

## LCQ18: Support for children with special educational needs

Following is a question by Dr Hon Elizabeth Quat and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (January 30):

Question:

Children with special educational needs (SEN) refer to children with the following conditions: specific learning difficulties, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorders, speech and language impairment, intellectual disability, hearing impairment, physical disability, visual impairment and mental illness. Regarding the support for children with SEN, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of children referred to the Child Assessment Centres (CACs) under the Department of Health (DH) for assessments in each of the past five years by (i) clinics under the DH, (ii) the Hospital Authority (HA), (iii) the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and (iv) the Education Bureau (EDB);

(2) given that at present, children with physical, developmental, behavioural or learning problems are first referred to the Maternal and Child Health Centres of their respective districts for assessment, are then referred, on a need basis, to the CACs for assessment, and are subsequently referred, on a need basis, to the HA for specialty consultation, whether the Government has assessed if the process is too complicated and can be streamlined so as to facilitate early identification of children with SEN and follow up their needs; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) given that the "On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services" and the "Training Subsidy Programme for Children on the Waiting List of Subvented Pre-school Rehabilitation Services" target at children with SEN who are aged below six, whether the Government will relax the age ceiling so that such children can continue to receive support upon admission to Primary One; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) given that starting from the current school year, pre-school rehabilitation service units will, before school year begins, forward to the EDB through the SWD the progress reports of children with SEN who are of the right age for admission to Primary One, so that the EDB can transfer the relevant information to the primary schools concerned before the commencement of the school year, whether the Government has (i) received complaints about this arrangement, and (ii) assessed the effectiveness of the arrangement; if so, of the details;

(5) given that under the integrated education policy, children with SEN will attend mainstream schools, and schools will support students facing varying

degrees of learning difficulties according to the "3-Tier Support Model", but there are views that school-based support measures cannot provide support according to the actual situation of individual students, whether the Government will introduce measures which better cater for the individual needs of students; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(6) whether it will consider afresh (i) compiling statistics on the number of children waiting for SEN assessment each year as well as their waiting time, and (ii) setting up a central database for children with SEN to facilitate stakeholders to grasp the demand for services to support children with SEN; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Through multi-disciplinary collaborative efforts, relevant government bureaux/departments have been offering various services to support children with special needs or at risk of developmental delay. Specifically, the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) provides assessment and medical services for children in need, while the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) provides rehabilitation and welfare services. The Education Bureau (EDB) is responsible for providing public sector ordinary schools with various additional resources, professional support and teacher training to help them cater for students with special educational needs (SEN). By providing training for teachers, teachers' professional capacity can be enhanced so that they can identify and provide appropriate support for children with special needs as early as possible.

Our consolidated reply, prepared in consultation with relevant bureaux and departments, to the question of Dr Hon Elizabeth Quat is as follows:

(1) The Child Assessment Service (CAS) of the Department of Health conducts clinical assessment for children under the age of 12 years with suspected symptoms of developmental problems referred by doctors or psychologists. New cases are referred from various channels, including the Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs), the Hospital Authority (HA), doctors in private practice and psychologists. In the past five years, the number of new cases referred to the CAS from various sources is as follows:

	Number of cases				
Channels of referral	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Provisional)
The MCHCs and other specialties under the DH	5 731	6 328	6 554	6 812	7 155
Paediatricians, Out-Patient Clinics and other specialties under the HA	1 344	1 368	1 416	1 422	1 233

Doctors in private practice	1 844	1 652	1 611	1 533	1 442
Psychologists (including those from the HA, EDB, SWD, non-governmental organisations and in private practice)	548	505	600	655	630
Others	27	19	7	16	6
Total	9 494	9 872	10 188	10 438	10 466

(2) The MCHCs under the DH provide a comprehensive range of health promotion and disease prevention services for children from birth to five years of age through the Integrated Child Health and Development Programme which covers developmental surveillance. Through developmental surveillance, healthcare staff of the MCHCs arrange interviews with parents at specific ages of the children and observations of their performance in various developmental areas for early identification of children suspected to have developmental disorder. Apart from the scheduled visits at specific ages, parents can always make appointments with the MCHCs for special follow-up. In addition, under the Comprehensive Child Development Service jointly implemented by the EDB, DH, HA, SWD and non-governmental organisations, pre-school tutors can directly refer children in need to MCHCs of respective districts for preliminary assessment. Subject to assessment results and needs, the MCHCs may refer children to assessment services of the DH or other specialist services of the HA for follow-up. The waiting time for assessments by doctors at the MCHCs generally ranges from four to eight weeks. DH will continue to monitor the service demand and make internal manpower deployment as needed to ensure timely case referral.

(3) On pre-school rehabilitation services, the SWD provides children with special needs from birth to six years of age with early intervention services to enhance their physical, psychological and social development, thereby improving their opportunities for admission to ordinary schools and participation in daily activities, and helping their families to meet their special needs. These services include the On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services and the Training Subsidy Programme for Children on the Waiting List of Subvented Pre-school Rehabilitation Services.

When pre-school children with special needs progress to Primary One, they need to be given various learning support, accommodations and guidance in order to adapt to learning in primary schools which have different requirements in learning, social, emotional and behavioural aspects as compared with those in pre-school stage. Hence, on top of regular subvention, the EDB has been providing public sector ordinary schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training to assist schools in catering for students (including Primary One students) with SEN so as to enhance their learning effectiveness. Starting from the 2018/19 school year, the EDB, SWD, HA and DH have strengthened their collaboration and introduced an enhanced mechanism under which the assessment information and progress

reports of pre-school children with special needs will be transferred to the primary schools they are going to attend before the new school year begins. This enables schools to learn about the SEN of these children so as to plan and provide appropriate support for them. In parallel, the EDB has all along requested primary schools to implement the "Early Identification and Intervention Programme for Primary One Students with Learning Difficulties" to ensure that students who have received pre-school rehabilitation services can receive further assessment when necessary as well as early support, and also to ensure that students not identified at pre-school stage can be identified and given appropriate support. The EDB will continue to support Primary One students with SEN under the current mode of service.

(4) Starting from the 2018/19 school year, the EDB, SWD, DH and HA have strengthened collaboration and implemented an enhanced mechanism to ensure that when children with special needs proceed to primary schools from pre-school centres/kindergartens, the primary schools can be aware of their special needs earlier and provide them with support.

Under this mechanism, for each school year, the EDB will send letters and parental consent forms to parents of children who are receiving or waiting for pre-school rehabilitation services subvented by the SWD, and are of the right age for admission to Primary One the next school year. Upon obtaining parental consent, the EDB will send the relevant children information to the Child Assessment Centres (CACs) of the DH and HA so that the CACs will provide the assessment information of these children to the EDB. In June, the EDB will confirm with parents the schools which their children are going to attend, i.e. public sector primary schools or Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) primary schools, for transfer of the assessment information to the schools concerned before the new school year begins. This enables schools to learn about the situations of these students as early as possible with a view to planning and providing appropriate support for them.

Besides, upon obtaining parental consent, the pre-school rehabilitation service units subvented by the SWD will also forward, via the SWD, progress reports of pre-school children to the EDB for transfer to the public sector or DSS primary schools which the children are going to attend before the new school year begins. Professional officers of the EDB will visit the primary schools concerned within the first six to eight weeks upon the commencement of a new school year to understand from the primary schools their support services for the respective Primary One students based on the assessment information from the CACs and progress reports from pre-school rehabilitation units, and will offer advice to schools as appropriate. The enhanced collaborative mechanism, implemented from the current school year, has been running smoothly and we have not received any complaints. We will continue to review the implementation of this enhanced mechanism.

(5) The EDB encourages schools to adopt the Whole School Approach to support students with SEN through the 3-Tier Intervention Model, taking into account their individual circumstances and support needs. Tier-1 support refers to the use of quality teaching in the regular classroom to cater early the diverse learning and adjustment needs of all students, as well as to provide early support to students identified with learning difficulties and

adjustment problems. Tier-2 support is additional support, such as after-school small group training, for students to develop learning and/or social-adaptive skills required for regular classroom learning or daily living. Through practice and application in regular classroom, students' acquisition of knowledge and skills under Tier-2 support can be strengthened. Schools will provide Tier-3 support to students with severe and persistent learning difficulties by setting out individualised support and small group training through devising Individual Education Plans (IEP), and by providing opportunities for students to practise and apply the knowledge and skills acquired in Tier-2 and/or Tier-3 support in the classroom, thus ensuring the effectiveness of the overall support.

The above-mentioned 3-Tier Intervention Model is underpinned by the Response to Intervention (RTI) approach. The determination of the tier of support for individual students with SEN through the RTI approach is rooted in the consultancy report that the British scholar Dr Rea Reason prepared for the then Education and Manpower Bureau. In the report, Dr Reason suggested that Hong Kong should, drawing on the experience of the United States of America and the United Kingdom, arrange timely and structured intervention for the students, adjust the tier of support according to RTI and review the progress of students regularly in order to evaluate and provide the appropriate tier of support for students under the 3-Tier Intervention Model. The arrangement enables students with diverse needs to receive the most appropriate support and services.

To provide the appropriate tier of support that matches the needs of students with SEN, student support teams of schools will collect and analyse their students' information and needs, gauge the views of students and parents, and consult professionals. Schools are also required to record the support and accommodation measures provided, as well as their students' progress for regular review and adjustment of the tier of support when appropriate. For students who need Tier-3 support, schools must draw up for each of them an IEP which sets out such items as long-term objectives, short-term objectives, specific implementation methods, evaluation criteria and outcomes. Underlying the above measures is the principle of catering for the individual needs of students. We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of these measures and introduce enhancement measures.

From the 2019/20 school year, we will implement various enhanced measures on integrated education including restructuring various funding schemes on integrated education, extending the Learning Support Grant, multiplying the grant rate for Tier-3 support and provision of additional permanent teaching posts; upgrading the post of special educational needs coordinator to a promotion rank in public sector ordinary schools with a comparatively large number of students with SEN; extending further the Enhanced School-based Educational Psychology Service; and enhancing the school-based speech therapy services. On the whole, schools will have a stable teaching force, resources that can be used flexibly and enhanced professional support to cater for students with SEN.

(6) (i) The DH and the HA have expressed that they will continue to maintain

close communication with various service providers, with a view to providing more appropriate and effective medical services for the children with SEN.

(ii) At present, there is an established collaborative mechanism in place among the EDB, SWD, DH and HA to ensure that the assessment information and progress reports of pre-school children with special needs will be transferred in a timely manner to the primary schools they will be attending, thereby enabling their schools to provide appropriate support for them upon their admission to Primary One. The Special Education Management Information System (SEMIS) of the EDB also collects the information of students with SEN studying in public sector schools. The EDB has been keeping tabs on the situation of the demand from students with SEN for educational services and support through the information collected by SEMIS, so as to implement corresponding policies and measures to assist public sector schools in supporting these students. Different bureaux and departments can, upon parental consent, transfer the information of children with special needs. Hence, we have no plans to set up a central database for children with SEN at this stage.

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## **LCQ10: Applications for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance from persons with less than seven years' residence in Hong Kong**

Following is a question by the Hon Mrs Regina Ip and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (January 30):

Question:

On December 17, 2013, the Court of Final Appeal ruled that the requirement for seven-year residence in Hong Kong (residence requirement) stipulated by the Government for the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme was unconstitutional, and the residence requirement was therefore restored from seven years to one year, which was the requirement before January 1, 2004. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council of the following, since the judgment was handed down:

(1) the respective numbers of CSSA applications received and approved each year which were made by persons with less than seven years' residence in Hong Kong, as well as the respective percentages of such numbers in the total number of applications for the same year; and

(2) the total amount of CSSA payment made each year to persons with less than seven years' residence in Hong Kong and its percentage in the total expenditure on CSSA payments for the same year?

Reply:

President,

Following the judgment handed down by the Court of Final Appeal on the judicial review regarding the residence requirement of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme, the Social Welfare Department restored the "one-year residence requirement", which was in effect before January 1, 2004, on December 17, 2013. As in the past, persons aged below 18 are exempted from the residence requirement of the CSSA Scheme.

My reply to the Member's question is set out below:

(1) From the date of the judgment to 2017-18, the number of CSSA applications received and approved involving persons aged 18 or above and had resided in Hong Kong (HK) for less than seven years, and the percentages of the relevant application number in the total CSSA application number are as follows:

Year	Number of CSSA applications received from persons who had resided in HK for less than seven years	Number of approved CSSA applications from persons who had resided in HK for less than seven years	Total number of CSSA applications	Percentage of CSSA applications from persons who had resided in HK for less than seven years in the total application number
2013-14 (Since December 17, 2013)	4 007	3 272	39 514 (Note 1)	10.1 per cent
2014-15	5 876	4 677	39 623	14.8 per cent
2015-16	4 380	1 339	38 376	11.4 per cent
2016-17	4 005	1 078	41 111	9.7 per cent
2017-18	3 729	1 191	39 342	9.5 per cent

(2) In 2013-14 to 2017-18, the estimated CSSA expenditures involving recipients who had resided in HK for less than seven years (CSSA is payable on a household basis and the relevant expenditures are rough estimates) and their percentages in total CSSA expenditure are as follows:

Year	Expenditure (Note 2) (\$ million)	Percentage in total CSSA expenditure
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2013-14	582	3.0 per cent
2014-15	823	4.0 per cent
2015-16	949	4.3 per cent
2016-17	933	4.2 per cent
2017-18	885	4.1 per cent

Note 1: Number of applications in year 2013-14.

Note 2: The expenditure for 2015-16 includes the provision for two additional months of CSSA standard rate payment in that year, and the expenditure for 2013-14, 2014-15, 2016-17 and 2017-18 include the provisions for an additional month of CSSA standard rate payment in the respective years.

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## LCQ4: Raising the eligible age for elderly Comprehensive Social Security Assistance

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Fernando Cheung and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (January 30):

Question:

On the seventh of this month, the Government announced that starting from the first of next month, the eligible age for elderly Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) would be changed from 60 to 65. As that measure has aroused grave concerns in the community and among Members of this Council, this Council passed on the seventeenth of this month an amendment proposed by me to a related motion, urging the Government to "shelve the tightening of eligibility age for elderly CSSA to 65". The Government announced on the eighteenth of this month that starting from the first of next month, an Employment Support Supplement (ESS) of \$1,060 would be provided monthly to able-bodied adult CSSA recipients aged between 60 and 64. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the total amount of CSSA payments granted to elderly CSSA recipients aged between 60 and 64 in each of the past five years, and a breakdown of the number of such recipients by the following characteristics: educational attainment, years of stay on CSSA, the trades and positions in which they were previously employed, whether or not they had any record of work injuries, and current employability (including health conditions and types of jobs which are suitable for them to take up); whether it has assessed the reasons for the number of elderly CSSA recipients dropping continuously in the past five years;



(2) of the anticipated number of able-bodied adult CSSA recipients aged between 60 and 64 in the current year and each of the coming five years, and the total amount of ESS they will receive; given that the objective of ESS is to encourage the recipients to join the labour market, of the reasons for not granting the supplement to able-bodied adult CSSA recipients aged below 60; and

(3) of the respective names of the various supplements and special grants (e.g. grants covering costs of dental treatment and glasses) for which elderly CSSA recipients are eligible but able-bodied adult CSSA recipients are ineligible; in respect of each of those items, the number of recipients and expenditure in each of the past five years; the Government's justifications for deciding that starting from the first of next month, all of those elderly persons aged between 60 and 64 who cannot receive elderly CSSA may not receive such supplements and special grants?

Reply:

President,

In view of the improved life expectancy of the population of Hong Kong and the trend of extending the retirement age to 65, the Government announced in the Policy Address in January 2017 that the eligible age for elderly Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) will be adjusted from 60 to 65. The relevant adjustment is one of the social security measures announced in the abovementioned Policy Address. Other measures include raising the asset limits for the Normal Old Age Living Allowance (OALA), introducing the Higher OALA, implementing the Fujian Scheme in addition to the Guangdong Scheme, etc. In this connection, the Higher OALA, which has been implemented for about six months since its launch in June 2018, has become the social security programme with the highest number of elderly recipients aged 65 or above. At present, around 480 000 elderly persons are receiving the higher allowance of \$3,485 per month. With about 60 000 Normal OALA (currently at \$2,600 per month) recipients, the OALA programme covers some 540 000 elderly persons aged 65 or above, involving an annual recurrent expenditure of about \$24 billion.

Regarding the adjustment of eligible age for elderly CSSA from February 1 this year, I would like to reiterate that persons aged between 60 and 64 who have received elderly CSSA before February 1 this year will be "grandfathered" and not be affected. The CSSA payments of persons with disabilities or persons in ill health will not be affected either. They will, regardless of age, continue to receive CSSA payments which are higher than those applicable to able-bodied adults. It is noteworthy that around 70 per cent of CSSA recipients aged between 55 and 59 are with disabilities or in ill-health.

As for the able-bodied recipients aged between 60 and 64 under the new arrangement (i.e. those who are not disabled, in ill-health or have not received elderly CSSA), they will continue to be entitled to the basic living protection as able-bodied adults under CSSA and receive the standard rates

and special grants that are applicable to able-bodied adults (including rent allowance, water and sewage charge allowance, burial grant, child-care grants and school grants which are disbursed on a need basis). Furthermore, they will also benefit from the disregarded earnings (DE) arrangement, i.e. the recipients will have part of their monthly earnings from employment disregarded in the CSSA assessment. In other words, they will have extra income on top of their CSSA payments. Recipients will be entitled to the maximum DE level of \$2,500 if their employment earnings reach \$4,200. In addition, CSSA recipients are entitled to medical fee waiver for public healthcare.

The Government has announced that it will put in place, with effect from February 1 this year upon the adjustment of eligible age for elderly CSSA, the Employment Support Supplement under the CSSA Scheme especially designed for able-bodied adults aged between 60 and 64. Eligible recipients will be provided with a fixed rate of \$1,060 per month (i.e. the difference between the monthly CSSA standard rates applicable to singleton able-bodied elderly and singleton able-bodied adult recipients). The supplement seeks to encourage able-bodied adult recipients aged between 60 and 64 to join the labour market. It will also benefit employed able-bodied adult recipients in this age group to support them to remain in employment. The supplement will be adjusted annually according to the established mechanism. Moreover, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) will provide suitable employment support to these persons under the "Integrated Employment Assistance Programme for Self-reliance" according to their situation and needs. The Labour Department (LD) has also enhanced the Employment Programme for the Middle-aged, and renamed it as the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged (EPEM) on September 1, 2018. Employers engaging mature job seekers aged 60 or above who have left the workforce or are unemployed would receive a monthly on-the-job training allowance up to \$4,000 per employee for a period of six to 12 months under the EPEM.

My reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) The breakdown of the number of CSSA recipients aged between 60 and 64 by their education level, their duration of receiving CSSA and their categories of standard rates in the past five years is set out at Annex 1. The CSSA Scheme is a household-based programme. The SWD disburses standard rates, supplements and special grants to CSSA cases according to their respective number of family members as well as the needs of individual members. In this connection, the SWD does not maintain the total amount of CSSA payment disbursed to recipients aged between 60 and 64. It also does not maintain information on their employment and work injury records.

Meanwhile, there is a slight decrease in the number of elderly CSSA cases in the past five years. The figure at end-2018 (i.e. 142 364 cases) registered a 6 per cent decrease as compared with that in five years ago (i.e. 151 151 cases in early 2014). Indeed, the relevant figure has remained between 140 000 and 150 000 since 2003. Whether a person applies for or continues to receive CSSA involves a number of factors and considerations, including individual, family and socio-economic circumstances. It should be

noted that the CSSA Scheme is only a part of the Government's cash assistance system. We have put in place various measures to cater for the different needs of needy persons. In particular, the expenditure on cash assistance programmes targeting at elderly group, i.e. persons aged 65 or above (i.e. the expenditure arising from the Old Age Allowance and the recently introduced Normal OALA and Higher OALA) has exceeded the overall expenditure on all age groups under the CSSA Scheme. Such expenditure will continue to increase significantly given the ageing population.

(2) The Government has reiterated that the adjustment of eligible age for elderly CSSA is not intended for reducing expenditure. Having regard to the views from the public and stakeholders (including members of the Legislative Council), the SWD will provide the Employment Support Supplement to able-bodied adult recipients aged between 60 and 64 upon the implementation of the relevant arrangement on February 1 this year. Taking into account the job seeking and employment situation of the persons concerned, the supplement aims to encourage them to join the labour market and remain in employment. In fact, the abovementioned EPEM administered by the LD has specifically provided higher on-the-job training allowance to employers of eligible persons aged 60 or above.

As I have pointed out earlier, whether a person applies for or continues to receive CSSA involves a number of individual, family and socio-economic considerations. The Government is unable to provide an accurate assessment on the number of able-bodied adult recipients aged between 60 and 64 of and the expenditure under the Employment Support Supplement. In fact, the CSSA is a non-cash limited programme and all eligible persons in need would be provided with support.

As at end-November 2018, there were about 6 500 able-bodied CSSA recipients aged between 55 and 59. If they remain able-bodied and need to receive CSSA when they reach the age of 60 on or after February 1 this year, they will benefit from the Employment Support Supplement. CSSA able-bodied applicants aged between 60 and 64 who have not received elderly CSSA before February 1 this year are also eligible for this supplement.

(3) CSSA households are provided with different standard rates according to the number of household members and their circumstances to meet their different basic needs. Apart from the standard rates, the CSSA Scheme also provides eligible households with supplements and special grants. For example, able-bodied adult recipients are eligible for rent allowance, water and sewage charge allowance, burial grant, child-care grants and school grants according to their needs. Single parents are entitled to the Single Parent Supplement. Furthermore, the Government will provide the Employment Support Supplement to able-bodied adult recipients aged between 60 and 64 from February 1 this year. These supplements and special grants as well as items particularly applicable to recipients who are elderly, disabled or in ill health are set out at Annex 2.

However, as mentioned earlier, CSSA is payable on a household basis and the SWD does not maintain the respective number of recipients of and expenditure under each of the supplements and special grants.

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## Manager of unlicensed guesthouse fined

A man was fined \$8,000 at the Kowloon City Magistrates' Courts today (January 30) for contravening the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance.

The courts heard that in November 2017, officers of the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA), the Home Affairs Department, inspected a suspected unlicensed guesthouse on Nathan Road in Mong Kok. During the inspection, the OLA officers posed as lodgers and successfully rented a room in the guesthouse on a daily basis.

According to the OLA's records, the guesthouse did not possess a licence under the Ordinance on the day of inspection. The man responsible for managing the premises was charged with contravening section 5(1) of the Ordinance.

A department spokesman stressed that operating or managing an unlicensed guesthouse is a criminal offence and will lead to a criminal record. Upon conviction, the offender is liable to a maximum fine of \$200,000 and two years' imprisonment.

The spokesman appealed to anyone with information about suspected unlicensed guesthouses to report it to the OLA through the hotline (Tel: 2881 7498), by email ([hadlaenq@had.gov.hk](mailto:hadlaenq@had.gov.hk)), by fax (2504 5805) using the report form downloaded from the OLA website ([www.hadla.gov.hk](http://www.hadla.gov.hk)), or through the mobile application "Hong Kong Licensed Hotels and Guesthouses".

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## TAC briefed on follow-up actions in relation to Report of the Independent Review Committee on Franchised Bus Service and free-flow tolling system for tunnels

The following is issued on behalf of the Transport Advisory Committee:

The Transport Advisory Committee (TAC) was briefed by the Government today (January 30) on the follow-up actions in relation to the

recommendations put forward in the Report of the Independent Review Committee on Hong Kong's Franchised Bus Service (IRC), as well as the plan to implement a free-flow tolling system (FFTS) at Tseung Kwan O – Lam Tin Tunnel (TKO-LTT) and other government tolled tunnels and roads.

The TAC Chairman, Professor Stephen Cheung, said, "The IRC put forward a total of 45 recommendations under 16 areas. TAC Members noted that the Government will, in collaboration with the franchised bus operators and other relevant stakeholders, proactively pursue the recommendations with a view to enhancing the operation safety of franchised buses. Members welcomed the measures to further enhance the safety of franchised buses with a view to sustaining the safe and reliable franchised bus service in Hong Kong."

Following the fatal traffic incident involving a franchised bus on Tai Po Road in February last year, the Chief Executive set up the IRC to comprehensively review the operation and monitoring of franchised buses. The IRC commenced its work in late March last year and submitted a report to the Chief Executive on December 31 in the same year.

The Transport Department (TD) will, in conjunction with the franchised bus operators and relevant experts, proactively implement a series of measures to strengthen the safe operation of franchised bus services. The Working Group on the Enhancement of Safety of Franchised Bus, set up by the TD in March last year, has been turned into a permanent set-up so as to provide a common forum for the Government, franchised bus operators and relevant experts to continue to discuss, study, implement and promote various measures to enhance bus safety.

The TAC also noted at the meeting that, as one of the major smart mobility initiatives under the Smart City Blueprint for Hong Kong, the Government will develop an application of in-vehicle units (IVUs) to allow motorists to pay tunnel tolls without stopping at toll booths.

"Members welcomed the Government's plan to implement FFTSs at other government tolled tunnels and roads by phases, after implementing the system at TKO-LTT upon its target commissioning in late 2021. A FFTS allows vehicle to pay tolls more efficiently by avoiding the need for them to stop at toll booths for manual toll payments, thereby making traffic flow smoother. Toll booths at toll plaza could also be removed, potentially freeing up space for improving existing bus stops. Members also believe that IVUs will lay an important foundation for pursuing smart mobility in Hong Kong. Apart from using them in FFTS, IVUs could facilitate the collection of real-time traffic data for traffic management and big data analysis, and serve other functions such as payment of parking fees by remote means," Professor Cheung said.

The proposed FFTS will read IVUs affixed to vehicles by radio frequency identification supplemented by automatic number plate recognition. To enable toll payment by FFTS at TKO-LTT upon its commissioning, the TD plans to commence issuing IVUs to registered vehicle owners in the third quarter of 2020, including issuing the first IVU for each registered vehicle free-of-charge.