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(Draft)

Public Consultation Paper on

**Radio Television Hong Kong
Pilot Project for
Community Broadcasting Involvement Services**

Radio Television Hong Kong

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Background	Pg. 3-4
Chapter 2: Our Nine Questions	Pg. 5-11
2.3-4	Public Purposes of Community Broadcasting Involvement Services (CBIS)
2.5-6	Service Targets of CBIS
2.7-8	Programme Themes and Production Cycle
2.9-10	Chinese and Non-Chinese Language Services
2.11	Eligibility Criteria for Community Broadcasting (CB) Producers
2.12-15	Relationship between RTHK and CB Producers
2.16-20	Facilitation and Support by RTHK
2.21-22	Community Broadcasting Involvement Fund (CBIF)
2.23-25	Selection Criteria and Process of CBIS and CBIF
Chapter 3: Consultation and the Way Forward	Pg. 12

Chapter One

Background

1.1 In October 2009, the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB) published the consultation paper on “The New Radio Television Hong Kong: Fulfilling its Mission as a Public Service Broadcaster”. In Chapter 7 of the consultation paper, CEDB suggested that community involvement broadcasting should be one of the new programming opportunities taken up by Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK).

1.2 According to the consultation paper, there are strong calls from some sectors of the community for opening up the airwaves for community and public access broadcasting. The consultation paper explains that there is a lack of sufficient frequency spectrum to support low-cost reception; and that stand-alone community broadcasting services requires substantial financial and human resources which may pose difficulties for smaller community groups to participate.

1.3 Having considered the above, CEDB proposed that RTHK should be tasked to devote part of its airtime and resources within the development of its digital services to provide a platform for community participation in broadcasting.¹ As a pilot, RTHK would administer a Community Broadcasting Involvement Fund (CBIF) to encourage community organizations to bid for resources for producing television and radio programmes, and would arrange to broadcast these contents on RTHK’s channels.²

1.4 The report of the consultation was published in April 2010. The report concluded that members of the public were in general positive of the proposals of encouraging public participation in broadcasting and the establishment of CBIF.³ These proposals were later incorporated in the RTHK Charter⁴ which was published in August 2010.

1 Para. 7.7, “Public Consultation Paper on the New Radio Television Hong Kong: Fulfilling its Mission as a Public Service Broadcaster”, Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, October 2009

2 Para. 7.8, “Public Consultation Paper on the New Radio Television Hong Kong: Fulfilling its Mission as a Public Service Broadcaster”, Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, October 2009

3 Para. 4.19, “Consultation report on the future operation of the Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) and the new RTHK Charter”, Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, April 2010

4 “Charter of Radio Television Hong Kong”, http://rthk.hk/about/pdf/charter_eng.pdf

1.5 In order to launch the brand new Community Broadcasting Involvement Services (CBIS), RTHK has held rounds of internal discussions with staff. We propose that, as a pilot, radio programme production should be the first testing ground given its lower technological threshold for public involvement. With the advent of Digital Audio Broadcasting, RTHK should also be able to allocate some airtime for community radio production without affecting the services our audience currently enjoys.

1.6 We have also held several focus groups with community leaders and panel discussion with RTHK programme advisors on the framework of CBIS. We have taken into account views gathered in these discussions as well as the production capacity of RTHK in preparing the proposed CBIS set out in this consultation paper.

1.7 In Chapter 2, we would like to open a dialogue with you by laying out our initial views and asking for your response in order to formulate our plan for CBIS. To take forward CBIS, we need your frank comments and creative ideas.

Chapter Two

Our Nine Questions

2.1 To be funded by the Community Broadcasting Involvement Fund (CBIF), Community Broadcasting Involvement Service (CBIS) will be a three-year pilot project administered by RTHK, with radio programme production as the first testing ground.

2.2 This is an avant-garde concept as our audience may, through this scheme, become community broadcasting producers (CB producers) to provide programmes on RTHK platform. We believe it is prudent to build up CBIS in phases so that we can adjust our capacity in tandem with public demand. We also need to hear the views from the community in the following nine important areas so that CBIS can meet the needs and expectation of our community.

Public Purposes of Community Broadcasting Involvement Services

2.3 Hong Kong is an open society where different forms of mainstream media thrive, providing a variety of platforms for different quarters of the community to express their views freely. In recent years, the internet has developed into yet another media for exchange of views in the cyber world, i.e. internet radios, discussion forums and social networks, etc.

2.4 We believe that the objectives of CBIS should not be confined to merely providing one more platform for the expression of opinions, but should embrace the promotion of a wider range of **social gains**⁵ to the community, notably,-

- (a) plurality, diversity and social inclusion;
- (b) mutual respect, social empathy and civic mindedness;
- (c) creativity, uniqueness and talent nurturing, and

⁵ In relation to a community radio service, “social gain” means the achievement, in respect of individuals or groups of individuals in the community that the service is intended to serve, or in respect of other members of the public, of the following objectives – (a) the provision of sound broadcasting services to individuals who are otherwise underserved by such services, (b) the facilitation of discussion and the expression of opinion, (c) the provision (whether by means of programmes included in the service or otherwise) of education or training to individuals not employed by the person providing the service, and (d) the better understanding of the particular community and the strengthening of links within it.

<http://licensing.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/radio/community/thirdround/notesofguidance.pdf>

(d) community involvement.

Question One: What do you think about our proposed public purposes for CBIS?

Service Targets of CBIS

2.5 One of the major characteristics of CBIS is that we are not just targeting the society at large as our audience but also various communities within the society who are interested in the work and fun of broadcasting. Therefore, we define service targets of CBIS as “communities” or groups of people who share common interests and aspirations, values and cultures, geographical vicinity and closeness, etc. For those communities who aspire to become CB producers, they must be able to organize themselves and put their heads together to create a programme idea. They should have a clear objective and a well defined target audience. They should be able to work together to create a programme for broadcast eventually.

2.6 As for the audience of CBIS, we expect them to be supportive and open up their ears and hearts to appreciate the works of the CB producers. Some programmes might be for mainstream but we envisage the majority of programmes should be dedicated to a niche audience. Some could be up to professional broadcasting standards but most of them would be amateurish. CBIS audience are encouraged to embrace not only what they listen to but also appreciate why and how these programme are created.

Question Two: What do you think about our proposed service targets?

Programme Themes and Production Cycle

2.7 Within the three-year period for the pilot, we propose that there should be four programme quarters each year. Each community group will produce a one-hour weekly programme for 13 consecutive weeks. “One-hour weekly” is a common programming strategy in the radio broadcasting scene and hence is proposed for adoption in the provision of CBIS. In order to accommodate more groups to participate in community broadcasting during the three-year period, we recommend reshuffling of programme every quarter.

2.8 Considering that the scope of the CBIS is rather broad, we need to identify a wide range of topics and keep changing them each quarter in order to encompass community groups with various interests. At this stage, our initial proposed categories include education; art and culture; social services; ethnic minorities; politics and current affairs; economy and finance; district affairs; health; environment; religion and philosophy; and science and technology.

Question Three: What do you think about our proposed production cycle and programme themes?

Chinese and Non-Chinese Language Services

2.9 In order to encompass the entire community, there will be two production branches under CBIS, namely the Chinese Language Service (CLS) and the Non-Chinese Language Service (NCLS). Chinese will be the working language used between RTHK and the CB producers for the CLS and English for the NCLS. While we expect that the language of the programme output will usually be congruent with the production branch, cross-cultural and multi-lingual programme proposals are highly encouraged to promote social inclusion and cultural understanding.

2.10 While Cantonese is the most common medium used among Chinese speaking population in Hong Kong, we foresee a more diverse language environment and needs among non-Chinese speakers here. Allocation of resources between the two production branches should be weighed prudently.

Question Four: What should be the proportion of programme hours allocated between the Chinese Language Service and the Non-Chinese Language Service?

Eligibility Criteria for Community Producers

2.11 The spirit of CBIS is the involvement of communities who are keen on producing programmes by themselves. We are not looking for people of technical expertise in broadcasting. We are looking for communities who are keen and able to deliver their message through broadcasting. This will be the first time RTHK engages communities from all corners of the society to produce programmes. We

envisage overwhelming response. Given capacity constraints, we will accord priority to applications from registered groups⁶ as a start to ensure smooth operation for all parties involved.

Question Five: What do you think about our proposed eligibility of community broadcasting producers?

Relationship between RTHK and Community Broadcasting Producers

2.12 Without active participation of the CB producers, CBIS would become just another RTHK production department and the programmes will be no different from our own output. In short, CB producers must be able to produce programmes independently. RTHK will be the facilitator in CBIS.

2.13 CB producers, once their applications are accepted, will enter into contractual agreement with RTHK. Duties and liabilities of both parties will be clearly stipulated in the document.

2.14 With the advent of technology, creative radio programmes ideas can be delivered in a simple way and require only basic audio production skills. RTHK will provide orientation and advice during the production process.

2.15 Since different community groups will have different levels of technical skills and organizing ability, we recommend that proposals on recorded programmes should have priority. CB producers should plan for enough time to prepare and produce their programmes to their expectations before they are put on air. Proposals on live broadcast will only be considered if there is an actual need in programme design and proven record of technical ability.

Question Six: What do you think about our proposed relationship between the CB producers and RTHK?

⁶ Registered groups may include:

- (a) organisations registered under the Companies Ordinance,
- (b) organisations registered under the Society Ordinance,
- (c) charitable institutions exempted from tax under section 88 of the Inland Revenue Ordinance, and
- (d) members of umbrella organizations of the above.

Facilitation and Support by RTHK

2.16 As a broadcasting service which emphasizes community involvement, it is important that we can, through this scheme, identify community groups who can add value to our normal programming and social gain with their own productions. We value creative and unique ideas from the community – perspectives we would not have thought of, information we are ignorant about and most importantly, the network and people only community groups have direct access to. That means we are not looking for sophisticated production skills but **content**.

2.17 Having said that, we do understand the concerns of the community groups in the following two aspects.

Technical Facilities and Standards

2.18 With the financial assistance of CBIF, successful applicants should be able to find studios and other technical facilities they need during the production process. RTHK will, upon requests by the CB producers, offer advice and assistance of sources of such facilities. For all participating CB producers, an orientation of basic technical requirements will also be offered to ensure that their productions meet the minimum technical standard for broadcast.

Editorial Autonomy and Compliance

2.19 Community groups applying to be producers for CBIS have to go through a selection process and will enter into contractual agreement with RTHK stipulating the programme purpose, content outline, production format, etc. All CBIS participants are expected to produce programme content as approved by the Selection Panel. RTHK will not be involved in editorial matters of CBIS programmes unless upon the request of the CB producers or a non-compliance issue has arisen.

2.20 Before starting the production process, a mandatory orientation on codes and practice of broadcasting, relevant legal and copyright requirements and values of Public Service Broadcasting will be held for all participating CB producers.

Question Seven: What do you think about the facilitation and support proposed by RTHK?

Community Broadcasting Involvement Fund

2.21 RTHK has been tasked to administer CBIF. We propose that the funding by CBIF should be used to defray reasonable actual expenses incurred for the programme production. To ensure proper use of public funds, CBIF recipients will have to submit budgets, entering into a funding agreement for the approved budget, and submit audited financial statements.

2.22 With HK\$45,000,000 earmarked by the government for this three-year pilot project, we have given further consideration to the funding amounts and propose that –

- (a) the funding support for both technical and labour costs should be subject to a ceiling rate of HK\$15,000 per one-hour episode, and
- (b) while technical costs can be estimated on the basis of actual usage, it is difficult to assess objectively the appropriate remuneration for manpower involved in the production such as producers, presenters, scriptwriters, researchers, etc. As CBIS is not a commercial procurement exercise and voluntarism is its core spirit, we consider that a standardized payment in the form of honorarium per person for manpower input with a limited quota of participants on each episode should be adopted.

Question Eight: What do you think about the funding arrangement proposed by RTHK?

Selection criteria and process of CBIS and CBIF

2.23 A Vetting Committee will be set up to advise the Director of Broadcasting, who will be the Controlling Officer of the CBIF, on the selection of participants, allocation of airtime and CBIF funding if applicable.

2.24 According to our previous experience in programme commissioning, we recommend that programme ideas and content to be the primary concern of allocating airtime for a particular programme proposal. While professional technical capability is not a must, applicants need to demonstrate keenness and commitment to finish their

programme independently. While financial support may be granted by CBIF, community groups will have to organize themselves and secure the necessary technical assistance with CBIF funding.

2.25 A vetting panel, to be drawn from members of the Vetting Committee will be formed to consider a batch of applications for each programme quarter. Membership for the Vetting Panel will be changed every quarter to ensure fairness. The Vetting Panels will be tasked not only to reflect public views but to ensure proper management of public funds in pursuing the objectives of the CBIS including the examination of the budgets proposed by the community groups.

Question Nine: What do you think about our suggestions on the selection criteria and process?

Chapter Three

Consultation and the Way Forward

3.1 Comparing with community channels elsewhere in the world where communities bid for an independent license and frequency spectrum to run their own programmes, the proposed Community Broadcasting Involvement Service (CBIS) enables community groups lacking financial and technical resources to try their hands on producing radio programmes. The threshold for participation is therefore much lower such that a maximum number of our citizens can avail themselves to the experience of CBIS. Administered by RTHK as a public service broadcaster, we position this new broadcasting service as a community outreach project. We expect new talents to be found, new stories to be discovered and a new form of public engagement to be evolved within the communities and with RTHK via participation in broadcasting.

Ways of providing views and comments

Please send us your views by mail, facsimile or email on or before **(date)**.

- (a) Address:
- (b) Fax number:
- (c) E-mail address:

3.2 It is voluntary for members of the public to supply their personal data upon providing views on this consultation document. The submissions and personal data collected may be transferred to the relevant Government bureaux and departments for purposes directly related to this consultation exercise. The Government bureaux and departments receiving the data may only use the data for such purposes.

3.3 The names and views of individuals and organizations who/which put forth submissions in response to this consultation document (“senders”) may be published for public viewing.

3.4 To safeguard senders’ data privacy, we will remove senders’ relevant data, such as residential/return addresses, email addresses, identity card numbers, telephone numbers, facsimile numbers and signatures, where provided, when publishing their submissions.

3.5 We will respect the wish of senders to remain anonymous and/or keep the views confidential in part or in whole. If the senders request anonymity in the submissions, their names will be removed when publishing their views. If the senders request confidentiality, their submissions will not be published.

3.6 If the senders do not request anonymity or confidentiality in the submissions, it will be assumed that the senders can be named and the views can be published in their entirety.

RTHK
[Date]