

H. K. Standard

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A guide to the district board

21-3

THE Urban Council looks after the general affairs of urban areas, while in rural areas, the New Territories Provisional Council, carries out that duty.

The roles of both councils include maintaining decent standards of public health and providing cleansing services, administering public amenities such as libraries, cemeteries, swimming beaches, sports grounds, bath houses, toilets, markets, and enforcing legislation to control hawkers and markets.

The Social Welfare Department looks after family services, with concern for personal and family problems. Adoption is an example.

Social security is another, provided mainly through a Public Assistance Scheme and a Special Needs Allowance.

There is also a Probation and Correction section, Rehabilitation and Community Work sections and the Medical Social Service.

There is a Recreation and Sports Service for the promotion and use of sports related facilities, also for managing these amenities and facilities.

The District Lands Office is responsible

for all aspects of lands administration, e.g., sales, land or property evaluation, acquisition and disposal, village improvement, lease enforcement and land control. There is a Lands Registration Office too.

Associated with Lands is a local public works fund. Allocation via this source means the amount involved is too small to warrant control under the Public Works Programme.

Villages are geographically grouped to form rural committees; in towns there are the kaifongs.

But these are not government administered, and nor is the Heung Yee Kuk, which is still a powerful force in the rural areas and the Rural Committees are its centres of administration.

There are various community organisations too such as local chambers of commerce, clansmen and sports associations, youth groups, welfare agencies etc.

Others organising activities are mutual aid committees, owners incorporations and residents' associations.

Although pressure groups and the like are important influences, having arisen spontaneously they have not figured in government administration or planning.

District Boards were established in April 1981 as part of the overall District Administration Scheme. The objective was and is to provide a proper forum for public consultation and participation by the public at district level.

Public funds are allocated to District

THIS is a paper prepared by Tony Henderson for the Humanist Association, which felt there was a need for a guide to the District Board system for baffled councillors. It provides a surprising reminder of just how complicated the system has become.

Boards for minor environmental improvement works and for local community involvement activities. Elected "unofficial" members were introduced in April 1982.

District Boards have particular terms of reference:

- To advise on matters affecting the well being of people living in the district and working there.

- To advise on the provision and use of public facilities and services.

- To advise on the adequacy and priorities of government programmes.

- To advise on the use of public funds allocated for public works and community activities.

- To undertake, where funds are available for the purpose, minor environmental improvements.

- To undertake, when funds are made available, the promotion of recreational and cultural activities within the district.

Area Committees are part of the scheme and serve to advise government via and on behalf of the District Board on the adequacy or otherwise of:

- Cleansing and environmental con-

trol.

- Provision and maintenance of roads, footpaths, drainage, lighting, rural water supply and postal services, and transport.

- Provision and management of amenities such as sports grounds, playgrounds and sitting out areas.

The foregoing advice can be backed by further advice to government about remedial measures.

Any matter or measure to be given consideration, intended to improve the living conditions, can be communicated from an Area Committee to the government, on the District Board's behalf.

Besides these area committees there are functional committees; these commonly relate to environment, transport and culture, recreation and sports, though others can be formed depending on needs.

An Environment Committee advises the District Board on the priority and use of board funds for minor environmental improvements, supervises implementation of such projects as approved, advises on matters relating to the environment and also on publicity and other matters in connection with such matters as a clean-up

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Hongkong policy.

The Culture, Recreation and Sports committee brief includes advising the D.B. on the priority and use of funds for cultural, recreational and sports programmes, promoting these activities generally in regard to local needs, and advising the D.B. on the adequacy of the related amenities and facilities.

The Traffic and Transport Committee provides a forum on traffic and transport matters, and advises on projects, public transport facilities, road safety hazards, and possible improvements.

It seeks public opinion on transport matters and reports it to the board, and may form working groups to investigate particular problems and areas of concern.

A District Management Committee serves to provide a forum for inter-departmental consultation and co-ordination to ensure that a district's needs are met and the local problems are solved effectively. It is made up entirely of government staff, without DB members.

Under the District Management Committee come the Street Management Committee and Community Building Coordinating Committee.

The terms of reference of the rather clumsily named Community Building Coordinating Committee are:

- To promote and cultivate a sense of district identity.
- To co-ordinate a district's efforts in implementing policy decisions and directives on community building.
- To establish priorities on civic spirit

issues.

- To keep under review the effectiveness of community building projects and to make recommendations to the Community Building Policy Committee through the District Management Committee.

- To keep in touch with civic spirit activities undertaken by voluntary agencies, and make recommendations to the Policy Committee through the District Management Committee on how to best co-ordinate these activities.

The terms of reference of a Street Management Committee include:

- To identify blackspots of poor street management, with special emphasis on environmental hygiene and road obstruction.

- To recommend to the District Management Committee improvement measures.

- To implement measures adopted by the District Management Committee, for example clearance of illegal structures.

The District Boards are comprised of the elected representatives of the local people, appointed members (for the time being) where the government considers there are gaps; the District Officer, and various government department representatives.

This is the structure of local government and it is within this scheme that the government administers the people of Hongkong.

Ideally it should also work to monitor public opinion and influence government activities.