposed in the Report on the 2023 District Council Ordinary Election a series of improvement recommendations in respect of the failure of the EPR system, which include enhancing the reliability and stability of election-related systems to ensure that future elections are conducted in a smooth, safe and orderly manner. The REO will actively follow up and implement the relevant recommendations. The EAC will make public the contents and recommendations of the Report in due course.

2. In addition, the Government will continue to 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 facilitation to electoral arrangements, we must ensure that elections are fair, just and honest, and further strike a proper balance among the application of information technology, efficiency enhancement, security risks, privacy protection and public confidence etc., so as to make the

elections more efficient and user-friendly. The resources and manpower required for the relevant work are absorbed in the recurrent expenditure and establishment of the REO and cannot be itemised separately.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB057

(Question Serial No. 1055)

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:

What are the reasons for the increase of 16 posts in 2024-25 despite the expected decrease in election expenses for 2024-25? What are the ranks, expenditure on emoluments and duties involved?

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

Reply:

In 2024-25, the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) plans to create 22 additional civil service posts (including 1 Systems Manager, 5 Senior Executive Officer, 12 Executive Officer I, 2 Clerical Officer and 2 Assistant Clerical Officer posts). After discounting 6 posts to be deleted in the same year (including 1 Senior Executive Officer, 1 Executive Officer I, 2 Assistant Clerical Officer and 2 Clerical Assistant posts), the net increase of posts in the REO in 2024-25 is 16. These posts are used mainly for carrying out the relevant preparatory work for the 2025 Election Committee Subsector By-elections and the 2025 Legislative Council General Election. The increase of the relevant posts will result in a net increase of \$15.966 million in the notional annual mid-point salary value.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB058

(Question Serial No. 1059)

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 Electronic Poll Register (EPR) system was used for the first time in Hong Kong in the election for the Election Committee Subsector in September 2021. Please provide all the expenditures involved with regard to the EPR system from 2021 to 2023, including the recurrent and non-recurrent expenditures, scheduled maintenance or repair fees, number of staff administering the system and contract fee for the system operator.

Asked by: Hon CHAN Yung (LegCo internal reference no.: 34)

Reply:

The Registration and Electoral Office (REO) conducted an open tender in 2020 for the design, supply, implementation and maintenance services of the Electronic Poll Register (EPR) system. A contract valued at about \$45 million was awarded in January 2021.

2. The REO started to gradually take over the EPR system subsequent to the 2021 Legislative Council General Election, and the takeover was completed during the 2022 Chief Executive Election. Since then, the Information Technology Management Division of the REO has been responsible for the administration, enhancement and maintenance of the system. As the expenditure on the administration and maintenance of the system (including staff costs) are part of the REO's recurrent expenditure, no breakdown figures are available.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB059

(Question Serial No. 1158)

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 Electronic Poll Register system failed on the polling day of the seventh District Council Ordinary Election, dampening the electors' desire to vote. Subsequently, the Electoral Affairs Commission (EAC) set up a dedicated group to investigate the incident. In this connection, will the Government inform this Committee of the following:

1. whether tenders were invited for the construction of the system? If so, the total number of quotations received and the expenditure on the procurement of the system;
2. the annual expenditure and manpower for the repair and maintenance work of the system after the Registration and Electoral Office took over the system in 2021;
3. whether the Administration has provided any training on the application and operation of the system for the polling staff? If so, the details;
4. Please set out in table form the number of system failures since the application of the system in the 2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections, the relevant details and follow-up actions;
5. It is understood that the EAC has a "three-tier confirmation mechanism" for the system. However, it was not implemented during the alteration of system design in this election to ensure proper functioning of the system. How will the Administration prevent the recurrence of the same situation?

Asked by: Hon IP LAU Suk-ye, Regina (LegCo internal reference no.: 7)

Reply:

The Registration and Electoral Office (REO) conducted an open tender in 2020 for the design, supply, implementation and maintenance services of the Electronic Poll Register (EPR) system. A total of three tenders were received and a contract valued at about \$45 million was awarded in January 2021.

2. The REO started to gradually take over the EPR system subsequent to the 2021 Legislative Council General Election, and the takeover was completed during the 2022 Chief Executive Election. Since then, the Information Technology Management Division of the REO has been responsible for the administration, enhancement and maintenance of the system. As the expenditure on the administration and maintenance of the system (including the staff costs) are part of the REO's recurrent expenditure, no breakdown figures are available.

3. With regard to the 2023 District Council Ordinary Election, the REO provided a series of training on the application and operation of the EPR system for electoral staff of all levels, including organising hands-on practice sessions on the operation of the system and the counting of ballot papers for over 30 000 electoral staff, enabling them to practise in groups the issuing of ballot papers with the EPR system, and organising drill and simulated scenario sessions for staff at supervisory level, including step-by-step demonstration and practice of activating the contingency plans in the event of failure of the EPR system. Through training on handling simulated scenarios, the REO ensured that staff at supervisory level were familiarised with the relevant procedures and operation and would lead the polling staff to tackle unexpected events which might arise on the polling day. Meanwhile, the REO arranged technical training on the actual operation of the system for technical support staff to familiarise them with the procedures and skills of setting up the EPR system at the polling stations. Furthermore, the operational manual and training videos produced by the REO included dedicated chapters to explain the application and operation of the EPR system, as well as various relevant arrangements in case of the need to activate the fallback mode when there was a system failure.

4. Since the commissioning of the EPR system, there have been a total of 3 system-related incidents. The details and follow-up actions are set out below:

The elections concerned	Details and follow-up actions
2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections	<p>At one of the polling stations, the time shown on the built-in clocks of the tablets installed with the EPR application was about two minutes behind the standard time of the Hong Kong Observatory. Therefore, when using the tablets to retrieve the number of ballot papers issued, the figure fell short of that recorded in the system by 2.</p> <p>For details, please refer to Part (D) of Chapter 14 of the Report on the 2022 Chief Executive Election (which covered the 2021 Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections).</p> <p>https://www.eac.hk/pdf/chief/en/2022_CE_Report/2022ce_full_report.pdf</p>
2021 Legislative Council General Election	The poll at 7 of the polling stations was suspended for 3 to 22 minutes due to power,

	<p>network connection or operation stability issues which affected the EPR system.</p> <p>For details, please refer to Part (A) of Chapter 14 of the Report on the 2021 Legislative Council General Election.</p> <p>https://www.eac.hk/pdf/legco/2021LCE_Report/en/2021lce_full_report.pdf</p>
2023 District Council Ordinary Election	<p>The EPR system failed in the evening on the polling day, and polling stations were unable to use the system for issuing ballot papers.</p> <p>For details, please refer to the press release issued by the EAC on 26 January 2024.</p> <p>https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202401/26/P2024012600476.htm</p>

5. The main cause of the failure of the EPR system was that when altering the system design, the REO technical team did not fully consider the impacts on loading that might be induced to the system during actual operation, and therefore did not conduct sufficient and comprehensive load tests. When submitting alterations to the other two tiers of the confirmation mechanism, the technical team did not adequately explain the details of the alterations and various possible impacts. As a result, the two latter tiers were unable to fully grasp the possible consequences of the alterations in programme design.

6. The EAC proposed in the Report on the 2023 District Council Ordinary Election a series of improvement recommendations in respect of the failure of the EPR system, which include enhancing the reliability and stability of election-related systems to ensure that future elections are conducted in a smooth, safe and orderly manner. The REO will actively follow up on and implement the relevant recommendations. The EAC will make public the contents and recommendations of the Report in due course.

7. Besides, the Government introduced a new measure in November 2023 requiring departments to subject their large-scale electronic systems to additional load and stress tests to be conducted by an independent third party arranged by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO). In future elections, the REO will, in accordance with the relevant requirement, pass the alterations to the EPR system to an independent third-party contractor arranged by the OGCIO for conducting independent load and stress tests, and examine and follow up on the test results and recommendations confirmed by the OGCIO. The REO believes this will help further ensure the security and stability of the system.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB060

(Question Serial No. 0118)

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 2023 District Council Ordinary Election held last year, will the Government inform this Committee of the revised estimated expenditure, the provision and its breakdown for the preparation and conduct of this Election?

Asked by: Hon LAI Tung-kwok (LegCo internal reference no.: 5)

Reply:

The 2023 District Council Ordinary Election (DCOE) from the preparation to the completion of all follow-up work usually straddles several financial years. The preparatory work for the 2023 DCOE commenced in 2022-23 and the actual expenditure incurred in 2022-23 was about \$168 million. The revised estimate for 2023-24 and the provision for 2024-25 under the Registration and Electoral Office for the preparation and conduct of this election are about \$992 million and \$58 million respectively (including the provision for the preparation and conduct of the 2023 Voter Registration Campaign), with breakdown as follows:

Expenditure on the preparation and conduct of the election	2023-24 (Revised estimate) \$ million	2024-25 (Provision) \$ million
(1) Staff cost	235	27
(2) Publicity	122	0
(3) Other expenses (including the costs of hiring venues, manning polling and counting stations, financial assistance scheme, transportation, postage, free mailing, printing, and rental cost of temporary offices and stores, etc.)	635	31
Total	992	58

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB061

(Question Serial No. 2443)

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 review of electoral arrangements, will the Government inform this Committee of the following:

1. What is the expenditure earmarked for the review of electoral arrangements for the current year?
2. As regards the failure of the Electronic Poll Register system in the District Council election last year which caused delays to the vote counting process, will the Government's review for the current year cover such failure? In this connection, have provisions been earmarked for improving the relevant systems and operational processes? If yes, what are the details? If not, what are the reasons for that?
3. In respect of the measures adopted to facilitate electors with mobility difficulty to vote in the District Council election last year, what was the total number of related applications received by the Government? Could the arrangements for re-allocating the electors to other polling stations set up at venues with barrier-free facilities be completed before the polling day?
4. Has the Government received complaints that electors with mobility difficulty were unable to vote at the polling stations re-allocated to them on the polling day due to the faults made by the relevant staff and consequently lost their right to vote? Have the staff received punishment eventually? And has the Government reviewed the relevant mechanism accordingly? If yes, what are the details? If not, what are the reasons for that?

Asked by: Hon LEUNG Hei, Edward (LegCo internal reference no.: 89)

Reply:

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

2. As for the incident of the failure of the Electronic Poll Register (EPR) system of the REO during last year's District Council election, according to the investigation, such incident occurred in the election because the REO's technical team had not handled the changes of some programmes of the EPR system properly. To improve the situation and prevent similar incidents in future, the Electoral Affairs Commission (EAC) proposed in the Report on the 2023 District Council Ordinary Election (DCOE) a series of improvement recommendations, including enhancing the reliability and stability of election-related systems to ensure that future elections are conducted in a smooth, safe and orderly manner. The REO will follow the EAC's recommendations and take appropriate measures, including rectifying the programmes concerned and adopting an improved monitoring mechanism, etc. The manpower resources involved in the relevant arrangements have been absorbed in the estimated expenditure of the REO.

3. In the 2023 DCOE, a total of 29 electors with mobility difficulty applied to the REO for re-allocation to other polling stations with barrier-free facilities to cast their votes, among which 27 electors were granted approval and 2 electors eventually chose to vote at their originally allocated polling stations, with appropriate assistance provided by the polling staff on the spot.

4. The EAC received two relevant complaints, in which the complainants had applied to the REO for re-allocation to other polling stations with barrier-free facilities to cast their votes and were informed that their applications had been approved. However, when they arrived at the re-allocated polling stations on the polling day, the staff therein informed them that their registration information was not available. Upon investigation, the REO found that the incidents were caused by staff members who had failed to update the system with the records of changes of polling stations for the above electors. The REO has reminded its staff to handle each application for re-allocation of polling station with care and caution, and strengthened the internal checking mechanism by having different staff members to double-check to confirm that the application has been properly handled, so as to prevent recurrence of similar incidents. The REO has taken serious follow-up actions against the unsatisfactory performance of the staff members involved, including making relevant records in the appraisal reports of the staff members concerned, and not offering renewals upon the expiry of their employment contracts.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB062

(Question Serial No. 1370)

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:

Since Dr Hon Stephen WONG Yuen-shan ceased to hold office as an Election Committee constituency member of the Legislative Council (LegCo) upon his resignation in December 2022, the seat has been vacant for over 1 year up till now. In this connection, will the Government inform this Committee of the following:

1. Will the Government arrange for a LegCo by-election in 2024-25? If so, what are the details of the related work plans, manpower and expenditure?
2. In view of the problems (such as electronic system failure) occurred in previous elections in Hong Kong, what are the specific enhancement measures on the electoral arrangements to be carried out by the Government to ensure the smooth conduct of elections?

Asked by: Hon LIAO Cheung-kong, Martin (LegCo internal reference no.: 25)

Reply:

The Government will maintain close communication with the Electoral Affairs Commission (EAC) and will consider matters related to the Legislative Council By-election based on the actual situation.

2. While the Electronic Poll Register (EPR) system failed on the polling day of the 2023 District Council Ordinary Election, the EAC had immediately decided to activate the fallback mode through which printed-form final register was used to issue ballot papers to electors, resulting in the smooth completion of the election.

3. The Government has strived to introduce various information technologies under the improved electoral system in recent years with a view to continuously making public elections more efficient and user-friendly. Examples include the extensive application of the EPR system for issuing ballot papers, and the use of an optical mark recognition system to facilitate vote counting etc. The Government will continue collaborating with the EAC to proactively study the wider application of information technology at various stages of the election

workflow, including voter registration as well as casting and counting of votes etc., with a view to improving work efficiency of elections and further facilitating various stakeholders. Nevertheless, before introducing any specific facilitation to electoral arrangements, we must ensure that elections are fair, just and honest, and further strike a proper balance among the application of information technology, efficiency enhancement, security risks, privacy protection and public confidence, etc. At the same time, the Registration and Electoral Office will also formulate a detailed election operation plan and conduct adequate and comprehensive staff training, rehearsals and system testings; establish a rigorous mechanism to monitor the development, management, maintenance and daily operation of computer systems; formulate emergency and contingency plans to strengthen on-site supervision and management, activate the Crisis Management Committee to handle unexpected incidents promptly when necessary, and critically review and learn from experience after the elections to continuously refine various arrangements.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB063

(Question Serial No. 1701)

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 provision of \$800.741 million under Subhead 000 Operational expenses is for the salaries, allowances and other operational expenses of the Registration and Electoral Office (REO). The estimate for 2024-25 is nearly 40% lower than the revised estimate for 2023-24, which is due to the decreased requirements for election expenses. In this connection, will the Government inform this Committee of the following:

- (a) The reasons for the expected net increase of 16 posts in the REO in the coming year when there is no election.
- (b) In the District Council election last year, there was the incident in which the system failed after multiple errors occurred. What are the roles to be performed by the 16 net additional posts in preventing the recurrence of a similar incident in future?

Asked by: Hon LUK Hon-man, Benson (LegCo internal reference no.: 34)

Reply:

In 2024-25, the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) plans to create 22 additional civil service posts (including 1 Systems Manager, 5 Senior Executive Officer, 12 Executive Officer I, 2 Clerical Officer and 2 Assistant Clerical Officer posts). After discounting 6 posts to be deleted in the same year (including 1 Senior Executive Officer, 1 Executive Officer I, 2 Assistant Clerical Officer and 2 Clerical Assistant posts), the net increase of posts in the REO in 2024-25 is 16. These posts are used mainly for carrying out the relevant preparatory work for the 2025 Election Committee Subsector By-elections and the 2025 Legislative Council General Election.

2. As regards the incident concerning the Electronic Poll Register system, the Government and the Electoral Affairs Commission (EAC) have all along attached great importance to the safe and efficient conduct of public elections. Therefore, various stringent arrangements will be put in place when implementing any new technological initiatives in order to ensure that elections are conducted in a safe and orderly manner. Such arrangements include conducting pre-implementation assessments of security risks and

feasibility studies, engaging qualified and reliable contractors, conducting various security tests and load tests repeatedly, engaging third-party contractors to conduct security risk assessments, adopting multi-tier confirmation mechanism on security, as well as carrying out reviews on elections to gain experience and continuously enhance the relevant systems, etc. The Government and the EAC will continue to proactively study the application of various information technologies in future to enhance the effectiveness of public elections, and at the same time strive to ensure that elections are conducted smoothly in a fair, just, honest, safe and orderly manner.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CMAB064

(Question Serial No. 1293)

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. There will be a net increase of 16 posts in the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) in 2024-25. Given that no large-scale elections are to be held in 2024-25, what are the duties of 16 additional posts?
2. Given that an amount of \$527 million has been earmarked for election expenses in 2024-25, does the REO have any plan to conduct a by-election to fill a vacancy in the Legislative Council (LegCo)? If so, what is the plan? If not, how many vacancies in the LegCo and District Council are required for a by-election to be arranged?
3. The matters requiring special attention in 2024-25 includes "the review of electoral arrangements with a view to introducing more efficient and user-friendly measures in future elections". What are the measures being planned? Considering the current progress of computerisation in the REO, will there be more efficient measures, such as electronic counting, for introduction in the LegCo election to be held in 2025?

Asked by: Hon MA Fung-kwok (LegCo internal reference no.: 29)

Reply:

In 2024-25, the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) plans to create 22 additional civil service posts (including 1 Systems Manager, 5 Senior Executive Officer, 12 Executive Officer I, 2 Clerical Officer and 2 Assistant Clerical Officer posts). After discounting 6 posts to be deleted in the same year (including 1 Senior Executive Officer, 1 Executive Officer I, 2 Assistant Clerical Officer and 2 Clerical Assistant posts), the net increase of posts in the REO in 2024-25 is 16. These posts are used mainly for carrying out the relevant preparatory work for the 2025 Election Committee Subsector By-elections and the 2025 Legislative Council General Election.

2. The Government will maintain close communication with the Electoral Affairs Commission (EAC) and consider matters related to the Legislative Council By-election based on the actual situation.

3. Regarding the electoral arrangements, the Government has strived to introduce various information technologies under the improved electoral system in recent years with a view to continuously making public elections more efficient and user-friendly. Examples include the extensive application of the Electronic Poll Register system for issuing ballot papers, and the use of an optical mark recognition system to facilitate vote counting, etc. The Government will continue collaborating with the EAC to proactively study the wider application of information technology at various stages of the election workflow, including voter registration as well as casting and counting of votes etc., with a view to improving work efficiency of elections and further facilitating various stakeholders. Nevertheless, before introducing any specific facilitation to electoral arrangements, we must ensure that elections are fair, just and honest, and further strike a proper balance among the application of information technology, efficiency enhancement, security risks, privacy protection and public confidence etc., so as to make the elections more efficient and user-friendly.

- End -

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

(Question Serial No. 2383)

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 December last year, the Government took “Cast your vote at DC election for a better community” as the slogan for the 2023 District Council (DC) Election and launched territory-wide publicity for this Election. Starting from 1 month before the polling day, the Government had been appealing to members of the public in Hong Kong to vote. Even the Chief Executive, several Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries all spared no efforts in publicising the polling day. Eventually, the Electronic Poll Register system failed in the evening of the polling day and many polling stations were once closed. After the re-opening of the polling stations, only the printed copies of the elector registers could be used. In this connection, will the Government inform this Committee of the following:

1. To advance the application of information technology, including the adoption of electronic ballot issuing and counting procedures, the Registration and Electoral Office was allocated provisions by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council last year to create a directorate post at D1 level as the consultant to handle the electoral and voter registration system. Regarding the above incident, the Government set up a dedicated investigation group to look into it. However, in this DC Election, the Government engaged an independent third party through the arrangement of the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer to conduct additional load tests and stress tests. What criteria does the Government have when choosing third party enterprises to conduct tests? What are the standards for the load tests and stress tests of this Election?
2. After this DC Election, will the Government consider following, introducing and studying the practices in other countries or regions, as well as providing technical guidance and support, etc. to solve the technical problems currently encountered in public elections?
3. The Government has listed the “Review on Electoral Arrangements” as one of its major initiatives. Nevertheless, electronic voting has yet been developed and implemented. What are the difficulties and reasons for not having fully implemented electronic voting so far? What is the Government’s total expenditure on the 2023 DC Ordinary Election?

Asked by: Hon SHANG Hailong (LegCo internal reference no.: 30)

Reply:

The Government introduced a new measure in November 2023 requiring departments to subject their large-scale electronic systems to additional load and stress tests conducted by an independent third party arranged by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO). However, since the Electronic Poll Register (EPR) system of the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) was launched in 2021 before the implementation of the new measure, and the subsequent programme alterations to the EPR system was also conducted before the new measure was effective, the EPR system was not subject to the additional load and stress tests by an independent third party arranged by the OGCIO as required under the measure. In the future, the REO will strictly adhere to the relevant measure to pass new or enhanced large-scale electronic systems of the REO to an independent third-party contractor arranged by the OGCIO for conducting relevant tests.

2. Currently, when conducting various public elections, in order to ensure the normal operation of electoral systems, the REO will arrange on-site technical team to support the operation of electoral systems, and take immediate remedial actions where necessary. Besides, various fallback and emergency plans that can be activated immediately in the event of an emergency are in place to ensure the smooth conduct of the election. In order to continuously improve the efficiency and security of elections, the REO will continue to adopt appropriate measures and proactively make reference to the good experience and advanced practices of other countries and regions with a view to continuously improving the effectiveness of elections.

3. It is indeed the target of the Government and the Electoral Affairs Commission (EAC) to continuously review and refine electoral arrangements. In different elections in the past few years, various parts of the election and electoral procedures have become electronic and automated, including the extensive application of the EPR system for issuing ballot papers, the use of an optical mark recognition system to facilitate vote counting, etc. The Government will continue collaborating with the EAC to proactively study the wider application of information technology at various stages of the election workflow, including voter registration as well as casting and counting of votes etc., with a view to improving electoral process and work efficiency, and facilitating various stakeholders. Nevertheless, before introducing any specific facilitation to electoral arrangements, we must also ensure that elections are fair, just and honest, and further strike a proper balance among the application of information technology, efficiency enhancement, security risks, privacy protection and public confidence etc., so as to make the elections more efficient and user-friendly. The REO will continue collaborating with the EAC to carefully study the feasibility of electronic voting.

4. As for District Council (DC) Ordinary Elections, the preparation to the completion of all follow-up work usually straddles several financial years. In respect of the 2023 DC Ordinary Election, the preparatory work commenced in 2022-23 and the actual expenditure incurred in 2022-23 was about \$168 million. The revised estimate for 2023-24 and the provision for 2024-25 under the REO for the preparation and conduct of this election are about \$992 million and \$58 million respectively (including the provision for the preparation and conduct of the 2023 Voter Registration Campaign).

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CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

S-CMAB01

(Question Serial No. S023)

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. Regarding the reply to Question 3, the Government indicated that a total of 29 electors with mobility difficulty had submitted applications, and there were 2 complaints related to the applications. Upon investigation, it was found that the cases involved faults made by the staff. Concerning the relevant situations, did the Government review all the applications? According to the voting records, how many of the 29 electors who had submitted applications did cast their votes on the polling day?
2. Regarding the reply to Question 4, the Government indicated that it had strengthened the internal checking mechanism. In this connection, will the Government further explain how many levels of staff are involved in the double-checking under the existing mechanism? And whether there was no such mechanism and only a single staff member was relied on to perform double-checking in the past.
3. Regarding the reply to Question 4, the Government indicated that the staff members concerned would not be offered renewals upon the expiry of their employment contracts. Does the relevant contract terms include a contract gratuity? Will the Government explain why the staff members are still allowed to complete their contracts rather than being dismissed outright in case of committing such serious mistake? What are the standards underlying the decision?
4. Regarding the reply to Question 4, apart from the contract staff members concerned, does it involve negligence at management level? Does it raise any supervisory issues, especially concerning the immediate supervisors of the staff members in question? Has the Government imposed any penalties on the supervisors and made relevant records on their performance appraisals? If so, what are the details; if not, what are the reasons?

Asked by: Hon LEUNG Hei, Edward

Reply:

Upon the receipt of the complaints, the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) reviewed all the applications for re-allocation to other polling stations with barrier-free facilities to cast their votes submitted by those 29 electors with mobility difficulty. Apart from the 2 aforesaid complaints involving negligence of the staff who had failed to update the system with the records of changes of polling stations requested by the relevant electors, other applications were properly handled and approved eventually. As for the voting records of those 29 electors, the REO will not investigate whether individual electors have cast their votes by virtue of the principle of vote secrecy.

2. Each application for re-allocation of polling station submitted by an elector was handled and double-checked by 2 REO staff members of different ranks. In order to prevent recurrence of similar incidents, the REO will enhance the checking mechanism in future elections by involving staff members of higher ranks in conducting verification checks for each application, as well as arranging another team of staff members to conduct cross-checking, so as to further prevent human errors or negligence.

3. In appraising staff performance, the REO has to take a holistic approach, including the consideration of an appraisee's performance in various job areas during the contract period. In addition to handling applications submitted by the aforesaid electors for re-allocation to other polling stations to cast their votes, during the contract period, the staff members concerned were also responsible for other electoral arrangements of the polling and counting stations before the polling day, maintaining liaison with venue management of polling and counting stations, electoral staff and contractors, and follow-up work after the election such as handling electoral materials. Taking into account the overall performance of the staff members concerned in other job areas and in this incident, the REO has taken serious follow-up actions and decided not to offer renewals for them upon the expiry of their employment contracts.

4. The REO has made relevant records on the performance appraisal of the immediate supervisor of the contract staff concerned to reflect the situation, and reminded the staff member to handle each application with due care and caution in the future. The REO has also reminded all staff members responsible for handling such applications to strictly follow the enhanced checking mechanism mentioned above in the future to ensure that each application is properly handled.

- End -