

Office of The Ombudsman announces completion of direct investigation with aim of preventing imprisoned singleton PRH tenants from becoming homeless

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

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (November 14) announced the completion of a direct investigation on the notification mechanism and arrangements of the Housing Department (HD) and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) for imprisoned singleton public rental housing (PRH) tenants.

According to the established policy of the HD, if singleton PRH tenants are serving a relatively long sentence (normally three months or more), the HD will advise them to voluntarily surrender their flats. If they meet the relevant criteria (including no rent arrears), the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HKHA) will issue a Letter of Assurance (LA) which allows them to be offered another PRH flat upon release from prison.

The Office of The Ombudsman received a complaint that the PRH unit of an imprisoned singleton tenant was recovered by the HKHA due to rent arrears, as a result of suspension of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) payment upon the tenant's imprisonment. The tenant was then ineligible to apply for an LA. He had no place to live upon release from prison and needed to apply for PRH again. The complainant withdrew the complaint when he was allocated a PRH unit. However, the Office found inadequacies in the current mechanism and initiated a direct investigation in March 2019.

Ms Chiu said, "The current mechanism and arrangements are not conducive to ex-inmates' reintegration into society. If these tenants are in rent arrears, the HKHA would recover their flats. Upon release from prison, they would need to apply for a PRH flat again and settle all outstanding rent payments.

"In particular, for PRH tenants who are CSSA recipients, since their rent allowances are directly transferred to the HKHA by the SWD, any rent arrears may imply a change in the tenants' CSSA eligibility (e.g. due to imprisonment). We consider that the HD needs to find out as soon as possible the reason for any change in a tenant's CSSA eligibility so that prompt follow-up action can be taken to recover the flat for reallocation. It can also prevent the situation in which a tenant loses both his or her PRH flat and the chance of getting an LA because of rent arrears, which may create another problem."

The Ombudsman made four recommendations to the HD including calling on

the department to devise an alternative system to issue Conditional Letters of Assurance (CLAs). Subject to specific conditions, imprisoned singleton PRH tenants with rent arrears could still apply for a CLA. This would allow them to be allocated a PRH flat in the future once all rent arrears/outstanding sums are settled.

The Ombudsman also recommended the HD to strengthen the existing notification mechanism with the SWD, so that the SWD can provide the HD directly with the details about PRH tenants' imprisonment upon suspension of rent allowance payments and obtaining consent from the imprisoned singleton PRH tenants.

The investigation report has been uploaded to the Office of The Ombudsman website for public viewing.

Ombudsman probes Leisure and Cultural Services Department's regulation of public coaching activities at public swimming pools

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

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (November 14) announced a direct investigation to examine the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD)'s regulation of public coaching activities at public swimming pools.

The Office of The Ombudsman previously initiated another direct investigation into the LCSD's allocation of swimming lanes in public swimming pools and its monitoring mechanism, and invited public views on the matter. Among the public views received, there were allegations that individual and group coaching activities had caused nuisance to other swimmers in public swimming pools. In fact, the Office has received similar complaints from time to time.

Under the Public Swimming Pools Regulation, no person, within a swimming pool or the precincts thereof, shall do any act which is likely to endanger, obstruct, inconvenience or annoy any person. In order to promote swimming and ensure water safety, the LCSD generally allows coaching activities at its public swimming pools provided that such activities are performed in an orderly manner without causing any nuisance to other swimmers. Otherwise, the LCSD will take enforcement action in accordance with the Regulation.

Currently, there are 44 public swimming pools under the management of the LCSD, and a public coaching area is designated in nine of them to better

regulate the coaching activities therein. Preliminary inquiries by the Office have revealed that the LCSD had yet to establish a standardised mechanism for the designation of public coaching areas in public swimming pools. The Office considers it necessary to examine the LCSD's regulation of coaching activities at public swimming pools so as to minimise the nuisance caused to other swimmers.

Ms Chiu said, "Swimming is good for the body and mind. There is a practical need for members of the public to learn swimming at public swimming pools. Hence, the LCSD should consider measures to segregate different types of swimmers so as to reduce conflict between those participating in coaching activities and other swimmers. We have initiated this direct investigation to examine the LCSD's regulation of public coaching activities at public swimming pools, and we will make recommendations for improvement to the department where necessary."

The Ombudsman now invites members of the public to give their views on the above topic in writing to the Office of The Ombudsman by December 13, 2019:

Address: 30/F, China Merchants Tower, Shun Tak Centre
168-200 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong

Fax: 2882 8149

Email: complaints@ombudsman.hk

Closure of some LCSD facilities in Sham Shui Po District and Yau Tsim Mong District

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) announced today (November 14) that due to special circumstances which happened nearby, tennis courts of Shek Kip Mei Park in Sham Shui Po District and Hong Kong Museum of History in Yau Tsim Mong District are closed to ensure the safety of venue users and staff members. The department will closely monitor the situation and announce venue arrangements in a timely manner.

Subject to the situation, more cultural and leisure facilities in the same district and any other district which may be affected will also be closed early and at short notice to ensure the safety of venue users. Members of the public who plan to go to those venues are advised to contact the venues concerned or 1823 in advance.

Red flags hoisted at some beaches

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (November 14) that due to big waves, red flags have been hoisted at Stanley Main Beach and Big Wave Bay Beach in Southern District, and Silverstrand Beach in Sai Kung District. Beach-goers are advised not to swim at these beaches.

DSD Open Days to postpone

The Drainage Services Department (DSD) today (November 14) announced that due to the latest situation at various districts, which had affected the preparatory work, and the possibility of transport arrangements on the day being affected, the DSD Open Days, scheduled for November 16 and 17 (Saturday and Sunday), at Stonecutters Island Sewage Treatment Works will be postponed. Details will be announced later.