

Section 1 – Introduction

Background

1.1 In accordance with section 21 of the Rural Representative Election Ordinance (Cap. 576) (“RREO”), after the ordinary election held in 2015, the Electoral Affairs Commission (“EAC”) made arrangements for the conduct of the eighth round of Rural By-election on 7 October 2018 to return seven Rural Representatives (“RRs”) for filling Resident Representative (“ReR”) vacancies and Indigenous Inhabitant Representative (“IIR”) vacancies in seven villages.

1.2 The Rural By-elections should normally be conducted twice a year in April/May and November/December unless there are special circumstances that warrant a departure from the scheduled time. The polling day of this By-election was brought forward to 7 October 2018 to avoid clashing with the nomination period of the 2019 Rural Ordinary Election (“ROE”) which commenced in November 2018. The reasons for conducting the By-election are set out in paragraph 1.3 below.

The Vacancies

1.3 After the conclusion of the seventh round of Rural By-election in May 2018, a total of seven RR vacancies, comprising two ReR seats arose in two Existing Villages (“EVs”) and five IIR seats arose in four Indigenous Villages (“IVs”) and one Composite Indigenous Village (“CIV”). These vacancies arose because the elected ReRs and IIRs had passed away.

1.4 Five Districts, namely North, Sai Kung, Yuen Long, Islands and Sha Tin, were involved in this By-election. A list showing the

details of the vacancies and dates on which the vacancies were declared in the Gazette notices is at **Appendix I**.

Section 2 – Appointments

Polling Day and Nomination Period

2.1 Pursuant to section 6 of the Electoral Procedure (Rural Representative Election) Regulation (Cap. 541L), the Director of Home Affairs (“DHA”) published a notice in the Gazette on 24 August 2018, appointing 7 October 2018 as the polling day of the By-election and specifying the period from 30 August 2018 to 12 September 2018, both days inclusive, as the nomination period. The By-election was held to return two ReRs to fill the vacancies in two EVs and five IIRs to fill the vacancies in four IVs and one CIV. A breakdown of the number of ReRs and IIRs to be returned by District is shown at **Appendix II**.

Appointment of Returning Officers, Assistant Returning Officers, Assistant Returning Officer (Ballot Paper Sorting Station) and Assistant Returning Officer (Legal)

2.2 In accordance with section 54 of the RREO, the EAC appointed four District Officers and one Assistant District Officer of the five District Offices concerned as the Returning Officers (“ROs”), six members of their staff as the Assistant Returning Officers (“AROs”) and a staff from the Home Affairs Department (“HAD”) Headquarters (“HQs”) as the ARO (Ballot Paper Sorting Station) (“BPSS”) to take charge of the operation of the BPSS. A Government Counsel was also appointed as the ARO (Legal). The appointment of ROs was published in the Gazette on 24 August 2018. A list of the ROs and AROs is shown at **Appendix III**.

Operational Manual for Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers

2.3 To enable all parties concerned to familiarise with the rules and operation of the By-election, HAD prepared and issued operational manuals to the ROs and AROs as well as the polling and counting staff for reference. As, by virtue of their previous experience and work knowledge, the ROs and AROs were familiar with the electoral arrangements, it was considered unnecessary to conduct a briefing by the EAC Chairman for them.

Section 3 – Publicity

3.1 Information on the By-election was published on the websites of the EAC, HAD and the Independent Commission Against Corruption (“ICAC”) throughout the election period for general reference of candidates, electors and members of the public. Press releases were also issued to publicise the major events of the By-election such as the nomination period and the polling day. These measures helped enhance the transparency of and public interest in the By-election.

3.2 Apart from the publicity measures mentioned in paragraph 3.1 above, HAD also placed advertisements on local newspapers to invite nominations for the By-election. Appeal letters were also issued to electors before the commencement of the nomination period to encourage the registered electors of the villages concerned to participate in the By-election.

Section 4 – Nomination of Candidates

The Nomination Period

4.1 The nomination period started on 30 August 2018 and ended on 12 September 2018. Candidates were required to hand in their nomination forms to the relevant ROs in person. At the close of the nomination period, the ROs had received a total of seven nominations.

Validly Nominated Candidates

Validity

4.2 After vetting the nominations, the relevant ROs determined that all the seven nominations (one for the ReR election and six for the IIR elections) were valid.

Uncontested elections

4.3 Having examined the nominations, the ROs declared that a candidate for the ReR election for Kwun Yam Shan and Kong Pui in the Sha Tin District, a candidate each for the IIR elections for Fan Tin San Yi Cho and Tai Wai in the Yuen Long District, a candidate for the IIR election for Tam Shui Hang in the North District and a candidate for the IIR election for Ho Chung in the Sai Kung District were elected uncontested as there was only one validly nominated candidate for each vacancy. There were in total five candidates returned uncontested in the By-election and their names were published in the Gazette on 21 September 2018.

Contested election

4.4 As the number of validly nominated candidates for Wong Ka Wai and Lung Tseng Tau, a CIV in the Islands District exceeded the number of IIR to be returned for the village, a poll was arranged to be held on 7 October 2018 for the village. The names and relevant particulars of the validly nominated candidates were published in the Gazette on 21 September 2018.

Election that failed

4.5 As for the ReR vacancy for Mok Ka in the Islands District, the RO concerned declared that the ReR election had failed as no nomination was received by the close of the nomination period. The notice of failure of election for this village was also published in the Gazette on 21 September 2018.

The Briefing for Candidates

4.6 For the contested election mentioned in paragraph 4.4 above, all the validly nominated candidates indicated that they would not attend the briefing session. So, the briefing session for candidates originally scheduled for 17 September 2018 was cancelled.

4.7 The RO for Wong Ka Wai and Lung Tseng Tau drew lots to allocate candidate numbers and designated spots for displaying election advertisements to the candidates at the Islands District Office on 14 September 2018.

Section 5 – Preparatory Work

Appointment and Training of Polling and Counting Staff

5.1 Staff of HAD were deployed as polling and counting staff for the By-election. A training session was held on 2 October 2018 for the staff who would perform polling and counting duties and operate the command centre on the polling day. It aimed at familiarising the staff concerned with the rules, operational procedures and their respective tasks.

Polling and Counting Station

5.2 HAD identified the Auxiliary Medical Service (“AMS”) Tung Chung Office as the polling-cum-counting station for the IIR election for Wong Ka Wai and Lung Tseng Tau in the Islands District.

Dedicated Polling Station

5.3 To enable registered electors of the contested village who were imprisoned or remanded by the Correctional Services Department (“CSD”) to cast their votes on the polling day, dedicated polling stations (“DPSs”) would be set up in the penal institutions for the By-election as needed. As advised by CSD on 6 October 2018, no registered elector of Wong Ka Wai and Lung Tseng Tau would be in their custody on the polling day. Hence, there was no need to set up DPS in any penal institutions.

5.4 Mei Tin Community Hall in the Sha Tin District was designated as the DPS for registered electors of the contested village who were remanded or detained by law enforcement agencies (“LEAs”) (other

than CSD) on the polling day to cast votes. Since the LEAs might arrest persons who happened to be registered electors of the contested village at any time on the polling day, the polling hours for this DPS were the same as those of an ordinary polling station, i.e. from 12:00 noon to 7:00 pm.

5.5 A notice of designation of the polling station, DPSs, BPSS and counting station was gazetted by the DHA on 21 September 2018.

Introduction to Candidates and Polling Notices to Electors

5.6 HAD produced the “Introduction to Candidates” to provide registered electors with information on the relevant personal particulars, election platform and photographs of the validly nominated candidates to enable electors to make an informed choice on the polling day.

5.7 On 21 September 2018, a polling notice, together with the relevant “Introduction to Candidates”, voting guide, location map of polling station and an ICAC leaflet, were sent to each of the electors of the contested village, notifying them of the polling date, polling hours and location of the polling station. A notice was also sent to each of the electors of the uncontested villages informing them that no poll would be conducted for their villages.

The Contingency Plan

5.8 To cope with any unforeseeable situations (e.g. inclement weather conditions, occurrence of public danger, etc.), in which the poll at the designated polling station could not be conducted as scheduled, HAD identified a venue for use as the alternative polling station. The designation of the alternative polling station was also gazetted by the DHA on 21 September 2018. The designated polling station, together

with the Mei Tin Community Hall, which was designated as a DPS, were also reserved for use on the fallback day on 14 October 2018. The arrangements in case of emergencies or inclement weather on the polling day were included in the Operational Manual for ROs and AROs and that for polling and counting staff for reference.

Section 6 – The Poll

Polling Date and Polling Hours

6.1 The poll was held on Sunday, 7 October 2018. According to the established arrangement for the RR election, the polling hours for the polling station at the contested village and the DPS at the Mei Tin Community Hall were from 12:00 noon to 7:00 pm.

Logistical Arrangements

6.2 The designated polling station and the DPS at the Mei Tin Community Hall operated as scheduled on the polling day. A Central Command Centre was set up at HAD HQs to oversee the operation of the polling and counting stations as well as the District Command Centre to co-ordinate the communication and dissemination of information for all parties concerned on the polling day.

6.3 In the office of the EAC Secretariat at the Harbour Centre, a Complaints Centre was set up to receive and handle complaints from members of the public throughout the polling hours.

6.4 There were also designated ICAC and Police officers on duty to attend to complaints on the polling day.

Voter Turnout Rates

6.5 The total number of registered electors of Wong Ka Wai and Lung Tseng Tau in respect of the IIR election was 45. A total of 42 IIR electors (i.e. 93.33%) cast their votes on the polling day. A breakdown of the turnout rates is shown at **Appendix IV**.

Section 7 – The Count

Counting Station and Ballot Paper Sorting Station

7.1 The polling station at the AMS Tung Chung Office was converted into counting station for counting of votes after the close of the poll. The counting station was supervised by the RO concerned.

7.2 To enhance the efficiency of counting, HAD made special arrangements in respect of the delivery of ballot papers for the DPS at the Mei Tin Community Hall as follows:

- (a) if no elector was to cast vote in the DPS at the Mei Tin Community Hall, the ballot box would be delivered to the BPSS. The ARO(BPSS) would open the empty ballot box from the DPS and inform the RO of the result and that no ballot paper would be delivered to the counting station; or
- (b) if elector(s) did cast vote(s) in the DPS at the Mei Tin Community Hall, the ballot box would be delivered direct to the counting station for counting of votes.

Counting Method

7.3 Manual counting was adopted in the By-election. Ballot papers were separated with reference to the candidate for whom the vote was recorded and placed into the relevant transparent plastic box, and then the valid ballot papers were counted.

Counting Arrangements

7.4 The conversion of the polling station at the AMS Tung Chung Office into counting station was completed at 7:15 pm. In accordance with the special arrangements stated in paragraph 7.2 above, since no vote was cast in the DPS at the Mei Tin Community Hall, the ARO(BPSS), after opening the ballot box from the DPS and confirming that no ballot paper was therein, informed the RO concerned of the result and that no ballot paper would be delivered from the Mei Tin Community Hall to the counting station. The ballot box of the polling station opened thereat was jointly emptied by Mr Justice Fung, the EAC Chairman, Mr Arthur Luk, EAC Member and the RO concerned. The count then commenced immediately.

7.5 Counting staff then sorted the ballot papers into different transparent plastic boxes according to the votes marked thereon, before starting the count of the number of votes obtained by each candidate. There was no invalid or questionable ballot paper identified during the sorting process.

Declaration of Result

7.6 The election result was declared at the counting station by the RO concerned after the completion of the count at 7:45 pm. The result of the contested election was promulgated in the Gazette notice on 12 October 2018.

7.7 The lists of successful and unsuccessful candidates (including those uncontested) are shown in **Appendices V(A) and (B)**.

EAC Visits

7.8 Mr Justice Fung, the EAC Chairman and Mr Arthur Luk, EAC Member visited the polling station at the AMS Tung Chung Office. They also observed the count at the same venue after the polling station was converted into counting station. They considered the polling and counting arrangements generally satisfactory.

Section 8 – The Complaints

Complaints-handling Period

8.1 The complaints-handling period started on 30 August 2018 (i.e. commencement of the nomination period), and ended on 21 November 2018 (i.e. 45 days after the polling day on 7 October 2018).

Complaints-handling Parties

8.2 The parties involved in the handling of complaints relating to the By-election included the EAC, the ROs, Police, ICAC and, on the polling day, the Presiding Officers (“PROs”) as well. The EAC, supported by the EAC Secretariat, would deal with cases that were within its jurisdiction and not covered by any statutory provisions involving criminal sanction.

8.3 The EAC Secretariat assumed the role of co-ordinator for collating the complaint-related statistical information from other parties and compiling a consolidated return for submission to the EAC on a weekly basis during the complaints-handling period.

Number and Nature of Complaints

8.4 By the end of the complaints-handling period on 21 November 2018, no complaint had been received by any of the complaints-handling parties.

Section 9 – Review and Recommendation

9.1 After reviewing the electoral procedures and arrangements made for the By-election, the EAC considers that the polling and counting was conducted smoothly and satisfactorily.

9.2 The polling-cum-counting station for the only contested village in this By-election was set up at the AMS Tung Chung Office. The EAC notes that the venue is easily accessible. Although there are a few steps at the entrance of the polling station, it was turned into a barrier-free venue with the aid of a temporary ramp. Besides, polling staff were deployed at the entrance to offer assistance to electors with walking difficulties or using wheelchairs. The EAC considers the overall arrangement satisfactory and recommends that same arrangement should be made to similar venues in the upcoming 2019 ROE. It is anticipated that about 93% of the polling stations in the ROE, including 63% with temporary ramps, will be accessible to electors with mobility difficulties.

Section 10 – Acknowledgement

10.1 The EAC wishes to extend its gratitude to HAD, particularly those serving as ROs, AROs, PROs, polling and counting staff for their part in validating nominations, making the necessary preparations for the By-election and conducting the poll and count on the polling day. The EAC is thankful to the various government departments for rendering valuable assistance throughout the By-election, including the Registration and Electoral Office which was responsible for drafting this report, preparing the EAC visit programme and co-ordinating the handling of complaints for the By-election. The EAC would like to thank CSD, Police and other LEAs for their assistance provided to HAD in making necessary arrangements for the operation of the DPSs. The EAC is also grateful to the police officers who conscientiously performed their duties in maintaining law and order in the By-election.

10.2 The EAC would also like to express its appreciation to the electors who turned up to cast their votes at the polling station and all those who complied with the electoral legislations and guidelines.

Section 11 – The Way Ahead

11.1 HAD is planning the ROE scheduled for January 2019 to return 789 IIRs and 695 ReRs for 709 Villages and 56 Kaifong Representatives for two Market Towns in Cheung Chau and Peng Chau.

11.2 The EAC would like to recommend that this report be made public, at a time when the Chief Executive thinks appropriate, to uphold the principle of transparency.