

## LCQ2: The overloaded public healthcare system

Following is a question by the Hon Wilson Or and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (February 20):

Question:

It is learnt that the public healthcare system has been overloaded for a long period of time, resulting in deterioration in the quality of healthcare services and healthcare workers being overstretched. During the recent influenza surge in Hong Kong, the number of medical inpatients in public acute hospitals exceeded the number of medical inpatient beds by 10 per cent in total and even by 20 per cent in respect of the two acute hospitals in the Kowloon East Cluster. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the new measures put in place to tackle influenza outbreaks so as to alleviate the overcrowding situation in public hospitals and shorten the waiting time of patients, as well as to lower the death rates arising from influenza-related complications;

(2) whether it knows if the Hospital Authority (HA) has taken targeted measures to solve the overcrowding problem in the acute hospitals in the Kowloon East Cluster; if HA has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it has formulated long-term plans and measures (e.g. enhancing the medical public-private partnership programmes and allocating resources to provide additional beds and healthcare manpower in public hospitals) to alleviate the pressure on the public healthcare system and to enhance both the quality and quantity of public healthcare services?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Wilson Or is as follows:

(1) The Hospital Authority (HA) has formulated a series of measures to enhance service capacity, increase manpower and expedite the turnover of hospital beds to meet the service demand during the winter surge in 2018-19.

To enhance service capacity, the HA opened 574 regular beds under its Annual Plan 2018-19, and will open time-limited beds and ad hoc beds in response to the increased service demand. To provide additional manpower,

the HA launched the Locum Recruitment Website in November 2018 to enhance the flexibility and efficiency of recruitment, with a view to attracting more healthcare professionals to provide part-time services in public hospitals. The HA also implemented additional relief measures, including increasing the rate of the Special Honorarium Scheme (SHS) allowance by 10 per cent, to address the manpower shortage during the period from January 28 to April 30, 2019.

To expedite the handling of cases and shorten the waiting time of patients, the HA provides rapid flu test for patients with influenza symptoms seven days a week and provide test results within 24 hours so as to expedite patient management decisions. Moreover, extra healthcare staff have been recruited through the Accident & Emergency (A&E) Support Session Programme to handle semi-urgent and non-urgent cases categorised under the A&E Triage System. Different clusters have also set up discharge lounges for centralised management of patients who are suitable for discharge to complete the procedures and wait for non-emergency ambulance transfer service, so that more beds can be vacated as soon as possible for admission of other patients. The HA has also collaborated with various government departments and external parties, including transferring suitable patients to private hospitals with low-cost hospital beds for completion of treatment.

(2) The Kowloon East Cluster (KEC) of HA has implemented a series of measures to enhance service capacity during the winter surge, including opening 126 regular beds under its Annual Plan 2018-19 and 2 750 service quotas of General Outpatient Clinics, as well as providing extra clerical and supporting staff by extending the SHS so as to allow healthcare staff to focus more on clinical work. The KEC has also been actively recruiting part-time and temporary healthcare staff to cope with the additional demand during the winter surge period.

In addition, discharge lounge in the KEC has undergone renovation in 2018/19 to expand the space and increase service capacity. The scope of discharge lounge service has extended from medicine to surgery and orthopaedics departments, and the service hours have also been extended to Saturdays and public holidays.

The HA is implementing the First Ten-year Hospital Development Plan (HDP), which includes the expansion of United Christian Hospital and Haven of Hope Hospital in the KEC. It is anticipated that the KEC could better cope with the demand for public hospital services upon the completion of the HDP and recruitment of the necessary additional manpower.

(3) To increase healthcare manpower, the Government will, in the 2019/20 to 2021/22 University Grants Committee triennium, further increase the number of healthcare-related publicly funded first-degree intake places by over 150 each year in order to alleviate the shortage of healthcare professionals. The Government has also been closely liaising with the HA to formulate other short, medium and long term measures, including hiring full-time and part-time healthcare professionals and agency nurses, rehiring suitable retired healthcare staff, increasing the number of Resident Trainee posts and hiring

of non-locally trained doctors to work in public hospitals under limited registration. The Government will continue to provide the HA with sufficient and appropriate resources to attract and retain staff.

As regards healthcare facilities, the Government has earmarked a dedicated provision of \$200 billion for the implementation of various hospital development projects in the next ten years. Over 5 000 additional public hospital beds will be provided under the First Ten-year HDP. The Government has also invited the HA to commence planning for the Second Ten-year HDP, which will involve about \$270 billion. Upon the completion of the Second Ten-year HDP, there would be over 9 000 additional beds and other healthcare facilities that would more or less meet the projected service demand up to 2036.

The HA has also introduced a number of public-private partnership (PPP) programmes in recent years to offer more choices of healthcare services to patients. The HA will continue to utilise the investment returns of the Hospital Authority Public-Private Partnership Fund to implement various PPP programmes. The HA will also continue to communicate with the public and patient groups and work closely with stakeholders in exploring the feasibility of introducing other PPP initiatives to meet the public's demand for healthcare services, and enhance the overall quality of healthcare services in the community.

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## LCQ4: Medical and nursing manpower in the public healthcare system

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Helena Wong and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (February 20):

Question:

In recent years, the shortage of medical and nursing manpower in the public healthcare system has been acute. According to the projection in the Report of Strategic Review on Healthcare Manpower Planning and Professional Development of 2017, there will be shortfalls of over 1 000 doctors and 1 600 nurses in Hong Kong by 2030. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will consider permitting doctors who have graduated from recognised medical schools in Commonwealth countries to come to Hong Kong, without going through examinations and internship, to practise in public hospitals, so as to increase the manpower of doctors in the public healthcare system; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it knows if the Hospital Authority (HA) will transfer the senior management work currently undertaken by staff members from the medical and nursing grades to administrators who do not belong to such grades, so that staff members with medical and nursing professional knowledge can have more time to perform clinical duties; if HA will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will implement new measures to reduce the wastage of doctors and nurses in the public healthcare system, and explore the stipulation of a minimum number of years for which locally trained doctors and nurses are required to serve in the public healthcare system upon graduation; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the various parts of the question raised by Dr the Hon Helena Wong is as follows:

(1) The Government has been striving to strengthen medical workforce. The University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded medical training places have been substantially increased over the past decade. The number of places was 470 in the 2016/17 academic year, representing an increase of 90 per cent when compared with 250 in the 2005/06 academic year. In the 2019/20 to 2021/22 UGC triennium, the Government will further increase the number of UGC-funded medical training places by 60 each year. We expect that increasing the number of medical training places will alleviate the manpower shortage of doctors in the medium to long term.

Meanwhile, upon commencement of the Medical Registration (Amendment) Ordinance 2018, the validity period and renewal period of limited registration have been extended from not exceeding one year to not exceeding three years. It is expected that more eligible non-locally trained doctors, particularly those who are Hong Kong people, will be attracted to serve in the public sector in Hong Kong through limited registration, thus alleviating the manpower shortage problem.

For non-locally trained doctors who have passed the licensing examination and worked in the Hospital Authority (HA) for three years under limited registration, the Medical Council of Hong Kong is exploring if their internship requirement could be exempted. This is to provide more incentive for eligible non-locally trained doctors to serve in the public healthcare system in Hong Kong.

The Government will take into account the effectiveness of extending the period of limited registration and responses from the healthcare sector before deciding on the way forward. In the meantime, HA will continue to roll out measures, including recruitment of part-time doctors and implementation of Special Honorarium Scheme (SHS), to increase manpower at

public hospitals.

(2) The head office of HA has announced that in response to the winter surge, the head office and all clusters will minimise the number of meetings or postpone non-urgent meetings as far as practicable, so as to allow healthcare staff to focus more on clinical work. HA will also review the frequency and efficiency of meetings on a regular basis. Additional ward clerks and ward assistants are also recruited with a view to easing the workload of healthcare staff.

(3) The Government and HA are very concerned about the healthcare manpower situation in public hospitals. HA will recruit all qualified locally trained medical graduates and provide them with relevant specialist training. There will be a total of over 2 000 medical graduates becoming registered doctors in the coming five years. The Government has no plans to stipulate the required length of service of local medical graduates in the public healthcare system upon graduation. Nevertheless, HA has been proactively implementing various human resources measures to retain professionals and alleviate the shortage of manpower.

To enhance manpower support in the short term, HA actively recruits part-time and temporary healthcare staff, as well as agency nurses and supporting staff. In addition to the establishment of the Locum Office, HA launched the Locum Recruitment Website in November 2018 to expedite the process for recruiting part-time staff. As at February 10, 2019, over 90 locum healthcare staff were hired. HA has also further enhanced the flexibility of SHS to meet service demand.

Among the staff who left HA each year, some of them were retiring staff. To alleviate the manpower shortage and assist in knowledge transfer, HA implemented the Special Retired and Rehire Scheme to hire the retiring healthcare professionals and supporting staff to continue to perform clinical duties on a full-time basis.

To retain doctors, HA set up the centrally co-ordinated additional Associate Consultant Promotion Mechanism in 2011-12 to create more promotion opportunities. Meanwhile, HA provides its doctors with more training courses and overseas training opportunities.

To retain frontline nursing staff, HA reinstated the annual increment mechanism in April 2018 to boost staff morale. Besides, HA has enhanced training and promotion of nursing staff. HA created the post of Nurse Consultant in 2008-09 to enhance the development prospects of the nursing profession. A total of 1 476 nurses were promoted in the past three years. In addition, HA also provides subsidies each year for over 100 experienced nurses to undergo further studies and training overseas. To enhance preceptorship support for newly recruited nurses, HA recruits experienced nurses under the Preceptorship Programme to serve as preceptors and provide guidance for newly recruited nurses in the actual clinical setting, and to alleviate the work pressure of other experienced nursing staff in coaching new nurses.

HA will continue to introduce medium to long term measures, including actively considering providing more flexible options in work arrangements to retain staff, such as allowing frontline professionals who are temporarily unable to work full-time due to special needs, or for health or family reasons to work on a part-time basis under special work arrangements.

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## LCQ12: Retrofitting noise barriers on existing roads

Following is a question by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (February 20):

Question:

Regarding the retrofitting of noise barriers on existing roads to alleviate the traffic noise nuisance caused to nearby residents, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of noise barriers retrofitting works projects that were (i) completed, (ii) in progress and (iii) under planning, in each of the past five years; whether it has studied what factors have contributed to the year-on-year changes in those numbers;

(2) of the following information (if applicable) on the works projects referred to in (1): (i) the (expected) commencement dates of the works, (ii) the (expected) completion dates of the works, (iii) the progress of the works, (iv) the traffic noise levels at the road sections concerned, (v) the (estimated) project costs, and (vi) the (expected) numbers of persons benefitting from the works;

(3) of the order of commencement of those noise barriers retrofitting works projects currently under planning; the mechanisms adopted by the Government for determining the order and design of the noise barriers; as some residents of Heng Fa Chuen have indicated that they have, for many years, been suffering greatly from the noise nuisance caused by the traffic on Island Eastern Corridor, whether the Government will expedite the retrofitting of noise barriers on the road section concerned;

(4) in respect of those road sections on which noise barriers retrofitting works are needed but have yet to commence, of the short-term measures the Government has in place to alleviate, before the completion of the relevant works, the noise nuisance caused by the traffic on the road sections concerned to nearby residents;

(5) whether it will expedite the planning of noise barriers retrofitting works projects, and set a target for the number of such works projects to be completed per year; and

(6) in view of the completion of two major infrastructure projects last year, whether the Government will seize the opportunity presented by the relatively abundant supply of construction workers at present to expedite the implementation of noise barriers retrofitting works projects?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung is as follows:

(1) The respective numbers of noise barriers retrofitting works that were completed, in progress and under planning in each of the past five years are tabulated below:

Year	Completed	In Progress	Under Planning
2014	7	0	24
2015	0	1	23
2016	0	2	22
2017	0	2	22
2018	0	3	21

Noise barrier retrofitting works on existing roads are public works, the implementation of which follows the procedures of the Public Works Programme. Procedures such as detailed design and tendering work will commence only upon funding approval.

Among the seven noise barriers retrofitting works completed in 2014, six were located at various sections of the Tuen Mun Road. As the retrofitting works were conducted in tandem with the road widening works carried out by the Highways Department (HyD) at those road sections, the six retrofitting works were completed concurrently.

For those works still in progress, they are expected to be completed within the next few years. Details of the retrofitting works are set out in (2) below.

(2) Other information on the retrofitting works referred to in (1) is tabulated as follows:

Retrofitting works completed

Road section	Commencement date (Year)	Completion date (Year)	Works progress	Maximum traffic noise level (dB(A))	Project costs (\$ million)	Approximate number of residents benefitted
Tuen Mun Road (Tsuen Wan section)	2009	2014	Completed	85	1 257	12 840
Tuen Mun Road (Yau Kom Tau section)	2010					
Tuen Mun Road (Castle Peak Bay section)	2010					
Tuen Mun Road (Anglers' Beach section)	2009					
Tuen Mun Road (Sham Tseng section)	2009					
Tuen Mun Road (Tsing Lung Tau section)	2010					
Tai Po Tai Wo Road (near Po Nga Court)	2012	2014	Completed	78	97	480

#### Retrofitting works in progress

Road section	Commencement date (Year)	Expected completion date (Year)	Works progress	Maximum traffic noise level (dB(A))	Project costs (\$ million)	Approximate number of residents benefitted
Tuen Mun Road (Town Centre section)	2015	2020	In progress	86	827	5 450
Tuen Mun Road (Fu Tei section)	2016	2019	In progress	80	786	2 580



Tai Po Road (Sha Tin section)	2018	2023	In progress	81	852	6 660
Long Tin Road	2019 (expected)	2023	Funding application under preparation	77	304	1 360

#### Retrofitting works under planning

Road section (Note)	Maximum traffic noise level (dB(A))	Preliminarily estimated project costs (at September 2018 prices) (\$ million)	Approximate number of residents benefitted
Castle Peak Road (Hung Shui Kiu section)	74	20	50
Castle Peak Road (Ping Shan section)	78	108	180
Chai Wan Road	76	102	470
Fanling Highway (near Tsung Pak Long)	79	111	280
Hoi On Road	79	347	1 900
Island Eastern Corridor (near Heng Fa Chuen)	81	82	420
Jockey Club Road and San Wan Road (near Fanling Wai)	77	83	190
Ma Wang Road	72	82	260
New Clear Water Bay Road	80	321	4 430
Po Lam Road North	74	364	1 150
Po Lam Road North (near Hong Sing Garden and King Ming Court)	76	188	260
Po Ning Road	76	201	2 420
Po Shek Wu Road	81	180	2 140
San Tin Highway	83	476	1 220
Sha Tin Road	79	519	3 170
Sha Tin Road near Wong Uk Village	76	24	50

Tai Po Road (Sham Shui Po)	78	181	1 080
Tam Kon Shan Road	78	201	1 610
Tsuen Wan Road	79	176	2 850
Yuen Wo Road	77	40	920

Note: Listed in alphabetical order of the road sections concerned. As the works are still under planning, details on their expected commencement and completion dates as well as works progress are unavailable.

(3) When determining the order of noise barriers retrofitting works, the Government will accord priority to road sections with the greatest noise impact and the largest number of residents affected. Moreover, if other road works (e.g. road widening works) will be carried out near the road sections concerned, the relevant departments will explore the feasibility of combining the works to minimise inconvenience caused to road users and nearby residents.

As to the design of noise barriers, due consideration will be given not only to their effectiveness in noise reduction but also to the following technical factors:

- (a) whether the noise barrier will obstruct emergency access or fire fighting;
  - (b) whether the noise barrier will undermine road safety or impede pedestrian and vehicular movements; and
  - (c) whether there is adequate space and structural capability (applicable to flyovers) for supporting the noise barrier.
- (4) In respect of those road sections on which noise barriers retrofitting works are being planned and not yet commenced, the Government will explore whether other feasible traffic noise mitigation measures can be put in place. For example, a section of the Island Eastern Corridor near Heng Fa Chuen has been resurfaced with low noise material to reduce the traffic noise impact on nearby residents.

(5) and (6) The Government has been looking for ways to expedite the planning of noise barriers retrofitting works. To this end, the HyD had engaged a consultant to conduct a feasibility study for a number of noise barriers retrofitting works under planning. The consultancy report has provided preliminary feasible options for the projects and relevant details on the advance design to enable faster and smoother work at the detailed design stage. To save time, the Government is also combining the detailed design work for noise barriers retrofitting works on different road sections. Given that government works must follow the funding procedures, and that due consideration has to be given to all relevant factors, the Government is unable to set a target for the number of works to be completed per year.

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## LCQ20: Land administration of shipyard sites

Following is a question by the Hon Au Nok-hin and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (February 20):

Question:

The Lands Department (LandsD) conducted a tendering exercise in 2012 to let 16 shipyard sites along Ap Lei Chau Praya Road by way of short-term tenancies (STTs). The STTs concerned were granted for a term ranging from five to seven years commencing from 2013, with the lowest monthly rental being around \$10,000-odd. It is stipulated in the STTs that the sites concerned may only be used for ship or boat building and/or repairing. However, it has been reported that while slipways are originally intended for temporary anchorage of vessels pending repair only, some tenants have, for profiteering purpose, let such slipways as berthing spaces for yachts. Over the years, I have received a number of complaints from local residents alleging that certain sites have been put to uses not permitted under the STTs, such as vehicle repairing, yacht sale shows and barbecue parties. The structures erected on such sites have also exceeded the structure height restrictions stipulated in the STTs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the LandsD has set priorities for handling complaints about alleged breaches of STT conditions; if so, of the details;

(2) since the commencement of the STTs of the aforesaid 16 shipyard sites in 2013, of the respective numbers of (i) inspections made by staff members dispatched by the LandsD and (ii) occasions on which the LandsD found that the shipyard tenants had breached STT conditions; the actions taken by the LandsD in respect of those cases involving breaches of STT conditions and the outcome thereof;

(3) as the LandsD had reportedly written to the shipyard tenants concerned in late 2017 requesting them to provide information to prove that the land uses at that time had not breached STT conditions, whether the LandsD has assessed if such a practice is sufficient for ensuring tenants' compliance with STT conditions; whether the LandsD (i) has other measures in place to ensure that the shipyard tenants will comply with STT conditions and (ii) has reviewed the effectiveness of such measures;

(4) as the STTs for 15 out of the 16 shipyard sites will soon expire, whether the LandsD has plans to conduct a tender exercise for letting such sites again; if so, of the details; and

(5) whether it has made long-term plans for the uses of these 16 shipyard sites?

Reply:

President,

A consolidated reply to the five-part question in consultation with the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) is as follows:

(1) At present, there are over 5 000 short-term tenancies (STTs) in Hong Kong, covering a total area of some 2 500 hectares. Upon receipt of complaints or referrals, District Lands Offices will conduct appropriate investigations and follow up actions having regard to the circumstances of individual cases, such as making site inspections, issuing enquiry letters to tenants, consulting relevant bureau(x) and department(s) on actual operations, and seeking legal advice on tenancy conditions and enforcement, etc. If it is found that a tenant has breached STT conditions, the relevant District Lands Office will require the tenant to rectify within a specified period. If the situation shows no improvement, the District Lands Office, acting in the capacity of landlord, will take enforcement actions in accordance with the tenancy conditions, including terminating the relevant STT as the last resort. Where appropriate, District Lands Offices will also carry out proactive inspections on STTs which involved breach of conditions previously to monitor their compliance.

(2),(3) and (4) With the policy support of the THB, the Lands Department (LandsD) conducted open tender for 16 shipyard sites along Ap Lei Chau Praya Road for award to the highest bidders in 2013. The STTs of these sites were effective from 2013, with 14 sites let out on a term of seven years and the remaining two on a term of five years. After consulting the THB and relevant department(s), the LandsD recently re-tendered the latter two sites in December 2018, with the two STTs commencing in April and May 2019 respectively. The tenure of both sites is a fixed term of five years, but extendable for two years thereafter (i.e. a maximum of seven years in total) if the tenant of a site applies to and obtains approval from the Town Planning Board for use of the site as shipyard permanently. The LandsD will consult relevant bureau(x) and department(s) at an appropriate time and handle the remaining 14 sites according to the applicable policies.

Whether the use of an individual shipyard site is in breach of the tenancy user conditions depends on the actual operation of the shipyard concerned and the content of the STT conditions involved. As regards the 16 sites concerned, their STT conditions stipulate that the sites shall only be used for ship or boat building and/or repairing (excluding building and/or repairing of steel ships or boats). In general, mooring of such vessels awaiting repair within the STT area will not constitute a breach of STT conditions. Nevertheless, it will be a breach of STT conditions if a tenant sublets land within the STT area to others for berthing of vessels or uses the site for other purposes unrelated to building/repairing of such vessels.

In light of complaints and referrals regarding suspected breaches of tenancy user conditions, the LandsD wrote to Ap Lei Chau Praya Road shipyard tenants in November 2017, enquiring about the current use of the shipyard sites and whether they had been sub-let for berthing of yachts, as well as reminding them of the user restriction under their respective STTs and their responsibility to rectify any breach of STT conditions. At that time, the shipyard tenants replied that the shipyard sites had been used only as shipyards, and not sub-let for berthing of yachts. The LandsD and the Marine Department (MD) subsequently conducted joint site inspections (including surprise checks) on Ap Lei Chau Praya Road shipyards in batches in January, March, June, and November 2018. Among the 16 sites mentioned in the question, after consulting the MD, the LandsD considers that there is no evidence to substantiate breaches of tenancy user restrictions in respect of nine of the shipyards. As for the remaining seven shipyards, in view of the substantial amount of information involved, the LandsD is consolidating the results of the joint inspections and will consult the MD in due course to confirm whether there is any breach of tenancy user restriction.

In addition, having consulted the THB and the MD, in order to strengthen the monitoring of the use of the STT sites, special tenancy conditions have been incorporated in the two recently re-tendered Ap Lei Chau Praya Road shipyard STTs, requiring tenant to produce job sheets in relation to shipyard use on the STT site, as well as opinion from certified public accountants or other relevant documents upon request by the Government, to confirm that the tenant's income from business carried on the STT site is related to shipyard use.

As for the issue of the building height of structures mentioned in the preamble of the question, the LandsD conducted investigation and followed up in October 2015 on a complaint about breach of height restriction in one of the shipyard sites. The relevant tenant rectified the breach in the same month.

The LandsD and the MD will conduct joint inspection of the shipyard sites concerned in a timely manner as and when necessary to ensure that the use of the sites complies with the tenancy conditions. If there is evidence substantiating that tenancy conditions have been breached in the use of the shipyard sites, the LandsD will take appropriate enforcement actions.

(5) The 16 shipyard sites located along the Eastern side of Ap Lei Chau Praya Road are zoned "Industrial" on the approved Aberdeen and Ap Lei Chau Outline Zoning Plan (OZP) No. S/H15/33. According to the Explanatory Statement of the OZP, the area at the Eastern side of Ap Lei Chau Praya Road is developed for boatyards and engineering workshops to serve the local fishing fleet. Providing timely and adequate repairing and maintenance services to sea vessels is of paramount importance to port operation, maritime safety, and sustainable development of the shipping industry. At present, the Government has no plan to change the existing planned use in the area.

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## LCQ14: Declaration of ownership of properties outside Hong Kong by public rental housing applicants and tenants

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Chi-chuen and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (February 20):

Question:

Applicants for public rental housing (PRH) are required, if they themselves or their family members own properties outside Hong Kong, to declare so. Under the "Well-off Tenants Policies", PRH tenants likewise are required, if they own such properties, to declare so. It has been reported that quite a number of new arrivals from the Mainland concealed the ownership of properties on the Mainland when applying for PRH and they, upon being allocated a PRH unit, reside on the Mainland on a long-term basis. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of (i) the number of new applicants for PRH who declared that they owned properties outside Hong Kong, (ii) the number of reports received by the Housing Department (HD) regarding PRH applicants concealing the ownership of this type of properties, (iii) the respective numbers of concealment cases uncovered upon receipt of reports and upon investigations initiated by HD, and (iv) the respective numbers of cases in which applicants were prosecuted and convicted for concealing the ownership of this type of properties, in each of the past three years; if HD did not initiate any investigation, of the reasons for that;

(2) of (i) the number of PRH tenants who declared that they owned properties outside Hong Kong, (ii) the number of reports received by HD regarding tenants concealing the ownership of this type of properties, (iii) the respective numbers of concealment cases uncovered upon receipt of reports and upon investigations initiated by HD, and (iv) the respective numbers of cases in which tenants were prosecuted and convicted for concealing the ownership of this type of properties, in each of the past three years; if HD did not initiate any investigation, of the reasons for that; and

(3) whether HD will adopt measures (e.g. setting up a dedicated investigation team) to take the initiative to investigate and verify if PRH applicants and PRH tenants own this type of properties; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Chi-chuen is as follows.

Public rental housing (PRH) is precious social resources. To ensure that PRH will be allocated to those with genuine needs, PRH applicants are obliged to declare all the information as required, including all assets (such as properties) owned by them in and outside Hong Kong in a true and accurate manner. Moreover, they are required to make a declaration that all the particulars furnished are true and correct. It is a criminal offence under the Housing Ordinance to provide false information and make a false statement. The PRH applicants concerned will have their applications cancelled and may be liable to prosecution. The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) conducts regular case reviews, random checks and data matching with other Government departments and organisations.

Starting from July 2017, HA has put in place a new computer system for processing PRH applications which records certain statistical data. As at December 2018, HA had received about 120 PRH application cases with declarations of ownership of premises/properties (including domestic properties, shops, parking spaces, etc. in and outside Hong Kong). The system, however, does not maintain a breakdown of premises/properties in and outside Hong Kong. Before July 2017, HA did not maintain statistics of asset items by types.

Apart from initiating random checks, upon receipt of reports of suspected concealment of information (including income, assets, family status, etc.) in PRH applications, HA will carry out in-depth investigations into those cases with reasonable grounds to suspect. In the past three years, HA had received about 380 reports relating to PRH applicants' concealment of information, and had initiated random checks on about 1 800 PRH application cases. Among such cases, about 50 cases involved the concealment of ownership of properties outside Hong Kong. There were four cases in which the offenders were successfully prosecuted and convicted.

Regarding PRH tenants, under the prevailing "Well-off Tenants Policies", PRH tenants who have been living in PRH for ten years are required to make a declaration biennially. Also, households who are granted a new tenancy under the Policy on Grant of New Tenancy (Note 1) and those who have their applications approved under the Tenancy Management Policies for PRH (Note 2) are also required to make a declaration biennially under the "Well-off Tenants Policies", regardless of their length of residence. Each year, over 250 000 households are required to make declarations under the "Well-off Tenants Policies". HA does not maintain detailed statistics classified by whether the properties declared by the PRH households are in or outside Hong Kong.

To make good use of public housing resources, HA is committed to combating tenancy abuses and is taking stringent action against all tenancy abuse cases. HA also conducts random checks on the information declared by PRH tenants. In case of doubt or complaints, HA will conduct in-depth investigations, and consult institutions both in and outside Hong Kong when necessary.

In the past three years, HA has received on average about 4 000 complaints related to tenancy abuse each year, and has conducted about 6 000 random checks on the income and assets declarations (Note 3) each year. HA does not maintain statistics on PRH tenants concealing properties outside Hong Kong. In the past three years, there were no prosecution cases by the Housing Department regarding PRH tenants concealing their properties outside Hong Kong.

Note 1: According to the Policy on Grant of New Tenancy, upon the death or moving out of a principal tenant, if there is no surviving spouse, a new tenancy may be granted to other authorised family members living in the PRH unit, provided that the prescribed limits and the requirement of not owing any domestic property in Hong Kong under the "Well-off Tenants Policies" are fulfilled.

Note 2: For example, the Territory-wide Overcrowding Relief Exercise and Living Space Improvement Transfer Scheme, Transfer of Tenants Occupying Converted One-person Flats, addition of family members, household splitting and housing arrangements for divorced couples in PRH units, etc.

Note 3: Including PRH applications.