LCQ12: Promoting the setting up of family offices in Hong Kong

Following is a question by the Hon Jeffrey Lam and a written reply by the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui, in the Legislative Council today (April 2):

Question:

The Government has proposed in the latest Budget that it will formulate proposals on the preferential tax regimes for funds, single family offices and carried interest, and develop a vibrant ecosystem for family offices. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the Inland Revenue (Amendment) (Tax Concessions for Family-owned Investment Holding Vehicles) Bill 2022 was passed by this Council in 2023, which sought to provide profits tax concessions for family-owned investment holding vehicles managed by single family offices in Hong Kong, whether the authorities have assessed the adequacy of such tax concession measures and their effectiveness in encouraging family offices to establish a business presence in Hong Kong; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as it is learnt that a single family office is not required to apply for any licence under the Securities and Futures Ordinance (Cap. 571) if it does not carry on a business of regulated activity in Hong Kong, whether the Government has estimated the number of family offices in Hong Kong which have not applied for such licence; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) of the progress and details of the Government's formulation of proposals on the preferential tax regimes for funds, single family offices and carried interest this year; and

(4) whether it will study encouraging more Mainland high-net-worth individuals to make cross-border investments through family offices set up in Hong Kong; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Family office (FO) business is an important segment of the asset and wealth management sector. According to the Asset and Wealth Management Activities Survey 2023 published by the Securities and Futures Commission, the size of private banking and private wealth management business attributed to FOs and private trusts clients reached $1,452 billion as of end-2023, providing huge business opportunities for the asset and wealth management sector and other related professional services. In consultation with Invest Hong Kong (InvestHK), the reply to various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) and (3) The Legislative Council passed the Inland Revenue (Amendment) (Tax Concessions for Family-owned Investment Holding Vehicles) Bill 2022 in May 2023, under which family-owned investment holding vehicles managed by single FOs in Hong Kong fulfilling the minimum asset threshold of HK$240 million and substantial activities requirement can enjoy profits tax exemption for qualifying transactions. The Government have maintained communication with the industry to evaluate the effectiveness of the tax concession regime, and announced in the 2025-26 Budget the proposals to further enhance the preferential tax regimes for funds, single FOs and carried interest, including expanding the scope of "fund" under the tax exemption regime, increasing the types of qualifying transactions eligible for tax concessions for funds and single FOs, enhancing the tax concession arrangement on the distribution of carried interest by private equity funds. The Government have completed the industry consultation on the enhancement measures on the preferential tax regimes. The Government are formulating the relevant enhancement measures with financial regulators based on the feedback received. The Government target to work out the details of the proposals by this year and submit the legislative proposals to the Legislative Council for consideration in 2026. If approved, the relevant measures will take effect from the year of assessment 2025/26.

(2) and (4) A single FO is not required to apply for a licence under the Securities and Futures Ordinance if it does not carry on a business of regulated activity in Hong Kong. According to the research findings of the consultant commissioned by InvestHK and publicised in March 2024, there were around 2 700 single FOs operating in Hong Kong as of end-2023, with over half of them set up by ultra-high-net-worth individuals having a wealth of US$50 million or above. Meanwhile, since its establishment in June 2021 up to end-February 2025, the dedicated FamilyOfficeHK team of InvestHK has assisted over 160 FOs to set up or expand their business in Hong Kong (including 135 FOs having set up or expanded their business in Hong Kong after the profits tax exemption regime for single FOs has taken effect), including 98 single FOs and 63 multi-FOs. Currently, around 150 FOs have indicated that they are preparing or have decided to set up or expand their business in Hong Kong as tabulated below by geographical region:

Region	FOs preparing or having decided to set up or expand business in Hong Kong
Mainland and Taiwan, China	82
Europe and Americas	34
Asia Pacific and Oceania	22
Middle East	9
Total	147

InvestHK will continue to conduct diversified investment promotion activities (e.g. roundtables, seminars, meetings with investors, media interviews and external visits) to proactively reach out and encourage more high-net-worth individuals (including high-net-worth individuals from the Mainland) to set up FOs in Hong Kong. Furthermore, investors from the Mainland currently can make investment in Hong Kong through various mutual access arrangements. The Government has been actively exploring opportunities to introduce further expansion initiatives, including enhancements to the Cross-boundary Wealth Management Connect has been further enhanced since February 2024 to increase individual investor quota, lower the threshold for participating in the Southbound Scheme, expand the scope of participating institutions, the scope of eligible investment products, and enhance the promotion and sales arrangements. The Government will continue to discuss with financial regulatory authorities in the Mainland on various cross-boundary remittance arrangements, including how to provide more facilitation arrangements while ensuring that the risks are manageable.

LCQ2: Exploring economic, trade and investment opportunities in Latin America

Following is a question by the Hon Martin Liao and a reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau, in the Legislative Council today (April 2):

Question:

In November last year, the Hong Kong Government signed a Free Trade Agreement with the Latin American country Peru, and the Chancay Port in Peru, an important project under the Belt and Road Initiative jointly invested by the Chinese and Peruvian enterprises, has also been open for use. Regarding the exploration of economic, trade and investment opportunities between Hong Kong and Latin America, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will provide Hong Kong businessmen with the latest market information, technical support and consultation services etc, so as to assist them in expanding into the Latin American market; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) how it will assist Hong Kong's professional services sectors in grasping the development opportunities of the emerging markets in Latin America; and

(3) whether it will step up efforts to attract enterprises from Latin

American countries to come to Hong Kong and make use of Hong Kong as the gateway to enter into the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and even the entire market of China, so as to expand their businesses; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In response to the question raised by the Hon Martin Liao, I provide below the consolidated reply.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has been actively expanding the economic and trade network, and exploring development opportunities in different markets, with particular emphasis on strengthening economic and trade ties with and market development in emerging markets and those of potential in recent years. In 2024, the total merchandise trade between Latin America and Hong Kong amounted to about HK$124.3 billion, representing an increase of 17 per cent when compared with 2023. On services trade, the total trade between the two places amounted to about HK$7.8 billion in 2023, representing an increase of about 24 per cent when compared with 2022. With the good foundation of economic and trade connection the HKSAR Government has built with the Latin America, we will continue to foster closer economic and trade ties with the Latin American region, opening up more trade and investment opportunities for Hong Kong businesses.

As part of our efforts in expanding the economic and trade network, the HKSAR Government strengthens economic co-operation with trading partners, assists Hong Kong enterprises in developing markets and securing better market access, and enhances protection of investors' overseas investments through forging free trade agreements (FTAs) and investment agreements. Hong Kong signed an FTA and an investment agreement with Chile in 2012 and 2016 respectively, an investment agreement with Mexico in 2020, and an FTA with Peru in 2024. In addition, Hong Kong is exploring with Peru the signing of an investment agreement, and is also proactively seeking to forge FTAs and investment agreements with more trading partners in the Latin American region, with a view to further promoting economic and trade relations between Hong Kong and our major trading partners in the Latin American region.

Hong Kong and Chile have updated their commitments on trade in services under the FTA in recent years. Chile has made commitments in over 50 new service sectors, encompassing priority service sectors in which Hong Kong has traditional strengths or has potential for priority development, such as professional and business services, technical testing and analysis services, convention services, distribution services etc. Relevant Hong Kong services as well as their providers, subject to specific exceptions or conditions, enjoy access to the Chilean market and treatment no less favourable than that for Chile's local service providers. The updated commitments, which entered into force in 2023, create more opportunities for relevant service providers and investors.

In addition, Hong Kong and Peru signed an FTA in November 2024. Under the FTA, Hong Kong service providers in over 150 services sectors, including professional services, can enjoy legal certainty of better market access and national treatment when operating in Peru. We have been actively conducting a series of publicity and promotional activities (including holding and participating in seminar, reception and exhibition; launching designated webpage; and issuing circulars and promotional leaflets) to introduce the content, benefits and implementation arrangements of the FTA, and encourage Hong Kong's businesses to grasp the opportunities brought by this FTA, as well as through Peru and our FTA and investment agreement partners including Peru, Chile and Mexico to expand their businesses in the Latin American markets. In the meantime, we have also conveyed the benefits brought by the FTA to Latin American companies by outreaching events to promote collaboration in trade and investment. For instance, Invest Hong Kong (InvestHK) and the Trade and Industry Department (TID) cohosted a reception for the Ibero-American community on March 13, 2025, promoting further collaboration through, among other initiatives, trade and investment agreements.

Besides, the TID has been closely monitoring the trade development in the Latin American region, issuing circulars regarding the latest policies and measures concerned of the economies there, as well as publishing factsheets on Hong Kong's commercial relationship with its major trading partners in that region for Hong Kong enterprises. The TID has also established hotline, email account and webpages to assist Hong Kong enterprises in obtaining and inquiring about the relevant information of trading partners in Latin America, including FTAs and investment agreements signed by Hong Kong, helping businesses understand and develop markets in the Latin American region.

Meanwhile, the Dedicated Fund on Branding, Upgrading and Domestic Sales (BUD Fund) provides funding support for enterprises to develop business in economies with which Hong Kong has signed FTAs and/or investment agreements. The geographical coverage of the BUD Fund covers 40 economies including Chile, Mexico and Peru to further support enterprises in exploring more diversified markets.

To assist Hong Kong enterprises in tapping the markets of Latin America, the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC) has established consultant offices in Brazil's Sao Paulo, Chile's Santiago and Mexico's Mexico City, to support the HKTDC's local trade promotion activities and business matching services. The HKTDC will continue to leverage its consultant offices in Latin America to provide Hong Kong enterprises with information on the latest developments of Latin America and invite enterprises in Latin America to participate in Hong Kong's large-scale exhibitions and conferences, in order to reinforce Hong Kong's role as a two-way global investment and business hub.

As for InvestHK, through its teams based in Hong Kong, the Dedicated Teams for Attracting Businesses and Talents based in the Mainland Offices and the overseas Economic and Trade Offices of the HKSAR Government, as well as consultant offices in other locations (including those located in Latin America, namely, Mexico City, Mexico; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Santiago, Chile; and Lima, Peru), it has all along been reaching out to a wide spectrum of companies in different sectors and industries around the world to attract and assist them to set up or expand their businesses in Hong Kong, and offering one-stop customised support services from the planning to implementation stages.

InvestHK will continue to proactively provide overseas enterprises, including those from Latin America, with the latest information on Hong Kong's business environment and promote Hong Kong's distinctive advantages of enjoying strong support of the motherland and being closely connected to the world and other core strengths under "one country, two systems", as well as the immense opportunities brought by key national strategies including the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area development and the Belt and Road Initiative, with a view to attracting these enterprises to set up or expand their businesses in Hong Kong and leverage Hong Kong as a springboard to enter the Mainland market. For example, InvestHK plans to visit Medellín, Colombia; Lima, Peru; and Buenos Aires, Argentina in 2025, and co-organise investment promotion activities with local chambers of commerce to strengthen investment promotion work in Latin America.

LCQ20: Transport connecting two hospitals in Kai Tak

Following is a question by the Hon Yang Wing-kit and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Ms Mable Chan, in the Legislative Council today (April 2):

Question:

It is learnt that the Transport Department plans to introduce Citybus Limited Route No. 20X and Supplementary Green Minibus Route No. 88A, and extend the existing route of Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited Route No. X6C, so as to enhance the connectivity of Hong Kong Children's Hospital (Children's Hospital) and the New Acute Hospital in Kai Tak (New Acute Hospital) with neighbouring areas. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information on the aforesaid newly-introduced and extended routes: (i) the tentative implementation schedule, and (ii) the stops involved;

(2) whether it will consider extending the origin and destination of Green Minibus Route No. 88A from Wong Tai Sin Station to Chuk Yuen and Tsz Wan Shan, and introducing a franchised bus route connecting Tsz Wan Shan, Chuk

Yuen, Lok Fu and San Po Kong, so as to make it convenient for local residents to travel to and from the Children's Hospital and the New Acute Hospital; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will study the construction of a travellator connecting a station of the proposed Smart and Green Mass Transit System in Kai Tak to the aforesaid two hospitals; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Transport Department (TD), our reply to the question raised by the Hon Yang Wing-kit, is as follows:

(1) and (2) The TD has been maintaining close liaison with the Hospital Authority and relevant departments on the public transport services for Hong Kong Children's Hospital (HKCH) and the New Acute Hospital (NAH), with a view to assessing the overall demand for public transport services in the Kai Tak Hospital Area (KTHA) and making targeted planning in advance to meet the travelling needs of passengers. This includes strengthening services for citizens in Yau Tsim Mong, Kowloon City, Wong Tai Sin districts and the surrounding vicinity to travel to and from the KTHA, as well as enhancing the connectivity between the KTHA and the MTR network.

At present, there are four franchised bus routes and six green minibus (GMB) routes serving the KTHA, connecting the area with districts such as Kwun Tong, Kowloon City, Mong Kok and Tsim Sha Tsui, as well as nearby MTR stations such as Kai Tak Station, Sung Wong Toi Station, To Kwa Wan Station, Kowloon Bay Station, Ngau Tau Kok Station, Kwun Tong Station, and Wong Tai Sin Station. Among them, GMB Route No. 88A is a new route commissioned in end-March this year, connecting HKCH with Wong Tai Sin Station. Residents in the San Po Kong area can take this route to travel to and from the KTHA. Meanwhile, residents in Lok Fu and Chuk Yuen can take MTR and GMB Route No. 38M to Wong Tai Sin Station respectively, and then interchange to GMB Route No. 88A to the KTHA. The existing franchised bus and GMB routes serving the KTHA are set out in Annex 1.

To cope with the increasing passenger demand, the TD plans to introduce or extend three franchised bus routes via the KTHA, including the addition of CTB Route No. 20X and extension of KMB Routes No. X6C and No.15A, in order to further enhance the KTHA's connectivity with other districts. Details of the relevant routes are set out in Annex 2. The new routes are expected to come into service from the second half of this year to early next year.

The TD will continue to closely monitor the progress of the NAH project and the overall development of the area. Subject to the demand, the TD will make timely adjustments or enhancement of the public transport services in the area, or introduce new franchised bus or GMB routes to cater for public's need to travel to and from the KTHA.

(3) We will explore pedestrian connectivity improvement scheme between the

proposed station of the Smart and Green Mass Transit System in Kai Tak and the captioned two hospitals, such as the addition of cover or travellator, on facilities including the existing footpath of the Kai Tak Bridge. In the process, we will have to consider the impact of the improvement scheme on the existing facilities, including relevant carriageways, footpaths and public facilities, and assess the technical feasibility and cost-effectiveness.

LCQ1: Pet-friendly policy

Following is a question by the Hon Maggie Chan and a reply by the Under Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Miss Diane Wong, in the Legislative Council today (April 2):

Question:

There are views that the existing legislation has impeded the development potential of Hong Kong's pet industry, and there is still substantial room for improvement in the pet-friendly policy of Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that in the reply to a question from a Member of this Council on June 12 last year, the Government indicated that it would conduct research on practices and experiences in other places regarding bringing dogs into food premises and consider reviewing the existing legislation, of the progress and details of the relevant work, including whether it will establish a licensing regime for pet-friendly food premises and devise supporting insurance solutions, open up outdoor dining areas for entry of pets on a trial basis, and implement a tiered access system based on the size of food premises, indoor and outdoor space, or types of dog;

(2) as it is learnt that the Government is studying the introduction of ISO microchips for pets, of the progress and details of the relevant work; and

(3) whether it has studied including other Mainland cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area in Group IIIA countries or places concerning the quarantine-related arrangements for cats and dogs, and shortening the quarantine period for cats and dogs imported from countries or places in the Group to less than 30 days, as well as assessed the technical barriers and risks involved; if so, of the details and progress; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

As pet keeping has become increasingly common in Hong Kong, there has been more attention in society to bringing animals to enter different premises and use public facilities. In general, the Government needs to take into account different factors when considering whether to further relax existing arrangements, including the nature of individual facilities, whether ancillary facilities are in place and the degree of social acceptance, to achieve the policy objective of facilitating animals and people to co-exist harmoniously.

On the questions raised by the Hon Maggie Chan, I would like to reply to the question as follows:

(1) Regarding bringing dogs into food premises, the Food Business Regulation (Cap. 132X) currently prohibits dogs (except guide dogs) from entering food premises. The existing regulatory requirements have been in place for close to 30 years. The Government understands that there has been changes in the societal culture but would also have to strike a balance on the need to safeguard public health and hygiene, etc, including food premises in Hong Kong are generally cramped, the need to consider the reaction of pet dogs in a crowded and cramped environment (possibly with different types of dogs), as well as the potential impact on other diners.

The society is divided over this subject. On the one hand, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) has from time to time received complaints about certain food premises allowing customers who bring pet dogs inside, expressing concerns on pet dogs entering restaurants. On the other hand, in recent years, there are views in society hoping to bring along pet dogs to dine in food premises.

The Government needs to take into account different factors when considering whether to relax certain restrictions on pet dogs entering food premises, including public health, the operating environment of food premises and social acceptance. The Environment and Ecology Bureau, together with the FEHD, are conducting research on practices and experiences in other places, and would carefully consider whether there is room for relaxing the relevant restrictions.

(2) To effectively prevent and control the spread of rabies in Hong Kong, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) requires all dogs over five months of age to be vaccinated against rabies and implanted with a microchip in the AVID format (microchip), which serves as a proof of rabies vaccination and licencing. Each microchip carries a unique identification number for identifying the pet, and can be used to assist the owner in locating their dogs if they are accidentally lost.

Considering the widespread use of ISO microchips in many other countries and regions, to further facilitate the movements of dogs into and out of Hong Kong, the AFCD has completed a feasibility study and proposed to introduce ISO microchips in addition to the existing AVID microchips. The AFCD has consulted relevant stakeholders, including licensed animal traders, animal welfare organisations, pet transport agents, veterinary clinics and animal-related organisations on the proposal, and the trade is generally supportive. The Government expects to consult the relevant Legislative Council (LegCo)

Panel on the proposal in the second quarter of this year. If the proposal is supported by the Panel, the Government will introduce the proposed amendments to the relevant subsidiary legislation into the LegCo in due course.

(3) On the quarantine arrangement for the import of cats and dogs, the AFCD currently regulates the import of live animals through a permit system, and controls the import of cats and dogs under the Public Health (Animals and Birds) Regulations (Cap. 139A) and the Rabies Regulation (Cap. 421A), aiming to prevent the transmission of animal diseases including rabies into Hong Kong, and safeguard the health of the public.

The AFCD classifies places into different groups according to different risk of rabies, with reference to information about the surveillance of animal diseases from the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). Group I includes rabies-free places (i.e. where rabies has been absent for a long time); Group II includes places where rabies cases are few and under effective control. Since Groups I and II places are considered of lower risk of rabies, cats and dogs imported from these places are exempted from quarantine upon fulfilling relevant requirements (such as providing Animal Health Certificate, Residence Certificate and Anti-rabies Vaccination Certificate). Furthermore, Group IIIA includes places that do not meet the requirements of Group II but have satisfactory regulation of veterinary services and official controls on health certification; whereas Group IIIB includes places where rabies cases are reported and not under effective control. In general, places that do not meet the requirements of Group I, II, or IIIA (or their situations cannot be determined) will be included in Group IIIB. Since the incubation period of rabies can be up to several months, to prevent the transmission of rabies into Hong Kong, the AFCD requires a quarantine period of no less than 120 days for the cats and dogs imported from Group IIIB places.

Group IIIA has been introduced since December 2024 to facilitate animal owners in bringing their pet cats and dogs to Hong Kong. The quarantine period for cats and dogs of the relevant places will be significantly shortened from the current 120 days to 30 days upon their arrival in Hong Kong, provided that they meet the relevant quarantine requirements including that the animals must be vaccinated against rabies, have a satisfactory rabies neutralising antibody titre test and have an animal health certificate issued or endorsed by a government veterinary officer of the place of export. The AFCD has proactively contacted some Group IIIB places which do not meet the requirements of Group II but have satisfactory regulation of veterinary services and official controls on health certification to discuss the relevant quarantine arrangements and, upon reaching an agreement, to include them in Group IIIA to shorten the quarantine period for dogs and cats upon arrival in Hong Kong. Among Group IIIA places, the Macao Special Administrative Region has implemented the new arrangements since December last year. On extending the new arrangement to other cities of the Greater Bay Area, the AFCD is actively discussing the details of the arrangement with the relevant Mainland authorities with a view to implement the new arrangement as soon as possible.

The current arrangement of a 30-day quarantine period for Group IIIA places is formulated with reference to the risk assessment conducted by the expert consultant in light of the actual situation in Hong Kong. The AFCD will continue to make close reference to the latest situation of animal diseases published by the WOAH and timely review whether the relevant quarantine requirements can be enhanced in the light of factors such as operational experience, views of stakeholders and risk assessment.

LCQ9: Combating animal cruelty

Following is a question by the Hon Lau Kwok-fan and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (April 2):

Question:

The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance (Cap. 169) has not been updated since its amendment in 2018. The Government proposed in 2019 to amend the Ordinance to step up efforts to combat animal cruelty, but the specific bill has not yet been introduced into this Council to date for scrutiny. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as the Government indicated in its reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on February 26 this year that it would complete the law drafting work as soon as possible after collating the views of the stakeholders concerned and introduce the proposed legislative amendments into this Council, of the specific timetable of the relevant work and the direction of the legislative amendments; whether it has encountered difficulties in the course of preparing for the legislative amendments; if so, of the details;

(2) as it is learnt that the community generally considers that the penalties for offences of cruelty to animals under the existing legislation (with the maximum penalty being a fine of $200,000 and imprisonment for three years) fail to reflect the seriousness of some cases (such as cruelty resulting in death and organised cruelty) and to pose sufficient deterrent effect, whether the Government will consider substantially raising the maximum penalty, for example, by increasing the maximum fine to $2,000,000, and raising the maximum term of imprisonment to seven years, so as to satisfy the principle of proportionality;

(3) as the Government has indicated that it will study the introduction of the concept of "Duty of Care" in Cap. 169 mandating persons responsible for animals to take proper care of the welfare of animals, but it is learnt that the community has rather strong and diversified views in this regard, whether the authorities will amend Cap. 169 in phases by raising the maximum penalty

in the first place, followed by amendments and enhancements to the Ordinance as appropriate and necessary at the next phase;

(4) as there are views that the existing evidential threshold in Cap. 169 is too high, for example, requiring law enforcement agencies to prove that the perpetrator has the intent of "deliberately causing cruelty to animals" in order to secure a conviction, resulting in a large number of cases not proceeding to judicial proceedings due to insufficient evidence, whether the authorities will draw up dedicated prosecution guidelines so as to lower the evidential threshold and boost the conviction rate; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) apart from amending the existing legislation, of the details of the Government's other specific work in preventing cruelty to animals; whether the authorities will enhance public awareness of animal protection through publicity and educational efforts; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government adopts a multi-pronged approach to curb acts of cruelty to animals. This includes exploring raising penalties for offences under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance (Cap. 169) (the Ordinance) to enhance deterrent effect, taking stringent enforcement actions against illegal acts, and continuing to enhance relevant public awareness through education and promotion activities.

Having consulted the Security Bureau and the Department of Justice, the reply to the question from the Hon Lau Kwok-fan is as follows:

(1) and (3) The Government has been studying amendments to the Ordinance. The directions being explored in the legislative amendment include imposing a positive "Duty of Care" on persons responsible for animals, requiring them to take proper care of the welfare of animals (including diet, environment, health, and behaviour); raising penalties for animal cruelty offences; and enhancing enforcement power, etc. In preparing the bill, it is necessary to consult the relevant stakeholders again on some of the proposals. After collating the views, we will finalise the legislative amendment proposals, implementation arrangement, and law drafting work promptly. Once the work is completed, we will consult the Legislative Council on the proposal.

(2) Currently, any person who does or omits doing any act and causes unnecessary suffering to an animal, may constitute an offence for animal cruelty. Upon conviction, the maximum penalty is a fine of $200,000 and imprisonment for three years.

The Government is studying raises to the penalties for animal cruelty offences to reflect more clearly the gravity of the offence, and to introduce an indictable offence to allow enforcement officers more time to instigate prosecution on complex or serious cruelty cases, in order to further enhance deterrent effect. In finalising the proposal on penalty, the Government will make reference to overseas experience, local penalties for relevant criminal offences, and views of stakeholders, etc.

(4) The existing offences under the Ordinance cover different forms of cruelty to animals, including causes any unnecessary suffering to an animal by wantonly or unreasonably doing or omitting to do any act; neglects to supply animal in confinement with sufficient food and sufficient fresh water; conveys an animal in such a manner as to subject it to unnecessary pain or suffering, etc. The Ordinance provides that an owner shall be deemed to have permitted cruelty if he shall have failed to exercise reasonable care and supervision in respect of the protection of the animal therefrom, proof of intention to cause cruelty to animals is not required.

In making a decision of whether or not to prosecute in each case, the relevant departments make an objective and professional assessment of the available evidence and applicable law, and strictly act in accordance with the Prosecution Code issued by the Department of Justice. The current practice has worked well and we consider it not necessary to formulate a specific prosecution guideline.

On the other hand, according to the information of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), over 90 per cent of the reports were found to be not related to animal cruelty after investigation, but nuisance or other situations, such as frequent noise from animals or odour from the premises where the animals were kept, and this misled the reporters into thinking that the animals suffered from acts of cruelty.

(5) The Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF), the AFCD and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) jointly implement the Animal Watch Scheme to proactively prevent and detect suspected cases of animal cruelty through multi-agency collaboration. The HKPF would also invite the AFCD and the SPCA officers to provide professional advice at the scene of an animal cruelty case and assist thereafter where necessary.

On publicity and education, through various channels including the Animal Watchers Programme, the "Be a Responsible Pet Owner" thematic website and roving exhibitions, the HKPF and the AFCD are respectively promoting the message of preventing cruelty to animals at the community level and online platforms; encouraging the public to report cases timely and to provide information that aids investigations; as well as raising public awareness of animal welfare.

The AFCD has also launched a series of "Duty of Care" publicity programmes, including the production of posts on social media platforms to share information on how to take proper care of animals, and the recent launch of the "Animal Welfare Project: The Adventures of Meow" promotional video, which aims to educate the public on the content and importance of "Duty of Care" in an interesting manner.