

Report No. 47 of the Director of Audit — Chapter 9

PROVISION OF ELECTORAL SERVICES

Summary

1. In August 1997, the Electoral Affairs Commission (EAC) was established as an independent, apolitical and impartial statutory body under the EAC Ordinance (Cap. 541) to oversee elections in Hong Kong. The Chief Electoral Officer is the Controlling Officer of the Registration and Electoral Office (REO). The REO provides administrative support to and implements the decisions of the EAC in relation to the review and delineation of geographical constituencies (GCs) for the Legislative Council (LegCo) and District Council (DC) constituencies, the registration of electors, and the conduct and supervision of the Chief Executive elections, the Election Committee subsector elections, the LegCo elections and the DC elections.

Voter registration and deregistration

2. **Registration rates of eligible electors.** The Audit Commission (Audit) noted that for the years from 1999 to 2005, the average registration rate of 33% for electors aged between 18 and 20 was only about half of the overall average registration rate of 67%. In view of the low registration rates of the young age groups, Audit reviewed the efforts made by the REO to encourage young people to register as electors.

3. **School visit programmes.** In 2001, the REO launched a school visit programme. However, Audit noted that no more school visits had been arranged since 2002. *Audit has recommended that the Chief Electoral Officer should, in consultation with the Chairman, Electoral Affairs Commission, consider launching the school visit programme on a regular basis to promote the awareness of students on electoral affairs and encourage more eligible young persons to register as electors.*

4. **Voter registration programmes at the Registration of Persons offices.** Since 2000, staff have been deployed at the Registration of Persons (ROP) offices of the Immigration Department to invite the newly eligible persons who have reached the age of 18 to register as electors. Audit compared the registration results of three periods between

2003 and 2006 during which staff were deployed to set up voter registration counters at the ROP offices. The better registration rate for the six-week period ended on 16 July 2003 may be attributable to the additional number of staff deployed during this period. *Audit has recommended that the Chief Electoral Officer should: (a) in consultation with the Director of Immigration, consider deploying more staff at the ROP offices to encourage eligible young persons to register as electors; and (b) closely monitor the performance of such staff so as to gain the full benefits of the voter registration programme at the ROP offices.*

5. **Publicity programmes for voter registration.** The total expenditure for the voter registration campaigns from 1999 to 2005 was \$76.1 million. In recent years, an inter-departmental working group, chaired by the Deputy Secretary for Constitutional Affairs, worked out the details of voter registration campaigns and formulated the publicity strategies. Audit found that, up to the end of June 2006, no objective criteria had been established and no review on the cost-effectiveness of voter registration campaigns had been conducted. *Audit has recommended that the Secretary for Constitutional Affairs should, in consultation with the Chairman, Electoral Affairs Commission: (a) establish objective criteria to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of voter registration publicity activities organised by the government departments involved; and (b) ensure that pre-campaign and post-campaign surveys are carried out for evaluating the effectiveness of voter registration publicity activities.*

6. **Verification of residential addresses of registered electors.** Audit noted that the REO relied on a self-declaration mechanism to ensure that the residential addresses of applicants were correct. In the 2004 GC final register, there were 367 cases with more than ten electors registered under the same address. In July 2006, Audit selected 85 out of 367 cases and passed them to the REO for further investigation. The registered addresses of these 85 cases were not specific and unclear. The premises at these addresses were apparently not for residential purposes or not large enough to accommodate the number of registered electors. *Audit has recommended that the Chief Electoral Officer should, in consultation with the Chairman, Electoral Affairs Commission and the Secretary for Constitutional Affairs: (a) explore the feasibility of requiring applicants or registered electors in doubtful cases to provide supporting evidence for verifying their residential addresses; (b) consider implementing a checking system to verify the residential addresses of registered electors recorded in the GC final registers on a sampling basis; and (c) review and analyse the outcome of the investigation into the 85 cases selected by Audit, and take appropriate follow-up action in warranted cases.*

7. **Voter deregistration.** The name and particulars of a registered elector should be kept up-to-date, and he will be struck out from the final register of electors if he is no longer eligible to be an elector or disqualified from being registered as an elector. Audit found that the REO had not carried out adequate checking for ineligible elector, and

checking for disqualified electors. *Audit has recommended that the Chief Electoral Officer should, in consultation with the Chairman, Electoral Affairs Commission and the Secretary for Constitutional Affairs: (a) consider implementing on an on-going basis a system which would update the registered addresses of electors, by means of transfer to the REO of data on their notifications of change of addresses furnished to other government departments, subject to the prior consent of these registered electors; and (b) consider implementing a checking system in coordination with relevant government departments to ensure that the registered electors in the final registers are not subject to any disqualification from registration.*

Election arrangements and expenditure

8. ***Election-related materials sent to electors by post.*** Audit found that for the 2004 LegCo election, the REO and candidates used 600 tonnes of papers and spent printing cost of \$5.8 million and postage of \$35.2 million on mailing election-related materials to electors. In March 2005, the REO sought advice from the LegCo Panel on Constitutional Affairs on the ways to reduce paper consumption in distributing election-related publicity materials. A majority of the Panel Members supported the option of ceasing the production of candidates' introductory leaflets in paper form by the REO. In October 2005, the REO introduced trial arrangements to reduce paper consumption during a DC by-election. The EAC decided to continue with the trial arrangements and consult the public before the trial arrangements are formally adopted for use in all public elections. *Audit has recommended that the Chief Electoral Officer should, in consultation with the Chairman, Electoral Affairs Commission and the Secretary for Constitutional Affairs: (a) review the existing practice of sending candidates' introductory leaflets to each elector by the REO; (b) explore the feasibility of sending election-related materials to electors by the REO on a household basis in future elections, subject to the consent of individual registered electors; and (c) encourage candidates to send their election-related publicity materials electronically to the electors who have opted to receive election-related publicity materials by e-mail.*

9. ***Recruitment of polling and counting staff.*** Audit noted that for the 2004 LegCo election, (a) the estimated working hours and the expected time for releasing the polling-cum-counting staff after work had not been specified in the circular memorandum on the recruitment of polling and counting staff; and (b) an additional honorarium of \$500 per head was paid to all the polling-cum-counting staff of different ranks, and an additional honorarium of \$250 per head was paid to the 40 counting staff. *Audit has recommended that the Chief Electoral Officer should: (a) in consultation with the Chairman, Electoral Affairs Commission, derive a fair basis for determining additional honoraria payable to polling and counting staff of different ranks; and (b) consider specifying in the circular memorandum on future recruitment of polling and counting staff the estimated working hours and the expected time for releasing them after work, and the conditions and circumstances necessitating the payment of additional honoraria.*

Performance measurement and resources management

10. **Performance measurement.** Audit found that the REO had not included the relevant performance measures and performance information, recommended in the Guidelines issued in the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury's circular memorandum of October 2005, in the 2006-07 Controlling Officer's Report (COR). *Audit has recommended that the Chief Electoral Officer should: (a) consider developing more meaningful performance measures to fully measure the performance of the REO; and (b) show the progress of activities in the COR, so as to provide stakeholders with a full perspective of the performance results.*

11. **Provision of office accommodation for the EAC and the REO.** The office accommodation of the EAC and the REO is mainly located in leased commercial premises at an annual rent of \$8.66 million. Audit has found that: (a) in August 2004, the Government Property Agency (GPA) proposed to relocate the EAC and the REO to government buildings, but without success; (b) the office accommodation of permanent offices and temporary offices of the REO is scattered in various locations; and (c) the temporary office accommodation at 13/F Guardian House and 7/F Cornwall House was not fully utilised. *Audit has recommended that the Chief Electoral Officer should, in consultation with the Chairman, Electoral Affairs Commission and the Secretary for Constitutional Affairs: (a) and in conjunction with the Government Property Administrator, consider identifying suitable government office accommodation for relocating the EAC and the REO; (b) consider the feasibility of relocating the scattered office accommodation to one location for permanent offices and another location for temporary offices; and (c) review the requirement for the temporary office accommodation in the coming years, taking into account the election cycles, and provide the GPA with timely forecast of excess temporary office accommodation so that the GPA can plan for their alternative use.*

Response from the Administration

12. The Administration generally agrees with the audit recommendations.

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