

## **SPORTS COMMISSION**

### **Hong Kong Football Association Five-Year Strategic Plan – Mid-term Review**

#### **PURPOSE**

The paper informs Members of the findings and recommendations of the Mid-term Review of the Hong Kong Football Association (HKFA) Five-Year Strategic Plan (Five-Year Plan).

#### **BACKGROUND**

2. In October 2011, the Sports Commission endorsed a proposal to earmark \$20 million annually from 2011-12 to 2013-14 to the HKFA to implement the recommendations in the Project Phoenix report. During the three-year period, a total of \$55.45 million was allocated to the HKFA. In reviewing the Project Phoenix in May 2014, the Football Task Force (FTF) considered that the HKFA had made reasonable progress in implementing the changes as recommended in the Project Phoenix report and taken positive steps towards the further development of local football. The membership list of the FTF is at **Annex I**.

3. Following the Project Phoenix, the HKFA presented the Five-Year Plan as a logical and progressive way forward for further development of football, based on the groundwork laid under the Project Phoenix. An executive summary of the strategic plan is at **Annex II**. The FTF considered that the Five-Year Plan is a comprehensive plan covering all age groups with a view to nurturing local footballers with talents to improve the quality of the sport locally and raising our performance in playing football. To enable the HKFA to deliver the Five-Year Plan, its administrative and technical capability developed under the Project Phoenix should be retained. In this connection, the FTF suggested that, upon the completion of the Project Phoenix, the Government should continue to provide time-limited funding for the HKFA's engagement of key management and technical staff to implement the Five-Year Plan. The FTF suggested the inclusion of performance

indicators and quantifiable targets directly relating to the initiatives in the Five-Year Plan in the funding agreement with the HKFA. The FTF's suggestion was subsequently endorsed by the Sports Commission by circulation on 19 September 2014.

4. Having considered the views of the FTF and the Sports Commission, the Government entered into a five-year funding agreement with the HKFA in which it was stipulated that the Government would allocate a maximum of \$25 million annually to the HKFA for the implementation of the Five-Year Plan for a time-limited period of five years, from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2020. A summary of the performance indicators and targets is set out at **Annex III**.

## **REVIEW OUTCOME OF THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN**

5. In accordance with the requirements in the funding agreement, the FTF conducted a mid-term review in the second half of 2017. Apart from reviewing the report submitted by the HKFA, the FTF and its Secretariat had collected views of the stakeholders through the following channels –

- (a) meeting with members of the HKFA Board, subvented staff and representatives of football clubs and teams;
- (b) setting up of four focus groups comprising coaches, players, fans and media/commentators respectively to gain some insights on their views on the performance of the HKFA and the state of development of football in Hong Kong; and
- (c) sending out questionnaires to people in the football community, including coaches, referees, administrators and players at all levels to collect their views on matters covered by the Five-Year Plan.

The review findings indicate that the performance of the HKFA in various areas has improved but the FTF expresses concerns about the performance of the HKFA in certain areas. The conclusions of the mid-term review report are summarised in the ensuing paragraphs.

### ***Performance in achieving Indicators and Targets***

6. The FTF has examined the performance of the HKFA in achieving various indicators and targets. As at 30 September 2017, the HKFA commenced work on over half of the targeted items under the Five-Year Plan, though some of the interim performance indicators could not be met (see below). The HKFA is confident that it would complete most of the work in relation to the targets and achieve the performance indicators by the end of the five-year period. A summary of the HKFA's achievements of the targets and performance indicators and its work progress (as at 30 September 2017) is at **Annex IV**.

### ***Governance and Organisational Development***

7. The HKFA's performance in governance and management meets the interim indicators. In 2015, the HKFA increased the number of independent members in its Board of Directors by adding five independent directors so as to enhance its internal integrity management, monitor its operation and increase transparency. Regarding the organisational development, the HKFA has kept various posts created under the Project Phoenix, including the Head of Corporate Governance, the Financial Controller and the Human Resources Manager. It has also increased the number of staff in the Marketing and Communications Department under the Five-Year Plan to cope with the increasing workload in public relations and with the social media. In 2015, the HKFA was awarded the Developing Member Association of the Year Award by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) in recognition and acknowledgement of its professional governance and the efforts made in promoting local football development.

### ***Football Development***

8. The HKFA's performance in the promotion of grassroots and youth football, girls and women's football and futsal programmes was impressive. The numbers of participants in these programmes all exceeded the interim performance indicators. The FTF agrees that the HKFA has taken active steps in the development in the above areas and the FTF well recognizes HKFA's efforts.

## Grassroots and Youth Football

9. The number of participants in youth football increased from 11 180 in September 2015 to 15 931 in September 2017, representing an increase of over 40%. The HKFA has made vigorous efforts to promote grassroots and youth football through the Jockey Club Youth Football Development Programme and it lowered the age of participants to below six, thus laying a solid foundation for the overall promotion and development of football in Hong Kong.

## Girls and Women's Football

10. The HKFA has been actively promoting women's football in the community. Measures taken include youth development projects, district selection and training, promotion in schools and formation of five representative teams for young women to provide steady development for senior squads. Concurrently, the number of participants in the women's football programme increased substantially from 1 818 to 3 140, representing an increase of over 70%. The HKFA has achieved the performance indicator of 3 000 participants, i.e. the ultimate target of the Five-Year Plan, ahead of the schedule.

## Futsal

11. In 2013, the HKFA launched programmes to arouse students' interest in futsal, mainly through organising of training courses, fun days and competitions at schools. The number of teams participating in the Futsal League increased from 11 in the 2016/17 season to 17 in the 2017/18 season. As at September 2017, the number of participants exceeded 19 000. The HKFA has achieved the performance indicator of 15 000 participants, i.e. the ultimate target of the Five-Year Plan, ahead of the schedule.

## ***Football Curriculum***

12. One of the key targets of the Five-Year Plan is to develop a Hong Kong Football Curriculum to steer and uniform the style of play in Hong Kong football from the grassroots up to the elite level and to provide coaches

with a framework and the tools to nurturing better players. The HKFA compiled the curriculum in 2015 and had been updating it from time to time. The curriculum has also been incorporated into the coach education training.

### ***Coach Development***

13. The HKFA spared no efforts in training coaches. Since the establishment of the coach registration system in 2014-15, the HKFA has been actively organising training courses for coaches at various levels. Apart from theory courses and practice sessions, training through lesson plans via the electronic platform, seminars and briefings had been provided to encourage coaches and help strengthen their ability to attain more advanced qualifications. Although the HKFA was unable to achieve the performance target in relation to the number of coaches by September 2017, it was close to meeting the interim performance indicators in terms of the number of coaches with an AFC “C” Licence and the HKFA “D” Licence as stated in the progress report published in March 2018.

### ***Referee Development***

14. Since its establishment in 2013, the Referees Department of the HKFA has been actively increasing the number of qualified referees at various levels and improving their standard of refereeing. At present, there are already seven FIFA referees and six referees with the AFC Elite Referee Instructor qualification. Besides, the number of newly joined referees has far exceeded the target. This shows that the HKFA has actively attracted newcomers to receive training so as to provide quality refereeing for football matches.

### ***Football Facilities***

15. To increase the football training venues, the HKFA commenced construction of a football training centre at Tseung Kwan O in 2016, which would provide three standard-sized natural turf pitches, three standard-sized artificial turf pitches, a hard-surfaced futsal pitch and related auxiliary facilities. Apart from providing training venue for Hong Kong representative teams, the HKFA can use the venue for implementing various development plans and community football activities. The football training

centre is expected to be in operation in the third quarter of this year.

## **AREAS OF CONCERNS**

16. As noted from the above, while the HKFA has made good progress in some major areas at the mid-term stage of the Five-Year Plan, the FTF considers that there are still some areas of concerns requiring the HKFA's further attention.

### ***Performance of Hong Kong Representative Teams***

17. At the qualifying round for the World Cup in 2015-16, the Hong Kong Men's representative team won 4 matches, drew 2 matches and lost 2 matches (playing 8 matches in total), finishing third in the Group. At the qualifying round for the 2017 Asian Cup, the men's team won 1 match, drew 2 matches and lost 3 matches (playing 6 matches in total), also finishing third in the Group. The men's team made great efforts till the end despite being unable to advance to the next round in both qualifiers. As regards the ranking of the Hong Kong men's and women's teams, there was no significant progress in the past three years. Until now, there has not been any indication that their rankings would reach the FIFA and AFC ranking targets of the Five-Year Plan by March 2020, i.e. the ranking of 130 and 15 respectively for the men's team and the ranking of 50 and 10 respectively for the women's team. The HKFA advised that the Hong Kong teams had made improvements in the preparation of and training for competition, but it would take time to reach the target rankings. The rankings of men's and women's senior teams are set out as follows –

	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>Target position by March 2020</b>
Men's senior FIFA ranking	156	137	139	144	130
Men's senior AFC ranking	29	20	23	28	15
Women's senior FIFA ranking	67	74	67	68	50
Women's senior AFC ranking	12	15	13	14	10

18. Given the considerable public funding invested in football development, there is growing public expectation to see better performances on the pitch by the Hong Kong representative teams. The FTF suggests the HKFA to review the reasons for not being able to help advance the performance of the Hong Kong representative teams as well as provide an assessment on ways to improve the performance of the Hong Kong senior representative teams for the next two years. The FTF also recommends that the HKFA should closely track and benchmark the performance of the Hong Kong junior representative teams to provide some indication of the future performance of the Hong Kong senior teams in the longer term.

### ***Hong Kong Premier League***

19. One of the strategic objectives of the Five-Year Plan is to enhance the Hong Kong Premier League (HKPL) through the new Club Licence System. These licence requirements are intended to enhance the governance, management, operation and professional standards of football clubs so as to develop professional football. The FTF finds that a number of existing clubs have failed to comply with the HKPL licence requirements after four seasons since the HKPL's establishment. In the interest of the long-term development of the HKPL, the FTF recommends that the HKFA should review the Club Licence System and take proactive measures in assisting the club's development to achieve full compliance with the HKPL requirements.

20. In the past three seasons, the average attendance per HKPL match was 1 019 in 2015/16, 919 in 2016/17 and 954 in 2017/18 respectively. In the first half of 2017/18 season, the average attendance increased by 28% to 1 213 as compared to the preceding six months, although it still fell short of the interim target attendance of 1 500 by 19%. Thus, the FTF recommends that the HKFA should review the effectiveness of its marketing strategy and identify ways that would boost the interests by members of the public in the HKPL. The FTF also suggests the Leisure and Cultural Services Department to discuss with the host teams of HKPL matches on measures to enhance match day experience.

21. We note that some individual HKPL clubs have performed well in local matches in recent years and could be directly qualified for the group stage matches of the AFC Champions League. However, some clubs have withdrawn from the HKPL or are reluctant to be promoted from the First Division to the HKPL. The FTF expresses concern about the sustainable development of the HKPL and recommends that the HKFA takes measures to enhance the attractiveness of the HKPL.

### ***Communication and relationship with Stakeholders***

22. The FTF considers that the HKFA should enhance its communications and build up a closer relationship with stakeholders under the Five-Year Plan. For example, the lack of stakeholders' participation in the formulation of the football curriculum made it difficult for the HKFA to secure full support from clubs, coaches and players when the football theory was introduced and delivered in the training. Grievances from clubs and relevant parties were noted when the HKFA introduced the new play format in the youth league. Also, many stakeholders were not aware of the progress made by the HKFA under the Five-Year Plan and therefore their perceptions might not match with the HKFA's actual performance. In this regard, the FTF recommends that the HKFA should review its public relations strategies and enhance its relationship and communication with stakeholders and organisations (including the media) to build consensus and secure their support for its work and new initiatives.

### ***Reliance on public funding***

23. The funding commitment under the Five-Year Plan is time-limited for a five-year period from April 2015 to March 2020. When supporting the Five-Year Plan in 2015, the FTF suggested that the HKFA should consider prioritising its initiatives to maximise the use of the resources available, with a particular focus on the initiatives that would have a greater impact on attracting more public and commercial interest in football. However, the FTF has yet to notice any increase in the income of the HKFA from sponsorship, advertising and the sale of broadcasting right since the implementation of the Five-Year Plan. The FTF therefore recommends the



HKFA to step up its efforts in generating commercial revenue and set appropriate targets for the remaining period of the Five-Year Plan.

### **WAY FORWARD**

24. Based on the above analysis, we consider that the HKFA has indeed achieved certain progress at this mid-way stage, including the increase in the participation of women and youth in football activities, improvements in the administration and organisational structure, and enhancement in coaches and referees training. That said, further efforts should be made in the development of professional football, promotion of football performance and enhancing the communication with stakeholders. We have conveyed our views to the HKFA and requested it to submit a written response to the FTF on its proposed follow-up actions to improve the situations in the coming two years.

### **ADVICE SOUGHT**

25. Members are invited to note the content of this paper and comment on the way forward for the development of football in Hong Kong.

**Sports Commission Secretariat  
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