

# LCQ1: Enhancing Leisure and Cultural Services Department's SmartPLAY system

Following is a question by the Hon Carmen Kan and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Raistlin Lau, in the Legislative Council today (June 18):

Question:

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD)'s intelligent sports and recreation services booking and information system, SmartPLAY, which was developed at a cost of \$500 million, was launched in 2023. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of complaints it has received and investigated since the launch of SmartPLAY in relation to hirers profiting from touting their booked sessions for use of recreation and sports facilities (touting activities); among these cases, of the respective numbers of those being punished according to the LCSD's penalties, prosecuted according to the law, and convicted; whether it has examined the effectiveness of SmartPLAY in combating touting activities, including whether its anti-bot solution can effectively block plug-in programmes from snatching up booking sessions;

(2) as some members of the public have reflected that the e-payment method for the LCSD venues allows non-hirers to pay venue hire charges, making it possible for touting agents to book the venues on others' behalf, whether there are any countermeasures in place; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; apart from the fact that minors may have their parents book recreation and sports facilities on their behalf, whether there are any other exceptional circumstances where third-party bookings are permitted; and

(3) as there are views that the current approach to allocation of venues (e.g. grass soccer pitches) by ballot is more effective than the first-come, first-served approach in combating touting activities, whether the authorities will consider allocating all recreational and sports facilities by ballot; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) launched a brand new intelligent sports and recreation services booking information system named SmartPLAY in November 2023 to replace the old Leisure Link Computer Booking System. The SmartPLAY system is an integrated one-stop electronic service platform designed to facilitate the public in searching for and booking the sports and recreation facilities of the LCSD, as well as enrolling in various kinds of sports and recreation activities or competitions through the internet or mobile application. At present, the SmartPLAY system has 1.07

million registered users with 28 000 daily booking transactions on average.

My reply to the the Hon Carmen Kan's question is set out below:

(1) The LCSD has always paid close attention to unauthorised transfer or touting activities in relation to sports and recreation facilities, and adopted a multi-pronged approach to combat touting activities, including enhancing the booking system on an ongoing basis, imposing penalty arrangements, and stepping up inspections. At present, the SmartPLAY system includes the following functions to combat touting activities:

- (i) adopting real-name registration;
- (ii) allocating popular sports and recreation facilities by ballot in addition to the first-come, first-served allocation mechanism;
- (iii) requiring hirers to declare and undertake that they will be present during the use of relevant facilities and that the user permit will not be transferred by any means when booking and signing for facilities via the SmartPLAY system. Offenders may have committed an offence of fraud under the Theft Ordinance (Cap. 210) and be liable to imprisonment of up to 14 years upon conviction; and
- (iv) imposing restrictions to prohibit the booking of overlapping sessions of fee-charging or non-fee charging sports and recreation facilities.

In addition to enhancing the SmartPLAY system, the LCSD closely monitors information on touting and inspects venues from time to time, including conducting surprise inspections and requiring hirers to present identification documents to facilitate investigation and follow-up immediately as necessary. If a hirer is not present during the booked session, it will be counted as a breach. A hirer who has accumulated two breaches within 60 days will result in a 90-day ban on booking fee-charging sports and recreation facilities under the LCSD. Since the commissioning of the SmartPLAY system until May 2025, the LCSD has conducted over 890 000 random inspections, with more than 13 000 hirers being penalised for breaches, i.e. being suspended from booking the LCSD fee-charging sports and recreation facilities for 90 days. From November 2023 to May this year, the LCSD received a total of 435 complaints relating to touting activities. Upon investigation, the LCSD imposed penalties for 50 cases of breaches. The LCSD will continue to monitor the situation and consider imposing heavier penalties on repeated offenders.

Furthermore, the LCSD launched a joint operation with law enforcement agencies in July 2024 at tennis courts in Wan Chai District to combat touting and other illegal activities. Several individuals were arrested successfully. Some of the individuals had been prosecuted and convicted, and were sentenced to imprisonment of four months and six months respectively. Other cases are still under trial or being processed.

To effectively combat the abuse of computer programmes for booking sports and recreation facilities, a new generation of Web Application Firewall and anti-bot technology have been introduced in the SmartPLAY system to closely monitor users' log-in activities. SmartPLAY also employs artificial intelligence (AI) to oversee users' behaviour and network usage

for auto-defence, ensuring smooth operation of the system. When AI detects any abnormal operation (such as unusual log-in), the system will automatically intercept suspicious access. Moreover, the LCSD, in collaboration with the contractor, has been closely monitoring the operation of the system and adjusting its settings from time to time. More than five million log-in attempts by suspected bots were intercepted by the system during peak periods in early 2025. The LCSD and the contractor will continue to follow up and actively explore more solutions to prevent bot booking of sports and recreation facilities, thereby enhancing the booking experience of normal users.

(2) SmartPLAY is a one-stop electronic service platform that requires real-name registration. It enables the public to enquire about the sports and recreation facilities of the LCSD and make bookings anytime via the internet or mobile application with e-payment options. Owing to various circumstances (such as a lack of electronic payment tools or insufficient balances therein), individual users may not be able to use e-payment when booking facilities and require the assistance of others who are not hirers to make the payment and complete the process. Besides, parents of minors (aged under 18) may need to help manage their children's accounts for booking and payment. Therefore, the SmartPLAY system does not require the hirer and the payer to be the same person. That said, real-name registration of the hirer is required and the hirer must personally check in and be present to use the facilities.

(3) Currently, the LCSD allocates its sports and recreation facilities using two methods, namely on a first-come, first-served basis and balloting. To facilitate members of the public in planning their exercise schedule, the SmartPLAY system allows users to make seven-day advance bookings or on-the-spot hires of most of the sports and recreation facilities on a first-come, first-served basis. As for balloting, although it is a fair mechanism, it requires users to make advance planning by submitting balloting applications within 14 to 20 days before the usage date. Applicants must also pay attention to the balloting results and payment deadlines. Since both allocation methods have their own merits and drawbacks, the LCSD has conducted a questionnaire survey to collect public views on the mechanisms for booking and allocating various sports and recreation facilities under its purview.

After considering the feedback from different users as well as reviewing the actual usage carefully, the LCSD currently only allocates sessions of popular turf soccer pitches by balloting, while other sports and recreation facilities continue to be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. The LCSD will continue to pay close attention to the usage of its various facilities and review relevant booking arrangements with a view to encouraging the general public to engage in regular exercise.

Thank you, President.