Meeting of the Ethnic Minorities Forum

9 December 2014 at 3:00 p.m.

30/F Conference Room, Southorn Centre, Wan Chai

**Present**

**Government representatives**

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| Assistant Director of Home Affairs (3) | Miss Dora Fu  (Acting Chairperson) |
| Chief Executive Officer (3),  Home Affairs Department | Mr K Y Cheng |
| Assistant Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs | Mr Michael Yau |
| Assistant Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs | Mr K Yeung |

**Representatives of public bodies**

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| Senior Policy and Research Officer, Equal Opportunities Commission | Ms Kitty Lam |

**Representatives of non-government organisations**

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| Caritas – Hong Kong | Mr Bill Lay |
| Christian Action | Mr Brian Wong |
| Hong Kong Christian Service | Ms Karrie Chan |
| Hong Kong Nepalese Federation | Ms Rita Gurung |
| Hong Kong SKH Lady MacLehose Centre | Mr Jonathan Chan  Mr Lo Kai Chung |
| Hong Kong Unison Ltd. | Ms Annie Li |
| Human Welfare Services | Mr M J Shahab |
| International Social Service Hong Kong Branch | Ms Adrielle M Panares, MH |
| Kirat Yakthung Chumlung Hong Kong | Mr Krishna Raj Limbu |
| Masterful Limited | Mrs Ruqaiya Ebrahim |
| Mission for Migrant Workers Ltd. | Mr Norman Carnay |
| New Home Association | Mr Chan Yee Fei |
| Nigerian Union Hong Kong | Mr Prince Chukwu Clement |
| Oxfam Hong Kong | Ms Rachel Wong |
| Southern Democratic Alliance | Mr Lung Wai Man, James |
| The Hong Kong Council of Social Service | Ms Lynn Law |
| The India Association Hong Kong | Mr Mohan Chugani |
| The Lok Sin Tong Benevolent Society, Kowloon | Mr Cheung Hon Wa, Brian |
| The Zubin Foundation Limited | Ms Shalini Mahtani |
| United Muslim Association of Hong Kong | Mr Syed Jamil Raghbi |
| Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service | Mr Lam Chun Ming |

**Other attendees**

*For Agenda Item 1*

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| Senior Housing Manager,  Housing Department | Mr Samson Lok |

*For Agenda Item 2*

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| Christian Action | Ms Fifi Tsoi |
|  | Ms Cindy Ng |
|  | Ms Chandni Puri |
| Hong Kong Community Network | Ms Yue Mui Ying |
|  | Mr Fu Tsue Hung |
|  | Mr So Man Yum |
|  | Mr Fan Kwok Fai |
|  | Ms Cheung Ying Ying |
|  | Ms Khaen Aisha |
|  | Mr Faizan |
| New Home Association | Mr Aero Fong |
|  | Ms Gurung Prativa |
|  | Ms Rana Tika |
|  | Ms Pun Sabitri |

**Secretary**

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| Senior Executive Officer (RRU), Home Affairs Department | Mr Alfred Shum |

1. **Support for ethnic minority public rental housing applicants by Housing Department**
   1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr Samson Lok of the Housing Department (HD) briefed attendees on HD’s support services for the public rental housing (PRH) application from ethnic minority (EM) , with a PowerPoint presentation.
   2. Issues raised by attendees and the discussions were summarised below:
2. **Assistance to ethnic minority applicants**
   * 1. Some attendees raised concern that the procedure on application for PRH was complicated. There were so many documents to be submitted and the information was difficult to understand. Mr Lok said that PRH had always been a precious resource and a comprehensive vetting procedure was in place to ensure equitable allocation. To help applicants make a PRH application, there was an application guide with detailed information, including a sample application form to guide applicants filling in the application forms and a checklist to ascertain whether all necessary documents had been included. He added that apart from a video highlighting the salient point in submission of PRH application, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HKHA) website also featured an “eligibility checker” through which an applicant could make an initial assessment by answering some simple questions. In addition, applicants might call the hotline or visit the Housing Authority Customer Services Centre (HACSC) at Lok Fu for further assistance. Mr Lok said that while frontline staff had been given comprehensive training, some complicated cases could not be resolved on the spot. Such applicants were asked to leave a means of contact and a formal reply to these complicated cases would be provided as soon as possible.
     2. The Chairperson asked whether there was any support to help applicants overcome the language barrier. Mr Lok said PRH applicants were encouraged to make use of the translation and interpretation services provided by the Centre for Harmony and Enhancement of Ethnic Minority Residents (CHEER) funded by HAD. Interpretation services were provided either through conference calls or pre-arranged on-site service at HACSC. An attendee suggested that HD should employ its own EM staff. Mr Lok replied that two EM Hall Attendants were employed to offer reception and simple interpretation service in HACSC to the non-Chinese/English speaking EM PRH applicants to facilitate EM’s access to PRH applications, the support service was well-received by the EM applicants. He also noticed that the usage rate of on-site interpretation service was low as many EM applicants preferred to bring along their family members or friends to do interpretation for them. Some attendees opined that some EMs might not be well aware of such services.
     3. To facilitate communication between an EM applicant and HD’s staff, Mr Lok suggested that EMs with language barrier might consider making better use of HAD’s support services centre whose staff could interpret the PRH application information or call HD’s hotline on their behalf if deemed necessary. In addition, HD could also provide briefing to the staff of support services centre upon their request to enhance their understanding on PRH application procedures. The Chairperson remarked that while there was always room for better collaboration, support services centres staff did not have the expertise to answer enquires on behalf of HD.
     4. An attendee said that as HD was subject to the Administrative Guidelines on Promotion of Racial Equality, it should take proactive steps to collect data on the ethnicities of applicants so as to monitor the situation. Mr Lok said that HD had always and would continue to adhere to the guidelines. In this connection, HD had set up an administrative guidelines for the promotion of equality for EMs and provided intensive customer service training to its staff to enhance their alertness and sensitivity on racial equality for all nationalities. From time to time, HD also held meetings with EM concern groups to listen to their need and to improve its services and conducted relevant briefings to non-government organisations. Mr Michael Yau of the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau suggested that HD might nominate its staff to attend cultural sensitivity workshop organised by the Civil Service Bureau or the Equal Opportunities Commission from time to time.
3. **Submission of PRH Applications** 
   * 1. An attendee commented that HD’s practice of returning incomplete PRH application forms might cause applicants misunderstanding that their applications were rejected. Mr Lok said that together with the returned application, there was a letter clearly showing the missing documents that the applicants had to provide on re-submission of the applications. He continued to explain that since applications were handled on a first-come-first-served basis, the established practice was to ensure that incomplete applications would not take precedence over completed ones.
     2. An attendee said that it often took time to obtain an employer certificate or pay slips and might delay the application process. He asked why HD would not accept salary payment records in passbooks as a proof of income. Mr Lok said that the latest information on an applicant’s income was required and on many occasions irregular income were involved, employer certificates or payslips were required to calculate the average monthly income over the computation period concerned.
4. **Allocation of PRH flats**
   * 1. An attendee asked how many applications from EM applicants were received and how many of them were still on the waiting list. Mr Lok said that the waiting time had increased in general due to an increasing number of registered PRH applications. Applicants might refer to the monthly reports published on HKHA website and concerned newspapers for the general progress of PRH application. However, he said that no statistics on the race or nationality of the applicants since such information was not required/collected for processing their PRH applications.
     2. An attendee asked how flats in different districts were allocated to applicants and raised concerned that clustering of EMs geographically would discourage integration with local people. Mr Lok explained that applicants might choose from one of four broad districts, i.e. urban, extended urban, New Territories or Islands according to their wish and the entitlement of their PRH application, and PRH flats would be offered to eligible applicants by computer on a random basis in their district choice. If an applicant had special needs (e.g. medical or social grounds) for PRH allocation in a particular area in their district choice, HD would also consider the recommendations from the relevant authorities, subject to availability of suitable PRH resource.
     3. An attendee said there was rumour that larger families would enjoy priority in the allocation of flats. Mr Lok clarified that all registered applications were processed strictly according to their relative priority, family size would have no bearing on the chance of allocation.
     4. An attendee said that some EMs might forget to update their contact information after moving housing so they lost contact with HD. He suggested that HD should give special care to EM applicants. Mr Lok replied that there were various channels for the applicants to update their information, and applicants had already been reminded to keep HD abreast of any changes .
5. **Compassionate rehousing**
   * 1. An attendee enquired about the policy of Compassionate Rehousing (CR) in respect of the role of Social Welfare Department (SWD). Mr Lok said that under CR, SWD recommended cases to HD for further processing. Regular liaison meetings were held between HD at the district level and at the headquarters level. There were also established inter-departmental mechanisms to ensure CR cases with special needs could be properly dealt with.
6. **Leasing of non-residential units**
   * 1. An attendee enquired about the procedures for NGOs to rent premises in HKHA’s housing estates. Mr Lok replied that another team in HD was responsible for leasing of non-residential units and invited the enquirer to discuss the matter after the meeting such that he could provide the means of contact.
7. **Enhanced support services for ethnic minorities**
   1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr K Y Cheng gave an overview of the four new initiatives undertaken by HAD to enhance community support for EMs, namely, support services centre for EMs in Kwai Tsing district, youth units in all centres and sub-centres, ambassador schemes for EM youths and strengthened manpower support in HAD.

*Support services centre in Kwai Tsing district*

* 1. The Chairperson welcomed Ms Yue Mui Ying and her colleagues from Hong Kong Community Network (HKCN) to the meeting. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms Yue briefed members on the services provided by LINK Centre.
  2. Issues raised by attendees and the discussions were summarised below:

1. **Selection of operator for the new centre**
   * 1. Some attendees noted that HKCN, which had been selected to operate the new support services centre for EMs, had been in operation for a relatively short period. They raised concern whether they had adequate experience and social connection to provide service effectively. The Chairperson replied that the invitation and selection process in accordance with the Government’s established procedures in an open and fair manner. The invitation for proposal document had set out all the requirements and communicated to all relevant parties through the HAD website, newspaper as well as letters to members of the Committee on the Promotion of Racial Harmony and this Forum. The proposals received were considered by am interdepartmental vetting committee comprising representatives of HAD, Social Welfare Department and Labour Department. Assessment was based on six major criteria, i.e. service design and general operation of service, performance management, human resources management, implementation plan, relevant operation experience and co-ordination strategies and financial management. She emphasised that experience was just one of the criteria. After considering all relevant factors, the vetting committee recommended and the authority approved that the contract be awarded to the present operator.
     2. Some attendees noted that HKCN employed many qualified social workers and EM staff and wondered why HKCN could have access to so many resources. An attendee also asked whether the availability of financial resources was a determining factor in the selection process. The Chairperson said that all support services centre received subvention at a similar level. The ability to provide the best service for EMs, in terms of people served, programmes offered, etc. was the major consideration. Mr So added that they could afford to have so many qualified social workers because three out of seven were volunteers.
     3. An attendee asked why no selection interview was conducted. The Chairperson replied that there was no need to conduct interviews in this exercise because the information contained in all proposals received was clear and adequate.
     4. An attendee enquired about the background and track record of HKCN. Mr Fu replied that HKCN was established in 2010 and they had been serving EMs in Kwai Tsing district since 2012. Before they bid for the new centre, they had organised home visits, school visits, tutorial classes, seminars and discussion groups with EMs to establish connections with the EM community there. He said that the ability to recruit over 370 members in one month’s time reflected their past efforts in the district.
2. **Programmes of the new centre**
   * 1. Some attendees were interested in the programmes offered by the new centre. Mr So said that the centre had just commenced operation in October. All training courses and integration programmes as well as employment services would be implemented in phases within one to two months. On the innovative programmes, Mr So said that they intended give some surprises to centre members and, hence, preferred to not to disclose the details at this moment. The Chairperson invited Mr So to share their experience during the forthcoming visit to the LINK Centre.
     2. An attendee asked whether there would be any national education programmes in the new centre. The Chairperson said that programmes were mainly designed to meet the needs of the EMs. There were already so many courses that the centre might not be able to handle more.
     3. An attendee was concerned that whether the centres would engage in political activities and Mr Fu replied that they did not have any political agenda in their operation. The Chairperson supplemented that the support services centres should only be used for delivery of services to EMs. Other services no matter political or not should not be featured in the programme.
3. **Control and monitoring of support services centres**
   * 1. In response to an attendee’s enquiry on the monitoring mechanism, the Chairperson said that there was a performance management evaluation mechanism, which was applicable to all support services centres. They were required to deliver the committed output and had to give an explanation if the target could not be met. They were also required to report to CPRH regularly to ensure that the requirements were met and the quality of service was up to the standard required. The Chairperson also invited attendees to report any non-compliance to HAD. Mr Fu informed attendees that they would set up an internal audit group to monitor the centre’s activities.
     2. An attendee enquired whether there were any policies to safeguard the personal data of service users. The Chairperson said the service contract required that personal data collected could only be used by the centre for the purpose of service delivery. HAD would investigate into any reports of non-compliance.
     3. Noting that the staff of support services centres and other EM programmes were mainly Indian, Nepalese and Pakistani, some attendees wondered whether people of African or other origin were aware of these services and job vacancies. The Chairperson said that the support services centres and other EM programmes were open to all EMs regardless of their origin. Regarding the employment of Publicity Officers and Publicity Assistants by HAD, the vacancies were advertised through newspapers and the website of the Civil Service Bureau. They were open people of all ethnicities but there was no application from Africans.

*Ambassador Schemes for EM Youths*

* 1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr Brian Wong of Hong Kong Christian Action and Mr Chan Yee Fei of New Home Association briefed members on the implementation of the Ambassador Schemes for EM Youths in the Urban Areas and in the New Territories respectively.
  2. Issues raised by attendees and the discussions were summarised below:
     1. Some attendees raised concerned about the political background of the operators as there was a news report about New Home Association’s participation in a political campaign in August this year. An attendee suggested that service providers should be reminded not the engage in political activities. Mr Chan replied that services for new arrivals and EMs were provided by separate units under New Home Association. There were well-defined service boundaries and serving EM youths was the only focus under this programme. The Chairperson supplemented that there were strict requirements under the service contracts in this regard.
     2. Some attendees expressed appreciation to the EM staff working for various programmes and considered that they were role models for other EM youths.
     3. An attendee were concerned about an observation that EM youth in Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai were being exploited to take drugs or engage in drug trafficking. She wished the youth ambassadors could help with referrals or collaborate with relevant agencies in these areas.

1. **Any Other Business**
2. **Discrimination against EMs in everyday life**
   1. Some attendees commented that banks were discriminatory against EMs in their account opening procedures and some landlords refused to rent houses to EMs. An attendee said that some banks refused to open a bank account for persons of certain nationalities even though they possessed Hong Kong Identity Cards. Another attendee said that banks required EM applicants to provide a local referee. In this connection, an attendee suggested inviting the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) to come to this Forum to explain the relevant policies. She also suggested inviting the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) or the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (CMAB) to brief the Forum on the recent review on anti-discrimination laws.
   2. Ms Kitty Lam of EOC said that they had also received complaints relating to bank account opening. She was aware that some banks claimed that they had followed HKMA’s guidelines. She suggested that EMs facing similar situations should approach the EOC to make enquiries or lodge complaints so that their case officer could look into the details. She explained that the current Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO) prohibited discrimination on ethnicity but not nationality and EOC had conducted a public consultation on this. Mr Michael Yau of CMAB said that it might take some time for EOC to study the submissions received. The findings would probably available by mid-2015 or later. Separately, Ms Lam said that EOC was conducting a study on discrimination against EMs in the provision of goods and services which would complete in about a year’s time.
   3. For the date of next meeting, attendees would be duly informed nearer the time.

**Home Affairs Department**

**December 2014**