

LCQ15: Manpower situation of lifeguards

Following is a question by the Hon Vincent Cheng and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (October 23):

Question:

Incidents of temporary closure of the public swimming pools under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) due to manpower shortage of lifeguards have frequently occurred in recent years. As the swimming season has begun in Hong Kong, some members of the public have expressed grave concern about the services of public swimming pools. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the situation of partial or full closure of the public swimming pool complexes in Kowloon West due to manpower shortage of lifeguards since May this year, with a tabulated breakdown of the relevant details by swimming pool complex and the District Council district to which it belongs (including the parts which were closed);

(2) given that the number of days of closure of the Hammer Hill Road Swimming Pool in Kowloon East dropped from 98 days in the year before to nine days last year, while the numbers of days of closure of the Ho Man Tin Swimming Pool, Sham Shui Po Park Swimming Pool, Lei Cheng Uk Swimming Pool and Lai Chi Kok Park Swimming Pool in Kowloon West rose (from four days to 149 days, from 111 days to 206 days, from 129 days to 182 days, and from 73 days to 145 days respectively) in the same period, of the reasons for that;

(3) as LCSD has indicated that it will raise the remuneration for seasonal lifeguards to attract eligible persons to join the service, of the details and progress of the implementation of the measure; and

(4) of the new measures which have been and will be adopted by the LCSD in this summer to alleviate the problem of manpower shortage of lifeguards?

Reply:

President,

The reply to the various parts of the Hon Vincent Cheng's question is as follows:

(1) The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) currently provides 44 public swimming pools in the 18 districts over the territory. To protect the safety of swimmers, LCSD will take into consideration the usage of swimming pools, swimmers habits and manpower of lifeguards on duty to partially open swimming pool facilities for use by members of the public, when there are

inadequate lifeguards on duty. Generally speaking, major pool facilities, such as main pools and secondary pools will remain open for public use as far as practicable. For the period between May 1 and September 30, 2019, the numbers of days of temporary partial closure of individual public swimming pools in Kowloon West (including Kowloon City District, Sham Shui Po District and Yau Tsim Mong District) due to inadequate lifeguards on duty are at Annex.

(2) The mobility of seasonal lifeguards is higher than that of civil service lifeguards due to their short-term job nature, where the recruitment effectiveness of seasonal lifeguards is more affected by employment conditions at the time of recruitment when compared to long-term jobs. As the manpower shortfall of seasonal lifeguards in various districts in 2018 was generally higher than that in 2017, there was also an increase in the number of days of partial closure of a number of public swimming pools due to inadequate lifeguards, such as Sham Shui Po Park Swimming Pool, Lei Cheng Uk Swimming Pool and Lai Chi Kok Park Swimming Pool in Sham Shui Po District, and Ho Man Tin Swimming Pool in Kowloon City District, etc. Nevertheless, individual districts faced a relatively modest shortfall of seasonal lifeguards and a slightly better situation (e.g. shortfall of nine seasonal lifeguards in Wong Tai Sin District in August 2017 as compared to one in the same period in 2018). Hence, the number of days of partial closure of Hammer Hill Road Swimming Pool in Wong Tai Sin District due to inadequate lifeguards decreased from 98 in 2017 to only nine in 2018.

(3) and (4) To improve the stability of the lifeguard workforce, the LCSD was provided with additional resources for creation of 80 civil service lifeguard posts in 2019-20 to replace 80 seasonal lifeguard posts. The pertinent recruitment exercise has been completed. In addition to appointing all the 80 newly-created positions, this round of recruitment has also recruited staff to fill 30 civil service lifeguard vacancies anticipated to arise due to natural wastage this year. New recruits have been reporting for duty since April to undergo training and be deployed to perform duties.

Besides, the LCSD has also allocated additional resources to launch a pilot scheme in 2019-20, which aims to recruit 40 non-civil service contract full-year full-time lifeguards this year to form a regional "special support team" to alleviate unforeseen manpower shortages in swimming pools and beaches and the work pressure faced by lifeguards on duty.

At present, civil service lifeguards recruited by the LCSD belong to the Artisan grade, with the starting pay point at Master Pay Scale point 5 (currently \$16,790). The Government adjusts the civil service pay scales under the established mechanism to adjust the pay for civil servants (including civil service lifeguards). The LCSD has not encountered difficulties in recruiting civil service lifeguards. As regards seasonal lifeguards, in view of the short-term job nature, the mobility of seasonal lifeguards is higher than that of civil service lifeguards, where the recruitment effectiveness of seasonal lifeguards is more affected by employment conditions at the time of recruitment when compared to long-term jobs. Hence, a series of measures have been adopted by the LCSD, including

stepping up publicity efforts through different channels, e.g. posting of recruitment advertisements on social media websites, holding recruitment days for seasonal lifeguards at swimming pools in different districts to attract local residents to work as lifeguards, as well as adjusting upward the remuneration in terms of salaries and end-of-contract gratuities for seasonal lifeguards as appropriate to attract more eligible applicants to join the service.

In order to maintain the attractiveness of the pay of seasonal lifeguards, the LCSD adheres to the principle of keeping the pay of seasonal lifeguards broadly comparable with that of their private sector counterparts. To this end, starting from 2004, reference has been made to the local private employment market in terms of pay level of lifeguards and other important relevant factors, including the LCSD's fiscal position and the Composite Consumer Price Index in determining the annual pay adjustment for seasonal lifeguards. Details of adjustments to the remuneration are as follows:

(i) To adjust the end-of-contract gratuity arrangement for seasonal lifeguards to encourage people who had formerly worked as full-time seasonal lifeguards to continue working in the LCSD so as to ensure the steady supply of manpower. To this end, full-time seasonal lifeguards who have served in the LCSD for at least six months in the swimming season in the previous year and who have completed one single contract of six months or more in the swimming season in the subsequent year (who have behaved and performed satisfactorily during the contract period) will be offered a 15 per cent end-of-contract gratuity for the whole contract period (seasonal lifeguards on satisfactory completion of the initial three-month contract used to be offered a 10 per cent end-of-contract gratuity and a 15 per cent end-of-contract gratuity would be payable starting from the fourth month).

(ii) To offer an additional monthly payment of \$300 to seasonal lifeguards who have obtained a valid first aid certificate and completed a contract of employment offered by the LCSD for a specified period so as to attract holders of a valid first aid certificate to become seasonal lifeguards and encourage seasonal lifeguards to enhance their skills.

(iii) As beaches are generally located in more remote areas, seasonal lifeguards will take a longer commuting time and pay a higher transport fare to work at beaches. As a result, fewer seasonal lifeguards are willing to work at beaches. In order to attract more qualified persons to work as seasonal lifeguards at beaches, those working at beaches will receive \$700 or \$1,000 more than those for swimming pools/water sports centres (depending on the districts).

The LCSD will continue recruiting seasonal lifeguards and part-time hourly-rated seasonal lifeguards to fill current lifeguard vacancies.