

Anti-epidemic Fund Steering Committee convenes second meeting

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, chaired the second meeting of the Anti-epidemic Fund Steering Committee today (March 18).

At the meeting, the Steering Committee examined the progress of the 24 measures under the \$30 billion Anti-epidemic Fund (the Fund).

The Steering Committee noted that various measures under the Fund had been rolled out progressively.

At the meeting, Mr Cheung stressed the importance of fully implementing the initiatives as soon as practicable.

"All bureaux and departments should press ahead with the initiatives at full steam. We should aim to disburse the subsidies under the array of relief measures expeditiously. We need to provide timely support for enterprises and members of the public hard hit by the current epidemic or affected by anti-epidemic measures," he said.

The Steering Committee noted that the \$5.6 billion Retail Sector Subsidy Scheme, which is expected to benefit some 70 000 retailers, will be launched on March 23 (Monday). The first tranche of payment will be made within April this year. Under the scheme, each eligible retail shop will be given a one-off subsidy of \$80 000.

The Steering Committee is chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, and members include nine relevant Directors of Bureaux. The Steering Committee seeks to monitor the implementation of the measures and the use of Fund, and to examine the progress reports from relevant bureaux and departments.

LCQ13: Reduction, recovery and recycling of waste textiles

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hoi-yan and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (March 18):

Question:

Some environmentalists have relayed that at present, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has not actively promoted the reduction, recovery and recycling of waste textiles (including used clothes and other used textile products). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of (i) the disposal quantity and recovery rate of waste textiles, and (ii) the quantity and percentage of waste textiles recovered through the Community Used Clothes Recycling Bank Scheme under the Home Affairs Department, in each of the past five years; if such figures are unavailable, whether the Government will gather them;

(2) whether the EPD has set targets on (i) the quantity of reduction, (ii) the recovery rate and (iii) the recycling rate in respect of waste textiles; if so, of the details and the specific measures taken to achieve such targets; if not, whether the EPD will set such targets;

(3) of the respective numbers of applications for subsidies made to the Environment and Conservation Fund (i) received and (ii) approved by the authorities in each of the past five years in respect of used clothes recovery projects, and the total amount of subsidies granted;

(4) as waste textiles currently are not the major waste items to be recovered under both the Community Recycling Network and the Community Green Stations, whether the EPD will consider including waste textiles in these two programmes or other programmes implemented by the EPD;

(5) whether the EPD will (i) collaborate with educational bodies to set up used clothes recovery boxes and organise recovery activities in schools, so as to increase the recovery quantity of waste textiles and enhance community engagement, and (ii) provide education and services relating to repairing clothes and recycling of used textile products, so as to encourage members of the public to reduce waste at source; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(6) whether the EPD has put in place new measures to encourage more non-profit making organisations and community groups to take part in the recovery of used clothes, so as to promote community-wide participation?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Hoi-yan is as follows:

Among the municipal solid waste (MSW) generated in Hong Kong, food waste, waste paper and waste plastic have accounted for more than 75 per cent of the total quantity. The waste reduction strategy of the Government is to put in more resources for reducing those wastes of larger quantities. To foster the environment-friendly culture of "use less, waste less" and enable

green living to take root at the community level, the Government has been carrying out promotion of overall waste reduction through education and at the same time assisting local communities in the collection of various recyclables, including waste textiles.

While waste textiles account for only about three per cent of MSW, the Government is implementing the "Community Used Clothes Recycling Bank Scheme" (the Scheme) launched in 2006. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) which participate in the operation of the "Community Used Clothes Recycling Banks" regularly collect donated used clothes. All of the collected clothes and revenue generated from them have to be used for charity purpose. The current Scheme Managers are Friends of the Earth (Hong Kong), Christian Action, the Salvation Army and the Conservancy Association. Apart from operating some of the banks by themselves, Scheme Managers have to allocate, in an open and fair manner, no less than 50 per cent of the banks to other organisations, so as to encourage more NGOs to participate in the recycling of used clothes. At present, 192 "Community Used Clothes Recycling Banks" are placed at appropriate locations in all districts under the Scheme.

The Government has established a Community Recycling Network across the territory. Through a wide range of recycling programmes and environmental education activities, the Network's Community Green Stations (CGSs) encourage public participation in waste separation for recycling as well as reuse of suitable second hand items. They also disseminate messages of at-source waste separation and clean recycling. To promote a "use less, waste less" lifestyle, swap and charity donation events are held from time to time by the CGSs to encourage proper use of resources, including used clothes.

Currently, quite a number of organisations in the community are providing clothing reuse services such as consignment service, online auctions and swap parties for used clothes. In recent years, some large fashion houses even provide shopping discounts for customers bringing in used clothes for recovery. Relevant information may be obtained via the Environmental Protection Department (EPD)'s website on waste reduction (www.wastereduction.gov.hk). The public may also make use of the EPD's "Hong Kong Second Hand Exchange" platform to exchange used clothes to avoid wastage.

On funding support, the Government has set up a \$1 billion Recycling Fund to assist in upgrading the operational capabilities and efficiency of the recycling industry. This can help spur the sustainable development of the industry, thereby promoting waste recovery and recycling as well as turning waste into resources. A total of about HK\$ 4.38 million has been granted under the Recycling Fund for two projects concerning, among others, the recovery of used clothes.

Three funding applications on upcycling of clothing were received under the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) in the past five years. The applicants proposed to upcycle the used clothes into cloth bags, cloth dolls, pet clothing, accessories, etc. However, these funding applications were not supported as the proposals were considered not as good as other funding applications. In 2017, a total of HK\$ 2.36 million was approved under the ECF

for three projects for the collection of resources/recyclables in the community. Apart from collection of common recyclables, the three projects also provide reuse, recycling and upcycling outlets for recyclables including used cloth.

The disposal quantity at landfills and recovery rate of textile waste between 2014 and 2018 are tabulated as below while compilation of relevant waste statistics for 2019 is underway:

		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Textile waste (Note 1)	Disposal quantity at landfills (tonnes)	107 000	112 000	126 000	135 000	143 000
	Total quantity recovered (tonnes) (Note 2)	4 200	4 800	4 200	3 000	6 400
	Recovery rate (%)	3.8%	4.1%	3.3%	2.2%	4.3%

Note 1: Among the textile waste, about 50 per cent was non-clothing waste including towels, handkerchiefs, cloth dolls, cloth bags, quilts, towel blankets, cloth carpets and flat sheets, etc while the rest were clothing such as inner and outer clothes, scarfs and gloves.

Note 2: Including the quantity recycled locally and exported for recycling, but not including the quantity of direct reuse through community activities such as "exchange of goods", consignment service and online auctions for used clothes.

The quantity of used clothes collected under the Community Used Clothes Recycling Bank Scheme managed by the Home Affairs Department between 2014 and 2019 are tabulated as below:

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Quantity collected under the Scheme (tonnes)	503	492	608	713	762	835

[Suspected case tests negative for MERS-CoV](#)

The Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health today (March 18) reported that a suspected case of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) pending results on March 16 upon preliminary testing has tested negative for MERS Coronavirus.

LCQ10: Impacts of the epidemic on schools and parents of students

Following is a question by the Hon Hui Chi-fung and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (March 18):

Question:

In view of the rampant novel coronavirus epidemic, the Education Bureau (EDB) earlier on has extended for several times the class suspension arrangements for all primary and secondary schools, kindergartens and special schools in Hong Kong, and classes will resume on April 20 this year at the earliest. Regarding the impacts of the epidemic on schools and parents of students, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as some parents of kindergarten students hold the view that since their children have not been able to go to school for the whole months of February and March, it will only be reasonable that they are not required to pay for these two months' tuition fees, whether the EDB will consider paying the tuition fees for February and March on behalf of the parents of all kindergarten students in Hong Kong; if not, of the measures in place to assist parents with financial difficulties;

(2) of the details of the various support provided by the EDB for schools since the outbreak of the epidemic, and whether the EDB will provide subsidies to schools in need for paying expenses such as rents and salaries; and

(3) given that there are nearly 28 000 cross-boundary students in Hong Kong, how the EDB ensures that the epidemic on the Mainland will not spread to the schools in Hong Kong through such students upon class resumption, in order to safeguard the health of all students and teachers?

Reply:

President,

Under the novel coronavirus epidemic, to minimise the risk of the spread of the virus, and to ensure students' health and well-being by reducing social contacts, the Education Bureau (EDB) has announced that all classes in Hong Kong have been temporarily suspended and classes will not resume before April 20. The exact date of class resumption is subject to further assessment. During the period of class suspension, the EDB has maintained contacts with schools to better understand their operation and needs, join hands with them to tackle related problems and provide support as necessary.

My reply to the Hon Hui Chi-fung's question is as follows:

(1) At present, about 90 per cent of the kindergartens (KGs) joining the kindergarten education scheme (Scheme-KGs) and offering half-day programmes are free. For whole-day and long whole-day programmes, their tuition fees are at a low level, with the median tuition fees per instalment at about \$820 in the 2019/20 school year. For parents whose children are attending these KGs, tuition fee should not be a heavy burden. Families with financial needs may apply for fee remission through the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (KCFRS) under the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency. Under KCFRS, although students are required to have attended school in the month concerned to be eligible for fee remission in that month, in view of the fact that the number of school days may be affected during the school suspension period, the EDB and the Student Finance Office will handle the cases with flexibility so that students will continue to receive the subsidy. During the period of class suspension, KGs remain open to take care of students in need and maintain contacts with parents to provide information and support as necessary to support students' learning at home. As such, schools are in practice still providing services.

Overall speaking, to reduce parents' burden on educational expenses, a funding of about \$900 million is allocated from the Anti-epidemic Fund newly set up by the Government to provide an additional \$1,000 for each recipient of the Student Grant, i.e. an increase from \$2,500 to \$3,500 for the 2019/20 school year, benefitting some 900,000 students, including KG students studying in both Scheme-KGs and non Scheme-KGs.

In addition, to assist KGs in tackling operational difficulties and additional expenses caused by the epidemic, the EDB has implemented the following measures:

(a) using the number of students in January this year as the basis for calculation of monthly subsidy for each Scheme-KG during the class suspension period to ensure that there will be no reduction of government subsidies due to absence or withdrawal of individual students during the period;

(b) providing an additional grant for all KGs (including Scheme-KGs and non-Scheme KGs); the one-off subsidy for each KG ranges from \$60,000 to \$160,000, incurring an additional expenditure of about \$120 million;

(c) providing a one-off Special Anti-epidemic Grant for all KGs. Please refer to Part (2) of the reply for details.

These measures have alleviated the pressure on operational expenditure faced by KGs, and have indirectly supported parents.

The cost structure of non-Scheme KGs is not monitored by the EDB, some of these KGs are even not non-profit making in nature. Payment of tuition fees by the EDB on behalf of parents does not conform to the principles governing the use of public money. Nevertheless, if individual KGs, in

particular those without government subsidies, need to reduce their tuition fees, the EDB will expedite the processing of the applications to cater for the needs of the KGs and parents.

(2) In order to help schools replenish their epidemic prevention equipment, clean their school premises and pay for other expenses related to epidemic prevention, the EDB will deploy the existing resources to provide a one-off Special Anti-epidemic Grant to all schools offering full and formal curriculum (including KGs, public sector schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools, English Schools Foundation schools, international schools, Private Independent Schools, private primary schools and private secondary day schools). The subsidy rate, ranging from \$10,000 to \$25,000 per school, depends on the type and size of the school. This will involve an additional expenditure of about \$42 million, benefitting some 2 200 schools.

Apart from that, the boarding sections of aided special schools have been operating to cater for students in need of boarding service during class suspension. To enhance the support for the boarding sections to guard against the epidemic and to reduce the risk of the spread of the novel coronavirus, the EDB has already provided separately a one-off additional grant for 21 special schools with a boarding section. The amount of the special grant is determined by their approved boarding capacity, ranging from \$50,000 to \$150,000, incurring an additional expenditure estimated to be around \$2.25 million.

During the period of class suspension, both primary and secondary schools are making use of different modes of learning (including e-learning) to maintain students' motivation and interest in learning and achieve the goal of "suspending classes without suspending learning", with a view to helping students continue learning at home. In accordance with the established mechanism and criteria, the EDB will continue to provide public sector schools and DSS schools with subsidies, the amount of which will not be reduced because of the suspension of classes. As for private schools, which are market-driven, their operating expenses (such as salaries, rentals of school premises, etc.) are generally included in calculating their annual budgets and tuition fees. As far as we understand, the number of students in private schools during the period of class suspension has remained fairly stable. If individual schools wish to adjust their tuition fees due to the impact of the epidemic, we will process their applications as soon as possible.

As for KGs, the support measures launched by the EDB have already been detailed at Part (1) of my reply.

(3) As the epidemic is still evolving, the date of class resumption is subject to further assessment. The EDB will act on medical advice and take into account the readiness of schools and the supply of protective equipment in the community in making further assessment. The EDB will decide on the date of class resumption when there are sufficient conditions to do so, so as to safeguard students' health. As regards cross-boundary students, we will take into account the anti-epidemic measures at that time (including the

immigration control measures and quarantine arrangements, etc.), epidemic situation in neighbouring regions and medical advice when formulating the arrangements. We will continue to closely liaise with the relevant Government departments, including the Centre for Health Protection, and make reference to the views of the representatives from the school sector, so as to draw up the anti-epidemic measures when classes resume.

Traffic enforcement operation against illegal parking in Sha Tin Police District

Sha Tin Police District is conducting a three-day traffic enforcement operation against illegal parking in Sha Tin, Tin Sum and Ma On Shan police divisions starting from March 17 to 19, to ensure road safety and smooth traffic flow.

On the first day (March 17) of the operation, 1,901 fixed penalty tickets were issued for double parking, loading, unloading or waiting at restricted zones, and obstructing emergency vehicular accesses.

The Police appeal to motorists to be responsible and safe road users. The Police will continue to step up enforcement actions today and tomorrow (March 18 and 19) to ensure smooth traffic flow and safety of the public.

The Police will issue multiple tickets and take summons actions against drivers who have contravened illegal parking regulations, obstructed traffic flow or caused danger to other road users, especially pedestrians. Illegally parked vehicles will be towed away if necessary.