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Assurance for districts

By DAPHNE CHENG

THE Acting Governor, Sir David Ford, yesterday assured district boards that adequate financial resources would continue to be allocated to them despite the Government's austerity measures.

Sir David yesterday acknowledged the importance of the territory's 19 district boards in reflecting public opinions on government policies.

He said funds for the district advisory bodies had been on the increase, even though the Government was trying to trim down its overall expenditure.

He pledged that the district boards' consultative role would not be downgraded in future.

Sir David made the assurance during a surprise

visit to a North District Board meeting yesterday.

He told the board members that the ranks of the officials deployed to head the district offices would not be downgraded.

However, Sir David noted that the Government was considering measures to better utilise resources in the City and New Territories Administration (CNTA), which oversees the district administration scheme, and reduce staff levels.

Other department officials would not attend all district board meetings but would be present only when required to answer questions raised by board members on matters within their jurisdiction, he added.

He noted that such an arrangement would also apply to the Executive Council.

Sir David stressed that

these measures would not affect the district boards' functions in the Government's three-tier advisory machinery.

Board chairman Mr Pang Hang-yin said his colleagues were concerned that the status of the district boards would be downgraded if government officials ceased to attend their meetings.

He also expressed fears that funds allocated to the district boards would be cut in future.

In reply, Sir David said the Government would not pay less attention to the boards.

He said he had received a preliminary report by the CNTA on a review of its establishment and one measure being examined was to reduce the department's strength.