

Ombudsman announces results of direct investigation operation into Housing Department's handling of illegal parking in public housing estates (with photo)

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

The Ombudsman, Mr Jack Chan, today (March 13) announced the completion of a direct investigation operation into the Housing Department (HD)'s handling of illegal parking in public housing estates, and made 12 recommendations for improvement to the HD.

Currently, there are 195 public housing estates in Hong Kong, with more than 780 000 households and about 2 million residents (not including residents of Tenants Purchase Scheme and Buy-or-Rent Option). The HD is responsible for the day-to-day management of estates and handling a wide range of issues. As proper management of public housing is a vital livelihood issue, this Office has decided to conduct detailed studies on it. Given the broad scope, the Office will initiate direct investigation operations into various aspects of public housing management in phases. This direct investigation operation focuses on illegal parking.

From time to time, the Office takes note of public complaints and media reports about illegal parking in public housing estates. Particularly, the Office is concerned about the obstruction of emergency vehicular access by illegally parked vehicles, which may hinder the rescue operations of emergency vehicles in the event of contingencies and lead to serious consequences. In this connection, the Office probed the HD's enforcement mechanism against illegal parking in public housing estates, with site inspections conducted in four selected estates, namely Yau Oi Estate, Cheung Hong Estate, Lai Yiu Estate and Queens Hill Estate, where the installation of vehicle barrier gates in all vehicular access is infeasible due to geographical constraints.

To tackle illegal parking in Yau Oi Estate, the Office learned that the HD has specifically strengthened road controls outside office hours. Apart from enforcement in collaboration with the HD's Mobile Operations Unit, the Estate Office has also enlisted the support of the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) on a case-by-case basis. The Estate Office has acquired more immobilisation devices and instructed the security service contractor to deploy more staff dedicated to patrolling. An additional closed-circuit television (CCTV) system has been installed in the estate, and the Internet of Things (IoT) sensors are piloted on specific road sections to facilitate the staff's remote real-time surveillance of traffic. As a result of the HD's

commitment to improvement, the situation of illegal parking has been alleviated.

As regards the other three public housing estates, the Office's investigators found illegal parking during site inspections. In Lai Yiu Estate, illegal parking was even found along the emergency vehicular access.

Mr Chan said, "In certain public housing estates, the installation of vehicle barrier gates is infeasible due to geographical and environmental constraints, resulting in practical enforcement challenges against illegal parking, particularly outside office hours. Our site inspections revealed prolonged illegal parking of many vehicles in public housing estates at night; some of these vehicles may even obstruct emergency vehicles. The situation is unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, as the case of Yau Oi Estate has shown, strengthening enforcement is indeed conducive to alleviating illegal parking. Overall, we urge the HD to improve its handling of parking violations, especially to step up combating illegal parking along emergency vehicular access to minimise potential safety hazards."

The Ombudsman's recommendations for improvement to the HD are:

- continue to closely monitor the situation of illegal parking in public housing estates, especially on roads where the installation of vehicle barrier gates is infeasible, and formulate enforcement strategies;
- step up enforcement against blackspots of illegal parking;
- take enforcement action against illegal parking along emergency vehicular access immediately without warning, including impounding or towing away the vehicles;
- strengthen collaboration with the HKPF to arrange joint operations for greater deterrence and increasing the non-compliance costs of offenders if necessary;
- step up monitoring the follow-up actions taken by security service contractors, consider stipulating key performance indicators for contractors under their service contracts and requiring them to report enforcement results regularly;
- consider compiling statistics and analysing the records of written warnings against illegal parking issued by the Estate Offices to facilitate their monitoring of illegal parking by frontline staff, with a view to supervising staff and reallocating resources where necessary;
- conduct timely review on the effectiveness and results of the pilot use of CCTV surveillance and IoT sensors;
- if the results of pilot arrangement are positive, proactively explore expanding the pilot arrangement to more public housing estates to facilitate effective detection by frontline staff of illegal parking;
- organise sharing sessions and training for the Estate Offices and security service contractors regarding enforcement against illegal parking from time to time;
- review existing manpower and, according to actual circumstances, explore any need to internally redeploy or obtain additional resources for enforcement;

- step up publicity and education for motorists, stressing the importance of refraining from illegal parking on emergency vehicular access; and
- draw up an implementation timetable for the above recommendations and conduct regular reviews.

The Office is pleased to note that the HD has accepted all of its improvement recommendations.

The full investigation report is available on the website of the Office of The Ombudsman at www.ombudsman.hk for public information.

