

LCQ15: Development of pet-related industries

Following is a question by the Hon Rock Chen and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (June 11):

Question:

It has been reported that the number of households keeping pets has increased in recent years, with pet-related industries developing rapidly. However, there are views pointing out that Hong Kong still has room for improvement in veterinary medical care and pet-friendly public facilities, as well as in data management and policies regarding the pet industry. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as it is learnt that a number of private shopping centres have introduced pet-inclusive facilities, such as pet accesses and pet rest areas, to attract spending from pet owners and thereby further unleash the potential of the pet economy, whether the Hong Kong Housing Authority will consider drawing on the relevant experience to implement pet-friendly measures in the shopping centres of the public housing estates under its purview; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as it has been reported that public or charity-run veterinary organisations have been established one after another in Taiwan, such as in Taoyuan City and New Taipei City, to provide basic veterinary medical services at transparent charges, which not only enhance pet health protection but also boost the pet economy, whether the HKSAR Government has conducted studies or policy planning regarding the establishment of public or semi-public veterinary medical facilities; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as there are views that maintaining pet-related data can help understand the risks of pet epidemics and diseases, as well as the market structure and potential of the pet industry, whether the Government will establish a territory-wide pet data management platform to systematically collect relevant data, including the number of pets, breed distribution, keeping and vaccination records, and pet disease trends, so as to provide a scientific basis for the formulation of policies on pet-friendliness and developing the pet economy policies; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Housing Bureau, the reply to the question from the Hon Rock Chen is as follows:

(1) 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, in order to achieve the policy objective of facilitating people and animals to co-exist harmoniously.

The shopping centres under the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) are mainly "neighbourhood shopping centres" located in public housing estates/courts. These shopping centres provide local residents with shopping convenience, with the aim of catering for their basic needs in daily life. All along, guide dogs accompanying the visually impaired have been allowed to enter the HA's shopping centres. The HA has further implemented some pet-friendly policies, such as allowing pets to enter shopping centres if they are placed in pet carrier bags or pet strollers and that no hygiene and environmental nuisance will be caused. The HA will keep in view the development and needs of the community for pet-friendly spaces and facilities, and design "neighbourhood shopping centres" that are in line with the actual situation.

On the other hand, the Domain located in Yau Tong is a large-scale regional shopping centre under the HA. Coupled with spacious indoor space, outdoor activity areas, wide passageways and multiple entrances at different locations, it is more equipped with the requisites for development into a pet-friendly mall than typical "neighbourhood shopping centres" located in housing estates. The HA will review whether it is appropriate to further provide pet-friendly measures in the Domain, such as installing relevant human-pet friendly facilities to appeal to pet owners for boosting consumption and visitor flow.

(2) The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has been carrying out publicity and public education to remind the public to consider carefully before deciding to keep pets, to assess whether one could fulfil the duties of pet ownership in meeting the pets' basic needs in diet, environment, daily care, healthcare, etc.

On veterinary services, the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong (VSB) established under the Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance (Cap. 529), is currently responsible for the regulation, registration and disciplinary control of veterinary surgeons, so as to ensure a high standard of veterinary services in Hong Kong. The VSB learns about the overall veterinary services through data gathered in the regulation of the veterinary profession. The number of registered veterinary surgeons (RVS) has been consistently on the rise since 2015, from 823 in 2015 to 1 364 in April this year, representing an increase of 65 per cent. RVS comprises many specialties, such as small animal internal medicine and surgery, dermatology, cardiology, neurology and veterinary pathology, and therefore animal owners should be able to find appropriate veterinary services for their pets. To meet unexpected medical

expenses, members of the public may also purchase pet insurance products available in the market as appropriate.

Apart from private veterinarians, the City University of Hong Kong and some animal welfare organisations (such as the Hong Kong Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) also provide veterinary services and hence the Government currently has no plan to separately establish public medical facilities for pets.

(3) To safeguard public health and prevent the spread of animal diseases, the AFCD monitors and regulates animal activities in accordance with the law, and assesses the risk of pet animal diseases. The AFCD regulates the import of live animals through a permit system under the Public Health (Animals and Birds) Regulations (Cap. 139A) and the Rabies Regulation (Cap. 421A), so as to prevent the introduction of animal diseases into Hong Kong. Furthermore, the AFCD regulates the local animal activities through various licences, for example, regulating the animal trading and dog breeding activities through the Animal Trader Licence and Dog Breeder Licence respectively under the Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Trading and Breeding) Regulations (Cap. 139B), and to require dog keepers to have their dogs vaccinated against rabies, implanted with a microchip, and to apply for a dog licence under the Rabies Regulation, for the prevention of rabies.

The Government last conducted a Thematic Household Survey on pet ownership among households across Hong Kong in 2018. The AFCD and the Census and Statistics Department will conduct another survey later this year to gather the latest data on trends and preferences in pet ownership of Hong Kong families. These findings will assist the trade to learn about the latest trend of pet ownership, for their provision of products and services according to market demand.