

Scmp 27 FEB 198x

Bid to boost expenses for district board members

By FRANK CHOI

Monthly allowances for district board members — and possibly future regional councillors — may be increased.

The move is to encourage more participation by the working class in the District Administration Scheme.

And it will compensate for the time and monetary loss by district board members who come from a low-income working group and need to spend most of their time working on district matters.

At present district board members get \$2,000 a month in allowances.

Speaking after a city forum in Victoria Park yesterday, the Principal Assistant Secretary for the City and New Territories Administration, Mr C.M. Leung, said Government officials concerned are now studying the issue and will probably come up with recommendations by

the middle of the year.

Mr Leung said his department is reviewing the present district boundaries and constituency boundaries to see whether there is a need for change.

He said revision is more likely for district boards in the New Territories where constituencies cover a large area while urban district board constituencies are likely to remain generally unchanged.

"The present one seat per constituency might not work in the urban area with the growth in population because a further split of constituencies would be impossible for the small ones.

"Therefore, it is likely that some constituencies will have more than one seat on the district boards with the proposed expansion," he added.

For the New Territories, Mr Leung said the constituencies of the future regional council may not be exactly

the same as those of the district boards but would have little variations in the boundaries.

At yesterday's forum, entitled "Should a regional council be set up in the New Territories," there was a heated debate among guest speakers representing different interest groups.

In principle, speakers had no objection to the setting up of a new body to oversee the management of services in the new towns and NT villages.

But the issue involved was whether the new body should take the form of an expanded Urban Council, or a new body, or to give more power to the district boards so they could take care of local services.

Mr Leung said the proposed new council is to fill in the gap in the present system in which there is no body to oversee management and co-ordination of work for serv-

ices in the New Territories.

With about three million people presently living in the New Territories, it is logical for the introduction of a new council to oversee services in the region, he added.

He said there should be no duplication in administration between the two regional councils and as for manpower, the NT council will be supported by the existing New Territories Services Department and the only new part to be set up is a secretariat for the council.

Urban Councillor Dr Denny Huang argued that the introduction of the new council is for political reasons rather than the need to separate the territory into north and south regions.

He said the expanded Urbco could have elected New Territories elements to join the present body so NT interests would be protected.

Former Heung Yee Kuk chairman, Mr Stephen Wong, said the New Territories had long been deprived of any say in regional services although the Government had collected rates totalling an estimated \$400 million from the region.

Therefore, the kuk had pledged full support to the proposed new council so that more New Territories elements could take part in regional management, he added.

A lecturer at the Chinese University, Mr Andrew Wong, said the expanded Urbco is theoretically and practically unsound because the council would then have similar jurisdiction as the central Government.

"If there are two central bodies in the Government, there is bound to be confusion over their authority," he said.

The chairman of Meeting Point, Mr Lau Nai-keung, said he is in favour of the NT regional council if the two-council set-up is temporary and would eventually be merged into one council.

Mr Lau also suggested joint council meetings in the future to avoid duplication and confusion in policy making and implementation.